

Mech 4211

Chapter 4211 War Weary

The meeting adjourned with plenty of people feeling bewildered and out of depth.

Nonetheless, the feelings of the doubters did not change the fact that the leadership of the three alliance partners had all voted in favor of committing to a bold attack!

The Glory Seekers maintained a secure communication channel with the Wodin Dynasty, which in turn kept in touch with the rest of the Hex Federation.

This ensured that all of the involved parties were able to communicate quickly and securely.

Even as the spies working for the Blacks Cats and the Hexer intelligence agencies worked overtime to verify the leaked intelligence, the war leaders already drafted up a comprehensive assault plan.

This was a major operation to say the least because the Hex Federation needed to commit at least 200,000 mechs to the assault!

In the past, the Hexadric Hegemony could easily commit millions of mechs to a general assault, but those times were over.

The Hexers were only able to evacuate a limited amount of mechs, starships and industrial assets to the new frontier. Though the passage of time allowed them to build up their colonies and erect new production facilities, it was still unreasonable to be able to deploy more than a few hundred thousand mechs at once.

Still, the Hexers were so eager to take advantage of the intelligence leaks that they scraped up every available carrier that they could gather and stuff them full with as many combat mechs as possible!

The spies planted by the Fridaymen undoubtedly noticed the movements, but so what? Only a few high-level figures understood the truth. As long as they did not reveal that the upcoming assault was actually aimed at Pima Prime, it was fine even if the defenders went on high alert!

Of course, the Hexers were keeping tabs on the Fridaymen as well. As long as the Gauge Dynasty or any of the other coalition partners started to converge their troops onto the three targets under consideration, then it became too unreasonable to proceed with the attack.

This delicate dance caused many people to grow tense. While most of the soldiers of the Hex Federation did not receive any explanation from their superiors, they already figured out that they were about to take part in a major operation!

"Finally. It was about time we stop attacking those useless outposts."

"I've been longing for revenge!"

"It's time to kick out the Friday Coalition out of our turf entirely!"

The Fridaymen on the other hand grew graver when they noticed the Hexers gearing up for war. They all bolstered the defenses of their colonies and prepared additional fast reaction fleets in order to quickly converge their dispersed troops to a colony under attack.

So far, it did not appear as if the Fridaymen were aware of the true intentions of the Hexers.

Much of the activity within the Friday Colonies went towards bolstering the defenses of the weaker core colonies that were currently in the hands of the weaker coalition partners such as the Carnegie Group and the Vermeer Group.

These star systems were the logical choices to attack if the Hexers wanted to make a greater impact than razing a few backwater settlements.

Interestingly enough, the Gauge Dynasty and the Konsu Clan made the least amount of adjustments during this time.

They already possessed a considerable amount of confidence in their own defensive measures.

Spies within their hierarchies also reported that the leadership of the two coalition partners did not exhibit that much urgency.

So far, so good.

As the plans to launch an attack became more concrete, the official starting date of the Trailblazer Expedition also loomed closer!

Many Larkinsons prepared to say goodbye to the friends and acquaintances that they had made among the locals of the Davute.

Aurelia and Andraste even cried as they had to say farewell to the little playmates that they had grown familiar with at kindergarten.

As the clan shipped more and more people and goods to the formidable expeditionary fleet, many Larkinsons still maintained the impression that they were about to travel in the direction of the center of the dwarf galaxy.

The closer they traveled to the heart of the Red Ocean, the more likely they would fight against indigenous alien forces.

The odds of encountering a hostile group of humans and entering into battle with them was not that great.

This reflected back into the Larkinson Clan's training and preparation work. A lot of emphasis had been put on increasing the Larkinson Army's readiness to fight against powerful alien warships.

That did not necessarily mean that the Larkinson mech pilots forgot how to fight against conventional human mech forces, but years of reduced emphasis on these kinds of engagements may have caused the mech legions to grow rusty.

General Verle recognized this shortcoming and instituted additional simulation drills. He even suspended live practice sessions in order to get mech pilots to spend more time on refamiliarizing themselves with pure mech combat.

It just so happened that many of the battle scenarios that the mech pilots had to go through were variations of the Battle of Reckoning.

This allowed the Larkinson soldiers to understand and anticipate the mindset, tactics, mech doctrines and overall combat approach of the Fridaymen.

In the meantime, Ves held a second meeting with Tristan. This time, the two old friends met at a more casual setting.

Both of them sat in the back garden of the Royal Mansion. The idyllic scenery was one of the favorite playgrounds of Ves and Gloriana's children.

Now, it had become host to a discussion about war and bloodshed.

Tristan looked conflicted as he lifted up his teacup in order to take a sip of the chamomile tea that Ves had served.

The patriarch of the Larkinson Clan looked as relaxed as ever as he scratched Lucky's chin while sipping his own cup of tea.

The Fridayman mech designer eventually sighed and broke the peaceful silence.

"I came to Davute in the hopes of brokering peace between my people and the Hexers. Instead, I became the catalyst to another war, one that will extend the hatreds and animosity that should have been buried after the Komodo War has come to an end."

Ves' lips curled upwards in amusement. "Don't act so innocent, Tristan. Your actions have benefited the marginalized groups of the Friday Coalition. The only ones who are in trouble at the moment are the members of the Gauge Dynasty. They all deserve to get beaten for their arrogance. If they did not want to get targeted like this, then they should have treated you all better. Since they refused to value their fellow compatriots in the Coalition, then they have only themselves to blame when they are left to fend for themselves."

Though a part of Tristan agreed with this stance, his sense of duty towards the Friday Coalition still could not come to terms with this development.

"The Komodo War has left its mark on me. I spent a decade of my life contributing to the war effort and dealing with the aftermath of widespread destruction. I have seen more death and destruction than I ever wanted. War is terrible, Ves. I do not wish its horrors on anyone, even the Hexers. I cannot fathom why the Hexers are so eager to resume the fight when they have suffered more than anyone else. Is it too much to ask for them to recognize how much harm they will do to both the Fridaymen and themselves?"

Ves leaned back on his garden chair and chuckled. "That's unlikely. They're like bloodhounds. As long as they see weakness, they will pounce. I bet that the secret cabal from your state that is behind the leaks is aware of this as well. Why else would they turn the Gauger core colonies into irresistible targets?"

Though Tristan had agreed to become the spokesperson of this so-called cabal, he was anything but happy with what he had put into motion.

Yet he also agreed with the analysis that if the Gauge Dynasty's ambitions continued to go unchecked, the very fabric of the Friday Coalition might change for the worse.

Tristan was just a mech designer. He was never meant to get involved in matters of such import. He still struggled with the burden that his actions might set events into motion that would lead to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Fridaymen and the worsening of the quality of lives of many more innocent civilians!

Compared to the obvious discomfort shown by the Fridayman mech designer, Ves remained as unconcerned as ever.

"What you have done is not that different from designing mechs, Tristan. Did you never think that the mechs that you have designed or took part in their development will go on to fight and kill a lot of people? We are both makers of destructive weapon platforms. War is part of our business. If there is no fight, then our profession loses a lot of meaning. The mech industry that we are a part of would have never become so large and prosperous if humanity was dominated by pacifists."

"That is different, Ves." Tristan frowned. "Neither of us are soldiers who are responsible for pulling the trigger. Our mechs may be used for destructive purposes, I admit, but they can also be used for other purposes. Deterrence is one of them and defending against external alien enemies is another. Back when I originally decided to study mech design, the Komodo Star Sector used to be a lot more peaceful, you know. The Friday Coalition and the Hexadric Hegemony maintained their restraint for four straight centuries. I thought that they could easily hold it in for four more centuries."

Ves chuckled again. "Assumptions do have a way of turning us into fools. I don't blame you for holding this sentiment. I also thought that the two second-rate states wouldn't have been stupid enough to risk everything on a single throw of the dice. Even so, you shouldn't complain about what has come to pass. Humans like you and me are accustomed to taking what we want by force. We did so on a massive scale during the Age of Conquest and we have

never gotten rid of this habit now that we are living in the Age of Mechs. War between the two states would have broken out eventually. Peace in this cosmos is a lie, and you are a fool to ever believe in it in the first place."

"I don't know, Ves. I would rather be a fool in a time of peace than a clever person in a time of war."

The two mech designers differed too much from each other. Their stances, their life experiences and their ideologies were all shaped by vastly different circumstances.

Though both of them had seen their fair share of bloodshed and tragedy, Ves still maintained his eagerness to seek confrontation while Tristan had become far too jaded to feel any eagerness for more conflicts.

"You're not cut out to be a mech designer if you continue to maintain this mindset." Ves eventually told his old friend. "The work we do is intricately tied to military action. We are not responsible for what others wish to do with the mechs that we design, but we should be cognizant that we are actively contributing to a climate where fights have become more common. If you don't want to take part in this, then I suggest you reconsider your career options."

Tristan cynically snorted. "There's no use. There are so many mech designers in the industry that my departure will change nothing. The Friday Coalition alone still has lots of Journeymen who are more than eager to take my place. Besides, what will I do? I have dedicated most of my life to learning how to design better mechs. I painstakingly developed my design philosophy around empowering mechs with special gems of my own making. To put that all aside would not only invalidate much of my life, but also disappoint Master Katzenberg and everyone else who believed in my potential."

When Ves looked at Tristan, he saw a mech designer who had lost his passion and drive for mech design.

It was a sad sight, to be honest. How could mech designers ever put their all into designing mechs and progressing their design philosophies if they questioned the righteousness of their work?

This was an absurd situation!

Ves treated Tristan as another bad example and resolved to never turn into a similar kind of loser!

Chapter 4212 Farewell Davute

Tristan's depression and war weariness did not prevent him from continuing to act as a conduit between Ves and his backers.

When the man was not complaining about the death and destruction that his actions may have put into motion, he dutifully relayed the words of the weaker coalition partners to Ves and the Hexers.

Even though it might have been more convenient for the Carnegies and Vermeers to negotiate directly with the Hexers, it was impossible for this to happen.

The two sides were still enemies!

Not only that, it was incredibly taboo for the Fridaymen to openly plot for the downfall of one of its coalition partners!

By continuing to communicate through Tristan, the damage of exposure would be kept at a minimum. At most, a single Fridayman mech designer along with a few unimportant diplomats would take the fall for the scandal.

Tristan had become more cognizant about this truth as of late, which caused him to become even more disillusioned about the entire situation.

Since Tristan frequently passed on information and received instructions from his current employers, he possessed a more thorough understanding of all of the preparations being made.

The Hexers were moving into action. The Golden Skull Alliance was about to dispatch its formidable main fleet. The weaker coalition partners had made many assurances that their own mech forces were staying put throughout this sensitive period.

The latter was especially important to Ves and many other careful people. They still could not fully shake the possibility that this was all a giant trap that was ultimately aimed at the Hexer raiders who had been causing a lot of misery to the Fridayman colonies.

In order for the Carnegie Group and the Vermeer Group to demonstrate their sincerity, the Hexers requested information that confirmed that no friendly forces would be ready to reinforce the targeted star systems.

This was not a difficult request to meet because the territories of the Fridayman colonies were relatively sparse and underdeveloped. There was quite a bit of distance between each major colony, which meant it would be too late to reinforce the Gaugers if no one moved beforehand.

Of course, the Hexers weren't satisfied with this guarantee alone. They also wanted complete information on the movement of ships through the territory of the Friday Colonies for the past few years as well as permission to actively monitor the borders in case foreign fleets were lingering in the vicinity.

These were all heavy demands that essentially forced the Friday Colonies to expose a lot of information to the Hex Federation.

Unfortunately for the people behind Tristan, the Hexers were well aware that they held the initiative in the negotiations.

If the Hexers refused to attack the holdings of the Gauge Dynasty, then the internal situation of the Friday Coalition will continue to deteriorate!

Both Ves and Tristan became quite surprised at how extensively the Carnegies and the Vermeers accommodated the unreasonable demands of the Hexers.

