

The Mech 5101

Chapter 5101 Evolving Fiend

Alarms rang throughout the interior of the puelmer heavy cruiser!

The entire crew of puelmers became frenzied as reports of sudden deaths continued to be transmitted on the vessel's internal network.

Every once in a while, most of the puelmers stationed in a compartment lost their lives no matter what sort of means they utilized to repel the intruder.

If that wasn't bad enough, the visual captures of the dark and shadowy ghost became increasingly thicker and more substantial.

This ghost that had no doubt been unleashed by the evil humans was feeding off their lives!

The more puelmers that perished at Nosferatu's hands, the more he began to resemble the puelmer form, only in a nightmarish version that was ghoulish enough to frighten both aliens and humans!

His belly grew thicker and thicker as he continually absorbed the tortured and fractured souls of his alien victims.

The hands that extended from all sides of his body grew longer to the point where Nosferatu looked as if he was a hair demon from hell.

At a certain point, his arms had grown so abnormally long and strong that the evil fiend no longer needed to dive into the bodies of his puelmer victims.

It was already enough for him to extend one of his many creepy hands and use it to directly grasp the souls of his helpless victims!

Weapons fire continually assaulted Nosferatu as he moved and phased around.

The puelmers no longer put any thought on trying to restrict their firepower in order to minimize the collateral damage to the valuable internal ship components.

They made full use of their heavier transphasic armaments as that appeared to be the only effective means to damage and disrupt Nosferatu's form!

Though transphasic attacks did inflict a certain degree of harm against Nosferatu, he had become far too healthy to be significantly affected by these attacks anymore.

It was impossible for the puelmers to bring their starfighter and warship-grade weapons to bear against an internal intruder. The small and cramped compartments worked against them this time as the lack of space not only prevented the aliens from bringing in more serious firepower, but also gave the fiend plenty of physical cover to haunt his victims!

After Nosferatu grew increasingly more annoyed at all of the attacks striking his increasingly fatter and rounder body, he phased down into the deck and never showed his full body in the open again.

From then on, the puelmer nightmare truly began!

Random groups of crew members either rolled around or gathered together in order to guard a critical section of their homeship.

None of these puelmers were frail or soft-hearted, yet the information they received caused so much dread that they couldn't help but experience the rare emotion of fear this time.

Just as these armored puelmers succeeded in suppressing their apprehension, dozens of long and spindly arms poked out of the deck beneath and grappled their spirits in an instant!

"Uuehaah!"

"Kiiikiiiaah!"

"Uuuahaa!"

The mouths of the ball-like aliens all uttered different cries as they all felt as if the ghostly arms were sapping their lives in an excruciatingly torturous sequence!

Nosferatu's killing speed dropped to a considerable extent when he adopted this approach. He had to split his strength more and more in order to drain multiple puelmers at the same time, and that gave the aliens more time to resist the pull and make a desperate last stand.

Fortunately, he was able to exert enough suppression on his alien victims to prevent them from rolling out of the reach of his many arms!

In desperation, the puelmers all shot their weapons in a desperate attempt to shake off the evil human devil.

It was a pity that the high technological standards set by their own race held them back. Their weapons weren't powerful enough to damage the transphasic deck quickly enough.

By the time their weapons dug deep enough, Nosferatu had already managed to drain all of their souls at once!

As the fat fiend savored the taste of the latest batch of alien spirits, he felt sated in a way that he had never experienced before in his short existence.

Yet despite how much vitality he absorbed in this deployment, Nosferatu did not have any thoughts about quitting!

His yearning for life had turned into an extremely strong obsession!

He wanted to continue to harvest the lives of the puelmers until the entire homeship had turned into a giant metal shell that was devoid of life!

"Hishaaaaaa!"

However, the puelmers weren't about to let the evil ghost continue to harvest their lives as if they were rations for the taking.

As over fifty puelmers lost their lives and turned into motionless sacks of meat, the captain of the homeship took in the analysis of his staff and issued several specific orders.

Hundreds of puelmer crew members started to move at once. Many of them rolled out of the center and moved towards the outer section of the ship.

Although their intentions were obvious to those with an outsider's perspective, Nosferatu couldn't think so much anymore!

He did not have any time to properly digest all of the scattered and messy puelmer thoughts and emotions that he absorbed during this time.

This caused his entire spirit and mentality to become extremely distorted. The exotic radiation in the air did not help matters either.

As the fiend continued to grow stronger, he was able to draw more strength from the environment, but the problem was that the only energies that responded to him at this time amplified his evil and chaotic tendencies!

From the moment Nosferatu sensed a large group of delectable puelmer souls within his range, he completely ignored all other considerations and phased through the decks in order to catch up to all of the juicy alien prey!

His greedy actions did not escape the perception of the Phobos and his occupants.

"This fool." Venerable Zimro uttered with a frown. "Can't Nosferatu see that the aliens are leading him to a trap? His job still isn't done. There are many more powerful ship systems that he needs to sabotage. It is not enough to disable the alien warp drives, especially when the damage is rather superficial. Phobos, is there any way you can rein him in again?"

"No." The living mech's artificial voice softly replied. "The Geist System does not come with that feature. If you want to know more, you should ask its designer. The only action I can take is to forcefully call him back, but doing so will definitely inflict great damage so long as the puelmer homeship maintains her transphasic energy shield cover."

The energy manifestation of Ves did not look pleased either.

"The Geist System... is a first-generation product." He briefly explained. "It is not a surprise that it has a lot of shortcomings because I was pretty much groping in the dark when I developed it. I don't have any readily available solutions at hand."

It was at this time that the Phobos detected a lot of movements from the alien forces.

"The yurgens are sending over hundreds of starfighters." Zimro noted with notably greater concern. "It looks like the aliens are pretty certain that there is an active stealth mech or vessel hovering in the vicinity. Since this homeship isn't able to sniff us out on her own power, the puelmers have finally condescended to asking for assistance from their yurzen subjects."

This was not a positive development.

Venerable Zimro was already busy trying to maneuver his expert stealth mech around to prevent the puelmer heavy cruiser from detecting the source of her current troubles.

It would become exponentially more difficult for the Phobos to remain hidden around the puelmer vessel with hundreds of alien starfighters buzzing around!

The starfighters did not possess particularly powerful sensor systems, but just flying around was enough to exert a lot of pressure on the expert stealth mech.

This was because a single collision was already enough to expose the Phobos to the aliens!

"The range of the Geist System is too limited." Ves remarked with an annoyed tone. "If you are able to maintain a distance of at least 10 kilometers from the target ship, a trick like this wouldn't pose that much of a threat to you. There has to be a way to extend the range, but I haven't figured it out as of yet. So long as that is the case, risks like this will continue to exist."

He previously assumed that he would be able to use the Phobos to weaken and mess around with all of his adversaries.

That was still true so long as his targets did not expect to be infiltrated by hostile covert elements.

However, once the Larkinson Clan dispatched the Phobos multiple times against the same group of enemies, it was inevitable for the latter to grow suspicious and enact targeted countermeasures to prevent the expert stealth mech from exploiting their weaknesses again!

The only ways that Ves could mitigate this were to dispatch the Phobos against substantially different groups or to reduce the frequency of his deployments.

As long as the Phobos did not hit the same enemies multiple times in quick succession, it became a lot more difficult for the Red Cabal and its vassals to maintain their guard all of the time.

Still, Ves had no intentions of turning the Phobos into a rarely used trump card. His capabilities were far too useful and he could assist the Larkinson Clan in many different ways.

The expert stealth mech also needed to undergo many different experiences and battles in order to grow quickly and form more Ascension Runes.

Only when the Phobos grew up further would he be able to evolve and address his greatest shortcomings!

This was actually a pretty convenient way to solve a complicated technical problem.

Ordinary mechs that did not possess any growth and evolution capabilities could only rely on other mech designers to fix their shortcomings.

Living mechs had the option of taking care of at least a portion of their problems.

While it was impossible for them to transform into all-powerful first-class multipurpose mechs through this method alone, it shouldn't be too much of a problem for the Phobos to upgrade the functionality of a spiritual weapon system!

This not only saved Ves a lot of trouble and effort, but it also granted him the possibility of studying and reverse-engineering the solutions that his living mechs came up with over their lifespans.

Only when he was able to decipher the working principles of the extraordinary capabilities of his evolving works would he be able to systematically apply all of these powerful new features on his future mech designs!

In any case, concerns like these were a matter for the future. The Phobos was still far from forming his third Ascension Rune.

At this time, Nosferatu had been chasing after the groups of puelmers that continued to roll towards a small and compact hangar bay.

As a squad of puelmers boarded an oval-shaped shuttle, the greedy and uncontrollable fiend readily phased inside and began to grip all of the alien crew members with his many evil arms!

However, the activated shuttle immediately activated all of her thrusters and boosted out of the open hangar bay hatch at full power!

The shuttle suddenly ended up in open space!

A silent scream spread throughout the cramped vessel as Nosferatu experienced a huge amount of pain as his entire body squeezed through multiple layers of transphasic energy shields!

Much of the alien life energy that propped up his greedy existence scattered away from the fiend. He had lost almost all of the progress that he had made before and almost degenerated to his weakest point again!

That was not the extent of the alien scheme.

As soon as the shuttle had built up enough distance from the puelmer heavy cruiser, the powerful vessel opened fire with multiple batteries of highly precise and highly destructive transphasic laser cannons!

The shuttle and all of the puelmers inside became vaporized in an instant!

Chapter 5102 Born To Be Exploited

The Phobos had no choice but to retreat.

Ves was fairly satisfied by the fact that the expert stealth mech managed to cripple the warp drives of at least one puelmer heavy cruiser.

However, despite all of the alien crew members that fell at the hands of an increasingly more outrageous spiritual fiend, the overall fighting power of the alien homeship likely did not drop that much.

Nosferatu had become so addicted at harvesting the lives of his alien victims that he completely neglected to sabotage any critical ship systems such as power generators and transphasic shield generators!

The Phobos could have done a lot more damage if the aliens did not employ so many effective and targeted countermeasures.

It was a pity that the arrival of so many alien starfighters made it impossible for the Phobos to linger around any further.

No matter how effective he was at hiding his presence, stealth technology could not prevent a machine in hiding from getting struck by another solid object!

As the Phobos retreated from the rear section of the alien fleet, Venerable Zimro Belson briefly considered whether he and his battle partner should approach the other puelmer homeship in order to find a way to immobilize her as well.

However, the puelmer captain and officers in charge of the second puelmer heavy cruiser responded far too quickly to give the Phobos any openings.

The powerful alien homeship did not even wait for any human infiltration units to get close enough to reduce her capabilities.

She instead began to propel forward again while engaging one of her warp drives.

Soon enough, the undamaged puelmer vessel entered into warp travel again!

Once she continued to build up a respectable amount of speed in warp, the ship began to turn and circle around the surrounding areas.

The puelmers made sure to vary and randomize her trajectory extensively enough to prevent any humans to mine her route or allow any units in stealth to have any chance of getting close enough to perform their mischief.

Seeing that the alien raiding fleet had become extremely alert towards further intrusions, Venerable Zimro Belson briefly considered whether he should attempt to cripple the yurzen warships, but ultimately decided to back off and distance his expert mech from all of the commotion.

The difficulty of attacking a prepared and fully alert adversary was hundreds of times more difficult!

No matter how well the extensive stealth capabilities of the Phobos could elude the alien search efforts, the chance of accidents had become too great at this stage.

"Let's move towards the hidden archeship." The energy manifestation of Ves suggested. "Lucky is still stuck in captivity. The longer he remains at the mercy of the arche, the greater the chance we won't be able to get him back."

It had been a bit of a reckless decision on their part to dump Lucky into an alien warship that they knew little about. Ves was a bit surprised that the arche managed to do what so many other enemies had been unable to do over the years. They successfully managed to contain the gem cat!

"What is the status of your cat?" Venerable Zimro asked.

