

Mech Touch 6771

Chapter 6771: Adequate Fighter

After the first day, Saint Stark continued to agree to undergo another extreme training session the next day.

She did not have enough downtime to study the footage of the completed bouts extensively. Her head became filled with ideas, yet due to wringing out her extraordinary willpower to her bottom limit after every session, she required a lot of sleep in order to recover and regain her strength for the next lengthy bout of practice!

It was tiring.

It was stressful.

It was... satisfying.

The progress she made every day was astonishing.

Although the Stewards Siamesia never once gave the Amaranto a chance to fire a shot with her Instrument of Vengeance, Stark was rapidly improving her ability to duel against threats up close!

She built up an entire foundation on the first day..

She refined her new resonance-empowered abilities on the second day.

She further polished and perfected her bayonet fighting skills on the third day.

She made great strides on improving her intuition and enhancing the maneuverability of the Amaranto.

All the while, her resonance strength grew by leaps and bounds.

She started off at 114 laveres, but reached 133 laveres by the end of the day!

This was a huge leap in strength!

Saint Davia Stark made the greatest progress in the first day, with each passing day making less and less gains.

She grew disappointed when the growth of her resonance strength was approaching a plateau.

Was her potential that poor? Had she become too satisfied with her growth in strength that she thought there was no need for her to grow stronger anymore?

"There is nothing to be worried about." Jerivern Chevor reassured the junior ace pilot. "The reason why you grew so quickly at first is because you had a lot of untapped potential. You only broke through rather recently, but already received an ace mech rather quickly. You are still in a rapid growth stage, but it is not obvious because your willpower does not grow automatically. You need to exercise it and push yourself to your raised limits. Only when you activate your new potential are you able to 'cash in' your elevated strength. The reason why your growth is slowing down is because there is no 'reserve' left. You are still improving, but at a much slower rate."

"I see."

Stark grew reassured. The explanation made sense. Besides, she knew in her heart that she still had a lot more room for growth.

"For several days, we have insisted on training your ability to defend against threats at closer ranges." Alo spoke. "This crash course on self-defense has yielded great improvements. While it is too much to expect you to become an adequate fighter when you are being threatened at point-blank range, you are no longer a floating target dummy as before. We are especially satisfied with how much your intuition and your reaction speed has improved. Anticipation and speed are your most important weapons to defend against sudden attacks. Your penchant for fighting from the rear has caused your scores in these areas to atrophy for too long. Now, they are much closer to standard than before."

That meant that there was still a lot of room for improvement. Saint Stark agreed with the statement that a few days of intensive sparring was not enough to reach a standard that would enable her to survive most ambushes against hostile ace mechs or phase lords.

However, it was a start. Stark could steadily engage in her own form of practice from here on out. Her progress wouldn't be as quick without the cooperation of another ace pilot, but she could manage by herself.

If not for the fact that the MSTS persistently had problems with accurately simulating the performance of ace mechs affected by ridiculously strong levels of true resonance, Stark and her living mech would have been able to gain a lot of practice in virtual training!

"I have to admit that learning how to fend off enemies up close has become... a gratifying experience." Saint Stark admitted. "There were many moments where I felt frustrated, disappointed and angry. What the two of you have subjected me to is truly a form of torture. However, I am clearly able to tell that it is for my own good. Fighting against you has improved me almost as much as a fight against a phase lord. Just because I do not like your method doesn't affect my understanding of their necessity."

Both Alo and Jeri Chevor smiled. "We are always happy to help. We deliberately rile you up and make you feel suffocated because we have found that ace pilots are able to realize their potential faster when they are uncomfortable. The more their mood deteriorates, the more they are focused on improving their performance. That is exactly what happened to you. Your skills have grown remarkably quickly and you have also strained your creativity to develop new ways to empower your ace mech with your Saint Kingdom."

There was no reason for Saint Stark to hold a grudge against the Stewards Siamesia. The Rubarthan saints employed orthodox methods to produce quick results, and they succeeded.

Stark's expression dropped when she thought about the necessity of such a rough training method.

"I fear that I may have to put my new skills and abilities into practice sooner than later. What are the native aliens up to these days? I have already heard that they have started to assault the fifth defensive band."

"That is correct, Davia. The aliens are amassing their phasefighters and warships in many strategic star systems. They have yet to attack in great numbers, but they have already commenced a few determined assaults in the Middle and Lower Zones."

"What about the Upper Zones such as the one we are in right now?"

"The native aliens are taking their time." Alo said. "Their warships have already begun to arrive in greater numbers in this star system, and they have already begun to spread out in order to scout the terrain and engage in skirmishes against mech patrols. Only one greater phase lord has emerged in the Kayana System so far, but there will definitely be more. The Red Cabal knows that they must bring more in order to resist my methods. We cannot predict when the other phase lords will arrive, and how soon they will besiege Kayana VIII-E."

There were three developed satellites of significant strategic importance. One of the larger moons that orbited the gas giant known as Kayana VIII-E would be the first stage of this lengthy battle for control.

Saint Stark thought about the complicated fight that would ensue at first. Kayana VIII captured plenty of moons. Each of them orbited the gas giant at different heights, angles and speeds.

This created a complex space combat environment where both enemies and allies could hide behind moons or slingshot themselves around to surprise their enemies.

What muddled up the battlefield even further were gravity and exotics. Gas giants always produced weird environments where multiple forces of gravity intertwined with each other.

There were also rich deposits of high-grade exotics and as well as hyper materials on the moons and in the gas giant itself. All of this produced energetic reactions, which could produce a myriad of uncontrolled effects. Mixing them up made the environment even more unstable.

All of these variables produced additional problems for Saint Stark.

There were clearly more opportunities for the enemies to sneak their forces close and attack ranged mechs such as the Amaranto Mark III at closer ranges.

Perhaps this was one of the other driving reasons why the Stewards Siamesia insisted that the Amaranto Mark III was ready to hold her ground if she was ever ambushed at close range.

"Do you think I should continue to polish and strengthen my ability to fight at close range?" Saint Stark sincerely asked. "If I continue to invest in this training, I think I can actually become even better. If you let me borrow a plasma sword or if I request a custom melee weapon from the Larkinson Clan, I may be able to take many would-be slayers by surprise by briefly matching their efforts at close range. As you have already said, my sniping abilities are already good."

"Hmmm."

Both Alo and Jeri looked skeptical.

Jeri Chevor ultimately shook her head. "If you began your career by piloting a multipurpose mech and only later chose to specialize in piloting ranged mechs, then an argument could be made about going back to your roots. Your record indicates that this is not the case. You have never spent any serious attention on attending more than the minimum required courses on melee combat. You lack the heart for melee combat. Do not think that your current optimism is an indicator that you have discovered a new talent. It is much harder to make incremental improvements from this point onwards."

"Do not let your training in the last 5 days forget who you are." Alo warned Stark. "You are a marksman. Your ace mech is specialized in shooting. Now that you are done with your self-defense training, I think you will gain a fresh perspective on ranged combat. You should be able to translate some of the lessons that you have learned about fighting at close range to fighting at longer ranges."

He was right. Saint Stark had already begun to think about the possibilities.

"Do you have any specific advice on what I should pay attention to when training my ranged combat capabilities?" She earnestly asked.

"Your fury is your strength." Jeri said. "We have noticed that anger is the primary emotion that is fueling your drive and stimulating your willpower. You can try to experiment with that to develop a new combat ability that allows you to project your power more effectively at distance."

Stark could already think up an idea or two. "I will try my best to develop a working ability in the following days. I hope that the native aliens won't decide to attack too soon. I need enough time to develop a complete ability. It is rather fun to work out how my Saint Kingdom can produce the outcomes I desire."

"Do not fret if you fail. We will ensure you can still make an adequate contribution. That is one of our missions." The female twin said. "When the first pitched battle breaks out in this star system, would you like to stay in the rear as you have always done in the Larkinson Clan, or would you prefer to shadow my ace mech as we roam around the battlefield?"

"What do I need to pay attention to if I choose one or the other?"

"If you choose your established approach, then we will not be able to stay by your side and protect your Amaranto. The mechs in front need our assistance more. Our ace mechs will have to coordinate with each other from a distance. My Lamia Kailamassu will block the advance of the enemy phase lords while your Amaranto will snipe them from a safe position in the rear."

"That will leave me vulnerable to teleporting phase lords and such." Stark immediately analyzed. "I may have to bet my life on my new skills and abilities."

"Yes, but you will not be without support." Alo explained. "There will be numerous expert mechs, first-class multipurpose mechs as well as a strong array of fixed defenses providing extensive protection. They may not be able to hold back greater threats by themselves, but they can buy time and hinder any surprise attackers."

"You can also choose to fight by our side in the field." Jeri explained the alternative. "This will expose you to many additional risks. However, so long as you remain in the range of our Saint Kingdoms, we can always extend our formidable protection and other forms of support to your Amaranto. You may have to put your new melee capabilities to use more often, but you will also enjoy a far greater advantage than if you fight at a distance from our Lamia Kailamassu."

"What do you prefer, Davia?"

This was a difficult choice...

Chapter 6772: Renewed Offensive

Red humanity's final defensive band was under attack!

The Red Tide Offensive had entered the next phase.

News of assaults on hundreds of star systems spread across the fifth defensive band flooded the galactic net.

One live feed after another depicted violent skirmishes and direct assaults against fortified strongholds.

While the battles unfolding in the Upper Zones progressed in a methodical fashion similar to a chess game, the battles that erupted in the Middle and Lower Zones were much more intensive!

The Lower Zones collapsed the fastest. The native aliens had spent the last month on accumulating a greater quantity of mass-produced phasefighters and warships from the lesser races.

What they lacked in coordination, efficiency and fighting spirit, they more than made up with quantity alone!

No matter how ramshackle their warships may be or how poorly made their phasefighters turned out, the third-class defenders of the Lower Zones were most prone to getting overwhelmed by numbers.

There was no need for the native aliens to send too many phase lords to overrun the defenses.

They merely had to disregard the enormous amount of losses suffered by their side and continue to ram assault fleet after assault fleet down the throats of the third-raters!

The Middle Zones played host to the most intense battles. Every important strategic location was protected by millions of mechs and varying amounts of 'auxiliary warships'. Their orbital defense networks were also a lot more built up and difficult to take down.

The native aliens deployed a mixture of assault fleets hailing from both the major and lesser alien races.

Their coordination was still as superficial as ever. While they had decided to send out larger quantities of strike craft and warships than usual, the second-class defenders should still be able to hold on due to their formidable defensive works.

It turned out that Human High Command had always treated the first to fourth defensive band as disposable.

Their purpose from the beginning was never to stop the alien advance entirely. They were primarily designed to slow down and bleed the alien invaders as best possible.

It would have been great if the first four defensive bands managed to stop the aliens entirely, but the brightest human military strategists and planners never held their hopes up. Not that they shared their opinions with the rank and file who died on the battlefronts.

The fifth defensive band was different. The number of soldiers stationed over there were at least twice as great on average. The buildup of infrastructure and defensive fortifications was at least three times greater!

Despite these advanced preparations, the native aliens answered with greater numbers, but not as much as they could have sent.

Instead, the aliens in charge of taking over the Middle Zones made a different choice than the leaders of the Lower Zones.

The alien bigshots made the atypical choice to rely more on quality rather than quantity!

It was public knowledge that all of the Middle Zones had sent off the vast majority of their ace pilots to the Upper Zones.

This created a critical gap in the defensive strategies previously employed by the humans stationed in these vulnerable territories.

The final battles over the control of the fourth defensive band conclusively verified that the humans had not engaged in any subterfuge.

They truly 'abandoned' the Middle Zones and chose to transfer their strongest champions to the Upper Zones.

This made the phase lords assigned to the Middle Zones ecstatic!

Not only did more of them volunteer to take over these underprotected territories in the name of their alien dominions, they also brought in their personal forces, which were considerably more elite and well-equipped than the usual forces assigned to attack the Middle Zones.