The Fridaymen who had schemed against the Gauge Dynasty thoroughly proved their willingness to uphold their end of the deal and stay away from any major battles that might ensue.

Minister Shederin Purnesse easily figured out why the weaker coalition partners were not eager to compromise the deal or pull off any shenanigans.

"They're afraid, Ves. The Carnegie Group, the Vermeer Group, the Vanguard Group and the Puffer Clan have all built their own costly settlements in the neighborhood. Who knows whether the massive Hexer assault army decides to take a detour and attack one of those colonies instead? They are all weaker and more vulnerable than the core colonies of the Gauge Dynasty! If I was in their place, I would do everything to fortify my own defenses. There are no mechs to spare for ambushes and delayed reinforcement actions."

"Ah. That makes sense."

"I suggest that you should emphasize the inherent instability and impulsiveness of Hexer decision-making in your next meeting with Tristan. It is already enough if you are subtle about it. We just need to raise enough of a probability that their worst fears might come true to put enough fright in their hearts."

"Hehe. That sounds fun. I'll be sure to do so. Since our fleet will be taking part in this assault as well, it is in our best interest to cow the Fridaymen into staying put."

As all of this was taking place, the Golden Skull Alliance slowly completed all of its preparations.

The Cat Nest and the Cross Production Complex became a lot less lively as hundreds of thousands of Larkinsons and Crossers had fully relocated to the allied fleet in orbit!

Despite the large outflow of personnel and mechs, the Cat Nest was still able to maintain normal activity.

The clan had put a lot of effort into filling up the Davute Branch. A lot of mech pilots who had either chosen to retire from the main fleet or possessed lesser qualifications had chosen to serve in the local garrison and defense force.

The branch's defense force was already capable of deploying 10,000 mechs in battle, and that figure would soon rise to 15,000 mechs by the end of the year.

Those numbers sounded quite impressive, but the truth was that most of those mechs were mid-range machines that were simpler and cheaper to design, build and maintain.

That was enough. The amount of mechs patrolling the Cat Nest and manning the defensive stations had not dropped at all, which showed that the Davute Branch was more than capable of defending the valuable site.

Ves met with Branch Director Raymond Billingsley-Larkinson one last time.

"I'm not sure whether our fleet will return to Davute after we have completed our assault on Pima Prime." Ves said. "If the damage that we have suffered is limited, then we will probably head straight in the direction of the deep frontier. This means that it will probably take numerous years before we can reunite in person."

The rejuvenated Raymond nodded in understanding. "The Davute Branch will not give you cause for concern. You have provided more than enough for us to take care of ourselves. We will do our best to serve as the custodians to all of your investments and business holdings on Davute VII."

"That is good to hear. Take care, and make sure to remind everyone that they are members of the Larkinson Clan and not just the Davute Branch."

After touring the Cat Nest one more time, he stopped at the entrance of the Royal Mansion where a number of bots brought out the last pieces of cargo from his home for the last five years.

Ves could smell Gloriana's floral scent as she approached with a glum expression. Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine all followed after her while wearing black, formal outfits.

It looked as if his wife and children dressed up for a wedding instead of an ordinary departure!

"I still think that this is a mistake." Gloriana whined.

"This again? It's a bit too late to complain now that we are on the cusp of leaving."

"I hate you, you know that? Just look at how your decision has made our kids sad!"

When Ves looked down at his children, he saw that Aurelia had already come to terms with the decision.

Meanwhile, Andraste and Marvaine actually appeared as if they both looked forward to going on an adventure!

"I think our kids can manage. Isn't that right, my babies?"

"This is for the good of the clan." Aurelia said in a proper tone.

"I want to see our mechs fight against the evil aliens!"

"Pew pew pew!"

Gloriana gnashed her teeth at this response.

"C'mon, honey. They're just kids. They are a lot more adaptable than you think. Living aboard the Spirit of Bentheim will be fun. We can also take them on excursions to other ships like the Vivacious Wal if we want to enjoy a bit of quality time. We can also bring them to new and exotic planets. Their childhoods will be utterly unique. No one else can raise them like us. Doesn't that sound great?"

"I wanted our children to be more civilized than you." Gloriana complained again. "The Trailblazer Expedition will make it harder for me to ensure they remain proper and obedient."

"I don't want our children to be too stiff and dull. They are much more adorable when they show their personality!"

Ves and Gloriana could never quite agree on this, so they eventually put their argument aside and brought their children away.

As their escorted shuttle ascended through the atmosphere, Ves peeked out of the window and took one last look at the globe that was growing smaller and smaller before his eyes.

He truly did not know when he would return or if he would ever have the chance to step foot on the planet again.

All he knew was that his clan could not remain shackled to Davute. No matter how much the Larkinsons had grown their roots in the local community, Ves only considered the Krakatoa Middle Zone to be a temporary stop.

Once the shuttle smoothly landed in the Spirit of Bentheim's hangar bay, Gloriana took their children to the grand stateroom that they hadn't occupied for years while Ves headed towards the bridge.

Along the way, Ves briefly equipped himself with his upgraded Unending Regalia before he stepped foot on one of the control centers of the upgraded factory ship.

Much had changed over the past few years. Every capital ship had received extensive upgrades and the Spirit of Bentheim was no different. Her defenses, her production capabilities and her mobility had all received substantial improvements, making her more useful to the expeditionary fleet than ever!

Ves did not spend his time on admiring all of the improvements of the ship. He readied himself to address his entire clan.

Soon, every clansmen stopped and stood at attention while facing the nearest projection of their patriarch.

Over 500,000 Larkinsons had been spread throughout the fleet while 100,000 more clansmen were standing by at the local branch.

These were unprecedented numbers and spoke of how quickly the Larkinson Clan had grown since their initial arrival in Davute!

"My fellow Larkinsons." Ves spoke as he deliberately adopted a more martial and forceful air. "The time for peace and relaxation has passed. Our hibernation has come to an end. Fire has always been in our blood, and it is time to reignite it by seeking out challenges that can better ourselves and our fellow clansmen."

Ves swept his armored limb around his body.

"The Red Ocean has much to offer to pioneers! The Purgatory Campaign was but one of the instances where our clan managed to get ahead. There are many other treasures in this new and turbulent galaxy that can allow us to leap past our peers and rivals. Many of these opportunities may be fraught with danger, but with the increase in our combat strength, I am confident that we can navigate each peril that we might face!"

Ves earnestly smiled.

"Remember this day and remember your resolve to grow the clan. Life within our clan will not be as relaxed as before. There will be times where you need to obey orders unconditionally and trust in the strategies adopted by your superiors. While you are allowed to have questions, know that we are all trying to do what is best for our clan and our families. I, like many of you, have brought my wife and children along this expedition because I sincerely believe that what we are doing will not only succeed, but put our entire clan much further ahead than if we continued to linger in Davute!"

He closed his eyes and briefly envisioned the faces of his children. Reminding himself of them steeled his resolve to do right by his offspring.

Once he opened his eyes, he slowly raised his fist.

"Today, I declare the start of our Trailblazer Expedition! Let us plunder as much wealth from this dwarf galaxy as possible! For the clan!"

"FOR THE CLAN!"

Chapter 4213 Don't Yell

"Papa, what is this?"

Aurelia curiously poked at a projection that showed a glimpse of a report related to a possible assault on Pima Prime. She sat cutely on Ves' lap as she tried to figure out what her father was doing.

"That's an analysis on the defenses of a star system held by an enemy." Ves replied as he dove in to kiss her head.

"What enemy?"

"The Friday Coalition."

"Mama mentioned that before. What is the Friday Coalition?"

"It's a state that is located in the Komodo Star Sector all the way back in the old galaxy where you were born."

"Home!"

"The star sector used to be our home, but no more. Our ships are our homes now. Anyway, the Fridaymen who originate from that state have come all the way here to the Red Ocean to build new homes."

"That is bad, because the Fridaymen are our enemies."

"Why?"

"Because they are bad guys who once tried to hurt me and take me away from your mother. If the Fridaymen had their way, your mother and I wouldn't have been married and we would never have precious children like you and your siblings!"

"That is bad! Fridaymen are all bad guys!"

"That's right, Aurelia! Never trust the Fridaymen. They hurt us a lot while we hurt them back. If we keep meeting each other, we can't help but hurt each other until one of us can't take it anymore. It's a pretty sad reality." Ves sighed.

His daughter turned her head and stared up at her father with her big and expressive eyes. "Can't you be friends again? Mama says talking always helps."

"It's not that simple. Your mother is right in a way, but talking only helps if both sides want to kiss and make up. While a part of the Fridaymen have indeed tried to do so, there are still too many of them that just want to hurt us and make us cry. Instead of waiting for our enemies to get strong enough to do that to us, we have decided to strike first and ruin their colony!"

"Why?"

"If we burn their biggest colony to the ground, our enemies won't be able to stay in the Red Ocean anymore. Hopefully, they will get so discouraged that they will tuck their tails between their legs and run back to the old galaxy."

"Ohhh..." Aurelia looked fascinated.

Ves continued to explain his geopolitical considerations to his cute little girl in an oversimplified manner.

Though it was way too early to expose Aurelia to adult topics like waging war and trying to demoralize an enemy with excessive violence, his baby daughter was not a normal girl.

Though Ves rejected the outdated and illogical customs of noble houses, he had to admit that it was hard not to pick up on their best practices.

If Ves wanted his clan and his family line to continue as prosperously as possible, it was never too soon to groom a replacement for his leadership position.

He quickly glanced at his prosperity tree that had remained on his display case all this time. The small tree had grown thicker and more lush since he last checked it. He did not want to see it droop again even though he did not really believe in the superstition that its growth was related to the clan's success.

Nonetheless, when the time came for Ves to pass on his weighty mantle, he wanted one of his children to be competent and prepared enough to lead the Larkinson Clan to a new epoch.

Right now, Aurelia was the best candidate. She was the oldest of his children and her genetics were tailored for the job.

Though Ves did not entirely rule out the possibility that Aurelia might prefer to assume a different job and that one of his other children might end up inheriting his patriarch position, for now he was more than willing to teach his oldest the tricks of the trade.

As father and daughter continued to enjoy their shared moment together, the hatch to his office slid open without warning.

"Ves!" Gloriana yelled as she stomped inside!

"Meow!"

"Miaow?"

Lucky and Clixie, who had been cuddling against each other on a couch, both jumped from their cozy positions and scurried behind the bulky, armored form of an honor guard.

The cats both knew that when Gloriana used this tone, there was bound to be an argument!

Both Ves and Aurelia looked up at the angry mother.

"What's up, Gloriana?" Ves innocently asked.

"Don't act like you don't know. WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME THAT YOU WERE GOING TO ATTACK THE FRIDAYMEN?!"

"Huh? Where did you hear that from?! That is supposed to be a secret!"

"It wasn't that hard to figure out, Ves. We are traveling in the exact wrong direction from the stated goal of the Trailblazer Expedition! Instead of traveling towards the center of the Red Ocean, we are doing the opposite!"

"That's because we are picking up a new fleet carrier commissioned on behalf of the Glory Seekers! The new vessel is too valuable to be shipped to Davute by herself, so our fleet is taking a short detour to the Magair Middle Zone to pick up the new capital ship as well as a few other high-value goods that we have ordered from the Hex Federation."

This was the excuse that the Golden Skull Alliance had come up with after deciding to take part in the surprise attack on Pima Prime.

Although neither the Hexers nor the Golden Skullers believed that they could maintain the confidentiality of the ironically-named Operation Saturday Market forever, it was best if the Gauge Dynasty remained in the dark as long as possible.

It would be rather suspicious if the Golden Skull Alliance randomly traveled to the Magair Middle Zone when they were supposed to travel closer to the frontlines of the ongoing invasion of the Red Ocean.

Fortunately, the Glory Seekers and the Hexers quickly figured out a plausible arrangement.

