

Chapter 481 Resonance Profile

It didn't take long for the commander to change his orders. Breskin issued a new set of orders that forced over half of the analysts to abandon their current investigations and begin to tackle a new one based on detecting one of many different resonance profiles.

The workload seemed daunting. With only a score of people, it would be impossible for them to manually match every signal gathered by millions of sensors scattered over Neron City with the twenty-plus resonance profiles.

The Detemen League sprinkled a lot of different sensors over the city in preparation for this operation. Once it begun, the sensors came online and gathered an enormous amount of raw observation data. It was frankly too much to work with, so the rebels mostly stored them in their databanks to be used selectively when they needed it most.

This was one of those times. They subjected almost four days worth of raw data to a signal matching program that rapidly tried to detect signals similar to the resonance profiles.

The computational load from all of this work put a huge strain on the rebel base's processors. While the rebels gathered a substantial amount of processing power, that simply emphasized how monumental their newest search had become.

"How long will this take?" Addy frowned as she stood next to Ves.

"Could be hours. Could be days." Ves replied. "It depends on how soon we find a match. We're currently searching from the first day of the operation when Lord Javier presumably fled with his Raphael. If there was any a time to activate his mech, that would be the moment to look for. It shouldn't take too long to obtain a definite answer."

While others fretted and tried to contribute their own efforts into searching for a match, Ves really didn't have anything else to do. The processors did all the grunt work, and the only thing the analysts needed to do was to make a judgement on every edge case the simulations presented to them. They rejected quite a bit of false leads this way.

Not everyone believed this investigation would bear fruit. A Vandal who sat a few seats away from Ves snorted contemptuously.

"That Javier fellow put all of his attention on evacuating from the palace. By all accounts, he fled before the rebels moved their forces to that location, so the noble never needed to fight."

"What's your point?" Ves asked.

"His mech never pulled out all the stops. There's no reason for us to be searching for signals that have never been transmitted!"

Ves smirked in response. "You're wrong in that. You're right in that the Loquacious Raphael is hard to detect if Lord Javier kept a low profile, but both the mech pilot and his mech are attention seekers. Do you really believe that Lord Javier ran his mech at the lowest settings possible?"

The man couldn't answer that because he never analyzed Lord Javier and the Loquacious Raphael like Ves had done.

Hero mechs always made a scene wherever they went. Their ability to intimidate and inspire awe was baked into their feature set.

In the vast spectrum of mech types, hero mechs pretty much sat in the opposite dimension of stealth mechs and assassin mechs. The former sought to make a statement, while the latter sought to come and go without a whisper.

Certainly, if Lord Javier possessed some common sense, then he might have done his utmost to suppress every possible signal emanating from his mech. It was what a professional would do.

A spoiled brat on the other hand... even if Javier was a mech prodigy, some habits died hard.

Ves therefore faced the skeptic with confidence. "I've studied the Loquacious Raphael in detail. Did you know that when put under a small level of resonance, the rifle arm will begin to glow like a rainbow? It's meant to distinguish the mech and force others to pay attention to it. I would bet all of my wealth on the chance that he activated this effect by default."

Resonance couldn't be sustained forever. Besides exacting a mental toll on the mech pilot, it also wore out the resonating exotics. The level of deterioration was directly proportional to the energy level of the resonance.

As fake resonance was weaker than true resonance, the Loquacious Raphael shouldn't be under too much strain. For a rich man like Lord Javier, the added cost of maintenance shouldn't even register on his mind.

Thus, Ves remained confident even if others believed nothing could come out of this search.

Ves did not relax for long though. While he initially planned to take it easy and rest, he suddenly slapped himself out of his complacency. "This is the final day of the operation. As long as Lord Javier isn't in our hands, we can still botch this up."

He needed to be more proactive and prepare for every eventuality.

Thus, Ves prepared for the event that the Loquacious Raphael would be detected. What would happen next?

"The rebels and the Vandals will send as much of their forces as they can to apprehend him. If it's true that he's hiding in the neighboring districts, then not a lot of mechs will arrive in time."

The major deficiency of the Detemen League was that they mostly consisted of lower-class commoners. Some of the rebel cadre came from slightly more privileged backgrounds like Commander Breskin, but most of their combat personnel belonged to the underclass.

Still, Ves found it strange that the local rebels hadn't managed to retain a single mech pilot. He turned to Addy. "Hey, can I ask you something? Why doesn't your group have any mechs?"

"Mech pilots have no reason to join forces with us." Addy replied simply.

"House Eneqqin's administration may appear incompetent, but when it comes to nurturing mech pilots, they are surprisingly diligent about it. Potentates are wooed from their tenth birthday, and constantly receive many benefits as they go through the academies. Once they become mech pilots, the best of them will join House Eneqqin while the worst of them will still believe that they are the best."

"You haven't found any exception?"

"There may be a handful of disgruntled mech pilots on Detemen IV that we could potentially recruit, but it isn't worth the effort. We'll have to expend a lot of resources and manpower to maintain a separate mech force."

"It doesn't take too much of both to run a mech force. That's one of the selling points of mechs." Ves pointed out. "Many mercenary corps are able to run their operations on a shoestring budget. Why shouldn't the Detemen League be able to do so as well?"

Addy sighed. "There are many other reasons. For example, the Vesia Kingdom classifies the rebel groups that are fighting against it according to

their military strength. On a list, a dozen auxiliary regiments worth of assets simply isn't threatening enough compared to a single fully-equipped mech regiment."

"In other words, you can have enough strength in the form of infantry, tanks and aircraft to overrun this planet, but it won't look as alarming as a handful of mechs?"

"Exactly!"

"That's stupid." Ves stated. Even though he was a mech designer who absolutely loved mechs, he also knew what they were capable of. Mechs became the main mode of combat in human space due to their versatility and ease of transport and supply.

That didn't mean their strength overwhelmed older unit types. Combined arms still remained the most effective form of deployment in wars, especially because states were only able to field so many mechs before they ran out of mech pilots.

"Do you really think it's stupid?" Addy blinked. "Mechs are threatening in the hands of rebels like us because they're fast, easy to deploy, and easy to hide. What do you think will happen to the auxiliary regiments we've taken over at the start of this operation?"

Ves never thought about their fate. The auxiliary regiments that used to answer to House Eneqqin defected to the Detemen League, if in a much diminished capacity. Still, those regiments entailed tens or even hundreds of thousands of soldiers, most of them on foot, but plenty more in various vehicles.

All of that placed an enormous logistical burden on the rebels.

"Have you thought about evacuating them?" Ves suggested. "I know you are in the possession of a space fleet."

"A small fleet, just enough to trade with the VRF and smuggle in some goods. Room is limited aboard a ship, and we simply don't have the capacity to bring away all of the war materiel. The most we can do is to evacuate the soldiers without most of their equipment to escape House Eneqqin's wrath when they eventually retake control over our planet."

The aftermath of this rebellion would provoke a furious backlash, especially if they managed to do something to Lord Javier. Ves could already imagine the cleansing that would ensue. Though Count Loger would be limited by the laws of the Duchy and Kingdom, Ves expected plenty of blood to be spilled in the coming weeks.

Thinking about the consequences reaffirmed the fermenting idea in his mind that this operation didn't pay off.

The more he spent time with the rebels, the more he began to question their motives. They all seem to love their home planet, so why didn't they feel remorse over plunging Detemen IV into chaos?

Even if Lord Javier turned out to be a tyrant, the amount of damage he could inflict on a planet wasn't even a tenth of the damage already being done by the rioting and pillaging happening on the surface.

Ves looked at Addy with a questioning eye and hesitated on bringing up his suspicions. Calling out the rebels in the middle of their base would not be wise. Besides, he might be wrong about them as well. If he said anything opportune, he would have ruined his relationship with them for nothing.

"WE'VE DETECTED A TRACE!"

Everyone in the data center stopped what they were doing and focused on the female analyst who called out her success.

"Show me!" Addy said and hurried over to the analyst's terminal. Others quickly gathered around them and looked at the results projected from the terminal with awe.

"Four days ago, our sensors in this area caught a very weak signature. I didn't expect much from them because the location of these sensors is rather far from the palace, but the matching program found a definite match for resonance profile 16!"

Ves turned to his own terminal and brought up the attributes of resonance profile 16. This profile put a little bit more emphasis on resonating one exotic over another. According to his judgment, this resonance profile would enable the Loquacious Raphael to amplify the effects of many types of explosive shells.

"From this point onwards, the sensors across this route only intermittently picked up the signals that closely resemble resonance profile 16. They signals ceased to be detected at the end of this projected route."

The projected map showed a broken line that started a decent distance away from the palace and began to meander towards a district that neighbored their current one. The signal took a lot of detours and loops, as if it tried to throw off its pursuers. After many hours of sidetracking, the signal finally stopped underneath a massive industrial recycling and salvaging plant.

"So that's where Lord Javier is hiding!"

Ves had to give it to the bastard. A industrial recycling plant was one of the best locations to hide out. It was an extremely unpleasant place where old machinery and broken wrecks got broken down into raw materials.

This process was very energy intensive, and involved a huge amount of heavy alloys and composites. This effectively threw the entire location in a

perceptual fog that made it difficult for most kinds of sensors to detect anything unusual in the vicinity.

"You did it, Mr. Larkinson! We sniffed him out!" Addy beamed as she became convinced of the veracity of the finding. "Alright boys and girls, let's move out and hunt ourselves a noble!"

The entire base rang out in roars as every rebel pumped up their fists.

Chapter 482 Cornered

The rebel base turned into a whirlwind of activity. After several tense and fruitless days of searching, they finally found a trace of their elusive objective. As much as Lord Javier tried to hide his movements, in the end his faithful mech betrayed his probably location.

As the man who played an instrumental role in deducing Lord Javier's hiding hole, Ves received a lot of appreciation from the rebels and Vandals around him. The Vandals all treated him with friendly slaps on the backs and the like, but the Vesian rebels all kept their distance from him and treated him like a high-class commoner.

Evidently, the Vesian class structure was too ingrained in their minds to act any differently.

Still, his latest accomplishment couldn't have been done by anyone else but a mech designer with a broad base of knowledge. Ves had to lean on his extensive base of knowledge and his sharpened spirit to crack some of the secrets of the Loquacious Raphael.

What an impressive mech!

The more he learned about the hero mech, the more a sense of dread began to build within his bones. This was not a regular mech at all. From the amazing alloys used in its armor, to the powerful explosive shells that fed its rifle, every part of the Raphael spoke of an excellent degree of refinement.

"I can feel Mr. Reeve's touch on its design. His Raphael definitely a labor of love."

A mech designer like Constantine Reeve needed to pull out all the stops when he designed a personalized mech for a special client. For a Senior of his caliber, Reeve must have charged a billion sovies or more to House Eneqqin to create such a high-quality mech.

This was a mech that could easily stomp trash mechs by the dozen. The materials alone far exceeded regular premium mechs such as his gold label Blackbeaks and Crystal Lords. The advanced technologies incorporated practically doubled its value, while the added benefit of fake resonance doubled that sum once again.

"It's a second-class mech that can go toe-to-toe with mechs of the Friday Coalition."

In all likelihood, the performance of the Loquacious Raphael exceeded the parameters of decent quality second-class mechs in most areas. Coupled with a skilled mech pilot that fit the mech like a glove, then the mech would certainly be able to surpass the performance of a regular second-class mech.

The amount of sovies House Eneqqin put into training Lord Javier and equipping him with the best mech possible must have reached a staggering amount. Yet compared to the costs, the outcome would be worth it if Lord Javier became the strongest mech pilot of their House.

As long as his strength overwhelmed his siblings, there was no question whether he would inherit the title of count from his father!

The only curveball that could change this equation was if a branch member of the House advanced to become an expert pilot.

No matter how skilled Lord Javier might be, he would only be able to bully around regular and advanced mech pilots. The true elites of the Mech Corps

and the Mech Legion would easily be able to turn the Loquacious Raphael into scrap.

The power of fake resonance simply couldn't compare to true resonance.

"Expert mech pilots are too rare." Ves muttered. "Some mech regiments don't even have one on their retainer."

Venerables enjoyed a privileged status in the Bright Republic, but they enjoyed outright worship in the Vesia Kingdom. Even the worst expert pilots became barons at an instant, which would forever enshrine their families into the ranks of nobility.

To their credit, the rebels and the Vandals came with as much force as they could muster in a short amount of time. Due to the impending arrival of Vesian reinforcements, they couldn't afford to wait for every Vandal to convene in this part of the city.

