

# THE MECH TOUCH

## *Chapter 7208: Expedited Development*

The meeting between Ves and the four collies did not last long.

They did not have much to discuss considering that Ves did not feel it was appropriate to make important decisions about the Phase Lord Department.

The collies therefore left the recovery room disappointed as they hadn't been able to resolve a lot of lingering issues.

At least Ves promised to let the Dark Apostle out later in the day. That should finally allow the Red Collective to take concrete steps to claw back the Phase Lord Department from damnation.

Before that could happen, Ves first wanted to handle his own business.

He already reassured his children, so he sought out his wife to see how she was spending her time.

"Ugh, my body..."

The painkillers started to wear off now that many liters worth of chemicals were no longer being pumped into his bloodstream.

That caused him to feel a growing amount of aching inside his entire torso.

Fortunately, the pain was bearable for the time being. If it ever grew bad enough, then Ves could always retire early and let the Dark Apostle suffer the consequences of his own actions.

It was his fault that their shared true body deteriorated to this state!

For the time being, Ves allowed a bot to freshen him up and adorn him with a clean set of smart clothes.

He decided to tackle the most immediate issue straight away, which was placating his wife before her anger boiled over.

Ves did not need to inquire about her present location aboard the Tarrasque. He headed straight down to her private design lab and found her straight away.

Just as he expected, Gloriana immersed herself in her mech design work.

Lucky lazily hovered beside her head while he chewed on a mineral.

"Meow..."

The gem cat made a perfunctory greeting towards Ves, showing no sign of happiness to see him up and about again.

Gloriana studiously kept her attention on her terminal. She was borrowing a significant fraction of the Tarrasque's processing power in order to run simulations on various design solutions of the Riot Mark III Project.

The two of them were originally supposed to complete the upgrade of the Riot by this time, but Ves' old habit of getting distracted by the latest shiny had postponed this important event.

This clearly did not please his wife.

"Honey..."

Gloriana did not react to him at all when he was sure she registered his arrival. In fact, she must have received a notification as soon as he woke up. The fact that she did not bother to put down her work to visit him at the recovery facility was a statement in itself.

"Do you know what you did wrong this time?" She finally broke the silence.

"I... have a few ideas..."

"Then why did you recklessly put your life at risk, Ves?! You did not have to answer to the Oscillating Fist's provocations! You and that other personality of yours are both the same! Your egos are too big and your desire to gamble your lives is too strong! Do not tell me that everything is excusable since you got what you wanted. The problem is that you accepted a needless risk from the start! You did not have to go so far to take over the Phase Lord Department! Winning 3 duels was supposed to be enough. Starting the fourth one was pure hubris! Have you ever thought that if you died, you would not only lose your life, but leave our children without their father?!"

Ves winced as Gloriana castigated him. As much as he wanted to deny it, her words rang true.

"At least it worked out this time, right?"

"That is not an acceptable answer." His wife growled. "This is worse than the previous incidents. At least those were one-off events that we could eventually put behind us. This time, you and your alter ego became so adamant about proving your ability to lead from the front that the Ascended Giants will expect you to fight with the same degree of courage and recklessness as you have shown in the 4th duel. That has become the new standard as far as they are concerned."

She made a decent point, but Ves tried his best to ease her concerns.

"Fights like these should be rare. I was forced by circumstances this time. Now that I am in control, I can pick and choose where I want to go and which enemies to confront. I have the Bluejay Fleet and the Ascended Giants should be able to take care of most opponents given their comprehensive strength. If I need more assistance, then I can always call over the Premier Fleet. There should be no need for me to contribute my strength against most opponents we come across."

His wife did not accept this argument.

"I know you well enough that you will not be able to resist. You have never been a typical mech designer. For whatever reason, you can never allow yourself to stay in the rear and let the professionals do their job, especially now that you and your larger self have gained the power to intervene directly on the battlefield. The Dark Apostle will insist on putting his life and your life on the line on repeat. Do you know how frustrating it is to not know whether you will return from the battlefield? It is one thing to allow for ordinary soldiers to fight and die on our behalf. It is another thing to subject yourself to the same risks and dangers!"

He could understand her concerns. Unlike him, her own foundation was not strong enough to maintain their combined influence and network.

Many arrangements would fall apart as soon as Ves got himself killed somehow.

However, Ves had no intentions of discouraging the Dark Apostle from fighting.

"You know why I cannot agree with you, honey. We are locked in a state of total war. The Red War is developing at a fast pace. The native aliens still remain dominant in the Red Ocean while the mutated voribugs have proven to be a new galactic scourge. It remains to be seen whether the return of the Cybernetic Empire will help to stabilize the border regions. The lack of deep and earnest cooperation between all of the major players risks fracturing our united front. Order is continuing to break down."

