

# AKIRA

## CLASS BATTLECRUISER



A tacit admission that the new 'multimission' ethos designed to unify the Federation's Starfleet was driven more by wishful thinking and internal political maneuvering, failing to address actual issues, the *Akira* class was intended to put an end to the aimlessness that had given rise to earlier classes such as *Korolev*.

Designs that truly were multimission, were often too large and/or complex to produce in the quantities needed to truly satisfy the entire mission spectrum. Starfleet saw this with the *Ambassador* class and attempted to create a something of a 'stripped-down' counterpart, using much the same technology and systems to create the *Korolev* class. The chief problem with that was there was little that those heavy cruisers could do that smaller, lighter frigates could not. With that in mind, the entire idea of a multimission starship design was only truly viable for those above a certain size figure and that fit a certain mission profile.

As much as some within the Admiralty and the Federation General Assembly did not want to admit it, it was both easier and more effective to design and build classes with a singular or otherwise more narrowly defined focus than it was trying to adopt something like *Ambassador* to every possible contingency. The introduction of the *Centaur* (FF 42043) class in 2332 proved the validity of this,

The pace of technological advancement combined with the emergence of threats both new and old (ex. the Cardassians and Tholians) dictated a more comprehensive solution. In 2338, this resulted in the inception of a long-term development project designed to provide Starfleet with robust tactical & supporting capabilities to compliment the next generation of explorers that were being planned.

The firstfruits of this project was the *Steamrunner* (FH 53504) class Heavy Frigate that was launched in 2342. A do-it-all support platform in the same vein as the earlier *Miranda* (FH 1830) class, it could not only transport troops, cargo and small craft, but featured a unique design and special hull coatings designed to absorb sensor emissions and make it harder to detect/track.

Next came the *Norway* (DD 63522) class Destroyer in 2344. With a stealthy, low-profile design and excellent maneuverability at both sublight and FTL velocities, she was optimized for the same kinds of rapid-response and longer-range reconnaissance missions so ably undertaken by the *Akyazi* (DD 1010) class.

Following that came *Sabre* (ST 61900) in 2348. Something of an oddity, it featured surprisingly robust scientific and tactical capabilities for its size (160m L; 317,200mT displacement) allowing it to replace nearly all of the fleet's existing scouts. It managed to serve as a spiritual successor to both the *Archer* (CU 1870) and *Lancer* (CO 1500) classes and to the *La Fayette* (CO 2040) class as well, carry a workload that was almost equal that of *Steamrunner*, undertaking everything from scouting & basic mapping/surveying to intra-system policing and point-defense.

What Starfleet needed now was a spiritual success to the *Exeter* (CB 2200) class—a Battlecruiser that could take the lead in combat or on other missions of a tactical nature, fulfilling the same role as the fleet's Dreadnoughts did 60 years earlier and taking that burden off of classes like *Renaissance* (CH 9770) and *Ambassador* (CH 10521). Obviously, heavy firepower had to be a primary element. The fleet's Starfighter Command lobbied ardently for carrier capabilities to be included, given the role that fighters had played in the ongoing Cardassian conflict thus far and that the new *Steamrunner* class had not only incorporated, but used to great effect as well.

With these requirements in mind, the ASDB reached all the way back to the *Independence* (CVL 1590) class for inspiration. With a design derived from the trailblazing *NX* class, *Independence* was heavily armed for its day and could carry a diverse mix of small craft. Though it never had to, it was quite conceivable that one of these Light Carriers could—using her own capabilities and those of her small craft—seize and hold an entire star system entirely on its own. This made it a perfect template for the ASDB to base its newest creation on.

Codenamed *Akira*, this new design maintained the same basic profile with several distinct differences. First, the LF-35 warp nacelles were mounted on booms that were canted at a much more relaxed 47-degree angle, increasing the overall beam figure. Secondly, the saucer was not of any fleet-standard design, being wide, somewhat flat and integrating seamlessly with the secondary hull, which took the form of a smooth 'bulge' protruding from the underside. Finally, the swept-back pod mounted above the hull and between the booms did not contain the navigational deflector or sensors of any sort but was solely devoted to a special 12-tube rotary torpedo launcher.

Like *Independence*, *Akira* also maintained a distinct 'through-deck' configuration. Decks 8 and 9 were given over almost entirely to hangar space, making it the largest such bay featured on a starship now that the *Midway* (CV 2300) class was retired. Launch and recovery operation could be facilitated through a massive set of clamshell doors set into the saucer's leading edge or one of two doors aft. In the launch bay (which took up the forward 2/3rd of those two decks), 12 large elevator platforms permitted easy movement of craft from the 'launch' level, up to a separate bay of almost equal size (occupying decks 6 and 7) used for storage/maintenance and accessible through the aft doors.

The primary Turboshaft, Warp Core and associated engineering spaces spanned decks 5-14, cutting right through the center of the hangar space. As those spaces were relatively self-contained with turbolift & jefferies tube access to levels above and below, designers created 'throughways' around them to port and starboard that were wide enough for two craft to maneuver side-by-side forward and aft.

All told, *Akira* could support the same number of small craft as *Steamrunner*, however her loadout was decidedly slanted - 2 full squadrons (24) of *Valkyrie* class Attack Fighters and 1 squadron of *Danube* class Cutters. Unlike the fleet's new Heavy Frigate however, she did not feature any scientific accretions whatsoever, trading that for cargo space and expanded pilot accommodations.

Unusual for any starship up to that point, but further emphasizing, it's tactically-oriented role, *Akira*'s armament was highlighted not only by the 12 torpedo launchers in the rotary pod, but 4 flanking launchers—2 each to port/starboard, located just below the hull's centerline. These, plus the 3 primary launchers were all located on deck 10 and fed from a central magazine also located there and extending down onto deck 11 (just above the deflector dish which occupied decks 12-15). All told, *Akira* featured an amazing 19 total torpedo launchers. These were augmented by 3 Type X Phaser Emitters—1 on the dorsal surface of the primary hull and 2 more located ventrally, 1 each flanking the secondary hull.

Between small craft/parts storage, accommodations for flight crews & ground troops, those for the 392 officers and crew and then torpedo storage, interior volume left over for cargo and contingencies was at a premium. 1,092 metric tons of cargo capacity though gave *Akira* the ability to conduct resupply missions of moderate scope or otherwise operate without having to resupply for months at a time.

The launch of the lead ship in 2352 and dozens more over the next 4 years came none too soon. The outbreak of full-scale hostilities with the Cardassian Union in 2355 was the toughest challenge Starfleet faced in 75 years. Technological equals of the Klingons approximately, they pushed *Excelsior*, *Miranda*, *Exeter* and other classes designed to fight those former foes, to their absolute limit.

The pressure on these ships was eased somewhat when Starfleet's Starfighter Command inducted the *Peregrine* class Attack Fighter into service, which packaged much of the armament of these elderly vessels, into a smaller, more resilient, and more lethal package. It and *Akira*'s baptism of fire came in late 2356 at the Battle of Iadara.

Iadara was a lush, tropical world, home to a Starfleet listening post, the current billet for the SFMC's 4th Ranger Battalion & a separate Special Forces Platoon and a major irritant to Cardassian forces operating on the frontier. A single *Condor* class support craft provided atmospheric support, while in orbit, a combined squadron of frigates (*Miranda*, *Centaur*) and Light Cruisers (*Kearsarge II*) maintained overwatch.

The *Rabin* (CB 63293) led the Assault Transport *Tripoli* (TTA 4823) and a fully modern support squadron of *Steamrunner* (*Sacramento*/FH 53007, *Matewan*/FH 53446, *Daran*/FH 53218), *Norway* (*Defiance*/DD 64792, *Olympia*/DD 64823, *Oslo*/DD 64823, *Sagittarius*/DD 64917) and *Saber* (*Sentry*/ST 61890, *Veldar*/ST 61899, *Triumph*/ST 61972, *Balthasar*/ST 61905, *Schirra*/ST 61938, *Burke*/ST 62006) class ships out from Starbase 47 to Iadara to relieve their brethren.

They arrived on 11 November, in the middle of a Cardassian siege. Several Starfleet ships had already been destroyed, while others were hopelessly crippled. Attacking in waves, Starfleet's fighters managed to make the Cardassians scatter and allowed the *Tripoli* to make orbit.

As the Cardassians scattered, *Norway*, *Saber* and still more fighters led a charge aimed right at the Cardassian center, causing them to scatter even more. Disorganized and out of formation, the smaller *Hideki* and *Akril* class ships became easy pickings for *Rabin* and her consorts—dozens being destroyed by the near-continuous volleys of photon torpedoes.

Not to be outdone, the *Miranda* class *Alamo* (FH 1836) led Iadara's support squadron in taking the initiative from their newer counterparts and charging the Cardassians themselves. By this time though, Cardassian *Zhoden* class ships had reformed and were initially able to repel the assault, destroying the Light Cruisers *Sandusky* (CL 1572), *Archer* (CL 1580) and *Kern* (CL 1582). Retaliation was swift—the 3 surviving *Centaur* class ships executing surgical phaser strikes, upon which *Alamo* capitalized. *Rabin* and her escorts followed this up with phaser spreads and torpedo volleys. The Cardassians fought bitterly, enough so that it was another 4 grueling hours before Starfleet wiped them from the field. Once they did, the *Rabin*, *Sacramento* and *Matewan* commenced a massive planetary bombardment of Cardassian positions

while the assembled *Norways* and *Sabers* took the *Alamo* and other older ships under their wing, helping with casualty treatment and damage control.

As with *Antons* and other *Baton Rouge*-era assets during the Four Years War, current Reserve Force Assets were removed from the front lines following this engagement and reassigned to second line support duties. Larger fleet combatants like *Carolina* (BB 4000) remained the only classes from this generation capable of defending against the Cardassians' lethal plasma torpedoes. Consequently, they remained centerpieces in the next engagement, helping to keep Starfleet's momentum up.

With reports filtering back from Starfleet Intelligence of possible Cardassian activity near the Mira Antilae system, they seized the opportunity and deployed a squadron to investigate. The *Osceola* (CB 62743), *Red Cloud* (CB 63306) and *Devore* (CB 64088) led 3 Frigates, 3 Battleships and several Destroyers into the area. With better than 20 ships in their armada that orbited the third planet, the Cardassian Guard had 2:1 superiority, though these were predominantly smaller *Akril* and *Hideki* classes.

Due to the proximity of Mira Antilae III to the system's star, the frequent delta radiation bombardments gave Starfleet, the element of surprise, the squadron commander electing to warp into the system and execute a three-pronged blitz in overlapping waves. *Osceola* led the starships *Hiroshima* (FH 52444) and *Vosper* (DD 64851) in a trailing-V formation behind the *Jamestown* (BB 4406), *Bergen* (DD 64844) and *Odessa* (DD 64849) in the first wave, *Red Cloud*, *Gettysburg* (FH 51941) and *Kiev* (DD 64952) formed up around the *Philadelphia* (BB 4402) in the second wave, while the *Devore*, *Trafalgar* (FH 52427) and *Pendragon* (BB 4404) constituted the third and final wave.

Typical for the Cardassians, they were dispersed haphazardly near the planet's equator. The first group to be detected by short-range sensors broke orbit and set an intercept course that put it at a 30-degree angle opposite the closest approaching Starfleet squadron. Another group of ships was on a vector that would take them across the stern of the first group (assuming none of the commanders changed course to avoid the ensuing collision). The remaining ships were on the far side of the planet, in a tight formation that left little, if any room for emergency maneuvers.

Once engaged, *Jamestown* and her destroyer escorts quickly established dominance, laying down a furious torpedo barrage that crippled 2 ships almost immediately. The first and second waves then moved in, establishing something of a perimeter. Following that, *Jamestown* used torpedo fire to drive the Cardassians toward her smaller, more agile compatriots. The third wave, with its cumulative firepower, was used to then mop up the field.

This combination of tactics and firepower enabled Starfleet to win the day. However, the Cardassian Guard was not about to just blithely roll over—they would make Starfleet pay dearly for every subsequent victory.

As they could not hope to match the Cardassian numbers, at least in any reasonable amount of time, Starfleet decided to use the Cardassians' impetuous nature to their advantage. Given their penchant for striking at Starfleet's supply lines, using convoys as bait was a logical tactic and paid off handsomely a little more than a year later near the Camor system.

Convoy L-412 had departed Camor III and was enroute to resupply several front-line outposts, help establish 3 colonies and replenish the Beta Antares shipyard complex. As such, it was quite large and diverse, consisting of two-dozen *Deneva* class Freighters, a squadron of fully loaded *Java* class Freighters and a half dozen *Istanbul* class Transports. While this was a legitimately assembled convoy, Starfleet Command stripped it of any Destroyer or Frigate escort, knowing that its size would make it a target too tempting to avoid. Instead, the USS *Kherson* (CB 64791) and a *Steamrunner* class squadron laid in wait along the convoy route.

True to form, the Cardassians soon pounced. Detecting no escort, a raiding party of 3 *Zhoden* and 5 *Hideki* class ships moved in for the kill. While most of the ships in the convoy featured minimal to no armament, all had deflector shield systems strong enough to withstand a moderate assault. The *Kherson* and her consorts quickly emerged from their cover and surrounded the Cardassians, destroying the *Hidekis* in short order and capturing the *Zhoden* trio.

These ships were the real prize. Smaller than the *Galor* yet featuring the same aesthetics and much of the same technology, they held roughly equivalent positions to *Steamrunner* in the Cardassian order of battle. Taken to the Beta Antares Yards, their systems and library computer data were extensively analyzed by both the ASDB and Starfleet Intelligence before they were integrated into Starfleet's aggressor squadron and used for dissimilar combat training (DCT).

By this time, large numbers of *Sabre* class ships had filtered out to the border region and had begun to assume most perimeter action responsibilities. *Akira*, *Steamrunner* and *Norway* class ships were also present in strength as well, forming the bulk of Starfleet's combat force.

The Cardassians thus far had failed to secure a beachhead inside Federation space. Losing Convoy L-412 together with other defeats had begun to place a strain on their logistical apparatus. Overcoming this obstacle was a priority, leading to the first major ground battle at Minos Korva in May of 2358. It was home to a fledgling colony that was fast becoming a center of commerce and trade as well as being rich in natural resources (a comparative rarity for a border world).

Starfleet Intelligence discovered this was the Cardassian Guard's next target and quickly relayed this information. With little notice, the SFMC dispersed their 7th Marine Brigade (7,632 troops) among the *Inchon* class ships of the 12th Heavy Transport Wing and quickly deployed them along with a Frigate squadron lead by the *Zephyr* (FH 63512).

A fierce and bloody battle, it further validated the effectiveness of Starfleet's new *Peregrine* class fighter and was notable for degenerating into wide-scale hand-to-hand combat.

With each successive engagement, the Federation's offensive footing gained further strength. The Cardassians, now facing logistical strains, started to show signs of desperation. Their next attempt to establish a strategic foothold in Federation space came in August at Tyra. Despite their performance in previous battles, including the infamous Ambush of Convoy L-412, Reserve Forces—principally *Excelsior* and *Miranda* class ships—formed the vanguard of Task Force Gamma. *Akira* featured heavily here and with an impressive number of smaller ships including *Steamrunner*, *Norway* and others, one would think the task force would be enough to hold a backwater system of no significant importance. Starfleet had learned from its previous engagements however, taking the liberty of assembling a separate battle group and hiding it inside a nearby asteroid field for contingency purposes.

Being pushed squarely onto the defensive didn't blunt the Cardassians' edge, but it did make them more cautious. Successive waves of *Hideki* class ships were of little challenge to the ships of Task Force Gamma, even the elderly ones. Introducing an *Akri* squadron turned up the heat, if only slightly—their maneuverability proving to be a challenge for the *Mirandas*—but their weak shielding made them easy prey for *Steamrunner*, *Norway* and their more modern compatriots.

The introduction of 1 *Zhoden* and 1 *Galor* squadron tilted the balance more sharply. *Zhoden*, with her more powerful disruptors, *Galor* with those plus stronger shields and thicker armor.

*Miranda* as before, proved to be the weak link. As they fell one by one, the pressure on the remaining ships increased. Despite making quick work of the Cardassian cutters, their superior numbers and plasma torpedo stores claimed several *Steamrunners* (*Arcadia*/FH 52144, *Dublin*/FH 52537, *Icarus*/FH 52391, *Kyushu*/FH 52470) and even 3 *Akiras* (*Oriskany*/CB 62584, *Concord*/CB 62597, *Truxtun*/CB 62617).

Taking these grim conditions into consideration, Starfleet called in their supporting battle group. Massive *Carolina* class ships were escorted by numerous, smaller *Norways* at the center, backed up by *Curry* class Light Carriers and starfighters of the 12th Attack Wing. Smashing into the Cardassians' right flank, they destroyed several ships with their opening volley of photon torpedoes. Next, they attempted to establish dominance on the battlefield. The *Philadelphia* (BB 4402) and *Jamestown* (BB 4406) led half of their forces and bore down on the smaller combatants to relieve pressure on their larger compatriots while the *California* (BB 4410) and *Maryland* (BB 4413) engaged the capital ships.

In the hopes of preventing the Cardassians from bogging them down, electronic warfare was refocused from these capital ships to the smaller combatants in the hopes that they would quickly fall, but this was not the case—proving to be the beginning of the end.

The *Philadelphia* and *Jamestown* got bogged down along with the ships they were attempting to relieve. Despite the overwhelming number of starfighters, they were unable to prevent the *Norways* from getting picked off one by one. Together with the *Sabres* and *Akiras*, the *California* and *Maryland* launched successive photon torpedo barrages that paved the way for surgical phaser strikes, claiming several *Zhodens*. The Cardassians though responded in kind. By linking their forward disruptors and concentrating their fire, the *Galors* disabled several ships and destroyed a handful of others. After their initial volley, their successive volleys focused on *Maryland*. Despite near-continuous torpedo fire from *Leyte Gulf* (CB 71427), *Jupiter* (CB 71627) and *Templar* (CB 71659) along with a valiant attempt by several *Steamrunners* to screen them from incoming fire, *Maryland* lost her warp engines and forward phaser batteries in short order. When *California* soon suffered a similar fate, it became clear Starfleet couldn't win this fight.

