

Mech Touch 7041

Chapter 7041: Gamma Laser Beam Weapon Supremacy

When the combined damage output of dozens of warships including numerous capital ships focused on a single greater phase lord, the results were devastating.

Not only had they aimed their weapons at the same phase lords, their energy beams also converged on a single spot of the enemy leader's spatial barrier.

This exerted an insane amount of strain on the defensive barrier. Although the unstable spatial activity caused many beams to fly crooked, the advanced AIs and targeting systems of the CE warships rapidly compensated for the anomalous behavior and made sure the persistent energy beams remained on target.

The enemy was unable to endure this constant damage intake. The effects of the transphasic hyper laser beams were not that exaggerated at first, but when so many of them concentrated at a single point and remained active for many seconds, the dramatic concentration of partially phased energies produced an unknown compound effect that began to disrupt the energy barrier even further.

This was the goal of the Gamma Scorchers!

They not only tried to focus their fire to the best possible extent, but also concentrated so many energies at a single coordinate in order to generate a temporary anomaly!

Whatever the Gamma Scorchers were doing, it was working. The concentration of phased energies warped the local space to the point where the spatial barrier fizzled out at least 50 percent sooner than Ves and other people expected!

"This is impossible!" Gloriana exclaimed! "How can transphasic hyper laser beam cannons produce this result so quickly? It does not make sense!"

She was quite familiar with how energy weapons worked, as did many Senior Mech Designers who designing mechs armed with them before.

Laser weapons had always been the most basic and low-end option available to mech designers. While they were efficient, precise and effective at longer ranges, their damage output had always been one of their greatest letdowns.

However, the Gamma Scorchers proved to everyone that they had underestimated the potential of the laser weapon system.

By giving them the ability to launch persistent laser beams, they transformed this simple method of inflicting damage into an effective counter against phase lords!

Although the demands were heavy, the transformed laser beam cannon batteries had truly succeeded in breaking the defenses of a champion without relying on a champion of their own.

Once the greater phase lord's body became exposed, the persistent laser beams mercilessly focused on his head, causing the gigantic nuser to rear back in pain as the combined energies along with the strange spatial anomaly almost carved a hole through his skull!

Fortunately, though slow, the phase lord succeeded in rearing back and allowing his chest to take the brunt of the damage.

Though his flesh was getting torn into at a prodigious rate, the nuser phase lord finally folded his true body and shrunk in size just before he initiated an emergency blink!

The injured phase lord disappeared from view before suddenly reappearing just behind one of the other greater phase lords.

While that saved the nuser from getting carved into pieces, it also caused the CE warships to direct their firepower at the greater phase lord that was being used as physical cover!

The same thing was happening all over again!

"The laser cannons have not interrupted their fire once since they unleashed their initial persistent beams!"

The laser beam cannons continued to remain active with no signs of reaching critical condition. They only grew a little hotter, but not to the point where people grew concerned about whether they would begin to melt or anything.

This was definitely not a normal result! Ves guessed that the Cybernetic Empire also managed to develop much more effective heatsinks. The amount of waste energy being transferred away was so much higher than what was previously possible for a warship-grade weapon system of this size.

At this point, the native aliens understood that they had fallen into a trap.

They had come so close that the persistent energy beams could burn at them for a long time if they attempted to turn around and get out of range.

The native alien leaders reluctantly concluded that the only way for them to survive this unfavorable circumstance was to bite the bullet and commit to their attack!

They needed to get close enough to break apart the human fleet formation and crush the enemy warships with their superior physical might!

To that end, the greater phase lords all decided to move faster. They squeezed out all of the speed they could muster from their true bodies, though there was not much they could do to move any faster.

The Gamma Scorchers weren't stupid enough to remain in place. They had already turned around and burned away, trying to traverse more distance in an attempt to prevent the enemy phase lords from closing in too soon.

The warships accelerated faster this time, proving that they had previously been moving slower on purpose!

The speed of the warships just happened to give the phase lords hope of catching up in time, but the latter would definitely lose a number of their own in the process.

The alien native gods could still decide whether it was better for them to turn around and flee from this horrible human fleet.

Whether it was due to pride, hope or stupidity, the phase lords chose to keep up the chase no matter the consequences!

The phasefighters and warships under their command struggled to keep up with their giant leaders. Although they were able to contribute their own firepower to the fight, their influence was marginal due to all of the maneuvers.

"The 24th Gamma Scorchers are stringing the native aliens along." Ves commented. "I bet their warships can accelerate even faster, but they are deliberately controlling their speed in order to give their enemies just enough hope to get close. There is no other explanation why they are moving at those exact speeds. The native aliens are fools if they think they can get close."

Gloriana frowned. "I do not think the native aliens are that ignorant. They should know by now that they have fallen into the plans of their human foes. They just do not have anything better to do. The phase lords can only continue to close in while using whatever spatial abilities they have to debilitate the human warships."

It was too bad that this was not working. It became obvious by now that the lesser and greater phase lords actually did not possess any good means to inflict damage at a distance.

Their lethality was the highest at close range, but it rapidly dropped off after that point. The phase lords had always disdained the practice of wielding ranged armaments, and now that custom came to bite them back in their butts.

Without a powerful rifle or any ranged weapon system that was superior to the primary gun batteries of a warship, the phase lords had no way of dishing out any significant damage. This shortcoming might prove fatal now that they were being strung along like a kite!

Seeing as the phase lords were unable to close the distance, they instead began to rely on their minions to exert pressure.

They forcibly ordered their phasefighters and warships to stop cowering behind their bodies and accelerate forward as best as possible.

The phase lords even focused their spatial manipulation on warping the space in front of their own units so that they could cover more distance than usual!

The desperation move was working. Although the enemy strike craft and larger vessels could no longer hide against human attacks, they were able to launch repeated attacks against the human vessels.

The Gamma Scorchers evidently adopted a naval doctrine that emphasizes firepower and mobility over defense.

The hull plating of their warships were not very thick and their azure energy shields were not as powerful, though they were remarkably more efficient.

Even so, all of the sustained damage was taking a toll on the vessels. Their active shield links made sure that no single vessel got taken down prematurely, but as their defenses endured more strain, the warships required more and more energy to keep everything together!

This posed a problem for the Gamma Scorchers as they needed to dedicate a large amount of energy to their persistent laser beam cannon batteries.

The Gamma Scorchers needed to make another move.

They did so by shutting down their laser cannons. A huge amount of emergency coolant sprayed from the primary and secondary turrets. The emergency release rapidly cooled down the strained gun barrels to more acceptable temperatures.

The weapon systems began to transform for a second time. Their barrels lengthened and grew even thicker at the base.

As soon as they finished their transformation, the energy cannons began to launch their persistent beams again, this time at a considerably higher intensity than before!

"Those... those are gamma laser beams!"

A regular graser beam already inflicted a lot of damage even when it was active for a fraction of a second.

What would happen if the energy cannon did not pulse its activation, but instead kept the damage output active on a continuous basis?

The result was that any target that got struck by the gamma laser beams received much more damage than before!

The sheer quantities and concentration of energies involved in this attack defied people's imagination.

The spatial barriers of the enemy phase lords wore down at a faster rate, partially because the strange energy anomaly had grown a lot more severe!

It was as if the concentration of all of the transphasic hyper gamma laser beams seemed to generate a small star at the point of convergence. No spatial barrier was able to resist its might for long!

Multiple phase lords lost their defenses and started to get cut and burned so much that they quickly got crippled and died!

The phase lords had no effective way to defend themselves against the overpowering might of the graser beams!

Their huge true bodies should have given them a hefty buffer, but the gamma lasers were so precise that their combined strength quickly cut through all of the flesh and bone and instantly vaporized large pieces of brain matter or other vital organs!

There was nothing the native aliens could do. Their damage output was respectable, but nowhere close to matching that of the Gamma Scorchers.

Combined with the mechs that did an excellent job of clearing out the enemy phasefighters, the Gamma Scorchers eventually relied on the overwhelming firepower

of their persistent gamma laser beam weapons to finish off a formidable fleet led by multiple phase lords.

Of all of the native gods that joined in the attack, only a handful of lesser phase lords managed to get away after they split up and let their peers attract the brunt of the firepower!

"The Gamma Scorchers did better than the Dominators." Gloriana commented.

"That is because the 24th relied on strategy and misdirection. The 76th solely relied on brute force to win its battle. There is nothing wrong with that, but the extra effort from the Gamma Scorchers enabled them to claim the lives of a lot more phase lords and other aliens."

The demonstration of the 24th Gamma Scorchers Warfleet was not too varied, but already showed the charm of the handful of energy weapon systems on display.

The Irradiator Gamma Laser Beam Rifles and the Persistent Gamma Laser Beam Cannons both proved so powerful that the Gamma Scorchers did not need to rely on other parts of their Arsenal to finish off their alien foes!

Ves looked thoroughly impressed. "Damn, if the other warfleets of the Cybernetic Empire can spank the native alien fleets as easily as this, then red humanity should not have to worry about going extinct in the next five years."

"It is too bad that the native aliens proved incapable of dealing with the new weapons." Gloriana sighed. "If they were stronger, then the Gamma Scorchers may have been forced to reveal other innovative weapon systems."

Chapter 7042: Undermining Taboos

The 24th Gamma Scorchers Warfleet definitively proved why they earned their name.

Their main armaments all consisted of gamma laser beam weapons. This enabled them to channel a lot more energy through their weapon systems than normal.

Combined with a few other advantages such as persistent beam technology, the mechs and warships armed with these armaments could inflict so much damage that even phase lords could not resist their concentrated might!

"You seem to have a strong opinion about this demonstration of energy weapon supremacy." Gloriana remarked.

"I do." Ves said as he continued to think about the seemingly simple but profound tech demonstration. "Gamma laser beam weapons are like the premium deluxe versions of regular laser beam weapons. It is kind of frustrating that we already possess the basic knowhow to develop and produce graser weapons, but we are prohibited from doing so because the mechers and fleeters think that gamma rays go too far while destructive positron beams and deadly hot laser beams are somehow okay."

A third-class gamma laser weapon could easily be outmatched by a first-class laser weapon.

Yet the RA and the RF deemed the former illegal and the latter a weapon system that is very safe to use.

Gloriana sardonically smiled. "Everyone knows that the rules that govern which weapons are allowed and which are prohibited are not entirely logical. They just do not mention it because their objections are either useless or invite punishment. Besides, it is easier for gamma laser weapons to inflict collateral damage to people. That does not change the fact that the main reason to object to the use of gamma laser weapons is largely due to abuses that took place in the past."

People prohibited the use of gamma laser weapons in the past. That stigma lasted for thousands of years and continued to be upheld by the RA and RF due to inertia and inherited fear.

The Cybernetic Empire evidently thought differently on the subject of gamma laser weapons.

The Polymath adopted a completely objective perspective on this matter and concluded that there was no reason to abide by the taboo against the use of graser weapons.

Not only did she remove this prohibition for her empire, she also raised a warfleet that was specifically set up to specialize in this previously forbidden weapon system!

Unlike the safer and more controllable energy weapons that many people had grown accustomed to using, the graser weapons were new, powerful and above all exciting.

Many viewers who had tuned into the broadcast of the Gamma Scorchers all admired the exceptional damage output of the graser weapons on display.

They too began to wonder why the Red Two still bothered to uphold the ban on graser weapons.

The rule still made a little sense during the Age of Mechs. Back then, the MTA and the CFA had removed all external sources of conflict, leaving states with little choice but to go to war against each other.

