

The Mech 5111

Chapter 5111 Unlock Her Fire

Ves and Venerable Isobel Kotin walked closer to the Promethea at this time.

The former briefly recalled the design choices he made when he developed the black-and-purpose expert rifleman mech.

He was quite proud with how the Promethea ended up. She might not be as flashy as masterwork expert mechs such as the Everchanger and the Phobos, but the expert rifleman mech comfortably occupied her own niche in the Larkinson Army.

If the Age of Mechs continued to progress like everyone expected it to, then the Promethea would have been able to excel without question!

Ves felt a lot of regret for the fact that his original projections and expectations for this creation failed to match the actual reality.

How could he have known at the time that the Promethea would no longer be able to use her Ignitron rifle to set fire on unshielded or lightly shielded human starships anymore?

Unlike human vessels which mostly lacked transphasic protection due to the extreme scarcity of phasewater, seemingly every alien warship was equipped with a collection of powerful transphasic shield generators!

Even the weaker and less advanced alien races such as the wheednars and the yurzens were also able to outfit their warships with this powerful form of protection.

This disparity illustrated the difference between the two sides. Humans were still newcomers to the Red Ocean. They only controlled a relatively modest portion of its galactic rim.

In contrast, the native aliens occupied the vast majority of phasewater-endowed territories for many millennia! Even a minor race would be able to construct a lot of decent warships by relying on long and steady accumulation!

This pattern practically ensured that as long as red humanity and the native aliens remained at war, the Larkinson Clan would have to fight against many more warships protected by transphasic energy shields!

Ves grew even more determined to enhance the Promethea's performance against this difficult enemy type!

He wanted this older creation of his to live up to expectations he set when he initially designed this fire-based machine!

He did not want the Promethea to constantly play second fiddle to the Amaranto. Both of them were expert mechs, and while only one of them was a masterwork, that did not excuse their unusually wide divergence in performance!

Ves examined the Promethea with his spiritual senses. Her growth and evolution had not progressed too far, as evidenced by her 4 Ascension Runes.

This was understandable. The machine was a lot younger than the Amaranto and participated in considerably fewer battles. She also started out as a second order living mech and had to spend a lot of time with Venerable Isobel Kotin to evolve into a third order living mech.

The Promethea currently had access to two Ascension Paths.

The Path of the Metal Eater was derived from Zeigra. It took advantage of the aggressive design spirit's original talent for corroding metal and increased the upper boundary of the Promethea's ability to burn metal with her flames.

Ves grew more confident in Venerable Isobel Kotin and the Promethea's ability to gradually burn the toughest first-class alloys!

However, the greatest shortcoming of this Ascension Path was that it was only effective against armor-based defenses. It did not provide any clear enhancements against energy-based defenses.

The Path of the Illuminator was derived from the Illustrious One. It strengthened the Promethea's more direct energy attacks and paired fairly well with the Detonation Code.

If the expert rifleman mech continued to progress further into this Ascension Path, then the Promethea would eventually be able to draw out the greater potential of energy attacks and luminar crystal weapons!

Ves originally set up both of these Ascension Paths together with the design spirits to go hand-in-hand with each other, but perhaps that might not be the best for Venerable Isobel's development.

There was no quick and easy way for the Promethea to make use of a third Ascension Path that could enable her to counter transphasic energy shields.

There was no obvious source for one aside from the Phase King, but doing so would change the fundamental spiritual makeup of the expert rifleman mech.

The combination of the Illustrious One and Zeigra fit the Promethea best from a practical and conceptual perspective.

After learning about the importance of sticking to strongly defined artistic conceptions in cultivation science, Ves found it even more important to exhibit restraint when it came to matching mechs with design spirits!

If Ves couldn't improve the Promethea's performance through Ascension Paths, then maybe he should look elsewhere.

He turned towards Venerable Isobel. "How are you doing with your companion spirit?"

The woman smiled in delight. "Kiroshi is fun to have around. I also found her to be useful in helping me resonate more with specific parts of my mech. I have found that she is especially good at increasing the power of the Promethea's flamethrower. It's a shame that it's only effective at shorter ranges."

Her companion spirit popped out of her head as she talked. The purple cat shared a surprising degree of resemblance to Blinky!

"Ya! Ya!"

Their spiritual natures were substantially different, though. Whereas Blinky embodied energy itself, Kiroshi was a full reflection of Venerable Isobel's fire domain.

Kiroshi actually reminded him of Emma!

"Have you been able to use Kiroshi to strengthen the effectiveness of your long-ranged energy attacks?" Ves questioned.

"I've tried to, but it's hard." She responded. "I tried to do what you have suggested and go beyond the basic trick of increasing my resonance with the Ignitron rifle, but... I'm not sure if it is even possible to attach Kiroshi to the energy beams released by the weapons. No matter which attack phase crystal I employ, none of the beams have any 'substance' that Kiroshi can attach herself to. The only way I can do what you have told me is to switch to a kinetic weapon or throw an incendiary grenade."

Ves looked disappointed. He hoped that Venerable Isobel Kotin would be able to use Kiroshi in the same manner as how Irene Mox made use of Emma, but their circumstances were not the same.

He still did not give up on this method of attack enhancement. He strongly believed that he and Isobel just needed to figure out the right approach to turn Kiroshi into an indispensable addition to the Promethea.

As Ves gained a better understanding of Kiroshi's traits by listening to Isobel and examining the burning purple cat, he began to form different ideas.

He briefly switched his gaze over to the Promethea. The third order expert mech was quietly cultivating the Greater Larkinson Metal Guardian Mantra in her own way.

The invisible energy vortex that surrounded her giant frame predominantly attracted metal energies, but also sneaked in a bit of fire energies as well.

That fire energy was crucial as they not only strengthened the Promethea's fire domain, but also granted her the ability to draw upon ambient fire energy to amplify all of her burning attacks in combat.

It would have been better if the cultivation method put a lot more emphasis on the fire element as opposed to leaning hard on the metal element, but that was not an option at the moment.

Ves had to work with what he got. How could he enhance the Promethea's burning ability if the expert mech didn't know how to effectively absorb large quantities of fire energy?

"Wait a second."

He turned back to the female purple cat that was playfully brushing against Isobel's face.

The Promethea may be bad at leveraging the ambient fire energies in the environment, but the opposite was the case for Kiroshi!

As a companion spirit that fully inherited her principal's fire domain, Kiroshi had practically turned into the spiritual embodiment of fire!

His eyes lit up as he began to come up with a new model of cultivation.

The Promethea herself was not cultivating at her full effectiveness due to the lack of fit between her own nature and the inadequate cultivation method developed by Ves.

However, if Venerable Isobel or more precisely Kiroshi got added to the picture, Ves believed that he could figure out a solution to effectively transfer the companion spirit's strengths to the expert mech on a temporary basis!

"It would be like dual cultivation!" He realized!

The Eternal Love Dual Cultivation Method taught him the basic framework of cultivation through cooperation.

It did not offer him a lot of useful references though as it was explicitly designed to work with two extremely similar practitioners.

The Promethea and Kiroshi were far too divergent from each other to make that work.

Nonetheless, Ves could borrow a few tools from the Eternal Love Dual Cultivation Method and combine it with bits and pieces from all of the other cultivation science he learned!

He did not have time to develop an entirely new cultivation method that fully enabled the companion spirits of mech pilots to synergize with their mechs at a more profound level, but now that he stumbled upon the right idea, he would definitely flesh it out after the current operation came to an end!

For now, he needed to lower his ambitions and create a more practical combat technique.

"I have an idea, Isobel. Would you care to listen?"

"Always, sir."

He briefly explained his general thoughts. Even if Isobel was not proficient in cultivation herself, she was still able to follow his simple description.

She looked uncertain, and so did her companion spirit.

"Ya?"

"What you say makes sense, but it's not enough to make my mech stronger, sir. Trying to give the Promethea access to Kiroshi's power sounds like trying to set a piece of metal on fire."

Ves smiled at her. "That is why we need to come up with a more specific fighting application that essentially tells Kiroshi and the Promethea how to channel both of their powers in combination. Hm, let's go somewhere more private. I want to show you a trick."

The mech designer led the expert pilot to a nearby work office that just happened to be empty.

Once Ves locked the hatch and activated his jamming suite, he raised his armored hand and unleashed a small firebolt that splashed against the metal bulkhead!

Bang!

"What?! How?!"

Venerable Isobel Kotin initially reacted with alarm when she thought that they were under attack.

Once she processed what she had just witnessed, she grew shocked when she realized what actually happened.

The patriarch summoned a small amount of fire out of nothing and actually managed to leave a slight scorch mark on the bulkhead!

Venerable Isobel was close enough to know that Ves managed to do this by leveraging the E energy radiation in the air as opposed to employing a secret weapons module built into his combat armor.

"That... is a spell." Ves replied with a smile. "Don't ask me where I learned it. The short story is that I am a bit ahead of most people when it comes to figuring out ways to draw power from exotic radiation. That is how I have been able to give your Promethea and all of our other living mechs a way to strengthen themselves. Right now, I want to teach Kiroshi how to perform this spell. I don't have time to teach all of the theories and techniques required to perform it properly, but I think I can make your companion spirit perform a bootleg version of this spell if I quickly teach her the bare minimum."

"Ya yaaaa?"

Kiroshi looked absolutely befuddled.

"You're teaching my companion spirit as opposed to myself?" Isobel doubtfully asked.

"That is correct. You are an expert pilot, Isobel. If my understanding is correct, you won't be able to pull off tricks like this by yourself. You will only be able perform a similar ability when you interface with your Promethea, but the underlying nature will be different because the power you express will largely be a manifestation of your willpower and the true resonance between you and your battle partner. What I am looking for is to unlock Kiroshi's own power. Her nature is different from yours. She is much more suited to absorb and leverage the ambient fire energies in the environment."

"I... don't quite understand..."

"That's okay. Let's begin the lesson. If my suspicions are correct, it won't take too long before Kiroshi can spit her own fireball."

Chapter 5112 Fire Talent

Ves exchanged 250 Ascension Points to get his hands on the enlightenment fruit that imparted the entire contents of the Beginner Five Elements Spells Manual.

He spent a hefty amount of points, but got a lot of value in return!

It was impossible for other people to quickly master all of the knowledge and techniques contained within this expansive manual.

Not only did they have to spend a lot of time and effort on studying a lot of new and confusing theories, their learning efficiency was also affected by their own elemental affinities!

Ves was able to perform the beginner spells for all five elements because this benefit was included in the package.

Other people did not have this benefit. Short of being able to pluck an identical enlightenment fruit from the Tree of Possibilities, they could only start learning the spells as long as they possessed a higher-than-average talent or comprehension for a single element.

Ves himself would probably be able to learn a few metal and wood spells if he had to study the manual the old-fashioned way.

It would be a lot harder for him to get started with wielding the power of fire, though perhaps his incarnation Vulcan might have better luck.

All of this showed that talent and affinities were essential for cultivators to do anything related to a specific spiritual energy attribute!

This was also one of the biggest reasons why the Five Scrolls Compact had never been able to produce too many powerful True Gods or cultivators who had gotten close to this height.

Talent and affinity not only determined whether a human could get started in an elemental cultivation method, but also had a large influence on how far they would be able to go by relying on their own efforts!

While cultivators had come up with many ways to improve one's affinity to a specific element over the ages, they always had to pay a hefty price to improve their own conditions.

One of the advantages of the mech designer and mech pilot cultivation methods was that they both enabled their 'practitioners' to develop their affinities as they did their jobs.

The more they did anything meaningful like designing a mech or winning a difficult battle, their valuable experiences and realizations would automatically feed back to their spiritualities, causing them to develop in a comprehensive manner.

It was how a previously average human like Venerable Isobel Kotin managed to develop such a strong fire domain.

She hadn't acquired her remarkable affinity towards fire naturally, but earned it through focused effort while piloting rifleman mechs.

