

The Mech 6021

Chapter 6021 Breakthrough Ambitions

Venerable Brutus Wodin wordlessly shook his head in disapproval.

Commander Melkor's damaged mech failed to move for several long seconds.

Eventually, the Avatar Commander wised up and moved his Fey Fianna to the rear.

It was not as if Brutus was unsympathetic towards Melkor Larkinson.

Every mech pilot yearned to become a hero one day. Even male Hexers dreamed of becoming strong enough to serve as the shields of the female Hexers.

However, greatness could not be attained by being recklessly suicidal in combat. Theories about breakthrough triggers varied, but Brutus personally believed that mech pilots needed to be sincere in their approach towards combat.

They needed to fight with the intent to survive and overcome any challenges in their way!

Sometimes, that meant making the sensible decision to perform a tactical retreat. There was nothing shameful about backing away from a disadvantageous situation if doing so would lead to better results down the line.

Commander Melkor wouldn't do anyone on his side any favors if he foolishly overextended himself before getting himself killed.

Morale among the Avatars of Myth would plunge, and many Larkinsons would probably go crazy as they attempted to make up for the shame of losing their commander!

This was exactly why Commander Casella Ingvar had approached Venerable Brutus before the battle with a request to keep an eye on the Avatar Commander.

"I am always happy to fulfill a request from a charming lady such as yourself, but why do you seek my assistance in particular? Venerable Davia Stark and Venerable Isobel Kotin can already provide support from a distance. You are also in a position to lend him aid from your Minerva."

Casella crossed her arms. "The Amaranto and the Promethea are some of our best anti-ship assets. More importantly than that, I do not want to insult Commander Melkor by exposing the fact that our ranged expert pilots have been ordered to babysit him. It would shatter his self-esteem and put him in the wrong state of mind. You are much better placed to save him in the upcoming battle. Your expert mech's firepower is not strong enough to put you on ship elimination duty. If the Torment Fleet deploys a large number of phasefighters, then you are much better suited to whittle down their numbers. You can do this while at the same time position yourself to prevent Melkor's demise."

"He will not appreciate it, especially if he finds out." Brutus frowned. "I will do as you ask, but if I am compelled to intervene to save his life over that of other mech pilots, then I will disclose the reason for doing so. His honor and my honor insist on it. After that, I will extend any special favors to him. There are many other soldiers on the battlefield that are equally deserving of my help. I would much rather intervene to save the life of a woman rather than Melkor."

"He is family, you know. You are married to a Larkinson, and so is your sister."

"That is true, but I will not let family affection override Melkor's desire to risk his life for a chance of ascension. Coddling him may keep him alive, but it will kill his fighting spirit."

A tense pause ensued as Casella recognized the truth of that statement. She was an expert pilot as well.

The female commander eventually let out a sigh. "Not every Larkinson is equal. Melkor is an important contributor to the Larkinson Clan's early development and rise to power. Let us do this, then. You only need to pay special attention to him and save his life once. Hopefully, Melkor will have learned a lesson from his near-death experience and adjust his mentality so that he will no longer behave so recklessly."

"Reckless mech pilots tend to be the most willful pilots of all. If you deprive them of their willingness to confront enemies that they cannot overcome under normal circumstances..."

There was no need for Brutus to finish that sentence.

"Once is enough." Casella said. "If he continues to take disproportionate risks, then he must bear the consequences of his actions. Perhaps only by coming closer to death will he have a chance to succeed."

Although Venerable Brutus did not believe that Melkor possessed the qualities to break through, he had already fulfilled Casella's request.

While Melkor's shabby Fey Fianna beat a hasty retreat, the Star Dancer Mark II continued to advance forward!

Unlike other rifleman mechs, the Hexer expert rifleman mech boldly flew in the middle of enemy formations and rapidly fired one resonance-empowered transphasic energy beam after another at many different targets.

Brutus had deliberately reduced the power of the Hexacris rifle in order to increase its firing rate, but it still managed to unleash enough power to overwhelm the transphasic energy shields and sear a hole into each and every alien phasefighter.

This was because his resonance strength had grown just as rapidly as the Larkinson expert pilots as of late!

With the help of the general cultivation elixirs provided by the Larkinsons, Brutus felt much stronger than a couple of years prior.

Now that he had just managed to become an ace pilot candidate, he was already thinking about forcing his next breakthrough!

Although his chances of breaking through were low due to his irregular growth and the limitations of his outdated expert mech, Venerable Brutus was at least able to work on his courage and momentum in advance.

Even though his bold behavior had caused hundreds of alien phasefighters to direct their firepower towards his Star Dancer Mark II, their retaliatory fire was completely ineffective!

Just as the machine's suggested, The Star Dancer was highly maneuverable and easily evaded many incoming attacks no matter which direction they came from. The aliens had yet to learn how to

coordinate their fire so that they could envelop their targets into unavoidable grids, so Brutus found it remarkably easier to dance around the firepower of the inflexible enemy small craft.

Even if the sheer volume of fire still caused his expert rifleman mech to get struck by ranged attacks, the powerful resonance shield easily withstood the damage without much consumption.

Now that Brutus had reached the strength of a high-tier expert pilot, he was much better able to utilize his willpower to forcibly negate the damage inflicted by enemy attacks!

"If Saint Tusa can do it, then so can I!" Brutus exclaimed as his Star Dancer's rifle began to overheat due to his insistence on raising its firing rate. "I need to kill faster. I can still exceed my limits!"

Venerable Brutus was not the only expert pilot who became inspired by Tusa's breakthrough.

Every high-tier expert pilot of the expeditionary fleet tried their own ways of taking on greater challenges and tapping into their hidden potential.

Further away, one of the modern alien battleships of the Torment Fleet had begun to perform more erratically over time.

Even though her excellent coverage of segmented multi-

layered azure energy shields easily resisted the ranged attack salvos from the distant human mechs, the alien vessel began to suffer more and more malfunctions and inexplicable deaths.

It was not until the orven command crew got slaughtered in a single fell swoop that the remaining alien crew discovered that they were being haunted by demons!

None of the aliens were aware that a very hidden expert stealth mech had been shadowing their homeship for several minutes.

Despite all of the havoc wreaked by the expert mech's Geist System, the aliens failed to connect the dots, thereby allowing the Phobos to lurk in the vicinity.

What was even more remarkable was that Venerable Zimro Belson and his living expert mech were able to escalate the damage they inflicted onto the alien battleship over time!

In fact, the Phobos ordinarily shouldn't be able to compromise the enemy vessel when she had erected all of her energy defenses.

However, Venerable Zimro and his Phobos were both living beings. This meant that they possessed the capacity to grow and adapt!

Zimro and his battle partner had long become frustrated by the inability for his Geist System to infiltrate enemy vessels when they had erected their transphasic energy shields.

This was why they both conducted focused training and learning on how to allow them to sneak the fiends anchored to the Geist System to quietly slip through energy shields no matter whether they were transphasic!

Their efforts paid off. What was supposed to be impossible no longer applied to the pair.

With great effort, Zimro and the Phobos carefully wrapped a fiend with their true resonance and essentially tried to smuggle the dangerous ghost past the multiple layers of azure energy shields.

The concentration and effort required to sneak a fiend past such formidable barriers was great, but as long as the Phobos remained undetected and undisturbed, Zimro was confident that he would be able to succeed!

"....Haaahahaha....."

The fiend uttered a haunting laugh once the intangible monster finally found himself inside one of the vessel's compartments.

After receiving his instructions from the Geist System, the spiritual fiend grinned, revealing disturbingly sharp and long fangs.

"....Killllllll....!"

Orven crew members began to drop dead for inexplicable reasons while delicate components got torn into pieces!

One of the older fiends that was coincidentally named Nosferatu the Tormented proved to be especially fearsome!

As the first fiend to infiltrate the enemy vessel, the fiend already slayed more enemy aliens than the other fiends!

After sapping the life out of every officer in what passed for the alien vessel's bridge, Nosferatu utilized the strength granted by Zimro's true resonance to unscrupulously drain the lives of the reinforcing orven crew members as well as hundreds of staff that were stationed in the surrounding compartments.

The disruptions caused by his death directly caused the hyper battleship to fall into a state of paralysis, thereby making it less likely for the Phobos to become exposed!

Meanwhile, two powerful expert rifleman mechs were doing their jobs by besieging enemy warships in the rear.

The Amaranto had set aside her Instrument of Vengeance and relied on the superior firepower of the much larger Instrument of Doom to shatter and overwhelm the transphasic energy shields of numerous orven sub-capital warships all by herself!

Once the expert rifleman mech managed to create a hole in an enemy vessel's energy shield coverage, Venerable Davia Stark had already done her job even if the gap only lasted for a few seconds!

This was because the Promethea was able to exploit these momentary gap to fire a strong resonance-empowered purple fire beam that started a fire on the enemy vessel's exposed hull!

As long as the Promethea managed to land a single shot with her Ignitron luminar crystal rifle, Venerable Isobel Kotin was able to feed the flames and caused them to engulf more and more parts of the hull until it was too late for the enemy vessel!

"Ya ya ya!"

The reason why just a single attack from the Promethea was already able to spell the doom of any exposed enemy warship was because Isobel's companion spirit had become particularly good at raising the heat!

As long as Kiroshi piggybacked on the resonance-empowered fire beam, the flaming purple cat was able to blend into the other King Killer Flames while quietly working to spread them towards anything nearby that looked vulnerable and important enough!

Although Isobel felt satisfied for being able to relieve the expeditionary fleet by single-handedly burning down several enemy vessels, she did not feel this was enough to trigger her second apotheosis.

She needed to conquer a greater challenge or perform a more impossible feat in order to transcend for a second time!

"Transphasic energy shields." She uttered. "It is frustrating that they continually prevent me from burning down these alien ships. How can I make them catch fire?"

If she could evolve her fire to the point where she could burn energy shields despite how it should be impossible according to science, then Isobel became certain she would be able to turn into a Saint!

Chapter 6022 Mutual Evolution

As the battle between the expeditionary fleet and the Torment Fleet raged on, it became clear that the Golden Skull Alliance had gotten caught in a tough battle!

This had become an increasingly rare occurrence because the mech forces of the expeditionary fleet had grown to a formidable level of strength.

Ever since the expeditionary fleet started the Trailblazer Expedition, the Larkinsons and their allies defeated one alien raiding fleet after another.

Each victory yielded a huge amount of spoils, as the Golden Skull Alliance always managed to claim possession of the rich debris field as well as any alien warship hulls that were still relatively intact.

The Larkinsons had already replaced many old second-class mechs with modern and well-equipped quasi-first-class products. The other alliance partners made similar moves, if only so that they could keep up and ensure they contributed enough to the battle to claim a richer share of the spoils.

With powerful models such as the Fey Fianna, the Transcendent Punisher Mark III and most recently the Storm Sword, the Larkinson Army's comprehensive strength and ability to counter alien warships had increased remarkably.

However, the Torment Fleet was not as easy to defeat as other alien fleets!

Different from the old and outdated warships that the Red Cabal drove into human space to create attrition, most of the vessels fielded by the Torment Fleet were more modern, more powerful and more well-supplied orven homeships.

The Eminence of Torment had lived for over 800 standard years, and managed to amass a sizable amount of wealth and influence in orven civilization during much of that time.

Even if he strangely portrayed himself as a weak and defective phase lord that was constantly suffering from unending pain, that did not stop the Eminence of Torment from building his own power base and earning more rewards from the Red War.

The smaller vessels of the Torment Fleet were easy enough to defeat. Their defenses were better and their gun batteries may be remarkably more effective at eliminating large numbers of mechs, but they still succumbed when a large number of mechs overwhelmed their transphasic energy shields.

It was the bigger warships that posed a bigger problem! The aliens had not only incorporated a lot of stolen human technologies, but also adapted the designs of their homeships in order to better cope with human fighting methods.

"The newer hyper battleships are too lethal to our mech forces! They don't mount as many primary gun batteries, but their hulls have at least 50 percent more secondary gun batteries and thrice as many tertiary gun batteries! These alien ships carry so many rapid-fire transphasic hyper laser gun batteries that they can shred entire mech companies in seconds! Even our much better protected quasi-first-class mechs can hardly last more than a few seconds when subjected to focused fire!"

While the Torment Fleet had yet to receive too many state-

of-the-art hyper battleships from the Red Cabal, their designs deliberately placed less emphasis on anti-ship armaments in order to free up capacity that could be used to accommodate a much greater amount of anti-small craft armaments!

