

The Mech 5121

Chapter 5121 Distant Exchanges

This battle was different from many of the other ones fought by the Golden Skull Alliance.

Unlike the ambushes and relatively short pitched battles of the past, Ves and his fellow leaders wanted to employ an advance unit to disrupt the enemy warships that had grouped into at least two separate formations.

At the very least, the Spirit of Bentheim and her accompanying mechs needed to do whatever they could to pull Stingray 2 away from the partially crippled Stingray 1!

With the main fleet slowly making its way to the battlefield, the Larkinson Clan and its allies would be able to reduce the projected casualties by a massive degree if Stingray 2 was no longer around to provide support!

Aside from that, the Phobos had never entirely left the site either. The expert stealth mech continued to remain in hiding in the hopes that he could exploit any openings while the alien warships were fully preoccupied with fighting against their more visible opponents!

The key was whether the Spirit of Bentheim detachment could produce enough of a commotion to provoke a serious reaction from the aliens!

So far, the enemy warships had done nothing aside from channeling more power to their transphasic energy shields.

Aside from that, the aliens still behaved as if they were determined not to split up in order to chase after the Spirit of Bentheim.

Everyone else seemed to hold their breath and remain silent as the Macharia Excelsia struggled to land a single shot with its Hexfire rifle.

No matter how well Saintess Ulrika tried to aim at the distant starships, none of her shots had landed onto an enemy vessel as of this time!

The mood across the ship gradually dropped. The optimism that people felt before started to fade and make way for a more pessimistic outlook of the situation.

"It is not working so far." General Verle spoke to Ves over a private communication channel. "It was a low-probability event anyway. We have already accounted for this eventuality. If our ace mech has yet to produce a positive result in five minutes, we will move closer until we are a light-second away from the closest enemy warships. That may put us in range of getting struck by their most precise armaments, but that is the risk that we will have to take."

Ves grimaced as he took in the static situation. "I think we should wait a bit more. Saintess Ulrika is not the sort of pilot who gives up easily. We need her to land at least one strike in order to restore morale."

"I know, but the longer this drags on, the greater the cloud that will hang over our heads."

Reports of misses continued to sound across the bridge.

"Miss! The Macharia Excelsia was 20,000 kilometers off-target this time."

"Miss! The energy beam is off-target by 9.7 kilometers."

"Miss! The beam has deviated from its target by 50.3 kilometers."

Ves almost felt tempted to say a few words of encouragement to Saintess Ulrika, but he declined to do so in the end. This was a struggle that she needed to fight on her own. There was no one that could help her increase her hit rate aside from maybe Ylvaine, but her lack of belief in the design spirit precluded any possibility of cooperation.

"HIT! The Macharia Excelsia has managed to strike its target!"

"The attack inflicted effective damage on the target." Another bridge officer reported. "The transphasic energy shield of the largest yurzen warship has just lost a small amount of integrity."

The damage was relatively minor, but the symbolism of landing an attack was significant!

Ves grinned but quickly schooled his expression.

"Let's see whether this is a fluke or the beginning of an improving pattern."

The Macharia Excelsia did not stop and continued to fire whenever Saintess Ulrika felt the time was right.

The interval between shots remained fairly long at around 70 seconds on average.

Each time, everyone waited to see whether the ace pilot could repeat her earlier success!

"Miss!"

"Miss!"

"Miss!"

"Hit!"

Hits remained few and far between. Though there were signs that the aliens grew a bit more annoyed at the sporadic attacks, the aliens did not do anything else aside from engaging in more serious evasive maneuvers.

This was also partially why the Macharia Excelsia's hit rate gradually began to drop.

"I believe this is the best result that we can attain at this range." General Verle told Ves. "It is impressive that Saintess Ulrika and her ace mech are able to occasionally land an attack, but we are not exerting enough pressure to force the aliens to make more proactive moves. The alien vessels struck by the attacks can restore the integrity of their energy shields easily enough."

"I know." Ves let out a soft sigh. "Let's get closer then. Try to err on the side of caution whenever possible. I don't want my newly upgraded factory ship to get battered by the combined firepower of lots of enemy warships."

The Macharia Excelsia temporarily ceased fire and landed its feet onto the solid hull of the Spirit of Bentheim.

The factory ship accelerated forward while also engaging her superdrive for a bit. This enabled the capital ship to move forward just enough so that she ended up approximately a light-second away from the enemy warships!

It took a solid second for light to pass from one side to another.

While that still represented an impractical range for conventional space combat, both the humans and aliens had a few more ways to ensure they could land their attacks at this distance!

Before the Macharia Excelsia could fly out and begin to snipe the relatively closer enemy warships, the puelmer heavy cruisers already launched their first salvo of attacks!

A small forest of powerful laser beams struck the general area around the Spirit of Bentheim!

"We are under attack!"

"Stingray 1 and Stingray 2 have both fired with all of the secondary transphasic laser cannon batteries that they could bring to bear on our starship!"

"None of the enemy attacks has struck our vessel. The closest laser beam was only off-target by 3050 kilometers."

The puelmers wasted a lot of energy just to strike empty space, but they did not appear to be undeterred.

The firing rates of their laser cannons was rather high on account of their relatively smaller calibers.

That did not mean that they were weak! Sustained hits from a continued barrage of secondary laser beams had the same effect as being attacked by hundreds if not thousands of mechs at once!

The defenses of the Spirit of Bentheim could not resist such attacks for long, but that was exactly why the ship maintained a respectable distance from the enemy warships.

"It looks like the pair of puelmer heavy cruisers don't have an effective response at this range." Ves determined.

Stingray 1's accuracy was quite respectable as her laser beams generally strayed a lot closer to the Spirit of Bentheim.

Stingray 2 on the other hand exhibited much more deplorable accuracy. This was primarily because she was moving and firing while still engaged in warp travel!

The latter eventually gave up on wasting her energy after seeing that there was no point in persisting at this range.

Stingray 1 continued her attacks. The groupings of energy attacks slowly began to tighten, which showed that the puelmer crew members were slowly making improvements.

Meanwhile, the Macharia Excelsia began to land a lot more hits than before! Saintess Ulrika clearly did not consider the challenge to be as insurmountable as before, because the interval between attacks had shrunk to around 30 seconds!

"Hit."

"Hit."

"Miss."

"Miss."

"Hit."

"Miss."

The presumed flagship of the yurzens began to suffer more sustained attacks. The yurzens had to take the resonance-empowered shots more seriously as her transphasic energy shields began to drain at a more concerning rate.

Of course, the enemy ship was nowhere close to experiencing an actual threat. The yurzen raiding fleet began to make targeted adjustments and moved a couple of untouched starships in the firing line to temporarily take over the burden of withstanding the ace mech's distant strikes.

The enemy fleet could do this all day. One of the greatest advantages of energy-based defenses was that they could easily be restored to full if they were given enough time to recuperate.

The aliens readily made use of this advantage and showed through their responses that they still did not take the Macharia Excelsia too seriously at this point!

While this was happening, Stingray 1 finally managed to land a hit on the Spirit of Bentheim!

"We've been struck by the latest salvo from Stingray 1! One of our transphasic energy shields has lost a negligible amount of integrity as the Macharia Excelsia's Saint Kingdom has already weakened its power."

The Stingray 1 replicated her earlier success a few times, but the hits were too sporadic to pose a serious threat towards the Spirit of Bentheim.

Ves continued to observe the proceedings. As he analyzed the data, he felt that there may be a better way to pressure their opposition.

"Saintess, if you are feeling confident enough in your aim, you should try to attack the yurzen destroyers instead. Their transphasic energy shields are much weaker. It may be possible for your ace mech to punch through them with a single strike, especially if you borrow the power of the Phase King."

The Macharia Excelsia proceeded to shift its aim towards the smallest and weakest enemy warships.

This time, the ace mech's interval between shots had increased to an average of 50 seconds, but many of its attacks came close to hitting the narrower and nimbler yurzen destroyers!

"Hit! The resonance-empowered transphasic positron beam has inflicted severe damage to the enemy destroyer's energy shield! There is a high likelihood that it will break after getting struck again!"

The yurzen destroyer in question appeared to panic and quickly tried to move behind the hull of a nearby cruiser-sized vessel.

This took quite a bit of time as the enemy warships had deliberately spread out their formation.

Nonetheless, the Macharia Excelsia failed to land another hit on the threatened yurzen destroyer before the latter succeeded in taking shelter behind a bigger vessel.

"We're still not getting much done at this rate." Ves communicated to General Verle. "Maybe it is time to move forward by half a light-second."

"That... is a much riskier proposition, sir. We have found that the secondary laser cannon batteries of the puelmer heavy cruisers are in excellent condition. They are well-designed, well-built and well-maintained. The only way we can reduce their hit rates is if we enter into warp travel ourselves. We can choose to take the Macharia Excelsia along, but that will reduce the ace mech's hit rate. We can also choose to leave it behind, but that will deprive us of its most powerful defensive feature."

Their choices became harder and harder once the distance shrunk. It was already fairly amazing that the puelmers were able to threaten the Spirit of Bentheim to this extent.

It made Ves a little more fearful of how much more effective the aliens might be if his flagship moved any closer!

"We don't have many choices, general." He retorted. "I suppose we can keep up the current attacks in the hopes of eventually annoying the aliens so much that they will send a few ships at us, but I don't think that will work. We will just be giving the crew of Stingray 1 more time to repair her warp drives."

The Golden Skullers were all operating on a timer. There was no way to attain victory by playing the long game. They needed to get closer and take greater risks in order to advance their plan!

General Verle knew this as well, but he was being careful because the margin of safety was razor-thin this time.

A single serious error in judgment might be enough to doom the Spirit of Bentheim and everyone aboard her including Ves himself!

This was how tense their situation had become!

Chapter 5122 The Battlefactoryship

"We need to get closer!"

The distance between the Spirit of Bentheim and the alien warships still precluded many ranged mechs from taking part in the ongoing firefight.

Only the most extreme mechs and warships possessed the capability to strike targets across a distance of over a hundred-thousands of kilometers, especially when both sides actively maneuvered around in space.

The Spirit of Bentheim avidly put her newly upgraded main thrusters and maneuvering thrusters to good use. As massive and sluggish the factory ship may be, she was able to move considerably faster in space than she ought to, especially once she began to engage the warp function of her superdrive at a low setting!

The spatial distortions produced by the superdrive made it a little more difficult for the factory ship's sensors to make more precise and delicate observations of their distant foes.

However, the distortion factor was not too great so long as the superdrive did not generate a strong warp babble.

The ship also tapped into the sensor systems of nearby drones and hidden listening posts in order to gather more data.

As the powerful secondary laser cannon batteries of Stingray 1 kept trying to strike the maneuvering Spirit of Bentheim, the Macharia Excelsia also did its best to exert more pressure on the opposing vessels.

The alien ships all began to accelerate and maneuver in ways that inhibited the powerful ace mech from launching repeated strikes at any single starship.

Saintess Ulrika Vraken was not at fault. She managed to attain an impressively high hit rate with a positron rifle that was not optimally designed for long-ranged combat. She demonstrated superhuman skill, judgment and control over her mech with each and every shot fired by her potent machine!

Ves would have loved to have several more ranged ace mechs at his disposal.

In fact, if Patriarch Reginald Cross hadn't impulsively decided to join the Warborn, this phase would have become a lot more effective!

Even if the Mars could not possibly match the hit rate of the Macharia Excelsia, its ARCEUS System granted it a much higher volume of fire, thereby giving the ace hybrid mech a lot more chances to produce repeated hits!

As Ves observed the proceedings while he seated on his elevated command throne, he formed many different thoughts.

It would have been nice if his forces included a specialized mech unit that could deal effective damage at this range.

He briefly held a discussion with Commander Casella Ingvar about this topic.

"Under normal circumstances, it's not technically feasible to fabricate weapons that can effectively hit targets at this extreme distance." He told her. "It can only be done if a weapon is especially designed for this mode of combat and is fabricated with the utmost precision and care."

"Can you produce such a weapon, sir?" Casella asked while she remained on standby in her Minerva. "It would help our clan out a lot if our main fleet can still contribute to a battle against warships while remaining outside the effective range of our most dangerous opponents. It is frustrating to have so many mechs at our disposal that are forced to remain idle."