If she had made different choices in her life and settled for piloting swordsman mechs instead, then the odds were high that she would acquire a strong metal-related domain instead!

Ves was not in the presence of Isobel the swordsman mech specialist.

He was in the presence of Isobel the pyromaniac.

Compared to other ranged mech specialists such as Venerable Davia Stark and Venerable Brutus Wodin, there was no one who invested so much of herself in making her flames burn hotter than Isobel!

Her unusual mentality and approach may have given her mixed results so far, but when it came to learning a basic technique on how to leverage her acquired closeness to fire to perform an actual flame spell, the fire domain that she worked hard for granted her an enormous boost at this time!

Technically, Ves was trying to teach Kiroshi on how to cast a simple firebolt, but the companion spirit was Isobel's mirror, so they both put their mind on absorbing his teachings.

Ves had already noticed that Isobel was a little smarter and more academically gifted than other expert pilots. Now that she essentially had two separate but related minds to do her thinking, she picked up on his theories a lot faster than he initially expected!

A lot of expert pilots came across as ignorant louts that only knew how to fight. This was actually a mistaken impression as the better pilots always had to learn a bit of science in order to fight properly in different environments.

Most pilots simply didn't like it when they were forced to sit in class benches and learn boring textbook theories. They would much rather hop into a cockpit and spend their time on practical lessons!

Ves was glad that Isobel Kotin possessed a much higher tolerance for boring theoretical lessons. It was essential for him to impart a basic theoretical framework to Isobel before he actually explained how to execute a specific fire spell.

Two hours of rapid tutoring went by before he began to give Kiroshi specific instructions on how to let loose a ball of fire.

Ves could see and feel the flaming companion spirit exercising her control over fire energy. The speed in which she picked up and applied his lessons was quite frightening!

Eventually, Kiroshi managed to produce an actual result!

"Ya... YAAAAAA!"

A surprisingly large and uncontrolled spray of purple flames swept a part of the office with a huge amount of heat!

If not for the fact that Ves manually disabled the fire detection systems in this space, alarms would have already started to ring due to this sudden release of heat and light!

"Yaaaa!"

Kiroshi reacted with fear and embarrassment at the fact that she unleashed a large spray of purple fire from her breath!

"I apologize, sir! I didn't mean to make it so big!" Venerable Isobel immediately spoke. "I don't know why my companion spirit lost control."

Ves swept his arm at her. "It's okay. It wasn't directed towards me. Even if an accident occurs, a little fire won't be able to harm me through my Unending Regalia. I am much more glad about the fact that your companion spirit successfully harnessed the power of fire energy and converted it into an actual physical manifestation of fire. This is a huge deal, Isobel. It is always the hardest to get started. Once you have successfully converted E energy radiation into another form of energy and matter, you will be able to repeat this feat a lot easier in your subsequent attempts. The fact that Kiroshi has managed to complete this step so quickly means that his fire affinity is... exceptional."

It shouldn't be a surprise that this was the case. Companion spirits were much more spiritually pure compared to their associated humans.

Not only that, but their nature as pure energy-based lifeforms allowed them to manipulate spiritual energy with much less barriers in the way.

They were pretty much natural gifted qi cultivators!

Kiroshi also benefited a lot from Venerable Isobel's existing growth and development. Despite her relatively young age, she did not truly start to grow from scratch, but had split off from an actual expert pilot!

This illustrated the incredible value that companion spirits could add to a mech pilot.

As willpower cultivators, mech pilots ordinarily weren't supposed to be able to launch firebolts or firesprays out of nowhere as if they were wizards.

Abilities like these were usually associated with qi cultivation.

Yet by giving mech pilots such as Isobel an 'alternate self' in the form of a companion spirit, they could potentially enjoy the best of both worlds!

"Ya ya?"

"What now, sir?" Isobel asked.

"Kiroshi is really talented and gifted in this kind of stuff. I would really love to teach you more or give you an entire textbook on fire spells, but we don't have the time right now. What we need to do is improve your companion spirit's control. Power is not the issue here. Try to make it so that Kiroshi doesn't rely entirely on her high fire affinity to convert spiritual energy into actual fire."

The companion spirit attempted to do as instructed and focus more on finesse rather than raw power.

It was difficult because she was practically filled with fire. Just unleashing a bit of it always produced a noticeable spray of flame!

A part of Ves actually felt a little jealous at Kiroshi for being able to produce such powerful spells.

Then he realized that Blinky practically had access to his own internal universe that was filled with a lot of different spiritual energy attributes!

Even though Blinky did not share Kiroshi's exceptional connection to the fire element, the Star Cat could rely on the massive quantity of fire energy deposited in the Blinkyverse to brute force any spell!

Anyway, this was not about Blinky right now. What mattered was that Venerable Isobel and Kiroshi thoroughly gained a grasp on how to attract and convert exotic radiation into a specific and intended result.

It became a lot harder for Kiroshi to exert proper control over her energies than to tap them in the first place.

Companion spirit or not, Kiroshi needed to go through a lot of practice and build up her skills over time in order to truly master the techniques that Ves had taught.

This was okay. Ves could proceed with the next step in his plan so long as Kiroshi was barely able to perform the complete firebolt technique without causing it to break down in an uncontrolled spray of purple flames!

"Yaaaaa!"

When Kiroshi opened her maw yet again, a wobbly and overly powerful ball of fire launched from her burning body and splashed against the bulkhead!

This time, the flames started to stick.

This was another breakthrough for Isobel and Kiroshi!

Ves could see that the companion spirit not only managed to retain her connection to the flames she had just unleashed, but actively nurtured and controlled them to eat away the metal alloys of the bulkhead and use that to propagate the fire further!

Though Kiroshi's ability to do so was not on the same scale as the Promethea, it was already impressive that she was able to do this in the first place!

"What now, sir?" Venerable Isobel asked in a more excited tone now that her companion spirit had actually learned a technique that turned into more than just a mascot! "Should I enter the cockpit of the Promethea and see if I can replicate this technique on a larger and more powerful scale?"

Ves shook his head. "Don't be in such a hurry. We need to complete two more steps. First, I need to modify and tinker with the Ignitron rifle so that this luminar crystal weapon can do a better job at channeling Kiroshi. Secondly, I need you to perform a variation of this firebolt technique. The problem is that I haven't really learned or mastered it myself, so you will need to figure it out yourself."

That sounded rather vague to Isobel.

"What do you require from us, sir?"

"Instead of making Kiroshi launch a firebolt out of her mouth, why don't you try and turn her into a fireball and launch her forward instead? If I am right, you should be able to propel her far away enough that you can actually take advantage of this in a space battle." "What?" Isobel reacted with surprise. "Is that even possible?"

"I've seen it happen before, though in a slightly different way. It is truly possible. You just need to master the trick of turning Kiroshi into a flaming projectile. The goal is to make it so that once your Promethea launches a shot, your companion spirit can hitchhike on the energy beam and reach the target. As long as you can successfully deliver Kiroshi to the enemy, I'm sure that she can do a lot to compound the damage with her flames."

The imagery of this scenario enthralled Venerable Isobel. The air around her seemed to grow hotter as she developed a strong desire and will to make this happen!

"I will work on this right away, sir! I will not let you down and do my best to figure this out before our battle commences."

"Good." Ves smiled in satisfaction. "I will leave you here to practice on your own. Take care not to burn down our entire flagship. I will call down a few fire extinguishing bots as an added form of insurance."

He knew he could rely on the reality distorting properties and the pig-headed stubbornness associated with expert pilots to enable Isobel to produce a result.

She might not be able to meet all of his requirements, but she should at least be able to get enough work done to strengthen her hand in the upcoming operation!

Chapter 5113 A New Luminar Crystal Theory

Ves left Venerable Isobel Koton to her own devices.

He possessed full confidence in her ability to quickly master the power of fire.

Out of all of the people in his orbit, there was no one who possessed an affinity for fire as high as hers! The strength and domain that she developed over the course of her piloting career had all been invested into deepening her fundamental closeness and compatibility towards fire.

Ves found this to be a fascinating process. Mech pilots essentially progressed through willpower cultivation by coming up with all kinds of self-fulfilling properties centered around themselves.

The sheer variety of mech pilots in human civilization led to an enormous diversity of high-ranking mech pilots.

There were pilots who liked to blow stuff up a lot, so the Destroyer of Worlds became really good at producing the most powerful explosions.

Ketis wanted to gain the power to cut everything, so Sharpie helped her enhance the sharpness of her blades to an extraordinary level.

Commander Casella Ingvar wanted to command and control her subordinates to a precise degree, so her ability to Commandeer mechs and mech pilots enabled her to direct them as if they were her own chess pieces.

All of these advantages and more came to life without the mech pilots knowing anything about cultivation science.

While the Kingdom of Mechs played a huge role making this process automatic, the general premise behind willpower cultivation was to turn the impossible into reality just by wishing for it really hard!

The power of human consciousness was truly impressive. It might not amount to much in normal times, but whenever a warrior was pushed to his limit, there was a small but realistic enough chance for that individual to break through that line and reach into an extraordinary domain!

Something like this was common in many cultivation methods, but it was especially prominent in willpower cultivation!

This was the key reason why talent and affinity never became a hindrance to mech pilots.

No matter how poor their starting points may be, as long as they piloted a decent mech and possessed adequate spiritual potential, they could always rely on their strong willpower to reshape their own image of themselves to better fit their ideals!

"It's a pity that there aren't many mech pilots under my command that are so strongly oriented towards one of the five elements." Ves sighed.

Mech pilots generally picked whatever they liked as the focus of their own power and domain. There was a huge variety of concepts for them to channel their power, and the five elements only consisted of a tiny proportion of all of the viable possibilities.

From Patriarch Reginald Cross' desire to dominate on the battlefield to Venerable Joshua's compassion for life, high-ranking mech pilots could turn any abstract concept into a form of combat power!

Not many mech pilots settled for excelling in concepts as basic as one of the five elements.

"Maybe I should change that for the Larkinson Army." Ves considered.

He briefly thought about founding a new mech legion that focused entirely on a single element.

The mech pilots would all be picked for their preference for an element and start to pilot mechs that were themed entirely around the dominant element.

In the long run, this would lead to the breakthroughs of many mech pilots who excelled in the same element. This not only made it easier to design similar expert mechs that all possessed the same kind of special features, but also enabled the expert pilots to learn from each other and combine their elemental abilities on the battlefield!

Ves quickly shook his head after he imagined the creation of such a powerful and distinctive mech legion.

"Our clan already has enough legions for the time being. We don't have the carrier capacity to take on thousands more mechs. Maybe I'll reconsider this idea in the future."

He and his clan did not have the time and resources to invest in such an endeavor. Ves needed to restrain his dreams and focus on his immediate situation.

There was a good reason why Ves contemplated the nature of a high-ranking mech pilot's power as he approached the Promethea.

After getting paired with Venerable Isobel Kotin, the living mech had been subjected to willpower baptism for an extended period of time.

Of course, the willpower baptism of a low-tier expert pilot did not amount to much, but a little transformation was better than nothing!

As Ves inspected the living mech with his spiritual senses, he could sense the growing imprint and influence that Venerable Isobel left onto the Promethea.

If the pair continued to work and fight together for a couple of decades, the Promethea truly had the potential to subtly evolve into an expert mech that was able to channel Isobel's power a lot more efficiently than normal!

The difference between a Promethea that had been partnering up with Isobel for decades and another copy of the Promethea that had just rolled off a production line would be massive!

Ves directed his attention towards the Ignitron Luminar Crystal Assault Rifle that he had developed specifically for the Promethea.

This was the key piece of equipment that he wanted to improve for the upcoming operation.

He did not have much time to do his work, so he had to find a way to quickly elevate the Promethea's combat effectiveness.

"This is quite an old weapon." He muttered.