The increased numbers of elite phasefighters and capital warships assaulting the strongholds of the Middle Zones clearly took a huge toll on the latter.

Even if the defenders of the fifth defensive band were able to withstand the onslaught for the most part, the destruction of so many mechs and defensive fortifications could not be made up in a short amount of time!

Wave after wave of alien attacks continued to take place over the span of days and quickly started to wear down the strategic depth of the defending forces.

In a few cases, the greater phase lords fighting in the Middle Zones boldly risked substantial injuries to their massive true bodies and advanced close enough to wreck the most powerful and well-equipped space fortresses with their physical and spatial might!

The lack of ace mechs that were capable of holding them back meant that the defenders could do almost nothing against them. Their only solution was to allocate lots of firepower to exhaust their ridiculously strong spatial barriers.

The efficiency of this method was so low that the greater phase lords were able to laugh with impunity as they were able to dismantle important nodes of an orbital defense network while absorbing blows that were powerful enough to obliterate an entire assault fleet!

This was the power of extraordinary superdimensional beings!

Much of what they were capable of went beyond the scope of conventional science. The phasewater flowing inside their veins fundamentally transformed their true bodies into organic miracles that were still difficult for humans to decipher.

Whatever the case, the gap between superdimensional and non-superdimensional combatants was so big that the latter needed a lot of advantages just to overcome their enormous handicap!

As the final defensive strongholds of the Middle Zones began to falter in time due to the relentless efforts of highly motivated phase lords, more and more people placed their hopes in the Upper Zones.

Every soldier involved in the war effort had learned that Human High Command had placed all of their hopes on the Upper Zones.

So long as the defenders of this zone were able to not only hold back the invading alien forces, but also beat them back while culling much of their numbers, red humanity would finally be able to launch a serious counterattack!

Saint Davia Stark was able to witness through her own eyes what the native aliens relied upon to topple the most difficult and well-defended human strongholds.

They were relying on both quantity and quality.

The most obvious manifestation of this was the abundance of full-blown warfleets comprised of many warships.

None of them appeared to be in outdated configurations that originated well before the Red War.

While the native alien races weren't extravagant enough to build entire armadas of modern warships that incorporated a lot of stolen human technologies, they were still able to spend a lot of resources on refurbishing their best warships.

The orvens, nunsers, puelmers, arche, zzamayels, juregs and so on had taken advantage of their vast industrial capacities and extensively refit and modernized a lot of hulls to the standards of the Hyper Generation.

Their smaller warships had eschewed their anti-ship weapons entirely. Their hulls were entirely covered by as many point defenses and anti-strike craft gun batteries as the aliens could get away with. The vast majority of them consisted of simple transphasic energy weapon cannons of a caliber that was small enough to support constant rapid fire barrages.

The alien frigate, destroyer and light cruiser equivalents also mounted sizable amounts of small missile launchers.

Each of them were able to fire large volleys of short-ranged transphasic missiles that were small and humble enough to home in on hostile melee mechs at close range, but explode with enough power to wreck multiple mechs within a modest radius!

The smaller hulls also possessed enhanced mobility, enabling them to provide fire support to nearby strike craft and allowing them to outflank or outmaneuver their human foes.

While the sub-capital warships weren't particularly tough enough to last long when confronted by accurate and concentrated firepower, the native aliens had constructed or modernized enough of them that the human defenders had to waste a lot of time to whittle down their numbers!

The capital ships were more concerning. They mainly boasted a mix of tertiary gun batteries and primary gun batteries. Most of the alien races had evidently abandoned the use of secondary gun battery batteries for their largest and most expensive warships.

This was because the humans did not make heavy use of warships, particularly sub-capital ones that secondary armaments were most suited to attack.

The tertiary gun batteries were essential to making the lives of swarming melee mechs miserable.

The primary gun batteries solely consisted of slow but immensely powerful siege cannons that were able to exhaust the defenses of static fortifications in quick order.

With the new and optimized naval configurations, the modernized warships assigned to punch through the Upper Zones were clearly well-prepared to assault the strongest and most formidable human defenders in the Red Ocean.

Alongside them were the elite phasefighters. While their overall strength and sophistication still fell short of first-class multipurpose mechs, the native aliens had built up enough carriers to deploy millions or in some cases tens of millions of them in every contested star system!

Not only were these phasefighters more difficult to defeat due to their ubiquitous azure shield generators, they were also substantially better piloted than Saint Stark was accustomed to in the Middle Zones.

"The aliens assigned to pilot these phasefighters are always professional soldiers that understand the value of discipline and coordination." Saint Alo Chevor explained to Stark. "The races that trained them also held them back long enough to train them properly while incorporating the lessons learned over the course of the Red War. The pilots have all learned many tactics on how to deal with mechs."

Their tech was also better and more uniform. A single phasefighter was not strong enough to wear down the defenses of a first-class multipurpose mech by itself.

What if a dozen phasefighters attacked the same mech?

As long as the disparity in numbers grew great enough, even the most elite and storied mech forces of the first-raters would succumb!

"How many first-class multipurpose mechs and other first-class mechs do we have at our disposal in this star system?" Saint Stark asked.

"That information is classified." Jerivern Chevor answered. "In truth, we am not fully informed of the numbers ourselves. We are still trying to scrape as many reinforcements as we can. Officially, the Kayana System hosts at least 8 full Rubarthan mech corps, each of which can field around 50,000 first-class multipurpose mechs. We also host at least one full Rubarthan Carmine mech corps. The upgraded Yellow Jackets that have arrived in recent days and weeks are all piloted by wounded veterans and retirees, so they can be relied upon even if their numbers are not particularly great."

"What about other mechs?"

"There are at least 6 irregular mech corps comprised of first-class mechs of multiple different archetypes. Their pilots mostly come from the private sector or second-rate states, so do not expect them to perform up to our best standard." Jeri warned. "That said, every soldier can be of use. The irregular mech corps are best suited for defense and scouting."

"The numbers are not high enough to inspire confidence in our ability to hold this star system." Stark frowned. "Especially considering that we are short on warships."

"There are still more forces arriving with each passing day. We will have to remain passive and rely extensively on our orbital defenses to hold our ground, but we are relying on other measures to repel the invading aliens."

"You mean that strange black space fortress that somehow teleported in orbit of Kayana VIII-E?"

Saint Alo nodded. "One of our primary responsibilities for the upcoming battle is to defend the Obsidian Orb. The priority of this directive exceeds all of our other orders because it is almost irreplaceable. It is one of the limited number of superweapons that our Rubarthan Pact has imported from the old galaxy."

The Obsidian Orb was not a normal space fortress. It was designed and built by the Plasma Shaper herself, and it was a masterwork-level superweapon!

Chapter 6773: The Obsidian Orb

For the first time since the start of the Red War, the Red Association and the first-rate superstates had finally deployed their first 'superweapons'.

Human High Command had made the deliberate choice to escalate the scope of warfare.

Although these superweapons mostly came in the form of mysterious space fortresses that were stuffed with large-scale high technologies, their power and capabilities far exceeded the scope of other space stations of the same size!

Stories and rumors about these vaunted fortress-type superweapons had always circulated across the galactic net.

Nobody could say how many of them existed, but there was no doubt that every Star Designer had built at least a handful of them. It was practically tradition in their circle.

Everyone knew that Star Designers were the ones responsible for developing god mechs, but they were not limited to designing mechs anymore.

It was not unusual for them to be able to design powerful gadgets and structures of exceedingly high quality and performance.

However, there were very few opportunities for Star Designers to showcase the power of their superweapons. The masses had no chance of witnessing them in action. The most they could enjoy was the use of fictional superweapons in unrealistic action dramas.

Even though few people possessed a clear understanding of the power and the capabilities of these vaunted technological miracles, they still knew to fear their usage.

Their effects surpassed that of regular warships.

While Star Designers were capable of designing warship-type superweapons as well, they rarely did so in practice.

Most people believed that they wanted to avoid contributing to the development of warships as much as possible.

There was no reason to develop advanced tech that could subsequently be used by the CFA or RA to improve their own warships!

If Star Designers developed their own super warships, the hulls were always exclusively made for their own usage.

In any case, Star Designers developed so many fortress-type superweapons over the years that they possessed a few traits in common.

Their mobility was relatively limited. Most of them possessed sub-light propulsion capabilities that enabled them to fine tune their orbits, but their acceleration was so low that they were not expected to rely on thrusters to move from one location to another.

What they did possess were FTL travel capabilities. This was solely reserved for moving them to the star systems where their protection and deterrence were needed the most.

Smaller super fortresses tended to be more mobile than larger ones, though this was not an absolute rule.

Many fortress-type superweapons actually possessed limited teleportation capabilities, though this could also vary.

There were super fortresses that could only reach other star systems by relying on portals generated by mecher or fleeter warships.

There were also other super fortresses that could generate portals of their own that were large enough to transport them to neighboring star systems.

Whatever the case, they were never designed to be fast or nimble. They instead relied on their considerable size and mass to fend off all incoming attacks.

No one wanted to lose their precious superweapons!

For this reason, Star Designers always made sure to make their fortress-type superweapons tough enough to potentially withstand hits from other superweapons!

What truly caused them to stand out was that each of them were built to exacting quality standards. This was one of the main reasons why they performed so much better than regular space fortresses.

The less important ones tended to come in masterwork quality. They required significant effort and resources to make, but they were always worth the considerable cost.

Star Designers usually tended to make these masterwork superweapons to experiment with new technologies or try out special applications. The masterwork fortresses tended to match the scale of a small to medium-sized space station, as making them larger cost a lot more high-end resources. It was difficult to justify so much spending on 'mere' masterwork-grade superweapons.

The Obsidian Orb that the Rubarthan Pact chose to transfer to the Kayana System was one such masterwork-grade superweapon.

However, what people truly yearned for were grand works.

These were so much better and stronger than masterworks that there was no competition.

Grand works could come in the form of anything, but Star Designers had to overcome a radically different set of challenges to build them at the scale of a large space fortress.

Designing a grand work in the form of a god mech tested the limits of how Star Designers could work with limited capacity.

Designing a grand work in the form of a kilometers-long space fortress tested the limits of how Star Designers were able to acquire enough high-quality resources and maintain impeccable quality at an enormous scale.

Whatever the case, there were relatively few known grand work-grade fortress superweapons in existence.

Everyone and their mother could easily guess that the major powers most definitely obscured the existence of a lot more of these supremely powerful super fortresses, but nobody could come up with a number.

Regardless, these were among the most powerful human trump cards in existence. Even if they were less powerful than god mechs, the disparity shouldn't be too great!

Saint Stark did not know whether Human High Command had deployed the more powerful grand works as well.

"There has been no mention of them as of yet." Saint Alo informed Stark after checking the news through his exclusive channels. "The deployment of our most important strategic superweapons is highly classified. Even if I know where they are deployed, I am not able to tell you. I can say that none of them have appeared at the frontlines yet, but that can change depending on how the battles unfold."

Saint Stark did not look too surprised. "I think that the higher ups are probably keeping them in their capital systems or central star nodes in order to guard against enemy deep strike operations. So is the Obsidian Orb the only one that we will work with, alo?"

"That is the case for the time being. I will brief you on some of its capabilities so that we know what to expect on the battlefield. Once the Obsidian Orb takes action, it will either hinder or promote your performance to a significant degree depending on where you operate. Have you made a choice yet whether you wish to stay close to my Lamia Kailamassu or prefer to maintain a position at the rear? If you choose the latter, you can stay close to the Obsidian Orb and take advantage of its formidable bulk and other defenses to remain protected against enemy attacks. On the other hand, the native aliens will become more determined to assault your position."

Nobody witnessed the Obsidian Orb in action, but considering that it was made by the Plasma Shaper, it was bound to contain at least one huge plasma cannon!