Naturally, since these were all human-to-human conflicts, the fighting had to be controlled in order to prevent the ignorant space peasants from repeating the mistakes of the dark days of the Age of Conquest.

However, the current period was nothing like that. The Red War was a genuine war for survival to red humanity. How could they possibly abide by rules that would only cause them to abandon a highly effective weapon system and spare the aliens the suffering caused by graser beams?

Slowly but surely, more and more people questioned the taboo against gamma laser weapon technology.

"Why can't we be like the Gamma Scorchers? Our old laser weapons are weak and inflict almost no damage against alien energy shields. Since we aren't rich enough to obtain transphasic weapons, why don't we try and get our hands on gamma laser weapons instead?"

Arguments like these became more and more common. The second-raters and third-raters especially desired to make use of graser weapons as they did not have any other superior options available.

The vast majority of these people worked for parties that did not have the power or funding to arm their mechs with transphasic weapons.

The difficulty of fighting against and defeating the native alien forces became much harder if the humans did not employ transphasic weapons themselves!

Groups such as the Larkinson Clan may have grown wealthy and pampered enough to readily hand out transphasic weapons and even entire mechs to all of its soldiers, but there were many more that could not afford such an extravagant treatment!

Most of the time, only the leaders or a small elite detachment received the privilege of utilizing transphasic weapons or mechs.

It was not economical to extend this treatment to the rest of a mech force. In fact, it was much more common for these soldiers to rely on outnumbering the native aliens by 5 to 1, 10 to 1 or even 20 to 1 in order to overcome the vast disparity in tech and resources.

This was not a sustainable approach. Soldiers were dying in droves and settlements kept getting wiped out by the native aliens just because of the lack of availability of phasewater.

Each of them looked at the performance of the gamma laser weapons freely utilized by the Cybernetic Empire and grew envious.

Even if the non-transphasic version of graser weapons would not be able to produce results as good as shown in the live feed, it should at least be a lot better than their bog-standard laser weapons, right?

"What a devious ploy. As expected of the Polymath."

As Ves thought about the implications of the use of graser weapons by the Gamma Scorchers, he realized that this display killed multiple birds with one stone.

Not only did it show off the superior might and technological prowess of the Cybernetic Empire, but it also sowed further doubt and division among the people who had always abided by the rules set by the mechers and fleters without question.

The first step to convincing them to break away from the old human order was to question why it was necessary in the first place.

Through a simple demonstration of 'taboo' technology and showing how much good it could do on the battlefield, the Red Association and the Red Fleet suddenly became confronted with another crisis.

Even if this controversy was not big enough to spark their downfall, it would definitely distract them and keep them occupied for a long time. They may even have to initiate even more reforms in order to satisfy the changing demands of the public.

"Yes."

"Yes, honey?"

"Do you want to equip our mechs with graser weapons?"

"Uh, why do you ask?"

"Come on. Just look at yourself. Ever since you witnessed the Gamma Scorchers in action, you became as excited as an eager puppy. You love the power of gamma laser weapons. Do not deny it. You want to master the tech behind these powerful energy weapons."

Ves gave her a sheepish smile. "You caught me. You're right. I have been thinking about adopting them and incorporating them into my mech designs if the Red Two decides to change their policies. However, I am not sure whether it is practical to combine gamma laser technology with luminar crystal technology. I know it is possible, but I also know that it will produce a lot of new challenges and complications. I don't have the time or interest to solve all of these problems."

"You do not have to do everything yourself these days." Gloriana rolled her eyes. "There are other mech designers and R&D personnel in our clan that can undertake this project. If we do not have the right people, then we can hire them. Luminar crystal technology is not that well known, but I am sure that there are plenty of energy weapon specialists that are willing to branch out into alien technology so long as they are given the right incentives."

Ves thought about it for a few seconds.

"You can start the prep work for this, but don't go on an immediate hiring spree. We should wait and see how the Red Two react to this development. It might be that they will insist on restricting the use of gamma laser weapons."

"Why would they do that after this?" Gloriana frowned. "The mechers and the fleeters should know better than to issue a rule that will never be obeyed. The Cybernetic Empire's flagrant disregard for the taboos has already broken a dam. I am sure that the Terrans and the Rubarthans will roll out their own versions of graser weapons as well. Since you have always desired our clan to become a sovereign power, there is no reason for us to abide by the pedantic taboos of the Red Two."

Ves stared at his wife. As expected, she even fell victim to the Polymath's conspiracy.

"What you just said is not wrong, but you are missing the bigger picture. The Larkinson Clan is only independent as so far the other major human powers allow it to be. They are tolerating us and indulging in our whims because we are useful to them and we have never violated their bottom line. If we start to do the latter, our relationships with them will not break right away, but they will become a lot more strained."

Gloriana frowned deeper. "I know you have a good relationship with the mechers. I do as well. However, there is no doubt that the Red Association is in decline. Even if there are many more Star Designers on its side than with the Cybernetic Empire, the fact remains that the Polymath had many more years to complete her research than the others. Perhaps the mechers will be able to make a comeback after a decade or two, but who knows whether the Star Designers will still agree to remain part of the same club."

"You've noticed that?"

"I have my own channels, Ves. They may not be as extensive as yours, but there are still people who are willing to tell me certain things that take place behind the scenes."

Ves slightly narrowed his eyes after he heard that. He imagined that these contacts did not volunteer this information out of the goodness of their heart. The only way for Gloriana to obtain such information was to volunteer valuable intelligence in return.

However, he had no reason to suspect that she was leaking secrets that were not meant to be divulged.

After his latest deep discussion with her, he decided to give her the benefit of the doubt. It was not healthy for him to maintain his distrust towards his wife for so long. He actually felt much closer to her now that he had invited his wife to become the latest user of the Mech Designer System.

If his wife had actually exposed the existence of the Mech Designer System to outsiders, then that was his fault for making an erroneous judgment.

"It is dangerous to make too many assumptions about Star Designers." Ves vaguely said. "They have transcended their mortality and transformed into energy-based life forms. They are still marked by the vestiges of their humanity, but they have acquired so much more that it is difficult to judge them by human standards. The Polymath is already a confounding individual, and all of the other Star Designers are just as complex. None of them are simple figures."

Whether the Star Designers decided to split up and go their own way had massive implications. Nobody dared to make too many assumptions about them, but that did not stop them from wondering about possible futures.

Ves was no exception to this. He personally could not understand the logic of breaking up a superorganization that united the strength of multiple god pilots and Star Designers.

However, the fact of the matter was that the Polymath and the Huntsman had already taken steps to disassociate themselves from the RA.

If this was the case, then how many more of their peers dreamt of going independent but never had an opportunity to do so until today?

Chapter 7043 - 27th Assimilators Warfleet

The 24th Gamma Scorchers Warfleet and the 76th Dominators Warfleet both demonstrated different technologies that the Polymath and her legion of R&D personnel had developed and refined over the span of half a century.

Everyone who expected the two warfleets to dominate and crush the native alien forces did not come away disappointed.

Many people became happy when the Cybers introduced more than one miracle solution to the transphasic energy shield problem.

The native aliens had been taking advantage of their superior access to phasewater for too long. Their transphasic and azure energy shields often proved to be the bane of defenders who possessed the courage but not the gear to defeat enemies that hid behind such luxurious defenses.

The people who fought against the native aliens out of duty or out of necessity finally saw a light at the end of the tunnel.

So long as they gained parity in terms of tech and materials, many mech pilots did not believe that they were inferior to their alien adversaries!

Still, Ves believed that many folks were celebrating too soon. Whether the newly developed tech would fall into the hands of the masses remained to be seen. The Cybers at least wanted to earn a hefty profit out of their technological achievements.

"Let us switch to the playback of the third battle." Gloriana suggested after they had exhausted their discussion on the Gamm Scorchers.

"Yes, let's do that. I have been saving the best for last."

When Ves and Gloriana switched the feed to the third battle, they expected to observe a very different kind of battle than the last two ones.

The 27th Assimilators Warfleet did not disappoint them in this regard.

Just like with the other two warfleets, the Assimilators entered a star system that had already fallen to the enemy.

The difference was that this time the star system was occupied by swarms of mutated voribugs.

It was frightening to see how much they expanded their numbers since they took over the star system from the Rubarthan colonists. Their greed for mid to high-quality materials was insatiable.

To that end, the insects completely broke down all forms of life and construction and even began to burrow into rich ore veins.

Like a superorganism, the voribugs all moved in coordination with each other, passing on resources to special hives and other locations where the materials went through further processing.

Ultimately, the materials ended up inside eggs and cultivation fluids where they would be used to grow and strengthen the next generation of voribugs!

At this time, it was impossible to count the number of voribugs in the star system. There were simply too many of them, and they were constantly multiplying their numbers with each passing second.

Even if 90 percent of them consisted of variations of the most basic cannon fodder bugs, the remaining 10 percent or so still amounted to billions of more advanced mutated bugs!

Of course, their quality still varied. There shouldn't be too many large and formidable mutated voribugs that could fight and win against mechs in a duel.

The voribugs did not ascribe to quality in the first place. They would much rather produce a lot more cannon fodder with low-grade exotics and hypers that were easily available in many star systems.

It was already frightening to behold all of these hostile and dangerous alien creatures when they were peacefully nesting and gathering resources.

From the moment the starships arrived, their behavior completely shifted.

The mutated voribugs instantly knew that 'their' territory received unwelcome visitors!

The nearest bugs placed in the edge of the star system began to maneuver around and monitor the arriving warships, carriers and support vessels.

It remained unclear whether the voribugs possessed the intelligence to understand the fleet composition of the Assimilators, but they definitely took the new arrivals seriously.

"The voribugs are spread out across the entire star system." Ves observed. "They are particularly concentrated in most terrestrial satellites and more mineral-rich parts of the asteroid belts. That means that it will take time for all of these voribugs to converge on a single enemy force. I wonder what the Assimilators will do now that they have clearly kicked the hornet's nest."

The Assimilators clearly did not hesitate and already began to move as soon as they exited their FTL travel.

The starships of the 27th did not move straight into the inner system where the concentration of mutated voribugs was the highest.

They instead made their way over to the furthest planet from the system. It was nothing more than a small icy terrestrial globe that contained small amounts of mid-grade exotics.

That was an interesting choice. Ves had already an idea why the Assimilators wanted to start off their action plan at a relatively small and remote location.

Once the warfleet approached orbit of the furthest planet in the star system, the voribugs that had been doing their own thing had already mobilized to fight against the intruders.

Many voribugs did not possess the ability to traverse through space, but that did not matter when they could just board larger and more specialized voribugs that did happen to possess this capability!

Although these bugs required an injection of phasewater to unlock their speed, once they satisfied this requirement, they were not that much slower than a typical human vessel!

Tens of thousands of teardrop-shaped voribugs therefore propelled themselves into space and flew straight towards the approaching warfleet with many more voribug combatants sheltered inside their sacks or clinging outside their fleshy forms!

A sensible human force would take one good look at the sheer amount of voribugs closing in and decide it was better to turn around and maintain distance!

While the voribugs had already mutated numerous species that specialized inflicting damage at range, this was not their preferred mode of combat.

They would much rather get into point blank range and take a bite out of their adversaries!

This desire was so strong that few if any of the bugs in space bothered to launch more than a pittance of inaccurate plasma bolts and spore projectiles.

The Assimilators still did not choose to retreat. Their vessels continued to barrel forth with no disregard of how badly they were outnumbered.