The original version of the Ignitron was not transphasic. This was because he designed and built the Promethea in a time period where the Design Department was reluctantly able to apply third party transphasic armor systems to their high-end mechs, but could not turn to anyone to supply the corresponding transphasic luminar crystal weapons.

Ves had to do his own research in this area. He eventually managed to develop a working implementation of it, and used what he learned to develop the Instrument of Doom for the Amaranto, among other things.

He had yet to provide the same service for the Promethea because he originally intended to upgrade the entire Promethea in a single major revision.

"I can't wait that long anymore."

It might not be possible for Ves to transform the Ignitron into a transphasic luminar crystal weapon in a short amount of time, but he came up with a different idea on how to enhance its power!

He took control of a handful of heavy-duty bots and used them to take out and bring the Ignitron rifle to an adjacent workshop.

Though the workshop next to the hangar bay was not as well-equipped as his personal one, Ves did not intend to make heavy use of the equipment at hand.

Ves only needed a quiet place that was devoid of people in order to engage in spiritual engineering.

He predicted that what he was about to do next might produce a lot of disruptions.

"Blinky, Come out. I will need to rely on your power a lot this time."

"Mrow."

A different purple spiritual cat emerged at this time!

Though Blinky and Kiroshi practically looked like siblings, the former was considerably older and more developed.

Having cultivated the Internal Universe Method Version 3.0 for a time, the reflection of the Blinkyverse on his fur had grown a little more complex.

It displayed a larger landmass that was already in the process of turning into a round planet. A relatively powerful point of light as well as smaller dots of light formed around this developing globe.

"What do you think, Blinky? Are you up to the task?"

"Mrow..."

"I know it will cost you a lot, but all you will be spending is a renewable resource. Just focus on absorbing a lot of fire energy from the environment if you are so afraid of putting the Blinkyverse out of balance."

"Mrow mrow."

Ves came up with a relatively simple plan at this time.

What Ves envisioned for Venerable Isobel and Kiroshi was to enable them to leverage prime resonance to produce a powerful effect in battle.

More specifically, he wanted to replicate the way in which Venerable Irene Mox was able to attach Emma to a projectile and launch both of them at the enemy at the same time!

This was not easy considering that the circumstances were entirely different at this time.

Ves believed that he could still make it happen so long as he satisfied a number of conditions.

As long as Kiroshi was able to turn herself into a flaming and self-sustaining projectile, at least one condition would be satisfied.

However, if the Promethea was not able to properly make use of prime resonance in a targeted manner, it would be useless even if Kiroshi learned a new trick!

What Ves needed to do was to alter the Ignitron into a weapon that could effectively deliver Kiroshi to the enemy.

Yet how could he do that if the luminar crystal rifle fired continuous energy beams in short bursts as opposed to launching a physical projectile?

The answer he came up with was to incorporate a hyper material into the weapon and turn it into a prime weapon!

Another problem emerged when he settled on this decision.

Where could he get a sufficient amount of fire sympathetic material?

The T Institute only started to cultivate prime materials a short time ago, and Ves only had a batch of weak and fragile D-i in storage at the moment. This was completely useless to his current plan!

This was why Ves came up with an alternate idea.

It was based on an assumption that he only recently came up with after connecting a lot of different theories and observations together.

"Luminar crystal technology was originally developed in a time where the Milky Way was not yet broken." He speculated. "At the time, the luminar race was not only gifted in spirituality, but also developed their crystal technology to work the power of heaven that used to be abundant at the time."

If this guess was true, then that essentially meant that luminar crystals may essentially function as an artificial hyper material!

This was a shocking conclusion if it happened to be true!

Ves felt this idea made a lot of sense even if he lacked strong proof to back up this amazing assertion. He just thought that it made a lot of sense given what he learned about the luminar race and spending a lot of years researching and applying luminar crystal technology to his mech designs.

Though Ves had yet to see any existing luminar crystals undergoing any transformations so far, he had a faint guess that the intensity of E energy radiation was not high enough to meet the required threshold.

If luminar crystals were fairly powerful and high-end to the luminar race, then it may be a given that they could not be produced so easily!

"It does not cost that much to verify this new theory." Ves smirked. "At most, I'll only waste a bunch of time."

He did not delay any further and resumed his operations.

As the Ignitron's internal components became exposed to his sight, he thought about commanding a bot to take out one of the six attack phase crystals integrated into the weapon.

"Which one has the greatest relation to the fire element?"

He chose to set aside the positron beam attack phase crystal after a brief period of consideration.

A laser beam could inflict a lot of thermal damage, but its greatest advantage was that it propagated at the speed of light. This was ideal for attaining higher hit rates in long-ranged combat in space.

However, a positron beam consisted of actual antimatter, though at a scale and power that was far below the level of an actual weapon of mass destruction.

Since a positron beam weapon essentially emitted a large amount of positron particles at a distant target, it was a beam that actually possessed mass and substance, even if it was not heavy at all in absolute terms.

However, Ves prized this property because he guessed it would be a lot easier to enable Kiroshi to hitchhike an energy beam when she could attach herself to actual physical particles as opposed to tiny and much less substantial photons!

"Aside from that, a collision between positrons and normal matter releases a lot of energy that mostly comes in the form of heat. This reaction should have an excellent compatibility with the element of fire!"

Once a bot placed the positron beam attack phase crystal in a secure chamber, Ves proceeded with the next and most important step of his experiment.

Blinky slowly flew closer until he stopped next to the luminar crystal.

After a brief pause, the Star Cat slowly opened his maw and began to channel a small fraction of the huge fire energies contained within his Blinkyverse!

This was the essence of Ves' plan!

He wanted to see if he could force a luminar crystal's transformation into a prime material related to the fire attribute by essentially flooding it with energies of the same element!

"Come on, Blinky! I'm relying on you! Just dump out as much fire energy as you can channel!"

"Mrow!"

Chapter 5114 Extremely Low Efficiency

What was the point of creating an entire internal universe that consisted almost entirely of spiritual energy if Ves could not make use of its accumulated resources?

Sure, Blinky's cultivation depended entirely on how extensively he could grow and expand the Blinkyverse, but that did not mean he was prohibited from taking out the energies he absorbed!

The companion spirit just had to be careful not to take out too much at a time. Doing so might weaken the structure and stability of the internal universe.

The Blinkyverse might even collapse in its entirety if it was drained too much!

This was one of the weaknesses of this cultivation method.

Even though Blinky only started to cultivate the Internal Universe Method for a relatively short amount of time, he already absorbed way more E energy radiation from the environment than Ves and Blinky ever harnessed in the past.

However, only a small proportion of the accumulated energies could be spent at a time!

It was like an investment fund that continued to collect money in order to generate more returns by spending it in different ways.

The fund was only able to produce a somewhat consistent return on investment so long as it had enough money and assets in its balance sheet.

Taking out a bit of money would not significantly affect the functioning of the investment fund, but taking away much of it would likely cause it to collapse or wind down!

The Blinkyverse was equivalent to an investment fund from his perspective. The main difference was that a normal fund worked with money, while Blinky's internal universe worked with spiritual energy!

The analogy became a bit more complicated when the Blinkyverse actually contained spiritual energies that aligned with many different attributes.

Ves only needed to draw upon the fire energies stored in the Blinkyverse, but he could not take too much of it, or else the internal universe would lose all source of light and heat!

"I don't want to create a dark and cold universe. Life can hardly exist in such a dreary place." He said to Blinky. "Don't go overboard and do your best to control your output. It is not a big deal if this little experiment fails due to an insufficient supply of energy."

"Mrow mrow!"

The Star Cat did not release the floodgates all at once.

Although it looked as if a lot of fire energies spilled out of his Blinkyverse at once, this was far from the companion spirit's current limit.

Seeing that the positron beam attack phase crystal did not show any reaction at this time, Blinky steadily increased the output.

The saturation of fire energies in the immediate environment rose even faster than before!

Ves began to feel a little hotter. Despite the precise climate control systems that regulated the temperature across the Spirit of Bentheim, he couldn't help but feel as if he had suddenly ended up in the middle of a tropical planet!

It was all an illusion for the most part. The spiritual energies that were attributed towards fire quickly spread out and dispersed into the environment without doing anything special.

Even if all of that fire energies could be used to produce powerful attacks when channeled into specific spells or spiritual constructs, they were mostly harmless when left untouched.

This was why Ves did not try to avoid or do anything to take care of the escaped fire energies.

"It's a pity that Blinky can't devour the released energies." He sighed.

This was an inconvenient limitation. When Blinky's was releasing the energies from his Blinkyverse, he could not swallow back the energies before they dispersed out of his reach.

Ves did not care about this problem at the moment. He only cared about whether his current experiment had any chance of producing a successful result.

"C'mon! It has to work! Even if normal luminar crystals don't have hyper material properties, this attack phase crystal is different."

The positron beam attack phase crystal had become exposed to Venerable Isobel Kotin's force of will for a long time. That inevitably generated a lot of subtle changes to its essence, of which one of them was to make it a lot more compatible with the fire element!

This was his backup plan of sorts.

Whether his theory about luminar crystals was true or false, he hoped that Venerable Isobel's persistent influence over the positron beam attack phase crystal could make a difference in this experiment.

Minutes passed by as Blinky continued to release large amounts of fire energies. Ves grew less and less comfortable by the addition of so much illusionary heat, but he stuck around in the hopes of catching any reactions.

"C'mon. This has to work. Don't stop, Blinky!"

"Mroooow!"

The spiritual cat couldn't keep this up forever. The central star of the Blinkyverse had already lost a lot of power and started to dim. The background stars had also grown a lot fainter, with a few distant stars disappearing in their entirety!

As the Blinkyverse grew colder, it became increasingly more unbalanced. Without sufficient sources of heat and light, the internal universe became shakier and less capable of resisting external shocks.

Ves did not want this to happen! If the Blinkyverse turned into a liability, then it just wasn't worth having it around anymore.

"Mroooooow..."

Just as Blinky began to reach a limit, the positron beam attack phase crystal finally started to produce a noticeable reaction!

"It's working, Blinky! Don't stop! You need to keep going for a while! Do your best to maintain the current concentration of fire energies!"

Blinky had channeled so much fire energies that the luminar crystal finally did not remain silent any longer.

Its entire physical structure started to undergo a mysterious and unexplainable transformation that subtly rearranged its inner structure.

Ves could feel that this transformation gradually made it more compatible with the fire element!

Not only that, but he could feel that its structure could also process fire energy and turn it into output that was much more slanted towards producing powerful flames!

Ves had no idea how the transformed crystal exactly worked, but he was sure that its compatibility with Venerable Isobel Kotin had grown!

The reason why he held this thought was because the crystal actually took on a purple shade!

He believed that this was a manifestation of Isobel's strong influence over the object. As the luminar crystal gradually transformed into an artificial hyper material, it became clear to him that its prior association to an expert pilot undoubtedly produced a more specific result!

Ves did not think he would be able to attain the same result if he conducted this experiment on a freshly synthesized luminar crystal.

"I hope this works out better for Venerable Isobel."

The initial transformation was a bit drastic, but the changes began to reach a plateau as it dragged on for minutes.

"Mrow mrow..."

Blinky visibly grew tired as his Blinkyverse began to grow awfully colder than before.

He eventually reached a limit where it became too detrimental for him to keep spitting fire energies. The companion spirit stopped what he was doing.

Now that the supply of fire energies had ceased, the workshop gradually turned to normal as the illusionary heat dispersed.

"Mrowww..."

"Good work, Blinky. You have done your job. You can go back and recuperate now. Try your best to make up for the lost fire energies first. The Blinkyverse must return to balance before you can fully develop it again."

It was important to bring the Blinkyverse back to equilibrium in case he wanted to pull off this move again in the future.

There were many more luminar crystal weapons that he wanted to augment in a similar manner!

However, the Blinkyverse itself was still a bit too small to withstand the huge expenditure of energy.

The biggest problem was that this hyper material production method was too wasteful and inefficient!