Still, the Vandals somehow mustered well over seventy-five mechs. Captain Orfan and the mechs restored by Ves happened to be among their ranks.

When Captain Orfan's looted mech congregated at the entrance of the rebel base, Ves didn't know how to feel about her presence.

"It's funny." He muttered. "For all her efforts, it turned out to be me who found Lord Javier's trace."

Ves shook his head and didn't think about Orfan anymore. The woman only did the best of her duties and Ves couldn't fault her dedication to the mission. He instead spared a glance at the troop transports and hovertanks that the rebels prepared to accompany the Vandals.

Though they looked impressive, Ves couldn't help but be dubious at their effectiveness. "The infantry will only get in the way, and the hovertanks won't

have enough room for maneuver if the battle erupts in an underground tunnel or hall.

Obviously, the mechs would take the lead while the infantry and the hoovertanks acted as support. The recycling plant was a fairly large facility, and who knew what kind of complex lay beneath the ground. For that reason, the rebel auxiliary forces would secure the facility and the surroundings in order to relieve the Vandals of all their worries.

"No matter what, today is Lord Javier's downfall!"

The rebels cheered at those words as Commander Breskin finished his brief speech. After that, the mechs and the auxiliary forces moved out.

Breskin and Addy quietly approached Ves as the remaining personnel looked on as mechs and vehicles disappeared into the streets.

"We still need your help, Mr. Larkinson." The commander spoke in a gentler tone than before. Before, Ves was just a forgettable mech designer. This time, the rebel leader as an asset. "We'd like you to monitor the battle and analyze the mechs at Lord Javier's disposal. Our sources believe that his honor guard is also accompanying him. Count Loquer directly bestowed them to his son, so they'll put up a good fight to defend him to the death."

Ves nodded. "I'll get on it as soon as the battle starts."

He did not expect to make much of a contribution. The Loquacious Raphael alone displayed no obvious weak points, and the same could probably said for the mechs piloted by Lord Javier's honor guard. Mechs of those caliber simply didn't exhibit those kind of low-level design flaws.

As Ves took his seat in front of a terminal, he discovered that he had access to the feeds of every vehicle deployed by the rebels. Sadly, the rebels hadn't built up the necessary amount of trust to patch into the feeds of the Vandal mechs, it was better than nothing.

"How soon until the battle starts?"

"In about forty minutes." Addy answered as she stood behind Ves. She constantly rotated among the analysts in order to coordinate their efforts.

"Though the recycling plant isn't too far away from here, we don't want Lord Javier to slip away. We are gathering all our nearby tunnelers in order to collapse every underground escape route in the vicinity. Until that's done, we don't dare to launch our attack."

That made sense. Since Lord Javier was able to sneak to this place through a hidden tunnel, he could escape through similar means.

"Once our forces collapse the tunnels, how will the attack proceed?"

Addy began to frown. "We haven't come up with a plan beyond that. Beyond confirming the presence of the Loquacious Raphael, we don't know the terrain or how many enemies we'll face. We do expect Lord Javier to be caught flatfooted though. He has his whereabouts extremely well so far, and if it wasn't for your help, we would have never gotten to this point."

"You're exaggerating!" Ves modestly smiled and scratched the back of his neck. "Any mech designer can do the same. I just happen to be the first one to piece together the clues."

He was definitely being modest here, but his accomplishments meant nothing if they failed to apprehend Lord Javier.

Both Addy and Ves became engrossed in several projections as they transmitted footage of the movements of the two allied forces.

Once the forces reached the recycling plants, the majority of the auxiliary forces split up and started to secure the adjacent streets and secure the other approaches.

If reinforcements arrived to bail Lord Javier out, then the rebels needed to stall their intrusion as long as possible.

The tanks meticulously hid behind the corners of structures that the infantrymen evacuated by force. They didn't even bother to knock at any doors. They simply barged in with their exo-skeleton suits and dragged out every civilian, business owner and scum they could find.

"This is my home! Who gives you the right to drag me around!?"

"My workshop! Careful with that, it's flammable!"

"Don't kill me, please don't kill me!"

The rebels uncovered many disgusting sights when they entered into certain abodes. Many criminals and gang members had run amuck in the last couple of days.

The exo-skeleton soldiers treated them all the same. Every obvious lowlife got a bullet in their heads. Ves applauded their decisiveness.

However, when it came to the actual attack plan, Captain Orfan who took charge on behalf of the Vandals clashed with Commander Breskin. The commander had opted to accompany the attack inside a mobile command center.

Addy patched into the command channel, allowing Ves and her to listen in from the rebel base.

"...I strongly object to your foolhardy suggestions!" Commander Breskin shouted over the channel. "Shelling the recycling plant will expend much of our ammunition and lead to a substantial amount of collateral damage! That recycling plant is a large source of income for Neron City, and it can ill afford its loss!"

"The plant is a massive obstacle and a nightmare to secure. Who knows how many defenses Javier has prepared at that plant. With the amount of activity taking place at the plant, we won't be able to use our sensors at all. As long as the plant remains standing, we'll be fighting with our hands tied behind our backs."

The two argued back and forth over several minutes, which caused their subordinates to grow apprehensive. There was no doubt that the recycling plant had detected their forces. One or two mechs could be hidden, but the presence of over a hundred mechs and vehicles could not be obscured at all.

Just as the argument ran over four minutes, a mutation happened on the streets. A series of explosions sounded out at the flanks.

"Lost contact with Wolf-353 and Wolf-664!"

Two hovertanks down!

Another explosion erupted at an adjacent street.

"Wolf-25 and Wolf-612 are downed! Wolf-55 is has sustained heavy damage and has lost all of its lifting capacity!"

The thunder of cannon fire rang through the streets, but another explosion finally shut down the street.

"Give me footage of Wolf-55's final seconds!" Breskin ordered at the mobile command center.

Back at the base, Addy requested the same data. She possessed sufficient credentials in the rebel hierarchy to access this sort of sensitive materials. Ves looked at Addy and wondered whether she was Breskin's daughter or something. She looked way too young and pretty to be a veteran rebel leader.

"Look!" Addy said, and Ves forcibly turned his head towards the projection of Wolf-55's final recording. "It's the Raphael!"

The mech peeked out from a hidden trapdoor built into the streets. It only needed to expose its upper body in order to fire ballistic rifle held within its arm.

Ves leaned closer and studied the Raphael's weapon arm. As expected, the arm that held the rifle glowed in a shimmering rainbow pattern.

"It's definitely the Raphael! In that case, Lord Javier should be very close!"

Unfortunately, a fair number of trapdoors littered the streets leading up to recycling center. Far from surrounding the recycling plant, the rebels instead spread their forces thin for Lord Javier to take them out one by one!

Commander Breskin sounded furious as he relayed his orders. "Give up on the envelopment and pull back! Don't let this bastard son have his way!"

"Belay that, commander!" Captain Orfan spoke. "Stand your ground and pin down the Raphael. We are on our way as fast as possible! Help is on the way!"

"You don't command us, Brighters! Ignore the mech captain's words and fall back this instant!"

Despite the temporary confusion, most hover tanks and infantry units opted to pull back. Only a handful of vehicles remained in place.

The Raphael quickly popped up from a nearby trapdoor and took out every tank with a single shot of its potent rifle.

The rebels and the Vandals hadn't even managed to fire back! They couldn't even pin Lord Javier down!

Chapter 483 Split Command

Ves came up with one word to describe Lord Javier's fighting style.

"Shameless!"

Instead of hiding inside his hiding place like a rabbit shivering inside its burrow, Lord Javier evidently decided that the best defense was offensive. He boldly jumped on his adversaries before they could start to storm the recycling plant!

His actions brought incredible results. The hovertanks didn't possess sufficient armor to withstand the enhanced explosive shells fired by the Raphael's rifle. They all crumpled and blew apart when hit, and Lord Javier never seemed to miss.

Right now, the rebels and Vandals fell into further confusion at Lord Javier's despicable tactic. The Loquacious Raphael completely went against its heroic tendencies. The surroundings of the recycling plant had obviously been prepared well in advance, leaving the attackers naked and vulnerable to the unknown.

All of it pointed to a trap.

"Pull back!"

"Retreat!"

Even Captain Orfan could no longer let this farce continue. Her spearman mech she appropriated from the Dastardly Handsome Bastards, simply couldn't keep pace with Lord Javier's movements.

They could only withdraw and figure out something else.

"Cowards!" Lord Javier broadcasted from his mech as it popped out yet again to wreck a couple of infantry transports. "Fight me if you dare!"

Every Vandal on the battlefield gnashed their teeth. Who dared to go toe-to-toe with his elite mech on a location of his choosing. They would obviously be sending themselves to their deaths if they meet Lord Javier on his terms!

While Lord Javier taunted his attackers, back at the base, Ves already started to analyze the Raphael. Though the sensors of the hover tanks only caught a couple of glimpses of the hero mech, footage of the Raphael in a live battle was very precious.

Ves constantly observed new details from its brief appearances.

He noticed something important. "The Loquacious Raphael isn't carrying any spare magazines! Javier is likely replenishing his ammunitions from caches prepared in the tunnels!"

Addy relayed his observation to Commander Breskin, but it wasn't what they needed to hear. They wanted a silver bullet that could cripple Lord Javier in a single blow.

Breskin mulled over his options as he rubbed his face. After a moment of consideration, he relayed new orders to his infantrymen. "Penetrate the underground tunnels and track down those ammunition caches. Destroy them all if you can, or mark them if you can't. Move out!"

The infantry bravely went into action. Some of the soldiers were fully decked out in exo-skeleton suits, but others only wore varying levels of combat armor, much like what Ves wore at this moment.

Still, no matter what kind of armor they wore, they both wouldn't last an instant against an attack from a mech. They faced instant death if they ever bumped into the Loquacious Raphael.

The first screams erupted two minutes after Breskin issued the orders. Ves switched his feed to the sensors of an exoskeleton soldier. The man tried to avoid an enemy mech while firing his heavy rifle at it, to no avail. Every bullet bounced from the mech's thick armor until a foot finally stomped the exoskeleton soldier flat.

"Javier's honor guard is patrolling the tunnels!"

Many infantry squads got massacred. Not a lot of soldiers reached the ammunition caches, but even then they couldn't step any further, because each cache was guarded by a handful of turrets with enough firepower to deter a medium mech.

"Commander, we can't complete our objective!"

Breskin cursed up a storm at that news. Eventually, he sounded the retreat. Apart from mapping out parts of the tunnel, they hadn't gained a lot of benefits.

His eyes turned over to his allies. "Captain Orfan, many of my men have sacrificed themselves, while your mechs are running back and forth. Don't you think you should make a contribution?"

"Twelve minutes."

"What?"

"We've deployed a countermeasure against the tunnels. We highly urge you to evacuate your forces at least six-hundred meters away from the recycling plant!"

The mechs already stopped their useless charge and began to fall back in an orderly fashion. Their ranged mechs pointed their gun barrels in each direction while the melee mechs positioned themselves in a way that allowed them to pounce on the Raphael if it emerged somewhere close.

"Run if you can! No matter where you flee, I'll kill you before you escape my planet!" Javier laughingly taunted.

No matter the soundness of their actions, retreating in the face of an enemy hurt their self-esteem. Javier's taunts only rubbed in the humiliation. Yet they listened to Captain Orfan and Commander Breskin because they recognized the danger of their surroundings.

Before neutralizing Javier's advantage of the terrain, it wasn't wise to make a forceful push.

Several minutes passed by as the two forces successfully pulled back. The entire area around the recycling plant had been thrown into disarray. Amidst the damaged and destroyed hoversuits, a lot of civilians looked out the windows of their apartments, offices and workplaces with apprehension.

In order to make this area appear as normal as possible, Lord Javier hadn't done anything to chase the nearby citizens away. It would be too conspicuous if every citizen had been chased away from this important location. Their ignorance formed the best kind of camouflage for the heir.

Too bad he didn't count on his mech giving away his position. The civilians completely lost their utility now that the game was up. Many concerned civilians gathered together for safety or because they were scared. Children clung to their mothers as they endured yet another frightening event.

"What's happening next?" Ves asked Addy.

"I'm not certain, Mr. Larkinson. We've underestimated Lord Javier's preparations. This isn't a hasty setup at all. We don't even know how he managed to prepare the field without us getting wind of it. We shouldn't have missed the extensive tunnel complex around the recycling plant!"

Ves didn't blame the rebels for the oversight. A lot of heavy activity went on at that plant, which caused it to throw a lot of interference in the air. The activity far surpassed what went on in a mech manufacturing plant because breaking down broken products into useful resources took an immense amount of effort.

