

Mech Touch 6411

Chapter 6411 Farewell Meal

The product reveal had finally ended.

Ves and his fellow collaborators completed their presentations and stuck around long enough to answer enough relevant questions to satisfy the curiosity of most people.

There was little point in answering further questions, as the public would be able to learn the properties of the Yellow Jackets and the Jacket Commanders themselves by handling them in person.

Once Ves answered the final question, he announced that the exhibition hall would remain open for the remainder of the week.

During this period, the Larkinson Clan and the Red Association would continue to demonstrate the performance of the different mechs of the Swarm Project. They even gave opportunities for guests to trial the Jacket Commanders or purchase a Yellow Jacket on the spot before piloting it on location.

Suffice to say, so many people applied for these activities that all of the slots of every day filled up within a single minute!

Many people on La Reine groaned as they saw their opportunity to purchase and try out a Yellow Jacket with the least amount of delay slip out of their grasp.

Other people had no choice but to order the Yellow Jackets from the mech companies that had just begun to produce them. The need for secrecy had prevented them from building up a stockpile of readily available Carmine mechs, so the waiting lists instantly ballooned.

The good news was that a lot of third-party manufacturers had already smelled the money and began to retool their production lines. The bad news was that it would still take around a month for production to ramp up and Carmine mechs to ship to all of the right places.

As the Carmine Revolution continued to keep the attendees engaged well after the speakers had finished their presentations, Ves and the others finally left everyone's sights.

They soon gathered at a restaurant on one of the upper floors of the Palace of Mechanical Marvels. They enjoyed a well-deserved meal as they congratulated each other for holding a successful product reveal.

"This has been the best product reveal that I have participated in by far." Lord Richard Brownstone said after a toast. "I do not think I will be able to attract the attention of so many people in the future myself, but... at least I know what it is like. You have changed my life forever, Ves. My ancestor, my siblings and my teachers all want to have a piece of me. I have never felt so wanted in my life. My work has finally found meaning in the first and possibly best Carmine mech to exist."

"I think it is a bit too exaggerated to evaluate the Yellow Jacket designs so highly." Ves

cautiously said. "They are still rush jobs. We have made many imperfect compromises, and they are not exactly powerful in the conventional sense. I have much more impressive Carmine mechs in mind that will blow the Yellow Jackets out of the water. That is not to say that the work we have brought into reality is bad. There is always a place for budget mechs in the mech market. It is just not a work that I am particularly proud of. The Yellow Jackets only give customers a taste of what I can do with living mechs."

Ves felt incredibly constrained by the limited budget and scope of the Yellow Jacket designs. He had to hold back a lot of powerful features due to lack of space, lack of budget and the need to prioritize simplicity over fancy features.

This was why he could not wait to get back to the design lab and start a Carmine mech design project with higher goals in mind. A more expensive mech could accommodate a lot more awesome stuff!

"What will you do now that we have concluded our collaboration?" Ves asked Richard as he started to cut into his exotic steak that originated from a mutated beast. Eating human-sized meals was completely useless to him, but it did not hurt to pretend as if he enjoyed the experience. "Now that we revealed what we have been working on in the past half year, there is no need to keep you close and isolated anymore. If you want, you may stay with us and work as a mech designer in the LMC

Richard Brownstone seriously considered this offer. After working alongside Ves for months, he possessed a certain understanding of the relatively young but incredibly ambitious mech designer.

"The Design Department of your mech company heavily prefers to absorb young and talented Apprentices and Journeymen. I am a Senior Mech Designer who already passed those stages years ago. I won't be able to integrate into your workforce and work for you as readily as your other recruits. Besides, I would also have to join your clan, which is unacceptable to me. I am a Brownstone. As great of an opportunity it is to join your clan and take advantage of your rise, I truly cannot abandon the Brownstone Principality and the Rubarthan Pact. It would have been more acceptable if you allowed me to retain my loyalty to them, but you never make any exceptions in this regard."

Ves slowly nodded. "That is true. The work we do is quite sensitive, so I prefer not to deal with double loyalties in my Design Department. If you cannot put the interests of the Larkinson Clan above the interests of other groups, then we do not have to explore this option further. I feel it is regrettable to lose access to an offensive specialist such as yourself. You do good work, and your kinetic weapons can be very useful to our clan. The Rubarthan mech designer shrugged. "Your clan is doing well. Your Design Department is lacking in Seniors and Masters, but that has never stopped you before. Your talent pool is quite impressive for a clan of your size. It is much better for you in the long run if you recruit younger mech designers and raise them to your standards. That way, you do not have to be too concerned about loyalties either."

"That is my existing developing strategy, but it takes a lot of time to produce results."

"That is why many families lay plans that do not bear fruit until the next generation arrives."

They chatted a bit more. Since Richard had no intention of sticking around, he intended to travel back to the Brownstone Principality fairly soon.

"Just because I have decided to return to the Rubarthan Pact does not mean I no longer wish to remain in contact with you." Richard said to Ves. "I welcome any opportunity for me to provide you with consultation and collaborations in the future. I am also well-connected in the regional mech community of my superstate. Feel free to contact me anytime if you need anything done in the Rubarthan Pact."

"I will keep that in mind." Ves nodded at Richard before turning to another collaborator. "What about you, Lady Romanda? Will you return to the Devos Ancient Clan or are you willing to stick around and join my clan?"

"My situation is... special. I informed you about it before, do you remember?" Romanda asked with a critical voice.

Ves certainly did not forget that Romanda was a 'moderate' and 'reasonable'

cosmopolitan.

That did not deter him from hiring her. She held far too much value for him to let go

with ease.

"I think we still have a lot of room for cooperation. The Biodome that you have designed for the Yellow Jacket can be applied to many other kinds of Carmine mechs. Are you willing to collaborate with us as a guest designer, or are you willing to join my clan

outright?"

As a woman with multiple loyalties and a belief in a dream rejected by nearly everyone, Romanda did not quite fit into society.

She spent enough time among the Larkinsons to grow envious at how much they regarded each other as family. They lacked the strong hierarchy and stiff etiquette that was the norm in the Terran ancient clans.

Yet... just like Richard, she did not want to abandon her ancient clan.

"I cannot bring myself to give up my heritage as a Devosian." Romanda answered Ves. "I will return to my ancient clan after this is all over. I am not opposed to designing Biodomes to your other Carmine mechs. That is the greatest value that they can provide, and I am not stupid enough to ignore the advantages to me if I continue to cooperate with you on this matter. Eventually, my Biodomes will become permanently associated with your Carmine mechs."

Ves was not sure how he would handle Romanda if she actually joined his clan, but he was secretly glad that she remained committed to the Devos Ancient Clan. "That is fine. You do not have to be a member of my clan or become my employee in order to work together."

"I am actually looking forward to designing a non-organic version of the Biodome. Trying to blend my ultra-large cockpits with biotechnology has been an interesting experience to say the least, but I still prefer to develop the cockpits so that I can understand and

improve myself."

"That is fair, Romanda. Have you thought about how to present your time on our collaboration with the Devos Ancient Clan and other interested parties?"

One of those parties included the Cosmopolitan Movement.

"I will not divulge too much information, Ves. I can promise you that. I will have to spend much time contacting different people, but the 'friends' that I am familiar with are not pedantic. They will all approve of what I have done. It would be better if we stayed in contact with each other. That will make my story more believable.

"Hmm."

Ves was not quite sure what Romanda would do once she was able to hold a proper talk with the cosmopolitans she was aligned with. This represented a huge security risk, but Ves could not bring himself to care.

He soon turned his attention to Jovy and Vector.

"The two of you will be sticking around, I suppose. You are my liaisons, after all. Are you open to collaborations in the near future?"

Jovy shook his head. "It may not look like it, but we have a life outside of communicating with you. We spend most of our time on improving our design skills, conducting experimental research and designing good virtual mechs that can impress a discerning audience. I must study a large amount of knowledge in order to become a first-class Master Mech Designer according to the standards of the Red Association. I do not want to fall too far behind."

"My motivations are similar." Vector Loban said next. "We may appear superior to other mech designers, but Jovy and I have reached this height by working hard and outcompeting other rivals of the same generation. I cannot afford to split my time too much. I am willing to collaborate on large projects that are worth my time, but not immediately. I still need to enjoy my vacation."

The message was clear. Neither RA mech designers were available to collaborate during

this sensitive period of time.

That was fine. Ves could always look for talents within his clan or seek out other third party mech designers that he could get in bed with. Now that he had become the Father of Carmine Mechs, it should be easier than ever to recruit young and talented mech

designers! Yernstall was a pretty good place to recruit good mech designers, so Ves reminded himself not to miss this opportunity as he tried to remain productive all day.

"Maybe it is best that the two of you do not interfere too much in my work." Ves accepted the explanations. "I do not want anyone accusing me of acting as a puppet of the Red Association. Maintaining a bit of separation will do us both good."

"I am glad you understand, Ves." Jovy said. "Besides, we truly have many assignments of our own. Neither of us want to give up on our own careers as mech designers. My design philosophy only truly becomes powerful when I become a Master."

"I look forward to seeing what you can do. Hopefully I won't have to wait too long."

Chapter 6412 Living For Yourself

The hype about Carmine mechs started off strong, and only got more ridiculous over time.

The emotional impact of norms being able to pilot mechs for the first time was indescribable.

As the Palace of Mechanical Marvels stocked enough Yellow Jackets to satisfy thousands of lucky guests, many attendees who acted quickly enough to sign up for the opportunity to purchase and try out the Carmine mechs right away all displayed such strong reactions that entire broadcasts had been dedicated to recording their experiences!

The popularity of the product reveal still remained strong despite the fact that the speakers had already concluded their presentations.

It couldn't be helped. In the absence of piloting their own Carmine mechs, the masses residing on many different planets and other vessels had no choice but to watch other lucky norms take advantage of this stellar opportunity first.

Master Theresa Oreinze had lived for over 360 years. She was a Terran who grew up during a time where mechs still went through rapid changes and evolution.

Just like any other child born during the Age of Mechs, she dreamt of becoming a mech pilot.

Alas, it turned out that she belonged to the 96.5 percent of the population that did not possess a suitable genetic aptitude.

Just like any other 10-year old kid at the time, she took the disappointing news extremely hard.

She could not get over the fact that she was not destined to pilot a mech.

In desperation, she threw herself into mech design instead, channeling her love and passion for mechs in a creative approach rather than a martial approach.

She studied hard. She constantly lacked time to spend on leisure. As an ordinary civilian, she lacked the more advanced and powerful implants enjoyed by the scions of ancient clans.

However, that made her gains all the more precious. While those pampered ancient clansmen could rely on their implants and genetic gifts to do most of the work, Theresa Oreinze simply worked harder and tried her best to capture the essence of the subject matter she was trying to master.

Gradually, she managed to stand out and impress a professor with her studying and problem solving abilities. After becoming the professor's protege, she finally obtained enough support to acquire a superior suite of augmentations.

That was when she truly started to make a lot of progress!

The mech industry at the time was a lot more splintered and fluid at the time, so after she graduated, Theresa immediately began to make sales based on her own approach towards mech design.

Theresa had always developed a fascination for fast mechs. She chose to specialize in designing light mechs that possessed superior straight-line acceleration characteristics because she loved speed so much.

Though her combat mech models never really generated a large amount of sales, her racing mechs occupied a growing share of the market.