Ves loosely estimated that 99.9999 percent of the fire energies released by Blinky did not do anything useful and spilled into space.

Only 0.0001 percent of the output actually went into transforming the luminar crystal into a fire sympathetic material!

There was clearly a lot of room for improvement. As long as Ves developed a more efficient alternative to the crude and rudimentary method employed by Blinky, it was not out of the question

for him to mass produce the sympathetic materials he needed to produce more prime mechs or upgrade his existing ones!

"This is ultimately a much better way to leverage the Blinkyverse to my advantage!"

Ves initially assumed that he would have to wait for Blinky to cultivate all the way to a True God before he could produce large quantities of useful raw materials.

However, if all it took to produce high-quality prime materials was to expose them to a high concentration of spiritual energies, then Ves did not have to wait that long!

"The only issue is Blinky's capacity. He has only completed the first stage of his cultivation method so far, which is far from enough to sustain mass production."

He could only employ this production method on an individual basis, but that was already enough for his current needs.

Once Blinky returned to his head and started to work on solving the deficiency of fire energies in his internal universe, Ves performed a quick examination of the newly transformed luminar crystal.

Though Ves could not make a solid conclusion on whether his theory about luminar crystals was correct, he at least managed to turn the positron beam attack phase crystal into a stronger variant that was more conducive to channeling the power of fire!

Although Ves did not understand much of the physical changes to the crystal, he meticulously recorded it in the faint hope that he could reproduce it in a lab without relying on a flood of fire energies.

Time was short, so he reluctantly suspended his examination when he confirmed that it hadn't changed beyond recognition.

"It should still function as an attack phase crystal more or less."

He quickly put it back into the Ignitron before reassembling the mech rifle.

A short time later, the Promethea reunited with her missing weapon.

The living expert mech immediately sensed a profound change in the Ignitron!

As the Promethea continued to cultivate, both she and Ves noticed that the freshly upgraded weapon began to attract a lot more fire energies than before!

The expert mech could not remain silent after noticing this profound change.

The machine's eyes lit up as her systems powered up a bit. "PROGENITOR. WHAT DID YOU DO TO MY WEAPON?"

Ves replied with a shrug and a sheepish smile. "I don't know myself, actually. You and Isobel will have to explore this by yourselves. If my suspicions are correct, the next time you fire a positron beam at the enemy, it will be much easier to start a wildfire!"

He would have liked to perform a practical test straight away, but this was not possible while the Spirit of Bentheim was engaged in warp travel.

The only way to know whether he succeeded in meaningfully upgrading the Promethea into a stronger prime mech was to witness her performance in the upcoming battle!

Ves had a good feeling about this, though. His design flame burned a little brighter at the prospect of creating yet another way for a mech and a mech pilot to synergize together!

As long as Venerable Isobel was able to maximize the power of Kiroshi through the use of a prime weapon, there was no reason why Ves could apply this new setup to all of his expert mechs!

"The key is energy." He muttered to himself as he reflected on what he had done. "Exotic radiation is a free and ubiquitous source of energy, but it takes a lot of deliberate effort to make use of all of that latent power. None of my mechs have reached their limits in this regard. The best way to strengthen them without actually turning them into proper first-class mechs is to abuse the hell out of prime materials!"

Chapter 5115 The Pilot Who Came Too Late

As Ves glanced at the time, he noticed that he spent a bit more time on upgrading the Promethea than he initially intended.

He did not regret it as he managed to come up with a handful of new discoveries and inventions that had massive implications for his future work!

So long as the Promethea lived up to his high expectations, then that meant he could turn other expert mechs into more effective prime mechs that were much better adapted to the Age of Dawn!

"The best part about all of this is that these prime expert mechs will continue to produce more dramatic effects as their expert pilots grow in power!"

Venerable Isobel Kotin was still a low-tier expert pilot. Many of the other Larkinson expert pilots had barely grown into mid-tier expert pilots.

This meant that each of them still had a lot of room for growth in this aspect!

The only exception was his own grandfather. Venerable Benjamin Larkinson was not lacking in resonance strength, but it would take a long time before he could obtain a proper high-tier expert mech that could fully exert his might!

"Maybe it's a good thing that I haven't completed an expert mech for him yet." Ves suddenly thought. "I can upgrade his Blood Star into a much more effective prime mech from the ground up rather than in an ad-hoc manner like I did with the Promethea."

Ves could have done a lot more to improve the expert rifleman mech if he could do more than upgrade a single attack phase crystal.

He at least wanted to upgrade the Ignitron into a quasi-first-class transphasic luminar crystal weapon!

"It might not be necessary to make the weapon transphasic, though." Ves loosely guessed.

"Venerable Isobel's fighting style does not rely so much on penetrating defenses as that of Venerable Stark."

As Ves worked with different mech pilots and mechs, he gradually understood that it may be better to focus more on reinforcing their existing strengths than to obsess too much over mitigating their weaknesses, especially with regards to prime mechs!

"Let's see whether I can whip up anything comparable for my next mech."

His steps slowed a bit as he entered the smaller and more enclosed bay that held the most powerful mech in the Spirit of Bentheim.

"We meet again, Macharia Excelsia." He softly greeted the ace mech with a smile.

He reminded himself that it was a great honor and privilege to get into contact with such a high-end mech.

As Ves continued to get closer, he noticed that the strategically valuable mech was guarded by a dedicated troop of elite infantry soldiers dispatched by the Vraken Matriarchal Dynasty.

Although these guards probably wouldn't be able to do anything against hostile mechs, they at least signaled how much the dynasty cared about this incomparably powerful asset!

"It is exquisite."

Only the best Master Mech Designers of a state received the honor of designing such a potent machine.

Although Ves prized the Mars a lot more, its technological sophistication was actually inferior to a 'proper' ace mech like the Macharia Excelsia.

It couldn't be helped. The latter was designed as an ace mech with the full backing of the entire military-industrial complex of the Hex Federation.

The Mars on the hand was cobbled together by combining a lot of third party parts and systems. Though Ves and Benedict Cortez put them together in a brilliant fashion to create a fantastic masterwork, that did not change the fact that the mech still suffered from a lack of access to the best and most cutting-edge technologies developed by advanced state-backed R&D institutions.

This was what made it so valuable for Ves to get into close contact with the Macharia Excelsia. The Hexers may be an odd group of people, but their Master Mech Designers followed all of the proper rules when it came to designing an ace mech that their state wanted to depend upon for a long time.

As the only legal equivalent to a superweapon that states and organizations were allowed to possess and use, every single part about the Macharia Excelsia was a technical accomplishment by themselves, but that was not enough to elevate the entire package.

A team of experienced and accomplished Masters carefully put them together and applied their own expertise to elevate its firepower, mobility and defenses.

Although the Master Mech Designers did not possess any particularly unusual specializations that could give the ace mech a special edge like the Mars, it wasn't necessary to make the mech strong.

So long as its core performance in every aspect was good enough, the Macharia Excelsia was fully qualified to duel against other ace mechs!

As Ves continued to inspect the ace mech further, he noticed that its overall configuration was likely based on the urgent need to fight against the ace mechs of the Friday Coalition.

This was evidenced by the configuration of the Hexfire Transphasic Positron Beam Assault Rifle.

Similar to the Ignitron rifle that he just modified a short time ago, the Hexfire rifle was designed to steadily erode the defenses of individually powerful targets.

Its firing rate was quite high, which was helpful in landing hits on fast-moving light mechs.

Its ability to effectively damage slower but tougher targets was significantly worse, but that was not as bad as it sounded.

Ves recalled that Saintess Ulrika Vraken's specialty was her ability to erode the defenses of anything she struck.

This worked best against armor but was also reasonably effective against energy shields.

The issue with that was that the more advanced alien races often employed segmented transphasic energy shields.

Whenever the Macharia Excelsia opened fire on an alien warship, the ace mech was actually damaging a small portion of the total energy shields covering the entire vessel.

All of the effort that Saintess Ulrika put into eroding a single 'scale' ultimately did not affect the rest of an alien warship's defensive coverage!

This meant that the indigenous aliens unintentionally managed to counter the Macharia Excelsia's greatest advantage!

This was quite inconvenient for Ves and the Golden Skull Alliance to say the least.

At least the Macharia Excelsia was armed with a pair of proper high-end transphasic weapons. Its plasma sword was especially damaging against transphasic defenses, though the ace rifleman mech was only supposed to use it as a last resort if any enemies got too close.

As Ves gained a good understanding of the ace mech, he began to think about how he could quickly upgrade its effective combat power.

"I can't use the same approach I used on the Promethea on this ace mech."

Blinky was in no condition to produce another sympathetic material. Even if the Blinkyverse started to bleed a lot of spiritual energies of a different attribute, the shaky stability of the internal universe would deteriorate even further!

"Besides, the Hexfire rifle is not a luminar crystal weapon. It is a more conventional positron beam rifle that I don't fully understand."

Ves knew better than to mess around with the parts of an intricate weapon system. Arbitrarily changing the parameters of a single part might cause the entire weapon to overheat or explode!

Just as Ves started to think about improving the ace mech in a different way, its pilot finally walked into the bay and moved closer.

He could feel the strong force of will that was typical of a junior ace pilot.

Whereas Patriarch Reginald tended to unconsciously suppress and force the people around him to obey his will, Saintess Ulrika Vraken sought to erode and weaken anything and anyone she regarded as her foe.

Ves was not among her enemies, but his high spiritual sensitivity still caused him to get a taste of Ulrika's potential.

If she was a sword saint rather than an ace pilot, he bet that she would have been able to cause a person to melt in front of her just by holding a sword!

"Saintess." He politely greeted her. "I have just applied a quick upgrade to the Promethea in order to give her an additional edge in the upcoming operation. I came to see if I can do so for your Macharia Excelsia as well."

It was customary to address ace pilots by the title of 'Saint' without making a distinction of gender, but the Hexers clearly had different ideas.

Ulrika glanced towards her machine. "I have learned that you can improve mechs in different ways by making them more alive."

"That's right." Ves smiled. "I already did that a little bit with your two weapons just so that they can call upon the power of the Phase King. This is not the extent of what I can do, but it will take a lot more time and design work to turn your Macharia Excelsia into a proper living mech. It is not that useful for you if I spend a short amount of time on it. You'll just end up with a weak first order living mech that can hardly benefit you at this junction."

The female ace pilot frowned. "I see. What else do you have in mind, then?"

"I need to understand your situation a little better. The more I know about you and your ace mech, the more I know where I can intervene. Tell me about your career. I heard that you used to participate in many battles during the Komodo War."

A melancholic expression appeared on her face at the mention of that infamous war.

"That is true. I do not particularly like to revisit those days. I fought and challenged the Fridaymen on many different battlefields. I sought to do my part to repel the Fridayman mech armies as they crossed the border and toppled one stronghold after another. I used to be proud of wielding the might of a high-tier expert mech at the time, but as the warring went on, I realized that for every Fridayman expert pilot I defeated, others would always take their place. The scale of the Komodo War was so great that expert mechs ultimately devolved into high-level cannon fodder."

"Only ace mechs have the individual power to sway the outcome of entire battles in a theater." Ves remarked.

Her expression darkened. "That is correct. I knew that and so did everyone else. I worked hard to attain my breakthrough. I picked my battles, I confronted Fridayman high-tier expert mechs whenever I could in a desperate attempt to trigger my second apotheosis. The more casualties the Hex Army suffered, the more my heart bled for all of the fallen women. The more star systems fell into the hands of the Fridaymen, the more I feared for the future of the lost Hexer civilians. I finally managed to reach my tipping point and broke through, but... time was already running out. It was too late to make a difference."

This was her greatest regret. If she broke through a year or two sooner, she would have been able to improve the Hexadric Hegemony's strategic situation!

At the very least, its collapse wouldn't have happened so quickly!

Ves quietly listened to her regrets. Though he already heard her backstory from different sources, it hit differently when the ace pilot voiced her thoughts and feelings in person.