Once this enormous weapon started to open fire and produce results, the native aliens would definitely prioritize its destruction!

Sticking too close to this massive but impressive work of craftsmanship would constantly put the Amaranto Mark III in danger.

However, it was not safe to accompany the Lamia Kailamassu either.

The powerful dual-pilot ace mech possessed excellent speed, maneuverability and defenses. It also possessed a relatively short-ranged teleportation device that may be powerful enough to speed up its return to the Obsidian Orb in case it came under attack.

The Amaranto Mark III was impressive in her own ways, but she lacked the ability to escape a dangerous location in an instant.

"Before the arrival of the Obsidian Orb, I may have felt tempted to shadow your ace mech." Stark told Alo. "Now that you have told me that its continued safety and existence should be our highest priority, I believe it would be better if at least one of us remains by its side."

"There are other ace mechs and many expert mechs stationed in this star system." Saint Alo responded. "We are not alone."

"That is true, but I think you would appreciate the added insurance. We have been sparring against each other for almost a week. You should know me well enough to entrust me with holding back any aliens that manage to get close."

Both Ali and Jeri stared hard at Saint Stark, but they eventually decided to accept the proposal.

"Very well. I will primarily be needed to hold back the alien phase lords. We will have to remain in a forward position and attract as much ire and firepower as possible. We can still extricate our Lamia Kailamassu and return to the rear in an emergency, but you must mind the delay."

It was not ideal for the Lamia Kailamassu to clash directly against the enemy phase lords at the front, but its combination for excellent mobility and defenses enabled it to function as a space knight to a degree!

No matter what, the Rubarthans could not allow a single phase lord to get close to the Obsidian Orb.

"I hope that the Obsidian Ob produces a powerful enough warp interdiction field to prevent phase lords from punting it straight into the nearby gas giant." Stark said.

"Not to worry, Davia. The Obsidian Orb is equipped with a specially developed Zeta-70 Super Warp Interdictor that is far more effective than the more common Zeta-65 versions. Its interior and surface is also embedded with a large amount of space suppressors, mainly to prevent enemies from teleporting directly inside or on top of the super fortress."

The mention of a Zeta-70 Super Warp Interdictor reassured Venerable Stark somewhat.

The Spirit of Bentheim came equipped with the Zeta-65 and it had always worked great at protecting the factory ship and the rest of the expeditionary fleet from alien interceptions.

The Zeta-70 version which was evidently exclusive to superweapons must definitely be able to inhibit teleportation and all kinds of other spatial shenanigans in a wider radius!

Operating at a close distance from the Obsidian Orb should also make it harder for enemies to approach the Amaranto Mark III.

However, the Stewards Siamesia warned him about getting too close.

"The Obsidian Orb will run hot when it starts to take action." Jerivern Chevor warned. "It is equipped with at least one main gun that is enormous and almost certainly capable of launching immensely destructive plasma bolts. It is equipped with smaller but still deadly plasma cannons as well. Finally, it protects itself against damage with its powerful and large-scale plasma shield. Your Amaranto Mark III will most certainly get affected by collateral damage if you stray too close."

"Thank you for the reminder, Jeri. I will make sure my Amaranto Mark III keeps a certain amount of distance."

"If you are willing to remain in the rear, then do not stay far enough away that you will be unable to come to its rescue if the native aliens still manage to get close enough. The loss of the Obsidian Orb will make it much harder for us to defend our other star systems in the future."

As the discussion about the Obsidian Orb came to an end, Saint Stark asked one more important question.

"Will the native aliens deploy superweapons of their own?"

"Nobody can tell." Saint Alo shook his head. "We have chosen to escalate first. This should come at a surprise to the Red Cabal. They may choose to reciprocate, though we are unclear whether their fortress-type superweapons measure up to ours as they do not have any Star Designers of their own. Without makers of this caliber, the performance will never catch up. The closest the native aliens have come to matching our superweapons are their Tide Stations."

Davia Stark could argue that the full collection of Tide Stations were the most powerful fortress-type superweapons in the Red Ocean.

After all, their lack of masterwork or grand work quality did not hinder them from teleporting an entire dwarf galaxy 50 million light-years away!

This was a feat that could only be replicated by a god, and a very powerful one at that!

Chapter 6774: The Big Push

Ever since the Obsidian Orb settled in orbit of Kayana VIII-E, the mysterious masterwork fortress did not conduct any tests.

There was no need to test its capabilities when it was already built a lot close to perfection from the onset.

So long as it had not incurred any damage due to getting hit or wear and tear, there was no need for its highly competent crew to conduct any live tests.

Saint Stark spent the remaining days until the inevitable attack on improving her skills and abilities. She cherished each additional day of practice as the native aliens continued to accumulate their forces.

Her ability to fight at close range had experienced a huge improvement. She still maintained a lot of confidence in her marksmanship at longer ranges, but she could use more work in improving her ability to deal against multiple enemies at medium range.

The Amaranto Mark III began to shoot at large quantities of cheap and disposable target dummies.

The Rubarthans were able to produce them en masse for an affordable price as they did not need to be made out of expensive alloys.

However, they needed to be fast and agile enough to give Saint Stark a decent challenge.

Their compact sizes and excellent maneuverability made it difficult for the Amaranto to take them down in sequence with the least possible delay.

The Instrument of Vengeance was a luminar crystal rifle that was optimized for maximum firepower. Its firing rate had always been a lesser concern.

Fortunately, the upgraded power reactor enabled the Amaranto to charge up the rifle fast enough to be able to fire serviceable energy beams at an acceptable firing rate.

The frequency of attacks did not come close to matching that of other ace rifleman mechs, but it at least granted the Amaranto Mark III a means of thinning swarms of elite phasefighters.

"Shouldn't phasefighters be a lower priority to us?" Stark questioned. "There are plenty of orbital defense platforms and first-class multipurpose mechs that can handle the enemy small craft."

"That may not necessarily be the case. The elite phasefighters are almost always armed with powerful transphasic missiles. If they are able to outmaneuver our mechs, they may be able to get close enough to launch their payloads at the Obsidian Orb. Its defenses will not break after getting hit by hundreds or thousands of missiles, but it will deplete them much faster. It is worse if the phasefighters are equipped with space suppressors."

"Space suppressors!"

Given how ubiquitous space suppression modules had become, the cosmopolitans easily stole the technology and converted them to alien usage.

The main reason why phasefighters had not been equipped with space suppressors in the past was because the strike craft preferred to maintain their distance from their foes.

However, if the aliens wanted to take down a strategic asset like the Obsidian Orb as effectively as possible, they could drain its defenses a lot faster if it was swarmed by thousands of phasefighters that generated their own space suppression fields!

"Will the aliens employ this tactic against the Obsidian Orb?"

"They have done so in the past against other important fortifications. The Obsidian Orb is much stronger and more threatening than those orbital fortifications, so the alien commanders would be stupid to hold back."

Stark frowned. Her Amaranto Mark III was not suited to take down lots of weaker targets. That was what the Minerva and Promethea were for. Both high-ranking mechs were much more capable of swatting down lots of flies.

"So I should divert my firepower to advancing alien strike craft and missiles as long as they are capable of threatening the Obsidian Orb, is that correct?"

"Correct. We are aware that you would much prefer it if you attack the enemy phase lords, but trust me, the Obsidian Orb can repel them much more effectively than you. Your Amaranto Mark III may be a powerful masterwork ace mech whose performance

is drastically amplified by your Saint Kingdom, but the Obsidian Orb is a massive station-sized masterwork that is filled with tech that is no worse. It may lack true resonance empowerment, but its enormous scale alone more than makes up for this shortcoming."

That was what made the Obsidian Orb so mysterious in the eyes of Saint Stark. She still couldn't figure out its full power despite staring at it ever since it arrived in the Kayana System.

Its reflective black surface continued to obfuscate its secret. The entire surface had a blocking effect similar to alloys infused with Solus Gas, so Saint Stark was not able to glean much information.

She could only go by the words of the Stewards Siamesia to judge its effectiveness.

"I hope the expectations we place on it are not misplaced." The guest pilot said. "You Rubarthans are all placing a huge amount of confidence in it, but since it is visible in the open, the native aliens will definitely be able to take this super fortress into account."

"Good." Jeri smiled in satisfaction. "This added variable is the reason why the alien commanders have yet to commence a direct assault. Delays are good. Delays will disrupt the offensive rhythm of our enemies and cause their greater plans to become disjointed. The native aliens are already diverting reinforcements originally allocated elsewhere to star systems such as ours in order to prevent the assaults from turning into disasters. We are putting an especially great strain on their phase lords. Super fortresses such as the Obsidian Orb can only be defeated or driven away by their native gods. There shouldn't be enough of them to overwhelm all of our prized masterwork fortresses."

This caused Davia Stark to figure out the intent behind the move to put the super fortresses into action.

They were a direct response against the enemy phase lords. There were only so many of them participating in the Red War at the moment.

The Red Cabal faced a difficult choice. They could either disperse their phase lords across many different star systems and incur greater losses as a result, or they could

suspend the attacks on numerous star systems in order to concentrate more phase lords in the places that hosted these superweapons.

In other words, the alien commanders had to choose between bleeding time or bleeding phasewater-infused blood!

Saint Stark personally hoped that the aliens would be arrogant enough to spread their phase lords thin. The fifth defensive band might still fall anyway, but at least the human defenders should have a better chance of winning their local battles!

On a fateful day, the aliens had ceased to skirmish the human scout forces in the periphery of the star system.

They had clearly consolidated their forces and moved out in order to assault the first of three fortified positions!

"How many phase lords?"

"18 in total. There are 2 greater phase lords leading 16 lesser phase lords."

"That is... less than I expected."

"I agree, Davia. The alien commanders have proven to be patient, shrewd and cautious, so they must definitely know that this is not enough to dislodge the Obsidian Orb, let alone destroy it. My intuition tells me that they are hiding a powerful surprise of their own. This may come in the form of hidden greater phase lords or weapons of mass destruction. Remain watchful."

As the alien armada continued to advance towards Kayana VIII-E, the human defenders received another piece of news.

An explosive development had occurred that shocked everyone!

"This is bad! Yernstall is cut off from the galactic net!"

"WHAT?!"

Many people began to fear the worst. As time passed by, numerous starships that had stopped just beyond the edge of the Yernstall Central Star Node confirmed that their FTL travel got cut short because the entire star system by a strong spacetime bubble!

"Those damn aliens! They pulled off the same trick they used to isolate Bridgehead One!"

"So this is where the missing alien forces ended up! It turned out that they had been sneaking through our territories for the purpose of attacking our important star system!"

"What are the mechers and fleeters doing?! It is dead obvious that the aliens might pull off this stratagem again. Why hadn't they been able to stop it before the aliens were able to do it again!?"

"Wait. The latest news reports that the spacetime bubble is losing power at a very fast rate. It won't last more than a week! It sounds like the defenders failed to prevent the spacetime bubble from going off, but they are at least able to tear it down at record speed. Besides, ever since the Bridgehead One debacle, we have all learned our lesson and dispersed everything important across many different star systems. Yernstall is still important, but it isn't irreplaceable."

The temporary absence of Yernstall couldn't have happened at a worse time.

While it was true that it was not as important as before, it definitely held a lot of top assets that temporarily got cut off from the rest of human space!

This meant that there was a chance that Star Designers, god pilots, dreadnoughts and so on would not be able to fight where they were needed the most!

However, the Red Cabal definitely paid an enormous price to cut off the Sapphire of the Red Ocean.

A strong spacetime bubble could only be generated by 6 ancient phase whales working together!

If it was only able to last for a week in the universe, then that meant that those inside were probably crushing the powerful aliens inside the bubble!

The trapped people also prepared much better tech to exhaust the spacetime battle, proving that red humanity was no longer as vulnerable to this kind of attack as before!

While this was fairly bad news, what happened next in the Kayana System instantly applied a huge amount of pressure onto the defenders across the frontlines.