"I'm not sure. Only Goldie is able to maintain contact with him. Since Goldie hasn't given me any updates, we can presume that Lucky is not being acutely threatened by the arche. That can change at any moment, though, so it is better for all of us if we hurry up and get him out sooner rather than later."

"The arche should be taking countermeasures as well in order to prevent us from rescuing your cat." Zimro remarked.

Ves nodded. "That is true, but their means are a lot more limited. Lucky has not only managed to sabotage the warp drives of the archeship, but also damaged a lot of other archemetal systems. The alien vessel's overall effectiveness has dropped to an extent. Right now, our target ship is quietly trying to distance herself from the yurzen raiding fleet as well, but her acceleration and traversal speed are largely constrained by the need to keep her presence hidden from both us and the other aliens. The arche don't even have the option to throw all caution to the wind and warp away anymore."

Mobility was the key to many engagements. Controlling the movements of the enemy was key to setting them up for defeat.

The Phobos soon changed course and quietly tried to catch up to the fleeing archeship.

"It will take a while for my expert mech to reach the archeship." Venerable Zimro said with a frown. "According to the supplied data, my expert mech should be a little faster under full stealth, but the alien ship has a headstart on us. Lucky will have to wait longer for rescue."

"Understood. There is little we can do about that." Ves sighed. "Let us hope that the archeship won't be as difficult to infiltrate as the puelmer heavy cruisers. The arche rely a lot more on their famed archemetal to protect their ships. Much of the reason why that is the case is because energy-based defenses will practically give away the presence of a starship that is trying her best to remain hidden. So long as this is the case for our latest target, you should be able to deploy all of your fiends."

The biggest uncertainty was whether the Phobos would be able to catch up to the hidden alien vessel in time before the arche did anything serious to the captive gem cat!

Ves glanced at the timer that Venerable Zimro had just put up. It would take a while before the Phobos could get into action again. He decided to pass the time by checking up on Nosferatu and evaluating what had happened earlier.

After the puelmers tricked Nosferatu into boarding a shuttle that subsequently launched out of the hangar bay and got vaporized by the potent firepower of the alien warship, the Geist System managed to recall the heavily injured fiend.

Nosferatu experienced far too many ups and downs in a short amount of time. All of the abuse and uncontrollable feeding behavior produced a lot of distortions that permanently scarred and contaminated the undead spirit.

At this time, the heavily injured fiend was in an awful condition. His state was not much better than his lowest point.

If not for the fact that the Geist System offered him a stable and supportive environment for him to recuperate, Nosferatu would have probably deteriorated until he could no longer keep himself together!

As it was, the special fiend had changed forever. Despite losing almost all of the vitality that he had drained from so many puelmer crew members, the spiritual entity still maintained his 'fat' and many-armed shape.

He looked extremely grotesque to humans such as Ves. A chaotic air of cruelty, hunger and suffering radiated from his form.

"How is Nosferatu doing, sir?" Venerable Zimro asked.

"He has reached, no, exceeded his limits." Ves answered. "His condition is extremely poor and he is in no state to deploy right away. The good news is that the events that affected his state have expanded his tolerance. So long as he is able to survive from his ordeals, he will be able to endure similar abuse a little better. You can make use of Nosferatu to infiltrate ships that are fully covered by transphasic energy shields again once he has fully rested and digested his gains."

"What is the bad news, then?" Venerable Zimro asked next. "The Phobos and I failed to exert any influence when he was rampaging on the enemy ship. Is there a way to increase our control over him? We cannot make full use of him if he constantly gives in to his baser instincts."

The energy manifestation of Ves pressed his lips. He did not look optimistic about this situation.

"I believe that Nosferatu should be able to sober up a bit once he has rested, but he won't be as docile as before. You have to realize that he is a relatively young spiritual entity, much like all of the other fiends. I designed their initial forms and brought them all to life only a few months before I fabricated the Phobos. They are not young, but also a lot more sheltered compared to living mechs. If that is not enough, they are largely made up of negative energies."

Venerable Zimro understood what Ves was trying to convey.

"We haven't treated them very well since they were born. A young fiend like Nosferatu has not lived very long, and he has already been subjected to multiple strong traumas on his second deployment. Experiences like that could drive anyone crazy. It's actually remarkable that he still retains the desire to live after all of that abuse."

Despite sounding sympathetic towards a poor spirit like Nosferatu, Venerable Zimro still understood that it was not appropriate to improve the treatments of fiends.

They were all evil and destructive life forms. Ves deliberately made them that way in order to maximize the harm they could do to their designated targets.

They could do a lot of damage against innocent people if they somehow got free!

There was no way to counteract their evil tendencies because doing so would either kill them or render them ineffective!

If Venerable Zimro Belson wanted to retain his abnormally effective means of sabotaging enemy starships and other assets, he had no choice but to continue working with creatures that shared an awfully close resemblance to demons.

Ves too did not find this situation to be ideal. It went against his principles to bring spiritual entities to life, only to exploit them without giving them any hope of relief.

He still hadn't figured out how he should deal with the ethics of using the Geist System in its current form, so he pushed this troublesome matter aside and directed his thoughts elsewhere.

He began to discuss possible improvements for future missions.

"It is not good to rely on Nosferatu alone." Zimro told his patriarch. "If the Geist System had four more fiends like him, they could have inflicted a lot more damage to the puelmer heavy cruiser before the aliens eventually managed to drive us away. Can you make more ghosts like him, sir?"

"I'm thinking about it. This is not a simple matter. Theoretically, I can drain the life from other fiends like Mephisto, but that will cause them to become less controllable and a lot more vulnerable to spiritual contamination. They will also create an imbalance in the Geist System that it was never designed to handle."

There was still far too much about the Geist System that Ves had yet to figure out. While his dramatically increased understanding of cultivation science and other weird phenomena helped to clarify a few matters, it was far from enough to explain everything.

So long as Ves did not make much progress in this area, he did not dare to experiment too much with the current implementation of the Geist System.

"It would help if I can get more company while I complete my missions." Venerable Zimro suggested next. "We could get a lot more work done if there are multiple stealth units acting on an enemy fleet at the same time."

"I know. I have been thinking about building a dedicated stealth units around your Phobos. In order to make this happen, I will have to design an expensive high-tech stealth mech that is almost as good at keeping its presence hidden as your Phobos. Since it is merely a standard mech, the new design won't have the benefit of resonating exotics and true resonance empowering its stealth capabilities. I can try to make up for that by fabricating them one by one in person. That should at least elevate them into third order living mechs, which means that they can cultivate on their own and accumulate Ascension Runes."

The only problem was that Ves had no time to take on another mech design project at this time. He needed to complete a lot of ongoing mech designs before he could even consider this job!

Chapter 5103 Lucky Prisoner

While the Phobos was trying to catch up to the fleeing archship, Lucky was not having a good time at the moment.

"Meow...!"

The cat still felt pissed about getting thrown onto a completely new alien vessel without any adequate preparations.

Out of the many possible alien vessels that he could infiltrate, an archship was one of the least ideal ones for him to run amuck!

Despite looking remarkably like evolved turtles, their arche warriors and arche lords possessed all kinds of effective means to threaten him and restrain his movements!

Ultimately, it was the archship herself that finally caused him to end up in a cage surrounded by transphasic energy shields.

In order to prevent Lucky from giving him any chance to overcome one of these energy shields, the arche lord had taken the time to morph the interior of the ship.

The amount of layers of transphasic energy shields that surrounded the captive gem cat had tripled!

This way, even if Lucky was able to blow up or bypass one or two layers, he still had to go through at least a dozen more if he wanted to obtain his freedom!

"Meow..."

There was no way he could get out by relying on his power at the moment. His best hope of regaining his freedom was to rely on the Phobos to sabotage the archship and break him out of this excessive energy cage.

Fortunately for Lucky, the arche might be powerful enough to restrict his movements, but they were unable to cut off his connection to the Larkinson Network!

He was able to secretly remain in contact with the Golden Cat at all times.

This not only helped him retain his composure, but also gave the Larkinson Clan an effective beacon to track the movements of the archship!

Perhaps the arche thought that they were being clever by quietly moving their stealthy archeship away from the action zone while the Phobos was busy with trying to sabotage a puelmer heavy cruiser, but the aliens never thought that all of their efforts to cut off any signals were completely ineffective against this odd mechanical creature!

Lucky already learned from Goldie that he had to sit tight and wait for the Phobos to finally catch up to the archeship.

He would have felt more comfortable if the arche temporarily forgot about him and directed all of their manpower to fix all of the damage he inflicted on the archeship.

While the turtle-like aliens did allocate a portion of their limited crew to repair or replace the damaged archemetal components, the arche lord along with his arche warrior escort continued to keep Lucky company!

The arche lord remained close to the gem cat for multiple reasons.

He primarily remained on guard in case the small but absurdly tricky cat somehow succeeded in breaking through all of the barriers.

However, that was not enough for the arche lord. As an older and respected leader among his race, his understanding and mastery of archemetal as well as technology in general had reached an impressive height!

He couldn't hold in his curiosity towards how Lucky worked and how he was able to bite through so much archemetal with so much ease.

What was even more perplexing was how Lucky was able to phase through the hull and bulkheads without limit!

Archemetal was designed to block and interfere with all forms of teleportation and other forms of unauthorized intrusions.

In a dwarf galaxy that was enriched with phasewater, it had been essential for the arche to develop countermeasures in this area, or else their precious archeships would have become a lot more vulnerable against their many alien rivals!

Despite all of these measures, a single cat that was presumably dispatched by the evil humans easily overcame the efforts of the arche!

This intensified the arche lord's curiosity towards Lucky even further.

The only known adversaries that could do everything Lucky had done was a phase lord.

Only phase lords were able to ingest tons of archemetal far in excess of their apparent mass.

Only phase lords were able to utilize spatial blades or spatial tearing to bite through the toughest archemetal alloys without any apparent difficulty.

Only phase lords possessed the sheer amount of phasewater to phase through thick layers of activated archemetal!

The arche lord had lived for enough centuries to meet a phase lord and even a phase whale in person.

He knew what these alien gods were like. Lucky completely lacked the demeanor and the spatial activity that characterized organisms that had bonded with phasewater.

Aside from that, the arche lord also never heard of anyone who succeeded in creating a completely mechanical phase lord!

For all of their comprehensive understanding of powerful high technologies, not even the humans should have been able to realize such a creation.

Even if they defied the arche lord's expectations and did manage to create such a priceless construct, the humans would never randomly deploy such a groundbreaking creation in this random star system!

The only explanation that made sense to the old arche lord was that Lucky contained novel human technologies that utilized phasewater in new and interesting ways.

This realization multiplied the arche lord's curiosity and increased his urge to pick Lucky apart in order to see what was inside!

The powerful alien leader slowly stepped forward with his four alien limbs.

"Huuwhaakaak." The arche lord spoke.

Lucky did not like being addressed by the alien that was chiefly responsible for his capture. He also did not like the look that the alien directed towards his trapped form.

The cat already began to dread what the arche lord had in store. He hissed and started to bang his paws against the closest transphasic energy shield!

"Meow meow meow!"

Unfortunately for Lucky, the arche lord remained undeterred.

The alien continued to direct greedy glances at Lucky's bronzed and striped metallic body.

Cats were alien to the Red Ocean, so the arche lord was not too familiar with their kind. He only learned about this varied species of pets when he studied the intelligence supplied by the Red Cabal.

"Meow." Lucky hissed at the alien leader.

The arche lord remained completely unimpressed by the gem cat's feeble warning behavior.

Lucky may have done a lot of damage to the ship, but there was little he could do now that he was surrounded by so many barriers.

The alien could no longer hold himself back any longer. He began to use his powerful archeshell to control the functions of this secure compartment and commence a more extensive examination on the trapped intruder!

"Meeowww!"

Lucky suddenly felt a lot more discomfort as invisible force fields robbed him of what little movement space he had left.

