

Mech 4431

Chapter 4431 Descendants Of The Elder Gods

Ves began to interrogate the remaining two prisoners that the Larkinson Clan had redeemed from the Santana Group.

He adopted different approaches for these interrogation sessions. Guided by Calabast behind the scenes, Ves employed different words and psychological techniques to apply the right amount of pressure at certain intervals.

While the two prisoners proved to be just as susceptible to pressure as Aruva, Ves couldn't prevent them from committing suicide out of guilt.

As soon as they spilled any information they deemed critical enough, these lower caste orvens no longer possessed the will to live and completely ended their lives through an unknown biological process.

Though the Larkinsons had taken measures to prevent these captives from pressing their metaphorical suicide button, humans simply didn't know enough about orven physiology to prevent this from happening!

After causing two more orvens to shatter their brains to mush and cause blue blood to lead from all of their orifices, Ves simply let out a deep sigh and started to gather his thoughts outside of the interrogation room.

"Did you get what you wanted out of these talks, Calabast?" He asked.

"I would have liked the orven prisoners to be more forthcoming. It was rather unfortunate for us that the last two alien subjects were older and considerably more alert than the first one. Couldn't you have bought more prisoners? Three simply aren't enough to obtain all of the puzzle pieces we need to build a more complete picture."

Ves grimaced. "No. The Santanas were already ripping us off. If we asked for more prisoners, we would not only affect their own plans for the captives, but also signal that we are willing to pay ten times as much as the price that we

ended up paying. No matter how valuable it is for us to obtain these scraps of information, I do not want to engage in a loss-making transaction. As far as I'm concerned, the information we got out of the three is definitely worth more than 150 MTA credits, but it's not as if our situation has changed all that much."

They learned that the Palace of Shame was far more than just a pirate base. They learned that the Unspoken played a key role in preserving its greatest secrets. They learned that the Unspoken also answered to a possible multiracial coalition in order to fulfill an important mission.

The additional answers provided by the two older orven prisoners did give Ves a few more concerns.

That was because both of their answers related to the phase whales!

"What do you think about the repeated mentions of the so-called 'descendants of the Elder Gods'? Do you think those orvens treat the phase whales as a powerful alien race or do they view them in a greater light?"

"It is definitely the latter, though that may solely be attributed due to the great disparity in status." Calabast replied. "However, it is rather significant that all three orven prisoners refer to the phase whales by this archaic term. Normal orvens don't use this long and unwieldy phrase, mostly because the modern orven rulers do not want their underlings to worship gods of different species. This is why the orven race has taken to calling the phase whales by another set of alien terminology that matches closely to our own name for the aquatic race."

That made sense. The phase whales were probably the singular most powerful aliens in the Red Ocean, but none of the other alien races wanted to surrender under the rule of these aloof and extremely arrogant whales.

"The Unspoken are different from other orven groups in that its members deify the phase whales." Ves stated. "I don't know about you, but it is highly flattering to be called a descendant of an Elder God."

"Hehehe. I suppose you of all people should know." Calabast chuckled.

"Do you think there is any truth to this title?"

"No." Calabast immediately replied. "The existence of these supposed Elder Gods is a myth in the Red Ocean. Legend has it that an extremely powerful alien race once reigned over the Red Ocean and maybe many other galaxies. This precursor race was so powerful that it could even crush the Big Two overnight. The Elder Gods eventually grew bored with the current universe, so they eventually decided to move or ascend to a higher one. Before they left, they created the phase whales to serve as the caretakers of whatever legacies they left behind. Ever since then, the phase whales have quietly served their purpose while letting other alien races bloom and populate the stars under its supervision."

The story sounded rather fantastical, but there was still a possibility that it was true.

Ves simply snorted, though.

"That's a nice story, but there are too many holes in it. A race as powerful as the Elder Gods would have left far more traces of civilization behind than now. In addition, if these mythical Elder Gods were powerful enough to conquer the Red Ocean, then they would have been able to take over the Milky Way Galaxy as well, but no one in the old galaxy have ever heard of them. Finally, if the phase whales were meant to be the caretakers of their legacy, then they did a pretty bad job."

Calabast partially agreed with his judgment.

"Personally, I think this tendency to elevate the phase whales above the other races of the Red Ocean is due to the fact that they have mastered the applications of phasewater more extensively than others. Don't forget how the prisoners all referred to phasewater as 'godblood' in their native language. Many indigenous aliens believe that phasewater is the divine lifeblood of a god. One that has mastered it to the point where this exotic flows through the veins of the body matches the definition of a god in the eyes of the indigenous aliens."

This was a rather strange difference between the Red Ocean and the Milky Way.

Back in the old galaxy, there was no phasewater to be found, so all of the races that evolved from there developed myths and ideas about gods that were more abstract and maybe spiritual in nature.

Here in the new frontier, the aliens that evolved and developed in an environment rich with phasewater easily associated this strange but powerful liquid substance to the concept of godhood.

Once any alien began to imagine that phasewater was not just a naturally occurring resource but the lifeblood that old and powerful gods had shed from their bodies, then it was not much of a jump to equate any organic creature with phasewater in their bodies as demigods at the very least!

Ves recalled what he knew about all of the major alien races. "The phase whales are by far the organisms that most prominently infuse their bodies with phasewater, but they are not the only ones. I heard that the most powerful members of the other races such as the orvens, the puelmers and so on have all mastered technologies that can enable them to modify and augment their bodies to such an extreme degree that they have phasewater running through their veins."

"That sounds as mad as trying to inject poison in your body, but a material as special as phasewater all too easily evokes so many myths."

In the end, both Ves and Calabast concluded that the Palace of Shame likely possessed a strong relation to either phasewater or the phase whales.

The risk that a phase whale might suddenly show up out of the blue after humans attacked the Palace of Shame should be low.

The hypothetical multiracial coalition had much greater problems on its plate than the raid of one of its small and distant outposts that was doomed to be discovered by humanity sooner or later.

"In the end, humans like us are an outside context problem to the natives of the Red Ocean." Ves summed up his thoughts. "We are a problem and a threat that no one from this dwarf galaxy seriously anticipated and guarded against. When we arrived from afar to crash the party, it became abundantly clear that the major alien races that used to call all of the shots were woefully unprepared to form an effective response. Though they have started to shape up as of late, they have woken up far too late."

The complete lack of readiness of the indigenous alien races showed how poorly they were positioned to resist the invasion from the beginning.

Now that humanity already managed to conquer many different zones, it was far too late to kick the human race out of the Red Ocean!

At best, the older residents of the dwarf galaxy might be able to fight humanity to a standstill, but that was only a temporary condition.

The Big Two was far greater than the relatively limited amount of warfleets they transferred to the new frontier.

If the MTA and CFA were willing to pay a greater price, then they could easily double the amount of active warfleets operating at the frontlines and steamroll the opposition by relying on brute force!

Ves felt more confident about the upcoming assault. The indigenous aliens had proven time and time again that they were worse than humanity in every way.

Their technology, their numbers, their aggression, their contingency planning and even their gods all paled in comparison to their human equivalents!

Time moved on. The preparations of the Larkinson Clan did not fundamentally change in light of the intelligence obtained from the three orven prisoners.

It took hours before the Gemini Family finally decided that the time was right to launch the attack!

"Advance along this route! Take into account that every group will split up and surround the perimeter of the Palace of Shame from six sides."

"Put our civilian vessels in the rear and allow our more combat capable ships to take the lead!"

"Deploy at least a quarter of your mech force just in case! The alien pirate groups are known to bury hidden traps or warships inside unassuming asteroids."

"Once we pass this point, you are no longer allowed to back off! Any attempt to retreat from the field will be seen as a betrayal and a severe violation of our contract. We will only retreat when we have formed a consensus on the matter. Not before!"

Ves as well as many others observed all of the starships and mechs slowly threading through the periphery of the asteroid belt.

At some point, they would have to go deeper in order to reach the Palace of Shame. The environment where they would commence the impending battle was significantly different from the battlefields where the Golden Skull Alliance fought in the past.

Together with the strong magnetic interference produced by the local neutron star, it was clear that both sides had to do their best to adapt to the local circumstances!

While the alien pirate groups were undoubtedly a lot more prepared to fight in this complex environment, the human pioneering groups possessed more firepower and flexibility.

Every mech pilot prepared for a tough battle that was different from any of the others that they had fought before.

The only comparable opponent that the Larkinsons had fought against in the past was the Gravada Knarlax, the third-class heavy cruiser fielded by the Allidus Alliance.

The fight against the warship was in no way comparable to the one that the temporary coalition was about to start.

The difference in power, size, tech and numbers were simply too great!

"Luckily, we have our ace mechs." Ves smirked.

The Mars was but one of several apex machines that was warming up to confront the most powerful alien warships in open battle.

Though Patriarch Reginald Cross would rather duel another powerful ace mech, he did not mind the opportunity to smash alien warships instead!

"I hope you can last long enough to give my ARCEUS System a good workout." Reginald said as the eyes of his towering incarnation flashed with anticipation.

Chapter 4432 Many Guns Doctrine

A relatively small section of the asteroid belt of the Boryan System was about to become the site of a clash between races and civilizations.

On one side was the temporary coalition formed out of six different fleets from six different pioneering organizations.

On the other side was the complex collection of alien pirate organizations of the hidden asteroid base called the Palace of Shame.

Ves and the rest of the Larkinson Clan possessed a clear understanding of the combat strength of their own side.

Led by the main fleet of the Gemini Family, the fleets of the Golden Skull Alliance, the Adelaide Mercenary Company, the Santana Group, the Lehrer Foundation and the Boojay Family all followed their prearranged instructions and moved to encircle their primary target.

The human coalition deployed over 1000 individual starships and well over 60,000 mechs!

Though the human pioneers did not intend to expose their precious starships to the powerful guns of their alien adversaries, the abundant quantity of mechs alone represented a potent amount of combat power!

However, mechs were not the most effective weapons to deploy against warships. The pioneering groups had to make clever use of their small and vulnerable combat assets. A single careless decision could easily allow the powerful alien warships to shred thousands of exposed mechs into pieces!

Though the human mech forces intended to make abundant use of the nearby asteroids as cover, it was impossible for the opposition to be ignorant of this possibility.

When Ves thought about the strength, technology, tactics and preparations of the opposing force, he soon looked troubled.

"I don't know what we are about to deal with. I don't think anyone, including the aliens themselves, know what they have at their disposal."

This was a reflection of the sheer variety and lack of unity of all of the alien individuals that had found their way to the Palace of Shame!

There were far too many alien races and pirate groups to mention. However, the strongest among the pirates was undoubtedly the Unspoken, a rather mysterious group founded by the supposedly exiled members of the powerful orven race.

Ves previously thought that his next encounter against a major alien race would set his troops against the nunsers or the puelmers.

Both of these powerful races were rather prevalent in this corner of the Red Ocean.

The nunsers were herd animals with a strong collectivist mindset and a penchant for living on massive vertical structures that also doubled as their starships and warships.

This gave the furred intelligent species a strong ability to form a massive warfleet, split off into many different detachments or rendez-vous at a central location in order to form a massive doom armada!

Ves feared the nunsers the most after the phase whales due to the sheer quantity of 'warship homes' they had at their disposal!

The puelmers preferred to concentrate their resources into swarms of smaller but more advanced sophisticated warship homes. Their vessels might not be as large as the warship homes of the nunsers, but they were packed with different technologies, some of which could threaten entire planets!

This approach meant that it was extremely difficult to gauge the effective combat power of a puelmer warship.

There were stories about pioneering fleets stumbling upon a single puelmer warship home, only for the human mechs and fleets to get swallowed by artificial black holes!

The huge disparities in tonnage and numbers were no longer effective indicators of strength when fighting against the puelmers and many other alien races for that matter.

One of the most important lessons that much of humanity had learned for the first time after arriving in the Red Ocean was that the aliens did not abide by the same taboos!