"Our sensors have detected a massive teleportation event a short distance away from the alien armada!"

"It's... it's a phase whale! A greater phase whale!"

"How big?!"

"As big as a small moon, which roughly corresponds to the size of a mid-tier greater phase whale! Its phasewater concentration must be close to 100 percent and should be extremely resistant against all forms of attacks."

Compared to the nunser and jureg greater phase lords that previously led the armada, the disparity in size was too great.

Phase whales were the original body cultivators of the Red Ocean. Their physiques were already as large as starships from the beginning, and they only grew bigger from that point onwards!

This had always given the phase whales a natural advantage in the Red Ocean.

Despite their clumsy appearances, it was much harder to defeat them just because they had more phasewater and mass at their disposal!

"Alo. Jeri. Is the Obsidian Orb capable of defeating a greater phase lord of this size?"

"...I suppose we will find out, Davia. We need to adjust our plans."

Even though the greater phase lord was still far away from Kayana VIII-E, the alien aquatic titan already seemed to cast a dark shadow over the fortified moon.

The Kayana System was not the only location that became host to phase whales.

Reports came in of other star systems detecting the arrival of phase whales, both lesser and greater ones!

Pretty much every contested star system in the Upper Zones was at risk of falling due to the unexpected arrival of so many phase whales!

The Red Cabal had finally decided to stop hanging back. After studying the human defenders and figuring out their threat levels, the phase whales finally gained the confidence to lend their strength to the offensive!

The mass dispatch of phase whales signified their determination to topple the last line of defense and eradicate the humans from the Red Ocean once and for all!

"We are in deep trouble!"

"I thought these phase whales were lazy! How many of them came out of hibernation?!"

"Stop complaining and start fighting!"

Chapter 6775: The Divine Maw

The phase whale race had begun to move in earnest.

Previously, the phase whales had been content to remain behind the scenes. As the original gods of the Red Ocean, they commanded enough respect and worship from the other races that their absence from the battlefield did not generate any complaints.

It helped that the phase whales of the Red Cabal successfully united the rivaling major races and bound them together in order to accomplish a common cause.

So long as the invading humans remained a serious threat to the natives of the new frontier, the Red Cabal would continue to retain its legitimacy.

This effectively put the phase whales in charge of all of the aliens in the Red Ocean!

Of course, the real situation was probably a lot more nuanced than that. Not every alien race worshiped the phase whales as literal gods, and there were probably a lot of phase lords that secretly desired to tear down the presumptive overlords.

For years, the phase whales kept themselves out of harm's way while using the humongous population of the other races as literal cannon fodder.

The phase whales did not care about the feelings or opinions of these aliens, particularly the lesser ones.

Even if the low-ranking aliens objected to their suicidal missions, there was no need for the mighty phase whales to act in person. There were plenty of enforcers of other races that could easily squash dissent before it could spread.

Thus, the Red War unfolded as the phase whales desired. A lot of human and alien blood got spilled across the frontlines, yet rarely if ever did the blood originate from an actual phase whale.

They could have stuck to this pattern and continue to drive the phase lords of the other races to risk their lives on the battlefield. This was an excellent opportunity to cull the native gods of the other races and prevent them from having any rebellious ideas down the line.

The fact that the phase whales chose to enter the fray in person showed that they had different ideas.

Whether the phase whales were forced to respond to political pressure or whether they moved out because they genuinely sought to maximize their chances of inflicting a fatal blow to red humanity, the phase whales had moved out in great numbers!

Not only did they show up in many contested star systems in the Upper Zones, they had also invested at least 6 ancient phase whales to temporarily envelop the Yernstall Central Star Node in a greater spacetime bubble!

The latter was a particularly costly investment and one that would likely end with all of the powerful phase whales dead at the hand of Yernstall's extremely powerful defenders.

Ancient phase whales may be True God-level existences, but red humanity had its own gods. Nobody was too concerned about Yernstall. Its defenders would be able to free the central star node from its isolation.

Still, the temporary isolation already created a lot of ripple effects. Yernstall was home to a lot of research institutions and production facilities. It served as the center of trade and became a nexus of human civilization.

Most crucially, Yernstall was one of the few star systems where Terrans and Rubarthans could tolerate each other's presence. Trade between the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact proceeded a lot more smoothly even if they had to put up with the pretense of relying on the services of third-party brokers.freewebnovel.com

Human High Command definitely had a strong presence within Yernstall as well. Even if the military strategists and their enormous staff had made an effort to decentralize their offices, the loss of Yernstall still inflicted a symbolic and operational setback during one of the most critical weeks of the Red War!

It was not an exaggeration to say that the outcome of the battles unfolding in the next months would decide the life and death of red humanity!

As the native aliens assigned to take over the Kayana System had begun to advance towards the eighth planet from the star, all of the defending forces stoically prepared to fight for the future of their race and civilization.

The arrival of a greater phase whale threw a huge wrench in the plans of the human defenders.

The fact that the native aliens purposefully deployed one in a star system that hosted a super fortress indicated that the greater phase whale was confident in his ability to deal with the Obsidian Orb!

Nobody knew what the greater phase whale was capable of. The phase whales hadn't exactly fought much in battle, and they had definitely made far better preparations in order to properly fight against their human foes.

The intelligence services worked hard to gather as much data as possible. They were familiar with at least some of the phase lords that accompanied the armada, but half of them were completely new.

As the battle was only a little over an hour away, the intelligence gathered by operatives embedded in numerous alien societies finally managed to transmit enough useful information to hold a small briefing.

Saint Stark studied the intelligence package carefully. She took note of any relevant information about their equipment and defensive capabilities.

"You can peruse the information on the 16 lesser phase lords at your own leisure." Saint Alo told the guest pilot. "Do not dismiss their threat. Unlike the lesser phase lords that are assigned to attack the Middle Zones, these ones are a caliber above. Their lineages and backing are better. Their phasewater organs are rarer and better developed. Their raiments can withstand powerful attacks considerably better and are equipped with other advanced tech. Their biggest shortcoming is their ego. They are more full of themselves and typically have poor teamwork."

"Shouldn't their greater phase lords or the greater phase whale keep them in line, Alo?" Saint Stark asked.

"Not... exactly. Think about it. The phase lords assigned to the Middle and Lower Zones usually have good mortal backgrounds, but are practically the equivalent of grassroots civilians in their societies. The lesser phase lords that we are about to fight against are the most favored scions of older alien dynasties. There are many implications, but the most important one you should keep in mind is that they are a better match against junior ace mechs. If you are not careful enough, they can end your life and the life of your mech."

"I see."

It made sense. These lesser phase lords were a cut above the rest of their kind. Assigning them to the Upper Zones was a rational choice as they were much more capable of withstanding first-class firepower.

"These phase lords also have a habit of hiding behind the bulk of their own warships, especially if they are assigned to the Rubarthan front." Jeri Chevor added. "They respect and fear our firepower, with good reason. Their spatial barriers are ridiculously strong, but mortal firepower can still tear them down as long as it is vast enough."

"The aliens will seek to close in, then?"

"Yes. You may very well be forced to put your new training to use. The greater phase lords are much more concerning. The Descent of Hushae'Rhua is a familiar sight among us. He is a nunser greater phase lord that has led the gradual conquest of the previous defensive bands for years in the Monroe Upper Zone. He is familiar with our mechs, our tech, our doctrines, our thinking and so on. He will not be fooled by our tricks. What is worse is that he has been awarded with a Saint Piercer, though its size is fairly limited. The greater phase lord will have to maintain a more compact body form in order to wield it as a polearm."

"What they lack in size and reach, they make up for in maneuverability and reaction speed." Stark described. "It is a worthwhile tradeoff even if it makes their bodies more vulnerable to assassinations."

A big body was a pain to fell. There was just too much mass in the way that could block an attack before it reached a vital organ.

When a phase lord reduced the size of his true body, his diminished form did not become proportionately weaker. The formula was actually a lot more complicated than that, but it was undeniable that most attacks were able to penetrate a bit further into the flesh. There were definite risks to phase lords that tried to shrink to their smallest possible statures.

Saint Stark had encountered plenty of nunser phase lords in the past. They were among the most common races on the battlefield. Nunsers usually lacked imagination, but many of them were often disciplined and diligent. Their martial fighting skills were always solid at minimum, though their enthusiasm for spatial manipulation was not as high.

Davia Stark had grown familiar enough with their biologies to know where she should target her Instrument of Vengeance.

"The second greater phase lords come from the jureg race. From what our intelligence agents have gathered, the Divine Suppliant of the Great Ones is new to the frontlines. Unlike the Descent of Hushae'Rhua, this giant crustacean-like alien directly serves in the Red Cabal. Look at how he is constantly shadowing the greater phase whale. Our intelligence agents believe that he serves as a direct vassal or retainer. He is clearly here to serve as the greater phase whale's shield. His raiment is remarkably modern and high in quality, and he is also carrying a piece of superdimensional equipment that we have never witnessed in the past."

So far, the native aliens had only unveiled Saint Piercers. These long and relatively thin poles comprised entirely of fairly high-grade superdimensional matter and could pierce through almost everything.

People had long speculated that the native aliens weren't dull enough to stick to spears alone, and what they witnessed today confirmed that the aliens had built other stuff with the superdimensional matter that they managed to obtain from unclear sources!

The Divine Suppliant carried a fairly large and wide physical shield on one of its forelimbs. This shield was at least partially made out of superdimensional matter!

This did not bode well for the human defenders. If everyone's suspicions were correct, this superdimensional shield granted the Divine Suppliant the ability to resist attacks far exceeding what his other defenses could tolerate!

Was it enough to withstand the enormous might of the Obsidian Orb?

Saint Stark feared that the answer to this question might not be what she desired!

"What about the greater phase whale himself?"

"The aliens have information on him. He is known as the Divine Maw, and he serves as a cadre for the Red Cabal. In combat, this greater phase whale is known to be strong in both martial and spatial manipulation, with a greater preference towards the

latter. He is most infamous for being able to open his maw and absorb every attack or craft that passes through his massive gullet."

"What?! Is that even possible?!"

Saint Alo grimaced. "None of this is reliable information, so take it what you will. Personally, my sister and I think it is credible that the Divine Maw has replaced his original stomach with a phasewater organ that serves the same purpose and so much more. It likely works as a dimensional stomach. Anything that the greater phase whale devours will literally end up in a pocket space. That is where he gets his title. Suffice to say, do not get devoured by him. Do not even attempt to fight him at close range. Your plasma bayonet will do nothing against an enemy of this caliber."

"I am not stupid. My resonance strength alone is not even close enough to threaten the life of a greater phase lord the size of a small moon. That said, will this phase lord maintain his enormous size?"

"We are not certain. If he does, then his defenses will remain at full strength, but he will also become incredibly easy to target by all manner of siege weapons. It all hinges on whether the Obsidian Orb can inflict enough damage to force the Divine Maw to shrink his enormous true body and take shelter behind his forces."

Chapter 6776: Three Final Chances

The first battle that would decide the ownership of the Kayana System would soon begin.

The alien armada had continued to advance at a steady pace while the predominantly Rubarthan defenders geared up for a hard fight.

Kayana VIII-E was fortified to the brim. Its orbital defense network was more developed than ever, and the surface of the moon hosted additional fortifications that could pose all kinds of problems against the native aliens.

All of it would endure catastrophic damage by the time the battle came to an end.

Nobody knew whether any part of the orbital defenses would remain intact. The surface of the developed and resource-rich moon was bound to get struck by thousands of warship-grade strikes.

Just like the battles that took place in the first to fourth defensive bands, Kayana VIII-E was not exactly worth dying for. The Rubarthan Pact could still afford to lose control over it. The defenders just had to make sure that they forced the invaders to pay a heavy enough price to obtain their prize.

The surviving defenders could still fall back to Kayana VI. The orbital defense network was just as formidable, and would certainly force the alien attackers to suffer even greater losses.