"Is this not the time for the warfleet to slow down and turn the other way so that they can kite the incoming voribugs?" Gloriana asked.

"It would if this was a regular warfleet." Ves responded. "I have a strong feeling that this smart metal fleet will not fight like the other ones. It is based on substantially different tech that has radically different implications."

As the distance continued to close, the Assimilators still did not stop or slow down. They did not even deploy their mechs. All they did was charge straight at the overwhelming swarm as if the disparity in numbers meant nothing.

The two forces physically collided against each other!

All of the starships of the Assimilators promptly disappeared. Their hulls became surrounded by millions and millions of mutated voribugs, each of which had their own

special way of drilling through solid matter and claiming the lives that their master sought.

"This is insane!" Gloriana gasped. "Are the Cybers truly confident enough in their warships that they are willing to let them drown in voribug bodies?!"

"I guess so." Ves shrugged. "Keep watching. This is hardly over. It is just the beginning."

Though Ves already predicted it, he still found it shocking that the Assimilation also did not bother to launch more than a paltry number of ranged attacks.

Seeing so many vessels getting surrounded by voribugs was like watching a catapult move forward until it was offering itself up the enemy side.

Yet the expected outcome did not happen. The starships did not behave anything like other hulls.

Slowly but surely, the activity levels of the voribugs and the engulfed Assimilators kept rising higher.

Something was happening inside that caused the bugs to become a lot more active and vigilant!

"Wait... is the swarm thinning?"

Ves hadn't noticed it yet, but now that he directed his attention to it, he realized that his wife was correct!

A situation like this should ordinarily lead to a reduction in human resistance.

What happened instead was that the 27th Warfleet not only managed to withstand this test, but also launch a counterattack that was disturbing the voribugs increasingly further.

Soon enough one of the warships became visible again, though it no longer looked like a traditional vessel anymore.

Instead, massive chunks of internal compartments became exposed to vacuum. The voribugs kept crawling in from every direction and tried to gnaw at the warship's interior.

Yet the vessel was also striking back. Not only did she rely on internal defense turrets and the like, but she also directed large swarms of tiny nanomachines to fight back against the native aliens!

These smart metal swarms were gradually gaining ground.

When faced with the voribugs, the nanomachines easily slipped between the cracks and overcame the resistance of every single voribug.

Because these bugs largely consisted of relatively low-quality cannon fodder, the smart metal had a very easy time burrowing deep inside their organic tissue before beginning to break down their brains and nerves!

As far as insect species went, the voribugs did not possess a particularly abnormal biology.

Their organs resembled that of many other life forms in the Red Ocean and the Milky Way for that matter.

When the smart metal ate up much of the brain matter, the voribug in question ceased functioning.

These shutdowns happened intermittently at first, but they rapidly exploded in frequency as more and more voribugs lost all signs of life.

As soon as these individual creatures died, the surrounding voribugs automatically devoured their deceased cousins as if they could not stand the waste of biomatter!

The rate of bugs dropping dead increased exponentially.

As quickly as the voribugs tried to recycle their deceased brothers and sisters, their ability to replenish their losses was not as fast as the smart metal that had infiltrated their bodies!

In fact, devouring the bodies of the insects that dropped dead only exacerbated the problem as it delivered the lethal nanomachines directly into the bodies of other voribugs!

Although the voribugs recognized the danger and attempted to stop what was happening by trying out several different maneuvers, nothing worked!

Like an invisible plague, the smart metal continued to infiltrate their bodies and spread among their comrades.

Even after the voribugs had ceased to devour their fallen and attempted to disperse their swarms, the infection still couldn't be stopped at this point!

Many voribugs fell quickly while the larger and stronger ones exhibited greater resistance before they succumbed.

The orbit around the furthestmost planet eventually turned tranquil as the vast majority of voribugs that had participated in the attack had perished.

No, it was not correct to state that the voribugs died.

So long as their carcasses were not devoured by other voribugs, the nanomachines that had drilled into their flesh and multiplied by making use of the living tissue simply continued their work.

This naturally caused more and more bodies to break down until lots of nanomachines had taken their place!

The feed helpfully displayed an annotation that described that the nanomachines actually consisted of a mix of three 'basic' CE nanomachine models.

The NanoGatherers were the basic scavenger units of this group of nanomachines. Their advantage was that they worked exceptionally fast wne dealing with weaker materials.

The NanoSmiths took all of those raw resources and produced brand-new nanomachines, including copies of their template if there was need to expand their production capacity.

The NanoWarriors comprised the basic fighter units at the nanomachine scale. They were good at damaging both big and small opponents. They accomplished the former by carefully studying their adversaries and determining their weak points.

These three specialized nanomachine models each fulfilled their functions brilliantly!

This was because instead of getting devoured by the voribugs, the Assimilators had assimilated all of the voribugs in the immediate area!

Chapter 7044: Attrition Warfare Specialists

After the 27th Assimilators Warfleet took over a planet, they quickly began to build up their 'army'.

Swarms of nanomachines flew out of the starships, which happened to consist almost entirely of smart metal themselves.

This had many implications. One of them was that the starships could dynamically alter in shape and acquire new functions as needed.

The Assimilators made good use of this function by merging several 'starships' in orbital space stations and landbound complexes.

These facilities quickly turned into productive powerhouses. They centralized a lot of heavy industrial processes, thereby enabling them to obtain manufactured goods at reduced prices.

The expansion continued even after the Assimilators completely mastered the remote planet.

Instead of consolidating their control over this corner of space, the Assimilators chose to go aggressive.

With the remote planet as a springboard, the 27th Assimilator Warfleet split up into several detachments that either stayed behind to guard harvesting and production operations, or went on different missions to conquer the other planets in the star system.

This part of the battle was not that easy to convey in an easily digestible manner. This was why the broadcast dragged on long after the other two warfleets had concluded their battles.

Despite the passing hours, many viewers remained riveted by the sight of the Assimilators in action.

With the help of their warp drives or superdrives, they moved around as quickly as possible and invaded the planets and if applicable the moons that the voribugs had previously gained control over.

The voribugs were not kind to the satellites they conquered. No matter their development, the mutated bugs had no interest in living in harmony with nature. The bugs mercilessly engaged in destructive mining practices because they deemed that to be the most effective way to sustain their invasion.

Now that the red humans dared to invade a star system that had fallen under their control, the voribugs advanced their pace and engaged in even more destructive practices.

They destroyed mountains and dried up lakes.

They destroyed any terraforming that may have taken place in the past and made the environment unlivable for humans.

They dug so deep and drained so many underground ore veins that they triggered earthquakes, some of which were so violent that they ended up killing a fair amount of voribugs in the process.

Why were the bugs behaving even more extreme than before?

It was because they were actively changing their bug composition!

The alien insects abruptly reduced the production of low-quality voribugs. It became clear that whatever intelligence they possessed must have noticed that their cannon fodder was far too susceptible to getting killed by nanomachines.

The voribugs in this star system despised their low-quality voribugs so much that they even cannibalized over 70 percent of their own ranks!

Their biomass had to be reclaimed in order to speed up the production of more effective voribug subspecies!

The newer bugs that emerged from this organic frenzy became larger, deadlier and far better armored than before.

Their exoskeletons became a lot thicker and more reliable than before. When these new voribug mutations finally had a chance to prove their mettle against the invading smart metal warships, the variations proved effective at preventing the human nanomachines from passing through their exteriors and devouring their body tissue from within!

"Damn. That is too fast." Ves remarked. "It only takes a single battle for the voribugs in the rest of the star system to form immediate countermeasures."

After the Assimilators found out that the mutated voribugs had adapted against their nano-infiltration methods, they did not give up on their assault.

The Cybers instead resorted to more conventional means of warfare.

"Finally! They are putting real mechs and warships into action!" Andraste celebrated the return of the spectacle.

The 27th Assimilators Warfleet might possess the capability to take on any form due to its predominant smart metal composition, but if it needed to fight like a traditional warfleet, then it certainly possessed this capability!

The smart metal warships dynamically altered their gun batteries to output searing gamma laser beams!

The beams raked across the swarms of bugs, striking thousands if not tens of thousands of armored units at a time.

Although the newly adapted voribugs were much more resistant against damage, the Assimilators had already adjusted the power settings of their gamma laser cannon batteries to ensure that a single pass was enough to kill or condemn an armored voribug to death!

The Assimilators showed no qualms about utilizing the signature weapon system of the 24th Gamma Scorchers Warfleet.

Ves guessed that the Assimilators possessed the capability to imitate a lot of other proprietary CE weapon systems.

Although the gamma laser weapons proved to be highly effective against organic targets, there were voribugs that did not fall so easily.

These were the more elite types that relied on high-grade materials to grow stronger and much more resilient bodies. They were the closest equivalent to champions that the voribugs possessed.

The voribugs also cherished their lives a lot more. They assigned millions of lesser insects to guard them and act as their sacrificial shields.

Once these 'elite' voribugs got close enough to the smart metal warships, who knew what kind of attacks they might unleash!

In order to stop these powerful but agile elite voribugs, the smart metal warships tried their best to sweep them away with their gamma laser beam salvos, but the elites had

grown special adaptations that made them much more resistant against energy damage!

This was a rather familiar trait of the voribugs, but the mutated alien insects had found a way to improve it even further!

The Assimilators decided to respond with their smart metal mechs.

Although not as large and powerful as warships, the smart metal mechs possessed much more finesse and precision.

So long as they were not surrounded by a voribug swarm, they could dart along the edges and inflict critical damage against special voribug subspecies, such as those that were able to launch plasma bolts or the ones that rapidly helped injured voribugs heal from their wounds.

Now, many of these smart metal mechs fearlessly dove into the middle of the swarms, having altered their shapes until they resembled arrowheads in order to pierce through the bugs in the way!

"What are they doing?!"

Even the voribugs did not expect for these smart metal mechs to enter their swarms. They tried their best to block the machines, but their efforts largely proved inadequate.

By the time the smart metal mechs had reached the center of the swarms, they finally managed to impale and cut apart the elite voribug variants that posed a potential threat.

In order to make sure that the swarms could not absorb the body pieces and regrow an identical elite voribug, the smart metal mechs actually enveloped their dead prey before going critical.

Hundreds of explosions set off among the voribug swarms as the smart metal mechs simultaneously self-destructed!

"What?!"

Ves almost wanted to jump to his feet when he saw all of those mechs self-destruct without any hesitation!

What about the mech pilots?!

"Wait..."

Both he and Gloriana immediately exchanged glances with each other. They had a growing suspicion about the nature of those smart metal mechs.

Soon enough, the smart metal carriers that had previously maintained a low profile began to shrink in size.

At the same time, pieces of their hull pooled up into balls that continually grew in size.

Soon enough, a brand-new batch of smart metal mechs came to life!

However, calling them mechs was a misnomer at this point.

"These aren't mechs." Gloriana said with a frown. "They are battle bots. There are no humans inside their cockpits. They are either autonomous or remote-controlled."

"I am 90 percent sure that the latter is the case." Ves said with his professional judgment. "There are clear differences between the two. Autonomous mechs are much more clean and precise in their movements. They are also less prone to performing actions that make no sense. These smart metal mechs have shown plenty of traits that definitely makes me think they are controlled by real people. If I turn out to be wrong, then the Cybernetic Empire has apparently made great strides in their mech AI development."

"Are the smart metal mechs alive?" Gloriana asked a direct question.

"No. I am certain they are not. I do not know whether to be disappointed or relieved by this fact."

