

## The Mech 5031

### Chapter 5031 Recontextualizing Mech Models

As the expeditionary fleet approached the territories beset by alien raids, the Golden Skull Alliance started to form more plans and coordinate their actions.

It was not enough for them to defeat a bunch of mediocre raiding fleets. Their combat strength was far too great to waste on cleaning up the riff raff.

What they truly had their eyes on were the staging areas where many of the smaller alien raiding fleets resupplied and started their missions!

Destroying crucial alien infrastructure would disrupt a lot of arrangements and award a lot more MTA merits.

Not only that, but there was bound to be a lot more phasewater and other valuable resources in these places!

The opposition was significantly greater, however. The defenses of these staging heavily depended on how many raiding fleets were present in the star system.

This was why it became extremely important to track the condition and movements of the more powerful alien raiding fleets.

It would not be good if one of the more powerful fleets that had at least one formidable battleship in their lineup came back all of a sudden!

What was even worse was the possibility that warships hailing from the Red Cabal or the major alien races might drop by as well!

This was why the plan to attack an alien stage area had yet to be decided. The various alliance partners wanted to collect more intelligence and gain more assurances that they would not get ambushed by a superior alien warfleet.

While all of this took place, Ves continued to split up his time on many different priorities.

From working on previously stalled mech designs such as the Eye Project to forming the complete syllabi of his upcoming courses at the Eden University of Business & Technology, he felt happy with returning to a productive routine.

Of course, he also had to spare a bit of time each day to raise his children.

Venerable Benjamin's surprise recovery helped a lot with ensuring that Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine grew up with the correct values. He was able to cover for the times when Ves could not be present himself.

As Ves continued to accomplish a lot in the Red Ocean, Veronica also experienced busy days.

The cyborg cat not only acted as a substitute mech designer for all of Ves' ongoing mech projects, but also became exposed to an entirely different world.

Cynthia Larkinson set a lot of new plans in motion now that she regained her body and stole a portion of the authority of the Water Scroll.

Though she declined to share her full plans to her son, it was clear that she was planning to launch a massive offensive against the Abyss Empire and the Compact cultists that caused so much trouble!

Ryncol Larkinson had to fulfill his own responsibilities, so Ves did not have many chances of getting a glimpse of his highly evolved Devil Tiger.

It had grown far beyond its initial form, and his mother had induced massive changes to it that somehow bound it closer to his father!

Fortunately, Ves was able to examine it extensively enough to develop a lot of ideas on how to upgrade and enhance its performance despite all of its weirdness.

"What is mother up to?" Veronica asked Helena as the young design spirit held the cat in her arms. "She promised to tutor me on different stuff, but I hardly see her nowadays."

"That is because time is of the essence, brother. Our mother has gained a lot of power, and now is the time to strike. If we wait too long, our enemies will adapt and make it much harder for us to attain our goals. We are not just trying to defeat them. My mother is attempting to take full control over the Nyxian Gap. This is a much greater goal. Once we are able to claim complete sovereignty over this region, we can truly establish our empire in this galaxy."

Veronica's expression started to scrunch in concern. "Why do I have the feeling that I won't like what my mother has planned? I'm family, you know. Why are you still keeping me in the dark?"

Helena patronizingly patted the cyborg cat on the head. "It is true that we are trying to keep you away from our plans, but it is for your own protection. You aren't able to defend yourself against our strongest enemies. We prefer it if you stay out of the limelight. There will be many more opportunities for you to assist us after we have resolved the immediate dangers within and around the Nyxian Gap."

Ves did not like it at all. A lot of changes were already taking place in the Red Ocean. Now he discovered that his mother was not content to remain still in the Milky Way!

As events continued to unfold in both galaxies, Ves made a lot of progress in completing the Eye Project.

Despite his persistent neglect of the design project, Ves still spared a bit of thought on it from time to time.

Now that he accumulated a lot of possible ideas and design implementations, he was able to employ them in quick succession now that he focused on completing them as fast as possible!

It helped that the Eye Project was a simple mech by nature. Ves just had to design a relatively straightforward second-class marksman mech without too many bells and whistles.

There were three distinct traits that set it apart from the competition.

First, it was a living mech. Though many of his latest advancements did not apply to a mass production model, his recent advancement to Senior meant that he could still ensure that every copy of the Eye Project would start out a little stronger in this aspect!

Second, it was armed with a fairly powerful luminar crystal rifle. Ves tried his best to make it as precise and hard-hitting as possible at a fairly modest budget. He restricted it to a laser weapon in order to cut down on a lot of redundant elements.

Third, turning Vulcan into its design spirit should grant its pilot a lot of help with identifying the weak points of its targets.

Vulcan had learned a huge amount of technical knowledge. The dwarves turned out to be an especially great font for information!

While the dwarven Masters possessed a lot of high-level knowledge that Vulcan could not access for various reasons, it was already more than enough to collect a lot of general knowledge!

Vulcan's understanding of technology was more than enough to identify the best ways to damage both human and alien targets.

Ves harbored a lot of expectations for this feature. It could play an extremely useful role for any mech force.

His only concern was whether the Eye Project would still be able to find a place in a mech community that transitioned to the Age of Dawn.

Sure, all of his living mechs and design spirits were becoming stronger due to the influence of exotic radiation, but every other mech experienced similar boosts!

There were a lot of mechs on the market that were designed by people who specialized in offensive ranged weapons.

These products were becoming a lot more attractive as hard firepower became a much greater priority due to the need to punch through the defenses of large alien warships!

Ves could already foresee that the mech market was about to undergo a lot of upheaval in the next few decades.

Mech models that made sense in the Age of Mechs might not be as useful in the Age of Dawn anymore.

The increased prospect of fighting against alien forces meant that mech models that were primarily optimized to fight against other mechs would lose a lot of value!

With the introduction of Warship Tokens, the mech industry most definitely needed to put more emphasis on combating warships.

Ves also predicted that many consumers would flock increasingly more to mechs designed by various Master Mech Designers.

This was because exotic radiation amplified the performance of their works a lot more than lower ranking mech designers!

Why settle for a mech designed by a paltry Apprentice when a similar machine designed by a Master offered up to 50 percent better performance while costing the same to produce?!

Apprentices, Journeymen and Seniors urgently needed to find a way to become more useful if they wanted to keep their place in the mech market.

So many changes were taking place that Ves could no longer predict whether the Eye Project could still become a good seller.

"Well, it's not my problem." He shrugged. "That's what the Marketing Department is for. I am sure those guys will find a way to sell my latest product."

He needed to be more creative about his next batch of commercial mech designs. He also had to learn how to make good use of exotic radiation if he wanted his next products to remain competitive.

As Ves continued to think about his next projects as he was in the process of optimizing the Eye Project, he briefly paused his work when he received an important notification.

Ketis and her fellow collaborators completed the Samurai Project!

Ves paused his design session and went down to the workshop where the swordmaster stood triumphantly in front of her newly fabricated mech!

Tifi Coslone, Sara Voiken and Merrill O'Brian stood a short distance away. They had made their own contributions to the Samurai Project.

As Ves stopped next to Ketis and stared up at the impressive looking second-class swordsman mech, his gaze rested on the twin Stormblades that the mech was specifically designed to wield!

"Hello, Ves." Ketis greeted him. "What do you think about my work?"

"It is... similar, but different." Ves said after a few seconds. "It shares a lot of similarities with your previous work. However, I can see how you tried to make its identity more separate and distinct by making different design decisions and giving up control to your fellow collaborators. Has it been easy to manage all of the input from other mech designers who don't necessarily know much about swordsman mechs?"

The swordmaster looked bemused. "It's a lot harder than I thought to lead a design project of this scope. There were too many times where Tifi or Sara wanted to push through their own design solutions despite the fact that it would ruin the overall balance and fighting potential of the Samurai Project or should I say the Stormblade Samurai model. I wasted far too many hours on explaining why they have to stick to my parameters."

"That's project leadership for you. It will get easier over time."

Ketis snorted. "That is easy for you to say. Everyone acknowledges your design skills and looks up to you. You have also become a Senior, so it is natural for you to command us Journeymen."

"Hey, that was only a recent development!" Ves protested. "Anyway, I hear that you intend to produce your latest model in large batches in the near future."

"I do. I first intend to fabricate a small batch of Stormblade Samurais so that we can test their performance against alien targets in the coming engagements. If the results are as good as I expect, then I will try and convince the Swordmaidens to trade in at least a part of their Second Swords with my new Stormblade-equipped mechs."

"Do you have that much confidence in your Stormblade Samurai model? The Second Sword has always been one of your proudest works."

Ketis let out a tired breath. "That was true in the past, but it has become increasingly more outdated. I intend to do something about it by working on the Mark II model, but I need more time to figure out meaningful improvements. In the meantime, the Stormblade Samurai should be a lot more useful in our current expedition as its Stormblade technology is much more effective at draining

transphasic energy shields. Whether that remains true with all of the exotic radiation flying in the air, I don't know, but it shouldn't be a problem in the short term."

"I look forward to witnessing its performance."

Chapter 5032 Evil Humans

The Khoraln-Lizh-Gharaer hovered over a planet with her main cannons directed towards the surface.

These cannons fired at slow but momentous intervals as they propelled heavy projectiles directly towards a distant speck of color.

Each time the dense and metallic struck the surface, the mighty homeship's optical sensors detected a large explosion of dust and force!

The aged orven battleship had held back from firing her formidable arsenal in the first few hours.

This was because her firepower was no longer needed. After smashing the human defensive garrison and driving away the scattered mechs and starships that managed to flee out of range, the Khoraln-Lizh-Gharaer still needed to remain on guard in order to prevent those annoying human machines from coming back.

It was not as if those weak mechs could do anything to threaten the raiding fleet that was under her protection!

Riewna-Khalerin-Ortosu-Fugha-Celeron sneered as he sat atop his throne in the center of the command center of his homeship.

He disliked his current duty. The Khorain-Lizh-Gharaer may not have been able to incorporate all of the latest stolen human technologies introduced by the Red Cabal, but she was still a genuine battleship, if only a relatively smaller one of her kind!

However, Riewna-Khalerin-Ortosu-Fugha-Celeron understood quite well that homeships like his own had no place in this new era.

The successful implementation of the Ancient Refuge Plan had given everyone a chance to drive out the hated humans!

Each homeship must contribute, and while the Khorain-Eizh-Gharaer could have become a part of the much more impressive main forces that were responsible for fighting the strongest humans war machines, her performance simply wasn't up to standard!

Instead, the homeship's relatively high traversal speed and expendability made her a lot more suitable for babysitting the raiding forces formed by the minor races.

When Riewna received his orders, he obeyed without question.

The gods were the ultimate rulers of the Red Ocean! Those without a drop of phasewater in their veins must never defy the authority of their betters!

That said, the orvan homeship captain already hated his latest mission.

Under normal times, Riewna would spare a second glance towards the disgusting race called the Wheednar.

These eight-limbed mammalians lacked noble fur like the orvens and crawled on the floor like beastly savages.

Although the Wheednar at least had the smarts to obey the directive of the gods, they never showed as much regard towards Riewna himself despite being descended from a god of his own race!

This raid was a typical example of the lack of obedience and discipline inherent in this filthy race.

The Wheednar spent 70 percent more time on the surface than the limit imposed by Riewna.

Too many of their starfighters got shot down by mechs and defensive turrets due to their persistent habit of racing ahead of the warships that could provide life-saving support.

The ground troops deployed by the Wheednar subsequently spent way too much time trying to hunt down the fleeing and hiding the humans for sport. Instead of trying to gather all of the valuable human tech, materials and possibly godblood.

Though orvens such as Riewna hated the human Invaders like anyone else, even he could not deny the strength of human technology.

The Red Cabal had an incredibly high demand for human salvage!

Every alien homeship assigned to raid the human colonies had to fulfill a demanding quota of human salvage in order to complete the mission!

Riewna's only hope of ending his awful Wheednar babysitting tour was by turning over enough human salvage.

He could not do this effectively when these naked eight-limbed creatures kept fooling around!

"Do the Wheednar not understand that they will invite destruction if they keep squandering time!?"

"The Wheednar have never encountered humans before this mission." An orven officer supplied.