He gained a much better understanding of Saintess Ulrika Vraken as a person and as a soldier.

"How is your relationship with the Vraken Matriarchal Dynasty?" He eventually asked a different question.

"I see myself as a servant and a member of the dynasty." She replied. "I enjoy the greatest respect from the Vrakens. My formal authority is not high, but that is what the matriarchs are for. I am a professional soldier and I have taken a vow to defend and fight for the Hexer people."

She sounded like a typical straightforward soldier that gradually gained a lot of individual strength.

There was nothing wrong with that. Ves quite liked these kinds of high-ranking mech pilots actually. They were more obedient and less prone to go rogue. Their thinking patterns weren't too whacky and their only fault was that they couldn't shake the indoctrination that shaped their values and principles.

Once Ulrika completed her little story about herself, she took the initiative to issue a request.

"I have spoken to expert pilots such as Brutus Wodin and your own Larkinson ones. They all boast of receiving a useful 'companion spirit' from you. Is it possible to grant me one as well?"

That caused Ves to pause and gaze at the Hexer ace pilot.

Despite his recent boost in strength, he did not dare to stare too closely at her fortified will and spirit!

What was even worse was that Blinky was in an exhausted state at the moment, so Ves couldn't count on his companion spirit to perform the difficult operation!

"I would love to do that, Saintess, but it's not as simple as you think..."

Chapter 5116 The Value Of Ace Pilots

Every ace pilot was an exceptional human without a doubt. Though only a miniscule fraction of them had what it took to advance to the rank of god pilot, that did not diminish their exceptional nature in the slightest!

The Great Severing caused their value to rise even further. The introduction of exotic radiation may lead to the promotion of a lot of high-tier expert pilots that were currently hindered by their bottlenecks, but the ace pilots that already existed at this time enjoyed a considerable head start!

The population of red humanity was not as exaggerated as the populations of humans in the Milky Way. The amount of ace pilots in the Red Ocean was also a lot scarcer and less ubiquitous.

Each of them were incomparably precious to the humans that were cut off from their home galaxy.

Ves and many other people had heard rumors that the Red Two soon intended to publish a directive that would prohibit warfare between humans in its entirety!

With the native aliens breathing down red humanity's necks, humanity really couldn't afford to squander resources and manpower on fighting against each other anymore.

What was even more important was that the Red Association really did not want to risk the lives of the powerful ace pilots that fought on behalf of various colonial states.

While their current combat power might not be exaggerated enough to merit so much attention, it was their potential that the mechers prized the most.

Each ace pilot, no matter how messy or troubling their individual circumstances may be, was a precious god pilot seed!

Only 8 god mechs presented red humanity with absolute individual firepower. Aside from the CFA's greatest and most extravagant battleships, those 8 gods in the form of humans and mechs were the only champions who were strong enough to resist the greatest of phase whales!

No one knew how well a god mech was able to fare in a battle against an ancient phase whale.

Even if god mechs held an advantage, the problem was that the entire Red Ocean most definitely produced a much greater quantity of ancient phase whales over the history of this dwarf galaxy!

Once the ancient phase whales recovered from the massive exertion and resource depletion following their successful execution of their Ancient Refuge Plan, the 8 incomparably precious god mechs may not be enough to resist the true onslaught!

All of that was a bit too far away from Ves at the moment. He was far too weak to meddle in these high-level affairs. The galactic net also contained a lot of false and misleading rumors that served no other purpose except to muddle the public's perception.

What Ves found most important was that the importance of an ace pilot like Saintess Ulrika Vraken had risen in the Age of Dawn.

This was not just due to the scarcity of mech pilots that could fight against alien warships head-on, but also due to their potential to become exponentially more powerful by finding ways to properly leverage the power of E energy radiation!

The biggest issue at the moment was that no one appeared to know how exactly ace pilots could exert more power under the light of Messier 87.

As Ves asked a pointed question about this topic, Saintess Ulrika curtly shook her head.

"The Hex Federation and the Red Association is conducting extensive cooperative studies on this broad topic." She responded to Ves. "I have taken part in some of them, but I haven't been able to produce any useful results so far. I can feel the E energy radiation passing through everyone and everything, and I can even draw from it to an extent, but aside from making my resonance strength improve a little faster and making my mech a little stronger, it doesn't help that much."

Ves nodded in understanding when he heard about her lack of progress.

The Macharia Excelsia was a powerful ace mech that was highly tailored to her own individual strengths and preferred piloting style, but that did not change the fact that it was a product of the Age of Mechs.

The absence of hyper materials and other specific adaptations geared towards the Age of Dawn meant that the ace mech was unlikely to become a lot more powerful all of a sudden.

It was held back even further by the fact that it wasn't even alive. This meant that it could not proactively absorb or leverage E energy radiation in a more focused and conscious manner.

Ves already had plenty of ways to resolve these obvious shortcomings, but he was far too lacking in time and resources at the moment.

If he wanted to apply a quick adaptation that could measurably increase the combat power of the Macharia Excelsia, he needed to find a more inventive and creative solution.

As he continued to chat with Saintess Ulrika Vraken, he quietly studied her strong and indomitable willpower.

"How much is your resonance strength?"

"250 laverses." Ulrika replied. "It is not that much compared to the older and more experienced ace pilots of the Hex Federation. They can produce much greater results on the battlefield. Our senior ace pilots wouldn't be struggling so much to penetrate the transphasic energy shields of all of those alien warships."

He fully believed her claim. The resonance strengths of those senior ace pilots reached the thousands, which basically translated into a much more extensive ability to rewrite the rules of reality by relying on sheer willpower alone!

Of course, their stronger ace mechs also helped a lot. The Macharia Excelsia already looked incredibly powerful to Ves, but he knew that the Hex Federation likely developed ace mechs that incorporated the very best tech and materials within their reach!

Ves truly yearned to inspect the ace mechs of senior ace pilots, but the Hexers were extremely reluctant to transfer any of them outside of the borders of their colonial states.

Each of them played an essential role in guarding their most important and strategic star systems against hostile incursions, whether they be human or alien!

The Vraken Matriarchal Dynasty wasn't stupid. It readily sent out one of their most junior ace pilots to test the waters and limit any potential losses that might occur.

This also gave Ves a license to pull off nearly anything he liked. He could experiment on Saintess Ulrika Vraken and the Macharia Excelsia in any way he liked as long as his stunts did not negatively impact their combat effectiveness!

His thoughts currently strayed towards his more radical and extreme ideas at this time.

This was because he already ruled out his more common and reliable solutions.

For example, Ves saw no feasible way in meeting Ulrika's request for a companion spirit.

"Don't misunderstand me, Saintess. I would love to give you a companion spirit if possible, but doing so requires me to operate into the deepest part of your core being and essentially split off a piece of it in order to birth a new life and consciousness. I can reluctantly do this for expert pilots as long as they restrain their instinctive urge to repel intruders, but this approach won't work for a half-god that has honed her strength through the flames of war."

He demonstrated this by pulling out an exhausted Blinky from his head.

"Mroww..."

"Don't resist his approach. Try your best to let my companion spirit get close without shoving him away. This won't work if you keep him out of your inner being."

As Blinky flew closer towards the Saintess, he became more and more affected by her strong force of will.

Even though Saintess Ulrika Vraken employed great discipline and self-control over herself, she couldn't completely suppress her instinctive repulsion towards a foreign spiritual entity such as Blinky!

As the purple spiritual cat moved closer, his energy manifestation grew increasingly wobblier. It was as if he had entered a forcefield that constantly damaged his cohesion!

Blinky would have been able to fare better if he was in his peak condition, but he still wouldn't have been able to shake off the interference!

"Mrow... mrow!"

As soon as Blinky touched Ulrika's head, the ace pilot could no longer hold herself back.

Her more direct contact with a foreign spiritual entity triggered an instinctive defensive mechanism that caused her extraordinary willpower to burst out a repulsion wave that cleansed and pushed out any foreign influences!

The silent outburst not only caused Blinky to spin away from the Hexer ace pilot, but also produced a temporary void as her willpower also repelled the surrounding E energy radiation!

"My apologies, Supreme Son. I... could not control myself." The Saintess said with a genuinely troubled expression.

She never intended this to happen!

"It's okay. No harm is done. I already expected you to react this way. It is part of your nature as a high-ranking mech pilot. Anyway, I hope that explains why I can't give you a companion spirit."

Historically, high-ranking mech pilots arose due to a need to counter and defeat the spiritual sorcerers of the Five Scrolls Compact.

Anything related to qi cultivation was supposed to be anathema to their extraordinary willpower!

This made them almost impervious to spiritual manipulation no matter whether they were benign or malicious in nature!

Ace pilots existed in a different league compared to the vast majority of other humans. The power of their personal will far surpassed any other cultivator at the same height, whether they were mech designers or orthodox qi cultivators.

Ves speculated that it may be too late to grant companion spirits to mech pilots once they evolved to this stage.

This was because they had moved past the expert candidate and expert pilot stages where they were still malleable enough to adapt to drastic changes.

Once a pilot became a Saint, they had completed their soul-searching and solidified their combat approach. This was the point where they had to transition to a higher level track that was mainly focused on elevating their capabilities all the way to the threshold of god pilot!

"In my personal opinion, ace pilots such as yourself have no great need for companion spirits anymore." He told her. "They can provide substantial boosts for weaker mech pilots, but that is because they are not that strong in an extraordinary sense. You are different. Once you interface with your ace mech, you can reproduce almost every feat that a companion spirit can do. You are not missing out on much."

That was not exactly true, but Ves still believed in the overall sentiment.

The Saintess could easily sense his overall sincerity and eventually nodded in agreement. "Perhaps you are correct. I should be looking to develop my strength according to my own situation. It is not a good idea for me to abandon everything I have worked for ever since I entered into service over 60 years ago. Do you have any other ideas on how I can improve my results against our upcoming opponents?" The expeditionary fleet was moving closer and closer to the coordinates of the invading alien warships. That did not leave Ves much options to choose from. He thought of a few alternatives before settling on a choice that he did not feel comfortable with, but had a better chance of working than his other expedient ideas.

"How is your relationship with the Superior Mother?" He carefully asked. "Do you... believe in her as a Supreme like many other Hexers?"

That was a controversial and loaded question. Saintess Ulrika directed a more pointed glance towards the man who was rumored to be the literal son of the Superior Mother.

"We Vrakens are taught to observe reality from an objective and unbiased lens." She slowly said. "We have never been fans of the hexism movement. For a long time, I believed that goddesses and Supremes did not actually exist, but then I came across many instances that caused me to question this long-held assumption. Those living mechs of yours are all tied to an existence that unquestionably holds the identity of the Superior Mother. After encountering so much proof of her existence, her power and her support for our people, I can only conclude that she truly exists."

That was helpful to know, but it was not the answer that Ves wanted to hear.

"You did not exactly answer my question, Saintess. Let me rephrase it a bit. Do you worship the Superior Mother?"

Chapter 5117 Earning Godhood

A complex expression appeared on Ulrika's face.

This showed that even a determined and strong-willed ace pilot like herself could still be stumped by complex matters!

She would rather not answer the question at all, but she understood that it was important for their future cooperation for her to issue a sincere response.

"I believe... that the Superior Mother has done much good to our people." She began in her strong and steady cadence. "The Hexadric Hegemony used to be a more polarized and divided state when the Superior Mother was but a passing symbol of motherhood in those times. It was not until you introduced your living mechs such as the Blessed Squire and more notably the Valkyrie Redeemer that we all experienced the changes that she has brought to our state."

The Superior Mother propagated a set of beliefs that espoused a less extreme and man-hating version of hexism. Ves had deliberately created her to make the Hexers less reprehensible, and the widespread shifts in their culture clearly showed that his efforts had succeeded!

From the way that Saintess Ulrika spoke about the Superior Mother, she clearly did not suspect that Ves was the mastermind behind the transformation of her entire people.