"Our clan doesn't have the capabilities to produce the ultra-precision rifles that you are asking for." Ves regretfully shook his head. "I am not trained and experienced in this specific area of fabrication. I will need to spend a lot of time in virtual simulation training to shore up my skills. The real limitation is our production equipment. I have a set of excellent first-class production machines including the AP-VEX superfab, but even they cannot help me attain the insane level of precision required to produce a laser rifle that can fire beams that are both precise and cohesive enough to actually hit a distant target."

This was why the Transcendent Punishers did not even bother to fire despite their reputation for landing shots by relying on the prescience of their design spirit.

Ylvaine could make all of the predictions he wanted, but if the luminar crystal cannons and the gauss cannons were so technically shaky that no amount of calculation could perfectly predict where a shot would actually land, even he would get overwhelmed by the sheer amount of possible outcomes!

"You can overcome this by buying a new set of production equipment, am I correct?"

Ves nodded. "That is true. A materializer will be able to solve most of our technical problems in this regard, but they can be ridiculously expensive. This is the most advanced industrial precision production machine mastered by the human race. Do you know how much it costs to obtain a relatively affordable production unit?"

Casella frowned. "I have heard that it is not cheap."

"Try 5 billion MTA credits."

The expert pilot almost lost her composure when she heard that sum!

"That is... considerably outside of our budget."

"Only first-raters have the financial muscle to play with materialization technology. That said, it is not entirely out of the question for us to get our hands on a device. I think the Red Association allows us to exchange a working materializer for around 1 billion MTA merits or so, but we will have to defeat several more alien raiding fleets in order to redeem such an extravagant reward. Do you think that is a worthwhile goal for us to work towards?"

Casella shook her head. "I understand your point. We will lose more than we can gain if we try to overreach and chase after a reward that we are not yet qualified to handle."

"That is also why I am not in a hurry to upgrade our forces to first-class standards even if we technically have the funds and means to do so. We will throw away our strong position in the second-class community only for us to get pushed to the very bottom of the first-class community. We will promote to first-raters when we are truly ready to do so, and not before."

Ves did not object to selectively procuring pieces of high technology in advance. What was important was that they paid for themselves by providing greater value in return.

The first-class workshop and lab equipment along with the brand-new Hyper Chamber all opened up a lot of promising opportunities.

He did not think that adding an expensive materializer to his factory ship would make that much of a difference.

"So there is no realistic way for us to fight at these distances in the short term, sir?" Casella asked.

"Probably." Ves replied. "Technology is undergoing rapid changes in the Age of Dawn. There may be ways to increase the precision of long-ranged weapons without sacrificing too much. We will just have to wait and see. Perhaps the aliens have the tech we want."

"Let us hope so. We should try to keep these puelmer ships as intact as possible."

As the two concluded their discussion, General Verle had just decided to close the distance!

"Advance but stay in warp. This will affect the hit rates of our other mechs, but it is necessary to prevent our ship from getting overwhelmed. Do not forget that our primary goal is to lure a part of the enemy warships away from Stingray 1. As long as we get close enough to pose a serious threat to any of them, the aliens will be forced to respond."

Against intelligent aliens that possessed the capacity for rational thought, this was an open conspiracy.

The aliens could clearly figure out that the strange human ship wanted to lure at least a part of their warships away.

Yet they might not have another choice if it turned out they were at a disadvantage in combat at these extreme ranges.

The Golden Skull Alliance observed the conditions of the enemy warships long enough to know that most of them were not that useful at these distances.

The technical states of the yurzen warships were nowhere near as fine as that of the puelmer heavy cruisers!

So far, the former played no role in this firefight aside from serving as additional targets.

The only way for the yurzens to properly make use of their numbers advantage was to get closer, but would the aliens be willing to take bait?

Everyone was about to find out as the Spirit of Bentheim gradually moved closer.

People's hearts started to beat faster as the factory ship closed the distance at a relatively fast pace under light warp travel conditions.

Ves had to admit that a superdrive offered a starship a lot of conveniences. His clan would have never dared to pull off a plan like this if the flagship could not move around the battlefield at such exaggerated speeds.

However, everyone also realized that it did not take much to rob them of this crucial advantage.

If the aliens ever destroyed or debilitated the superdrive in any fashion, the Spirit of Bentheim would instantly lose the ability to retreat.

Dozens of alien warships with working warp drives could easily surround the Spirit of Bentheim and overwhelm her defenses from every direction!

This was why no one took this situation lightly. Most of the crew of the factory ship probably never expected to take part in frontline combat, but the Larkinsons did not shirk their duty.

They all knew what was at stake.

As the Spirit of Bentheim closed the distance at an oblique angle, the aliens began to make more threatening movements.

The relatively lower tech yurzen warships formed several squadrons that sought to cover multiple angles and limit the maneuvering space of the human capital ship.

Stingray 2 began to move slightly closer under warp and began to open fire with her secondary laser cannon batteries yet again. This time the threatening puelmer heavy cruiser clearly showed that she was getting serious about fighting the intruding human starship.

"The attacks against us have intensified! Both Stingray 1 and Stingray 2 are striking our ship with much greater regularity!"

The new set of transphasic energy shields installed by the MTA were doing their jobs. Though every single attack by a laser cannon inflicted a lot more damage than a bunch of mechs, the protective measures were not weak!

It cost the Larkinson Clan over 50 million MTA merits as well as 33 kilograms of phasewater to procure a set of basic first-class shield generators.

In truth, no proper first-class outfit would be cheap enough to employ this kind of model of shield generators.

They demanded so much phasewater that it was a lot more cost-efficient to spend all of those resources to invest in more premium shield generators!

Nonetheless, despite their relatively low capacities, the shield generators were genuinely capable of resisting the damage output of serious alien warships, at least for a time.

The main limitation that prevented them from lasting so long was their insanely high energy requirements.

It costs a lot of energy to keep these hungry devices running!

The Larkinsons tried to mitigate these demands as much as possible by exposing just one of the sides of the factory ship's hull at a time whenever possible.

However, the crew also took advantage of all of the power reactors that were ordinarily used to meet the energy requirements of all of the Spirit of Bentheim's production lines.

Ves especially prized the first-class power reactor that was ordinary used to keep the advanced AP-VEX superfab as well as the other first-class workshop equipment running!

The greatest difference between first-raters and second-raters was how much energy they consumed to make their machines work.

Ves suspected that the mechers never thought that Ves would take advantage of the fact that his 'non-combat vessel' was equipped with a genuine first-class power reactor to use her as an improvised warship!

This was definitely an oversight on their part! Who knew that Ves and his Larkinsons would be crazy enough to send forth an industrial ship of all choices and use her to confront over a hundred alien warships at once?!

Clearly these people underestimated the extent of Ves' madness!

"Go forward! We need to get closer! We've got so many other mechs that are doing nothing right now. Let's not waste their firepower!"

Chapter 5123 Old Mech, New Powers

"Our transphasic shield generators are losing integrity at a more concerning rate. The accuracy of Stingray 1 is continuing to rise and the puelmers are becoming increasingly better at reading our maneuvers. Their laser cannons have lowered their damage output to a third of their maximum power, but their firing rates have doubled because of this shift!"

Transphasic laser beams pelted the space around the Spirit of Bentheim like rain.

Each time a laser beam threatened to strike the factory ship, it briefly lost intensity as it passed through the Saint Kingdom of the Macharia Excelsia before it slightly drained the integrity of the forward transphasic shield generator.

The damage inflicted by each individual laser beam was not much, but the adaptations made by the puelmers increased their hit rates so much that they were putting the Spirit of Bentheim under greater pressure!

The much more numerous yurzen warships had yet to properly open fire at this time!

Reports kept pouring in as the Spirit of Bentheim gradually entered into greater danger.

Ves could not stop himself from looking up the data that described the performance of the superdrive, the first-class power reactor and the first-class transphasic shield generators.

Each of these high-end ship systems played a crucial role in enabling the Spirit of Bentheim to function as a 'battlefactoryship'!

None of the production lines and other non-essential systems were operating at this time. The production workers had already shuttered many of those machines or temporarily shipped them to other friendly ships.

This not only prevented a lot of expensive equipment from suffering needless damage, but also reduced the Spirit of Bentheim's total mass.

The ship needed all of the maneuverability she could get, because by this time the larger and more threatening yurzen warships had begun to open fire with their laser weapons!

The volume of fire directed towards the Spirit of Bentheim ballooned at once!

"We are under heavy fire!"

"Increase the warp factor of our superdrive!"

"The accuracy of the long-ranged directed energy weapons of the yurzen warships are much worse than that of Stingray 1 and Stingray 2. Their armaments are also infused with considerably less phasewater, so their successful strikes also inflict less damage to our defenses."

The situation appeared to be a lot more dangerous to the human capital ship, but the situation was still under control.

Ves began to grin in the face of all of these overwhelming attacks. The differences in technological sophistication and power mattered a lot. The yurzens showed many inadequacies as their more primitive warships struggled to land their shots against the factory ship that was taunting the aliens from a distance.

In truth, the yurzen vessels did not excel in long-range combat at all. They were all designed and built to fight at much closer distances where fancy tech and advanced production methods made much less of a difference.

As long as they could get within knife-fighting range, the yurzen warships would be able to unleash their full arsenal and overwhelm any opponent by relying on quantity alone!

The aliens could make this happen as long as they engaged the warp drives of their warships and took the initiative to get closer!

However, the puelmers apparently forbid them from doing so because that would play into the hands of humans.

The yurzen aliens had no choice but to restrain themselves and continue to play escort to the partially crippled Stingray 1.

"We need to give the aliens more reasons to fear our might! Venerable Stark, are you able to add your firepower to the fight?"

Situated in the maw of the gigantic cat head prow, the Amaranto laid prone as she carefully adjusted the aim of her Instrument of Vengeance.

Despite the steadily shrinking distance, Venerable Davia Stark struggled to formulate her firing solutions when the Spirit of Bentheim was not only surrounded by a warp bubble, but also adjusted her course on a frequent basis.

Nonetheless, she was not considered the most accurate marksman mech pilot within the fleet for nothing!

"I am preparing to open fire." The guest pilot stoically announced.

Davia Stark resonated increasingly more with her masterwork mech. The Amaranto responded a lot better than usual, not just because she had recently begun to cultivate on her own, but also because her battle partner had recently passed the threshold that classified her as a high-tier expert pilot!

Any pilot whose resonance strength had begun to exceed 40 laves truly started to set themselves apart from their low to mid-tier colleagues.

A small but significant qualitative transition took place at that point that caused high-tier expert pilots to exert much greater power in all of their actions.

The Amaranto was an expert mech that was solely dedicated to long-ranged combat, so Venerable Davia Stark was able to employ all of her true resonance and skill towards offense!

She did not even bother to invest too much attention in keeping up an adequate resonance shield. The pilot put her full trust in the transphasic energy shields covering the Spirit of Bentheim and concentrated on landing an attack on the smaller and more elusive yurzen warships.

As the Instrument of Vengeance started to glow, the manifestation of the Illustrious One appeared and seemed to grant the charged weapon an additional boost that caused it to glow in radiant rainbow colors!

From an outside perspective, it was as if the giant cat head's mouth was about to launch a multicolored breath attack.

It was a pity that the Instrument of Vengeance was a relatively outdated luminar crystal weapon.

The long mech rifle did not possess any transphasic properties like the much more powerful Instrument of Doom.

While the latter weapon was much more suitable to be employed against tough and damage-resistant warships, its accuracy and precision at extreme ranges were much worse.

This was why the Amaranto had set the powerful transphasic luminar cannon aside for the time being. The expert mech could always switch weapons once her targets came a lot closer.

Sweat poured from Davia's brow as she continued to work through all of the complicated variables that affected her firing solutions.

This was a much more mathematical exercise than normal. With a warp bubble distorting her perspective to the outside cosmos, Davia could not even trust her expert mech's optical sensors to help keep her aim straight!

It was not until she saw a fleeting window of opportunity that she mentally pulled the trigger.

"Fire!"

The old masterwork rifle barked out a resonance-empowered laser beam that initially appeared to be wildly off-target, but almost instantly corrected its trajectory by bending back in the right direction!

A fraction of a second later, the bent laser beam seemed to bypass the larger yurzen battleships and cruisers that utilized their bulk to shield the ships from damage.

The Amaranto's crooked laser beam easily defeated this effort and precisely struck the yurzen destroyer that was still trying to recover from the initial attack dealt by the Macharia Excelsia earlier.