Originally, the Glory Seekers were supposed to receive a new and large fleet carrier from the Hex Federation. With a total capacity of 1000 mechs, the Vengeance of the Hegemony played a key role in bolstering the operational strength of the expeditionary fleet.

However, the construction of the 3.1 kilometer-long fleet carrier had suffered numerous delays due to her high specifications.

The shipyard responsible for constructing her ran short of key materials needed to build powerful ship parts.

While the Hexers managed to complete the Vengeance of the Hegemony just in time, the onset of Operation Saturday Market prompted the Hexers to change their plans.

By making it so that the Golden Skull Alliance needed to pick up the brand-new fleet carrier as well as a few other valuable goodies, hardly anyone thought that there was more behind this trip.

Gloriana wasn't fooled, though. "Don't lie to me, Ves. I have my sources. I already know about the plan to attack Pima Prime. What were you thinking when you tried to keep me out of the discussion?! I'm your wife, Ves! You're supposed to be more forthcoming about matters like these!"

"Don't yell so much, Gloriana! What did I tell you about raising your voice in front of our children? Don't make Aurelia upset."

Their girl already started to look confused.

The mention of their daughter snapped Gloriana out of her tirade. Her eyes softened with love as she directed her attention to her pretty little daughter. She walked around the desk and snatched Aurelia out of Ves' lap.

"There there, baby. Mama is here. Everything will be alright."

"Why is mama angry again?"

"Mama is angry because your father is a dum dum again. He's been very naughty as of late by trying to keep a secret from me. Your father needs to learn that he is not supposed to handle these matters alone. I am also a part of the Larkinson Clan!"

Ves was not impressed with the words spoken by his wife.

"Gloriana, there is no use even if you know. The planning and decision-making surrounding Operation Saturday Market is a high-level strategic affair. You're a mech designer. Your input is not needed. We already have Master Benedict Cortez and numerous other Hexer Masters who are capable of analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the leaked Fridayman mech designs."

Gloriana let out a noise in frustration. "I am not irrelevant! I am your wife. I am a Hexer and a Wodin as well, so I have a clear interest in defeating the Fridaymen. In addition to that, I am a mother who doesn't want our children to come to harm. While I am not trying to stop you from attacking an important stronghold of the Gauge Dynasty, I have serious doubts and objections about launching an attack with our entire fleet. We have too many ships that have no business on the battlefield!"

Ves grimaced and crossed his arms. "You already know why we have to do this. Do you think I like dragging the Spirit of Bentheim, the Vivacious Wal and the Diligent Ovenbird to one of the biggest battlefields in this zone? I don't, but I don't have a choice. It's not just about maintaining the solidarity of all of our clansmen. It's about keeping everything we care about by our side. We can't trust the authorities in Davute to protect all of our valuable but vulnerable non-combat ships."

"Then why not park the ships in question in the Hex Federation?" Gloriana suggested. "The Wodin Dynasty is my family but yours as well. Brutus, Ranya and myself are all married to you Larkinsons. If there is anyone you can trust in this dwarf galaxy, it will be my relatives. My mother would love to spend time with her grandchildren. Though she can always talk to our children over the galactic net, there is nothing better than hugging them in person. She would be more than willing to extend her dynasty's protection to our civilian vessels. You can go off and satisfy your violent and destructive urges while our children and I will remain utterly safe and far away from any scary and threatening Fridaymen."

"..."

While Ves acknowledged that Gloriana had made a few good points, her tone did not sit well with him.

However, the bigger problem was that he did not want to leave Aurelia, Andraste and most importantly Marvaine in the clutches of his in-laws for weeks on end!

Who knew how much Hexer poison Madame Constance Wodin would instill in the minds of his innocent children?

"No."

"No, what?"

"I am not stashing our civilians and civilian vessels at the Wodin Dynasty. It goes against clan policy to entrust our family and our most vulnerable assets to third parties. While I am sure that the Hex Federation is trustworthy enough, I am not in the habit of making any exceptions."

"YOU ARE THE CLAN PATRIARCH! YOU ARE THE ONE WHO SET THIS RULE IN THE FIRST PLACE! YOU CAN EASILY REVERSE IT AS LONG AS YOU DO THE RIGHT THING!"

"Don't yell so much, honey! Look at what you're doing to our daughter!"

Aurelia didn't like it when her parents were screaming at each other. Her eyes already began to tear up as she began to squirm in her mother's grasp.

"Whaaaa! Mama doesn't love papa anymore!"

Gloriana panicked all of a sudden. "That's not true, baby! Mama and papa still love each other. We are just having a disagreement, that's all. Mama and papa are both happy with each other, isn't that right, Ves?"

The warning tone at the end made sure to remind Ves that he needed to play along.

He quickly nodded. "That's right. Your mother and father aren't breaking up. In fact, we will make sure to stay by each other's side even as we commence our attack on the bad guys that I have pointed out. We'll remain as one happy family as our forces overrun the Fridaymen defensive lines and lay waste to their precious settlement."

Aurelia's tears dried up remarkably quickly after that. She even giggled and clapped at the prospect of enjoying another 'family outing'!

"Yay!"

Her mother on the other hand had grown speechless. "..."

Chapter 4214 Mercer Larkinson

As the large and formidable expeditionary fleet crossed the border between Krakatoa and Magair, no incidents occurred.

Though space was anything but safe these days, hardly anyone wanted to provoke a formidable pioneering alliance.

It was well-known that the Golden Skull Alliance was not only capable of fielding more than a mech division worth of crack troops, but also enjoyed the protection of a genuine ace pilot and ace mech!

Any group with or without a brain knew better than to provoke the expeditionary fleet. Its intimidation factor became so high that any other ships or fleets in the same star system actually took the initiative to increase the distance.

It would be a tragedy if they created a misunderstanding!

The only possible enemies that might ignore the deterrence of the main fleet were indigenous alien forces and feral astral beasts.

The chances of bumping into either of them was fairly rare, though. Years had passed since the Big Two conquered the Magair Middle Zone and Krakatoa Middle Zone. Many subsequent human forces had poured in and cleaned up all of the alien stragglers that managed to escape the initial net.

These days, most of human-occupied space had become a lot safer than before. At the very least, a lot of groups such as the Fridaymen and Hexers became more worried about fending off threats from each other than random voribug swarms or puelmer retribution fleets.

This was also one of the reasons why Ves was eager to head towards the deep frontier. He had already seen his fair share of combat against human mech forces. He would much rather bump against new and interesting aliens that could give him a lot more surprises on and off the battlefield.

"Too many people are way too obsessed about fighting other humans." Ves shook his head in disappointment. "The aliens are our real enemies. Fighting them is a much worthier case, and more profitable besides."

He understood why a lot of people didn't hold much interest in challenging humanity's external opponents.

It was hard to put up a fair fight against titanic phase whales and enormous nunsen warships that could give the Big Two a run for their money.

Not even the Golden Skull Alliance dared to stray too close to the frontlines and seek a confrontation against the strongest alien fighting forces!

In any case, with nothing special happening during this period, Ves spent most of his time on participating in the planning of the upcoming assault.

The scope of operation Saturday Market was enormous.

While the amount of mechs involved in the fighting was not as exaggerated as the biggest and deadliest battles of the Komodo War, the strategic importance of the upcoming confrontation was just as great if not greater!

A victory would drastically weaken the strongest pillar of the Friday Coalition and give its weaker partners a much-needed reprieve.

A defeat would not only damage the Golden Skull Alliance in a time where it could least afford it, but also alter the balance of power between the Friday Colonies and the Hex Federation by weakening the latter!

There was too much riding in this operation for the Hexers and the Golden Skullers to fail. If not for the fact that many indications looked favorable, Ves and the others wouldn't have maintained their willingness to launch such a risky operation.

While the Black Cats and other spies continued to keep a close eye on the Fridaymen, more and more information poured in from many different sources.

The intelligence continued to confirm and expand the leaks provided by Tristan. The Hexers knew so much about Pima Prime and its extensive defensive plans that they could even conduct rudimentary simulation training of the upcoming invasion!

The Larkinsons and the Glory Seekers began to fight repeated battles in a simulated version of the port system with the help of the MSTS.

Most of the Crossers did not have access to living mechs, so it was impossible to grant them a connection to the MSTS unless they hopped into the cockpit of a Larkinson mech.

However, each of them made do by completing virtual training scenarios with regular simulation training systems.

The mech pilots weren't stupid. Even without a formal announcement, many of them figured out what they were preparing to do. There was no other reason to conduct repeated training sessions on attacking a major fortified star system!

"Why are we preparing to launch an assault on Pima Prime? We're Larkinsons, not Hexers! I didn't sign up to fight in a continuation of the Komodo War!"

"The patriarch must have his plans. We are much stronger than the enemy. There's no way we can lose."

"The Fridaymen killed my brother! I never got the opportunity to take revenge on them until now!"

Just as Ves and the other leaders expected, the sentiment among the soldiers were mixed, but not too opposed towards this upcoming action.

By this time, General Verle and the legion commanders had made it clear that the Golden Skull Alliance only committed to a single battle against the Fridaymen.

Once the Larkinsons and their allies concluded Operation Saturday Market, they would get back on track and start the Trailblazer Expedition in earnest.

As Ves and his fellow lead designers began to spend time on advising the mech legions on how to deploy their signature mechs against the Fridaymen, a few Larkinsons expressed their misgivings about their participation.

It did not surprise Ves at all to see Jannzi showing up one day. The expert pilot had never changed her stance, but she rarely kicked up a fuss these days.

What was different was that she visited his workspace in the design labs while being accompanied by her young son.

Ves frankly did not expect his cousin to go as far as to marry a clansman and bear a son.

He thought that her will was so focused on following her convictions that there wasn't any room for love in her heart.

It appeared that he thought too simply about her and other strong-willed expert pilots. Just like many other Larkinsons, Jannzi did her duty and started her own family.

"Hello, patriarch." The boy politely greeted as he had been taught.

"Hello, Mercer." Ves smiled back as he turned his attention away from the schematic of one of the key mechs of the Fridaymen. "How are you, today? Are you adjusting well to life on a ship?"

"It is fun! Everything is so cool! I miss our old home. I want to go back one day."

"Haha, maybe your wish will come true."

Mercer was a cute boy that shared a lot of resemblances with Marvaine. Since the two were roughly of the same age, they frequently spent time together.

The two M's shared none of the tension that their parents held towards each other and already turned into bosom buddies!

Seeing that Jannzi was growing impatient, Ves picked up Lucky who was dozing on a nearby workbench and tossed the clueless gem cat in the direction of Mercer.

"Meow?!"

"You go play with Lucky, alright? Your mother and I have grown-up business to talk about."

"Okay."

As Lucky began to distract Mercer, Jannzi strode forward and stood in front of Ves.

"We need to talk." She spoke as her powerful will pressed against Ves.

"I can gather that seeing as you visited me unannounced."

"What are you doing, really? Why did you decide to participate in this fool's errand? Don't tell me it is because you care about the Hexers. I know you well enough that you would never easily commit our entire fleet on such a dangerous operation. Your grudges against the Fridaymen shouldn't be serious enough for you to take such a drastic step either. What motivates you into taking part in a conflict that is none of our business?"

There were many reasons why Ves was in favor of this action, but he didn't think it would be a good idea to reveal them all to a busybody like Venerable Jannzi.

"We need to test our strength. What better way than to fight against an opponent that we know extremely well? Besides, we also need to use this opportunity to show off to others that we are not to be trifled with. We have grown a lot more formidable than before, but not everyone is aware of all of the gains we have made. Demonstrating our ability in combat will do much in keeping our clan and clansmen safe against opportunists looking to take advantage of us. Think about the family we have left behind in Davute. Our branch there is well-protected, but it wouldn't hurt to amplify our reputation so that our branch members can stay safe."

His arguments primarily emphasized the safety of the Larkinson Clan. This was what Jannzi cared about the most.

While his words sounded nice, Jannzi wasn't fooled.

