

## Mech Touch 681

### Chapter 6381 Split Spoils

After Ves concluded his talk with Saint Tusa, he thought that the ace pilot was being too indecisive.

What was wrong with accepting the title of Phase Bane? This was an awesome moniker that would definitely turn him into one of the foremost rising heroes of the Red War. If Ves was in his cousin's place, he would have embraced without any hesitation!

The alternative was not too bad either. Inheriting the title and position of the Arena Lord of Ya'gwasa from the previous holder sounded like this was part of an epic saga. A title like this not only emphasized Tusa's martial prowess, but also legitimized his ownership of an alien arena planet!

It didn't matter that Ya'gwasa was a completely alien institution from beginning to end. Tusa's ascension to the position of arena lord would definitely serve as a point of pride to red humanity.

The native aliens on the other hand would suffer intense humiliation for surrendering such a significant position to their human adversaries.

Ves loved it! He would definitely want to parade this title in front of the aliens to provoke them into madness. The more unhinged they became, the better!

Alas, Saint Tusa was a very different kind of individual. Although the ace pilot did not outright reject the proposed titles, he did not accept them either, thereby leaving this issue in limbo.

It would be great for the Larkinson Clan if Saint Tusa started to distinguish himself by embracing one of the titles, but Ves did not dare to voice this argument.

Mech pilots took matters like this personally. Only the pilots themselves should make the decision on how they wanted to define their public personas in the future. A title that had attained enough momentum could not be changed so easily. Ves knew this personally as he never managed to get rid of his Devil Tongue moniker.

Once Ves reunited with Jovy Armalon, the two discussed the aftermath of the Battle of Mazepan.

Jovy brought good news to Ves. "Now that we have received hard proof that the cosmopolitans and native aliens have severely violated our boundaries, more reserves are being called to explore the surrounding regions of space and track the greater phase lords that have penetrated far too deeply into human-occupied space. One of the immediate consequences of this is that the remainder of our journey should be much safer. What used to be a speculative possibility has now become a hard fact. Many higher ups were especially alarmed when we reported that the native aliens are able to generate a weak spacetime bubble without investing as much effort. This is a strategic weapon that they can use to isolate and destroy many of our defensive strongholds." Ves crossed his arms. "It would have been great if they took this threat more seriously and sent more forces to begin with. While I am glad that we managed to win this battle, it was quite close, you know."

"There are not many reserves to begin with, Ves. The Red Association and any other organization must allocate their forces to the places based on necessity. The priority of this incident has only risen a short time ago because of the proof that we have delivered. Besides... bait only works when it is small enough to be enticing. Traveling with a much larger fleet may have prevented this ambush from happening, but would continue to leave our enemies in the dark."

That was another source that provided confirmation that the mechers arranged this entire setup in advance.

Ves did not look amused. "I am really tired of getting set up like this. I thought that becoming a high-tier galactic citizen was supposed to make you guys work hard to preserve my life. Instead, I ended up having to enter the battlefield and take part in the fighting myself! You mechers just can't help yourselves."

Jovy at least had the honesty to look remorseful. "I am on your side, but not everyone holds the same ideas. People far more powerful than us have devised plots that go deeper than you can imagine. You have caught the attention of many different parties. Your decisions and performance are being closely monitored. The better your results, the more you have earned the respect of others. The victory that we have attained on this battlefield today has definitely met or exceeded the expectations that those leaders have placed in you. I can promise you that you will reap the rewards of that over the course of your visit to Yernstall."

Although Jovy sounded far too vague about the compensation that Ves deserved, it was better than nothing.

"Speaking of rewards, what is the loot division? Our clan has definitely earned the right to claim the Arena Lord's phasewater production system. I will not accept it if others attempt to steal the treasure that Saint Tusa has risked his life to secure."

Many humans and assets contributed to today's victory. The Larkinsons did not do all of the work, so they did not deserve full credit either. The interests of the other parties who participated in the battle could not be ignored, so they each deserved to earn a share of the loot.

The RA Senior Mech Designer immediately sought to reassure Ves. "Do not worry about that. No one can deny that your ace pilot has earned the greatest amount of credit. You have also made a large amount of contributions. As much as we would like to lay claim to the PPS taken from the Arena Lord ourselves, we have already decided to transfer its ownership to you. On top of that, you are also entitled to receive 1 quarter archeshell, 2 relatively intact phasewater organs harvested from the Arena Lord and 3 damaged but functional phasewater organs harvested from the dead arche phase lords."