The Battleships formed up in a diamond slot formation, closely followed by the Carriers (which would be the next logical targets) and attempted to retreat, however the *Philadelphia*, *California* and *Maryland* were all destroyed. The surviving *Akiras* expended the rest of their torpedo stores before what reserve forces were left formed up around the *Galacta* (CH 2003) and *Yonada* (FH 1879) and charged the Cardassians—buying the bulk of Starfleet's assets enough time to escape to the Tammeron system. This marked a bloody end to Starfleet's worst loss thus far.

Starfleet notched a psychological victory at Cuellar in November (when a small compliment of *Excelsior* and *Steamrunner* class ships breached Cardassian lines and eviscerated an important supply convoy) but despite this, the Cardassians continued to advance toward Aldebaran III on one front and Tarchannen on another. The Battle of Castor and the Attack on Koinonia in February of 2359 proved similarly disastrous for them and laid bare their increasing weakness and desperation. A shortage of supplies and lack of reinforcements contributed to a gradual breakdown in strategic organization. Eventually, the need for supplies, forward operating bases (FOBs) and front-line repair facilities outweighed the need for sheer numbers of combat vessels. As the Cardassians grappled with this, a general lull in fighting took hold.

The Cardassian Central Command pinned their chances to get back on the offensive and regain momentum on inflicting comparable logistical damage to Starfleet and pushing them as far back from the border as possible. To do so, they planned two massive thrusts into Federation territory—one would center on the destruction of Starbase 67 while the other involved the total pacification of the Vega Reticuli system that the Cardassians believe to be the location of a major military command center.

Standing between the Cardassians and Vega Reticuli was Aldebaran. It had been surveyed some 15 years prior in 2344 and had been selected as the site for a major industrial base to support future exploration and colonization/expansion efforts. By 2355, a major industrial base to support future exploration and

colonization/expansion efforts. By 2355, major mining, production and fabrication facilities had been established, along with a Lotus Flower/L-Type Space Station that serviced and supplied the various vessels operating in the region. With the outbreak of war, personnel and assets flooded into the region, working to establish a major shipbuilding complex in orbit of Aldebaran III. By 2359, with the system's increasing importance, an entire task force, plus a battle group of reserves—over 200 starships—called Aldebaran home.

The battle group was positioned in and around the system's core, protecting the station and the shipyards, while the task force was dispersed into squadrons, spread amongst the system's six planets. Along with *Steamrunner* and *Norway* class ships, multiple *Akiras* were present at Aldebaran III, IV and VI.

The Cardassian task force that intended to push through and on to Aldebaran III approached from the far side of the border, initially detecting only the reserves at the system's center due to the extensive sensor masking that was in place. Aware that they had the rare advantage of numbers in this instance, Starfleet forces proceeded cautiously. They let the Cardassians proceed to the shipyards and engage their reserves before they sent in three squadrons from Aldebaran IV to lull them into a false sense of security.

Letting the battle progress, *Steamrunners* leading the Starfleet charge primed the field with electronic warfare measures, tricking Cardassian sensors and convincing them reinforcements were approaching from their left flank. This deception had its intended effect, keeping the Cardassians off guard as the *Antietam* (CB 67433) led 4 more squadrons into the area, advancing from the rear. Capitalizing on the confusion, they used surgical phaser strikes on Cardassian propulsion and sensor systems to push them onto their heels.

The same tactic was repeated, this time creating the illusion that Starfleet forces were retreating towards the edge of the system. This caused the Cardassians to reform and move away from the shipyards, but before they could get anywhere, 5 more squadrons approached from Aldebaran IV and VI, completely cutting them off. At this point, the battle quickly disintegrated into an all-out melee. Starfighters softened up the larger Frigates and Cruisers, their starship-level weaponry presenting a nearly insurmountable challenge. From there, all remaining Starfleet forces in-system that hadn't yet joined the battle, did so – engaging the Cardassians at point blank range, some starships (including many *Akiras*) engaging multiple targets at once.

This sound defeat marked the beginning of the end of the Cardassian war effort. Despite the comparative power of plasma torpedoes and a string of early victories, the fragility of their logistical apparatus made resupply & replenishment operations incredibly difficult, that difficulty only increasing with each subsequent defeat.

Through the capture of several additional Cardassian vessels and careful examination of their databanks, Starfleet Intelligence discovered the existence of a major base at Kelrabi IX. The ninth planet in the resource rich Kelrabi star system, it

was the only Class M world present. With a mild, temperate climate, it added an agricultural dimension to a meager, yet growing industrial center. Prior to the outbreak of war, the Cardassian Guard established a large base ostensibly for administrative purposes, but also to coordinate various in-system activities and to serve as a rudimentary supply hub for forward deployed forces on the frontier. After war broke out, Kelrabi IX gained significant strategic and logistical importance as the only major link to front line forces from the various industrial and military centers in the Union's core.

Even as the Cardassians' fortunes declined throughout the course of the war, the Guard continued to maintain it as an administrative center, carrying out upgrades to help it serve as a major C3 hub, but doing little to boost its military capability aside from constructing a *Nor* class Space Station (similar in size/function to Starfleet's *Lotus Flower/L-Type*) in the system's core linked to a network of powerful weapons platforms deployed throughout. This made it a prime target to Starfleet, who, after their defeat at Tyra, sought to sever this logistical link and cripple the Guard's offensive capability altogether.

Late in the month, nearly 80% of Starfleet's active forces were marshaled and set off to end the war once and for all. Over 900 starships, 1200 starfighters and nearly 40,000 personnel embarked on a mission that was described by many in the Admiralty as being 'too big to fail.'

Opposing them in the system were over 300 Cardassian warships deployed in three layers. The outer layer contained the familiar *Hideki* and *Akril* classes, carefully dispersed amongst the network of weapons platforms. The middle layer saw *Zhodens* holding station amongst the moons and gas giants, while the inner layer around Kelrabi IX itself was protected by *Galor* class Cruisers.

Starfleet's singular goal was to reach Kelrabi and inflict as much destruction as possible by any means necessary. Making heavy use of photon torpedoes while traveling at warp, they were able to make it past the periphery with little trouble before dropping out of warp at the middle layer. Here, the *Steamrunners* and other Frigates along with a motley collection of Destroyers and smaller combatants engaged their counterparts at point blank range before waves of starfighters swarmed into the area and allowed them to punch their way through to their target.

There, the heaviest classes including *Carolina*, *Akira*, *Exeter*, and *Inchon* engaged the space station. Engaging the *Galors* fell to *Steamrunner*, *Centaur*, *Norway*, and *Sabre*. Destroying the weapons platforms was somewhat troublesome given the robust shielding aboard the station, but the *Akiras* had all been equipped with limited stores of tri-cobalt torpedoes. Utilized strategically around the central core, the station's shields were overwhelmed, and she was destroyed in short order. 12 fighter squadrons were then redeployed to fan out and destroy the platforms while the starships swarmed and destroyed their Cardassian counterparts.

With its supply lines crumbled, a large portion of its fleet lost and Starfleet holding clear tactical and technological superiority, a plurality of analysts assumed the Cardassians would sue for peace. However, given their history plus intelligence gained thus far, there were some who predicted they would continue a low-level campaign when and where they could. What no one in the Federation or Starfleet could anticipate though was that there were many in the Cardassian intelligence establishment who were desperate to end the war before they could be further subjugated.

To that end, agents of the Obsidian Order (the Cardassian Intelligence Service) had identified a suitable officer—Laen Enkoa—and fed him intelligence about a Federation colony world along the border.

Enkoa had an unremarkable record but was highly ambitious and was known throughout the Guard's command hierarchy as being over-eager. Concurrent with the Federation war, the Union was also embroiled in a low-level conflict with the Talarian Republic. In early 2362, Talarian Raiders ambushed the CDS Rekkel. Enkoa, part of the ship's security contingent, assumed command after the ship's commander and executive officer were killed. Together with the assistance of the Rekkel's chief engineer, he engaged and destroyed the Talarian attackers—earning him a small level of distinction.

The falsified intelligence that later found its way into his possession concerned the planet Setlik III. A mere 3.6 light years from Kelrabi, the planet and Setlik system overall was quite unremarkable—uninhabited save for a small Federation colony and lacking any natural resources of note. Its proximity to Cardassian space and to Kelrabi though gave it a measure of strategic significance and made the Obsidian Order's assertion that the Federation colony there was cover for a covert military supply depot, all the more plausible.

With no permission from higher authority, Enkoa took his new ship, the *Zhoden* class CDS *Lakar* to Setlik and launched an assault on the colony. His direct superior, Jagul Hanno, was alerted and it was hoped that Hanno would marshal forces and repond quickly enough to prevent much loss of life (while still drawing in a Starfleet response). However, the Order miscalculated. In the *Lakar*'s initial orbital bombardment and then following the deployment of ground forces, over a third of the colony's population was wiped out.

Hanno arrived with an armada soon after, Enkoa's actions leaving him no choice but to capture the planet and annex the entire system. His primary objective though was to capture Enkoa and take both him and the *Lakar* back to Cardassia. That said (and given the Guard's depleted manpower by that point), only a token occupation force was left behind.

That force was later engaged by the New Orleans class USS *Rutledge* (FF 57295) which completed a difficult rescue mission and managed to drive the Cardassians off.

When word of the massacre got back to Starfleet Command, the Admiralty belatedly realized that defeat in the traditional military sense would not be enough to bring the Cardassians to heel. This was underscored by the fact the Guard achieved one final victory—completely wiping out the 12<sup>th</sup> Fleet's 5<sup>th</sup> Destroyer squadron in an engagement at the Hugora Nebula.

At that point, many in the Admiralty knew what had to be done, yet few had the guts to come out and say it. One of the few was the 12<sup>th</sup> Fleet's commander, Vice Admiral Edward Sherman. He whole-heartedly endorsed a 'scorched earth' campaign that would rip the 'heart' out of their war effort and crush their resolve once and for all. He never bothered to elaborate on what such a campaign would entail, knowing full well it would not meet with approval from the Federation Security Council and would more than likely provoke an uproar in the General Assembly. He was however, successfully able to convince his superiors the plan *would* work.

On stardate 39666 (13 May 2362) Vice Admiral Sherman was officially placed on detached duty. At his request and by his design, a battle group was formed from ships of the 12<sup>th</sup> Fleet and armed with large stores of tri-cobalt torpedoes. Deploying from Starbase 129, they undertook an 18 light year journey to Omekla, obliterating the colony on Omekla III and beginning a rampage that took them across 52 light years. A dozen colonies, 4 fixed installation and a further 30 military and civilian vessels were destroyed before Sherman's forces regrouped at Salva IV inside the region known as the 'Badlands'. There, they covertly monitored communications & intelligence, recording on stardate 39772 (22 June 2362), the petition the Cardassians transmitted that requested an end to hostilities.

All records of 'Sherman's March' as it came to be known, were compartmentalized and classified to the highest level following the return of he and his battle group to Starbase 129. The capabilities of *Akira*, *Steamrunner*, *Norway* and *Sabre* had been validated many times over by that point, in some cases, going back decades. While Starfleet continued advancing their utopian dream of a entirely 'multi-mission' fleet, these rugged classes became the premier tools to surveil and secure the Federation's borders.

Indeed, the fact that class construction and deployment of *Akira* and her smaller compatriots had continued apace had given both Starfleet and the ASDB both the time and space needed to finalize the designs of and then subsequently launch the *Nebula* (CA 60147) and *Galaxy* (CH 70637) classes. Further, data from the battles at Lyshan, Iadara IV and Kelrabi IX was used to refine the design and operation of several systems on both classes.

The early 2360s for the most part though were relatively quiet and uneventful, the astropolitical tempo picking up markedly when the Romulans reemerged onto the galactic stage in 2364.



Early in that year, both the Romulans and the Federation mysteriously lost contact with colonies and outpost stations on either side of the Neutral Zone. Starfleet sent the *Enterprise* (CH 1701-D) to the border to investigate and shortly thereafter, she was confronted by a *D'Deridex* class Warbird. The encounter was short-lived but brought renewed attention to this border—which up until this point was guarded solely by a number of *Foxtrot* class Outpost Stations. Regular patrol routes were established and soon, the *Armitage* (CB 62517) became a fixture in the area along with no less than 3 *Steamrunners* and numerous other vessels. Just 3 years later, those numbers were doubled following the discovery that the Romulans were attempting to influence the outcome of the Klingon Civil War.

The emergence of the Borg—the deadliest and most powerful enemy the Federation has faced to date—marked a turning point in both Federation history and the school of thought that guided the conception, design, and engineering of its starships. Up to that point, astropolitical realities dictated what kind of ships were built and how.

During the 2250s & 60s, exploration and expansion was the order of the day, giving rise to ever more advanced iterations of *Constitution* (CH 1700). The 2270s & 80s took the same ethos and balanced that against simmering tensions with the Klingons & Romulans, providing ample justification for a new generation of powerful Dreadnoughts. The 2290s up to the early-mid 2350s saw the ASDB attempt to leverage a multitude of technological advances into ever-larger starship designs as a renewed era of peace took hold.

The ASDB meanwhile, had designed *Akira* and her ilk as a hedge, that provided a basic modicum of multi-mission functionality, but would primarily hold the line against current and future threats—thereby giving them the breathing room to work on bigger, more prestigious projects like *Nebula* & *Galaxy*. In effect, it was the 'Class I era' mindset all over again.

First contact with the Borg was made when the entity known as 'Q', transported the *Enterprise* to star system FGC J25 in 2365. There, they found further evidence of planetary destruction identical to that found on worlds near the Neutral Zone. They were subsequently met and assaulted by a Borg cube. After suffering severe damage, the *Enterprise* crew successfully pleaded to be transported back to the Alpha Quadrant and Q obliged.

Now quite aware of the Federation, it was inevitable that there would be further encounters. The next one in 2367 showed that resistance definitely **was** futile—the combination of advanced weaponry with technological sophistication and bleeding edge engineering proving to be no match against the Borg. They would prove as equally impotent against the next threat the Federation would encounter, however, these shortcomings would prove to be mercifully short-lived.

In the aftermath of the Battle of Wolf 359—where 39 Federation starships were cut down in the blink of an eye—and the destruction of the Borg cube by the *Enterprise*,

this renewed sense of innocence was lost and it became clear that Starfleet must adapt to a new reality whether it wanted to or not.

Naturally, 'adapting' in this case meant the development and deployment of new tactical systems to be employed as circumstances dictated. Leading this effort was a quartet of systems—pulse phaser cannons, ablative hull armor, quantum torpedoes and next-generation operating software that made deflector shields stronger and more effective. A trio of starship classes was developed to take full advantage of these technologies—*Defiant*/DD 74205, *Sovereign*/CH 73811 and *Prometheus*/CT 74913—but only the latter two could be backfitted to classes like *Akira*.

The 'next generation' software suite wasn't as revolutionary as it was evolutionary. Essentially, it slaved complete control of a vessel's shields to the main computer. When activated, the vessel's sensors analyzed incoming weapons fire (or other interference/phenomena) and automatically altered shield frequencies in kind to provide the most robust possible defense.

Quantum torpedoes on the other hand were originally conceived as replacements for, but later became complements to, standard photon torpedoes. A continuum distortion emitter created a disruption in a target's shielding (or the underlying molecular structure of any armor/hull plating present) while a zero-point energy initiator enhanced the explosive potential of a modified photon warhead to create a weapon with a maximum yield of 55 isotons/143 megatons (compared to the 25 isoton/65 megaton yield of a photon torpedo).

Work on these developments consumed the rest of the 2360s and continued well into the 2370s. Unfortunately, non could arrive soon enough to prevent the destruction of the USS *Odyssey* (CH 71832) in 2371.

The *Galaxy* class ship along with a pair of *Danube* class Cutters (*Mekong*/CU 72617, *Orinoco*/CU 72905) had deployed on a search and rescue mission to retrieve Commander Benjamin Sisko and his party who had traveled to an unexplored world in the Gamma Quadrant. After locating his ship—*Rio Grande* (CU 72425)—and while still attempting to locate him, they were intercepted by two Jem'Hadar Attack Ships. Utilizing phased polaron weaponry, they were able to defeat the shielding of the Starfleet vessels with ease. Luckily, it didn't take long for personnel aboard the *Rio Grande* to locate and rescue Sisko and his party. However, while attempting to retreat, one of the Jem'Hadar attackers made a suicide run at the *Odyssey*, both being destroyed in the ensuing explosion.

Months later, the results of the first encounter between the Starship USS *Defiant* (DDX 74205) and the Jem'Hadar were little better. The prototype of a radically new starship class, the *Defiant* incorporated all the aforementioned tactical advancements and more. Initially intended as the centerpiece of a new offensive force designed to tackle threats like the Borg, the expected invasion never materialized following the Battle of Wolf 359 and the prototype spent much of its time at the Utopia Planitia Starship Yards undergoing further refinement.

Despite being overpowered and overgunned for a ship of its size, Starfleet rushed the *Defiant* to Deep Space Nine following the destruction of the *Odyssey*. On a mission to the Gamma Quadrant to establish contact with the Founders—the leaders of the Dominion and masters of the Jem'Hadar—the ship was quickly set upon by the Jem'Hadar. While the effectiveness of her pulse phasers was validated after she destroyed one of her attackers, she was still overpowered and disabled in relatively short order.

The overwhelming advantage of the Dominion's Phased Polaron weaponry was blunted a mere two years later when now-Captain Sisko discovered and salvaged a Jem'Hadar Attack Ship that had crashed on the surface of Torga IV. Taken to Starbase 375, the ship was subjected to extensive examination by personnel from the ASDB and Starfleet Intelligence. Data collected on the ship's weaponry resulted in an extensive re-write of computer control software that was nearing the end of development.

While initial iterations involved sensor systems analyzing the frequency of incoming weapons fire, this was ineffective against phased polaron weaponry because the subspace compression pulse harnessing the polaron particles was placed out of phase and thus did not exist at any frequency on the EM spectrum. Polaron particles themselves had a destabilizing effect, containing them in a subspace compression pulse allowed this destabilizing potential to be crudely harnessed in a manner similar to plasma torpedoes. Delivering this pulse in a phase shifted state is what allowed it to pass through deflector shielding and unleash its destructive effects on a target.

To compensate for this, Starfleet sensor systems were modified to not only analyze the EM frequency of incoming weapons fire, but the phase state of that weapons fire as well. If a starship's or station's computer determined the phase configuration of its deflector shields differed, even in a minute way, from incoming weapons fire, it would automatically adjust that configuration to block the fire from penetrating the shields.