Small but fast-tracking and fast-firing transphasic hyper laser cannons had been specifically designed and optimized to lock onto mechs and shred them with continuous barrages of energy beams.

The design philosophy of these unassuming but extremely numerous gun batteries was to rely on quantity over quality.

Mechs were quite difficult to hit at different ranges, especially if they were fast and maneuverable. Even if they got hit once or twice, they were usually tough enough to shrug off the attacks without getting impaired.

Yet very few mechs could remain intact when they were focused on by at least a dozen rapid-fire transphasic hyper laser cannons!

One by one, these clusters of laser cannons continually induced despair onto mech pilots as their machines almost had no recourse against these kinds of attacks.

Only shield link technology could allow these mechs to defend against attacks that vastly exceeded their native defensive capabilities, but it was a pity that the expeditionary fleet did not enjoy this extravagant luxury.

As such, with each minute that passed, every force suffered an escalating number of casualties from these giant anti-mech platforms.

The only positive news for the mech forces was that the threat posed by these hyper battleships became so acute that numerous mech pilots managed to break through after getting targeted!

The immense terror of getting bombarded by dozens of transphasic laser beams in quick succession was enough for many desperate mech pilots to unlock their hidden potential!

Numerous mech pilots took their first step on the path to godhood by advancing to the rank of expert candidate!

More notable were the existing expert candidates who broke through to the rank of expert pilot and temporarily wielded the power of an expert mech!

Yet for every hero that got born on this bloody battlefield, many more mech pilots perished in an instant.

The successive transphasic laser beams were too ruthless. The gun batteries may be small in relation to warships, but they were a lot more powerful than the weapons employed by small craft, hence their tendency to leave very few survivors behind!

The threat posed by the new alien vessels to the mech forces happened to be so great that the Jedda Sandivar had become fully preoccupied with interfering with their operations.

The ace light skirmisher rapidly flew from one hyper battleship after another. The Jedda Sandivar's Saint Kingdom produced a strange mist that lingered even after the machine moved away.

The persistent mist did not block the perception of the sensors and the aliens stationed inside the hyper battleship.

Instead, it primarily sapped the energy out of the laser beams that attempted to pass through the hazy mist!

The anti-energy beam mist was empowered by enough true resonance to easily block or weaken thousands of laser beams fired by tertiary gun batteries.

It would have been much more difficult for this mist to neutralize the energy beams fired by much larger weapon emplacements, but the tertiary armaments were so much smaller and weaker that they failed to exceed the threshold of the anti-energy beam mist!

Although the mist gradually dispersed shortly after they left the Saint Kingdom, causing its effects to rapidly weaken over time, Saint Marissa was still able to limit the firepower of three or four hyper battleships!

Unfortunately, there was only so much the Jedda Sandivar could do to suppress the vessels.

There were other hyper battleships that had split away from the main formation and tried to put as much distance from the ace light skirmisher as possible.

This forced the remainder of the mech forces to confront the threat posed by all of these specialized anti-mech battleships by themselves!

The horror of these warships became increasingly more clear even as they attracted a lot of attacks.

The Stormblade Samurais and the Storm Swords deployed by the Swordmaiden Legion assaulted one of these hyper battleships.

Despite employing a powerful combination of electrifying stormblade weapons and stackable space suppressors, the warship demolished over a hundred mechs, most of them Stormblade Samurais, and even put in the effort of striking any of the ejected cockpits that managed to abandon the doomed mechs in time!

"No! Sisters!"

"These orvens must die!"

With the help of the much more powerful transphasic stormblades of the powerful new Storm Swords, the Swordmaiden mechs eventually managed to exhaust much of the segmented azure energy shields, allowing them to slip through and tear apart the vulnerable battleship!

Further away, two large formations of Valkyrie mechs led by two expert mech versions of the same mech line began to summon two different apparitions of the Superior Mother.

Yet before the Glory Seekers could launch their infamously lethal death energy wave attacks, multiple hyper battleships launched dozens of torpedoes at the approaching Valkyrie mechs!

Many mechs attempted to shoot down the torpedoes, but that was easier said than done. The large torpedoes were not only clad with thick layers of transphasic alloys, but they were also protected by their own transphasic energy shields!

Even though many of them eventually got shot down by many ranged mechs, one of them ultimately managed to survive long enough to detonate right in front of one of the large but highly inflexible battle formations!

"No! Sister!"

The affected battle formation immediately collapsed as a weapon of mass destruction engulfed hundreds of Valkyrie mechs, many of them piloted by highly experienced veterans!

"What is the status of Venerable Olivia Remus?! Did we lose an expert pilot!?"

Fortunately for the Glory Seekers, the heavily damaged form of the Valkyrie Krista quickly managed to hover away from the explosion. The mid-tier expert mech managed to withstand the fury of the powerful blast due to the fact that Venerable Olivia managed to reach the strength of a high-tier expert pilot with the help of general cultivation elixirs.

Even more fortunate for the Hexers was that numerous other surviving mech pilots became so desperate that they managed to break through to the rank of expert candidate!

Even so, the loss suffered by the Glory Seekers was great!

The fact that the other battle formation led by Venerable Eona Ballentine successfully managed to depopulate over half of the crew serving aboard the entire hyper battleship hardly lifted their moods.

In fact, the Larkinsons and the Glory Seekers became unpleasantly surprised that the hyper defenses of the modern orven battleship proved to be partially effective at neutralizing the power of one of their most reliable trump cards!

"Red humanity is adapting, but so are the aliens." Master Benedict Cortez muttered as he observed the battlefield from the safety of the Cross Clan's flagship.

The Hemmington Cross was in the process of moving further away from the ambush site. While this would make it harder for the fleet carrier to provide support to the Crosser mechs in the field, the ship was too large and vulnerable to stay so close to the action.

This was because the Eminence of Torment was particularly good at damaging starships!

Even though the Royal Jeem was steadily working to reduce the copious amount of energy barriers surrounding the juggernaut-sized alien, the alien relied on both his unblockable space ripple attacks as well as the graser cannons mounted on his giant suit of armor to inflict significant damage onto the expeditionary fleet every now and then.

When the giant Eminence of Torment successfully managed to swat aside the Royal Jeem, he also raised one of his arms and transmitted a deadly space ripple attack at the Spirit of Bentheim.

Out of all of the starships of the expeditionary fleet, the vessel with the giant cat head prow had earned a lot more enmity from the enemy phase lord!

"The Eminence of Torment is trying to destroy the Spirit of Bentheim so that he can weaken our suppression of his spatial abilities!"

Although it was hard to believe, the orven phase lord was not fighting at his full strength at the moment.

He was originally even stronger!

It was just that the combined efforts of space interdictors and space suppressors weakened a lot of spatial abilities and prevented any warp bubbles from forming.

If not for these effects, the Eminence of Torment would have become a lot more mobile, allowing him to approach the starships of the expeditionary fleet and wreck them with impunity!

In order to free himself up, the powerful alien leader had set his sights on the flagship of the Larkinson Clan.

Yet before the spatial ripple attack could strike the factory ship, the Bastion quickly interposed herself in front of the ship and deployed a large and fairly powerful resonance shield!

"Primal Aegis!"

The ripple in space struck the enlarged resonance shield and quickly collapsed it due to the enormous difference in power!

Venerable Jannzi was not stupid enough to put her high-tier expert mech in the way. As impressive as the Bastion may be after her rebirth, the expert heavy space knight would probably get crippled at once if she withstood the full brunt of this spatial attack!

The weakened but still fairly powerful ripple attack therefore bypassed the Bastion and struck the azure energy shields of the Spirit of Bentheim.

The frontal shields held for a short while, but the Eminence of Torment's main attack turned out to be so effective against transphasic defenses that it managed to overcome this barrier and strike the hull!

The giant prow that was supposed to depict Goldie's splendid head suffered major tears!

Fortunately, the decorative prow successfully managed to prevent the ripple attack from drilling further into the hull.

The Spirit of Bentheim may appear to be a factory ship, but her last refit had boosted most of her defenses to the standards of a first-class capital ship!

Just the many layers of first-class alloys stacked onto the prow section had proven that they were worth all of the expense and effort to install onto the Spirit of Bentheim.

"Our flagship remains intact!"

"The new Zeta-65 Warp Interdictor has remained unaffected. The new module is still doing a good job of suppressing the Eminence of Torment's spatial abilities."

"The Spirit of Bentheim cannot withstand too many spatial ripple attacks. We need to neutralize the threat posed by the phase lord quickly before he inflicts more damage!"

"When is it time for our new ace pilot to deploy?!"

"Where is Saint Tusa?!"

Chapter 6023 Illusionary Dream

As the forces of the expeditionary fleet struggled to defeat the warships of the Torment Fleet, one notable asset remained in reserve.

The Dark Zephyr remained active but silent as the living mech continued to huddle inside the hangar bay of the Spirit of Bentheim.

The fresh ace pilot inside the cockpit impatiently tapped his foot as he observed the battlefield from multiple different live feeds.

He carefully observed and studied the performance of the Eminence of Torment, the recently developed alien hyper battleships and the more powerful hyper phasefighters.

Saint Tusa-Billingsley-Larkinson wished his Dark Zephyr could sortie into battle and tip the scales in the favor of the Golden Skull Alliance.

However, all of the leaders of the expeditionary fleet insisted that Tusa and his upgraded expert light skirmisher remain in reserve.

Tusa did not believe he was being held back just because the Golden Skull Alliance wanted to have a powerful troubleshooter on hand that could quickly respond to any unexpected surprises.

The Torment Fleet may have sprung several surprises after getting ambushed, but the aliens have likely brought out everything they had in their arsenal.

It did not make much sense to hold his powerful new Dark Zephyr back unless the Golden Skull Alliance had other reasons to justify this decision.

As Tusa witnessed many of the breakthroughs that occurred across the battlefield, he became increasingly certain what this battle was truly about.

He opened a communication channel to the Minerva.

"Commander."

"It is not yet time, Saint Tusa. Please be patient for another minute. Your time will come soon."

"I do not have much patience to begin with!" Tusa barked as he slammed his fist against the armrest of his piloting chair! "Is it truly worth it to let so many of our clansmen die in order to trigger all of these breakthroughs?!"

Commander Casella sighed. "That is not our call to make. Our patriarch has recently changed the priorities of our expeditionary fleet. Our former goal was to focus on resource acquisition and minimizing our losses. Now that our clan urgently needs to build a small but powerful first-class fleet and mech force, our strategy needs to shift. We must focus on promoting as many talents among our mech pilots as possible. We must give them a better stage for them to perform beyond their limits, even if it means that many of their compatriots may die in the process. As you can see, our new strategy is already bearing fruit."

Tusa let out a frustrated sound. "I am not blind enough to deny that this approach makes a certain amount of sense, but don't you think this is a little too much?! How much longer do you have to make our clan bleed?! How many lives are you willing to trade in order to obtain another expert pilot? Dozens? Hundreds? Thousands?"

"Do not think that I am in complete agreement with this approach!" Casella defensively shot back! "However, we must build up our high-end combat assets as extensively as possible. The patriarch has already warned me that our clan may be forced to fend off much more powerful alien adversaries in the future. Ordinary mech pilots cannot play a significant role anymore. Even if they do, we can easily hire as many of them as we want. What cannot be bought with money are expert pilots and ace pilots. Not only can they be transferred to the Premier Branch as long as their mechs are upgraded to first-class standards, they can also train and inspire our troops if they remain in the expeditionary fleet."

"..."

Tusa felt conflicted. Just because he became an ace pilot did not mean he gained absolute certainty in everything. In matters unrelated to his conviction, he was just as ignorant and indecisive as any other soldier!

"The survival of the Larkinson Clan and all of our dependents is at stake." Casella emphasized. "Whatever suffering we incur today is much less than what we will endure if we fail to nurture enough high-ranking mech pilots. Our previous strategy was more appropriate for the Age of Mechs. Now that we have entered the Age of Dawn, we cannot afford to pursue steady development anymore. Our patriarch has stepped up his game, and so must we. This battle shall be one of many crucibles that will strengthen the foundation of our clan."

The Sentinel Commander sounded way too callous when she easily dismissed the bloody price for this change in strategy.

There were many human lives in the balance!

Tusa feared that this battle would not be the last of its kind. He thought that the Larkinsons had already done away with fighting pitched battles against enemies strong enough to make the Larkinson Clan bleed.