"They have heard of the might of the invaders from others, but the actual humans they fought against were far from matching the tales from the front. They have only ever fought against the peasants among the humans. Their primitive brains cannot make them understand that the weak humans they have hunted so far are the least of what we have to fear!"

Though many of his fellow orvans spoke as if cutting off the humans from their home galaxy already meant they won the war, Riewna was sober enough to understand that the humans still had plenty of ways to retaliate before they died!

"The last Wheednar shuttles and homeships are about to lift off from the planet!"

"It is about time. Remind me to punish their council of leaders for failing to control their unruly minions."

"You have already replaced their leaders for the third time, my lord. Each cycle has caused the Wheednars to fight amongst themselves and neglect their other duties."

**"I DO NOT CARE! THESE FILTHY CREATURES MUST BE TAUGHT TO OBEY!"**

He could not wait long enough to get rid of this babysitting duty!

As Riewna-Khalerin-Ortosu-Fugha-Celeron continued to oversee his slow raiding fleet's steady withdrawal from the ruined human colony, the Khoraln-Lizh-Gharaer briefly shook.

"Report." The orven captain immediately called even as his four eyes scanned the information panels extended from his seat.

"We are receiving confusing reports from downstairs. Our engineers are screaming about... about being haunted by an evil demon! A human demon!"

"That is nonsense!" Riewna boomed! "Our homeship is under the protection of our gods. No evil can possibly invade our blessed walls!"

"Be that as it may, our engineers are continuing to issue the same warnings! Wait, we have just received another notification that the evil demon has invaded our first warp drive. It... it is beginning to transmit errors! It cannot activate without conducting repairs!"

Riewna-Khalerin-Ortosu-Fugha-Celeron stood up from his seat in shock!

He immediately summoned a live feed of his homeship's primary engineering bay.

Half of the orven engineers were either screaming and running around.

Many of the remainder had attempted to flee from the cursed compartment.

None of the engineers made any attempt to protect or repair the damaged ship systems.

This was because the few brave orvens that attempted to do so inexplicably collapsed and died!

"Demons! We are beset by demons!"

"The humans that we have slain have risen up to punish us for our dishonorable actions!"

**"STOP PANICKING! WE ARE BEING ATTACKED BY HUMAN SABOTEURS, NOT DEMONS! SEND IN OUR GUARDS AND SHOOT THEM ALL DOWN!"**

"My lord, the engineers assigned to our second warp drive are screaming about demons as well! Their superior who attempted to banish the evil human demon has died shortly after a demon dove inside his body!"

Alarms rang throughout the Khoraln-Lizh-Gharaer as the demons not only destroyed many delicate and difficult-to-repair components of both of her warp drives, but also started to appear in other places!

The entire bottom section of the old orven homeship fell under disarray as the crew reported dozens of sightings of 'evil human demons'!

Though Riewna was convinced that the humans had secretly snuck invisible saboteurs aboard his homeship, the subsequent reports and security footage increasingly caused everyone to doubt this conclusion.

This was because the enemies simply would not die!

The guards that responded to the increasingly more panicked calls for help continually attempted to stop the evil demons, yet they found that their weapons were anything but effective!

"Die, human!" A tall and armored orven guard roared in his native language as his plasma shotgun sprayed the grinning and translucent human demon with hot matter!

Though the crippled power conduit in front of him melted into ruined slag, the guard shook in primal fear as he saw that the proud weapon that he had worked hard to obtain completely failed to harm the grinning demon!

An aura of evil and death spread from the demonic entity. The creature's grin showed that it was deliberately mocking the guard for his inability to succeed!

"This cannot be! My weapon cannot fall!"

The orvan guard roared again as his plasma shotgun fired again and again.

Nothing but the best transphasic shields should have been able to withstand this barrage of attacks!

However, the demon did not show any sign of damage or suffering from beginning to end. Its two human-like eyes curled in amusement as the advanced plasma shotgun finally stopped its fire due to excess heat buildup.

"No! I have more weapons!"

Sharp and wicked curved blades extended from the armored arms of the guards. These blades then started to buzz as current ran through the transphasic material, which amplified their penetration power by at least an order of magnitude!

The guard then put all of his training to good use by stabbing and slashing his blades in an uninterrupted flurry!

Any soldier from almost any race would have already been sliced to pieces if they got struck so many times.

Not even the large and formidable nunsers possessed the ability to shrug off so many attacks of this nature!

However, not a single blade blessed by godblood managed to leave more than a single scratch on the human demon's translucent body!

"It is working!"

The guard was convinced that his opponent's appearance meant that the demon's body had been phased to another dimension.

Any transphasic weapon that was powerful enough should have been capable of countering this effect and inflicting damage on the phased entity's true body!

Yet as attack after attack struck the demon, the enemy's translucent body only showed minor disturbances.

The attacks were as futile as trying to slash a cloud of fog!

Though the demon stopped grinning now that it was suffering actual damage from the guard's transphasic weapons, the evil human creature continued to hover in place.

The evil entity was clearly using the orven guard to test his own defenses!

In the end, the spiritual fiend concluded that transphasic weapons did indeed pose a threat against his incorporeal existence, but they had to be powerful enough in order to do more than disturb his apparent form!



The fiend eventually tired from this confrontation. He received firm instructions to stop playing with prey and continue his mission to wreck the orven battleship's power generators and energy transmission systems.

The 'evil human demon' no longer remained passive and dove forward until his sharp claws swiped through the enclosed helmet of the taller orven guard!

"Ghuurr!"

The orven guard's flurry of attacks instantly faltered as he felt enormous pain bursting from his brain.

His armor informed him that his brain was damaged and bleeding from the inside!

"That... that's impossible!"

His helmet hadn't been penetrated! It remained completely untouched! How could the evil demon phase straight through the slightly transphasic alloy without showing any effort?

It was a pity that the evil demon did not bother to answer the orven's doubts.

The evil human demon swiped his claws a few more times until the guard collapsed as his brain was sliced to ribbons!

The fiend sadistically grinned at the orven reinforcements that arrived a few seconds later before phasing right through the deck of the compartment!

As more and more fiends began to disable all sorts of essential systems aboard the Khoraln-Lizh-Gharaer, Riewna had been driven to fury and desperation!

"Activate our shields!"

Set all of our sensors and scanners at full power!"

"The humans must have smuggled these phased saboteurs with the help of a stealth shuttle. Find it immediately!"

It was not until the orven homeship activated all of the transphasic energy shields that were still intact and many starfighters started to comb the immediate surroundings that the evil demons disappeared!

This strengthened Riewna's suspicion that the humans must have employed a new means of sabotage that was apparently limited by range.

As the search effort continued, the homeship soon received an emergency notification from a Wheednar warship.

"My lord, the Wheednar fleet's flagship is asking for reinforcements! Their crew... their crew is reporting the same sightings! The fiends have struck the warp drive first before spreading out to disable the power generators."

Riewna roared with fury and frustration!

The humans continued to torment his fleet!

Chapter 5033 The Hidden Stalker

Venerable Zimro Belson closed his eyes as he continued to operate his new expert mech.

He had been waiting to do this for a long time. It had been torture for him to spend all of those months as a newly advanced expert pilot without a suitable mech.

Though he got his practice in by piloting standard mechs and training with the MSTS, they failed to satisfy Ills needs.

Was all of that waiting worth the reward?

Hell yes!

It took a lot of effort for Venerable Zimro to suppress his bursting excitement and maintain an utterly cool and calm mindset.

He continued to resonate with the Phobos to the fullest. He specifically tapped the power of the Emdar Alloy that was integrated into the frame, enabling his expert stealth mech to enter into Silent Mode that suppressed all of his emissions by another measure!

This was crucial to keeping the Phobos near the large alien raiding fleet without getting detected all of this time!

It was not for lack of trying. The partially crippled orven battleship may have suffered badly at the hands of Geist System's fiends, but she was still large and thick enough to boast many redundancies!

If not for the fact that the alien warship only boasted two warp drives, it might not have been possible for the Phobos to cripple her superluminal travel capabilities!

Fortunately, the aged alien homeship was far from the best of what the orven civilization had produced over the years.

The orven battleship's lack of technological sophistication as well as the low number of warp drives turned her into an ideal sabotage target for the Phobos!

Venerable Zimro Belson was well aware of the risks. This was not the first live deployment of the Phobos, but all of the powerful expert mech's previous sorties comprised of safe practice sessions.

The outcomes of these practice sessions gave Zimro a lot of confidence in his new machine's stealth performance.

Whenever the Phobos disconnected itself from the command net and entered into complete stealth, hardly any of the mechs and starships of the expeditionary fleet succeeded in detecting the elusive machine!

Zimro had humiliated a lot of pilots and spacers by flying his Phobos at close range and planting cat stickers onto surfaces before making a silent but triumphant retreat!

A lot of people laughed when they saw that the Phobos had succeeded in planting yet another funny cat sticker onto the rear armor of a mech or the nose of a starship!

The Phobos spent weeks on testing the stealth capabilities of his quasi-first-class Seferath AQ-3M against many different detection methods.

No matter whether it was the Larkinsons, the Glory Seekers, the Crossers, the Adelaides or the Boojays, the equipment they used to detect for any stealthed threats often failed to pick up any trace of the Phobos!

It was only when the expert stealth mech strayed too close to an active scanning module that it was possible to detect the sneaky machine's approach!

Of course, it was unrealistic for the mechs and starships to keep their high-powered scanning modules active all of the time.

They were never meant to be used over longer stretches of time. The more delicate parts of these ship systems wore out at an accelerated rate, which would eventually cause them to shut down entirely until they had been serviced.

As such, the Phobos's transphasic stealth system proved to be highly effective at sneaking up on most targets so long as they had little reason to suspect that there were hostile stealth units lurking around!

Though Zimro had a lot of fun pasting cat stickers onto different machines, he enjoyed less success when he attempted to replicate his success onto various high-ranking mechs!

The Phobos completely failed in every attempt to sneak up onto an ace mech.

The capabilities of the Macharia Excelsia of the Glory Seekers, the Jemma Sandivar of the Adelaide Third Fleet and the Royal Jeem of the Boojay Family were on a whole other level!

Their designs not only incorporated much more powerful and technologically advanced sensor systems, but were also surrounded by highly sensitive Saint Kingdoms at all times!

The domain fields produced by the ace pilots and amplified by their ace mechs created a large sphere-shaped field around them that prevented even a single speck of dust from passing through unnoticed!

As for the expert mechs of the Golden Skull Alliance, the Phobos produced mixed results.

Whenever Venerable Zimro and his battle partner relied solely on the technological capabilities of the Seferath Seferath AQ-3M, they occasionally got detected in advance.

"Got you!" Venerable Tusa yelled as his Dark Zephyr spun around and tapped the chest of the invisible Phobos! "You've fooled me once, but you can't fool me twice. Your shadow is too obvious!"

A powerful gravity field pushed the Phobos away just as he was about to approach the Bastion.

Venerable Jannzi smirked. "The sensor systems of my new expert mech are much more modern and high-end than the ones installed on the older expert mechs. You won't be able to sneak past by my detection envelope."

Whether the expert pilots relied on their tech or the intuition honed through combat, the expert stealth mech clearly couldn't guarantee success when trying to sneak up against his peers.

The story was much different when Venerable Zimro started to resonate with Emdar Alloy.

The Silent Mode resonating ability that the designers specifically paired with the Phobos instantly changed the game!

The suppression of every emission not only caused the Seferath active stealth system to exhibit fewer flaws, but also made the Phobos less noticeable in a more metaphysical manner.

"Hey!" Tusa angrily roared as his living mech reported a new addition to the frame. "How did you manage to place a sticker on my Dark Zephyr without my notice? There is no way you should have been able to do that when I was actively paying attention to my surroundings!"

More and more expert mechs started to get pranked as the Phobos defeated all but the most effective methods when he was operating in Silent Mode!

After extensive testing, it turned out that the Phobos was not completely undetectable in this state.

The new expert stealth mech struggled to remain undetected when trying to approach a target which frequently accelerated at high power and made numerous random changes in direction.

Moving quickly and turning at high angles were all cases where the flight systems of mechs tended to produce the highest emissions and disturbances.