"We can demonstrate our combat prowess in many other ways. If we just proceeded with the Trailblazer Expedition as planned, we would have stumbled upon an alien fleet sooner or later. Fighting against the aliens that wish to do humanity harm is a much nobler and worthier cause than getting dragged back into a grudge war between two human groups."

Ves scratched his head. "I don't disagree with you, but there is a difference between being noble and being naive. We have lots of enemies in human space, you know. There are a lot of rivals based in Davute that would love nothing more than to push us away. There are also competitors based in other port systems such as Makairo that are also eager to get rid of us. I can't tell you how many times our Black Cats have foiled malicious attempts to harm our clansmen and sabotage our assets."

"That may be true, but what does that have to do with Operation Saturday Market? As I've said before, we can build up a reputation in many other ways besides attacking a Fridayman colony. What is it you are really after? Are you aiming to plunder Pima Prime like you did at Purgatory? Are you trying to add another notable but easy victory under your belt? Correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't this battle less about furthering the interests of our clan and more about satisfying your ego and vanity?"

This line of questioning quickly began to grate on Ves! There was no way he wanted to get caught by her rhythm. That would only lead to undesirable outcomes!

"Stop." Ves raised his palm. "Stop with these stupid questions. Let's just skip all of this nonsense and get to the real point that you are trying to make. What do you want, Jannzi? What is the purpose of your visit?"

Venerable Jannzi paused for a moment. She grimaced at the thought of all of the bloodshed that might ensue.

"I have come on behalf of myself and other concerned Larkinsons, many of whom don't dare to speak out against you. I want you to guarantee to us that if our side manages to win the upcoming battle, our forces and the Hexer forces must refrain from slaughtering the defenseless Fridaymen citizens as much as possible."

"You... are asking a bit much, Jannzi. Don't you get that this is the war we're talking about? There is no room for mercy on the battlefield!"

"The Fridaymen and the Hexers have managed to avoid excessive civilian casualties in most battles! Whenever one of them conquer a star system, they have never committed any mass murders!"

Ves snorted. "That's because the rules of the game are different in the old galaxy! The Friday Coalition and the Hexadric Hegemony had no choice but to

abide by the directives set by the MTA and CFA. It just so happens that the rules are a lot looser in the Red Ocean. It is not uncommon to hear about entire colonies and their populations disappearing from existence. This is the reality of the new frontier. Those who venture in this lawless space must bear the risks associated with profiting from it. If you object to this regime, then take it up with the Big Two."

"I am not talking about the Big Two, Ves. I am talking about what we can do to limit any unnecessary bloodshed. We cannot be party to an incident where we become culpable to the deaths of millions of civilians!"

Ves couldn't believe what he heard. How could she be so foolish?

Chapter 4215 Greater Leverage

Although Ves wanted to get rid of Jannzi right away, he knew that he needed to give her a satisfactory answer.

Pissing off an expert pilot was never a good idea. Pissing off Jannzi when he knew that she spoke for a larger group of clansmen also wasn't wise.

Part of being a patriarch was to placate his constituents when they opposed his policies and decisions.

He did not pay too much attention to this in the past, but as the Larkinson Clan grew explosively in the last few years, the situation had gradually become more complex.

Hundreds of thousands of people had come from every corner of the old galaxy and joined the Larkinson Clan.

The fact that they managed to get through the screening meant that they were at least somewhat compatible with his ideology.

However, it was hard to recruit qualified manpower that were just as aggressive and ambitious as himself. A lot of professionals who had joined the clan in the last 5 years were much more innocent and naive than the battle-

tested veterans that had gone through the Battle of Reckoning, the Battle of Fordilla Zentra and the Purgatory Campaign.

These newer adopted Larkinsons never developed any personal grudges against the Fridaymen. They only heard about the hatred that the Larkinson Clan held towards the Friday Coalition but never became involved with it until recently.

If Ves wanted to maintain the cohesion of all 500,000 Larkinsons in the fleet, then he needed to be more considerate about the needs of the ones that weren't eager to bash the faces of the Fridaymen.

He sighed again. "I know it is hard to get this through your thick expert pilot skull, but you vastly overestimate my influence. While I am willing to restrain our fellow Larkinsons, I have no power in stopping the Hexers from doing what they want. The Hexers who have fled to the Red Ocean have all done so because they were driven out by the Fridaymen. The hatred between these two groups is irreconcilable."

Even Jannzi couldn't deny that the Fridaymen and Hexers were unlikely to become friends, but that didn't mean she should give up on her quest.

"Where is your humanity? Oh, I forgot. You corroded it many years ago. You're a mech designer without a conscience."

"Humanity is a lot uglier than you think. Imagine if this situation was reversed and that it is the Friday Colonies plotting to attack the Hex Federation. The Fridaymen would have butchered the Hexers without any hesitation if they managed to succeed in an attack. The Hexers are merely defending their own civilians, many of whom are also innocent by the way, from unjust slaughter by striking first."

"That is the stupidest and most deceitful argument that I have heard from you so far. You're despicable, Ves." The expert pilot snarled.

"Then let me give you another dose of reality. The ultimate truth is that the Magair Middle Zone is too small to accommodate the Fridaymen and Hexers. They're going to fight and kill each other no matter what you think about it because they're never going to respect your opinion. At least now a fight will take place while the colonies are relatively underdeveloped. Only millions will die instead of billions. Isn't that great?"

"..."

Ves crossed his arms. "If you want to issue a demand from me, then be realistic. Even without our clan's involvement, the Hex Federation still would have committed to this attack. They would be fools not to after one group of Fridaymen sold out another group of Fridaymen. Hell, even our allies would have continued without us. The Glory Seekers are literally Hexers while Patriarch Reginald Cross will jump at any legitimate opportunity to duel against an ace pilot. This attack will proceed without or without our participation."

"What are you saying, Ves?"

"Instead of trying to stop the inevitable, you should focus on trying to accomplish a goal that is within your power." He calmly said. "Don't forget you are just one of many expert pilots in our clan and alliance. If you happened to be an ace pilot, we would take your opinions much more seriously, but even then it is unlikely that you can do much to change our course unless you can convince Saint Reginald to reconsider his intentions. For now, your voice is limited, and you need to accept that, Jannzi."

The woman's face turned ugly. She understood this truth quite well due to being confronted by it many times. Even though her progress as an expert pilot was quite impressive, there were plenty of other expert pilots that also performed well within the clan.

Aside from that, the influence of Patriarch Reginald was too great. Even though he was not as clever and ingenious as Ves, being an ace pilot allowed Reginald a lot of opposition by force or by the admiration he drew from his strength!

There were many times where Jannzi saw how easily Reginald got things done by issuing decrees. If she was as powerful as him, she too would have been able to change the direction of her entire clan!

The expert pilot shook her head. She was far from reaching this height. She needed to bide her time and wait until she developed to a point where she could restore a bit of sanity in the Larkinson Clan.

In the meantime, she accepted Ves' advice and took a step back. She thought for a moment before she came up with a more realistic alternative.

"Then... can you convince the Hexers to show more restraint in battle? I don't mean that they should hold back against hostile combatants. The Fridaymen mech pilots and defensive personnel are all soldiers who have accepted the risks that come with the job. The civilians haven't. They are earnest colonists and immigrants that have moved to the Red Ocean in order to build a new future for themselves and their families. Please tell our forces and the forces of our allies to spare them if possible. I can understand it if the civilians take up arms, but there is no reason to harm them as long as they do nothing but cower in their shelters."

That was a more sensible suggestion. Ves seriously considered the possibility.

"Our people are honorable, so they will not be a party to any massacres. The Crossers are the same. I'm not sure about the Glory Seekers and the Hexers, though. The war against the Fridaymen has run too deep. In a state of total war, the civilian population of the Friday Colonies are all invaluable assets. Even if they don't directly serve in the armed forces, they are still capable of

farming food, mining exotics, producing mechs, manning starships and handling all the bureaucracy. Sparing these civilians will mean that they will eventually put their time and effort into endeavors that will cause a lot of harm to the Hex Federation."

Jannzi's face grew ugly again. "You can't convince the Hexers to do even this?"

"What I am saying is that sparing the Fridaymen will leave future dangers behind that will come to bite the Hex Federation in the butt. It is not in the best interest of the Hexers to make a decision that will only cause further harm for themselves."

"Hehehehe. That is funny. In my opinion, the Hexers are quite good at self-harm." Jannzi darkly chuckled.

"Well, you may have had a point in the past, but they've lost a lot of their hubris. They will definitely make certain that they are not as careless as before. That will only strengthen their resolve to crush the Fridaymen as much as possible. It is unrealistic for the Hexer soldiers to spare any mercy towards the civilian colonists residing in Pima Prime. Your reasoning is not good enough."

This put Jannzi in a bind. She could not in good conscience allow herself to leave without a result. If she wanted to do more than pay lip service to values, then she needed to be more earnest in upholding her noble ideals!

"Then... what about taking the Fridaymen civilians prisoner?" She reluctantly suggested.

"Go on."

"It will be just like what you have done with the pakklavons. Since you're willing to spare alien civilians, there is no reason why the Hexers can do the same with the Fridaymen. Taking prisoners is a common occurrence in war. The

Hexers don't have to do this for nothing. Human lives are valuable. It is impossible for the Gauge Dynasty to allow millions of its citizens to languish in captivity. The Hex Federation can ransom the prisoners or use them as leverage for a swap. I am certain that the Friday Coalition captured a lot of Hexer soldiers during the Komodo War. If these Hexer prisoners are still languishing in their cells, then they can finally be freed after the two sides make a deal!"

This was a much better argument than what Ves had heard before! While it was a lot harder to take so many prisoners in a short amount of time, it should be viable as long as the Hex Federation made additional preparations.

Most colony settlements in the Red Ocean offered robust emergency shelters for its citizens in case they came under attack.

These shelters could mostly be found deep underground and were all hardened against determined attacks and orbital bombardment.

Normally, it took a lot of time and effort to find and breach these shelters. It was much easier to shatter them entirely with overwhelming might than to delicately drill an entrance and capture every person inside with nonlethal force.

The situation was different this time. The leaked intelligence happened to include thorough blueprints and maps that showed the locations, capacities and other traits of each emergency shelter.

This made it at least ten times easier to break into them and empty them of people!

Ves smiled at Jannzi. "I will pass on this suggestion to the Hexers. I think it has a lot of merit. While killing prisoners will undoubtedly set back the Fridaymen, the Hexers can gain even greater profit if they make good use of their new bargaining chips. However, I should warn you that accidents can

always happen on the battlefield. Mechs aren't known for being gentle. I hope you adjust your expectations properly."

"As long as our side doesn't engage in butchery, I will take it. I hope we can put this sordid operation behind us as soon as possible and head towards the deep frontier where we can fight against proper opponents. I truly cannot understand why we humans have to fight at all. Aren't there enough territories in the Red Ocean for people to colonize? Why couldn't the Fridaymen and Hexers settle further away from each other? Occupying star systems in the same zone is just asking for trouble!"

Ves cluelessly shrugged. "I don't know either. People are strange like that. The Fridaymen and Hexers simply can't let each other go. Not even relocating to the new frontier can change their obsession towards each other."

"These people would have benefited humanity a lot more if they stopped fighting against each other and turned their firepower against the aliens." Jannzi said while shaking her head in disappointment. "They're like children that can't accept the need to share their toys. Although I don't like it, our race is aggressively encroaching on the territories of other races, this is at least more sensible than allowing humans to fight and kill each other like nothing has changed."

"This is part of human nature, Jannzi. Even in a situation where there are a lot of star systems up for grabs, we can't help but want to monopolize the best star systems with the richest resources. This is why Davute and Makairo are slowly entering into a collision course even though there is still a lot more room for expansion in their own colonies. We just keep wanting to obtain more."

"What if we stop wanting more?"

"Then we'll get overtaken by hostile alien races that are more hungry and have made more gains than us. There is no way out. We can either keep progressing as fast as we can or we die."