Orfan and Breskin feared the unknown. Who knew what else lurked in these tunnels and how many other traps Lord Javier prepared. At the very least,

they should scout out the underground terrain extensively before doing anything else.

Yet even on this issue, Captain Orfan and Commander Breskin held differences of opinion.

"We should bomb half the district flat. Give us the word, and we can demolish every structure and expose the tunnels within an hour."

"Out of the question!" Breskin roared back. "There are thousands of civilians living in the vicinity of this plant! A significant amount of people who live in the nearby apartments are the women and children of the plant workers!"

The two argued back and forth on this matter with so much vitriol that Ves palmed his face. "At least evacuate the civilians. They have no reason to be present there!"

Some nearby apartment blocks got hit by the shockwave of the Raphael's explosive shells. Many windows shattered from the blasts, and several civilians sustained heavy injuries from the shockwaves and flying shrapnel.

"Detecting unknown objects descending from orbit!" Someone in the base abruptly announced.

Ves turned away from Addy, who was relaying some instructions to the rebels on the field to call for the civilians to evacuate. Cherishing their lives, most of the people who lived there ran from the district as fast as their legs could urge them forward. Others entered various vehicles and made an even faster getaway.

"Objects identified! They're... they're artificial meteorites!"

"What's their trajectory?!" Addy asked with widened eyes.

"They're on course to impact the vicinity of the recycling plant!"

Everyone stopped when they heard that. The artificial meteorites could have only been sent from one source, which was the only force that held orbital supremacy over Detemen IV.

"Mr. Larkinson!" Addy shouted with fury and abruptly approached him and grabbed his shoulders. She tried to drag him up his feet, but his combat armor and firm body prevented her from gaining any purchase. She opted to grab his hair instead. "What have you Vandals done?!"

"I have no idea! I'm not a Vandal, and I'm not in their chain of command!"

It was obvious what the Vandals had done. While it was a war crime to bombard a location from orbit with meteorites or other debris that floated in space, nothing was said about artificial weapons.

The bottom line of the MTA was that any weapon employed within human space against a human adversary needed to be small enough to be deployed by a mech.

Artificial meteorites formed something of a loophole of that rule. Most often, the meteorites were up to half as large as the mechs that launched them. Nobody dared to make them any bigger for fear of running afoul of the MTA's taboo on weapons of mass destruction.

When a meteorite was big enough, they could wipe out entire cities or continents.

Forces in space often resorted to artificial meteorites due to their low cost and incredible convenience. The launching mechanism consisted of nothing more than the mechs pushing them towards a planet with their limbs. Small boosters built into the artificial meteorites took over from there, and insured the meteorites would roughly land where they were supposed to hit.

The problem right now wasn't that the Vandals resorted to artificial meteorites, but that they went ahead and launched them without consulting their local partners on the ground!

To say that the Detemen League was incensed was putting it lightly!

"The evacuation isn't complete! Over twenty percent of them has made it out of the probable blast site! The rest won't make it out in time!"

"Who ordered this orbital strike?!" Commander Breskin repeated again over the command channel.

"I did." A new voice interrupted. Ves recognized the voice of Major Verle. "On my authority as the highest commanding officer of the 6th Flagrant Vandals, I agreed with Captain Orfan's suggestion to strike the area from orbit."

The spaceborn mech officer was evidently back in command over the detachment orbiting above Detemen IV after surviving the Stubby Growler's destruction.

"Heartless filth from the Republic! Countless lives will be lost!"

"No more than what the rioting populace have already inflicted upon themselves. Sometimes, sacrifices must be made. The longer we equivocate about the matter, the higher the chance that Lord Javier will spring another surprise on us. He might even be attempting to flee!"

The Loquacious Raphael hadn't shown itself after the attackers pulled back their forces. Perhaps whatever command center House Eneqqin erected underneath the recycling plant detected the incoming artificial meteorites as well.

Not even the best mechs could withstand the sheer kinetic force of a falling meteorite. Artificial ones were much deadlier than natural ones because they had been purpose-built to do survive entry into the atmosphere. The

Loquacious Raphael had no chances of survival even if the artificial meteorite landed next to the mech!

"Impact in three minutes!"

"Stop the meteorites! Shoot them down!" Breskin ordered.

"Don't! Stay your hand!"

"Ignore this murdering Brighter and execute my orders! Use every anti-air battery and missile platform in range!"

A multitude of lasers and projectiles soared into the air. Hundreds of missiles followed suit. Due to the predictable trajectory and the incredible density of the artificial meteorites, even the dumbest targeting systems could land a hit on the falling objects.

Sadly, the lasers barely accomplished anything but melt some potholes on the surface of the heat-resistant meteorites. The kinetic impacts from the ballistic projectiles hardly even chipped away at their surface, while the explosions from the missiles only caused their surface to crack a bit.

The meteorites were too tough!

"Impact in one minute!"

Practically nothing could be done. With one minute to go, Ves envisioned almost complete devastation from the orbital strike. Even the tunnel network underneath would collapse in the face of fury from space!

Chapter 484 Unpalatable Options

One might think that the most precious resource in a battle consisted of manpower. Without able men and women trained to fight, no force would be able to sustain themselves in battle.

Others might argue that mechs counted for more. A force that invested in the quantity and quality of their mechs would possess more depth and options even if their mech pilots fell short.

Through the progression of the battle on Detemen IV, Ves learned that both manpower and mechs played second fiddle to the most crucial resource of all: time.

"There's never enough time."

The entire operation on the Detemen System rested on the premise that the Flagrant Vandals and the Detemen League could complete their objectives within four days.

If they stuck around longer than that, then enemy reinforcements might arrive to close their window of escape.

The rebels numbered hundreds of thousands at the very least. Though most didn't possess any exceptional skills, it was undeniable that they had numbers on their side, or else they wouldn't have been able to wrest control of the auxiliary regiments that guarded the planet.

The only downside was that they hadn't been able to cultivate a mech force that could compete for global hegemony on the planet.

As for the 6th Flagrant Vandals, as a legitimate mech regiment, their numbers was only a fraction to the rebels, and only about two-thousand of them consisted of the actual fighters. Yet their ability to fight was arguably more superior than the Detemen League due to their abundant ships and mechs.

Both of them had managed to overwhelm the defenses around Neron City and enjoyed free reign in certain parts of the city. While a lot of different outfits still possessed enough mechs to resist the Vandals, their internal rivalry and mistrust ruled out the possibility of forming a common front against the invaders.

Over at the manufacturing district, the Vandals picked their targets carefully. They didn't overwhelm every manufacturing complexes in their way with brute force, but rather focused their efforts on a handful of plants at a time. Through this fashion, they deliberately let off valuable sites whose defenders sighed in relief.

The company defenders of the complexes that had been spared all thanked their lucky stars that the Vandals chose to pass them by. They had zero incentive to bail out the industrial sites that the Vandals raided.

In fact, the lucky ones even cheered the Vandals on for ruining their competitors and make it easy for them to expand their businesses after this ordeal.

Yet while the Vandals achieved a decent amount of success in one of their objectives, the hunt for Lord Javier consumed far too much time. The noble's whereabouts only became known on the last day of the operation, and it wouldn't be easy to take him into custody.

"Lord Javier is a tough bone to chew." Ves surmised.

Not only did he pilot the Loquacious Raphael, which was arguably the best mech on the planet, he also relied on the protection of his elite honor guard. Furthermore, the entire area around the recycling plant was riddled with traps and tunnels.

The attacking force made out of Vandal mechs and rebel auxiliary troops faced two unappealing options.

The most direct option was to push through regardless of the cost. No matter how many traps Lord Javier prepared, it was undeniable that he didn't bring too much mechs when he escaped the palace.

Still, anyone could imagine the cost might not be worth it. Depending on how well Lord Javier and House Eneqqin prepared their battlefield, the Vandals might lose all of the mechs committed to this assault.

The other option would be to take it slow. This was the most proper response to the situation the attackers faced. By scouting ahead and detecting the traps beforehand, they could easily dismantle them one by one before they exploded in their faces.

The problem with this choice was that it would take days or even weeks to tighten the envelope around Lord Javier's hideout. This course of action might be viable in other campaigns, but in the time-sensitive operation of the Vandals, they needed to scam from this star system by the end of the day or risk never coming back to Republic space.

In essence, the defenders deliberately served an unpalatable binary choice to Vandals and the rebels. Taking it slowly was out of question, and barging on ahead would lead to unacceptable losses.

The mastermind behind this defense plan therefore hoped that the attackers would pick the third option, which was to give up on Lord Javier and abandon any thoughts of pushing through.

Commander Breskin and the rebels already leaned towards this exit that the defenders had magnanimously prepared for them. Although failing to take out Lord Javier would discredit their organization, they could always make a comeback.

The Vandals on the other hand couldn't afford to fail when they were so close to completing this objective. They staked much more than their credibility, but locked themselves into a contract with the opposition forces within the Vesia Kingdom.

If they stepped away at this critical moment, then their return to friendly space might be in question.

This was why Major Verle rejected all three options, and chose a fourth instead. When facing an elaborately prepared board set up by their opponent, the best solution wasn't to play the game on the enemy's terms.

No. The best solution was to flip the board entirely.

The artificial meteorites sent down from orbit plummeted through the atmosphere like the wrathful hammers of a god. The sheer kinetic energy these meteorites could unleash was unimaginable. Though anti-air batteries successfully shattered a handful of the hardy meteorites through sheer weight of fire, that still left around a dozen more.

The fleet in space already estimated the amount of anti-air fire the meteorites would be subjected to. They flung enough of the meteorites to push through the storm and make it to the surface.

Half a minute before the first impact, every civilian still in range despaired. Madness and resignation took over, and a few of them even did things they never would have done if not for the glowing specs streaking towards their location from the air.

"HAHAHAHA! It's the end of the world!"

"Shhh honey. Don't cry. It will all end soon."

"Screw Lord Javier and screw the Brighters! They can all go to hell!"

The Vandal and rebel forces evacuated as far as they could. Even though they escaped the most acute danger zone, they could still suffer a substantial amount of damage by staying in the vicinity. Once time almost ran out for them, they braced their vehicles and mechs as best they could.

Even Ves, Addy and the others in the underground rebel base huddled into their crash seats. Ves put his helmet back over his head, enclosing him in his worn but serviceable light combat armor.

Someone projected the ticker for the first impact above their heads.

"Brace for impact!"

Three. Two. One.

BRRRRRMMM!

A huge roar sounded out in the distance, and various vibrations and shocks ran throughout the entire underground base. Substances fell from the ceiling while some of the haphazardly piled crates fell over. Several rebels cried out in pain as these crates smashed against their bodies.

The deep shakes and vibrations continued in succession as more artificial meteorites landed on the ground and unleashed all of the energy they built up in a single instant to the ground and its surroundings.

Through the projections of the impact area, they witnessed the devastation as it progressed.

The first artificial meteorite landed directly on the recycling plant itself. The large structure crumpled instantly became engulfed in a massive upheaval that destroyed the entire complex.

Other meteorites devastated the area around the annihilated plant. Dozens of structures disintegrated like crumbling sand, much of which the collision launched far into the air. Debris rained like apocalyptic ash many kilometers away, causing hundreds and thousands of unsuspecting citizens to lose their lives.

A handful of mechs, troop transports and hovertanks sustained incidental damage as well. Two mechs even got hit by aircar-sized chunks that almost

crippled them. At their current state, they lost at least half of their combat effectiveness.

As for the area within the danger zone, virtually no civilian made it out alive. The kinetic impact, the ensuing shockwaves, the raining debris and more all turned the danger zone into an area of death. Without any form of protection, a human stood no chance of survival.

Those who cowered underground fared no better. The reason why forces in space still resorted to artificial meteorites was because as much as the damage on the surface looked bad, they inflicted the same level of destruction to any underground construction in the vicinity.

Many tunnels collapsed outright as the powerful impacts rearranged the underground terrain. Vast craters emerged in the place of boltholes and panic rooms. The massive tunnel complex that House Eneqqin prepared to play with their opposition transformed into upturned soil that was indistinguishable from the ruinous terrain.

As the impacts and immediate destruction subsided, everyone in the underground base lowered their guard.

No one celebrated their survival. Instead, they stared at the shaky footage of the aftermath of what the artificial meteorites had wrought.

"You bastards!" One rebel suddenly shouted and started to assault a nearby logistics officer from the Vandals. "Now I know why you're called the Flagrant Vandals! It's because you have no compulsion to destroy everything in your way!"

"Cut it out!" Addy yelled, and quickly ordered her more level-headed subordinates to pull the maddened rebel away. "What happened was tragic, and we will definitely account for it with the Vandals, but this is not the time to fall out with our allies!"