These fields spun Lucky's body around so that the arche lord could get a good look at the gem cat from multiple angles.

Once the powerful alien completed this initial examination, he proceeded to make use of tools.

He first called up an archemetal rod that seamlessly passed through all of the energy shields.

Once this object entered the center cage, the arche lord used it to tap against Lucky's body.

Ting! Ting! Ting!

The taps continued to produce slightly different sounds. The cat that was being subjected to this treatment did not like what was happening at all, but he was completely helpless at this time.

After a few minutes of random tapping, the archemetal rod hovered close to his head and began to get within biting range.

Even though Lucky knew that the rod was currently being used as bait, his yearning for delicious archemetal couldn't be suppressed.

The cat took a huge bite out of the rod, causing it to lose a third of length!

The arche lord quickly pulled back the shortened rod and brought it all the way in front of his alien face so that he could examine it in person.

Powerful sensors and scanners had recorded a lot of data on both the archemetal rod and Lucky's teeth.

The latter did not show any sign of transphasic enhancement or spatial reinforcement, yet it managed to bite off a piece of solid archemetal!

Though the arche lord already expected this outcome, seeing it happen caused him to question whether archemetal was still as superior as he thought.

What was Lucky made off? Why were his teeth so absurdly sharp and strong? Where had all of the archemetal gone?

The alien leader refused to believe that Lucky was an artificial phase lord. He would rather believe that the humans came up with original new tech that interpreted phasewater from a different angle than the natives of the Red Ocean.

If this assumption was true, then deciphering the gem cat's secrets could potentially produce serious breakthroughs in the application of transphasic archemetal!

The arche had always maintained tense and hostile relations with the other dominant races of the Red Ocean.

The disparity in power and technology was a major reason why the arche had to remain in hiding all of the time.

If the arche could build a new generation of archeships that incorporated many advancements based on reverse engineering Lucky's advanced technologies, then that would give all of them a much better chance to survive these turbulent times!

A sense of purpose overcame the arche lord. He gained the feeling that he had obtained an opportunity to change the destiny of his oppressed race.

His naked desire towards Lucky grew. The trapped gem cat was no longer just an odd intruder anymore.

He had turned into a gateway of fantastic new human tech!

The arche lord enthusiastically resumed his examinations. He sent back the shortened archemetal rod to the center cage, but did not position it in front of Lucky anymore.

Instead, the arche lord carefully positioned the rod to the rear of the gem cat.

Lucky grew a lot more nervous for some reason.

"Meow...?"

The arche lord briefly fell into thought. The metallic construct possessed another orifice on the opposite side of his body. The alien grew curious whether it functioned similar to the cat's front orifice or whether it served a different purpose.

"Meooooow..."

Lucky was still able to exert limited control over his tail. He purposely curled it up so that it covered his backside as extensively as possible.

The arche lord made a sound of irritation and commanded the forcefield to pull the metallic tail back!

"Meow!"

The cat fully understood what sort of a predicament he was in right now. That crazy turtle alien was about to commit one of his greatest taboos!

There was no way that Lucky wanted to let this dangerous situation proceed any further!

"ME000W! MEEEEOW! MEEEEOW!"

Where was the Phobos?!

Where was the Larkinson Clan?!

Why hadn't Goldie manifested besides him and helped him escape from this cage?!

He was her daddy cat! Would she really stand by and allow this alien lord to conduct an invasive examination of his body?

Seeing that the rod was hovering closer and closer to one of his most sensitive areas, Lucky could no longer hold himself back any longer.

He began to activate many different parts of his intricate body and abruptly entered into a supercharged mode!

Heat began to escape from his feline shape as his overloaded systems processed all of the archemetal in his bottomless stomach in rapid tempo.

Together with all of the other powerful exotics that Lucky digested in the past, he made use of the extracted essence of all of his meals and rapidly used it to upgrade his mechanical body!

The arche lord paused and made a noise of surprise as he saw that his small captive was morphing before his eyes.

"Yeyayahaw!"

The alien and his attendants expressed considerable shock when they noticed that Lucky's metallic composition grew more complex.

His appearance underwent subtle changes as the fairly normal-looking alloys of before steadily transformed into highly accurate imitations of archemetal!

The sight of the entire gem cat autonomously upgrading his entire exterior into an archemetal shell exceeded the expectations of the observing aliens!

As power continued to exude from Lucky's overheated body, the furious cat forcefully exerted his strengthened might against the invisible force fields and managed to regain his ability to move.

The cat sent a hateful stare at the arche lord before turning around to present his transformed backside.

"MEEEE000W!"

A hot and glowing multicolored gem suddenly appeared and collided against the transphasic energy shield!

The arche lord immediately examined this strange new object.

He noticed that the gem actually exhibited a complicated internal structure that shared a great resemblance towards archemetal!

It was at this time that the ship sounded an alarm.

The arche lord barely had time to realize what was happening before the unstable gem exploded with great power!

B00000000000M!

Chapter 5104 Berserk Cat

The arche had miscalculated.

This became clear as soon as a giant explosion in the secure compartment inside the archeship became engulfed in a potent transphasic explosion!

All of the transphasic energy shields in the chamber failed to withstand the concentrated fury of all of the unstable energies contained within the fragile gem excreted by the gem cat in a hurry!

Once the dust had begun to settle, the arche lord and the arche warriors all picked themselves up from the deck and looked in dismay at the empty and ruined crater at the center.

"Yyuuaakaka!"

The dangerous captive had gotten loose!

Not only that, but the vengeful cat was out for blood!

"MEOW!"

The angry cat's cry seemed to ring throughout the entire archeship!

Even the arche crew members who were stationed further away could somehow hear the utter rage contained within Lucky's vocal outburst!

This shouldn't have happened. The arche lord felt great regret that he had taken the intruder too lightly.

The archeship endured a lot of damage before the aliens finally managed to capture the small feline culprit with great effort.

If the arche exhibited enough self-control and held themselves back from messing with this strange and dangerous mechanical creature, they might have been able to bring their prized captive back to a larger and more well-equipped archeship.

The aliens refused to believe that this tiny metallic saboteur had the power to escape from the sight of their higher leaders!

It was a pity that the arche lord couldn't restrain his urges. For one reason or another, he touched upon a great taboo, causing Lucky to go completely berserk!

The cat completely turned into a different beast as soon as he entered into an overdrive mode!

In this special state, Lucky completely set aside all long-term priorities and channeled much of his accumulated resources into generating a massive short-term boost!

The heat expelling from his steaming body was but a small hint of the extreme processes taking place within his hyperactive systems.

Lucky's sophisticated body used up massive amounts of matter and energy to fuel all kinds of powerful but highly inefficient processes.

The gem cat felt pained at how much waste was being produced. He could have derived a lot more benefits from all of the archemetal and other exotics he had eaten so far if he had taken the leisure to digest them slowly.

Unfortunately for the gluttonous cat, the arche lord had forced his paw!

Since rescue was nowhere to be found, Lucky had no choice but to liberate himself!

The consequences of his choices became increasingly more evident. His body rapidly took on the superior traits of the vast quantities of archemetal that he managed to bite in his prior rampage.

Supplemented by the accumulated essence of much of the exotics he had ingested over the last years, the gem cat experienced a massive transformation that affected almost every part of his interior and exterior components!

That was not all. In order to extend his evolution and make sure that he would gain enough strength to overcome all resistance on the ship, the overheating gem cat continued to gnaw on every piece of archemetal in his way!

The more advanced alien alloys he ingested, the more his incredibly advanced internal systems understood the nature and the working principles of archemetal and archetech.

Lucky's body did not just copy archemetal outright. It went a step ahead by deciphering the best traits of this powerful and almost organic-like classification of metal alloys before using these gains to form a new and exclusive variation of archemetal!

Lucky did not lose much of his prior advantages. The benefits of much of the most powerful and useful exotics that he had ingested in the past such as Rorach's Bone and Unending alloy blended into the superior archemetal composition that was beginning to define this upgraded version of himself.

The archemetal iteration of the gem cat had not only become tougher, more resilient and more elusive than before, but also began to exhibit traits that specifically countered the means utilized by his desperate alien pursuers!

"MEOW!"

The arche lord and the arche warriors chased after the berserk cat as soon as they recovered from the shockwaves unleashed by the earlier explosion.

Time was of the essence to them. Now that Lucky had resumed his eating spree, the archship was steadily being eaten from the inside.

The arche could not allow their precious archship to deteriorate beyond a critical point.

Once their vessel no longer possessed the means to maintain her active stealth, all sorts of problems would arise!

If the arche could not repair one of their damaged and half-eaten warp drives in time, both the aliens and human forces in the Corellix System would definitely finish off their ship and everyone inside!

"Kyaaakakak!"

The arche warriors furiously charged at the overheating cat in an attempt to constrain Lucky's movements!

The arche lord meanwhile utilized his comprehensive mastery over the surrounding archemetal to create passageways and activate transphasic energy shields to keep up with the flying cat.

However, Lucky became a lot harder to trap now that he had gotten free again!

He not only possessed a much greater familiarity of the tricks of his alien pursuers, but he was visibly growing stronger with each passing second!

When Lucky approached an important section of the archship, three layers of transphasic energy shields suddenly barred his way!

If it was before, Lucky would have struggled to overcome one of them, but now his strengthened archemetal composition enabled him to resist the extradimensional barriers and push through the resistance with only a moderate amount of effort!

Lucky forcefully phased through the layers like he had just passed through a waterfall!

"MEOW!"

The transphasic energy shields that the native aliens liked to employ could no longer block the evolving gem cat's movements as before!

They only slowed down the cat long enough to enable the arche to continue to stay on the escaping cat's tail.

Seeing that energy-based defenses could no longer hinder the evil mechanical construct as much as before, the arche lord used his potent archeshell to communicate with the archeship and activate other kinds of countermeasures!

Turrets emerged from the ceiling and shot powerful barrages of transphasic energy beams at the cat.

Small transphasic warheads popped out of the bulkheads and exploded in close proximity to the escaped prisoner.

Solid archemetal walls slammed down from the ceiling and became fully energized in an attempt to block Lucky's passage through alternate means.

These measures might have been able to slow down the gem cat a lot more if he had not undergone a rapid transformation.

Yet now that the cat assimilated the best traits of archemetal, his resilience and his ability to cope with difficulties was no longer on the same level as before!

Many transphasic attacks impacted Lucky's archemetal exterior. Though the changes weren't too obvious, the patterns and texture of his bronzed and striped exterior bounced off energy attacks and physical attacks with much greater ease!

As the arche lord attempted to utilize his control over archemetal to employ more diverse countermeasures in order to suppress the rampaging cat, he suddenly found to his horror that his archeshell was beginning to encounter interference from the archeship.

"MEEEEOW!"

Crackles of electricity began to escape from the gem cat's transforming metallic body.

This showed that Lucky was beginning to touch upon the power of electronic resonance that formed the basis of archetech!

The consequences were dire for the arche.

Though Lucky had just come into contact with the power of electronic resonance, the inherent properties of his archemetal body along with his amazing assimilation abilities enabled him to harness this new part of himself at a rapid rate!

Though Lucky was not able to exert anywhere close to the precise and far reaching control over the archeship as the arche lord, the gem cat was still able to produce just enough messy electronic resonance to mess with the control of his main pursuer!

The turrets that were supposed to pop out and shoot at the cat no longer emerged as smoothly as before.

Their movements froze at times, and their aiming and firing processes experienced such severe lags that they almost shot at the arche warriors that were having trouble with keeping up with the cat!

Transphasic energy shields that were supposed to drain Lucky's energy reserves and slow him down for just an instant no longer looked as strong and stable as before.

Through the electronic resonance produced by the overheating cat, the barriers suddenly lost over half of their strength, or produced so much instability that they fizzled out before they could even do their jobs!

"MEOW!"