Chapter 4216 Special Briefing

Today was a special day. As the expeditionary fleet moved deeper into the Magair Middle Zone, the Hex Federation and the Golden Skull Alliance collected and verified enough intelligence to flesh out Operation Saturday Market.

The complete and comprehensive attack plan was an extremely complex affair that could fill up an entire library.

The Larkinson Clan was simply unable to plan out so many details, movements and actions in advance.

Fortunately, the Hexers had evacuated plenty of veteran strategists and staff officers from the Hex Army to the Red Ocean. Many of them were involved in the planning and data analysis of multiple major military operations.

Each of them earnestly pooled their efforts to formulate a thorough and realistic attack plan in the shortest possible time.

Much of it fell out of the scope of the Larkinson Clan and the Golden Skull Alliance. They involved tedious and troublesome matters such as preparing the logistics for all of the mech units, deploying scouting ships at star systems that might hide secret reinforcements and charting numerous different escape routes to avoid interception from angry Fridaymen.

The plan also went into thorough detail on what the different fleet elements and mech units should do once they arrived in the Pima Prime Star System.

As a port system that served a similar purpose as Davute, the place contained more than just a single terraformed and colonized planet!

Even though all of the Larkinson mech pilots had familiarized themselves with the probable opposition that they might face once they ventured into Pime Prime, the latest update from the Hex Federation finally clarified the role that the Golden Skull Alliance would play in the upcoming operation.

It was not easy for mech pilots to keep their heads in a massive war theater. Pima Prime was almost as large and developed as Davute, so there were a lot of objectives and a lot of opposition that was spread out over many different areas.

In order to ensure that every Larkinson mech pilot remained on the same page, General Verle decided to hold a general briefing.

The briefing was a bit different from normal, however.

Instead of standing in front of a stage where General Verle held a lecture that would be broadcast in different assembly halls across many different carrier vessels, he decided to take advantage of the latest technology and hold a more immersive event.

"Can you do this, Ves?"

Ves frowned for a moment as he parsed the man's suggestion.

"I never really thought about it before, but theoretically it should be possible. You already maintain a connection with the Golden Cat, but the bandwidth isn't too big. However, I think that as long as you limit your actions to speaking and moving a few limbs, I don't think there is a problem with your question. You've actually given me a lot of food for thought. Let me see what I can do. This won't take too long."

After Ves made a few additional improvisations, the general briefing commenced.

Vulcan had to work overtime to simulate a large and complete spiritual simulation of the Pima Prime System.

The central star and all of the planets and significantly-sized moons were rendered in impressive detail.

The MSTS even portrayed the basic shapes of the asteroid belts and planetary rings, and displayed parts of it in much greater detail if there were areas of interest.

At the same time, over 10,000 mech pilots simultaneously entered the cockpits of their mechs and interfaced with their battle partners.

Together, both the mechs and mech pilots engaged the MSTS in unison. Vulcan accepted each of the incoming connections and caused the mech pilots to appear above the star system's plane, giving them an impressive view of Pima Prime.

The simulation did not just display the stars and planets with the naked eye. The MSTS also displayed numerous markings and annotations to show the orbits of the satellites and the estimation population of humans on every settled part of the star system.

After giving all of the mech pilots a bit of time to take in the new setting, the simulated form of General Verle appeared in front of the floating crowd.

The man felt as if he was a specter who was about to egg on an army of ghosts. He inwardly sighed at how amazing the MSTS was at making him feel as if he was really floating above the Pima Prime System. The sense of realism was far beyond any virtual simulation programs he had tried.

"My fellow soldiers. Welcome to Pima Prime. Each of you have conducted many simulated fights in this star system already, but now that the Hexers and us have tentatively finalized our plan, I can finally tell you what we will be doing once we commence the actual operation."

Every Larkinson mech pilot connected to the MSTS perked up. The expert pilots who floated at the front of the massive crowd were more attentive than most.

The general first swept his arm across the star system down below. "Let's get the basics out of the way. Pima Prime is of great significance to the Gauge Dynasty. It is one of the few port systems of the Friday Colonies, and it is relatively abundant in common resources. This makes it a great place to build up a colony quickly and steadily turn it into an economic and industrial hub of the surrounding region."

He waved his arm. The presentation changed as the simulation displayed the flow of traffic that passed through the star system in the last few years.

"As you can see, the port system is functioning exactly as intended. Many comparisons have been made between Pima Prime and Davute, but the biggest difference between the two is that the former is backed by a single state while the latter is founded by a conglomerate of different pioneers. What this means is that 80 to 90 percent of all of the people, traffic and most importantly mechs in Pima Prime hail from the Friday Coalition or more specifically the Gauge Dynasty."

The reason why Davute attracted so much traffic from people who originated from all over the old galaxy was that it did not overtly attach itself to any legacy powers.

The pioneers who packed up their bags and passed through the beyonder gate wanted to found their own sovereign states. Each of them dreamt of becoming the kings or at least the dukes of their own kingdoms!

While it was a lot easier for the pioneers to accomplish their goals with state backing, the problem was that ultimate control would always rest with the officials and financiers from the Milky Way!

This was not what the ambitious founders of Davute wanted to happen, so they all agreed to invest and develop their port system using their funding and resources.

Their risky gamble succeeded and they managed to present enough of an open atmosphere that Davute became known as one of the friendliest places to conduct trade and commerce in the Krakatoa Middle Zone.

The situation was different at Pima Prime, and the mech pilots needed to know that in order to avoid making any false assumptions.

"When the pioneers hailing from the Friday Coalition entered the Red Ocean, they adopted a united strategy that called for colonizing lots of star systems in the same space region. The result is a sizable concentration of settlements that are all close enough to conduct mutual trade. Pima Prime already serves as the lynchpin of this trade. The Friday Colonies is already large and extensive enough that it does not need to import a significant amount of raw resources or finished goods from external sources. This makes Pima Prime much more cohesive and less chaotic than Davute."

The latter acted as more of a freeport where anyone from any place could come and conduct trades. As long as the traders and visitors did not bring any outrageous contraband or possessed a history of breaking the rules, they were all welcome in Davute!

Pima Prime on the other hand primarily existed to further the development of the Gauge Dynasty's colonies and lay the groundwork for its future dominance in the Friday Colonies.

External trade was not as necessary at the current stage and scale of colonial development in the Magair Middle Zone.

The frequent raids conducted by the Hexers made it a lot more dangerous to welcome foreigners in the Friday Colonies.

As such, the Fridaymen maintained a lot more vigilance towards foreign traffic. It was no surprise that a lot of trading fleets preferred to try their luck elsewhere.

The relative dearth of foreign traffic made it a lot harder for spies and malcontents to slip inside Pima Prime.

Fortunately, the Black Cats and the Hexer spy agencies knew the Fridaymen well enough to circumvent the strict security precautions.

"While Pima Prime is overly geared to servicing the domestic needs of the Friday Colonies, there are just enough foreigners passing through the port system for us and the Hexers to insert at least a respectable amount of infiltration and saboteur teams." General Verle spoke. "With the help of the intelligence leaks that we have obtained, these teams will play an important role in softening up the defenses and causing disarray among the opposition. I will explain the most relevant operations to us later. Just know that if everything goes right, the Gaugers will have to fend off attacks from within and without. This will make it much more difficult for them to maintain their composure!"

This was one of the ways the attackers intended to maximize their advantages. How could the Hexers not take advantage of all of the weaknesses exposed by the information package passed on by Tristan?

In truth, the assassins and saboteurs did not even need to succeed in their efforts. As long as they diverted vital manpower and resources away from the main fight and as long as they spread a lot of fear and confusion among the defending troops, they already contributed a lot to the operation!

General Verle pointed at the different planets orbiting the star.

"As a sizable star system, Pima Prime boasts 8 terrestrial planets, 4 gas giants and hundreds of moons. The Gaugers have only terraformed two

terrestrial planets and one of the moons orbiting a gas giant thus far. Not only that, they also built dozens of space stations that orbit both settled and unsettled star systems."

The military leader grinned. "By the time our forces depart from this port system, I expect we will have trashed all these costly colonies and space stations."

The economic damage from doing all of this was incalculable!

It was already extremely costly for the Gauge Dynasty to send entire fleets filled with valuable resources and industrial machinery through the beyonder gate.

It cost even more time, money and effort to build up all of the mines, factories and infrastructure needed to quickly ramp up local industries.

While all of this would be worth it in the end, the premise was that the Gauge Dynasty was able to protect all of its infrastructure during this time!

If a group of angry Hexers barged into Pima Prime and happened to break all of this expensive stuff, then the Gauge Dynasty's colonial ambitions would be set back by several years!

While the Gaugers had the money and the resources to make up for their material losses, it was a lot more difficult to regain all of the time they lost if their most important colony in the Magair Middle Zone was razed to the ground.

Plenty of competitors who owned and developed their port systems would quickly take off and create a permanent disparity that meant that Pima Prime would always trail behind!

This was practically a death sentence to the Gauge Dynasty's desire to dominate the colonial state and become the undisputed hegemon of the Friday Coalition!

General Verle emphasized this priority in no uncertain terms. "This is our primary objective. Above all else, we must inflict as much material damage to Pima Prime's infrastructure. We don't necessarily need to defeat every defensive troop. If the enemy mechs have lost their courage and wish to distance themselves from our forces, then they are free to do so. We will just go on and bombard all of their precious factories and other valuable structures into scrap. Mechs can easily be replaced, but the manufacturing complexes that pump them all out are much more difficult to rebuild!"

In other words, in order to set back a colonial state, it was better to wreck all of the boring infrastructure than to defeat entire mech armies upfront!

Chapter 4217: Titan Shields

General Verle saw plenty of difficult and overwhelmed expressions from the mech pilots who attended the special briefing.

It was all well and good to talk about wrecking dozens of space stations and lots of different settlements that were spread across multiple different planets, but pulling it all off was much more difficult!

Many Larkinsons had never participated in an operation of this scope, let alone fight in a battle that involved more than a handful of mechs!

Even the veterans who had taken part in battles that involved over 10,000 mechs did not have the confidence to be able to strike at so many targets during a brief invasion.

They needed to cover too many targets!

This was bad because the Larkinson Clan had always been at its strongest when it was able to concentrate all of its mech forces in a single location.

While it was possible for every mech legion and individual mech company was able to spread out and complete different objectives, the Larkinson Army simply didn't have enough training, experience and institutional support to effectively complete such complex operations.

It was impossible for General Verle to miss these truths, so he quickly made it clear that the Larkinsons held different responsibilities.

The man waved his arm, causing a hypothetical invasion force to appear at the edge of the star system.

Thousands of starships of different sizes and ship classes appeared in rapid succession!

These were the carriers and support vessels that made up the Hex Federation and Golden Skull Alliance's massive invasion force!

Once they arrived in the star system, they collectively headed towards the inner system where the most valuable targets resided.

That didn't mean they continued to gather in one gigantic formation.

There were lots of secondary targets in the star system that could easily be taken out as long as the attackers spent a little effort.

Soon enough, the sped-up simulation showed over a dozen different carrier squadrons splitting up from the main formation in order to head towards numerous different valuable sites in the outer system.

"As you can see, the Hex Army is already prepared to send detachments to ruin all of the mining posts, military space stations and other outlying strategic assets. As long as the leaked intelligence is still accurate and not too out of date, the Hexers should be able to bring just enough mechs to guarantee success without drawing too much strength away. Once these detachments have completed their objectives, they will converge back to the main fleet and provide any aid as needed."

This would take quite a bit of time, so thousands of Hexer mechs would not be present in any opening battle.

"Make no mistake, soldiers. Our time is limited." General Verle stated. "A port system is much more valuable to a state than a regular star system. Ruining it will deal untold damage to the Gauge Dynasty, but the downside is that it is much easier for different elements of the Sundered Phalanx to reinforce Pima Prime. The longer we remain in the star system, the more Gauger mechs will come to salvage a victory from this ruinous tragedy."