A short burst of cheers rang throughout the bridge!

The first Larkinson mech to open fire successfully managed to land a shot!

"Hit! The Amaranto's attack has interrupted the restoration of the yurzen destroyer's transphasic energy shield and caused it to lose a minor degree of integrity!"

The Amaranto's firepower may be fairly light, but her capacity to hit her targets at longer ranges was not in doubt!

Venerable Davia Stark immediately started the cycle over again and began to calculate her next firing solution.

The earlier success seemed to give her a little boost. She found it a little easier to resonate with her Instrument of Vengeance.

With the addition of the Illustrious One's blessing, the luminar crystal weapon seemed to take on a life of its own. It not only became more receptive to the expert pilot and the design spirit, but also stirred the exotic radiation in the immediate area!

This was an impressive sight. Although none of the parties involved had yet to learn any proper fighting techniques that could empower their attacks by leveraging the power of heaven, their intense will, emotions and familiarity enabled them to form a crude solution that represented a step in the right direction!

Ves was able to observe some of this from his command throne. His eyes lit up when he saw that Venerable Stark and the Amaranto did not wait for his intervention to figure out a better way to empower their attacks!

"I forgot that the Instrument of Vengeance is also a prime weapon."

Although it was relatively weak in this aspect, after years of being used and getting subjected to the minor willpower baptism of the same expert pilot, the Instrument of Vengeance had undergone a subtle evolution that caused it to become an unparalleled masterwork weapon when used by Davia Stark!

"The Amaranto's Ascension Paths are also helping a lot."

As one of the oldest masterwork expert mechs developed by Ves, it boasted a whopping 12 Ascension Runes! This was a clear indication that the Amaranto had grown considerably faster than almost any other living mech in the Larkinson Clan over the years!

The Amaranto solidified 8 Ascension Runes in the Path of the Illuminator.

Unlike the Promethea that only barely stepped into this path, the Amaranto shared a much closer relationship with the Illustrious One!

This enabled the latter mech to acquire a much greater understanding and control of energy weapons, among other benefits.

The Amaranto also invested 4 Ascension Runes in the Path of the Marksman. This facilitated her performance at longer ranges by increasing the precision of her weapon handling and by offering her expert pilot greater support in calculating her firing solutions.

Though the expert rifleman mech had already developed much of these enhancements through organic growth, she had undergone a small rebirth from the moment the Ascension Paths properly sorted out her evolution.

With the help of these mysterious Ascension Runes that not even Ves fully understood, the Amaranto's ability to resonate and draw power from E energy radiation had noticeably improved!

"Fire!"

After a delay of only half a minute, the Instrument of Vengeance barked out another bright and luminous beam from the 'mouth' of the Spirit of Bentheim!

Just like before, the resonance-empowered beam's aim appeared to be wildly off, but quickly corrected its course and struck the same destroyer yet again!

This time, the alien warship showed slightly more severe signs of faltering. The second strike had caused her stalled transphasic energy shield to lose more integrity.

The yurzen destroyer's defenses were not that strong to begin with. The various factors that amplified and elevated the damage potential of the initially weak Instrument of Vengeance and caused it to pose a serious threat against their smaller ships!

The aliens did not allow the Amaranto to fire at the threatened destroyer with impunity. The yurzens adjusted their formation and surrounded the vulnerable vessel from multiple angles.

While this caused more yurzen cruisers and battleships to turn into easier targets to strike, their response prevented Venerable Davia Stark from inflicting any permanent damage onto the small destroyer.

This was why she switched to another target. The yurzens brought a lot more destroyers along in order to make up the numbers.

A short moment later, another alien destroyer that was actively maneuvering in space received a small shock as a bright resonance-empowered beam struck her transphasic energy shield!

Now that she had entered her groove, Venerable Davia Stark needed less time to calculate her firing solutions.

It only took 23 seconds later for her expert mech to launch a follow-up strike that caused the ship to experience even greater distress.

None of the Amaranto's attacks had missed up to this point!

The yurzens began to experience much greater pressure now that they realized that the humans had a mech that was not only unreasonably accurate, but could also strike their assets at unreasonable angles!

As the Amaranto depleted the enemy transphasic energy shields with disturbing regularity, the other mechs stationed aboard the Spirit of Bentheim were also preparing to make their moves...

Chapter 5124 Feed The Flames

Venerable Isobel Kotin observed with envy as the Macharia Excelsia and the Amaranto exerted serious pressure onto the alien warships.

While it was understandable that the Macharia Excelsia was able to land its shots with an impressive hit rate at these distances, the Amaranto's performance exceeded her expectations!

The younger Larkinson expert pilot underestimated the skills of the older guest pilot.

The Amaranto also truly showed to everyone that a machine that was entirely dedicated to long-ranged combat could accomplish this difficult feat with greater ease than others!

Isobel frankly could not even understand how Venerable Stark and her Amaranto could effectively calculate their firing solutions when their laser beams also turned by up to 45 degrees!

The complexity of trying to land a hit under those circumstances increased dramatically under those conditions!

"FOCUS ON YOUR OWN GAME, ISOBEL." The Promethea spoke. "WE HAVE OUR OWN ADVANTAGES TO RELY UPON. I MIGHT NOT BE A MASTERWORK MECH LIKE THE AMARANTO, BUT OUR RIFLE IS FRANKLY BETTER AFTER MY PROGENITOR HAS APPLIED A POWERFUL UPGRADE."

Venerable Isobel nodded as she focused her attention back to her own machine.

The power of fire surrounded the upgraded Ignitron Transphasic Luminar Crystal Assault Rifle.

Though nothing seemed to have changed on the surface, one of the six attack phase crystals that were usually chambered in the weapon had not only become a lot more purple, but actively absorbed the fire energies floating in the environment!

The more time passed by, the more the transformed prime crystal began to embody the element of fire.

"We should get ready to open fire ourselves." Isobel concluded as she noticed that the Spirit of Bentheim continued to close the distance.

Though the ship was taking more and more serious damage by making it easier for the enemy to land their many shots, Venerable Isobel hoped to bring the firefight back in the favor of her side by adding her own firepower to the mix.

"Ya. Ya."

Her purple companion spirit was already eager to contribute to the fight.

Different from the last battle, Kiroshi learned a couple of useful tricks from Ves. She had only just managed to figure out how to turn herself into a firebolt and propel herself forward!

Now, Venerable Isobel Kotin and the flaming purple cat just needed to see whether their recent gains could make an actual difference on the battlefield.

Their hopes were high, but it remained to be seen whether their abilities and their recently upgraded expert mech could give them the edge they needed to make a more substantial difference.

A sense of anticipation and excitement welled up inside Isobel. The expert pilot slowly broke her carefully controlled facade as the rush of battle started to put her into a more fervent state.

"The Amaranto can bend her beams like a noodle, but my own machine's damage output is a lot hotter! Come on, Kiroshi! Let's charge up the Ignitron!"

"Yayaaaa!"

The companion spirit phased through the cockpit and dove straight into the waiting Ignitron.

The weapon immediately seemed to grow hotter as Kiroshi entered the new fire beam attack phase crystal.

The combination between the two seemed to produce a mutually reinforcing effect that caused the attraction of fire energies to multiply by several times.

As Venerable Isobel began to resonate with the Promethea and the rifle occupied by her companion spirit, she found that the Ignitron rifle harnessed much greater power this time!

As a hot and flaming purple corona began to surround the prone Promethea at an increasing intensity, the weapon braced before the expert mech began to glow increasingly brighter as different energies combined together in a charge that held exceptional burning potential!

Venerable Isobel and the Promethea both started to grow concerned about holding back such powerful energies.

They felt as if the Ignitron rifle might explode if they failed to pull the trigger in the ensuing moment!

Isobel gave up on trying to strike at the smaller and weaker exposed targets and simply trained her rifle at a distant yurzen battleship.

As soon as she locked her target, she pulled the trigger!

"FIRE!"

"Yaaaaaaaaaaa!"

Isobel almost gasped as she could feel Kiroshi riding along the stream of positrons!

This was the first time her companion spirit moved so far away from herself!

"It worked! The patriarch was right!"

Different from the Amaranto, the Promethea fired a resonance-empowered positron beam that was just a fraction slower than an equivalent laser beam.

Nonetheless, it also possessed transphasic properties, which meant that it could inflict much more effective damage against transphasic defenses.

The difficulty of striking an alien battleship was much lower. Isobel did not look too surprised that she managed to land her shot at this distance.

A silent but fiery purple burst of flames and energy struck the yurzen warship in question.

Though the vessel was a lot easier to strike than her smaller counterparts, her capacity to resist damage was also a lot greater.

Minor race or not, the yurzens clearly understood how to make the best out of their limited tech by making everything bigger!

At first, the alien officers and crew members did not even take the attack too seriously.

The native aliens learned much about their human foes. They understood that their opposition largely utilized second-class technologies and that ordinary expert mechs could not make a significant dent on their defenses.

However, a few observant crew members soon began to notice that the purple burst of flame that initially struck the segmented transphasic energy shield did not fade like normal.

This was not a normal phenomenon. Transphasic energy shields were not flammable, and their surfaces were too unstable to make anything stick for long.

The alien crew members began to exchange more alien words with each other as they tried to figure out a way to douse or shake off the flames.

The only reason why they did not exhibit more alarm was because the persistent purple flames did not stress the defenses of their battleship.

Several minutes passed by as the Promethea continued to charge her Ignitron rifle and fired flaming purple energy beams at the same target.

Not all of the shots hit their mark. Venerable Isobel was not as proficient as Venerable Stark in this regard.

"I'll just fire more often!"

Unlike the Amaranto, the Promethea did not expend too much energy to fire a full-powered attack.

Though the latter's damage output per shot was not as great as a consequence, it didn't matter to Isobel as each successful strike enabled her to pass on more flames to her target!

Isobel felt as if she was in tune with her Ignitron rifle. She completely forgot about using the other attack phase crystals as the only one that resonated the best with her was the new fire crystal!

The recently transformed sympathetic material was doing its job and more. It attracted more and more fire energies from the environment and used it to augment every attack with additional flaming potency!

The more Isobel utilized her Ignitron rifle, the more she gained a feel of her impressive new weapon.

She no longer felt jealous at the powerful weapons of other expert mechs anymore!

Who cared about the Instrument of Vengeance or the Hexfire when the Ignitron enabled her to make full use of her fire domain!

"Feed the flames!"

The Promethea exhibited more and more eagerness in her determination to add to the fire she had started onto the energy shields of the largest yurzen battleship.

Each time she managed to land a purple fire beam close enough to Kiroshi's current coordinates, the new burst of flames linked up with the existing ones, causing them to combine together to form a greater wildfire.

This not enabled Kiroshi to extend her time away from Venerable Isobel, but completely reinvigorated the flames that were having difficulty sustaining themselves after a time.

Shot after shot struck the enemy battleship until over 15 percent of her entire transphasic energy coverage became engulfed by a purple conflagration!

The yurzen officers and crew members could no longer ignore the fires that were increasingly blocking their sensors and inflicting constant damage onto their energy shields.

The alien battleship tried to shake off the flames in various ways. Her gun batteries shot directly at the flames, though this did nothing to diminish the fires.

The segmented energy shields shifted and rotated in the hopes that the flames would lose their anchors.

This did not work either as the fires either remained unaffected or because they deliberately moved whenever necessary!

The aliens grew completely confused at how stubbornly the growing conflagration stuck to their starship.

The flames did not entirely behave naturally!

It was as if they were truly alive!

What they did not realize was that this wild fantasy was far closer to the truth than they suspected.

With Kiroshi providing intelligent direction to the expanding fires, she had become the main contributor to the damage inflicted to the increasingly more beleaguered alien battleship!

When Ves observed what was happening from his command throne, he began to grin as he saw that his efforts to help Venerable Isobel out were vindicated!

From his perspective, the Promethea had truly begun to flex her strength as a prime mech!

Even though the immediate damage inflicted by all of the flames were not as good as a direct strike from an expert mech, the flames possessed a persistence that enabled them to steadily reduce the integrity of any energy shield.

Once the conflagration reached a point where they grew large and hot enough to cover roughly 30 percent of the energy shield coverage, the alien warship tried to move behind the cover of other friendly vessels.