Ves frowned when he heard that. "I thought I would get at least 1 whole archeshell and over 10 phasewater organs. Surely we deserve a greater reward?"

"Not necessarily, Ves. We have formed this division of spoils after calculating the fairest possible distribution of spoils. Do not forget that most of the mechs and ships of the Bluejay Fleet belong to our Association. We have contributed almost just as much as Saint Tusa if not more. We also deserve a hefty share of the credit."

That was correct more or less. Ves could deny this argument.

After a bit more talking, it became clear that there was no leeway on this matter. The rewards quoted by Ves were absolute. To change a single term would generate a lot of objections from the other parties that benefited from the current system of loot distribution.

Fortunately, Jovy gave Ves an extra benefit.

"Our salvage teams are working to remove and store the viable phasewater organs as fast as possible. We have managed to identify some of them, but others pose a mystery to us. You enjoy the right to make the first selections. No one is allowed to go first and snatch the most desirable phasewater organs. This should hopefully make up for the lack of quantity. You cannot take them with you. Another fleet will come and bring the massive spoils back to their intended destinations."

Ves looked a lot more mollified after hearing this benefit. "Thank you. I suppose I do not necessarily need more organs. Implanting so many alien organs in my body can't be

healthy."

"I am told that there are numerous interesting options available to you that can directly enhance your survival. I do not recommend you implant them directly in your body, but you can transfer the organs to a bio research institution and derive a myriad of benefits." "What if I don't like most of the available phasewater organs? What if the rest are too damaged, too costly to repair or possess functions that are useless to my physique?" "You can always exchange the phasewater organs with MTA merits." Jovy suggested. "You and your ace pilot have earned a great amount of MTA merits already, but you can obtain more if you surrender many of the spoils and materials to us. You can use those same MTA merits to invest in more tangible benefits."

Ves could think of a lot of goodies that he could buy with a large amount of MTA credits, but he valued the phasewater organs even more!

Unless the mechers managed to crack the secret to producing human phase lords on a wider scale, the demand for these phasewater organs shouldn't be too great. This was a good opportunity to claim a few mature phasewater organs himself.

"Just give me a tour of all of the phasewater organs once they are harvested. I will make the decision on the spot." Ves said after releasing a tired breath.

"We can do that, but as we have said before, we cannot identify the function of every

organ. Do not make a decision that you will regret."

They soon changed the subject to the remainder of the journey. Ves was eager to depart from this star system and reach his intended destination without any further

complications.

"Please tell me that we will reach Yernstall without bumping into another ambush.

"Our fleet should arrive at Yernstall after only a slight delay in our comprehensive schedule." Jovy said. "Once we exit the next star system, we should have already entered into the central star node's strong suppression."

"Good. Will we enjoy elevated levels of security while the gathering takes place?"

"I do not possess the details on that, but it is not justifiable to keep you ill prepared to face the next assassination attempts."

That sounded pretty good. Relying on the Dark Zephyr alone to sweep aside enemy phase lords was too precarious.

Ves chatted a bit more with Jovy, but there was not that much they could exchange while they were still waiting for the harvesting process to complete.

"The Battle of Mazepan is not only a military victory for us. It can also serve as a propaganda victory. Expect to become more famous than before. We decided it was necessary to remove most footage related to weapons of mass destruction before editing and broadcasting any acceptable recordings."

That was very good overall. Saint Tusa's reputation and renown was about to enjoy a massive boost as everyone would be able to see how he managed to prevail where many others would have fallen.

"Try and keep Tusa's titles out of the edited footage." Ves warned. "As much as we

appreciate the idea behind calling Tusa the Phase Bane, my cousin is not comfortable with it. He may end up embracing another title. He is still young, so he has the luxury to

wait."

"I disagree, Ves. We do not have enough time. If Saint Tusa can embrace the title of Phase Bane so soon in his career, he should be able to improve his combat effectiveness much faster. We are all racing against time to promote the evolution of the next

generation of god pilot candidates."

The mechers were aware of how little time they had until the Red Ocean welcomed its

visitor from Messier 87. This left very little time to nurture a new batch of ace pilots and have one or two of them advance to the rank of god pilot fast enough.

Saint Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson had definitely put himself on the map of all of those

bigshots today.

By defeating a greater phase lord and experiencing such a large growth boost, Saint Tusa proved he possessed the qualifications for greatness.