That left Kayana III, the capital planet and the final barrier. If the battle had shifted to this planet, then that was when the situation truly grew dire.

The Rubarthans and their allies couldn't afford to concede any further territory at this point. Losing Kayana III was the equivalent of creating a hole in a dam.

Once the native aliens captured the Kayana System, they could not only divert their powerful warships towards adjacent star systems, but they could also launch incursions into the hinterland of Rubarthan space!

While the Rubarthans could still muster a few forces to reclaim the conquered star systems and plug the holes in the fifth defensive band, their numbers were too limited.

Every fallen star system represented another costly and time-consuming endeavor. If too many star systems had fallen, the fifth defensive band would be as good as lost!

The Amaranto Mark III had deployed in space.

Many mechs had deployed in space as well. An intricate array of mech units flew out into space and took up different positions that were designed to cover the orbital defense network from multiple different angles.

The amount of mechs and the amount of firepower was astonishing.

The most glorious mechs of all were the first-class multipurpose mechs. While not all of them consisted of the most expensive and powerful high-tier versions, their designs

spoke of incredible flexibility and competence. They might not excel in any area, but their large range of options always made them useful in any situation.

Compared to the mechers and the Terrans, the Rubarthans distinctly favored ranged combat.

Every first-class multipurpose mechs therefore possessed abundant means to strike at enemies from multiple distances. Their energy weapons were precise and most suited for longer ranges while their devastating plasma weapons inflicted heavy thermal damage, but were most effective at closer ranges due to the relatively slow speeds of their projectiles.

The low muzzle speeds of most forms of plasma weapons was the main reason why the Obsidian Orb had not opened fire as of yet. If its output was just as slow to travel, then the chance of missing a shot was too great.

The Amaranto did not suffer from this particular problem. Saint Stark was already itching to snipe a target from afar. The only disappointment was that there were no easy targets within sight.

Just as expected, the native aliens had done their homework. The lesser phase lords that were most vulnerable to getting picked off from afar had chosen to travel well behind friendly warships.

It made them look cowardly, but the lesser phase lords assigned to the Upper Zones had learned the hard way that humans were more than capable and willing to launch powerful precision strikes if they ever exposed their true bodies!

This was why Stark had instead shifted her attention on the warships of the invading aliens.

The intelligence services had identified over a dozen different flagships, some of which were more important than others. Taking them out would definitely impede coordination, but not as much as the humans would like. The aliens would simply transfer command to the captains of the next warship down the line.

The scouts had also detected the presence of other unusual warships. There were visible and non-so-visible indications that their roles may not be as straightforward.

What purpose did they serve?

Did they contain weapons of mass destruction?

Were they carrying special supplies?

Were they being crewed by cosmopolitans?

Nobody knew the significance of these abnormal ships. All the intelligence services managed to find out by eavesdropping on alien transmissions was that they fell outside the normal alien chain of command.

Saint Stark felt tempted to target one of these mystery ships first, if only to glimpse through the hull breaches what they might carry.

However, hitting the flagships was a surefire way to mess up the coordination of a large contingent of enemy warships.

No matter how well the native aliens were able to transfer command to other leaders, the confusion combined with the lack of trust and familiarity towards the new commanders could cause the attackers to make a lot of avoidable mistakes.

The Lamia Kailamassu had yet to make an appearance. Everyone remained frozen until the most powerful pair of ace pilots entered the field. Until they emerged, Saint Stark was ordered to stay put.

It was frustrating for the Amaranto Mark III to remain idle while the aliens kept moving closer.

Their rigid formations and steady advance turned them into easy targets as far as Saint Stark was concerned!

She badly wanted to start the fight by opening fire, but the Rubarthans had other ideas.

"Perhaps Casella might understand."

Stark did not possess any command capabilities, so she did not see the significance of keeping her Amaranto Mark III silent when she could clearly start making the aliens suffer.

Finally, a new development occurred.

The Lamia Kailamassu launched from the largest orbital fortress and immediately began to fly to a forward position.

Its appearance delighted every soldier! The Rubarthans took great pride in the honor of being able to fight under the gaze of the twin saints.

The Stewards Siamesia made a show out of it as well. Perhaps aware that the Rubarthans had grown shaky due to all of the bad news circulating across the galactic net, the twin saints had deliberately flared up their Saint Kingdoms.

This caused their dual-pilot ace mech to look a lot more powerful and divine than usual!

When the Lamia Kailamassu finally reached its central position, it ceased and turned to face the defenders that were stationed on or around Kayana VIII-E.

The peak ace mech began to transmit in the open.

"Soldiers." Saint Jerivern Chevor spoke in a solemn tone with the full force of his partial divinity. "The Eleventh Hour has arrived. Time is running out. The Rubarthan Pact and the rest of humans in the new frontier is being driven to the brink of defeat. We have fought valiantly to repel the native aliens in the past year. We have made the native aliens pay a heavy price in blood, phasewater and alloys in order to encroach on our territories. Many of you have proudly helped to keep the first, second, third and fourth defensive bands in human hands as long as possible. Many brave Rubarthan soldiers have made the greatest sacrifice that we could have asked for them. It is through their loyalty and duty to our colonial superstate and our fellow human beings that we have been given a fighting chance... to win the most important battle of our lifetimes."

Saint Aloretzi Chevor spoke next. "Heed the words of my sister. No battle is more important than the one that has already begun. The fifth defensive band is the final barrier that is left to protect our civilians and our industries from relentless alien raids. We may still be able to win the Red War if we fail to hold the line, but we will no longer possess enough agency to decide our own destiny. At that point, we can only win if our alien adversaries make egregious mistakes."

Davia Stark had heard plenty of speeches from the leaders of the Larkinson Clan.

Patriarch Ves had a way of inflaming the passion of those who listened to his Devil Tongue. He had such a way with words that he was able to drive up people in a frenzy against their judgment. This had served him well and had saved his life and freedom on numerous high-profile occasions.

The Saint Commander Casella Ingvar already inspired people by her presence and proven competence alone. Her words merely served to reinforce what was already present. She served as a beacon of hope and certain victory to the soldiers who had the fortune of fighting under her command.

So far, the Stewards Siamesia had been quite realistic to their predominantly Rubarthan audience, but they were probably building up their momentum.

"We have only three chances left." Saint Jeri stated. "Forget about the battles that are taking place in the other star systems. None of them are relevant at the moment. To us, only this star system matters. Kayana VIII-E, Kayana VI and Kayana III are all that stand in the way between survival and extinction as far as we are concerned. We absolutely cannot lose our control over the last planet. If we are forced into a retreat, then half of the people residing in the Rubarthan Pact will die. This is only a conservative estimate."

"..."

That was a heavy prediction, but one that may very well come true if the aliens were truly able to rampage across human space as they saw fit.

Saint Alo spoke in a more solemn and respectful voice. "Today, and in the following days, we ask the utmost of you all. Whether you are mech pilot or station personnel, it

does not matter. Each of you can fight for yourself, or fight for your friends and families that are relying on your protection. I hope that each of you will understand the importance of sacrifice and what it will mean for those around you. Live if you can, but make your deaths meaningful if you have no other choice. Trust that your surviving soldiers will do whatever it takes to finish the job and that your sacrifice will never be in vain."

The Lamia Kailamassu began to glow brighter, making it look as if it was the first machine to lead the soldiers to their inevitable demise!

"Today, we fight for the continuation of our Rubarthan society!" Saint Jeri exclaimed! "The greater our resistance, the more we earn the right to preserve the Rubarthan Pact. By doing our part to defend our race, we will contribute to the collective effort for our superstate to earn back its sovereignty. No longer will we fight under the yoke of the mechers and the fleeters. As long as we survive this gravest of tests, it is inexcusable for the Red Association and the Red Fleet to withhold our sovereignty from us any longer. LET US FIGHT TO RECLAIM OUR DIGNITY!"

Everyone began to cheer! Many of the soldiers were patriotic Rubarthans that had always dreamt of seeing their superstate turn into a proper star nation again!

Even though the Stewards Siamesia weren't Rubarthans by birth, the New Rubarthan Empire had always welcomed the entry of highly talented and capable people.

The Rubarthan Pact took over these ideas, but had a chance to fulfill the long-cherished dream of its people. The mechers and the fleeters had denied these proud people their sovereignty for too long.

It was through this fervor and common belief in the values and principles of their Rubarthan superstate that the defenders in the Kayana System had truly become unified in thought and intention!

Chapter 6777: The Most Insidious Enemies

Saint Stark liked the speech.

She liked it even though its most important points were lost to her. Stark was not a Rubarthan, so she had never grown up and learned to take pride in a Rubarthan identity.

That did not mean she was ignorant of how much the citizens as well as many immigrants took pride in their Rubarthan identity and citizenship.

It was a very big deal in both the Milky Way and the Red Ocean.

Davia Stark merely found it unfortunate that she lacked the context and emotional ties to experience the moment herself.

She felt as if she was relegated to the role of a neutral bystander. She simply had no stake in the life and death of the Rubarthan state.

She felt envious of the Rubarthans for maintaining their love and reverence for a common identity.

It was one of the many aspects that Davia Stark had lost along her difficult journey of transcendence.

She had lost the capability to feel pride in one's state, culture, people or nation.

Ever since her former state had perished along with most of its population, Davia had gone adrift.

Though she spent a lot of time with the Larkinsons, she could never bring herself to blend in with them. She was incapable of living a normal life.

These days, her heart burned with vengeance instead of love. So long as that remained the case, only her duty remained.

She briefly closed her eyes and centered her thoughts. Though she did not care about the Rubarthan Pact in any way, she was more than willing to fight to preserve the lives of the civilians who relied on the protection of the soldiers at the frontlines.

Not all first-raters were stained with sin. The ordinary folk were almost just as powerless as the civilians of second-rate and third-rate states. These people were still worth protecting as far as Davia was concerned.

Besides, the strategic outlook remained clear. Defending the Upper Zones was vital to keeping at least some Middle Zones and Lower Zones alive. The fall of the Kayana System would cause a chain reaction that might spell the end of the Monroe Upper Zone and all other adjacent zones!

"Davia." Saint Alo said as his voice maintained its transcendent quality. That was a sign that he was bringing his full power to bear against the advancing enemies. "The enemy forces should have entered your effective range some time ago. You have our permission to take aim."

The guest pilot grinned. The Amaranto Mark III, which currently took shelter on the hull of a Rubarthan combat carrier, cautiously began to inch forward and aim her Instrument of Vengeance towards the distant enemies.

"Target?" She asked as she refrained from channeling her full power just yet. "Do you wish for me to prioritize a phase lord, a flagship or one of those mystery ships?"

"Are you confident that your firepower can disable one of their flagships fast enough before they respond and provide cover? Every alien flagship of importance usually possesses the strongest defenses out of a fleet."

"I cannot guarantee an elimination. I don't have enough information to make that judgment. I am confident I can penetrate the azure energy shields and drill into the hull."

"Hm. The 'mystery warships' that you refer to are easier targets. They are smaller and most certainly less well-protected. The lack of intelligence concerning their roles and payloads are of great concern to our commanders. It is more important to dispel the cloud of uncertainty around them, and the best way to do that is to peel open their hulls and expose their interior. Please target one of these vessels and make sure you inflict enough damage to open up a gap in one of their cargo holds."

"Understood. This will not take long."

The Amaranto Mark III began to light up. Her Solus Gas-infused exterior was able to hide her emissions for now, but the mech frame soon started to emit so much heat and light energy that the distant aliens most certainly detected the activity!

As the Instrument of Vengeance started to charge up at a considerably faster rate than before the Amaranto's latest upgrade, the native alien armada already began to respond to this obvious threat.

More important warships began to fall back. At the same time, less important warships began to make up the vanguard and used their bulk to provide shelter to the ships and phase lords hiding in the rear.