Though Lucky felt a lot of aches due to the extreme changes of his body and the excessive heat generated from his overloaded systems, he also experienced a massive rush of power!

His strength had grown so much and his proficiency in electronic resonance had improved just enough for him to change the dynamic of this fight!

The cat abruptly stopped his flight and began to turn his body around to face the pursuing aliens.

"Kyaaaikaka!"

"Huuhahaa!"

The arche warriors did not think much about Lucky's unusual behavior and readily charged forth with their archeshells set to collide against their target!

Yet even as they struck the domineering cat, their thick and solid archeshells passed through the cat without producing any measurable effects!

Their collisions could no longer threaten a gem cat whose phasing ability had undergone a substantial evolution!

The arche warriors were not slow in their thinking. They began to make use of all of the transphasic energy armaments mounted onto their shell to pressure their target, only to find that they were unable to track and hit the elusive cat.

Lucky had dove into the deck and used his electronic resonance abilities to resist the arche lord's attempts to displace the surrounding archemetal.

The arche lord's eyes widened as the increased interference from his target had reached a point where he could no longer effectively pursue the gem cat anymore.

In fact, it was the opposite now. Lucky had gained just enough power to turn the tables against his alien captors!

"Yhuiaaaa ykaaa!"

Just as the arche lord issued a warning cry, the vengeful cat leapt out of a nearby bulkhead and landed onto the archshell of a warrior!

"MEOW!"

The cat did not think about the fact that he was technically eating an organic product and bit into the archshell with the intent to cause harm!

The alien victim cried out in pain as one of his most important body parts was being ruined with each passing bite!

The surrounding arche tried to dislodge the evil shell eater through many means, but all they did was cause more harm to the poor arche warrior in question!

Seconds passed by as the afflicted arche warrior grew weaker while Lucky grew stronger.

Compared to artificially produced archemetal, organic archemetal that had grown into a complete and harmonious shell possessed different properties that provided a massive boost to Lucky's control over electronic resonance.

"MEOW!"

The cat jumped onto a second arche warrior and worked to deshell the alien with even greater fervor!

The aliens all began to despair as they lost their proudest and most important physical features of their lives.

The arche lived and died by their archeshells. Losing it was one of the cruelest punishments that they could imagine. There was no greater shame, dishonor and loss of identity than to live as an arche that had lost his shell!

Once all of the warriors dropped, the steaming hot archemetal cat set his blazing green eyes in the direction of the fleeing arche lord.

The leader figure had already concluded that his hopes of containing or defeating the berserk cat were gone.

This was why he had resolutely abandoned his doomed warrior escort and ran towards the chamber that stored the most potent bombs on the archeship.

The arche lord was ready to blow up the entire archeship if that was what it took to put down this abominable shell eater!

Chapter 5105 Missing Shell

Ves hoped that Lucky remained in good shape by the time the Phobos caught up to the fleeing archeship.

He wanted to urge the Phobos to go faster, but the masterwork expert mech had little choice but to restrain his full mobility in order to maintain the effectiveness of the Seferath transphasic active stealth system.

Ves had yet to encounter a stealth system that was advanced enough to hide the very obvious disturbances produced by warp bubbles.

He did not believe it was impossible to find a way to dampen the emissions and other activity produced by warp travel.

He just hadn't entered a circle or come into contact with players who possessed the high technologies that he desired.

He was still a second-class Senior Mech Designer for the most part. He had yet to enter the most powerful ranks of red humanity, though he was working hard to increase his status and earn the qualifications to make contact with those who held true power in the current society.

Ves initially thought that it might take an hour or more for the Phobos to quietly overcome the headstart of the fleeing alien vessel.

However, the archship oddly ceased her forward acceleration and drifted off into space on a ballistic trajectory.

Though the ship still remained in motion due to Newton's First Law of Motion, it had become a lot easier for the Phobos to shorten the distance due to the latter's continued ability to accelerate forward.

The Phobos just had to exert a little bit of extra effort to prevent himself from overshooting the archship.

As the expert stealth mech slowly approached the coasting alien vessel, neither Ves nor Venerable Zimro Belson understood what was going on inside the ship.

Why had the archship stopped her acceleration when she had not yet created enough distance from the other alien ships?

Why was the ship not employing more measures to reduce the odds of repeat infiltrations?

Why did Ves sense that the ship suddenly contained a lot less life than before!

All of these questions and doubts caused the two Larkinsons to become a lot more vigilant about this odd and suspicious situation.

Ves asked for clarification from the Golden Cat.

"What is going on inside the ship? Why has it become less responsive? Did Lucky manage to break out of his cage and neutralize the alien crew somehow?"

"Nyaaaa..." Goldie replied in an uncertain tone.

Her response hardly clarified the situation at all. Ves was still left with many unanswered questions. The only certainty was that Lucky's situation was no longer as acute as before.

"Is it safe to take a look inside?"

"Nyaa nyaa."

"Very well. Thank you for the intel." Ves said before he turned to issue an instruction to Venerable Zimro.

"Let's scout out the situation first. I need you to send out your least noticeable fiend to observe the conditions inside the archship with as little fuss as possible. If the arche are still in control of their archship, I don't want the aliens to realize that we have snuck up on them again."

"Understood." The expert pilot nodded. "I will dispatch Ahriman. Out of all of the Geist System's current collection of fiends, he is the best at hiding his presence, especially when there are pockets of darkness inside the ship."

Ves created a diverse range of fiends to populate the Geist System. Death energy was hardly the only main ingredient he used to create them. He made use of various other spiritual energy attributes to create fiends in order to increase the versatility of his expert stealth mech.

Compared to many other fiends, Ahriman looked a lot less vicious and violent.

Different from fiends like Mephisto and Nosferatu that would not hesitate to kill all of the hostiles that entered their sight, Ahriman was okay with keeping his aggression in check.

What he liked the most was to remain hidden and expose his presence as little as possible.

As a fiend that was mainly composed of shadow energy, darkness was his home and his ally.

He liked to stay away from brightly lit areas and the noisy activity of large crowds.

Ves deliberately conceived of a fiend like Ahriman to act as a spy and a secret observer that could linger in the same place for hours on end.

The other fiends were not as suitable for these kinds of boring observation missions. Their violent and destructive tendencies made them far too restless to stay in one place at a time.

They were all creatures of action who were prone to resisting their instructions whenever their instincts took over!

In order to prevent Ahriman from becoming an uncontrollable beast, Ves deliberately designed the fiend to possess a lot more rationality and capacity for thought than the rest of his own kind.

The result was a fiend that looked like an ancient and dignified noble official who was constantly surrounded by shadow.

Ahriman did not possess many abilities, but his lack of strong emotions and his deep affinity for shadows made it so that he could be just as subtle as the Phobos when he was at his best!

His only major shortcoming other than his lack of combat ability was that he could not pass through transphasic energy shields.

Ves hoped that Ahriman would grow strong enough to overcome this problem in the future. He just didn't know how much time the fiend needed to develop this crucial capability.

As Ahriman quietly slipped away from the Phobos and steadily passed through the thick and solid archemetal hull of the alien vessel, he was greeted by silence.

Archemetal systems contained almost no moving parts, so they rarely produced any noises when they were active.

However, the ship normally produced a lot more noises when she was operating normally.

For the interior to become so quiet signified that the archeship was operating significantly below her regular state!

As Ves and Venerable Zimro Belson saw through Ahriman's perspective through special means, they had the illusion that they had entered a ghost ship.

The light levels became inconsistent. Some areas were still brightly lit while other compartments and corridors had become shrouded in darkness.

A lot of marks of damage could be found throughout the ships. Marks of massed weapons fire along with random holes in bulkheads and decks showed that Lucky must have led the resident aliens on an extensive chase.

It did not take long before Ahriman encountered his first arche.

The alien was clearly dead, but the manner in which he died was strange.

Compared to the images of the arche in the MTA's internal database, the deceased alien crew member looked substantially different!

The most obvious discrepancy was the alien's distinctly lacking archeshell.

Only remnants of it remained on the back of his alien body. Ves could observe clear bite marks on the edges of the remnants of the archeshell.

He could recognize those bite marks anywhere.

"Lucky... ate the poor fellow's archeshell." Ves concluded. "He almost stripped the arche clean of his greatest source of pride as well as the anchor of his entire identity. I am not too familiar with this new alien race, but even I can deduce that an arche without a shell will probably be regarded as a cripple or an outcast among his fellow aliens."

Venerable Zimro's sight lingered on the sharp blade that the arche used to slit his own alien throat.

A lot of alien blood leaked out of the shell-less alien's body. The stains spread across the deck and formed a gruesome work of art.

Ahriman quietly moved on and phased through the next couple of bulkheads before he came across another arche.

Lucky had viciously de-shelled this particular turtle-like alien as well.

However, unlike the previous arche, this one did not muster up the courage to end his own existence.

"...Huwaakka..."

The alien moaned in constant pain and loss as he laid lifelessly on the deck.

It became clear to Ves and Venerable Zimro that it was still possible for the arche to live without their characteristic archeshells.

The aliens just couldn't handle the psychological blow from suffering such a heavy loss.

"I thought that Lucky only eats metals." The expert pilot softly remarked as his gaze moved away from the crippled alien. "Will he suffer any problems from eating so many archeshells?"

Ves shook his head. "Probably not. Lucky's diet encompasses all metallic substances. Plain metal alloys are best, but he is not above eating hard organic matter so long as they have a high enough metallic content. The arche just happens to have a habit of eating significant amounts of high-grade metallic exotics. This is the best way for them to develop the hardest and most colorful archeshells."

Ahriman encountered one crippled arche after another before he ultimately reached a chamber that looked a lot better secured than the other compartments.

Ves and Zimro immediately took note of several notable elements inside this space.

They finally caught sight of Lucky.

The gem cat looked substantially different than before!

His temperature had skyrocketed and steam constantly leaked out of his body.

"What?!"

All of the archemetal eaten by Lucky clearly had a profound effect on his body. Though the gem cat still retained his handsome feline shape and his striped and bronzed external appearance, his formerly smooth metal plates had acquired a rougher and more complicated texture!

This special texture was a distinct characteristic of archemetal.

Given that the archeship was riddled by many small-sized holes, Ves did not need to make any guesses to conclude without a shadow of a doubt that Lucky had converted to an archemetal body structure!

"Meooooowww..." Lucky wearily but aggressively expressed his resentment towards the fiend that just hovered into this special space.

His feline tone conveyed a lot of animosity and bitterness. It sounded as if Lucky suffered a big loss in order to free himself from captivity and turn the tables against his former captors!

Ves didn't see the problem, though. Lucky might have fallen into a low state now that he was suffering from the aftermath of overloading his systems, but all of the archemetal that he had managed to eat over the course of his stay on the archeship clearly benefited him enormously!

In fact, Ves was a little pissed that Lucky ate so much of this alien vessel. The archeship was an incomparably precious product of alien technology. The Larkinsons and their allies could derive many more benefits from her hull if her interior hadn't become so disarrayed!

"Meow..."

Ves shifted his sight towards the small pile of misshapen gems that laid a short distance away from the gem cat.

Different from the beautiful and symmetrically cut gems that Lucky usually produced, the ones that were currently strewn on the deck looked anything but complete.

Their surfaces were rougher. The gems were only partially cut. They also exhibited a complete lack of symmetry.

Yet despite all of these shortcomings, the nine gems all looked legitimate enough that Ves might be able to use them to augment his mechs!

Sure, the misshapen gems looked like waste products that an overstressed Lucky hastily forced out of his body without any thought, but any gem produced by a gem cat was a treasure in his eyes!

What caused Ves to become especially delighted by this fresh batch of gems was that they exhibited similar patterns to archemetal!

This meant that their properties likely had a direct relation to the characteristics of this special alien alloy!

Once Ves became satisfied with the sight of these new gems, he briefly observed the shell-less alien that had been beaten and thrown into a corner of the compartment.

This alien looked considerably larger and older than the others. It did not take much guessing to determine that he was the leader of the archeship.

