

The Mech 5671

Chapter 5671 Red Mercenary Association

More than a month passed by as Yuri Enfame and 18 other lucky heavy artillery mech specialists acclimated to their Ultimatums.

They practically spent every day on training and building up their relationships with their new machine partners.

By swapping stories and tips with each other, the heavy artillery mech specialists all became proficient in the use of the newly purchased machines. None of them fell behind, as they did not want to give Commander Pellicky any reason to replace them with another mech pilot!

It helped that the Ultimatums actually weren't as difficult to pilot as they thought.

When it came down to it, they were heavy mechs with 5 big guns at their disposal. Four of them were identical to each other and worked like any other heavy artillery cannon.

The biggest and most impressive Onyx Cannon needed a lot of care and attention in order to utilize its power to the best effect, but its slow firing rate gave the mech pilots plenty of time to monitor its readings and make adjustments.

Even if the mech pilots overlooked a few considerations, their living mechs occasionally 'nudged' them into action.

Pilots such as Yuri Enfame still hadn't become entirely accustomed to piloting a living mech.

Compared to all of the other machines that they had piloted in the past, they noticed that they weren't 'alone' in their thinking anymore.

The Ultimatums most definitely had a mind of their own, and even if it was only as intelligent as a pet, that was already enough to completely redefine their relationships with their living mechs!

To be honest, Yuri did not have many opportunities to interact with the glows and the entities behind them in any way due to the limitations of practice sessions.

It took a considerable effort to employ the Guided Aim and the Amplified Destruction abilities.

The mech pilots had to put a lot of effort into adopting the right mindset to call upon these powerful embedded abilities.

Trying to activate both at the same time forced them to enter into a highly demanding mindset!

This was one of the reasons why the Pellicky Praetorians had hung back for an entire month. Commander Pellicky demanded that each of the assigned mech pilots could activate both embedded abilities on demand.

After spending so much time on training and preparation, more and more mercenaries started to get antsy.

Pellicky Praetorians was mostly made up of her old buddies from her former state back in the old galaxy. Many of them used to serve in various mech militaries, but there were also ex-mech athletes

and other miscellaneous people among them. Each of them came together under the belief that Commander Pellicky would lead them to a better future.

So far, she had not made a lot of progress in earning greater glory and riches for her mercenary outfit, but the Red War offered brand-new opportunities for rapid promotion.

This was why many of them were eager to test their new capabilities against their alien foes!

"Have you and the others reached the point where you can employ both abilities at once in combat?" Commander Pellicky asked.

"Almost." Yuri Enfame responded. "It is tricky as the two 'design spirits' are different from each other. Ylvaine cares a lot about having faith in his foresight. The Destroyer of Worlds is a lot more tolerant, but you need to build up the strong desire to destroy your target in order to earn her grace. There are many among us who are good at doing the latter due to our prior training and experience, but the former is still giving us trouble."

The mercenary commander frowned. "That is not what I want to hear. We are not rich enough to afford any transphasic rounds for your Onyx Cannons, but the non-transphasic ones that are especially designed to fire from them are already expensive enough. We can't keep wasting good ammunition that should be used to break open enemy warships rather than a collection of worthless asteroids."

"Don't worry about us ma'am. You can go ahead and accept a new mission. My fellow Ultimatum pilots and I will get it together somehow. We are making steady progress in activating the embedded abilities of our new mechs."

"...Very well, Yuri. I will proceed with the assumption that we can depend on you all. I think I will start off with a lighter assignment just to be certain."

Yuri grew a bit more relieved. He knew what that meant. The Red Mercenary Association frequently issued group missions where multiple smaller mercenary outfits could join together and fulfill a common responsibility.

While different mercenary groups typically didn't get along very well, the RMA usually penalized any mercenaries that inhibited the success of the mission.

Weeks went by before the Pellicky Praetorians arrived in a star system that was located in the hinterland of a contested middle zone.

The star system held a medium-sized colony that was in the process of getting fortified.

It took forever to get the defenses in decent shape. The construction works proceeded at a slow pace since the location was not close to the border. The star system was not endowed with a lot of resources either, so many materials had to be imported at great expense.

That normally shouldn't have been a problem since the star system had never suffered an attack.

However, the Red Two somehow managed to get word that the Red Cabal had instructed many different alien raiding fleets to bypass the nearest border systems and penetrate even deeper into human space before raising hell.

This imposed a much greater burden on red humanity as it needed to cover more star systems than ever. If too many colonies got razed, then it became increasingly more difficult to stabilize the border.

The Red Mercenary Association therefore called upon mercenaries to fill in the gaps and make sure that the vulnerable star systems at least had a better chance at fending off enemy assaults.

"Who are we fighting with this time, commander?"

"Five other mercenary outfits have signed up for this defense mission. They are the Grimly Brothers, the Five Fingers Club, the Hullsi Wardogs, the Rutherford Family and the Desiccators."

A few of the Praetorians frowned. There were way too many mercenary outfits in the Red Ocean for everyone to know about all of them. The only names that managed to rise above anonymity and earn enough fame to become well-known within the mercenary community were all special in different ways.

"I heard about the Desiccators." Yuri mentioned with a disgusted expression. "There are people who hate the aliens, and then there are weirdoes who want to torture them before cutting off their body parts to use as decorations. These guys are all sick. Just the stench of them is enough to pose as a biohazard!"

Commander Pellicky crossed her arms. "We do not get to choose our partners. It is just our bad luck that the Desiccators accepted this mission as well. You know how it goes. If you don't like the other mercs, just stay out of their way and they will do likewise."

"I've heard good stories about the Grimly Brothers. The two brothers in charge set a good example for their men and are good at talking to their employers. They have the best reputation out of our collective."

"I haven't heard about the Five Fingers Club before, but they seem average if we go by their record. Their mechs and mech pilots are not the best, but they should be able to pull their weight."

"The Hullsi Wardogs are the worst. I have worked alongside them back when I was working for another outfit. The Wardogs have low recruitment standards, and that tends to attract the wrong sort of people. I do have to say that they are ferocious fighters when they think the battle is in their favor. They also have numbers on their side."

"Who are the Rutherfords?"

"They're a fallen family according to the news reports. They have taken up a mercenary life in order to earn enough war merits and climb their way back to their previous society. From the few missions they have completed so far, their soldiers are all consummate professionals, and their mechs are also good. They are definitely sitting on a large cash reserve."

The Pellicky Praetorians had learned that it was best to understand their temporary allies before they started their mission.

So far, the mission group consisted of a mix of good and bad apples. This was not too remarkable as the Red Mercenary Association often employed this approach.

"The good apples must keep the bad apples in line. You know how this goes. Do your job well, and we will all get our paydays."

"How likely is it that our mission location will get attacked, commander?"

"There is a small probability. There are so many occupied star systems in this middle zone that the alien raiding fleets can go anywhere. I wouldn't be surprised if we will spend the next months in total silence and boredom."

"Silent and boring missions are the good ones."

"Not for me! I need to earn a lot more war merits, and we can't do that without a fight."

"Be careful what you wish for, Jonathan."

As the Pellicky Praetorians and the other 5 mercenary outfits arrived in orbit of the planet they were supposed to protect, they all split their focus and became responsible for monitoring different sectors.

At the same time, they landed a portion of their mechs onto the surface of the planet in order to guard against planetary raids and invasions.

These assignments had never been too popular because the aliens might decide to engage in outright orbital bombardment with their powerful primary gun batteries!

Yuri Enframe deeply hoped that he would not get selected for this assignment.

Fortunately, his wish came true this time.

"I want you right by my side in case the aliens are coming." Commander Pellicky told Yuri. "I am counting on you to keep the Hooligan Barke intact and in fighting condition."

"You can count on me, ma'am!"

Days went by as the mercenaries settled down. Defense missions tended to be incredibly boring and uneventful most of the time, so the hired guns quickly distracted themselves with various activities.

The mercenaries were barely 10 days into their mission before a listening post placed in the other system detected the tell-tale warp bubbles that denoted the passage of alien warships!

After confirming that no human starships were traversing along the same trajectory, all 6 mercenary outfits quickly started to prepare for battle.

The star system was not that big, so the incoming fleet would probably arrive in a matter of hours.

"That is not enough time!"

The mercenaries scrambled their mechs and readied their other assets for an immediate engagement.

Once the alien raiding fleet came close enough to the planet, the enemy warships drastically lowered the warp factor of their drives and scoped out the enemy resistance.

Despite the clear and obvious presence of additional human reinforcements, the alien raiding fleet boosted forward anyway and showed no signs of wanting to avoid confrontation!

"This is going to be tough." Commander Pellicky spoke over the command net. "Our sensors have detected 32 alien sub-capital warships and 6 alien battleships. I don't recognize the species who built these ships, but they obviously like to build them small and fast. That must be one of the reasons why this fleet managed to slip past the border."

There was not much room for any maneuver in this battle. The enemy warships were clearly compelled to attack the colony settlement or die trying.

The hired mercenaries had to stand their ground and do their best to defend that same settlement. They were only allowed to abandon their mission and flee if the battle had truly reached a terrible stage.

As both sides waited for the confrontation to begin, a completely unexpected incident occurred.

BOOOM! BOOOM! BOOOM!

"Ack! What are you doing, Grimlys?! Why have your mechs opened fire on our positions?!"

"The troops brought by the Grimly Brothers have gone crazy! They have lost all of their reason and are launching an all-out attack on our mechs!"

"The settlement is under heavy attack! The Grimlys care nothing about the collateral damage they are wreaking around them. Stop them now!"

For an inexplicable reason, the heroic and well-regarded mech pilots of the Grimly Brothers had done the unthinkable.

They betrayed their humanity and turned their weapons against their own kind!

"Why?! How could this happen?!"

Chapter 5672 Brittle Unity

Before the alien raiding fleet had arrived at the crucial planet, the human defenders had already entered into complete disarray!

All of the mech pilots and other personnel of the Grimly Brothers had turned their weapons against the other mercenaries assigned to the same defense mission!

The Grimly troops that previously appeared friendly and easy to talk to had cast aside all joviality and tried to murder as many humans as possible!

Despite being heavily outnumbered, their sensitive positions and their abundant preparations caused their opening strikes to inflict devastating damage!

On the surface of the planet, plenty of mech hangars, weapon depots and defensive works blew up in short order!

Squads of melee mechs in Grimly colors dashed into the exposed formations of ranged mechs and cut them to pieces without mercy.

Hundreds of personnel that had fled the collapsing structures or still remained in the open for whatever reason got trampled by the feet of the hostile Grimly mechs.

As screams, explosions and collisions engulfed the entire colony settlement, the other defenders on the ground eventually adjusted to the inexplicable betrayal and turned all of their assets against the Grimly mechs!

Though the Grimly mechs were outnumbered 5 to 1, their initiative along with the targeted elimination of many key assets gave them a lot of momentum!

It did not help that the Grimly soldiers all turned into fanatics who were willing to die for their cause!

This was an attitude that was inherently alien to mercenaries. The troops hailing from outfits such as the Five Fingers Club and the Rutherford Family were completely unwilling to let themselves get dragged down by the rabid Grimly traitors.

"Humans must fall before we can rise again!"

"For a pluralistic society!"

"The Genlock Cell is the harbinger of change!"

When the back-footed defenders heard the insane slogans broadcast by the crazy Grimly mech pilots, the apparent truth had become clear.

"The Grimlys are cosmopolitans!"

"It is not just the two brothers that have betrayed us all. Their entire ranks are filled with traitors!"

"What is the Genlock Cell?"

"I don't know, and I don't care. Defend your station and do whatever it takes to eliminate them. If the aliens arrive before we can root out all of the Grimlys, we are doomed!"

As the colony settlement continued to experience heavy fighting, the situation in orbit was not much better.

At the same time the Grimlys on the ground struck the first blow against their former allies, their mechs up in orbit turned their weapons against the other mercenary forces and opened fire!

They did not attack without coordination. Even though they behaved as if an invisible switch caused them to turn into fanatical warriors, the Grimlys still retained their logic and capacity for thought.

In order to destabilize the defense of the planet as much as possible, the mech units of the Grimly Brothers in orbit concentrated all of their firepower towards the mechs and starships of one particular mercenary outfit.