Decades and eventually centuries passed. She no longer enjoyed the advantages of youth, but managed to make steady progress. Every time she started to lose her love and motivation for the craft she had dedicated so much time and effort to, she thought about her regrets for not being able to pilot a mech.

It would be a complete betrayal for the little 10-year old girl who decided to design mechs as opposed to piloting them after she received results of the genetic aptitude test.

For the sake of that promise, Theresa detested any thought about squandering her work as a mech designer!

That determination had ultimately carried her over to her current rank. Unlike her works, her design philosophy did not progress all that quickly. She only managed to promote to a Master Mech Designer after living for over 2 centuries.

This was an embarrassingly slow rate within the Terran mech design community, but Master Theresa was just glad that she managed to avoid disappointing that 10-year old girl.

Unfortunately, her progress never picked up since then. There was so much knowledge that first-class mech designers had to learn, and they also had to work harder in order to meet the heightened expectations of the mech market.

As Master Theresa slowly neared her 4th century of life, she still had no solid prospect of becoming a Star Designer.

She only had a handful of promising research directions to choose from, but none of them gave her the confidence that she would be able to transcend her own limitations and create a work that could surpass the quality of masterworks.

She was fine with that. Master Theresa had already lived for a long period of time. Many of the friends and rivals she once interacted with had either passed away or moved away from her orbit.

She had already married and had kids, who subsequently had families of their own. Not all of her descendants had accompanied her to the Red Ocean, but there were enough of them that Theresa had no concerns about continuing her bloodline.

A few of them even managed to possess the right genetic aptitude to become mech pilots.

The old woman envied these descendants very much. She funded their training and education and made sure they never lacked for good quality mechs when needed. Other people may have accused Master Theresa for living vicariously through the potentates of her family, but she never really took them seriously.

Which mech designer hadn't lived vicariously through their potentate descendants? This phenomenon was so common that the stigma had already lost its value!

Perhaps seeing her grandchildren, great-grandchildren and so on fulfill their own goals and dreams by piloting mechs was the only activity left that brought genuine joy to her

heart.

Master Theresa had long made peace with her inadequate genetic aptitude.

As a Master Mech Designer of one of the most powerful states of human civilization, she shouldn't have anything to complain about.

She had worked her way up from an ordinary citizen and built a commercial empire that enabled her descendants to start from a much higher position in life.

As she continued to grow older, her physical body may be able to endure for a few more decades, but her soul had already grown too weary to pursue life with as much passion

as before.

Even the joy she derived from seeing the members of her Oreinze Family become brave and dashing mech pilots started to produce diminishing returns.

This was a problem common to people who had lived through so many years. Even if Master Theresa was able to earn enough merits to pay for another round of life-prolonging treatment, she increasingly felt unwilling to do so. Her passion for life had diminished when she realized that she was unlikely to become a Star Designer. She had already accomplished most of her goals in life. Her growing family could always use more help, but it was high time her descendants started to take care of themselves. Perhaps the only reason why she still persisted in her work and postponed her retirement from her profession was because of the changes taking place in the Red

Ocean.

The Great Severing, the Age of Dawn and the Red Tide Offensive had partially revived the urgency in her heart. If she wanted her descendants and the people she cared about to live well after her passing, she still needed to work hard in order to improve the conditions of the soldiers fighting in the frontlines.

There were still plenty of ways for Master Mech Designers to contribute to the war effort.

In fact, Master Theresa just so happened to visit Yernstall in order to attend a professional conference. She happened to sign up for Professor Larkinson's product reveal, but she never expected to become surprised to this degree.

Carmine mechs.

The entire notion of a mech that could be piloted by a norm completely blew up everything she knew and took for granted.

She was one of the stubborn old people who struggled to accept the authenticity of the Carmine System.

How could a single Senior Mech Designer solve the limitation of genetic aptitude to such an explosive degree?!

Shouldn't a breakthrough in this area only allow a slightly greater share of the population to gain the ability to pilot a mech?

To completely unlock mech piloting to at least 99 percent of the population of red humanity sounded absurd!

Yet as the presentations had ended and people began to trial out their newly purchased

Yellow Jackets with great enthusiasm, the reality of the situation finally sank into her aged mind.

It was true. Every early adopter who was lucky enough to obtain an early quota succeeded in bonding with their Carmine mechs.

Yellow Jacket after Yellow Jacket lifted off the air and exhibited extremely immature but genuine movements.

Even if the new Carmine mech pilots only received a brief amount of time to try out their machines, these experiences completely changed their lives!

After hours of waiting, Master Theresa finally received her turn. "Respected Master, as a woman of advanced age, the risks of interfacing with the Carmine System are greater than usual." A doctor from the Red Association performed a few tests on the Terran Master. "Your heavy augmentations may produce unexpected complications during the interfacing process. We will analyze your physique and augmentations and apply selective restrictions to lock down the implants or organs that may cause overreactions. Do you consent to these precautionary measures?"

"I do."

Master Theresa understood enough about the Carmine System that it would cycle artificial blood in her bloodstream. That should not be a major issue as her heavily augmented body should be able to tolerate a large variety of blood types and properties.

However, her body also possessed a much stronger immune system as well as other protective measures. These systems needed to be constrained, or else her body might choose to fight against the Carmine System!

Once Theresa finished her preparations, she nodded to the pair of descendants that accompanied her before finally entering the cockpit of the Yellow Jacket she managed to buy at the first possible opportunity.

She was one of the lucky ones who managed to reserve the Yellow Jacket Version A.

There were many other first-raters who hadn't been able to snatch up the first-class

Carmine mechs and could only settle for the second-class and third-class versions.

"Initiate."

Master Theresa followed the simplified instructions that even a teenager could follow

and readied herself for the interfacing attempts.

Needles sank through her skin.

Foreign blood began to flow through her veins.

Her powerful mind and spirit began to make contact with a much weaker and innocent.

existence. Despite the vast gap in power, Master Theresa actively welcomed the new entity. Her

Yellow Jacket eagerly formed a Blood Pact that instantly allowed it to receive a huge amount of high-quality feedback.

As the Yellow Jacket swelled to life, Master Theresa quickly became overwhelmed by the sheer amount of control and new experiences that came with being able to pilot a mech!

Unlike the vast majority of other people who interfaced with a Yellow Jacket for the first time, Master Theresa utilized her extensive knowledge, evolved spirituality and vast intellect to quickly gain a grip on her conditions.

The Yellow Jacket under her control moved a lot steadier and more precise than the ones piloted by other norms!

Though Master Theresa still failed to execute movements that required proficiency in

martial skills, she was more than satisfied with how well she could control the most. advanced version of the Yellow Jacket!

She never wanted this magical experience to end. The feeling of piloting a machine and

the joy of being able to share her passion with a living mech that completely accepted

her were indescribable.

When she was finally forced to end her all-too-brief piloting session and leave the

cockpit, she quickly knelt on the ground and wept!

"Master! What is the matter!?"

As tears fell from her aged eyes, Master Theresa couldn't help but smile.

"I... controlled an actual mech today. My first and most precious dream... has come true.

I... can finally become a mech pilot!"

The fire in her heart roared to life as she managed to revive one of her deeply buried

passions!

No longer did she feel that her life had grown stale and boring anymore. Now that she was able to pilot a mech without any regard for genetic aptitude, she would be a fool if she missed out on the fantastic world of Carmine mechs!

Chapter 6413 Rolley Boulevard

Instances such as Master Theresa Oreinze's reaction towards piloting a mech for the first time happened disturbingly frequently.

Yet despite the embarrassing displays, no one laughed or ridiculed the people who failed to control their emotions.

Instead, the people who could only watch the lucky norms complete their first piloting sessions felt jealous and envious towards these lucky people!

They had managed to snatch up a Yellow Jacket quickly enough to be able to pilot their new Carmine mechs on the same day of the product reveal!

Everyone else had to wait for weeks if not months before a mech company got around to fulfill their orders!

For the first time since it was built, the Palace of Mechanical Marvels truly began to live up to its grandiose name.

Every visitor became enchanted by the mechanical marvel that represented the Yellow Jackets.

Of course, the Jacket Commander model also earned a bit of appreciation from the mech pilots that tried it out, but it was unfortunately that the command mech was completely overshadowed by the splendor of the first publicly available Carmine mech!

As more and more people formed their Blood Pacts and bonded their spirits to their Yellow Jackets for the first time, the Palace of Mechanical Marvels produced so much joy that it infected the mood of many others.

Even as the bystanders cursed the lucky bastards who got to try out the Yellow Jackets first, they were sincerely happy that so many norms opened up a new future as mech pilots.

The successful occurrences not only increased other people's confidence in their ability to pilot a Carmine mech when they finally managed to get their turn, but also cemented their impression that they had entered a completely new era of mechs!

There was nothing fraudulent about the Carmine Revolution. The changes it brought to the mech community and human society at large were all genuine. Words alone may not convince all of the people, but seeing it happen in front of their eyes completely convinced even the most skeptical of doubters!

All of the journalists working for different publications instantly got caught up in the excitement! They wrote glowing reports about the release of the first commercially available Carmine mechs and interviewed any early adopter they managed to come across.

The news portals amplified the impact of the Carmine Revolution and ensured that even the people who were least interested about mechs learned about the groundbreaking products released by Professor Larkinson.

[The Monthly Mech Report: MECHS FOR ALL - THE CARMINE SYSTEM GRANTS EVERY NORM THE GIFT OF MECH PILOTING.]

[The Biotechnology Digest: BIOTECHNOLOGY HAS SAVED THE DAY! THE CARMINE SYSTEM'S ROOTS AS A BIOTECHNOLOGICAL APPLICATION.]

[The Crashed Warship: STARFIGHTER CORPS RENDERED OBSOLETE IN TWO HOURS. CARMINE MECHS HAS ALREADY KILLED STARFIGHTERS IN THEIR CRADLE.]

[The Terran Telegraph: CARMINE MECHS, DESIGNED IN THE HEART OF THE TERRAN ALLIANCE.]

[The Rubarth Daily: THE BROWNSTONE PRINCIPALITY'S PRICELESS CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE YELLOW JACKETS.]

[The Human Interest: OUR INITIAL ANALYSIS ON THE WIDESPREAD CONSEQUENCES OF ALLOWING EVERY HUMAN TO PILOT A MECH.]

The galactic net became thrice as active as before as everyone demanded more information about the Yellow Jackets and the Carmine System.

Even though the Yellow Jackets had only just become available, a huge amount of people already started to make changes to their planned trajectories. The possibility of piloting a mech without any concern about genetic aptitude completely allowed a huge range of people to obtain hope where there was previously none!

From the centuries-old Master Mech Designers who never imagined they would live long enough to say this day, to the 11 or 12-year old children who still suffered from the depression caused by their disappointing genetic aptitude tests, far more people than Ves could ever count had found joy beyond their wildest expectations!

Ves currently stood on an elevated position on the upper floors of the Palace of Mechanical Marvels. He gazed through the transparent ceiling and witnessed all of the people break down into tears after successfully concluding their short but life-changing piloting experiences.

"Meow." Lucky commented as he perched upon Ves' shoulder.

Ves reached up and petted his gem cat's oiled head. "Yeah. It is pretty amazing how one single pilot session can completely cause all of these people to turn into little kids again. It's amazing to see how my work can make so many people cry tears of happiness."

The lead designer of the Swarm Project continued to observe the reactions of the early adopters. They were not exactly part of the target audience of the Yellow Jacket models, but Ves figured that the dramatic displays below would become frighteningly common in the next few months and years.