The Divine Maw on the other hand made no attempts to make himself less easy to target. He still retained the size of a small moon, so much so that he had formed his own gravity well that unbalanced the gravitic environment even further!

As the Instrument of Vengeance charged up to full power fairly quickly, Saint Stark quickly activated almost all of the means she could employ to augment her next shot.

True Resonance.

Charge Mate.

Phasewater technology.

Hyper technology.

Blessed weapon.

The combination of true resonance empowerment and light energy empowerment caused the Instrument of Vengeance to glow with so much light and power that it was beginning to turn into a miniature sun!

There were still measures that Stark held back. Given the range and lack of mobility of the mystery warships, there was no need to engage the Ultimate Module.

The Two-Step Execution Module should only be used in situations where her base marksmanship was not adequate enough.

She also held back her companion spirit. Vail was much more useful when attacking enemy powerhouses than big warships.

Aside from that, the Amaranto Mark III was ready to unleash the power of an ace marksman mech that had been lovingly designed by the Larkinson Clan!

Moments before Saint Stark was ready to pull the trigger, she only had to pick her target.

Her weapon minutely adjusted its angle from side to side. Several mystery warships had not taken long before they successfully took shelter behind a less important enemy warship.

There were those that moved a little slower due to lack of coordination or differences in ship class parameters.

Davia randomly selected a mystery warship that had almost moved out of the Amaranto's line of sight, but could still be struck if she pulled the trigger sooner rather than later.

Beep.

"FIRE." The living mech crowed.

The ace pilot pulled the trigger without hesitation.

An overflow of light flooded a lot of sensors as a bright white energy beam tore across space and instantly crossed over to the alien armada!

Although almost no one was able to notice it, the energy beam was not entirely straight. The complex gravitic environment and the interference produced by energetic exotics could subtly cause an energy beam to go slightly crooked.

This was why no one else had bothered to open fire with their own energy weapons. They were more likely to miss all of the time.

The Amaranto Mark III was different. Not only was she incredibly precise at incredibly long ranges, Saint Stark had meticulously calculated and optimized her firing solution in a short amount of time!

The thick and bright beam only lasted for an instant, but it successfully reached the alien fleet and struck the target vessel at the exact right angle!

The mystery warship's segmented multi-layer azure energy shields flared, but succumbed almost immediately!

The power and penetration of the Amaranto's first full-powered shot against a real enemy since her ace pilot's breakthrough vastly exceeded the resistance of the ship's defenses!

One segmented azure energy shield crumbled after another. It happened so quickly that there was practically no delay!

The alien warship immediately lit up as her hull got struck by the resonance-empowered light beam.

The hull plating did not stand a chance!

Even if the exterior consisted entirely of transphasic human-developed alloys, the power of the recently upgraded Instrument of Vengeance was still too great to withstand for any mortal vessel!

The improvements that Saint Stark had made over the last week had borne a lot of fruit. Not only had her resonance strength grown by a substantial degree, she had also developed a closer understanding and appreciation of the power of light.

One of the small but impactful gains she made was to add a modest purging aspect to her energy weapon attacks!

Just as she relied on the purging qualities of light to cleanse her mind of mental afflictions, she was also able to use the same property to negate the effects of hyper technology!

It was for this reason that the azure energy shield succumbed faster and more easily than it should. The powerful light energy had purged the energy barriers of their water energy!

Now, the same aspect was purging the alloys of their metal energy and other reinforcing energies.

The bright white energy beam continued to drill into the hull until it had finally reached one of the large cargo holds before punching a hole straight to the other side!

As the sensors recovered their normal states, many people paid close attention to the target.

The mystery warship had been cored. The Amaranto had managed to destroy enough power generators and other critical components to cause the vessel to lose control!

"What is that?"

"That looks familiar..."

"Those are... mechs..."

"What?! That cannot be! How can they be mechs!?"

"Have the aliens managed to crack the secrets to our neural interfaces?!"

"No. Those aren't alien mechs. They are too human. I fear... that the cosmopolitans have come to hasten our own extinction."

"That's crazy!"

"Are these cosmopolitans blind?! It is not enough to steal our tech and give them to the aliens. Fighting directly alongside the aliens is a step too far! Don't they know they will get killed once we are gone?!"

"You are trying to apply logic to the Cosmopolitan Movement. That never works because sanity doesn't exist among their cells."

The surprise reveal of cosmopolitan mechs shocked every human defender. Each of them were ready to fight to defend the Rubarthan Pact and red humanity. Whether they were selfish or not, right now they were united by their collective responsibility to their people.

To encounter humans who were shameless and depraved enough to completely go against this sacred duty was betrayal of the highest order!

All reason had left the cosmopolitans as they were still willing to side with the aliens even when red humanity was on the verge of losing the Red War!

Shock quickly transitioned into rage as the Rubarthans had become motivated by fury as well as duty!

"KILL THEM ALL!"

"LEAVE NONE OF THESE TRAITORS ALIVE!"

"NO COSMOPOLITAN IS ALLOWED TO LEAVE THIS BATTLEFIELD!"

The rank-and-file soldiers had already grown rabid at the sight of active human treachery.

The cosmopolitans no longer bothered to hide their presence anymore. The cat was already out of the bag.

More and more cosmopolitan mechs launching out of the other mystery warships.

None of their pilots responded to any hails. They remained completely unmoved by the pleas and insults of the Rubarthan defenders.

As far as they were concerned, the human supremacists were irredeemable. Only by wiping out 50 to 90 percent of their population or more would it be possible for the remaining survivors to finally let go of the foolish notion that humans were superior to other alien races!

Whatever twisted justifications they used to turn their mechs against their own kind, the cosmopolitans could never be persuaded to switch sides!

Meanwhile, the Amaranto began to glow brighter.

The sight of cosmopolitan mechs incensed Saint Stark!

Of all of the possible enemies she could encounter, none earned her ire more than human trash that were actively colluding with genocidal aliens!

Her eyes began to glow with light while her mind became filled with fury!

Her hatred blazed so hot that she finally couldn't hold in her anger anymore!

"TRAITORS!" She roared while at the same time her Instrument of Vengeance spat out another destructive light beam!

This time, another capital warship got cored!

Chapter 6778: Static Defense vs Mobile Attack

Combat had begun in earnest.

As the most critical phase of the Red Tide Offensive unfolded across the fifth defensive band, the defense of the Kayana System was one of many that could decide the outcome of the entire war!

After the Amaranto Mark III kicked off the battle in earnest by shooting down a warship that turned out to function as a makeshift carrier for cosmopolitan mechs, both sides eventually began to shoot each other in earnest!

The firepower at the disposal of both sides was cataclysmic.

The native aliens had brought an abundance of modernized transphasic hyper warships. These vessels not only enjoyed the protection of formidable azure energy shields in both segmented and multi-layer configurations, but also possessed heavy armaments that could unleash a huge amount of firepower.

However, the human defenders were not incapable of matching that firepower. Not only had the RF sent a modest contingent of warships to share the pressure, the huge and extremely well-built orbital defense network was well-matched to face this onslaught of cannons and alloy!

While there were many differences, the orbital fortresses and orbital platforms functioned as the equivalent of alien battleships and alien escort vessels.

It was just that the orbital defenses lacked strong propulsion capabilities. They were never designed to move unless an asteroid or out-of-control warship threatened to crash into their structures.

The Rubarthans hadn't even bothered to install teleportation modules onto them because they were explicitly designed to absorb as much firepower as possible before succumbing to all of the damage.

To that end, these orbital fortifications were able to pile up on lots of thick armor layers. The alloys may be inferior to those used to protect high-end mechs, but their affordability and ease of sourcing made it easy for the Rubarthan Pact to produce high volumes of armor plating and structural components!

Combined with the fact that they were equipped with Titan Shields and enough battleship-grade cannons that could reasonably be added without compromising too much of their defenses, these orbital defenses served as the obstacles that the native aliens had to overcome in order to conquer Kayana VIII-E.

Right now, many of the orbital defenses still held strong.

Due to the range that separated the two sides, the advancing alien warships primarily brought their biggest guns to bear onto the large and easy-to-hit orbital fortresses.

Their Titan Shields were designed to resist punishment from warships. While the concentration of firepower was great enough to drain the capacity of these immensely powerful energy shields in less than a minute, this was already enough to pay for the beleaguered fortresses!

This was because attracting a minute's worth of cannon fire from dozens if not a hundred of alien warships bought the human defenders enough time to take down the advancing alien warships!

The enemy did not make it easy to take down their hulls. As the native alien vessels flew closer, they began to employ formations and rotate back and forth.

So long as their warp drives worked, they were able to move pretty quickly. They constantly used their excellent energy defenses to shield each other and give nearly exhausted warships time to recover their segmented energy shields.

The enemy warships were making the best possible use of their mobility. Their highly intricate and highly coordinated dance prolonged the survival of every hull and enabled them to pump out more firepower.

This was an excellent tactic to employ against attacks that mainly arrived from one direction!

While the orbital defenses were orbiting above Kayana VIII-E just enough to be able to target the same warships from different angles, the human gunners struggled to inflict enough damage to make a difference.

So long as the distance between them remained great enough, the amount of firepower that could be brought to bear against warships sheltering behind other vessels remained limited!

Another factor that inhibited their effectiveness was the use of segmented energy shields.

Attacks launched by an orbital fortress from the 'left' side did not overlap with the attacks launched by an orbital fortress on the 'right' side.

This made it difficult to blow open a temporary gap in energy barriers and take advantage of it to inflict crippling damage to the hull!

The orbital defenses therefore had to whittle down the segmented azure energy shields the old fashioned way.

While the alien crew members in charge of managing the energy defenses did their best to stretch the dwindling amount of active segmented energy shields, they were gradually being overwhelmed due to the sheer firepower the bigger orbital fortresses possessed.

Unlike warships that possessed a lot of limitations on mass and volume, orbital fortresses could be made as thick and massive as their builders could afford!

This not only enabled them to bear lots of armor, but also mount guns that were as big as those found in larger battleships!

These formidable armaments surpassed the caliber of most primary gun batteries. No matter whether they flung gauss rounds, positron beams or exotic particles, every warship that got struck by them suffered a lot of pain!

They possessed a lot of downsides, however. It was easy for the enemy to target these stationary guns once the orbital fortresses lost their energy shields.

Their firing rates were abysmally low.

Their tracking and precision characteristics were also low, causing them to miss a lot of shots if they attempted to target smaller and more maneuverable warships.

Despite these many shortcomings, these guns were doing the heavy lifting when it came to reducing the number of enemy warships.

Even so, the operators manning the guns found themselves overwhelmed by the enormous torrent of transphasic hyper alloys.

The modernized aliens were even trickier to defeat than usual, and the excellent coordination exhibited by the enemy fleets further reduced their loss rate.

In contrast, the immobile orbital fortresses were sitting ducks that were only able to last for a respectable amount of time due to the stacking of defenses.

The Rubarthan state had invested a great amount of funding and resources into building up the orbital defense networks of many different planets across the fifth defensive band.

Unfortunately, all of this buildup took place in the open. The native aliens were not stupid, and they understood the human strategies even better once the cosmopolitans helpfully explained their own doctrines and strategies.

The native aliens assigned to attack the Kayana System had purposefully delayed this grand assault for multiple days.

It was all worth it as the native aliens brought so many warships that the orbital defense network was beginning to crumble a lot faster than the enemy assault fleets!

"The native aliens made sure to bring enough warships to crush all three orbital defense networks in the star system!"

"Their firepower is too great!"

"Are you crazy?! We are getting overwhelmed by the alien naval assets. We can't spare our guns to suppress the enemy phase lords! Isn't that what our ace mechs are for?! They look fine for now, so let them stall the enemy gods a while longer!"

The most Rubarthans never thought the orbital defense network could repel the aliens alone.

They had always placed the greatest hope on their mechs.

A strong core of 8 Rubarthan mech corps led the assault with 6 Rubarthan irregular mech corps providing support.