The most numerous but also the most poorly equipped Hullsi Wardogs fell victim to the opening strikes!

"We're under attack by the Grimlys!"

"We need assistance straight away!"

"Arrgh! They're bombarding our flagship with transphasic attacks! We have lost contact with our commander!"

"Abandon ship!"

The Grimlys not only utilized their strongest attacks to eliminate the flagship of the Hullsi Wardogs, but also suppressed the mechs in the open, sowing even greater panic and confusion in the process!

Commander Pellicky slammed her fist against the command table. "Do not give in against the traitors! Hold your ground, Wardogs. We are giving you fire support and sending additional reinforcements. We need to eliminate all threats within our ranks before we can face the alien threat."

"We can't, Pellicky! The timing of this attack is too devious. The moment we divert troops to gang up on the Grimlys, the alien warships will be able to smash apart our disarrayed and incomplete formations. We had a plan!"

"What do you suggest we do then, Commander Rutherford?!"

"As callous as it may sound, we should allow the Grimlys to tear into the Hullsi Wardogs. The latter are more numerous than the former. The Wardogs can bite down the Grimlys and keep the traitorous forces occupied. Do not worry. The fall of their flagship has caused the Wardogs to become disconnected from this channel."

Commander Pellicky immediately snarled. "Are you daft, you failed noble? You don't know anything about mercenaries, least of all the Wardogs! Look at them! Do you see them putting up a brave fight against the traitors of red humanity?!"

Though the Hullsi Wardogs had already lost their flagships and a couple of other combat carriers, they still had plenty of intact mechs and starships left to put up a good fight.

Even if their command and control had broken down, the individual officers should be capable of rallying their troops and fighting back against the Grimly mechs."

A third of the Wardog mech units initially did so. They still recalled their mission and their obligation to defend red humanity and prepared to resist the incoming Grimly mechs as best as possible.

Another third of the Wardogs had stalled and effectively did nothing as they fell into confusion.

The command structure broke down and the division between the ranks caused many mech pilots to express their own sentiments in a time where unity was needed the most!

"Forget about this mission! We've already failed from the moment the Grimly's opened fire on us. This planet is already doomed!"

"We can't run at this junction. We have only recently been able to wipe out the red mark on our records. Once we flee from a battlefield without proper cause again, the RMA won't bother to reinstate our previous mark. It will stamp us with a black mark right away. None of us will be able to find any work once that happens!"

"I don't know about you, but I would rather live with a black mark on my record than die as an exemplary mercenary. Let's go! Who knows what other traps the Grimlys have laid."

The remaining third of the Hullsi Wardogs completely ignored all of their obligations and retreated without any hesitation.

Unlike genuine soldiers, mercenaries had no attachment to their mission objectives. They just wanted to fight in order to get rich and retire in comfort. They also wanted to earn a lot of war merits if possible, but if they had to sacrifice their lives in order to make this happen, then they would rather throw up their hands and run away.

That was exactly what they did. From the moment the disorganized formation of the Hullsi Wardogs became even more patchy due to the desertion of so many mechs and starships, doubters among them instantly became infected by the panic.

"We can't stay here anymore! We don't have enough mechs to fend off all of the Grimly mechs. This mission is over!"

The retreat turned into an outright rout before the Hullsi Wardogs launched a proper counterattack.

The entire sight looked absurd to everyone else. Commander Pellicky and many others watched on with complete disbelief as the Hullsi Wardogs exhibited the worst trait of a mercenary.

Just because they lost their flagship and a few other assets, the Wardogs had already lost all of their courage. They made it clear that they would rather live on in disgrace than to stand their ground!

The collapse of the Hullsi Wardogs had become a foregone conclusion. Even the braver and more honorable mercenaries among them had become infected by the spreading fear and panic.

Even the most stalwart of soldiers had little choice but to run when they realized that only a paltry amount of mechs were left to resist the onslaught of the Grimly Brothers.

Commander Pellicky slammed her fist against the table again in frustration.

"Those idiots! If they could just stand their ground, they wouldn't have collapsed so soon!"

Two out of the six defenders had already been knocked out of the fight. The remaining four outfits that were left all tried to figure out a response.

Commander Rutherford expressed a clear opinion. "This mission is meant to be fulfilled by 6 mercenary organizations, not four. Not only do we have to fight against the alien raiding fleet with less numbers, but we have yet to properly respond to the Grimly Brothers. The circumstances have already deteriorated to such an extent that the RMA will not punish us for failing to defend this planet."

"I agree. We can make up for this failure by completing other missions. The important part is that we will remain alive to do so. We no longer enjoy any kind of numbers advantage."

"We still have troops on the ground!"

"Then evacuate them as quickly as possible! If I were you, I would forget about bringing any mechs or supplies. Just send a fast ship and load in as many of your people as possible."

"We can't do that! There is a high chance that the ships will get shot down by anti-air fire from the Grimly mechs."

"Leave them behind!"

"NO!"

None of the mercenary commanders had any appetite to fight this battle any further, but that did not mean they were of one mind on what to do next.

Half of them wanted to stay longer so that they could buy time to evacuate their people on the ground.

The other half just wanted to run away as soon as possible! They needed to travel in a single group as much as possible in order to prevent the alien warships from utilizing their warp drives to catch up to the fleeing human vessels and defeat them in detail.

The tension over the command net grew stronger. There was no way to do both at the same time.

"Five minutes." Commander Pellicky proposed through gritted. "Give us 5 minutes. We will begin our departure after that. Is that agreeable?"

"...Fine."

"The clock starts now."

Five minutes sounded like a short time, but a lot could happen during this interval!

At the moment, the treacherous forces of the Grimly Brothers continued to hound the Hullsi Wardogs in order to ensure that the latter had no chance of regaining their wits and reforming their mech units once again.

This would probably take a while, so the Grimly mechs were not an acute threat for the time being.

What truly concerned the human forces was that the alien warships were about to open fire!

If the gun batteries mounted on the hull of the alien warships were similar to the other ones employed by the aliens, then their energy weapons should just be able to target the human starships.

"The aliens have just fired their laser cannons!"

"The Alabaster Kayak has just been struck by three primary laser cannon strikes! Half of her directional energy shields have collapsed, and the outer layers of her hull have been vaporized!"

"Move the Alabaster Kayak to the rear and cover for her retreat. Tell me whether their energy shield generators can still become active again."

"We have just transmitted an emergency evacuation order to our troops on the surface. They are trying their best to board any shuttle or transport that is fast enough, but there are still enough Grimly mechs intact that they can shoot down these non-combat vehicles with ease!"

"Then tell our remaining mechs on the ground to squash those traitor mechs!"

"We can't! They are too dug in and are difficult to dislodge. They are using our own defensive works against us! We can break them open if we all work together, but the mechs belonging to the other outfits are not cooperating!"

"What are they doing?!"

"They have already turned tail and run away! They want to flee fast enough so that they can catch up with the ships in orbit that are about to retreat."

"Fools!"

It was pure chaos on the surface!

Chapter 5673 Customer Bias

"Good day, fine citizens of the Red Ocean. I am your host Locur Deklok, and I shall be giving you a relevant and up-to-date outlook of the mech market for today. Today, our focus rests entirely on the market for second-class heavy artillery mech. Sales of the famous Ultimatum design have broken through yet another record! Designed by Professor Larkinson and mainly distributed by Isthmus Manufacturing based in the Rubarthan Pact, more and more mech factories are being retooled in

order to meet the insane demand for a mech model that is 7 times more expensive than a more conventional equivalent!"

The man dressed in a rich green suit continued to address his audience that was largely made up of mech insiders throughout human space.

The Monthly Mech Report was one of the most authoritative news portals in human space. It did not deliver the news as lightning fast as other publications, but it had earned the appreciation of many professionals due to the depth of its analysis and the capacity to accurately measure the pulse of the mech market.

"Today is yet another day where the recently released Ultimatum UDS-550 has broken a new sales record. The trend is slowly starting to reach a plateau, but we predict that the sales of the total mech line will spike two times in the near future as the much-anticipated release of the UDS-551 and UDS-552 variants draws closer! We have polled many mech users and they have all indicated a strong interest in purchasing versions of the Ultimatum that are much more optimized for space combat at longer ranges. Once the two new variants are released, we expect Isthmus Manufacturing to break through a record despite its best attempts to discourage overconsumption through setting purchase limits and charging higher premiums."

The sales of the Ultimatum could not be stopped. Many of the astonishing claims surrounding the Ultimatum had all been proven valid. Though the actual effect on the battlefield did not always match the hype, the fact that the mech possessed a solid foundation in both conventional technology and E-technology was enough to make countless second-raters excited!

"In order to gain a greater insight on the Ultimatum line, we here at Monthly Mech Report have managed to secure an exclusive interview. For the first time since the release of his award-winning Ultimatum line, Professor Ves Larkinson has agreed to attend this studio in virtual form and answer my question as well as some of yours!"

Locur Deklok spent the next minutes on explaining the process and the rules for submitting questions.

The communication lines of the show had already started to get flooded with proposed questions!

The workers in the background definitely had their work cut out for them. They had to select the most appropriate questions and make sure that it did not contain any allusions towards unsavory topics.

As many viewers submitted their questions over the galactic net, the much anticipated guest finally made an appearance!

Professor Ves Larkinson's body shimmered into place onto the seat opposite to the desk where Locur Deklok stood ready to greet the famous mech designer.

The tier 3 galactic citizen most definitely dressed for the part. Compared to his previous public appearances, he now wore an exquisitely tailored smart blue suit that was covered with subtle off-color patterns that depicted cats and other symbols of the Larkinson Clan.

Normally, such a design would have looked garish, but subtle color differences and lack of too much contrast made it look elegant instead.

The Senior Mech Designer looked like a true first-rater. If not for the fact that he still looked relatively young for his galactic citizenship tier, he would have definitely commanded a lot more respect!

"Welcome to the show, Professor Larkinson. It is no secret that many different publications sought to secure an interview with you. For months, you have closed yourself off to outside inquiries and continued to go about your day on the surface of New Constantinople VIII. What is the reason for your refusal to offer personal clarification to the many current and future buyers of your all-time bestseller?"

"It is quite simple, Mr. Deklok. I believe that the Ultimatum model doesn't actually need that much clarification. The Living Mech Corporation and the Isthmus Manufacturing have already published an exhaustive amount of documentation. They do not explain every facet of the Ultimatum model, but it is enough to make proper use of my mechs. I encourage every customer to explore any further aspects themselves."

"That is not a satisfying answer to your customers."

"Even I cannot explain everything there is to know about all of my products because living mechs are constantly growing. That means that they can improve certain parameters and become much better at performing a specific task than before. The direction of their improvement correlates with the activities they are doing and how much the mech pilots emphasize specific actions. Rather than rely on the input of a mech designer who is far too busy to handle individual customer inquiries, it is better that you explore my products yourselves."

"Your message is clear, Professor Larkinson. Customers must continually monitor and track the growth of their living mechs themselves. Is this the entire reason why you have refused to issue any statements relating to the Ultimatum?"

"The Ultimatum model is the first of many commissions that I have accepted." Ves replied. "Once I have completed the design and delivered it to the intended recipient, it is up to the latter to determine how to handle it. Isthmus Manufacturing is more than capable of marketing any mech, and does not require my assistance to properly handle the downstream activities of this product."

"I see. It is logical that a mech that has such a strong connection to the Rubarthan Pact and one of its god pilots is under the control of a Rubarthan institution. Speaking of which, the Ultimatum continues to remain a rare sight within the Terran Alliance. Despite the obvious desirable traits of your hyper heavy artillery mech model, the Terrans and the citizens living within their sphere of influence have consciously rejected the use of your Ultimatum, preferring to use their arguably inferior second-class heavy artillery mech models instead. What is your opinion on this undesirable state of affairs?"

This was a contentious topic to say the least. Anyone utilizing the Ultimatum while in Terran space would not get beat up, but they would definitely become ostracized until they left or got rid of the arch-Rubarthan mech!

Ves had prepared for this kind question well in advance, so he was not afraid of offering his direct reply.