However, it would be intellectually dishonest for him to deny that these sorts of difficult battles also tended to produce the most breakthroughs!

Tusa found it difficult to deny the logic behind this shift. He just felt disgusted by the fact at how easily Casella succumbed so easily to the trap that the ends justify the means.

He himself found it difficult to make up his mind whether this was the right call. It depended upon whether Ves' opinions about future threats were credible enough. If the patriarch exaggerated the threat posed by the native aliens because he was greedy for more high-ranking mech pilots, then Tusa could not say whether he was willing to become an accomplice to his cousin's bloody schemes!

It was only because that Ves often turned out to be right in his decisions that the Saint was willing to give the mech designer the benefit of the doubt.

"Do you think that our clansmen are unwilling, Tusa?"

"What do you mean?"

"I am their commander. I know what is on their minds. I understand their dreams and aspirations. Do not forget that service in the expeditionary fleet is completely voluntary. Many Larkinsons that value their lives over ascension have already transferred to the side branches. The soldiers that remain have already signed an implicit contract that conveys their willingness to put their lives at risk for a chance of obtaining glory. What we are doing is fulfilling their dreams, more or less. Do not forget that you used to be one of these hopeful mech pilots. You still are in a sense."

That was true. Battles were also unpredictable. It was unreasonable to expect that the clan had a total grasp of the enemies they confronted.

In fact, many of the battles as of late had gotten too predictable. The expeditionary fleet had become increasingly more proficient at defeating the rabble that ranked at the bottom of native alien society.

This was not conducive to the development of the Larkinson Army. Winning lots of battles against the alien equivalent of cannon fodder only made the Larkinsons better at bullying the weak.

Battles against more formidable enemies such as the Torment Fleet were essential to improving the ability for the Larkinson Clan to cope against its more powerful adversaries of the future!

Tusa sighed. "I won't argue with you on this matter any further. I am not in charge. You are. I only have one more question. Have we waited long enough?"

"We have." Casella smiled. "According to our analysis, most of the mech pilots that have accumulated enough and were most prone to breaking through have done so. Continuing to maintain the current status quo will only lead to escalating losses without the corresponding benefits. You are free to sortie into the field, Saint Tusa."

"Finally! I have a lot of repressed energy that I urgently want to vent onto these orvens!"

The Dark Zephyr already exited the hangar bay of the lightly damaged Spirit of Bentheim and began to activate a warp bubble that quickly accelerated the high-tier expert mech towards the battlefield!

"Which target should I attack first, Casella?"

"You decide. If you are confident you are up to the task, then you can attempt to team up with Saint Kalasandra Boojay into defeating the Eminence of Torment. If you think that you cannot land an immediate crippling blow onto the phase lord, then it is better to let the Royal Jeem grind away at

his defenses. You can make a more immediate impact on the battle by helping our troops eliminate the hyper battleships."

Tusa faced a difficult choice. He could make an enormous impact on the battle in one fell swoop by inflicting a crippling blow onto the Eminence of Torment.

However, he was not quite certain whether his current level of strength was enough to allow him to damage a phase lord that had proven to be much stronger and more cunning than anyone expected!

As much as Tusa wanted to make the most powerful possible impression in his debut as an ace pilot, he decided that it may be better to go for the sure bet this time.

"I shall take on the surviving hyper battleships." He conveyed.

"Good choice. You do not have to expend your resources to eliminate all of them. You can already make a large difference by eliminating half of them if you can do so quickly."

"I can handle it." Tusa confidently replied. "Get ready to follow up on my results."

As the machine surged towards the action, Saint Tusa did not unfold his complete Saint Kingdom right away.

Doing so would make his Dark Zephyr way too conspicuous on the battlefield. The living mech instead began to attract a lot of shadow energy with the help of his Ultimate Module in order to reduce his emissions and energy signature.

In the middle of a red-hot battlefield, none of the aliens had any time or attention to spare in surveying the battlefield for incoming threats that were difficult to detect! They already had their hands full with their most immediate human enemies!

The Dark Zephyr did not excel at rapid long-range traversal, but the expert light skirmisher was still fast enough that he managed to approach one of the hyper battleships relatively quickly.

The kilometers-long alien homeship had proven to be a formidable terror on the battlefield so far. Hundreds of tertiary transphasic hyper laser batteries had already scythed down many mechs belonging to the Larkinsons, the Glory Seekers, the Crossers, the Adelaides and the Boojays!

No matter what sort of mech fell into the orven hyper battleship's crosshairs, none of them could withstand the barrages for long!

Tusa had deliberately chosen this target as the hyper battleship was only subject to light suppression. Every human mech force had long learned that it was counterproductive to spread their firepower across multiple heavily shielded targets.

Since the mech forces had decided to focus their attacks on other targets, this left Tusa's target with fully intact segmented multi-layer azure energy shield coverage!

This was among the higher defensive configurations that the native aliens applied to their more valued homeships.

It would have taken the Jedda Sandivar or the Royal Jeem an awful amount of time to drill through all of these potent energy shields!

Yet when the comparatively weaker Dark Zephyr charged towards the same alien battleship, Saint Tusa did not consider any situation where he would have to take just as much time to eliminate the vessel!

"Blackwing!"

"Chip chip chip!"

His companion spirit had already begun to reinforce the Dark Wind Module.

The Ultimate Module had been accumulating energy all this time. This meant that as soon as the Dark Zephyr was getting close to crashing against the alien vessel's energy shields, the living mech was ready to activate his latest and most powerful ability in an instant!

Alarms began to ring inside the bridge of the alien homeship. The high-caste orven captain became alarmed when the resonance meters derived from human technology began to sound a particularly scary alarm!

Before the orven captain could begin to issue his orders with the assumption that his homeship's energy shields would hold, the Dark Zephyr had already made his move!

"<nullb>Leap of True Freedom!"

"<nullb>Dark Wind Passage!"

Though it strained Tusa and his battle partner a lot to trigger multiple powerful abilities at once, the pair nonetheless managed to pull them off without missing their timing!

A thin but very conspicuous streak of shadow ran straight through the orven battleship from the side!

What was remarkable was that the streak briefly became interrupted just before and after running through both sides of the battleship's energy shield cover!

Seconds later, the hyper battleship's gun batteries interrupted their fire as the hull began to suffer from multiple severe malfunctions and internal explosions!

Many segmented azure energy shields lost power and disappeared, making it clear that the vessel had just suffered a powerful blow, one that the latest mech to enter the battlefield had inflicted without any regard for the orven battleship's defenses!

"Tusa!"

"Hah! That's our Saint!"

The best part about this was that Tusa looked anything but done. The Dark Zephyr had already changed his trajectory so that he initiated another attack run against a different orven battleship!

Both the ace pilot and his upgraded mech became hungry to earn more achievements in battle.

Having witnessed so many Larkinsons losing their lives in order to chase after an illusory dream, Tusa vowed to never rest until he utterly crushed every alien on the battlefield today!

"FOR THE LARKINSON CLAN!"

Chapter 6024 Dark Wind Blowing

Many soldiers on the battlefield could not afford to become distracted, but they all heard the news nonetheless.

Saint Tusa had entered the battlefield!

Not only that, he instantly managed to cripple or inflict severe harm onto multiple hyper battleships that had been responsible for felling so many mechs and mech pilots!

Each of these prized orven battleships had proven to be a reaper of human lives. Their abundance of fully powered tertiary transphasic hyper laser cannon batteries had already become responsible for producing many new traumas among the surviving soldiers.

To see these terrors of the battlefield getting their comeuppance with so much ease provided a huge amount of relief to the troops!

"Tusa! Tusa! Tusa!"

Morale across the expeditionary fleet shot up as their third ace pilot continued his hunt against the most threatening alien vessels on the battlefield.

The Dark Zephyr had fully unfolded his Saint Kingdom by now! A bright blue zone enveloped the black machine, allowing the living mech to inspire greater hope and courage from every mech pilot that was able to track the expert light skirmisher's passage!

It was remarkable how thoroughly Saint Tusa's entry into the battle tipped the balance.

The expeditionary fleet went from fighting a bitter struggle to gaining the upper hand in just the span of a single minute!

"<nullb>Leap of True Freedom!"

"<nullb>Dark Wind Passage!"

Another shadowy streak ran through yet another hyper battleship!

Just as in the previous cases, the unfortunate vessel in question began to suffer widespread malfunctions as many power generators, shield generators and other important ship systems fell apart for inexplicable reasons.

Many important orven officers and crew members had succumbed as well! Their deaths were particularly horrific in the eyes of the survivors as the bodies of the victims seemingly blackened before disintegrating into particles of ash!

While it was impossible for a single attack run to neutralize a large enemy battleship in totality, Tusa received enough intelligence about the layout of these alien battleships to know where he could do the most damage.

Each time he crippled another threatening battleship, the mech forces made sure to follow-up on the strike and collapse the weakened defenses of the damaged vessel!

With the surprisingly rapid downfall of the most threatening hyper battleships, the Torment Fleet quickly lost its backbone!

Not only were the human mechs no longer taking as many losses as before, but the morale of the orvens serving on the intact warships plunged to the bottom!

It had always been the alien raiding fleets that fought and died like worthless voribugs. When was it supposed to be their turn to get killed by the human invaders?

No matter whether they were low-caste or high-caste orvens, each of them died just as easily when attacked by human mechs!

As the Dark Zephyr finished off the fifth alien hyper battleship, the remaining surviving enemy vessels quickly became overwhelmed by the mechs that attacked and swarmed them with a vengeance.

Eliminating so many powerful alien warships early freed up thousands of mechs, allowing them to concentrate their attacks on weaker and more outdated vessels.

Unlike the modern alien vessels that had improved so much with the help of stolen human technology, the older orven warships lacked all of the latest advancements, causing them to inflict less damage and collapse much faster!

Tusa could already tell that there was hardly any need for him to join this frenzy. The mech forces had taken serious losses, but their quantity was still so great that there were more than enough intact machines to maintain a decisive advantage.

"There is only one enemy left."

Performing 5 different Dark Wind Passages in quick succession had been a strenuous effort to the new ace pilot. He had taken a risk by pulling off the last one as he hadn't been sure whether he or his expert mech still had enough power left to destructively phase through one end to the other end of the enemy battleship's hull!

Fortunately, his intuition did not steer him wrong. His Dark Zephyr had not ended up stuck in the middle of the enemy vessel. If his living mech remained operational somehow, it would have been incredibly awkward to tear his way out of the enormous metal cage.

The ace pilot took the opportunity to recover from his previous exertions. He also checked the condition of his expert mech.

"How are you, battle partner?"

"I CAN STILL FIGHT, BUT... I DO NOT THINK THE DARK WIND MODULE IS DESIGNED TO BE ACTIVATED SO MANY TIMES."

The state of the Ultimate Module was not great at the moment. When Blackwing separated from the mysterious module, the companion spirit could already tell that its archemetal components had exceeded their safety levels.

It was a small miracle that the Dark Wing Module managed to stay intact!

If not for the fact that much of it consisted of archemetal that had been reinforced by true resonance, the Ultimate Module would have likely exploded by this time!

"I was not thinking straight." Tusa frowned.

As an ace pilot, he should have been able to keep his cool, yet when he first went into action, his surging emotions overwhelmed his reason!

Getting held back for so long and witnessing so many Larkinsons perishing without accomplishing anything that was truly meaningful in their lives had made him angrier than he thought.

The fact that Tusa did not even notice that he was going overboard warned him that possessing strong willpower was not always beneficial.

What he wanted did not always conform to what was best in a given situation!

There was a time and place for a Saint to go over the edge and exceed their limitations, but this should never be done on a regular basis.

Even ace pilots weren't that unreasonable!

After spending a bit of time catching his breath and gaining a better idea on how much fight he had left, he focused his attention on the Eminence of Torment.

The alien phase lord had definitely noticed the rapid downfall of his precious fleet. Despite being covered in a gigantic suit of armor, the Eminence had definitely become afflicted with rage!

Nonetheless, the orven also lived up to his apparent reputation by constantly trying to back away from the battlefield.

The Eminence of Torment wanted to get as far away from the expeditionary fleet as possible so that he could activate a warp bubble and leave his human adversaries behind!

"I decree that you are moving slower."

Saint Kalasandra Boojay's latest decree had mysteriously taken effect, causing the beleaguered phase lord's acceleration rate to drop by as much as 30 percent!

This effectively prevented the Eminence of Torment from moving out of the range of the Spirit of Bentheim.