Deploying these improvements (which were entirely software-based and required no additional hardware or hardware modifications) came none too soon. The signing of a treaty with the Cardassian Union midway through 2373 saw untold numbers of Dominion ships flooding into the Alpha Quadrant from the wormhole. With each passing week and each new contingent of ships that came through from the Gamma Quadrant, the Federation's strategic position became more and more precarious.

By the end of the year, personnel from Deep Space Nine had devised a plan to mine the wormhole's Alpha Quadrant terminus with self-replicating mines that had been augmented with small-scale cloaking devices. The seeming invulnerability of this approach provoked an immediate response, the Dominion sending a Vorta Ambassador to the station to stall for time while the *Defiant* continued work deploying mines.

When the expected confrontation did arrive, DS9, the *Defiant* and Starfleet/Allied forces overall fared well, though the station was captured in short order and the *Defiant* was forced to flee the Bajoran system. Save for the Battle of Torros III, where an allied armada destroyed a Dominion shipyard complex, the first 3 months of the conflict were marked by grievous defeats at Ronara and New France.

The former was a system located along a key front for Starfleet, facing a sparsely populated side of the Cardassian border marked roughly by Omekla on one end and Kelrabi on the other. Here the 4<sup>th</sup> Fleet spread out across a 30 light year span, with support and surveillance provided by Starbase 129 and the Argus Array. There was little of tactical or strategic significance on the Cardassian side of the border, so the fleet's mission was largely defensive.

To that end, the fleet's makeup was highly diverse. Led by the *Galaxy* class USS *Challenger* (CH 71099), *Akira*, *Steamrunner*, *Norway* and *Sabre* made up only a third of the fleet's total. The other two-thirds was made up of so-called 'mainline' classes including *Nebula*, *New Orleans*, *Springfield*, *Ambassador*, *Challenger*, *Korolev* and *Renaissance*.

The Cardassian Guard, having benefitted from Dominion support for nearly two years by this point, had recently launched their new *Kondal* class starship. Officially classified as a Light Cruiser (CL), this was something of a misnomer. Slightly smaller than *Galor* and *Keldon*, it repackaged the armament and capabilities of the latter into a smaller, more maneuverable spaceframe, putting it nearly on par with *Akira*. The Guard's 3<sup>rd</sup> Order was one of their few frontline units to field the class at better than squadron-level strength. Given the Dominion's impressive shipbuilding capability and their ability to clone Jem'Hadar in a similarly impressive timeframe, the Cardassians could afford to keep their shipbuilding & expansion capabilities tightly focused as they did while the Dominion filled in their gaps (and expanded their capabilities 2x to 3x).

Their first offensive push came barely a month after their successful operation to capture Deep Space Nine. On stardate 50124.8, they broke out at Ronara. Despite the presence of the *Challenger*, *Antietam*, *Spector* (CB 63898) and *Leyte Gulf* (CB 71427) in addition to two *Steamrunner* squadrons, the bulk of the forces in the immediate vicinity were constituted by *New Orleans* and *Springfield*.

The opening stages of the battle were hard fought—*Kondal* and *Zhoden* formations pinned down *Challenger* and her *Akira* class consorts while *Galor*, *Akril* and *Hideki* formations swarmed the *Steamrunners* and their smaller compatriots. Recognizing a divide-and-conquer strategy when they saw it, the *Hiroshima*, *Denver* (FH 54927) and *Iron Horse* (FH 62175) led the counter-assault. As with the previous conflict with the Cardassians, heavy weaponry and sensor jamming was the key to survival, the Starfleet forces slowly gaining the upper hand and destroying nearly a quarter of the overall Cardassian force.



Before they could completely overwhelm the Cardassians, a 700-ship strong Dominion fleet emerged from the Hugora Nebula. They both outflanked the 4<sup>th</sup> Fleet's main body and cut them off from their smaller compatriots. In short order, the tide began to turn and one by one, ships fell, including the *Knox* (FH 52497), *Barcelona* (FH 52501) and *Cimmarron* (FH 52536). Soon, the battle degenerated into an utter bloodbath and the order was given for Starfleet forces to fall back to Starbase 129. In all, over 54 starships and over 13,000 personnel were lost.

Once again, Starfleet had allowed itself to become complacent and stretched too thin with regards to its shipbuilding and deployment. It wasn't that they lacked the resources to quickly correct this, on the contrary, several ship classes (*Defiant*, *Sovereign*, *Prometheus*) were in development which could almost assuredly correct the force deficiency. The problem lay in the fact that they lacked the yard space and resources to make any kinds of quick changes to their shipbuilding strategy.

While current ship production was ramped up and changes were scheduled, Starfleet called on its Reserve Forces Command to commit the bulk of its assets to the front lines. In addition to the hundreds of *Miranda* (FH 1860), *Excelsior* (CH 2000) and even *Constellation* (CA 1974) class ships that were reactivated, refitted and deployed out, quantum torpedoes were certified for active service and began to filter out to certain front-line units (those equipped with MK I torpedo launchers or better).

Unfortunately, this would do little to affect the outcome of the next battle surrounding New France where the situation was much the same – just on a larger scale. The 14<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> fleets were hurriedly assembled formations, comprised primarily of reserve force units, but also featuring *Centaur*, *Korolev* and *Ambassador* class ships at squadron-level strength or better.

As at Ronara, the Dominion attacked with numerical superiority, forcing the 14<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> fleets to retreat before they were surrounded and eviscerated. The 21<sup>st</sup> fleet on the other hand, fell back to the Tibor Nebula. There, the *Valdemar* (CH 26198), *Von Braun* (CH 47159), *Hood* (CH 42296), *Oriskany* (FF 42785) and *Garibaldi* (FF 42688) distinguished themselves, destroying the Cardassian flagship *CDS Shyllira* and almost all the *Akril* and *Hideki* class ships present before the new *Kondal* class ships back by Dominion Battlecruisers forced them to flee as well. Despite the greater numbers involved, Starfleet losses were comparatively light – 40 ships, including the *Goddard* (CH 59621), *Alaska* (CH 26279) and *Avenger* (FH 1860).

The next battle is where Starfleet's fortunes improved, if only momentarily. After driving them back from New France, the Dominion—supported by the Cardassian 19<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> orders—advanced to the outer edge of the 40 Eridani (Vulcan) star system. There they were met by the 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet. Unlike the front-line formations along the outer rim, those further in towards the Federation's core were comprised of newer, heavier ship classes. Led by the *Sovereign* class *Gibraltar* (CH 75689), nearly a third of the fleet was comprised of *Akira* class ships.

Even still, the Dominion's siege of the system was a drawn-out one, lasting for over two months. Breaking it involved rushing completion on the *Sovereign* class *Agamemnon* (CH 73925), the *Defiant* class *Moscow* (DD 75663) and *Bennington* (DD 75664) and attaching them to the 1st Fleet which had departed Alpha Centauri with sorely needed parts and stores.

Once they arrived at Vulcan and linked up with the 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet, the push to expel the Dominion forces began. Along with the hastily completed *Moscow* and *Bennington*, there were eight other *Defiant* class ships present (*Alexey Leonov*/DD 75665, *Avenger*/DD 75656, *Baton Rouge*/DD 75657, *Crockett*/DD 75658, *Dauntless*/DD 75659, *Eclipse*/DD 75660, *Gauntlet*/DD 75661, *Havoc*/DD 75662). Together with their re-armed *Akira* class brethren, they formed a potent spearhead, pushing through to attack and destroy the Dominion Battlecruisers.

Along with their *Streamrunner* class brethren the *Akiras* present maintained tight formation around the *Gibraltar* and *Agamemnon*, doing their best to screen them from enemy fire. Compared to the Type X Phasers that equipped many of the forces present the new Type XII weapons equipping the *Sovereign* pair were capable of directing 75% more energy at a given target. Combined with quantum torpedoes that were now widely employed, they were able to destroy the vast majority of the Dominion capital ships—taking out their weapons first before moving on to sensors and propulsion systems—before pushing their remaining forces back to a point some two light years away.

Losses here were not as grievous, but still rather high—127 ships, including the aforementioned *Dauntless* and *Churchill* (FH 52071). With the power of *Sovereign* now graphically demonstrated, first against the Borg and now against the Dominion & Cardassians, Starfleet command broke with their unspoken tradition. Aside from the *Sovereign* herself (CHX 73811 – used for testing/experimentation) and the new starship *Enterprise* (CH 1701-E), all subsequent examples would find their way to the front lines.

Unfortunately, none were present at Tyra. A sparsely populated system 12 light years from the Cardassian border, the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet assembled in a dense defensive bulward between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> planets. The Cardassians learned from the First Battle of Vulcan and had assembled their own spearhead of *Kondal* class ships. With the Dominion's feared Attack Ships and their own *Hideki* class Corvettes to sweep the field and larger Dominion Battlecruisers providing heavy fire support, they had more than enough firepower to challenge Starfleet. To top it off, they had clear numerical superiority as well – outnumbering the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet 2:1.

The Dominion took up flanking positions while letting the Cardassians take the lead. Despite their imposing firepower—individually and moreso in larger formations—the assembled *Akiras*—led by the *Bright Star* (CB 71602)—were hard pressed to provide fire support for the *Mirandas* and *Centaur*s which formed one of the first lines of defense, let alone protect larger *Ambassadors* and *Nebulas*. Once the *Bright Star* herself was destroyed in a kamikaze run by the Jem'Hadar, the battle disintegrated

into a free-for-all. The *Vincennes* (CB 62719) took up the *Bright Star's* flag and pressed forward along with the *Canberra* (CB 62753) and *Bainbridge* (CB 62804), attempting to punch a hole in the Dominion/Cardassian lines and drive them back.

Unfortunately, this was the beginning of the end for the Starfleet force. With numbers on their side, the Cardassians fought to the last man. Estimates of their losses alone exceeded 240 ships, but thanks to the Jem'Hadar, they whittled the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet down to just 14—the *Vincennes*, *Canberra*, *Bainbridge* and 11 others. Ships that were disabled or too badly damaged to flee were systematically destroyed—the Cardassians taking no prisoners.

The tide finally started to shift to Starfleet's favor with the Battle of Bolarus. As at Tyra, the Cardassians attacked in force—bringing the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Orders to bear—and were backed by correspondingly heavy numbers of Dominion reinforcements. Being marginally closer to the Federation's core systems afforded a slightly larger and wider array of starships that the Admiralty could deploy. The three aforementioned *Akiras* joined nearly 100 others spread between the 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> Fleets. The *Steamrunner* class also featured heavily as did the *Defiant* class as well—this being the first battle to feature it in serious numbers.

Like the Cardassians, Starfleet too had heavy reinforcements courtesy of the Imperial Klingon Defense Forces (IKDF) – a task force led by the *Negh'var* class IKS *Kormat*.

The first phase of the battle saw the combined Starfleet/Klingon force confront the Dominion & Cardassians two systems away from Bolarus—bottling up the numerically inferior enemy force near Stametis IV and inflicting heavy losses. Here, the task of the *Akiras* was to engage the enemy capital ships alongside the Klingons while the *Defiants*, backed by *Steamrunners*, attempted to systematically wipe out the Dominion & Cardassian invaders. With the *Defiant's* fighter-like maneuverability and the sheer power of her pulse phaser cannons, this should have been an easy task. However, the composition of the Dominion force—a 75/25 mix in favor of their larger Battlecruisers—turned it into something of a stalemate.

This stalemate was broken 2 days later, on stardate 51136.8. The second phase of the battle, known as **Operation: Blue Room** saw the Dominion & Cardassians redeploy in an extremely broad crescent, hoping to envelop the more densely-arranged, numerically superior Starfleet/Klingon force. One of the few occasions where classic tactics & strategy won the day, Vice Admiral Mitchell Halliwell divided his force up into 4 separate groups, the *Sovereign* class *Bismarck* (CH 74947) leading one and *Galaxy* & *Nebula* groups leading the others, with *Defiants* spread equally between them.

The Klingons eagerly took the lead, sending waves of *B'Rel* and *K'tinga* class ships against the enemy center with larger *Vor'Cha* class ships joining the *Kormat* in providing heavy fire support.

Thanks to the capacity provided by *Akira*, *Steamrunner* and the *Curry* class *Bennington* (CVL 42317) and *Windsor* (CVL 42357), Starfleet was able to field 12 full fighter wings. A quarter of those had been lost in the fighting over the preceding days, but those that remained formed up with the Klingons and hit the Cardassians & Jem'Hadar in wave after wave,

After clearing the field of nearly all of the Jem'Hadar Attack Ships, the battle more or less turned into a contest between capital ships. As expected, the *Bismarck* was the prime target against which the enemy trained their center. Closely guarded by the *Sentinel* (CB 62859), *Avondale* (CB 62861) and *Rapier* (CB 62865) as well as the *Bonchune* (CA 70915) and *Endeavour* (CA 71805), that left the smaller ships (*Steamrunner*, *Norway*, *Defiant*) free to run the field.

Here, it was the Cardassians that posed the biggest threat. The Dominion's Battlecruisers, while heavily armed, were sorely lacking when it came to maneuverability, even against older Federation designs such as *Excelsior*, making them more or less fixed targets in this instance. *Nebula* and *Ambassador* class starships. Executed flanking attacks using photon & quantum torpedoes while *Galaxy* class ships confronted these brutes head on and from the rear.

As before though, *Kondal* was the Cardassians' most potent asset. Together with *Zhoden*, it had the armament, speed and maneuverability to challenge not only *Steamrunner*, but also *Defiant* on equal terms. Despite the fact *Galor* had stouter shields and marginally better armor plating, it too was more or less a fixed asset – though one that utilized *Hidekis* as a defensive screen.

With these facts established, the battle was a vicious melee that raged for well over four hours. As the Dominion Battlecruisers fell one by one, the pressure on the assembled *Galors* increased in kind. Their shields being no match for volley after volley of quantum torpedoes, they disappeared from the field in short order. *Zhoden* and *Kondal*, as maneuverable as they were, proved nearly impossible to engage head on. The only solution was to catch them in a crossfire. While being engaged head on by *Defiant* class ships, *Steamrunners* and *Norways* would quickly maneuver to surround their targets before pummeling them with repeated torpedo volleys.

Eventually though, word reached both the Allies and the Dominion/Cardassians of a separate Klingon attack that claimed the Dominion's nearby supply flotilla. Without fresh stocks of ketracel-white, any operation this deep inside enemy territory would be a futile one and with that said, the Dominion & Cardassians quickly withdrew to a more defensible position closer to the Cardassian border.

Capitalizing on this short, but impressive string of successes, Starfleet Command turned their attention to Deep Space Nine. Up to this point, much of the Admiralty still believed that the key to securing and holding the Alpha Quadrant was Earth, rather than DS9 and the Bajoran Wormhole, as argued by Captain Benjamin Sisko. Knowing that the Dominion had vast reserves of ships and troops waiting in the Gamma Quadrant and that it was only a matter of time before they dismantled the

minefield surrounding the wormhole's Alpha Quadrant terminus, he and Vice Admiral William Ross were the principal proponents of an operation to retake the station.

Like **Operation Blue Room**, **Operation Return** as formulated by Sisko involved a four-pronged assault on the Dominion at DS9. Underscoring the weakness behind Starfleet's deployment strategy, there was no single fleet or multiples thereof in the vicinity. The operation relied on elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> (stationed at Kotanka along the frontier), 5<sup>th</sup> (stationed at the Vulcan border) and 9<sup>th</sup> (stationed at Kalandra) Fleets as well as a separate contingent of IKDF assets rendezvousing at Starbase 375 before setting off for DS9.

Timing however, was not on Starfleet's side. Five days prior to the operations' projected launch date, word reached Starbase 375 that the Dominion forces on DS9 had begun utilizing an antigraviton emitter to disable the self-replication unit on each mine in the minefield. This process was slated to be complete in just three days, at which time the Dominion could detonate the mines en masse and bring nearly 3000 ships through the wormhole.

If that were to happen, the chances of the allies ever achieving victory would be severely reduced, if not eliminated outright. Therefore, even though the 9<sup>th</sup> Fleet elements were still days away and there was no indication of any forthcoming support from the Klingons, Sisko took the ships he had and launched the operation early.

Dominion intelligence was every bit the equal of Starfleet's and as such, they easily discovered this plan, sending 1,254 ships to block Sisko's path. Outnumbering Starfleet 2:1, the battle began as a straightforward shooting match. Recognizing that the only choice he had of reaching DS9 was punching a hole in the Dominion lines, wave after wave of starfighters were sent in against the Cardassians. Initially, they like their Jem'Hadar comrades, stood their ground. Gul Dukat however, saw through this and correctly deduced Sisko's strategy. In an attempt to envelop and destroy Sisko and the rest of the Starfleet force, Dukat ordered a half dozen *Hideki* squadrons to break formation and engage the Starfleet fighters.

In this order of battle, *Akira* was tasked with heavy fire support, providing a defensive screen for the larger *Galaxy* class ships. *Nebula* in this instance was tasked with leading *Steamrunner* and smaller ships in directly engaging the Jem'Hadar. Flying directly toward the Jem'Hadar Battlecruisers, they used their phasers to keep the Cardassians and smaller Jem'Hadar attackers at bay until they got to point blank range, when they launched a furious barrage of quantum torpedoes in concert before breaking off.

They managed to destroy three targets in such a manner before closer attention from the Jem'Hadar and Cardassians broke their coordination. At that point, the battle disintegrated into a melee once again. Given that the 9<sup>th</sup> Fleet's contributions to the task force consisted primarily of reserve units—ships that were more than capable of combatting the Cardassians, but clearly inferior to the Jem'Hadar—many

*Steamrunners* and *Norways* attempted to screen their older compatriots from incoming fire.

Right in the nick of time, a separate Klingon task force arrived, smashing into the Dominion's right flank. With the pressure now greatly reduced on the Starfleet forces and the Cardassians unable to regroup, Sisko seized the opportunity and redeployed his Cruiser (*Excelsior*, *Akira*, *Nebula*) and *Galaxy* class ships against the Cardassians, distracting them long enough for the *Defiant* and several other ships to try and punch through this momentary opening and get to DS9.

Unfortunately, the *Defiant* was the only ship to make it through, her escorts *Sitak* (FH 32591) and *Majestic* (FH 31060) felled by sustained Jem'Hadar fire.