"I admire both the Terrans and the Rubarthans. They are both great people who possess two distinctly different cultures that have withstood the test of time. That said, I am not a part of either

of them. I am a former citizen of a third-rate state and have risen up to lead my own independent clan. I do not seek to divide my market and exclude my products from any group of customers. It is regrettable that I cannot control the behavior of the Terrans."

"Are you blaming the Terrans for showing bigotry against an arguably Rubarthan mech?"

"As a mech designer, I do not see any borders when I observe a mech." Ves calmly replied while sounding as principled as possible. "Whether a product is associated with the Terran Alliance or the Rubarthan Pact should not be a reason to reject it in the other market. Mechs do not pick sides. They serve whoever pilots them. If the Terrans and their dependents are open-minded enough to sincerely pilot the Ultimatum, I think they will be pleasantly surprised by how much my living mech can accommodate their needs as well."

Locur Deklok clapped his hands at this elegant and diplomatic response.

"You may have voiced the opinions of many mech designers who find their products to be unfairly excluded from different markets due to reasons outside of merit. Let us turn our attention to a different matter. How did you manage to convince the Destroyer of Worlds herself to sponsor your heavy artillery mech?"

Ves made a slight shrug. "I asked nicely. This may sound simple, but in my exceedingly limited experience, a god pilot is not as inhuman or unsociable as they appear. Perhaps my identity and contributions may have played a large part in this, but I found that it was simple to reach a limited form of cooperation with Her Divinity. The situation is really not that complicated. The Destroyer of Worlds is eager and able to assist red humanity win more battles and save more lives. I happen to have the capacity to channel a small aspect of her power throughout all of the mechs based on one of my designs. It is logical for us to work together, especially when there is no conflict of interest between us. Thus, a new heavy artillery mech model in development that was only supposed to be highly accurate has also gained a large amount of firepower."

"There has been a considerable amount of criticism that the Ultimatum's unique capability to draw upon the power of the Destroyer of worlds has been... underwhelming. Once the initial wave of excitement has died down, mech pilots have discovered that their attacks have not become nearly as powerful as they expect from a god pilot who is known as the ultimate destroyer."

"The Destroyer of Worlds is not a nanny or a power dispenser. She has her own missions to fulfill. Mech pilots should focus on their fundamentals instead if they want to become more effective in battle. Ignoring these factors in favor of begging for power is not a sign of strength. It is a sign of weakness and surrender."

"That is clear."

"Besides, the Ultimatum can also only do so much, at least when it is at the beginning of its life cycle. I suggest that each of you who wishes that their living mech can wield more power be patient and nurture their battle partners over the long-term. There are living mechs out there that are 5 years old that can clearly defeat their younger counterparts. This is the difference that age can make. This phenomenon is especially relevant in the Red Ocean as the existence of E energy radiation has amplified the performance of any form of E-technology, which serves as the core of my living mechs."

"Not everyone is willing to wait 5 or 10 years for their mechs to reach their ultimate forms." Locur Deklok responded in a disapproving tone.

"They are welcome to purchase any other mech that offers more static and consistent performance. They may perform better at the start, but they will only deteriorate and wear out over the years. My products are the opposite. Their inherent growth properties will only make them stronger and more valuable. My Ultimatums are no exceptions to this rule."

"There are critics who have lodged the accusation that your Ultimatum is forcing heavy artillery mech pilots to become worshipers of the Destroyer of Worlds. Whether they are willing or not, too many pilots of your latest release have become avid believers in Divine Mox. Is this your intention, or...?"

The interviewer did not finish his sentence, but everyone smart enough knew that Deklok was hinting at the possibility that Ves was doing this at the behest of the Destroyer of Worlds.

This was the first time that Ves frowned. "I am a Brighter. I am tolerant of different beliefs, but I do not advocate for any of them. I can assure you that the Ultimatum does not induce its pilots into worshipping the Destroyer of Worlds. It is more likely that they were overtaken by their emotions and have fallen in love with the stellar performance of my machines."

"Does that not lead to the same outcome, Professor Larkinson?"

"I disagree. It is not my intention to turn the pilots of my Ultimatum into the worshipers and lackeys of the Destroyer of Worlds. I think that many people have a serious misunderstanding of the purpose of my latest release. The Ultimatum is not a mech that was originally based around the power of a god pilot. It is a machine designed to eliminate difficult targets and end battles through overwhelming superiority."

Deklok looked impressed. "It is doing a good job at that based on all of the battle reports circulating through the galactic net. The mech exemplifies power."

"That is true, but do not overlook the other piece of the puzzle. The human who pilots my living mech is meant to grow alongside the Ultimatum. Together, they can produce better results, find greater purpose in life and become the heroes they always dreamt of. What makes the Ultimatum different from any other mech is that it can inspire others to step up and become the next great hero of our civilization. It has a high skill ceiling and can tolerate a lot of pressure. As long as the pilot has the will, there will always be a way to turn a difficult situation around. Ultimately, I am hopeful that my latest contribution to the mech community may foster a new cohort of heroes who will shoulder the burdens of red humanity in the future."

Chapter 5674 Forced Last Stand

In a certain star system within the sphere of control of the Rubarthan Pact, everything was falling apart!

Pure chaos had engulfed the planetary settlement on the surface!

Meanwhile, the mech forces still in orbit were about to get hammered by the approaching alien warships!

It did not appear as if the alien raiders actively colluded with the Grimly Brothers, but that did not ease the pressure for the defenders that much.

They still faced an awful prospect where they had to fight off a complete alien raiding fleet at the front while simultaneously fend off human traitors at the rear!

"We're getting torn apart out here! We need backup!"

"Damn Grimly Brothers! Red humanity is doomed if these 'heroic mercenaries' turned out to be traitors all this time."

"Run! Run as far as you can! Nobody can be trusted anymore!"

None of the mercs could have imagined that a group of mercenaries founded by a pair of noble-minded brothers actually served as agents of the Genlock Cell of the Cosmopolitan Movement.

Though no one among the mercenaries stationed in the star system was familiar with the Genlock Cell, it held a notorious reputation among those in the know.

Even among the radicals, the Genlock Cell had a reputation for being more extreme than others.

Their main characteristic was that they were impatient.

The Cosmopolitan Movement had been fighting for the same cause for millenia. The human adherents of this notorious organization sought to erase the barriers between humans and aliens, but in the years following the Age of Stars, the divisions only grew greater.

This indicated that the cosmopolitans had not attained any fruitful results after all of these years!

Perhaps they had prevented interspecies relations from deteriorating even further, but it hardly made a difference when it was already close to the bottom.

How much longer did they need to wait in order for humanity to get its act together?

Would their children and grandchildren live long enough to see their great cause fulfilled?

Nothing was going to change!

That was the conclusion drawn by the cosmopolitans that had become disillusioned by their own movement.

Human supremacy still remained the dominant school of thought in both galaxies.

Even when red humanity got cut off from the Milky Way and had suddenly become outnumbered and outgunned, people still held delusions of grandeur about conquering the Red Ocean as if they were reliving the days of the Age of Conquest!

Given the abject failure of the Cosmopolitan Movement, a lot of disgruntled members left their previous cells and came together with one common purpose in mind.

Since the Great Severing hadn't been enough to force red humanity to compromise with the native aliens, then the latter needed to be put into an even more desperate situation!

Only when people had no other choice but to seek compromise with the aliens would interspecies cooperation finally become an acceptable practice!

This was the strong belief and conviction that drove the indoctrinated members of the Grimly Brothers into turning their weapons against their fellow humans!

"Your sacrifice shall not be in vain." Alexander Grimy exclaimed over a public channel as his rifleman mech shot down a fleeing mech of another mercenary outfit. "Your noble deaths shall pave the way for a necessary change. Through our collective effort, humanity shall no longer brave the universe alone, but stand side-by-side with our new alien brothers."

His brother Cory Grimly sounded just as fanatical. "Why are you running? Fleeing is futile! Even if you can run away from our mechs, you won't be able to escape the pursuit of warp drive-equipped warships. Give in to the inevitable, and we shall make it quick!"

"SHUT UP! We just toasted together the night before, and now you want to kill us all. You guys are sick! There is no place in human space anymore for traitors like you. Evidence of all of your crimes have already been transmitted to the Red Two."

"Good! The more the mechers and fleeters are aware of us, the more our beliefs will spread. Only by confronting them with their failures will they have the heart to change their minds!"

"Crazy! You cosmopolitans are all crazy!"

The scattered and broken Hullsi Wardogs continually suffered more and more casualties as the mechs of the Grimly Brothers easily picked them off one at a time.

The complete breakdown of any form of coordination had turned lots of mechs and starships of the Wardogs into isolated targets. They pretty much only fought back when they were actively being targeted.

It was rather tragic. The Wardogs obviously could have stood a better chance at surviving if they banded together and fought the Grimly Brothers to the bitter end, but the cowardly and short-sighted nature of mercenaries instead led to a circumstance where they made the worst possible choice!

The Wardogs not only got shot down at a fast rate as they readily exposed their vulnerable rear sides to the pursuing mechs of the Grimly Brothers, but failed to reciprocate the damage!

By the time the Grimly Brothers had finished nearly every fleeing Wardog combat asset, the traitor troops still remained in remarkably good condition.

The Grimly Brothers were more than ready to finish off the other 4 remaining mercenary outfits that still resisted the inevitable outcome.

"Reverse course, brothers!" Alexander Grimly called. "There are still many more unenlightened fools that have yet to embrace the truth. If we want our plan to succeed, then we must wipe out all defenders! Let the people of the new frontier experience the despair of losing ground while they maintain their stubborn human-centric attitude."

While the Grimly Brothers finished off the Hullsi Wardogs and began to swing around to finish the job, the Pellicky Praetorians along with the other mercenaries realized that they had too few options at their disposal.

"Staying here was a mistake! We should have run away the first chance we got!" The commander of the Five Fingers Club complained as his flagship fended off another long-ranged barrage from the incoming alien warships. "Now, it is too late for us to flee."

"If you wanted to run, you should have done so from the moment we detected the aliens approaching from the edge of the star system. We could have reached the nearest Lagrange point and entered into FTL travel just in time. It is too late now!"

"I agree with Commander Pellicky. Those alien warships may be slower in intersystem travel, but their warp drives grant them an enormous advantage in interplanetary travel. Even without the unexpected treachery of the Grimly Brothers, we never had a chance of escaping to begin with. The only way for us to survive is if we can defeat our enemies outright!"

"How do we do that?"

"That is the hard part..."

"We have no other choice than to go all out! Don't be as stupid as the Hullsi Wardogs and throw away all your cohesion for an illusionary chance of running away. Be prepared to sacrifice all of your starships and most of your troops in order to get away. Only by throwing aside all other considerations will some of us have a chance to live to the end!"

Everyone had to fight. There was no other choice. This was an agonizing position for mercenaries to be in. No matter what background they originally possessed, they all possessed similar natures once they became soldiers of fortune. They prized their lives above almost everything else. Dying wasn't supposed to be an intrinsic part of the job!

To be forced into a last stand with no other recourse could break ordinary mercenaries!

However, with the negative example set by the Hullsi Wardogs, the remainder gritted their teeth and fought as if they were determined soldiers.

The courage of most mercenaries who were willing to fight against alien warships was not too bad in most cases.

Commander Pellicky desperately sought a pathway for survival. "We can't defeat an alien raiding fleet that consists of 32 sub-capital warships and 6 capital ships anymore now that we have been reduced to this state. Our only chance of repelling them is if we imitate the Grimly Brothers. Target their flagships. Sow confusion. Scare the remaining survivors into preserving their lives by abandoning their missions. Most native aliens aren't actually motivated into fighting against humans. It is the Red Cabal and the most aggressive major alien races that are driving them into fighting. As long as we can break their will, they will run just as desperately as the Hullsi Wardogs."

That was easier said than done. Up to 38 warships bore down onto the diminished defenders. One of them was even a nunsen battleship that possessed far more powerful defenses than the remaining vessels in the enemy fleet.

As the alien warships began to land more accurate shots, the human defenders no longer dared to procrastinate any further.

"Go! We have no other choice but to advance!"