The yurzens did not want to know what would happen if the purple fires surrounded the large vessel in every direction!

"Don't let that ship get away!" Ves urged. "Her transphasic energy shields are becoming increasingly more affected by the interference produced by the Promethea's flames. This is our best opportunity yet to punch through the protective barrier."

He was not the only one who recognized this opportunity.

Both the Macharia Excelsia and the Amaranto shifted their rifles away from their original targets and began to strike the yurzen battleship with powerful transphasic positron beams!

Even though their damage output did not add to the flames, they played an important role in damaging the segmented transphasic energy shields.

Still, the ship was built to take a beating. The aliens also made sure to rotate and change the orientation of their vessel, but that did not help as much as they hoped as Kiroshi simply moved so that she always offered the Golden Skullers a clear beacon to direct their fire!

Just as the yurzens believed that they could move their vessel behind cover fast enough to save their vessel from suffering real damage, the Macharia Excelsia suddenly started to behave a lot different than before.

The manifestation of the Phase King truly started to bless the ace mech's Hexfire rifle!

While the quick modifications applied by Ves did not truly enable the Phase King to exert much of his power, he was still capable of optimizing the transphasic properties of the weapon.

As the Hexfire rifle charged up as much power as it could, Saintess Ulrika Vraken finally pulled the trigger!

A bright positron beam quickly soared across space and struck the burning battleship!

The segmented transphasic energy shield finally broke after it already received so much abuse!

Though the alien warship quickly tried to compensate for this momentary gap in coverage by placing another segmented energy shield into place, the ship did not respond quickly enough for Kiroshi to slip into the gap!

The conflagration oddly began to shrink and grow cooler now that it had lost contact with the fire spirit.

While the yurzens briefly grew optimistic at this favorable turn of events, they soon realized why the earlier flames had lost power.

Kiroshi had managed to sneak onto the surface of the massive hull of the battleship!

A new fire broke out on the hull. Though it was a lot smaller and weaker than the earlier conflagration, the problem was that it actually began to feed off the thick but relatively weak metal hull!

A newer and far more alarming conflagration started to spread across the surface!

The greater the flames, the hotter they grew.

The hotter the flames, the easier it became for Kiroshi to burn the tougher and more heat-resistant alloys!

"The alien battleship's hull has caught fire! There is no indication so far that their fire suppression methods are working!"

Chapter 5125 Icon Of War

The conflagration had spread!

As soon as the segmented transphasic energy shield coverage of the yurzen battleship exhibited a gap, Kiroshi instantly spotted the opportunity and slipped past this powerful barrier!

This temporary vulnerability wouldn't have been as serious if the kilometers-long alien vessel featured multi-layered transphasic energy shields.

However, the yurzens were only treated as a minor race in the Red Ocean. Their access to advanced tech and higher quality materials were severely constrained due to the deliberate suppression of the major races that always had the greatest say over the dwarf galaxy.

This was why the yurzens had no effective means to prevent Kiroshi from bypassing the most important defensive barrier that protected the large and relatively expensive warship from outside threats!

At first, the aliens hoped that the purple fire would run out of propellant to burn.

They assumed that the previous conflagration that had engulfed much of the surface of their transphasic energy shields had only managed to grow so big due to the constant follow-up shots by the Promethea.

Now that the energy shield coverage had been repaired, the expert rifleman mech that was able to fire purple flaming beams should not be able to supplement the relatively small that was locked on the other side of the barrier!

That was what the aliens thought at least. Their logic was not wrong, but how could they know that expert pilots like to defy common sense the most?

The 'small' purple flame was not an ordinary kind of chemical reaction.

It was alive. Controlled and centered around a companion spirit and empowered by the resonance of an expert pilot, the extraordinary purple fire took root into the light transphasic alloys that made up the outer layers of the alien warship.

Although the alloys utilized by the natives of the Red Ocean were not as tough as those utilized by the humans, their density and resilience were not low!

Their resistance towards heat and radiation was quite high, and few aliens could ever imagine that these dedicated protective layers could ever catch fire.

Yet that was currently happening under the conscious and deliberate actions of Kiroshi.

The spiritual cat not only invested her own strength into trying to make the alloys combustible, but she already drew upon the ambient spiritual energies in the environment to reduce her burden and feed the flames even more!

The quick crash course in fire spells taught by Ves before the battle granted Isobel and her companion spirit a lot of useful insights!

Though the companion spirit did not acquire a formal cultivation method that could truly enable her to harness the element of fire as if she was its incarnation, Kiroshi was nonetheless able to employ simple and rudimentary methods to take advantage of E energy radiation!

This was a power that the yurzens had yet to master or become aware of, so they could do nothing to prevent the living flames from absorbing the vital spiritual energies they needed to not only sustain themselves, but also enhance their burning properties even further!

The yurzens desperately tried to douse the flames that were slowly spreading across the hull of their largest warship. Their measures became more and more extreme.

Several large nuzzles surrounded the purple fire that had taken root and spouted large amounts of water and other fire-suppression substances.

Several nearby gun turrets lowered their cannons as much as possible before firing straight through the flames no matter the risk of hitting other exterior modules!

A few shuttles launched from the hangar bay and proceeded to launch a payload of bombs and missiles in an attempt to disperse the flames.

Even that did not work!

The flames completely ignored the ordinary forces that should normally be enough to douse them, and continued in their mission to burn through the thick but ultimately vulnerable layers of alloys that made up the exterior of the alien capital ship!

This time, the yurzens truly became desperate. After a short but intense deliberation, the aliens chose to commit an act of self-harm in order to avoid even greater damage down the line.

A transphasic missile launched from a port, only to turn around and explode right in the middle of the conflagration!

This powerful detonation tore a hole through all of the exterior layers and breached multiple outer compartments!

Many different sensor modules and nearby gun batteries either got vaporized or fractured into pieces as the transphasic explosion mercilessly engulfed all of these parts that took a lot of effort and resources to produce.

A gaping hole had been left behind in the hull. The crater went deep enough to destroy several layers of compartments.

If not for the fact that the yurzens stationed in the danger zone had been evacuated in advance, the self-harm would have been a lot more serious!

The idea of the yurzens was not all that bad this time. Since the strangely stubborn and persistent purple fire apparently needed to eat through solid matter in order to propagate, why not wipe out all of the nearby alloys and other materials?

The aliens did not believe that the purple fire could still exist when there was nothing left but vacuum in the vicinity!

Yet as the dust began to settle, the faint optimism that welled inside of the hearts of the yurzens quickly disappeared.

Distressed noises escaped from their alien mouths as they saw that the purple fire had somehow managed to survive the devastation!

Though it had shrunk and lost a lot of volume due to the explosion, Kiroshi still managed to keep herself together.

Not only that, she purposefully moved towards the large exposed hole in the hull and began to engulf the bulkheads and other structural parts that were weaker and softer than the exterior layers!

The conflagration quickly grew in size and scope as Kiroshi spread the fires under her control at a considerably faster pace!

The yurzens had ultimately made a counterproductive move. Instead of keeping the purple flames outside as much as possible, the act of blowing a hole on their own ship gave the persistent purple conflagration the opening it needed to burn the ship from the inside!

The yurzens began to panic even harder now!

Dozens of damage control crews tried to employ every measure to contain, redirect or suppress the flames, yet their actions were completely futile.

Scores of yurzens who strayed too close to the flames not only failed to reduce the threat, but also burned to death in an instant when the seemingly intelligent flames devoured all nearby life!

As the flames started to breach through the more important compartments and lit important ship systems on fire, the yurzen battleship began to malfunction to an increasingly greater extent!

Entire ship sections lost power while other parts simply exploded and shattered all of the adjacent compartments!

The more alloys the conflagration burned, the larger it became!

The greater the size of the flames, the hotter they burned!

This caused Kiroshi to gradually find it easier and easier to burn through more and more materials at once.

Even the toughest and most heat-resistant alloys incorporated in the battleship was no match to the endlessly hungry flames!

As the conflagration started to engulf 15 percent of the entire volume of the yurzen warship, the flames attracted so many fire energies in the environment that all of the yurzens stationed in the intact sections of the ship started to feel as if they had been stuffed into an oven!

No matter how well the temperature control systems kept everything cool, the yurzens had the illusion that they were already starting to get cooked!

A wave of fear spread throughout the crew. Their efficiency dropped as panic and indecision started to spread.

The alien captain was left with a difficult choice.

Various subordinates and advisors suggested one option after another, but none of their ideas had made a difference.

The honored yurzen captain observed the state of the battleship. Over a hundred warships built by his race as well as two puelmer ships that contained a host of advanced technologies could do nothing to prevent his proud ship from turning into a burning wreck!

The most ridiculous part about all of this was that they were all fighting against a single human starship.

The human vessel did not even mount any guns. The main culprit responsible for turning his large warship into a flaming coffin of metal was a single mech that was no larger than a typical starfighter!

The yurzen captain simply couldn't understand how such a tiny machine could almost single-handedly cause the downfall of his powerful vessel.

Unfortunately, reality stared right in his face. He could no longer deny the truth. Seeing that there was no way to rescue his vessel, he issued the fateful command in his own alien words.

The yurzens around him felt ashamed and depressed, but they did not dare to disobey their latest instruction.

They all left their stations and boarded the nearest intact escape vessels.

Hundreds of miniature shuttles and other oddly-shaped contraptions launched into space and distanced themselves from the fires as much as possible. They all flew towards the other friendly ships that had tried to stay away from the burning battleship in case the flames were contagious.

None of these developments escaped the sight of the Golden Skull Alliance.

Everyone aboard the Spirit of Bentheim grew amazed and astonished how the Promothea played an outsized role in the downfall of one of the largest and most threatening alien warships.

The yurzen battleship might not be as advanced as Stingray 1 and Stingray 2, but the sheer size and volume of her gun batteries turned her into a powerful threat against both mechs and starships!

Taking down this key asset brought the Golden Skull Alliance a substantial step closer to attaining victory without suffering serious losses in the process!

"Did you expect the Promethea to become this good, Ves?" General Verle quietly communicated to Ves over their private communication channel.

It took several seconds for Ves to respond.

"I did not expect for Venerable Isobel and the Promethea to be able to burn an entire battleship after taking advantage of a single opening." He slowly responded. "The new fire crystal integrated in the Ignitron is a lot more effective at channeling fire energies than I thought. The real star here is Kiroshi. Her ability to launch herself at the enemy and exert so much control over all of the resonance-empowered flames showcases the true potential of companion spirits. If Venerable Isobel can repeat this feat many more times against other alien starships, the total damage that she can inflict on the alien raiding fleet might surpass that of Saintess Ulrika Vraken!"

Expanding flames had always been a symbol of widespread destruction. The power of fire was incredibly powerful in combat, and being able to harness it to such a degree turned Isobel and her battle partner into an icon of war whose potential for mass destruction was the greatest within the Larkinson Clan!

Ves pretty much regarded Venerable Isobel as his own homegrown version of the Destroyer of Worlds!

Perhaps one day this humble low-tier expert pilot might also evolve into an all-powerful god pilot who could single-handedly make the galaxy burn!

He shook his head. He shouldn't get ahead of himself. Any pilot could turn into a ridiculously powerful force of nature if he thought this way about everyone.

"Let's continue to light a few more starships aflame." Ves suggested to General Verle. "Concentrate all of the firepower of our mechs on a single large starship. So long as we poke a single hole in the vessel's energy shield coverage, Kiroshi will be able to do her magic once again."

General Verle clearly shared the same idea. He grinned as the Spirit of Bentheim boldly began to move even closer!

"We are already taking this step. We will soon enter into a range where our Transcendent Punishers can begin to contribute their firepower. The alien warships will truly heat at that time!"

Chapter 5126 Precise Bombardment

The burning wreck of the largest yurzen battleship caused the confrontation between the two disparate forces to enter into a new phase.

The aliens no longer dared to take the lone human factory ship lightly anymore.

Even though the Spirit of Bentheim had come by herself along with a modest amount of mechs, her 'firepower' exceeded their imagination!

Human tech was too powerful and confusing for the aliens. These extra-galactic invaders not only possessed a dizzying amount of high technologies, but also appeared to be capable of making a joke out of the laws of physics!

Flames were not supposed to be that effective against their starships!

The conditions needed to make their alloys combust and burn outside carefully controlled lab conditions led them to assume that they could never possibly lose one of their largest and most well-defended assets through a simple fire.