Both sides only had a few rules in common. Aside from that, the alien forces did not uphold any taboos concerning the scale of warships, the limitations on the firepower at their disposal or the use of weapons of mass destruction.

Though the individual alien civilizations may enforce their own set rules upon their subjects, it was doubtful whether any alien law had effect on the lawless pirates of the Mysterious Palace.

"They shouldn't have too many weapons of mass destruction at their disposal." Ves guessed.

The analysts surmised that the Palace of Shame shouldn't contain too many nuclear bombs and other destructive armaments.

The reason for that was because these superweapons threatened the Palace of Shame and its many pirate gangs far more than any external enemy!

There was no way the Unspoken and the other vested interests of the pirate base would permit the existence of so many threatening weapons in the vicinity of their shared home. What if a pirate group decided to engage in blackmail and threatened to blow everything up from the inside?

Aside from that, the production and maintenance of highly destructive weapons that were powerful enough to threaten modern forces were too great. A ramshackle asteroid base did not provide the necessary infrastructure to support the development of too many weapons of mass destruction.

That was no excuse for the human attackers to grow complacent, though.

Distance was the best form of protection against the vast majority of superweapons. This was why almost every mech was ready to fight their opponents from afar.

Even the most quintessential melee mechs such as the First Sword, The Rigid Wall, The Rigid Spine and the Lucid Rage temporarily set aside their melee armaments for energy rifles!

As every ship and mech slowly moved to their respective positions, many humans waited for the first shot to be fired.

Ves sat in his usual chair on the bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim.

He was not sitting alone as his wife and children also accompanied him this time. He wanted them to stay close to him so that he could always be reassured that no weird alien weapon affected them away from his presence.

The children were remarkably more behaved than before. They all wore their cute little protective suits and had all been strapped to their own little chairs.

Ves arranged a simple projected interface for each of them where they could easily browse between different feeds of the upcoming battle.

"Miaow..."

The suited form of Clixie nervously rested on Aurelia's lap. She hated the thought of entering into battle against enemies that wielded weapons of enormous power.

She could still claw out a bunch of hostile aliens on foot, but when it came to a warship that was the equivalent of a battlecruiser, there was no way her tiny claws could rend through hull plating that was several meters thick!

"Meow meow."

Lucky on the other hand looked forward to the epic clash that would ensue. His tail swished with excitement as he rested on the armrest of Andraste's chair. He knew that when the human mechs defeated the alien warships and defensive installations, he would soon gain an opportunity to enter the Palace of Shame and have his pick of the spoils yet again!

Even though his last feast left him with a tummy ache that went on for months, the cat had pretty much forgotten about that awful experience.

Ever since his digestion system ejected a number of gems, his stomach turned into an empty void. No amount of food could make him feel full and sated.

Perhaps this upcoming battle might give him the opportunity to fill up the void in his belly.

"So many mechs. So cool." Marvaine spoke as his suited arms held a dinosaur plushie.

The little boy forgot all about his toy as he became completely engrossed in the large variety of mechs, many of which he had never seen before.

Though Marvaine still thought that the mechs designed by his parents were the best, the machines deployed by the other pioneering forces were not weak by any means!

Whereas their children were only able to appreciate the different mechs on a surface level, Ves and Gloriana could glean much more details from their designs.

Ves found his attention drawn to the Santana Group at first.

He still hadn't forgotten how the Santanas drove a hard bargain and forced the Larkinson Clan to cough up 150 MTA credits in exchange for 3 pathetic alien prisoners.

His interactions with the Santana Group taught him that much of its decisions were based on financial considerations.

This did not sound too abnormal at first. every pioneering group had to watch their finances in order to keep their mechs and starships afloat.

A severe gap in money could easily spell the end of a pioneering force even if all of its mechs and starships were still in working condition.

As a holding company, the Santana Group owned many subsidiary companies, of which there were numerous successful security companies.

Compared to other mech forces, security companies generally did not invest too much money in elite mech pilots or extremely powerful mechs.

The missions and assignments they tended to undertake were mostly boring and lengthy but provided a stable flow of income.

For this reason, security companies tried to offer a good degree of protection in the most cost-efficient manner possible.

The mechs deployed by the Santana Group's fleet reflected this frugal approach.

"The Santana Group sure likes to employ a lot of guns." Ves remarked.

"That is an understatement." His wife said.

The thousands of mechs that launched from the carrier vessels of the Santana Group possessed one common trait.

They were all hybrid mechs. Entire mech companies formed up that all consisted of machines that were armed with multiple guns.

A combination of energy weapons, kinetic weapons and missile weapons adorned their frames in different configurations.

Of course, the Santana Group vastly preferred to make use of energy weapons because they were the cheapest and most convenient ones to replenish.

Backing up the hybrid mechs in the field was a small number of space knights and other melee mechs, but their numbers were so small that they could only delay an intercepting force for a short amount of time.

Much more significant were the heavy artillery mechs that were rooted in the bunkers of the serviceable Santana carrier vessels.

Ves did not spot anything special about the artillery mechs. Their mass, firepower, armor and other parameters were worse than the Transcendent Punisher Mark II, but that was hardly a surprise.

The Larkinson Clan's staple heavy artillery mechs were costly investments. Ves put a lot of trust in the Eye of Ylvaine pilots when he designed the powerful machines.

The Santana Group evidently did not trust its mech pilots as much, because the heavy artillery mechs they handed out to its troops were equipped with a greater quantity of cannons but did not pack as much of a punch.

"The Santana Group's mech doctrine basically centers around bringing as many guns to bear on their opponent and rely on massed firepower to grind the opposition down from a distance."

"You sound as if you disapprove, Ves."

"It is a simple and cheap approach that is designed to be as foolproof and standard as possible. There is too little tactical depth to the mech composition of the Santana group. Mech pilots also have very little room to overperform or turn the tide with a single feat of brilliance. As long as an enemy is able to outgun the Santana mechs or get close to them somehow, it is game over for hybrid mechs and heavy artillery mechs. Their ability to defend against opponents at close range is abysmal."

Gloriana viewed the Santana mech forces in a more favorable light.

"The Santanas are making the best use of the resources that they have available, which is not that much. The vast majority of conventional opponents won't even be able to close the distance in the face of so much firepower. The excessive number of guns makes it so that the difference in skill no longer matters. No matter how much the enemy mechs try to evade the Santana attacks, they will always get hit by at least some attacks. Besides, their expert mechs and ace mechs are much more special. Those businessmen are at least sensible enough to invest in their brightest talents."

Chapter 4433 A Greater Struggle

The Many Guns Doctrine adopted by the Santana Group also applied to its high-ranking mechs.

Since the expert pilots working for the Santana Group advanced while they were piloting the ranged mechs of one of its security companies, all of these demigods all transitioned into piloting the expert mech versions of their former machines.

Gloriana had glossed over the mediocre mechs of the Santana Group but paid close attention to their expert mechs.

"The mech designers who designed those expert hybrid mechs and expert heavy artillery mechs know what they are doing." She said after a time. "It is a

pity that their corporate masters have restricted them from implementing too many of their own ideas into the designs."

Ves understood what she meant. The Santana Group's expert mechs all looked similar to each other. It was as if they all started off from the same standard template before subsequently being modified to fit the unique circumstances of every individual expert pilot.

While this was a relatively fast, reliable and cheap approach to designing expert mechs, there was far less room for innovation, personalisation and creativity.

Ves merely had to look at his own eclectic mix of expert mechs to see how much better they were. Each of his Larkinson expert mechs shared little to no resemblance to each other. They were all designed with their pilots in mind from the ground up and also incorporated unique design solutions that sometimes demanded drastic changes to an entire mech frame.

The Larkinson Clan's approach towards the development of expert mechs was much costlier and more time-consuming, but everything was worth it in the end when fantastic machines like the Amaranto and the Everchanger burst with incredible power as they fully complemented the talents and fighting style of their respective expert pilots.

Fortunately, the Santana Group was not completely stupid. The stronger the expert pilots, the more investment they received.

The high-tier expert mechs no longer showed any signs of standardization. They were truly unique machines that only resembled the lower tier expert mechs because their pilots had already gotten used to the same style of machines.

"All in all, the Santana Group is well-positioned to defeat swarms of starfighters and whittle down the defenses of smaller warships." Ves

analyzed. "However, the relatively low calibers of all of their guns makes it a lot harder for them to deal effective damage to the larger warships of the alien pirate forces and the defensive installations of the Palace of Shame."

In short, the Santana mechs excelled the most at bullying weaker opponents, but suffered a great disadvantage as soon as they encountered stronger individual opponents.

This made Ves and many others worry because the force composition of the Santana Xenoaerology Division Fleet did not excel at stopping breakthroughs.

As long as the alien pirates were smart enough, they would gather as many ships as possible and throw them all in the direction of the Santana mech forces!

Though the enormous massed firepower would mostly give the alien ships a lot of trouble, as long as the largest and most heavily armored vessels took the lead, many of the other ships would be able to escape destruction!

Fortunately, the Santana Group was aware of this as well and tried its best to split up its artillery mechs so that they would fire upon any approaching enemy vessels from multiple directions.

By setting up crossfire positions, the hybrid mechs and heavy artillery mechs could not only target the more vulnerable vessels in the rear, but also attack their weaker side hulls as opposed to their stronger prows.

Ves could vaguely feel the moods of the Santana mech pilots as he observed their mechs through the live feeds.

Vague hints of dread and resignation ran throughout their ranks. The Santana mech pilots had voluntarily applied to join the Santana Xenoaerology Division Fleet after getting lured by higher salaries, excellent hazard pay and fantastic pensions for their families if they perished in battle.

The offer seemed like an incredibly good deal at a time as the salaries for regular service was not as nearly as generous.

Now that the reality of what they were being paid for began to dawn upon the mech pilots, they became considerably less enthused about their current assignments.

Their professionalism, their training and the encouragement of their mech officers kept them in line. Ves believed that they would hold, but he did not expect much brilliance from their performance. They were all cogs in a giant corporate machine, nothing more and nothing less.

When Ves gained a radically different impression when he looked back to his own mech legions. Pride filled his heart when he observed how each mech legion possessed its own character and how every mech pilot fought for far greater purposes than money.

A new projection came to life.

"Patriarch Ves, our troops and the troops of our partners are all in position."

"What is the response from the Palace of Shame?"

"There are many signs of activity at the alien asteroid base. We do not have a clear picture of what is taking place inside, but there are many indications that a large amount of movement is happening inside its halls. The alien pirates are mustering their personnel and readying their combat assets for a hasty deployment."

"Have any of the alien pirate groups sent out their warships?"

"No, sir. They have done the opposite. They have recalled all of their ships back to their respective berths at the Palace of Shame."

The asteroid base was large enough to function as a small province. The abundant amount of volume and surface area enabled every major pirate

group to claim their own slice of territory and build their space docks and fortifications.

This caused the Palace of Shame to look like a miniature moon occupied by several rival powers.

Right now, the pirate groups probably found out fairly recently that the humans had finally arrived and intended to launch an assault!

When Ves studied the slightly grainy long-ranged sensor feeds showing the external activity of the Palace of Shame, he observed a clear difference in activity.

The larger and more established alien forces had already organized most of their available forces. They had all found out about the impending human attack at an earlier date and began their preparations earlier.

The smaller and more scattered alien pirate groups were much worse off by comparison. Starfighters and other craft chaotically launched into space while their eclectic mix of warships went online at rapidly different rates.

Even now, the aliens still showed division, which said a lot about their ability to come together.

Ves did not dare to underestimate them, though. Who knew what kind of powerful technologies they mastered. The temporary coalition still didn't have a good idea of what kind of weapons they needed to contend against.

"It's time to address our troops." General Verle said. "We have just received word from the Gemini Family. If the aliens are not making a move, then the Geminis intend to fire the first shot. The second phase of our battle plan will commence at that point."