The factory ship was the main culprit responsible for limiting the mobility of the enemy phase lord!

The recently shipped and installed Zeta-65 Warp Interdictor may demand a huge amount of energy in order to operate, but the Polymath and Spacelock's latest joint invention was especially effective at weakening phase lords!

Seeing that he could not run away, the aggrieved phase lord fixated on the Spirit of Bentheim and wanted to smash the factory ship once and for all!

The Eminence of Torment ignored the Royal Jeem's persistent spear attacks and trusted that his spatial barrier and remaining transphasic energy shields would hold for the time being.

The giant alien instead focused all of his attacks on the Spirit of Bentheim!

The factory ship's azure energy shields immediately started to buckle from all of the graser cannon attacks.

Other fleet carriers attempted to shield the Spirit of Bentheim against damage, but their defenses did not last very long!

"Get lost!"

"Saint Marissa has arrived!"

The Jedda Sandivar was no longer needed to suppress the remnants of the Torment Fleet.

The ace light skirmisher rapidly closed in on the Eminence of Torment and began to surround the phase whale in the middle of a disorienting smoke cloud!

Engulfed by Saint Marissa's domain field, the powerful alien became subjected to another weakening effect as he suddenly lost his ability to observe enemies more than a few hundred meters away!

While the phase lord was still able to track the movements of the Royal Jeem, the Eminence of Torment was unable to track the Jedda Sandivar and the Spirit of Bentheim.

The factory ship quickly changed trajectory and moved far enough away from her old coordinates to prevent the phase lord from striking her hull with repeated attacks in the same direction.

Not that it mattered that much. Saint Marissa's disorienting smoke cloud not only obscured the Eminence of Torment's perception, but also caused him to lose his sense of direction and orientation!

The alien could no longer determine which direction was galactic coreward, rimward, spinward or counterspinward!

Even those who were located well outside the smoke cloud could clearly guess that the alien had become completely lost as he uselessly fired his graser cannons into many random directions!

Despite the power of his high-energy cannons, they never came close to striking anything. Space was simply too big, and it became exponentially harder to land a hit at targets that were further away!

Still, Commander Casella instructed every Larkinson mech unit to back away just to be certain!

"Retreat! Do not get affected by collateral damage! The phase lord is a trapped and cornered beast at this time. Let our ace pilots claim the glory of defeating this powerful leader!"

Saint Marissa and Saint Kalasandra had been fighting and training alongside each other for years. They understood each other very well and seamlessly worked together to grind down the Eminence of Torment's annoyingly effective energy defenses.

Even though the Royal Jeem had managed to shatter so many segmented transphasic shields that it had removed an entire layer, the Eminence of Torment often used his spatial barrier to give his ship raiment's energy shields time to recover!

By continuing to alternate his defenses, the Eminence of Torment substantially prolonged his survival, giving him more time to focus his attacks on his only visible target, the Royal Jeem!

As powerful as the ace spearman mech may be, the frequent spatial attacks and graser beam strikes constantly sapped the Royal Jeem's reserves.

Saint Kalasandra's domain field had blocked and reduced the power of over a thousand attacks, causing it to grow increasingly more worn and exhausted.

While the addition of the Jedda Sandivar partially relieved the Royal Jeem, the Eminence of Torment did not experience that much threat from the ace light skirmisher.

The Jedda Sandivar's attack power was too weak!

The only way the elusive ace mech was able to inflict stronger blows was by building up a lot of speed before charging at its target!

This was not an efficient method of attack, and fared especially poorly against the Eminence of Torment's outrageous energy defenses.

The Eminence of Torment grew a little more confident. Although the humans had demolished his fleet, his power combined with the power of his massive suit of armor resulted in a lot of synergies that gave him a chance to fight his way out of this ambush!

Yet before he could work towards exhausting the Royal Jeem's Saint Kingdom, the powerful alien sensed an acute threat approaching from behind!

It was a pity that the Eminence of Torment was unable to react fast enough to respond to sudden change!

"<nullb>Leap of True Freedom!"

In an instant, a third Saint Kingdom had emerged!

This one pressed uncomfortably close onto the phase lord's body. The Eminence of Torment grew alarmed when he noticed that none of his energy defenses had managed to stop the expert light skirmisher from bypassing his defensive envelope!

The Dark Zephyr did not activate his Ultimate Module and risked the possibility of crashing into the phase lord's resilient flesh.

Instead, the powerful mech rapidly approached the graser cannons mounted on the back and shoulders of the large phase lord and began to strike them with a pair of transphasic stormblade knives!

Lightning crackled across the phase lord's ship raiment whole entire chunks of graser cannon barrels and other pieces of metal alloy separated from the phase lord's body!

The Eminence of Torment panicked and attempted to swat away the Dark Zephyr by moving and rotating his body.

However, the Dark Zephyr proved to be fast and agile enough to keep up with the phase lord's movements!

"Forget about the graser cannons, Tusa! Destroy the transphasic shield generators and power generators! We have already identified their approximate locations! Strip away the alien's defenses so that we can kill, no, subdue him! This is our best chance of capturing an alien phase lord alive!"

All three ace pilots became shocked at the audacity of this instruction.

Could they truly defeat the Eminence of Torment without claiming his life?

The challenge excited all three of them! They became determined to pummel the Eminence of Torment into submission!

Chapter 6025 Organic Salvage

"We defeated the Torment Fleet!"

"It was a bloody battle, but we won!"

"The overseer in charge of leading the raids on the Torald Middle Zone is ours! We have finally taken revenge for all of the colonists who died from the raids orchestrated by this alien."

"We managed to capture him alive, did we? He's obviously been crippled, but phase lords are much tougher than ordinary aliens. What will we do with him? How will we be able to transport him back to human space?"

"The Black Cats dropped the ball yet again. How many times did they get fooled by enemy counterintelligence? Aren't we supposed to be the best at spycraft? We need to reform our entire intelligence agency from top to bottom!"

The Golden Skull Alliance vanquished the Torment Fleet.

The news exploded onto the galactic net, causing major ripples throughout the nearby zones!

Every soldier that had either been assigned to defend the border regions or aspired to become a linefighter became shocked when they heard about this development.

The Eminence of Torment may have been an elusive phase lord who never dared to show up on the battlefield, but his leadership over the alien raiding fleets had earned him a lot of infamy.

The supposedly cowardly but shrewd alien often resorted to despicable means in order to attain more results.

He exhorted the alien raiding fleets to target the weakest defended colonies and penetrate deeper into human space in an attempt to sow terror among the residents of the Torald Middle Zone.

He utilized his connections within the orven race to occasionally transfer much more powerful warfleets to smash apart the mech forces that had made consistent achievements in recent months.

The Eminence of Torment had already proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that he had no shred of honor in his enormous bones.

The fact that the Eminence of Torment deliberately misled both humans and aliens about his true strength as a phase lord cemented his reputation as an honorless alien who deserved to get captured!

Many Golden Skullers looked pleased when they gazed at the crippled and immobilized phase lord.

It had been glorious to see the three ace pilots of the expeditionary fleet systematically dismantle the large but relatively clumsy orven space lord!

The Dark Zephyr had played a key role in this confrontation by bypassing the Eminence of Torment's vaunted energy defenses. Once inside the defensive envelope, there was little the phase lord could do to prevent the expert light skirmisher from wrecking many of the graser cannons, transphasic shield generators and power generators of his so-called 'ship raiment'.

Once Saint Tusa single-handedly managed to neutralize the enormous technological enhancements of the enemy phase lord, the other two ace pilots quickly joined in to finish off the enemy!

The Eminence of Torment might have been able to repel just one of the ace pilots, but even he could not withstand the combined attention of three of them at the same time!

The Dark Zephyr and the Jedda Sandivar mainly served as distractions while the Royal Jeem skillfully utilized its transphasic spear to cripple the phase lord's limbs and sap the alien's strength by draining his phasewater-infused blood!

Unfortunately, the Eminence of Torment was so afraid of falling into the hands of his enemies that he put up a desperate resistance, not hesitating to overdraw his phasewater organs in order to buy his way to freedom!

"This is why the Eminence of Torment is in fairly bad shape at the moment." Commander Casella Ingvar reported.

The physical projection of Ves stood alongside her as he stared outside one of the observation windows of the Spirit of Bentheim.

As a leader who was stationed in the rear, Ves no longer kept up with the day-to-day affairs of the expeditionary fleet. He did not have the time to babysit it, and he trusted the judgment of the leaders who held all of the authority.

Ves had not even been informed about the specifics of this planned battle. He always maintained an attitude that it was better to save his time and wait for the expeditionary fleet to present their results every once in a while.

He never expected the debut of the first ace pilot of the Larkinson Clan to unfold in such a bombastic fashion!

Pulling off an ambush against the Torment Fleet was a feat that had drawn the admiration of many linefighters!

By defeating the Torment Fleet in such a decisive fashion, the participating soldiers of the Golden Skull Alliance earned a lot of war merits for this accomplishment!

Ves had many reasons to feel happy about this. Not only did his clan burnish its military credentials even further, but it also managed to secure a huge amount of gains, of which many of them happened to be of unprecedented value!

Naturally, his first priority was the condition of the enemy phase lord.

Commander Casella gestured at another projection that showed a live feed of the captured alien. "The Eminence of Torment has implanted 11 phasewater organs in his body. His reckless efforts have ruptured or drained 6 of them. It is difficult for our biotech experts to restore them to an operational state. They have all frozen the organs in case there is still a chance they can be salvaged, but their prognosis is not good."

The projection changed to display a fairly thorough scan of the Eminence of Torment's biological condition.

The giant humanoid alien had been reduced to an awful state. All of his limbs had almost been severed from his torso. His head was brushed and concussed to the point of suffering brain damage. His abdomen had been torn and cut open, exposing large gaps where the alien's valuable phasewater organs were supposed to reside.

Compared to the state of the Eminence of Torment when he was healthy, the current picture looked a lot emptier than before!

The biotech experts had quickly moved in to remove all of the phasewater organs no matter whether they were in a working condition or not. The value of the 5 remaining intact phasewater organs were much more precious and had to be taken away as soon as possible in order to avoid any further tampering.

Who knew whether the Eminence of Torment would wake up and grow spiteful enough to destroy his healthy phasewater organs!

Ves waved his hand, causing the projection to turn into a slideshow that showed the actual physical state of every frozen or preserved phasewater organ.

The damaged ones had all been frozen in order to prevent decay.

The healthier ones had been placed in special cultivation tanks that were already preconfigured to preserve the vitality of giant orven phasewater organs.

Ves relaxed a bit when he glanced at the data that showed that the healthy phasewater organs remained stable for the most part.

"Let's leave the destroyed phasewater organs aside for the time being. What can you tell me about the healthy phasewater organs?"

"They are clearly not developed by the Eminence of Torment himself. Instead, he has bought or acquired the organs developed from the orven civilization or the Red Cabal as far as we can ascertain. There is a distinct difference in quality and performance between the two 'developers'. The orvens are much more adept at adapting phasewater organs for the phase lords of their own race. There is no rejection to speak of. The organs developed for their own race are highly stable and fault tolerant, but they are also relatively unsophisticated and limited in performance. The ones procured from the Red Cabal are much newer and considerably more powerful at the cost of stability. They are more universal, so they are only lightly adapted for use by orven phase lords."

That was an interesting set of details. It indicated that phase lords functioned similar to custom biomechs that could steadily be upgraded with new phasewater organs every once in a while.

The phasewater organs acted like modular plugins that could easily be installed in the body of a phase lord. The staggered and modular nature of this 'business model' gave Ves a few ideas about commercializing his future modular products.

The LMC was already doing this in part with the Fey Fianna. While the base mech itself was not modular, a thriving industry had emerged where many different third-party manufacturers developed a lot of useful and powerful living fey for every living drone mech.

The Larkinson Army's own contingent of Fey Fianna also happened to make heavy use of third-party fey models during the recent battle!

"Tell me about the state of each intact organ."

"The Locos, Maracos and Kelsis organs are all intact." Casella replied to the physical projection.

"The Kelsis organ has endured a lot of strain in an attempt to sustain a powerful spatial barrier, but it is in relatively good condition. The Locos organ is in a decent state. The Eminence of Torment had overstrained it in an attempt to defeat the Jedda Sandivar's disorienting Saint Kingdom. The Maracos organ is damaged and torn as the phase lord becomes very desperate at the end. He has

tried to fend off our ace mechs by generating many spatial attacks, each of which had proven to be ineffective under the circumstances."