A few minutes passed until a familiar Senior Mech Designer entered the observation room and came closer.

"Can I finally get out of here?" Ves asked.

Jovy Armalon nodded. "Yes. We have completed all of the security arrangements. We cannot hide your departure, but we can make sure you will not face any threats as you move across La Reine. Are you certain you want to leave? There are many fans down below that are eager to show their gratitude to the Father of Carmine mechs. There are also many journalists who have requested exclusive interviews from you. Meeting their requests is a good way to boost your public profile and spread any messages that you want to pass on to the public."

Ves shook his head. "I originally included that in my schedule, but there is no need for it anymore. The masses cannot get anymore excited than now, and I have already passed on a lot of information already. The public cannot handle any further stuff. I think it is better to let them digest what I have already given to them. They should be ready for a lot more novelties in three days."

As satisfied as Ves felt for being able to evoke so much joy and satisfaction from the masses, his reaction was actually a lot more muted than he thought.

He should have felt more fulfilled for meeting the demands of so many people, but the reality was that he did not really feel as if he had done a particularly great job.

Part of it was because the Carmine mechs were already old news to Ves. Another part of it was because he had yet to develop a more serious and mature version of the Carmine System.

"You have completely changed the lives of many people."

"They haven't seen anything yet." Ves shook his head. "Wait until I have realized my design philosophy. Once I unveil my elemental Carmine mechs, these Yellow Jackets will become completely overshadowed."

"We are all hoping to see your future works, but do take into account that excessive delays will be detrimental to you. If your elemental Carmine mechs demand too much time to complete, then it may be better for you to reevaluate your plans and tackle an easier research direction."

"It's okay, Jovy. The elemental Carmine mechs should not be impossible for me to design. I have already figured out the working principles of 2 out of 5 of them, and I have just come up with a good idea for 1 more. I do not think it will take as long to complete all of the steps in my plan. In fact, the latter is one of the reasons why I am eager to go out and shop for exclusive goods. La

Reine is a center for mech design and sells a huge variety of tech and materials. I would be a fool if I missed out on this opportunity to visit a number of exclusive shops and exchanges."

"What are you looking to purchase?"

"A lot of different goods, but one of my top priorities is enough smart metal to design my own raiment. I have a very special plan in mind, but one of the key requirements is to acquire a special batch of high-quality nanomachines. Failing that, I want to satisfy the conditions to develop my own nanomachines. By the way, has the Nanolord agreed to my request for an audience?"

Jovy shook his head. "I am afraid that His Excellency has declined your request. He did not pass on any reasons, but do not take this as a sign of disrespect. Star Designers are inherently busy, and it is not entirely appropriate for them to open up a dialogue with a Senior Mech Designer like yourself."

Though Ves felt disappointed that the Nanolord denied his request, he quickly schooled his emotions. Jovy was right. He should not have any unrealistic expectations about being able to meet with the Nanolord whenever he wanted. They still belonged in two different worlds.

"If that is the case, then I guess I will have to shelve my plan to exchange a good set of nanites from him. I will try to find what I want elsewhere."

"Then come. We have prepared a heavily armored vehicle that can take you to one of the commercial streets that are often frequented by high-ranking mech designers."

Ves and Lucky followed Jovy to the roof. A vehicle that was much larger, heavier and better protected than an armed shuttle lay in wait.

When the three entered the armored transport vehicle, they settled down and waited until the craft lifted into the air.

A large escort of mechs surrounded the transport in stealth or in full view of onlookers.

The Dark Zephyr hovered behind and above the armored transport. The ace mech had unfolded his Saint Kingdom at full strength in order to be on the lookout for anything that tried to sneak close.

Although Ves felt awfully exposed during the trip, the armored transport successfully touched down the roof of a tall building that was situated at Rolley Boulevard.

The entire luxury street became a lot more guarded than usual in order to provide adequate safety to the VIP guest that decided to pay a visit.

This was not an uncommon sight, as many powerful Master Mech Designers chose to visit Rolley Boulevard when they visited the Yernstall Central Star Node.

"Where to first?" Ves asked as he held Lucky in his arms.

"It depends on what you want to buy first." Jovy said with a smile. "Do you want to purchase phasewater organs, or do you want to get your nanomachine business out of the way first? There are also other goods for sale here such as rare exotics and working alien technologies."

Ves thought for a moment. "The nanomachines can wait. I am more interested in taking a look at phasewater organs. Are they actually real?"

"They are, but do not hold too many high expectations for them." Jovy warned. "The fact that they are so easily available means that they are not as pristine as fully intact phasewater organs. It is inevitable that the phasewater organs available for sale here come with many pitfalls. There are enough potential customers who do not mind the damage because they never intended to make use of the organs themselves. They are primarily interested in obtaining the damaged phasewater organs in order to decipher them and reverse engineer what they do in a systematic manner."

"I see."

Ves should have known it was good to be true. Phasewater organs were not common enough to be listed for sale in a shop, even if it was a high-end one that catered to wealthy and successful mech designers.

Still, it was not entirely necessary for him to obtain fully intact organs either. He just had to supply enough research material to the Larkinson Biotech Institute to develop their own homegrown versions of phasewater organs.

The advantage of using organs made in-house was that the biotech researchers could fully tailor them to his true body and DNA.freewebnovel.com

The downside was that it may take years of research to produce good results.

Since that was the case, Ves needed to restrain himself and avoid buying too many random phasewater organs. He should only think about picking up potential treasures that could complement his personal combat system and synergize with the other phasewater organs that he acquired last time.

Chapter 6414 Jessup Organics

A sales manager greeted the arrivals with a sincere bow.

"It is our greatest honor to welcome the Father of Carmine Mechs to our respectable establishment. Jessup Organics has a moderate range of high-quality goods for sale for the discerning and exacting customer. If there are any biological products that you wish to procure that we do not have in stock, we can pass on your order to our wider network of vendors, many of which are based in other zones, to see whether we can satisfy your needs."

Jovy stepped up to handle the sales manager.

"As we have mentioned in the message that we sent beforehand, Professor Larkinson is in the market for phasewater organs harvested from phase leaders. We have information that you have a number of them in stock."

"That is true." The older and impeccably dressed man nodded. "The Red Tide Offensive has brought forth many more phase lords than before. The supply of phasewater organs has increased dramatically in the last 6 months."

"The demand for phasewater organs is also high. Shouldn't they be in the hands of major research institutions and so on? Why are there still organs available for sale in a place like yours?" Ves curiously asked.

The sales manager expected this question. Ves was far from the first one to make this inquiry.

"There are two reasons why Jessup Organics has phasewater organs for sale. Combat against phase lords usually produce violent outcomes. The damage that ace mechs and warships can inflict against phase lords is enormous. The chance to harvest a completely intact phasewater organ is small. Most phasewater organs salvaged from the carcasses of deceased or captured phase lords have deteriorated in a burned, shredded or punctured state. In many cases, the phasewater organs have

suffered so much damage that they cannot operate as they did in their original condition. Such organs have much more limited research value as it takes vastly more resources to discover anything of value out of them. Many parties that have claimed damaged organs would rather sell them for an upfront price and settle the matter in an instant."

"I see. What is the second reason?"

"Jessup Organics is part of a group that has many connections and partnerships with other biotechnology institutions." The sales manager said as he began to lead the guests further inside the large and well-furnished store. "Since we maintain a reputable brand and a fixed customer base, we also accept consignments from other groups. We put them on sale on behalf of our clients and proactively seek potential buyers if necessary. What is special about the consignments is that many of them cannot be bought by cash. They can only be bartered for goods or services specific by the consignor."

"This is a good means for Master Mech Designers and other powerful groups to trade high-end resources with each other without the need to develop good relations." Jovy clarified for Ves. "Jessup Organics here does good business by connecting Terran traders with Rubarthan traders and vice versa, often with the use of intermediaries if necessary. You may see a phasewater organ that is offered up for trade by a company from the Kromo Republic, but the actual source may be a Terran ancient clan. If a Rubarthan buyer happens to trade the phasewater organ with special resources that are only available in the Rubarthan Pact, then he will have no idea whether he has ultimately completed a transaction with a Terran."

Ves looked impressed. It sort of sounded like a deception game where everyone knew the real score, but they happily agreed to play ignorant just so they wouldn't ruin the fun.

The necessity of needing to play this game allowed for the rise of intermediary companies and brokers such as Jessup Organics. They might not possess any core industries themselves, but they were extremely good at relationship management and customer service. That was all they needed to rely on to take advantage of the friction between different states and groups.

Ves did not really care about this charade. He only cared about whether he could take advantage of it. He looked forward to the phasewater organs that he might find in this place.

Soon enough, the sales manager led the guests to a secure underground chamber that contained dozens of different organs.

Each massive organ was stored in a liquid solution that was meant to preserve their life activity.

Ves could immediately tell that they were all phasewater organs or fragments of phasewater organs. The phasewater infused in the large biological tissue all told him that the goods were genuine.

"Are these all of the phasewater organs that you have on hand?"

"Correct, Professor Larkinson. We can also mobilize dozens more phasewater organs, but they are currently in the possession of other stores."

"Let's take a look at these ones first."

Ves tried his best to temper his expectations. This turned out to be prudent as the offerings quickly turned out to be worse than he hoped.

The majority of organs consisted of variations of the most common Kelsis organ, Locos organ and Maracos organ.

That was not necessarily bad as the fundamental three organs all exhibited various different directions of purposeful biological development.

There were some organs that possessed better range, while others were more effective at close range. There were organs that were tweaked to consume less energy than usual, and there were also other organs that could produce strong effects at the risk of

exhausting them prematurely.

All of this had a decent amount of research value, but Ves was not too interested in acquiring another copy of a phasewater organ that he already possessed.

This was especially the case when all of the aforementioned organs were in varying states of disrepair!

Ves grimaced as he looked at a Maracos organ that had shrunk to a third of its original size. The still-healing burn marks clearly showed that it had taken an awful amount of damage from half-a-dozen plasma bolts.

"I could use a more advanced Maracos organ, but this one has suffered so much damage that a lot of core biological functions are missing. There is not much research value to this product. You can't come up with stuff out of thin air."

The sales manager did not look ashamed. "The Maracos organ of a phase lord may be incomplete, but there is enough research available that has analyzed and published the complete biological blueprint of a standard Maracos organ. It is not impossible for a capable biotech institution to reconstruct the missing pieces of this organ. A good research team may even be able to extrapolate and restore the directional improvements applied to this remnant organ. If successful, you will not only be able to obtain a completely upgraded Maracos organ, but also the knowledge and expertise required to replicate this process."

Ves looked mildly impressed. "That does indeed sound attractive, but if it was that easy to produce those outcomes, someone would have already bought this phasewater organ

a while ago. My Larkinson Biotech Institute definitely cannot rank as high as those renowned institutions. Forget it. Let's look elsewhere."

Jessup Organics was not stupid. The goods that were much more practical and readily usable tended to impose greater conditions in order to exchange for them. The ones that could readily be bought with cash or phasewater tended to possess very serious

flaws.

There were no products that possessed none of these flaws. If such goods ever appeared, they would have been snapped up by the force that felled the phase lord, or traded away to a trusted partner in a private transaction.

The PPS and the other remarkably intact phasewater organs that Ves obtained as spoils was a typical example of that. There was no way that Jessup Organics could ever put a phasewater production system up for sale as if it was a fancy croissant.