Unfortunately, the once-proud arche lord no longer possessed the gravitas of before. His powerful archeshell which he had shaped and nurtured for centuries had all ended up inside Lucky's stomach at this time!

The arche lord would have killed himself by now if Lucky hadn't broken his bones!

The vengeful cat did not want to end the suffering of the arche lord so easily.

Once Ves took a good measure of the crippled and broken alien leader, he finally set his sights on the largest and most prominent archemetal constructs in the chamber.

"Meow..."

These... were superweapons.

Ves grew a lot more nervous when Ahriman's cautious inspections revealed that the archeship carried a small but extremely arsenal of anti-matter bombs and fusion missiles!

The repercussions of coming into contact with these destructive weapons were gigantic.

As long as Ves made the wrong move, he might get into a huge amount of trouble with the Red Two!

"Damn!"

Chapter 5106 A New Perspective On Weapons Of Mass Destruction

The destructive capacity of technology was limitless.

As humanity continued to develop its technology to greater heights, people always managed to come up with better and more creative ways to kill a lot of life at once.

From developing antimatter weapons that were powerful enough to crack entire planets to spreading fast-acting viruses that killed a specific species of aliens faster than they could develop a cure, it was disgustingly easy for scientists and engineers to cobble together superweapons in their own labs and workshops!

Though humanity had also invested a lot of resources and attention into developing effective countermeasures, their R&D in this area had never managed to keep up with the pace of superweapons development.

This was a reflection of the universal adage that it was a lot easier to destroy than to create.

Humanity had a long history with superweapons. Over time, people formulated all sorts of rules and customs concerning their usage.

Unfortunately, all of the rules in the galaxy ultimately did not prevent a lot of crazy and power-hungry leaders from employing them in large numbers during the twilight of the Age of Conquest!

The enormous damage, suffering and trauma produced by the liberal usage of weapons of mass destruction as well as warships, which were pretty much superweapons in their own right, produced an extreme backlash during the Age of Mechs.

Anything related to warships, nuclear weapons, antimatter weapons, engineered toxins and other overly destructive tech was declared taboo.

In order to prevent the irresponsible masses from ever repeating the darkest period of human history to date, the Big Two struck people down with immediate effect as soon as they attempted to employ any weapon of mass destruction.

The strong enforcement of this taboo produced massive societal changes to humanity after the Age of Mechs.

Many generations of people were born in a galactic culture where no one dared to even think about getting their hands on warships or other superweapons, let alone using them against other humans!

The vast majority of people readily accepted the reality that only the Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance were 'disciplined', 'enlightened' and 'righteous' enough to wield the awesome power of superweapons without leading humanity into darkness again.

No matter the validity of this belief, it had become a powerful truth to many humans.

Any human that managed to stumble upon a cache of superweapons that were powerful enough to annihilate entire cities would not think of trying to take advantage of such an astonishing find.

In fact, the mere thought of trying to arm them and launch them was so abhorrent to modern humans that they would probably grow visibly ill at the very notion!

Predictably, Venerable Zimro Belson's reaction towards the discovery of multiple antimatter bombs as well as transphasic fusion missiles was no different from that of a typical human born during the Age of Mechs!

"This is dangerous!" The expert pilot cried out! "These superweapons are probably powerful enough to destroy all of our mechs and starships within their effective range! Perhaps only the few ace mechs in our combined fleet will be able to survive the overwhelming power of these warheads, but only if they haven't strayed too close to the heart of the explosions."

Both Zimro and the Phobos grew incredibly frightened as they realized that they were well within the lethal radius of just one of these dangerous alien superweapons!

What if the arche secretly armed them and set timers on these destructive warheads?

What if the archeship came programmed with a secret anti-capture safeguard that would automatically set off the superweapons if the crew had lost control over their own vessel?

What if the superweapons had taken damage throughout Lucky's rampage throughout the archeship and began to lose containment?

All sorts of dangerous scenarios could take place as long as these superweapons continued to exist!

"According to the regulations of the MTA, we need to report this finding right away!" Zimro quickly determined. "I'm not sure how extensively the Red Association has overhauled its own rules, but I am sure that they have not changed their regulations concerning the handling of weapons of mass destruction. The longer we keep this news to ourselves, the more we become culpable of violating the taboo. Sir, please report the news straight away! We need the mechers to come and secure this dangerous arsenal before the aliens can take them back and use them against our most populated colonies!"

"...Sir?"

"Ahem." The energy manifestation of Ves coughed. "I was just a little lost in thought. Let's not be in a hurry to call in the MTA. In fact, I would prefer it if we contained the news of this finding."

Venerable Zimro looked scandalized when Ves suggested a course of action that was completely contrary to how humans were expected to behave in this kind of situation!

"Patriarch! I am aware that it is not appropriate for me to question your decisions, but... are you truly certain about this? Why would you possibly want to withhold this news?"

Ves had to think really carefully about how to formulate his words. This was an exceedingly delicate situation. If he issued the wrong answer, then he might lose the loyalty and dedication of one of the most powerful and promising assets under his direct command!

"Rules are made for specific reasons." He said. "We have already left the Age of Mechs behind, Zimro. We may have continued many of the same rules and customs as before, but this is not a time for us to repeat the same behavior by rote without even questioning whether they are still as relevant as before."

The expert pilot impatiently listened to his superior, but soon shook his head.

"I do not necessarily disagree with you, sir, but the Red Two that have affirmed their authority over red humanity have reiterated many of their old rules. They have always made sure to announce any deliberate changes in policy to prevent any form of ambiguity from taking place. The fleeters have only recently started to give private individuals and organizations a way to earn the right to employ warships, but there are no new provisions concerning the use of more direct superweapons like antimatter bombs. We must still obey the old rules when it comes to their discovery!"

Ves really did not want to do that. Sure, antimatter bombs were really scary and could easily blow up and kill their owners along with millions of innocent people who just happened to be within the blast radius, but this was an unprecedented amount of firepower!

He had long lost the irrational sense of fear and awe towards weapons of mass destruction.

When it came down to it, they were just weapons that were considered far too powerful to be employed in regular conflicts, especially internal conflicts between members of the same race.

Ves did not think it was as problematic to employ antimatter bombs like the ones carried by the archship against the aliens, especially when the natives of the Red Ocean openly fought to wipe out all of red humanity!

In any case, the Red Cabal and the major alien races had never shown much restraint when it came to their own usage of warships and superweapons. They never signed any treaties that constrained them to the same taboos as humanity.

The only reasons why the aliens did not make extensive use of these kinds of weapons was because they were rather economical.

The primary cannon batteries of large alien warships could deal as much damage as an antimatter bomb if not more if they were allowed to fire enough volleys!

However, the advantage of employing such a bomb was that it was a lot more compact and self-contained.

Ves did not miss the fact that the archeship was devoid of large and prominent cannon batteries.

Powerful weapon systems were not conducive towards maximizing stealth. This particular archeship was never designed to fight a standing battle in the first place. She was clearly meant to function as a scout and possibly an ambush predator.

The small arsenal of extremely powerful bombs precisely fit the intended role of the archeship. The aliens who normally crewed this vessel just had to sneak up on an enemy and deploy one of these powerful warheads at the right moment in order to defeat an entire enemy force without suffering a single attack in return!

The more Ves thought about how he could use these potent superweapons to his advantage, the less he wanted to surrender them to the Red Association!

What would giving them up do for him, anyway? He would just get another symbolic pat on the head and earn a few MTA merits that he could easily earn through other means.

Ves was not short on MTA merits at the moment!

The difference in scarcity between MTA merits and three whole antimatter bombs was extremely clear. Ves would be a fool to suffer an enormous loss and give up the latter just because it was the right thing to do. He would much rather put his faith in his own power!

"Times have changed, Zimro. While I do not question your habit of looking up to the Red Two, my vision is greater than that." Ves steadily told the expert pilot. "We need to prepare for... extreme contingencies. That does not necessarily entail the use of antimatter weapons, but... it is better to have the option of using them than to be rendered completely helpless when we are threatened by an overwhelming adversary."

The start of the Age of Dawn was a time of unprecedented turmoil and danger.

There was no guarantee that the current human order would continue to persist as it did in the Age of Mechs.

The Age of Conquest had largely been dominated by the Greater Terran United Confederation and the New Rubarth Empire in the open, though few were aware of the Five Scrolls Compact pulling the strings in the shadows.

The Age of Mechs was the era where the Big Two maintained their hegemony over a somewhat united human civilization for over four stable centuries. No other human power could shake their might and prestige as they indirectly reigned over half of the Milky Way.

Now, Ves was willing to make a bet that this new and unprecedented age would enable the rise of a newer and better group of hegemonies that were much more capable of adapting to the changing circumstances.

This was the survival of the fittest!

Ves refused to believe that the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact would remain as complacent as before. Their leaders were definitely plotting to regain the sovereignty that they had lost during the previous age.

Other organizations might rise up as well. Just as the MTA and the CFA rose up out of nowhere, a different collection of forward-thinking groups might emerge that offered much better alternatives to people who were looking for salvation!

With these thoughts in mind, Ves strongly argued to secure these superweapons and keep them in reserve without notifying the Red Two.

Though Venerable Zimro still had a lot of misgivings about this course of action, he still respected Ves' authority.

"How will you even keep these superweapons?" The expert pilot skeptically asked. "Don't tell me you intend to keep them inside this damaged archeship so that you can potentially shift responsibility to the aliens if you ever want to launch a destructive strike. It won't work, sir. The Red Two will find out the truth one way or another, and when they do, you will become the latest fugitive to be hunted by the Red Association's Compliance Department."

Ves shuddered at the mention of the dreaded Compliance Department. It was pretty much a modern version of the inquisition in all but name!

"My solution is a little more sophisticated than that, Zimro. Let me handle this. I will quietly take away these superweapons before we turn this archeship into the common spoils for the Golden Skull Alliance. No one else should be able to notice anything amiss as long as we keep the transfer as quiet as possible."

"And how do we do that exactly, sir?"

"If I am not mistaken, the archeshell exterior of all of these superweapons should possess stealth functionality. It makes little sense to deploy them when they can clearly be detected and intercepted in advance. We just have to figure out how this alien tech works and activate the right settings. Let me think on how to make this happen..."

Chapter 5107 Barely Controllable

Ves felt tempted to swallow the archeship and all of the spoils contained within alone.

The value of the vessel that was almost entirely made out of archemetal was obvious to everyone. Despite the relatively low-key and elusive conduct of the arche race, archetech had proven to be both powerful and ingenious due to how it developed technology in a substantially different direction than normal.

Most technological races such as humans and puelmers reggraded their sophisticated products as collections of lots of little building blocks that fit quite well together.

The goal of most developers was to create a whole that was greater than the sum of its parts.

The arche approached their technological development from a substantially different angle. They took their own remarkable shells as the principal example of how their technology should work and tried to make everything into artificial adaptations of archeshells.

Their weapons were extensions of their own archeshells.

Their stealthy homeships were basically giant archeshells that could be 'worn' by multiple arche crew members at the same time.

From an engineering perspective, archetech possessed a lot of parallels to organic structures. It was as if it was originally supposed to be biotech, but somehow got transformed into metallic tech down the line.

Whenever Ves studied any part of the archeship, he had the feeling that he was studying a giant and multifunctional turtleshell that had been converted into a mechanical form.

It was beautiful and exotic in a way that Ves had never encountered from human tech or other forms of alien tech.

His mind bloomed with inspiration as he barely managed to decipher the intricate brilliance of how the arche put together their own tech.

The research and reference value of the archeship was enormous to a mech designer like Ves!

He became especially interested in the phenomenon called electronic resonance. It was a more advanced way of powering different energy-hungry parts. It was a lot more stable and provided a lot of redundancy, which was exactly what mechs and starships needed the most when operating under dangerous circumstances!