The best way to damage the enemy starships was to send enough melee mechs up close so that their space suppressors could weaken the surrounding transphasic energy shields.

The four remaining mercenary outfits had all come to a consensus and sent their carrier vessels forward as well, knowing that they would all become sitting ducks to the increasingly more accurate gun batteries of the alien raiding fleet!

At this time, it would be better if the aliens directed their firepower towards the mercenary carriers. The more they attracted enemy fire, the more the melee mechs deployed in the field had a chance to get close without getting shot before they reached their targets.

As the two sides continued to exchange fire, it became clear that the disparity in firepower was too great!

"Our carriers can't take this pounding! Unlike our mechs, our ships aren't small and agile enough to evade the incoming shots."

"Three of our combat carriers have already blown up, and two more are about to join them. Most of the crews didn't even have enough time to evacuate!"

"Our ranged attacks are hardly doing anything! Each time we concentrate our fire against an enemy warship, other warships swoop in before we can break through a transphasic energy shield."

"We need to split up and attack the alien ships from multiple angles."

"That will only make it easier for the aliens to defeat us in detail!"

The cooperation between the four forces immediately started to get strained again when it became clear that approaching from a single direction wouldn't work.

However, each of them were afraid that once they started to split up, the others might choose to take their chances and flee outright!

Lack of trust held them together for the time being, but without enough hope, it remained questionable whether they would maintain any cohesion.

Throughout all of these difficult struggles, the newly purchased Ultimatums had to go through a baptism of fire.

All of the mech pilots struggled to put their recently arrived mechs to good use, but the stress and upheaval of the moment prevented them from employing the mech model's iconic embedded abilities.

Neither Ylvaine's foresight nor Emma's destructive power empowered their attacks!

Fortunately, the Ultimatums were still strong enough without these gimmicks, but the aliens coped against their attacks so well that it was hard for the mech pilots to figure out whether they were making any difference.

Yuri Enfame gritted his teeth as he tried to breach the defenses of an opposing warship fast enough before the vessel could use other alien hulls as cover.

The deadly Onyx Cannon launched another full-powered attack that accurately struck one of the larger vessels.

At the same time, 13 other Onyx Cannons struck the same target in quick succession!

However, the target's transphasic energy shield managed to resist this salvo without breaking.

Despite the obvious stress to the ship's transphasic energy shield, the attacks of other mechs were too scattered to take advantage of this temporary weakness.

The time it took for the Onyx Cannons to charge up for another full-powered attack was way too long. By the time the Ultimatums were ready to fire again from their bunkers, their original target had already moved to the rear of the enemy formation!

"This isn't working!"

Chapter 5675 Spiraling Down

Humans were not as unfamiliar with their alien foes than when they just arrived in the Red Oceans.

They all learned that so long as an enemy warship kept up her transphasic energy shield, any damage inflicted on the vessel would ultimately be wasted as the barrier regenerated back to full strength.

The only way to actually hurt the aliens was to inflict real material damage to the hull!

While the melee mechs were on their way to make this job a lot easier, it was unlikely for the mechs of the four remaining mercenary outfits to succeed in their job.

There were too few melee mechs and too many alien warships!

The problem became compounded by the need to keep melee mechs back in order to guard against the coming attack from the Grimly Brothers.

Many mercenaries realized that the only way to survive was to soften up the alien warships and take a few of them out at range.

The less vessels the melee mechs had to deal with, the more they could survive long enough to finish their mission!

"Commander Pellicky! You boasted so much about your newly purchased Ultimatums during our last meeting. Why have they not produced any results?"

"They are powerful, but we have too few of them. 4 of our Ultimatums are stuck on the surface of the planet, and our remaining 14 don't have the weight of fire to break a transphasic energy shield in a single salvo."

"Then coordinate your fire with other ranged mechs!"

"We are already doing that, but it isn't working! At this range, the larger alien warships are tough enough to withstand all of our firepower, while the smaller ones are agile enough to cause many of our attacks to miss."

"Our melee mechs are about to get shredded by the tertiary gun batteries of those warships if we don't give them enough cover. We need to do better! Forget about targeting the flagship or the other large starships. Focus your fire on the enemy frigates and destroyers. They are weak enough that enough successful hits should be able to pop their bubbles fast enough. They also have the most armaments that pose the greatest threat against small craft."

The mercenaries abandoned their plan to decapitate the leadership of the native alien fleet. The enemy flagship was simply too tough!

Yet that did not leave them in a better position. The Hullsi Wardogs actually fielded the largest quantity of ranged mechs, but the Grimly Brothers had made short work of them all. The remaining mercenary outfits also had their fair share of ranged mechs, but their collective firepower had dropped below the threshold where they could comfortably down any enemy warship.

Every mech pilot endured greater pressure as a result. They were all tasked with a mission that seemed impossible to fulfill under the circumstances.

However, they had no other choice!

At this time, many mech pilots were praying for a miracle, only for none to arrive.

The pilots assigned to the recently delivered Ultimatums endured greater expectations than most.

The hype and the excessively high expectations placed on the mech model caused a lot of people to expect the new wonder machines to bail them out of this predicament.

When this did not happen, the heavy artillery mech pilots all felt as if they were letting everyone down!

"I don't know what you are doing so far, Yuri, but you are not making everyone convinced that you are piloting a mech that is worth at least 30 MTA credits."

"We can still do better, commander!" Yuri Enframe insisted as he tried his best to wear down the defenses of a distant enemy warship. "We still have too little training and experience with piloting these beasts. They are capable of hitting harder and more accurately, but it turns out that it is a lot more difficult to enter the right mindset in the middle of a desperate battle."

"If the problem does not lie with the mechs, but rather what goes on in your head, then fix it right away! If nothing changes within a few minutes, then we won't have enough mechs left to turn this battle around. Isn't your Ultimatum supposed to be a shipkiller? The only ships being killed are our own! Put your heads in order and start making the aliens hurt before it is too late!"

The increasing pressure wasn't doing the pilots assigned to the Ultimatums any favors.

As mercenaries, their ability to perform under pressure was not great. Even the ones that had prior military service usually weren't all that great, or else they would have stayed.

Yuri Enframe did not quite fit this mold. He was a 40-year old veteran, but he left the service because it seemed unlikely that he would be spending his time on activities other than training and participating in exercises.

He experienced more scuffles when he joined the Pellicky Praetorians. The mercenary outfit was not bound by borders and always moved where mech pilots could occasionally put their skills to good use.

However, that also meant that mercenaries such as Yuri ended up fighting in strange places on behalf of people or employers he didn't care about.

Right now, Yuri's mind had entered a mess.

The stress and fear evoked by the betrayal of the Grimly Brothers as well as the prospect of fighting an alien raiding fleet at a disadvantage sapped his confidence.

"What am I doing here?"

"Why must I fight alongside unreliable allies?"

"Are my actions making any difference?"

The doubts plaguing Yuri wasn't doing him any favors. This was the wrong time and place for him to get distracted.

His pessimism reflected in his performance as he was doing the Ultimatum a major disservice by failing to draw out its potential.

It was not for lack of trying. Yuri tried multiple times to activate the Guided Aim and Amplified Destruction embedded abilities.

Just activating one of them was already enough to make a more meaningful difference in this battle!

Yet while the glows of the two design spirits still remained present, Yuri failed to engage them sufficiently enough to borrow from their powers.

He knew it was not their fault. They were so distant that it took a lot of effort for mech pilots to reach out to them. Even if Yuri knew that his mindset had diverged too much from what it took to activate the special abilities of his mech, it was not easy for a human to take control over his own emotions!

His Ultimatum unleashed another powerful attack with its Onyx Cannon.

However, Yuri winced shortly after as the alien frigate under his sights utilized her boosters and thrusters to spin and cause the round to miss.

At this distance, it was too hard to score consistent hits against the smaller and more agile enemy vessels!

The native aliens possessed a better understanding of their human foes than before. They discovered that their warships had a greater advantage at longer ranges due to the quantity and power of their gun batteries.

If not for the fact that lingering too long in this star system would invite overwhelming retribution from the Red Two, the aliens would have chosen to stay at maximum range and whittle down their enemies over a longer stretch of time!

However, even if they were forced to go on the attack, the aliens weren't in a hurry to get closer.

Doing so not only made ranged mechs such as the Ultimatum more effective, but also enabled the melee mechs to close the distance a lot sooner!

In short, the circumstances were anything but favorable to Yuri and his fellow heavy artillery mech pilots.

"Ahh! My ship is going down! I am sorry everyone, but I have to abandon my machine."

"Wait! Don't leave! You can still fight as long as your mech stays in one piece! One of our carriers can pick up your Ultimatum."

"It is too late!"

One of the combat carriers of the Pellicky Praetorians broke into several pieces after the warships of the opposing side unleashed their latest salvo.

Numerous escape pods managed to get away in time, but many more did not launch quickly enough to bring the crew to safety.

The heavy artillery mechs that had been placed inside the handful of bunkers embedded along the hull experienced a wild time.

The ones that got affected the most became inoperable. One received so much damage that only a third of the machine was left intact!

The other bunker mechs managed to get loose or still remained stuck in metal coffins that were flying and spinning away in an uncontrollable fashion.

The downfall of every combat carrier meant that there were less bunker mechs contributing to the fight.

This increased the burden on the remaining heavy artillery mechs even further!

Without access to rare and expensive transphasic rounds, the mechs could only make do with cheaper alternatives.

The Ultimatum was lucky enough to be a modern hyper mech that was designed to work with hyper ammunition.

Many of the other mechs fielded by the mercenary outfits were mostly relics from the Phasewater Generation. They were not designed to work with hyper technology and could not fire hyper rounds without undergoing substantial modification.

Mercenary organizations were usually among the last customers to update their mech lines.

Regardless, the use of hyper technology wouldn't have made much of a difference in this instance. The numbers disparity was too great and the morale among the human mech pilots was too low.

Everyone waited for a lucky break that just wouldn't come. Neither the native aliens nor the Grimly Brothers had made any mistakes so far. The only accidents took place among the four remaining mercenary outfits as fear and chaos affected the remaining personnel to an increasing degree.

In this dire time, Yuri Enflame tried his best to turn this situation around by correctly utilizing his Ultimatum and lighting the flame that would reignite the hope in everyone's hearts.

He failed to complete the first step!

This frustrated him increasingly more, which predictably caused his performance to drop even further!

"This cannot go on! How can I make this right?!"

There was very little a heavy artillery mech could do aside from attacking. Yuri Enflame might have access to the greatest individual firepower a mech had at its disposal in this battle, but if it wasn't properly utilized, then it was of no use!

Doubt and self-loathing continued to engulf his mind as he failed to grasp a turning point. His performance became so pathetic that he even felt that his living mech was starting to reject his presence.

The Ultimatum was a proud mech despite being so young! It expected a lot from its pilot, so when Yuri continued to deteriorate with no end in sight, even the second order living mech became fed up with this dolt!

Strangely enough, that was the signal that finally caused Yuri to pause.

He had never piloted a mech that possessed enough intelligence to form its own opinions.

Yuri felt appalled at the increasing sense of disgust and rejection from his own machine!

Even if he was about to die in this doomed battle, he at least wanted to perish in an honorable manner!

Getting kicked out by his own machine on the cusp of defeat was incredible to his pride, as brittle as it may be at the moment.

His mentality reset. Many of the doubts and fears in his mind spontaneously vanished, but not entirely.

In the end, the fear of disappointing his new living mech superseded all other concerns, including his life, the lives of his comrades and the outcome of this battle!

Though the Ultimatum had fallen completely silent at this time, Yuri became numb to the complaints of his commanding officer.

Instead, his entire world and vision diminished until he was only able to register himself and his Ultimatum!

It was only after he entered this introspective state of mind that he saw the true form of his living mech for the very first time.

Chapter 5676 Why Me?

"Thank you for supplying us with your insightful answers, Professor Larkinson." Locur Deklok conveyed genuine gratitude and appreciation as the interview reached the hour mark. "You have resolved many doubts and filled many gaps in our understanding of your products. My understanding of your new Ultimatum line has increased greatly compared to before. I am sure your rapidly expanding customer base will be able to pilot your works with greater confidence."