That was not a surprise. Ves felt it was a bit of a pity that the Maracos organ got damaged. That made it harder to study it and decipher its working principles. It also made it a lot riskier if he wanted to implant this organ in his body.

In fact, ever since he heard that the Eminence of Torment got captured relatively intact, Ves could not resist the urge to change his previous policy and upgrade his phase lord cultivation by taking over the captured phasewater organs!

Ves inwardly shook his head.

This was a bad idea!

The rejection and incompatibility issues were too annoying to deal with. There was also the possibility that the organs could fail at crucial moments due to alien tampering. Who knew how many backdoors the organs and the Red Cabal had installed in those organs!

"It is not too big of a deal if the phasewater organs got scuffed in the process of capturing the Eminence of Torment, commander. I do not intend to implant them in my body as is. We can make much more optimal use out of them if we transfer them to the Larkinson Biotech Institute and have our research teams derive their own versions of the same phasewater organs."

"I see. Then the state of the intact organs should satisfy your researchers, then. Perhaps the expired organs may also give them enough research data."

With all of these specimens, it may take a few years for the research teams to generate results, but at least it was much faster than starting from scratch!

Ves especially looked forward to upgrading his Locos organ. He would not only strengthen all of his spatial senses, but also fulfill a lucrative Mission in the process!

"What about the other intact organs? Did you manage to save the organ responsible for launching those powerful spatial ripple attacks?"

"Unfortunately, we failed, sir. Before the Royal Jeem managed to knock the alien unconscious, the Eminence of Torment may have already guessed our intentions, so he deliberately self-destructed the large and powerful organ responsible for granting him this capability. The destruction was especially thorough, so there is little left to salvage."

That was a huge pity. The data indicated that it was a high-quality product from the Red Cabal.

If the expeditionary fleet truly managed to retrieve an intact version of this organ, then Ves would feel a lot more tempted to implant it inside his body, backdoors be damned!

If nothing else, he would find other ways to neutralize hidden dangers embedded into the alien organ. It was not as if this was the first time he ended up in this kind of situation.

Since the greatest prize had been denied to him, Ves focused his attention on the remaining organs that could still be used.

Chapter 6026 Dofner & Pelmir Organs

After the expeditionary fleet managed to capture the Eminence of Torment, the biotech experts managed to salvage 5 phasewater organs from his body.

Ves only held a moderate degree of interest towards the basic three organs.

While the orven phase lord had invested enough of his resources to obtain upgraded and more developed versions of the Locos, Maracos and Kelsis organs, they had never been his focus.

The Eminence of Torment was a typical phase lord who did not pay too much attention to the fundamentals. He instead invested much of his resources into acquiring more powerful, more exotic and much flashier phasewater organs that could generate more advanced effects.

This was why Ves cared a lot more about the latter than the former!

It was a pity that it was exactly due to their greater value that the Eminence of Torment deliberately ruined them out of spite!

If he was destined to suffer defeat, then at least he did not want to give his enemies more reasons to celebrate!

In battles between phase lords, it was actually distressingly common for the defeated party to destroy his own phasewater organs to prevent the victor from earning more spoils.

This made it more difficult for human forces to obtain any working phasewater organs. They were exceedingly rare and precious, especially since phase whales and phase lords rarely possessed the courage to enter the battlefield.

"What is this organ?" The physical projection of Ves asked as he looked at an image of a strange collection of alien flesh.

"This is known as a Dofner organ. It is a very common but useful phasewater organs that most phase lords install after they have increased their phasewater concentration by a noticeable extent. It massively strengthens and automates the process of generating a warp bubble that can be used to grant superluminal travel to the phase lord. It is relatively slow because it is a simplified version of a larger and much more powerful phasewater organ that is exclusive to phase whales, but it is highly valued nonetheless."

Ves' eyes lit up when he learned about the properties of the Dofner organ.

Superluminal travel!

"So in other words, this is an organic warp drive."

"You can say so. There are many differences, but you would have to ask a bioengineer in order to obtain more detailed answers." The mech commander shrugged.

The Dofner organ held a very strong attraction to Ves. As a phase lord, he already possessed an inherent capability to form a warp bubble, but doing it by himself was a very tedious and inefficient manual process.

It may be possible for him to travel from one star system to an adjacent one, but the trip would be long and exhausting. He would always be better off if he just boarded a proper starship.

Once a phase lord equipped himself with a proper Dofner organ, he should be able to keep up with the superluminal travel speed of a typical warp drive-equipped starship!

Of course, alien warp drives were much slower than human FTL drives. The superdrive that combined the functions of the previous two drives was even more outrageous when it came to speed!

The Dofner organ was therefore not as impressive as Ves hoped, but it was still an effective way for him to escape from danger if there was no one else around him that he could rely upon!

"This Dofner organ looks remarkably intact. Did the Eminence of Torment lack the time to destroy it as well?"

"There is a reason for that, sir. The Eminence of Torment still tried to cling to the hope of being able to escape from the battlefield. He fought and overloaded his phasewater organs in sequence. He likely placed his Dofner organ on the back of his list because it plays a vital role in his escape plan."

"I guess the other intact phasewater organ holds the same meaning." Ves speculated.

"That is a good guess, sir. The Pelmir organ is responsible for generating fairly strong thrustless propulsion. It essentially works as a reactionless drive that can make phase lords move much faster in realspace without needing to rely on conventional thrusters. It is an excellent complement to the Dofner organ. It does not make as much sense to implant one without the other."

Generating a warp bubble did not immediately result in faster speeds. It only caused the object within the bubble to traverse more distance with less effort.

The ability to move fast in realspace was therefore still an essential factor in any form of warp traversal.

A starship with a weak warp bubble could still travel quickly across the stars if she was equipped with powerful thrusters.

Of course, the more optimal combination would be to have the same starship be surrounded by a bubble with a much higher maximum warp factor!

"What is the warp factor of this Dofner organ?"

"The biotechs cannot make that determination. They do not even dare to form an estimate. They are not familiar with all of these phasewater organs. They will need extensive examinations and cross-reference a lot of confidential data on the study of phase whales and phase lords before they can answer your question. You will probably have to install the organs yourself if you want the final answer."

That was probably the case. The Larkinson Biotech Institute did not have the high-level research talent or the enormous accumulation required to conduct thorough enough studies in this advanced field.

Ves shrugged his shoulders. "The researchers of the LBI will be really happy once we ship these organs back to them. They will gain access to years if not decades worth of prime research materials. From the looks of it, these two organs are products of the orven civilization, correct?"

Casella nodded. "Our biotechs believe so. The organs are not as sophisticated as the organ responsible for launching space ripple attacks."

That was relatively good news. The Eminence of Torment's Dofner and Pelmir organs should be relatively mature, standardized and highly optimized biological products. They may lack advanced features and probably did not acquit themselves well when compared to higher-end products, but they should stand out in terms of simplicity. That made it easier to decipher their working principles and develop imitation products without taking too many detours.

Ves was not greedy enough to desire the more advanced 'models' developed by the Red Cabal.

The phase whales were famous for their excellence in biotechnology, but their long lifespans and weird ideas caused them to develop much more exotic and complicated phasewater organs.

It made sense as they always preferred to research and develop their own personal phasewater organs from scratch. They invested many years of effort into perfecting and personalizing their own ability sets.

Ves did not have the luxury to waste his time on what could arguably be considered the most correct approach. He needed to rely on professional teams of biotech researchers to do all of the hard work.

Given the remarkably pristine states of the Dofner and Pelmir organs, he had high hopes that the LBI would be able to develop their own versions that he could install inside his true body within a decade!

"This is an excellent set of prizes, commander. The expeditionary fleet has done good work." Ves praised. "What else have you managed to yield from your captive phase lord?"

"Well, our enthusiastic biotech experts have taken the liberty to collect a massive quantity of tissue samples. We have also assigned many retrieval teams to the task of salvaging all of the phasewater-infused blood that the Eminence of Torment has spilled into open space. They have taken action quickly enough that we are confident that we can retrieve approximately 30 to 50 percent of all of the blood that has been spilled. We will not be short of phasewater in the foreseeable future."

That was a disappointingly low percentage. It told Ves that the Eminence of Torment resisted for several long minutes after he first suffered an actual wound before he finally lost his ability to resist.

Ves smiled. More phasewater was always good news, though it was no longer a particularly scarce resource to the Larkinson Clan.

"I am sure that you have managed to salvage many more tons of phasewater from the intact alien warships. The ordinary alien raiding fleets don't carry much phasewater as they are expected to get defeated sooner or later, but the Torment Fleet should be different."

"You are correct in that, sir. We are still in the process of sweeping and securing all of the intact hulls. There are still so many of them that our infantry troops are being stretched thin at the moment. On top of that, we have taken the liberty to siphon more blood from the Eminence of Torment's massive body. The main purpose of doing this is to weaken him and lower his ability to resist captivity. Of course, securing additional phasewater is a welcome bonus. If we are lucky enough, we may end up returning to the Bortele System with over 10 tons of phasewater in our cargo holds."

10 tons of phasewater!

That was an extravagant amount of wealth!

The Larkinson Clan could make excellent use of so much phasewater. From mass producing transphasic mechs to designing and constructing warships clad with premium transphasic hyper alloys, these were all excellent additions to his future first-class fleet!

"What will happen with the Eminence of Torment?" Ves asked next. "Will you be able to ship him back to Diandi Base where we can conduct thorough scientific studies on a live phase lord?"

The legion commander shook her head. "I am afraid that we cannot oblige your request. The Red Association has issued a demand that we surrender the captured phase lord into their custody. A retrieval fleet is already en route. This is why our biotech experts have been working hard to collect whatever organs, blood and tissue samples that they think they can get away with. They are racing against time."

Ves' expression dropped. He really wanted to take possession of the body of an actual phase lord! There were so many different experiments that he could conduct on such a stellar test subject.

For example, he always wondered whether it was possible for him to convert an alien phase lord into a biomech!

Unlike other biomechs that had been created through the conversion of large exobeasts, a biomech formed from the base of a phase lord was a natural transphasic biomech! The performance of a working version of this idea was bound to be groundbreaking!

Alas, Ves guessed that the Transhumanist Faction already came up with the same idea. The Transhumanists were much better positioned to produce a successful result from this venture. This may be for the best.

"Will the mechers at least compensate you guys for taking away the Eminence of Torment?"

"Most certainly, sir. We will all earn a large bonus of war merits on top of the ones that we have already secured after defeating the entire Torment Fleet. The three ace pilots that are chiefly responsible for capturing the Eminence of Torment alive will earn the lion's share of war merits."

That would probably allow them to exchange for a lot of expensive goodies!

While Ves was happy that Tusa earned a lot of spending power, this was not an entirely positive development.

War merits were not issued by the Larkinsons. This meant that Tusa gained a lot of room for maneuver outside of the confines of his own clan.

Perhaps this was one of the sneaky ways that the Red Association employed to poach expert pilots and ace pilots from their original states and organizations.

Oh well.

The conversation soon shifted over to the captured warships, of which there were several.

Commander Casella wanted to highlight one of the captured prizes in particular.

"Do you recall the request that you have issued? Well, we have found an excellent stopgap warship that you can use with the help of your Battlecruiser Token. Let me introduce you to one of the most modern hyper battleships that we have managed to capture in a relatively intact state..."

Chapter 6027 It's Mine Now!

Ves looked at a projection of the largest and most valuable captured enemy warship.

She was shaped like a tower more or less. Her hull was wide and flat, which was typical of orven ship design.

Much of her surface was covered by gun turrets of all kinds. The thought of commanding all of this firepower after converting the captured vessel delighted him a lot!

It hadn't been too long ago since he issued the order for the expeditionary fleet to find and capture a stop warship.

Ves did not expect that the Golden Skull Alliance would not only take so little time to fulfill his request, but exceed his expectations by securing a much more modern and powerful alien hull!

"What is she called?"

Commander Casella's lips twitched. "Her official designation according to the orvens is... excessively long by our standards. I will not even attempt to pronounce how it is spelled in the native alien language. The translated name of the alien battleship is not as... poetic. Do you truly want to hear it, sir?"

This must be good. Ves gestured for her to proceed, which she did with obvious reluctance.

"Very well. The full translated name is as follows: The Torturous Scream of a Human Dying in Agony over a Span of 46.7 Hours."

"..."