The faster and more erratic the movements of the targets, the more the Phobos risked detection by attempting to get close!

For example, the living mech's chances of successfully sneaking close of the Dark Zephyr dropped by a huge margin whenever Venerable Tusa treated the surrounding space as an imaginary obstacle course.

"I'm not giving you any chance of embarrassing me another time."

Other mechs such as the Bastion relied on their inherent advantages to increase their detection capabilities.

For example, when Venerable Zimro Belson became determined to tag the Bastion at least once, the expert knight mech released a low-powered gravitic pulse that rippled across an invisible shape.

Venerable Jannzi's expert mech diverted maximum power to her sensor and scanning systems and easily exposed the Phobos in Silent Mode!

"Good attempt, but you need to do better, Zimro." Jannzi taunted.

This fun little game took place whenever the expeditionary fleet transitioned into realspace and needed to cycle all of the FTL drives.

Every starship and every mech constantly had to keep a close watch around their perimeter in order to make it harder for the Phobos to tag them with a cat sticker without notice.

It was a good way to increase the alert level of all of the crew and mech pilots while also giving Venerable Zimro and the Phobos a lot of effective training.

General Verle and his counterparts at the other alliance partners never put a stop to these sessions despite all of the complaints.

It was better to keep all of the personnel on their toes. Hostile stealth units would never be so forgiving as to stick a playful sticker onto a surface!

When the time had come for the expeditionary fleet to confront a fairly powerful raiding fleet, Venerable Zimro Belson and the Phobos finally had a chance to prove their worth!

"The greatest hurdle of eliminating the alien raiding fleets is not to beat them on the battlefield." General Verle briefed the expert pilot. "We can do that as long as we have enough firepower and trump cards at our disposal. The real challenge is to force the aliens to fight a standing battle. These alien raiders aren't stupid. The moment they detect an incoming human fleet that is large enough to inflict heavy losses, their ships will turn around and warp away into the distance. Most of our older starships are not equipped with warp drives or superdrives, so we cannot catch up to them unless we are willing to fight while heavily outnumbered."

It was still possible to defeat the alien raiding fleets when they were fleeing at full speed. Human warp-capable ships such as the recently refitted Spirit of Benthelm could still catch up and rely on its complement of Transcendent Punishers as well as high-ranking mechs such as the Amaranto and the Macharia Excelsia to take potshots at the main thrusters of alien vessels!

So long as the alien propulsion systems incurred enough damage, the affected ships would no longer be able to flee the star system as the warp drive was useless without enough forward movement.

Tills was the tactic employed by most pioneering fleets that had responded to the call of the Red Two to defend humanity's colonies.

However, this was an exceedingly dangerous and risky tactic because the aliens could turn around and eliminate the outnumbered warp or superdrive-equipped starships at any time!

The only way to somewhat mitigate this risk was to maintain a huge distance, but this directly reduced the chances of crippling the mobility of an opposing starship.

If the Larkinson Clan hadn't completed the Phobos, then the expeditionary fleet would have been forced to employ this risky delaying tactic anyway.

Fortunately, the Phobos provided the Golden Skull Alliance with a much more effective option.

As long as the Larkinsons were willing to risk their precious expert stealth mech on a solo operation, there was a great chance of crippling the main warships of the targeted alien raiding fleet!

Venerable Zimro and his Phobos did not disappoint in their debut mission.

While the aliens eventually wised up and activated all of the transphasic energy shields to wrap their warships in a protective bubble, their Job was already done.

The pair sabotaged enough warp drives from enough alien ships to anchor the raiding fleet in place!

The expeditionary fleet was already approaching from afar. It would take a significant amount of hours for the human starships to get close enough to deploy their mechs, but the aliens were unlikely to fix all of their warp drives so quickly!

The best and most rational choice the aliens could make at this point was to split up their fleet and evacuate as many personnel and assets to the fully operational warships. This would allow them to flee the human-occupied star system without losing everything.

"It's too bad they made the wrong choice."

The Phobos continued to stalk the confused alien raiding fleet. The expert mech was capable of keeping up his Silent Mode for many hours.

A surge of excitement ran through Venerable Zimro Belson's mind.

He could feel through his man-machine connection with the Phobos that all of the recent training and the successful sabotage operation had finally enabled the expert mech to grow by another step!

[I have earned my second Ascension Rune.] The powerful living expert mech quietly communicated to his pilot. [Which path should I choose this time? The Path of the Ghost King should enable our fiends to pass through the weaker obstacles if we go far enough.]

Zimro shook his head. "Stealth is the foundation of our success. These battleships can easily overpower our defenses if they can successfully lock our positions. You should go further into the Path of the Hidden Stalker before considering anything else."

The expert stealth mech experienced a subtle metaphysical change. Zimro could somehow feel that it had become even less easy to detect than before, though he did not know exactly how.

[Done. Would you like to test my new upgrade?]

"Let's go, partner."

#### Chapter 5034 Superior Tactical Position

Ves sighed as he observed a projection of a ruined colony.

The pioneer who boldly decided to invest into building a settlement on a planet at the coreward side of the Torald Middle Zone definitely suffered a massive loss!

Though it was unlikely for that pioneer to remain in the star system while his colony became subjected to ruinous orbital bombardment, it was still a massive loss that could ruin the man's ambitions!

There was no way for a defeated pioneer to invest in another colony in the new age. Many pioneers had lost the ability to replenish their funding and assets by relying on the easy support supplied by the Milky Way.

"I could have been one of these unlucky fools." Ves quietly muttered.

"Meow." Lucky responded as he lazily rested on the armrest of the command throne.

"I knew it was a better idea to keep the core of my clan mobile." Ves smugly said. "These colonies are completely fixed in place. It is far too easy for hostile aliens to bombard them into pieces. They will never be able to do that to our fleet."

"Meow meow meow."

"You're not wrong that we are frequently forced to expose our civilian ships and populations to enemy fire, but I would rather endure these dangers than making it easy for our enemies to target our foundation."

The war against the indigenous alien races of the Red Ocean had taken a decisive turn for the worse now that the counterattack had begun!

Many more frontier colonies already suffered similar fates. The pioneers who all wanted to get ahead of the trend and build their settlements in danger paid heavily for their decisions!

Ves did not necessarily feel sorry for all of the rich people and organizations who sunk so much money and assets into their crumbling colonies.

He felt sorry for the poor residents and workers who had bought into the hype and accepted risky transfer offers in the hopes of securing a prosperous new life.

It may have been possible for the Golden Skull Alliance to stop the alien raiding fleet from capturing and killing most of the harmless human colonists.

The expeditionary fleet could have sped up. The Spirit of Benthelm and the few other modern starships equipped with superdrives could have reached the colony ahead of time and bolster the local defenses.

As long as this superdrive squadron loaded up all of the ace mechs as well as a lot of other high-end mechs, there was a realistic chance that they could have repulsed the alien raiders and protect the lives of the human colonists!

The Golden Skull Alliance did not opt to do so. The Larkinsons and the others were not that noble and selfless.

Splitting up the fleet and transferring all of the ace mechs away severely reduced the defenses of all of the starships left behind!

Any powerful enemy would have been able to pounce on the opportunity and destroy the foundation of the Golden Skull Alliance!

The Torald Middle Zone had become a lot more dangerous as of late, so neither Ves nor any of the other leaders were willing to split up their forces that easily.

The only acceptable way to disperse their forces was to send out their combat carriers and more expendable mech units on various missions in neighboring star systems.

The main fleet always had to be protected by the best of what the Golden Skull Alliance had at its disposal!

In any case, Ves felt no overwhelming guilt for choosing the safest course for his own men and fleet.

The pioneers and colonists who boldly built their new homes and businesses in the deep frontier clearly knew what they signed up for. The risks were clear to everyone from the start, even if few humans took them seriously at the time.

The fact that the 'weak' indigenous aliens defied everyone's expectations was no excuse to treat this as an injustice!

There was no right and wrong in a war between races and civilizations. There was only survival and extinction.

A projected figure appeared next to his command throne. General Verle looked rather ecstatic for his age. Ves hadn't seen the man so excited in a long time!

"I take it that the Phobos completed the mission."

"We have just received the latest delayed data burst from the Phobos. Our fantastic new stealth asset has successfully crippled the warp drives and various other systems of the orven battleship as well

as half-a-dozen other large alien warships. While they still retain a high degree of combat effectiveness, we can maintain the initiative for two to four days. That is how long it will take for the alien engineers to repair the damaged warp drives."

This was an important advantage!

The alien raiding fleet was at the Golden Skull Alliance's mercy. Ves and the other leaders could fully choose whether to commit to an attack or retreat without suffering any losses.

"What have you decided?" Ves asked as he idly stroked Lucky's back.

"We can take them." The general responded with a gleam in his eyes. "The disparity in firepower is not as great as we would have liked, but it is still within a tolerable range. The orven battleship is by far the greatest threat of the opposing fleet. However, she should be weaker than the Fractured House of the Collapsing Star and the larger orven battleship we fought during Operation Lighthouse. Three ace mechs should be enough to take her out, especially when the Phobos has partially crippled her defenses."

The sabotage inflicted by the Phobos made a crucial difference in this calculation as well!

Anything that could tilt the balance in their favor could mean the difference between a pyrrhic victory and a clean victory.

Even though the real battle had yet to commence, both Ves and General Verle understood quite well that the Phobos deserved the greatest credit in this operation!

"If we have four more expert stealth mechs like the Phobos..."

Ves waved his hand in interruption. "Stop dreaming. Expert stealth mechs are rare for good reasons. Pilots of stealth mechs generally do not possess the right personality traits to trigger apotheosis."

"That was true in the Age of Mechs, but do you truly think that this will remain a constant in the Age of Dawn?"

"...Good question."

Not enough time had passed for exotic radiation to significantly affect the breakthrough rates of mech pilots, but that might change in the future.

Even stealth mech pilots might get boosted by this emerging trend!

"Anyway, what is the current battle plan? The alien raiding fleet may have been immobilized, but their formidable gun batteries are still operational. The Phobos can't sabotage them while these starships have fully powered up their transphasic energy shields."

General Verle grinned. "That is exactly what is playing in our favor. It doesn't matter if the Phobos cannot take action for the time being. Just the threat of follow-up attacks is useful in itself. Do you see how all of the alien warships are keeping up their transphasic energy shields at full power for an extended period of time? While the alien shield generators are highly developed and can remain active for a long period of time, they are still enduring heavy strain. By the time our forces get into engagement range, the alien crews and warships will no longer be in their prime condition."

"I see. You're right."



Ves did not specialize in transphasic shield generators, but he possessed enough of an understanding of how they worked to know that it was indeed torture for them to remain up for so long!

While he assumed that the aliens would eventually reduce the power of the shield generators to preserve their conditions, they would still experience at least some losses in performance.

Relying on the probable outcome that the Phobos successfully spooked the aliens into wearing themselves out, General Verle and his colleagues intended to launch a bold strike by deploying at least 15,000 mechs on an extended attack run!

Ves found this part of the plan to be a little dubious.

"I can understand the need to keep our starships out of the effective range of the primary gun batteries of the enemy warships, but isn't this too much? This plan will exhaust at least part of the reserves of our mechs due to all of the distance they need to traverse under their own power."

"We expect the alien raiding fleet to collapse quickly enough that the reduced operation times shouldn't play a major factor, sir. We have thousands of mechs more in reserve that we can push forward in case our assumptions are wrong. We would prefer to hold them back in order to protect our main fleet, though."

It was rare to suffer zero casualties in any battle against alien warships. Their gun batteries were simply too tyrannical.

The battle plan formed by the military leaders was already the most rational of the bunch. It was a lot harder to replace a broken starship than a broken mech.

General Verle effectively tolerated a certain degree of mech casualties. In any case, the Spirit of Benthelm could easily build replacement machines to fill up any free capacity on a carrier vessel.

Ves eventually gave his approval after he confirmed that the plan had accounted for many different possibilities.

"Alright." He said with a sigh. "There is no way to make any gains without taking risks. If we don't have the guts to confront this alien fleet under such favorable conditions, we have no business venturing any deeper into the frontier."