They were right.

Venerable Isobel Kotin and her Promethea just so happened to harness more than a simple fire. The combination between the two combined so many advantages together that their synergy had broken through to an entirely new level!

On paper, a low-tier expert pilot combined with a mid-tier expert mech represented a threat that was not inferior to a sizable warship!

The fact that the pair only needed to sneak Kiroshi onto the hull of any starship in order to light the entire vessel aflame meant that their capacity and efficiency for mass destruction was unparalleled at their respective tiers!

As Ves witnessed the Macharia Excelsia and the Amaranto directing their damage output at another yurzen battleship that was only a little smaller than the burning alloy wreck that had already drifted out of formation, he became inspired by what had happened.

He began to gain a new appreciation and understanding of how extensively E energy radiation could change warfare forever.

Although he had always imagined this profound shift in his mind, it always hit him hardest when he had a concrete example of what it actually meant in front of his face!

The Age of Mechs was largely dominated by mechs and mech pilots.

The Age of Dawn did not necessarily replace mechs, but exotic radiation unlocked a lot of additional means to enhance the performance of existing combat platforms!

It all depended on how extensively these assets were able to leverage E energy radiation.

Ves even began to develop more ideas about designing fire-themed mechs that could reproduce what the Promethea was capable of on a smaller scale!

Even if these standard mechs were not able to harness as much fire energy as a prime expert mech, they could easily become a powerful force of their own by relying on a numbers advance!

What would it be like to deploy a full mech regiment's worth of fire mechs in battle? The conflagration they could produce could burn entire cities!

The destructive forces that they could evoke through their collective effort was no less than a genuine weapon of mass destruction!

Ves felt extremely reluctant to put aside this promising idea.

"I already have too many design projects on my hands. I really don't have room for other mechs."

He turned his attention back to the battle.

The powerful direct damage output of both the Macharia Excelsia and the Amaranto quickly induced a lot of strain on the defenses of the yurzen battleship in their sights.

Combined with the fire beams launched by the Promethea that caused the enemy vessel's energy shields to endure constant thermal damage, it looked as if it was only a matter of time before this large and powerful warship shared the same fate as her predecessor!

The yurzens grew increasingly angry, frustrated and afraid at these circumstances.

Their own warships tried harder to damage or repel the Spirit of Bentheim, but the factory ship was difficult to catch under warp, and any successful strike failed to inflict any real damage due her unusually effective defenses.

The alien vessels needed to get a lot closer to bring their more powerful and devastating gun batteries to bear. However, the puelmers continued to insist on keeping all of their vessels in place in order to protect Stingray 1 as best as possible.

It became increasingly harder for the aggrieved yurzens to stick to the orders issued by the puelmers.

For now, all of the yurzens hoped that the combined damage output of all of their warships would steadily drain the defenses of the Spirit of Bentheim and drive this dangerous human starship away!

Just as the two sides reached a tentative new equilibrium, the other remaining mechs stationed aboard the Spirit of Bentheim began to make their moves as well.

Both Commander Taon Melin and Commander Casella Ingvar had been waiting for this moment.

The Transcendent Punishers had been withholding their fire for a long time. It was only when the operation had reached this phase that the classic Larkinson heavy artillery mechs finally came close enough for their cannons to effectively strike the distant enemy warships!

Taon carefully studied the performance and the behavior of the enemy warships. His insights combined with the occasional whisper from Ylvaine granted him an understanding of how his unit could advance the objectives of the Golden Skull Alliance.

"The yurzens are growing more and more frustrated with their inability to prevent their starships from suffering. Let us give them more reasons to worry about!"

The Ylvainan mech pilots began to aim the old but still fairly powerful cannons of their Transcendent Punishers at the designated targets.

Surprisingly enough, Commander Taon did not direct them to focus their damage output on the large yurzen vessel that was getting increasingly more surrounded with flames.

Adding additional firepower to this effort would not make much of a difference aside from creating a hole in the energy defenses a bit sooner.

What Taon actually wanted to accomplish at this time was to spread more panic and distress among the opposing aliens!

"Open fire!" He roared!

A score of Transcendent Punishers had precisely aimed their weapons in the direction of one of the many relatively small yurzen destroyers.

The alien ship's transphasic energy shield flared up as it resisted the salvo of kinetic projectiles and positron beams!

A surprising proportion of attacks managed to strike the destroyer despite her evasive maneuvers. The hit rate of the heavy artillery mechs had reached a whopping 75 percent!

This figure could have been higher if not for the technical imperfections and limitations of the current generation of Transcendent Punishers.

The effect of the opening salvo was less than impressive, though. The targeted ship did not actually look as if her energy shield experienced significant strain in resisting the attacks.

Many alien destroyer-sized vessels were expressly designed to fight against starfighters and other comparable small craft. Their ability to resist the attacks of larger classes of warships was not good, but their defenses were still formidable enough to shrug off a lot of weaker attacks.

As the Transcendent Punishers launched another salvo of attacks, the destroyer still did not look as if she was enduring any significant stress.

Conventional attacks were normally highly ineffective against transphasic defenses!

This had been the rule in the Red Ocean for a long time.

Yet the Larkinsons were about to put this established truth in doubt yet again.

"Are you ready, Casella?" Taon asked.

"I am. The Minerva and I are about to take action! Make sure your men open up to me as much as possible!"

The expert command mech remained sheltered inside the hull of the Spirit of Bentheim. There was little need for this strategically valuable masterwork mech to expose herself in order to exert a major influence in a battle.

As Casella began to resonate with the Minerva, the two worked together to Commandeer all of the Ylvainan mech pilots as well as the heavy artillery mechs under their control!

The process did not proceed as smoothly as they wished. They already expected this to happen as Commander Casella's relationship with the Eye of Ylvaine was not as good as her own Living Sentinels.

Nonetheless, they were all Larkinsons who fought for the same side. By relying on these commonalities, Casella's force of will reluctantly managed to take root inside the hearts of her subjects!

Each and every Transcendent Punisher that was safely ensconced inside a bunker began to glow and exude more power.

Casella's willpower had descended upon all of them, enabling her to lend a fraction of her own power and resonance to all of these machines.

The Sentinel Commander was accustomed to Commandeering hundreds if not thousands of mechs at once. She did not find it as challenging to spread her attention towards a hundred or so heavy artillery mechs.

As the heavy artillery mechs began to fire their next salvo, their Ylvainan mech pilots all started to listen to a second authority.

They were normally accustomed to receiving the guidance of Ylvaine, so they did not find it too disturbing to follow the intimate instructions of Commander Casella.

The next time the Transcendent Punishers opened fire, the yurzen destroyer in question experienced a lot more distress!

Not only did the hit rate increase to 90 percent, but every attack was empowered with a light amount of true resonance!

The amplification granted by resonance was not too great, but it induced enough of a qualitative transformation to the attacks that they struck the destroyer's transphasic energy shields with extraordinary might!

"Fire!"

"Fire!"

"Fire!"

As the Transcendent Punishers simultaneously fired their weapons numerous times, their attacks steadily compromised the integrity of the alien destroyer's energy shield with every blow.

Commander Casella willed the attacks under her direction to overload the energy defenses of her target, so the hefty quantity of resonance-empowered attacks continued to hammer the poor vessel without any sign of faltering!

The alien destroyer tried her best to take shelter behind another friendly ship, but the problem was that the yurzens had instructed their warships to distance themselves even more due to the threat posed by the Promethea.

The alien destroyer failed to move to the nearest form of cover fast enough for her relatively weak and less sophisticated energy shield to break!

"Her hull is exposed! Now is the time to cripple her entirely!"

The Transcendent Punishers began to inflict real damage as their resonance-empowered attacks impacted the relatively thin hull of the small warship.

Gun batteries collapsed and broke apart under the strikes of all of the gauss cannons. Entire compartments and hull sections started to get carved up by the might of the luminar crystal cannons.

Soon enough, the Eye of Ylvaine under the direction of Commander Casella Ingvar had succeeded in reducing the disparity in numbers even further!

No matter how weak this small alien warship might be, removing it from the board meant that additional mechs and mech pilots would survive the main confrontation that would occur hours later.

The surviving yurzens stationed throughout the surviving warships grew a lot more stressed this time!

The Promethea single-handedly struck fear in the hearts of all of the aliens serving on the larger and slower alien vessels that were all vulnerable to getting engulfed in all-conquering flames.

The Transcendent Punishers with the support of the Minerva possessed just enough resonance-empowered firepower and accuracy to make the aliens serving aboard the destroyers concerned as well!

The morale of all of these indigenous aliens deteriorated to a remarkable degree considering that the humans were heavily outnumbered in this absurd fight.

Nonetheless, the Spirit of Bentheim could not keep this up forever. Her first-class transphasic shields started to get drained at an increasing rate.

A single first-class power generator was not enough to properly support the demands of multiple transphasic shield generators.

Perhaps there might be hope of repelling the Spirit of Bentheim and her dangerous contingent of mechs.

It was at this time that the Everchanger chose to open fire.

The expert hero mech had been holding his fire up until now because the Gray Lotus was not as effective at longer ranges.

It wasn't until enough time had passed that Venerable Joshua and the Everchanger gained the confidence that they could hit their targets!

Chapter 5127 Everchanging Possibilities

Venerable Joshua and the Everchanger observed the feats of other friendlies while they awaited their turn.

They became impressed by how extensively Venerable Isobel, her companion spirit and the Promethea managed to set an entire warship on fire.

As the expert rifleman mech was in the process of doing the same to another large but hapless alien warship, Joshua started to think about how he could make his own impact in battle.

"Everchanger?"

"WHAT IS IT, PARTNER?" The third order living mech responded.

"Do you think you are better or worse than the Promethea?"

"IT DEPENDS ON YOUR CRITERIA. I MAY BE OLDER THAN HER, BUT I AM A MASTERWORK THAT EXPERIENCED MORE GROWTH. I HAVE MORE ASCENSION RUNES THAN THE PROMETHEA AND POSSESS A MORE EXTENSIVE AND VARIED LOADOUT OF WEAPONS. I SHOULD EASILY BE ABLE TO BEAT HER IN A DUEL."

"Can you single-handedly destroy a battleship that is several kilometers long by yourself?"

"...THAT'S NOT A FAIR COMPARISON."

Joshua snorted. While the Everchanger was right about his own strengths, it didn't seem to matter that much under the current circumstances.

The Larkinsons were no longer primarily preoccupied with fighting against human mech forces anymore.

Their new opponents consisted of alien warships with vastly different properties and rules of engagement.

The fact that it was not convenient for the Everchanger to fly close to the enemy fleet at this time severely restricted his effective options.

While the Everchanger possessed an unparalleled degree of versatility due to his mech type and design, he was not as effective in ranged combat as more dedicated expert rifleman mechs.

The only reason why the Everchanger got to participate in this harassment operation at all was because he was the current wielder of the Gray Lotus.

Joshua had witnessed the Gray Lotus in use several times before. He roughly understood what it was capable of. He also received additional instructions from Ves on how he should make use of its properties during this fight.

If he wanted to, he could easily utilize the Gray Lotus to shoot at the large enemy warships. The death beams would pass through the transphasic energy shields and other obstacles without too much hindrance and go on to kill any alien in the way.

He did not think this was a good use of his time. The few deaths he could cause by firing an extremely narrow death beam at an enemy warship would not be able to create a great impact.

Compared to the flames spread by Venerable Isobel, Joshua's paltry death beams wouldn't really make a difference!

"IF YOU WANT TO MAKE A SERIOUS CONTRIBUTION TO THIS BATTLE, THEN YOU SHOULD TRY AND PICK OFF THE PUELMER ALIENS INSTEAD. THEIR LIVES ARE MUCH MORE INDIVIDUALLY IMPORTANT."

Joshua nodded. "That is true, but... it is a lot more difficult to land my shots on Stingray 1 and Stingray 2. Both ships are smaller and a lot more maneuverable in realspace regardless of the states of their warp drives. Their ships are also highly automated so there's much less of a chance of taking away their lives than normal."

A highly skilled and specialized marksman mech pilot such as Venerable Stark would probably be able to land consistent hits on Stingray 1, but Joshua possessed enough self-awareness to know that his marksmanship could not come close.

He needed to play to his advantages instead. The only question was how. He could make so many possible decisions that he still hadn't figured out what strategy to employ this time.