He still had a long journey ahead of himself, but at least he successfully proved his

mettle! "Take good care of the Dark Zephyr." Jovy advised Ves. "Your ace pilot and ace mech have put themselves on the map. The worst thing they can do is to make fools of themselves and lose the respect of their observers. As long as Saint Tusa and the Dark Zephyr continue to make accomplishments, the higher ups will not be stingy with awarding them greater rewards."

While Ves appreciated this sentiment, why did Jovy make it sound as if Saint Tusa and his battle partner were working for the Red Association instead of the Larkinson Clan?

Chapter 6382 Norigo Organ

After a bit more ambiguous chatting, Ves and Jovy quickly moved on to a much more. pleasant topic of discussion.

Loot distribution.

Due to safety reasons, the Tarrasque along with a few core warships and carriers of the Bluejay Fleet had transitioned into FTL travel in advance.

The native aliens had yet to prove their ability to intercept starships traveling through the higher dimensions, so this would place Ves out of their reach and deny the surviving greater phase lords an easy opportunity to take away his life.

The mechs and ships that remained in the Mazepan System policed the battlefield and secured the debris fields that were constantly drifting apart from each other.

Harvesting and salvaging work had already begun. Although few people in the forces that remained possessed expertise in the harvesting of phasewater organs, they were able to call upon remote assistance from preeminent biotech researchers specialized in the study of phase leaders.

Work proceeded at a brisk pace. The harvesting teams may be making slow progress in separating the gigantic phasewater organs and placing them into hastily produced preservation tanks, but the biotech scientists among them had already done a good job of identifying their properties.

Jovy soon presented Ves with a list of phasewater organs.

"As stated before, the contributions of you and Saint Tusa-Billingsley-Larkinson entitles you to receive a quarter archeshell, an intact PPS, 2 greater phasewater organs originating from the Arena Lord of Ya'gwasa and 3 lesser phasewater organs originating from the 3 dead arche lesser phase lords. You have the right of first selection, so we have collected as much information about the organs for your perusal."

Ves frowned. "You guys sound like you are in a hurry. Do I have to pick now, or can I wait until the biotech researchers have learned more about the properties of the phasewater organs that aren't included in your databases?"

"Perhaps you may be patient enough to wait, but the other parties are less able to hold themselves back. It is not every day that they can take possession of the phasewater organs of a greater phase lord as well as the very rare lesser phase lord of the arche race. There are many biotech institutions that are exerting political and monetary pressure onto us to 'reserve' certain phasewater organs for themselves. We have decided it is best to get this over with before the demands and enticements become too outrageous."

Pleasing one party meant disappointing half a dozen other parties. The greater the stakes, the greater the latter took it personally. This was why the mechers wanted to get rid of this burden as soon as possible.

Since Ves had first pick, he was essentially the person responsible for holding up the allocation process. Jovy eagerly wanted him to hurry up and complete his selection. Ves took a good look at the projected list. He raised his finger and tapped on one of the entries. This opened up another projected screen that detailed all of the data and information that the mechers managed to gather.

If Ves wanted to make an optimal selection, then he first had to formulate a development strategy for his body cultivation. He then needed to take stock of what he already had in his possession and what he still needed to obtain. That should help him guide his selection process.

He already decided a long time ago that he would not put much time and effort into his development as a phase lord.

Other humans and aliens may be willing to sacrifice everything just to get a chance to break their mortal shackles, transform into a monster that could fight against mechs with their true bodies and extend their lifespans by centuries if not millenia, but Ves never fully appreciated what he got for free.

Ves still felt a bit peeved that the heavenly authority of the Red Ocean sought to put him in debt by shoving all of this phase lord stuff onto his physique.

Still, now that he had it, Ves could not allow himself to waste this boon. The Red Ocean had already become an unfriendly place for human civilization. Every human was scrambling to obtain more resources so that they could put up a better fight against the native aliens.

It would be an insult to his fellow humans if he wasted his own cultivation. He could potentially do a lot of good with his strength as a phase lord, even if it amounted to providing research data and reducing the burden of protecting him from his growing list of enemies.

This consideration helped him decide his overall direction of phase lord cultivation.

Pursuing maximum combat effectiveness was off the table. He did not intend to participate in frequent combat, and if his enemies forced him into a battle, then winning was not as important as survival.

He should therefore prioritize stability, defense and escape over other criteria.