Arriving at DS9 too late to prevent the destruction of the minefield, the *Defiant* headed into the wormhole, preparing to confront the Dominion reinforcements when Sisko was approached by the Bajoran Prophets. Though enigmatic, they communicated their wish that Sisko--their emissary to the Bajoran people--not sacrifice his life. He then appealed to them to intervene, arguing that the fleet constituted a direct threat to Bajor (even though they had signed a non-aggression pact prior to the outbreak of hostilities). They subsequently agreed and made the Dominion's reinforcements—about to overrun the *Defiant* and exit the wormhole at DS9—simply vanish. Lacking these much-needed ships and troops doomed the Dominion position, the Klingon task force having tied them down enough to allow 200 allied ships to break through their lines and retake the station.

This significant victory brought a much-needed morale boost to Starfleet and marked a brief lull in fighting—both sides concentrating on rebuilding their forces and consolidating their gains. It was during this time that a schism developed within the Admiralty. Even though *Steamrunner*, *Norway*, *Sabre* and *Akira* had clearly proven themselves, the unusual success enjoyed by their spiritual progenitors—principally *Miranda* and *Excelsior*—was perceived by many as the reason why production levels not only remained stagnant, but also why the fleet's current shipbuilding program (which was more and more biased towards larger Cruiser classes) remained fragmented.

In any event, the Dominion used this time wisely—expanding their ship production and experimenting with cloning new, modified Jem'Hadar. They also altered their strategy somewhat, putting an enhanced focus on hitting Starfleet's logistical chokepoints. Using their strength in numbers (1000+ ships), they made an unexpected raid at Coridan, which was not only protected by the 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet, but the 16<sup>th</sup> as well.

The latter was a relatively young unit, formed in the aftermath of the Borg Incursion of 2367 and commanded by Vice Admiral Alynna Nechayev. A shrewd tactician, she was one of the main proponents of including the *Sovereign* class in the war and attached 5 examples to the 16<sup>th</sup>. Along with numerous *Defiant* class ships (which

were finally starting to enter service in quantity), this made it a force to be reckoned with.

Dominion Battlecruisers along with Cardassian *Kondals* kept them pinned down long enough for a formation of Attack Ships to approach the planet and collapse the dilithium mining complex on Coridan's surface with ultritium concussion devices. These ships were eventually destroyed, but in the time it took Starfleet to drive off their main force, 1500 miners perished along with 10 starships.

With dilithium mining setback for a number of months, the Dominion resorted to other asymmetric measures with varying levels of success. Rebuilding their forces, they launched another offensive push in mid 2374 near the Kalandra sector. Within a matter of months however, they would reach Betazed and hand Starfleet one of their worst defeats yet.

Betazed was the biggest Federation colony—and the most tempting target—aside from Minos Korva that was less than 10 light years from the Cardassian border. The system fell under the responsibility of Denobulan Rear Admiral Masc commanding the 10<sup>th</sup> Fleet. A veteran of the Tholian War and also one of the few survivors of the attack on Starbase 277, Masc harbored a well-developed sense of paranoia. Typical of this were the large and intricate battle drills—frequently unannounced—he subjected his forces to. The 10<sup>th</sup> was on one such exercise on stardate 51721.3 when it was ambushed by a Dominion/Cardassian fleet.

The 10<sup>th</sup> was spread out in a mock battle formation which was intended to test their skills in interdicting enemy forces while elements of their own force carried out search and rescue operations. Taking into account the fact that Starfleet Intelligence had wholly discounted a move on Betazed due to its location relative to Dominion Supply Lines and the fact that magnetic anomalies in the area were interfering with navigational sensors, the stage was set for a bloodbath.

Dominion/Cardassian forces at Kalandra assembled a force of approximately 570 ships, outnumbering their Starfleet foes by almost 200. Surrounding their quarry in a five-pronged attack, over 70 Starfleet ships were lost in the initial attack. To their credit, they rapidly tried to regroup in an effort to repulse their attackers, but as with prior engagement, the lack of coordination and rapid losses turned the battle into a bloody melee. A trio of *Steamrunners* quickly racked up an impressive kill count, but not to be outdone, the *Zumwalt* (CB 62720), *Leyte Gulf* and *Kherson* matched them kill for kill, using surgical phaser strikes to decimate multiple targets each. The firepower of the larger Dominion ships allowed their combined force to win the day however, providing over for the surviving Cardassians to regroup and their combined force to completely wipe out the 10<sup>th</sup> Fleet.

With the 10<sup>th</sup> Fleet now gone and Betazed solidly in Dominion control, Starfleet Command scrambled to redeploy sufficient forces to protect its core worlds. The first world they targeted was Vulcan (for the second time). Here, the 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet under the command of Vice Admiral Salok stood guard. This battle marked the first known use

of the Dominion's immense ' Battleship' in open combat and the first recorded destruction of such by allied forces.

This Battleship was supported by a strong central formation of Battlecruisers and then Cardassian *Galor*, *Kondal* and *Zhoden* class ships, with Jem'Hadar Attack Ships and *Hideki* class Corvettes forming the vanguard.

They penetrated the system and made it as far as 40 Eridani V before they were confronted by Starfleet. Despite being seemingly outmatched tactically, Admiral Salok's counter-attack remained methodical in the extreme. His first order of business was to eliminate the Dominion Battleship from the field. Over 2000 meters in length, it, like the smaller Battlecruisers, bristled with firepower. It also shared the smaller ship's primary weaknesses—glaring gaps in its fields of fire and abysmal maneuverability. The Dominion compensated for these with thick, high-density armor plating and a powerful deflector shield system befitting its size.

Here, *Akira* and *Steamrunner* took the lead, ordered to fight their way through the enemy lines and target the Battleship with massive torpedo bombardments at point blank range. *Galaxy* and *Nebula* class ships would engage the Battlecruisers. *Intrepid*—marking her baptism of fire—would join with *Norway* in attacking the Cardassian main body. *Sabre*, the assembled starfighters and all other ships engaged the *Hidekis* and Jem'Hadar Attack Ships.

For six grueling hours, the battle raged fiercely, the Jem'Hadar & Cardassians not being nearly as mercurial. *Intrepid*, though lacking the kind of armor plating *Akira* and *Steamrunner* featured in abundance, was both nimble and powerful enough to give the heavier ships the opening they needed. *Steamrunner* lead the way, using surgical phaser strikes to weaken the Battleship's shields at specific points, before falling back so *Akira* could move in. It was grueling work and not without consequence (the *Bremerton*/FH 52451 being destroyed and the *Al Rashid*/FH 52479 being damaged severely enough it had to withdraw), but once the Dominion leviathan was destroyed, the logic of Salok's approach gradually became clear.

With the few torpedoes they had left, the *Akiras* joined their *Galaxy* and *Nebula* compatriots in wiping the Dominion heavies from the field, while *Steamrunners* retrained their focus on the various surviving Cardassian ships. Even with the formidable firepower of the Admiral's flagship (the *Sovereign* class *Gibraltar*), Starfleet still suffered grievously. The addition of Klingon forces (who arrived after the Dominion Battleship was destroyed) ameliorated the situation somewhat, but even still, over 250 allied ships were lost before the Dominion was forced to fall back to a position some six light years away.

At the last minute, the Dominion changed course and made their next target Benezar instead of Alpha Centauri. Defended by the 11<sup>th</sup> Fleet and ringed by a perimeter of defense satellites, it was an imposing target, though not so much so to a numerically superior opponent. Like the 10<sup>th</sup> Fleet at Betazed, the 11<sup>th</sup> was eventually wiped out,

though not before exacting a heavy toll on the attackers (thanks to the tricobalt weapons on the satellites).

The 14th Fleet was hurriedly redeployed from Alpha Centauri and luckily enough, arrived just in time to prevent the Dominion and Cardassians from taking complete control of the defense perimeter. They did however manage to seize a number of tricobalt devices. Upon entering the area, ships of the 14<sup>th</sup> quickly dispersed, splitting into 4 groups. The *Nebula* class *Fe'garren* (CA 72105) took a direct tricobalt hit and suffered severe damage before the *Tolstoy* (FH 52150) and *Archon* (FH 56037) joined the *Ambassador* class *Forrestal* (CH 26512) in retaliating and pressing an attack against an already-beleaguered enemy force.

Just as it appeared that Starfleet was about to take the upper hand, Dominion reinforcements arrived from Kalandra and smashed into the 14<sup>th</sup>'s right flank. Yet again, despite their famous tenacity, Starfleet lost a major formation—the above 4 ships and 43 others escaping under withering enemy fire—and a key territory. Though, unlike the earlier battle at Betazed, Bizar would not remain in enemy hands for long.

Throughout the bulk of 2374, with Starfleet's production capabilities severely curtailed thanks to attack or sabotage and the Federation's core worlds seemingly under siege, it became clearer and clearer that new allies were needed if this tide was to be turned. The Klingons and their Imperial Defense Forces were powerful allies to be sure, but their own campaign against the Cardassians, followed by a more aggressive offensive against the Dominion put them in the same position as Starfleet. Enter the Romulans.

The Romulan Imperial Navy was powerful and imposing in its own right, but their introverted and vaguely xenophobic nature did them no favors politically. Signing a non-aggression pact while lacking any sense of foresight as to the long-term ramifications (the Dominion dispensing with the pact and turning on them when the moment was right) was blatant proof.

Thanks to the desperation and duplicity of Starfleet Captain Benjamin Sisko and former Obsidian Order agent Elim Garak, the Romulans soon found themselves staunch allies of both the Federation and Klingon Empire.

On his own initiative, Sisko created a forged holorecording of the Vorta Weyoun and Cardassian Legate Corat Damar discussing the planned invasion of the Romulan Star Empire. To gain the Empire's unwavering support, Sisko recognized he would have to convince the very architect of the Empire's non-aggression pact, Senator Meren Vreenak.

A staunch Romulan chauvinist and former Vice Chairman of the Tal'Shiar, Vreenak had long been mistrustful of, if not outright hostile towards the Federation and its allies. Like past Romulan political and military figures, he viewed the Dominion's war

against the Federation and Klingons as the solution to the Romulans' biggest existential problems.

That being said, it did not take him long at all to discover the recording was a forgery. Anticipating this possible outcome, Garak (unbeknownst to Sisko) took the liberty of sabotaging Vreenak's shuttle, which exploded shortly after he concluded his secret visit to DS9. In retrospect, killing the Senator should've been the plan all along. Any reasonable person would've expected Vreenak to easily expose Sisko's lie, while it would've been a trivial matter for an Obsidian Order agent—current or former—to frame the Cardassian government for the Senator's "accident".

In any event, it did not take long before the Empire issued their declarations of war against both the Cardassians and the Dominion. Once they did, the Imperial Navy's mobilization was swift and their response was furious. More notable than the breadth of their response was the fact this was the first time they deployed warship classes aside from *D'Deridex*—an imposing symbol of power they used to convey their military might as well as mask their true strength.

Somewhat like the IKDF, they relied on just 3 other classes to fill out their Navy. *Aelahl* was a rough counterpart to *Sovereign* (though quite a bit larger, at 780m in length). *Ar'kif* approximated *Steamrunner*, while *P'vash* was the closest the RiN could come to *Defiant*.

Equipped with sophisticated cloaking devices, modern phase disruptor armament (on par with their Klingon contemporaries) and plasma torpedoes, they were more than a match for the Cardassians and a serious threat to the Dominion. In retaliation for Senator Vreenak's 'murder', they struck and destroyed over a dozen major targets along the Cardassian-Federation border.

Unlike the Klingons who preferred to face their enemies in the open, the Romulans complimented their cloaking devices with sophisticated stealth systems—sensor absorbent hull coatings, ECM and ECCM systems and more—giving their ships the ability to stay undetected even at extremely close ranges. Their battle doctrine was almost entirely predicated on the element of surprise—approaching their target(s) under cloak, then decloaking and unleashing a furious disruptor and/or torpedo barrage, destroying them before they could react.

Eager to take a more active role in the war effort, Starfleet gladly welcomed their assistance when it came to the Bizar issue. Their own closest formation was the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet. The 7<sup>th</sup>'s remnants escaped from Tyra and made it all the way to Starbase 235 before transiting back to Earth where they received more extensive repairs and their ranks were slowly fleshed out. Unfortunately, with Starfleet's shipbuilding capabilities being what they were, the fleet was only restored back to half strength before Starfleet redeployed them to retake Bizar.

Entering the system and approaching the outer defense perimeter, they took detailed sensor readings of enemy ship positions and force composition, relaying it to

the main Romulan force who trailed close behind under cloak. Now led by the *Galaxy* class *Venture* (CH 71854), the 7<sup>th</sup> met stiff resistance from the Cardassians, *Kondal* and *Zhoden* screening larger *Galor* class ships from fire as Jem'Hadar fighters filtered into the area. With their countermeasures activated, neither the Cardassians, nor the Jem'Hadar knew they were silently being encircled. Once the Romulans had them encircled and targets assigned, they decloaked and opened fire.

At that point, forces of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet—principally, the assembled *Steamrunner* and *Norway* class ships—immediately switched targets and trained their weapons on the Jem'Hadar, as their small size and nimble maneuverability made them nearly impossible to pin down compared to the Cardassians.

Making a name for itself in this phase of the battle was the *Discovery* (FH 52333). Given that this was one of the few occasions where the allies outnumbered the Dominion, pinning down the Jem'Hadar Attack Ships was slightly easier. That the Jem'Hadar favored swarming tactics with little care for their own situational awareness once engaged, made them ripe for the picking.

*Discovery* used torpedo spreads to bait them into attacking and then coordinated with *Kodiak*, *Zephyr* and *Sacramento* in utilizing their *Norway* class compatriots to cut off the Jem'Hadar's escape.

Moving further into the system, the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet met more determined resistance—larger Jem'Hadar Battlecruisers along with *Galor* and more *Kondal* class ships. The *Venture* and her primary escorts (*Oppenheimer*/CA 622057, *Akira*/CB 62497, *Osceola*) were hard pressed to draw the Jem'Hadar into a false sense of security but given the relatively limited fields of fire of those targets, it didn't take long for the Romulans to move into position.

In the ensuing dual between capital ships, the even-larger *Aelahl* distinguished herself. As opposed to her Klingon contemporaries which were built around large canon-type weapons, the class' armament put heavy, beam-type weapons front and center—a dual-beam disruptor bank near the apex of the vessel's 'nose' and a pair of disruptor beam emitters (a novel development, similar in principle/operation to Starfleet's phaser emitters) mounted further back along the centerline, one dorsal and one ventral. These weren't quite as powerful (about 90% as much when compared to the *Negh'var*'s heavy disruptors), but featured much wider firing arcs and much, much faster recharge rates. Together with six standard disruptor cannons and a pair of dorsally mounted torpedo launchers, *Aelahl* was quite imposing.

Five full disruptor salvos (cannons + beams) weakened the Jem'Hadar shields enough for a further barrage of plasma torpedoes to punch through and take their Battlecruisers out of action, surgical phaser strikes from the *Steamrunners* and their compatriots removing them from the field entirely. Once these were dealt with, Starfleet forces turned their attention to the remaining Jem'Hadar Attack Ships while the Romulans made quick work of the Cardassians.

Not only did the Romulans contribute the bulk of the space-based forces towards the retaking of Benzar, but the ground forces as well. With an entire brigade of Imperial Legion troops, backed by an artillery battalion and a company of Tal Prai'ex (special forces) operators, they eliminated all of the Jem'Hadar units on the surface in a little more than a week, though not before thousands of Benzites had been killed.

Unfortunately, the same performance could not be repeated at Betazed. Though the Romulans were now staunch allies of the both the Federation and the Klingons, strategic imperatives drew their attention elsewhere. Predictably then, when the Dominion moved to establish a more robust supply line into the Argolis Cluster and Starfleet had to respond (lest Vulcan come under siege again), they did so alone.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet, still not fully regenerated and not having time to resupply, was sent to head off the Dominion & Cardassians at the Tibor Nebula. Strategy and tactics were not at issue here, as Starfleet was outnumbered 3-1 (even if the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet was at full strength, the numerical disparity would still be 2-1 at best). The *Venture* layed down a nearly continuous stream of phaser fire, intercepting incoming torpedoes and swatting away smaller Cardassian and Jem'Hadar attackers as if they were horse flies.

Her escorts also stuck close, leaving it up to *Discovery*, *Zephyr*, *Kodiak* and *Sacramento* to press forward with an offense. As at Benzar, they coordinated their efforts with the smaller *Norway* and *Sabre* class ships, among others. Moving in one amorphous mass toward a target or group of targets, they took down 2 ships for every one of their own. This exacted a heavy toll, but still being outnumbered, the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet inevitably succumbed to the same fate as the 10<sup>th</sup> Fleet did at Betazed—the *Venture*, *Oppenheimer*, *Osceola* and *Akira* being the only ships to survive.

Mere days later, the Dominion and Cardassians mounted their third (and final) assault on Vulcan. Operating from a flawed assessment that the sabotage of their infrastructure and then a number of painful defeats would've stretched Starfleet too thin and kept them in a qualitatively weak position, the Dominion did not commit another massive force, instead, redeploying the remnants of their force from Betazed. Arrayed against those 400-odd ships was not only the 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet, but elements of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Fleets, marking one of the few times Starfleet held the upper hand numerically.

Instead of meeting the enemy head on and then trying to win the day with superior tactics, Admiral Salok elected to use some of the Dominion's own tactics against them. The 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet remained at full strength more or less and was only down a handful of ships vs the Dominion/Cardassians. The 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet contributed heavier assets including cruisers of the *Korolev*, *Ambassador*, *Nebula* and *Akira* classes while the 13<sup>th</sup> Fleet's contributions were lighter—*Norway*, *Steamrunner* and *Centaur* classes principally.

The Admiral kept these extra assets out of the fray, hiding them inside the system's Oort cloud. As during the earlier engagement here, the *Gibraltar* was a primary



target. Here, the *Ambassador* class *Indianapolis* (CH 10535) lead her defensive screen, directing the *Matewan*, *Iron Horse*, *Solaris* (FH 54129) and *Trebuchet* (FH 55781).