The general agreed. "Our mech pilots have trained for scenarios like these many times within the MSTs. However, there is a true substitute for the real deal. If we want to forge them into brave and fearless warriors, we need to put them to the ultimate test. If they can charge into the guns of a warship without flinching, we can rely on them to fight against the most terrible enemies imaginable, including the aliens of Messier 87 that we might have to confront down the line."

General Verle not only set his sights on their current enemies, but also the much more powerful alien adversaries that could threaten all of red humanity in a few decades!

That was his true goal. The Larkinson Clan had a limited amount of time to strengthen its mechs and train its mech pilots to the excruciatingly high standards necessary to put up a worthy fight against the powerhouses of M87.

Nobody knew quite how strong they would be, but Ves believed it was better to have too much firepower at his disposal than not enough!

He briefly felt tempted to order the Everchanger to secretly switch to the transcendence glow and give a lot of mech pilots a hidden boost, but he refrained from this idea.

Exotic radiation already produced a similar outcome, though not as exaggerated at this early stage.

Ves was curious to see how many mech pilots would break through at the current concentration level of ambient spiritual energy. It was best not to taint the study through artificial intervention.

"Proceed, then. I hope that our mechs can silence the enemy warships quickly enough to prevent them from inflicting too many losses."

"You shouldn't have to worry too much about that. We will be deploying our mechs in highly dispersed formations. The enemy gun batteries won't be able to wipe out our mechs en masse unless they get into closer ranges. While this will make our mech units more vulnerable against alien starfighters, the weak race that we are facing up against haven't been able to develop anything that can properly compete against our machines."

Ves smirked. He had already skimmed through the detailed observation data of the hidden Phobos.

The designs and the material compositions of most of the alien starfighters were quite rudimentary. Only the small craft that belonged to the orven battleship could put up a good fight, but there weren't enough of them to overturn 15,000 mechs!

#### Chapter 5035 The Long Approach

The approach was the tensest and most nerve-wracking phase of the battle.

While the Phobos had done an excellent job at immobilizing the orven battleship as well as the other larger ships of the raiding fleet, it could not deal that much real damage unless the alien warships dropped their transphasic energy shields.

It was up to the other mechs of the Golden Skull Alliance to finish the job!

While a large number of melee mechs as well as other short to mid-range mechs fanned out into a loose swarm and approached the enemy position from multiple directions, the two sides had already started to shoot against each other.

The orvens and the weird eight-limbed aliens identified as the wheednars weren't stupid. Their gun batteries which consisted of a mix of long-range laser cannons, hard-hitting kinetic cannons and fast-firing particle cannons began to blanket the approaching swarm with lots of firepower!

Most of the powerful gun batteries mounted on the alien warships were designed to damage other warships, so they were not entirely suited to swatting down mechs, especially at longer ranges.

Though the newer classes of alien warships started to adopt configurations that excelled at demolishing large numbers of small craft, the lower tech and outdated warships of the wheednar race lacked this capability!

As a result, the slow firing rates of most warship cannons severely hampered the amount of approaching mechs they could fell!

The only downside was that each direct hit pretty much obliterated a mech without question!

There was practically no chance for a mech pilot to save his life by ejection because the attack came so quickly that the entire mech, cockpit and everything else had either been vaporized or crushed into countless pieces!

It was like a large-scale game of Russian roulette. No amount of defense could save a mech and mech pilot from embracing oblivion!

The only consolation was that the highly dispersed mech formations and the dispersed approach angles lowered the killing efficiency of the enemy warships to the extreme.

Still, Ves did not like it that dozens or so clansmen died without any way to save themselves.

He felt relieved when he noticed that most expert mechs and ace mechs did okay. Their pilots possessed extraordinary intuition that easily allowed them to evade any impending attacks that could punt a serious dent in their expensive machines!

However, it was unrealistic for the Golden Skull Alliance to win an engagement against an alien fleet by relying solely on high-ranking mechs.

"We need to find a better way to start a battle against an alien fleet." Ves remarked to General Verle. "We can sustain this kind of loss rate in the first couple of battles, but we will be bleeding most of our veteran mech pilots if we continue to fight like this. Even weaker alien fleets will be able to make us bleed."

General Verle remained impassive. "The current results are already good considering the tonnage and firepower of our opponent. We deliberately picked a stronger target in order to test our combat effectiveness and forge all of our fighting forces into a more cohesive whole. Suffering casualties is unavoidable. The most we can do is to make the aliens pay as much as possible for each pilot they manage to kill."

Ves did not like the approach of spending the lives of his Larkinsons like currency anymore. He may have been more open-minded in the past, but that was when the Milky Way constantly disgorged batch after batch of hopeful mech pilots.

Now that red humanity was on its own, he needed to do much more to preserve the life of every single combatant. The supply of manpower would soon dry up as states such as Davute preemptively snapped up as many pilots as possible to defend their territories against the coming alien onslaught!

"Do you have any ideas on how we can do better?" Ves asked. "I mean, I already intend to upgrade all of our mechs to their quasi-first-class equivalents over time, but that will probably take a few years to complete. We need to whip up a few stopgap solutions in the meantime."

"There are not many convenient options to mitigate the losses at this stage of a space battle, sir. We can either rely on superior artillery suppression, faster interception speeds or highly effective area ECM measures to do better."

It was nearly impossible for a bunch of mechs to outgun a warship. Scale mattered and the latter always enjoyed a decisive advantage!

While the expeditionary fleet actually boasted a lot of fairly powerful bunker mechs that could overwhelm the defenses of an enemy warship through sheer volume of fire, their effective ranges were not that great!

The entire expeditionary fleet did not dare to stray within the effective range of the enemy alien warships.

While it was still possible for energy weapons attuned for maximum range to successfully hit a target, the complexities of space movement, the severe effect of beam dispersal and the difficulty of nailing the right angles meant that a lot of energy beams ended up hitting nothing!

The only mechs that defied the odds were the Transcendent Punishers.

Though Ves had come to dislike the design choices he made for the first true artillery mechs of his clan, he could not deny that they were pretty useful and effective as bunker mechs under the right circumstances.

The Eye of Ylvaine cleverly focused their extreme range damage output on the smaller wheednar warships.

The alien frigates and destroyers ordinarily relied on their smaller hulls and warp-enhanced acceleration to remain elusive and evade many long-ranged attacks.

However, their transphasic energy shields were much weaker and broke much faster when subjected to massed attacks!

This was normally not that big of a deal as long as they remained mobile.

When Ves studied the performance of the artillery mechs employed by the other alliance partners, he could clearly see that they had no hope of landing consistent hits against those dancing alien warships.

They had little choice but to aim their cannons at the largest and most unwieldy alien warships.

These metal tubs in space easily resisted the large amount of relatively small caliber attacks for the time being.

Even if their energy shields slowly depleted over time, their weapons kept firing without being subjected to any pressure!

Ves was glad to see that his Transcendent Punishers attained much more results at this stage.

Despite the extreme ranges, the targeting guidance from Ylvaine made it so that around 30 percent of the positron cannon attacks struck a smaller wheednar warship!

As this minor race could not build any good warships, the sustained fire from several hundred Transcendent Punishers eventually wore down the defenses of the alien vessel.

Once her energy shields fizzled out, her hull immediately became beset with a multitude of attacks!

The little wheednar warship did not boast a strong hull, which was fairly typical in the Red Ocean. The distant artillery strikes easily punched through their hull armor and started to drill into the compartments underneath.

The wheednar destroyer belatedly tried to spin her hull and flee to the rear of the partially crippled orven battleship, but it was too late!

"Warship destroyed! Her hull has broken in half and her main power generator has exploded!"

A brief cheer spread through the bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim, but everyone soon calmed down.

The wheednar fielded dozens more warships, a significant amount of which consisted of much larger and tougher cruisers!

Even so, the Eye of Ylvaine significantly reduced the threat towards friendly mechs by taking out the warships that were most effective against small craft!

The wheednar frigates and destroyers mounted a lot of smaller and faster firing gun batteries. This was why they actually needed to be taken out first!

"Our mid-range rifleman mechs are starting to open fire! Commander Casella Ingvar is doing her best to enhance the firepower of the Avatars of Myths and the Living Sentinels!"

The Avatars of Myth fielded the greatest number of Bright Warrior Mark H's, though the Living Sentinels also possessed a fair amount of the highly adaptive modular mechs.

Many of them were currently configured for ranged combat. They had deployed in a large but fairly dispersed swarm centered around the Minerva.

The living expert mech currently glowed with gold.

Soon enough, over a thousand rifleman mechs around the expert command mech faintly started to glow in gold as well!

Ever since exotic radiation started to affect the Red Ocean, Commander Casella Ingvar had noticed that it had become easier and less strenuous for her to Commandeer a large amount of other mechs.

It was as if E energy radiation compensated for much of the effort that she previously had to supply by herself!

This not only allowed her to empower more mechs at high efficiency, but also enhanced the power of her Commandeered mechs a little further!

The difference became evident as soon as a lot of ranged mechs opened fire!

Compared to the ranged mechs fielded by the likes of the Adelaides and the Boojays, the Larkinson rifleman mechs not only attained higher hit rates due to Casella's strong guidance, but also depleted the enemy transphasic energy shields much more effectively due to the enhancement of true resonance!

When it came to fighting against warships, Ves had to admit that the Minerva was a lot more effective than any of the other expert mechs in the fleet!

The Amaranto that remained in the rear and the Promethea that accompanied the other mechs forward all had their good points, but their resonance-enhanced firepower was ultimately constrained to a single mech frame.

"The defenses of the alien warships are depleting at a faster rate!"

"Another wheednar destroyer has lost power!"

"The alien warships are beginning to direct more firepower towards our mechs!"

"Spread out further and focus on evasion!"

The Avatar and Sentinel mechs produced remarkable results while fighting with the help of Commander Casella Ingvar, but that also turned them into higher priority targets!

The mechs fielded by the other alliance partners endured less pressure as a result as their firepower wasn't as effective.

Ves groaned. "Our mechs are too good!"

This was not the result that he wanted to see. He did not want his clan to incur the most losses just because they attracted the most attention.

It was not just the mechs Commandeered by Casella that attracted a lot of enemy attacks.

The Nullifier Battalion of the Battlecriers also started to inflict a lot of effective damage to the alien warships despite their limited numbers!

So far, the Nullifiers were the only Larkinson standard mechs equipped with heavy transphasic luminar crystal rifles by default.

This made them a lot more effective against any transphasic defenses, and the aliens clearly felt the difference as the elite battalion crumpled an entire wheednar frigate by themselves!

Naturally, this caused the elite mechs to become another focus of enemy attacks!

Ves gnashed his teeth at the sight.

"We can't go on like this. I need to design a new auxiliary mech that can deploy a large interference field of sorts that can mess up enemy targeting solutions. We can't throw them at a fleet of enemy warships in the clear anymore!"

General Verle's projection nodded in agreement. "That is a good idea, sir. I know of a handful of commercial mech models that claim to do the same, but their costs are prohibitively expensive as they rely on special tech and materials to reduce the effectiveness of enemy sensor systems. Will you be able to design a mech that is more effective than the products on the market?"

"Definitely." Ves replied. "I already have a good idea on how I can accomplish this in a more cost effective manner."

"How much time will you take?"

"That is hard to say. I think I can complete the design within half a year, but that is assuming that I won't get distracted."

Ves already had his hands full with a bunch of existing commitments, but he believed he could still squeeze enough time to design a new mech that should successfully give his mechs a better chance to survive the coming battles!

Chapter 5036 Stormblade Debut

The wheednar warships were taking more and more of a beating as the human mechs flew closer.

Their proud cannons that could repel or destroy a lot of opposing warships had taken down far too few mechs.

Sure, a couple of hundred of them had been wiped out during the lengthy approach, but that still left many thousands more!

The ranged mechs had already begun to pressure the mechs with their firepower.

Meanwhile, the melee mechs were just about to close in and exhaust the defenses of the starships a lot faster at close range!

The only way for the wheednars to delay the human mechs from completely terrorizing their warships was to make use of their own small craft!

Formations of starfighters flew under the cover of the alien warships and began to strafe and harass the human mechs!