Ves recalled that his clan already secured two lesser phasewater organs during the Battle of Torment. They originated from the Eminence of Torment, an orven lesser phase lord that fought a lot harder than expected.

The lesser Dofner organ essentially functioned as an organic warp drive. The lesser Pelmir organ worked as a fairly basic but reliable reactionless drive.

While neither organs were particularly strong or special, they satisfied the demand for



an effective means of intrasystem and interstellar travel.

To put it simply, Ves no longer had to rely on starships to ferry him around in space

once he integrated these organs.

Of course, he would never do that during ordinary times. It was much faster and easier

to travel around on starships, especially ones equipped with superdrives.

As far as he knew, the native aliens had yet to develop a phasewater organ that combined the functions of a warp drive and an FTL drive.

The use of a Dofner organ and Pelmir organ should therefore solely be reserved for emergencies.

In any case, since Ves already had access to basic mobility options, his choices today should either be focused on expanding his defensive options or augmenting his escape

options.

He took a look at the phasewater organs found inside the enormous carcass of the Arena Lord of Ya'gwasa.

Although the Dark Zephyr had inflicted catastrophic damage inside, his tier 3 Destroyer spear was only able to completely wreck a limited number of organs.

Others sustained severe damage, but possessed enough intact bits left that they could still be salvaged after receiving emergency treatment. Then there were the organs that the Dark Zephyr had not been able to reach at all. These ones were in pristine state and held the greatest amount of value!

One of them immediately caught his attention.

"This Norigo organ actually possesses an amazing capability." Ves noted. "Matter ingestion is a rather brief description, but its implications are enormous." "Our biotech researchers speculate that the Norigo organ is designed to facilitate rapid physical recovery" Jovy spoke, sparing information that had not yet been verified. "Seeing how old and well-developed it is compared to the other greater phasewater organs, the Arena Lord clearly prioritized its acquisition as early as possible. We suspect, he worked hard to obtain it because it can allow him to ingest large amounts of nutrients to rapidly speed up his healing process. TAs an alien gladiator, he is expected to fight on a regular basis against other formidable opponents. He cannot afford to spend years on recovering his massive injuries. That would create openings for other challengers to take advantage of his vulnerability and pick up a bargain."

That made a lot of sense. As Ves studied the scans of the Norigo organ, he understood none of the alien biological structures, but found that it looked incredibly complex and multifaceted. This was a sign that it was highly developed and very difficult to attain through normal channels.

"So what sort of stuff does the Arena Lord have to eat in order to enable his Norigo organ to speed up his recovery process?" Ves asked.

"Almost anything." Jovy answered. "The Norigo organ somehow enhances the digestion system of the phase lord to allow him to safely ingest any material that does not immediately inflict severe damage to his physique. You will not be able to swallow anything lethal to you such as antimatter or superhot plasma, but as long as you can hold it in your hands, you can devour it. The Norigo organ and your augmented digestion system will take care of the rest. If you can make use of the nutrients in any way, your true body will automatically absorb them and put them in the right places. If your body cannot figure out how to make use of weird or dangerous materials, then it will expel them so that they no longer pose any risks and take up valuable space."

For whatever reason, Ves immediately became reminded of a certain gem cat and his infrequent need to use the kitty litter box.

"Wait minute, when you refer to expelling waste materials, are you implying that..."

The RA Senior Mech Designer couldn't help but smirk at this point. "It is exactly what you think. Suffice to say, a normal toilet cannot possibly hold the massive volume of waste products that you will inevitably produce after you have devoured a meal worthy

of a phase lord."

Ves could already imagine such an accident. If he somehow forgot that he was a phase lord as tall as three mechs stacked on top of each other, he may accidentally sit down on his toilet bowl, only to destroy the entire bathroom and all of the surrounding rooms or compartments! It would be an embarrassment that people would never forget! Despite this... disadvantage, it could not cover up the allure of the Norigo organ. The self-recovery ability was not fast enough to regenerate wounds in the middle of the battlefield, but it would ensure he would be able to survive and return to his peak condition a lot faster after the fighting had ceased.

"The biotechs also speculate that the Norigo organ is useful for speeding up the development of a phase lord." Jovy commented. "As long as your phasewater concentration can be raised, you can quickly increase the mass and volume of your true body to their raised limits by ingesting large amounts of nutrients. The Norigo organ allows for the consumption of raw ores and unprocessed phasewater, but it is best if you eat organic tissue that is infused with phasewater. That includes exobeasts that have evolved on planets rich with phasewater as well as... other phase lords." That caused Ves to raise his eyebrow. "Cannibalism?"