Ves nodded in understanding. "I am ready."

He had been waiting for this. The ensuing fight would definitely be a tough one, so he wanted to make sure that every soldier remained on the same page.

He stood up and checked his appearance one last time. His Unending Regalia looked as impressive as ever. No one regarded him as a simple mech designer when he looked like he was ready to go into battle himself.

A part of him found it regretful that it had been a long time since he was able to test his combat armor's defenses in a real scenario.

He poured so much time and resources into its development that he felt like he had wasted much of it. He mainly used his Unending Regalia to craft a specific image of himself in front of others.

He inwardly shook his head. He shouldn't be sad about this state of affairs. The lack of threat aimed at his person was a massive improvement compared to his past circumstances. He had so many protectors around him that it was far too difficult for assassins to threaten his life nowadays!

As the countdown closed to zero, Ves inspected his appearance one last time before the broadcast became active.

Almost every member of the Larkinson Clan watched the broadcast. Projections of Ves appeared on almost every corner of every Larkinson ship.

The mech pilots also couldn't escape the broadcast as the cockpits of their mechs all displayed the feed as well.

With his wife and his children staring up at him, Ves began his latest address.

"My fellow Larkinsons. We have arrived on another alien battlefield." He began in a calm and steady voice. "This should be nothing new to us. What is new is that our upcoming opponents are radically different from the ones that we have fought in the past."

"The scope and significance of this battle is different from all of the others that we have fought before. Unlike our last battle, we are not fighting against familiar opponents in the form of another human mech army. Unlike the Purgatory Campaign, we are not fighting against a rudimentary society of isolated alien beasts. Unlike the battle against the pakklaton refugee fleet, we are not confronting alien warships that are infested by voribugs and have already reached their limits."

Ves paused for an instant.

"No. Our upcoming enemies are none of that. For the first time since our arrival in the Red Ocean, we are about to confront opponents that are part of the true indigenous power structure of this dwarf galaxy."

"Make no mistake. The fact that the aliens are all pirates does not detract from the fact that they make use of the same warships, the same technologies and the same battle tactics as their regular counterparts. Some pirate groups will be relatively weak because the civilizations they are part of were also fairly weak. Others will be strong enough to give all of us a lot of pressure."

"No matter what, an alien is an alien. We have made enemies with each of them as soon as humanity stepped into the Red Ocean and declared it ours. By entering this battle, you will truly take part in a grander struggle. If we win, we will earn honors and recognition for contributing to the human race's eventual victory in the new frontier. If we lose, the aliens will show no mercy to us or our family. We cannot afford to lose today."

Ves briefly glanced away so that he could look at his children. All of them looked awed as his father appeared greater than life at this time.

He smiled and turned his head back so that he could address his audience directly again.

"We have stepped up today. This marks the first time that we have left the petty infighting between human powers behind so that we can take part in a more important war. Today, we fight not just to advance the cause of our clan, but to advance the cause of the human race as a whole! For the clan!"

"FOR THE CLAN!"

Ves raised his fist. "For humanity!"

"FOR HUMANITY!"

Ves bumped his fist against his chestplate. "For Victory!"

"FOR VICTORY!"

The broadcast ended after that. Ves returned to his seat and tried to evaluate his own speech.

His wife was the first to give her opinion. "That was rather short. I was expecting more. You always like to put on a show."

"It's unnecessary." He replied while shaking his head. "Our soldiers are already in high spirits. They are far from the rabble that I have seen in the past. They only need a single push in the right direction in order for them to approach the upcoming battle with the right mindset. For this particular speech, I wanted to remind them that they are no longer fighting against familiar opponents anymore."

Chapter 4434 The Battle Of The Boryan Belt

The asteroid belt that housed the Palace of Shame was about to get a lot more explosive.

The initial human explorers that entered the Boryan System for the first time plainly registered it as the Boryan Belt.

This meant that this battle would probably go down as the Battle of the Boryan Belt.

Before the first shot was fired, both sides began to generate a lot of interference.

It became a lot harder to observe and communicate from a distance as both sides tried to make it as difficult as possible to target them at longer ranges.

The measures were a lot more effective than usual. This was because the nearby neutron star already produced a lot of interference in the form of a strong and fluctuating magnetic field.

Even if the Boryan Belt was already orbiting relatively far away from the binary stars at the center of the system, the interference was not light.

Now that ships such as the Blinding Banshee and mechs such as the Buzzy Bee began to throw up a lot of jamming into space, it became a lot harder to obtain reliable sensor data.

The projections that previously displayed a relatively clear asteroid base became a lot fuzzier all of a sudden.

Though it was still possible for Ves to distinguish individual ships and other craft, he was no longer able to observe the smaller details.

"The alien jamming methods are more effective than I thought." Gloriana said from her position at his side. "I'm curious to know how the aliens are making it more difficult for our optical sensors to observe the Palace of Shame. We cannot remedy this by observing the asteroid base with our naked eyes."

Ves nodded in agreement. "That is just one of the many interesting pieces of alien tech that can substantially increase the safety of our fleet. Is this jamming effect applied to the entire asteroid base or is it only concentrated on a single side?"

"It appears to be uniform. It may be old alien technology that the Unspoken or another alien group installed throughout the Palace of Shame. Whatever it is,

we can partially power through their jamming by using high-powered scanners."

"That will also expose the coordinates of the source of the scanning."

It was like turning on a flashlight in order to see in the dark. The flashlight allowed for its holder to clearly light up a certain place, but also allowed others to trace his position by following the trajectory of the light beam!

The human forces knew that and deliberately baited the alien forces into opening fire first.

The enemies refused to take the bait.

"Hm. They are showing a lot of restraint." Ves said. "I wonder what they are waiting for. Are they hoping that we will call off our attack because we are too afraid to confront the unknown?"

Gloriana disagreed with him. "I do not think that is the case. I think their commanders might not have a good idea of what they are up against. Depending on how well informed they are of the rapid changes that have taken place in the Red Ocean, they may have a general idea of mechs and the division of human powers, but I seriously doubt they have become familiar with the incredible diversity of our fighting methods. Don't forget that we are just as alien to them as they are to us. The side that makes the first move will expose their details first, giving the other side an advantage."

"That makes sense. It's like a turn-based game in a sense. The situation that we are in right now makes it difficult to gain an advantage by taking the initiative. The side that is able to react to a previous move enjoys a considerable advantage."

The human mech forces that essentially boxed in the Palace of Shame from six different sides continued to provoke the alien pirates through different means, but to no avail.

Even if a number of aggressive aliens wanted to make a move, their bosses firmly kept them under control.

Not a single alien starfighter or other craft launched from the asteroid base!

Since this was the case, the human forces had little choice but to make the first move.

"The Geminis are taking action!"

A couple of hundred rifleman mechs cautiously lifted their rifles from the asteroids they were hiding behind and simultaneously fired a loose volley of energy beams and kinetic rounds at their target.

The Gemini ranged mechs did not concentrate their attacks on any particular section of the asteroid base. The attacks therefore landed across the surface of the Palace of Shame that was facing the Gemini Family.

"There is energy shielding!"

Several shimmering energy shields came to life and blocked each and every incoming attack with lots of power to spare!

Ves and many other people straightened up and tried to analyze the form of protection utilized by the alien base.

"It's strong!"

"The Palace of Shame is not covered by a single large energy shield, but several smaller ones that cover their own sector. Each of them partially overlap each other, making them function similar to fish scales."

"Every energy shield also generates a strong spatial effect. The alien energy shield generators are transphasic!"

Energy shielding technology was fairly advanced, but their working principles were not that complicated compared to many forms of high technology.

This meant that the indigenous aliens of the Red Ocean independently invented the same sort of energy shielding technology employed by humanity and other races native to the Milky Way.

While the data soon revealed that the alien version of an energy shield generator was rougher and much less sophisticated than a human equivalent, the Palace of Shame was still covered by a strong layer of defense!

However, the Geminis and the other human forces were not deterred by a thick shell. They all possessed a lot of mechs armed with guns that could keep firing as long as there was enough energy and ammunition to sustain their usage.

"The Geminis want us to open fire with all of our available mechs! They don't want to give the enemy more time to adjust."

The situation became tense when it became clear that it wouldn't be easy to crack open the Palace of Shame.

The transphasic energy shield generators might be cruder than the ones employed by humanity, but the Palace of Shame accumulated a lot of them over its long existence!

No matter whether their tech was old and outdated, the sheer quantity along with the abundant amount of phasewater integrated into them meant that the energy shields were extremely difficult to break by relying on conventional attacks.

The Larkinson Clan had already learned in past battles that the most effective way to overcome transphasic defenses was to employ transphasic attack methods!

This way, the phasewater effects of both measures would cancel each other out and allow ordinary attacks to take effect.

"We don't have that many transphasic weapon systems at our disposal." Ves sighed.

He didn't know the exact circumstances of the mech forces of the other pioneering forces. But he figured that their situation shouldn't be any better.

The only mechs in the Larkinson Clan that possessed powerful transphasic weapon capabilities were the expert mechs and the rifleman mechs of the Nullifier Battalion.

The Battle Criers did not field that many Nullifier mechs, though. There were only 200 of them last he counted. Their formidable Godkiller heavy rifles also only integrated 5 grams of phasewater each, which was far from sufficient to shake the spatial defenses of the Palace of Shame.

"It should not really matter." Gloriana reassured Ves. "Transphasic weapons are helpful but not necessary. Conventional firepower can still wear down a transphasic defense system as long as the power or quantity is large enough."

In the case of the Larkinson Army and many other mech forces, they had plenty of quantity to spare, even if the firepower was a bit insufficient.

After receiving a signal from the Gemini Family, tens of thousands of mechs opened fire at once!

The only mechs that did not do so were the ones that could not face the right direction, such as bunker mechs stuck in the wrong orientation, or mechs that were put in reserve, such as expert mechs and ace mechs.

Aside from that, well over 50,000 mechs launched a torrent of energy beams and physical projectiles at the Palace of Shame!

Due to the distance and the limitations of the skill and technical capabilities of many mechs, a lot of attacks slashed across the entire shielded surface of the alien pirate base!

It would have been better if all of the mech forces could concentrate their attacks on a single side of the Palace of Shame, but that was not possible due to the need to form an encirclement.

"The Palace of Shame's transphasic energy shields are still holding! They are being less affected by our attacks than we hoped. We believe that the enemy's first line of defenses is primarily built to defend against warship attacks!"

Ves grimaced. "Great. The attacks of our mechs are the equivalent of small arms fire to the aliens."

The Unspoken and the other alien pirate groups initially built up the defenses of the Palace of Shame to defend against threats similar to themselves.

Since the aliens mainly employed warships and only utilized small craft as a supplement, it was natural for the local pirate groups to invest in large, heavy-duty shield generators.

As a solid minute passed by, the formidable strength of those energy shield generators became abundantly clear as they hardly experienced any strain!

Ves' mood soured. "How long will it take for us to take down a goddamn alien transphasic energy shield?"

"We cannot give you a solid estimate yet, but it will not be less than two hours!"

"Two hours is way too much! Can't we concentrate our fire and overload one of the energy shields faster that way?!"

"We need to bring our mechs closer to make that happen, but that will increase their exposure to enemy counterattacks. We also cannot rule out the possibility that the aliens have another defensive measure in reserve."

There were many good reasons why the Palace of Shame managed to exist for so long, and its incredible ability to withstand punishment was definitely a contributing factor!

Seeing that quantity was far from sufficient to open up a gap in the first layer of defense, Ves quickly concluded that his side needed to bring out the big guns.

He already started to think about ordering Venerable Stark to debut her Instrument of Doom on the battlefield, but he was reluctant to reveal its firepower so soon.

"What are the Geminis thinking about? What is our next move?"

"They are still deliberating on this matter, sir. Ah, they have just passed on a message to all of the ace pilots. Their firepower may be needed soon."