The wheednars had already encountered mechs in their past raids, so they knew better than to confront the humanoid machines at closer ranges.

The eight-limbed aliens showed none of the complacency and foolishness of before as they all realized that this would be the most difficult fight of their lives!

While the wheednar starfighters did not boast excellent performance, their high acceleration along with their respectable ranged firepower meant that they could still fight effectively against human mechs!

At first, the swift wheednar starfighters put a lot of mechs under pressure by making cautious attack runs that kept them well away from any threatening melee mechs.

However, the Golden Skull Alliance soon dispatched their own fast mechs to counter these fast and annoying alien small craft.

The Valkyrie mechs fielded by the Penitent Sisters and the Glory Seekers might not have the mobility to catch up to the alien starfighters, but they were still fast enough to give their submachine guns a good chance of damaging the relatively fragile enemy craft!

"The Daughter of Death is watching over us! I can feel her gaze!"

"Bless us, Helena! Let the souls of the aliens nourish your divinity!"

"Hah! Look at them running! The aliens are afraid of our lady!"

The glows of the Valkyrie mechs had become more effective at disturbing the mood of enemies as of late. They became stronger and were able to remain effective at longer distances.

Combined with the ferocity and the determination of the highly trained Hexer pilots, the alien starfighter pilots hated to fight against this mech line the most!

Of course, the aliens did not fare much better when fighting against other human mechs.

The Larkinson Clan primarily relied on the Ferocious Piranhas and the Stingrippers of the Flagrant Vandals to chase the enemy starfighters down to the end!

While the Ferocious Piranhas rarely managed to catch up to the faster alien starfighters, the light skirmishers could still direct the movements of the enemy craft with the help of their disorientation glows.

The aliens had already discovered that as long as any of them came close enough to the deceptively weak light mechs, the starfighter pilots would quickly lose concentration!

The wheednar pilots soon tried to avoid the Larkinson mechs entirely, but that did not help them much when the fast and light Stingrippers flew behind their tails and persistently peppered their targets with their luminar crystal submachine guns!

Of course, the mechs fielded by the other groups did not fall too far behind either.

Though the wheednar starfighters had the capital to pose a more serious threat against most second-class mechs, the alien raiding fleet ultimately brought too few of them to this fight!

After all, the wheednars primarily fielded warships. Starfighters had always been treated as a secondary concern to the indigenous aliens.

The only small craft that gave the Golden Skull Alliance a greater challenge were the ones deployed by the orven battleship.

Even though the orvens only deployed thirty of them, each of them were much more powerful than a typical second-class mech. Their defenses particularly stood out as their transphasic energy shields shrugged off a lot of attacks!

It was a pity that there were too few of them. The Golden Skull Alliance did not even bother to allocate any expert mechs or elite mech units to wipe out these excellent machines.

The ranged Bright Warriors that were still Commandeered by the Minerva only briefly shifted their weapons away from the enemy warships and accurately struck all thirty orven starfighters with accurate resonance-empowered disruptor beams!

The proud but relatively weak transphasic energy shields folded in seconds. Dozens more disruptor beams continued to pelt each alien starfighter until their electronic systems completely failed!

No further intervention was needed as the powerless starfighters coasted off in the distance.

The Larkinsons deliberately tried to keep the alien starfighters as intact as possible this time as they contained a lot of valuable salvage. Their highly compact transphasic energy shield generators were already valuable enough by themselves as they could easily be transplanted into human mechs after a bit of reconstruction!

The alien starfighters no longer became a problem. They had either been eliminated or controlled to the point where they could no longer make any contributions.

The real fight was about to start!

"Come on, sisters! Let us hack into these energy shields and show these aliens that our mechs are still to be feared!" A Swordmaiden captain roared!

"For Lydia!"

"For Ketis!"

"For the Swordmaidens!"

Hundreds of Second Swords flew forward and began to envelop a wheednar heavy cruiser!

While the relatively powerful alien warship tried her best to sweep away the greatsword-wielding mechs with her tertiary gun batteries, the Swordmaiden mechs fearlessly struck their blades against the vessel's segmented energy shields while continuing to stay on the move.

The Second Swords were famed for being able to cut through armor with their sharp and heavy greatswords.

Their weapons had become even sharper due to the influence exerted by Messier 87!



Unfortunately for the Swordmaidens, most energy shields did not care about the sharpness of enemy attacks. They simply absorbed all kinetics at the same level of efficiency no matter whether the weapon was sharp or blunt!

When Ketis observed the results in the main design lab where most of the other mech designers had gathered, she crossed her arms but otherwise maintained her cool.

She already expected for her Second Swords to struggle with overcoming transphasic energy shields.

What she really wanted to see this time was whether her latest completed mech model could make a difference!

Soon enough, a single squad of Swordmaiden mechs joined the fray!

Different from the familiar Second Swords, the new swordsman mechs not only looked a bit more expensive and high-end, but also held two smaller swords that currently crackled with electric potency.

The Stormblade Samurai model had made its first proper debut on the battlefield!

Ketis would have preferred to wait for a few more weeks so that the Spirit of Bentheim could have produced more copies of this new dual-wielding swordsman mech.

It was already impressive that the Swordmaidens managed to field a single full squad so quickly after she completed her latest design!

Though the quantity of Stormblade Samurais was not enough to make a significant difference in this battle, it was enough to test its performance and make direct comparisons with other melee mechs!

"Come on sisters." A veteran Swordmaiden told her fellow Stormblade Samurai pilots. "Our blades are made to drain energy shields, so don't stop attacking until we can get through!"

As the dual-wielding swordsman mechs flew within range, they began to pound the segmented energy shields with swift and unrelenting attacks while continuing to circle around the wheednar heavy cruiser.

The barrage of lasers and machine gun fire erupting from the heavy cruiser occasionally dinged against their armor, but the modern mechs benefited heavily from the stronger and more resilient armor system designed by Sara Voiken!

This gave the Samurai pilots enough confidence to continue their attacks. Even if they weren't able to stay motionless long enough to concentrate all of their attacks on a single segmented energy shield, the sensors still measured the approximate effects of every attack.

Ketis' eyes gleamed as the initial sensor readings suggested that her Stormblade Samurais were sapping the enemy warship's energy shields at a much more impressive rate!

"Every light Stormblade attack can inflict more than three times the damage of a single conventional greatsword attack!"

This was much bigger of a deal than it looked on the surface!

A greatsword was a larger and more hard-hitting weapon that took quite a bit of time and effort to swing against an opponent. They relied on a combination of force and sharpness to deal damage.

A single-handed stormblade on the other hand could swing a lot faster with less exertion, which meant it could strike at greater frequencies at the cost of less power behind every attack.

While there was a physical component to the attack of a stormblade weapon, their electrical components meant that they could inflict a lot more damage against energy defenses through disruption!

Since every Stormblade Samurai wielded two swords at the same time, this meant that they could effectively maximize the disruptive attacks that they could inflict on a transphasic energy shield!

"The heavy cruiser is losing her energy shields at a faster rate!"

If the Swordmaidens deployed a hundred or so Stormblade Samurais, the wheednar warship would have lost her primary form of defense at this time!

Still, Ketis was more than satisfied with the results.

"You can go ahead, Dise." She transmitted to the Swordmaiden expert pilot.

"I have been waiting for this!" Dise responded as her expert mech glowed brighter on approach!

Many Second Swords flew out of the way as the First Sword descended upon the beleaguered wheednar heavy cruiser like a comet!

As the living expert mech came closer, her Decapitator greatsword started to get surrounded by a shimmering field of stars.

Ketis had been unable to pass on her fairly recent Ultimate Cut technique to Venerable Dise as it was too specific to her own sword style.

That did not mean that Venerable Dise had done nothing to improve her own ability to cut through transphasic defenses.

She had spent months practicing and refining her Phase Cutter technique.

Compared to the previous she employed this extraordinary sword technique, she succeeded in shaping the field of stars into a sharper and more condensed energy blade form!

The First Sword momentarily looked as if she was wielding a sword that was over three times as long as the Decapitator!

The alien heavy cruiser detected the huge threat posed by the expert mech and directed numerous secondary and tertiary gun batteries towards the approaching machine.

However, the First Sword easily resisted the tertiary weapons fire with her resonance shield and easily evaded the more powerful attacks launched by the secondary warship weapons.

The expert swordsman mech soon came close enough to launch her charged attack!

Both the expert pilot and the expert mech roared at the same time!

"CUT!" [CUT!]

The enormous blade made out of thousands of miniature stars made contact with a half-depleted transphasic energy shield and tore right through as if the barrier was made out of paper!

The First Sword charged straight through the gap she had just made before the wheednar vessel had any chance of plugging the gap.

Now that the expert mech managed to get inside the main defensive envelope of the alien heavy cruiser, she had free reign to cut down all of the gun batteries that had suddenly become vulnerable!

Ketis already shifted her attention away from the live feed. She had absolute trust in Venerable Dise and her fellow Swordmaidens.

She instead chose to complete her calculations based on the data gathered just a little bit earlier.

The Stormblade Samurais depleted their energy reserves a lot faster, but the gains were more than worth it. Their offensive threat against warships were simply too great to pass up, especially in an age where battles against shielded warships would only become more common!

While the Stormblade Samurai had yet to test its mettle against opposing mechs and other types of enemies, the new model's effectiveness against the transphasic energy shields of warships had already been confirmed!

"We need to equip our Swordmaidens with more stormblade weapons!"

#### Chapter 5037 Diverse Strengths

The battle against the wheednar raiding fleet presented the Golden Skull Alliance with a chance for the mech forces to test how much progress they had made since their last engagement.

Ves, Ketis and many other mech designers confirmed the effectiveness of their newer mech models while also gathering ideas for future additions.

As the battle continued to unfold, it became clear that the mechs of the Larkinson Clan performed the best due to various reasons!

In a circumstance where skill was not as important as hard power, it was rather surprising that the Larkinson mechs managed to exhibit so much combat effectiveness against opponents as tough as warships!

The Larkinson Clan had never been shy about investing more in the development and production cost of its own mechs.

The living qualities of every mech made a substantial difference in boosting the control of every mech pilot. With two minds working for the same purpose, every living mech had a higher chance of surviving an engagement as it was easier for both human and machine to detect incoming threats in advance!

Aside from that, the Larkinson mechs all possessed a large diversity of quirks and gimmicks that all made them better at their respective jobs!

Nonetheless, the mech units hailing from the other partners of the Golden Skull Alliance tried their best not to fall behind. Each of them managed to showcase their strengths.

For example, the Glory Seekers mainly favored the Hexer mechs designed by Ves and Gloriana.

The Valkyrie Redeemer and its variants as well as the and Maiden of Adversity had become the mainstays of the Wodin-sponsored mech force.

While neither of them were completely suited to fight against warships, their strong and distinctive glows augmented their performance where it mattered the most.

For example, the Glory Seekers quickly discovered that the suppressive glows of their Valkyrie mechs easily passed through the intact transphasic energy shields and any other obstacle.

A lot of wheednar crew members either collapsed in fright or made erratic movements that prevented them from focusing on their duties!

As more and more Valkyrie mechs surrounded a wheednar cruiser and directed their identical glows at the alien hull, Helena's strong and oppressive presence began to envelop the ship from all angles!

The consequences were obvious. The ship's responses slowed down. Her gun batteries fired less frequently while her transphasic energy shields depleted faster than before.

The ship even began to launch escape pods despite the sheer idiocy of this action!

Naturally, the Glory Seeker mechs easily cut down the escape pods with ease.

The enemy cruiser vessel did not last long under the combined with the attacks launched by the Glory Seeker mechs.

The Hexer mech pilots did not even have to call upon the assistance of any expert mechs to finish off their prey!

The other alliance partners did not possess any special tricks, but were still capable of wearing down the defenses of the enemy warships in their own ways.

Master Benedict Cortez designed a lot of mechs for the Cross Clan that possessed expanded energy reserves compared to other machines.

Energy was the root of a mech's combat power.

Any Crosser ranged mech was able to fire more powerful shots at extended periods of time!

Any Crosser melee mech was able to carry around more armor and strike considerably harder!

In this battle against an alien raiding fleet, the Cross Clan mainly fielded its ranged mechs this time.