Through a mixture of persuasion and cajoling, Addy successfully managed to keep a lid on any potential outbursts. Ves quietly sighed in relief and loosened his armored hand.

If the rebels truly turned on the Vandals, Ves would have pulled out the Amastendira without hesitation. For now, he could keep his weapon a secret for a while longer.

A few minutes after the disaster, the rebels sent out various bugs and floating sensors. An increasingly detailed picture emerged from ground zero. The footage sickened most of the occupants of the base.

Ves was no different, even though he understood the brutal chain of logic behind Major Verle's decision. Just because he recognized that throwing down a bunch of heavy objects from orbit was the most expedient solution to their dilemma, didn't mean he agreed with the decision.

Yet what else could Major Verle have done? Give out a warning and delay the launch? Giving the civilians the time to evacuate the impact site would also provide the same opportunity to Lord Javier and his honor guard.

They could not let the slippery bastard slither out of their grasp again.

"We're not done yet." Ves spoke, cutting through the fog and depression that hung over most of the rebels. "A proper underground stronghold is always meant to withstand weapons of mass destructions. If Lord Javier and his escorts fled into their strongholds in time, they won't be taken out by a bunch of meteorites."

The possibility that Lord Javier survived was in fact very strong. The artificial meteorites managed to inflict a lot of damage, but beyond the immediate impact site, the damage quickly spread out. A tough enough bunker wouldn't crack under the pressure.

"You heard the man! Deploy more bugs and focus them underground! Find me their bunkers and mark their locations!"

It would be too easy for Lord Javier to perish from such a banal attack.

The investigation quickly confirmed his guess.

"We've detected a major bunker underneath the recycling plant! It's.. it's partially intact!"

A score of mechs and hovertanks proceeded towards the site. While the mechs had trouble finding their footing in the complex terrain, the hovertanks displayed no strain as they hovered over the debris that used to be places where people worked and lived.

This time, the fight against Lord Javier proceeded in a completely different way. The meteorites wiped out the tunnels and traps, leaving the Vesian noble with very few advantages.

Chapter 485 The Villain

As some of the Vandal scouts approached the vicinity of the bunker, a hatch opened up. The Loquacious Raphael emerged from underneath and returned to the outside world.

Nine honor guard mechs followed in its footsteps.

Four of them consisted of melee bestial mechs. They all looked like robust tigers with an excellent balance between speed and armor. Up close, their jaws could crunch mech limbs while their claws could tear apart armor plating.

The rest of them consisted of ranged mechs of various configurations. All of them were humanoid, and all of them carried an abundant amount of gear.

Over forty mechs stopped at the other end of the path leading up to the bunker. Their surroundings had turned into a complex landscape of craters

and collapsed structures, which made it exceedingly complex to navigate. Only the former main street offered somewhat flat terrain.

The Loquacious Raphael stepped forward in a dusty but dazzling display. For some reason, the blue and silver hero mech acquired a white cape that looked dazzling in the midst of ruin. The mech extended out its sword to the approaching Vandal scout mechs.

"Devils!" Lord Javier's young voice boomed over the broken lands. "Your evil knows no bounds! To bombard my planet from orbit without any hesitation reveals your cruel nature! If this is what your corrupt Republic has taught you, then you deserve to die!"

"What?" Ves asked. What was Lord Javier going on about?

"Lord Javier." Captain Orfan spoke up from her spearman mech. "Cut the nonsense and obediently surrender. You are outnumbered eight-to-one, and that's only when you count the mechs. Your tunnels are collapsed and your escape routes are blocked. There is no chance for you to make it out alive if you choose to fight. Do the smart thing, and we won't have to take this any further than we already have."

The Raphael swung its sword in a theatrical manner. "Surrender? Never! My people have died under my watch! So long as you Vandals are still alive, my mission is not yet done! Prepare yourselves, villains, for I shall cleanse this star system of Brighter filth!"

An analyst in the base suddenly stood up from behind his terminal. "This is bad! Lord Javier is showboating in front of the entire Kingdom!"

Ves looked over and saw a local news portal commenting on a live feed of Lord Javier's speech.

So the man acted sanctimoniously for a reason!

"Cut the feed! Destroy his recorders!"

"We're working on it but there's too much! Some of them are extremely well hidden! Without taking over the entire site, we won't be able to take them all out!"

The invasion of the Detemen System had always been broadcasted to the news portals on both sides of the war. At the beginning, the Bright Republic pounced on the feeds as a way to boost the morale of their citizens who felt weary at hearing about another loss or stalemate.

Though the Mech Corps always treated the Flagrant Vandals like an abandoned son, now that they grabbed the spotlight, they temporarily changed their stance.

The battle at Detemen II and Detemen IV provided a riveting display of their own side. The people back home relished seeing Vesians getting ground beneath the foot of the Vandals.

As for the Vesians, they had all been juiced up by the initial successes at the outbreak of the war. The quick invasions and the rapid takeover of the border systems gave them an inflated feeling of confidence. The war would go different this time, and victory was already in the bag.

This sudden attack on the heartland of the Kingdom not only disabused them of this notion, it also put the seed of fear into their hearts.

If a formerly safe place like the Detemen System could be raided, what about their own home systems? Many Vesians never believed that their star system would be vulnerable to the Mech Corps. In the previous wars, the Bright Republic almost never struck at the Kingdom, and what few raids they sent almost always struck the Vesian border systems.

Now, the commoners of the Kingdom started to fear that this might change. If the Flagrant Vandals got away, who could tell they wouldn't pull off the same long-ranged assault again?

Strangely enough, looking at Lord Javier spouting justice against the evil Brighters served to allay some of their apprehensions. With heroes like Lord Javier in charge, the Flagrant Vandals would never go unpunished!

Ves didn't know whether he wanted to laugh or cry. This spoiled, abusive brat with one of the most awful reputation in the Detemen System portrayed himself as a righteous Vesian. The worst part of it was that almost every news portal in the Kingdom lapped it up.

In fact, they actively promoted him. Lord Javier's face got plastered all over the Vesia Kingdom's galactic net, and more and more citizens tuned into the broadcast of the ongoing battle.

Addy walked back to Ves and shook her head. "This is how the media works in the Kingdom. Every major news portal is in the hands of the Duchies or the Royals. They won't ever spin this battle as a loss."

"Shouldn't there be a lot more independent news outlets in the Kingdom? It's very hard to block everything on the galactic net. Besides, there's also the larger news outlets that serve entire star sectors or larger, like the Rimward Star Herald."

"Hahaha!" Addy laughed. "It's funny how naive you are something! Don't put your trust into both. The larger news portals aren't interested in what they consider to be a minor spat. As for the so-called independent news portals, nobody ever follows them, because what they report doesn't match with the rosy picture that the government-owned outlets publishes."

That sounded really strange to Ves. The Bright Republic exhibited a much less tightly regulated press environment. Opinions diverged wildly, and it was

a challenge to pick the right news portal to believe, but overall the Republic famously touted itself as a state that upheld the torch of human civilization.

Addy noticed his confusion. "Think of it this way. When you hear news that you don't want to hear, you won't feel glad. Only when you listen to the government-owned media will you feel more comfortable, because you are used to the uplifting news they try to serve you every day."

Ves understood her argument, but couldn't completely wrap his head around it. The news was the news. Sometimes, they publicised something good, but they also had a duty to let the people know of things that didn't work very well.

"Ah nevermind." The rebel woman sighed and turned to one of the feeds. "I think Lord Javier is about to end his speech."

"...If you will not lay down your arms, we will take you by force!" Captain Orfan yelled and brandished the spear of her stolen mech.

"If you wish to take away my arms, then come and take them! I can guarantee you that you will never lay your filthy hands on my weapons!"

"Open Fire!"

The negotiation broke down and both sides fired off their long-ranged weapons. The weight of fire on the side of the attackers was like a thunderstorm raining down in the direction of the Raphael and its honor guard. Scores of laser beams and projectiles forced them to dodge and crawl to the sides.

The hovertanks floating in the rear provided a lot of long-ranged fire support. While their fire wasn't very accurate, whenever they hit, they dealt as much damage as a mech cannon.

As for the defenders, the ranged mechs all fired as they ran. The quality of their rifles surpassed those of their adversaries. The mechs used by the

Vandals also fell short in terms of quality. In fact, their larger numbers and the cramped terrain made it easier for the Raphael and its buddy mechs to land some hits.

The Raphael zigged and zagged as it charged up its fake resonance. The rifle arm glowed like a rainbow, and adjusted the aim of its one-handed ballistic rifle. "Rainbow Shell!"

A glowing shell fired from the rifle and rapidly cut the air until it impacted on a Vandal light mech. The shell exploded in a gout of rainbow fury, and the blast was at least twice as powerful as the regular shells that wrecked the hover tanks with a single hit.

The light mech hadn't survived! Its cockpit belatedly launched into the air, but the rest of the mech was almost a total loss. The resonance-enhanced shell had managed to break the light mech's thin torso armor and inflict crippling damage to its internals.

"Hahaha! None of your mechs stand a chance against my Loquacious Raphael! Take this! Rainbow Shell!"

Another charged shell spat out from the muzzle of the glowing rifle. The shell impacted a medium mech this time and fractured a lot of armor. The Vandal mech survived the impact, but looked a lot worse off. It wouldn't be able to handle another round!

"Tch! You're lucky your vital components hadn't gotten hit, but your luck won't last! Rainbow Shell!"

This time, Lord Javier aimed at the approaching form of Captain Orfan's spearman mech. The captain possessed much better reflexes and battle awareness, so she already started dodging her mech as soon as the noble called out the name of his attack.

There was no reason for Javier to call out his special techniques! In his time with the Vandals, Ves heard a lot of stories about resonance. One of them was that evoking this phenomenon in the heat of battle could be exceedingly hard, because the mech pilot needed to be at their best and put forth all of their concentration into achieving their desired outcome.

By putting a name on a specific resonance pattern and saying it out loud whenever they engaged it, mech pilots came to resort to this method as a crutch.

Over time, whenever they said the name of their technique, they would unconsciously facilitate the activation of the resonance profile that they desired to unleash.

Still, even if saying the names out loud helped a bit, there was no reason for Lord Javier to keep his broadcasting speakers on! It was as if he was acting like the main character of an action drama!

Eventually, the exchange of fire died down when the Raphael and the honor guard dove into the complex terrain around them. "Catch me if you can!"

"Surround this site and track him down! He won't be able to get very far!"

The battle progressed to another stage as both sides dove into the ruined landscape. Due to the extreme terrain, ranged mechs lost most of their advantages. The narrow corridors and abundant hills heavily favored melee mechs.

Ves looked on from a bug positioned above, and caught a glimpse of the Raphael darting forward to one of the Vandal mechs. Due to a lack of space in the immediate environment, the Vandal mechs had been forced to march in a single column. This allowed the Raphael to face it without any interference from the other Vandal mechs.

"Twin Star Slash!"

The Raphael's sword didn't glow or exhibit any remarkable effects, but the manner in which Lord Javier controlled his mech was something else. The arm rapidly flicked back and forth in a rapid sequence of movements. While their penetration power left much to be desired, the so-called Twin Star Slash had somehow manage to cut off the hands of the Vandal mech in front.

"Twin Star Helix!"

The Raphael's hand rotated around itself as it stabbed forth its sword. The completely useless drilling motion actually made it harder to penetrate the armor of the Vandal mech, but once it dug in with the help of the Raphael's weight, it started to inflict a load of damage.

The Vandal pilot panicked and ejected in reflex. The cockpit almost bumped against the head of the friendly mech standing behind it as it made its way out of the site.

"Next!" Javier called out with a laugh. He was enjoying this!

Chapter 486 Stopped

It became evident that the upturned terrain played to House Eneqqin's advantage. The abundant amount of obstacles and cover played to their advantage. While their elite ranged mechs couldn't shoot at the Vandal mechs, neither would the Vandals be able to use their weight of numbers in melee and ranged mechs to bear.

The choke points that Lord Javier and his honor guard held for seconds at a time before squirreling away always forced the Vandals to fight the Vesian mechs in one-to-one duels.

A knight piloted by a seasoned Vandal clashed violently against the Vesian tiger mech. While most felinid mechs emphasized speed and agility, the honor guard bestial mechs carried a lot more armor than usual, allowing it to not lose out too much when it pitted its physical weight against the knight.

"You're outnumbered! Surrender now or be ground into dust!" The knight broadcasted.

The tiger mech wrenched up a claw to parry the incoming sword slash. "The only ones who will turn into dust are invaders like you!"