His wife finally turned away from her terminal and faced him directly.

"What are you trying to say?"

"We have made many friends, but when it comes down to it, we can't rely on them to go out of their way to save us." Ves flatly said. "It is ultimately better if we grasp power directly. The requirements of leading the Phase Lord Department are harsh, but it is worth it. Trust me. Including me, we have 360 Ascended Giants in total. That is a formidable army in itself. I bet we could easily conquer an entire zone by ourselves. Even if I can't afford to transfer them all to the Bluejay Fleet, just a squad or two of Ascended Giants is enough to make a qualitative difference in the field. They can do stuff that ace mechs cannot."

"Ace pilots are superior to lesser phase lords." Gloriana argued back. "Our champions are incorruptible. The ones that hail from our clan are completely loyal to us. We do not have to worry that any of them will defect to the Red Cabal. I cannot say the same for the human phase lords that you love so much."

Ves crossed his arms. "Ace pilots have their merits, but it is incredibly difficult to raise them. We only managed to obtain a bunch because we have persistently invested a disproportionate amount of resources into their mechs."

Phase lords require a lot of phasewater to produce, but we can get a lot of it if we continue to defeat enemy phase leaders on the frontlines. The Premier Fleet is doing quite well in the Terran Alliance, especially when the Minerva Mark II is teaming up with the First Sword Mark III. Do you know that I have been thinking about raising a new phalanx that is exclusively made up of members of the Larkinson Clan?"

Gloriana looked surprised. "Wait, is that even permissible? The conflict of interests would be massive."

"You are technically true, but a deal is a deal." Ves smirked back. "The collies have promised the Dark Apostle and I complete authority over the Phase Lord Department in the next 20 years. While that doesn't mean I can do what I want without limitations, using its knowledge and resources to raise a phalanx that is made up of Larkinsons and only answers to our clan is not a big deal so long as I don't go too far."

His wife fell into thought. "If that is the case... then I may see this gambit of yours in a better light. It would be best if we can enjoy the permanent protection of 60 human phase lords that hail from our clan."

"This is just the start." Ves grinned. "There are plenty of other ways to take advantage of a public institution, especially one where the RC has agreed to place under our care. So long as we are clever about it, we can continually squeeze benefits out of the department while still making sure it fulfills its most essential responsibilities."

"Your term only lasts 20 years, correct? Are you not afraid that the RC will deny a renewal of your appointment?"

Ves shrugged. "Not so much. A lot can change in 2 decades. I will become a much stronger mech designer at that time. I should be able to make enough contributions to the war effort that minor rule violations get forgotten. If I have learned anything from the god pilots and Star Designers that I have come into contact with, it is that when you become powerful enough, the rules don't constrain you anymore. Instead, you get to impose them on others. Becoming the department head of the Phase Lord Department has already put me very close to this threshold."

He grinned as he spoke those last words.

Why did he fight so hard?

Why did he allow the Dark Apostle to fight to his heart's content?

Why did he agree to let the 4th duel unfold?

It was because he could shave several years off his timeline.

If he had a choice between becoming a chess player today as opposed to 5 years later, he would definitely pick the former option!

He was already thinking about how he could put his newfound leverage to good use.



"20 years is a long time, Gloriana." He said as he approached his wife and softly embraced her from behind. "For the time being, I think we can treat this as if we have inherited a very powerful mercenary company. The Ascended Giants at our disposal are trained for war, but they are not particularly committed to any state or organization aside from their ethnic group. We will have to be careful about indulging in their racial ambitions, but other than that they should be happy at being given a chance to fight and prove their strength."

His wife looked up at him while raising an eyebrow. "A mercenary company, huh? Well, that certainly fits your profile. Who will keep the income?"

I don't intend to exploit the Ascended Giants if that is what you are implying." Ves briefly frowned. "I haven't studied the ledgers yet, but even I know that it is insanely expensive to raise, equip and maintain the upkeep of 360 phase lords. The costs will only balloon further if the Larkinson-exclusive phalanx gets off the ground. We have little choice but to put our earnings right back into the Phase Lord Department. As for whatever is left... I am sure we can put it to good use in a number of R&D projects."

The money was not the point. Ves had many ways to earn more cash.

What truly mattered was power, leverage and access. Now that he became a department head, a lot of doors opened up for him. He had become the equivalent of an admiral if he joined the Red Fleet.

This effectively meant that he could draw upon a lot of exclusive knowledge and resources so long as he made enough contributions to the Red Collective!

"I wonder if the big shots will finally decide to raise my galactic citizenship tier."