One of Salok's favored tactics was the massed-wave attack. Grouping his ships by class, he sent them directly at the enemy's center, each targeting a specific ship subsystem. In this regard, *Sabre* and *Norway*'s size played to their advantage. Jem'Hadar Attack Ships were a problem, as were similarly sized Cardassian attackers. Torpedo spreads kept them at bay long enough for the Starfleet defenders to inflict their expected amount of damage on the enemy capital ships before they broke off and engaged their smaller quarry. *Centaur*, with its slightly heavier armament, yet striking maneuverability was intended to engage these smaller ships directly, pinning them down, if not destroying them outright. *Steamrunner*, *Akira* and all other larger ships were intended to finish off their targets, leaving them disabled or destroyed. This they did and did well. However they were not immune to losses themselves.

Wanting to lull his opponents into a false sense of security, Admiral Salok directed his forces to continue the fighting until it became clear to both the Jem'Hadar and Cardassians that this would turn into a battle of attrition. At that point, he ordered a partial withdrawal, sending his smallest ships toward supposed safety at the center of the system. The Dominion/Cardassians took the bait and set off in pursuit, with the rest of the 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet hot on their heels. Once they were brought to battle, the *Gibraltar* sent a signal to their reinforcements. Emerging in similar massed waves, they quickly surrounded their targets and cut off any chance of escap. From there, the largest of them were picked off first, enough ships being present to pin down the smaller targets before they too could be destroyed.

Following this victory, Starfleet Command hoped to capitalize on it, taking advantage of the boost in momentum and morale to recapture Betazed. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Fleet undertook three separate offensives to try and liberate the system, but to no avail. The Dominion had continually reinforced their position there since defeating the 10<sup>th</sup> Fleet and repulsed all three Starfleet attempts to recapture it, inflicting heavy losses.

Starfleet's Admiralty grudgingly came around to the realization that they couldn't win the war, let alone make any substantive progress, by remaining on the defensive and so toward the end of 2374, they regained their sense of initiative and went back on the offensive.

Their first target was the frontierward system of Chin'toka. Like Minos Korva for the Federation, Chin'toka was sparsely populated, but provided the Federation Alliance could secure it, it would provide a direct route into the Cardassian heartland. Oddly though, the Jem'Hadar only left a half dozen squadrons of Attack Ships in system as a defense.

Given the system's location and the relatively light defenses, a full third of the forces Starfleet contributed to the allied force were reserves—the *Excelsior* and *Miranda*

classes having proven themselves time and again against the Cardassians while also having ample troop transport capabilities.

The ensuing battle saw the Jem'Hadar use kamikaze tactics to devastating effect. This all served a greater purpose however. The Cardassians made up for the lack of ships by deploying a dense network of weapons platforms around the two inhabited planets. However, unlike in previous battles, the Cardassians used Dominion technology to augment these—utilizing a central power source on a hidden asteroid to power their weapons as well as their regenerative shields. The Jem'Hadar's task was to destroy as many allied ships as possible before the platforms could be activated. Between their own kamikaze tactics and superior allied numbers, they were pushed aside in short order.

The allies then moved to destroy the platforms one by one, however, only a small handful were destroyed before the Cardassians managed to activate them. Once they did, the tone and tempo of the battle changed dramatically. Armed with several heavy disruptor cannons and a seemingly infinite supply of plasma torpedoes, they quickly took down a multitude of vessels including the *Adirondack* and *Geronimo* (CB 62501).

As quickly as the platforms were activated, so too did Starfleet discover their power source. The USS *Hood* (CH 42296) and her escorts *Nautilus* (FH 31910) and *Tian An Men* (FH 23182) attempted a direct bombardment, but like the platforms, the asteroid's defenses were all but invulnerable. An unorthodox solution devised by the crew of the USS *Defiant* saw them use their navigational deflector to imprint a Starfleet warp signature on the asteroid. This successfully tricked the platforms' targeting systems and soon, the asteroid was reduced to space dust. Starfleet and the Romulans moved to destroy the remaining platforms while the Klingons landed ground troops on the two planets.

This victory came at a cost however. While Captain Benjamin Sisko and other personnel were away from Deep Space Nine, Gul Dukat—possessed by the Kosst Amojan—boarded the station, killed Commander Jadzia Dax and precipitated the collapse of the Bajoran Wormhole. According to Bajoran religious texts, such an event would bring about what was referred to as the 'Reckoning'—an apocalyptic battle between the Prophets and Pah Wraiths (of which the Kosst Amojan was one).

From here the war settled into something of a predictable pattern. The Dominion & Cardassians subjected Chin'toka to a constant siege while Starfleet continued to mount offensives aimed at retaking Betazed. While neither side achieved anything resembling victory on either of these respective fronts, the IKDF did mount a successful "cavalry raid" on the Monac Shipyards—destroying them as well as a significant number of Dominion & Cardassian warships by means of a massive solar flare.

After 3 months, Captain Sisko (the Prophets' chosen emissary to the Bajoran people) had a vision that led him to the remote desert world of Tyree. There, with the

assistance of his father, his son and Commander Ezri Dax, he located the hidden Orb of the Prophets. Once released from the Orb, the Prophet entered the Celestial Temple (the wormhole) and expelled the Pah Wraith inside.

The subsequent reopening of the wormhole, though of diminishing strategic significance (thanks to attacks on Dominion & Cardassian infrastructure), was a major morale booster for the allies who pressed on with their offensive ambitions. Continuing enemy harassment of their position within the Chin'toka system however, remained something of an irritant. Typical of this was the fighting over/around a major Dominion communications relay on a planet known only as AR-558. Typical of the planets in the system, AR-558 was relatively barren and featured a dense network of subterranean caverns. Upon the allies' capture of the system, the SFMC dispatched an entire company of troops to capture the comm relay and occupy the surrounding cavern. Unfortunately though, the caverns' layout made the relay's position incredibly difficult to defend. Repeated Jem'Hadar probing attacks, ambushes and extensive use of anti-personnel mines gradually reduced the initial troop strength down to just 4 squads before they were resupplied by the USS *Defiant*. Only after *Defiant* personnel were able to gain control of the mines and turn them against the Jem'Hadar, did the situation improve.

The surviving troops were evacuated by the Sovereign class *Veracruz* (CH 75400) while the *Cimmarron* and *Denver* (FH 53471) arrived to beam down fresh troops, supplies and a Starfleet Corps of Engineers team who were able to gain access to the comm relay and analyze its inner workings. The wealth of intelligence it provided allowed Starfleet to make important progress in and around the Kalandra sector (with a regenerated 10<sup>th</sup> Fleet) as well as on the Bolian front.

While not nearly as heavily defended as Betazed, Starfleet was unable to reverse the Dominion gains and dislodge them from the area, even with heavy Klingon assistance. That changed on stardate 52793.6 (3 February 2376).

On that date, a combined allied force launched an assault on the Dominion/Cardassian stronghold of Verdonis, approximately 1.5 light years from Bolarus. Starfleet and IKDF assets took the lead, utilizing *Sabre*, *Norway* and *B'rel* classes to harass enemy formations while larger *Steamrunners* and *K'Tingas* targeted specific ships in order to throw the Jem'Hadar and Cardassians off balance.

Heavier formations—typified by *Akira* and *Vor'Cha*--maintained their positions, providing scattered fire support away from the thick of the fighting. This is where the RiN came in. The Romulans utilized their tried-and-true tactics of stealth and evasion, slipping behind the enemy lines, recording capital ship locations/dispositions and locking in specific targets. Once they decloaked, their opening volleys claimed upward of 30% of the combined Dominion/Cardassian capital ship force. *Vor'chas* moved in next with heavy disruptor salvos, followed by *Akiras* with quantum torpedoes.

Once a sufficient number of smaller targets were destroyed, *Steamrunner* and *Ar'kif* reformed with their larger brethren in attacking the largest of the Dominion/Cardassian ships. After four grueling hours, Starfleet deployed large starfighter formations to perform a coup de grace—crushing the last Jem'Hadar Attack Ships and preventing them from executing kamikaze runs on allied targets.

Heavy fire support from *Sovereign*, *Galaxy*, *Vor'Cha* and *Aelahl* classes prevented losses from getting too grievous and helped push the Dominion and Cardassians back 4 light years, to the Daxura system. With this victory, the Starfleet contingent (the 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet) redeployed to the Kalandra sector to bolster efforts there.

With the war now back into something of a stalemate, the Dominion needed something more than just a surprise victory or two to regain momentum. They found that in an alliance with the Breen Confederacy. Following the capture of Chin'toka and the communications relay at AR-558 by the allies, the Female Changeling made a covert overture to Thot Gor, the Breen's de-facto leader. Sensing an opportunity for conquest, Gor accepted her overtures and quickly traveled to Cardassia to formalize the alliance.

Following the Breen's entry into the Dominion, Gor, on his own initiative, planned and executed a sneak attack on Earth—something no other spacefaring power had dared to do.

On stardate 52827.4 (16 February 2376), a fleet of over 300 Breen ships equipped with sophisticated phase cloaks, entered Sector 001, made it past the Mars Defense Perimeter, past the ships of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Fleet and all the way into Earth orbit. They decloaked and quickly began attack cities and structures on the surface via sustained disruptor fire. Severe damage was inflicted on a large portion of Marin County California, nearly destroying Starfleet's Headquarters complex as well as the city of San Francisco. Also suffering heavy damage was Paris, France—the seat of the Federation Government—and Yokohama, Japan—home to Starfleet's Research & Development branch.

Almost immediately after they decloaked and began their attack, the Breen were engaged by forces of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Fleet, Starfighter Command's 1<sup>st</sup> Interceptor Wing and a network of orbital defense platforms. They suffered no losses among them and managed to destroy all the Breen invaders, but only after 5 million Starfleet personnel and 7 million civilians on the surface had been killed.

Concurrently, the Breen also spearheaded an assault on the allies' positions in the Chin'toka system, breaking through in two places. The Breen Frigates were more or less on par with their Cardassian contemporaries—armed with plasma torpedoes and featuring decent armor plating, but primitive deflector shields and lackluster maneuverability. As allied reinforcements formed up and moved to expel the invaders, a number of these Frigates quickly fell to heavy weapon volleys. Soon though, the Breen unleashed their secret weapon—an energy dampening pulse,

which upon impact with a target, unleashed a tightly-focused dampening field that froze all matter-antimatter reactions, effectively disabling it.

The use of this weapon quickly gave the Dominion the upper hand they needed. The allied occupiers were rendered defenseless and their ships were destroyed in short order. In an effort to strike a further psychological blow, the Female Changeling directed that the allies' escape pods be left alone, allowing the frightened and demoralized troops within to return to their own territories. These escape pods were met at the edge of the system and recovered by a small reserve force led by the *Endeavor* (CA 71805), *Goddard* (CH 59621) and *Gander* (FH 63109).

The nature of the Breen's new weapon precluded the quick development of any countermeasure. Modern matter/antimatter power sources functioned by virtue of intermix ratios that were calculated to extremely precise degrees, owing to the underlying volatility of both matter and antimatter. The IKDF though, managed to discover a countermeasure purely by accident. Just prior to the battle, the IKC *Ki'tang* experienced an unexplained power fluctuation that temporarily disabled their M/AM containment system. The *Ki'tang*'s chief engineer devised an emergency workaround that involved boosting the tritium levels in the overall intermix ratio. This had a 'supercharging' effect, generating more power and a much quicker rate than the Breen weapon could successfully dampen, even with repeated strikes.

Deploying the same modification across their fleet, the Klingons instantly took on the brunt of the allies' war effort. With this newfound advantage, the Dominion & their Cardassian & Breen servitors undertook an offensive push of their own, encroaching on several systems along the Klingon & Romulan frontiers. The Klingons continued to strike out themselves—seizing the Septimus star system, occupying Septimus III with 15 Imperial Guard and Black Staff (special forces) divisions and inadvertently planting the seeds of a Cardassian insurgency.

Thanks to the Breen's usurping of the Cardassians in the overall Dominion hierarchy (especially after the former's attack on Earth), discontent began brewing in the Cardassian establishment concerning their alliance with the Dominion. The seizure of Septimus III—a major Cardassian Guard base—and the annihilation of half a million Cardassian 'reserve' troops following a Dominion betrayal, turned that discontent into outright anger, leading Skrain Dukat's onetime successor—Corat Damar—to turn against his Dominion allies.

This did little to help the Federation Alliance, at least initially. The Klingons' immense burden fueled their own political upheaval as well, though for different reasons. Despite the overwhelming odds, the IKDF fought valiantly, gaining much prestige & honor in the process. Being the supreme commander of Klingon forces, Martok was obviously the recipient of a lot of this and indirectly gained much political clout. This clout stoked jealousy in the heart of Chancellor Gowron, who set out to disgrace Martok by haphazardly deploying IKDF forces on missions where there was clearly little to no chance of a Klingon victory. After a string of these defeats, Gowron was defeated and killed in single combat by Worf, son of Mogh. Worf refused to accept

the Chancellorship and instead passed the mantle to Martok, who became the next leader of the Klingon Empire.

During this time, the Federation nor the Romulans had made much headway in countering the Breen energy dampening weapon. Given the Dominion's prodigious shipbuilding capabilities and the fact that they were beginning to integrate this weapon on their ships following their victory at Chin'toka, the impetus was on Starfleet to capture and reverse engineer one before they were overrun or otherwise suffered further losses.

To precipitate this, Starfleet Command sent a team to covertly aid the Cardassian insurgency. Following a successful insurgent attack that decimated the Tevak Shipyards, the insurgents were able to infiltrate the Kelvas Shipyard complex under the guise of having captured Starfleet personnel. After successfully absconding with a Jem'Hadar Attack Ship, rather than proceed through the heavily patrolled corridor between Kelvas and Deep Space Nine, the team proceeded out into the Cardassian frontier and crossed the border into unclaimed space. Eventually, they crossed into Federation territory and delivered their prize to a Starfleet Corps of Engineers team at Starbase 129.

With a functioning weapon to examine, the CoE was able to develop a countermeasure—modifying the power systems of Federation vessels and deflector shield generators of Romulan ones—in short order. Being a software-related fix for the most part meant that all ships not currently out of service for repairs were able to remain in the field and fight on.

Due to the earlier allied victory at the Tibor Nebula, the Dominion/Cardassian forces occupying Betazed had been completely cut off, including from new Breen reinforcements. This was ameliorated somewhat by the presence of *Sentok Nor* which was used as a general maintenance facility, Jem'Hadar hatchery and base of operations for Cardassian Dr. Crell Moset. Moset was head of the Cardassian Guard's 'Unit 137' which quickly became infamous for humanoid experimentation and atrocities so horrific that after action reports and summaries were classified to the highest levels.

That being said, elimination of their spaceborne forces was a comparatively simple affair for the allies. Spearheading the assault was the newly regenerated 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet led by the *Royal Sovereign* (CH 75300) and *Stephen Decatur* (CB 66015), with heavy escort provided by a *Steamrunner* contingent led by the *Santa Fe* (FH 54287). Backing the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet were the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Fleets led by the *Hyperion* (CH 78905) and *Yamato* (CH 75808) respectively. The Klingons & Romulans—eager for revenge after seeing the Dominion & Breen encroach upon their own territories—also contributed large numbers of ships and ground forces.

Unusual for Starfleet, given that Betazed was one of the Federation's core worlds, they let the Klingons lead the assault. Smashing straight into the center of the enemy lines, they forced the occupiers to scatter almost immediately. Concurrently, the

Romulans entered the battle zone under cloak, targeting lead ships before decloaking, destroying those vessels and breaking the enemy's cohesion.

*Sentok Nor* was Starfleet's responsibility. Due to Moset's status as a war criminal as well as knowledge of his activities provided by Starfleet Intelligence, the Admiralty as well as the Federation Security Council wanted him taken alive. The *Royal Sovereign*, *Hyperion* and *Yamato* therefore concentrated on disabling the station, before initiating a large-scale boarding action—marines fighting compartment to compartment before capturing Moset in the station's laboratory complex. What the troops saw aboard the station and data downloaded from the station's computer core was nothing short of horrific. Unfortunately, this was but a mere preview of what they would find on the surface of Betazed.

Once Moset was secured and it was confirmed that data from the station's computer had been transferred in its entirety, the station was destroyed via direct bombardment. Soon after, Starfleet, the Klingons and Romulans moved into planetary orbit and began transporting troops to the surface. The capital as well as roughly 60% of the major cities were decimated. Total casualties, from direct & indirect combat, forced labor as well as Unit 137's 'experimentation', were more than 75 million.

The level of destruction & depravity witnessed stunned the Romulans, shocked and revulsed the Klingons and filled Starfleet personnel with the kind of anger not felt for centuries. In the war's aftermath, reconstruction & recovery here would arguably be the most arduous and time consuming among all the Federation worlds.

Fortunately, by the time the Dominion and its servitors had been expelled from the system, the anti-Breen modifications had been distributed to and installed & tested amongst enough allied ships so as to present a 'credible threat' which influenced their decision to withdraw back to the Cardassian home system.

This withdrawal prompted a drastic realignment of Starfleet forces forward, particularly toward Deep Space Nine and the DMZ/Cardassian Border. Prior to this action, 2/3rds of the total *Akira* force was deployed within the core systems guarding key planets and installations. Despite the raw power of *Sovereign* and the fact that numerous examples were now in service on the front lines, nearly all of the remaining *Akiras* were brought forward—leaving only a token amount behind at Earth—and deployed primarily to Deep Space Nine and other points along the border. Starfleet's Reserve Forces Command also stepped up and undertook a massive deployment of its own forces to secure frontierward areas formerly protected by *Steamrunners* and other modern assets. *Carolina* appeared once again, each of the surviving Battleships forming self-contained formations that included ships of the *Conquest*/DN 2589, *Dahlgren*/CS 2500, *Exeter*/CB 2200, *Kearsarge II*/CL 1500, *Soyuz*/FT 1940, *Valley Forge*/FH 2970, *Akula II*/DH 4700 and *Akyazi*/DD 1010 classes. With this kind of depth, Starfleet could afford to spread these formations out and still maintain the same kind of extensive surveillance and control over these areas.

Further in, the more modern *Renaissance* (CH 9778), *Springfield* and *Challenger* classes took over for *Steamrunner* while ship deployments within the core systems—aside from *Akira*—remained unchanged.

The allies managed to marshal nearly 10,000 starships at Deep Space Nine and in the Bajoran system. There was some debate about when to take the fight to the Dominion, as Vice Admiral William Ross pointed out that they could keep the Jem'Hadar, Cardassians and Breen bottled up indefinitely. However, Klingon Chancellor Martok pointed out that given enough time, the Jem'Hadar showed incredible aptitude in both breeding more soliders and constructing warships, meaning any attempt to bottle them up would turn into a grinding battle of attrition. Reluctantly then, Ross and Romulan General Velal agreed to an all-out assault.