The two mechs pushed against each other, trying to bully their opponents with their weight. The Vandal burgundy and black provided a stark contrast against House Eneqqin's astral blue and silver.

The clashes grew more violently, but neither side got the upper edge. The knight mech possessed more throwing weight, but the tiger mech possessed a firmer footing. The differences in mech shapes led to a lot of complexities.

Unfortunately, the Vandal pilots lacked experience dealing with bestial mechs. Though they often trained against them in simulations, they never got to fight against them a lot in the real universe.

That proved devastating as another tiger mech jumped from behind the tiger mech locked in combat. The second bestial mech jumped against a wall of debris with its four limbs and used it as a platform to change its trajectory and swoop at the knight mech from its flank!

"What?!"

The second tiger mech's jump happened too fast for the knight mech to respond. In addition, the front tiger mech tied the knight mech down by doubling up its aggression.

The Vandal mechs at the rear tried to move forward to help, but the bottleneck hindered their approach.

A massive crunching sound emerged as the second tiger mech chomped the knight mech's sword arm. Its forward momentum also caused it to slam against the knight, which completely destabilized its footing. Another hard

wrench caused the tiger mech to savage the sword arm as it tried to pull it out of its socket.

While the tiger mech eventually failed to do so, the other tiger mech pounced on the knight mech which was in no shape to defend and tore apart its chest armor with repeated claw strikes.

The Vandal pilot finally had enough. His cockpit ejected from his mech before the claws could go past the chest armor and do more damage.

Further ahead, the Loquacious Raphael clashed against a Vandal swordsman mech. Though the latter mech's quality couldn't measure up against the Raphael, its mech pilot excelled at defense. Lord Javier's habit of broadcasting his special moves even allowed him to move in advance.

"Twin Star Meteor Storm!"

The Raphael's sword glowed like a comet as it hacked down onto the Vandal swordsman mech in quick succession. The flurry of blows contained little elegance, and the glow was just a cosmetic addition to the sword instead of an indicator of resonance.

Nevertheless, the swordsman mech struggled to defend against the might and frequency of attacks. Even though the Raphael only wielded its sword in one arm, the sheer strength in them was enough to push back the Vandal mech despite wielding its broadsword with both hands.

"I need some help here!"

A Vandal rifleman mech approached from behind the swordsman mech and tried to lean to the side in order to unleash a volley of explosive shells.

Lord Javier noticed the maneuvering and grinned. "Villains! Fight me one-on-one if you dare!"

"This isn't an arena! Ignore his words and pile up on him!"

"Take this then! Combo attack: Twin Rainbow Helix!"

The Raphael charged up its resonating rifle arm, channeling an ungodly amount of energy in the rifle. The swordsman mech desperately surged forward in order to interrupt Lord Javier's so-called combo attack, but the Raphael's sword deftly slowed down its progress.

The rifle unleashed a spinning rainbow shell that impacted the swordsman mech's chest and blew up in a directional fashion. Most of the energies unleashed by the explosion was directed further into the mech, causing the swordsman mech to stagger.

Immediately after the explosion wracked the chest armor, a spinning sword entered the opening in the chest armor and churned past the weakened armor layers without effort. The sword kept spinning as it entered deep inside the chest until it rammed through the cockpit and blended the pilot inside into hashed meat.

"NO!" The mech pilot of the rifleman mech yelled. The ranged mech fired a barrage of shells at close range. Most of them hit the Raphael head on but its frontal armor consisted of high-quality compressed armor that easily endured the rifle shells.

"Hahahaha! Villains like you are unqualified to sully my Raphael!" Lord Javier taunted as he jerked his mech's sword from its latest kill while bringing up his ballistic rifle.

The Raphael quickly unleashed a salvo of unenhanced shells. Unlike the Raphael, the rifleman mech was a lot more fragile. The three shells all landed on its chest, causing the frontal armor to be crumpled into pieces.

Just as the rifleman mech wanted to retreat, the Raphael jumped over the wreck of the swordsman mech and chopped down with its sword, which sliced through the weakened chest in a single blow.

The rifleman mech tipped over as the internal damage caused it to lose all power. Before the pilot could eject, the Raphael stomped its open chest with its foot, causing the cockpit and its occupant to be fattened into a pancake.

"Brighter scum deserve no quarter!"

Just as the Raphael surged forth with its majestic red cape flapping in the wind, a barrage of long-ranged lasers and kinetic projectiles slammed into its rear. The cape instantly gained a couple of holes and the custom mech's rear armor gained some dents.

"Treacherous cowards!" Javier yelled in frustration as he urged his mech out of the bottleneck and into cover. "You'll pay for turning my regiments against me!"

The rebel-controlled hovertanks finally showed their utility. Though they normally hovered a few meters above the ground to minimize their energy consumption, they could also float higher in the air if they wished.

In the absence of aerial mechs, they formed the versatile units in the air. Normally, they would never float in the air and expose themselves in such a reckless manner. The hovertanks waited close to the ground as the rebels spent almost all of their available manpower in destroying every nearby anti-air turret that exposed their positions as they attempted to stop the artificial meteorites.

With every anti-air turret in the vicinity taken out, the hovertanks floated above the rubble and hills of debris until they gained a clear line of sight of the Vesian mechs. Their powerful cannon muzzles fired a variety of lasers, shells and projections that wouldn't lose out from what an Akkara heavy mech could unleash.

"Annoying thieves!" Lord Javier yelled as his mech and his honor guard all pulled back. The hovertanks started to surround them in a circle, granting

them no respite no matter where they hid behind. "Don't think you can use my property against me without a price!"

The Loquacious Raphael transmitted a wide-area signal that reached every hovertank in the vicinity.

Five of them instantly lost power and plummeted to the ground. The height of the fall and the force of the impact practically killed every crewmember inside the vehicles.

Unfortunately, only the latest model of hovertanks had been taken out this way. Plenty more remained aloft. The rebels had long scoured their systems for backdoors and other vulnerabilities. The reason why the latest model ultimately failed was because the auxiliary regiments only received them a few months ago.

"Keep up the pressure! Lord Javier won't be able to shut us down!" The tank commander urged his crews.

The hovertanks couldn't maneuver very fast in the air, and they also needed to slow down in order to lay down accurate fire, but their crews possessed enough training to minimize their exposure until they were ready to fire.

The honor guard's ranged mechs stopped supporting the Raphael and the tiger mechs in order to suppress the hovertanks bobbing in the air. Both the mechs and the tanks played it safe, so they didn't make a lot of progress in the short term.

Only the Raphael's rifle could take them down in a single hit, and only if it employed its resonance.

Lord Javier lost some of his joviality as the hovertanks entered the battle. He couldn't pull back and shoot down the floating vehicles as his presence was very integral in stopping the Vandal mechs in their tracks. His tiger mechs wouldn't be able to halt all of the Vandal mechs by themselves.

While Commander Breskin and Captain Orfan hadn't communicated any plans, they adjusted to each other's movements as if they were part of the same unit.

The Vandals stopped trying to press forward and merely tried to tie their adversaries down.

Meanwhile, the rebel hovertanks slowly chipped away at the honor guard mechs. They not only threatened their ranged mechs, they also put some pressure on the tiger mechs, forcing them to be less brazen unless they wished to be filled with holes.

The cramped terrain turned from an advantage to a disadvantage to House Eneqqin's mechs. While they took full advantage of the broken terrain to bottleneck their opponents so that their superior numbers amounted to nothing, the presence of the hovertanks and their ability to disregard most obstacles turned their advantage back into a disadvantage.

The confined spaces limited their range of motion, and they simply didn't have any room to dodge.

Lord Javier gritted his teeth as his Raphael pulled back. The mech's rifle was extremely powerful and already took out numerous Vandal mechs and hovertanks, but its magazine emptied out very quickly.

When the Raphael initially emerged from the bunker, Javier ordered a backpack module to be attached to its back. Beneath its tattered cape rested an ammunition carrier.

The Raphael quickly sent a signal to the rifle, causing it to detach and drop its spent magazine. The mech then maneuvered its rifle to its back in a specific position. A fresh magazine emerged from an opening of the backpack module and slammed into the breech of the weapon.

Having finished its reloading process, the Raphael jumped back into the action with its rifle arm glowing brighter.

"Triple Rainbow Shell!"

The rifle unleashed three shells in quick succession. Each of them somehow accurately hit three hovertanks that dipped down a bit too late. Powerful rainbow explosions coursed through each vehicle, wrecking them completely and lessening the pressure on the honor guard.

Inside the Raphael's cockpit, Lord Javier started to sweat profusely. Pushing the Raphael to enact resonance imposed a significant burden to his mind. Advanced mech pilots lacked the mental strength to elicit resonance from their mechs. Even if fake resonance was a pale imitation of the real thing, Javier's mind became increasingly strained as the battle went on. Yet he never thought about stopping.

He was having the time of his life. He felt as if he was made to fight this battle. "Come, Vandals! Show me your best! Where are your champions?! I want a challenge!"

"If it's a challenge you want, then here I am!"

A spear stabbed towards the Raphael, causing it to interrupt its targeting of the hovertanks. It fired a quick shell at the mech that drove forth the spear, only for the Vandal mech to sidestep the attack in the nick of time.

The Raphael's sword entangled the spear and barely managed to redirected it away from its frame, though the spear still managed to scrape against its arm.

Captain Orfan's looted spearman mech pulled back the spear and brandished it towards the Raphael. "Your playtime is over kid!"

Chapter 487 Impromptu Duel

Reinforcements from both sides tried to reach the ensuing battle that could very well decide the fate of Detemen IV. Every member of the household

guards knew that Count Loquer valued Lord Javier above all else. If it wasn't for the traditions that tied down his power, he would have allocated much more troops to guard his only offspring.

The consequences of failure was unimaginable. In the strong hierarchical culture of the Vesians, mech pilots under the service of a House carried a lot of responsibility. Failure to safeguard the lives of their charges often led to imprisonment or execution to those who failed to do their duties.

Yet as much as they tried to reinforce their liege, the battles they fought in the previous days had sapped much of their strength. Even now, many Vandal mechs spread out in Neron City tried to drag on their heels and force them to stop.

"Rescue the Lord!"

"Rescue the Lord!"

Many of the Vesian mechs that survived up to now consisted of second-line and law enforcement units. They weren't equipped for a full-scale war and their mech pilots found it hard to match the skill of the Vandal mechs that harried their footsteps.

Aerial mechs also started to emerge in the skies. With the exposure of most anti-air turrets in Neron City, the Vandal forces made good progress into clearing them all out. Much of the hidden turrets that remained belonged to mercenaries and other private forces. They would never dare to fire them at the Vandals for fear of attracting their wrath.

This basically led to a wild battle in the skies where the Vandal Aerial forces continued to harass the Vesian forces spread out in the city. Sometimes, aerial mechs from both sides clashed high up in the air, though the Vandals slowly managed to gain an edge due to their better skill.

As for the underground rebel base, a lot of rebels stayed behind to support their comrades. The Detemen League held numerous strategic positions in Neron City and assisted the Vandals in slowing down the enemy from reinforcing Lord Javier.

"It's getting increasingly harder to stop the household troops." Addy said.

"They are too persistent in trying to reach their Lord. Our auxiliary troops aren't meant to battle mechs head-on, and your Vandals are too spread out to slow down larger concentrations of mechs."

"Do the best you can." Ves replied. "The battle at the former recycling plant won't end so soon."

"Can't you do anything to help?"

"I've already relayed my analyses on the mechs piloted by Lord Javier and his honor guard. I can't determine much more than that because these are very polished mechs."

Ves felt a bit useless at this stage. He only managed to figure out the basic specs and some tentative weak points for each mech model. None of them were easy to deal with, and only the rifleman mechs could be taken out quickly if they became exposed to concentrated fire.

The real threat came from the tiger mechs and the Loquacious Raphael. The former proved to be an adept prowler in the ruins. They took full advantage of their ability to navigate the ruinous terrain in order to flank the Vandals.

As for the Raphael, the hero mech proved its valiance with each mech or hovertank it managed to fell. However, this time it met its match when Captain Orfan tried to run interference on its rampage.

"The righteous won't be stopped! Twin Star Slash!"

The Vandal spearman mech deftly blocked the predictable sequence of slashes with its spear and sent out a counter-attack right after. The Raphael quickly brandished its rifle and fired another shell to force Captain Orfan back.

"Why don't you look into the mirror to find a villain!" She yelled out as she went back on the offensive. Her spearman mech stabbed forth in a flurry of blows that forced the Raphael to back off. "A monster to his own people doesn't deserve to take on the mantle of a hero!"