"I swear that I am not deceiving you, sir. This is the best translation of the name that the orvens have bestowed on the captured warship."

"Do the orvens really use the long form of this name in daily parlance?"

"That is not the case. They usually make do with calling their ship 'The Torturous Scream' in most cases. That is also the working name that we have adopted for her. Since we have claimed the hull as our prize, it is within our prerogative to rename her. You can keep her current name or bestow her with a more dignified one if you wish."

Ves dismissively waved his hand. "We can think about that later. In fact, I find her current name to be quite... amusing. How big is the Torturous Scream, exactly?"

"She is 3.6 kilometers long, but she is also much wider compared to human starships, so her internal volume is quite impressive. However, that also means that her cross-section is much wider when facing the hull from specific directions, so she is easier to strike from a distance. As far as we can tell, she follows the typical native alien design philosophy of high energy defenses and low material defenses. Her hull plating is relatively thin and her structure is only strong to a point. The Torturous Scream relies almost entirely on her segmented multi-layered azure energy shields to defend herself against external attacks."

"Wait, azure energy shields? Have the orvens started to roll out our most advanced energy shield technology already?!"

The Sentinel Commander grimly nodded. "The alien implementation is cruder and not as up-to-date, but the azure energy shields of the Torment Fleet already bodes ill for all of the mech forces that will soon have to struggle against them on a wider scale. Not all of the ships of the Torment Fleet integrated these recent technological developments, but it is clear that the rollout of updated warships is beginning to ramp up in alien space."

This was truly awful news!

Alas, there was nothing that Ves or anyone else could do to stop this development. Even if the traitorous cosmopolitans did not actively leak advanced human tech to the Red Cabal, that was not a permanent solution.

The aliens had their own means of capturing and reverse engineering the tech attached to captured human mechs and warships.

After all, humanity once managed to rise up in a similar manner during the Age of Conquest!

In a situation where two opposing sides were not at technological parity, the weaker side would definitely be able to catch up to the stronger side. It was far too difficult to widen this gap!

Ves set aside his concerns about aliens attempting to replicate humanity's legendary rise and focused on his more immediate concern.

"How much damage has the Torturous Scream sustained?"

"As you can see, her hull is largely whole, sir. The Glory Seekers failed to unleash one of their battle formations, but they still managed to eliminate around half of the crew members of the Torturous Scream. The drop in crew performance combined with quickly draining the azure energy shields has allowed our boarding troops to invade the hull and begin the long process of clearing her interior of surviving orven threats. We have made sure to deploy a large quantity of Swordmaidens and other eager infantry units for this high-priority mission. We did not have enough manpower to efficiently clear many other relatively intact alien warships, but we deemed it necessary to allocate additional manpower in order to prevent the orvens from sabotaging the ship."

"I take it that our infantry forces have managed to succeed on that front?"

"That remains to be seen. We still have a relatively poor understanding of the actual state of the Torturous Scream. When the Glory Seekers struck the hull with a death wave attack, the orven crew members that managed to resist the effect did not come away unscathed. Many have become disoriented and lost much of their concentration. Only a minority of orvens were able to maintain their wits. Of the latter, most of them tried in vain to repel our boarding troops. Incidences of sabotage is low, but the damage that these orvens were able to do was fairly significant. Numerous power generators have been overloaded, causing severe localized damage. If not for the fact that the orvens themselves have taken preparations to contain reactor explosions in case of accidents, the Torturous Scream would have been covered by a few more holes."

Ves carefully observed the helmet footage of a random collection of infantry deployed onto the orven battleship.

He found the alien architecture to look rather... quaint. The ceilings were high to account for the higher body length of the orven race. The lighting was dim as the orvens did not need more as they

were blessed with excellent eyesight. Much of the bulkheads and decks were coated in black, making the environment look even darker.

It look... almost perfect to Ves' new sensibilities, but he understood that most humans would find the lack of strong light sources to be distressing.

Many corridors and some compartments were shaped like triangles. Their ceilings were sloped, which seemed like an incredibly awful waste of internal capacity to Ves.

However, the orvens applied this architectural feature so much throughout the Torturous Scream that it was impossible to correct in a short amount of time!

It was not worthwhile to invest so much time and effort into transforming the triangular spaces into square spaces.

As Ves continued to study the helmet footage, he spotted many areas where there were many more decorations on the surface.

He was reminded a bit by how much the fleeters liked to apply their art inside the Dominion of Man.

This was different as much of the artwork was a lot more primitive and abstract. Many subjects took on a more religious angle as they were clearly made to revere the phase lords of the orven race!

All of that had to be removed before the Larkinson Clan could even think of using the Torturous Scream as a stopgap warship!

From what he could tell, many areas were undamaged. Only a small amount of compartments showed signs of light to moderate damage, and only a few compartments and sections had suffered from more significant cases of sabotage.

"The damage is fairly light considering that half of the crew initially managed to survive the battle formation attack." Ves remarked.

"We have found that the orvens serving on the Torment Fleet are well-trained, but not psychologically prepared to fight. What that means is that their performance is good in situations that they have trained for, but their effectiveness, cohesion and fighting spirit will rapidly drop once they are beset by unexpected situations that they have never seriously considered."

That was not a unique problem. There were plenty of human forces that suffered from the same fault. This was why Ves always insisted that his troops must be bloodied in order to supplement their training.

"I guess that works out in our favor. The orvens probably grew complacent after spending years in the service of a cowardly and famously risk averse orven phase lord."

This was further good news to Ves and the Larkinsons. The more intact the warship, the less time it would take to convert her into a human-usable vessel!

The only major complication was that her length and width far exceeded the internal dimensions of the E-66 Experimental Yard.

There were very few shipyards in human space that could fit such an oddly-shaped warship!

This made it a lot more difficult to refurbish her as much of the work had to be done in open space where cosmic radiation and solar radiation regularly wreaked havoc on exposed sections of the hull. However, it was still easy enough to implement a lot of internal transformations. The shipyard just needed to dispatch a lot of manpower due to the inability to rely on large machinery.

As long as much of the existing hardware and software of the Torturous Scream could be used by humans, it shouldn't take too long to repair and convert the interior for human usage.

"What can you tell me about her armaments?"

"As we have stated before, we expressly targeted a modern alien hyper battleship that features an obvious anti-warship configuration. There were more hyper battleships with anti-

mech configurations, but we did not set out to capture them as they do not fulfill a role that is as useful in your first-class fleet. What you need the most is a powerful firepower platform that can allow you to defeat enemy warships with overwhelming firepower and siege alien strongholds from afar."

"You made the right choice, Casella. We can already rely on our excellent mechs to defeat enemy small craft. Besides, our mech forces and boarding troops would have suffered a lot more losses if they attempted to capture one of the anti-

mech battleships intact. Those tertiary laser cannon batteries are no joke at those quantities."

Ves actually suspected that there was another reason why the Larkinson Army did not make any attempts to capture the threatening anti-mech hyper battleships.

The mech pilots were all afraid that they would get replaced. Even though the entire notion was absurd, there were still people that thought that warships equipped with lots of fast-firing weapons would make mechs obsolete!

This was not true simply due to the fact that the weapon operators serving on those starships were unable to break through like mech pilots.

The projection changed to show a good overview of all of the armaments placed on the exterior of the hull.

"As you can see, the Torturous Scream is primarily built around her big guns. Her primary gun batteries are mostly made up of kinetic armaments, but there are also laser and plasma cannons mixed in. The heavy emphasis on kinetic weapons indicate that the hyper battleship serves as the main source of orbital bombardment of the Torment Fleet. The most effective way to bombard a location on the surface of a planet is to launch a large amount of kinetic projectiles from above. Outside of that, the kinetic cannons can inflict a punishing amount of damage at short to medium ranges. This warship is a brawler."

Ves was not a fan of relying on kinetic weapons in space combat, but he had to admit that it was truly an excellent choice for orbital bombardment purposes.

The Eminence of Torment must have taken a lot of care to select and transfer the Torturous Scream to his Torment Fleet.

Now, the modern hyper battleship had fallen into the hands of the Larkinson Clan!

"It's mine now!" He grinned with satisfaction.

Chapter 6028 Phasefighter Counters

The pieces were slowly coming together.

Ves harbored a lot of ambitions for the upcoming deep strike expeditions.

In order to accelerate his progress, improve his status in human society and gain the strength needed to overcome the pursuit of the Subjugation King, he needed to become a lot more proactive than his peers.

Plunder was by far the fastest way to speed up his progress.

It was also the most dangerous activity to undertake.

All of the alien raiding fleets that met their end after bumping into powerful mech forces served as clear examples how insufficient strength could quickly doom any attempt at enrichment through plunder.

Ves therefore placed a lot of importance on building the strongest possible first-class fleet by the time the greater beyonder gate enabled red humanity to undertake deep strike expeditions.

Obtaining the phasewater organs was important, but not too much. Ves still did not know whether it would be possible for him to participate in a deep strike expedition himself.

He felt it was necessary to be present in some capacity at the very least, but his value to red humanity had risen so much that the mechers and the fleeter would never allow him to risk his life in such a reckless manner!

This was one of the many disadvantages of becoming too high profile. Ves could no longer move wherever he wanted to. He could only hole up in safe locations within human space. The mere thought of entering alien space probably spooked a lot of tier 1 galactic citizens who saw a lot of promise in his work.

Ves at least needed to realize his design philosophy before he became more dispensable!

Unfortunately, Ves had no confidence in his ability to break through to the rank of Master Mech Designer within the next half decade. He could clearly feel that his accumulation was not even close to satisfactory. He also needed to absorb a lot of knowledge and design a lot more mechs in order to gain parity with other Masters.

All of that could be considered later. Now that the Battle of Torment had come to an end, the Larkinson Army collected enough data to hold multiple after action reviews.

Several hours after their last meeting, Ves met with Commander Casella Ingvar again.

Several other legion commanders entered the small conference room inside the Spirit of Bentheim as well.

Commander Melkor of the Avatars of Myth looked particularly morose. He was one of several Larkinsons who did not take much joy from vanquishing the Torment Fleet.

He was far from the only soldier to feel sad. Hundreds of mech pilots died and thousands of ship personnel perished as well. The Gorgoneion had been hit particularly hard, so much so that it

remained doubtful whether the large defensive ship could still travel back to the Bortele System under her own power!

However, a leader such as Melkor should already feel accustomed to the loss of subordinates. The air of depression hanging over him felt a lot more personal. Both Ves and Casella already had a good idea why the Avatar Commander acted like he suffered a loss in this battle.

Commander Sendra did not look too good either. Her Swordmaidens had performed admirably during this battle, but the attrition rate was much higher this time. She had lost a lot of good sisters, each of whom had taken a lot of effort to train up to the standards of her mech legion.

No other legion commander attended this private and semi-formal gathering, but Ves did not mind. He only really needed to hear from a couple of voices in order to gain a decent overview of how the Larkinson Army acquitted themselves during this battle.

"Legion commanders." Ves' physical projection addressed the three. "Thank you for taking time off your busy schedules to meet with me. From what I have learned, your opponent this time was much more reflective of what the native aliens intend to roll out in the near future. As our enemies continue to get rid of a lot of weak and horribly outdated transphasic warships, their comparatively massive industrial engine will begin to produce large amounts of modern hyper battleships that have been specifically designed to counter large amounts of mechs. In addition, their phasefighter designs have improved at a remarkable rate. The newest ones they fielded earlier today are not yet up to par against second-class mechs, but what about next year?"

The appearance of those modern hyper battleships and elite phasefighters spooked the Golden Skullers a lot!

Their enemies had been slow to adapt to red humanity, but they had time on their side. Enough months had passed for the major alien races to finally kick their technological doctrinal reforms into gear!

Ves gazed at the three legion commanders in the eyes. Each of them formed different thoughts and conclusions from the earlier battle.

"Well, let's start this meeting by discussing the smallest change, which is the introduction of updated and improved phasefighters. From what I can observe from the battle footage, the Torment Fleet's phasefighters are much more numerous and much more up to date than average. Their elite phasefighters are especially powerful. The aliens have apparently learned how to compensate for their lack of killing power against mechs by loading them with transphasic missiles. How well do you think our mechs can cope against these enemies?"

Commander Melkor felt the obligation to speak first as he and his fellow Avatars had fought directly against the phasefighters.