These larger rifleman mechs wielded much larger energy rifles that fired thick beams that straightforwardly dealt more damage without any other-bells and whistles!

Their mech pilots confidently kept pulling the trigger against the warships in their sights with the knowledge that their mechs could take the strain!

The Adelaide mechs on the other hand weren't as tough and filled with energy as that of the Cross Clan.

As a mercenary force, the Adelaides placed a high priority on mobility. They expressly sent out a lot of faster and less sluggish mechs this time as they were least likely to get hit by stupendously powerful warship attacks.

The Adelaide Third Fleet indeed suffered the least casualties out of the five partners of the Golden Skull Alliance.

None of their mechs were slow or burdened with too much armor and equipment. Although their corresponding firepower was not as impressive, they fought a lot more confidently as they took advantage of their faster speeds and acceleration to frustrate the aim of enemy warship gun batteries as much as possible.

The Boojay mechs were perhaps the least suited to combat against warships. Their heavy emphasis on melee combat meant that they did not possess as many powerful ranged mechs that could wear down the defenses of alien vessels from a comfortable distance.

Nonetheless, the Boojays had made some adaptations as many of their machines carried hammers instead of swords and spears.

Equipped with heavy blunt weapons, the Boojay melee mechs relied on momentum to deliver powerful impacts against transphasic energy shields!

When Ves briefly directed his attention at the mechs fielded by the wannabe Terrans, he raised his eyebrows when he noticed that the simple-looking hammers were actually a bit more effective than they looked!

"Those aren't regular hammers." Ves noted.

He studied the sensor readings a bit more and figured out what made them special.

"They have actually impregnated the hammerheads with a little bit of phasewater!"

Even if the Boojay Family had been unwilling to expend more than a couple of drops of phasewater for each hammer, when approximately an entire mech regiment's worth of melee mechs began to drain a large warship's protection within a single minute!

This little demonstration taught Ves not to underestimate any pioneering organization. The Boojays spent enough time in the frontier to adapt to its new realities. They wouldn't have chosen to join the Golden Skull Alliance if they hadn't made any preparations to fight against the aliens!

As much as Ves and the other leaders were willing to let their mech units prove their mettle and finish off this relatively weak fleet of alien warships by themselves, the losses would be too great.

This was why the Golden Skull Alliance leaned heavily on its high-end mechs and other measures to quickly neutralize this alien raiding fleet.

While the three ace mechs continued to distract and drain the defenses of the most powerful orven battleship, the Larkinsons and Glory Seekers finally prepared to launch their most devastating attacks against enemy warships.

"Prepare the battle formations!"

"Oh, Helena, come and bless our attacks!"

"Let us show these filthy aliens that hexism is stronger than any of their ancient phase whales!"

Just like before, the Everchanger along with the Valkyrie Krista and the Valkyrie Ursa led three separate battle formations composed entirely of Valkyrie Redeemers or its variants.

The aliens apparently did not recognize the threat posed by the battle formations. The wheednars and the orvens were much more preoccupied with shooting down the much more obvious threats up close!

This granted the Penitent Sisters and the Glory Seekers enough room to align their thoughts, accumulate energy and summon three identical manifestations of the Daughter of Death!

Different than before, the more favorable circumstances produced by the Red Ocean's relative proximity to Messier 87 had caused these gigantic depictions of Helena to become more solid and material!

By this time, every alien could feel the danger of these approaching human 'archdemons'!

A few warships even managed to fire a few powerful cannon salvos at the seemingly solid female apparitions, only for all of the shots to pass through Helena's bodies without making any substantial difference!

As soon as the battle formations reached the most optimal ranges at the same time, they unleashed a wave of resonance-empowered death energy into the largest concentrations of alien warships!

The wheednars did not group their warships as tightly as other alien races. They apparently lacked the discipline to pay close attention to the positioning of their vessels, which caused their overall formation to become quite messy.

The Penitent Seekers and the Glory Seekers therefore tried their best to focus their attacks on the densest clusters of warships.

In order to maximize the result of this crucial move, the other mech units had already put a decent amount of effort into driving the wheednar ships closer to each other!

At this time, Venerable Joshua and his Everchanger had become fully connected with Helena.

The normally lively expert mech exuded a strong aura of death and doom.

Joshua already noticed that it became easier for Helena to descend on the Everchanger and for him to resonate with her. He had not felt this way since he last fought in the Nyxian Gap!

When the Penitent Sister battle formation finally unleashed their infamous death energy attacks, the waves were noticeably larger and thicker than in the past!

Each of them steadily traversed through empty space before passing straight through the transphasic energy shields and hulls of the intact alien vessels!

The death energy waves did not weaken all that much after passing through their first warships.

They continued on to sweep the next couple of warships in their trajectories.

Each battle formation produced a different effect due to the resonance of each individual expert pilot.

One battle formation attack caused the ships in its passage to malfunction as many different technological parts failed for inexplicable reasons!

Another death energy wave killed all of the alien crew members in its way without any exception!

The third death energy wave inflicted the greatest losses by far because Venerable Joshua skillfully steered its direction so that it was able to sweep a couple of additional warships before it finally expended its charge!

Roughly a third of the alien raiding fleet had immediately lost all or at least a majority of their combat effectiveness.

While the ships were still able to operate to a limited degree by relying on automated systems, the death of a large proportion of alien crew members meant that the vessels had become a lot easier to exploit!

Nonetheless, Ves sat up a little straighter when he noticed that not all of the affected alien warships behaved as if they had become completely uncontrolled.

"Helena." He softly called. "What gives? Is the effect of exotic radiation giving you any trouble?"

A small manifestation appeared next to his command throne.

"Do not blame me, brother." Helena said. "M87 may have strengthened these formation attacks, but do not forget that the aliens are benefiting from exotic radiation as well. These wheednars are surprisingly harder to slay when they shouldn't. When my energy passed through their bodies,

I found that their relatively weak souls have become a little stronger."

Ves furrowed his brows. If not just humans but also the indigenous aliens benefited from exotic radiation in the same fashion, then the Penitent Sisters and the Glory Seekers would soon have to discount one of their most powerful solutions against warships!

"So these aliens are growing faster than the increase in power of our battle formations?"

"That is not entirely the case." Helena replied with a frown. "I encountered another hindrance that has made it much harder for me to affect the lives of mortals in this dwarf galaxy. These wheednars... are strong believers of the native gods of the Red Ocean. Every race here holds the same beliefs. Faith can be a powerful force, brother. While I did not encounter any active resistance from an opposing god, just the belief itself is a powerful focus that has allowed all of these wheednars to protect their minds and souls to an extent. From what I found, the perished aliens primarily consist of those that were weak to begin with and those whose faith in their local gods were not that strong."

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Ves had to wrap his mind around what he learned.

Her explanation actually made sense in a certain way.

From what he learned so far, exotic radiation had a tendency to produce all kinds of random positive and negative mutations on organisms if left alone.

However, the strong and persistent mental activity of an intelligent human or alien was able to direct the effects of E energy radiation to an extent!

Aliens who possessed strong belief that their supposed gods would protect them were much more likely to strengthen and firm up their spiritualities due to their superstitions.

The longer exotic radiation affected the native aliens of the Red Ocean, the more they would be able to defend against not just the death energy attack, but also many other sorts of extraordinary attacks!

It would be fine if there were many secularists among the nunsers, the puelmers and the other local alien races, but that wasn't the case!

Practically every intelligent alien worshiped the phase whales and the phase lords as literal gods!

This superstition was baked into the cultures of every native alien civilization!

"This is not a positive development."

#### Chapter 5038 Expert Mechs Showing Their Might

The famous Death Phase Formation that the Penitent Sisters and the Glory Seekers often relied upon to wipe out large swathes of mechs and starship crews instantly shifted the direction of the battle!

Although the strong faith of the wheednar crew members firmed up their spiritualities under the influence of exotic radiation, not enough time had passed for this strengthening effect to save too many of them from Helena's might!

Besides, the female mech pilots held an even more fanatical faith towards the Daughter of Death. Their focused and uniform beliefs towards Helena enabled them to channel her powerful and deathly strength at significantly greater efficiencies!

All in all, only a small proportion of alien crew members had any hope of surviving the devastating death waves, and even then they did not manage to survive unscathed.

Each affected vessel easily folded in the following minutes. Even if the ships managed to resist the onslaught of hundreds of mechs, their automated systems were unable to keep up with the rapidly changing circumstances. The lack of manual direction and operations quickly caused their transphasic energy shields to break and their hulls to become completely exposed!

The mechs of the Golden Skull Alliance did not demolish the vulnerable ships entirely, but instead chose to limit the damage by disabling the gun batteries and destroying a few other important systems such as the thrusters and any easily accessible power generators.

It was a lot more lucrative to salvage the starships when they were still close to intact!

It may even be possible to convert them to human use if the Golden Skull Alliance happened to possess suitable Warship Tokens!

In any case, the remaining wheednars stationed on the unaffected vessels became more desperate when they learned what happened.

"The gods have already foretold our doom. We must die in order for our home planet to live!"

"Do not lament your demise! As long as you can drag down at least one evil human with you, our race shall persist!"

Although the wheednar race possessed many common flaws, the soldiers assigned to this raiding mission knew what was at stake.

They did not falter or despair when they realized that there was no way for them to win or escape from this battle.

Instead, they threw themselves into their duties with even greater fervor than before!



Their belief in the native gods that had brought the entire Red Ocean out of the clutches of the Great Hive peaked yet again!

Their common desire to protect their homeland and prevent the humans from ever posing a threat against race pushed them to fight to the bitter end!

The resistance from the remaining alien warships only intensified as their transphasic energy shields came under greater stress.

More and more mechs smashed into pieces or vaporized into nothing as the vengeful alien warships directly managed to strike them with their enormous gun batteries, but there were simply too many humanoid machines to wipe them all out in this manner!

As the standard mech units of the Golden Skull Alliance continued to wear down the defenses of the remaining dozens or so warships, the high-ranking mechs demonstrated their might in various different ways!

For example, the Amaranto that had remained behind in the expeditionary fleet was one of the few machines that was able to offer effective support at extreme range.

The powerful masterwork expert mech occupied a newly added bunker on the refitted Spirit of Bentheim.

At this time, the gigantic Golden Cat head mounted on the prow of the factory slightly opened its maw in order to open up a small gun port.

This gun port was just large enough to fit the muzzle of the Instrument of Doom!

As Venerable Davia Stark resonated with her living mech as well as the powerful transphasic luminal cannon, she spent an entire minute on adjusting her aim as it was extremely difficult to land an accurate shot at such an exaggerated range.

At the same time, she resonated with the Phase King and requested for the design spirit to bless her Instrument of Doom and boost its penetration power!

Once the expert pilot felt she was close to completing her firing solution, she barked out a single instruction over the command net.

"Open up a window and get out of the way!"

Hundreds of mechs that were swarming around a particularly resilient wheednar heavy cruiser suddenly withdrew and put more space between themselves and the target vessel.

Other mechs that happened to be positioned in the Amaranto's firing line received urgent instructions to make their way out as well!

Only after all of these mechs had cleared out did Venerable Stark finally pull the trigger.

"FIRE!"

A blindingly bright and thick laser beam escaped from the mouth of the Golden Cat head!

If other people did not know any better, then they would have thought that the Larkinson Clan had violated the taboo against warships!

The might and penetration power of the blessed and resonance-empowered transphasic laser beam far surpassed that of any ordinary mech or even expert mech for that matter!

Some of its properties even managed to catch up with the power of a serious attack of an ace mech!

Venerable Stark's aim held true. The laser beam crossed thousands of kilometers at the speed of light and struck so close to the center of the heavy cruiser's silhouette that practically no one else in the fleet could have done any better!

The weakened segmented transphasic energy shield could not withstand an attack of this magnitude.

The true resonance and phasewater empowering the thick laser beam were so substantial that the alien warship's main defensive barrier folded in an instant!

Though the laser beam had lost most of its power after overcoming this obstacle, the vulnerable hull fared poorly against the energies that remained! The still-potent attack burned and phased through dozens of compartments as the relatively weaker hull structure proved much less adequate at withstanding a strike of this magnitude!