Ves raised his eyebrow but did not feel too surprised.

The human attackers did not want to waste too much time on this siege. The mechs that were all opening fire at this moment were squandering a lot of energy and ammunition without necessarily getting much in return.

If they kept firing their weapons at this rate, their weapons would get worn out and their mechs would build up a lot of heat and other stress.

It was better for the mechs to save the brunt of their firepower on more worthy targets such as enemy warships and other offensive threats.

Perhaps it was not the best to expose the ace mechs so soon, but their incredible firepower was the only convenient solution that could quickly overcome the powerful fortress-grade energy shields that exceeded the performance of human titan shields!

Soon enough, seven powerful energy signatures emerged from six different fleets! Many humans already became hopeful as their strongest heroes finally made an appearance!

"The Seven Saints are about to take action!"

Chapter 4435 Thunderer Mark II

The siege had barely begun. Over 50,000 mechs opened fire at the massive asteroid base that they enveloped from six different sides, but any hope of relying on quantity to wear down its defense was not realistic!

Heavier firepower was needed to punch through the strong transphasic energy shielding that was rated to protect the Palace of Shame against powerful warship attacks.

The first to appear among the seven ace mechs of the temporary coalition was the Mars!

Patriarch Reginald Cross had always been spoiling for a fight and his impatience showed in how quickly he obeyed the command to make an appearance!

Launching from the Hemmington Cross with an abundance of fighting spirit, the impressive and indomitable Mars finally revealed itself to both the Golden Skull Alliance and all of the other pioneering groups!

"So that is the Mars? It looks even more impressive than in the battle footage recorded in the Pima Prime System."

"What an extravagant ace mech. Patriarch Reginald Cross was merely a high-tier expert pilot at the time the Mars was initially made, but already the machine featured a lot of top-end components that were mainly suitable for ace mechs. The Cross Clan bet a huge amount of money, effort and resources that this mech would help him undergo his second apotheosis, and they happened to be lucky enough to hit the jackpot!"

"That is not an indicator of luck. That is an indicator of foresight. The Cross Clan along with those Larkinson brats knew exactly what they were doing. The fact that a team that consists entirely of underqualified mech designers managed to produce a masterwork of all things is a strong reflection of their talent and potential."

"Talent and potential alone cannot explain this unreasonable result! The quality and the performance of the Mars far exceeds what they should be able to design at their respective levels. There has to be an outside factor that provided them with secret help."

"No. The Mars is completely reflective of the work of Master Benedict Cortez and his Larkinson helpers. Don't underestimate their capabilities. Look at how many masterworks the Golden Skull Alliance is able to field and imagine how many more they will be able to harness in the future. The Cross Clan and the Larkinson Clan will exceed all of our mech design efforts in a century or two. Their starting points may be lower, but their upper limits are much higher."

Many different people studied or admired the Mars. Not only was it one of the rare masterworks among ace mechs, it had already exposed much of its prodigious might during the Battle of Pima Prime!

As such, the Mars was the one ace mech that everyone in the temporary coalition was familiar with. Its proven combat prowess and powerful ranged damage output provided everyone a lot of reassurance. They knew that the Mars had the range and the punch necessary to stop many powerful threats!

"Mars!"

"So cool!"

"That's mama's work!"

Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine all became excited when they saw the mech that their parents had helped to make.

Though they had witnessed much more powerful mechs in action dramas and recorded footage, the powerful first-class mechs weren't as tangible or as real as an ace mech that was right next door!

Though none of the children knew exactly how much their parents contributed to the design of the Mars, that did not stop them from imagining that their mother and their father played a pivotal role in its creation!

Both Ves and Gloriana smiled with pride as they heard their kids express their childish admiration.

Gloriana was practically beaming with pride while the smile on Ves' face was a little more bittersweet.

"Is the Mars the strongest mech on our side, mama?" Andraste asked as she hugged Lucky against her suited body.

Though Gloriana's first impulse was to boast shamelessly in front of her adoring offspring, her professionalism did not allow her to do so. She possessed enough professionalism and integrity to recognize that there were ace mechs that exceed the Mars in many aspects.

"All ace mechs are strong, honey. They all have their own strengths and weaknesses. It is not so simple to rank them from strongest to weakest. All I can say is that the Mars is definitely one of the strongest ace mechs among the seven that will appear on the battlefield. It will not make our Golden Skull Alliance embarrassed."

The Mars glowed with aggression while its Saint Kingdom already warped the space around it, making it so that many nearby Crossers developed the urge to follow Patriarch Reginald into hell!

However, the Mars did not steal the show for long as a second ace mech appeared soon afterwards!

A larger and even more massive mech surged from the center of the Santana Group's fleet.

At first, the new ace mech vaguely looked like a heavier and larger version of the Mars.

However, it soon became clear that the blue-and-black coated machine was not a medium hybrid mech, but a heavy artillery mech!

Ordinary mechs of this type did not possess flight capabilities because the addition of a heavy flight system would detract from its primary purpose.

This was not the case at the ace mech level. The heavy and imposing Thunderer Mark II surrounded by a dark blue corona might not be as fast and nimble as the Mars, but it was still able to maneuver around in space with the help of its advanced transphasic flight system!

Despite the prodigious power of this flight system, the reason why the Thunderer Mark II did not possess a lot of mobility was because of its large mech frame, its incredibly thick armor layout and its generous number of heavy cannons.

"Wow. It's so big." Marvaine admired with wide eyes.

"That's right, my son. While the Mars is great at damaging enemies from a distance, the Thunderer Mark II is even better at this job." Ves explained.

"Huh? Why is that, papa?"

"It has to do with their designs. Look at the Mars. It is smaller but faster, which means it can easily run away when there is trouble. It is a humanoid design, which means it has arms that can be used to hold a shotgun, an axe or a heavy saber. This makes the Mars good at dueling other ace mechs up close. The Thunderer Mark II doesn't have any of that. It has given up all of its chances to become good at mech duels so that it can function as the ultimate

ranged powerhouse of the Santana Group. It is less of a mech and more of a warship cannon that just happens to move."

Though that was a gross oversimplification of the Thunderer Mark II, the description was enough to give the children a quick idea of what it was about.

Their parents knew a lot more about the ace heavy artillery mech. The Thunderer Mark II was a kinetic monster that perfectly complemented the strength of its ace pilot.

Jelmer Osenring was far from an ordinary employee of the Santana Group.

When he was young, he already stood out as an absolute talent. As soon as it became known that his genetic aptitude reached as high as A-, countless groups tried to absorb the young boy into their ranks!

Lured by the highest package of remuneration and benefits, their parents eventually settled with a subsidiary of the powerful Santana Group. This completely changed young Jelmer's trajectory and put him into a small but privileged class of young elites whose talents were not any worse than his own!

The entire Santana Group poured a lot of effort into raising these high potential mech pilots. Everyone received personalized training along with plenty of augmentations and other forms of support.

Though most of the cohort ultimately failed to realize their potential for one reason or another, the heavy artillery specialist was one of the few who managed to meet all of the expectations set by his superiors!

Not only did he advance to the rank of expert pilot with ease, he also managed to take a major step further and become an ace pilot, thereby exceeding his original role!

Nowadays, Saint Jelmer Osenring had not only attained great power, but also maintained his strong loyalty towards the Santana Group!

This was not a surprise as the Santanas did everything they could to indoctrinate all of the young and eager talents that entered their orbit.

Of course, the Santana Group did not dare to mistreat an ace pilot, so Saint Osenring had also been promoted to an honorary executive and possessed the right to vote on major proposals.

"What is Saint Osenring good at?" Andraste asked.

As the most mech-obsessed child among the three children, Andraste already understood that the strength of a mech was not solely dependent on its design and specifications.

The mech pilot also affected the performance, especially for the more advanced and higher-ranking mechs!

"Saint Jelmer Osenring is an artillery mech specialist that is good at stunning and shaking his targets through generating shockwaves or concussive blasts." Ves explained. "The reason why his mech is called the Thunderer is because it is armed with a large amount of gauss cannons. Each of them fire heavy slugs that not only have good penetration, but also transfer a lot of kinetic energy at once, thereby producing powerful waves that can damage the components around the immediate impact site. What Saint Osenring does with his domain is to amplify and strengthen this secondary effect so that his ace mech can deal a huge amount of area damage."

All three of his children looked confused, so he decided to give them a demonstration. He raised his armored fist and banged it gently against the chest plate of his Unending Regalia.

Clang.

"Do you hear that noise? That is what happens when a weak projectile hits a starship. Since the power is weak, it doesn't transfer a lot of kinetic energy, which means that the shockwaves produced by the impact aren't that impressive. Since sound is produced by pressure waves, a softer noise equates to lower damage."

Ves repeated his earlier movement but this time he exerted a lot more force.

CLANG!

The difference was loud and clear! The ringing impact was so much stronger that Marvaine even let out a noise in surprise.

"Did you hear how much louder it sounds? Stronger physical attacks involve more kinetic energy which means bigger booms and stronger shockwaves. Can you imagine what it would be like if an attack hits a million times harder than my fist? You probably can't, but you will soon get to see what it is like when the Thunderer Mark II begins to open fire. Not only does it have a lot of cannons that all punch extremely hard, but when Saint Osenring resonates with his ace mech, the projectiles fired by all of those gauss cannons will produce vastly stronger shockwaves, which is perfect for inflicting a lot of internal area damage!"

Saint Osenring could already inflict a huge amount of damage when paired with a suitable heavy artillery mech, but the introduction of phasewater technology supercharged his combat power!

Before, much of his damage output first had to shatter through lots of armor and other forms of protection.

Now that all of the weapon systems of his impressive Thunderer Mark II gained transphasic functionality, it became a lot easier to bypass the layers of protection and inflict lots of damage directly to important components and personnel!

In short, the combination between Saint Osenring and the Thunderer Mark II produced the ultimate siege weapon!

Much of the reason why the Gemini Family was so eager to obtain the services of the Santana Xenoaerology Division Fleet was to secure one of the best ace mechs equipped to break open the Palace of Shame!

As Ves stared at the Thunderer Mark II, his mouth already started to salivate.

He would love to have an ace artillery mech of his own, but his clan was too far away from realizing this dream!

None of his existing expert pilots excelled at piloting this mech type. The greatest hopeful in the Larkinson Army was only an expert candidate so far, and his chances of breaking through were low due to various reasons.

Ves frowned for a moment. "Should I give Taon a little boost during this battle?"

That was a good question.

Chapter 4436 Jedda Sandivar & Royal Jeem

"The Adelaide Third Fleet has deployed its ace mech as well!"

If the Thunderer Mark II was designed to be the ultimate heavy ranged weapon platform, then the Jedda Sandivar was its opposite in almost every way.

The Jedda Sandivar possessed a slim humanoid mech frame that was covered by a dull black coating.

Though it had access to a pair of laser pistols, the twin kamas wielded by the ace mech betrayed its identity as a powerful light skirmisher!

"Wow! It's just like the Dark Zephyr, but much stronger!" Andraste chirped.

"That's not entirely correct, Andraste." Ves corrected his daughter. "Just because they are both light skirmishers doesn't mean that their configurations

and design concepts are similar to each other. There are many differences between light skirmisher models, and you need to be more careful about distinguishing them from each other. If you leave out the differences originating from the tier of the mech and the properties of the mech pilots, how does the Jedda Sandivar differ from the Dark Zephyr?"

"Uhh... the Jedda fights with small pointed axes while the Dark Zephyr fights with daggers."

Ves chuckled. "Well, that is one obvious difference. The kamas wielded by the Adelaide ace mech not only possesses a lot of different possibilities, but can also surprise an opponent that has never dueled against a mech armed with those weapons before. This is a relatively minor change, though. What else makes the Jedda Sandivar different from the Dark Zephyr?"

"Uhh... the Dark Zephyr has grenades."