The point he was trying to make was that while the attackers might be able to overcome the initial opposition, the constant flow of reinforcements from the surrounding star systems made it increasingly more dangerous to linger in Pima Prime.

"We believe that it is highly unwise to stay in the port system for more than a week." The general continued. "We do not necessarily fear the reinforcements dispatched by the Gauge Dynasty, but the longer the Hexers continue to violate the Friday Colonies as a whole, the more it becomes unreasonable for the other coalition partners to stand by and do nothing. We expect the troops of the Konsu Clan to move fairly quickly while the ones belonging to the remaining four coalition partners will try to delay as long as possible. However, the Carnegies and the Vermeers and so on cannot pretend to procrastinate forever."

The Carnegie Group, the Vermeer Group, the Vanguard Group and the Puffer Clan were all part of the same state as the Gauge Dynasty.

As much as they had begun to compete against each other in different areas, they were still nominally comrades-in-arms. They were all obligated to dispatch reinforcements in the event one of their own got attacked.

Perhaps the states might get away with delaying their troop movements for a day or two, but any longer than that would make their lack of action too unreasonable. The Friday Coalition might fall apart directly as a result and that was an outcome that none of the coalition partners wanted to see for the time being.

This was not great news for the Larkinson mech pilots. They needed to be able to get in, do their jobs and get out before help from all over the Friday Colonies arrived.

There was no way to conduct a slow and patient siege that best reduced the risks and dangers as much as possible.

The good news was that the Golden Skull Alliance wasn't expected to do much during this assault.

The expeditionary fleet would remain close with the main fleet of the Hexer invasion force and continue to move towards the most important and critical planet in the star system.

The Gaugers built three significant settlements in the port system.

Pima Prime IX-C was a moon orbiting a gas giant that the Fridaymen converted into a gas processing complex and depot.

Specialized gas mining vessels routinely skimmed the outer layers of the nearby gas giant in order to collect and filter out valuable substances.

Once they filled up their cargo holds, the gas skimmers returned to Pima Prime IX-C where they delivered the raw materials to the fuel production plants.

A lot of Fridayman mechs and starships made use of the different fuels produced from Pima Prime IX-C!

However, due to its outlying position, it was easy for the Hex Army to destroy it, so General Verle did not waste his time on this part of the plan.

He pointed towards one of the planets.

"There are two significant colonies in this star system. Pima Prime IV is the administrative hub of the port system. It also hosts a sizable military presence where numerous mech divisions are situated. If possible, the Hex Federation will send a detachment to overrun it and raze it to the ground, but there is not that much infrastructure on this planet to merit much attention."

The General turned towards another planet.

"The focus of Operation Saturday Market is centered around Pima Prime V. The fifth planet from the local star is where the Gauge Dynasty has decided to base most of its trade and industrial facilities. It is equivalent to Davute VII in a sense. If you imagine the planet where we have lived on for multiple years, then you will get a quick idea on what Pima Prime is like. Of course, the details are still different."

A lot of Larkinson mech pilots turned grave at the thought of invading a planet that was similar to Davute VII.

The degree of urban development was so great that the defenses were bound to be formidable!

"Let's talk about the orbital defenses first." General Verle said as the surroundings zoomed in to display a clear view of the layout of Pima Prime V. "Once our main fleet approaches this orbital region, we will first have to go through Pima Prime V-A and Pima Prime V-B."

The man pointed at the outer moon.

"Pima Prime V-B serves as a convenient trading and logistical hub for intersystem trade. It is basically a drop-off point for bulk cargo that is meant to be shipped to another destination. The cargo deposited in the warehouses built across the surface of this moon are generally raw materials or processed materials that are mostly reserved for planetary construction. Most of it isn't valuable so the moon's defenses are rather limited."

Verle then pointed at the inner moon.

"Pima Prime V-A is different. It has a considerable strategic value because it not only hosts a major military base, but also large manufacturing and assembly complexes dedicated to shipbuilding. While a lot of shipbuilding takes place in orbital drydocks, a significant amount of parts are produced and assembled on this moon for convenience and to achieve economies of scale. By our count, there are at least 24 moonside shipyards, many of which are responsible for constructing combat carriers and other sub-capital ships."

The value of Pima Prime V-A was great!

Though it did not host any of the really big shipyards that were capable of building capital ships, crippling these shipyards would deal a devastating blow against the Gauge Dynasty's ability to project power!

"The problem is that the Gauge Dynasty knows extremely well how important it is to protect these shipbuilding facilities, so the main complexes are all located underground. Not only that, they are built adjacent to a major military base that not only possesses a formidable amount of defensive turrets, but is also covered by a titan shield generator or city-grade shield generator."

A titan shield was basically the biggest and most formidable energy shield that could be formed by humanity.

Derived from the same technology that allowed shield generators to protect massive battleships, every titan shield generator was an incomparable huge, expensive and strategic defensive asset!

They could not only protect an area spanning up to dozens of square kilometers, but also withstand an insane amount of punishment!

If the titan shields did not have to withstand an excessive amount of damage in a short amount of time, they could theoretically run continuously for many weeks! This was because their massive generators were extremely robust and supplied with an abundance of power.

As long as the defenders hooked up enough power reactors to the generators, it would take way too long to exhaust the titan shields over time!

Every mech pilot was already familiar with the properties of titan shields. They even practiced a few siege scenarios where they were tasked with breaching different strategic sites that were covered by these massive shields.

While it was fairly easy to overwhelm these titan shields by pounding them with a lot of mechs, the enemy would never make it easy to accomplish this task!

General Verle grimaced. "While we can theoretically bypass Pima Prime V-A, it is impossible for us to allow an enemy stronghold to remain intact at our 'rear'. For better or worse, we must overrun Crosshair Base and demolish all of its hangar bays and turrets before our main invasion force can proceed. Naturally, the Hex Army will take the lead. They have brought more than enough ranged mechs armed with kinetic or explosive armaments that can quickly and efficiently overwhelm titan shields as long as they are able to do their jobs uninterrupted."

That last word was extremely important.

Tens of thousands of mechs showed up in the simulated scenario. The mech troops of the Sundered Phalanx did not appear to attack the main invasion fleet head-on. Instead, they did their best to maintain their distance but harass the attacking force as much as possible!

"In our estimation, the Sundered Phalanx will not choose to make their stand so soon. The Gaugers will likely use Pima Prime V-A and Crosshair Base as an opportunity to consume our resources. By letting the defenders of Crosshair Base take out as many Hexer mechs as possible while also expending a lot of energy cells and ammunition, our main invasion force will enter the next phase of the operation with less strength than before."

This wasn't pleasant news. Pima Prime V-A may be important due to its shipbuilding facilities, but it was not worth the price of losing hundreds if not thousands of mechs.

Venerable Joshua studied the different arrows and hypothetical movements and noticed an important detail. "Will we take action at this time, sir?"

"No." The general shook his head. "The massive Hexer force should be able to handle this task by themselves. We should remain in reserve and save as much as our resources for the next phase of the operation. It is only after we have moved past Pima Prime V-A that we will probably approach the main defensive line of the Sundered Phalanx."

The real battle started from this point as far as the planners of Operation Saturday Market was concerned!

Chapter 4218 Modern And Outdated Mechs

The ultimate goal of this ambitious assault was to ruin the Gauge Dynasty's economic and industrial ambitions in the Red Ocean.

It was for this reason that the Hexers wanted to ruin all of the buildup on Pima Prime V. They would never feel they had succeeded in this attack unless they directly turned all of the factories and cities of the busy trading planet into smoking ruins!

The Gauge Dynasty wouldn't make it easy. The military planners and analysts all expected the Gaugers to make their stand just before the invading fleet reached the doorstep of Pima Prime V.

Making a stand on the surface of the planet was unacceptable because the collateral damage of hundreds of thousands of mechs exchanging fire or crashing into each other was too great!

It was in the best interest of the defenders to fight as far away from the planet as possible, but they could not go too far or else they would give the attackers too much room for maneuver.

General Verle transmitted a silent command that gave his audience a clearer view of the immediate orbital area around Pima Prime V!

A loose ring of artificial satellites spun around the planet. When the view zoomed in even further, it became abundantly clear that many of these metal constructions were military in nature.

An entire array of orbital space stations and defensive platforms had practically turned its near orbit into a space trench!

While it was still easy enough to bypass this defensive line and land troops onto the surface, any carrier vessel that attempted to do so would likely be pelted by a lot of attacks from different directions!

The only way to reasonably transport a massive amount of mechs to the surface was to smash this orbital defense network first!

As long as the string of fortified space stations and defensive platforms got cleaned up, it not only became easy to dispatch a lot of mechs to the ground, but also bombard a lot of cities and critical sites from orbit!

Even though the defenses on the ground were not light, it was a bit too much to expect these static defenses to repel an entire invasion force consisting of at least 100,000 mechs!

"The Kosaic Ring itself will not be easy to dismantle. The strongest points are the military space stations. They not only host a lot of powerful turrets, but are also protected by medium titan shields. Each of them require massed firepower in order to breach their defenses and neutralize all of their threatening aspects. Again, we do not necessarily need to be concerned about this arduous task because the Hex Army will take the lead in this assault."

General Verle pointed out the defensive platforms that were much smaller and weaker but also a lot more numerous.

"The defensive platforms built by the Gauge Dynasty are not that special. They are cheap, mass-produced constructs that essentially amount to free-floating armored laser turrets. However, their quantity along with their dispersed deployment makes it quite difficult to clean them all up in a short amount of time. As long as these defensive platforms keep firing their long-ranged laser cannons at our ships and our mechs, they can deal a lot of damage over time."

Many Larkinson mech pilots frowned. The defensive platforms might be cheap and not that high-tech, but each of them were covered by thick layers of cheap metallic armor plating.

Since these platforms weren't mechs, there was no need for them to go on a diet!

No matter how much weight these bloated constructs put on, it was okay since their only job was to maintain a stationary orbit in space!

General Verle made the situation clear to everyone. "The fixed defenses of the Kotic Ring must be overcome, but the Sundered Phalanx will make this task as difficult as possible. Unlike Pima Prima V-A which will probably be utilized as a speed bump, the orbital defense network will serve as the bulwark in which the Gaugers will make their stand."

He waved his hand, causing well over 140,000 mechs to appear!

The scary part about all of these mechs was that none of them looked like random machines that were randomly thrown together.

Many of them exhibited shared designs, shared colors and shared battle tactics!

"We can expect the Sundered Phalanx to deploy at least 14 complete mech divisions at the Kotic Ring. Each of them consist of around 10,000 spaceborn or multi-environmental military-grade mechs. Many of them are veteran units from the Komodo War. The majority of Fridaymen mech pilots have fought and lived through years of massive battles and enormous campaigns. Their piloting skills are solid and their psychological values are even more impressive. Each of them has extensive experience with dealing against suppressive glows, so don't expect them to fold so easily when we confront them with living mechs."

Every decent Fridayman veteran from the Komodo War could no longer count the amount of times they fought against Valkyrie mechs.

Though the glow of the Valkyrie mech line had received a considerable boost in effectiveness when Helena took over from the Superior Mother as design spirit, the Fridaymen had done their best to train their minds to overcome their instinctual fears!

This especially applied to the troops of the Sundered Phalanx.

As the main military branch of the Gauge Dynasty, the Sundered Phalanx was the strongest and most well-funded military branch of the entire Friday Coalition!

General Verle did not look too worried, though.

"That said, while the mech divisions in Pima Prime have all been restored back to full strength, there are many rookies among them that have not gone through all of this fighting and tempering. I believe it will be fairly easy for you to distinguish them and pick them off with ease."

That still left a lot of mechs piloted by battle-hardened veterans, though!

Many of the opposing mech pilots fought in at least ten times as many battles as the Larkinsons!

The disparity shouldn't be too great, hopefully. The Hex Army had its own fair share of Komodo War veterans.

In addition, the Larkinson mech pilots spent thousands of hours inside the MSTs. They fought in all manner of highly realistic spiritual training scenarios that were not only hardly distinguishable from reality, but also stimulated them to a much greater degree than any virtual training programs!