"The Superior Mother has indeed done your people a lot of good." He smiled for a brief moment. "Do you begrudge her for not being able to prevent the fall of the Hexadric Hegemony?"

"No." The ace pilot forcefully said. "That failure is ours and ours alone. The Komodo War was a test for our people, and we had been found wanting at this important junction. We were too arrogant and complacent to deserve victory. We needed to be humbled in order to recognize the inadequacies about ourselves that we have long ignored. Though our numbers have diminished, we have grown stronger and more united as a consequence. Losing the war has also caused the remnants of our people to fully relocate to the Red Ocean. If not for that, we might not have been in such a good position to take advantage of the Age of Dawn."

The turning of the age presented a lot of existential challenges to red humanity, but the strong and confident among the people all recognized that it was a fantastic new opportunity to ascend to greater heights!

"Is that why you don't actually worship the Superior Mother in your heart?" Ves queried. "Your ambition is to become a god pilot. At this height of power, you are fully qualified to treat other deities as your equals. Is that how you think?"

Ulrika looked a bit surprised that his guess was so close to the mark. "Ace pilots such as ourselves all have great confidence that we have the potential to become gods ourselves. We can't quite agree on what that exactly means, but most of us see no reason to surrender ourselves to deities who we can possibly outgrow."

Those who held the arrogance that they could become gods had little reason to devote themselves to existing ones!

At the very least, the act of surrendering themselves to a higher power was contradictory to their nature as warriors who pursued ultimate strength!

The word 'surrender' already had strong connotations with the meaning of weakness and inability.

While there were exceptions among god pilots who regarded their ironclad faith in a higher and more unfathomable power as a source of strength rather than an admission of weakness, Saintess Ulrika Vraken clearly did not count herself as among these modern paladins!

"Okay, I think I get it." Ves said. "You don't worship her as a deity, but you don't object to her either."

The ace pilot smiled. "I do not have any issue with respecting the Superior Mother for offering a light in the darkness that surrounds my fellow Hexers. I can even look up to her for how extensively she has lent her strength to the servicewomen of the Hex Army. What makes me different from most Hexers is that I strongly believe I have a chance to ascend to god pilot and offer just as much help and protection to our people if not more. By that time, I can help uplift the Hex Federation to a first-

class state and grant better lives for every Hexer. That is a benefit that even the Superior Mother cannot provide."

She was right. The god pilots and Star Designers were the only human 'gods' recognized by the mechers. The voice and authority of the True God-level transcendents had become even stronger due to their relative scarcity in the Red Ocean!

Ves collected enough information from the ace pilot to conclude that his idea of turning Saintess Ulrika into some kind of apostle for the Superior Mother had no chance of working.

That was a shame. Ves believed that Ulrika might have been able to leverage the power of the Superior Mother more directly in battle.

Perhaps he should wait until he met with an ace pilot from a more religious matriarchal dynasty to try out this proposal.

At this point, Ves had no point of ruling out his promising idea yet. He had very little options left that could possibly increase the combat effectiveness of the only ace mech aboard the Spirit of Bentheim.

Ves did not want to admit defeat. He still felt he could do more in this situation. He hated the thought of giving up too soon. It was against his nature as a mech designer to leave a problem unsolved!

He fell into thought as his gaze continued to shift between Ulrika and her ace mech.

His extensive expertise in spiritual engineering did not see any way to improve their synergy.

The Macharia Excelsia was not his work, and Ulrika possessed more similarities with Patriarch Reginald Cross when it came to her insistence on relying on herself.

These circumstances closed so many different ways to improve their performance that Ves had to grasp for straws.

As he recalled all of the information that she shared to him, he suddenly froze as an entirely new idea came to his mind.

His understanding of spiritual engineering, cultivation science and his personal insights on high-ranking mech pilots all formed a connection that led him to come up with a bold new theory!

"A moment ago, you said that you aspired to become a new guardian deity for the Hex Federation and its people, is that correct?"

Ulrika nodded. "That is correct."

"Would you be opposed to the idea of possibly posing as one during the upcoming battle?"

That sounded like an odd request.

"I am not quite sure I understand what you are asking of me. What is the purpose of doing so, Larkinson?"

Ves quickly started to think about the viability of this idea. The Superior Mother would definitely have to get involved in order to mobilize the Hexers on a massive scale, but this was fine as she wouldn't be helping Ulrika directly.

The more he thought about it, the more he felt that this latest idea could truly make a substantial difference in combat!

The best part about it was that it did not appear to clash with the principles and beliefs of a strong-willed ace pilot.

So long as this powerful halfgod went along with his proposal, he had a lot of confidence that his measures would provide her with a real boost in the upcoming battle!

"What do you think the Age of Dawn represents, Saintess Ulrika?"

"The Age of Dawn... is a new beginning. It is an age where new heroines may rise and where existing ones such as myself can rise to godhood with greater ease."

Ves smirked. "Your views align with my own, but my perspective is more elaborate than that. To me, the Age of Dawn presents new possibilities that were previously impossible to attain in an energy-poor environment like the Milky Way. One of the possibilities that I am thinking about is something that will sound impossible to you, but is actually not. What I want to propose is a way for all of the Hexers in the Hex Federation to lend what little support they can offer to you when our operation against the aliens finally begins."

The ace pilot fell into confusion, and that did not happen often!

"I do not follow."

"Let me explain this quickly to you. Ordinary people don't usually possess the power to affect reality with their minds. That used to be reserved for high-ranking mech pilots and mech designers. Do you follow me so far? Nowadays, all of red humanity is exposed to exotic radiation, which somehow causes each and every person to absorb a bit of it and grow a little stronger in their own ways. While they are still far from transcending their own mortality, their spirits have grown strong enough that their unified beliefs may actually be able to induce changes in reality as long as their numbers are high enough!"

The ace pilot finally began to understand what Ves was trying to convey.

"Are you saying that belief holds actual power in these new times? Can large populations truly help people ascend to brand-new gods?"

"I'm not so sure about the latter." Ves quickly responded. "However, I think that the power of collective belief can most assuredly induce material changes in reality. Our clan has already proven that to an extent with our battle formations. This is also where I base my current theories on. Just think of it as an attempt to rope in as many citizens of the Hex Federation to take part in a power ritual of an unheard of scale. This ritual is solely dedicated to boosting your strength and the strength of your ace mech as they watch your machine fight against the aliens."

This was a radical proposal, and one that might not even work!

Saintess Ulrika was not entirely comfortable with this new idea. "Broadcasting our fight to the Hex Federation will also expose our mechs and our fighting methods to the Fridaymen. It is not wise to reveal so much of our core details to our possible adversaries."

"The truly strong do not have anything to fear by demonstrating their might." Ves replied with a grin. "Besides, we can take this into account by limiting what we truly do not want to expose to the public. What is important is that you can give your fellow hope in this new and more dangerous age. There is a lot of uncertainty among people. You have the ability to rise up and lead your people to a new and more prosperous future as long as you are willing to carry their collective hopes."

"Forgive me for saying this, but that does not sound appropriate." Saintess Ulrika frowned.

"It is not about you. It is about the innocent Hexers who you have vowed to protect. Think about how my proposal can benefit them. Most of the Hexers under your protection will no longer be defenseless against the Fridaymen and the aliens. They will know that as long as they invest their beliefs in their new gods such as yourself, you will gain the capital to guard them against any foe, no matter how powerful they might be! The formidable puelmer heavy cruisers that we are about to target will be the least of their future enemies. If you cannot defeat these alien warships, then what qualifications do you have to aspire to godhood? Take responsibility!"

His words finally drilled through her stubborn and slightly stodgy mind. The ace pilot still looked conflicted, but it appeared that she was finally willing to embrace his crazy proposal!

"You cannot decide upon this alone." She stated.

He nodded. "I need to hold an emergency meeting with the other leaders of the Golden Skull Alliance in order to find out whether they are okay with my proposal." He informed her. "In order to produce the greatest possible results, we will need to expose at least a part of our methods and broadcast the battle to the Hex Federation as it unfolds. We will also need to obtain the buy-in of your council of matriarchs. Let me take care of all of this boring stuff. You should just sit back and think about how you will be able to wield the collective power of the entire Hexer population when the crucial time has come."

Chapter 5118 Great Undertaking

What Ves just came up with sounded so crazy that no one could believe in his statements at first!

His idea sounded especially absurd when it came from his mouth of all people!

Most people familiar with Gloriana probably wouldn't have raised an eyebrow if she was the one who presented this radical new proposal, but it just had to come from a mech designer who did not believe in the existence of 'gods'!

The main reasons why people did not reject his ludicrous idea was because they were desperate for solutions and believed in his credibility.

Ves had a reputation for coming up with a lot of whacky ideas that somehow worked for one reason or another.

This was quite convenient as it directly dropped the resistance to his latest idea!

It also helped that the price of trying it out was not too great. The Golden Skull Alliance did not exactly like to broadcast its battles to the general public, but it was not entirely unfamiliar with exposing some of their stratagems and trump cards.

A lot of interested parties were actually interested to see whether Ves' revolutionary new theory and combat application could actually work!

If any of his assumptions about the extraordinary power of a human collective actually had a basis in reality, then that would definitely change warfare forever!

Ves actually had to do a lot of talking in order to organize this massive undertaking.

The lessons he learned from developing battle formations and seeing them in action told him that it was crucially important for the collective to be as unified in thought as possible.

The effectiveness of this new approach might or might not work depending on whether the Hexers could align themselves to each other as close as possible.

While it was a lot easier to satisfy this demanding condition for a relatively homogenous group of people who also happened to share the same religious beliefs, it was a bit of a stretch to assume that billions of Hexers could sufficiently synchronize their thoughts at once!

It was unrealistic to believe that something outlandish like this could even happen. This was why Ves would already be happy if the Hexers who took part in this grand experiment kept their mind on Saintess Ulrika Vraken and the unfolding battle!

This was also why Ves found it crucial to broadcast the battle on the galactic net. Only by giving this massive audience a live view of their 'goddess' in action would they be able to concentrate their collective power on Saintess Ulrika and her ace rifleman mech.

Ves initially thought that it would have taken a lot of effort to convince the leaders of the Hex Federation to go along with this massive undertaking.

However, it only took less than half an hour for him to receive definite confirmation that the entire colonial state would prepare and cooperate with his efforts at the appointed time!

"The council of matriarchs has unanimously approved of your proposal." The projection of Madame Constance Wodin declared with a satisfied grin. "You will have your chance to see whether our people can truly propel one of our Saintesses to greatness. So long as your methods can make even a minor positive difference, we can count on one more advantage against the Fridaymen!"

Ves wanted to roll his eyes. Of course the Hexers only cared about whether they would be able to get ahead of their old archrivals. He seriously doubted whether the council of matriarchs spent much thought about the greater implications to red humanity and all life as a whole.

After all, if humans were able to pull off this trick, then the aliens could potentially do the same!

It would truly be a disaster if the collective beliefs of the much larger populations of native aliens started to actively ramp up the power of their phase whales and phase lords!

However, Ves did not regard himself as a modern Pandora who happened to open a box that contained a force that could help the aliens destroy humanity.

This was because if he did not take the initiative to propose this idea, then another person would have done so eventually.

There were a lot of religious humans in the Red Ocean! Many of them were loyal adherents of many different faiths, and that meant that they would definitely be able to produce a similar result sooner or later!

Aside from that, the native alien races already possessed a strong collective habit of worshipping their ancient gods. This possible phenomenon could not be stopped.

However, Ves was not convinced that this form of collective empowerment was as easy to pull off as it sounded.

A lot of battles would have already changed course if that was the case!

The factor that Ves relied upon to make this work was the fact that the Hexers were secretly all connected to the Superior Mother.

Just as how the Golden Cat watched over the Larkinsons, the Hexers who believed in the Superior Mother were all tied to a kinship network that had always influenced their thinking for many years!