"YOU SHOULD TRY TO MAKE USE OF WILLY, JOSHUA. PART OF WHY THE PROMETHEA IS ABLE TO BURN THOSE SHIPS DOWN IN THEIR ENTIRETY IS BECAUSE OF KIROSHI."

The mention of Willy caused a green cat to emerge out of the head of Venerable Joshua.

Just like Joshua, the companion spirit exuded a strong and refreshing sense of life. Willy's soothing aura could make any random stranger feel more inclined to make friends with the gentle companion spirit!

While Joshua liked Willy a lot as the green cat was great with kids and beasts alike, his direct combat applications weren't all that great.

Unlike Kiroshi who harnessed the power of fire as if he was born from it, Willy was just a friendly green cat!

"Now what should I do with you?" Joshua questioned as he stared at his second self.

"Mraaw mraaw." Willy replied.

Fortunately for Joshua, the Everchanger came to the rescue by supplying a possible new idea.

"WHY DON'T YOU TRY AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF WILLIE'S FRIENDLINESS AND USE HIM TO CALL DOWN ANOTHER DESIGN SPIRIT?"

"Huh?"

"GLOWS AND WORKING TOGETHER WITH DESIGN SPIRITS IS OUR SPECIALTY, JOSHUA. IF WE WANT TO FIGHT AT OUR BEST, WE NEED TO MAKE AS MUCH USE OF THIS AS POSSIBLE. THE GRAY LOTUS CAN BECOME A LOT MORE POWERFUL WITH THE HELP OF HELENA."

Making my gun more powerful won't help if I can't land my shots."

"THAT IS WHY I AM SUGGESTING YOU TO MAKE USE OF WILLY. HAVE YOU EVER USED HIM TO CHANNEL A DESIGN SPIRIT? IT WOULD BE LIKE HAVING A SECOND VERSION OF ME AROUND. THINK ABOUT IT, PARTNER. IF THE BOTH OF US CAN FULLY CHANNEL THE POWERS OF TWO DESIGN SPIRITS AT THE SAME TIME, WE CAN PRODUCE MORE POWERFUL COMBINATIONS OF ABILITIES THAT WILL BE SURE TO MAKE AN IMPACT IN THIS BATTLE."

The expert pilot started to imagine what it would be like and became enamored by the idea!

"Maybe you're on to something, Everchanger! This is a much better way of using Willy than to use him as a simple antenna that can help me resonate a lot better with one of your parts."

Cooperation had always been their strength! The more friends they could ask for help, the better! However, there were limits to how many pals they could invite at a time. It was possible for the Everchanger to activate multiple design spirits at the same time, but the connections became a lot shallower as a consequence.

What the Everchanger proposed was to switch his design spirit to Helena, while making Willy embody Ylvaine as best as possible to receive as much guidance from the prophetic spirit as possible!

Joshua tried this out right away.

While the Everchanger began to adopt a more gloomy and negative demeanor, Willy began to glow and change until his green fur slowly faded into a sacred shade of white!

"Mraaaaaaaaw!"

Willy did more than invoke the Great Prophet.

He turned himself into a vessel that completely enabled the design spirit to use the companion spirit as a miniature avatar!

Joshua no longer felt as if Willy's consciousness was quite there anymore. It had taken a backseat in order to make way for an aspect of Ylvaine's power!

Though this unexpected change caused Joshua to temporarily lose a lot of control over his own companion spirit, what he got in return more than made up for this inconvenience!

As the sacred white cat stared into Joshua's eyes, the avatar of Ylvaine conveyed a single meaning to the expert pilot.

"Mraaw."

"I... see. I will do my best." Joshua respectfully said.

The white cat swished his tail and flew out of the cockpit before diving into the Gray Lotus.

The relic weapon began to play host to the strong influence of two design spirits at this time!

With Joshua channeling the Great Prophet and the Everchanger channeling the Daughter of Death, several different types of energies started to swell around the machine!

From an outsider's perspective, the Everchanger began to exude an aura that could best be described as a holy coffin.

It seemed as if the mech was made to push powerful individuals into their graves!

Joshua struggled to maintain a focused and cohesive perspective throughout all of these strong influences. It became a lot more difficult for him to straighten his thoughts while being influenced by the strong presences of not just the Everchanger, but also two whole design spirits!

Slowly but surely, all of the parties involved in this endeavor began to align themselves to a single goal.

Once the parties performed their own responsibilities, the Everchanger finally started to lift up an arm and point the muzzle of the Gray Lotus in the direction of Stingray 1.

The mech pistol started to accumulate a lot of death energy. Under Helena's strong manipulation, the Black Demon Steel did its work as a sympathetic material and began to concentrate a lot of death energy, far more than it typically attracted when utilized by other mechs!

At the same time, Ylvaine's direct influence granted Joshua and the Everchanger a constant stream of instructions on how to adjust their aim to effectively harvest the lives of the puellmers stationed inside Stingray 1.

While the cooperative effort that took place inside the Everchanger already sounded complicated enough, the expert hero mech gained an extra dimension by putting its Ascension Runes into play!

One of the more remarkable traits about the Everchanger was that he had access to far more Ascension Paths than other third order living mechs.

After all, the Everchanger could switch to every possible design spirit that was available, which meant that the expert mech had access to all of their Ascension Paths!

Even when the Everchanger did not actively channel a specific design spirit, he still maintained a permanent connection to them through the Ascension Runes that he had already acquired. They served as small and specialized anchors that granted permanent boosts to the expert hero mech!

The Everchanger obtained 4 Ascension Runes from the Path of the Larkinson, which increased his cooperation with friendly Larkinsons as well as every friendly design spirit.

The mech also gained 2 Ascension Runes from the Path of the Illuminator, which slightly enhanced the performance of any energy weapon.

That still left the Everchanger with 5 spare opportunities to acquire Ascension Runes that he had yet to allocate. Joshua and his expert mech hadn't made a decision yet about where to spend their remaining resources.

It was at this time that Joshua began to come up with an unusual idea. He did not know why, but when he thought about all of the possible ways he could cooperate with Helena and other design spirits, he started to entertain a crazy idea that sounded as if it came straight out of the patriarch's mind!

"Everchanger, let's try this out." He suggested with a grin that bordered on unhinged.

"ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS? WE WILL WASTE A HEFTY AMOUNT OF ASCENSION RUNES IF THIS SCHEME DOESN'T WORK ACCORDING TO YOUR EXPECTATIONS."

"Nonsense!" Helena protested as her manifestation briefly appeared in the cockpit! "This is a fantastic idea! Give him what he asks for. Even if it doesn't work, I'm sure that you can make use of those Ascension Runes in another way."

After a bit of cajoling, the Everchanger began to progress in two new Ascension Paths at the same time.

The odd part about them was that they were originally designed for the Phobos!

Now, the Everchanger acquired three Ascension Runes from the Path of the Soul Reaper, which directly increased his compatibility and ability to channel Helena's lethal death energy.

The Everchanger also obtained two Ascension from the Path of the Ghost King, which enabled him to leverage a fraction of Titania's domain that facilitated increased control over subordinates.

This was not only useful for pulling off better battle formations, but also had another benefit that Joshua couldn't wait to test!

As the power of death and control began to reinforce the Everchanger in his special state, Venerable Joshua tried his utmost to respond to Ylvaine's guidance and adjust his aim.

The expert hero mech ultimately fired the Gray Lotus, causing this relatively small weapon to unleash an oversized resonance-empowered death beam that almost instantly struck the segmented transphasic energy shield of Stingray 1!

Different from before, a lot less of the beam got blocked by the successive layers of transphasic energy shields.

Instead, a large part of the energy beam had somehow been converted into pure death energy, which was naturally capable of bypassing all of these obstructions without suffering any significant losses.

"Nothing can stop the onset of death!"

The oversized death beam swept through all of the compartments in a single line through the hull, causing over 20 puelmer to collapse and roll no more!

Among these puelmers were several important engineers who just happened to make a lot of progress in repairing the sabotage previously inflicted by the Phobos!

As the aliens reacted with anger and distress at getting struck by another attack that somehow bypassed all of their defenses as if they were made of air, an even more distressing event began to occur.

The round bodies of the death puelmers started to stir again. The hands poking out of their bodies slowly pushed from the deck and caused the 'dead' bodies to roll.

While the other nearby puelmers grew confused at what had happened. According to the data transmitted by the suits worn by the deceased, the victims of the last attack should have lost their lives!

"Yyhhakaka!?"

"Kyuakaka!"

Just as the puelmer crew members thought that the attack hadn't been as effective as they thought, the supposedly revived puelmers started to go crazy!

They began to roll towards their living comrades and collided against them as if they had gone crazy!

Though the damage inflicted by the undead puelmers was not that big of a deal, their odd and unnatural behavior provoked a huge amount of anger and alarm among the surviving puelmers!

As Venerable Joshua and the Everchanger continued to exert more control over the alien bodies that were being propped up by the combined energies of life and death, their ability to cause mischief inside the hull of Stingray 1 steadily improved.

This produced even more chaos inside the enemy warship!

Chapter 5128 The Light Of Sol

Alexa tried her best to contain her eagerness as she set about preparing for her professor's inaugural class.

This was an event that had ballooned into a much greater occasion than usual!

Ever since Professor Ves Larkinson informed the Eden Institute of Business & Technology that he might end up in the middle of an ongoing action when it was time for him to give his first lecture on Frontier Wisdom, a lot of people expressed greater interest in this class!

A lot of curious students as well as professors stormed the doors of the school administration and requested special permission to attend the lecture as visiting guests!

From the way the people in the campus started to talk about this class, the entire lecture threatened to turn into an overhyped and potentially disastrous spectacle for the Eden Institute!

After all, it was completely unheard of for a mech design professor to dare to put his own life on the line while holding an actual lecture!

What if the professor died in the middle of his presentation?

What if an excessively violent incident took place that completely traumatized the attending students?

What if the professor acted in a fashion unbecoming of a civilized and dignified Senior Mech Designer?

So many things could go wrong during the two-hour lecture that any ordinary school administrator would have stopped all of this nonsense as soon as it became known! Such an unconventional class clearly broke numerous rules set by the institute!

Yet for some unknown reasons, the Eden Institute did not do so. It let the news about this explosive opening lecture spread without any restrictions and allowed this special event to build up momentum among the student body.

This was not supposed to happen in normal times!

Master Laila Devos who was in charge of the Department of Humanoid Mech Design actually took steps to respond to popular demand.

She not only relocated the class from a sizable lecture hall to a full-blown auditorium that could easily seat tens of thousands of attendees, but also granted permission to allow every student and professor to postpone and reschedule any other classes that took place during this time slot without consequences!

Master Laila Devos generated a lot of controversy over her extravagant and disruptive decisions, but she weathered all of the criticisms and pushback without flinching.

As a senior and respected member of the Devos Ancient Clan that founded and developed the New Constantinople System where the Eden Institute was located, the Master Mech Designer held a lot of power.

Alexa felt a lot of gratitude towards Master Devos for cooperating so well with her professor, though she did not know whether it was a good idea to invest so much importance in the opening lecture of an inexperienced teacher.

"Whether the academic teaching content of this Frontier Wisdom class is up to our standards is a secondary concern." The older woman replied to a question from the young teaching assistant during a meeting. "What concerns us all more is to wake up our students and make them realize that our civilization has entered into a new phase of history. Our existing order and stability has disappeared. Our society may be slow to adjust, but once the consequences of getting cut off from the Milky Way and escalating alien incursions begin to ripple across our colonies, it may be too late for the Terrans who have grown up in a time of peace to adapt to a more violent and brutal future."

The young Apprentice Mech Designer possessed a broader perspective on society and immediately understood the significance of the latest changes.

More people supported this unusual endeavor aside from Master Laila. A large number of Terrans in higher positions probably recognized this problem as well, and sought to disrupt the existing pattern of everyone's lives in order to make it clear that hard times were ahead.

After understanding the position of the higher ups, Alexa no longer held any concerns about her professor's employment in the Eden Institute.

As long as he did not act too outrageously like stripping off all of his clothes in the middle of his lecture, Master Devos would probably be willing to keep him around if only to inject a lot of much-needed dynamism in the rather orderly classrooms of the Eden Institute.

While Alexa was there, she also inquired about a different matter.