The distinct lack of moving parts as well as fragile circuitry reminded Ves a lot of luminar crystal technology.

Though archetech and luminar crystal technology were definitely distinct from each other, Ves noticed multiple parallels between the two. It was as if they were distant cousins from each other who learned from the same teacher!

This had considerable implications for Ves. If he managed to figure out an important working principle of archetech, he may be able to adapt the ingenious solutions he learned into improving his luminar crystals!

The same dynamic could also apply in reverse. His extensive expertise in luminar crystal technology might give him a powerful head-start in figuring out how to adapt archetech into his own mechs!

"In fact, it's not me who will benefit the most from reverse engineering archetech." Ves guessed.

Compared to Ves who preferred to tinker with the spiritual design of his mechs, other mech designers who focused on the physical design of their mechs would benefit a lot more from learning the working principles of archetech!

Ves could easily foresee that mechs made out of archemetal parts were great at making heavier, solid and more reliable mechs in combat.

The high average density of archetech components made it a bit less suitable for light mechs, but they offered fantastic value for heavier and more defense-oriented mechs!

Leaving aside defense, archetech also offered more efficient ways to pack all kinds of functions inside a mech without taking too much capacity. This was because the use of highly efficient electronic resonance as an alternate means of powering mechs reduced the demands for energy transmission systems and heat management solutions.

On the top of his head, Ves could already foresee that his wife, Sara Voiken, Merrill O'Brian and Beatrice Hendrix could produce a lot of breakthroughs in their work once they have properly studied and mastered the principles of archetech!

Master Benedict Cortez should also be able to gain a lot, though the downside for an older and much more experienced mech designer like him was that his existing work was not compatible with archetech.

He would have to make a lot of trade offs if he wanted to integrate archetech or a derivative of it into his fixed design style.

Hours after the Phobos made contact with the archeship again and called in the Hidden Smile to covertly secure this wonderful prize, the leaders of the Golden Skull Alliance held another virtual meeting.

Several people provided the high-ranking leaders with an extensive update on the situation.

The topic of the archeship that unexpectedly lurked in the star system dominated the first half of the discussion.

As much as Ves wanted to keep this vessel for himself, he realized that it was impossible to hide it from others.

In addition, Ves was not unprincipled enough to deprive his allies from their rightful contributions.

Even if the Phobos did much of the work, the Hidden Smile played an indispensable role in ferrying the expert mech and quietly towing away the inoperative archeship.

The Cross Clan, the Adelaide Third Fleet and the Boojay Family did not appear to contribute anything on the surface, but their overall participation in the Trailblazer Expedition as well as the security offered by their mechs, expert mechs and especially ace mechs made this trip possible in the first place.

Naturally, it was still clear that the Larkinson Clan deserved the bulk of the spoils for capturing the archeship. The others did not dispute this point.

"The archeship encountered by the Phobos and captured through undisclosed means is difficult to secure." Captain Emily Ezam who commanded the Hidden Smile reported in the virtual conference room. "Our scientists and engineers have all attained basic proficiency in operating and manipulating various different native alien tech bases. DIVA headquarters also have renowned experts on orven, nunser and puelmer tech on retainer, but none of their expertise has helped us master any portion of the vessel. We have employed many different means to perform simple tasks such as shutting off the lights to opening a hatch. None of our efforts succeeded."

The DIVA naval officer proceeded to describe more failed efforts to hack the archeship and gain control over her hull.

"It is only when a... specialist from the Larkinson Clan agreed to lend a hand that we managed to insert a prize crew into the ship without compromising her hull integrity and causing her active stealth to drop." Captain Ezam finally said.

In other words, Lucky made use of his new ability to harness electronic resonance to fumble around until he finally managed to open a small hangar bay hatch.

It took a lot of effort to gain the angry cat's cooperation. Lucky was not happy with Ves to say the least!

"The archeship is still operating under full stealth despite the complete incapacitation of all of her alien crew, is that correct?" General Herman Foraine asked.

"That is correct."

"How long will that remain the case? It would be detrimental for us if the yurzen raiding fleet along with other possible parties manages to discover this extremely valuable prize."

Ves smirked when he heard that. "I don't think we need to worry too much about that. One of the conclusions of our preliminary examination of the archeship shows that she is designed to operate under near-permanent stealth. Human stealth technology is mostly developed on the basis of short to medium-term usage. Stealth mechs and stealth shuttles are designed to hide their traces for hours, days or weeks at most. Archeships can easily go months or years without ever dropping their active stealth state. The extensive damage inflicted to her internal systems shouldn't affect the core stealth systems too much. The arche are known to be paranoid about this kind of stuff, and have incorporated a high degree of redundancy in all of their vessels."

Not many people possessed more than a superficial familiarity with archeships and archetech. Even Ves did not know much better. He could only base his guesses on the paltry information contained within the Red Association's internal database and what little insights Lucky agreed to reveal.

In any case, everyone grew less tense when they learned that the archeship was not about to malfunction and reveal her presence anytime soon.

"We should be able to retrieve the archeship quietly and without revealing her existence to any third parties as long as our expeditionary fleet arrives at her coordinates." General Verle stated. "We have already started to prepare the Diligent Ovenbird to scoop the archeship inside her fully enclosed small oven. The internal drydock will offer our alliance the freedom to study and disassemble the archeship while our fleet is still on the move."

The archeship was only as large as a small destroyer, which effectively meant that she was not as large as a combat carrier.

The Golden Skull Alliance often encountered situations where the most valuable warships captured from their adversaries tended to be capital ships that were several kilometers long.

There was no way for the expeditionary to easily bring these titanic beasts away!

The archeship was a clear exception to this rule. Master Benedict Cortez clearly looked interested in taking a deep look at the interesting archetech contained within the captured vessel!

"We have already earned a profit with minimal investment as far as I am concerned." The Master Mech Designer shared his opinion. "I think we should seriously consider the decision to back out of this operation. The presence of an alien stealth ship that apparently expected our arrival in advance has many troubling implications. If we proceed with our planned assault on the yurzen raiding fleet, our more vulnerable starships in the rear may face a sudden threat with the secret arrival of a second

or a third archeship. Is there any way for us to determine whether the archeship we have captured is alone or part of a larger alien naval squadron?"

"I'm not too sure about that." Ves frowned. "The manner in which our 'specialist' has reluctantly managed to command some of the functions of the archeship is still too rudimentary. We cannot exert any control over the more advanced functions of the vessel, and I suspect that accessing information or making contact with other hidden archeship requires exceedingly high permissions. These are not commands that anyone with access to an archeship can exert."

There were too many unknowns related to the control mechanisms of the archeship. Humans did not possess archeshells so it was impossible for any of them to interface with the shell-shaped control points spread throughout the interior of the hull.

The arche didn't even have the decency to implement any backup control measures that could be manipulated without the use of an archeshell!

Ves believed that this was a deliberate design choice on the part of the arche in order to prevent other races from hijacking their own vessels!

The discussion slowly strayed from the disposition of the archeship to how they should the next battle.

The unexpected variables and partial setbacks that the Golden Skull Alliance encountered so far made it impossible for them to follow the original plan.

General Verle swept his hand at a projection that displayed the state and the locations of the ships of the yurzen raiding fleet.

"The Phobos has only managed to cripple the warp drives and assassinate a small portion of the crew of one of the puelmer heavy cruisers. We project that it may take a couple of days at most for the puelmers to repair or replace at least one broken warp drive. That does not give us too much time for us to take action. What is worse is that the second puelmer heavy cruiser is not only completely undamaged, but has also entered into warp travel in order to frustrate another covert attack. If we want to defeat this fleet, we will have to do so while being pressured by a highly mobile alien warship that is packed with advanced transphasic technologies."

The risks of proceeding with an assault were considerably greater than projected due to the failure to restrict the mobility of the second puelmer heavy cruiser!

Chapter 5108 Our Own 'Warship'

"We're in for a hard fight regardless of how we approach the yurzen raiding fleet." General Herman Foraine remarked as the current situation of the enemy fleet became clear. "Compared to the time when we rolled over the wheednar raiding fleet, the circumstances are considerably more adverse for us this time. Our ace mechs should be able to reluctantly contain one puelmer warship, but they cannot contain both of them at the same time."

"It is worse than that." Matriarch Rezzie Boojay added. "If we greenlight this operation, we will most certainly need to send out our ace mechs for the sole purpose of containing the second puelmer heavy cruiser. We absolutely cannot let this vessel outmaneuver our forces and strike our large and vulnerable core fleet."

The leader of the Boojay Family made a good point. The starships that comprised the expeditionary fleet were their biggest weaknesses. It was especially bad for the Larkinson Clan as it dragged along a lot of fairly vulnerable civilian capital ships such as the Dragon's Den and the Vivacious Wai.

While ships like these provided an incredible amount of utility, comfort and convenience to the expeditionary fleet when they were roaming far away from civilization, there was no way to avoid the fact that enemy ships could easily shoot them down if they were in the right position to launch their attacks!

This was why space combat among the natives of the Red Ocean often devolved into grueling and lengthy matches between two fast-moving fleets.

The hit rates were low since both sides preferred to keep their distance from each other.

Even if the warships struck their targets by coincidence, so long as the transphasic energy shields remained up, they would slowly be able to recover and resist similar attacks without causing any permanent damage.

The expeditionary fleet could not possibly fight their foes in this fashion. The alien warships were all specialized towards this mode of combat. The range and absolute firepower of their cannon batteries exceeded that of almost any mech. Size mattered a lot in these kinds of contests.

As the various leaders argued about how they could possibly tackle the yurzen raiden fleet without suffering excessive casualties, they eventually narrowed their options to a couple of possible approaches.

"Pulling out is always a viable option." Master Benedict Cortez said to everyone. "There is no shame in respecting the capabilities of our enemies and choosing to fight another day. We are not obligated to defend the colony on Corellix III and destroy the yurzen raiding fleet. We will only incur the opportunity cost of missing out on a combined reward of a billion or so MTA merits. We can easily make up for that loss by tackling other, less challenging alien raiding fleets."

This was the most logical and rational option. Ves and the other leaders didn't want to abort the operation that they had invested a considerable amount of effort into setting up. They especially did not want their journey to the Corellix System to be in vain.

Although it was nice to obtain a damaged archship as a consolation prize, it was not enough to satisfy everyone's expectations for this trip.

Marshal Ariadne Wodin mentioned another suggestion. "We can choose to call in backup. We have all cooperated with other pioneering organizations in the past. If we had a strong group like the Gemini Family by our side, then we wouldn't have been so troubled over the need to contain the intact puelmer heavy cruiser. Our scouts have already identified numerous rival pioneering fleets operating in the vicinity of the Corellix System. The only issue is that it will take at least 3 days or a little more for them to arrive and link up with our fleet, but the added security and the spreading of risk will be worth the wait."

The other leaders did not object to this option as much as before. While they were still greedy to claim the rewards for themselves, as long as they could reduce a lot of damage in exchange for sharing 20 to 30 percent of the spoils with a third party, the deal would still be profitable in the end!

"Our Black Cats have performed the same investigation on these third parties." Director Calabast spoke up at this time. "There are a few pioneering fleets that are fairly suspect. They are led by inexperienced leaders or lack frontier experience. It will be difficult for us to put our trust in their commitment and their fighting ability."

"There are also other pioneering fleets that have proven their strength against the aliens." The Glory Seeker leader retorted.

"That is correct, but they will most certainly demand a greater share of the spoils. We won't be able to earn much profit in the end."

That left the third option and one that Ves still favored, if only reluctantly.

"We can still attempt to attack the yurzen raiding fleet despite all of the complications that have occurred." General Verle said as the central projection displayed a different battle plan.

Ves sat upright as he studied the alternative plan proposed by Verle. It was a lot different as it not only depended a lot more on the ace mechs of the Golden Skull Alliance, but also required the Spirit of Bentheim to play a frontline role!