The former consisted of 400,000 first-class multipurpose mechs. Each of them were quite deadly at range and could hold their own at close range.

If these mechs were allowed to attack the approaching enemy warships without hindrance, then they could work in unison with the orbital defense network to quickly tear apart one alien hull after another!

However, the native aliens easily deployed over 2 million elite phasefighters!

These elite craft that were tough and piloted by well-trained alien fighter pilots were not necessarily expected to defeat the formidable alien mechs.

Even with their advantages, the humans had proven in more battles than anyone could count that they were masters at maximizing the value of their small craft!

Let alone getting outnumbered by 2 to 1, mechs had managed to win with worse odds!

The alien phasefighters were merely ordered to stall the human mechs and keep them busy as long as possible.

Again, their azure energy shields played a huge role in fulfilling their missions.

"These azure energy shields are tougher than the ones used by the alien craft we have seen in the past."

"The accuracy of their forward cannons have improved. Their targeting systems have become considerably more effective."

"Watch out for their transphasic missiles! Their payloads are strong enough to blast open your own azure energy shields and create a formidable hole in your armor."

"These phasefighters are too persistent! Our unit can't shake them off, and they're already calling reinforcements!"

The clash between mechs and phasefighters was a frustrating ordeal to the human defenders.

Mechs should be better in almost every criteria, but the native aliens have managed to close the gap to the point where phasefighters truly served as effective distractions on the battlefield.

The alien developers had purposefully amplified their most annoying performance characteristics so that they became a greater nuisance to mechs!

If that was not enough to make the Rubarthans upset, then fighting against other humans made them even more furious!

"TRAITORS!"

"Why are you trying to kill us all?!"

"You have thrown away the dignity of the human race!"

The angry Rubarthan mechs threw themselves at their cosmopolitan counterparts!

Both sides initially utilized their many weapon modules to exchange fire with each other ,but that did not satisfy the defending mech pilots.

The Rubarthans subsequently sent out their more melee-capable mechs to close in on the cosmopolitan mechs and entangle them at close range!

This caused the fight between the two groups of mechs to intensify.

What surprised the Rubarthans during the initial contact was that the cosmopolitan mechs were well-designed and well-built. Their quality and material usage also matched the standards of first-raters.

However, the cosmopolitan mechs also lacked support from the Red Kingdom!

None of the machines were affected by anyone's design philosophies. Whoever designed these cosmopolitan mechs clearly did not want to leave any trails.

While this should have caused the cosmopolitans to falter as they were missing a critical component that enabled mechs to rise above the competition, they had one undeniable advantage.

Every cosmopolitan mech featured high phasewater saturation!

The Cosmopolitan Movement evidently earned enough appreciation from their alien masters to receive an abundance of phasewater.

The human traitors put these resources to good use by applying stronger transphasic components to their mechs!

Combined with a fantastic understanding of how humans fought, their mechs were holding back a surprising amount of Rubarthan mechs!

"These traitors are more skilled than expected! Their phasewater tech is too strong as well!"

While that did not enable the traitor mechs to defeat all of their opposition in a decisive fashion, it helped them last longer and hit back harder.

Numerous Rubarthans mechs succumbed as they struggled to defeat their demented mirrors.

It was just too strange to see humans fighting on the same side as the native aliens in this day and age.

While there were modest amounts of flanking mech units that made it past the obstruction of enemy strike craft, the point was moot so long as there were too few mechs left to cripple the alien positions.

All of this meant that the alien attack plan was working. Sending out enough powerful phasefighters and warships to choke the human defenders and prevent them from pooling their strengths was a devious and cold-hearted idea..

It was because of this that the Rubarthan defenders looked to their champions for hope and inspiration.

Of all of the ace mechs in the field, the only one that could surpass the Lamia Kailamassu in splendor was the Amaranto Mark III!

While the battle continued to wage around the machine, Saint Davia Stark had been doing her part by knocking down one warship after another.

With the help of the impressive firing rate of the new Instrument of Vengeance, the Amaranto Mark III had already claimed over a dozen warships!

Each of them were large hulls that were bristling with weapon emplacements. For the Amaranto to be take them out with such each attracted a lot of unwelcome attention.

Chapter 6779: The Divine Suppliant of the Great Ones

The ace mechs defending the Kayana System played a crucial role.

Including the most powerful Lamia Kailamassu, they numbered an impressive 9 in total.

However, 5 of them consisted of junior ace mechs like the Amaranto while 4 of them were senior ace mechs.

The ace mechs were clearly outnumbered by the alien phase lords.

Over half of them were imports from the Middle Zones. They had just received their upgraded first-class ace mechs and had not had the chance to test their capabilities on the battlefield.

That did not hinder them too much. They were halfgods whose skills and capabilities vastly exceeded the human norm.

Even if they were unaccustomed to the power of their new machines, it only took ten minutes of hearty fighting for them to understand how to leverage the base capabilities of their ace mechs.

Even so, they struggled to contain the advancing phase lords, who were considerably stronger and better equipped than the ones fighting in the Middle and Lower Zones.

Powerful resonance-empowered gauss rifles, transphasic missiles, positron weapons struck the defenses of the phase lords, but did nothing aside from draining their spatial barriers.

While the more powerful armaments of the ace mechs allowed them to drain the defenses of the phase lords faster, the fact that they were outnumbered made it difficult for them to concentrate their attacks and achieve effective results in a short amount of time.

The presence of the looming phase whale alone forced all of the ace pilots to fight more cautiously!

The only ace mech that was qualified to confront such a terrible being head-on was the Lamia Kailamassu, but it was questionable whether this non-lethal mech had what it took to halt this formidable opponent for long!

The combination of being outnumbered and overpowered was not good news to the ace pilots.

There were 4 senior ace mechs, but it was questionable whether they could hold back the Divine Maw, the Descent of Hushae'Rhua and the The Divine Supplicant of the Great Ones.

Each of them were extremely well-equipped for their kind.

The Divine Suppliant mainly focused on defense, but he was almost unkillable. Many of his phasewater organs served to reinforce his spatial barrier and his exoskeleton. He also enjoyed the protection of a luxurious superdimensional shield, which he did not have to use yet because his energy defenses were not that easy to exhaust.

For the time being, the Divine Suppliant hovered close to the Divine Maw, enabling the two to work together and divide responsibilities.

This made the Divine Maw a lot trickier to attack. The Lamia Kailamassu had attempted to drag the greater phase whale into a stalemate, but many of its tricks were only partially effective on the massive alien monstrosity due to size and other limitations!

The most effective measure that the Lamia Kailamassu could take was to build up momentum and crash against the Divine Maw's spatial barrier with the force of a weapon of mass destruction.

These repeated crashing attacks produced modest results, but when the greater jureg phase lord came to the rescue of his liege lord and sought to withstand the incoming attacks, the Lamia Kailamassu began to encounter greater hindrances!

The Stewards Siamesia stimulated their Saint Kingdoms and attempted to interfere with the mentality of the Divine Suppliant, but the alien phase lord easily resisted the mental invasion!

"MY FAITH IS UNSHAKABLE! YOUR EVIL HUMAN TRICKS WILL NEVER WORK!"

The Stewards Siamesia had never fought against phase lords as strong as the Divine Suppliant.

Even though he was already regarded as a god by the aliens of the Red Ocean, the Divine Suppliant had only ever considered himself the servant of the phase whales!

The Divine Suppliant's apparent immunity to the Saint Kingdoms of the Lamia Kailamassu turned him into a disruptive nuisance.

The jureg greater phase lord did not bother to attack, but invested all of his power and attention on defense and interference.

His sole job was to get in the way of the Lamia Kailamassu and prevent the peak ace mech from threatening the Divine Maw!

"It is as we feared." Saint Aloretzi Chevor spoke over a high-level communication channel. "The native aliens have studied what I can do to them and specifically assigned the most fanatical greater phase lord they could find to hinder my actions. I fear that even if I turn away from the Divine Maw, the Divine Supplicant will still bite at my heels."

The Divine Supplicant gained more and more courage. He took advantage of his shrunken but still fairly large proportions to put his body and his spatial barrier in the way of everything the Lamia Kailamassu tried to do. His defenses were insanely strong, but his mobility was just good enough to fend off most direct assaults.

And this was without the Divine Maw taking action yet!

With the most powerful ace mech locked in a struggle, the other ace mechs shrugged to perform their responsibilities.

They not only had to hold back 16 lesser phase lords, but also another greater phase lord.

The Descent of Hushae'Rhua was extremely dangerous to confront. The nunser phase lord wielded his Saint Piercer with great skill and purpose and always made the senior ace mechs circling around his true body wary.

None of the ace pilots wanted to make a mistake that would get their machines impaled!

Those that dismiss this thought as cowardice and sought to prove their strength by challenging phase lords armed with Saint Piercers usually met abrupt ends to their long and storied careers!

The losses of so many overconfident ace pilots in the past few months had taught the remaining ones a hard lesson.

Never underestimate a greater phase lord armed with a Saint Piercer!

The Red Cabal only awarded their precious superdimensional arms to gods that not only earned enough merit, but also possessed the martial skill to wield them with great skill.

This was why the senior ace mechs assigned to fight the Descent of Hushae'Rhua maintained a moderate distance and sought to disrupt rather than kill.

The downside to this was that this approach only slowed down the advance of the nunser phase lord. He was still moving closer to the orbital defense network!

"We need more assistance! These lesser phase lords are too difficult to harm!"

"We are coming, but our firepower is limited."

"Stick to the plan and do not come close. Your resonance shields won't last long when struck directly by a lesser phase whale."

Assisting the ace mechs were scores of expert mechs.

They were much more numerous, and they were also more powerful than their second-class counterparts due to their much more expensive designs.

However, aside from the high-tier expert pilots, the resonance strength of the low-tier and medium-tier expert pilots were too low to inflict that much more damage to the spatial barriers of the lesser phase lords.

They attacked at the lesser phase lords anyway because they could still make a difference, however small.

In this early stage, neither side lost any champions.

The Lamia Kailamassu had just begun to team up with other friendly ace mechs and sought to empower them with their unique non-threatening Saint Kingdoms.

The enemy phase whale and phase lords were enduring the initial barrage of attacks well. Their spatial barriers were too good at absorbing punishment and were not about to break anytime soon.

While all of this was happening, there was only one ace mech that had yet to open fire against the phase lords.

The Amaranto Mark III very deliberately did not turn her Instrument of Vengeance towards any of the lesser phase lords!

Saint Stark felt frustrated about it. She itched to participate in the effort to strip the spatial barrier off a lesser phase lord and open the alien up for all kinds of attacks!

Yet Saint Alorezi Chevor denied this request and assigned a different task to her after the arrival of the Divine Maw forced everyone to readjust their plans.

"Your firepower is not as valuable when used to break down the defenses of the lesser phase lords. That is not to say that you are useless in this endeavor. I know you can significantly speed up the process of making them vulnerable. The problem is that you are too bright."

"I am too... bright?" Stark puzzlingly asked.

"If you begin to launch attacks on a lesser phase lord, everyone will take notice. Nobody can ignore what you are doing. This will make it more difficult to land a killing blow onto your target because the phase lords will put more effort into saving one of their own from a potential kill."

That actually made sense. If the native alien gods had any form of sympathy towards their injured comrades, then the former would definitely work hard to rescue the latter.

Saint Stark smiled. "I... see what you mean. Is this why you want me to remain on ship-killing duty?"

"Partially. Your firepower is highly potent against most warships. You should be capable of piercing through the defenses of most warships and crippling them in one or two powerful attacks. You should use this strength of yours to destroy them as much as possible. The less the aliens have left by the time the battle has come to an end, the more difficult it is for them to sustain their assault on this star system."

Seeing how the Amaranto already managed to core a bunch of warships, Saint Stark felt happy for being able to save more humans from extinction due to the removal of the warships.