"The normal phasefighters are a pain to fight against. Their defenses used to be relatively weak, but once the aliens invest real money into them, they can legitimately stall or even defeat our mechs. I can tell you right away that if we hadn't started to roll out quasi-first-class mechs such as the Fey Fianna and the Storm Swords, those phasefighters could have caused a lot more losses before we were able to take them down. The intervention of Venerable Brutus Wodin and a few other expert pilots from our alliance partners also eliminated so many phasefighters that the alien pilots quickly

became demoralized. If our regular mech units had to fight against the phasefighter squadrons, it is much harder to say how much of us will be left."

Everyone's expressions grew serious.

"Have the aliens already started to catch up in terms of small craft?" Ves softly asked.

"I am not a tech geek like you, Ves, so I can't tell you anything specific. What I can tell you as a mech pilot who personally faced them in battle is that we shouldn't dismiss the native alien version of starfighters as inferior fighting machines anymore. Sure, they don't have the advantages of our mechs, but so long as they incorporate both phasewater technology and hyper technology, they can do a good job at reducing the gap with mechs. At that point, which craft will win or lose is dependent on other factors such as numbers, mech types and cost."

Ves presented a scenario. "Let's say that a force of mechs is roughly equal to a force of phasefighters in every factor that counts. In which circumstances will the latter be able to win against the former?"

"Slow melee mechs will probably fare worse against phasefighters." Commander Casella spoke up. "Unlike mechs, phasefighters never fight while stationary. They are constantly on the move. Their comparatively powerful thrusters allow them to accelerate much faster than most of our mechs, so they possess a strong mobility advantage. This allows them to make swooping attack runs against slower melee mechs without needing to fear retaliation."

The other two legion commanders nodded in agreement.

Commander Sendra of the Swordmaidens also looked a bit concerned.

"Our Stormblade Samurais will struggle to catch up to those phasefighters. They will have to employ tactics such as flanking and boxing them in to allow their blades to touch the agile alien craft. Our Storm Swords have a better chance at catching up to the alien small craft, but that is no longer an equal fight anymore."

The Storm Swords were the elite quasi-first-class mechs of the Swordmaidens. They should be matched up against the elite phasefighters of the Torment Fleet in order to make a fairer comparison.

"The Flagrant Vandals actually attained considerably greater success in containing and eliminating the phasefighters." Commander Casella remarked. "The phasefighters are strong if they can keep their enemies at distance, but weak when mechs have gotten close. The Ferocious Piranhas were remarkably effective at catching up to the phasefighters and overcoming their transphasic energy shields by relying on their space suppressors. The disorienting glow of the Ferocious Piranhas have also proven to be fairly effective at disrupting the concentration of the orven mech pilots, though I have to note that it is gradually losing effectiveness against most alien races."

E energy radiation caused every life form's spirituality to gradually grow stronger over time.

A suppressive glow was nothing more than the inherent suppression of a superior life form towards lower life forms. If the latter started to grow stronger, then the gap wouldn't be as great anymore.

All of this meant that it became harder for the Ferocious Piranhas to incapacitate enemy pilots over time.

Of course, Zeigra and Lufa were also growing stronger, but their rate of improvement had slowed down a lot as it became a lot more difficult to make progress at their current states.

Ves formed his first conclusion. "Native alien phasefighters can be countered by light melee mechs. The phasefighters are not designed to fight at point-blank range, so any melee mech can tear them apart. The key is to be fast enough to close the distance. Only light mechs have a chance of getting within striking distance."

The legion commanders all nodded in agreement.

"What about the Stingrippers?" Ves asked.

"Their performance is decent, but they have produced noticeably less results than our Ferocious Piranhas." Casella answered. "The Stingrippers are equipped with small space suppressors as well, but since they always keep a certain distance from their targets, this module was not able to make any difference. Their relatively weak and light lumina crystal rifles are lacking in punch, so it takes a significant amount of time for their guns to break a transphasic energy shield and destroy the alien small craft. The main reasons why the Stingrippers still proved to be useful is because they were able to rely on focus fire and the fact that they do not need to waste time on fully catching up to their targets in order to land their attacks."

"Have the Stingrippers suffered a lot of losses?"

"No, sir. You should already have a good understanding of their evasive and misdirection capabilities. The phasefighters are not properly equipped to increase their hit rates against the Stingrippers. The Flagrant Vandals have lost a greater quantity of Ferocious Piranhas as they are not as elusive."

"I see."

Ves was glad that the Stingrippers still managed to achieve results against the phasefighters. The former were probably a lot cheaper than the latter. The Stingripper design had yet to be upgraded with phasewater technology and hyper technology, so his lastgen mechs effectively managed to gain the upper hand against currentgen phasefighters!

"There is one more observation I need to share with you, sir." Commander Casella spoke up again. "The Ferocious Piranhas and the Stingrippers already performed quite well when fighting against the alien phasefighters in isolation. However, the Flagrant Vandals always pair them up so that they can synergize with each other. They have proven to be especially effective this time. The Ferocious Piranhas can weaken the transphasic energy shields and disturb the mind of the pilot. The Stingrippers can subsequently focus their firepower on the afflicted enemy craft, causing its defenses to collapse much faster and easier than before."

In short, combining close-ranged suppression with lots of ranged fire support was a killer combination against these pesky phasefighters!

"It sounds like the Flagrant Vandals have become more indispensable in this age." Ves remarked with a smile. "They are well-positioned to become our best anti-phasefighter solution."

Light mechs definitely had a role to play in this new age of warfare!

Chapter 6029 The Importance of Warp Interdiction

While Ves started to dream about designing additional light mechs to better cope against the alien phasefighters, Commander Casella mentioned a complicating factor.

"There is one more variable that has led to a positive result against the alien phasefighters. The phasefighters we fought against today were unable to display their full strength. As far as we know, each of them are equipped with small warp drives that enable them to traverse distances much faster than normal. The reason why they were unable to unlock their full mobility was because they were operating in the range of our powerful warp interdictors. This essentially cut down their greatest advantage, meaning that our mechs only managed to defeat a crippled enemy."

Everyone gathered in the conference room frowned at that. The Sentinel Commander indeed raised a valid point. The warp interdictors that the Larkinsons installed on many of their combat vessels prevented the alien craft and vessels from deploying their own warp bubbles and thereby moving a lot faster in space.

Warp interdictors were essential to fighting against the native aliens. Trying to start a fight without these gadgets meant that the enemy held all of the initiative. The alien warships could advance and retreat whenever they wanted, and if they chose to fight, their superior mobility enabled them to outmaneuver an opposing mech force with much greater ease.

"So what you are saying that our mechs should have a harder time defeating the alien phasefighters if they are operating outside of the support range of friendly starships?"

"That is indeed what I am trying to convey, sir. Most of our battles so far are fleet-based engagements in space where our mech units are always accompanied by their carriers. These are situations where it is always possible to cover the entire battlefield with powerful enough warp interdiction fields. If our mech units have to fight away from our fleet or on the surface of a planet, then this condition may not apply anymore. In such instances, our second-class mechs will struggle to fight against the alien phasefighters. Only our quasi-first-class mechs will be able to achieve good results."

That caused Ves to frown even deeper. He understood and couldn't help but agree with Casella's logic.

The quasi-first-class mechs that Ves designed for his own clan were all equipped with transphasic flight systems. This allowed them to speed themselves up by forming relatively weak but functional warp bubbles. That should at least allow them to keep up with the speed of alien phasefighters.

The older and cheaper second-class mechs did not enjoy this particular luxury. The presence or absence of phasewater technology could make an enormous difference in any confrontation involving alien phasefighters!

The reason why Ves and many of his fellow Larkinsons never took the alien small craft seriously was because they had made great strides in pursuing quality over quantity. Their mechs had undergone massive upgrades compared to most other mech forces. They were ahead of the curve compared to the alien phasefighters.

However, as time went by, this disparity would most certainly reduce. The Larkinsons might not be able to enjoy their head-start for long. They all needed to be ready to treat alien phasefighters with the same degree of severity as human mechs.

Commander Melkor decided to share his own opinion on this subject.

"Those phasefighters take a lot of phasewater to build, so they cannot be cheap. The native aliens probably don't care too much. They control most of the territories of the Red Ocean, so they can afford to produce millions if not billions of phasefighters. It still takes a lot of resources to construct warships, but it is much cheaper to build carriers that can transport lots of phasefighters. After all, the carriers of the Torment Fleet are nothing more than large cargo ships that the orvens have hastily converted into carrier vessels."

The significance of phasefighters was therefore much greater on a strategic level. The Red Cabal and the major alien races all possessed a huge amount of industrial capacity, so they could churn out lots of transphasic small craft once they came up with adequate designs and retooled all of their production chains.

Ves could already predict that the aliens would probably reduce their dependence on expensive warships and begin to field lots of phasefighters!

This was both good and bad for red humanity.

On the one hand, phasefighters were not as big and intimidating to fight against. Many human mech forces were most comfortable when fighting against other mechs. The alien small craft were not exactly the same, but the similarities were still great enough that the divergences didn't matter.

On the other hand, the aliens already enjoyed an incredible numerical advantage in most aspects. Once they truly began to invest in phasefighters, they could easily field 10 times as many small craft as red humanity in a relatively short amount of time!

Additionally, it was much easier to fulfill the manpower requirements of phasefighters. They were inherently simpler than mechs so it took less years for an alien with an equivalent degree of intelligence to a human to become a proficient phasefighter pilot.

The alien pilots also did not have to satisfy an unreasonably restrictive condition such as suitable genetic aptitude either. As long as the alien species possessed good judgment, decent combat instincts and adequate reaction speed, they should easily be able to supply trillions of eligible pilots to the war effort!

There was no way to overcome this incredible disparity in numbers without resorting to other means!

Perhaps the most important factor that still gave mechs an edge over phasefighters was that the pilots of the former were able to break through and become much more powerful.

With the strength of expert pilots, ace pilots and god pilots, mechs would always maintain a qualitative edge!

There was no way the aliens could come up with similar means. The native aliens did not possess the ability to create a Kingdom of Phasefighters or whatever, and they were completely clueless about willpower cultivation.

It may be theoretically possible for extraordinary phasefighter pilots to emerge, just like how it was theoretically possible for mech pilots to advance without relying on the assistance of the Kingdom of Mechs.

In practice, there was no way that either scenario could happen. Cultivation was actually a delicate process. If anything went wrong, then that could already ruin a breakthrough!

Ves felt a lot better after making this conclusion. Phasefighters should not be able to dominate mechs entirely. His job should not be in danger anytime soon.

"Let's get back to the original topic." Ves said as he calmed himself down. "Seeing as alien phasefighters have become a trend in alien space, our mech community must develop more targeted counters against them. First, mechs expressly designed to counter phasefighters must be fast and ideally equipped with phasewater technology. If the latter condition cannot be satisfied, then any fight against these alien small craft will inevitably result in tragic outcomes."

Phasewater technology was simply too strong. It made a huge difference in any battle. Hyper technology might be able to reduce the performance gap, but the aliens weren't stupid. They were beginning to embrace hyper technology with almost the same degree of enthusiasm as red humanity!

"We also need a solution that can reduce our dependence on warships equipped with warp interditors." Commander Melkor said. "It would be great if you can design a mech that can deploy a warp interdiction field to prevent the alien small craft from running circles around our mech units. It would be even better if the mech can suppress phasefighters in other ways as well."

The other two legion commanders at the table nodded in agreement with Melkor. Since the aliens were most definitely on track to field enormous quantities of phasefighters in the future, it became imperative to find effective ways to weaken them wholesale!

However, this was easier said than done. Ves frowned as he considered the issue.

"Warp interditors are usually installed on starships for good reasons. They are generally large, powerful and require lots of energy in order to generate a warp interdiction field of sufficient strength. While there are smaller models of warp interditors available, they are usually seen in first-class mechs. It is currently not realistic to equip warp interditors onto second-class mechs as far as I know. The modules are too bulky and consume way too much energy. They also generate a lot of heat as well, which is a major problem in any space environment."

This was a challenging technical problem. It was not an issue to develop first-class warp interdicator mechs. At that tech level, it was not challenging to miniaturize warp interditors to the point where they could be slotted into specialized mechs.

It was difficult to design an equivalent mech for the expeditionary fleet. His options as a mech designer was much more limited if he had to design a warp interdicator mech at the second-class or quasi-first-class level.

"Is it too expensive?"