Though Ves feared that he had wasted this trip, he eventually stumbled upon a number

of phasewater organs that did not seem so bad.

[Lesser Collie Organ

Allows a phase lord to split a small part of his true body to form a miniature clone. This detached mass of phasewater-infused tissue can extend the phase lord's senses and act as a physical avatar. The operational range of this physical avatar is based on the phasewater concentration of the phase lord as well as the development and mastery of his Collie organ. A greater phase lord can only control the physical avatar created by the

Collic organ up to 17.2 AU.

Physical Integrity: 47 percent Consignor: Yighan-Arghat Consortium

Price or exchange conditions: Can only be exchanged for a lesser phasewater organ of at least 66 percent integrity. The Yighan-Arghat Consortium is also open to accepting other goods of greater value upon negotiation.

]

Ves' eyes quickly lit up after he read this description. He already planned to create an

avatar for himself in order to be able to take part in dangerous expeditions without

risking his true body.

However, those plans had numerous flaws and shortcomings. If he was able to use this

Collie organ to produce a small physical clone that he could control by remote, then that

would definitely be great!

The only downside was that only 47 percent of this organ was left. Over half of it was missing, and Ves bet that the destroyed flesh also contained vital bioprogramming and biohardware that made the Collie organ work!

Still, half a Collie organ was better than nothing!

"I am interested in this Collie organ." Ves said. "The information about it is incomplete. Where does this organ come from, if I may ask?"

"According to the records, the Collie organ was originally developed by the zzamayels.

This major alien race consists of evolved amoeba, which often repels other races. The zzamayal phase lords appear even more monstrous. They are often mistaken for space monsters and attract violent reactions."

Ves recalled what he knew about the zzamayal race.

"Aren't the slimes supposed to be non-religious? They are one of the rare races that do not believe in the divinity of phase lords and phase whales?"

"That is a simplistic explanation, professor." The sales manager carefully corrected Ves. "The zzamayal indeed reject the divinity of phase whales, but they are not blind to the

power of the latter. There is a small group of zzamayals that seek to become phase lords in defiance of majority opinion."

"I see. Is there anything else I should know about how the zzamayals have made the

Collie organ?"

"Yes. It is important to mention that the zzayamals not only possess strange and unique physiologies, but that their tech base is strongly based on biotechnology. Their exclusive phasewater organs tend to possess deviant biological properties that make them hard to decipher and adapt to the physiquies of true gods of other species. You should never

rashly implant a Collie organ inside your body."

"I never intended to. Even I can see that it is weird and dangerous." The preserved remains of the Collie organ did not exactly look friendly. Not only was it partially translucent, but it also contained strong acids and toxic substances that could poison a weaker phase lord!

Still, Ves remained interested in the Collie organ.

"I want it. Please get me in touch with the Yighan-Arghat Consortium," Ves instructed.

"I can do so right away. Are you willing to exchange this Collie organ with another phasewater organ that is in a better condition, or do you wish to negotiate a different

trade?" "The latter. While I do have a bunch of phasewater organs in my possession, I still need them myself. I would vastly prefer to trade for other goods."

The sales manager nodded. "There are normally thresholds and limitations to negotiating

a different exchange. However, your reputation and accomplishments are so high that I have the authority to sidestep these hurdles. The Yighan-Arghat Consortium will be happy and honored to do business with an esteemed mech designer such as yourself, I am sure. Please be patient. It will take time for a representative to reach our humble

establishment."

Chapter 6415 The Midas Touch

Negotiating a deal under the brokership of Jessup Organics turned out to be much easier and less costly than Ves thought.

At this moment, his reputation and prestige had reached a new peak. Not even god pilots and Star Designers could match his current level of popularity and adoration.

Sure, the god pilots of red humanity cleaned up the border regions and prevented the aliens from overrunning human-occupied space.

Sure, the Star Designers developed many crucial technologies that were useful in a wide variety of sectors.

Yet for all of the massive contributions they had made as of late, nothing benefited the lives of ordinary humans more than the chance to pilot a real mech!

Everyone wanted a Yellow Jacket.

Everyone wanted a piece of Ves.

When the Yighan-Argbat Consortium heard that the Father of Carmine Mechs wanted to negotiate for a phasewater organ, its president immediately dropped his schedule and connected to Jessup Organics by remote.

There was no need for the consortium to send an envoy to talk business in person. The president sounded eager to conclude a successful transaction with the famous inventor of the Carmine System.

"This is an inestimable honor for our consortium! With your permission, we shall always take pride that an esteemed mech designer such as yourself has sought to do business with our fine trade collective!"

After Ves received another round of flattery, negotiations soon began,

The demands of the president were simple.

"It would please us immensely you agree to fabricate ten, no five copies of the Yellow Jacket Version A! We would be glad to hand over ownership of the incomplete lesser Collie organ to your name if you take the time to customize the Yellow Jackets into unique creations of art that we can proudly display to the public, with your permission of course. We would also like the Red Association to issue official certificates of authenticity so that there will be no doubt to their providence."

Ves blinked at this outrageous offer. A phasewater organ was a precious treasure for any owner. It not only held a lot of research value, but could also be used to power up a phase lord through direct implantation.

Even if the Collie organ was damaged and not quite operational, its rarity as well as its unusual effects made it far more valuable than the samples of the most common phasewater organs.

Ves expected that he would have to trade another precious phasewater organ or unique treasure in order to get his hands on this Collie organ.

Yet instead of making such demands, the president of the Yighan-Arghat Consortium merely asked Ves to design and fabricate a bunch of custom first-class Yellow Jackets.

The difficulty of procuring the two was like night and day to Ves. A Collie organ was extremely rare, while Ves could produce any Yellow Jacket he wanted as long as he had access to a workshop and enough raw materials.

However, he soon understood that it was a different story for other people.

A Collie organ was still as difficult to procure for them as for Ves, but the difficulty of obtaining a handmade Carmine mech Ves was much higher!

Now that he had become a Senior Mech Designer, Ves had moved past the stage where he had to fabricate commercial mechs by hand in order to improve his sales and increase the profitability of the LMC.

This meant that his handmade mechs had become more and more scarce and precious to a market that had become increasingly more enamored with his living mechs.

Scarcity equated to value. The greater the scarcity, the greater the price that people were willing to pay.

This meant that any handicraft made by Ves could easily fetch millions if not billions of MTA credits at a grand auction!

Ves even had an illusion that he had acquired the Midas Touch!

Anything he made could be sold for a price hundred, a thousand or even a million times the original production cost!

Such a privilege was usually only reserved for the greatest of Master Mech Designers and Star Designers, but Ves had reached this eminent status in advance due to his latest and greatest contribution!

His breathing grew a little heavier when he thought how extensively he could milk this advantage.

However, he did not get lost in this fantasy. He quickly sobered up once he realized a few uncomfortable truths.

Not everything was truly free.

Though Ves did not have to spend too much time and effort to fulfill the demands made by the president of the Yighan-Arghat Consortium, he would still have to waste a week of time or so in order to get the job done.

That was 1 week of time that he could have spent on much more productive pursuits. Fulfilling this commission effectively meant that he would have to postpone his other works by an entire week.

This mattered a lot in a time where every day was precious!

With the Red Tide Offensive continuing to grind down red humanity's defenses, Ves could not delay or suspend his contributions just because he wanted to earn more personal profit for himself.

This was not only a betrayal of the expectations of the people he served, but also harmed his own core interests in the end.

That said, Ves did not want to miss out on this advantage either. As long as he restrained himself, he should be okay if he occasionally took advantage of the value of his

handmade products.

So long as he did not flood the market with his handicrafts, their value should continue to remain exceedingly high, allowing Ves to occasionally trade them for other precious goods and services.

Now that he had made up his mind regarding this issue, he began to negotiate with the president for a deal that both sides could agree upon.

"I do not have time to fabricate 5 Yellow Jackets for you." He told the physical projection of the businessman and leader. "2 Yellow Jackets. That is the extent of what I can make for you. In order to ensure that everyone understands the favor that I have bestowed upon your consortium, I will customize their visual design to reflect the colors and symbols of your organization. Is that to your satisfaction?"

The two sides argued a bit more against each other. Although the president seemed willing to accept the reduced amount, he was the leader of a cutthroat business consortium, after all. Negotiation was in his bones, so he never accepted concessions

easily.

The talks dragged on for a longer period than necessary until both sides finally agreed that Ves could obtain the lesser Collie organ in exchange for 3 first-class Yellow Jackets. The two eventually shook hands after they signed the contract.

"I shall arrange Jessup Organics to transfer ownership of the Collie organ to you immediately." The president generously said with a smile as he clearly conveyed the sense that he obtained the advantage in the end. "I do not dare to urge you to deliver the promised custom mechs in a short time frame. We are all aware that you are a busy mech designer and leader. Can you give our consortium an approximate time frame of when we can expect to receive your goods?"

Ves briefly recalled his schedule. "I can begin to work on your order during my return

trip from Yernstall to New Constantinople. I should be finished by the time my fleet arrives at my end destination. From there, a shipping company can transport the completed Yellow Jackets to any destination of your choice."

"That is faster than expected. We would be glad if you can complete your order within the month. Please allow our consortium to handle the shipping ourselves. The custom mechs that you have designed are doubtlessly of inestimable value. We do not dare to entrust their transportation to third parties. We have our own security companies that we can rely upon to safely deliver the Yellow Jackets to our headquarters." With that out of the way, Ves became the proud owner of a new zzamayal phasewater

organ.

Although Ves could already imagine that the Larkinson Biotech Institute gained another headache, the Collie organ promised to grant him an extremely practical benefit. The requirement was that his biotech researchers managed to figure out its mechanisms. Ves frowned. "I am putting far too many burdens on the shoulders of the LBI. Should I look for an established biotech company to acquire in order to increase our research

capacity?"

There were plenty of excellent and renowned biotech institutions in Yernstall, Ves could use the limited time he had left in the central star node to quickly acquire the ones that were willing to become a part of the Larkinson Clan.

He soon shook his head. "No. It is best to preserve the existing culture and structure of

the LBI."

Mergers and acquisitions had a way of corrupting his original institutions. In the worst case scenario, the new acquisition may even be able to take over the LBI and transform

the latter into its image!

Ves did not need a biotech institution that quickly became a lot more capable, but also started to lose its cohesion and loyalty to himself. The sensitivity of the work done by the scientists of the LBI meant that it was crucial that they remained loyal and committed to the clan and its patriarch.

He was willing to be a little more patient and trust the LBI's management to expand its operations in a sustainable manner.

"Let's see if there is anything else here that catches my interest." Ves said as his mind

returned to the present.

Though Ves could appreciate the value of some of the other phasewater organs available for sale or trade, their poor conditions and dubious value lowered his appreciation for them. Given the limited R&D capacity of the LBI in the present and the near future, it simply was not worthwhile to bother with these messy organs.

Ves still lingered at the store for twenty more minutes. Jessup Organics offered far more goods for sale than phasewater organs.

There were also live mutated beasts as well as the body parts of deceased ones for sale. Both product categories aroused his interest as he was always on the lookout for more special beasts that he could potentially convert into design spirits.

The prices for them were relatively expensive, but completely affordable to the Larkinson Clan, especially when so many different mech designers and companies paid the artificially reduced licensing fees for the Yellow Jacket and Jacket Commander

models.

Ves simply bought the ones he was interested in and trusted the Larkinson Clan to stow the mutated beasts where they could not do much damage.