"At the same time, attacking the lesser phase lords is a brave choice, but one that puts the target on high alert." Aloretzi confirmed.

"So you do not want me to attack any lesser phase lord."

"Only while they remain shielded." Alo responded. "Keep an eye on the lesser phase lords. If any of them lose their spatial barriers, you have my permission to freely open fire on the exposed targets. Let the others do the job of wearing down the spatial barriers of the enemy lesser phase lords. You shall be the mech that will claim their lives.."

Saint Stark grinned. "That sounds good."

It looked as if it would take a while for the weakest lesser phase lord's spatial barriers to crumble.

Until then, her Amaranto remained highly productive and continued to launch one precision strike after another.

No alien warship lasted more than two full-powered shots.

The azure energy shields employed by the native aliens simply weren't designed to guard against such potent penetration strikes.

Although the alien commanders tried to mitigate the damage by withdrawing the largest and more formidable hulls to the rear of their naval formations, this unexpected retreat exposed a lot of other ships to attacks!

Saint Stark had harvested the lives of many people aboard more than a dozen warships by this time.

If she kept up her current progress, she could easily wipe out a fifth of the alien armada and still keep going so long as there were targets in range.

Even as Saint Stark continued to land killing blows onto alien warships, the Obsidian Orb finally began to move.

Its first act was to unfold the reflective obsidian-like structure and reveal an enormous plasma cannon in its center.

The diameter of this gun was big enough to fit a moderately sized warship in the barrel!

"Be careful! The Obsidian Orb has just completed its preparations and warmup. It will soon open fire according to multiple possible trajectories uploaded to the command net. Do not find yourself in any of these corridors, or else you will get blasted away by the largest plasma attack that you have ever seen."

As the Obsidian Orb's main gun accumulated energy, it looked ready to unleash its first serious attack.

The main cannon continually absorbed more and more E energy until it became hard to contain so much energy!

"Target: The Divine Maw. Attack in 3, 2, 1, launch!"

A humongous plasma bolt streaked across space and struck the Divine Maw's enormous spatial barrier!

From the moment the two came into contact with each other, the explosion of heat and light was so great that some of the more sensitive instruments got scrambled by the powerful and chaotic release of radiation and unpleasanties!

Chapter 6780: The Star Caster

The battle turned into a different direction as soon as the Obsidian Orb opened fire.

The masterwork fortress-type superweapon was one of the sources of strength to the defenders in the Kayana System.

Its arrival was unquestioned proof that the higher ups had not forgotten about them. The Obsidian Orb may not be the most precious superweapon in the Red Ocean, but it was definitely one of few priceless war assets that the Rubarthan Pact had at its disposal!

Developed by the famous Plasma Shaper, the Obsidian Orb could easily be described as a black container for a massive hybrid energy weapon.

It was clearly designed and built to accommodate the 'Star Caster' Hyper Siege Plasma Cannon.

The Star Caster did not feature a long barrel, but its caliber was so immense that it could easily rival the famous spinal cannon of the Doom of Xenos!

While the Obsidian Orb did not possess the mobility and other handy features of the RF dreadnought, it possessed a huge range of support systems that were completely dedicated to enhancing the power and usability of the Star Caster.

In order to fend off smaller enemies and ones that have come closer, the Obsidian Orb was also protected by numerous 'Star Lancer' Hyper Plasma Cannons. Each of them were capable of obliterating warships, but their deployment required the super fortress to adopt a different configuration that disabled its Star Caster.

This effectively meant that the Obsidian Orb could only employ one type of weapon system at a time.

For now, the sole job of the super fortress was to repel the greater phase whale as best as possible!

Everyone carefully watched the results of the first direct impact. The power behind the plasma bolt was insane. Not only was it immense and enhanced by numerous different exotic factors, it was also infused with a high concentration of E energy.

The Plasma Shaper had somehow managed to upgrade the Obsidian Orb to incorporate a large amount of hyper materials taken from asteroids that had become infused with star-attributed E energy.

This 'stellar' energy had not only cast the plasma bolts in bright blue, but also enhanced their potency until they resembled miniature suns!

The average temperature of the massive plasma bolt exceeded 20,000 Kelvins!

The energy contained within this plasma bolt was so excessively great that the Divine Maw's spatial barrier struggled to withstand the extreme thermal energies released upon impact.

Everyone froze or slowed down for a short amount of time.

They all wanted to know how effectively the Obsidian Orb had struck the greater phase whale.

As the seconds passed by, the spatial barrier eventually stabilized, but it clearly did not look as healthy as before!

"The Obsidian Orb... has inflicted an effective strike against the Divine Maw. Our readings suggest that the integrity of the latter's spatial barrier has dropped by as much as 17 percent!"

17 percent!

That was an enormous figure, especially considering how much conventional firepower it took to erode the spatial barrier of a greater phase whale.

Saint Stark personally believed that she would be lucky if her full-powered attack was able to reduce the integrity of the phase whale's spatial barrier by just 1 percent.

She might be able to achieve a much better result if she had access to the upgraded Instrument of Doom, but the Design Department was not able to complete this task within the current timeframe.

In short, the Amaranto Mark III had no chance of matching the firepower of the Star Caster anytime soon.

This was the case for an ace mech that embodied the concept of extreme firepower.

It would be even more difficult for other ace mechs such as the Dark Zephyr Mark III to inflict a blow that was just as powerful!

All of this caused Saint Stark and many other mech pilots to become awed by the power of this singular super fortress.

"It deserves to be called a superweapon."

"The energy readings of that enormous plasma bolt doesn't make any sense!"

"The greater phase whale looks physically uncomfortable!"

The Divine Maw may be an alien of immense age, but he had probably never suffered a blow as damaging as the one he just received!

It hadn't been too long ago that the phase whales received a wakeup call when the god pilots of Red Humanity commenced a deep strike operation to destroy the Tide Stations.

So many ancient phase whales perished as the horrendous god mechs proved themselves to be unmatched by any alien opponent the natives could muster.

Even now, the phase whales still feared the possibility of getting caught by the immensely powerful god pilots.

While the Red Cabal was already working on solutions to close the unacceptable gap in power, it would not help the Divine Maw in his current situation. He was merely a greater phase whale that had yet to fully replace all of his blood with phasewater.

The good news was that he was unlikely to encounter a god pilot. The native aliens had already recorded the last known positions of the Spacelock and the Destroyer of Worlds, and they were nowhere near the Kayana System for the foreseeable time.

The bad news was that the Obsidian Orb alone already posed a considerable threat against him. If his spatial barrier fell, his body would have to withstand all of the stellar-infused plasma bolts.

As a siege weapon, the Star Caster was originally designed to demolish the most impenetrable land or orbital fortifications!

It was also capable of destroying entire subcontinents and cleansing the entire surface of a globe of life!

Such a superweapon could easily pose a credible threat to a greater phase whale as large as a small moon.

Despite the advantages of maintaining an enormous body, the Divine Maw quickly chose to shrink his true body!

It was a dramatic sight. The enormous biological monstrosity that previously loomed over everyone was shrinking out of fear of getting struck by the Star Caster a second time.

Even though his formidable phasewater organs were already working hard to restore the integrity of his spatial barrier, the damage inflicted by the first shot was already enough to make the Divine Maw take the defenders more seriously.

Once the greater phase whale had shrunk to the size of a cruiser, the alien god ceased to diminish his presence further.

In this form, the Divine Maw became a lot more mobile, agile and lighter. While his ability to withstand damage had suffered a reduction, this was an acceptable tradeoff as far as the alien menace was concerned.

It was much harder for the Obsidian Orb to land a hit on the greater phase whale a second time!

The alien transmitted a silent command to the jureg greater phase lord.

Soon enough, the Divine Supplicant flew in front of the phase whale and provided strong cover in the form of his superdimensional shield.

The move readily cut off the Obsidian Orb from damaging the Divine Maw again. There was only one superweapon, and its main weapon could only fire along a linear trajectory.

This was a huge shortcoming of the fortress-type superweapon!

The Obsidian Orb should ideally be used alongside another superweapon that was positioned at a different location.

This way, the two superweapons could target an enemy even if he sought to take shelter behind other assets.

However, the Divine Maw's cowardly but intelligent move prevented the Star Caster from targeting this high priority enemy with the same ease.

This prompted the Obsidian Orb's commander to alter the angle of the Star Caster. It went from trying to target the Divine Maw to attempting to target The Descent of Hushae'Rhua!

This alarmed the nunser phase lord. He no longer tried to impale the annoying ace mechs with his Saint Piercer and sought to take shelter behind other warships.

However, the ace mechs fought much harder in an attempt to drag down his forward progress!

Just before the Star Caster had reached full charge, the native aliens made a sudden move.

"INCOMING MISSILES!"

"Our systems are counting 600, 1300, 1900 no 2200 transphasic hyper missiles! Each of them are following winding trajectories that are highly likely to lead straight to the Obsidian Orb!"

"Incoming transphasic hyper torpedoes! We have counted 78 so far. Each of them are taking advantage of the interference produced by the smaller missiles to increase the difficulty of tracking and interception."

"Intercept the torpedoes!"

The Amaranto Mark III had already switched targets. Saint Stark went from trying to punch a hole through warships to intercepting as many torpedoes as possible.

The Instrument of Vengeance no longer fired at maximum power, but tried to squeeze out as many light beams as possible.

Even if they were launched at minimal power, the resonance-empowered light beams still possessed enough power and penetration to drill through the shielded and armored structure of the torpedoes and blow them up in advance!

One beam after another struck down the torpedoes. Stark did not miss a single time even though she was trying to maximize her firing rate.

Many other first-class multipurpose mechs attempted to intercept the torpedoes as well, but the native aliens had stuffed so much technology into them that they were not that easy to take down.

In the end, over 1200 transphasic missiles and 13 transphasic torpedoes struck the plasma shield that just activated at full power!

By this time, the Obsidian Orb had completely closed up, making it resemble a black and shiny egg.

The bright blue energy field wobbled considerably as missiles and torpedoes detonated against it in quick succession!

So much penetrating energies got loose that even the Amaranto Mark III got affected by all of the interference!

By the time the missile onslaught had finally come to an end, many humans cheered when the Obsidian Orb had managed to make it through unscathed!

The Divine Maw certainly did not look pleased at the results.

Nobody knew how many more missiles and torpedoes the enemy warships were able to launch, but nobody believed that they had run out. It cost a fortune to produce these transphasic warheads, but the native aliens could afford the expense!

"How much integrity has the plasma shield lost?" Saint Stark asked.

She found it difficult to form an estimate because plasma shields worked on different principles from more conventional energy shields.

"That is classified information, Davia." Saint Alo responded. "Trust in the defenses of the Obsidian Orb. It was designed to withstand at least a couple of equivalent shots. It has to give its relatively immobile state. We cannot afford to let the native aliens attack the Orb as they see fit. Continue to direct your firepower onto the alien warships. The more you disable them, the less missiles the enemy armada can launch. You have already made a significant contribution by making the initial considerably lighter than it should have been."

Saint Stark understood the significance of whittling down the enemy ship numbers. Each alien warship was capable of carrying a lot of missiles. It would be stupid to let them live long enough to exhaust their entire stockpile.

Her Amaranto Mark III began to shoot at the warships more enthusiastically than before.

In order to down more hulls, the ace marksman mech had even begun to shoot down the sub-capital ships. Saint Stark carefully estimated the amount of charge needed to disable the smaller vessels in a single blow without wasting too much energy.

It was an interesting exercise, and the challenge of it kept her highly motivated.

The Amaranto Mark III continued to attract more and more attention as she glowed increasingly brighter.

Not even the Obsidian Orb looked as conspicuous!

After all, the superweapon had yet to down a single enemy, while the Amaranto Mark III had caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of alien servicemen by this time!

If she kept this up, she might be able to destroy entire assault fleets!

As such, the alien commanders devised a plan to get rid of this high-priority threat.