There were still concerns that the gap between these MSTS-trained mech pilots and grizzled veterans in the service of the Sundered Phalanx was too great.

The only way to know for certain whether the Mental Simulation Training System could truly substitute actual battle was to test the Larkinson troops against their Fridayman counterparts!

General Verle grinned. "I happen to have another piece of good news to you. After thoroughly analyzing and confirming the intelligence on the different mech divisions, we can confirm that 8 of them still make use of outdated mechs while only 6 of them are modernized."

"What do you mean by that, sir?" Someone asked.

"Let me show you a comparison between two mech divisions."

The view changed to display two large collections of Fridayman mechs.

Each of them were formidable military mech models that were all designed by multiple Master Mech Designers!

However, the more discerning among the attending mech pilots soon noticed a few clear differences between the groups of mechs.

Verle pointed towards the collection of mech models on his left. "These are the mechs utilized by the 2003rd Medallion Guards. As you can see, most of them have a bit of heft to them. This is because the mech division is dedicated to spaceborn defensive battles, which is one of the reasons why the Gauge Dynasty has assigned them to this garrison. Now, do these mech models look new in your eyes?"

A lot of mech pilots shook their heads.

"That is because the Gauge Dynasty has transferred the entire mech division with all of their mechs to the Red Ocean. While the Sundered Phalanx has

drafted a plan to replace them all with more modern and more formidable heartland-level mech models, the timeline stretches well into the next decade. There aren't enough high-quality resources available in the Friday Colonies to fabricate so many military-grade mechs. Rather than replacing their older military assets for newer ones, the Gaugers would much rather keep their old machines while steadily producing more new machines."

This was a clever scheme. The Sundered Phalanx just had to ship over a lot more mech pilots that generally took up a lot less space on a starship.

Once they arrived at the Friday Colonies, these mech pilots would remain in reserve until the Gauge Dynasty finally built enough mechs to raise a new mech division.

General Verle pointed to the collection of mechs to his right.

"The 6161th Nidin Vergers is an example of a new mech division. While their martial traditions and mech doctrines are still immature, their mechs are highly modern and considerably more formidable than the ones fielded by the Medallion Guards. Each of them are recently designed with local materials and local technological standards in mind. The Nidin Vergers is a mech division that is meant to put up a good fight against foreign military units that might originate from the galactic heartland."

The threat posed by the Nidin Vergers was almost certainly higher than the Medallion Guards!

The performance difference between the newer and older mechs could reach as much as 20 or 30 percent!

Of course, a lot of variables such as the cost to produce the mechs were different as well, so the comparisons weren't entirely fair.

Nonetheless, that did not change the fact that a considerable part of the defending troops were still stuck with using rim-level mechs that had only received minor modifications and upgrades as best!

This was good news to the Larkinson mech pilots as the clan had made sure to supply them all with new or upgraded heartland-level mechs without exception!

"What of the mechs of the Hex Army, general? Are all of them heartland-level machines as well?"

"Good question. The Hexers have tried their best to pool as many modern mechs in their attack force as they can, but don't expect any miracles. What I can tell you is that all of the living mechs designed for the Hex Army are updated to current standards. This is especially the case with the newest batch of Hexer mech models that our mech designers have recently supplied to the Hexers. You can expect each of them to be as strong as our own mechs."

This gave the Larkinsons a lot of reassurance. Any mech designed by their patriarch was undoubtedly powerful enough to earn a lot of respect on the battlefield.

Since the Hexers were such avid fans of the mechs designed by Ves and Gloriana, the Hex Army would undoubtedly deploy a huge amount of them for this massive operation!

"Which of the mech divisions will we fight against, sir? Will we be focusing our firepower on the outdated mech divisions in order to clean them up as quickly as possible?"

"No." General Verle immediately shook his head. "It's the exact opposite in fact. We will take up the fight against the strongest and most modern mech divisions fielded by the Sundered Phalanx!"

That caused a lot of mech pilots to react with surprise!

"Do you think we are here to freeload off the Hex Army? I can imagine that it might be tempting to push the greatest burdens onto the Hexers, but that would be a disservice to our honor, our efforts and our friendship with our allies."

General Verle waved away the depiction of the outdated mechs of the Medallion Guards, leaving behind the more modern and formidable ones fielded by the Nidin Vergers!

"We are elites! Our mech legions are equipped with mechs that are more expensive and powerful than the crack troops of the Sundered Phalanx. While our numbers are not even close to catching up to that of our enemy, we have always pursued the elite route to the maximum in order to make the most out of the limited mech capacity of our fleet. I believe in our superiority! I believe in it so much that I do not expect you to just hold back the strongest opposing mech divisions, but demand that you smash through their ranks with clear and overwhelming force!"

In other words, if the Larkinson Army was not up to expectation, then it would surely suffer a lot if it allowed the elite Sundered Phalanx mechs to run amuck!

Chapter 4219 Economic Obligations

The decision for the Golden Skull Alliance and more specifically the Larkinson Clan to attack the strongest and most modern mech divisions of the Sundered Phalanx generated a lot of controversy!

The Hex Army should have been amply capable of stopping or at least stalling these elite Fridayman mech units.

Why should the Golden Skull Alliance work so hard and crash against the strongest elements of the enemy?

This did not sound like a favorable course of action! There were plenty of other alternatives that the Golden Skull Alliance could pursue.

For example, the Larkinson mech pilots heavily favored battle scenarios where they could get in a position to quickly mow down larger amounts of inferior mechs.

The Gauge Dynasty still fielded plenty of aged mech models that had yet to receive their Red Ocean-standard updates or replacements.

While it was true that the outdated mech divisions might not be as easy to defeat as they appeared due to the prevalence of battle-hardened veterans among their ranks, the absolute disparity in raw power and technological sophistication could not be overcome with guts and experience alone!

As long as the Larkinson mech legions gained an opportunity to advance towards the weakest elements of the defending troops, they would certainly be able to cut through the defensive lines like a hot knife through butter!

This was generally seen as the most favorable way to set up a victory. After all, as long as one side was able to deliver such a smashing blow that 10 or 20 percent of the enemy troops folded in quick succession, disarray and confusion would quickly spread among the surviving troops!

The Sundered Phalanx would have to scramble to plug the gap in their defenses lest the Golden Skull Alliance mechs attacked their exposed sides and rear.

Yet instead of pursuing this slam dunk strategy, General Verle instead told his men that they needed to get ready to collide against the sharpest edge of the enemy defense forces.

Though the prideful Larkinsons possessed a lot of confidence in their meteoric rise in strength, the reputation of the Sundered Phalanx was not for nothing!

Anyone who developed at least a passing interest in the Komodo War knew that the Gauge Dynasty's military branch had performed the best against the Hex Army.

Whereas the forces of the other coalition partners such as the Blue Cavalry and the Fortune Legion often struggled with lack of funding, resource shortfalls and shaky supply lines, the well-funded and well-organized Sundered Phalanx suffered none of these problems!

Since the Gauge Dynasty occupied a favorable territory that was out of the reach of Hexadric Hegemony, the Gaughers managed to retain their full infrastructure and industries throughout the Komodo War.

This not only gave less pressure to the Sundered Phalanx, but also ensured that they received the most support out of all of the other Fridayman military organizations!

This time, the Hex Federation and the Golden Skull Alliance's decision to invade Pima Prime and raze its fifth planet to the ground meant that they would have to fight elements of the Sundered Phalanx in their peak condition!

Even if the attackers had the benefit of possessing a lot of sensitive and valuable intelligence on their upcoming opponents, a strong mech was still difficult to defeat even if all of its strengths and weaknesses became exposed.

General Verle understood exactly what kind of thoughts the Larkinson mech pilots entertained at the moment. He knew that they needed more of an explanation in order to undertake this task with greater enthusiasm. The pep talk he gave earlier was not enough to overcome their instinctual dread at the prospect of fighting against veteran mech troops.

"Do you think that mech divisions such as the 6161th Nidin Vergers are stronger than us?" He asked in a judgmental tone. "You should all be well aware of your own strengths. I won't say anything about the enhanced training

results of the MSTS or how you are able to deepen your mastery of your mechs through the new deep exchange tech introduced by Mr. Hempkamp. Our greatest and most pronounced advantage has always been our mechs."

General Verle issued a mental command to the MSTS that caused the emblems of both the Larkinson Clan and the Gauge Dynasty to appear behind his floating form.

The familiar symbol of the Larkinson Clan inserted a lot of warmth and patriotism in the hearts of the gathered mech pilots. The head of the Golden Cat always reminded them that they were part of the same family!

The symbol that stood for the Gauge Dynasty was a lot more impersonal in comparison. As a reference to the name of its dynasty, the Gaugers shaped their emblem into a half-circle that went from green to red.

"Our clan and the Gauge Dynasty are not the same." Verle stated the obvious. "We are still a fleet-based organization more or less while the Gauge Dynasty is part of a large, multi-territorial second-rate state. The differences in wealth, tech, resources, population, mechs, servicemen, mech designers are too great. A direct collision between us both will instantly cause us to become crushed."

Despite these ominous words, the general began to grin.

"However, the chance that the Gaugers will pool all of their mech forces in Pima Prime is virtually zero. This is because the Gauge Dynasty has far too many burdens. Their territories are rich and abundant, but that means that each of them needs to be garrisoned by mech troops. If you look at the Sundered Phalanx as a whole, then you will notice that 95 percent or more of its mech units are still stationed in the Komodo Star Sector. Do you know why? The foundation of the Gauge Dynasty still remains at home!"

That was right! Though the Sundered Phalanx most certainly developed a formidable reputation, their numbers weren't endless.

"The reason for this is obvious. The leaders and the most important stakeholders of the Gauge Dynasty all reside in the Komodo Star Sector as well. They are already rich and successful and have a much greater interest in protecting their existing assets as well as the territories they have recently conquered from the Hexers. To them, the colonization of the Red Ocean is a secondary concern, at least for the time being."

The implication that General Verle tried to make was that even if the Sundered Phalanx was strong, its forces in the Red Ocean weren't necessarily the same due to lack of resources and attention!

"Consider this as well. As part of a state, the Gauge Dynasty must spend its revenue and resources on all kinds of obligations. I won't talk about their spending in the old galaxy. In the Friday Colonies alone, the proportion of money that they have invested in developing their colonial facilities and infrastructure is greater than what they have spent on expanding their military strength. Do you think all of those mines, factories, shipyards, warehouses, commercial facilities and more are cheap? No! Each of them require massive amounts of labor, capital and time in order to be built! Do you think the Gaugers have that much labor and capital left to expand their mech forces?"

Pima Prime had developed almost just as much as Davute over the years.

In the case of Davute, the cost of building up the port system was spread among many different independent pioneering organizations.

In contrast, the Gauge Dynasty pretty much carried most of the burden of developing its exclusive port system. While plenty of private parties from the dynasty had also invested their own wealth, the point was that money spent

on civilian infrastructure ultimately took money away from other spending priorities!

General Verle hammered home his point. "One of the most crucial inferences we can make from the intelligence leak is that the Gauge Dynasty has pursued a strategy of growth over defense in the Red Ocean. The idea behind this is simple. If they spend 90 percent of their available funding and resources on building up their colonial military, Pima Prime, Rotes Cewma and New Rammes will fall horribly behind in terms of industrial capacity. What that means is that they will hardly be able to produce anything while rival colonies are able to produce an abundant amount of mechs, starships and value-added goods."

Few mech pilots ever took classes that involved economics or territorial development, but the story was easy enough for them to follow.

"In order to prevent their colonies from becoming economically marginalized, the Gaugers are forced to spend over 70 or 80 percent of their available resources on civilian infrastructure." The general continued. "This means more money on factories that cannot contribute to a fight as opposed to mechs and defensive fortifications that can actively hurt us. The strategy adopted by the Gaugers isn't that bad, actually. As long as their colonies are able to hang on for the first decade, their local industries will develop so quickly that they will become self-sufficient and profitable. This allows them to ramp up their military production and quickly expand their colonial military strength. However, all of this will be for nothing if a powerful enemy strikes before the colonies have reached this stage of their growth."