Ves theorized that he could repurpose this massive kinship network into a tool that could efficiently channel the collective spiritual feedback of the Hexer people and use all of that power to produce a focused result!

Naturally, it was essential for the Superior Mother herself to take part in this endeavor. She was the only one who regulated the kinship network centered around herself, and she was also the only one who possessed the extensive expertise required to shape all of energies and prevent it from scattering or running out of control.

"This is a ritual that allows every Hexer to gain a closer connection to the Superior Mother, is that correct?" Madame Constance eagerly asked.

Ves plainly nodded. "That is correct. She will be directing this ritual more or less. So long as your colonial state makes sure to inform all of its citizens that they follow the right instructions, the Superior Mother will make sure that their efforts will not be in vain. However, don't forget that this is about empowering Saintess Ulrika Vraken. She is the one that needs to borrow the support of your people." "Understood." Madame Constance grinned. "I will continue to maintain contact with the council of matriarchs and ensure that all of your requirements are met on our end. The Hex Federation shall not disappoint the expectations of the Superior Mother and her blessed boy."

He coughed when he heard that last bit. "I need to get back to my preparations. Please inform me or my staff if any complications have arisen in the Hex Federation."

Ves closed the communication channel before Gloriana's mother could spout any more nonsense.

He did not really want to talk or do business with her at all, but she was the only Hexer he knew that could directly communicate his plan and intentions to the higher ups of the Hex Federation.

As for Gloriana herself... "Let's not bother her right now. This battle is my business, not hers. She can keep watching over our children."

Everything was slowly coming together. Way more people became invested in this upcoming confrontation than he and the Golden Skullers initially assumed.

Though Ves was wary of attracting too much attention to himself and his clan due to this extravagant undertaking, he was not blind to all of the possible benefits that he could attain.

The more fame and glory he could earn from this battle, the easier it was for him to earn the respect of the movers and shakers of the higher ups of red humanity!

Success in this operation could provide him with a lot of long-term benefits, though Ves mainly cared about how he could immediately increase his standing in the short term.

First, the upcoming conference organized by the Survivalist Faction was about to start shortly after the events taking place in the Corellix System had come to a conclusion.

Ves saw an opportunity to acquaint himself with a lot of powerful new contacts, and also believed he could convince them to support his more radical initiatives. He just needed to gather enough hard proof that he could deliver on his claims!

Second, his first classes for the Eden Institute of Business & Technology were about to start even sooner.

In fact, a potential scheduling conflict might arise depending on the timing of the upcoming operation!

He originally intended to delay the timing of the impending clash so that he could calmly lecture in front of a class of Terrans without getting shot at by a bunch of alien warships.

He changed his mind now that he had chosen to broadcast this battle in front of the Hexers and everyone else for that matter.

"Why not use this broadcast to give a more practical lesson to my students?" He suddenly thought. "I doubt that any professor has ever taught them during an active military operation! I will definitely make an unforgettable impression in their eyes!"

It was hard to stand out as a professor in a first-class university. Ves readily recognized that his teaching qualifications were much poorer than his fellow colleagues. He could not overcome the fact that he was a second-class mech designer who never seriously worked with first-class mech designs in his career.

How could he possibly earn the genuine respect and approval of all of his Terran students when they constantly looked down on him because of his humble origins and lack of involvement in their higher community?

What Ves needed to do in order to break this adverse circumstance was to employ a powerful gimmick that went against their expectations.

Teaching these pampered kids while he and his troops were in the middle of battle would definitely turn him into an overnight legend within the school!

As long as he put up a good show, Ves was confident that he would never have to worry about losing the respect of all his students for the rest of the semester!

When Ves contacted his teaching assistant and shared his brilliant plan with her, the woman looked anything but comfortable with the idea!

"You cannot possibly do this, Professor Larkinson! Your request is highly unorthodox and likely violates a number of standing regulations of our school! The Eden Institute of Business & Technology cannot bear the liability of encouraging any of its professors and students to take part in classes on a live battlefield. You are not a mech instructor. You are a mech designer!"

"I understand your concerns, Miss Striker, but I have been doing this for a long time, remember? While I can understand that the Eden Institute probably prohibits stuff like this, I am the only one connected to the university that is subjected to any risk. I am teaching a virtual class, not a physical one. All of my students will remain safe and sound while sitting in the benches of your classrooms. Times have changed. If the school wants all of these Terran brats to toughen up, then it should rethink its existing rules and consider whether they are still appropriate in our new environment. Just bring up my request to Master Laila Devos and await her response, okay?"

"I... will do so, professor."

Ves eventually obtained the permission that he sought, just as he expected.

He already possessed a decent understanding of the dean of the Department of Humanoid Mech Design.

As a clever Master Mech Designer, Laila Devos could also figure out that everyone had to get accustomed to harder times. It was no longer a certainty that the Terrans would be able to live safe and comfortable lives anymore.

The Greater Terran United Confederation may have been bigshots back in the Milky Way, but the Terran Alliance was a lot weaker in the Red Ocean!

Only by regaining their spirit of ambition and conquest would the Terrans be able to rise again in this brand-new age!

As Ves ended his latest call, he steepled his fingers and grinned.

He no longer felt as uncertain about the upcoming battle as before. He had taken enough measures to strengthen his hand and increase the combat effectiveness of his troops in a short amount of time.

"It's all coming together."

Chapter 5119 The Destiny Of A Group

"It is almost time." Ves said as he stood in the front of the forward observation chamber.

The recent upgrades to his flagship included a comprehensive overhaul of the observation decks.

They offered better views and a more tasteful arrangement of plants and trees. Everyone who visited the top decks for the first time inevitably felt tranquil and detached from the constant activity taking place in the decks down below.

Ves had already done what he could in the short time that remained. All of the mechs and mech pilots aboard the factory ship were as ready as they could be, and the other elements that the Golden Skull Alliance put into play understood their respective roles as well.

It would soon be time to see whether all of their planning and preparation worked out and enabled them to defeat the yurzen raiding fleet.

He found it a bit ridiculous that he put far more effort and preparation in this battle than he did in the previous one against the wheednar raiding fleet.

However, the appearance of a hidden archeship along with the presence of two puelmer heavy cruisers, of which one of them still retained her full mobility, caused him to become a lot more vigilant towards this upcoming confrontation.

He still questioned whether it was a good idea to pull the trigger and go through with this confrontation even though there were clear signs that the situation in the Corellix System was anything but simple.

"Nyaaaaa-"

The Golden Cat rested on his armored shoulder and pressed her head against his cheek. The ancestral spirit sensed his unrest and sought to calm his nerves.

Ves smiled and reached out to softly pat Goldie's manifested body. "I know. We're quite strong and we possess a lot of advantages. So long as the aliens don't spring too many surprises on us, we should be able to cope with whatever they bring to bear."

The problem was that the Golden Skull Alliance did not have a good idea on what their enemies were capable of. All of the scouting efforts only supplied them with a limited amount of information.

Their biggest shortcoming was that they did not have a complete understanding of the combat capabilities of the puelmer heavy cruisers.

Most of the homeships built by the puelmers were customizable combat platforms that tended to become more and more weird the older they became. Each and every year, the puelmer crew members upgraded the parts they did not like anymore and added new systems based on the latest inventions by their most inventive researchers.

This variability made puelmer warships a lot harder to defeat than equivalent vessels, but it also made them a lot more valuable as well.

Ves already had a glimpse of all of the wealth and insights that he could obtain from the archeship that was filled with exotic alien technology. Those two puelmer homeships should definitely contain other products of valuable alien ingenuity!

Two more spiritual entities manifested next to Ves.

Both Helena and the Superior Mother made an appearance in order to provide him with additional encouragement.

"You will do fine, little brother." Helena spoke as she gazed off in the distance. "So long as the Penitent Sisters and the Glory Seekers get close enough, they can call me down so that I can reap the souls of all of those alien crew members. Not even the puelmers should be able to resist my power."

Ves shook his head. "I don't think it will be that easy to eliminate the puelmers. We know that the aliens have collected intelligence on us. Our analysts and planners predict that the aliens will deliberately spread out their starships and do their best to intercept our Valkyrie mechs at all cost. We can still use the battle formations as a deterrence and a way to limit the movements of our

upcoming opponents, but I'm not sure it will be possible for us to wipe out the crews of dozens of opposing warships as before."

Helena furrowed her brows. "That is... regrettable."

He glanced towards the manifestation of the Superior Mother.

She showed up in a robed visage that shared obvious parallels with his actual mother over in the Nyxian Gap.

Ever since Cynthia Larkinson regained her body and assumed the power of a True God, her incarnation received a massive boost.

In the past, it had always been the Superior Mother who supported Cynthia.

This time, the balance of power between the two had reversed. It was Cynthia who was currently supplying the ancestral spirit with high-quality spiritual feedback!

This not only accelerated the growth and evolution of the Superior Mother even further, but also enabled Cynthia to descend her consciousness onto her incarnation in a much better fashion!

True Gods were truly existences on another level. Every pre-divinity entity did not come close to these higher life forms in terms of power, longevity and abilities.

Ves had learned from his mother that classical qi cultivators who had reached the state of a True God generally possessed the greatest and most versatile means.

It was not that difficult for Cynthia to strengthen and upgrade her incarnation in her own distinct ways.

However, even a True God like herself could not do much about the immense distance between the Milky Way and the displaced Red Ocean!

Perhaps the story might be different if Cynthia specialized in the manipulation of spacetime, but even she could not master every possible field of cultivation science!

"I have been keeping an eye on the Hexers." The Superior Mother spoke in a gentle and motherly tone that sounded nearly identical to that of the Oblivion Empress. "Their enthusiasm for this ritual is high. I find it rather adorable how eager they are for this. They truly yearn for victory after having tasted the bitter fruit of defeat."

Ves looked a little surprised. "Are the matriarchs truly in support of our initiative?"

"They are." His mother replied. "It is true that they have their own calculations, but they are not as duplicitous and selfish as you think. No matter what you think about them, they are truly cognizant of the immense responsibility they hold over their Hexer population. They know that their people are fragile and that they can easily enter into a self-reinforcing spiral of fear and uncertainty in this new and dangerous age. In order to prevent that from happening, they must lift the morale of their people. The citizens of a state must have optimism for the future in order to stand the test of time."

Helena nodded in agreement. "The matriarchs seek to bolster the destiny of their colonial state. Securing a dramatic victory is one of the best ways to do so. They already experienced this before

after you and the Hex Army successfully raided Pima Prime. Not only did that lift the destiny of the Hex Federation, but it also sapped the national strength of the Friday Colonies."

All this talk about destiny sounded a bit strange to Ves. He knew that they did not use this term randomly.

"Does destiny really exist? I find it hard to believe that everyone's futures and outcomes can already be determined in advance. Quantum mechanics makes fools out of anyone who assumes this is the case."

Both Helena and the Superior Mother looked at each other and chuckled.

"Nyaaaa nyaaa nyaaa." Goldie said as she hopped from Ves' shoulder and lowered herself into Helena's arms.

"Perhaps destiny as you interpret it does not actually exist. Who knows." The Superior Mother nonchalantly shrugged her shoulders. "However, I am sure you are familiar with the concept of esprit de corps. Any cohesive group that is tight-knit and unified enough is able to form a shared spirit that exemplifies their collective pride and identity. This has greater meaning in an environment where even the most average citizen of a state can develop an inkling of supernatural power. Esprit de corps will no longer be as insubstantial as before. It will gain real weight in this new age, and those who understand its power and take advantage of its potential will most assuredly be able to exceed their lesser peers."

Much of this sounded familiar to Ves. General Verle talked a lot about how important it was to actively reinforce the esprit de corps of the Larkinson Army and give the Larkinsons more reasons to remain attached and dedicated to their growing clan.

Ves threw a glance towards the Golden Cat. The esprit de corps of most organizations were rather insubstantial, but the Larkinson Clan happened to be an exception because he had already turned it into a living representation!