"The biggest element that is working against us is that intact puelmer heavy cruiser. So long as she remains extremely mobile and on guard, we cannot attack the rest of the alien fleet with ease. This is why I propose we start this operation with harassing this key alien asset. This job is best performed by a mobile but also fairly resilient cruiser armed with a full set of transphasic laser cannon batteries."

Master Benedict frowned. "We don't have that, general. You have just described the configuration of the lead enemy vessels. We are at an enormous disadvantage in this aspect."

"You are correct if you only limit your consideration to warships, but we have ace mechs that are just as strong." General Verle replied with a smile. He swiped his arm at the projection to set aside a representation of the Spirit of Bentheim and the Macharia Excelsia. "Our clan has recently upgraded our flagship into a quasi-first-class vessel. Her defenses are exceptionally notable and her new superdrives along with her sub-light propulsion systems give her the means to keep up with a puelmer homeship in terms of speed. The only real shortcoming is her lack of warship-grade weapons, but that is what the ace rifleman mech is for. If we pair up these two assets, the combination should reluctantly be able to fight against the puelmer heavy cruiser."

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The plan sounded absurd on the surface. The Spirit of Bentheim may have undergone a lot of upgrades due to Ves' profligacy, but she was still an industrial vessel in nature!

A factory ship was never meant to fly into the thick of battle and duke it out against other enemies!

Ships like these were solely meant to stay in the rear and avoid battle at all costs!

Still, who made it so that the Spirit of Bentheim was the only proper quasi-first-class starship in the expeditionary fleet?

The other alliance partners invested their hard-earned MTA merits in many other areas! None of them had put any significant effort into getting their hands on much better starships because the costs were too prohibitive at the moment!

"Are you Larkinsons truly willing to expose your flagship to considerable risks just so that you can harass or grind down the second puelmer heavy cruiser?" General Foraine asked in a doubtful tone.

Such risky and extreme behavior went against his mercenary instincts. People in his business never pulled off crazy stunts like these. It never worked out if mercenaries consistently assumed greater risks as it only took a single failure to ruin their entire business!

However, the Larkinsons were anything but normal. When Ves studied General Verle's unconventional battle plan, he found that it was oddly feasible.

"If the goal is to sap the defenses of one of the puelmer warships from a distance, then the Macharia Excelsia should be able to undertake this duty alone." Matriarch Rezzie Boojay said. "An ace mech equipped with a transphasic flight system can move just as quickly and its Saint Kingdom can resist a fair number of direct warship attacks that the powerful machine hasn't been able to evade."

General Verle already considered these arguments. "You are correct about that, but the firepower of a single ace mech may not be enough. I expect it will take more firepower to wear down the defenses of the enemy vessel. Our clan can contribute more firepower by relying on our Transcendent Punishers to break our targets a little faster. Their collective firepower against a fully functional warship is not that great, but their hit rates at extreme range are far better than any of our other standard mech models. Besides, we still have a way to upgrade their firepower to the point where their luminar crystal cannons can actually hurt our adversary."

He turned back to the projected map and dragged over the Minerva to the Spirit of Bentheim.

"Commander Casella Ingvar can qualitatively transform the firepower of our Transcendent Punishers by Commandeering them. She won't be able to keep this up for too many hours, but she can still go on rotation if the skirmish drags on for too long."

Her Commandeering ability was not entirely perfect. Casella cooperated well with her own Living Sentinels, but her compatibility with the mech pilots of the other mech legions tended to be a bit worse.

There were extensive differences in philosophy, religion and values between Casella and the Eye of Ylvaine. The only reason why they were able to cooperate with each other at all was because they were all Larkinsons who fought for the same clan.

Even so, it was better than nothing. Commander Casella had trained and honed her Commandeering ability extensively in order to make it effective under a lot of different circumstances. Ves did not expect her to falter in this duty.

"That helps, but that won't be enough I believe." The leader of the Boojay Family remarked.

General Verle dragged over a few additional expert mechs.

It went without saying that the Amaranto was also highly suited for this mission.

The Promethea was another expert rifleman mech that could contribute a decent amount of firepower.

The Star Dancer Mark II might not be as capable in long-ranged slugging fests like these, but it hardly cost the Spirit of Bentheim anything to host an additional expert mech.

The Spirit of Bentheim was starting to look a little scary. Not only did she possess the mobility and the defenses of a quasi-first-class warship, but her offensive power had become comparable to that of an actual alien warship!

The Macharia Exelsia not only provided a lot of additional defense to the Spirit of Bentheim, but could also act as the capital ship's incredibly powerful and accurate primary warship cannon battery!

The Minerva, Amaranto, Promethea and the Star Dancer Mark II could effectively function as the factory ship's secondary warship cannon batteries.

The Transcendent Punishers Commandeered by Casella Ingvar pretty much filled the role of the Spirit of Bentheim's tertiary warship gun batteries!

It was a luxurious lineup of mechs for a single capital ship. The Golden Skull Alliance still had the option of adding additional ranged expert mechs, but the main fleet had to remain adequately protected.

Ves suddenly thought of an additional variable that could play a helpful role in this daring operation.

"We should bring along the Everchanger as well. I've recently upgraded his firepower a bit. His new gun should be able to inflict effective damage to the enemy through unconventional means."

General Verle took the patriarch at his word and immediately shifted over the Everchanger as well.

The 'warship' in control of the Golden Skull Alliance might not look like it, but Ves and many other people believed she was fully capable of defeating or at least going even with one of the puelmer warships!

Chapter 5109 Recurring Larkinson Sickness

The plan proposed by General Verle combined a lot of different advantages together in the hopes of producing a remarkable result!

As long as the Spirit of Bentheim loaded up with a lot of powerful ranged mechs, she could theoretically compete against an alien warship so long as the opponent was not too powerful!

The problem was that the aliens had a lot more ships at their disposal.

"Those yurzen warships won't remain idle if the Spirit of Bentheim begins to harass the alien fleet." Master Benedict pointed out. "What if the aliens dispatch dozens of yurzen warships to back up the puelmer heavy cruiser under fire?"

This was a legitimate concern, but General Verle already took this possibility into consideration.

"That's also fine." He said with a grin. "In fact, I hope the enemy will be foolish enough to commit to a chase. If we can lure a portion of the alien warships away, we can effectively split up the enemy forces. That will make it easier for the rest of our fleet to attack the diminished forces left behind."

The central projection briefly played out this scenario. It showed the souped-up Spirit of Bentheim flying close to the yurzen raiding fleet before pulling away.

The aliens somehow hated the taunting human factory ship so much that one of the puelmer heavy cruisers along with two-dozen yurzen warships broke away and started to get led further and further away from their compatriots!

This granted the rest of the expeditionary fleet a golden opportunity to swoop in and overwhelm the crippled puelmer homeship along with the reduced number of yurzen warships keeping her company!

"This is wishful thinking." Marshal Ariadne Wodin shook her head in disapproval. "The puelmers may have a reputation for being angry and impulsive, but they are also highly intelligent. They know what we are capable of. I do not think that the aliens will be stupid enough to split up their forces. Even if the other puelmer heavy cruiser can be led away to an extent, what can we do to stop her from turning around and going back to repel our main assault?"

"That is the beauty of this scenario." General Verle continued to smirk. "One of the reasons why I insist on using the Spirit of Bentheim in this capacity is because she is equipped with an advanced Gravity Net developed by Morton Tech. It is a powerful warp inhibitor that has an effective range of 30 kilometers. As long as the puelmer homeship is close enough, she will have little choice but to drop out of warp travel and lose most of her effective mobility."

"Thirty kilometers is too short." Marshal Ariadne Wodin said with great concern. "At this relatively short range, the puelmer heavy cruiser will effectively be able to land all of her shots at the Spirit of Bentheim. No matter how well your factory ship can resist attacks, it is impossible for her to withstand too many direct hits."

General Verle nodded. "This is why the range must be carefully controlled. We do not intend to reduce the range to 30 kilometers right away. We can save it for later after the exchange of fire has already dragged on to an extent. It is a trump card that we intend to employ just before the alien vessel wishes to distance herself."

"That still doesn't address the possible interference from other alien warships. If multiple yurzen vessels get within a closer range of the Spirit of Bentheim, their cannon batteries will quickly wear down the defenses of your flagship no matter how awful they are. The quantity is too much."

"That is why we do not intend to get into closer range unless we absolutely have to, marshal. This is not a fixed plan, but a flexible one that contains many different responses to many different possibilities. If we find that the other alien warships have become a greater hindrance, we can direct our firepower at them instead. The yurzen warships are considerably weaker. The Macharia Excelsia alone should easily be able to penetrate their defenses in a relatively short amount of time."

The discussion continued as General Verle explained how their side should respond if the aliens made a specific move.

It all sounded a bit complicated to Ves. The sheer amount of possible decisions that the aliens could make led to many possible permutations on how the situation would unfold.

Ves no longer bothered with keeping up with the specific scenarios. He trusted that Verle and his staff figured everything out. If they weren't confident enough that this would work, the general would have never presented it in the first place.

After half an hour of discussion, the leaders reluctantly became persuaded by the plan.

The key variable was whether the Larkinson Clan was willing to risk its incredibly valuable and crucial flagship to such a risky operation.

The consequences of failure were great, especially if Ves and other key figures of the Larkinson Clan insisted on staying on the very same ship!

Though Ves understood that it was stupid for him to stay on his flagship while she was being used as bait, he possessed a lot of confidence in the Spirit of Bentheim's survival ability.

He invested hundreds of millions of MTA merits to upgrade her to this state! He knew exactly how much punishment she could take!

With Ves acquiescing to this risky plan, General Verle received the support he needed to pull off this bold and risky plan!

Of course, it went without saying that the Larkinson Clan was entitled to earn a greater share if they successfully managed to defeat the yurzen raiding fleet with this stunt.

Combined with the earlier successes attained by Lucky and the Phobos, it might be possible for the Larkinsons to claim 40 percent of the total spoils this time!

"Are you sure that the Macharia Excelsia is enough to cover the Spirit of Bentheim?" Master Benedict Cortez questioned. "Your safety margin will be much improved if the Jedda Sandivar or the Royal Jeem can accompany your flagship as well. They can independently harass the enemy warships and provide an additional defensive buffer with their Saint Kingdoms."

General Verle looked a little less certain. "You make a good point, Master, but doing so will deprive our main fleet of a powerful protector. I ultimately think it is better to keep the two ace mechs together so that they can work together to quickly contain and wear down the defenses of the damaged and less mobile puelmer heavy cruiser. One ace mech is not enough to constrain her completely."

They talked a bit more about the plan. General Verle fine-tuned a few details based on the feedback provided by the other leaders, but the general idea remained the same.

The only variable that truly concerned everyone was whether the native aliens still possessed hidden assets that could take the Golden Skull Alliance by surprise.

Marshal Ariadne Wodin asked an important question. "Ves, have you asked your friend Ylvaine whether there are other archships hiding in this star system?"

"I did." He replied. "He previously did not look for this, because none of us thought that the aliens would make such an extravagant move on a relatively small and unimportant battlefield, but now that we know better, I specifically requested the design spirit to sweep for additional surprises. He hasn't detected any so far, but I should caution you that his foresight is not completely reliable. We should still rely on our own scouting efforts to keep an eye out for any hidden enemies."

The discussion ended shortly after that. Once the revised plan spread across the fleet, the controversy it generated was not light!

However, an operation like this was not completely out of the ordinary for the Larkinsons. It was not exactly routine, but it did not exceed their psychological boundaries either.

It was as if they already expected for their patriarch and their leaders to commit to an extreme action every once in a while!

Everyone became a lot busier due to the sudden changes in the plan.

Buttoning down the Spirit of Bentheim became a high priority. A lot of different crews ran around to lock down and secure any objects that could possibly fly loose and hit people during combat.

The Larkinsons shifted a lot of fragile goods and valuable assets to other starships whenever possible.