In other words, Pima Prime and the other colonies were currently at their most vulnerable!

The Gaugers could have spent more on bolstering their defenses in the short-term, but that would cause them to lose the race in the long-term. The inability

to give up on the latter meant that the dynasty had to allocate its limited resources in a risky manner.

This was also why the Gaugers transferred a lot of existing mech divisions with outdated mechs to the Red Ocean. They attempted to reduce the burden of local military production as much as possible so that more factories could devote their production on building up the local infrastructure.

While not all of the mech pilots understood the economics behind it all, they were still smart enough to understand the gist of General Verle's message.

"In conclusion, the Sundered Phalanx units stationed in Pima Prime are not as strong as you think! Compared to the spending pattern of the Gauge Dynasty, we have invested a far greater proportion of our budget on military production and development. After all, we are not burdened by the need to terraform planets, build up expensive colony settlements and raise an entire industrial production chain from scratch. We were free to use much of the windfall profits earned by the LMC on commissioning new carriers and replacing our older, more budget-friendly mechs with newer machines where the production cost is a much lesser concern!"

Compared to the Friday Colonies, the Larkinson Clan was much smaller and demanded less infrastructure spending.

The downside of that was that the Larkinson Clan was also a lot more vulnerable to predation!

It was therefore essential for the Larkinsons to spend a much higher proportion of their revenue on military spending.

"There is also another factor that you should be aware about." General Verle continued. "Unlike the Gauge Dynasty that is able to stash as many mechs as they want in their star systems, our main fleet is limited by the amount of mechs we can carry. Since we are unable to pursue strength through quantity,

we have fully focused on maximizing the quality of every individual mech. Each of our mech models should perform significantly better than their counterparts in the Sundered Phalanx. Our knight mechs can withstand more hits. Our rifleman mechs output more damage. Our light mechs fly faster. While we are unable to match the scale of Pima Prime's defensive forces, we do not need to do anything about it. The Hex Army already has this covered. All we need to do is take over the burden of defeating the Fridaymen elites. Is this too much to ask?"

"No!"

"That is right! We are stronger than any of them! Whether we take up the fight against the Nidin Vergers or any of the other five modern mech divisions, a crushing victory is the only acceptable outcome!"

Chapter 4220 Breaking Eggs

Though General Verle talked a big game, he could not guarantee that the upcoming battle would proceed as straightforward as the battle simulation suggested.

There were more than enough examples in history where a numerically and qualitatively inferior force managed to overcome a superior opponent.

The Fridaymen possessed a defensive advantage and could count on the Kotic Ring as well as other local amenities to prop up their mech divisions.

In contrast, the Hex Federation and the Golden Skull Alliance had to dispatch their main force far away from friendly lines and deep into the space claimed by the Friday Colonies!

It was unrealistic for the Hexers to be able to provide any additional reinforcements or supplies over such an excruciatingly long distance.

This meant that everything needed to be done as quickly as possible. The more the defenders were able to stall and inflict pain on the invaders, the greater the chance of everything else going wrong!

Neither the Sundered Phalanx nor the Hex Army were incompetent. The brutal Komodo War exposed many flaws. The soldiers and leaders from both sides had to adapt to the war in order to avoid elimination.

Though the Larkinsons assumed that the Hex Army was competent enough to respond to any unusual moves and stratagems of the Sundered Phalanx, there were no guarantees on the battlefield.

The rank-and-file mech pilots did not need to hear about all of this. General Verle already prepared a separate briefing for the mech officers to prepare them for any complications that might ensue.

Assuming the attackers were able to break the backs of the Sundered Phalanx and demolish the Kosic Ring, the rest of the invasion plan was rather simple.

"The hardest part will be behind us if we are able to get past this point." General Verle explained as the surface of Pima Prime V became visible behind his back. "Depending on how much damage we have sustained and how many of our mechs are still battle effective, we will probably take part in the attack on Pima Prime V's planetary defenses."

As a large trade and industrial hub, Pima Prime V's development was spread across the entire globe.

Arrows came into view that roughly showed the extensive mech deployments of the Hex Army.

The Hex Federation's greatest goal was to destroy as much of the industries and infrastructure of the planet as possible, so not a single major city was allowed to remain intact!

If just a single of Pima Prime V's major settlements remained intact, then it became a lot easier to rebuild the colony to its former glory in a short amount of time.

While the Larkinsons didn't care too much about this, the Hex Federation were absolutely keen on undermining the foundation of the Friday Colonies as much as possible.

The Hexers did not wish to launch a risky and costly assault only to delay the development of Pima Prime by only a couple of years at best.

They wanted their forces to return from the Friday Colonies with the grandest of prizes that they could obtain from Operation Saturday Market!

As such, the planetary assault on Pima Prime V was an elaborate and detailed affair that involved a lot of complex mech deployments.

"Don't worry." General Verle quickly explained to his mech pilots. "The Golden Skull Alliance is not expected to split up its forces and spread out our mech units across many different geographic locations. Our Larkinson Army is at its strongest when our units can all act in unison and support each other. We have not trained with the units of the Hex Army, so the chances are too great that we will just get in their way."

That was another major relief. The Larkinson mech pilots would rather trust their backs to each other than to rely on the protection of strangers.

General Verle gestured at the largest and most developed city on the planet. The view zoomed in to display an overhead view of the expansive settlement.

"New Amblum is the capital city of Pima Prime. Just like Kotor City where we lived in the past, New Amblum is split up into multiple districts that have varying strategic value and defensive measures. The most valuable among them are covered by their own titan shields. Each of these protected and guarded districts must be breached, plundered and razed in order to consider

this invasion a success, and this is where we must pitch in. You can expect to face a lot of planetary defenses and a moderate amount of landbound mechs that will do their best to resist us, but we must push through even though we are not entirely optimized for planetary combat."

The Larkinson Army was primarily geared to protect the Larkinson Navy and fight in space.

While the Design Department had made sure to equip the mech legions with mech models that were technically able to operate on land and in the air, there was no denying that the Larkinson mechs would suffer a considerable handicap when fighting on a battlefield that was not in space.

Compounding that problem was the fact that the Larkinson mech pilots simply didn't have a lot of training or experience in executing these kinds of operations.

Fortunately, they didn't need to do anything too complicated. They just had to attack a couple of New Amblum's vital industrial or military districts.

"If the intelligence we have is accurate, then the resistance that we will face when we attack New Amblum should not be as great as during the assault on the Kotic Ring." General Verle stated. "What is different is that we will be fighting in a dense urban environment that is home to a population of over 7 million Fridaymen. If they are all smart and sensible, they should have evacuated to the well-protected underground emergency shelters ahead of time, but there are always idiots that ignore all of the warnings and haven't been hauled away by the local security forces."

This caused various Larkinson mech pilots to feel disturbed. They did not serve in the Larkinson Army to kill civilians by mistake.

It was a pity that mass collateral damage was an unavoidable reality in any planetary assault. The Larkinson mech legions needed to utilize heavy

firepower in order to break the titan shields and quickly destroy all of the fortified defenses and industrial facilities.

"How long will we stay on the surface, sir? How much are we responsible for destroying?"

"That is dependent on many different factors. Speed and safety are important concerns, but the Hexers will likely refuse to retreat before every important district and facility in New Amblum is destroyed."

It was difficult to predict what would happen at this stage of Operation Saturday Market. The ability to destroy Pima Prime's infrastructure depended too much on the outcome of the battle in orbit.

The Larkinsons needed to be prepared for scenarios where they had ample battle strength left as well as scenarios where they suffered a lot of losses.

In addition to explaining the narrow responsibilities of the Larkinson Army, General Verle briefly touched upon the activities of the Hex Army.

"A large amount of critical infrastructure and strongholds are built underground. Our clan is not equipped to break or breach these underground facilities, but the Hex Army is different. They are bringing ample enough tunneling machines, breaching bombs and mechs that excel at fighting in confined spaces."

Underground strongholds were difficult to break, but their biggest shortcoming was that they were completely stationary.

As long as the Hexers brought enough hardware, it would only be a matter of time before they could break open these buried eggs.

Once the troops received the call to retreat, they had to return to their carriers with as much loot that they could carry and return to orbit as soon as possible.

"We do not know how Pima Prime will look like, but if the Hexers have done their jobs, then there shouldn't be enough opposition left in the star system to hound our fleet and delay our departure. Our combined fleet should easily be able to travel to the nearest or safest Langrange point and leave the star system before reinforcements dispatched from neighboring Fridayman colonies are able to get close."

This was Operation Saturday Market. It was a powerful show of force that appeared quite straightforward at first glance but possessed a lot of nuances that General Verle did not explain.

For example, he could have mentioned that saboteurs and infiltrators were ready to assassinate key leaders and disable crucial defensive facilities.

General Verle was not certain that these additional measures would make a significant impact on the upcoming battle. They sounded great during the planning phase, but whether the operatives on the ground could actually pull off these daring stunts remained to be seen.

There were just too many Fridaymen, too many mechs and too many defenses for incidental sabotage to weaken their defenses.

Still, as long as the panic and uncertainty generated by attacks from the fear surpassed the actual damage, then the Sundered Phalanx should definitely feel more uncomfortable in battle!

Once General Verle finally ended the main briefing, he answered a few more questions before dismissing the majority of the Larkinson mech pilots.

They could all familiarize themselves with each stage of the battle plan.

The Larkinson Clan also updated the MSTs to allow for them to practice with fighting against each of the known Sundered Phalanx mech divisions.

The hope was that once the actual battle commenced, the Larkinson mech pilots would be more familiar with the properties of the enemy mechs and the habits of their mech pilots than the Fridaymen themselves!

Only a small handful of people remained behind.

Aside from Ves who had remained a spectator all of this time, the soldiers left all happened to be expert pilots!

Venerable Tusa, Venerable Stark, Venerable Orfan, Venerable Dise, Venerable Jannzi, Venerable Joshua, Commander Casella, Venerable Imon, Venerable Vincent and Venerable Isobel all understood that General Verle left out a very important element in his briefing.

The leader of the Larkinson Army did not have to work so hard to maintain an air of confidence and invincibility in front of his current audience.

Each of them were strong-willed veterans and champions that did not need to be babied. They could handle a few harsh truths.

"I won't lie to you all. If the numbers we have are correct, it is likely that we will be entering into battle with less expert mechs than our opponents." General Verle plainly stated.

None of the Larkinson expert pilots were happy to hear this. The Komodo War amply showed how getting outnumbered at this level could have profound effects on the outcomes of entire battles!

However, the Larkinson expert pilots did not feel too distressed after they heard this news.

"How strong are the enemy expert mechs and their expert pilots, exactly?" Venerable Tusa eagerly asked.

His anticipation for battle was strong! Ever since the Dark Zephyr received its massive upgrade, Tusa became a lot more confident in his ability to defeat strong opponents!

"As far as we know, the strength of the enemy expert mechs vary considerably. The low-tier expert mechs of the Sundered Phalanx are generally not impressive by our standards, but their medium-tier and high-tier expert mechs are well-designed even if their design budgets are not as high as the design budgets of your mechs. What is important to note is that while the Gauge Dynasty has not put a high priority on military spending, it has directed a notable amount of funding, resources and mech designers to equipping every expert pilot with modern heartland-level expert mechs. That means that you can expect none of the ones we are about to face in battle to be aged and outdated. There is even a chance that the high-tier expert mechs have incorporated phasewater technology."

That meant that the most powerful expert mechs fielded by the Sundered Phalanx were much tougher and more destructive after gaining transphasic properties!

Mechs such as the C-Man and the Mars had thoroughly shown the Larkinson expert pilots how much of a game changer phasewater technology could be! The prospect of challenging these enhanced machines in battle was anything but trivial!