Crossing the border, the Allies met the combined Dominion force outside the Cardassian home system in just under two days. Unlike past battles, there was no complicated or carefully choreographed strategy – the Starfleet contingent would attack the center of the Dominion lines, while the Klingons & Romulans would take flanking positions.

Having pressed an ambitious offensive into enemy territory while at the same time facing massive pushback drained the Jem'Hadar numerically in terms of both troops and warships. Pulling back to Cardassian territory released a lot of this pressure, but given the allies' tenacity and timing, the Dominion was not able to replenish these numbers before being faced with the allied assault. As such, the center of their lines was relatively weak. They compensated for this by deploying a number of their massive battleships in tight formations. Initially, this proved a wise move, these behemoths single-handedly keeping the Klingons & Romulans from outflanking them, while at the same time, providing room & support for regular forces to inflict heavy losses on the Starfleet contingent.

At the same time the space battle raged, the brewing Cardassian insurgency led by Legate Damar inspired both the civilian populace and the Cardassian Guard to revolt against the Dominion, which they painted as brutal occupiers. In an effort to rally their countrymen to their cause, Damar's insurgents managed to cut power to every Dominion installation on the surface of Cardassia Prime, completely cutting off their fleet from support.

Once power was restored and the Dominion leaders realized what was now taking place, the Female Changeling became incensed, ordering the Jem'Hadar to commit genocide against the Cardassian populace—civilian and military alike. In an effort to force the Cardassians back into submission, the Jem'Hadar completely leveled Lakarian City and eliminated its population of over 2 million, in a matter of minutes. This had the opposite effect however. Once news of the massacre became public, both the civilian population and the Cardassian Guard itself completely turned on their one-time allies.

In space, the fight to reach Cardassia Prime was turning into one of attrition as Ross and Velal had grimly predicted. Along with the Romulan flagship IRW *D'ridthau*, a full third of the allies' combined force had been lost thus far. Absent fresh reinforcements (which only the Romulan Imperial Navy was capable of marshalling), a massive defeat seemed likely. What remained of the Cardassian Guard's Starfleet quickly turned on the Jem'Hadar and the Breen though and soon, the Dominion's fortunes changed.

As the allies entered orbit and surrounded Cardassia Prime, Insurgents led by Bajoran Colonel Kira Nerys stormed the Dominion command center and captured the Female Changeling. Refusing to order her forces to surrender, Colonel Kira contacted the USS *Defiant* in orbit. There, DS9 security chief Odo appealed to Captain Sisko to let him beam down.

Upon doing so, he linked with the Female Changeling and cured her of the morphogenic virus that Section 31 had engineered (in an effort to kill her and eliminate the 'Founders' entirely). During the link, he also expressed his willingness to return to the Founders homeworld and meld with the Great Link, thereby passing the cure on to the rest of the Founders. In exchange for this, she willingly surrendered herself to allied authorities and ordered the Dominion to surrender as well.

The end to active combat and to the war itself brought no respite to *Akiras* or their crews. Wartime devastation was like a cancer, touching untold numbers of worlds inside the Federation. The task of excising it and reconstructing/rebuilding those worlds promised to be a long and arduous task. Then there was the entirely separate task of reconstructing/rebuilding Cardassia Prime and helping the surviving population get back on its feet so they could take charge of rebuilding their society.

One of the few lessons Starfleet seemingly took to heart following their conflicts with the Klingons a century prior, was building and supporting a robust logistics arm. The fleet's Transport Command maintained a simple 4 class structure (the *Deneva* and *Java* class Freighters (FT), the *Istanbul* class Transport (TT) and the *Mediterranean* class Supply Tender (TS)), ships of each class being refitted and upgraded nearly in lockstep with their front-line brethren. There was also the SFMCs massive *Inchon* class Assault Transport/Tug (TTA). A slightly exotic design, being based on and using many components from the *Excelsior* class nevertheless made it somewhat easy to maintain. Carrying a full 6-container load, it equaled the *Java* class in raw cargo hauling capacity.

Despite this greater logistical depth, these ships suffered just as many and, in some cases, greater losses. Thankfully though, the production lines for all but *Inchon* were still open and active. While construction of replacement vessels was ongoing, *Akiras* stepped up to the plate to fill in when and where they could. Nearly all examples were dispersed throughout the Federation frontier, relaying personnel and supplies outwards from the core systems. Only a half dozen (*Kherson*, *Leyte Gulf*, *Rabin*, *Sentinel*, *Vincennes*, *Zumwalt*) were attached to HARF (Headquarters, Allied

Reconstruction Forces), where they were primarily tasked with securing Cardassian space while the beleaguered Cardassian Guard rebuilt.

This pressure began to subside in 2378 with the launch of the *Luna* class (DH 80101). Designed along similar lines and with a similar mindset as the *Intrepid* class was, *Luna* was intended to bolster Starfleet's long range exploration capabilities. With production of this class as well as *Intrepid* continuing apace and Starfleet gradually moving the larger *Nebula*, *Galaxy* and *Sovereign* classes back into exploratory roles as well, the Admiralty moved the *Renaissance* and *Ambassador* classes back into this leading support role. This allowed *Akiras* to return to their traditional roles of patrol, reconnaissance and rapid response.

Ultimately, this respite would prove to be short-lived. In 2381, the Borg Collective launched their penultimate assault on the Milky Way, attempting to exterminate the major powers & races of the Alpha and Beta Quadrants. 195 *Akira* class vessels were lost defending Federation worlds and installations as well as at the Azure Nebula where the terminus of a subspace tunnel network used by the Borg was located.

The need for allies immediately prior to and the in the aftermath of the Borg invasion prompted a major political realignment which once again saw the Federation and its Starfleet pushed back onto a cold war footing. Just prior to the invasion, Federation President Nanietta Bacco summoned ambassadors from various states and floated the idea of forming a grand alliance to resist the Borg. The Tholians, still incredibly xenophobic, were of course not interested in such an alliance. They could however, see the wisdom in a grand alliance with other powers and convened their own diplomatic summit. Together with the Romulan Star Empire, Gorn Hegemony, Tzenkethi Coalition, Breen Confederacy and the Holy Order of the Kinshaya, they formed the 'Typhon Pact'—a coalition of powers formed principally as a counterweight to the Federation and the Klingons.

As opposed to wide-scale, open conflict (which the Pact knew they could not win, even collectively), they resorted to the asymmetric means of sabotage, subterfuge, espionage and assassination to push back against the Federation Alliance. Once agents of Starfleet gained knowledge of the Pact's formation, they countered by standing with the Klingons and inviting the Cardassian Union, Talarian Republic, Ferengi Alliance and Imperial Romulan State (a Romulan faction controlled by Donatra, which split from the Star Empire following Shinzon's coup in 2379) to join their alliance.

An important technological development (and source of conflict) during this period was Quantum Slipstream propulsion. Originally developed by an unknown Delta Quadrant race (referred to as 'Species 116' by the Borg), the technology was initially discovered by the crew of the USS *Voyager* (CL 74656) in 2374. It was similar in principle to transwarp in that it relied on extremely complex computational power and calculations to exceed the traditional warp speed threshold, however instead of creating a controlled wormhole (as Starfleet had tried to do), it used tightly-focused energy to penetrate the quantum barrier, which would propel a ship at velocities

approximately 300 times faster than warp 9.99, or 9,467,280,000 times the speed of light. In practical terms, a starship that broke the quantum barrier and achieved slipstream velocities could traverse 15 light years in just 3 minutes or 300 light years in 1 hour (using these calculations, if *Voyager* herself was equipped with this technology, she could've made her 70,000 LY journey back to the Alpha Quadrant in just under 23 hours).

For Starfleet, successful development and implementation of this propulsion technology would not only revolutionize & reinvigorate their exploratory efforts (making the exploration of the Delta & Gamma Quadrants actually feasible), but provide a boon to their still-sluggish redevelopment, recovery and colonization/resettlement efforts as well—allowing colonists, personnel and supplies to travel between destinations in unheard-of times. A catch did exist however—the computational power and complexity required to create and sustain a slipstream corridor being directly related to a given vessel's overall geometry and design. Smaller, more compact and more 'aerodynamic' designs were therefore easier to adapt this technology to than larger or otherwise more unwieldy ship designs.

Further, because quantum slipstream technology relied entirely on computational/quantum physics—requiring no antimatter or physical/natural resources for its generation or manipulation—it was by its very nature, quite energy efficient. This allowed for the creation, installation and use of more advanced weapons, sensors, computer and medical systems (among others) aboard starships. The ASDB designed the *Vesta* (CHX 82601) to serve as an experimental testbed for both Quantum Slipstream propulsion and new technologies that could make use of the now-surplus power from traditional M/AM reactors.

With *Akira*, integration proved remarkably easy considering its size and its somewhat unorthodox catamaran warp nacelle arrangement. That did however make calibrating the quantum field focus controller a bit more arduous, but not overly so. Processing and software upgrades were actually the most time-consuming part of the integration process. Upgrades and testing were carried out aboard the namesake vessel (CB 62497) throughout 2380 and into 2381.

By 2382, the propulsion technology had been integrated on enough starships of differing classes to constitute an existential threat to the Typhon Pact who viewed it solely in tactical terms, seeing it as a 'first strike' weapon (especially when employed aboard classes like *Akira* and *Defiant*). Using the Breen, they infiltrated Starfleet's Utopia Planitia Starship Yards, absconded with some quite relevant technical data and attempted to build their own Quantum Slipstream-equipped prototype vessel. The venture eventually ended in failure however, when the prototype's designer was killed and the vessel itself destroyed by agents of Starfleet.

This prompted the formation of a complex, large-scale plot on the part of the Pact to obtain the technical data and secrets necessary to build a working prototype of the drive which they could develop into a functional system.

Things kicked off in late 2382, when Breen agents acting at the behest of Sela—now the director of the Tal'Shiar—infiltrated Sector 001 aboard a Romulan vessel equipped with an interphasic cloaking device and stole the technical data.

Ironically enough, given the technical limitations of Starfleet's sensor technology, interphasic cloaking technology—which had propagated throughout vessels of the various Typhon Pact states—was a tactical 'trump card' in and of itself. Along with the raid on Utopia Planitia, this fact precipitated a wholesale shift in the strategy of Starfleet's Marine Corps—going from direct action/wide-scale warfare to smaller scale/asymmetric actions.

In cooperation with Starfleet Intelligence, the Corps and its Special Operations Command (MARSOC) expanded massively. Utilizing Acturan clones, the Corps proper added an additional 10 Expeditionary Forces, creating the largest standing army in the Milky Way at 7,065,600 troops. MARSOC itself expanded to a similar size, though these forces were divided up into smaller regiments with a much greater dispersal—nearly every starbase and space station in Federation territory. Owing to its troop transport capacity, *Akira* became a linchpin of Starfleet's rebuilding efforts in the aftermath of the Borg Invasion.

The elimination of the Typhon Pact scientist and their quantum-slipstream prototype vessel hardly dissuaded them. Trok—the last surviving member of the Breen's Quantum Slipstream research team—believed that Jem'Hadar ships would be more compatible with the exotic propulsion technology. However given that neither the Breen, nor any of the other Typhon Pact states had any Jem'Hadar ships or technology in their possession, the Breen formulated a mission to steal manufacturing machinery from the Dominion shipyards at Overne III.

The Tzenkethi began a raiding campaign against Federation shipping in the area around Deep Space Nine—distracting Starfleet forces in the area. While the Romulans, together with Cardassian terrorists (the 'True Way'), managed to both smuggle bombs aboard the station (in an attempt to disable it) and keep the *Enterprise* and USS *Robinsonn* (CH 71842) distracted in the Gamma Quadrant. Despite interference by the Jem'Hadar, the Breen's raid was a success. Upon emerging back in the Alpha Quadrant however, the *Defiant* intercepted both the Breen Freighter and the Romulan *Norexan* class warbird involved in the operation. While additional Tzenkethi and Breen warships decloaked and began firing on both the *Defiant* and the station, station personnel discovered the bombs—planted in areas around the fusion core which were intended to cripple, but not destroy the station.

A distress call was sent out while the station began scrambling to evacuate residents and personnel. Before ships could reach the area however, the station was destroyed. A number of premature detonations during the battle eliminated the ability for the station to eject its fusion reactors and the core eventually went critical and exploded, killing approximately 1,091 people who had not yet been evacuated.



Arriving in the immediate aftermath, the *Vincennens*, *Devore* and *Trafalgar* remained on station to assess the situation and assist the *Robinson* in recovering survivors while the *Gettysburg* and *Hiroshima* tracked down and destroyed the Breen and Tzenkethi ships which had attempted to escape.

Publicly, the Star Empire disavowed Sela's actions, with Praetor Tal'Aura taking the unusual step of denouncing both her and the Pact's quest to develop quantum slipstream propulsion for itself. She reminded her peers that interphasic cloaking technology still served as a tactical 'trump card' and if Starfleet wanted to use Quantum Slipstream as a 'first strike' weapon, they would've done so already.

Privately, Tal'Aura had little appetite to prosecute any sort of external campaign against the Federation or its allies. Her political situation remained extremely tenuous and the Star Empire's position vis a vis the Imperial Romulan State in the ongoing internal conflict was not favorable.

This necessitated continued vigilance on the part of Starfleet. *Akira* was still heavily involved in rebuilding efforts—using her capabilities as a carrier to coordinate the transport of personnel and supplies between various locations as well as keeping important locations secured. That left *Steamrunner* as the fleet's heaviest asset in the border-facing/frontierward regions, augmented by *Defiants* and *Sabres*.

If it wasn't for the steady, steely-handed leadership of Fleet Admiral Leonard Akaar, the Federation's own political instability would've subsumed part or all of Starfleet in a similar manner. The Andorian Reproductive Crisis as a principal example, was used by the Tholians to drive a wedge between the Federation and one of its oldest allies and by Cardassian extremists who utilized a Bajoran collaborator to try and destroy it from the inside.

Cardassian reconstruction took nearly a decade following the end of the Dominion War, Starfleet not terminating its involvement until 2385. With the damage inflicted by the Borg in 2381 nearly unmeasurable in scope, the fleet had barely scratched the surface in its rebuilding efforts by the time of the Hobus Supernova in 2387.

Though the event obviously pertained to the Romulans first and foremost, it did have ramifications for the Federation's relations with the Klingon Empire that would not reach their climax for a few years yet. A resurgent hardline faction had emerged within the Klingon High Council and had both swayed the council to not provide any assistance to the Romulans and to demand recompense from the Federation for the loss of their fleet at the hand of Nero (their logic being that Worf—a former Starfleet Officer—had sabotaged the assault in a Federation plot to weaken the Empire).

They would later take advantage of the confusion by mounting a surprise attack on two Romulan star systems. They would've struck further into Romulan territory had Starfleet not sent an armada to the Romulan/Klingon border. In a show of force and political will, it was led by the *Sovereign* class *Agamemnon* and made up predominantly by *Steamrunner* and *Defiant* class ships.

Though the IKDF had a long tradition of utilizing battle-tested starship designs for decades beyond what the Federation and Starfleet would consider serviceable, they were not blind to the pace of technological development or changing astropolitical realities. Between the end of the Dominion War and the Borg's final invasion, they had successfully introduced a heavily reworked version of *Vor'Cha* (the *Qang/Chancellor* class) to serve as the new backbone of the IKDF as well as a further 5 clean-sheet designs (*G-8/Enforcer*; *L-65/Mave'Q*; *D-20/Korgal*; *D-90/K'Mirra* and *B-70/Vo'Quv*). All entered service in subsequent years and had gained valuable combat experience versus the Gorn. As they had during the heady days of the 2270s and 2280s, this reinvigorated IKDF would eventually go on to become the bane of Starfleet.

The Klingons' aggression towards the Romulans presented problems enough, but it was their low-level war versus the Gorn that proved to be the bigger irritant. Would it have stayed confined between the two powers and them alone, it might not have registered much outside of Starfleet Intelligence and the occasional Federation Security Council briefing. The Gorn alliance with the Nausicaans though proved impossible to ignore—direct attacks on civilian colonies and shipping rising with each new base the latter constructed along the Klingon/Gorn frontier.

This presented Starfleet Command and the Admiralty with something of a dilemma. With their forces already spread thin as it was, they had precious few ships to spare. Further, deploying larger or otherwise more powerful classes like *Akira*, *Steamrunner* or *Defiant* risked inflaming tensions with the Klingons even further. They were able to dispatch a *Sabre* squadron outfitted with extra stores of quantum torpedoes, but the Nausicaans were too numerous, as were their potential targets. The only real hope was for the Klingons and Gorn to strike a peace agreement or cease-fire at the very least. Chancellor Martok though, stipulated that the Empire would not participate in any form of Federation mediation or peace talks unless they withdrew their forces from the Klingon/Romulan border.

While politicians and the Admiralty dithered around, the Nausicaans continued their attacks, the situation finally becoming acute in early 2391. Given the constraints placed on them by ongoing recovery operations, Starfleet had no choice but to pull their armada back from the border. The response from some Romulan colony worlds was predictably severe, but they were not left entirely helpless—Romulan Admiral Taris having worked tirelessly to organize surviving Romulan naval assets into a new fleet.

Following Starfleet's withdrawal, Martok stayed true to his word, the Klingons, Nausicaans and Gorn meeting aboard Federation space station K-7 for talks. Following two days of positive progress, they were derailed with a hidden explosive device seriously injured Gorn Ambassador Zogozin. After immediately locking down the station, Starfleet Security discovered the culprit—found dead himself—was a Klingon extremist. This would prove to be the start of not only an internal Klingon

political schism, but the point where the deterioration of their relations with the Federation started accelerating.

A further round of talks the following year on Cestus III ended more violently when after three weeks, the Gorn and Nausicaans broke off and attacked the Klingon world of Ogat. The growing group of hardliners on the Klingon High Council, led by J'mpok, pushed for a full invasion of the Gorn Hegemony. Chancellor Martok preferred to stay cautious, wanting to wait until more ships were launched and IKDF fleet numbers approached pre-Dominion War levels. Starfleet and the Federation Security Council finally began to take more notice when the USS *Montana* (CH 42715)—attempting to intervene in the fighting that still raged around Ogat—was fired upon and sustained severe damage at the hands of IKDF forces.