All non-essential personnel had to go as well. There was no reason to subject them to the same risks as the crew that were essential in keeping the Spirit of Bentheim functional.

Gloriana along with her lovely three children all wore their protective hazard suits as they prepared to shuttle over to the Indigo Tremor.

The mother clearly did not like any part of this insane plan to risk the Spirit of Bentheim in battle.

She also did not like it that Ves insisted on staying on the ship during this dangerous ordeal!

However, she knew better than to argue against him. If he set his mind on this lunatic act, then there was nothing that could pull him away from the thick of all of the excitement!

"I want to stay as well!" Andraste whined. "If papa thinks it is okay for him, then I should be okay as well!"

Gloriana firmly smacked her daughter's head with her palm. "Shut up! This is no game! You may be born for greatness, but you are still two decades too young to participate in a serious military operation. You will stay with me. Your aunts over at the Indigo Tremor will make sure you will enjoy your stay among the Glory Seekers."

"Aww..."

"She's right, pumpkin." Ves said. "You need to have qualifications if you want to take part in a fight. We never allow incompetent people to undertake any serious responsibilities during battle. They will just get in the way of people who are actually doing useful work. Just listen to your mother and just watch the battle from afar, okay?"

"Okay, papa..."

He looked a lot more brave and imposing now that he had changed into his Unending Regalia.

Practically no one would believe that he could be a nerdy mech designer. Although he did not possess the characteristic disciplined bearing of a career soldier, Ves conveyed a strong image of a warlord at this time!

It was no wonder that Andraste became enthralled by this operation. She wanted to become just as awesome!

Gloriana meanwhile still looked concerned due to all of the possible accidents that could happen.

"If the aliens prove to be more difficult to deal with than you expected, you will turn back, alright?"

Ves nodded. "Don't worry. We may be bold, but we are not suicidal. We won't push ourselves to the brink in order to chase after a victory that we don't really need. If the heat becomes too much, we will try to disengage and get away. The Spirit of Bentheim might not be able to catch up with the expeditionary fleet straight away. We might have to rendez-vous in another star system."

It all depended on how much the aliens were willing to disregard other priorities in order to take down the Spirit of Bentheim.

The Golden Skullers needed to be careful about this. Attracting too much hatred would land the Spirit of Bentheim into trouble. Attracting too little hatred would make it difficult to split up the alien raiding fleet.

Ves was not too worried, though. At most, he would find a way to trigger one of the weapons of mass destruction that he would soon be able to get into his possession.

Although it would be a little difficult to explain how a superweapon suddenly appeared and destroyed a bunch of powerful enemy warships, Ves hoped that the mechers wouldn't pay too much attention considering that the aliens suffered all of the damage.

However, that was merely an option of last resort. It was best if Ves did not use up these valuable strategic weapons in this battle. He could think of much better uses for these taboo armaments!

Chapter 5110 Under Pressure Again

Once the Spirit of Bentheim temporarily unloaded much of the non-essential assets and personnel that could be transferred away on short notice, a warp bubble began to form around her hull.

The upgraded factory ship finally had the opportunity to flex one of her superdrives for the first time the Red Association handed her back to the Larkinson Clan!

A slightly tense moment ensued as the space around the Spirit of Bentheim began to warp and distort. This produced all kinds of distortions that made it a bit more difficult to observe the outside reality.

The sensor systems of the Spirit of Bentheim struggled to maintain a clear view of the immediate environment.

However, even the best form of compensation could not make up for the fact that once the factory ship began to approach or exceed the speed of light relative to the central star, it became a lot harder to observe immediate changes happening in front.

This was why a starship equipped with a warp drive or a superdrive was never simple.

Without the corresponding support systems, it became far too easy for such ships to run blindly into problem areas or fail to disengage the warp drive in time to prevent catastrophic collisions!

It just so happened that the native aliens of the Red Ocean refined their usage of warp drives over many years. Humanity easily copied their best practices and used that to develop solutions that matched or in a few cases exceeded the performance of alien tech!

"This is quite exciting." Ves remarked as his flagship separated from the main fleet.

He felt a lot more vulnerable now that he could no longer count on the immediate assistance of tens of thousands of mechs as well as two extremely powerful standard mechs.

His current state reminded him of the times where he got trapped on various planets and could only count on a limited amount of protection around him. Although he hated those challenging ordeals, he couldn't help but feel nostalgic for them as well.

Whenever he could no longer count on quantity and excellent preparation to roll over his adversaries, he always became stimulated to develop a fantastic new solution that enabled the few forces left under his command to exert greater power!

This was part of the reason why he insisted on accompanying the Spirit of Bentheim on her special mission.

He thrived under pressure. It kept him on his toes and prevented him from clinging too much on his existing design solutions. Pressure also made him feel younger and more active, which had a great effect on mech designers as they aged!

Ves had met many different mech designers throughout his career, and he noticed that the more successful ones always managed to avoid stagnation by developing strong obsessions and pursuing greater challenges.

Although his method of stimulating his potential was a lot more extreme than other mech designers, the results he attained so far made it all worth it in the end!

This time, Ves was determined to find a way to overcome the greatest challenge when it came to fighting against alien warships.

"Those damn transphasic energy shields are too good at increasing the difficulty of taking down those powerful ships." Ves frowned. "While we are already working on specific counters against transphasic energy shields, there has to be other ways to counter this effective form of defense."

He already came up with a few ideas on how he might possibly tip the scales in his favor during the upcoming confrontation.

The problem was that he was woefully short on time at the moment. He needed weeks or months in order to complete more comprehensive undertakings such as upgrading the Transcendent Punisher to the long-awaited Mark III edition of this signature mech model.

Even a relatively quick and easy upgrade such as replacing the old luminar crystal cannons with transphasic cannons took an awful lot of time and work.

As an individual mech designer, Ves knew his limits. The best way he could use his expertise and abilities to good use was to perform a substantial upgrade to a few individual mechs.

"I should pay another visit to Saintess Ulrika Vraken." He immediately decided. "I only made a quick pass on her Macharia Execelsia a short time ago. Her ace mech can penetrate through transphasic defenses a lot more effectively now, but there should still be room for improvement."

The Hex Federation originally agreed to dispatch their ace pilots and ace mechs to the Golden Skull Alliance on rotation for the express purpose of receiving his unique upgrades.

It was an extremely rare privilege for a Senior Mech Designer to be able to get into contact with an ace mech, let alone receive nearly absolute free rein on changing it according to his liking!

Ves just didn't have the time to fully enjoy this rare and precious benefit due to his busy workload.

"I'm always short on time." Ves shook his head.

A part of him even contemplated whether it would be a good idea to make another incarnation of himself again. This was one of the only effective ways he could think of that could quickly increase his productivity and get a lot more work done in the same time interval.

A substantial amount of time had already passed since he created Veronica. After that, he went through a mystical sublimation and successfully advanced to Senior Mech Designer. His Spirituality became stronger than ever!

"I should think about this later."

He still had a job to do. Aside from finding ways to quickly improve the performance of the Macharia Exelsia, he also tried to see if he could upgrade one of the Larkinson expert mechs that were taking part in this wild operation.

"The Amaranto already has the Instrument of Doom, so she is good on this front. The Minerva's firepower is a little weak, but Commander Casella Ingvar always invests her power onto her subordinates, so it is fine. The Promethea packs a decent punch with the help of Venerable Isobel Kotin's explosive method, but their synergy clearly has a lot of room for improvement. The Star Dancer Mark II is too weak and outdated. Only a full upgrade can make my brother-in-law more relevant again. As for the Everchanger..."

Ves was not lacking for ideas on how he could optimize and fine-tune the Everchanger's performance. The expert hero mech was so flexible and pliable in his hands that he could use his prized work as a testbed for all sorts of whacky ideas!

As much as he wanted to head to his favorite mech and tinker with it all day, he needed to be more economical with his time.

"I've already handed over the upgraded Gray Lotus to Everchanger, so his firepower should be sufficient for the time being."

After a brief consideration, he decided to spend a little time with the Promethea as well.

He had good reasons for this selection. Ves hadn't any time on upgrading the Promethea aside from granting it access to Ascension Paths.

Venerable Isobel Kotin also happened to be the only other expert pilot aside from Venerable Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson who mastered a mystical attack method.

Given Tusa's increasing proficiency in borrowing the power of heaven and earth to enhance his shadow techniques, Isobel should be capable of doing the same!

In the Age of Dawn, any fighter who had access to any mystical cultivation or fighting method enjoyed a clear advantage to those who had always been groping around by themselves!

Ves called up the location of the Promethea and immediately marched over to the hangar bay where the expert rifleman mech was being prepared for battle.

He stopped for a moment and watched with satisfaction as one of his best maintenance crews meticulously cleaned and tuned her parts.

"Isobel!"

"Sir? What are you doing here?" The female expert pilot asked as she turned around.

Venerable Isobel wore a custom piloting suit that offered a high degree of protection against all kinds of hazards.

Strangely enough, she hardly looked like she was about to enter into a difficult and dangerous encounter against multiple alien warships!

Her self-control was a lot better than many of the other expert pilots under his command. Her fiery side only truly came out during the heat of battle.

"I came here to see whether I can apply quick modifications or upgrades to improve your performance in the upcoming battle. We need all of the firepower that we can get." Ves frankly said. "How well have you mastered the Detonation Code I gifted you a while ago? Have you found a way to increase the effective damage that you can deal against transphasic energy shields?"

The female expert pilot let out a sigh. "No. Not really. Don't get me wrong, sir. The Detonation Code is really useful. I have come to understand the actual meaning of a lot of the strange descriptions stuffed inside my head. I have already begun to amplify the explosions that I can produce with my expert mech by fueling them with E energy radiation. It is just..."

"What is the matter, Isobel?" He softly asked in concern.

"The more time and effort I spend on the Detonation Code, the less I spend on honing my abilities with fire." She said. "I feel increasingly more that I am turning into another kind of pilot. I am not sure I like this change, sir. I don't want the techniques supplied by the Detonation Code to become more than stopgap solutions for me. I would much rather figure out how I can make use of my original talent and strengths to burn those annoying transphasic energy shields instead."

Her misgivings sounded a bit familiar to Ves. Venerable Tusa also issued a similar complaint in the past.

The fact that both recipients of enlightenment fruits suffered from the same problems indicated that Ves needed to be more discerning about handing out mystical methods next time!

The cultivation methods and techniques had to match the traits of their recipients.

Ves thought for a moment. "I think you are right about your doubts. There is no need for expert pilots such as yourself to contort yourselves into becoming someone else. The Detonation Code is definitely powerful, but if you find that its philosophy and techniques goes against your preferred fighting style, then feel free to deviate from it. Have you attempted to adapt its theories and techniques to enhance your non-explosive attacks?"

"I have, but it is difficult." Isobel grimaced. "The Detonation Code works on very specific principles. It is meant to produce attacks that are immediate and violent. That goes against what I actually want to produce with my attacks. I want to set fires that don't release all of their energies in an instant. Instead, I want them to converse their power and quietly burn whatever they touch in order to progressively feed the flames until I can produce a giant conflagration that can engulf an entire starship!"

Ves could feel the heat of her desire as Venerable Isobel clearly expressed one of her cherished ideals!

Even though he was sure that the Detonation Code contained a number of impressive techniques that could produce results that were just as impressive, they just did not excite the expert pilot as much as setting fire to the largest possible targets!

Ves began to think He recalled all of the knowledge that he recently obtained from the Beginner Five Elements Spells Enlightenment Fruit.

Could he adapt one of the simple 'fire spells' he learned into a brand-new combat technique that Venerable Isobel could readily apply in battle?

It might be possible. Venerable Isobel was not unfamiliar with mystical methods. Learning the Detonation Code granted her a basic foundation in this kind of stuff. She could rely on her existing proficiency in the fighting methods of the Alfari Corps to quickly learn a fire-based technique that she could channel through the Promethea!

Ves just had to figure out how to make this happen in a handful of hours.