"Partially." Ves replied. "Technology hasn't caught up yet. Second-class warp interditors cannot be miniaturized to the same degree as their first-class counterparts. This means that I will have to design an entire heavy mech around this single function. Such a mech will be large and heavy. It also cannot do anything else as it also has to be equipped with a large power reactor and lots of heat sinks. Such a mech is an awful complement to light mech units that are assigned to go on the attack."

In other words, second-class warp interdicator mechs could only effectively be deployed in defensive combat, prepared ambushes and assaults on static locations.

"It is better than nothing." Commander Sendra said. "We are used to working with limitations. Even if we cannot use warp interdicators in most offensive actions, we can at least ensure the aliens will not be able to ruin us entirely if they launch attacks onto our vulnerable mechs. My Swordmaidens generally do not pilot light mechs, so they are sitting ducks if they have no hope of catching up to alien phasefighters."

The Swordmaidens needed warp interdicator mechs the most since they had no effective way of suppressing the fast and agile phasefighters at a distance!

Ves let out a sigh. "I will try to come up with a solution at the second-class level, but I won't lie to you. It will be difficult to design a viable mech with this function. Personally, I am hoping that the Red Association has made lots of progress on increasing the practicality of this tech. They have managed to do so with space suppressors, and it is natural to develop a convenient solution that works over longer ranges. I don't know how many years it will take, so I will try to come up with my own solution in the meantime."

That relieved the legion commanders. They did not want their mech forces to become shackled to their starships on a permanent basis. There were many different scenarios where it was better if mechs could operate far away from friendly starships or fortifications.

The Larkinsons talked a bit more about alien phasefighters. They analyzed the approximate performance of different mech types against these expensive but effective craft.

Most other mech types did not perform well against the alien small craft.

"Rifleman mechs cannot inflict enough damage to eliminate the phasefighters quickly." Casella noted. "Heavy artillery mechs possess the necessary firepower, but with the exception of our Transcendent Punishers, every other mech model will miss most of their shots against these mobile craft. The only medium or heavy mech type that can perform well against alien phasefighters are missileer mechs. As long as they are loaded with transphasic missiles, they should be able to take down multiple alien phasefighters, especially if they are accompanied by scout mechs that can provide more reliable targeting guidance."

The Sentinel Commander was correct, but her solution was not economical at all. Transphasic missiles were far too wasteful and expensive to be employed by most human mech forces!

The aliens on the other hand...

Chapter 6030 Missile Resurgence

Missiles.

Any mech designer who thought about this weapon type would instantly associate it with the words 'powerful' and 'expensive'.

Missiles did not necessarily have to be powerful, but they could be so long as their warheads were filled with highly volatile exotic substances. There was an endless variety of unstable materials that could produce huge exothermic reactions under the right conditions.

In fact, different human powers had managed to discover so many effective combinations that they had to be deemed taboo in order to prevent their excessive destructive power from depopulating entire cities and planets!

If the law did not hold back the use of powerful missiles, then their cost most definitely acted as another restraint.

Transphasic missiles were especially costly as all of the phasewater put into their warheads would essentially be gone forever!

"Missiles." Ves repeated the word. "The Battle of Torment has exposed the power of alien missiles. The elite phasefighters launched transphasic missiles that are powerful enough to destroy mechs in a single impact. Some of their larger warships are able to launch large torpedoes that are capable of wiping out hundreds of tightly packed mechs. All of this shows that the native aliens have become more willing to invest serious resources into defeating their human opponents. Given how effective the transphasic missiles and torpedoes were during this battle, I think it is inevitable that the Red Cabal are already in the process of pushing missile warfare on a large scale."

This was a big deal! Missiles were nightmares to fight against. Even though it was possible to intercept them, if at least a couple of them struck their targets, they could inevitably inflict a lot of damage!

The other legion commanders looked serious when they thought about the prospect of having to fend off missiles.

"We need more effective countermeasures against missiles." Commander Melkor said. "When my mech got targeted by a set of transphasic missiles, I noticed that our ability to intercept them was very poor. Our ranged mechs are all equipped to fight against phasefighters and warships. Their luminar crystal weapons are mostly designed to fire high power shots at relatively low firing rates. That works best against larger targets, but it is awful at intercepting small and fast missiles. The mechs that actually have the best chance of intercepting missiles is the Stingripper. Their rapid-fire luminar crystal rifles can easily track missiles as they dance in space."

Commander Casella Ingvar concurred with Melkor. "Interception is the most reliable way to stop missiles from damaging our mechs, but it is not our only means. We can employ ECM and other defensive countermeasures to interfere with the targeting systems of the missiles. The Fey Fianna can quickly be allocated to ECM duty after pairing them with the right fey models. We also have other ECM mechs that can serve a similar purpose, although they are considerably outdated. If the aliens incorporate enough modern human tech in their missile designs, then it will not be easy to neutralize them by relying on ordinary countermeasures."

Ves looked thoughtful at that. "I am aware that the Buzzy Bee and other ECM mechs I have designed a while ago have not kept up with the times. They will get updated sooner or later, but they are not particularly high on the Design Department's priority list. For now, it is much easier to rely on the modular nature of our Fey Fiannas and Bright Warriors to add more ECM measures to your mech units. This should help with coping against missiles the next time you confront a more modernized alien fleet."

It was times like these where the advantages of modular mechs became more apparent. The Larkinsons were also well-suited to respond more quickly to changing trends as the Spirit of

Bentheim could easily fabricate all of the necessary ECM for her in the field with her own production lines.

"This is not enough." Commander Sendra spoke. "Intercepting and misdirecting missiles is okay and all, but what do we do if those missiles hit their targets? Can we do nothing else but rely on our defenses to withstand the transphasic explosions?"

Ves shrugged. "I do not have a magical solution for you, Sendra. I suggest you look into adding more space knights to your mech legion. A thick transphasic hyper tower shield and larger azure shield generators can cope with these deadly missiles a lot better than an offensive swordsman mech. Other than that, you should either field a few ranged weapons equipped with rapid-fire weapons or team up with the mech legions that can fulfill this responsibility in your stead."

That was an unpalatable suggestion to Commander Sendra. The Swordmaidens had always been fanatic about relying on sword-wielding mechs and rejecting the use of ranged weapons.

If the aliens started to make heavy use of transphasic missiles in the following years, then the Swordmaidens would find it much harder to maintain their current policies!

They would all fall into a difficult dilemma. Should they stick to their original stance and suffer greater losses due to their inability to intercept powerful missiles? Or should they make an exception to their rules and add at least one missile interception mech model to their mech roster?

Ves did not want to make this decision for the Swordmaidens. This was a problem that they needed to address themselves. Perhaps Ketis might be able to whip up an innovative new solution that would allow her sisters to have the best of both worlds.

"Is there really no other effective way to defend against transphasic missiles?" Melkor asked.

"Not for second-class mechs, at least. First-class mechs have many more options available. Shield link technology is particularly useful in this case. As long as the mechs are not clumped together, much of the destructive power of a missile will get dispersed as an entire collective of mechs will share the burden."

Again, the technology existed, but it was not practical or economical enough to be applied at the second-class level.

Ves never really thought about it in the past, but now that he became more familiar with first-class mech design, he understood much more how much second-class mech pilots were missing out on! They were denied so much high technology and so many wonderful features simply because they were too poor to afford anything better!

The Larkinsons were not the only ones who struggled with the problem concerning missiles, so Ves did not struggle over it for long.

The Red Association most certainly understood how easy it was for the native aliens to invest a considerable part of their resources to arm lots of phasefighters and warships with lots of transphasic missiles.

Even if it cost a lot of money to launch an entire salvo of missiles, the native aliens could still withstand the consumption of resources due to the fact they held so much territory!

This was one of the frustrating parts about attrition warfare. The side with much greater resources at its disposal could employ all kinds of high-cost but also highly effective solutions at will!

"There are also the transphasic torpedoes that we need to be concerned about." Commander Casella reminded Ves. "Compared to the smaller missiles, the torpedoes can only be launched by warships, but they are so well-protected that it is not easy to intercept them. If an enemy fleet launches over a hundred transphasic torpedoes, it is questionable whether our fleet can intercept them all in time, especially if they possess high acceleration."

Commander Sendra grimaced at the mention of this powerful weapon type.

"The huge explosions unleashed by these torpedoes are especially deadly against our battle formations. I never realized it before, but it seems obvious in hindsight. In order to execute a battle formation attack, many mechs need to fly alongside each other in a rigid formation. The distance between mechs varies, but it is generally not too much. The need to stay close and follow a fairly straight and predictable trajectory makes it very easy for the mechs to get eliminated wholesale with a single powerful explosive device. We need to be much more careful about employing battle formations in the future."

This was another adverse development for the Larkinson Clan. Battle formations had been one of the most significant advantages that the Larkinson Army relied upon to achieve better results in combat.

Entire battles had been won due to the dramatic results of pulling off successful battle formation attacks. The Glory Seekers had practically turned it into their core strength due to how well they were able to summon the power of Helena.

"Battle formations are becoming less effective anyway." Ves mentioned. "The onset of hyper technology and the spiritual awakening of every sentient life form in the Red Ocean has given everyone a better chance at withstanding the power of our battle formation attacks. They can still be effective in many circumstances, but the results will probably not be as dramatic as before. Combined with the fact that the mechs that form battle formations are actually much easier to target with wide area attacks, you guys need to be more prudent about pulling them off going forward."

They had little choice but to do so. The native aliens possessed their own intelligence. The Larkinsons had fought against them so many times that many of their strengths became common knowledge.

"Is there a way you can improve battle formations so that they become less vulnerable to giant explosions?" Commander Sendra asked.

She had good reasons to do so, because the Swordmaidens were known to employ their own battle formations.

"It is not outside of the realm of possibility, but... it requires a lot of focused effort and research to produce new results, and this is not even guaranteed." Ves responded. "Battle formations work precisely because they compel mechs to form into mysterious formations that produce some sort of resonance with a design spirit. I have a feeling that these formations cannot easily be scaled so that there is a lot more distance between individual mechs. I need to explore a lot of possibilities, but I do not have the time to engage in this kind of research. Perhaps Ketis can figure this out even if she does not possess all of the required expertise."

He had no strong reason to revisit battle formations. He had very little ideas on how he could improve them. Perhaps he might be able to upgrade them once he advanced to Master Mech Designer and obtained a lot of new capabilities.

After they finished their discussion on missiles and torpedoes, they briefly touched upon the evolution of alien warships.

"If the aliens have wised up by developing and producing a large amount of anti-mech warships, then all of us will be in deep trouble soon." Ves ominously said.

Commander Sendra made a pained expression. "We must not fight those hyper battleships up close. Many of our Swordmaidens died when their mechs got shot down by transphasic laser beams salvos. Those small transphasic laser cannon turrets can shoot down our swordsman mechs with greater ease. Our mechs must get close, but they are constantly blocked by the powerful azure energy shields of the enemy ship. It can take minutes for hundreds of our mechs to exhaust the energy defenses. This buys plenty of time for those deadly tertiary gun batteries to assail our mechs at very close ranges."

"It is indeed inadvisable to dispatch melee mechs against such warships." Commander Casella affirmed. "We can reduce our losses by a large extent by relying on our heavy artillery mechs and other ranged firepower to wear down their defenses at greater ranges. The tertiary laser cannon batteries do not pose as much of a threat in those circumstances, but without any melee mechs exposing the enemy azure energy shields to space suppressors, it will take much longer to overcome the defenses of the enemy ships."

Time was of the essence. The longer it took for ranged mechs to destroy the alien hyper battleships, the more losses the Larkinsons would suffer!

"In this case, I think we should rely more on our Redlances and Transcendent Chargers." Ves mentioned after a moment of thought. "Ranged mechs are not efficient enough, and melee mechs will suffer enormous losses due to prolonged exposure to the deadly tertiary laser cannon batteries at close range. The most optimal answer should be to employ melee mechs that can inflict a lot of damage in a very short interval of time. Our lancer mechs should be able to do the job, but this is hardly an ideal solution."

Lancer mechs came with their own set of problems. Ves was not really satisfied with relying on them despite the fact that they appeared perfect for this job!

He believed that there may be a much more effective way to counter anti-mech warships.

One of them was to employ a warship that excelled at taking out warships like the Torturous Scream, but the Larkinson Clan was only allowed to field one such vessel.

Ves wanted to develop a more effective counter based on mechs, but how could he possibly reduce the lethality of those laser cannon batteries?

He suddenly gained an idea.

"Wait a minute. Solus Gas may be able to offer an effective response against threat posed by both anti-mech warships and transphasic missiles!"