The Klingons' internal divide eventually came to a head in 2393. Growing tired of J'mpok's insolence, Martok expelled him from the High Council and stripped him of his property. Not long after, J'mpok killed him in single combat and seized power as the next Chancellor of the Empire. Consequences for the Federation didn't immediately materialize, however like the situation with the Nausicaans, the Orion Syndicate emerged as a renewed irritant, following the signing of non-aggression and mutual defense treaties with the Klingons.

Over the next 6 years, J'mpok gradually solidified his position, allying with and restoring legitimacy to the House of Duras in 2397 most notably, but little else changed—relations with the Federation remaining icy and the IKDF continuing to prosecute their low-level offensive against the Gorn and their Nausicaan allies.

2 years later, the galactic stage was upended when the Klingons and Orions launched an all-out invasion of the Gorn Hegemony. Chancellor J'mpok requested assistance as per the terms of the Khitomer Accords, however the Federation General Assembly condemned the invasion and demanded the Empire return to the negotiating table. In response, J'mpok pulled the Empire out of the Accords and ended the alliance with the Federation.

What the Starfleet Admiralty and the Federation General Assembly didn't know is that the 'Undine' (aka Species 8472) had infiltrated the Milky Way and most of the major galactic powers.

In 2390, Captain Data and the *Enterprise-E* surveyed the McAllister C-5 Nebula and found faint residual traces of quantum singularities. These singularities corresponded to those used by the Undine to cross over from fluidic space. However, the nebula's properties made definitive identification impossible. The Klingons on the other hand, had much more intimate knowledge of the Undine's infiltration.

In 2395, Ja'Rod, son of Tog, was on shore leave at Rha'darus. While there, he was ambushed by 3 Klingons who he thought were enemies from the House of Duras. The capture and subsequent interrogation of one of the attackers revealed that all 3 were Undine infiltrators intent on capturing and replacing Ja'rod and also that there

were infiltrators in every one of the galaxy's major powers. When the captain of Ja'rod's ship, the IKS *Kang*, refused to investigate the matter further in the following year, Ja'rod instigated a mutiny, executing the captain as well as the first officer and seizing command. He then transmitted a coded message to Qo'nos and the *Kang* departed for parts unknown.

The *Negh'var* class ship reappeared just long enough in 2397 to announce the House of Duras' support for the House of J'mpok before reappearing 2 years later in 2399, when Captain Ja'rod revealed the findings of his investigation into the Undine and unwittingly sent the Empire to war.

After 4 years of heavy and often vicious fighting, the Klingons finally reached Gornar in 2403, landing multiple Imperial Guard detachments and focusing their efforts on capturing the capital. That happened in a mere 28 hours, Gorn King Slathis surrendering and ordering remaining Gorn troops to stand down not long after.

A week later, Chancellor J'mpok arrived aboard the IKS *Vo'quv* and made an address which was broadcast not only across Gornar, but nearly every Gorn colony and starship as well. During it, he revealed that the Gorn Prime Minister, his entire cabinet and nearly every other government official had been replaced by Undine infiltrators—their public execution being the broadcasts' climax. After much internal debate among members of the High Council, J'mpok elected to offer Slathis and the Gorn self-rule, provided they swore complete fealty to the Empire. Naturally then, Slathis agreed without argument.

During these intervening years, the Federation stood warily by, continuing to deploy a good portion of its Starfleet on traditional missions of exploration and scientific study. Construction of fleet mainstays such as the *Galaxy* and *Nebula* classes was dramatically curtailed, down to just a few examples a year. *Sovereign*, the fleet's current 'crown jewel' received the lions' share of production orders, along with *Intrepid* and the newer *Luna* (DH 80101) class, which took on more and more of the exploratory/scientific duties from their larger compatriots. *Vesta* continues on as the next 'great experiment', testing out systems, components and technologies that would filter out into the fleet proper.

When it came to the more pressing missions of patrol, defense, rapid-reaction and transport/support, *Akira* and her close companions (*Steamrunner*, *Norway*, *Sabre*) had proven themselves many times over, forming a powerful and resilient backbone which Starfleet would not have been able to survive without—accounting for a full ¾ of starship production both in the core systems and out on the frontier.

By 2405, Starfleet had recapitalized nearly all of its forces lost to the Borg but was still below pre-Dominion War levels. As opposed to the late 23<sup>rd</sup> Century when Starfleet fielded all manner of Dreadnoughts and other patrol combatants to fulfill its defensive/offensive needs, the fleet eventually coalesced around a more rational shipbuilding strategy to fulfill those same needs. In terms of size/capability, this strategy was 'bookended' by *Defiant* and *Prometheus* with 'middleweight' classes

such as *Steamrunner* and *Akira* fitting in between. The latter two classes, with few substantive changes, had been in service for nearly 60 years and would begin reaching the end of their useful operational lives by 2420. Hoping to avoid the difficulties faced with adapting classes like *Excelsior* and *Miranda* to the modern age, the ASDB began work on their replacements—codenamed *Appalachia* and *Armitage* respectively.

This came none too soon as the Klingons invoked ancient claims to the Hromi Cluster early in the year—giving the Federation 3 months to vacate it entirely. After briefly esposing patience and pragmatism, UFP President Aennik Okeg responded—effectively telling Chancellor J'mpok and his High Council to stuff it (“We *do not* want war, but we **will** defend ourselves.”)

The Klingon response was both swift and symbolic—the IKDF sending a fleet to attempt to capture the Korvat system a mere 3 days later. The Klingons had learned from the heady days of the 2270s and 80s as well as subsequent encounters with the Cardassians and Dominion—mastering combined/carrier operations. Classes known to and which Starfleet had experience with—like *Vor'cha* and *Negh'var*—had apparently been tasked with internal defense/security operations making the fleet they sent to Korvat, one which was comprised entirely of new designs.

The new IKDF order of battle centered around *B-70/Vo'Quv*—a nearly 1300m long leviathan vaguely reminiscent of the old *L-24/Komo'Val* class and capable of transporting numerous fighters as well as an entire Imperial Guard brigade (7,632 troops). 4 *Q'ang/Chancellor* class Battlecruisers acted as primary escorts, roughly in the same vein as *Akira*. 8 *D-90/K'Mirra* class Battlecruisers were tasked with engaging starships at *Steamrunner*'s level and below, while 10+ each of the *D-20/Korgal*, *L-65/Mave'Q* and *G-8/Enforcer* classes acted as a screen for their larger compatriots, engaging smaller Destroyers and starfighters.

Though entirely new, clean-sheet designs, their traditional weaknesses were still ever-present—the larger ships impressively armed and armored but featuring comparatively poor maneuverability while the smaller ones were quite maneuverable, but more sparsely protected.

The force Starfleet sent to expel them from Korvat was led by 3 *Prometheus* class vessels—*Sentinel* (CT 75017), *Monitor* (CT 75024) and *Merrimac* (CT 75136). Escorting them was an *Akira* squadron led by the *Leyte Gulf* while a squadron each of *Steamrunner* (led by the *Patton/FH 63304*) and *Defiant* (led by the *Sirocco/DD 75611*) class ships transported ground troops and served as a defensive screen.

Using their diversity to their advantage allowed the Klingons to take the upper hand early. With their multi-vector assault mode activated, the individual sections of the *Sentinel*, *Monitor* and *Merrimac* were able to score direct hits on the Klingon carrier and her escorts, but were quickly pinned down by the smaller birds-of-prey in a seemingly never ending game of cat and mouse. This forced *Akira*, *Steamrunner* and *Defiant* to split their attention. *Merrimac* was severely damaged, while several

*Steamrunner* and *Defiant* class ships were destroyed outright. In the end, coordinated torpedo salvos, followed up with heavy phaser fire allowed Starfleet to take the field, destroying the majority of the Klingon force and forcing their Carrier along with her single surviving escort to make a tactical withdrawal.

One key tactical development which had gone unnoticed by Starfleet Intelligence was the successful joining of standard phase disruptors by force coupling, into linear beam emitters/arrays. The hardware was somewhat simpler in engineering, because the energies at play—highly charged plasma—didn't need to go through the EM spectrum shift that the subatomic particles in Starfleet's phasers did. The bottleneck had always been the relative strength of the force couplings linking each emitter segment—the charged plasma always having overloaded and fried those couplings before the energy could be focused and released through the emitter crystals.

It was thought that the Romulan Imperial Navy (RiN) made the breakthrough sometime between 2382-2387 and then agents of Klingon Imperial Intelligence (KII) somehow gained possession of the technical specs/data in the chaotic aftermath during the IKDF's initial incursion into Romulan territory in 2389. However, the rapid appearance of these new weapons on ships of the Gorn Navy threw that into doubt. The fact that they now put the IKDF (or any other spacefaring power so armed) on the same technological level as Starfleet ensured that this new conflict would **not** be as predictable nor as easily won as the Four Years War a century and a half prior.

Two things that **were** predictable though, were the signing of a non-aggression pact between the Klingons and a Nausicaan coalition and the entry of the Gorn into the war. Both were of little consequence however—the Nausicaans' offensive power being negligible and most Gorn vessels being comparatively lightly armed (1-2 disruptor arrays and torpedo launchers at most).

A Gorn assault on Sherman's Planet provided a better opportunity to study these new weapons in greater detail. The fact that charged plasma did not undergo an EM spectrum shift conveyed both an advantage and disadvantage—the former being more energy able to be directed at a given target with the latter being that the lack of such a spectrum shift simplified the energy profile, making them easier for modern deflector shield systems to defend against (as with disruptors in general). Additionally, their effectiveness degraded at a much greater rate at long range vis-à-vis phasers.

In any event, the Gorn Navy's order of battle prioritized Starfighters—the *Naga* class being roughly analogous to Starfleet's *Valkyrie* class Interceptor—and Frigates—the *Vishap* class often being deployed in 'wolfpacks' of 3 to 4 ships. The *Tutara* class Cruiser, while highly maneuverable and heavily armored (roughly in line with the IKDF's *Q'ang/Chancellor* class), were no better armed and functioned more as command & control assets than anything else. Their major fleet combatants upped the ante though. The *Balaur* class Dreadnought and *Zilant* and *Varanus* Battleship classes were large and imposing—sized roughly in line with Starfleet's *Sovereign* and *Galaxy* classes—featured more powerful disruptor emitters (equivalent to Starfleet's

Type XII Phasers), added heavy disruptor annons and plasma torpedoes to their armament and could function as troop carriers.

The Sherman's Planet assault was an exploratory one for the Gorn, who were eager to feel out Starfleet's strengths & weaknesses as well as to test their ships in battle against a modern, highly formidable opponent. As such, they committed a diverse force—1 *Varanus* class BB, 2 *Balour* class DNs, 10 *Tutara* class CAs, 30 *Vishap* class FFs and 2 full wings (144) of *Naga* class Fighters.

Standing between them and the planet was a lighter Starfleet force at Station K-7, but one with a few surprises up its sleeve. Experience gained in both the Dominion War and in limited engagements against the Typhon Pact prompted the fleet's Starfighter Command to commit to a modernization effort itself. It supplanted the *Peregrine* class Multi-Role Fighter and fully replaced the *Valkyrie* class Interceptor with the new *Avenger* class—combining the strength and multi-mission adaptability of the former with the speed and agility of the latter. It also took the new *Pulsar* class Cutter (introduced to replace *Danube*) and subjected it to extensive modifications, creating the *Crusader* class Heavy Fighter/Assault Transport.

Their force was comprised of 1 *Prometheus* class CT, 1 *Sovereign* class CH, 1 *Galaxy* class CH, 6 *Akira* class CBs, 8 *Steamrunner* class FHs, 15 *Defiant* class DDs and 1 mixed wing of *Peregrine* (36), *Avenger* (24) and *Crusader* (12) class craft. The station initially began life as a *Kepler/K-Typ*

The rest of the battle proceeded in the same methodical fashion. Though outnumbered, the Starfleet forces identified the principal 'leaders' among the Gorn and sent their ships in to engage in waves. All fighters and small craft were deployed to distract, disorient and 'soften up' their targets, attacking specific subsystems once again. Pulse Phaser barrages from the *Defiants* did well to hammer these subsystems and even breach the shields of some ships before the *Steamrunners* moved in and hammered them even more with torpedo volleys.

This is not to say the battle was a walk in the park though for Starfleet. While the bulk of their ships were occupied with the Gorn Navy's main body, their Dreadnoughts and Battleship kept the Starfleet Heavy Cruisers pinned down, their formidable shielding and armor allowing them to absorb impressive levels of punishment while inflicting many orders of magnitude more on their opponents. By the time the Gorn *Tutaras* were destroyed, the *Galaxy* class *Lafayette* (CH 70684) had lost her port nacelle, starboard impuls engine and a third of the power couplings feeding her dorsal phaser banks. The *Sovereign* class *Archangel* (CH 74129) likewise lost her communications array and half of her forward torpedo launchers.

Mostly ignoring everything smaller than the *Akiras* surrounding the station eventually led to Starfleet getting the upper hand. The *Steamrunners* and the motley wing of small craft had all but exhausted their torpedo stores, but the *Defiants* as well as the *Akiras* still had the majority of theirs. Withering phaser fire took out the Gorns' sensors

first before disabling their engines. Blind and unable to run, these leviathans quickly succumbed to the same fate as their smaller comrades.

Though the battle was a solid loss for the Gorn, it validated the effectiveness of the new disruptor-based weaponry as well as some of their underlying shipbuilding concepts (mainly that bigger + heavily armored = better + more survivable).

A real test for Starfleet came the following year when the Klingons laid siege to the Archanis Sector. With the presence of the SFMC's massive Tanandra Bay complex (hope to the IV Corps) on Ajilon Prime and then the fact forces could be surged into the area from Starbases 67, 105 and then DS K-7, this action shaped up to be a costly battle of attrition for the IKDF.

That particular battle was still raging fiercely a year later in 2408 when the Gorn, backed by their Klingon allies, launched an assault on Cestus III. With the ongoing fight at Archanis though, both sides did not bother (nor could they afford) to commit the kind of heavy assets that would ensure a swift victory.

After undergoing repairs and restocking at the Beta Antares shipyards, Starfleet Command assembled a force around the USS *Trinculo* (CH 71867). Most of Starfleet's active *Akiras* were either engaged at Archanis or on assignment elsewhere, so that left 12 *Steamrunners* to serve as *Trinculo*'s primary escort. Just 6 of them were enough to embark Starfighter Command's famed 4<sup>th</sup> Attack Wing (now flying the *Avenger* class Space Superiority Fighter) while 6 more carried *Crusader* class Assault Craft and Type 12 Heavy Shuttles that were intended to secure the planet's surface as well as transport troops and supplies. A squadron each of *Norway* and *Sabre* class ships were hurriedly deployed from Starbase 12 to round out the force.

The Klingons committed just three squadrons of relatively light classes—*L-65/Mave'Q*, *G-8/Enforcer* and *K'tinga*--but also sent an entire wing of their warp-capable *D'aka* class Starfighters.

Developed during the late 2270s to take on Starfleet's *Wasp/Hornet/Yellowjacket* family, *D'aka* was relatively crude, but effective (so much so, that it served as the impetus for Starfleet to replace the aforementioned trio with the *Valkyrie* class). Unfortunately, the IKDF had little experience operating starfighters and instead chose to concentrate on their various warship classes. Their fighters formed a token force that more or less remained below the radar until the Borg Invasion of 2381 when they were forced into the spotlight to temporarily stand in for the losses incurred.

For their part, the Gorn Navy contributed 1 *Balour* class DN, 10 *Tutara* class CAs and a wing of *Naga* class fighters. Taken together, the combined Gorn/Klingon force was one that should've had little trouble defeating their Starfleet opponents.

Overlapping phaser fire kept the enemy fighters pinned down long enough for their Starfleet counterparts to break past them and use tricobalt torpedoes to inflict severe damage on first the Gorn's *Balour*, followed by their *Tutaras*. *Steamrunners* moved in

to deliver the killing blows (via surgical phaser strikes, followed by quantum torpedoes), while the *Sabres* targeted the enemy fighters and the *Norways* bore down on the Klingons.

Once the Gorn were cleared from the field, the *Trinculo* took the lead, diving straight into the center of the Klingon lines and engaging multiple ships at point blank range. *Avengers* took on the Klingon fighters, with covering fire provided by the *Sabres*. The *Norway* squadron did the same for the *Steamrunners* as they engaged the Klingon gunboats first, followed by the larger *Mave'Qs* and finally the *K'tingas*.

This was an unusually hard-fought battle given the caliber of forces involved, but it was one Starfleet won handily, wiping out the Klingon contingent and eventually forcing the Gorn to make a tactical withdrawal. This victory also marked the entry of *Steamrunner* into her twilight years and marked the beginning of her successor's (*Appalachia*) ascendance.

Though *Steamrunner* was older and entered service a decade prior to *Akira* (2342 vs 2352), design work on *Akira*'s successor—*Armitage*—was actually completed first, in 2304, with the prototype (CBX 97300) launching in 2306. Facing a firepower deficit and still subscribing to the same general 'bigger is better' philosophy made this something of a strategic necessity. Like *Appalachia*, *Valdres* and *DaVinci*, *Armitage* maintained the same general shape as her predecessor, eschewing *Akira*'s 'utilitarian' lines and emerging much smoother and more rounded.

Principle differences which formed a foundation for its sister classes included a dramatically more robust EPS distribution system that emphasized redundancy and survivability through a highly dense network of couplings and relays that ensured no threat could interrupt power flow to any one system or group of systems. Taking advantage of the surplus of power afforded gained thanks to Quantum Slipstream propulsion, *Akira*'s Type X Phasers were upgraded to Type XIII units. Functionally the same as earlier emitter/array incarnation, the main difference was the ability of Type XIII weapons to deliver 25% more damage per shot over the Type XII and 38% more than Type X weapons.

Perhaps more importantly, *Akira*'s over-the-top torpedo armament was paired down significantly, from a total of 15 launchers, to just 8—4 in a rollbar-mounted weapons pod (2 fore/2 aft) and 4 more at the base of the secondary hull (2 fore/2 aft). Making up the difference were 8 pulse phaser cannons. 4 were mounted forward, within the leading edge of the primary hull (2 each on either side of the navigational deflector). These were conventional units, the same introduced with the *Defiant* class.