The virtual form of Ves smiled and clasped his hands. "I am glad to be of service. There is endless depth to my living mechs. The answers that I have given so far only clarifies a fraction of what they can do. My advice is the same as before. If you want to learn more about your living mechs, then spend more time with them. The more you make use of them, the more they will unveil their secrets to you. My latest releases are all remarkably clever than in the past due to the existence of E energy radiation. E energy is a giant tonic for a living mech."

"What can mech pilots do to take advantage of this relationship?"

"It is not just hyper mechs that can leverage the power of E energy." Ves replied. "Humans such as you and I are constantly affecting the E energy radiation around us. It responds to our thoughts and emotions, and we respond to it as well. The effects are still too subtle to perceive for most people, but it is an established fact that these interactions are constantly taking place. What this means in practice is that if mech pilots want to squeeze more power out of their living mechs, they should channel all of their mind and will into completing whatever purpose you wish to fulfill."

Locur Deklok adopted a skeptical expression. "Far be it for me to question your expertise, but your advice does not sound practical enough. It is difficult to imagine that wishful thinking can change reality. As far as I know, only high-ranking mech pilots are capable of performing this feat. Standard mech pilots cannot do anything of significance."

"Is that what you think?"

"Am I mistaken, Professor Larkinson?"

"There are more ways to become powerful than you think." The mech designer responded. "While I cannot say that everyone can become as powerful as an expert pilot merely by wishing really hard, there are far more possibilities available to you than before. There are certain laws and limitations that restrict us, but nothing is infallible. Compared to the obstacles that our reality tries to impose upon us, humans possess endless potential. Never stop believing that you are capable of doing more. If my terminally ill grandfather can be cured from disability and break through to become a powerful expert pilot once again, anyone can turn from a zero to a hero. Just keep your mind open and be receptive to any possibility."

As Ves continued to clarify his thoughts, the battle involving the Pellicky Praetorians continued to deteriorate by the second.

"Yuri! Pilot Yuri Enfame! Answer me! Why have you ceased all activity?! I know you are still awake! The readings transmitted by your Ultimatum tells me that you are still in fighting condition. I don't know whether you have given up or not, but get back in the fight or I will pry you out of the cockpit of your mech and pilot it myself!"

Commander Andrea Pellicky's fell on deaf ears as the heavy artillery mech pilot was off in his own world, or more precisely, his living mech's world.

His connection to his body and all of his usual senses disappeared.

For whatever reason, it felt as if his consciousness fell into a pit that led right to the heart of his living mech.

The active man-machine connection allowed Yuri to 'perceive' his Ultimatum that his limited condition interpreted as a flaming ball of energy.

He was not sure whether other mech pilots would perceive a living mech in the same way, but to Yuri, the Ultimatum was like a burning star that constantly radiated power.

Now that Yuri was able to perceive his living mech in such an intimate manner, he already felt alot closer to this machine.

This was why he felt more depressed and disappointed in himself. He could feel the clear and obvious rejection from his machine.

When he attempted to 'move' closer to his living mech, the flaming ball blocked his advance and pushed him back!

"Give me a chance! I can do better! The battle is not over yet. I still have a chance!"

Yuri was not quite certain how he was able to convey his words without a mouth, but he still felt that his Ultimatum received his message.

The machine just wasn't receptive to his pleas.

"Why bring me here if you don't want me another?" Yuri asked as despair threatened to overtake his mind.

"Your living mech did not pull you into this space. It is incapable of doing so. I am responsible for pulling you here." An unfamiliar female voice spoke.

"Who!? Where?"

"Over here."

Yuri directed his attention 'downwards' and suddenly discovered there was a cat in the vicinity!

The translucent cat possessed a striking appearance. An enormous seed of power was buried within. The power of destruction suffused her body to such a degree that even her fur evoked illusions of calamities!

The mech pilot immediately froze when he realized who had just addressed him. Though the cat was a lot smaller than how she appeared in the battle footage, the Herald of Destruction was the avatar of one of the most powerful mech pilots in the Red Ocean!

"Your Divinity! My apologies for not recognizing you. It... it is an honor to be graced by your presence!"

The cat stared at Yuri with a judgemental expression but did not deign to respond to his words. Her only visible action was to swish her tail.

The silent treatment caused Yuri to grow uncertain.

"...Are you here... to tell us that you are about to save us all?" The mech pilot hesitantly asked.

"I cannot save you." The cat replied. "I am stationed several zones away. It is impossible for my Ragnarok to arrive in time to save you and your fellow mercenaries."

"Then... is it possible for you to channel your will through my Ultimatum?"

The Herald of Destruction shook her feline head. "I can do much, but channeling my power across light-years is not my expertise. Only a small fraction of my power ties me to your living mech. This anchor is too small and weak for me to do anything more than communicate with you. The moment I try to exert my power, this channel will snap and break. You should dispense with your unrealistic fantasies."

Yuri's hopes fell. He thought that since the Destroyer of Worlds deigned to reach him, she would surely take action to save his life and the lives of his fellow Praetorians.

He did not blame her for her inability to intervene. The Ultimatum already gave him a priceless opportunity to make contact with a powerful god pilot. He just wished that he wouldn't have met her when he was on the cusp of death.

"Why... are you here, if not to rescue us? Are you here to record my last words?"

The flaming cat began to move. She began to circle around Yuri's intangible form and looked as if she was scrutinizing him carefully.

"You are not special." She declared. "You used to be a serving soldier, but you resigned because you felt that you deserved more. Your skills are decent, but they are not solid. If your fundamentals were stronger, you wouldn't have missed as many shots with the Onyx Cannon. If a more talented and strong-willed mech pilot was in your place, he would have broken through more likely than not. While a single case of forced resonance is unlikely to turn the battle around, it can at least inspire others into fighting harder. A more exemplary mech pilot would have never allowed himself to enter into a spiral of doubt and self-defeat. Only heroes have the capacity to step up when they are subjected to adversity. You... are the opposite."

The cat's words struck Yuri like hammer blows. The much more inferior mech pilot developed an even greater loathing for himself!

The judgment of the Destroyer of Worlds was as truthful as it could get. There was no way for Yuri to deny the words of one of the eight gods of the piloting profession!

"If... if I am such a letdown as a pilot, what have I done to deserve your personal attention?"

The cat stopped her motion and stared straight into Yuri.

"Do you know how many situations like yours that I have experienced through the Ultimatum design? Ever since that brat turned me into a 'design spirit', I have come into touch with a rapidly expanding pool of mech pilots. Most of them are adequate, as it is unlikely for unqualified mech pilots to be assigned to an Ultimatum mech. Even so, not all pilots are able to respond better than you if they were placed in the same circumstances. It is difficult to cling to hope when all of the odds are stacked against you. It is only in the direst of circumstances when one's true character comes to light."

"Then I..."

The cat shook her head. "Yours is not that good. No one is perfect, but there are still hundreds of Ultimatum pilots that have earned my admiration for one reason or another. They are heroes in the making who have the greatest chance of activating their potential. You... are decidedly more average."

Yuri felt hurt and puzzled. It was always painful to hear the ugly truth, but to have a god pilot extend her attention to him just so that he could disparage his qualities as a mech pilot was excessive!

"Are you going to keep insulting me until I die?! If you keep talking to me like this, then I would rather prefer it if you bother another mech pilot!"

The cat finally showed her first sign of approval. "Ah, you are beginning to assert yourself. That is the spirit! A mech pilot must always be proud. Let me tell you the truth, then. A long time ago, I did not consider myself to be special, even if I had already managed to accrue a small measure of

strength back then. Once I was placed in a comparable situation as yours, I doubt I would have been able to survive this predicament by relying on my own power."

"Yet you managed to survive anyway."

"I had help." The cat wistfully smiled as if she was recalling her old memories. "This is a secret that I have never shared with anyone. Back then, someone came and decided to extend a helping hand to me. I do not know why I of all people received this help, but it has changed my life ever since. Nowadays, I find myself in a position where I can potentially act in a similar capacity. It is not a question whether I can do it, but whether it is right for me to interfere with the natural course of events. God pilots are not supposed to hold people's hands. They need to learn how to stand up on their own. Everything else will lead to excessive dependencies."

Yuri felt less confident about himself. "I... think I understand."

"I do not think you do. You see, my considerations are different. The rules that I am expected to abide by compel me to maintain my distance from you. If you are meant to fail and perish without my involvement, then so be it. Any intervention on my part will change the future and lead to unintended consequences."

"These are good points." Yuri acknowledged.

The cat snorted. "They are not! Why must I care about these rules and conventions? What is so dangerous about changing the future? Back when he changed my life by bestowing me with his boon, I doubt he respected the rules. He came in touch with me and gave me a chance regardless of how deserving I am. I still do not quite understand why I received his boon despite reaching my ultimate goal. Now that I have placed myself in his perspective, I think I understand a part of his considerations."

"And those are...?"

"Screw the rules." The cat contemptuously said. "How dare the future dictate my actions? If anything, it is my right to shape the future! The actions of a single individual have eventually led to my ultimate ascension. I am curious... if I bestow my assistance to seemingly ordinary mech pilot such as yourself, will I be able to replicate his contribution to society? It is worth exploring. Besides, I hate cosmopolitans. Helping you may cause them to suffer a setback. That is another reason I want to intervene."

Yuri suddenly grew a lot more hopeful! He did not dare to harbor too many thoughts, but he couldn't help but look forward to what kind of help he could receive from the Destroyer of Worlds.

"What should I expect?"

"There can be no rebirth without destruction." The flaming cat said as she suddenly became more menacing. "I cannot make you stronger without unmaking you first. Get ready, because this will be painful! Miew!"

Before Yuri could think about anything else, the flaming cat jumped straight at Yuri before inflicting pain to his very soul!

Chapter 5677 Human Sympathy

A gigantic explosion engulfed the space that previously occupied a highly sophisticated warfleet dispatched by a minor alien race that the Destroyer of Worlds did not even bother to learn about.

The Red Ocean may be fairly small, but it still played host to many intelligent alien races.

The main reason why the phase whales and the other major alien races declined to take them over was because their home planets were not worth spending resources to bring into their empire.

Similar to how human civilization divided its space into first-class, second-class and third-class territories, the natives of the Red Ocean divided themselves up in a surprisingly similar manner.

This proved that discrimination based on strength and resources were universal concepts that applied to every race or population group.

As the powerful and potent Ragnarok confirmed that the large invasion fleet had been wiped out to the last alien, the people of the colony fortress fanatically cheered at the display of power from one of their greatest heroes!

"Destroyer of Worlds!"

"Thank you for saving us, Your Divinity!"

"I am your biggest fan!"

To be honest, the colony should have been able to stall and grind down the invading aliens in a grueling siege. The Rubarthan Pact had made sure to divert enough resources to build additional fortifications.

The newly developed azure titan shields could protect cities from external bombardment for an extensive amount of time, though even these mighty barriers would eventually falter if subjected to sustained attacks from multiple warships.

Regardless, those azure titan shields would buy plenty of time for the newly produced and installed Ultimatums to strike at any alien vessel or large projectile with their potent Onyx Cannons!

Thinking about the new mech designed by the brat and mass produced by a Rubarthan partner company caused her to feel rather mixed about this state of affairs.

She never expected to become involved in the lives of so many people all of a sudden through Emma's apparent new job as a design spirit.

Irene recognized that Ves had taken clear advantage of her by using her name and power to market his new Ultimatum model.

Yet the Ultimatum was clearly a good mech. It did an excellent job at fulfilling the firepower gap for second-raters. As much as she thought that her association with a second-class mech model cheapened her reputation, she found that she did not care about this consequence.

God pilots had distanced themselves from the common folk to such an extent that they could no longer interact normally with each other.

Irene had become a god in a fashion. She couldn't stop herself from overwhelming mortals and turning them into single-minded fools just by approaching them and speaking to them in person.

This was why god pilots had to sever their ties to a lot of old friends and live in much greater isolation than before. They could only act with greater familiarity with those who were capable of resisting the pressure of their God Kingdoms.

Every god pilot voluntarily accepted this arrangement because they loved humanity.

A human civilization that descended into pure god pilot worship would no longer be as dynamic and freethinking as before. The extensive stagnation of the Red Ocean due to the ubiquitous belief in the descendants of the Elder Gods vindicated this approach.