"That is also a clear difference. The reason why I equipped the Dark Zephyr with all of those grenades and grenade holsters is because its offensive power can't keep up with the opponents we fight nowadays. Imagine Venerable Tusa's expert mech trying to attack a large warship. It won't be able to make any significant progress for a long time if it has to carve through the hull with daggers alone. That is why I gave it the option to bring along a lot of powerful explosives. The last battle amply demonstrated why that was a good idea."

"Why doesn't the Jedda have any grenades?"

Ves directed an envious glance towards the live feed showing the Jedda Sandivar in all of its glory.

"That's because ace mechs don't need to rely on those cheap tricks anymore. Saint Marissa Lewandoski has become so powerful that she can easily cope with ace mechs and other enemies without the use of explosives."

"How?"

"The Jedda Sandivar is primarily designed to complement Saint Lewandowski's Saint Kingdom. You see, when the ace light skirmisher gets close to a target, its domain field will generate a lot of special smoke that acts as a blinding element. A lot of sensor systems won't be able to see anything anymore when it is caught in this 'smoke cloud'. It is said that even ace mechs aren't exempt from this effect. This allows the Jedda Sandivar to fight anything while getting exposed to fewer attacks in return."

It was an interesting dynamic and one that turned the Jedda Sandivar into a nightmare to fight against. As long as it was able to get close, it could employ its disruptive Saint Kingdom to pull any powerful combatant into an isolating smoke field. This not only prevented the enemy from observing the rest of the battlefield, but also cut it off from outside help!

Ves found its design concept to be a rather refreshing and surprisingly effective interpretation of a high-end light skirmisher.

No matter what rank or tier they reached, it was undeniable that a mech that was smaller and lighter was inherently more fragile than its peers.

Such mechs needed to rely on other solutions in order to reduce the chances of getting hit by strong attacks.

Ves addressed this problem by amplifying the Dark Zephyr's evasion capabilities. By relying on several resonance-based solutions, the expert light skirmisher could still fly in the open but evade many ranged attacks that were supposed to strike its resonance shield or mech frame.

Though many of these solutions weren't as effective at close range, the Dark Zephyr's inherently high acceleration and evasive capabilities made up for that. Its ability to maneuver around an opponent was fantastic and allowed it to keep the initiative in almost every mech duel.

The Jedda Sandivar on the other hand followed a completely different track. Saint Lewandowski's ability to envelop it into a powerful, reality-defying smoke cloud meant that most opponents had to guess where they needed to aim in order to hit the ace light skirmisher hiding inside.

Suffice to say, most attacks were destined to miss the mark!

The Jedda Sandivar became even scarier when it got close. Isolation was the name of the game as the ace mech could cut off other mechs or even entire starships from help as soon as they became engulfed in Saint Lewandowski murky influence!

In fact, Ves even learned that her Saint Kingdom could spread its effects past the hulls and bulkheads of enemy starships!

This meant that every crew member that had fallen within the range of the domain field effectively became cut off from their work stations and each other!

"The Jedda Sandivar is an excellent disruptor." Gloriana praised. "The Adelaide Mercenary Company is lucky to have an ace pilot that has developed such a useful Saint Kingdom. When paired with a high mobility machine that can quickly close the distance and engulf a powerful opponent, the rest of the Adelaide mech force no longer have to worry about suffering enormous damage."

Ves would have loved to have a mech like this under his thumb as well, but Ves did not think the concept of the Dark Zephyr was any worse.

If Venerable Tusa became as strong as Saint Marissa Lewandowski one day, the Dark Zephyr would turn into an incredibly fast and elusive duelist that was practically untouchable despite dancing in the open!

Sadly, Ves and the rest of the Larkinson Clan needed to wait decades before it was possible to realize this vision. Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson was already

working hard to become stronger, but no one knew for certain whether he had what it took to take the next major step in his profession.

As the Jemma Sandivar hovered above the Adelaide Third Fleet like a standard bearer, the next ace mech also emerged at another location.

The ace mech of the Boojay Family was armed with a spear and a shield. It immediately evoked a classy vibe through its purple-and-red coating along with golden flourishes.

The Royal Jeem was a rather unusual ace spearman mech. On the surface, it fought just like a spearman mech with balanced specs, though it also carried a shield for additional defense. It also carried a plasma pistol in case it needed to strike a target at a distance.

However, the Royal Jeem was primarily designed to duel against other ace mechs. Not only did it possess good penetration capabilities, but it was also capable of weakening the armor and other protective measures of its opponents.

"The Royal Jeem is similar to the Jemma Sandivar in that it is not that special of an ace mech." Ves explained for his children. "It only becomes special once its ace pilot comes into the picture. Saint Kalasandra Boojay possesses an unusual Saint Kingdom where she is able to directly weaken the armor and other protective measures of her opponent by issuing decrees. At least, that is what I found out. We will see soon enough how extensively Saint Kalasandra's decrees can weaken her opponents at close range."

Saint Kalasandra Boojay was a member of the main branch of the Boojay Family and had always enjoyed the best resources during her lifetime.

Having lived for over two centuries, she was the oldest ace pilot among the seven that would make an appearance today. She had also spent the most time developing as an ace pilot, so her resonance strength should also be a

lot more formidable than the resonance strength of a younger ace pilot such as Patriarch Reginald Cross.

Ves and many others had high expectations for Saint Kalasandra Boojay for that reason. If a truly powerful and intractable alien weapon showed up, the Royal Jeem probably had the best chance to demolish it as quickly as possible!

Saint Kalasandra's ability intrigued Aurelia a lot. The oldest child began to imagine what it would be like to wield the Boojay Saint's power.

"Can she really change anything just by saying so?" She asked her parents.

"Not completely." Gloriana responded. "She cannot erase the existence of her enemies with her willpower alone. That said, don't underestimate what she can do. If she can issue and enforce a decree that makes it so that an opponent is 30 percent more susceptible to damage than normal, then that is already an excellent result!"

Ves nodded in agreement. "Her domain is an excellent complement to her ace mech. Spears are weapons that are inherently good at punching through armor. If Saint Kalasandra can weaken an opponent inside her Saint Kingdom first, any spear attack launched by her Royal Jeem will find it much easier to break through the defenses of her opponent. This combination works especially well against weaker opponents, though even ace mechs should be affected to a limited degree."

Saint Kalandra could have developed her domain in a broad direction. If she focused on becoming good at issuing various different reality-defying decrees, then she could have become the ultimate jack of all trades.

For example, she could exert her willpower in ways that could speed up her ace mech, boost the performance of other friendly mechs or make her machine less detectable.

While she had the potential to develop in this direction, she opted to discard all of these possibilities and focus solely on shaping her willpower in a direction that allowed her to become a lot better at weakening the defenses of her opponent!

There were numerous advantages to this approach. Her Saint Kingdom not only helped her Royal Jeem overcome a strong opponent with greater ease, but also made the same enemy more vulnerable to attacks launched by other friendly combatants!

"Saint Kalandra Boojay is like a queen who has the power to lead the Boojay Family's forces in battle." Ves explained. "She used to serve as a mech officer before she devoted her attention to martial excellence, so I think this background has played a role in the development of her abilities. In any case, Saint Kalandra is an excellent partner to work with. Any strong opponent that she is able to weaken with her Saint Kingdom becomes a lot more vulnerable to the attacks of other powerful ace mechs such as the Thunderer Mark II or the Mars."

Once the Unspoken's fearsome battlecruiser finally showed up, the temporary coalition was counting on the Royal Jeem to play an instrumental role in taking down the alien flagship!

"Saint Kalasandra Boojay's domain is not that different from the domain of Patriarch Reginald Cross." Ves explained. "They both share a common root, but the difference is that Saint Kalasandra is much further ahead and strengthened only a single aspect of her power. Patriarch Reginald is still at the point where he needs to figure out how he must develop his Saint Kingdom further."

Gloriana nodded in agreement. "Patriarch Reginald is a warlord who craves control. He also enjoys difficult challenges. I think he will shape his Saint Kingdom in a direction that will further those desires. From what I have seen

so far, I think it is highly likely that he will focus his efforts on boosting the performance of his own expert mech rather than debilitating the performance of his opponents."

That was a good analysis. Ves could see why this would be the case. Patriarch Reginald Cross did not enjoy bullying weaker opponents, so it made little sense for him to develop in the same direction as Saint Kalasandra Boojay.

Patriarch Reginald did not mind fighting against strong opponents. This was because he believed that he would always be stronger and come out on top in the end!

Chapter 4437 Infinite Gear

Soon after the Boojay Family presented their greatest champion, the Lehrer Foundation finally deployed its own peak combat asset.

"The Infinite Gear has entered the field!"

Gloriana immediately perked up. "Finally. I've been waiting to see an ace mech that dares to go beyond the confines of traditional mechs."

Out of all of the ace mechs that the temporary coalition had at its disposal, Gloriana held the greatest interests towards the machine developed by the Lehrer Foundation.

As a large scientific research and development company, the Lehrer Foundation had the capacity to develop a huge number of advanced mech components and systems.

When it came to the design of its ace mech, the Lehrer Foundation had a hard time choosing what kind of powerful goodies it wanted to add to the configuration.

Should the ace mech be armed with a powerful energy rifle that could flood an enemy with an endless rain of energy beams?

Should the ace mech be equipped with a sophisticated tower shield that could deploy a mighty transphasic spatial shield that could cover an entire area?

Should the ace mech have access to an extremely powerful ECM system that was powerful enough to disrupt the functionality of the electrical components of mechs and starships?

All of these options sounded attractive, and that made it difficult for the decision makers to discard these powerful possibilities.

That was until a mech designer working for the Lehrer Foundation made a bright idea to take maximum advantage of their ace pilot's versatility!

The result was the Infinite Gear, an innovative and extremely complicated ace modular mech.

The central premise to the Infinite Gear was its ability to change its parts and configuration in the field.

It was an ace mech that did not possess a single main form. Its flight system, its armor system, its limbs and its weapon arsenal could all be swapped no matter whether it was resting inside a hangar bay or flying in open space!

According to what Ves knew about the Infinite Gear, its designers treated it as a multipurpose mech in the same vein as a true first-class multipurpose mech.

However, the biggest limitation was that the Lehrer Foundation did not have access to the tech or materials that could realize all of the possibilities of a multipurpose mech.

The Infinite Gear therefore turned into a playground that closely matched the traits of a multipurpose mech but in a more limited fashion.

Instead of having access to a dozen miniaturized weapon systems at once, the Infinite Gear could swap out a rifle for a sword when it transitioned from fighting from a distance to fighting up close.

The special component swapping mechanisms were crucial to enabling the Infinite Gear to change its loadout and configuration in the field.

While people like Ves or Gloriana could develop a comparable solution, they would never be able to make it as fast, robust and reliable as the ones who worked on the Infinite Gear!

The Lehrer Foundation's developers worked so hard to overcome all of the technological challenges that they managed to earn industry recognition for their accomplishment.

When Ves looked at the Infinite Gear, he saw a lot of parallels with the Everchanger.

Both of them pursued similar goals. They tried to be as adaptable and versatile as possible in order to remain useful at any time.

The biggest difference between the two was how they expressed their mutability.

The Everchanger primarily functioned as a hero mech that could rely on one weapon or the other in the right situation.

In order to increase its versatility, Ves made it so that it could swap out its design spirit and channel any glow, even the ones that were ordinarily restricted such as the life-changing transcendence glow.

The Infinite Gear did not put any emphasis on changing its intangible properties. Instead, it focused on the opposite approach and excelled at transforming its physical form by swapping out its parts!

It was not only able to swap out its weapons, but also many other external components!

This was extremely helpful in many different situations. For example, if the Infinite Gear ever got struck by a powerful attack that broke a lot of modular armor plating, then the ace mech could simply shed the damaged parts.

In the meantime, the Lehrer Foundation's flagship could launch a batch of replacement armor plates straight towards the Infinite Gear. Once it got close, the fresh and undamaged armor plating would automatically slot into the gaps of the ace mech, thereby making the powerful modular mech as good as new!