After that, he began to browse the other specialty products for sale. From high-end bioimplants to exquisite designer beast pets, Jessup Organics satisfied both practical and

luxury desires.

Ves had little interest in them, though. As tempting as it was for him to splurge, he shouldn't get too comfortable with his life.

His most important priorities was to design good mechs and build up a power base that could protect him against both political machinations and more violent threats.

As long as his mentality slipped, he would grow soft and useless. All of those high-and-mighty tier 1 galactic citizens that held high expectations for him would lower their evaluations and no longer give him as much leeway as he enjoyed today.

He sighed. His mood had dropped. He may have accomplished a lot today, but he was always expected to do more.

"Let's go, Jovy, We should head to a different place where I can buy a bunch of gifts for

my wife and children. I promised them that I would bring back souvenirs for my family."

"Understood. There is a unique toy store and a luxury fashion store down the boulevard. I believe you will find what you need in both."

Chapter 6416 Materials Shopping

Ves tried to be more purposeful when he continued his shopping spree.

He stuck to his goal of purchasing rare and expensive presents for his wife and children while also remaining on the lookout for more functional goods.

However, many of the items for sale did not appeal to him for a variety of reasons. There were lots of high-tech gadgets that could make his life more convenient, but he did not trust their manufacturers to refrain themselves from installing backdoors into their products.

Although this was not a reason to reject the use of any tech that did not originate from himself and his clan, he would rather avoid the use of unnecessary technologies if he could easily do without the extra convenience.

As Ves continued his shopping spree while accompanied by an abundance of guards, he did not forget that he was also being followed by his cousin.

"While I am here, I may as well go ahead and purchase good stuff for you as well. Is there anything you want or need, Tusa?"

The ace pilot who guarded Ves from above thought for a moment. "I don't need you to buy me any presents. I have earned so many war merits as of late that I am not short of comfort. What I truly want is for you to make my Dark Zephyr stronger. Now that I managed to kill the old Arena Lord of Ya'gwasa with the tier 3 Destroyer spear, I have gained a whole new appreciation for good equipment. I could use more weapons to diversify my arsenal, preferably lighter ones that do not slow down my machine as much.

This was an understandable request. Many ace pilots tended to branch out and try out different weapons that worked better in different situations. The tier 3 Destroyer spear may possess extremely potent offensive power, but it was also a large and unwieldy weapon in the hands of an ace light skirmisher.

Ves did not forget that the Dark Zephyr was originally optimized to wield two small bladed weapons. It would be best if he could equip the living ace mech with superior weapons of the same type.

"There are mech boutiques and mech equipment stores in Rolley Boulevard. There are probably excellent blades for sale that may be able to grant you an immediate power boost."

"No. Don't buy anything that is readily made." Tusa rejected. "I prefer the arms that you and the people in the clan create more. Unless you manage to find a weapon that is just as powerful as a tier 3 Destroyer weapon, I think it is much better if you buy a collection of high-quality materials and hand them over to Ketis to forge a pair of knives. The ones my ace mech is currently equipped with are decent, but I have no reason to use them over the Destroyer spear. I hope that you or Ketis can buy a powerful material on this planet and forge a set of knives that fit my needs much better"

That sounded like a reasonable request. Though Ves did not feel as if the Dark Zephyr urgently needed better weapons, Saint Tusa deserved a reward for all of the fighting he had done.

Besides, Ves probably wouldn't be doing any of the hard work. He could completely outsource this job to Ketis. She had forged practically every blade utilized by the high-ranking mechs of the Larkinson Clan.

"I can do that, Tusa. I was just about to stop by the materials warehouse anyway. I need to purchase a lot of stuff to enrich my vault of strategic materials. You never know when a rare material with a specific effect might come in handy"

He proceeded to do just that. Rolley Boulevard tended to attract a lot of Master Mech Designers, and if there was one thing they liked the most, it was sniffing through a lot of rare and weird materials to find whether they could synergize with their design philosophies!

Naturally, the materials warehouse that Ves stopped by boasted a large collection of rare exotics as well as unusual hypers.

The price per kilogram of any material was much higher than elsewhere, but the convenience as well as the opportunity to feel and analyze the products in question made it worth the effort. It was no wonder that a lot of high-ranking mech designers frequented this business.

Of course, there were certain rare or exclusive products available that could only be bartered for other materials specified by the seller.

Ves proceeded to go on a slightly indulgent shopping spree. He picked up a lot of interesting exotics and hypers that might be of use to him one day. He particularly looked out for materials that could help to make the next iterations of his living expert mechs more powerful.

Aside from that, he also tried to find good materials to forge the next blades for the Dark Zephyr.

Nothing available could produce a weapon as powerful as the tier 3 Destroyer spear, but Ves felt quite good about their properties. He simply decided to purchase them so long as he did not have to barter anything weird or difficult to procure and throw them onto Ketis' lap.

Aside from purchasing a lot of samples of interesting materials, Ves also opened up his horizons and became more familiar with what was available these days.

Not only was there an endless variety of exotics available to possessed weird effects, Ves also managed to find a lot of new and interesting hypers.

Ves took a particular liking for hyper materials with a bias for the five elements as well as those slanted towards negative energy.

Even though none of the hyper materials reached the potency of Black Demon Steel, it was not impossible for a material scientist who knew what he was doing to alloy several

metals together to produce a more powerful compound effect.

"I definitely need a large amount of darkness-attributed hyper materials to forge my own Polymetal mech." Ves reminded himself.

The materials warehouse commonly sold samples of high-value materials, but also sold goods in bulk as long as there was enough supply in Yernstall.

Ves just had to pay an expensive premium for the materials warehouse to contact all of the vendors that possessed the required materials and ship them to a target destination.

By the time Ves exited the materials warehouse, he not only gained a lot of familiarity with thousands of new and exciting materials, but also ordered enough specialized materials to advance a number of projects, including his own Polymetal mech. Ves looked up at the sky and saw that evening had already arrived on the local planet. It appeared that he had spent too much time in the materials warehouse.

"Is there anything important in my agenda for today?" Ves asked.

Jovy made a brief check. "You have received hundreds of invitations from notable individuals and groups. They range from attending operas to attending an evening soirée organized by a notable mech designer of the Mech Supremacist Faction. Given your habits, I believe you have no interest in attending any of these events."

"You guessed right. While I recognize the value of expanding my connections, I don't want to waste my time on building friendships with people who are of little use to me. If I can gain their cooperation through money or reputation alone, then it is redundant to

win them over"

"Since that is the case, maybe it is better if you specify what you seek to gain during your visit to this central star node. You do not travel easily these days, so think about what you wish to do in the days you have left."

"I want to accomplish a lot of stuff while I am here." Ves said. "It is just that I have grown so much as of late that a few of my plans have become redundant. Wait. I would like to have a good talk with the Red Fleet. Is Commander Zonrad Reze available?" "Let me see. He has been fighting for a promotion, and that will take up much of his time and attention while he is in this star system. Ah. He has just transmitted a message that states he is available, either in a private or official capacity. What are your intentions?" "I want to talk to the captain as a representative of the Red Fleet." Ves stated his request. "If Captain Reze does not have enough authority to speak or negotiate on behalf of the RF, then tell him to bring a bigshot who does possess this right."

"Are you planning to make a deal with the Red Fleet?"

"Maybe. What's wrong, Jovy?"

"You have just given them a bloody nose by almost completely invalidating the RF's vaunted Starfighter Corps. Many starfighter pilots or pilots-in-training have already

committed to switching over. They are only waiting to get their hands on a Yellow Jacket. This transition period is most painful for the fleters, because they do not know how many starfighter pilots will switch over to piloting Carmine mechs when the opportunity arises."

Ves couldn't help but smirk. "If I was in their shoes, I would have drawn down the Starfighter Corps right away. Just keep enough of them around to maintain their numbers at the frontlines, but pull the obsolete starfighters back as soon as enough Carmine mechs arrive to take their place."

"That may very well be their plan. Whatever the case, you have become a controversial figure among the fleters. It may not be the best idea to talk to them or negotiate a deal with them now that their emotions are still heated."

"I don't think the fleters are as petty as you say." Ves retorted. "Carmine mechs have already become a reality. Their starfighters are already doomed. There is no use crying over spilt milk. The best way forward is to figure out a way to compete with the rising popularity of mechs. In the absence of anything better, I may be able to take part in their

solution."

Jovy clearly did not like it for Ves to get chummy with the fleters. The Survivalist still believed it was best for Ves to stick with the mechers and work together like always. However, Jovy did not have the power to stop Ves from talking to the fleters whenever he liked, so he reluctantly made the arrangements for a late night meeting. "Since you are meeting with the fleters on short notice, this can only be an informal gathering. This will make it more difficult to negotiate larger and more expensive deals."

"That is fine."

An hour passed by before Ves entered the hotel. He and his entourage reached the top

floor.

Jovy stayed behind while Ves, Lucky and his guards moved past the security checkpoint and entered an observation chamber that provided a striking view of the cityscape of the sprawling metropolis on La Reine.

Despite the short notice of this informal gathering, Ves successfully managed to secure a meeting with Chelsea Mieli, the head of the Seventh Light Fleet!

The two shook hands.

"It is an honor to meet you in person. Please sit down and order any refreshments you like.

As the two sat down and ordered their drinks, the RF admiral reached into her pocket. and carefully placed a heavy object onto the table.

"What is this, admiral?"

"You should be able to recognize the appearance of an RF Warship Token. You already own two of them, after all. Have you forgotten the bounties that we have placed on the

heads on phase lords and phase whales? It has taken time for us to complete the verification, attribution and settlement process considering that multiple different parties worked together to eliminate 4 phase lords in the Mazepan System, but we can finally award you the reward that you are due."

Ves looked at the metal token that the RF awarded to him and his clan.

As far as he knew, the loot and reward distribution had already taken place shortly after the Battle of Mazepan came to a conclusion.

The PPS and the remaining 5 phasewater organs was supposed to be his reward. The value of those organs were so high that Ves would have chosen them over the right to

field more warships. He never held any expectations of earning another RF Warship Token out of that effort.

Was this the Red Fleet's attempt to get into his good graces?

Chapter 6417 Red Fleet Turnaround

Ves looked down at the token. No matter whether the RF had been 'slow' to process the attributions of the killing of several phase lords, or simply decided to use the last battle as an excuse to buy his favor, the actual reason was not important.

A Warship Token was a Warship Token. Each medallion represented a legal right to own and field a warship. That was still an immensely rare and valuable privilege in the early years of the Age of Dawn.

When Ves picked up the item, he quickly puzzled out the type of warships that he was allowed to own by owning this token.

"A Light Cruiser Token?"

The female admiral who was known to be a loyalist of Fleet Admiral Stanley Argile nodded.

"Nobody will agree to award you with four Warship Tokens or even a single Heavy Cruiser Token. We must recognize the contributions of others as well. This is what your clan deserves after we have made a fair calculation of risks and rewards."

"Is this the token that comes without any strings attached?"

"Yes. This is an unrestricted version of a normal Warship Token. We have surrendered the right to conduct inspections on your ship and design. As long as you do not do anything egregious with your light cruiser, we will not be inclined to monitor your warship too closely. You also have a choice of receiving a restricted RF Heavy Cruiser Token, but your prior decisions indicate that you would rather obtain this reward instead."

"You are right." Ves said as he spun the token in his hands. "I don't like too many people snooping at my stuff. It is hard to avoid that these days, but that is not an excuse for me to grow complacent. Thank you for delivering this token to me. I do not have any plans to acquire and field a light cruiser at the moment, but I am sure I can find a shipyard that can build me a good ship."