While it was clear that this policy benefited humanity a lot in the Age of Mechs, that might not be true anymore in this case.

Red humanity faced a completely new reality when it had entered the Age of Dawn. Exposure to E energy radiation and the resurgence of 'cultivation' caused a lot of members of the upper echelon to rethink all of the rules that no longer served their society well anymore.

For one reason or another, god pilots such as the Destroyer of Worlds suddenly gained a lot more say in how human society should be run.

This shift had already begun from the moment that red humanity became extremely vulnerable now that its lifeline had been cut off. Just 8 god pilots stood in the way of total annihilation!

Given that the protection of powerhouses such as Irene had become an absolute necessity for humans to guarantee their survival in this dangerous new age, it shouldn't have been much of a surprise that her voice had gained a lot more weight than before.

It was a circumstance that she was not accustomed to. Though she had fought hard and struggled more than almost anyone else to attain ultimate power, she never really had the ambition to transform human society and shape it according to her image.

She had been more than satisfied to serve as the guardian and protector of the human race. Politics should be left to the politicians as far as she was concerned.

However, the role of politicians had become a lot more diminished now that red humanity was on a total war footing. The old leaders had no way of crushing alien incursions and deterring the powerful phase leaders from indiscriminately tearing through human-occupied space.

Only god pilots possessed this strength.

Irene's God Kingdom retracted just as her god mech disappeared from the field. The local onlookers became dismayed by her departure, but that did not stop their intense faith towards the hero that had spared them from waging a protracted and costly battle against a large invasion force.

Disappearing from sight was one of Irene's favorite tricks. Although she did not excel at stealth, it was easy enough for her to destroy the emissions released by the Ragnarok and even the very concept of her presence on a temporary basis!

Of course, the more powerful and expansive the concept, the more effort it took for her to erase it, not that she was bothered by her current consumption. Her power was so vast that hiding herself from ordinary perception was a breeze.

As she waited in order to determine where she needed to intervene next, a part of her expansive mind was constantly paying attention to the distant mech pilots that had come to pilot all of the new Ultimatums.

So many different mech forces had adopted the Ultimatum that Emma, and by extension Irene, suddenly came into much more direct contact with ordinary people than before.

Though the mech pilots of the Ultimatum were often better trained and more elite than average mech pilots, they all fell within the same scope to a god pilot like Irene.

This was a novel experience.

She no longer observed the lives of ordinary mortals from a distance, but instead gained a glimpse into their very minds and souls.

So long as Emma continued to fulfill her duties as a design spirit, she was able to violate the privacy of so many people that it had taken her aback at first.

How many design spirits managed to learn so much about people?

What had they done with all of the information they learned?

Had their creator imposed any control or restrictions to prevent them from disseminating all of the secrets they learned?

At first, Irene felt disturbed by how easy it was for Emma to get into contact with much the intimate thoughts and feelings of a rapidly expanding group of mech pilots!

Her objections lessened when she began to familiarize herself with the benefits of this recent development.

For the first time in many years, Irene experienced the joys and frustrations of what it meant to be a weak and powerless human.

By tracking different mech pilots and occasionally putting herself in their shoes, she slowly began to reconnect with the humanity she thought that she had lost forever when she finally traversed the road of no return.

It... put a lot of things into perspective. A god pilot never wavered in her purpose, so the Destroyer of Worlds did not suddenly question her entire life or whatever.

What concerned her instead was her future role and direction.

She had already taken upon herself to resort to extreme measures to attain the theoretical rank of god king pilot.

She was determined to do her duty to the very end, but that did not mean she had to like it. The distasteful methods proposed by the mother of her new 'friend' would see her reputation plunge to an unprecedented low.

Was this the only way for her to lead red humanity to a new future?

Emma's new responsibilities gave Irene the idea that there may be more ways for her to be of service to humanity.

However, if Irene took this step, then she would not only break the unspoken rules and customs that had always prevented god pilots from exercising too much influence over people's lives, but also add a side to herself that she wasn't sure she liked.

She derived a lot of satisfaction from seeing mech pilots make good use of the Ultimatum.

Seeing how they practiced their skills and utilized their machines in combat reminded her of her previous life.

She hadn't fought against alien warships back then, but she experienced many of the same struggles that gradually forged her into the god pilot that she was today.

However, not every mech pilot experienced a good day.

The frontlines were dangerous. Second-class mech forces still had to struggle a lot in order to defeat a typical alien raiding fleet.

Seeing the Ultimatums fail to make enough of a difference was not pleasant.

Many mech pilots put a lot of hope into their new machines, but as powerful as they may be, they were ultimately just second-class heavy artillery mechs.

Irene piloted one herself for many years, so she knew exactly what kind of limitations they possessed.

The more mech pilots came into contact with the Ultimatums, the more Emma became exposed to incidents where those earnest fighters lost their lives.

Some got blown up in an instant when their bunkers directly got struck by the main cannons of an alien warship. Others experienced a tortuous road towards inevitable defeat as the mechs and carriers around them continually fell in battle.

If the Ragnarok was present in the star system, she could immediately put an end to all of the human suffering.

However, it was exactly because god pilots could only exercise their immense might within a limited scope that Irene had never really felt bothered about her inability to put out every fire across human-occupied space.

That... was no longer the case anymore.

Through Emma, she had gained the option to intervene in many different places at once.

While she was not able to exercise her full power across those distances, this was a novel and unprecedented situation. Any decision she made would have untold consequences to her place in society. People's attitude would change in radical ways once it became known she decided to play a more active role in their lives.

Should she make use of the possibilities granted by the brat, or should she maintain her propriety and allow the process of survival of the fittest to filter out the weak and unworthy?

Thinking about how so many leading figures spoke with open contempt towards the common folk rankled her a lot.

She used to be one of them a long time ago! If she did not receive the gift of a companion spirit during her life-saving encounter with a time-traveling mech designer, she too would have remained a forgettable grunt who ultimately had to fend for herself with no prospect of rescue!

A sense of unwillingness welled throughout her formidable will.

Instead of settling in her old role as a silent protector of human civilization, perhaps she should keep up with the times and take a more proactive role in people's lives.

She was hardly the only god pilot who toyed with this idea.

The Huntsman had already taken a major step by promoting the Hunting Association.

The Fist of Defiance had successfully pushed through an initiative that would gradually shift power towards a new order.

The Evolution Witch was cooking up her own plan that was bound to shock a lot of people.

Perhaps Irene, or rather Emma, could become a patron to the struggling mech pilots who prayed for deliverance from any god who was willing to give them a helping hand.

The only question was how she should take on a more active role.

Chapter 5678 Unintended Power

When the strange cat 'dove' into Yuri and came into contact with his most fundamental self, the avatar of the god pilot did not act gently.

Now that the god pilot had made up her mind, she acted decisively.

Though she was only able to channel a tiny aspect of her power through Emma's faint connection to the Ultimatum, she was able to leverage more than enough power to induce far-reaching changes into Yuri's spirit!

The Ultimatum suddenly triggered multiple alarms as Yuri began to scream and thrash while he was strapped against his cockpit seat!

The Hooligan Barke became notified of the concerning development as well.

Commander Andrea Pellicky had been wondering what was wrong with one of her subordinates. To see him in pain and distress made her feel concerned. If she wasn't in the middle of commanding her mercenaries through an incredibly difficult battle, she would have stepped in and taken charge of this matter.

As it was, hundreds of good men had already died from the alien onslaught. With the native alien warships destroying human mechs and starships left and right, Commander Pellicky simply couldn't afford to spend too much time on the breakdown of a single pilot.

She just felt it was a pity that it had to happen to a mech pilot assigned to one of her precious Ultimatums.

"Commander! The Ardent Highlander has just suffered a hull breach that has crippled half of her mobility. She is drifting out of formation!"

The mercenary commander quickly set Yuri's abnormal condition aside and turned her attention back to more pressing matters.

Despite the fact that the mech pilot was suffering from a lot of pain and distress, the Ultimatum still remained active.

Its safety programming should have forcibly shut down the man-machine connection once it became clear that the mech had become a source of harm to the mech pilot, but the living mech forcibly blocked this directive and continued to maintain this connection!

This gave Emma the time she needed to complete an unprecedented transformation that sought to reinvent the mech pilot currently known as Yuri Enfame.

This was the first time that the Destroyer of Worlds did anything like this. Usually, she applied her powers on a wider scale. She embodied the concept of unbridled destruction.

She was not accustomed to applying her power in a much more subtle manner. God pilots usually weren't known for finesse because most of their problems could be solved by relying on brute force.

The willpower of a god pilot was also far too powerful to withstand for ordinary people. It was doubtful whether any of her peers could perform this delicate operation without utterly crushing the fragile soul of the recipient!

Irene herself would have never dared to go to this far if not for the fact she had Emma!

Her companion spirit represented a side of herself that still contained many vestiges of her past. Irene deliberately kept her feline alter ego free of her overbearing willpower to maintain her original character.

Emma was able to undertake actions that no other god pilot could do. The companion spirit was able to apply a lot more finesse and control her power to a much greater extent.

This was just enough to selectively alter Yuri's soul without exceeding a limit and killing the mech pilot in the process!

That said, this was the first time that Irene did anything like this, and she had no particular expertise in figuring out how to empower a mech pilot beyond his natural limits.

This was why she decided to take a few risks and try out a new and untested approach.

Irene relied on her powerful intuition to settle on an approach. She instinctively felt that she could remake Yuri into a stronger pilot by destroying the parts of him that held him back.

All Irene was really good at was wrecking stuff, so that was what she did. Emma carefully applied her power through her faint connection with the Ultimatum mech and surgically erased whole parts from Yuri's spirit.

Most of his fears, doubts and other parts got wiped out as Emma thought they held the pilot back.

However, destroying all of these parts was not only incredibly painful to the pilot, but also literally made him less than the person he used to be before.

The consequences to his psyche and his identity were extremely serious!

It would be a surprise if Yuri could still maintain his awareness and rationality after receiving so many crippling debilities.

His body may be physically fine, but his spirituality turned into swiss cheese after Emma had cut away so many parts that made up the mech pilot.

No matter how detrimental his fears and doubts may have been in his line of work, they were still parts that made up a complete life.

But wiping away these aspects, Yuri had literally lost essential parts of his humanity!

There was clearly no way for Emma to succeed in making Yuri stronger if she left at this instance.

Fortunately, Irene already had a follow-up plan in mind.

She became inspired by what a certain time-traveling mech designer once did to her own soul a very long time ago. Even if she was unable to recall that process, she could still figure out what he had done to a large extent.

The god pilot knew that there would be gaps in Yuri's soul, so she simply decided to fill up the gaps with other stuff.

The only viable source she could draw upon was Emma.

As a True God-level companion spirit, Emma's power was beyond doubt.

The problem was that she was far too powerful relative to Yuri's current state! His soul would definitely disintegrate if it came in touch with just a tiny fraction of Emma's potent energy!

However, Emma's power was more gentle and malleable than Irene's tyrannical willpower.

Even though Irene was not accustomed to doing this, she instinctively found ways to take a tiny mote of Emma's energy and selectively use her own destruction authority to weaken its power.

By destroying the parts that made it so destructive and harmful to other people, she gradually turned the mote of power into a weaker but much more digestible seed of power!

The Destroyer of Worlds actually derived a powerful sense of satisfaction when she created this delicate seed.

It had lost most of the extraordinary power that intrinsically belonged to a True God, but it still contained just enough of a trace that preserved the power to defy reality.

After all, what Irene wanted to accomplish went against the natural order. She did not think she could successfully empower Yuri without breaking the rules.

Once she created her seed of power, she carefully tried to integrate it into Yuri's fragile soul.

The screams that escaped from the mech pilot's throat became a lot louder all of a sudden!

The pilot's weak and injured soul forcibly fused with the seed of power.

Even if Emma had weakened the seed to such a degree that she was able to send it all the way to the Ultimatum, it was still too powerful for a mortal soul to bear.

Yuri originally wasn't worthy to bear this kind of power. His forced operation had improved his qualifications, but also injured his spirit to such an extent that he was not able to bear this power!