As their parents quickly explained what made the Infinite Gear so special, their children all looked impressed.

"It's like playing a mech building game in the middle of a battle!" Marvaine said!

Gloriana smiled. "That's right, my son. That is a good way to look at it. The Infinite Gear can theoretically last forever as long as the fleet that it is attached to has a sufficiently large reserve of high-end parts."

"Doesn't that mean the Infinite Gear can outlast everything else?"

Both Ves and Gloriana chuckled.

"That's not possible." Ves replied. "Ace mechs are extremely expensive. Their parts alone are worth at least several complete expert mechs. The Lehrer Foundation may be rich and successful, but I doubt it has the budget to build up a humongous reserve of variable parts such as a hundred pairs of arms or 50 different mech swords."

"How much money does that cost?"

"Tens of millions of MTA credits." Ves loosely guessed. "Anyway, the Infinite Gear may be highly modular, but it still possesses a single core that cannot be swapped in the field. Once its core internals incur damage, it becomes a lot less viable for the ace modular mech to keep fighting. Modular mechs are also

inherently less stable and solid than more conventional mechs, so it is easier to damage its internals."

"That is why modular mechs aren't as popular, right?"

Ves nodded. "That's correct. There are many more parts, which means that there are a lot more points of failure. The last point that I want to make is that an ace mech is only as strong as its ace pilot. What I mean by that is even if the Infinite Gear can last long enough to keep fighting, Saint Robert Montagne may not be able to keep up. The more he fights, the more he depletes his willpower and wears out his mind. Unless he can keep fighting at a low intensity, he will eventually reach a point where he can no longer empower his ace mech. That is bad because the Infinite Gear will become a lot more vulnerable at that point."

Despite all of these limitations, Ves and Gloriana still considered the Infinite Gear to be a brilliant feat of design and engineering.

It was a mech that they could never design themselves unless they had an enormous development company under their belt. This was because a modular mech like this had an extremely high demand for custom-developed parts that all abided by a common set of standards.

In any case, the Lehrer Foundation may have invested a lot more in the development and the expansion of the Infinite Gear, but what they got in return was better than a more traditional ace mech with a fixed configuration!

"It is interesting to compare the Infinite Gear to the Everchanger." Gloriana said. "They have so many similarities. Both of them are inherently adaptable machines that try to morph themselves in ways that allow them to exploit enemy weaknesses while making sure that their enemies cannot effectively employ their own strengths. The Infinite Gear is far better at executing this strategy on a physical level because it doesn't have as many compromises."

Ves did not entirely agree with her description. "That is only the case if we leave out the Everchanger's mounted wargear options. I already recognized that the Everchanger's inability to change its configuration would be a potential weak point, so I decided early on that it should be able to augment itself by equipping itself with modular external gear. As a result, the Everchanger can swap its gear on the fly as well. The only difference is that it can only do so with external equipment. The swapping process is also a lot slower and clunkier."

His wife snorted. "What the Lehrers have done with the Infinite Gear is expensive and time-consuming, but what you have done with the Everchanger is even more wasteful!"

"At least the Everchanger still has a solid base form that is already a complete mech in itself. When paired with an expert pilot that has a rare life domain like Venerable Joshua, I think my own work will eventually be able to defeat the Infinite Gear if it is able to catch up to the latter's level."

Ves truly believed that this was the case. The Infinite Gear's technical capabilities would probably be stronger, but the Everchanger had access to a lot of useful spiritual options!

There were many other reasons why he believed the Everchanger would be able to come out on top, but it was not necessary for Ves to elaborate any further.

Right now, he was more interested in studying its current configuration.

One of the defining advantages of a modular mech was that it could change into any mech type it wanted as long as the right parts were available.

The Bright Warrior line and the Quint also possessed the same capability, but the reason why they were classified as semi-modular was because they could only swap their configurations in the workshop.

This gave Saint Robert Montagne the freedom to deploy his Infinite Gear in a powerful artillery mech loadout.

Right now, the Infinite Gear possessed many similarities with the Thunderer Mark II. While the former was not as large and did not come with as many guns, it could still function as well as any other ace heavy artillery mech!

The Thunderer Mark II would still be better, though. It was a specialized artillery machine that did not contain any compromises or additional support systems related to modularity.

What was even more important was that Saint Jelmer Osenring was highly specialized in piloting heavy artillery mechs. His skills, his combat experience and more importantly his domain were all dedicated to maximizing the effectiveness of such machines!

Saint Robert Montagne did not possess these advantages. His domain was more geared towards increasing the adaptability and versatility of the Infinite Gear and its many complicated systems. He did not possess the magical ability to impart his ace mech's attacks with a damage enhancing effect that would allow him to do better at this specific job.

This was fine.

While Saint Osenring and the Thunderer Mark II excelled at fulfilling a single role, they became a lot less useful if they were compelled to fight in another way!

For example, if an ace light skirmisher mech managed to ambush the Thunderer Mark II, it would be extremely difficult for Saint Osenring to defeat such a powerful threat. The best he could do was to repel the adversary.

In contrast, Saint Montagne merely had to issue a request to the Lehrer fleet and wait until another set of modular mech parts reached his Infinite Gear.

Once the package arrived, the Infinite Gear could swap out its set of artillery mech parts for a set of striker mech parts and proceed to fight its enemies at closer range without any problems!

The same enemy ace light skirmisher mech would not only lose its prior advantage, but end up becoming extremely vulnerable to the Infinite Gear's wide area attacks!

This was why Ves and many others assumed that the Infinite Gear would be the ace mech that would retain the most relevance as the battle progressed to its later stages.

"Sir! The Gemini Family has finally launched its ace mechs. Both of them have revealed their presence!"

The strongest pioneering group finally unveiled its trump cards. Unlike the others, the Geminis had two ace mechs at their disposal, and they weren't shy about deploying them together.

Since both of their ace mechs were piloted by a pair of twins who also happened to be husband and wife, the synergy and cooperation of the two was bound to be extremely high!

"The Gemini Saints are piloting an ace space knight and an ace rifleman mech. That's a classic combination."

The power and capabilities of just one of them was already strong enough, but once they teamed up with each other, they could overcome much more potent challenges!

Chapter 4438 The Embodiments Of Love And Sacrifice

Every ace mech that took part in Operation Lighthouse possessed at least one unique advantage over their peers.

This was a given. Generic ace mechs didn't exist as such average machines would be an affront to the incredible strength and determination of ace pilots.

As such, the people who employed them usually invested as much as they could to weaponize them. By equipping them with the best possible ace mechs that they could obtain within their means, the various powers gained powerful trump cards that could single-handedly turn defeats into victories!

Not only did ace mechs provide mech armies with a crushing advantage against forces that lacked such a potent asset, they also provided critical protection against opposing ace mechs.

It did not surprise Ves at all that almost all of the ace mechs so far had primarily been designed with equal mech duels in mind.

If an ace mech did not even have the chance to defeat another ace mech, then a mech force that included such a deficient machine would not even be able to protect itself against rival human forces!

Powerful mechs such as the Mars, Jedda Sandivar, the Royal Jeem and the Infinite Gear might perform well in other areas due to their specific configurations and capabilities, but each of them were primarily designed to fight against other ace mechs first.

The only possible exception was the Thunderer Mark II, but that was only because it was relatively poorly equipped to fight against ace mechs at close range.

As long as it maintained a range advantage, its prodigious firepower was probably enough to pound any opposing ace mech!

In fact, that was probably the premise of the original design of the ace heavy artillery mech years ago. The heavy commitment towards ranged firepower not only matched Saint Jelmer Osenring's specialization, but also fit with the Santana Group's so-called Many Guns Doctrine.

It was only after the opening of the Red Ocean and the introduction of phasewater technology that the paradigms had changed.

The adoption of transphasic gauss cannons may have made the Thunderer Mark II a lot more effective at punching through the formidable defenses of enemy ace mechs, but also allowed the latter to rapidly close the distance with the help of minidrive technology!

Regardless of the ability for all of these ace mechs to contend against their own kind, Ves was glad that each of them were more than competent enough to fight against alien warships.

The Mars and the Thunderer Mark II could probably bombard and overwhelm moderate warships from a distance.

The Jemma Sandivar and the Royal Jeem needed to get closer in order to leverage their capabilities the most, but they possessed unique debilitating powers that could directly reduce the performance of their opponents.

The Infinite Gear might not possess any strong advantages in battle, but its unparalleled adaptability allowed it to take on any role at any time!

"Each of the ace mechs that showed up before are all strong and special machines." Ves commented. "They all have their good points which they depend upon to dominate the opposition. However... now that the ace mechs of the Gemini Saints have shown up, I am no longer sure they're all that impressive anymore."

His wife grew irked at his remark. "Surely you are exaggerating, Ves. The ace mechs deployed by the Gemini Family are excellent technical accomplishments, but they are not noticeably superior to the other ace mechs. They are not masterworks like our Mars. They are not as fast as the Jemma Sandivar. They do not have the incredible modularity and adaptability of the Infinite Gear. Their only advantages are that their ace pilots have developed an excellent degree of cooperation and that the defensive half of the duo should be incredibly good at withstanding enemy attacks."

Ves shook his head and gestured at the large projection that displayed the two Gemini ace mechs in their full splendor.

"Don't you see? It's so obvious! It's not the tech or the design of the machines that is the most impressive part about them. It is the unprecedented union between the Gemini Saints that is the real star of the show! This is the kind of engineering that no mech designer has worked on! This is social engineering!"

When Gloriana directed her attention away from the technical aspects of the two Gemini ace mechs and tried to study their more intangible properties, her eyes slowly widened.

"Now that you mention it... I think I can see it. Their Saint Kingdoms... are not conflicting against each other. They... they have merged with each other! Despite their underlying differences, the Gemini Saints trust and love each other to such an incredible degree that their egos and wills no longer reject each other in any way. I never knew this was possible! This goes against one of your own theories, Ves!"

Ves laughed in astonishment even as he tried to process the implications of this momentous discovery.

"My theories weren't wrong, Gloriana. They were incomplete. Now that I have observed a radically different phenomenon, I can supplement my theoretical framework."

If Ves only paid attention to the Gemini ace mechs, then his wife was still correct. The design of the ace mechs were anything but revolutionary. He even believed that the designers of the two machines had attempted to play it safe.

The Embodiment of Sacrifice was the defensive side out of the pair. The ace space knight was designed with a balanced configuration in mind and did not

possess any clear and obvious weaknesses aside from its meager ability to attack at range.

Other than that, the Embodiment of Sacrifice was serviceable ace mech all-considered. It possessed excellent defenses but not to the point of giving up too much mobility or offensive power.

In the hands of Saint Sandro Gemini, the Embodiment of Sacrifice gained a noble and friendly character that excelled at comforting and inspiring other nearby friendly mech pilots.

Aside from that, Ves was sure that the Embodiment of Sacrifice possessed other capabilities that he had yet to determine. The ace mech did not reveal a hint of any resonating abilities, but they were likely defensive in nature.

When Ves compared the Embodiment of Sacrifice's configuration to that of his upcoming Dullahan Project, he felt that the two shared a considerable amount of similarities, at least on a technical level.

Just like the designers of the Gemini Family's ace space knight, Ves also wanted to design a more balanced defensive mech that nonetheless possessed enough mobility to keep up with most hostile mechs and enough attack power to pose a real threat against opponents at the same level.

"Interesting."

The Embodiment of Love was the offensive half of the pair. As an ace rifleman mech, the machine piloted by Saint Kaia Gemini was also rather conservative in its design.

It was designed as a top-end version of a classic spaceborn rifleman mech. Its energy rifle was quite impressive in terms of firepower, but it was not as large, heavy and unwieldy as an energy cannon.