"We have many shipyards."

"I own a few shipyards as well. I can handle it. I don't want to bother with your stuff. You have your way of doing things and I have my way of doing things."

"That is one of the subjects that we would like to discuss with you." Admiral Chelsea Mieli leaned forward over the table. "After recent events, the Red Admiralty is currently evaluating whether we need to step up our timetable and accelerate the pace of reforms. One of the proposals we are considering at the moment is to increase our acceptance of metaphysical phenomena. An example that we are particularly interested in are 'living warships'. If you have plans to develop a living warship from the ground up, we would be glad to participate in your research. We can offer a large amount of experience and put our resources at your disposal. We only ask that you give us

permission to make use of our shared work."

Ves raised his eyebrow. He expected to hear an invitation like this, but not so soon. It appeared that his product reveal had caused the CFA to take him lot more seriously

than before.

"While I do have plans to develop living warships for myself, I work best if I try to keep all of the work in-house." Ves steadily answered. "I am still a mech designer. I do not intend to devote too much time on developing living warships. The unique conditions that made it possible for me to turn the Dominion of Man alive are not replicable. I have to figure out an entirely different arrangement for more ordinary warships."

"We can help with that. No matter the stage of your research, we have highly competent scientists and naval engineers of our own. They may not possess the strange metaphysical strengths of high-ranking mech designers, but that does not mean that they are any less knowledgeable."

Many people tended to underestimate the scientists and engineers of the fleeters, but that was a big mistake. The CFA and RF managed to rival the MTA and RA for so long that the two sides had to be comparable in strength and competence.

The research capabilities of the fleeters may not be as flashy as their mecher counterparts, but they had become extremely good at developing powerful hulls and equipping them with cutting-edge technologies.

Therefore, Ves truly felt the sincerity in Admiral Mieli's offer.

He saw an opportunity to collaborate with the RF more closely and on a more permanent basis. This was a good way to balance out his overdependence on the Red Association.

"I am not principally opposed to further cooperation, admiral. I just do not think I am ready to deliver a working example of a Carmine warship sso soon. I need to draft entirely new theories and test them out until I am sure that I have created a mature product. The problem is that you can't just build a random prototype warship where you can safely test your new works. The size difference between the two was numerous." Silence fell silent for a moment as the two took a few sips of their drinks.

A surprisingly harmonious mood spread between the two. Even though they were far apart in everything, they both felt as if they could become good friends.

Ves took this as an encouraging sign. The Red Fleet was so large that it was split up into multiple factions. No single group of fleeters could represent the majority.

Admiral Mieli happened to be part of Fleet Adimral Stanley Argile's faction. They were most supportive of change and were eager to abandon old traditions that no longer made any anymore.

That meant that if Ves wanted to establish any form of deep cooperation with the fleeters, he better win over Argile's faction first.

What they were asking for was too much. Ves could not pull a Carmine dreadnought out of his head.

Admiral Mieli needed to make other requests, ones that Ves could fulfill.

The problem was that the RF did not really know what Ves was capable of in relation to starship design and construction.

That did not mean that Admiral Mieli came unprepared. It would be an insult to her intelligence and the intelligence of her staff to be ignorant on basic information.

We have studied what you have done in the last battle." The woman said in a steady tone. "We have studied your decisive approach towards modifying and improvising weapons that exceed the normal standard. You have shown a capability to develop much stronger warship guns that can help us break through the firepower ceiling."

"It will not be mass producible." Ves shook his head. "At least not right away. You will have to wait until I have become a Star Designer to produce warship-grade guns that retain their special properties regardless of what I do to call for attention." After all, the rules of the warship industry were completely different than of the mech industry. Ves could not rely on the convenience of his design philosophy to mass produce a completely reimagined version of a warship."

"We are hiring numerous new as well as experienced 'cultivators' in our ranks." The RF admiral whispered to Ves. "The Second Main Fleet has already made series of discoveries and minor breakthroughs when facilitating their efforts into empowering our

warships."

"Hiring outside cultivators, eh? I bet that each of them won't mind it if they disappear and deter any pursuers from taking money in the same place."

Admiral Mieli elegantly shook her head again. "These cultivators have proven to be highly inconsistent, unreliable and far too unruly to control through normal means. Their power may have gotten to their heads."

"I am not surprised. Our race has long lived through many years as ordinary people. After a certain incident, the hired cultivators kept growing stronger, and started to exhibit extremely strong mood swings."

"Then you either contracted dubious cultists who did not truly understand their scriptures, or made a temporary deal with an extremist cult with very deviant beliefs. Be

careful who you invite into your doors. One of the purposes of the Red Collective is to organize these messy cultivators, stuff them inside the sects that align with them the best and hope that they can develop stably and without interruption."

The much older female admiral thought about the suggestion. "In hindsight, our approach towards recruiting personnel that wish to become a part of the RF is less than ideal. We suffer from an inability to discern whether a claim is true or false. This slows down our rate of innovation and prevents us from obtaining tech that is equally as superior as that of the RA"

"If you can recognize that much, why not force a change?" Ves inquired.

"That is what we have been doing for months or years." The fleetier high officer sighed.

"There are too many traditions and too much inertia holding us back. What we need is a shock such as the unveiling of a Carmine version of a warship to convince every person that our circumstances have changed, and so should our policies."

"Is the opposition from the Fifth Enforcement Fleet and allies too great?" "Yes, but they have reduced the pressure as of late. We believe that Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson and her supporters have reluctantly decided to stay more up to date with new

developments."

"So what does this all mean for us? What do you propose we do, admiral?"

Admiral Chelsea Mieli stared into Ves' eyes for a few seconds before she laid out her true proposal.

"What you have heard before is only a warmup. What we truly want is for us to

cooperate with you as a leader of the Red Collective. We plan to propose a joint development team or department within the fledgling organization that is responsible for researching and developing 'artifact warships'. It should not be a research team that only investigates one avenue of empowering warships with cultivation science. It should comprehensively study how humans such as you and I can comprehensively enhance the performance of our warships."

Ves looked a bit surprised. "Can't you do that in-house, admiral? I mean, warships are already your thing."

"That is how our R&D is supposed to progress, but our thinking is far too entrenched to take a more open-minded approach towards hyper technology and E-technology." The older woman in uniform lamented. "Think about how much progress we can make together, Professor Larkinson. Our best scientists and naval engineers are ready to cooperate with the cultivation scientists and other mystics that have mastered the more esoteric arts. We do not ascribe to the assumption that technology is diametrically opposed to 'magic! We believe that the two can be combined to produce synergies that we have never discovered before. Your Carmine mechs are the defining example of such

a fusion."

Ves understood what. Admiral Chelsea Mieli truly wanted. She and the rest of her faction were tired of getting obstructed by the overly cautious and paranoid fleeters within the

RF.

Instead of further wasting their time on convincing unwilling fleeters to engage in more research in this direction, the more forward-thinking fleeters would rather start a new research operation in the Red Collective!

The advantage of doing all of the more groundbreaking and radical research at the Red Collective was that it should be much easier to get stuff done. The RC would still be brand-new, and Ves should have a massive influence in shaping people's attitudes towards combining cultivation science with naval engineering.

The biggest disadvantages to this were that it would enrage a lot of people within the RF, and that it would be difficult to keep this valuable research confidential. Nonetheless, Ves could actually see this plan work out well. There were fleeters that

sought to produce true change, and if they could not find it within the RF, then maybe the RC would be able to give them a better result!

Ves actually found this proposal to be valuable to him as well. The Red Collective and by extension himself be able to harvest all of the R&D gains from this joint research

initiative!

This was like gaining an inside track in the most cutting-edge research projects of the

Red Fleet!

Chapter 6418 Simple Math

Ves had to admit that the layout presented by Admiral Chelsea Mieli sounded brilliant.

The more ardent reformists within the Red Fleet had to overcome the more strident resistance from the traditionalists within their ranks.

While the changes wrought by the Age of Dawn had forced the fleeters to embrace a certain degree of change, the traditionalists still wanted to stick to their old doctrines that had served them well for centuries.

Part of it was because of genuine belief in the superiority of their old tradition. The mentality of 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' tended to prevail much more often in naval organizations.

This was rather understandable as mistakes concerning warships not only led to a huge amount of wasted resources, but also risked the lives of thousands of crew members.

However, red humanity no longer lived during the placid and stable days of the Age of Mechs.

External enemies in the form of the native aliens of the Red Ocean constantly pressed red humanity's frontlines.

The existing solutions still worked, but many people started to doubt whether sticking to tradition was enough to prevail over the foreign enemies.

The traditionalists did not necessarily object to technological development. The CFA and now the RF still needed to rely on stronger warships to keep up with the pace of their rivals and enemies.

However, what the traditionalists rejected was radical change to the point of turning the Red Fleet into a drastically different organization.

The fleeters took a lot of pride in their identity as the most rational protectors of the human race.

Unlike the mechers who invested all of their power into unfathomably intelligent Star Designers and mentally ill god pilots, the fleeters consisted entirely of 'ordinary' humans that represented the apex of the race that ascended from Old Earth and continued to bring the best out of their humble biological origins.

"The Red Fleet is filled with old traditionalists who believe in their mission to protect the safety and purity of the human race," Admiral Mieli said as she rose up from her seat and moved over to the window showing the expansive cityscape of the planet of La Reine. "They reject the foreign and the unknown. They abhor science and technology that does not fit into the conventional frameworks that our race has built up over millennia. They believe that humans can defeat any adversary by investing their strength in conventional technology alone. It has worked out for them in the past. They believe that they can repeat their success."

Ves furrowed his brows. "That sounds like a stupid approach from my perspective. The Age of Dawn has introduced us to the wonders of E energy radiation. Surely they aren't close-minded enough to ignore all of the benefits brought by hyper technology and E-technology?"

"The traditionalists within the RF do recognize the potential of these new branches of technology, but they also acknowledge the immense risks and danger they pose. What distinguishes reformers from traditionalists is the extent to which they are willing to explore the more unconventional and less precise applications of these promising fields of technology."

"That... is far too cautious of an approach if you ask me, admiral. Don't they recognize the obvious strengths of a Carmine dreadnought like the Dominion of Man?"

"We drew different conclusions from our examination of the transformed god ship, Professor Larkinson. Reformers such as myself see them as the future direction of warship development and the only means to keep up with the times. We no longer care about the process all that much anymore. We only care about the results. If we have to dance naked in a circle in order to make our warships 20 percent more powerful, then we will do so without bothering to figure out why it works."

"We live in a time of crisis. Your approach does not sound ideal, but as long as it keeps us all alive, it is better than nothing" Ves evaluated.

"Not every fletcher is willing to embrace the unknown. The traditionalists within our ranks see the risks and instability of the Dominion of Man as potential threats. The ship may be abnormally strong, but our complete inability to grasp the esoteric powers and theory behind her mystical workings is seen as a critical vulnerability that can plunge the Red Fleet into ignorance and superstition. They fear that we may lose what makes us rational humans, and turn us into a warship-based version of the Red Fleet and the Red Collective. Red humanity will lose its only sober-minded and purely human guardian if that is the case. This is a doom scenario to those who commit to the causes of human purity and human enlightenment."

This actually sounded a lot more noble than Ves initially thought. While he belonged to the opposite camp, he could not fault the traditionalists for putting their ideals above their own interests and fighting for causes they consider righteous.