The onslaught continued. Smart metal units relentlessly eliminated as many voribugs as possible.

In turn, the voribugs tried their best to use their combination of numbers and evolved resilience to overcome the heavy firepower and inflict real damage against the smart metal warships.

Unfortunately for the alien insects, they had met their match this time.

As the engagement gradually morphed into a battle of attrition that could last an entire week, it became clear that neither side could be forced into a quick defeat.

The Assimilators were rapidly able to cannibalize any resource found on the battlefield to replenish their numbers. They were practically inexhaustible as they relied on their superior nanotechnology as well as huge reserves of energy to fuel a formidable smart metal war machine.

The voribugs on the other hand leveraged their control over much of the star system to desperately extract more resources from the local satellites and convert them into more armored voribugs.

Although the mutated voribugs also tried to experiment with other subspecies, the Assimilators were too powerful to possess any obvious weaknesses.

In the end, the two sides continually consumed the environment as well as the dead remains of each other's units as resources to sustain themselves in this brutal confrontation.

Many viewers who had become initially buoyed by the excellent performance of the Gamma Scorchers and the Dominators had grown increasingly more numb or horrified at what they saw on this battlefield.

Was this what it was like to fight against a biological calamity like the mutated voribugs?

It was terrible for the red humans to behold the enormous capacity for warmaking demonstrated by the voribugs.

"This is a nightmare."

"Pardon?"

"I cannot imagine how the expeditionary fleet or the Premier Fleet can make any progress on this kind of battlefield." Ves said as he swept his hand towards the projection that had switched back to a live feed. "As long as these voribugs have taken root in a star system, you have to fight against all of the planets, moons that support their organic war machine. This is a type of enemy that we have never planned against. None of our existing mech designs are suited for this mode of warfare."

"...You are correct, Ves. To see the Assimilators put so much effort to engage in warfare at an industrial level is mind-boggling. If the Cybers have to resort to such a costly method, then the mutated voribugs may pose a greater threat to us than the native aliens."

This was not an exaggeration. While the voribugs may be defenseless against expert mechs, ace mechs or god mechs, there were only so many of them, and they could not possibly sustain their damage output for days or weeks on end.

So long as the voribugs multiplied fast enough, they could sweep across the entire frontlines and slip through hundreds of gaps in the defenses!

"The good news is that the 27th Assimilators Warfleet should not be unique." Ves said. "I have learned from Hugo that there is also a Smart Metal Tower among the Thirteen Towers. This signifies that the Polymath has deemed smart metal technology important enough to develop many innovations in this field. What the Assimilators have shown so far is probably the tip of the iceberg. Their real nanomachines has to be a lot more formidable than just the basic three models in use at the moment."

Gloriana sensed an unusual amount of admiration from Ves towards this tech.

She glanced suspiciously at her husband.

"Are you... coveting CE smart metal technology?"

"I am." Ves freely admitted.

"Why?"

"Because as soon as I witnessed the performance of the Assimilators, I knew I had found the perfect foundation for my Polymetal mech design project."

Chapter 7045: Uncontrollable Infestation

Ves shut off the live broadcast.

The battle between the Assimilators and the mutated voribugs would probably drag on for weeks.

Ves had better things to do with his time than watch this titanic clash between two forces that specialized in battles of attrition.

He had seen what he needed to see, and so did everyone else.

"Is this the future of warfare?" Andraste asked with a disappointed expression.

Ves smiled and moved over to pick up his daughter. "Not necessarily, pumpkin. The Cybers managed to demolish the native aliens because they had many years to develop and optimize the right weapons to defeat them. That is not the case with the voribugs. Nobody expected to fight against an enemy that doesn't rely on transphasic energy defenses at all. The voribugs rely on the rapid reproduction of organic combat units to conquer every territory. This is not exactly new to humans, but the mutated voribugs do this better than any other race that humanity has vanquished in the past."

He continued to mull over this even as he and his wife accompanied their children for a time before putting them to bed.

Each of them became encouraged by the superiority of CE tech against the native alien threat.

At least half of their lives had become dominated by the Red War. The spectre of losing everything constantly hovered over their heads as they grew up on New Constantinople VIII.

Ves felt grateful to the Polymath bringing hope to a society that had become accustomed to being on the losing side.

Unfortunately, the surprise appearance of the mutated voribugs gave people a new source of fear.

If every voribug infestation needed to be removed with as great of an effort as the Assimilators were making, the cost of repelling this organic foe would definitely be terrible!

Late at night, Ves attended a private meeting organized by Saint Commander Casella Ingvar.

She had invited Ves, Gloriana, Alexa, Saint Dise to her office where they went over the footage and analyzed the implications of the new tech on display.

"As far as the native aliens are concerned, the Cybernetic Empire has the power to stall their invasion." The Saint Commander concluded. "The issue is that it is a new power that wants to claim a piece of the pie that is human-occupied space. The Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pect eagerly welcome the Cybers, but that does not mean they want to get taken over by the newcomers. The Terrans have no desire to escape the hegemony of the Red Two, only to answer to a different hegemon."

This meant that the Cybernetic Empire would face resistance at every turn. Other human powers eagerly wanted to obtain the secrets of CE tech, yet they did not welcome the expanding influence of the rest of the newly emerged empire.

This would lead to a lot of wrangling. Negotiations between the parties would definitely be tense and marked by difficulties.

The old powers all had to scramble to protect their existing dominion and prevent their populations from defecting to the Cybernetic Empire. They needed to fight to maintain their relevance in a new age that may eventually be led by the Cybernetic Empress.

"I have noticed that all of the weapons showcased by the Cybers are not particularly effective against superdimensional armor." Gloriana mentioned. "The new tech overwhelmingly focuses on countering transphasic energy shields. The Cybers have developed so many different solutions against this defensive measure that it is impossible for our enemies to close so many loopholes at the same time. So long as these weapons begin to proliferate, it will become much easier to defeat the fleets that are not led by well-equipped phase lords."

"What about the enemy fleets that are led by phase lords such as the Protector of Karnak?" Alexa asked.

"The responsibility for defeating them lies with god pilots and ace pilots who are paired with full superdimensional ace mechs such as Saint Dise."

Gloriana nodded towards the ace pilot in question.

"It will be a challenge." The female ace pilot said. "Alien-grade superdimensional alloy offers just enough protection to withstand my weaker attacks. I have to put serious effort into channeling my more destructive sword techniques in order to break open a full suit of superdimensional armor. It will be easier for me once I have developed new techniques and improved my existing ones. My resonance strength is also growing at a fast pace, especially if I am frequently challenging greater phase lords in combat. The higher my resonance strength, the easier it becomes for me to deal with multiple difficult enemies at once."

If she had grown as strong as a senior ace pilot, then the Protector of Karnak and the Endless Stomach wouldn't have been able to bully her around so much in the last engagement.

Unfortunately, the growth rate of ace pilot was usually measured in decades and centuries.

Dise's circumstances were much more favorable than the ace pilots who grew up in the relatively peaceful Age of Mechs, but that did not mean she could sprint her way to the threshold of god pilot in record time.

The general cultivation elixir and many other similar elixirs no longer possessed the potency to stimulate the willpower of an ace pilot.

Perhaps the alchemists and other experts of the Red Collective may be able to cook up a new solution that could speed up Dise's progression, but the cost would likely be so prohibitive that it would not be the turn of the Larkinson Clan to receive a quota.

"The native aliens won't stand still either." Ves mentioned. "They may not be able to rely so much on their transphasic energy shields anymore, but they will simply switch to building ships clad in thick layers of transphasic alloy plating. The cost of building them will easily multiply by a factor of 4 or maybe even 10, but they are large and prosperous enough to afford this extravagance. The Red Cabal has also been accelerating the deployment of Saint Piercer arms and they have just begun to distribute Saint Armors. I am sure that the armor worn by the Protector of Karnak is equivalent to a prototype. The future iterations of this armor will become much more sophisticated, especially if cosmopolitan mech designers are allowed to contribute towards their development."

CE tech may have put the native aliens at a disadvantage, but if the Red Cabal was able to produce and distribute more alien-grade superdimensional armaments and armor, they still had a chance of pressuring red humanity!

The emergence of the Cybernetic Empire made it less likely for the native aliens to wipe out all but a small remnant of red humans, but did not necessarily put an end to the Red War.

Both sides still had plenty of reasons to fight against each other.

This was bad news as the appearance of the mutated voribugs put an even greater strain on red humanity's warmaking capacity.

The Saint Commander clearly grew concerned about this new threat.

"Tell me honestly. How well are we able to fight against mutated voribugs?"

"Not good." Gloriana immediately replied. "The voribugs always arrive in swarms. They do not care whether our weapons are far superior to their own offensive capabilities. They can throw so many voribugs at our forces that our weapons and our mechs will wear down sooner or later. Even if we are able to defeat the swarms that are sent in our direction, the victory may ultimately prove meaningless if other swarms have managed to relocate to nearby planets or asteroid belts before setting up their hives. Once this happens, the voribugs can constantly produce more cannon fodder while also sending more swarms to occupy planets and asteroid fields that possess useful resources."

Unlike the native aliens, the voribugs could not be defeated by winning a frontal battle.

So long as just a handful of voribugs survived, they could easily hide inside an inconspicuous asteroid and slowly build up a new swarm that could spread to other satellites and reproduce further.

Once the voribugs began to snowball their numbers, the voribug invasion would begin anew!

If the mutated voribugs were truly perverse like this, then they were practically impossible to get rid of once they arrived in any star system!

"There has to be a limit to these voribugs." Ves insisted. "No organic life form is perfect. I am becoming increasingly more convinced that the voribugs were originally bioweapons that have somehow outlasted their creators. They are designed for warfare and conquest, but that means that they also have clear gaps that they cannot overcome such as high-ranking mech pilots."

Dise frowned. "I cannot do much against them. I specialize in defeating enemy champions and high-value combatants. My sword fey makes it easier for me to wipe out swarming enemies, but they can only do so much. In fact, I do not think that Isobel will be able to do much better once she returns with a new ace mech. Ace pilots like us are virtually unbeatable at the tactical level, but we cannot defeat an adversary that specializes in waging war at the strategic level."

"This is why I think that there has to be a weakness to the voribugs that we have yet to discover." Ves said. "One of the things that stand out most to me is how they act in total coordination. They show no visible sign of individualism. Every voribug is a tiny

cog in a massive machine. As you all know, every machine is centrally directed, or else it would not be able to fulfill a coherent function. If we want to shut down the machine, it is not necessary to destroy each individual cog. We just need to identify, locate and target the controlling factor."

"You mean the hypothetical queen of the voribugs?" Alexa asked.

He paused for a moment. "We do not know whether the mutated voribugs are all controlled by a single queen or multiple queens. We do not know whether there are additional layers in the hierarchy that help to manage all of the disparate swarms. However, I think that if they do exist, the god pilots will find out and either solve the problem by themselves, or inform us how to eliminate the influence of these leader units."

The Saint Commander looked thoughtful. "You have an idea."

"I have several ideas." Ves said. "The reason why the voribugs spook us so much is because we are not prepared to fight against them. We can address this by developing targeted solutions just like what the Cybers have done against the native aliens. For example, one of the theories I came up with is the potential means the hypothetical voribug queen uses to control her swarms across many light-years. I mean, it is unlikely that this leader unit is coordinating her bugs with an organic equivalent of quantum entanglement nodes. What if this leader unit is controlling all of her minions through her own version of a kinship network? If that is the case, I should be able to whip up a countermeasure."