Lord Javier wordlessly growled back. His eloquence deteriorated over the course of their impromptu duel. The captain was twice as hard to deal with compared to his previous opponents. Despite not carrying a shield, Captain Orfan abused the reach of her spear to interrupt his powerful combo attacks.

"You won't take me down that easily! Twin Star Helix!" He yelled as his mech unleashed one of its signature attacks.

Its rotating sword clanged against the shaft of the spear and got pushed to the side. The Raphael had to fire another shell in order to stop the spearman mech from following through.

On and on the two mechs tried to gain the advantage. While Captain Orfan possessed just as much skill, she also benefited from a much richer battle experience than her opponent. She employed her rich bag of tricks to unsettle Javier and throw him off balance.

Sadly, none of her attacks managed to deal more than a scratch on the Raphael. While it was clearly geared towards offense, its excellent armor system enabled Lord Javier to take risks he ordinarily couldn't afford to take. It withstood many blows that would have crippled many other mechs.

Ves studied the performance of the armor system in detail. The more he witnessed its incredible resilience, the more he felt he was out of his depth. "I'm not familiar with this type of armor. It's too effective!"

"Is the Raphael invincible?" Addy asked in a worried tone.

"No mech is invincible. Not even the machines piloted by god pilots can make this kind of claim. There's definitely a way to dismantle its armor. We just have to figure it out."

Ves always kept an eye on the Raphael since the start of the battle. Ves studied its armor carefully and noted that it did particularly well against all types of damage, from lasers to bladed weapons. The armor system appeared capable of resisting all conventional damage types without compromising anything.

Yet Ves still clung to the belief that its amazing performance hinged on a secret or two. Once he figured it out, Lord Javier wouldn't be so cocky anymore.

"It's too difficult." He whispered. He stared hard at the Raphael and attempted to connect to it in the imaginary realm. He never attempted such an act before, but he was grasping at straws at this point.

Surprisingly, distance mattered surprisingly little when it came to such probes. It was enough to look at the Raphael from a projection. The powerful and vivid depiction of its duel against Captain Orfan's mech allowed Ves to pinpoint its location with perfect accuracy. Just as his mental probe brushed against the Raphael, something happened.

"AHH!!"

Ves jerked back and held his head in pain. Something powerful and foreign rejected his mental probe.

"What happened?!" Addy asked as she placed a hand on his head.

"I'm fine, I'm fine! It's just an accident."

He nursed his head as his mentality tried to recover back to normal. The probe had utterly and completely failed to make a dent. Why did the mech reject his mental approach?

Ves tried to parse the flavors he tasted at the moment of contact. Between pride, confidence and belief, Ves thought he touched upon something more than the simple concepts that Mr. Reeve unconsciously bestowed on his custom work. It felt... greater, and inviolable.

"It's like I touched upon the mind of a human being!"

No, that didn't sound accurate to him. Perhaps he brushed against something more than a single mech or human being. A suspicion began to grow within his mind.

"Is this the strength of a human mind and mech working in unison?"

The mental construct from their combination felt surprisingly powerful. It contained the purity and rigidity of a mech, and combined it with the spark of life and intelligence of a human being.

From the Raphael's continued struggles against the spearman mech, Lord Javier probably hadn't felt a thing from his attempted intrusion.

"Okay, esoteric mind voodoo doesn't work either."

A mech designer couldn't work miracles. Ves guessed that someone like Alloc or the other Journeymen attached to the Vandals wouldn't have much luck either. The Loquacious Raphael was really something else.

Captain Orfan's spearman mech started to become increasingly more ragged in its defense. The mech she appropriated from the Dastardly Handsome Bastards might be one of their better mechs, but she felt regretful about the fact that it wasn't a military-grade mech. It came with several shortcomings

and differences in configuration that made it hard for her to draw out its full strength.

"Is your mech getting tired? Do you want to take a break?" Lord Javier asked with mock sincerity. His mech was still going strong.

"I will keep you here until the end of time if possible!"

Not a lot of mech pilots among the Vandals could match Captain Orfan's skill. She knew that if she pulled away from this duel, the Loquacious Raphael would go back to slaughtering the weaker Vandal mechs and hovertanks.

"Haha! Don't lie to me! You're at the end of your rope! Finishing move! Twin Star Extinction Comet!"

Captain Orfan hadn't witnessed this move before. Expecting a heavy blow, her mech pulled back its spear and gripped it tightly in anticipation for a block.

Instead, the Raphael's rifle arm glowed extremely bright. Just as Captain Orfan's eyes widened and commanded her mech to dodge, the Raphael fired a spread of five radiant shells. Just before they reached her spearman mech, they exploded, buffeting her mech with multiple shockwaves.

Through the fading blasts of the explosions, the Raphael emerged from behind and stabbed its sword downwards while firing off the final shell in the magazine of its rifle.

The shell exploded against the spearman mech's chest armor, which lost most of its layers already from suffering multiple blasts. Captain Orfan couldn't afford to think about that though as her mech hastily parried the plunging attack.

Unfortunately, the force behind the Raphael's attack and the previous shelling had destabilized the spearman mech's footing. No matter her skill in piloting

mechs, Captain Orfan couldn't go against the laws of physics. Her mech helplessly fell onto its back, exposing it to the Raphael's finishing move.

"Get away from the captain!"

The Vandals had rearranged their formation in the choke point and brought a couple of rifleman mechs forward. They fired at the Raphael in front of them with no regard to trigger discipline. Nonetheless, their accuracy and familiarity with their weapons allowed them to concentrate their fire on the Raphael's weapon arms.

Javier scowled as he urged his Raphael to retreat back to cover. "I may have let you off today, but I'll finish you myself after I deal with these insects!"

The Raphael might appear impervious to ranged damage, but Lord Javier always acted prudently and sought for cover before his mech could take much of a beating. He also needed to reload his rifle.

The Vandals took no notice of his words. Instead, a pair of melee mechs surged forth and dragged the downed spearman mech with their powerful arms. They couldn't afford to lose Captain Orfan or her mech, as she was the only Vandal so far to last against the Raphael's offensive.

"This is getting nowhere!" Addy slammed her fist against a console in frustration. The lack of progress in capturing or killing Lord Javier gnawed at everyone. "Neither their ranged mechs nor their tiger mechs are downed! What is this? We outnumber them!"

"We're losing our numbers advantage." Ves noted from his seat. "Don't forget how many mechs and hovertanks they've taken out. Our Vandal mechs and your hovertanks aren't equipped to take out an elite force of mechs, especially in bad terrain like this."

Though the hovertanks managed to pepper the honor guard mechs from a distance, their relative fragility allowed the Vesian ranged mechs to take them

out rather easily. It only took a handful of hits to destroy them. Therefore, Commander Breskin ordered most hoversuits to retreat after suffering one or two direct hits.

"I think we have to make some sacrifices." Addy concluded. She flickered through various ideas in her mind.

Chapter 488 Desperate Plan

The battle between the two sides went badly for the Vandals and the rebels. They lost a third of their total forces without downing a single enemy mech. The disparity in mech quality proved to be the decisive factor keeping Lord Javier aloft.

While the Loquacious Raphael attracted a lot of attention and firepower, its excellent armor and generous energy reserves allowed the mech to sustain itself in battle without declining in performance. Constantine Reeve deliberately designed the Raphael as a hero mech that uplifted its allies through perseverance.

Ves understood the Senior Mech Designer's intentions. "The Raphael leads by example. It excels in chaotic battlefields and lengthy campaigns. Its dependence on a sword and a ballistic rifle allows it to ration its energy consumption and relegate heat management to a distant concern."

As a mech designer whose only original designs echoed similar principles, Ves appreciated Mr. Reeve's design choices for the Raphael.

Much like the Blackbeak and the Crystal Lord, the Raphael could keep on fighting for a very long time.

Unlike the two regular designs, the highly advanced Raphael enjoyed some of the best designs and materials the Vesia Kingdom had to offer. This enabled the mech's performance curve to stay at a very high base level, to the point

where it wouldn't lose out to peak-performance mechs meant to unleash all of their might in a brief interval.

"This is the power of money."

When it came to mechs, you often got what you paid for. While mech buyers did often purchase a premium based on subjective qualities such as brand and current trends, every mech charged a price based on the quality of its materials and the quality of their designs.

This was bad news for the Vandals that clashed head-on against the Raphael, because none of their looted or refurbished Vesian mechs appeared to be premium mechs. Ves loosely estimated that the average value of their mechs didn't surpass 30 million credits.

Though their robust training and inclusion of some military-grade technologies narrowed the gap, it still left a wide gulf between the Vandals and the Raphael.

Nonetheless, the story was slightly different with the honor guard mechs. Though they lasted for an admirable amount of time, they hadn't been built to withstand long sieges.

Ves recognized that they'd been designed by someone else, and had been tasked with meeting very different criteria.

What was a honor guard mech?

"They need to guard their charges from sudden threats."

These threats often approached covertly and sprung their attack within a split-second. This was why the honor guard mechs all possessed excellent close-ranged sensors. Right now, the honor guard mechs utilized this trait to their advantage by forestalling every flanking attempts made by the Vandals.

Pervasive jamming along with all the interference released in the air from the meteorite impacts reduced the reliability of sensors in the vicinity. Even the observation bugs that relayed live footage of the battle to the rebel base glitched out or lagged a number of times.

The cheaper Vesian-built mechs piloted by the Vandals would sometimes be as blind as a bat, and needed to rely on those same observation bugs to pin down the locations of their adversaries. This took too much time, and the enemy often responded well before the Vandals completed their latest maneuvers.

The second advantage turned out to be a double-edged sword for the honor guard mechs. Designed to fend off assassin mechs as quickly as possible, their performance curve was a lot steeper. They could deliver a formidable amount of combat power in the first twenty minutes or so of combat.

This served them well as they miraculously avoided any losses so far. While a few honor guard mechs got beaten up a bit, none of them lost any major functionality.

However, their energy reserves obviously expended at a much faster rate, or better said, they didn't possess as much reserves as the Raphael. In ten minutes or less, they would quickly run out of steam.

The only problem was that they might taken a dozen or more Vandal mechs out of the equation in the meantime. Therefore, the attackers couldn't afford to drag out the fight until the honor guard mechs exhausted themselves.

"Reinforcements are also on the way."

Overall, fewer Vesian mechs remained in Neron City, yet the ones that lasted up until now still fought on their home ground. They utilized secret tunnels and other means to rapidly convey themselves across the battlefield. The first wave of reinforcements shouldn't take much more than five minutes to arrive.

The Loquacious Raphael and the honor guard mechs needed to be taken care of by that time, or else the attackers had to divide their attention on two fronts.

"Are you certain the Raphael has expended most of its ammunition?" Addy carefully asked Ves in the rebel base.

Ves nodded with confidence. "I've counted every shot. From the size of the magazines, to the diameter of the muzzle, I've made a pretty good estimate on how many shells the Raphael is carrying. His backpack module is a smaller and lighter variant, which prevents it from being a hindrance to the custom mech, but it also limits the amount of magazines it can store."

And now that the artificial meteorites crumbled all the tunnels and weapon caches, the Raphael wouldn't be able to replenish its supplies anywhere.

The plan Addy proposed sounded fairly risky, as they only had a single shot to make it happen. If the sacrifices failed to achieve the desired effect, then Lord Javier and his escorts might even be able to turn the battle around.

They could not let him get away!

Ves, Addy and the rest only spent a brief minute to refine their proposal before she contacted Commander Breskin and filled him in. Time was of the essence so they needed to make a quick decision.

The rebel leader responded in a decisive tone. "We'll do it. Help coordinate the hovertanks. Their trajectories need to be precise."

Both the mobile command center near the field of battle and the underground base worked in unison to prepare the hovertanks. After another minute of preparation, they readied every element for this plan.

A silent countdown reached its mark. Breskin immediately slammed a button. "Execute!"

The mobile command center sent a signal to the seventeen or so hoversuits that still remained aloft. The signal activated the autopilot of the suits, causing them to thrust forward at their maximum acceleration. They moved forth so fast that their hulls even started heating up.

Anyone familiar with hoversuits could see that they exceeded their maximum safe capacity. If this went on for more than a couple of minutes, the suits would eventually melt down or explode. In any case, the damage it already sustained had already ruined the vehicles.

Down at the ruined section of Neron City, the Flagrant Vandals valiantly persisted in fighting against the Raphael and its escorts. They even managed to cripple one of the tiger mech's forelimbs, causing its mobility and offensive ability to be truncated by a significant margin.