At this time, the Ultimatum suddenly stepped in. It previously disdained its pilot, but after Emma had taken personal action to reform Yuri, the living mech understood that it was his duty to give his partner another chance.

There was not much the living mech could do. The Ultimatum could only use the man-machine connection to siphon away a part of the pain.

The bond between the two grew stronger through the sharing of pain!

As the fusion between Yuri and the seed of power continued to make progress, the Ultimatum became more and more involved.

At one point, the bond between the two had grown so close that the living mech accidentally touched the seed of power.

This incident immediately provoked a series of consequences that no one managed to foresee!

First, the Ultimatum unintentionally absorbed a small aspect of Emma's power!

Even though the power was miniscule, it did not change the fact that it originated from a True God!

The living mech experienced a form of pain as the seed was not prepared for the machine at all. Forcibly merging this power rapidly boosted the machine's affinity for destruction and caused it to absorb destruction energy at a much faster rate than before!

This triggered a runaway reaction where the Ultimatum grew stronger. This enabled it to absorb more destruction energy from the environment, which caused the living mech to become even stronger and more infused with destruction!

The current environment played a large part in promoting this accidental process. All of the death and destruction wrought by the native aliens as well as the treacherous Grimly Brothers caused the battlefield to become flooded with destruction E energy!

More and more of this newly generated destruction energy began to flow in the direction of the Hooligan Barke before getting absorbed by the Ultimatum!

Fed with so much raw destruction energy, the Ultimatum rapidly grew far beyond the limit that its spiritual foundation was able to bear!

However, because the Ultimatum forcibly absorbed a small part of the power of a True God, its upper limits had been raised to a huge extent, thereby preventing the mech from hitting a ceiling that could have stopped this cycle from running any further!

However, just because the Ultimatum was able to rapidly expand its power did not mean it was wise to do so! The second order living mech experienced such extreme growth and expansion that it was experiencing a lot of pain as its very essence was being hammered into a much larger shape!

What truly alarmed Irene was that the active man-machine connection caused the Ultimatum's transformation to spill over to Yuri!

Just when the poor mech pilot had survived the worst of this soul-tearing transformation, his own living mech flooded Yuri with destruction energy that not only caused his spirituality to expand yet again, but also strengthened the active man-machine connection far beyond its specifications!

Emma was completely taken aback by this accident. As powerful as she may be, what was happening fell completely outside of her area of expertise!

If Irene was physically present, then she could have utilized her God Kingdom to cut off the flow of destruction energy and suppress any unwanted reactions as much as possible.

However, there was little Emma could do under the current conditions. Even if she was able to apply a bit more force, trying to end whatever transformation was taking place would kill Yuri outright!

As the dangerous processes continued to power up the mech and mech pilot beyond any reasonable limits, the two had grown so united by their suffering that it triggered an entirely new reaction that completely alarmed Irene.

"AAAAAAAAAAHHH!"

As Yuri roared in pain, the saturated energies inside the cockpit somehow caused his piloting suit and his body to gradually melt and merge into the cockpit seat!

"What?!"

Irene became shocked when she observed what was happening!

If her suspicions were correct, then Yuri and his Ultimatum had just begun the process of corporeal union!

Their forms had physically merged with each other!

If Yuri's body had just melted, then he would have died without a doubt, his potent spirituality still remained alive and continued to power up with no end in sight!

This meant that Yuri and his living mech had not only commenced corporeal union, but likely already formed an operation union as well as a domain union!

In short, Irene's intervention somehow caused the beneficiaries of her power to complete three out of the four steps of the Mech Body Merger Process!

This was wrong!

This experiment had gone horribly wrong!

Yuri and his Ultimatum had mutated far beyond the scope of what Irene intended to do and permanently became fused together in an unholy union fueled by a large supply of raw destruction energy!

The unrestricted absorption of chaotic E energies created from the destruction of so many lives and assets was making everything worse!

The huge amount of random factors mixed into these energies induced all kinds of mutations into the transforming beings.

Even the crew of the Hooligan Barke became alarmed when they saw that the Ultimatum assigned to Yuri not only started to exude a lot of destructive power, but also started to change into a more irregular and ominous shape!

Chapter 5679 Absense of Control

As a god pilot, Irene possessed a much greater understanding and insight in the nature of power and energy.

The main reason why Yuri and his Ultimatum grew stronger at an uncontrollable rate was because of her. The power of a True God was too much for any mortal enemy.

Even if Emma had put a lot of effort into passing on as little as possible, the fact of the matter was that the seed of power from a True God was still far too great in terms of quality!

Emma's life level was so much higher than that of a standard mech pilot that they shouldn't even be mentioned in the same sentence!

Imparting her power to a mortal mech pilot introduced the latter to a whole new level of power!

The resulting contact should have been enough to elevate Yuri to the rank of expert pilot!

That was Irene's original intention.

Unfortunately, she failed to take other variables into account. The living mech and the E energy floating in the immediate environment not only got dragged into Yuri's life-changing ordeal, but also began to produce all kinds of uncontrolled changes to the runaway transformation process!

The fact that Yuri and his Ultimatum spontaneously completed the first, second and third phase of the legendary Mech Body Merger Process was a miracle!

Unfortunately for everyone involved, not every miracle produced a happy ending.

As a successful god pilot, Irene had personal experience in completing the Mech Body Merger Process.

Though her journey was different from every other god pilot due to the addition of her companion spirit, she still comprehended the road of no return to a degree that could not be matched by those who could merely theorize about this process.

This was why she immediately determined that the life of the mech pilot was in great danger at the moment!

The Mech Body Merger Process was no joke. It killed at least 99 percent of the peak ace pilots that had attempted to bridge the gap. Anyone who completed all four steps without dying along the way was an exception rather than the rule.

It was already difficult for the very best ace pilots to survive this journey.

A mere mortal should have died before it ever came to this point!

Yet due to all kinds of coincidental factors, Yuri did not die, but instead continually grew in strength without any restraint or direction!

This was not supposed to happen!

Under ordinary circumstances, there were two powerful factors that controlled the evolution of mech pilots and prevented them from botching the process.

First, the Kingdom of Mechs, or the local equivalent known as the Red Kingdom, silently exerted its formidable power to regulate the transformation from mortal to demigod.

Second, the strong willpower of a worthy mech pilot helped to keep the energies in line and preserve the individual's original identity.

The greater the power, the greater the need for control!

Any powerful cultivator needed to develop a progressively stronger will in order to maintain control over an expanding pool of power.

This became especially essential for high-ranking mech pilots due to the basis of their power!

Without will, there was no control!

Right now, Yuri and his Ultimatum had a lot of power, but lacked the willpower to control it all!

They absorbed way too much energy but had yet to put any time and effort into bringing it to heel.

This allowed the mixed energies to freely exert their influence over the subjects, which clearly produced disastrous consequences.

The physical mutation of the Ultimatum was a clear indication that the random and scattered impulses contained within the E energies were exerting their influence over the living mech!

In one instance, the Ultimatum spontaneously spawned several human eyeballs across its enormous hexapod frame.

In the next moment, one of the heavy artillery cannons of the Ultimatum transformed into a warped and non-functional version of a warship laser cannon battery!

Such transformations started out small, but increased in magnitude as Yuri and the Ultimatum continued to absorb more E energies!

The more powerful they became, the more the heavy artillery mech became unrecognizable from its original design!

The mutating mech spawned additional alien legs, only for them to wither and die a few seconds later.

The Ultimatum's Onyx Cannon began to transform from metal into a bone-like substance that began to spawn all kinds of sharp and random spikes that served no clear purpose!

Explosive shells began to melt and mutate into entirely different objects. Some turned into organs whose functions were a mystery. Others turned into munitions that had become vastly more powerful and destructive than before!

It was incredibly fortunate that none of these explosive shells had exploded this far, but nobody could guarantee that the mech would stay in one piece at the end!

In fact, the Ultimatum or rather the fused amalgamation of a mech pilot and a living mech was finally shown signs of completing its wild transformation.

Everything had a limit. The mutated Ultimatum had reached the current limit of its heightened ceiling. It was not possible for it to expand its power any further unless it had stabilized its current condition.

Not that this was a priority at the moment.

Irene was not worried about Yuri's future.

She was still wondering whether he was still alive and cognizant after what had happened!

It was not just Irene that was concerned at what had happened.

Commander Pellicky had been forced to pay attention to her subordinate once again when his Ultimatum not only sucked in a lot of E energy, but also transformed into a half-organic abomination that only shared a vague resemblance to the original heavy artillery mech!

Gone were the clean lines. Gone were the functional lines. The overall shape of the heavy artillery mech had become a lot messier than before!

It had become considerably thicker and heavier than before. It looked a lot more bloated than before due to the random addition of mass at many different points along the frame.

Tumorous growths along with random bits of metal extended from the heavy artillery mech without any rhyme or reason.

The mech had lost a few legs, but gained others in return. It ended up with a total of five legs, each of which consisted of a different mix of bone, flesh and metal.

Their shapes varied widely from each other, but they still provided stable footing for the mech.

The armaments had all undergone a lot of changes as well.

The Onyx Cannon looked a lot more menacing than before. Its size and its caliber had clearly increased. Perhaps Yuri and the Ultimatum's subconscious desire to attain greater firepower helped to keep their main weapon in a relatively reasonable state.

Of course, it was still questionable whether it could actually launch any projections.

The four heavy artillery cannons mounted on the back of the beetle-shaped mech had gone through much more extensive changes!

One heavy artillery cannon transformed into a fleshy black tentacle that flopped and contorted as if there weren't bones giving it structure. The tip of the tentacle did not contain any opening that was large enough to release an explosive shell, but it still looked dangerous enough to suggest it was able to hurt enemies through different means.

The other cannon transformed into a miniature version of a triple-barreled laser cannon battery. It looked incredibly absurd. Not only was it a lot smaller than the real thing, but the reproduction was also sloppy to the point it looked like a parody rather than a real functional piece of equipment.

The third heavy artillery cannon had lost half of its length and became a lot thicker. It also transformed into a hardy form of gray stone. The weapon had turned into a stone mortar!

The final heavy artillery cannon transformed into a giant black hair follicle.

Yes, a hair follicle!

There was no sign that it retained any functionality that showed that it could still function as a weapon. It had simply turned into a giant hair that looked completely out of place compared to the rest of the mutated machine!

Then again, the Ultimatum had transformed in such a messy way that it was questionable whether mech could still fulfill any of its original functions!

There was only one visible sign that the Ultimatum had assimilated Yuri.

The head of the Ultimatum had vaguely started to resemble the mech pilot's screaming head!

Locked in silent agony, the metallic visage conveyed a depth of pain that reached down to the pilot's very soul!

"...Yuri? Give me your status! Are you still alive in there? Please confirm your status!"

The transformed monstrosity initially did not respond. It did not even show any sign of life aside from the strange organic bits that somehow turned into viable living growths.

The warped shapes and the inexplicable mutations had caused plenty of distress among the crew and officers who became aware of what had happened.

If this was a normal circumstance, Commander Pellicky would have issued the command to eject the bunker from the hull of the Hooligan Barke!

As it was, the battle against the alien raiding fleet in front and the Grimly Brothers in the rear were much more important!

By this time, the cosmopolitan agents had already turned around and began to assail the four remaining mercenary forces from the rear!

This made it even less likely for the Pellicky Praetorians and the three other mercenary outfits to make it out of this battle alive.

The Praetorians had already lost over 30 percent of their mechs and half of their combat carriers!

Far too many mercenaries had died due to the fateful decision to take part in this doomed mission!

No matter how hard Andrea Pellicky tried to coordinate her troops, the disparity in numbers and the plunge in morale were too great for her to overcome.

Since this was the case, she might as well pay attention to Yuri's condition.

At this time, both dread and hope welled up in her heart.

She recognized that the Ultimatum had become a lot more powerful than before. She had no idea what prompted this unscientific transformation, nor understand how exactly it managed to gain so much mass.

On the other hand, Pellicky feared what sort of monstrosity had appeared inside one of the bunkers of her flagship.

Was there any part of Yuri left alive in this abominable machine? She wasn't even sure whether it could still be called a mech!