"Is this why you feel the need to relocate to the Rubarthan Pact?" Casella asked.

"Yes. It may be wishful thinking on my part, but I truly think I have a chance of offering material help in pushing back this threat. I won't know until I actually reach the new front and see the voribugs in person. Even if my hypothesis is wrong, I am sure that I can do other useful stuff such as designing a mech that targets a different weakness. I have done it before. I am confident I can do it again."

Red humanity needed a miracle solution against the voribugs, because all of its usual methods were clearly ineffective.

The group talked a bit more about what they have witnessed and seen. They particularly focused on the new tech on display and what they would like to acquire

for themselves if they had the option of exchanging these goodies from the Cybernetic Empire.

Chapter 7046: Changing Geopolitical Landscape

The battles involving the three warfleets of the Cybernetic Empire shook human-occupied space.

Many people already had a vague idea that the Cybernetic Empire took advantage of the Time of Isolation to develop superior technology and construct a large number of powerful mechs and warships.

With a leader as smart and productive as the Polymath in charge, Bridgehead One should have definitely made good use of the additional time that she managed to buy.

Yet how good were her new warfleets, really?

Nobody had a clear idea. This was why it became necessary to stage a demonstration.

Until her forces tested their mettle in actual combat, few parties were willing to bet on the Cybernetic Empire.

Now that the three warfleets had shown off completely different but equally effective combat capabilities, all of those doubts melted away.

There were many more warfleets that possessed their own traits that had yet to showcase their strengths in combat, but it was not strictly necessary for them to show off their capabilities on an individual basis.

Most people were willing to believe that these other fleets performed at least just as well as the three that had debuted in full view of the public.

This caused many people to raise their evaluations of the Cybernetic Empire and treat it as a more serious threat, rival or potential ally.

The Cybers had shown that their bites were just as strong as their barks!

They no longer appeared presumptuous whenever they threw their weight around.

The confidence of having much superior tech in reserve and many more military assets that had yet to commit themselves in battle granted their negotiators a lot of bargaining power.

All negotiations between the Cybernetic Empire and other human powers started to tilt in the former's favor.

It couldn't be helped. Everyone wanted a piece of that sweet CE tech. Multiple states also urgently requested military reinforcements. Their core territories were on the verge of collapse and the existing defenders had increasingly run out of mechs, warships or supplies to hold the line.

What made these negotiations all the more frustrating for the different states and organizations was that the Cybernetic Empire was not in a hurry to take action.

The Polymath ignored all of the appeals to her conscience and morality. She maintained her silence while restraining her negotiators from offering her empire's services for free.

It appeared that the Cybernetic Empress had inherited the time-tested mecher tradition of never engaging in a transaction at a loss.

Many parties grew upset at the heavy demands imposed by the Cybers, but what could they do? They were literally in a crisis and urgently needed help.

The good news was that the Red Split enabled the Red Two to free up a lot of combat assets.

Perhaps the mechers and the fleeters still felt sour at the defiance of the Terrans and the Rubarthans, but that did not change the reality that the Red Two no longer had to spread out their forces far and wide anymore.

The warfleets and smaller detachments of the RA and the RF that had previously contributed to the defense of the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact decisively

retreated from the places where they were not welcome anymore and retrenched themselves in the Red Ocean Union.

The loose colonial alliance suddenly gained a lot more cohesion as the mechers and the fleeters suddenly became a lot more attentive to the demands of the states that had been struggling to hold the line.

The reinforcements to the first-rate, second-rate and even third-rate states significantly stalled the advance of the native aliens that had been assigned to this front.

What was even more significant was the transfer of multiple god pilots and dreadnoughts.

These top-level combat assets suddenly became a lot more prevalent than before now that they no longer needed to burden themselves with covering the lengthy Terran and Rubarthan fronts.

The improving conditions at the Red Ocean Union even granted them enough breathing room to retreat from the front in order to obtain much-needed upgrades, assist in secret ground-breaking experiments or even engage in clandestine operations that more often than not took place deep behind enemy lines.

"Heh. Unlucky bastard." Ves smirked when he heard the latest news from Davute.

The Colonial Federation of Davute had suffered enormous damage during the Red Tide Offensive so far. The native aliens continually battered the capital star system to the point where half of it already turned into ruin.

During the most desperate moments of the ongoing struggle for the Davute System, Saint General Ark Larkinson abruptly proposed that if he took over the Larkinson Clan, he would apply for it to join the Cybernetic Empire.

Such a campaign promise had massive implications, especially when made by a prominent figure such as Ark.

It was already bad enough that he lost the election.

What was worse was that the Red Two had finally ceased their neglect of the Krakatoa Middle Zone and began to offer real military aid to its states.

The Colonial Federation of Davute was finally able to catch its breath.

Together with the increased presence of god pilots and dreadnoughts of the nearby border regions, Davute had become very much aware that they owed the Red Two a lot.

This was despite the fact that the RA and RF's prior neglect of the Krakatoa Middle Zone put them in trouble in the first place.

Whatever the Davutans and their government might think, the reality was that they had become a lot more dependent on the protection of the Red Two.

The mechers and the fleeters had also begun to govern the Red Ocean Union more actively. No longer would the states in this part of the dwarf galaxy be able to do whatever they wanted with relatively little attention from above.

The mechers and the fleeters could not afford to lose control over the territory and more importantly the resources of these states. That was why the Red Two did not hesitate to transfer more troops and offer more technological aid to the various states, especially those who survived the brunt of the invasion but managed to stay aloft.

Davute just so happened to rank high in priority by the Red Association for its steadfast resistance and other qualities.

With Davute and the RA cozying up to each other, the status of a military commander who openly proposed to defect to the Cybernetic Empire therefore became a lot more awkward.

While Davute would never seek to spoil any relationship with the Cybernetic Empire, it was impossible for its government and major players to do anything that would make the mechers upset.

That was why Ark's political position had become untenable within the Davutan society.

"He's become a pariah, though he has not completely fallen out of favor." Gavin Neumann reported to Ves. "It is undeniable that Ark has made massive contributions to the war effort. He is one of the reasons why the Davute System still remains in human hands. That means a lot to the Davutans, so he is still able to maintain his position without suffering official sanction. However, as long as the mechers begin to increase their influence in the state, voices that are openly in favor of siding with the Cybernetic Empire will continue to become more marginalized."

"So what does that mean for the clan?"

"The impact to our clan is not too great, but the story may be different for the Davute Branch. For a long time, its influence was growing in Davute. There was even talk of granting it control over multiple territories that have been razed by the native aliens. Those ideas are not mentioned anymore. Ark and his Warborn have fought hard and made many sacrifices to defend the capital and the heart of the Davutan state, yet all they get in return is a pat on the back and the normal rewards that conform to the letter of their contracts. Ark has lost any hope of squeezing the Larkinson Clan into the same level of status as the pioneers who founded Davute. He could have taken over as the president of the state in the best case scenario."

That would have been a massive political achievement. Even if Davute was a mere second-rate state, this success in the political arena still meant a lot to a clan that previously had no significant territory to count upon in its short and mostly nomadic existence.

By essentially taking over the Colonial Federation of Davute, Ark would have completed the first steps to turning the Larkinson Clan into a territorial power, one that was not necessarily bound to a single second-rate state.

It was very much possible for the Larkinson Clan to repeat the same plan in a small first-rate state!

If he became the patriarch of the Larkinson Clan, he would have been able to gain control over the Premier Fleet, which was already powerful despite still needing to build up its numbers.

Instead of letting the Premier Fleet roam around wherever it was needed, Ark would have leveraged its strength to offer protection to first-rate states in exchange for territorial concessions.

If this happened, then the Larkinson Clan would definitely be able to gain a permanent foothold in the Upper Zones as well!

Alas, Ark's plan went bust at the first step as he failed to become the patriarch.

Other changes such as the realignment of major powers undermined his plan even further.

Ves was not sad to see Ark's political ambitions getting ruined. His ideas about owning territory may have just become a lot more viable now that the Cybernetic Empire had arrived to strengthen red humanity, but he still disagreed with the principle of the matter.

"So the Red Ocean Union is becoming a lot stronger due to the Red Two's retrenchment." Ves thoughtfully said. "How are the Terrans and the Rubarthans doing?"

"Well, the native aliens have not made any major shifts to their current strategy, but there are signs that they may be looking to increase their focus on the Rubarthan Pact. If the native aliens want to weaken our race the most, then hitting the Rubarthan when they are down is the best choice. The Rubarthan Pact is currently being threatened by the voribugs. If the native aliens push harder, they can more easily collapse the defenses of vulnerable Rubarthan star systems and raid everything of value before the voribugs come and ruin the rest."

"What about the Terran Alliance?"

"There is a chance that the Red Cabal may decide to attack the Terrans instead." Gavin noted. "This is based on the assumption that the Terran Alliance is only protected by a single god pilot. If the Red Cabal chooses to dispatch many ancient phase whales to this front, they can quickly invade the Upper Zones and ruin many strategic colonies, thereby inflicting a major blow onto Terran R&D as well as industry."

Ves frowned. "The Cybernetic Empire won't let this happen, though. With their Translocation Gate, they can easily transmit several dozen warfleets across the entire Terran frontline. Even if they are no match against the power of a genuine ancient phase lord, they can still delay the alien advance and buy time to deploy more powerful and effective deterrents against these powerful alien leaders. Perhaps... the Polymath will even agree to dispatch the Dominion of Man."

The mention of the living dreadnought evoked mixed feelings from Ves.

He was the reason why the former CFA and RF dreadnought underwent a profound transformation and eventually became alive.

Ves had risked his own life and fought against one of the most powerful lightning tribulations that could descend upon the Red Ocean.

He even provoked a powerful extra-galactic God King for his troubles!

All of this effort and sacrifice had given him a strong sense of ownership towards the Dominion of Man.

To see this godship fall into the hands of the Polymath who thoroughly treated the living vessel like her own crown jewel was maddening to say the least!

Ves feared that if he ever came into contact with the Dominion of Man again, his heart might break when the living ship and her crew had forgotten all about his contributions.

After all, it had been over half a century since his involvement with the dreadnought.

In the half century that passed since then, the Polymath had plenty of time to endear herself to the Dominion of Man!

There was no way she would miss this opportunity to convert the dreadnought into her possession!

Chapter 7047: Departure Arrangements

Although Ves felt upset each time he thought about how much the Dominion of Man grew within the sphere of influence of the Polymath, there was nothing he could do about this travesty.

After all, if the Red Fleet did not dare to insist on the return of the Dominion of Man, how could Ves do any better?

The Polymath was not stupid enough to give away such a grand prize!

Ves turned his thoughts away from the Dominion of Man for this reason. Nothing productive could come from continuing to obsess over the state of the living dreadnought.

He instead focused on the affairs that he would definitely be able to affect, such as his ongoing mech design projects or his negotiations with different parties.

Perhaps spurred on by the amazing technology displayed by the Cybernetic Empire, the Red Association acted quite quickly on his attempts to cash his two remaining 'minor' favors.

Jovy transited to the Tortuous Scream so that he could discuss this matter with Ves in person.

"They agreed?"

"They did. Both Star Designers have agreed to meet with you and Gloriana separately." Jovy said with a smile. "The Resonance Smith has agreed to look into the problem related to trying to combine superdimensional matter with archetech and provide guidance to your wife. I have the impression that he is not particularly enthused with this request of yours, but that he is willing to free up an hour in his schedule to address this problem."