Saint Kaia's ace rifleman mech was also rather slim and was equipped with a good transphasic flight system, so it possessed ample enough mobility to engage in dogfights against other ace mechs.

The only obvious shortcoming of the Embodiment of Love was that its armor system did not look like it could withstand a lot of attacks, but that was a common weakness for every mech of this archetype.

Just as with the other Embodiment of Sacrifice, Ves had the feeling that the pink ace rifleman mech might be hiding a surprise or two. There was no way an ace mech could be this simple and standard.

In any case, these ace mechs were clearly designed by the same design team. Ves could tell that not only were they designed to complement each other from the start, they were also set up to enable their ace pilots to cooperate with each other to the maximum possible extent!

The reason why he was certain of the latter was because the Saint Kingdoms of the Embodiment of Sacrifice and the Embodiment of Love seamlessly merged with each other!

While Ves assumed that the mech designers responsible for the development of the twin machines implemented many solutions that facilitated this phenomenon, the key to making this possible was the incredible trust and love of their ace pilots!

During his visit to the Gemini Family's fleet, Ves had seen first-hand how the Gemini twins and lovers adored and understood each other to a degree that could never be matched by an ordinary married couple.

For example, Ves and Gloriana were quite intimate with each other despite their many differences because their design networks regularly brought their minds together.

Yet even then, Ves could never claim to attain perfect harmony and acceptance with his wife!

He still had too many secrets and fears that held him back from sharing everything he knew to Gloriana, let alone putting his life in her hands! She had proven herself to be rather careless with his secrets in the past, so he simply decided to never give her the chance to leak anything too devastating.

Gloriana also kept a small distance from Ves.

While he knew that Gloriana was a little bit more forthcoming about herself, she too clung tight to the core values and principles that Ves always had a problem with. She refused to turn her back to her identity as a Hexer, and so long as this was the case, it would always act as a barrier.

This was a relatively normal state among many married couples, but it didn't seem to apply to the Geminis.

Sandro and Kaia were one of the many twins that grew up alongside each other. For a long time, they loved their other halves as brother and sister and shared many happy moments together.

Once they came of age, the Gemini Family indoctrinated them into changing the way they looked at each other from siblings to their fated lovers.

While they already loved each other to a strong degree, they began to develop a different kind of love on top of that, one that made them regard their other halves as husband or wife rather than brother or sister.

The dynamics behind these changes were disturbing and complicated. Ves was sure that the psychologists of the Gemini Family could write entire books about their perverted practices, but he was only concerned about the results.

The uninterrupted chain of love maintained by the Gemini Saints had become so strong and deep over the years that it had essentially caused them to form a partial fusion with each other!

Sandro was Kaia and Kaia was Sandro. The lines between the two had become blurred because they knew and trusted each other to a level that went far beyond the norm.

Normally, their advancements through the ranks should have caused them to develop a greater sense of self and make it a lot harder for them to meld with each other. This was because a high-ranking mech pilot's extraordinary willpower possessed a strong exclusionary property that protected them from all other external influences!

This was the reason why these high-ranking mech pilots were able to repel so many powerful attacks when they resonated with their expert mechs or ace mechs!

While Saint Sandro and Saint Kaia still maintained this essential property that served as their most powerful method of protection, the difference was that they did not treat each other as an 'external influence'!

It was as if the Gemini Family had discovered a loophole and purposefully exploited it through their unorthodox family planning practices.

"This is a brilliant approach!" Ves uttered with utmost admiration!

If the Gemini Family purposely pursued this strategy with the aim of producing a magnificent pairing like the Gemini Saints, then Ves fully applauded the masterminds behind this initiative!

It was the kind of radical and unorthodox solution that could only be spawned from the mind of a true innovator!

Only the most brilliant and daring minds were willing to question assumptions, break established conventions and bull through all opposition!

"I wish I came up with such a crazy idea." Ves enviously said.

Chapter 4439 Shaking Matter

From the moment the first ace mech deployed into space and rapidly took up position above the mech forces they were associated with, many people became distracted.

The mech pilots that were tasked with firing their guns at the well-shielded Palace of Shame still kept up their rate of fire for the most part, but it was obvious that they were merely pulling the trigger on autopilot.

Most of their attention shifted away from the enemy so that they could study and admire all of the excellent ace mechs and the Saints who piloted them. It was as if nothing else was in their vision aside from the powerful stars that outshone everything else on the battlefield!

It took a while for the mech officers to knock some sense into their subordinates.

"Our ace mechs aren't here to put on a show for you! You are soldiers, not gawkers!"

"Watch your aim and don't miss your shots! Focus on your aim, not on our friendlies! The ace mechs have their own responsibilities. You won't be able to help them and they will not come to your aid if you are in trouble."

"The enemy aliens will be ready to launch an attack on us at any moment. Be prepared to dodge and reposition at any time!"

As the soldiers largely went back to dedicating themselves to their original duties, the ace mechs that made a dramatic appearance waited to see how the aliens would respond to their appearance.

So far, the Palace of Shame did not exhibit any changes. The heavy jamming and interference generated by both sides made it a lot harder to observe any noticeable differences, but so far nothing threatening had appeared.

"Do these aliens know how much of a threat our ace mechs represent?" Ves questioned.

"They should." Gloriana guessed. "The energy readings from all of the ace mechs are much higher than any other individual machine. Even if you leave out the resonance meter which the aliens might not possess, the energy emissions generated by mechs such as the Mars far exceed the level of small craft and have already entered into warship territory. If the aliens are clever enough, they should treat our ace mechs as miniaturized warships and form their response accordingly."

Ves didn't think that the major pirate groups like the Unspoken were ignorant of the power of human ace mechs. He began to feel more and more unsettled. The longer the aliens were hiding their assets behind their transphasic energy shields and their interference fields, the more he dreaded the moment where they would finally unveil their combat assets.

"Have the Geminis transmitted any new instructions as of yet? Our ace mechs shouldn't be staying idle all of this time."

"Please wait, sir."

It took a minute before the Geminis along with the other leaders came to a consensus about their next step forward.

"Ah, we have just received another command transmission. The Geminis don't want to rush too much, sir. They intend to probe the Palace of Shame's defenses and possible responses first. All ace mechs aside from the Thunderer Mark II have been instructed to remain on standby."

"What about the Thunderer Mark II?"

The ace heavy artillery mech of the Santana Group had the honor of being the first of its kind to go into action.

While most of the ace mechs bravely moved into open space and held their positions as if they were stars providing navigation assistance to lost travelers, the Thunderer Mark II did not follow the crowd.

No matter its ability to withstand far more punishment than any other heavy artillery mech, Saint Jelmer Osenring still showed utmost respect towards his current enemies and made sure to plant his expert mech on the surface of a large and stable asteroid.

Similar to many other heavy artillery mechs, the Thunderer Mark II possessed far more than a single pair of legs.

It boasted eight thick and heavily-armored legs that provided the Thunderer Mark II with excellent balance, anchoring, heat transmission and more.

They also enabled the Thunderer Mark II to crawl across surfaces at surprising speeds for a mech of its size and mass!

The Thunderer Mark II's legs partially drilled through the surface of the asteroid. Once Saint Osenring was happy with the stability his ace mech obtained, he began to aim the weapons at his disposal towards the Palace of Shame.

Ten powerful and highly advanced heavy gauss cannons shifted their angles in order to converge on a specific segmented transphasic energy shield.

The selection of this specific target was not random. It just happened to be positioned at an angle where other ranged ace mechs such as the Mars could attack from their respective positions as well.

The ace pilot resonated with his ace mech and more specifically the ten gauss cannons at his disposal.

While the Thunderer Mark II also possessed other weapon systems such as a pair of medium positron cannons and a pair of potent plasma cannons, they excelled in different situations.

For now, the ten heavy gauss cannons were enough.

None of them were average weapon systems. They were specifically designed to match the Thunderer Mark II as well as the unique advantages of Saint Osenring's domain.

The most important element to the weapon system was its special ammunition. The Santana Group developed special transphasic rounds that not only penetrated deeper but also propagated the shockwaves generated by Saint Osenring's true resonance at different angles!

The Thunderer Mark II was equipped with dimensional magazines that contained an abundance of rounds with different damage effects.

There were wider, flatter rounds that were designed to break surface armor. They did so by penetrating less but maximizing the spread of shockwaves.

There were also other rounds that were designed for extreme penetration. These rounds were sharper and narrower than anything else and could pierce through many meters of solid alloy before they unloaded most of their incredible kinetic energies.

Right now, Saint Osenring opted to load his physical cannons with shield bypassing rounds.

These were relatively moderate projectiles that featured soft round cones and a surprising amount of clever engineering.

The purpose of all of these additional complications was to ensure that the rounds bypassed energy shields as best as possible before subsequently unloading as much of their power onto physical matter.

The ultimate purpose of these rounds was to destroy energy shields by attacking their source as directly as possible as opposed to wearing them down the traditional way!

"Let's see whether the power of an ace mech can defeat the power of advanced alien technology." Ves whispered.

Both he and his wife paid close attention to what would happen next. The effectiveness of the upcoming attacks directly influenced the human coalition's subsequent battle plans.

After all, it was a lot harder to conduct a siege if their best artillery solution proved to be less than effective against the enemy's strongest defensive measure.

"The Thunderer Mark II is about to open fire!"

Saint Osenring truly wanted his first salvo to succeed as the Thunderer Mark II glowed with power!

Soon enough, a faint but extremely far-reaching shockwave seemed to spread from the anchored ace mech and spread through everything on the battlefield!

At the same time, ten powerful dark blue jets soared from the muzzles of the gauss cannons and rapidly crossed through space until they converged on the same segmented energy shield!

Despite the latter's powerful transphasic properties, the gauss cannons and the special shield bypassing rounds were laced with phasewater as well, allowing them to mitigate the defensive boost.

Though a considerable portion of the matter and energy of the special gauss rounds still impacted the surface of the powerful transphasic energy shield, causing it to ripple and destabilize to an extent, around 20 to 30 percent of the power of the shield bypassing rounds still managed to get through!

Even if the proportions were rather low, just 20 percent of the original power of an attack launched by an ace mech and an artillery mech no less was still potent!

Nothing obvious happened after the rounds managed to get through, though.

"What are the results of the Thunderer Mark II's attack salvo? Has the Palace of Shame incurred any damage?"

"We cannot tell, sir. Our sensors and scanners cannot pick up any clear details beyond the enemy energy shields."

The destabilized energy shield soon returned to normal, which indicated that the underlying alien shield generator was still in working condition. It was probably buried deep enough to keep projecting a protective barrier without issue.

Saint Osenring did not exhibit any disappointment, though. He had already prepared his Thunderer Mark II to fire another salvo of shield bypassing rounds after the first time.

This was the modus operandi of a ranged mech of the Santana Group! If one attack wasn't enough, then attack another time.

If two attacks weren't enough, then attack two more times.

As long as there was a sufficient amount of time and resources, the mechs and the mech pilots of the Santana Group could fire their weapons all day!

This time, Saint Osenring changed a few settings and resonated with his ace mech in a slightly different fashion.

"The Thunderer Mark II is opening fire again!"

The ten powerful rounds that soared through space with incredible speed and power impacted the same segmented energy shield yet again!

The difference was that the energy shield became less affected than before. It rippled a little less and did not destabilize as much anymore.

This was a good sign! If the gauss rounds expended less of their power on damaging the energy shield, they would most certainly inflict more damage to anything that sheltered underneath!

"Around 40 percent of the energy of the attack managed to pass through the energy shield this time! This is an impressive adaptation from Saint Osenring!"

This was a solution that only a true high-end heavy artillery mech and specialized mech pilot could produce!

Ves doubted that Patriarch Reginald Cross and the Mars could bypass energy shields at the same rate with their own attacks.

The ARCEUS System was powerful in many ways, but it did not excel in this area. He knew that quite well considering that he was largely responsible for integrating its energy weapon modules into the design of the Mars in the first place!