The heavy cruiser started to malfunction shortly after the attack had passed. The crew received too much of a shock and the laser beam had destroyed enough systems to disrupt the operation of the rest of the vessel.

As multiple transphasic energy shields started to falter, the surrounding mechs quickly turned around and descended onto the vulnerable alien warship like vultures!

Elsewhere, the Everchanger had broken off from the Penitent Sisters. The Valkyrie mech pilots had exhausted most of their mental energies after executing their iconic battle formation.

Venerable Joshua hardly consumed himself, and his Everchanger still hungered for battle.

"TIMES HAVE CHANGED, JOSHUA. YOU CANNOT BE AS SOFT-HEARTED AS BEFORE. RED HUMANITY IS UNDER THREAT OF GOING EXTINCT, AND THESE ALIENS HAVE ALREADY TAKEN THE FIRST STEP OF MAKING THIS HAPPEN BY WIPING OUT THE NEARBY COLONY."

"I know that, Everchanger. Don't worry. I won't hold back this time." Joshua responded.

Although Joshua wished for a future where humans and aliens could forgo their hatreds and live in peace with each other, the current climate obviously did not allow for that to happen.

Now that red humanity had been cut off from the Milky Way, every indigenous alien became eager to wipe out the outnumbered invaders!

Even if Joshua had come to value all life, it was clear that he had no choice but to fight for red humanity's survival first before he could pursue any greater aspirations!

As the sensors of his Everchanger clearly observed the cratered and ruined human settlement on the surface of the nearby planet, Joshua built up a greater animosity towards these wheednars.

The aliens who slaughtered innocent human colonists en masse did not deserve his mercy!

"Let us drive them crazy, Everchanger!"

"I WAS WAITING FOR THAT." His living expert mech responded with great enthusiasm.

The pilot and his expert mech had cooperated so much together that they instantly knew what to do next.

The Everchanger flew towards the densest remaining concentration of alien warships.

Though the recent battle formation attacks had spooked the wheednars so much that they drove their starships away from each other, the Everchanger still managed to find a good position between two struggling alien light cruisers.

The Everchanger proceeded to rotate his design spirit over to Zeigra, Lufa and Qilanxo.

This classic combination produced a selective disorientation glow that the Ferocious Piranhas and the Doom Guards were already using to excellent effect!

However, their effectiveness against warships was rather limited as the range of their suppressive glows only reached the outer compartments of most of the alien vessels on the battlefield.

The Everchanger was different though. As soon as Venerable Joshua resonated with the Iridescent Mercury integrated with his expert mech, the radius of the glow amplified by many times!

An invisible globe expanded around the expert hero mech and enveloped the two nearby light cruisers!

Though the vessels did not show any apparent changes, the wheednars stationed inside of them screamed and used their forelimbs to grasp at their alien heads!

The alternating glows of Lufa and Zeigra drove each of them crazy as they continually became affected by the impressively powerful statures of two potent design spirits!

Only the strongest, oldest or most faithful leaders among them were able to maintain their wits while affected by this glow, but that was hardly enough to run the light cruisers at maximum efficiency!

As the thousands of wheednar crew members continued to remain suppressed by the Everchanger's amplified glow, the surrounding mechs eagerly took advantage of the new situation and easily wore down the defenses of the two light cruisers!

The only other action that the Everchanger took was to raise his Vitalus rifle and fire disruptor beams at one of the vessels in order to wear down her defenses faster.

Elsewhere, the Promethea flew alongside the Star Dancer Mark II.

Venerable Isobel Kotin and Venerable Brutus Wodin had chosen to team up this time.

The Promethea's Ignitron luminar crystal rifle continued to fire energy beams that produced powerful resonance-empowered explosions that severely strained the transphasic energy shield of an alien light cruiser.

The Star Dancer's own Hexacris luminar crystal rifle fired a flurry of rapid energy beams that might not possess as much individual punch, but made up for it with a higher firing rate!

The twin output of the two expert rifleman mechs quickly caused the alien warship to lose her defensive envelope!

With the help of attacks launched by other mech units, the wheednar cruiser became fully exposed, enabling the two expert mechs to fully unleash their firepower!

"Don't burn the ship, Isobel." Brutus gently reminded his fellow pilot as his expert mech precisely disabled the various gun batteries and other modules on the hull. "There won't be as much intact salvage left if you let your flames go wild."

"You don't need to remind me, Hexer."

The Promethea only blasted the largest and most resilient primary gun batteries of the exposed light cruiser with exploding positron beams before moving on to pressure another intact warship.

As many different expert pilots worked to punch through the defenses of their prey and neutralize their threat towards the expeditionary fleet, one special individual belatedly entered the battlefield under a surprising amount of scrutiny.

Nobody quite recognized the mech that had trailed the main wave mechs, but its appearance, design characteristics and IFF clearly identified it as another living mech from the Larkinson Clan.

The mech looked like a standard mech at first glance, but it exuded a surprising amount of power for its construction.

A small corona had formed around the exterior. Though it was faint, it showed that its pilot was anything but average!

Inside the cockpit, an old but recently rejuvenated pilot closed his eyes.

After over half a century of retirement, this old dog had finally returned to battle once again!

"I missed this." The aged voice with a steel core spoke.

"SO THIS IS WHAT COMBAT IS LIKE." The Blood Star responded to his aged battle partner. "IT IS... CHAOTIC. THESE WARSHIPS POSSESS FEARSOME ATTACKS."

"That it is, but that is exactly why we need to participate. If we want to pursue greater strength, then we must be brave!"

The Blood Star began to build up more momentum as Venerable Benjamin Larkinson began to refamiliarize himself with the excitement of combat!

It was only now that he felt more alive than he had in decades!

Chapter 5039 Brave and Fearless

Back inside the bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim, Ves glanced at a projected feed that solely tracked a single machine among many.

His latest creation had finally entered the fray by approaching a beleaguered alien destroyer.

The offensive knight mech's performance did not stand out from the rest. Although the Blood Star's sword faintly glowed under the resonance of a recently recovered high-tier expert pilot, the lack of resonating materials prevented the weapon from destabilizing the segmented transphasic energy shield as effectively as other powerful mechs.

This did not depress the Blood Star and Venerable Benjamin Larkinson's enthusiasm in any way!

Ves twitched whenever the alien warship's attacks strayed close to the Blood Star's position.

The Carmine mech may have been his latest handmade work, but he was lacking many of the qualities of an expert mech!

In fact, the Blood Star was not an expert mech at all! The machine was only able to exhibit a bit of true resonance and prime resonance at his current state.

Ves did not agree to allow his grandfather to sortie on the battlefield at first.

He had already put so much effort into clawing him back from the dead! This was no time for a pilot who had barely started his retraining from participating in a serious battle!

What if a warship was lucky enough to strike a direct hit against the relatively fragile Blood Star?

Without a resonance shield or a quasi-first-class mech frame, a single direct hit from any primary warship cannon could instantly smash the Blood Star and his pilot into pieces!

This was why Ves preferred to keep his grandfather back just like the expert pilots who recently made their breakthroughs.

However, his grandfather insisted on deploying into the field this time!

He even had an argument with Ves over this matter!

"You don't understand, grandson." The old man who had donned his custom piloting suit shook his head. "I need to take part in this fight. I have no excuses to stay out of it. My new Blood Star might not be an expert mech, but it is still strong enough for me to serve me decently enough. Besides, there is no better way for me to learn how to pilot a mech with that Carmine System of yours when my life is on the line."

"It is exactly because your life is on the line that I want you to stay out of it!" Ves yelled back. "Why can't you wait until you have gained a proper expert mech? If you want to deploy so badly, why don't you join the reserves and protect the fleet for the time being? There is no reason for you to charge forward and put your fragile new mech in the firing lines of those alien warships!"

Benjamin stepped forward and embraced his grandson in a warm and affectionate hug.

"I love you and respect you, Ves, but that does not mean I will obey you without question. Don't forget who is the elder among the two of us. Expert pilots derive their strength from being brave and fearless in the face of overwhelming adversity. Those who bide their time and refrain from going into battle when they clearly have the power to do so will not be able to make it as far. This is a lesson that I have only learned later on and after talking with many other expert pilots."

The older Larkinson's voice contained a strong element of will and belief. Now that he had reignited his fighting intent, he was determined to pursue the path that he had missed out on for half of his life to the very end!

He wanted to make the most out of the second chance provided by his grandson and gain the strength needed to protect his family and descendants against all threats, including the speculative aliens from the nearby supergiant galaxy!

"Grandfather..."

"I need to do this." Benjamin firmly stated. "If I cannot muster up the courage to confront these relatively weak warships with a fully functional mech, how can I ever break through once again and advance to ace pilot? Do not forget that I am far from my prime. My age and physical condition are still holding me back. The only means of overcoming these handicaps is to be braver and more relentless than other expert pilots!"

Ves actually agreed with his grandfather, but that did not mean he was okay with this course of action!

Though Ves felt tempted to force Benjamin back by force if necessary, he ultimately recognized that doing this was a massive disservice.

His grandfather was right. A true warrior must remain bold and fearless. Benjamin's abrupt recovery may have extended his lifespan by a comfortable margin, but he was still a bit too close to reaching his end than Ves liked.

Only by becoming an ace pilot would Benjamin's force of will grow strong enough to fully rejuvenate his own body!

"Fine." Ves eventually grumbled. "You can go as long as you prove you are able to control the Blood Star well enough. Your mech must be able to respond and move quickly enough to evade any powerful attack launched by a warship."

"Don't worry, grandson. My intuition has become stronger than ever."

As the Blood Star under the control of Venerable Benjamin Larkinson continued to fight alongside other Larkinson mechs, Ves eventually eased his concerns.

The aliens did not have the capacity to threaten his grandfather this time. The Blood Star also did not attract any scrutiny from the aliens due to its relatively unremarkable performance.

Of course, Ves did not completely leave his grandfather unattended.

He shifted the view and noted that the Dark Zephyr was hovering in the vicinity.

The expert light skirmisher contributed to the battle by attacking the transphasic energy shields and quickly eliminating all of the exterior modules of vulnerable warships, but that was not his true mission this time.

Ves did not completely feel reassured about throwing his grandfather into the fray with an inadequate Carmine mech. This was why he called on Venerable Tusa to shadow the Blood Star and step in whenever necessary.

No Larkinson mech was faster than the Dark Zephyr. Venerable Tusa's intuition towards danger was also the best out of any of the expert pilots of the Larkinson.

Fortunately, Venerable Benjamin had yet to encounter any lethal threats. Even if he was determined to embrace the life of a soldier once again, he still recognized his limits and did not attempt to pull off any unreasonable stunts. His Blood Star could only do so much.

"Sir! The orven battleship is about to falter!"

Ves' eyes lit up. He had been paying more attention to his own mechs than anything else, so he hadn't fully tracked the fight centered around the largest and most advanced alien vessel.

He never really exhibited that much concern towards this vessel because he knew that three whole ace mechs should be able to control it with ease.

This was especially the case when Ves had upgraded the primary weapons of all three ace mechs with the blessing of the Phase King!

From the start of the engagement against the alien fleet, the three ace mechs had already flown ahead of the main wave of mechs and preemptively controlled the orven battleship to prevent her formidable arsenal from threatening other friendlies!

In fact, the incredibly fast and elusive Jedda Sandivar boldly sped ahead of all of the other machines and arrived in the middle of the alien fleet without any fear!

The ace light skirmisher flew so fast and changed direction so often that none of the gun batteries of any warship was able to keep up with its dizzying movements!

In order to prevent the battleship from targeting other vessels, Saint Marissa Lewandowski activated her Saint Kingdom and filled it up with an obscuring mist that penetrated through all energy barriers and physical obstacles!

Over half of the structure of the battleship descended into fog, which not only isolated all of the orven crew members, but also started to block or interfere with the transmission of electronic signals!

Saint Lewandowski worked hard to improve the latter effect. A light skirmisher was not the best machine to deploy against a warship due to its inherent traits, so the ace pilot specifically developed her strength in order to maximize her ability to cripple any warship so long as her domain field could get through!

The Jedda Sandivar lived up to its promise. The ace mech single-handedly disrupted the operation of the orven battleship and the coordination of much of her crew!