"We can do it! Just hold on!" Captain Orfan urged in her heavily-damaged spearman mech. She had just been filled in on the plan and approved of it wholeheartedly. "Kenneth, switch with Jessie, she won't hold out much longer against the bastard!"

A very frayed skirmisher mech retreated against the Raphael, allowing a sturdy knight to take its place. It was the last intact knight that the Vandals could bring to bear at this time. They had kept their precious knight mech in reserve until now.

The movements of the hoversuits couldn't be hidden from anyone. The Raphael simultaneously parried a sword strike with its own sword while bringing its rifle to its back to deposit another magazine. Alarms blared inside the cockpit of the elite mech as its advanced systems detected a dangerous shift in movement from the hoversuits.

Lord Javier took a quick glance at their trajectories and their acceleration profile to recognize their intent. "Kamikaze attacks! You dishonorable dogs!"

A hovertank may be lighter than other forms of tanks, but they didn't lose out compared to aerial mechs and light mechs. They possessed a significant amount of mass and carried a substantial amount of momentum after building up a respectable amount of speed.

Now that every crewmember evacuated from the vehicles, the autopilot accelerated the war machines forward with reckless abandon. They could cross the distance in less a short span of time and impact the Raphael with power surpassing that of a heavy cannon attack.

"Guards, attend to me! Ranged mechs, shoot down the hovertanks!"

The honor guard tried to shift away to assist their liege, but the Vandals redoubled their offensive, causing most of them to be pinned in place. The ranged mechs were torn between aiding their comrades and shooting down the incoming hovertanks, and eventually decided to address the latter. They couldn't disobey a direct order from their Lord.

"Pressure them! Suppress them! Don't let them up!" Captain Orfan yelled and joined the fray even though her spearman mech's chest exhibited a huge hole.

A single solid hit on the chest would ruin the mech entirely, and could even end her life. Nonetheless, her devotion to the Vandals and her determination to complete the mission pushed her forward. Not a single Vandal mech remained idle during the execution of the plan.

Lord Javier saw that things proceeded badly for his side. The ranged mechs under his command tried their best to shoot down the hovertanks, and while they did manage to score some lucky hits that caused the hovertanks to falter or explode, too many vehicles still pressed forth.

The noble's brow started to sweat profusely. Just like Ves, Lord Javier had been keeping track of his ammunition reserves as well. His mech only carried

a couple more magazines. Once the Loquacious Raphael ran out of ammunition, it lost more than half its effective combat strength.

"I don't have a choice!"

The well-born man gritted his teeth and charged his resonance. The Raphael's rifle arm glowed in a majestic rainbow colors, yet it looked a little less stable than usual.

"No matter how much attacks you throw at us, House Eneqqin endures!" He broadcasted while trying to split his attention between fending off the persistent Vandal knight mech and maintaining his resonance with his mech. "Even if we fall, my father will take vengeance for me! Ultimate move: Exalted Rainbow Storm!"

The Raphael fired its rifle almost fully automatic. The quick succession of shots practically drained the rifle's magazine. Each of the powerful rainbow shells impacted a hovertank without fail.

As much as the hovertanks tried to make itself a difficult target, its extreme acceleration made it difficult for them to follow an evasive pattern. Half of the shells hit dead center against the nose of the hovertanks.

All of the vehicles that got hit turned into fireballs or sustained so much damage that they failed to remain aloft. Wreckage and pieces of debris rained down ruined ground of Neron City, but more of the tanks still closed in on the Raphael.

The elite mech reloaded its rifle in record time and fired at the hovertanks yet again. This time, it didn't have the luxury to wait until its resonance charged up. It emptied its rifle of shells without taking sufficient time to aim.

A few more hovertanks got taken out, but six more made it through.

Seconds away from impact, Lord Javier started to panic. His backpack module just deposited its last magazine in its rifle. With the hovertanks in spitting distance to his mech, he shot his last burst, causing three of the hovertanks to fall short of their goal.

Only three remained, and Javier could not think of anything else except to brace for impact. Moments before the hovertanks impacted the mech, it threw away its spent rifle and detached the backpack module from its back. Its free hand grabbed the backpack and gripped it as an improvised shield.

Naturally, Javier didn't think of enduring the collisions head on. He tried to move his mech out of the way for a dodge, only to get halted by Kenneth's knight mech.

At the final second, the noble had neglected his struggle against the Vandal knight mech. The mech dropped its sword and shield and took on the Raphael's sword strike head on, causing it to deliver an awful hack against its chest armor.

Kenneth ignored the damage to his mech and controlled it to reach forth with its arms until it held onto the Raphael's sword arm.

"You crazy Brighter! Let loose!"

It was too late! The hovertanks reached their destination and impacted square against the Raphael in quick succession!

Chapter 489 Last Stand

The Detemen League that rebelled against their rightful overlords never intended to free their home planet from the greedy nobles that exploited it dry. They wanted to make a statement that would shock the entire Kingdom, and to accomplish this, they intended to tear down the depraved heir that ruled over Detemen IV.

They never intended to stick around after initiating the riots. When the Vesian reinforcements came in force and started to scour the planet, most of their hideouts would doubtlessly be found. Instead, they already prepared to escape in space and rely on the Vesian Revolutionary Front to shelter them far away from their homes.

Since they only prepared a limited amount of ships, they couldn't bring everything they owned with them. The ships would only be enough to carry their core members along with some basic supplies and trade goods that they intended to barter for survival in the stars.

As much as they wanted to bring along the hovertanks and other vehicles, they simply didn't have the space to accommodate them all. The local rebels never valued them too much for this reason.

Letting them serve a use by driving them into the Loquacious Raphael was already generous enough.

In the aftermath of the collisions and subsequent self-destruction of the hovertanks, everyone tried to scan through the dust and interference. As the smoke and debris drifted away, the spectators came across an astonishing sight.

"The Raphael still stands!"

The mech lost its rifle arm, and its other limbs sustained moderate damage as well. Its chest looked mostly intact, but a handful of deformities left behind a couple of rents in its armor coverage.

Though the Vandals and the rebels felt disappointed that the Raphael survived the succession of collisions, it at least managed to create a handful of weak points on the mech. The rents in the chest armor and the exposed socket that formerly connected to the rifle arm both represented major vulnerabilities.

Captain Orfan grinned as she witnessed the damage through her damaged spearman mech's sensors. "What are you waiting for, men? We cracked it open! Finish it off!"

The Vandal mechs surged forth with renewed enthusiasm. The one thing they hated most about their opponent was that the Loquacious Raphael possessed a virtually impervious shell. None of their weapons managed to leave more than a shallow dent on its armor.

Yet the collisions changed everything. The sheer kinetic power behind the blows along with the subsequent explosions at point-blank range had finally managed to overwhelm the Raphael's amazing armor system.

The Vandal mechs only needed to deal some damage through these openings to damage the Raphael's much less resilient internals.

"We've got him on the ropes! Press on!"

The Raphael backed off continuously as its damaged and unbalanced state couldn't keep it at a stable footing. Mechs poured into the bottleneck and physically pushed every mech in a line along until the Raphael finally got pushed out of the narrow corridor it used as a bottleneck.

The Vandal mech pilots cheered as they entered a small clearing where they had much more room to maneuver. Some of the honor guard mechs finally managed to shrug off their opponents and repositioned themselves to back the Raphael up.

"Do you think we're finished? Hah! Think again!" Lord Javier broadcasted.

"Ridding me of my rifle only allows me to concentrate on my swordplay!"

Just as the Vandals moved to deliver the coup de grace, the Raphael turned into a nimble fencer. Lord Javier completely disregarded the absence of one of its arms and put his full attention on retaliating against his opponents.

Kenneth's knight mech was the first to go down. The Vandal mech pilot had become a little complacent after witnessing the damaged state of the Raphael. However, he completely misjudged the damaged mech's state.

Far from being crippled, the Raphael still retained much of its strength. Besides missing its rifle, it still proved to be a deadly mech up close. After exchanging a couple of blows with the Vandal knight mech, the Raphael surged its legs forth and flanked the knight mech before stabbing its sword into its lower back.

The Raphael's sword arm pushed its sword through the rear armor of the knight mech and punctured its engine. This instantly caused the knight to lose its motive power and freeze in place.

Lord Javier huffed in frustration as he controlled his mech to pull out its sword and turn around to parry another sword strike. He felt frustrated at being unable to finish off the knight mech.

Moments later, Kenneth ejected from the immobilized knight mech. With its engine out of operation, he would only be a target for the Vesian mechs that stubbornly kept up the fight.

"These guys just won't give up." Addy muttered in the rebel base.

Around them, the rebels started packing up their gear and supplies. The Detemen League expended all of their hover tanks in Neron City while their infantry couldn't contend against the power of elite mechs. Commander Breskin already retreated from the battlefield and ordered the rebels to evacuate their base in advance.

"Is it alright to move out when the fight isn't over?" Ves carefully asked.

Addie smirked at him. "Your worries are unfounded, Mr. Larkinson. The fight is already over. What we're witnessing is the death throes of a delusional brat who doesn't know the game is up."

Pretty much every rebel believed the fight would soon be over. Though the Loquacious Raphael put up a valiant fight, its vulnerable state meant that it was only a matter of time before a Vandal dealt a lucky hit. Even with the absence of long-ranged fire support from the hover tanks, the Vandals all believed that victory was near.

Captain Orfan smelled blood. She turned her damaged mech away from the rampaging Raphael and assisted a handful of other mechs in taking down the tiger mechs. Besides Lord Javier's mech, the tiger mechs inflicted the most damage to their forces.

Though they performed well in confined spaces, they lost none of their power when they fight in slightly more open terrain. They constantly circled around, building up speed for a powerful charge that could knock down any humanoid mech in their way.

A handful of Vandals braced their mechs too late, causing the tiger mechs to shove them onto their backs. Once they fell prone onto the ground, the tiger mechs savaged them with their claws or bit off their limbs with their powerful jaws.

One mech got demolished entirely, while the other two made it off with heavy damage after some of the Vandal ranged mechs forced the tiger mechs to back away.

Still, these mechs had already accumulated a lot of damage. The constant laser beams and shells that impacted against their thick armor started to chip away at their integrity.

Captain Orfan recognized their vulnerable state and pounced forth. Two Vandal light mechs at her sides supported her offensive and darted ahead to occupy their target. The tiger mech desperately swung its paws to smack

aside their attacks, but this was where one of their inherent weaknesses expressed itself.

Ves witnessed it all through the live feeds that continued to be relayed to the base even as it slowly emptied out. He nodded at the tiger mech's frantic state.

"One of the biggest reasons why the bestial supremacy movement failed to convince the galaxy to switch over entirely is because these animal shapes lack too much versatility."

Versatility meant many things. In the context of bestial mechs, they lacked this strength in two key aspects.

First, their rejection of articulated limbs meant that they would be stuck with a single loadout. They wouldn't be able to change their weapon types at all.

Many humanoid mech pilots loved the fact that they could change between different models of weapons whenever they wanted without any compatibility issues. This did not mean that a mech designed to wield swords would be able to wield spears with the same level of performance.

Merely having the ability to use different swords was enough of an advantage. In one deployment, they might want to use a short sword, in case they fought in confined spaces. In another deployment, they might wish to switch to a long and hefty two-handed sword for maximum reach and leverage.

Bestial mechs didn't possess that sort of luxury. For tiger mechs, even exchanging their claws for a different model was a huge pain, because it wouldn't be a given that the newer model would pair up as well with the limbs.

"Another area their versatility falls short is their shortcoming in defense."

Most bestial mechs fared well in a single mode of combat, and most of the time this consisted of offensive attacks. For example, most felinid mechs

excelled in pouncing on their targets, which the tiger mechs of the honor guard had pulled off successfully multiple times.

Yet when it came to fending off attacks, the limited range of motion of their limbs revealed their deficiency in this area. The tiger mech in question currently faced the harassment of two flanking light skirmishers, but already it fell into a tough situation as its limbs flailed around with dubious effectiveness.

At that moment, the tiger mech fell under so much pressure that its mech pilot unconsciously disregarded the heavily wounded spearman mech piloted by Captain Orfan.

Big mistake.

"Perish!"

The captain's mech charged forward and slammed the tip of its spear into the head of the tiger mech, piercing through and dealing catastrophic damage to the entire appendage. The honor guard mech reared back in shock, but the Vandal skirmisher mechs took the opportunity to close in and deliver deep stabs into its abdomen.

If the tiger mech was still in peak condition, it would have been able to shrug off these attacks and even deliver a counterattack with its intact claws. Yet the tiger mech jerked a bit as previous battle damage hampered its previously smooth movements.