Gloriana threw a knowing look in his direction. "You have been obsessing so much over ranged energy weapons lately that you have forgotten that ranged physical weapons have their own advantages. It is much harder to reproduce the same effect with an energy beam."

"You're right."

The Thunderer Mark II's second salvo still didn't produce any obvious changes, but that was okay. Saint Osenring had already entered into a familiar routine and commanded his huge ace mech to unleash a third salvo as soon as its weapons were fully charged again!

"Three..."

"Four..."

"Five..."

"Six..."

"The segmented energy shield has lost over half of its remaining integrity and power all of a sudden!"

Ves perked up as the Thunderer Mark II only took a few seconds to fire its next salvo.

After all of its ten gauss cannons boomed for the seventh time, the Palace of Shame exhibited an obvious change this time as Saint Osenring finally produced a concrete result!

"The targeted energy shield has disappeared! A gap in energy shield coverage of roughly 0.7 square kilometers has appeared over the Palace of Shame!"

Many people zoomed in on the gap and tried their best to observe the surface of the asteroid.

Though the jamming still remained at least partially effective, it was clear that the seventy powerful gauss rounds launched by the Thunderer Mark II inflicted utter devastation on a part of the surface of the asteroid base!

It was as if a massive earthquake had completely upended both the surface of this small section of the Palace of the Shame!

Whatever was underneath did not escape the tribulations either. The shockwaves generated by all of the rounds shook and tore apart hundreds of meters worth of rock, tunnels, halls and alien machines!

Evidently, these shockwaves also happened to tear apart one of the alien shield generators!

"Success!"

"Don't celebrate too soon! Now that the aliens have learned that they can't stall us anymore, they will most certainly respond more proactively against our aggression. They can't allow the Thunderer Mark II to strip the Palace of Shame of its defenses!"

Chapter 4440 V'gahnt-Zezne

The Palace of Shame was the foundation of the alien pirate groups that had chosen to remain behind.

Now that their only safe harbor came under serious threat, the aliens could no longer afford to procrastinate any further.

No matter how divided they were, each of them should still have enough sense to realize that all of them would undoubtedly become unmoored if the human aggressors managed to destroy all of the powerful transphasic energy shield generators.

"How long can the Thunderer Mark II go on like this?" Ves asked.

"It will not take as long to take down the subsequent segmented energy shields, sir. As long as there are enough gaps, the Thunderer Mark II can employ clever positioning to fire its transphasic gauss rounds at different angles to damage surfaces that should normally be covered."

The Santana Group's powerful ace heavy artillery mech continued to exert a lot of pressure towards the Palace of Shame.

Though a machine like this could mount even larger and more powerful guns if it wanted to, the advantage of its current set of heavy gauss cannons was that they offered a high rate of fire!

Once Saint Osenring managed to get into his groove, the machine under his control ran so smoothly that it was difficult to imagine that it was a large and clunky heavy mech.

Its heavy gauss cannons periodically boomed at the same time as Saint Osenring aimed to overwhelm his targets by triggering powerful earthquakes every few seconds.

Ves couldn't imagine what it was like to be an alien who was stationed in an underground area in the vicinity of the affected areas.

The shockwaves rippling through the rocky soil and reinforced spaces already inflicted catastrophic damage to a large chunk of the outer portion of the asteroid base, but also made themselves felt at much further distance.

The Thunderer Mark II must be terrorizing a lot of alien pirates at this time!

While this was great for inducing fear in the hearts of so many enemies, the downside was that the Thunderer Mark II also attracted a lot of heat in return!

If the aliens wanted to launch a counterattack, then they would most definitely focus their aggression on the ace heavy artillery mech first!

"Sir, we are detecting many fluctuations from the Palace of Shame! A massive amount of movements are taking place all across the surface of the asteroid base!"

"What is going on?! What is your best guess?!"

"The alien pirate fleets are no longer staying still. All of the alien vessels that can launch into space are about to ascend from the surface!"

"I see."

Ves half-expected the alien warships to continue to shelter in place while opening fire at the human mechs that threatened the Palace of Shame.

"I think the alien warships can't fire through the Palace of Shame's transphasic energy shields." Gloriana said. "It would explain why the aliens have yet to launch a serious counterattack at this time. It could be that the energy shield

technology used to protect the asteroid base offers greater protection while forgoing the option to allow attacks to pass through from the other side."

That was a plausible guess.

"Maybe you're right. I have the feeling that the aliens were doing their best to stall for time. There ought to be good reasons why they have invested in so many powerful shield generators of this type. In that sense, it may have been for the best for the Thunderer Mark II to pressure our opponents into action."

Ves did not think that the aliens were stalling for time for irrational reasons like completing an elaborate religious ritual. Pirates never tended to last if they engaged in stupid or self-destructive behavior.

If he assumed that there was a rational reason to stall for time, then the most likely possibility was that the aliens were waiting for reinforcements!

"We need to destroy the alien warships as quickly as possible before any outside help can arrive and join forces with our current opponents!"

Just as Ves made this realization, the alien pirates finally exposed their main mobile combat assets!

The first fleet to emerge was the most familiar-looking one to Ves. It was the Unspoken pirate fleet that possessed the highest degree of threat towards the human coalition!

Surrounded by 14 destroyer-like vessels, the battlecruiser at the center of the neat formation attracted a lot of attention.

The size and presence of this capital ship were beyond anything that Ves had ever seen from an alien vessel.

Though the MTA and CFA's capital ships were even more fearsome, the orven-built battlecruiser was intimidating in her own way!

"What do we know about the opposing battlecruiser?" Ves asked.

"According to the latest intelligence provided by the Gemini Family, the battlecruiser goes by the name of 'V'gahnt-Zezne', though that is likely a shortened version of her full name. She is 3.2 kilometers wide, 0.6 kilometers long and 0.8 kilometers deep. While her armor is fairly good, it is in no way comparable to that of a CFA battleship. The V'gahnt-Zezne primarily relies on her segmented energy shields for defense. She boasts an unusually large amount of thrusters due to her design and can accelerate forward at a surprising rate, though her ability to change trajectory is not as great."

While the orvens designed their warships according to radically different principles than most of humanity, the properties of the V'gahnt-Zezne made her comparable to a human battlecruiser.

A battlecruiser was basically a budget version of a battleship. The former featured stripped-down hull plating that was not as thick or resilient, but made the massive vessel a lot more affordable to build!

The thinner and lighter hull significantly increased the thrust-to-weight ratio of a battlecruiser, enabling the armed capital ship to get up to speed a lot faster and also change directions a lot faster.

Of course, this was only relative to the performance of a battleship. The V'gahnt-Zezne was still an awfully sluggish vessel that took a long time to accelerate forward!

The 14 orven escort destroyers that accompanied the massive V'gahnt-Zezne could have easily outpaced the massive slowpoke, but they did not do so because protecting the flagship was their main priority!

"Tell me about her weapons."

"We have double-checked the information we have with our long-ranged observations. The V'gahnt-Zezne has an unusual weapon arrangement where all of her main guns are placed on top or on the sides of her large and wide

forward-facing surface. This allows the battlecruiser to open fire with all of her primary weapon systems at a target that is in front of her orientation. Her primary armament consists of 14 evenly-placed plasma cannons, 132 secondary kinetic cannons and 317 tertiary laser cannons. She is presumably capable of launching missiles as well."

The entire bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim seemed to have fallen silent.

Leaving everything else aside, the potent array of weapon systems alone was enough to allow the V'gahnt-Zezne to annihilate entire mech divisions and their accompanying ships!

The V'gahnt-Zezne even had the power to compete against a smaller MTA or CFA warship!

While the overall tech and material quality of the battlecruiser might not be the best, the immense scale of this warship alone was enough to ensure it was capable of inflicting a crushing amount of damage!

The 317 tertiary laser cannons were comparable to the energy cannons of a ranged mech, but better.

The calibers were similar but the battlecruiser possessed a vast reserve of energy and could absorb a humongous amount of heat. This made it so that all of the laser cannons that were placed throughout the hull could keep firing at their maximum possible rate for a long period of time!

The V'gahnt-Zezne mainly relied on her tertiary guns to intercept incoming ordnance, starfighters or other smaller annoyances. Their power was lacking but their accuracy and rate of fire made up for this shortcoming.

The 132 secondary kinetic cannons were much more concerning. Even if not all of them faced the front, the sheer quantity of frigate-grade cannons was enough to pound and shred any starship, especially one that was lacking in shielding and hull plating!

Their main purpose was to demolish as many small-to-medium sized warships as possible. Any force that tried to rely on quantity to overwhelm the orven battlecruiser would likely regret it after facing so many powerful guns at once!

However, the true reason why none of the mechs and ships of the human coalition dared to move too close to the Palace of Shame was the biggest guns of the battlecruiser.

Though the V'gahnt-Zezne was much like the Thunderer Mark II in that she could have mounted heavier guns, the original designers of this battlecruiser opted to equip her with a larger quantity of slightly smaller main cannons.

The 14 plasma cannons gave the V'gahnt-Zezne an enormous degree of deterrence against both alien and human adversaries!

Just a single salvo from all of these huge guns was probably enough to overwhelm the shielding of the Spirit of Bentheim and melt a quarter of her hull into molten slag!

Given enough time, the V'gahnt-Zezne could destroy every ship of every human fleet present in this star system!

"We can't give the orvens the time to intercept our starships!"

Right now, the human pioneering groups had parked most of their starships far away from the battlefield.

There were tradeoffs to this decision.

The Larkinsons and many other groups did not have to worry about their precious assets getting demolished by the V'gahnt-Zezne or any other alien warship.

The downside was that mechs had to travel a long way back to reach their motherships and replenish their supplies.

"We can't let this battle drag out. The longer it goes on, the more we are at a disadvantage."

Even as the other alien fleets rose from the protective envelope of the Palace of Shame, the long-ranged sensors detected a massive buildup of heat and energy from the orven battlecruiser!

"The V'gahnt-Zezne is on the verge of opening fire with her primary armaments!"

"What are the plasma cannons aiming at?!" Ves requested.

"They... they are aiming squarely at the current coordinates of the Thunderer Mark II!"

Just as predicted, the ace heavy artillery mech of the Santana Group most certainly attracted the ire of all of the pirates!

Though Ves grew concerned at the fate of one of the crucial ace mechs of this operation, the Santanas and the Geminis already accounted for this possibility.

Though the Thunderer Mark II had quickly shifted its priority from attacking the Palace of Shame to attacking the orven battlecruiser, the plasma cannons finally unleashed their destructive energies!

Fourteen miniature stars escaped the sizable muzzles of the plasma cannons and zipped across the battlefield at a relatively astounding speed!

A brief instant later, many of the immense plasma bolts collided against the asteroid where the Thunderer Mark II had anchored upon while the remainder soared past at slightly different angles to cover any escape routes!

The sensors observing the asteroid in question temporarily became blinded as the plasma bolts released energies at levels comparable to the detonations of a dozen tactical nuclear missiles!

"This is an insane level of firepower! No wonder the Big Two stripped the right of owning warships from the rest of humanity. The destructive potential of a battlecruiser is enough to wipe out entire cities or continents within a single day!"

Yet as the blinding effects of the plasma bolt impacts finally faded, Ves and many other observers sighed in relief when they saw that the Thunderer Mark II was still in one piece!

Much of the asteroid had been wiped out in its entirety, but the chunk that was well within the influence of the ace heavy artillery mech's Saint Kingdom remained partially intact.

The Thunderer Mark II's domain field also experienced a lot of stress, but it had bled away so much of the destructive energies of the plasma bolts that whatever was left couldn't inflict any significant damage onto the ace mech's extremely thick and dense armor plating.

Though it was clear to Ves that Saint Osenring and his ace mech could not withstand repeated attacks of this caliber, the current demonstration amply proved that the human ace mech possessed the capital to contend against the alien warships!

"The real battle begins now!"