Ves did not hide his delight. "That is great! An hour should be more than enough time for a Star Designer to come up with a quick fix and a framework for a more elaborate solution. I don't dare to ask anything more than that, though extras are always welcome. What about my second request?"

"The Web Mistress has responded more eagerly to your request." Jovy revealed. "Her Excellency is willing to clear up 2 whole hours of her schedule, which is a great privilege to an associate and a Senior Mech Designer such as yourself. Do not underestimate the value of this favor. Many Seniors who have received this much guidance from a Star Designer have a higher probability to become highly successful Master Mech Designers."

"Good." Ves grinned. "I was afraid that either of the Star Designers would look down on my requests or become so busy that they couldn't spare any time to meet with us. Do you have the details on when and where we can meet?"

"I do. First, the Star Designers prefer to meet with the two of you in person. Remote consultations are inappropriate and an insult to their status. You are not immobile or trapped in a single location. Since you can move to them, then you should make the effort to do so. The good news is that both of them happen to be located at the Yernstall Central Star Node for the coming weeks. They are there because they are needed to handle the fallout of all of the recent events."

"How long will they stay in Yernstall?"

"I cannot say, Ves. I advise you and your immediate family to move to the Bluejay Fleet and set off to Yernstall as soon as possible. If the two Star Designers have completed their obligations, they will not wait for you to arrive. They are needed in many other locations."

That was understandable. Ves knew that he had to stop dragging his feet. He had been wavering in his decision to separate from the Premier Fleet that he had spent a significant amount of time and effort in raising.

It was nice to have a powerful first-class force at his command. Yet the Premier Fleet ultimately served the Larkinson Clan except for Ves in person.

As Ves continued to climb his way up in society, there were times when the Larkinson Clan shackled him and prevented him from pursuing promising opportunities.

Now that he had stepped down from his high position, he became a lot more free than before.

He just needed to take this important step in order to turn this separation into reality.

"I will talk with my wife and the Saint Commander about our departure." Ves affirmed. "I already thought about traveling to the Rubarthan Pact. It is not a big deal for us to go on a small detour. Yernstall also has a lot of stuff that I need to purchase now that I am separating from the Premier Branch."

"Good. For the best results, I advise you to leave no later than 3 days from now on. Make sure you have said your goodbyes and made the appropriate arrangements on how you can continue to do your work for the Larkinson Clan even as you are far away from the rest of your clansmen." Jovy advised.

That was indeed a big issue.

When Ves did what he said and approached this contentious topic with Casella and Gloriana, both of them frowned.

"The Design Department is the heart of our clan. I do not agree with your proposal to let you take all of the mech designers away with you." The Saint Commander stated the obvious. "It would be best if we can keep our best mech designers and the people responsible for designing both our mass produced models and our high-ranking mechs close at hand. It is also necessary for them to regularly remain in close proximity to the mech pilots they serve. If they start separating from us, they are more likely to grow out of touch."

Gloriana frowned. "I cannot lead the Design Department from a distance. I can certainly try, but I do not think the results will be good. I cannot in good conscience insist on maintaining my post as its director when I am physically removed from my subordinates."

"You can opt to stay with us." Casella offered an alternative. "You do not have to accompany your husband as he gallivates around the new frontier with his Bluejay Fleet."

"Unacceptable. I will not let Ves go away without supervision. Besides, he still needs to raise our children with me. Our work is important, but our family is important as well."

That left Casella in a difficult position.

The matriarch needed to respect the wishes of the founder of the clan as well as the woman who was chiefly responsible for designing all of the high-ranking mechs, which also happened to include her own Minerva Mark II!

Yet she also had to think about the interests of the clan. It truly was a bad idea to let the Design Department follow Ves around while he remained separated from the rest of the clan.

As the former patriarch of the Larkinson Clan, Ves understood that his decision to depart had put his successor in an uncomfortable dilemma.

Seeing that she was genuinely unable to figure out a satisfactory resolution, he decided to give her a bit of assistance.

"We can have the Design Department follow my wife and I on a temporary basis." He proposed. "While they settle in the design labs of the Tarrasque, I will spend my MTA merits for the Red Association to open up a portion of its advanced library and to offer tutoring on different high technologies that are normally inaccessible to regular mech designers. That way, they can treat this as a learning excursion and enrich their knowledge. They will return to the Premier Fleet or another branch of our clan with a much better foundation than before."

That sounded a lot more palatable to Casella. She looked thoughtful as she weighed the pros and cons.

"I can agree to this arrangement so long as the Design Department does not remain separated from the main branches of our clan for too long." The new matriarch eventually said. "It would be best if you return to us after you are done. Will you return?"

Ves shrugged. "I am not too certain. There is a lot of stuff that I want to do, and the Red Ocean is still a big place. However, I am very interested in participating in a deep strike expedition. Now that the Cybernetic Empire has successfully developed the Translocation Gate and used it to deploy three separate warfleets, I think the Deep Strike Plan can finally commence despite all of the upheaval."

The Saint Commander nodded. "I have been considering this matter as well. For now, the Cybernetic Empire has not made any announcements in relation to the Deep Strike Plan. It has also avoided any mention of letting third parties make use of its highly coveted Translocation Gate. We also need to take the time to prepare for a deep strike into the hinterland of alien space. We need to target the right region that holds great strategic value, but is not well protected to the point our fleet will become demolished if we dare to venture far away from any form of friendly support."

The amount of concerns related to a possible deep strike expedition was immense. The Larkinsons could not afford to go through the Translocation Gate and arrive thousands of light-years away without collecting at least basic data on the local territories and their holders.

Going in blind was a good way to bump into the wrong opponents that could make the Larkinsons bleed if ill-prepared!

The only person present who was not that eager to embark on a deep strike expedition was Gloriana, but she knew that it was useless to protest.

Her husband was a junkie for adventure and novelty while the Saint Commander was an ace pilot who needed to challenge herself in order to prove herself worthy to become a god pilot.

When these two highly influential Larkinsons both set their minds on a course of action, they were virtually unstoppable!

In any case, now that Ves proposed a more palatable solution, the three Larkinsons quickly agreed on how to deal with the temporary separation.

"By the way, the clansmen that we sent off to EdNet training are due to return soon." Casella mentioned. "The mech designers such as Juliet Stameris and Sara Voiken will likely be sent to you, while the remainder such as Quinlist Verle and Calabast Arnlend should arrive at the Premier Fleet."

Ves smiled. "Those are names that I haven't heard in a while. Those fellows have practically missed half a lifetime's worth of events while they were peacefully stuffing their heads with knowledge over a span of 20 subjective years."

"That means that they will come out of their EdNet training as changed individuals." Gloriana warned him in order to temper his expectations. "I have read articles about the profound changes that people go through after undergoing accelerated learning. Just as the Cybers have come out completely differently after spending 53 years in isolation from the rest of the galaxy, you should expect our friends and comrades to undergo major shifts as well. Much of that is for the better as they are undoubtedly much more effective at their vocations than before. However, there will always be a sense of separation. It is almost impossible to heal this divide. This is why Ketis would not dream of going through this herself."

Ves sighed. "I am not ignorant of the negative consequences of this, but it is ultimately worth it for all of those old buddies of ours. The sacrifices they have made has ensured their continued relevance for our clan in the difficult times to come. I cannot wait for our clan and I to make use of their services."

The return of numerous loyal Larkinsons who all became qualified first-class mech designers happened at the right time.

As soon as they came back and settled in, Ves intended to embark on the design of numerous first-class multipurpose mechs for the Larkinson Clan.

It would be much faster and more convenient for him if he was able to work on these projects alongside other Larkinson mech designers who knew what they were doing!

Chapter 7048: CE Tech Choices

Ves and many Larkinsons became busy after deciding to take the Design Department away with him on his journey to Yernstall and beyond.

A lot of mech designers were completely caught off-guard by the announcement. Not all of them were comfortable with this move. They had spent a lot of effort settling into the Premier Fleet, but now they and any families that they might have needed to transfer to the Bluejay Fleet and settle anew.

It was only after Ves announced the benefits he was willing to offer he managed to placate most of the mech designers. Being able to gain access to exclusive tech and learn how to incorporate them into their own work was a valuable benefit.

As much as the Larkinson Clan tried to provide its mech designers with the best learning resources, there was only so much publicly available libraries could offer them. Only by accessing a more elaborate repository of knowledge would the

Larkinson mech designers be able to enrich their capabilities and distinguish their design philosophies further.

Visiting Yernstall also gave them an opportunity to go shopping at one of the most developed star systems in human-occupied space.

While Bridgehead One recently overtook it by an enormous margin, it was still a nice place to acquire high-tech goodies and luxury products that were difficult to acquire elsewhere.

Of course, not everyone would transfer to the Bluejay Fleet to work under Ves and Gloriana.

There were enough assistant mech designers who rejected the offer to go on a long field trip and decided to stay with the Premier Fleet for whatever reason. Ves actually approved of their decision as they would be able to keep at least a part of the Design Department connected to the users of its products.

This decision would inevitably split the Design Department and create greater security and coordination issues, but Ves did not consider that to be a big deal.

It helped that it was not his turn to solve this problem. He pushed this headache onto Casella and Gloriana.

That said, Ves could not escape every responsibility.

"Since you are already making your way over there, please meet with Isobel Kotin and take her away when you arrive at the central star node." Casella requested to Ves. "My fellow ace pilot has been undergoing augmented body reconstruction and rehabilitation procedures at one of the advanced medical facilities at Yernstall. From what I have heard, the Transhumanist Faction are impressed by how quickly Isobel has been able to maintain her motivation to regain her strength and learn how to control her new body and all of its enhanced features. She actually resembles a high-ranking Cyber more than normal people at this point."

That was indeed a weird coincidence. They always had the option of attempting to restore her original body, but both Isobel and the Larkinsons wanted her to become stronger and better able to defend herself against hazards in the future.

Ves nodded. "I can do that, Casella. It is indeed impressive how quickly she is able to bounce back after burning her entire body in a misguided attempt to force her breakthrough attempt. She will have to wait a lot longer for her to receive her new ace mech, though. After my wife and I have completed the Riot Mark III, we will devote much of our time on both the Promethea Mark II Project and the Lionheart Mark II Project. If we don't have time to work on both, we will prioritize the former, but do not expect any quick results."

Casella did not look surprised. "Take your time. I trust you on matters such as this. All of your mechs and especially high-ranking mechs have always been works of art. As long as you can guarantee that the quality of the new Promethea Mark II is no less than the other high-ranking mechs, then I do not object to delays. Just keep the timetable reasonable for Isobel's sake more than anything. Ace pilots who have gone through trauma like hers have an urgent need to prove themselves."

"I know. Despite working on two ace mech design projects at the same time, my wife and I don't expect to be delayed too much. The mech designers that we are leaving behind will make use of the productive capabilities of the smart AI cores in our stead. After Gloriana has received the guidance she needs from the Resonance Smith, I expect her to become a lot more fired up than usual, which should help her complete her work faster."

"I trust you to do what is good for Isobel and our clan." The Saint Commander said before changing the topic. "I know you are interested in conducting a rather extensive technology exchange with the Cybernetic Empire. What sort of technologies are you interested in exchanging? What do you think is best for our clan?"

Ves took the time to sort out his thoughts on this matter.

"We need to master a weapon system that is fairly accessible but can be trusted to remain effective when employed against the native aliens. This is our highest priority. If we can only obtain one type of CE tech, then this must be at the top of our list. The biggest decision we need to make is whether to invest in energy or kinetic weapons."

"Do you have a preference?"