Seconds passed by while the unholy machine 'stabilized' its current condition. The energy vortex had become a lot weaker now that it had reached the ceiling of its current growth trajectory.

The mech had become packed with energy. It had acquired a glow of its own that not only erased much of the influence that originally belonged to Vulcan, but also radiated pure destruction that exerted a lot of pressure from the concerned crew members that stopped by in an attempt to check up on the machine.

"Yuri? Please respond! If you are still conscious, please give us a signal! If you do not respond within thirty seconds, we will forcibly eject you and your Ultimatum into space. It won't take long before the native aliens or the human traitors take down our flagship."

The mention of these enemies triggered a reaction from the partially organic machines. Its fleshy organs pulsed while its mechanical components started to grind against each other.

Suddenly, the 'eyes' of the human-like head started to glow red while the spiked Onyx Cannon spontaneously began to adjust its aim.

The monster machine clearly began to charge its main weapon. At the same time, it began to pull in a lot of destruction E energy, far more than what a normal Ultimatum was able to attract!

"Did you break through somehow, Yuri?!"

Even though Commander Pellicky grew a lot more hopeful at this time, she knew that this could not explain the radical transformations.

The resonance meters displayed no activity at all. Yuri had not gained any measure of extraordinary willpower!

If this was the case, what exactly happened that caused the Ultimatum to be a lot more powerful?

Who, or what had exactly broken through?

As the mercenary commander struggled to find an answer, her mind completely froze when the mutated machine finally reached full charge.

The sensors that monitored the bunker temporarily became blinded as a gigantic force propelled an altered super-heavy gauss round with unsurpassed power!

The force of the weapons discharge was so powerful that it looked as if a beam of pure power had lanced across space!

An instant later, the flagship of the alien raiding fleet suffered such a heavy blow that her forward momentum briefly stuttered!

Multiple impacts occurred in quick succession as her transphasic energy shield and her exterior hull failed to withstand the power of this supercharged attack!

"What?! How could this happen?!"

Chapter 5680 Directing A Monster

The monster had awoken.

It was clearly angry.

"Yuri! What has happened to you?! Are you still alive down there?! What has happened to your mech? It is no longer transmitting any telemetry! Please respond!"

The machine remained unresponsive. It completely ignored Commander Pellicky's transmissions and channeled all of its pain and rage towards its enemies!

At this point, it became completely unclear who was in control of the Ultimatum that had suddenly bulked up, grown a random collection of extra parts and looked a lot more dangerous for whatever reason.

If Yuri was still in control, then the mech should have at least made an attempt to communicate and coordinate with the Pellicky Praetorians.

However, its behavior at the moment indicated that whoever was in control was less than rational!

Not only did the mech radiate a huge amount of anger and desire to destroy, but it was also firing its mutated Onyx Cannon with power that was far in excess of the physical performance of its model!

Commander Pellicky had only witnessed such might from more formidable high-level mechs!

No ordinary second-class mech was able to produce such damage. Not even transphasic hyper gauss rounds could punch through both the transphasic energy shield and the exterior hull plating of an alien battleship in a single attack.

If this was a more normal instance, then Commander Pellicky would have thought that Yuri Enfame finally managed to step up and advance to the rank of expert candidate.

No. The power demonstrated by the machine was too great for that. Perhaps Yuri had managed to luck out big time and attained apotheosis right away!

Yuri may have experienced the mythical double breakthrough event. This was an extremely rare and exceptional circumstance where mortals turned into demigods in a single leap, thereby proving that they possessed outstanding talent and potential!

However, from the reports of the nearby mech technicians trying in vain to get close enough to inspect the monstrous machine, Commander Pellicky realized that this did not match those uplifting events.

"Yuri! Are you still alive?!"

"..."

The machine did not respond to any of the commander's inquiries. She had little choice but to resign to the fact that Yuri had either died or had gone crazy for whatever reason.

Either way, this mysterious accident might not be as bad as it looked.

This was because the Ultimatum that had somehow transformed into a half-organic monstrosity not only resumed its fight against the foes of the Pellicky Praetorians, but had also become at one if not two orders of magnitude more powerful!

Commander Pellicky could make use of that. She had no time to mourn the apparent loss of her friend. All she could do at this point was to do her best by preserving the lives of the men she had left.

A dampened shockwave ran throughout the command center of the Hooligan Barke. Together with the sensors that struggled to record the massively empowered projectile that struck the flagship of the alien raiding fleet with overwhelming force, this was a clear sign that the Ultimatum had opened fire yet again!

"Ultimatum One has opened fire with its abnormal Onyx Cannon yet again!"

"The alien flagship has suffered catastrophic damage to three transphasic shield generators and one secondary power generator! Two of her primary gun batteries have lost power. Her combat effectiveness has dropped by at least 40 percent. It took only three Onyx Cannon discharges for Ultimatum One to break the alien battleship's defenses and partially cripple her functions."

"Our ranged mechs along with the ranged mechs of our surviving allies are throwing everything they have at the flagship. Her hull integrity is dropping rapidly! The alien crew are already in the process of abandoning ship!"

The sudden and abnormal downfall of the alien flagship produced a lot of ripple effects.

Not only were all of the aliens taken aback by this sudden turn of events, but the friendly mercenaries also regained a lot of hope!

The surprisingly powerful weapon discharges from the Hooligan Barke was exactly the sort of miracle that the mercenaries had been praying for! Each of them thought that one of the mech pilots of the recently purchased Ultimatums had broken through!

Although their assumptions were mistaken, the mercenary mech pilots fought a lot harder now that they believed they had a chance of making it out of this battle alive.

"What is Ultimatum One doing?!"

"It is charging up its transformed Onyx Cannon for another full-powered attack. According to the alignment of its barrel, Ultimatum One is still determined to attack the alien flagship."

"That is not necessary anymore. It is a waste of its firepower to attack a ship that is already going down. Have you told the mech to change its target?"

"We have tried to do so multiple times, but Ultimatum One remains unresponsive!"

"Damn." Pellicky cursed. "Then let us force it to shift its target. Spin and orient the hull around so that it can no longer angle its Onyx Cannon towards the enemy flagship. Force the Ultimatum to break the transphasic energy shields of the remaining 5 alien battleships including the accompanying nuns' vessel. Our greatest issue with these ships has always been our inability to get past their energy defenses. So long as their hulls have become exposed, our remaining Ultimatums and our melee mechs can make short of what is left!"

While the enemy warships had been focusing a lot of their fire towards the combat carriers of the mercenary outfits, more and more of their guns had begun to fire towards the approaching melee mechs.

This not only gave the starships a bit more reprieve, but also signaled that the enemy vessels were about to get in a lot more trouble!

Unless the aliens had brought a lot of starfighters, it would be difficult for them to fend off the threat posed by the melee mechs.

The mech pilots of those machines were hungry for revenge and eager to fight for their lives.

They initially thought that it would have taken a lot of effort for them to get past the transphasic energy shields of the enemy vessels, but now that Yuri's transformed Ultimatum had gained the power to complete this step in advance, the melee mech pilots became a lot more optimistic!

This was because most enemy warships simply had no way of repelling melee mechs that had reached their hulls and started to carve their way into the interior!

Not even alien starfighters could dislodge melee mechs without inflicting even more damage to the damaged hulls!

Several supercharged attacks launched from the Hooligan Barke in the following minute. The damaged but operational combat carrier deliberately spun her hull to change the targeting of Ultimatum One.

Even though Yuri appeared to be completely unresponsive, his transformed machine still operated as if it was controlled by a relatively basic but competent AI.

The mech always sought to direct its most potent firepower at the largest and most threatening alien warships. It only employed its Onyx Cannon as it was probable that its back-mounted armaments had become inoperable.

It didn't matter. The Ultimatum was primarily a heavy artillery mech that was built around its enormous hyper super-heavy gauss cannon. Now that it had become even more powerful than the typical primary gun battery of an alien warship, this was all the human mercenaries needed to wreck the alien vessels!

"Keep directing Ultimatum One's fire! Prioritize the largest and toughest warships first. We need to strip each of them of their energy defenses before our melee mechs arrive and take advantage of the openings."

The Hooligan Barke quickly became the center of attention as the supercharged shots continually struck the alien warships with overwhelming might!

"The second enemy battleship has lost half of her mobility! The last strike has managed to wipe out her starboard main thrusters along with all of the segmented energy shields on this side!"

"The fourth enemy battleship has suffered a massive power failure! Over 80 percent of her systems have been knocked out! Most of her remaining intact transphasic energy shields are operating on emergency power reserves, but they won't last long at this rate."

"What is the condition of Ultimatum One? Has it weakened after firing so many powerful attacks?"

"The readings are a mess, but if I have to make a preliminary judgment, Ultimatum One has yet to tire itself out. In fact, there are signs that suggest that it may be growing stronger or at least more adept with utilizing its altered systems!"

Suddenly, a loud alert rang throughout all of the compartments of the Hooligan Barke.

"The nunsar warship is painting us with her most powerful targeting systems. She is about to open fire on our ship!"

"Evade!"

"Too late!"

"Brace yourselves!"

The Hooligan Barke shuddered as the most formidable nunsar battleship struck the Praetorian flagship with their formidable gun batteries!

"Did we get hit...?"

"We have lost our energy shields and suffered multiple hull breaches, but our ship's integrity is still at an acceptable level. This... this is another miracle!"

"What happened?! That nunser battleship should have inflicted catastrophic damage to our combat carrier!"

Commander Pellicky had to watch a piece of footage in order to obtain her answer.

It turned out that when the battleship's mixed energy and kinetic attack salvo was on the verge of striking the Hooligan Barke, an invisible energy field rapidly weakened the individual attacks moments before they impacted her flagship.

"Ultimatum One has saved us again! If my analysis is correct, then it may have deployed a domain field that has weakened the incoming attacks before they struck our ship. Right now, the altered heavy artillery mech is exhibiting the traits of being piloted by an ace pilot. The greatest inconsistency is the lack of responses from our resonance meters. None of them have discovered any trace of resonance."

That was highly abnormal! Though red humanity had gradually become more and more exposed to extraordinary phenomena, the only clear manifestations of metaphysical power that they were familiar with had always been associated with expert pilots, ace pilots and god pilots.

They simply could not understand how the Ultimatum One was able to fight like it was being piloted by a Saint, yet clearly wasn't controlled by one. The mech had turned into a giant anomaly that produced far more questions than answers!

However, answering those questions was not a priority at the moment. The surviving the battle was all that mattered!

Commander Pellicky narrowed her eyes as she rewatched the footage of the Ultimatum One's domain field preventing the nunser battleship from crippling her flagship.

"Encourage Ultimatum One to focus fire on the nunser battleship. I do not know how long the mech can keep up its domain field, but if there is a limit to its protection, then we need to eliminate the greatest threat on the battlefield right away! Do not stop until her entire hull has been rent to pieces!"

Ultimatum One gladly obliged with the intentions of the crew. Once the machine that had come to embody the power of destruction had a clear firing angle on the nunser battleship, the formidable heavy artillery mech pounded the much more technologically advanced alien capital ship multiple times!

Though the nunser battleship's more modern and advanced protection held out for the time being, the mutated Onyx Cannon attacks demolished multiple segmented energy shields with every thundering strike!

Just as the exchange of fire between the most powerful combat assets on the battleship continued to heat up, a major development threatened to undo the precious gains made by the Pellicky Praetorians.

"Commander! The melee mechs of the Grimly Brothers have closed the distance to our fleet and have begun to attack our forces from the rear. Their ranged mechs are exerting so much pressure that our ranged mechs are forced to divert their own firepower in order to defend themselves!"

"Over 200 Grimly melee mechs have just swung around and are currently advancing straight in our direction! Their intentions are clear. They intend to take down our ship!"

This was bad! The Hooligan Barke might not be able to cope with enemies attacking from two different directions!

Commander Pellicky actually feared the Grimly Brothers more. Unlike the alien foes, the human enemies understood their own kind a lot more! Their mechs were also more versatile and could employ all kinds of tactics in order to overcome their opposition.

What was worse was that a single heavy weapon like the Onyx Cannon was clearly not suited to wipe out a swarm of small craft!