4 more were located in the bridge module superstructure, 2 forward and 2 aft. Starfleet's first 'heavy phaser cannons', they were based on technology developed for the experimental *Galaxy-X* class, the hardware being massive – over 50% larger than the standard units. Being that much larger, they were also that much more powerful, 65% more to be exact. In simulations, they were able to breach the shields of a Klingon *Negh'Var*, Romulan *Norexan* and Gorn *Zilant* classes as well as a

Jem'Hadar Battlecruiser in a single volley. Despite their somewhat languid recharge rate, they more than made up for the lack of torpedo launchers.

Along with the *Appalachia*, *Odyssey* (successor to the *Sovereign*) and other classes in various states of completion, *Armitage* remained one of Starfleet's better takes on the much-hyped 'multi-mission' ethos.

These introductions (plus that of the *Excelsior II* class) came none too soon. The loss of contact with Starbase 236 and the subsequent destruction of the USS *Enterprise-E* (which, after discovering the Undine were responsible, pursued them into fluidic space and was eventually destroyed) revealed that the entire conflict between the Undine and the various powers of the Milky Way was orchestrated entirely by the Iconians.

This revelation changed the course of galactic events on a fundamental scale. Countering the Iconians and their Undine servitors however, proved to be anything but easy, let alone quick. Interestingly enough, it would be the Romulans who would hold the key to unlocking the next phase of the conflict.

In a bid to curry favor and influence with the Romulan Republic, both the Federation and Klingon Empire had provided varying levels of assistance to the fledgling state (which had established itself as a peaceful, diplomatically-oriented counterweight to the increasingly totalitarian Star Empire) in the year since its founding (2409). One of the biggest undertakings they assisted with, was the Republic's establishment of a new homeworld on Dewa III.

An *Akira* squadron, with its combined firepower and embarked craft capacity, led the Starfleet support contingent, accompanied by 2 *Steamrunner* squadrons and a transport flotilla.

A scientific expedition studying ancient ruins beneath the surface of 'New Romulus' though, uncovered an ancient Iconian Gateway. Its reactivation and subsequent actions of the three powers led to the inadvertent activation of the Iconians' entire gateway network.

Further analysis revealed a ship-sized gateway in the Jouret system that led to a massive Dyson Sphere on the edge of the Delta Quadrant. Discovering that the sphere utilized a massive amount of Omega particles to travel basically anywhere in subspace, the three powers formed a joint effort to eliminate this capability. They eventually did, but not before coming into conflict with the Voth and activating another gateway to the Jenolan Dyson Sphere.

That sphere, originally discovered by Starfleet in 2294, had moved at some point from its former position somewhere in the Beta Quadrant, close to the center of the Delta Quadrant. It now gave the Federation, Klingons and Romulan Republic access to the Delta Quadrant proper, but also brought them closer to the Undine and threatened to exacerbate that situation even further.

Attempting to keep the astro-political situation under control and keep their combined attention trained on the larger threats before them, Rear Admiral Tuvok convened a summit of all 3 powers on the surface of the Jenolan Dyson Sphere. During the summit, the Undine launched a full scale assault on Earth and Q'onos as well as several other major allied worlds.

Unlike most normal spacefaring races, Undine starships were less spacefaring vessels in their own right, than they were biological constructs. As such, they were immensely powerful, with a resistance to directed energy and associated heavy weapons that very nearly rivaled the Borg in some instances.

Now facing an immediate, existential threat to their very survival, the competing factions finally put aside their differences and set out to finally rid themselves of the Undine threat once and for all.

Arriving at Earth, they found the marauding Undine force to be smaller than expected, though it had already managed to inflict severe damage to Earth Spacedock, several Luna colonies and numerous settlements across Earth's Asian continent.

Klingon forces engaged the Undine around Luna, more Klingon and Romulan Republican forces engaged them on the far side of Earth, while Starfleet cleared the immediate area surrounding Spacedock. Being as powerful as they were, the Undine were still not entirely invulnerable. The allies in this instance outnumbered the Undine nearly 10:1. Klingon heavy disruptors, Romulan plasma torpedoes and Federation tricobalt torpedoes proved invaluable here. For its part, *Akira* was crucial in not only deploying these weapons and helping to destroy numerous Undine ships, but in transporting the troops & material that helped secure Spacedock.

*Akira* was relatively tied up—the *Kherson* being the only example available to escort the new Starship *Enterprise* (CH 1701-F) to Q'onos. Once there though, it was soon discovered that the attack in the Sol system was merely a distraction – the Undine's true goal being to destroy the Klingon homeworld with a 'planet killer' weapon.

While the *Kherson* remained close-in to the *Enterprise*, the *San Diego* (FH 52571) led a separate charge against the Undine that were formed up near Praxis, while the *Steamrunner* (FH 53504), *Arizona*, *Denver* and *Hiroshima* formed a screen for the *Enterprise* and *Kherson* who attacked the Undine leviathan directly.

Dwarfing even the massive Jem'Hadar Battleship and featuring an absolutely absurd degree of protection, the allies were hard pressed to take this down. Heavy weaponry once again proved critical, but the newest starships—Starfleet's *Odyssey*,

the Romulan Imperial Navy's *Kerchan* and the IKDF's *Vo'Quv*—also featured the newest weaponry. Phaser & Disruptor power/damage levels had long since eclipsed the 'Type XII' standard, but given the somewhat experimental nature of the newest incarnations, plus the years of almost unceasing conflict, their adoption was still somewhat hamstrung. Still though, these technological advancements, along with careful coordination and sheer luck is what eventually allowed the allies to destroy the Undine's deadly weapon and definitively end their aggression.

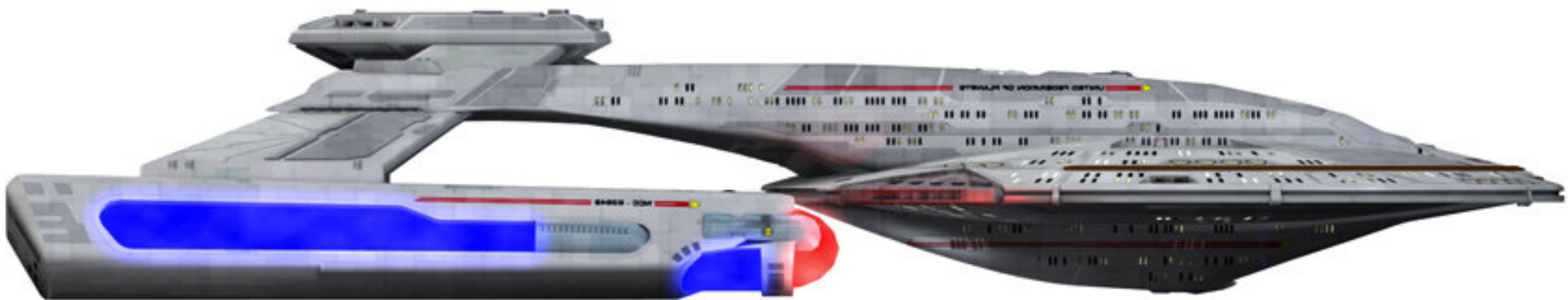
The shared jubilation at this turn of events was unfortunately short lived. Celebrations inside the Great Hall in Qo'nos' First City were interrupted by the Iconian known as M'Tara. She issued a thinly veiled threat against the allies, warning them not to attract any further Iconian attention. When they voiced their defiance, she demonstrated her power by wiping out the entire Klingon High Council, save for Chancellor J'mpok. In the aftermath of this, the Federation and Klingon Empire quickly put an end to their hostilities and agreed to cement their fledgling alliance with the Romulan Republic.

As it was following the end of the Dominion War, Starfleet once again enjoyed a period of relative calm. Given the threats it had to contend with over the past decade as well as the massive technological advancements that had taken place in that time, a new fleet of starships that incorporated these advancements and could confront threats like the Iconians was called for.

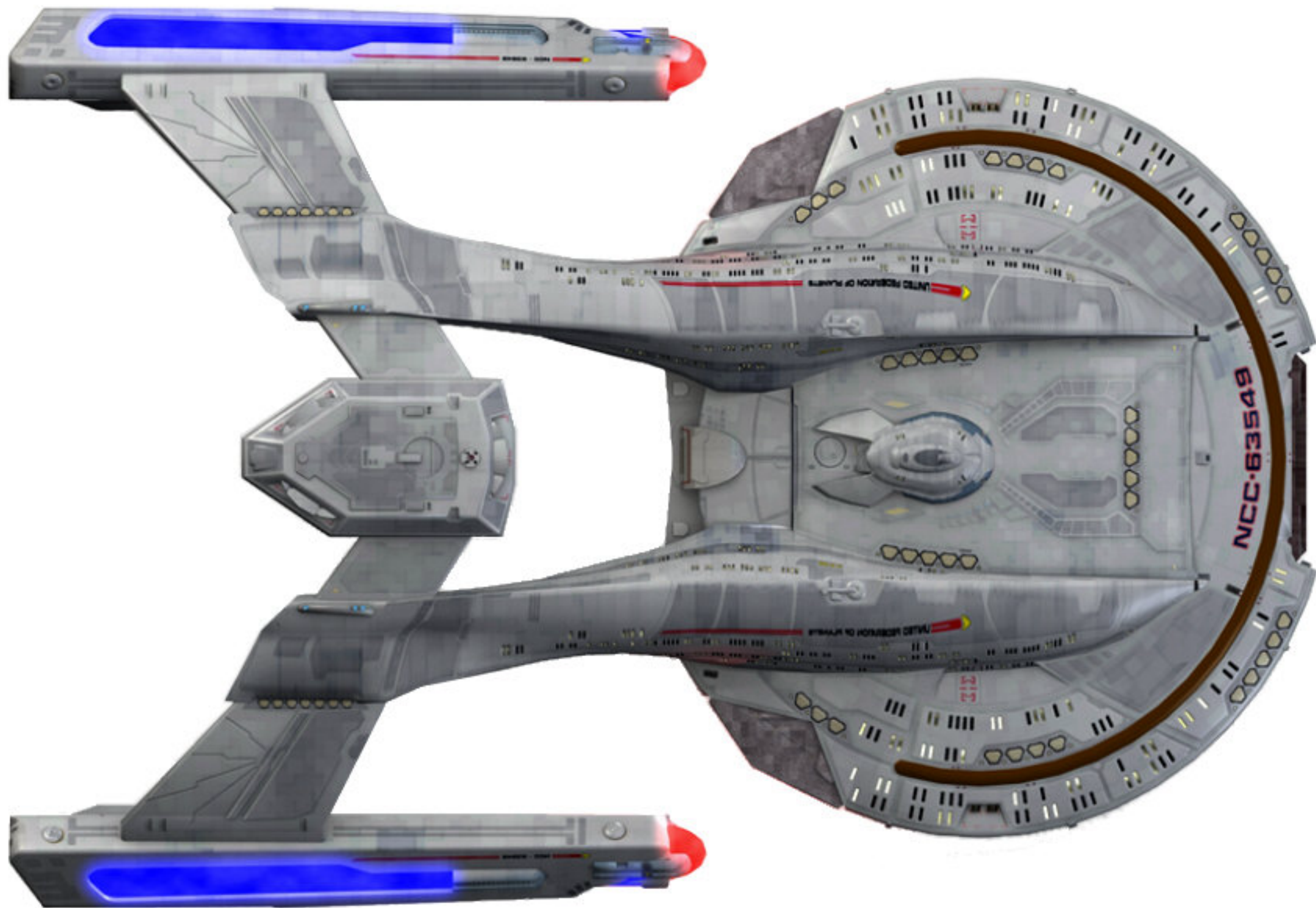
Unlike the *Miranda* class which was retired and eventually scrapped en masse, Quantum Slipstream propulsion kept *Akira* relevant. *Armitage* began to replace these stalwarts on a 1:1 basis, but in the 4 years since the prototype was completed, only a squadrons' worth had been completed and inducted into service. Bigger numbers of the *Valdres* (successor to *Norway*) and *Da Vinci* (successor to *Sabre*) classes had made it. Into service however, along with a continual stream of *Defiant* class examples (which, when considering advances in computer and automation technology, could be operated with a minimal compliment).

Despite the fact they would be losing a potent heavy firepower capability, Starfleet Command elected to go ahead and remove *Akira* from front-line service. Surviving examples continued in a second-line support capacity, temporarily augmented by the *Nova* and *Ambassador* classes (which were slated for retirement themselves). All were formally retired by 2420, with the namesake example (CB 62497) selected for inclusion in the fleet museum.

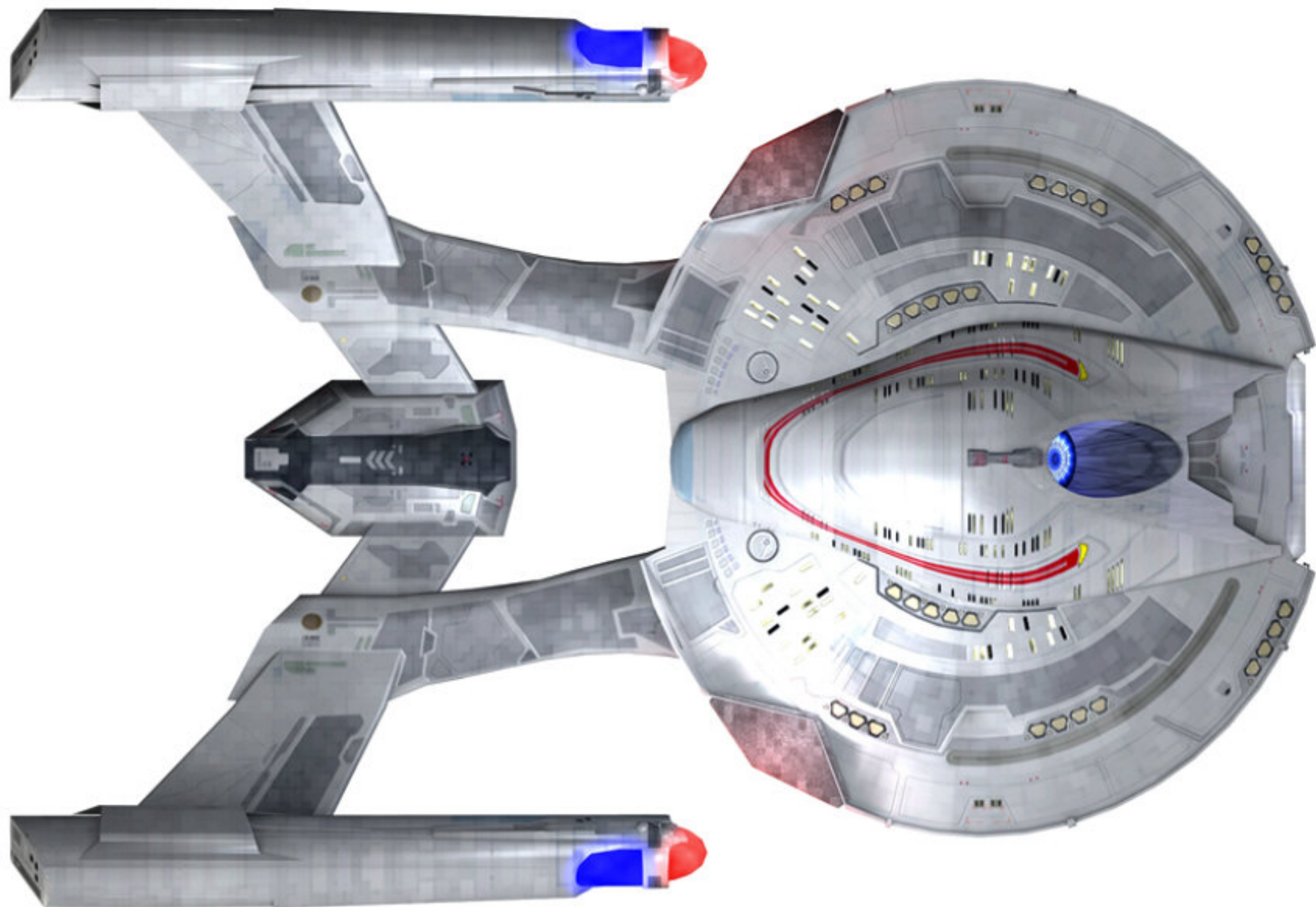




Class Classification	Akira Battlecruiser	Mass	3,055,000 metric tons	Armament	3 Type X Phaser Emitters 19 MK III Torpedo Launchers
		Compliment	500; 4500 evac. limit	Defense Systems	Standard Deflector Shield System total capacity 1,876,500 TerraJoules
Length	440m	Standard Duranium/Tritanium Double Hull plus 6cm High Density Armor			
Beam	300m				
Height	83m				
Decks	15				













# Editor's Annotations

This has definitely been a long time coming. The historical part of the text is based in large part on that which I wrote for *Steamrunner*—subtle alterations made to emphasize/highlight *Akira*'s contributions to this overall narrative, so there's really not a lot that's genuinely 'new'.

There are a few points of contention that I think eagle-eyed readers might pick up on. First and perhaps most obvious is the number of torpedo launchers. Fitting 12 in the rollbar mounted weapons pod and making that a 'rotary launcher' of sorts is no problem, none of the schematics/orthographic views I've seen being detailed enough to call that into question. The ones I used here though do show the additional launchers to port and starboard. As to the 3 I mentioned in the secondary hull though, these orthos only show one located below the deflector dish. The two others I mentioned on either side of the dish are not pictured, but I felt boosting the number here made sense to try and even things out.

Next is the weapons strengths I mentioned very near the end. Here, I looked up 'Phaser Weapons (Space)'. About halfway down the page is a table with 'Rank', 'Mark', 'DPV' (damage point value?) and 'DPS' (damage per shot I'm assuming). In my head, I just assumed 'Mark XII' = Type XII and so forth, looked at the DPS numbers and just did a bit of simple math from there.

Some of the physical/interior description is based on that which I wrote for the 'Independence' class way back when (since the two are basically the same design), otherwise as I mentioned above, there isn't much in here that I whipped up from scratch.



# Bibliography

Design—Alex Jaeger

Orthos—Doug Drexler/ILM

Logo—'Maximilian1271' ([Reddit Thread](#))

Selected Text—'Jean-Luc Picard' (Ad-Astra Fanfic) *\*\*not sure what happened to this link – appears to have been taken down?\*\**  
Star Trek Online ([STO Wiki](#))