"Has the Devos Ancient Clan changed its position on the New Terran Federation initiative?" She asked in an eager tone. "The start of the Age of Dawn is the best time to implement a drastic transition to a new and more modernized regime. People are far more willing to accept extensive changes to their daily lives in this sensitive period of time."

The older woman gently shook her head. "It is too early to make such decisions, young lady. Before the Great Severing, I admired your grandfather's ideals. The Greater Terran United Confederation of the Milky Way has indeed become too stagnant for too many centuries. The New Rubarth Empire and the Big Two have all demonstrated a far better ability to adapt to changing developments."

A woman as clever and well-trained as Alexa immediately detected a turn in the other woman's argument.

"But...?"

"Now that we have entered a brand-new era, I do not think that it is appropriate for us to pursue sweeping changes to our society," Master Laia said. "Change is already inevitable, but too much of it is detrimental to the stability of the Terran Alliance. I am of the opinion that we need to move in the opposite direction. While we should not deny the changes that cannot be resisted, we must also work harder to maintain as much of our existing Terran identity, culture, traditions and hierarchy. Our ancient clans reigned at the top in our old state. Let us work to ensure that the Terrans in the Red Ocean still respect our right to rule."

So that was what made Master Laila and the Devos Ancient Clan so concerned. The Devosans possessed a long heritage in the Terran Confederation, but their ancient clan had been on the decline for a long time.

Though the Devos Ancient Clan had previously been receptive towards his grandfather's reform initiative, this time the Devosans became a lot more concerned about losing what little foundations they had left in the Red Ocean.

The two mech designers who were separated by several generations continued to talk about political concerns.

Even though Alexa was a lot younger and did not hold any considerable authority in her own clan, her lineage and connections still made it permissible for her to engage Master Laila Devos in conversation.

Master Laila ended the conversation by giving Alexa a bit of hope.

"Our ancient clan is wary of excessive disruptions, but we are willing to reconsider our policies if your grandfather is able to obtain greater support. We may especially be persuaded to support the New Terran Federation initiative if your coalition is able to obtain an endorsement from the Light of Sol."

Alexa wanted to wince when she heard this condition, though she was far too trained to expose her feelings and emotions in such an obvious manner.

"My grandfather is still in talks with Divine Thibault Clement. I am not privy to their discussions, but I can tell you that they have contacted each other more frequently after the Great Severing occurred."

Master Laila Devos did not look too impressed. "As the most honored guardian of our Terran people, the Light of Sol has an obligation to stay in the loop of what takes place in our territories. The Divine is in contact with every ancient clan and major group, including ours. That does not make us any more special."

The Light of Sol was the god pilot who originally undertook the responsibility to guard the Terran Alliance as it was being established in the Red Ocean.

He was the consensus candidate that all of the ancient clans agreed to send to the new frontier first. He enjoyed a high reputation among every Terran for his combat prowess as well as his clean and uncomplicated stances.

Of all of the god pilots that still pledged their allegiance to the Greater Terran United Confederation, the Light of Sol received the greatest trust because he made a vow of neutrality!

The Light of Sol even went as far as to sever ties with the Clement Ancient Clan in order to exemplify his determination to rise above the common political disputes within the Terran Confederation!

Of course, everyone suspected that Divine Thibault Clement still maintained informal ties with his ancient clan on account of his existing family ties.

In order to facilitate the Light of Sol's transfer, the Clement Ancient Clan took the initiative to suspend their plans to invest in the new frontier. This would help with adding more credibility to the Terran god pilot's impartial image.

If the phase whales had not made the fateful decision to flip the entire board, the Clements would have slowly trickled into the new frontier and developed their holdings in a low-key manner.

However, not enough time had passed before the Red Ocean got cut off from the Milky Way!

This had many implications. The most important of which was that it became even more difficult to sway the opinion of the Light of Sol.

In the past, it might have been possible to nudge him in specific directions by obtaining the approval and support of the ancient clan that he had formally left.

Now, the god pilot who was rumored to pilot the fastest god mech in existence was truly alone for all intents and purposes!

So many different Terran leaders with their own ambitions sought to gain the Light of Sol's support.

Even though everyone knew that it was nearly impossible to gain his approval, they all held the belief that they could win Divine Thibault Clement's support so long as they presented a cause that was good enough!

General Axelar Streon happened to be among them. His reform ideas were bold and maybe a bit too radical in several areas, but he truly believed he could lead the Terrans to a brighter and more prosperous future under a more enlightened regime!

When young Alexa last spoke to her grandfather over a comm call, she could hear the undisguised weariness in his voice.

"Good ideas are not enough to enact great change." The man who had touched the ceiling of the rank of ace pilot spoke in an authoritative voice. "The greatest of the Terran Confederation and by extension the Terran Alliance is its permanent internal division. I hate to say it, but in this turbulent transition period, we urgently need the direction and leadership of a single decision maker comparable to the Star Emperor."

"How can such a figure rise within our colonial superstate when we still remain so divided?"

General Axelar responded with a measured grin. "The only viable solution that I can determine is to obtain overwhelming personal strength. The only individual that meets this condition is Thibault Clement, but that stubborn mule is so lost in his own principles that he is blind to the future dangers and pitfalls of the Terran Alliance. This is why it is important that I take matters into my own hands. If I can grasp the opportunity that I need in order to go through the Mech Body Merger Process with confidence, I will not be reduced to begging for the attention of an aloof god pilot."

Alexa Streon was well aware of her grandfather's long-standing problems in this area.

At this stage, any imbalance between the ace pilot and the ace mech drastically increased the probability that the Mech Body Merger Process would fail!

General Axelar personally believed that he had done all he could to shore himself up. The only problem was that he had a strong hunch that the Ouroboros had fallen behind in its development.

Unless the famed Serpent of Creation and Destruction received a profound transformation in its very essence, Axelar Streon might never have the opportunity to go further in his impressive mech piloting journey!

Chapter 5129 Attack Of The Alien Zombies

While the Eden Institute of Business & Technology was preparing to hold an event that was utterly unique in the academic community, the ongoing contact between the Spirit of Bentheim and the yurzen raiding fleet had taken a new turn!

Powerful and entrancing mechs such as the Macharia Excelsia, the Amaranto, the Promethea, the Minerva and the Transcendent Punishers all exerted an increasing amount of pressure towards the yurzens.

Of the unusual and unconventional living mechs of the Larkinson Clan, the Promethea's presence in this clash had become so great that its contributions exceeded that of the Macharia Excelsia!

The principal reason why a mid-tier expert mech was able to outshine an ace mech was due to how much better the former adapted to the Age of Dawn!

With so many fire energies converging on the Promethea and Kiroshi, the Golden Skull Alliance obtained a strong visual example of the limitless potential of prime mechs and prime resonance in this new era!

Ves already started to receive a lot of private inquiries from within the clan and outside of it about applying similar adaptations to many other mechs.

He couldn't be bothered to offer a more detailed reply than explaining that he was too busy to bother with additional mech design projects.

"Our performance in this operation exceeds our expectations." General Verle informed the patriarch. "The Promethea is already on her way to burn a third large yurzen battleship. I am actually thinking about ordering Venerable Isobel to shift to a lower priority alien warship once she and her expert mech are done with their current prey. If we keep letting this pair of pyromaniacs have their way, nothing will be left of the most valuable derelicts aside from burned and ruined alloy funeral pyres."

The general of the Larkinson Army raised a good point. This battle was not just about breaking the alien raiding fleet and preventing it from raiding the colony built on Corellix III.

This was also about getting their hands on a lot of valuable intact tech and materials!

The Promethea's conflagrations were too powerful for their own good in this regard. They could burn almost anything. Nothing remained untouched in their wake. The warped and blacked metal structures that remained after a warship became completely engulfed in purple flames had become distorted beyond recognition!

What was especially painful for the Golden Skull Alliance was that the flames not only burned and evaporated any available stores of phasewater, but also caused transphasic alloys to lose their most valuable properties!

"To be frank, the Promethea's capacity for destruction has reached the level of a weapon of mass destruction." General Verle noted. "The Red Association generally doesn't step in because all of that destructive potential is under the control of a disciplined expert pilot, but if a day ever arises where we abuse this power to inflict untold harm onto our fellow human beings, the mechers may see fit to confiscate our expert mech."

That was indeed a rule enforced by the Mech Trade Association and presumably the Red Association.

This was why the Destroyer of Worlds never destroyed entire cities or planets occupied by lots of humans.

Mechs were supposed to provide humans with more targeted and less destructive means to beat each other up. Although it was always possible for these new small machines to pack so much power that they could replicate the dark days of the Age of Conquest, few if any serious incidents occurred due to the strong suppression of the Big Two.

Aside from that, the mech pilots who tended to wield the greatest power also tended to be the least willing to open fire on innocent civilians!

This was why Ves did not worry too much that Venerable Isobel would allow her flames to go out of control and threaten the lives of millions of humans.

Fire had a reputation for going out of control, but Kiroshi's authority over it was so strong that it was highly unlikely for the Promethea to inadvertently commit war crimes.

Besides, so long as Venerable Isobel Kotin and the Promethea reserved their most threatening attacks to the aliens, the Red Two should have nothing to complain about.

Aliens did not possess human rights by definition.

Just as Ves wanted to study the telemetry of the Promethea in greater detail, he suddenly noticed that the Everchanger had started to make his move in the fight!

"What?"

When Ves took a closer look at the projection that displayed the exterior and the interior of the living expert mech, his spiritual perception immediately noticed a lot more activity than usual!

"What the hell is doing on over there?" He questioned.

His quick observation told him that the Everchanger was channeling the combined influences of Joshua, himself, Helena, Ylvaine, the Golden Cat, the Illustrious One and Titania!

Even though not all of the aforementioned design spirits were all that present, Ves never imagined that his Everchanger could become so messy at this time!

That was not all. This odd and crowded combination of participants empowered the Everchanger to such a degree that the death beams fired by the Gray Lotus not only became a lot more powerful and accurate than usual, but also carried additional influences and properties!

From the way that Stingray 1's movements became considerably more erratic than before, the Everchanger clearly disturbed the puelmers a lot more than all of the other mechs.

This was quite impressive considering that the Promethea had already deprived the aliens of a couple of powerful armed capital ships!

Ves couldn't hold in his curiosity. He concentrated his mind and forged a connection to the Everchanger.

Though his old masterwork mech became a little more crowded as a consequence, Ves tried his best not to mess up the delicate balance.

Once he was able to 'get inside' the Everchanger and study what everyone was actually doing, Ves grew even more surprised than before!

He never anticipated that the Everchanger could be used to mess with the enemy in this fashion!

Though the Everchanger was not able to gain a visual feed of what was actually taking place inside the hull of Stingray 1, he could feel most of the parties weaving together their respective powers to produce an astonishing result.

They were killing the puelmer crew members struck by the death beams, only to 'revive' them in order to animate their corpses!

Ves could feel how Helena snuffed the spirits of the puelmers with her death energy, only to prevent them from passing on in their entirety.

Venerable Joshua and his Willy subsequently injected a little life into the puelmer corpses to support the next operation.

The Titania stepped forward to facilitate the act of taking deliberate control over the 'undead' puelmers!

All of this and more ensured that every puelmer that fell after getting struck by the resonance-empowered death beam not only lost their ability to contribute to the enemy, but also turned against their own compatriots!

This was a brilliantly effective move!

Even though every individual death beam strike could not affect too many puelmers at once, the sheer amount of chaos and confusion that ensued whenever a batch of puelmer crew members lost their minds and turned against their fellow aliens was delightful!

For example, the surviving puelmer engineers who were working hard to repair the warp drives all became mobbed by violent and jerky undead bodies that rolled up to them and acted as if they hated all forms of life!

In another section of the ship, a third of the puelmers responsible for managing a pair of secondary laser cannon batteries, causing them to roll away from their stations and disturb their former colleagues. The disruption caused by this disturbance forced the affected laser cannons into silence before an automated system kicked in and temporarily took over control!

The physical damage that the undead puelmers were able to inflict was rather limited. It would have been a different story if the undead had been physically imposing nunsers, but the round bodies of the puelmer race were exceptionally unsuited to hand-to-hand combat!

Even so, the continuous conversion of healthy puelmers into maddened undead caused a lot of mental damage to the aliens that were normally accustomed to having everything under control!

Even now, Joshua, Everchanger and the design spirits were trying to figure out how to make the undead puelmers do more than basic physical actions.