The Superior Mother grinned. "Can you sense how well the Golden Cat is developing? She is much stronger than she should be relative to how many people she is watching over. One of the reasons for that is because the Larkinson Clan under your leadership is doing extremely well. The battles you've won, the enormous earnings that you have made and the escalating expectations of your clansmen have all raised the destiny of your clan to a much higher peak than that of other pioneering organizations. If this trend persists, it will only be a matter of time before you and your clansmen will be promoted into first-raters."

Her talk of the Larkinson Clan's constantly rising fortunes reminded Ves of a certain little tree that his grandfather gifted to him a long time ago. He hadn't checked it as of late. Perhaps he should take another look at it and see whether the changed environment altered its properties.

As much as his mother and his sister made a lot of sense, Ves still retained his skepticism towards the more nebulous connotations of destiny.

"I understand your overall sentiment, but I don't really buy into all of that crap about fate and destiny." He told them. "I get it that groups of people can be mobilized in order to assist in various endeavors. This is why I wanted the Hex Federation to attempt a grand ritual in the first place. As long as this works, we can leverage the power of a large and unified collective to pull off a lot of powerful feats!"

It would be similar to employing a battle formation but on a massive scale!

Of course, Ves did not believe that measures like these could defeat every opponent. The masses consisted of all kinds of messy individuals who diverged in many ways. It was impossible for random Hexer citizens to align with each other to the same degree as tight-knit elites who trained and fought alongside each other for many years.

The upcoming battle needed to be fought with mechs and mech pilots. As long as they were strong and capable enough, there was no need for Ves to rely on dubious means to overcome his opponents.

That said, Ves did not wish to reject any additional form of strengthening. The more cards in his hand, the greater his depth in combat. He never wanted to be left in a position where he had no card left to play on the battlefield!

"I hope that Saintess Ulrika Vraken will cooperate with us on this." He said. "By the way, is it possible for ace pilots to engage in deity cultivation? I'm afraid it may have a detrimental influence on their growth instead."

His mother responded with a coy smile. "You can seek the answer to this question yourself, my son. Perhaps the upcoming ritual will be enough to give you a clue."

Ves hated it whenever his mother answered like this, but he understood that she didn't want him to be lazy.

Rather than treating her as an easy repository for information, it would be better if Ves made his own discoveries.

Only by conducting his own research would he be able to leap beyond the existing confines of cultivation science and develop his own unique theories!

In this regard, the ritual he planned with the Hex Federation was one such attempt!

Chapter 5120 Opening Shots

Ves finished his little break.

When he left the forward observation chamber, he not only managed to center his mind, but also gained a greater awareness of what was at stake.

This upcoming operation had massive implications to the future trajectories of both the Larkinson Clan and the Hex Federation.

As long as they secured a decisive victory in this upcoming battle, both the Golden Cat and the Superior Mother would gain a rare reward that would strengthen them further!

More importantly than that, the Larkinsons and the Hexers would gain more confidence and momentum. They would hold their heads higher and become more willing to confront powerful foes!

The fact that the Larkinsons and their allies were readily willing to confront a substantial fleet of alien warships was already a sign that their esprit de corps had broken through an important threshold!

No average troop or outfit would be willing to put themselves within the effective range of the formidable guns of any warship, let alone many of them! Their courage and their belief in their superiors were way too inadequate to keep them in a serious fight!

As Ves thought about this further, he became increasingly more convinced that this may become one of the key factors that set his clan apart from many other pioneering organizations.

Of course, what made his clan a lot better in this aspect was that it had Goldie, a growing spirit that directly and tangibly personified the nebulous concept of esprit de corps!

Ves even speculated that spirits such as the Golden Cat might be able to play a substantially greater role in combat than before!

It all depended on how extensively exotic radiation changed the game.

He ate a quick meal before he strode into the expanded bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim.

Compared to before, the bridge held additional workstations and personnel. All of this was necessary in order to ensure that all of the departments of the flagship and her contingent of mechs maintained perfect coordination with each other.

The Larkinson servicemen were already hard at work to prepare for the first proper contact with the distant alien fleet.

On top of that, the Spirit of Bentheim also had to maintain a constant connection with the main fleet that was approaching the target coordinates at a much slower pace.

"What is our ETA?" He asked as he ascended up to his elevated command throne and took his seat like a returning sovereign.

"We are in the process of weakening the warp bubble generated by the active superdrive, sir. According to our latest projections, we will emerge from warp travel a few light-seconds away from the central location in approximately seven minutes."

"Understood. Are our scouts and hidden listening posts in place?"

"Not entirely, sir. The Hidden Smile has already spread a small network of sensors that can give us a short warning of any approaching ships in warp travel in the immediate environment. Some of the starships equipped with superdrives will take longer to get into position, particularly those that are assigned on the far side of the starship."

"Have the aliens responded to those movements?"

"We have yet to catch any sign of that. We think that there is a high likelihood that the aliens are wary of splitting up their warships only for the detachments to get defeated in detail."

That was not good news. It was yet another indication that the aliens were on high alert.

Ves briefly thought about how that might affect their upcoming steps. It might be a little more difficult to provoke a serious reaction from these vigilant aliens.

He activated a few projected control panels and glanced at the data. Everything looked fine so far. The crew reported no major issues that could hinder their next steps.

"Five minutes until we emerge from warp."

"All of our mech pilots have activated their mechs and completed their diagnostic checks."

"Three minutes until we emerge from warp."

"Our hidden listening posts are detecting movements from the alien fleet. Stingray 2 is circling around Stingray 1 and her yurzen escort ships at a faster velocity and a greater radius."

Stingray 1 was their designation of the puelmer heavy cruiser that the Phobos managed to mess up. Her warp drives were presumably still under repair, which caused the ship to remain a sitting duck for all intents and purposes.

Stingray 2 was the much greater threat. Her intact warp drives granted her a lot of mobility in realspace and made her difficult to catch.

Although the Spirit of Bentheim was not necessarily slow anymore after she had received a set of superdrives, her relatively long and massive hull still caused her movements to be sluggish.

The puelmer heavy cruisers were considerably smaller in volume. Although their defenses likely weren't too strong, they were much more nimble and maneuverable in space.

It was impossible for the Spirit of Bentheim to catch up to Stingray 2 if the latter truly wanted to make a getaway!

This was why the only way to force Stingray 2 into a fight was to threaten Stingray 1.

As the Spirit of Bentheim finally exited from warp, the factory ship took a moment to scan the surroundings and take stock of the immediate situation.

After confirming that the aliens hadn't laid any nearby mines or prepared any other dangerous traps, the mechs carried by the Spirit of Bentheim began to prepare to fire.

There was no chance in hell that any mech could land a hit at a warship at this distance.

Energy beams would quickly disperse and spread apart after traversing hundreds of thousands of kilometers while kinetic projectiles traveled far too slow to maintain reasonably hit rates in a space environment.

Nonetheless, there were exceptions for everything.

Ves knew that the energy weapons of most mechs such as the Transcendent Punisher and the Amaranto were not completely perfectly aligned.

Minor marks of wear-and-tear and tiny misalignments during the fabrication process inevitably caused these weapons to be unable to produce perfectly straight and concentrated beams.

Only weapons produced by materializers could reach a theoretical optimal state, and only for a short amount of time before time and constant use left their marks.

The Macharia Excelsia was different.

While the ace rifleman mech was mainly designed and optimized for mid-range combat, it could also be employed at longer ranges if the need arose!

Shortly after the Spirit of Bentheim exited warp travel, the Hexer ace mech launched out of a hangar bay and took up a position in front and slightly above the factory ship.

This enabled the ace mech to utilize its Saint Kingdom to weaken any incoming attacks that threatened to strike the quasi-first-class capital ship.

It also gave the Amaranto a clear line of fire as she occupied the specialized bunker in the opened maw of the giant golden cat head prow.

The Amaranto also happened to have a little more company this time!

Two more expert mechs had taken up positions in the 'eyes' of the giant cat head prow. The Promethea occupied the cavity that was supposed to contain the left eye while the Everchanger sat inside the right eye.

Ves expected each of these three expert mechs of his own design to play a substantive role in the upcoming clash, but their time had yet to come.

Once everyone completed their final checks and reported that everything was okay on their end, Saintess Ulrika Vraken soon received permission to launch an attack.

"The aliens aren't taking us too seriously yet." He communicated over a direct channel to the Macharia Exelsia. "If you can make them pay attention to us at this distance, then that would be great. If not, we'll just get close enough until you succeed."

This was dangerous. The Spirit of Bentheim's defenses may have received a massive upgrade, but as long as she came close enough to enter the effective ranges of over a hundred alien warships, there was no way that she would be able to persist for long!

The decision to start the engagement at this ridiculous range was vital to reduce the risks towards the Spirit of Bentheim. Ves and everyone else hoped that the ace mech would be able to do the impossible this time!

"I have never attempted to snipe targets at this range." The Saintess responded with a steely voice. "I will not fail your expectations. My Hexfire rifle is in a better state than usual. It will not let me down."

"I hope you are right."

High-ranking mech pilots were known to make the impossible happen. Ves was expressly banking on this advantage as he hoped that Saintess Ulrika Vraken's willpower was strong enough to perfectly align and calibrate her Hexfire rifle so that it could effectively strike a target that was several light-seconds away!

The Hexer ace pilot was not in a hurry to open fire. She closed her eyes and resonated with her ace mech. She thought about all of the Hexers who were depending on her to rise up and lead them to a brighter future.

Though the grand ritual had yet to begin, Saintess Ulrika already possessed the awareness that her success and failure at this junction would have considerable implications for the future of her state!

The weight of history rested on her ability to damage targets at a distance that others readily dismissed!

The Macharia Excelsia started to glow and exude more power. With a resonance strength that surpassed 200 laverses, the Saint Kingdom surrounding the powerful machine seemed to alter the reality occupied by the ace mech.

This included the properties of its Hexfire rifle!

Saintess Ulrika began to resonate specifically with the main weapon of her machine. She could feel how the modifications made by Ves had caused it to become entangled with an alien design spirit called the Phase King.

There was no need to tap into the Phase King at this stage. Ulrika mainly focused on maximizing accuracy as opposed to damage or penetration power.

As the Hexfire rifle accumulated energy, the ace pilot tried to immerse herself in the Macharia Excelsia as much as possible in order to finetune its aim.

This was a delicate operation. It took over 70 seconds for Saintess Ulrika to form her firing solution and subtly adjust her aim to her satisfaction!

Once she sensed that the right timing had come, she used her mind to pull the trigger, causing the powerful Hexfire rifle to let loose a transphasic resonance-empowered positron beam that quickly accelerated into the distance at relativistic speeds!

Ves let out a few breaths in the short moment that followed.

Did the Macharia Excelsia manage to hit an enemy warship?

"Miss! The positron beam was 20.6 kilometers off-target!"

Several people groaned, but Ves maintained his composure.

He knew that even the slightest of errors could produce massive deviations under these circumstances due to the amplification of distance.

In truth, he expected that the Macharia Excelsia would miss by hundreds if not thousands of kilometers.

To be able to keep the beam within a relatively narrow distance of 20.6 kilometers was already a notable feat, especially for a mech that did not excel at sniping in the first place!

"How was the cohesion of the energy beam?"

"Our observations suggest that it has remained remarkably tight! The diameter of the beam has only expanded by 87 percent."

That was significantly better than Ves had hoped! He believed that Ulrika's force of will had done much to ensure that the positron beam did not spread out into a weak and dispersed spray of particles at this extreme distance.

"The Macharia Excelsia has opened fire again!"

"Another miss! The positron beam was 607 kilometers off-target this time!"

"Damn." Ves softly cursed.

This might take a while. Saintess Ulrika might need a lot more time to get into her groove.

Trying to snipe a starship at this extreme distance was both a technical challenge and a mental challenge.