"Not really." Ves shook his head. "Arguments could be made for either. Irradiator laser beam technology is not particularly efficient and will expend most of our bargaining

power, but we can potentially combine it with luminar crystal technology and produce additional effects as a result."

"And what if we want to go physical instead?"

"Well, it depends on what kind of payment plan you can stomach. I think the Cybernetic Empire will soon start to sell manufactured Dynapulse Disruptor Missiles on a large scale in the near future. We can make sure to order a generous batch of them so long as our clan is willing to reimburse the phasewater used in making the transphasic warheads. However, so long as we do not master the manufacturing method, we will continue to remain dependent on this external supply."

The ace commander crossed her arms and frowned. "That sounds like a recipe for disaster. If anything happens that causes our relationship with the Cybers to collapse, then we will cut ourselves off from a supply of Dynapulses. Is there any way we can obtain the production method of these missiles?"

Ves snorted. "Not a chance. The Cybers can milk us all by constantly selling us manufactured goods. They would have to be stupid to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs, but they are too smart for that. If we are able to obtain the production method sooner or later, then the rest of red humanity will find a way to get it as well. The Cybernetic Empire will seek to prevent this from happening, and the best way is to not give us anything other than missiles produced in their own munition factories."

"Are you not able to reverse engineer this tech and develop your own version?"

"No. Don't even think about it. Advanced products such as the Dynapulses are designed with specific factory conditions and production tech in mind. They are also so highly optimized that third parties will always suffer a loss when attempting to produce imitation products."

In other words, it was simply not feasible to circumvent the many protections that the Polymath herself may have had a hand in programming!

"So what is your recommendation? Do you think we should stick to ordering Dynapulses or invest in the tech that makes Irradiator laser weapons work?"

"There should be more choices available than this." Ves said. "However, if we truly have to make a choice between the two, then I think that investing in the Irradiators is a good choice. I do not like for us to become dependent on the CE to supply us with weapons that can help us defeat the native aliens more effectively. The Cybers can abuse this dependency by compelling us to perform actions that go against our mission. It is better to make a heavy concession at the start in order to obtain the secrets to enhanced energy beam weapon technology."

This was a rather difficult choice to make as they were operating on incomplete information. The Cybernetic Empire wanted to leave its future customers in the dark about what was truly taking place.

"If you think that these special energy weapons are truly worth bargaining for, then I shall make an attempt." The Saint Commander promised. "It may take additional incentives to persuade the Cybers into giving away a core piece of technological equipment."

"We control the entrance to the Blue Dimension. We are the CE's best hope of obtaining more superdimensional matter. So long as you are willing to trade a bit of high-grade superdimensional matter, I am sure the Cybers will sing a different tune."

The supply of high-grade superdimensional matter was too limited for the time being.

That might change once Gloriana and Ketis upgraded the Dimension Observatory in the near future, but for the time being the Larkinson Clan should be able to gain a lot of concessions by trading precious armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimensional matter in this early stage.

Ves and Casella talked a bit more about further possible technological exchanges.

"One of the CE techs that I must get my hands upon is their smart metal." He said. "My standards are not too high. I am already satisfied if I can get access to their three basic smart metal models. The NanoGatherers will enable me to salvage materials from the environment or the debris of broken machines. The NanoSmiths will help me build stuff. The NanoWarriors can help with defending them all at both the micro and macro level. If necessary, I can drop my demand for the latter, but that is all I can accept."

The Saint Commander looked closely at Ves. "Is this a personal interest or will it serve the clan as well?"

"It can be both, but I won't lie to you. I am only really invested in using it myself." Ves honestly admitted. "My Polymetal mech design project has not yet started because I judged the tech was not there yet. Now that Bridgehead One came back, I finally see good enough tech. With the help of the Polymath's work, I can design a smart metal mech that serves as a source of production as well as plain old destruction. It isn't everything that I want in a mech, but I will have to rely on it to defend myself against most threats."

Ves painted a rather fantastical vision for his Polymetal mech. The central premise of this machine was to give Ves the tools to excel as a mech pilot and mech designer at the same time!

"Polymetal mechs may be the best way to convert mech designers from rearline into frontline units." He claimed. "I will not be the only one to enjoy this new product of mine. I do not object to making it available to the rest of the Larkinson Clan and possibly the mass market. Most mech pilots will never be able to exploit the full potential of Polymetal mechs, but mech designers still have a chance."

Casella struggled to imagine an instance where mech designers on the battlefield knew how to behave.

"You expect too much from your fellow mech designers. Few have undergone more than basic training, but even if we ignore this factor, they are not true life-and-death soldiers."

"I am not too certain about the utility of this smart metal Carmine mech of yours, Ves. There are many alternatives available where these workers can make themselves useful aside from scrapping and recycling broken machines."

"They can do their work even faster if they all pilot machines with the new nanomachines. They can land on untouched lands and erect a small colony base before the first day has ended."

Chapter 7049: Doing It Right

The time had come for the Bluejay Fleet to separate from the Premier Fleet.

The two fleets had only fought alongside each other for a relatively short amount of time, but it had been a fruitful period.

The Battle of Screed Tanner VI-F enabled the guard forces assigned to escort a VIP to confront a powerful native alien force in battle and earn a decisive victory.

The mechers, fleters and collies all gained opportunities to test their skills and any new methods that they might have in a realistic environment. They were all grateful to the Larkinsons for giving them the opportunity to do so under the protection and support of two powerful ace pilots.

Fighting under the command of Saint Commander Casella Ingvar was an unforgettable experience to the mech pilots and other personnel. They might not be able to enjoy this luxury in the future, so not everyone was eager to depart from the Premier Fleet.

However, Ves needed to pursue his own goals. He needed to travel to Yernstall and subsequently to the Rubarthan Pact no matter what. If the Bluejay Fleet refused to accompany him, then he would set off by himself and a smaller escort force split away from the Premier Fleet.

That was unacceptable for a mech designer whose status exceeded that of a typical tier 3 galactic citizen.

His departure evoked a lot of mixed reactions from the clansmen. The members of the Premier Fleet were sorry to see him go. While the Saint Commander was one of the greatest contributors of their most recent victory, Ves had long earned a reputation for being able to sniff out lucrative opportunities and deliver miracles on the battlefield.

He had become a totemic existence as far as the Larkinsons were concerned.

It was not as if his absence suddenly caused the Larkinsons to lose everything that made them strong and capable. They just lacked a central figure whose extreme decisions subjected them to a lot of good luck as well as bad luck.

The expeditionary fleet for example had become a lot more stable after Ves departed from it. Ketis may have chosen to stay behind, but her leadership was nowhere near as

extreme as that of her former teacher. The Larkinsons under her supervision therefore did not stumble into particularly extreme circumstances for this reason.

That was both good and bad. Abnormal scenarios usually tested mech pilots more than most. These were the kind of situations that were most conducive to breakthroughs.

However, too much excitement was not necessarily good. The Larkinsons needed time to adapt to new mechs, develop better tactics and train their fundamental skills.

The steady defensive battles that the expeditionary fought at Davute and other locations enabled the Larkinsons to polish their combat acumen and gain a lot of experience.

War was the ultimate crucible. Any flaws or mistakes could easily lead to death and significant material losses. Many forces that thought themselves ready had already turned into history, yet other forces such as the expeditionary fleet of the Golden Skull Alliance continued to persevere.

In any case, once Ves left the Premier Fleet, the Saint Commander would be able to cement her leadership over the first-class Larkinsons without any concerns about split authority.

This would do her a lot of good, both as the commander of the Premier Fleet as well as the matriarch of the Larkinson Clan.

On the day of departure, most of the mech designers of the Design Department had already transferred to the Tarrasque.

The RA heavy cruiser quickly managed to charm the guests with her advanced technologies and facilities.

From ultra-modern design suites to state-of-the-art laboratory instruments, the vessel offered much more substantial amenities to mech designers.

While the Tarrasque lacked the RF-developed smart AIs and powerful processor clusters, her processor banks were still fairly powerful enough to reluctantly meet their needs.

It would be nice to get an upgrade, though.

"The Red Association is developing its own version of smart AIs, but we are admittedly behind on this front." Jovy mentioned to Ves shortly after the Larkinsons settled in the flagship of the Bluejay Fleet. "You have to understand that we are not looking to compete with the Red Fleet in this area. Our investment in the field of artificial intelligence is only a fraction compared to what the fleeters have spent in funding, resources and manpower. Rather than try to match this extravagance, we are more than happy to let the fleeters be the first-movers. Anything they develop, our own R&D personnel would be happy to reverse engineer and imitate for just a fraction of the cost."

That sounded like a sensible approach. The mechers made the most rational decision by leaving AI development to the group that most relied upon this field to run all of its warships.

However, this decision also meant that the mechers would always be late to adopt the latest innovations.

Compared to the modern processor clusters with embedded smart AIs that practically turned into the second brain of the Tortuous Scream, the processor banks of the Tarrasque felt much more primitive in comparison.

Oh well. Ves would manage.

"I think the Cybernetic Empire may have overtaken the RF on this front." Ves threw out a guess. "The Living Machine Tower had over 50 years to figure out how to turn processors alive and make sure newborn smart AIs can continually get better at their jobs. When it comes down to it, creating smart AIs shouldn't be too difficult to anyone who is capable of designing a living mech. The bigger challenge is to restrain the behavior of the smart AIs and make sure they do not go rogue."

Joshua sighed. No mecher liked it when they got reminded that they were no longer the most technologically advanced organization in the Red Ocean anymore.

The Mech Trade Association had not only managed to retain its technological dominance during the Age of Mechs, but also managed to increase it with every passing year.

Controlling vast parts of human space in the Milky Way along with welcoming an increasing number of Star Designers had caused the MTA to produce more results when pushing the forefront of science.

Promising new fields of science emerged with every new mech generation while armies of clever mech designers found new ways to exploit the possibilities of existing tech.

"The Cybernetic Empire has definitely made a great contribution to red humanity by developing so many new technologies during its Time of Isolation." Jovy diplomatically said. "However, the Polymath is just one Star Designer, and she has never been able to do much with hyper technology and E-technology aside from conducting thought experiments. In my humble opinion, the CE's head start is only temporary. The more time passes by, the more the others will catch up, either because they have exchanged or stolen CE tech, or because they have worked hard to innovate in other fields."

He was right, but only if the Red Association stayed cohesive enough.

If it broke apart, then many of the Star Designers would probably be reduced to working alone or in small groups.

That was bound to affect their productivity and their ability to develop complex multi-disciplinary innovations.

The pair of mech designers speculated a bit more about how long it would take for the Red Association to regain its technological lead.

They also discussed a few other matters such as the usage rights of the Tarrasque's workshops and their itinerary once they arrived at Yernstall.

Once Jovy left in order to take care of other matters, Ves sought out Venerable Rosa Orfan in order to make sure she settled in nicely.

She looked rather forlorn when he visited her new guest stateroom.

"How are you doing, Rosa?"

"I am alright." She said, though she clearly did not look okay. "I am just being impatient. Every day that passes by without entering the cockpit of my Riot feels like a waste. I am not able to do my daily training or challenge myself in battle. Others such as Tusa, Stark and Dise are improving by leaps and bounds with their flashy ace mechs, yet my machine is still in junk condition. I feel I am being left behind by everyone."

High-ranking mech pilots were known to be unflappable. Their extraordinary willpower enabled them to withstand extreme hardships and help them do the impossible.

Expert pilots, ace pilots and god pilots had a reputation of never giving up and never compromising on anything.