They could do a lot more damage inside the ship if the animated alien bodies were able to act on their original memories and issue highly damaging commands to the systems that kept Stingray 1 running like clockwork!

If that was not possible, they at least wanted to make the undead puelmers activate the weapons at their disposal so that they could pose a more serious threat against their fellow living crew members!

Ves could see that they were still too far away from making this happen.

Everyone involved was too accustomed to this. Without developing more sophisticated methods to retain the memories of the deceased and have the undead aliens purposefully act on that information, it was impossible to turn these bodies into corporeal fiends.

Perhaps it might be different in the future once the Everchanger progressed further in the Path of the Ghost King and Titania developed her strength even further.

Venerable Joshua began to experience increasingly greater strain.

Even with his companion spirit sharing the burden, it became increasingly more challenging for him to support this expansive joint operation with each passing minute.

The distance between the Spirit of Bentheim and the alien raiding fleet was still considerable, so Joshua and the Everchanger had to struggle even more to maintain active connections to what was happening inside Stingray!

"Ah! I can't do this any longer! I need to take a breather!" He said as he steadily pulled back from the current effort.

"Mraaaaaw..." Willy echoed as the green cat let go of Ylvaine and returned.

As Venerable Joshua kept breathing hard as if he had just completed a strenuous exercise session, the manifestation of Ves appeared openly in the cockpit.

"Sir." The pilot said as he had already picked up the presence of his patriarch. "What do you think?"

"It's... not what I expected from you." Ves steadily replied. "It looks like your cooperation with Helena has enabled you to pull off a few new tricks. I have already witnessed how the Phobos is able to produce a lot of advantages through the interplay of life and death. Perhaps the Everchanger can grow and develop even faster if it gains a greater familiarity with an opposing element."

Joshua did not think so far ahead. He just wanted to produce immediate results in order to make more significant contributions to the clan.

"I've been trying to figure out a way to make the lives of our enemies miserable. These puelmers and other aliens are so accustomed to basking under the strong protection of their transphasic energy shields that they can't conceive of any attacks that can bypass these barriers entirely. I bet those puelmers are truly pissed at us now for having the temerity of turning their own colleagues against them. Look, Stingray 2 and a bunch of yurzen warships are no longer trying to maintain a protective envelope around Stingray 1. They're beginning to close in on our ship!"

"Wait, what?"

When Ves paid attention to the latest movements of his enemies, he saw that Joshua was not exaggerating.

The aliens could no longer endure the harassment from the Spirit of Bentheim and her eclectic contingent of mechs!

Two dozen yurzen warships under the lead of Stingray 2 moved to break away and surround the Spirit of Bentheim from multiple sides!

"The aliens have finally taken the bait! We need to get out of here right away!"

The crew of the factory ship had been paying close attention to the alien warships for a response just like this. The Spirit of Bentheim had already turned around as fast as possible and increased the warp factor of the superdrive so that she would not get overtaken by her angry pursuers.

"The chase is on! The alien vessels have split! Let us make sure to keep it that way!"

Chapter 5130 Current Limitations

The harassment operation had entered its most crucial phase at this time!

The entire point of sending out the Spirit of Bentheim to the enemy fleet in advance and at great risk was to tempt the puelmers into separating their homeships from each other!

Stingray 1 was in a vulnerable position, but so long as Stingray 2 kept hovering around, the two vessels would still be able to support each other during a full assault.

The fact that the Spirit of Bentheim was able to weather the attacks of many alien warships including Stingray 1 and Stingray 2 did not mean that the firepower of the opposing side was weak.

The factory ship's abnormally high defenses combined with the additional protection granted by the Macharia Excelsia's Saint Kingdom were the only reasons why the ship and all of her crew hadn't been blown into pieces!

No other ship in the entire expeditionary fleet was capable of enduring hundreds of full-powered energy beams fired by vast arrays of warship-grade cannons.

The transphasic energy shields of the Spirit of Bentheim had actually taken a serious beating during this time. If not for the fact that the first-class shield generators as well as the all-important first-class power generator were brand-new and in peak condition, the energy shields might have slipped, causing the hull to suffer actual damage!

The Spirit of Bentheim would have retreated sooner or later if the aliens failed to take the bait. It was quite fortunate that the combined actions of the Promethea, the Everchanger and all of the other mechs finally frustrated and enraged the aliens to such a degree that they no longer stuck to the most rational course of action!

As the Spirit of Bentheim rapidly sped away from Stingray 1 and her remaining escorts, the ship received a much-needed breather.

The distance between the Spirit of Bentheim and the alien pursuit force did not increase all that much.

The main reason why the Spirit of Bentheim no longer faced as much danger as before was because most of the incoming damage was now directed towards the stern area of the factory ship.

The crew deliberately tried to preserve the transphasic energy shields that covered the rear part of the capital ship as much as possible for this precise scenario.

Not only that, but a lot of threatening warships had been left behind in order to maintain a protective envelope around Stingray 1.

Due to the damage inflicted by the Everchanger, it had become even more certain that the partially crippled puelmer heavy cruiser would not be able to regain her full mobility anytime soon!

Nonetheless, the consequences of enraging the puelmers were quite serious. As the two sides tried to speed away as fast as possible, it quickly became evident that the second-class superdrive of the Spirit of Bentheim was not quite up to the task!

Ves looked at the map that displayed the relative positions as well as the movement data of the ships involved in the case.

His lips curled downwards as he noticed that the picture was not looking too optimistic.

"We are being dragged down by our superdrive." General Verle shared his opinion with Ves. "There is nothing wrong with it, but the fact that it is a second-class product that is trying to be both an FTL

drive and a hyperdrive at the same time is not doing it any favors. The only thing it has going for it is the fact that it incorporates 3 kilograms of phasewater, which is more than enough to cover the entire hull and increase the upper warp factor limit. However, it takes too much time to build up the warp factor. The more efficient warp drives utilized by our enemies are much better in this regard."

Ves understood these faults quite clearly. The Spirit of Bentheim was not a sleek corvette or a slender warship designed to intercept enemy ships in warp travel. Her hull was relatively large and heavy to accommodate a lot of production lines and various different goods.

A lot of her capacity was not dedicated to more combat-relevant functions at all. This meant that her defenses and mobility were nowhere near as good as a dedicated combat vessel with a comparable amount of volume!

As Ves studied the data on the pursuing ships, he understood that the upcoming hour or two would likely turn into a serious ordeal to the crew and mech pilots.

"Stingray 2 is able to accelerate so fast on account of her smaller hull and relatively powerful warp drive. She should be able to overtake and flank us soon." He guessed. "The yurzens have made a careful selection and sent out a large chunk of their fastest destroyers and light cruisers. Their firepower and defenses might not be as good as that of their larger ships, but they are so fast that we can't shake them off our tail."

Mobility was incredibly important in space combat, particularly when both sides engaged in lots of maneuvers!

Both Ves and General Verle understood how much of a disadvantage the Spirit of Bentheim was in now that it became clear that the aliens gained a crucial advantage.

As the alien warships tried to spread out and surround the Spirit of Bentheim from multiple different angles, the mechs did not remain idle at this time.

The Amaranto, the Everchanger and the Promethea had all left their previous bunkers in the cat head prow and instead emerged outside and anchored themselves onto the hull.

They exposed themselves in order to attain better firing angles.

The Transcendent Punishers on the hand remained in the same bunkers as before. Their spread positions meant that there were always a bunch of heavy artillery mechs that were unable to bring their guns to bear against the enemy warships, but enough of the mechs were able to fire at the pursuing enemy warships that it didn't matter too much!

The two sides exchanged a lot of firepower while they were on the move. The warp bubbles surrounding all of the ships along with the fact that they were maneuvering a lot more actively than before caused both sides to drastically miss a lot more shots!

A lot of firepower went to waste as the mechs and ships had to struggle a lot more to land a hit on their adversaries.

While the human mechs did better in this regard due to extraordinary skill or guidance, even they could not keep their hit rates as high as before due to all of the movement and vibrations.

As the mechs tried to repeat their earlier success as much as possible, the aliens showed that they had adapted to the human tactics.

The mechs tried to focus their fire onto the transphasic energy shields of one of the pursuing light cruisers.

Meanwhile, the Promethea heated up the vessel in advance by surrounding it with living purple flames.

Once a segmented energy shield had reached a limit, Kiroshi was able to slip through the momentary gap in defenses and begin to take root onto the hull like before!

This should normally result in yet another alien warship slowly going up in flames!

The difference was that this did not happen this time.

Just as Kiroshi buried herself onto the exterior hull of a vulnerable yurzen light cruiser, the alien helmsman jerked the ship out of formation and made her move away from the ongoing chase, thereby rapidly building up distance between herself and the Spirit of Bentheim!

Once the distance between the two starships surpassed a single light-second, Venerable Isobel grunted and started to experience an escalating degree of strain in her mind!

Eventually, the expert pilot reached a limit where she was no longer able to extend her companion spirit so far away from herself!

"Yaaaa!"

Like a band that had been stretched to its limit, it instantly snapped back to its original state!

Kiroshi had disappeared from the hull of the starship that was just starting to get cooked and reappeared inside the cockpit of the Promethea!

"Yaaaa..." The burning cat shook her head in order to regain her bearings.

"Ngh... It looks like there is a limit after all..." Isobel said as she tried to shrug off her headache.

Once Kiroshi left the hull of the affected yurzen light cruiser, the crew quickly noticed that the purple flames not only lost their conscious direction, but also started to lose their original ferocity.

Though the flames still retained a bit of extraordinary qualities that enabled them to sustain the original process of reinforcing their potency by absorbing ambient spiritual energies, it no longer worked as efficiently as before.

The fire-suppression systems of the alien ship finally worked. Since the flames were no longer able to burn the metal hull nearly as well as before, they would have probably sputtered out by themselves after a few more minutes.

Once the flames had been completely put out, the alien light cruiser altered course and began to catch up with the other chasing vessels in order to return to formation and continue with her current mission!

When Ves saw this happen, he knew that the aliens had successfully solved the threat of the Promethea.

"I am sorry, sir. My companion spirit cannot stay so far away from me." Venerable Isobel apologized. "There is a limit of sorts that prevents us from remaining too far apart. I think I might be able to increase it as my resonance strength grows, but that will take years."

Ves dismissively waved his hand. "You have nothing to apologize for. Your performance has already been above expectations. There is no need for you to shoulder the burden of eliminating the enemy vessels all by yourself. You can still play a useful role by straining their defenses and pushing away any enemy vessel that gets too close or poses too much of a threat. Your deterrence value is still great."

Venerable Isobel regained a bit of optimism. "Ah, you are correct. I will go back and make our enemies as uncomfortable as possible."

Isobel and the Promethea's shortcomings in this scenario showed that there was still a lot of room for improvement.

Ves already started to think on how he could use his own expertise in mech design and cultivation science to upgrade the Promethea to better support combat at extended ranges.

He did not believe that this limit was set in stone. There had to be an artificial method that could help Kiroshi travel further away from her principal. Ves just had to gain the right inspiration or master the right theories.

The Promethea also needed to enhance her direct damage potential. Relying too much on flames to do all of the work was too slow. She was already relying far too much on other powerful mechs to do the heavy lifting in opening a hole in the energy defenses of the enemy vessels.

Ves began to imagine an upgraded quasi-first-class version of the Ignitron Luminar Crystal Assault Rifle that could inflict a hefty amount of direct damage, whether it was through its now-iconic fire beams or with any other energy beam type.

"Aside from that, I should also drastically increase the proportion of fire sympathetic materials in the mech frame. The amount of fire energies that the Promethea is able to leverage is not enough. Without Kiroshi, the flames she can generate are not sufficient enough."

Perhaps the other Larkinsons thought that the Promethea had suddenly become a lot more powerful, but Ves only spotted a lot of flaws and shortcomings that had become incredibly obvious in the fight so far. The expert rifleman mech could have easily taken down an additional ship or two if Ves had made the machine stronger!

"I'm really itching to start her upgrade project right away. She can become a lot more useful in our future battles if I can bring her up to my latest standards again."

Ves had to resist the urge to do so as he still needed to complete his existing projects.

He was just a Senior Mech Designer at the moment. He still had a long way to go before he attained the legendary Mech Touch and produced a completely new design and mech with a single sweep of his arm!