Captain Orfan waited for this moment. Her mech janked out its spear and jabbed it forward, pushing the spear straight into the exposed neck and jamming the tip through the softer internals.

The tiger mech tried to shake off the spear, but it was too late. The spearman mech possessed enough power to continue to push through the neck until it hit the power reactor.

The bestial mech lasted for an admirable amount of time, but even it couldn't persist without a working power reactor.

The Vandals finally downed the first honor guard mech!

"One down, eight more to go!"

The downing of the tiger mech delivered a firm impact on the remaining honor guard pilots. Far from losing heart, they only grew more fanatical in their mission to safeguard their liege. They fought on twice as ferociously, but this only accelerated their eventual downfall.

With Captain Orfan taking the initiative, she helped down all the other tiger mechs. Other Vandals freed up from these takedowns proceeded to gang up on the honor guard that remained.

One by one they fell, until Lord Javier lost all of his guards.

The Loquacious Raphael was the last mech standing. A semi-circle of Vandal mechs stood opposite of its dirtied and damaged form. There was nothing left of its formerly pristine heroic form. If anything, it looked as ragged as a beggar.

Even then, Lord Javier lost none of his heroic bearing. The Loquacious Raphael maintained a straight-backed posture as it pointed its sword against the Vandal mechs arrayed against it like a knight sworn to fight to the death.

"It's over, Javier." Captain Orfan spoke with a tired voice as her mech stepped forth with its spear at the ready. "Your guards have put up a good fight, but the outcome was never in doubt. You're outnumbered and your mech won't hold up for long. Do the sensible thing and surrender."

The Raphael swept its head from side to side, as if it was contemplating its chances.

"You're wrong, Brighter."

"How so?"

"My mech. It's not at the end of its rope!"

Before anyone could process Javier's words, the eyes of the mech started to glow in red and gold.

Chapter 490 Supernova

One mech. Around twenty opponents. The Loquacious Raphael appeared to be on its last legs. The suicide attacks from the hoversuits rent apart its rifle arm while exposing various sections of its frontal armor to the elements.

No matter how well the armor system could hold out, it couldn't do anything about the exposed areas.

Nonetheless, at the end of its lifespan, the Raphael's entire frame glowed like a star about to explode. The mechs of the Flagrant Vandals all put up their guard as soon as Lord Javier yelled out those strange words.

"Twin Supernova Release? What does that mean?" Addy asked back in the rebel base.

Ves interpreted the sensor readings in rapid tempo. He quickly deduced that the Raphael's core heated up from two distinct spots. Once he realized what that represented, his eyes widened in shock.

"The Loquacious Raphael possesses two smaller power reactors instead of a single larger one!"

"What's the significance of that?!"

"It means it can run through a lot more power in an instant, though the heat build-up will be ruinous! At these power levels, the Raphael can't last more than three minutes!"

The artificial limiters that shackled the power reactors broke upon the command. With this irreversible, Lord Javier decisively chose to burn out the entire potential lifespan of his precious mech in a matter of minutes.

"My steed, lend me your strength! Let our final battle together be as magnificent as the death of stars!"

The mech glowed hot from more than heat. Some sort of unknown red-orange energy field coated the surface of the mech, including its damaged portions. It gave out the illusion that the mech was burning.

"Don't listen to his melodramatic nonsense!" Captain Orfan tried to sober up her mech pilots. "Ranged mechs, open fire! Melee mechs, prepare to intercept the Raphael!"

A storm of lasers and projectiles slammed into the Raphael, but just as they reached the energy field, it exploded. This prematurely set off the explosive shells and hindered the kinetic projectiles and laser beams from hitting the Raphael itself.

"What is this, some kind of energy screen?!"

"I don't believe it can sustain itself forever! Keep firing!"

No matter how much firepower the Vandal mechs threw at the overloading mech, none of their efforts bore fruit. The energy field acted like a reactive defense to the custom mech, halting any incoming attacks through sheer violence.

"Mr. Larkinson! Figure out that energy field!" Addy yelled at him.

"It can't be cracked by weak attacks, no matter how many it endures! It can only be penetrated by one strong attack!"

"Is there any other weakness?"

"As I said, the Loquacious Raphael can't possibly sustain this energy field forever. Why not wait it out?"

Unfortunately, Lord Javier didn't intend to waste this moment. His overloaded mech surged forward with its powerful legs, which stirred up soil and debris as it raced towards the nearest Vandal mechs.

"Block him!"

A handful of melee mechs moved to intercept the approaching Raphael, yet the elite mech arrived within range before they could finish their adjustments.

"Weaklings! Get out of my way!"

The Raphael avoided the twin daggers of a skirmisher mech and spun forward, allowing its glowing sword to slam against the side of the light mech with the flat of the blade.

BANG!

By striking with the flat of its sword, the Raphael maximized the contact surface of the energy field surrounding the weapon. Upon contact with the sides of the skirmisher mech, the surface of the energy field exploded with extreme violence! A quarter of the light mech's mass practically disintegrated from the blast!

The Raphael's decision to attack the light mech left the swordsman mech next to it free to attack the berserking mech. With a powerful two-handed chop, the swordsman mech attempted to bisect its target starting with the head.

However, just as the sword made contact with the top of the energy field, it exploded with a smaller but energetic blast that pushed the sword off-course. This unanticipated reaction caused the swordsman mech to become unbalanced.

"My mech is invincible! No attack shall ever sully it, especially from unworthy scum like you!"

Lord Javier's reaction time sped up along with the comprehensive enhancement of the Raphael. His mech utilized the blast that destroyed the light mech to swing its weapon towards the vulnerable swordsman mech.

Though the Vandal pilot only needed half a second to recover from his mistake, Javier wouldn't let his opponent off! The sword swung with the edge first, and upon contact with the arm, the subsequent explosion sprung forth in a narrow line that almost sliced the swordsman mech's torso in half!

"Butchers of Detemen IV! Justice is at hand! None shall escape our wrath!"

"Hold him off! Don't let him approach our ranged mechs!"

It was too late! The Vandals came with greater numbers, but they spread themselves out in an attempt to surround the Raphael in case it ran away. They never anticipated that Javier would storm their formation. Now, their melee mechs needed to close the distance in order to cover for their ranged mechs, but no matter how fast they ran, they couldn't overtake the Raphael in overdrive!

A trio of explosions rang out in the clearing as the Raphael swung its sword in three quick slashes. Just a light graze was enough for the energy field that enveloped its sword to explode, crumbling the fragile rifleman mechs that attempted to flee.

None of the mechs survived, and two of their pilots even perished when the explosion breached the containment of their cockpits!

The Raphael proceeded to turn around and chase after the other ranged mechs. Though the latter enjoyed a head start, the Vandal mechs had ultimately been optimized to run a marathon. Against a sprinter doped with destructive stimulants, the Raphael easily overtook the scrambling mechs and

downed them one by one with explosive stabs directed against their flimsy rear armor.

Captain Orfan shouted various commands to her surviving subordinates. She attempted to surround the Raphael to force it into a defensive posture, but the burning mech moved too quickly to let itself be cornered.

In an attempt to turn the tide herself, Orfan dragged her damaged mech into the Raphael's path and stabbed forth with its spear.

"Weakling! Stay down where you belong! Twin Supernova Slash!"

The Raphael accelerated for a tiny instant, allowing it to dodge the spear that attempted to impale its front. The mech swung its sword in a succession of rapid slashes that barely grazed the surface of Captain Orfan's mech.

Yet with each hit, the exploding energy field caused the mech to fall apart.

The first slash blew off its arms, causing the spearman mech to drop its precious weapon.

The second slash hit its abdomen, causing much of the armor at that section to be stripped off in an instant.

The third slash sliced off the head, which momentarily blinded Captain Orfan's mech.

The fourth slash slammed through the neck and into the exposed upper chest, destabilizing the mech's power reactor.

The fifth slash swung upwards on the same trajectory but deeper, allowing the sword to slam into the cockpit.

"This is your end!"

Luckily enough, Orfan realized her precarious situation beforehand. Just after the first slash landed on her mech, she already punched the eject button. Her

cockpit launched out of the back of her doomed mech just before the fifth slash hit home.

Lacking its rifle, the Loquacious Raphael helplessly witnessed the Vandal captain disappear. "Tch! Scaredy Cat!"

Lord Javier released his frustrations on the Vandals mechs that remained functional. "None of you will get away!"

The takedown of Captain Orfan's mech caused the Vandals to waver. The loss of their immediate superior also caused the Vandal mech pilots to lose their coordination. Though a mech lieutenant among their number attempted to take over the lead, the Raphael tore through their ranks too quickly for them to organize themselves.

It was like a fox in a henhouse! In just under two minutes, the Loquacious Raphael took down over twenty Vandal mechs!

Nobody could believe what had happened. Just as the Vandals and the rebels took out the honor guard mechs, Lord Javier's last stand completely turned the final battle around!

This was a disaster for the attackers!

"Damnit! Addy slammed both of her fists against a command console. "The Raphael is on the move! He's getting away! Intercept him!"

"With what?!" A rebel officer asked. "The Vandals lost all of their assets in the vicinity and we don't have any vehicles left except for the mobile command center and the troop transports!"

Both of those vehicles wouldn't last a second against the Loquacious Raphael, especially in its empowered state.

Addy gritted her teeth. Both she and Breskin wavered on the decision whether to pursue the fleeing mech. They might just be sending more men to their deaths if they did so.

Ves spoke up at that moment. "Don't forget that the Raphael is already a total loss! It won't last more than half a minute! I suggest you put your vehicles on pursuit, but keep them at a distance. Lord Javier's mech will collapse sooner or later, and when that happens, get ready to intercept him or his ejecting cockpit!"

"You're right!" Addy shook her head. "This is only a temporary state! There shouldn't be any way that ridiculous mech can sustain this mode forever, or else it would have unleashed it at the start!"

"We are moving our forces in position, but we don't have enough men and vehicles at hand to surround the entire perimeter!" Commander Breskin informed the base the command channel. "Send everyone you can spare and fan them out in hundred meter intervals in case Javier decides to eject! Ready our remaining portable anti-air assets as well!"

The rebel base was in the process of evacuating the premises, so they already readied most of their vehicles. With the change of plans, they abruptly switched gears. They dumped out most of their cargo from their transports in order to make space for any available man or woman.

The Raphael ran as far away as it could from the rebels, but the mech already showed signs of breaking down. Some of the sections of its twin power reactors began to melt down from the excess heat and energy that ran through its channels.

"A supernova is a star's last hurrah." Ves quietly remarked. "Burning brighter than ever before and exploding with the fury that shakes the local cosmos, the death of one star will invigorate the life of other stars."

Supernovas happened all the time in the galaxy. With hundreds of billions of stars spinning around its core, it didn't matter if their lifespan could be measured in eons. Stars burned as long as they possessed the right substances to burn. The moment they ran out of fuel, they transitioned into a wholly new shape, which sometimes led to an explosive bang.

"No matter how much Lord Javier stretches his Raphael, he can't stave off the inevitable."

As a mech designer attached to the Flagrant Vandals, he was excused from joining the final chase. Even Addy moved out to lead a contingent of rebels. The only ones who remained were the elderly and the disabled rebels who took on the role of caretakers within the Detemen League.

Instead, he stayed behind and performed some additional analyses. From his hasty calculations, he predicted that the Raphael's twin power reactors couldn't be shut down anymore. Instead, the runaway reactions continued to build up, which only exacerbated the heat and energy build-up.

In short, the mech would soon explode with enough force to take out an entire city block.

"Don't approach the Raphael! It's going to blow soon!" Ves informed the rebels over the channel. "Anyone on foot should stand at least five-hundred meters away! Chances are high that Lord Javier will eject!"

Only a few seconds passed before his words came true. Lord Javier would never choose to go down with his mech. With only an instant to go before the power reactors reached a critical state, the rear armor of the Raphael blasted apart, opening up an avenue for its cockpit to blast off from the doomed mech.

A halo of rainbow enveloped the cockpit. Boosters at least twice as powerful as those attached to a regular cockpit pushed the boxy mass away from the doomed mech.

Just as Lord Javier's cockpit cleared away, the Loquacious Raphael finally couldn't hold it any longer.

Its twin reactor exploded in unison, which quickly blended into a massive explosion that wracked the ruined terrain another time.

Despite the glorious explosion happening in the vicinity, none of the rebels paid attention to the tragic sight of a hero mech's end. Instead, they focused all of their efforts at taking down the cockpit traveling through the air.

"Fire the missiles!"