Ves could not even deny that they had a point. E energy was an inherently fuzzy and chaotic source of power. It promised to bestow humans with great might, but also greater tragedies.

"I think I get it, Admiral Mieli. The traditionalists ideally want to stick with reliable, fully understood conventional technology where $2 + 2$ will always equal 4. At most, they may tolerate a small level of uncertainty that always comes with hyper technology in order to boost their warships to a controllable degree. $2 + 2 + x$ will equal $4 + x$, where x can range from -0.5 to +2. Perhaps these cautious but confident fleters believe that as long as they can push their solution close to 5, they can vanquish the native aliens."

"It takes far more than a sum of 5 to overcome the massive disadvantages subjected to our side in the Red War. The RF admiral crossed her arms. "If we work with the oversimplified model that you have just constructed, reformers such as myself believe we need to attain a score greater than 8 in order to gain the upper hand in the Red War. Nothing the traditionalists prefer to do will get us anywhere close to that sum. We not only need to resort to more controllable measures encapsulated by x , but also more radical applications denoted by y , which can range from -5 to +5. The formula that we prefer to use therefore resembles $2 + 2 + x + y$."

This was a much more volatile approach. The sum could reach an astonishing figure of 11 in the absolute best case scenario, but could also plunge to a terrible low of -1.5 in the absolute worst case scenario!

If everything worked out the way the reformers hoped, red humanity would probably be able to launch a successful counterattack against the native aliens and completely conquer the Red Ocean within a single generation!

If the risks taken by the reformers blew up in their faces, then red humanity would probably lose all of its territory and go extinct! The worst part about this deplorable outcome was that humans essentially defeated themselves, thereby saving the native aliens a lot of trouble!

Given these realities, Ves understood quite well why the traditionalists rejected the huge uncertainties and risky gambles that came with experimenting with more alien and esoteric forms of technology.

"I think that one of the key deciding factors of choosing one's preferred approach is determining the difficulty of defeating our enemies." Ves said. "That not only includes the native aliens in front of our face, but also the more powerful aliens that may be able to reach our dwarf galaxy one day. Given what we know, I find it extremely short-sighted to stick to conventional human tech when its limits are so low. Don't they realize that they are underestimating the alien threat?"

Admiral Mieli responded with a grim smile. "That is what bothers us so much about the traditionalists. We are not working with the same numbers. They underestimate the alien threat and overestimate the strength of conventional human technology. Call them optimistic if you like, but they are more willing to believe in their own calculations. It has worked out for them once before. Humans managed to climb out of the threat of assimilation or extinction during the Age of Stars and kicked off the most glorious expansion of our race during the Age of Conquest."

"Are those fleeters ignorant of the true history of our civilization? As far as I know, the Five Scrolls Compact controlled humanity behind the scenes. Those crazy cultivators must have used their strange powers to stack the deck in humankind's favor."

"I think that is the case as well, but the records of those historic periods are biased and incomplete. Nobody can determine how extensively humanity was able to conquer half of the Milky Way by relying on our cunning and rapid technological adaptations alone, or if the aid of powerful cultivators working in the shadow proved indispensable. That has led to different factions and ideologies choosing the answers that best fit their desires as opposed to the actual truth."

Ves scoffed when he heard that. This was a typical human habit.

"I think I understand better now why you want to divert so much naval-related R&D to the Red Collective. The Red Fleet may be changing, but it isn't doing so fast enough to accept the necessity of investing research into y. Only the Collective is open-minded enough to tolerate all of the uncertainty and danger surrounding y. I can accept that. The only issue is... why should the RC bear all of the risks and the consequences of failure, while your RF gets to keep its hands clean and reap

all of the potential rewards?" The proposed cooperation sounded good, but Ves could recognize the trap inherent in

the scheme.

Letting the RC take point into this risky line of research meant that the latest superorganization would bear all of the blame if anything went wrong!

The RF on the other hand could pretend to be completely clueless and innocent of any guilt. This was despite the fact that the fleeters actively shared their knowledge base and loaned their scientists and naval engineers to the RC. The dynamic of the conversation had changed. Now that Ves explicitly started negotiations, the RF admiral had to follow suit and put herself on the opposite side.

"Might I remind you that the Red Collective does not have any strong armed forces of its own. It must rely entirely on the forces loaned by us and the mechers to protect and enforce its own interests. It is in your best interest to not only strengthen the warships protecting the RC, but also convert our more skeptical fleeters of the benefits of your more promising technologies."

Ves leaned back on his seat. "That may be true, but you stand to benefit a lot more than us. Any technological breakthrough will not only strengthen the warships seconded to us, but also the ones that remain in the command of your powerful warfleets. I will not accept an outcome where the RC is reduced to a special projects research division of the

RE"

"What do you propose then, professor?"

"If you want to muster the full enthusiasm of our cultivation scientists in your warship

projects, then give us the right to own and field our own creations. Only when we can build up our own fleets consisting of these newfangled 'artifact warships' will we be motivated to cooperate with your naval engineers with full sincerity. Also, I expect that we will need a lot of help from your RF. You must agree to send us lots of consultants that can help us set up our own naval organizations and organize our own warfleets. We may never be able to match the professionalism of the Red Fleet, but we should at least be competent enough to fight the native aliens without issue."

"Training and consulting can be arranged, but our Red Fleet is short of qualified

manpower..."

Chapter 6419 Zooming Out

Ves and Admiral Chelsea Mieli did not negotiate for too long.

One of the issues that hindered them from going too much into detail was that neither of them knew how much actual decision-making power Ves would gain over the RC. Since all of this remained unclear, the secret agreement that Ves drafted with Admiral Mielie would remain mostly informal until he gained the authority needed to put it into

action.

Still, it was quite advantageous for Ves to form an understanding with the Red Fleet. The distance between him and the fleeters instantly became reduced now that he had shown his willingness to cooperate with the RF and vice versa.

Aside from trying to negotiate more benefits for the RF, Ves also made sure to convince the fleeters to give him and the Larkinson Clan additional... privileges.

This would work out in various ways, from the Larkinsons being able to earn Warship Tokens with less effort to obtaining more technical support when developing new warships.

The fleeters, or at least the reformers among them, would naturally get what they wanted as well.

No matter what position Ves attained in the Red Collective, he would use his authority and his political capital to strive for greater cooperation with the Red Fleet.

Making sure that the RC established the so-called 'Artifact Warship Department' was the minimum requirement that Ves had to meet in order to unlock subsequent forms of cooperation.

If he was not able to accomplish this basic demand, then the fleeters would no longer deem him qualified to work together.

All in all, Ves and the reformers among the Red Fleet shared enough goals in common to forge a promising alliance.

Even if this cooperation contradicted the interests of the Red Association, Ves didn't care. He appreciated the mechers, but not enough to consider himself to be a part of their ilk. That made his dealings with the fleeters more important. Only when he was able to take advantage of both groups and play them against each other would he be able to maintain a state of relative independence.

As Ves shook Admiral Mieli's flawless hand, he made one additional inquiry.

"By the way, I have heard that Captain Zonrad Reze is being considered for promotion at the moment."

The woman looked slightly surprised that he would bring this topic up. "That is true. Captain Reze is one of my subordinates, so I am well aware of his case. He has made invaluable contributions, but he has also acted less than properly, and not only once.

ARCHIE values him highly, but any promotion of flag rank cannot only be determined through merit and key performance indicators alone. We have convened a board to discuss and cast our verdict on his complex case."

That sounded rather concerning. Sigrund was the only 'fletcher' that Ves truly knew and trusted.

The higher the secret AI's rank within the hierarchy of the Red Fleet, the more Ves could take advantage of the situation!

"Will it help if I put in a good word for Captain Reze?" Ves asked. "He has been a great liaison to me so far. He not only taught me that there is a lot of goodwill within the RF, but he is also highly competent in science and engineering, particularly in the fields of software and automation. I can easily foresee a future where we can collaborate together on projects that can benefit both my clan as well as the Red Fleet."

The older woman registered Ves' clear preference towards working with the current captain of the Babylon Excavator.

"Your endorsement does help to sway my opinion, but it may be counterproductive if I pass it along to the other members of the board. Not every fletcher sees you as an ally. I can only give you a tentative promise that I will see what I can do. If the captain receives a promotion, he shall obtain command over small squadron that will be assigned to your protection."

"I appreciate the help,"

After surviving the Battle of Mazepan, Ves no longer felt as annoyed at being 'protected' by the forces of the Red Two. He could think about surrounding himself with powerful protectors from the Larkinson Clan after he built up a strong and robust first-class mech force, not before.

He retired for the night now that he had concluded his meeting with the admiral from the Red Fleet.

On the morning of the next day, Ves ate a meaningless breakfast while Gavin presented his itinerary for the day.

"The founding ceremony of the Red Collective will commence in two days. We must use the time we have left to increase your popularity and leave no doubt who must lead the Upper Council." The personal assistant stated.

"I agree."

"To that end, I have taken the initiative to accept interviews from over a dozen different publications. Each of them are able to reach a different audience, and put emphasis on different topics. As long as you handle the interviews well, you will be able to give much of the public a preview of where you will lead the Red Collective if you are in charge. Since you are not a full-time politician, I do not advise you to lie or try to take multiple stances on the same issue. You will not be able to execute such advanced operations well enough to fool the public."

"I think you are underestimating my eloquence." Ves grumbled. "Still, I will follow your advice, if only because I cannot be bothered with political nonsense." Gavin gave Ves a reassuring smile. "As long as you maintain consistency in your stances and offer a compelling narrative that can win over the support of a large proportion of the people, you should be able to strengthen your legitimacy within the Red Collective. Aside from going on a press tour, you should also meet with your constituents shall we say. You are the man of the hour at the moment, so you should be able to drop by any establishment and talk with the people who live, work or visit over there. This is not only a good opportunity to show that you care about the common folk that form the backbone of your political support, but also open yourself up to feedback from humans that you normally do not come into contact with. It is an excellent way to prevent yourself from becoming out of touch with ordinary civilians."

That sounded too much like what a slimy politician would do. At the very least, Ves did not feel enthused about visiting meaningless places and holding useless talks with random people.

"I don't entirely like it, but... I trust you enough to know what is best. As long as it increases my chances of successfully claiming the seat of the chief councilor of the Upper Council, I will put my best face forward and act like it matters."

That caused Gavin to pause and stare directly at Ves. "You do care, right? Have you lost your empathy somewhere during your attempt to climb up the ladder?"

That was not a simple question to answer. Ves initially wanted to brush off this question by telling Gavin what he wanted to hear, but it would be unfair and unwise to act dismissively towards a trusted advisor and confidante.

Ves briefly thought about how his thinking towards the common folk had changed over the years.

"I think... I am becoming more like the high-and-mighty figures that I used to curse back when I was a simple Apprentice or Journeyman." He honestly admitted. "I think this is an unstoppable trend. The higher I climb, the more responsibilities I assume. I am no longer charged with the protection of just my clan. I also hold a lot of responsibility towards our entire civilization. When you constantly have to think about how my actions affect the wellbeing of an entire population, it is very hard for me to care or spend any moment of my time on the plight of individual citizens."

"So you have lost perspective."

"I wouldn't necessarily say that, Gavin. A better way to describe it is that my perspective has zoomed out. I have given up on caring about individual citizens, but have gained a lot more perspective towards the overall state and wellbeing of humanity as a whole. I do not think this is a bad trade as I can do a lot of good stuff that can benefit our entire race. The release of my Carmine mechs is a fantastic example of this. I can still improve the lives of ordinary people through my work. I just work at an entirely different scale

nowadays."