This granted an excellent window for the Royal Jeem to charge forward like a lancer mech and brace its spear for a devastating strike!

As the ace spearman mech surged forth like a flaming projectile, Saint Kalasandra Boojay resonated with the spear and called upon the assistance of the Phase King!

The manifestation of the design spirit briefly appeared into view before sinking into the glowing spear tip. Its integrated phase water became a lot more active under the creature's direction!

Just before the Royal Jeem struck the orven battleship's defenses head-on, Saint Kalasandra quickly issued a command!

"I decree that all energy shields shall shatter in front of my spear!"

The mighty spear of the Royal Jeem struck a powerful segmented energy shield and instantly caused it to collapse!

A second layer appeared but collapsed as well!

It was only when the third layer appeared that the Royal Jeem's advance had finally been blocked!

However, it was at this time that a burst of distant resonance-empowered transphasic positron beams struck this weakened segmented energy shield!

The Macharia Excelsia piloted by Saintess Ulrika Vraken had finally taken action!

Though the ace rifleman mech declined to fly into the middle of the enemy fleet like the other two ace mechs, it was still able to provide extremely powerful firing support from the rear!

The Macharia Excelsia's recently upgraded Hexfire Positron Assault Rifle faintly exuded the presence of the Phase King.

Although Saintess Ulrika Vraken was unable to accommodate the Phase King as well as the other two ace mechs, the degree of improvement was more than enough to exert heavy pressure onto the defenses of the orven battleship!

The Jemma Sandivar did not remain idle all of this time. While Saint Marissa Lewandowski continued to maintain her crucial blinding smoke, she also drove her ace light skirmisher to dive in and stab at the battleship's energy barriers with its twin blessed kamas!

Even if they weren't entirely suited to damaging energy shields, the Jemma Sandivar struck so quickly that the orven battleship's shield generators struggled to persist under the continuous assaults!

The Phase King's influence continued to amplify the attacks of the three ace mechs.

Under normal circumstances, the orven battleship should have been able to last much longer under the combined assault of three second-class ace mechs.

However, the extreme optimization and other boosts provided by the Phase King made all of the difference.

The fairly aged and outdated orven battleship had no solution against this onslaught! It was already a small miracle that her veteran crew and well-cared for components were able to last this long against the unrelenting attacks.

From the moment the Royal Jeem had circled around and charged against the orven battleship yet again, the ace mech succeeded in breaching through the last layer of segmented energy shields!

The ace spearman mech managed to get inside the multi-layered shells and gained full access to all of the gun batteries that the Golden Skull Alliance feared so much!

This time, no starfighter was left to stop the Royal Jeem from wreaking havoc across the hull.

No phase lord emerged from the hull of the alien battleship to flee into the depths of space or defend his last remaining shred of honor.

The Golden Skullers were disappointed when they saw that their ace mechs wrecked the orven battleship without any further complications.

It appeared that there was no hope of earning any Warship Tokens today.

#### Chapter 5040 Minor Losses and Gains

The battle wound down after the three ace mechs of the Golden Skull Alliance disarmed the orven battleship and disabled many of her systems.

By this time, only a handful of wheednar warships retained the ability to resist, but their straining transphasic energy shields were already faltering under the combined attacks of thousands of mechs!

The other alien warships had either been torn apart or drifted lifelessly in space.

The mech pilots had all been ordered to refrain from inflicting excessive damage to the alien warships.



While it was not possible for all of the mechs to show perfect restraint, the amount of relatively intact warships drifting into space was more than satisfactory!

The expeditionary fleet had already begun to accelerate forward by this time.

The main battle was pretty much over at this point. The mechs had already reformed into units and begun to secure the expanding debris field.

The mechs still maintained a respectable distance from the crippled warships. Even if all of their gun batteries had been knocked offline, there was still a decent risk that the desperate and cornered alien crew members would decide to blow up their vessels in a final act of spite!

However, the Golden Skull Alliance had already prepared for this. A few mechs began to throw EMP bombs into any breaches.

These bombs subsequently exploded and knocked out a lot of hardware!

Ranged mechs armed with luminar crystal rifles also fired disruptor beams and other damaging beams at select angles and points in the hulls. These precision attacks struck power generators and critical systems that could give the alien crew a chance to retaliate.

If that was not enough, a large number of Ferocious Piranhas flew close to the hulls of different mechs and made sure to use their glows to reduce the resistance of any alien survivors within range!

General Verle had even instructed the Everchanger to hover close to the disabled orven battleship and activate an amplified tranquility glow to envelop the entire vessel.

The Everchanger looked remarkably holy and pristine at this time. Faint silhouettes of angel wings even started to appear onto his back as Lufa's calming influence descended across the entire warship.

While this did not guarantee that every surviving orven spacer would cease their resistance and stop fighting, they should at least be a lot less fervent about resorting to extreme measures!

By the time the expeditionary fleet had drawn close to the debris field, thousands of shuttles launched from the various starships in order to begin rescue and salvage operations.

Not every mech that had been struck by the aliens collapsed into pieces.

There were still rare cases where the larger gun batteries only managed to inflict glancing blows that only cut off parts of a mech.

The alien starfighters also managed to damage a score of mechs before they all went down.

However, most of the shuttles were not assigned to perform search and rescue, but had instead been assigned to board and secure the crippled but mostly intact hulls!

This was already a familiar process to the older members of the Golden Skull Alliance.

Every boarding action was inherently risky and the resistance inside the vessels was bound to make the human boarding troops bleed.

Nonetheless, this was the only way to preserve the value of the alien warships to the greatest extent possible.

In any case, the lives of ordinary footsoldiers were much more expendable than mech pilots.

The pool of potentates in the Red Ocean was a lot smaller than the total population of humans. It also took years to convert potentates into qualified mech pilots.

It was a lot easier to train entire batches of infantry soldiers as they were not limited by conditions such as genetic aptitude.

It also took a lot less time to train a basic trooper that could adequately take part in dangerous boarding operations.

Ves did not bother to pay too much attention to the progress of the boarding actions. He only spared a brief amount of concern when he checked on the status of one of his closest friends and subordinates.

He groaned. "Damnit, Ketis. Not again."

Ketis was a Journeyman Mech Designer as well as a Swordmaster.

As a woman who held great ambitions, she could not resist the opportunity to put her excellent swordsmanship to good use and board another hostile alien warship!

The only consolation that eased Ves' concerns was that she had chosen to join a bunch of Swordmaidens in boarding a crippled wheednar heavy cruiser.

She probably did not consider the orvens to be worthy prey for her Bloodsinger after they had been tranquilized by her husband's expert mech.

"Well, let her have her fun. Venerable Dise should be able respond quickly enough if any unforeseen threats have appeared."

As the various forces continued to conduct rescue, salvage and capture operations, Ves eventually received a preliminary report from General Verle.

"We have just received the casualty list, sir. 112 of our mech pilots have lost their lives in this battle." The projected figure stated. "I know how you feel about this, but this amount of losses falls well within our more optimistic projections. Don't forget that we managed to attain a clean victory against a formidable alien raiding fleet. The combined firepower of all of the warships is enough to tear our entire expeditionary fleet to shreds in a direct confrontation. Any other second-class mech force that has attempted to fight against a similar hostile force of warships have sustained losses up to thousands of mech pilots."

"Yeah, but they don't have battle formations, an abundance of expert mechs and three ace mechs." Ves retorted.

"We all knew what we were getting into, sir. We are still in the process of building up our strength. The warships and the salvage that we have managed to score today will go a long way into helping us upgrade our mechs to higher standards."

Anyone who looked at the outcome of this battle would think that the Golden Skull Alliance scored an overwhelming victory!

There should be nothing to complain about as the aliens failed to touch any of the truly important assets such as the starships and the high-ranking mech pilots of the expeditionary fleet!

It was a pity that Ves could not feel so much joy at this time.

"We need to work on solutions that can decrease the amount of losses even further." He said. "If the disparity between our forces and the forces of the enemy has grown to this extent, then we should be able to win an engagement with near-zero casualties. Many more alien fleets like these will come from the depths of the Red Ocean and assault red humanity's space. We may need to be ready to fight many battles in quick succession."

They briefly talked a bit more about what sort of measures they could take to prepare for the future.

It was not easy to reduce the loss rate in the short term. The only way to completely reduce the risks to all mech pilots was to deploy the ace mechs by themselves.

In truth, everyone knew that the Macharia Excelsia, the Jemma Sandivar and the Royal Jeem could have defeated the alien raiding fleet by themselves.

They would have taken a lot more time to overcome the defenses of every shielded warship and a lot of alien vessels would doubtlessly succeed in splitting up and escaping from the battlefield, but at least this was a safe and guaranteed way to harvest a lot of spoils!

This was not conducive to the development of the Larkinson Clan and the other organizations, though.

The mech forces all needed to accumulate more experience and give their mech pilots enough opportunities to grow in battle.

"Have there been any notable breakthroughs in this battle?" Ves asked.

"Not particularly." General Verle shook his head. "This battle is actually relatively tame by our standards all-considered. The only pilots that broke through this time belong to the Adelaides and the Boojays."

"I see. I expected more, but I guess the Age of Dawn has only just begun."

Ves hoped to observe whether the influence of exotic radiation had loosened the bottlenecks of his mech pilots just enough to trigger a wave of breakthroughs, but his expectations were wildly off the mark.

He understood that it was not just the lack of time that played a role.

The relatively short duration of the battle and the amount of high-level support in the battle also caused the mech pilots to endure less pressure.

Ves did not really mind, though. There were plenty of opportunities in the future for his mech pilots to break through in a natural fashion. Lanie Larkinson and Taon Melin would have their day when they were truly ready to step up and become the heroes that the Larkinson Clan needed.

"What do the estimates of the plunder look like?" Ves asked.

General Verle briefly consulted a couple of reports. "The good news is that the cargo holds of the alien warships are filled with fairly valuable stolen plunder. Many warships are still close to intact sans their gun batteries, so it is possible for shipyards to refurbish them into hulls that are suitable for human use. Now that no more starships are pouring in from the greater beyond gate, the market prices for relatively intact alien hulls has multiplied by an order of magnitude. Oh, we are also entitled to a merit reward from the Red MTA, though it won't be much."

The bounties on the alien raiding fleets were not that impressive because the mechers and fleters already took the salvage value of the alien warships into account.

MTA merits were not that easy to earn!

"What's the bad news, general?"

"Well, the tech and materials of the wheednar warships are not that good. They are roughly equivalent or inferior to the ordinary alien warships we managed to defeat during Battle of the Boryan Belt. The wheednars are a minor race in the Red Ocean so their warships are not that interesting even if we managed to secure so many hulls. They haven't integrated a lot of phasewater into their hulls."

"What about the orven battleship?"

"That ship is the only one that is worthwhile among our prizes. Her hull structure is made out of considerably more valuable alloys, although they are still weaker than the other alien warship materials that we have obtained in the past. The ship can be sold for quite a hefty sum of MTA credits if kept whole, but we can also stockpile a lot of bulk first-class materials to produce a large quantity of quasi-first-class mechs in the future. It is up to you and the other leaders to decide which option you prefer."

This was not a simple decision to make as Ves did not have any designs on hand that could make good use of all of those salvaged first-class materials.

"We'll figure this out later. What about phasewater?"

The projection of General Verle released a laugh. "Hahaha! No chance. You can forget about it. While you can still recover a marginal amount of phasewater from salvaged transphasic materials, we can be certain that the aliens have not kept any containers filled with pure and unadulterated phasewater for us. All of the raiding fleets that the aliens have sent out have already been marked for death. Placing excess phasewater into any of the ships will only play into our hands in the end."

"Damn."

Ves already expected as much. The warships all looked like castoffs so it was unlikely for the native aliens to invest anything truly important into them. He could think of hundreds of better uses of phasewater than to load them into expendable warships!

"What about intelligence?"

"We should be able to obtain a lot more relevant and up to date information from the alien data banks." General Verle grinned. "It will take a lot of time and effort to unlock and translate the encrypted alien data, but once we do, we should have a good picture on the actual state of alien space beyond the borders of the Torald Middle Zone."

"Good. We need that information for our next operations. This is just the beginning."