However, Ves had spent enough time among them to know better. These human champions indeed deserved their reputations for the most part, but they were still human in many ways.

That meant that they could still experience fear, doubt, hesitation and other negative moods.

This was not a weakness per se. Ves merely considered these low points to be an indispensable part of an expert pilot or ace pilot's growth journey.

"The Riot Mark III Project may be delayed by another month depending on how much work Gloriana needs to undertake in order to merge superdimensional technology with archetech." Ves admitted to the frustrated expert pilot. "Such things take time. More extensive changes will force us to redesign large parts of the mech frame in order to account for the new properties and variables. There is no other choice. We can either do this properly or do a rush job, but my wife will never tolerate the latter."

Venerable Orfan grimaced further when she heard that it may take two months for her to be able to pilot her new machine.

Ves last told her that it would take less than a month. Such a massive change to the timeline made her grow angry.

It took all of her willpower to bottle up her mounting frustration and stop herself from making a scene.

She knew quite well that having a temper tantrum would change nothing.

"Look on the bright side, Rosa. The Dark Zephyr Mark III, the Amaranto Mark III and the Minerva Mark III are all good in their own ways, but they are already outdated by our current standards. Your Riot Mark III will not suffer from this problem. So long as everything goes right, your new machine will be a genuine full superdimensional archemch. Not only that, he will also gain other powerful advantages, though it will be a little difficult to predict the final outcome. Another way to look at it is to consider the previous mechs as prototypes that lead up to your Riot Mark III. It is only with this machine that my wife and I will be able to combine the stuff that we have been working on in a single mech frame."

As long as they managed to pull off their plans, the Riot Mark III may very well be the first high-ranking mech that could start a new generation of expert mechs and ace mechs of the Larkinson Clan.

Rosa reluctantly nodded. "I know that I have a lot to look forward to, but there comes a point where I would rather settle for less than accept another delay. The Red War is still taking place and the voribugs need to be taught a lesson as well. I am not doing anything useful before I get my mech back."

"If you are getting bored, then try to improve yourself in other ways." Ves suggested. "There are many mecher soldiers aboard this ship and the other ships of the Bluejay Fleet. You can spar with them or learn from them. You can access any library and read a few books on tactics or weapon handling. You can even contact the Terrans and ask for guidance on how to wield a Destroyer weapon. The more you prepare, the better the results once you have finally delivered your new and improved Riot."

The expert pilot nodded. "I suppose I cannot wallow in my misery. I will try and do that, Ves. These mechers have already invited me to take part in their non-mech training sessions."

Chapter 7050: Terrans Under Pressure

The Bluejay Fleet went underway. It departed from the Terran Alliance and entered the Red Ocean Union.

Although the fleet did not bother to stop by any planets along the way, Ves and the others could still gain an impression of the mood among the people who lived in these star systems.

The Terrans and their many dependents had come under a lot more uncertainty as of late.

Their leaders had taken a bold step by declaring independence, but the consequence of doing so was that the Red Association and the Red Fleet no longer provided any substantial aid, military or otherwise.

The Terrans had made a number of preparations to make up for this shortcoming. They mainly banked on adopting superior high technology that previously remained exclusive to the mechers and the fleters.

They also chose to violate numerous taboos that mainly existed to muzzle the firepower of every human state.

It only took more than a week for the Terrans to roll out their first upgraded fleets.

Although the Terrans had yet to build warships on a large enough scale to deploy them in battle, their carrier vessels had become much deadlier than before.

Simply linking their mechs to the power supply of the large vessel did wonders to their damage output.

Even if these carriers were unable to match the insane damage output of the Torturous Scream when all of her bunker mechs received the Minerva Mark II's Enfeoffment, the improvements made by the Terrans was still a game changer.

The abundant supply of energy combined with superior heat management solutions enabled the Terran machines to fire their energy weapons with much fewer constraints than before!

The Terrans had also continued to expand on their use of support link technology.

Just as everyone expected, they had long understood the secrets of shield link technology and energy link technology. It was remarkable how quickly the Terrans as well as the Rubarthans began to proliferate the tech now that they no longer had to restrain themselves anymore.

The Terrans were able to hold the line a bit easier as proper use of shield link technology massively reduced their attrition rates.

Many of their mechs returned from the battlefield without incurring any significant damage.

Only the machines that had become entirely overwhelmed got eliminated, but it took so much more effort for the native aliens to make this happen that the remaining machines had plenty of opportunities to avenge their fallen!

Perhaps the only downside to relying so heavily on shield link technology was that it put so much strain on the power management system and shield link arrays that they often required a round of maintenance in order to restore their reliability.

If the mechs fought too many battles while relying heavily on shield links to keep themselves alive and active, then the parts responsible for collectivizing their defenses might reach their limits and malfunction at a critical time.

Such incidents had already happened a few times. These failures taught the new adopters of shield link technology that its usage was not an excuse to neglect the need to take proper defensive measures.

Fortunately, the success cases far outnumbered the failure cases. The Terrans were quite happy with the results and planned to equip every first-class multipurpose mech with the necessary hardware.

Many mech companies and mech designers had already begun the arduous work of modifying their existing mech designs to accommodate these essential features.

If that did not work, they were not afraid of going back to the drawing board and designing brand-new mechs that made use of shield link transceivers from the very start of the project.

All of this would take time and resources to make them more prevalent on the battlefield, but at least the availability of shield link technology had restored the morale of the soldiers fighting at the front.

They knew that as long as they held the line and as long as they remained alive long enough, they would definitely be able to pilot one of the newfangled machines!

Not all of the signs were positive, though. The Red Cabal definitely learned about the massive changes that took place in this corner of the Red Ocean.

Even if the ancient phase whales were still deliberating on whether they should thoroughly rethink their strategy, the Red Cabal has been urging the major alien races to shift their forces away from the Red Ocean Union and focus their attacks on the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact.

The theory was that even if the Cybernetic Empire dispatched reinforcements to its new allies, all the native aliens had to worry about was to form the correct responses to the new technologies.

The native aliens did not look forward to sending so many fleets into human-occupied space, only to get wiped out by one of several god pilots or dreadnoughts that were on patrol!

The soldiers fighting on behalf of their gods or their civilizations were not emotionless automatons. Mutiny became a very real possibility if their leaders only cared about sending cannon fodder into a front that had become a literal meat grinder.

Even if the other two fronts were not actually that easy to overcome due to the escalating reinforcements dispatched by the Cybernetic Empire, the alien invaders

only had to track the movements of the Light of Sol to prevent the worst case scenario from taking place.

As Ves sat in his design lab and spoke with Master Laila Rebecca Devos over the comm about the Arboreal Project, he thought about whether all of the recent events might necessitate rethinking the first Woodsap mech.

"We have been making excellent progress despite all of the distractions that arose after we declared our independence." Master Devos casually revealed. "It is possible that one of our Star Designers may personally assist with the development of a human body surrogate control system that is compatible with our upcoming Woodsap mechs. If this happens, we may be able to complete this project one or two months ahead of schedule at this rate."

That caused Ves to raise his eyebrows.

The intervention of a Star Designer was a big deal!

Even if the Terrans only wanted His or Her Excellency to complete work on a complex piece of tech that could help Carmine mech pilots to control their mechs as if they were moving their own bodies, this was still a massive contribution as far as everyone was concerned!

"Are you sure about that? The Arboreal Project is an entirely new beast. It is unlike any other biomech that you and I have worked on before. There is no guarantee that it will succeed and deliver on all of its promises."

Master Laila Devos briefly hesitated before she made a decision.

"We have recently evaluated the concept of living mechs and decided to increase its priority. The main reason for that is because of how serious the Cybers are towards your design philosophy. One of their Thirteen Towers is dedicated towards living machines. Even if their applications are currently limited due to familiar reasons, their potential is limitless. We do not want to be left behind, so we are trying to catch up to the Cybers in this area."

Ves did not expect this to be the reason behind the change of heart. He welcomed any development that made his living mechs more popular, but the reasoning behind this shift was not exactly ideal.

Oh well.

At least the Terrans were willing to allocate more resources and manpower to help the Arboreal Project to completion.

"Don't misunderstand me, Master." Ves said. "I am happy for the changes. I just did not expect them to happen. Can we expect to receive other forms of aid?"

"No. The truth is that there were leaders that offered to increase our budget or give us better access to exclusive resources. My peers and I have rejected their offer because it would have been excessive at that point. There are many other projects that also require greater aid."

That surprised Ves. He would have liked to become a part of this conversation, but since he was not a Terran, he did not earn a seat in this meeting.

Ves and Master Laila Devos talked a bit more about the consequences of the recent policy changes.

From what Ves could gather, the higher ups wanted to use the results of the Arboreal Project to test whether the Cybers had made a wise choice by investing so heavily into living mechs.

If the new Carmine mechs designed by the inventor of living mechs met or exceeded the expectations of the Terran leaders, then the Arboreal Project would not only be allowed to proliferate without restrictions, but also encourage the spread of other living mechs!

Whether the Terrans wanted to urge Ves to design more first-class living mechs for the Terran mech market or invite the members of the Living Machine Tower to publish their mech designs, there were multiple ways to make living mechs more ubiquitous.

The Terrans could even rely on the work of the young Terran mech designers that Ves had educated in one of his classes.

This the least reliable solution of all because these individuals were still Apprentices for the most part.

Only Alexa had gone far ahead of the rest, and that was because she had become his student!

Personally, Ves suspected that among one of the deals concluded between the Terrans and the cybers, the former might open up its mech market to the products of the latter.

This would have a profound impact on the economy of the Terran Alliance. The participation of Cybers in the mech market would definitely lead to the release of a lot of technologically superior living mechs.

The downside was that the temporary dominance of Cyber mech designers might cause the Terrans to lose too much ground.

If the Terran mech designers lost their competitiveness, then they would lose a lot of market share.

It would be a bit ridiculous for the Cybers to squeeze out the Terrans from their own turf!

Yet that was exactly what might happen if the Terrans made such a heavy concession. They needed the superior tech offered by the Cybers.

Ves grew more sympathetic towards Master Laila Rebecca Devos after understanding how much pressure she was in. This may be one of the reasons why she was eager to accelerate the Arboreal Project.

"One of the traits of the Arboreal Project that many Terrans appreciate is how it is intrinsically tied to Gaia." Master Laila Devos said. "As long as that is the case, then our Woodsap mechs will only work when it is grown and used by Terrans who have earned her recognition. We believe it is too difficult for the Cybers, Rubarthans or mechers to overcome this security measure. Even if they can develop a workaround,

the benefits are not worth the cost. We will be the only humans in this changing dwarf galaxy that make use of exclusive Woodsap mechs."

Star nations with ambition for greatness needed to distinguish themselves now more than ever.

If the appearance of the Cybernetic Empire constantly pushed them on the backfoot, then they could forget about making it big, let alone get taken seriously by other rivals. Perhaps the weakest star nations would only end up getting devoured by their larger neighbors!

"I will do everything in my power to make your Terran dream come true." Ves solemnly said. "The stuff that I have already planned for the Arboreal Project should be sufficient enough to turn it into a compelling value proposition. By the way, are we still going with the simple and complex versions of the Arboreal Project?"

Master Laila Devos nodded. "Yes for now. We still insist on developing two different models. The simple variant should be available for general users. The more advanced variant will be reserved for our elite infantry sources and so on. This may be our best chance to repel the native alien invaders without relying too heavily on the military assistance of the Cybernetic Empire."