His assistant thought over Ves' words. "I understand what you mean. As your assistant, I am also faced with similar issues. The messages that I pass on to you can change the course of history by influencing your perception and decision-making. It is not easy to hold this responsibility,

especially after my most recent augmentation. It takes much more conscious effort to remind me that real people become affected by my work."

Ves shrugged. "Enough about this. Let's get back to business. I can understand the need for publicity stunts, but we also need to meet with the representatives of important stakeholders. I have already won the fleeters, or at least a faction of them, over to my side. I should also meet with other groups. At the very least, I need to meet with a representative of the Hunting Association before the date of the founding ceremony. Has there been any progress with arranging a meeting with those hunting addicts?"

"I do not think it is wise to speak of the Hunters in disparaging terms, boss. As for a meeting, I have successfully managed to arrange a relatively short appointment with a vice director of the regional headquarters of the HA after serious difficulty. The HA is not too enthused about opening up a dialogue with you at the moment." "The Hunters are probably annoyed at my incessant complaints about their ambivalent stance towards the Red Collective. They probably know that. I want to meet with them in order to find a resolution to this ongoing issue."

"You do know that they will not bow down to you, right?" Gavin asked. "The Hunting Association has the backing of a powerful god pilot. It does not need to rely on any other shelter in order to do well. As long as the Hunters have no strong incentive to submit to the Red Collective, they will continue to act on their own regardless of what we think." Ves briefly frowned. "Don't rule me out yet. I just need to talk to someone important enough within the Hunting Association to gain a chance to turn this situation around. Now that I am fresh off my latest product reveal, the Hunters should have a considerably higher respect towards me than before. As far as I know, many Hunters are norms who can only effectively enjoy their hunts by relying on their bodies and personal equipment alone. Now that they can pilot Carmine mechs, a lot more Hunters can tackle the biggest and most prestigious prey. They should owe a lot of gratitude towards me for giving

them this gift."

Ves needed to enter the Hunting Association's headquarters and personally gauge people's gratitude towards him. The more they respected and admired him for giving them a way to pilot a real mech, the more leverage he obtained!

This should at least soften the estrangement between Ves and the Hunting Association and open up tentative new possibilities for cooperation where there was previously

none.

As much as the Hunters revered the beliefs of the Huntsman, the god pilot was not the one that bestowed them with the capacity to pilot Carmine mechs. Ves was the person responsible for bestowing them with this precious gift! The implication here was that Ves should deserve the same respect as the Huntsman!

Chapter 6420 A Diplomatic Test

Ves did the obligatory press tour.

His heart was not in it, but he entertained a lot of interviewers and patiently answered their questions despite how repetitive and stupid they became.

Ves did not try to pull off anything fancy. Creating and publishing his first set of Carmine mechs was the greatest public relations move that he could make.

All he needed to do was to show that he could be more than the Father of Carmine Mechs. By elucidating the public with his viewpoints and proving that he possessed the right attitude towards public service, Ves hoped to establish himself as a leader who could be relied upon, especially during this time of crisis.

By presenting a more mature and responsible version of himself, Ves shed off the vestiges of his more youthful self and made himself appear as if he deserved a place alongside wise and much older leaders.

Of course, Ves made sure to not to go too far in playing a role that was different from his true self. He still retained his eccentricities and distinctive beliefs that did not match mainstream beliefs, but he tempered them so that his weirdness did not present a disharmonious image.

When he was not sitting down in order to participate in another widely broadcast interview, Ves was visiting factories, stores, gardens, universities and other places where people gathered.

His armored transport and heavy escort flew across much of the surface of La Reina in order to visit the places that Gavin and his staff had carefully selected.

Ves had to admit that the visits had been mildly fruitful towards him. He never visited these places in person. First-raters may enjoy a much higher level of prosperity than other humans, but they had their own fair share of struggles.

The economic pressure of living in Yernstall was enormous. High taxes, high fees, a huge number of competitors willing to take the jobs of existing workers and a high degree of overpopulation made it difficult to enjoy any peace and relaxation in this star system. Yet despite those difficulties, people still fought to obtain permanent residence in Yernstall. As one of the few central star nodes that was directly managed by the Red Association and the Red Fleet, it was one of the safest places for humans to live.

In fact, Bridgehead One was supposed to be safer, but had become isolated from the rest of human society due to the machinations of the Red Cabal.

The surprise attack on Bridgehead One should have caused people's confidence in the safety of other central star nodes to drop, but that did not really happen. People had a lot of faith in the ability of Red Two to properly guard their remaining centers of civilization from similar ploys.

All of this meant that Yernstall had gathered much of the smartest, most talented and most hard-working first-raters in the Red Ocean.

Since the Sapphire of the Red Ocean also attracted a lot of Terran and Rubarthan citizens, the central star node had access to a much wider manpower pool than other places.

Of course, the Terrans and Rubarthans normally preferred to avoid any direct contact with each other. They deliberately set up their own city quarters and city districts where they could group together and preserve their own culture and customs.

Ves happened to get along well with people of any state. No matter whether they were Terran, Rubarthan or a citizen of a smaller first-rate state, he enjoyed universal respect from all of them due to his massive contributions to society.

The Terrans almost considered him to be one of them due to the fact that he had taken up residence in New Constantinople.

The Rubarthans conspicuously dug up the Rubarthan origins of his Larkinson lineage and treated him as the descendant of an exile that had more than earned the right to regain his Rubarthan citizenship with honor.

Others drew upon his origins from the Bright Republic to consider him to be a fellow third-rater, while another group of people concluded from the fact that the Larkinson Clan mostly consisted of second-raters that Ves was actually one of them as well.

Visit after visit, Ves grew bemused by how hard people tried to twist the facts just so that they could claim that he was one of them. The fact that was all built on a kernel of truth just so happened to make their theories convincing enough to pass muster.

Though the constant visits and interviews started to wear him down on a mental level, he nonetheless felt he had developed a genuine connection with the people of Yernstall and human-occupied space as a whole.

Ves had the illusion that he had sublimated as a politician. He not only felt a greater sense of responsibility to stand up for the interests of ordinary people, but also considered himself to be guardian of their prosperity and wellbeing.

Of course, he also enjoyed the idea that he could practically ask them to do anything on his behalf.

He had no idea whether he would be able to retain this supreme power, but it was nice to be able to use it as a threat against his political opponents.

Though Ves had grown weary by the end of this expansive public relations tour, Gavin sounded highly optimistic about the gains they made.

"Your approval rating has risen. Less people see any problem of allowing you to ascend to high office despite your relative young age and lacking experience. Now that they have seen the current version of yourself show care and attention to the needs of the common folk, they are more willing to elevate you than more seasoned politicians."

Ves laid back on a lounge chair while nursing his slightly aching head. "What does this all mean to me, Gavin?"

"It means that anyone who wants to stop you from becoming the chief councilor of the Upper Council of the Red Collective has virtually little chance of succeeding. The personal assistant grinned like a shark. "In order to deny you this seat, your opponents must be able to recommend another candidate that possesses superior qualifications. There are plenty of individuals who desire to become the inaugural chief councilor of one of the most powerful organizations of red humanity. No matter whether they are statesmen, businessmen, mech designers or naval officers, none of them can beat your unique combination of massive contributions paired with level of empathy towards the people at the bottom."

Ves looked dubiously at Gavin. "I thought I already confessed to you that I don't really care about the plight of individual people anymore."

"Well, you have done a good job at pretending that you still do, boss. At least, the fact that you used to start close to the bottom of human civilization and worked your way up step-by-step at least meant you lived among ordinary folk for an awfully long time. The vast majority of bigshots cannot say the same. They are all elite first-raters who grew up in palaces or country estates. They cannot hold a normal conversation with an ordinary worker to save their life. You are different. Your plain diction alone distinguishes you from all of those upper-born snobs."

Ves could see what his assistant meant. He climbed up the hierarchy way too quickly, which prevented him from assimilating into the more refined half of society.

He never really cared about this stuff in the first place. He always considered himself to be a mech designer first, and he had learned that the best way that a man of his profession communicated with others was through his mech designs.

In that sense, designing and releasing the Yellow Jackets to the public accomplished far more than any lengthy speech from a politician!

Ves had proven with his deeds and actions that he could genuinely make people's lives

better.

This was his greatest strength, and one that no smooth talker could ever match. "Okay, enough flattery." Ves said as he wanted to move on with business. "Let's talk about my upcoming meeting. What do you know about the guy who I am about to meet?" "The vice director of the regional headquarters that you are scheduled to meet is an old and retired professional hunter called Talas Redmond." Gavin recited the intelligence collected about the man. "He is known to be a hardcore hunter and a staunch traditionalist, so much so that he often gets in the way of other leaders within the Hunting Association. He is one of the difficult people to persuade on anything. The HA is definitely making life more difficult for you by deliberately having you negotiate with such a stubborn old fool."

Great. This was yet another calculated snub from the Hunting Association. Couldn't

these guys act normal for once?

"Does he still hunt?"

"He does. Redmond is over 200 years old, but still goes out to complete his own hunts now and then. According to our intelligence, he takes every vacation opportunity that he can get to travel to a nearby hunting preserve and go out in the wild to complete a solo hunt. He is one of the types that likes to enter a jungle with nothing but clothes and other essential survival gear such as a breather mask if necessary. He doesn't necessarily go out to hunt the most deadly prey. The vice director finds greater enjoyment in hunting elusive prey by taking them down with bows and arrows that he crafted from the land, or by setting up ingenious traps that could take his targets down in a brilliant.

fashion."

The stories that Gavin shared about Vice Director Redmond painted the picture of an utterly bewildering old man. This guy willingly abandoned the comforts of civilization and embraced savagery just to make his hunts more exciting and authentic. His advanced age may have caused his fitness to drop from its peak a long time ago, but the man relished the opportunity to fell his prey through trickery and cunning instead. Ves already started to feel his headache growing stronger as he struggled to figure out how to develop a connection with such a savage figure.

"Maybe I should cancel this meeting"

"Don't. There is always a chance, boss. Suspending the meeting will be seen as a show of weakness. You absolutely cannot afford to do that during this politically sensitive period of time. You need to see this meeting through and come out strong enough to prove to all of the spies and secret observers that you can hold your own in front of a powerful rival or adversary. You can consider this one of the annoying tests that you have been complaining about as of late."

"Great. Really great. A test is the last thing I want to hear about." Ves groaned. Now that Gavin mentioned it, Ves could already recognize that it was likely true.

The Huntsman himself may have decided to give Ves a diplomatic challenge, just to see whether he could overcome it with his dignity intact.

If Ves failed to handle himself properly during this difficult talk, then that would

obviously cause the people above his head to silently lower their evaluation of himself! Though Ves felt so frustrated about these games that he felt the urge to flip the board out of rage, he held in his emotions and tried to be more rational about this affair. There were far more advantages than disadvantages if he agreed to play along.

If he was not strong enough to become a chess player, then he better do a good job as a chess piece.

His time would come sooner or later. Ascending to high office at the Red Collective was

the first major step of this ambitious plan. He could exercise a lot more power and

influence once his appointment turned into reality.

"Gavin, please help me with ideas on how I can possibly connect to this old vice director.

I refuse to believe I cannot persuade this guy to embrace a mutually beneficial

agreement."