"The phase whales have a strong taboo on cannibalism, but the same does not

necessarily apply to the other major alien races. Besides, it is not necessarily unacceptable for a phase lord to devour the flesh of phase lords of different species, even if the latter are sentient and intelligent beings. The norms and values of these alien civilizations are different from our own. We cannot assume that they will abide to the

same bottom lines as humans. One of the suspected purposes of the Norigo organ is to allow the winner of a confrontation between phase lords to quickly and more effectively absorb the strength of the loser. It is probably one of the less savoury means to advance

your phase lord cultivation."

"I see."

That was very important. Ves had no doubt that a lot of different parties wanted to get a

hold of the Norigo organ for that last reason alone!

The question was whether Ves needed such an organ.

After a bit of thought, he concluded that it was not strictly essential, but it would be

really nice if he gained access to all of its speculated benefits.

Just the ability to quickly recover from a near-death state to a healthy condition may be

enough to save his life in the future.

"I'll take it." Ves said before he could change his mind. "Take good care of this Norigo

organ. I will figure out how to implant it in my body after my current ordeal has passed. It is probably bound to be a complicated affair."

#### Chapter 6383 Marigal Organ

The Norigo organ did not entirely fit his calculus, but Ves selected it anyway because of its value in other aspects.

It was the most desirable phasewater organ left intact inside the Arena Lord's enormous carcass. Many biotech research institutions wanted to obtain it in order to unlock the alien secrets to fast recovery and promote the cultivation of human phase lords. Ves would be a fool to miss the option of picking it up just because it did not match his original plan.

He felt that the Norigo organ fit especially well in his plan to become a 'lazy' phase lord.

Ves did not have the time or motivation to engage in more time and labor-intensive forms of training.

He learned that alien phase lords tried all sorts of stuff to increase their phasewater concentration, from repetitively casting their spatial abilities to frequently injecting an excess of phasewater into their bodies. Every major race had developed their own particular rituals, customs and techniques to advance their growth, but none of them were suitable to a mech designer like himself.

The Norigo organ offered a much more convenient way to improve his cultivation, though it was not necessarily the most effective one. According to the speculations of the biotech scientists, Ves only had to eat a lot of phasewater-enriched nutrients to gradually raise his upper limits.

The ingredients may be expensive, but that was not that big of a problem for a leading figure whose actual status far exceeded his current galactic citizenship tier.

Ves also valued the Norigo organ for expanding his diet and allowing him to survive when he was cut off from his clan and left alone in a wild and unfamiliar environment. Just as Ves was ready to make his choice, his friend took the initiative to recommend another phasewater organ.

"Since you have chosen to claim the Norigo organ for yourself, I suggest you take the Marigal organ as well. This is the main reason why the flesh of the Arena Lord was able to resist so much warship-grade cannon fire. The Marigal organ helps to fold space inside the body of a phase lord that allows for increasing the mass of the flesh and muscles without expanding the volume to the same proportion. In other words, it will make you stronger and heavier without making you excessively large."

That sounded interesting. Ves actually disliked it that he would grow bigger as his phasewater concentration rose. He needed to use up a lot more expensive materials to construct a new raiment or expand his existing one. Making himself bigger without possessing the strength expected of a phase lord of this size would also end up turning him into a gigantic target.

In fact, not even a powerful martial phase lord such as the Arena Lord of Ya'gwasa was able to escape this weakness despite possessing the Marigal organ.

His body would have become a lot less resilient and vulnerable to the firepower of multiple warships if he lacked the functions of this handy phasewater organ. Even then, the Dark Zephyr was still able to take advantage of the Arena Lord's excessive size and wreck his true body from the inside.

Naturally, Ves did not want to die from similar means, so the Marigal organ should help a lot with that. It was better to pursue quality instead of blindly chasing after quantity like most phase lords.

The Arena Lord apparently learned this lesson as well, though he did not go far enough in this direction.

"I see the value of this Marigal organ, but why does it synergize well with the Norigo organ?" Ves asked.

"That is because the Marigal organ is costly to operate." Jovy replied. "Its effects can make your viscera stronger, thicker and more massive, but the nutrients required to grow all of that additional

mass has to come from somewhere. The typical digestion system of a phase lord is already operating far above the parameters of the digestive system of a mortal specimen of the same race, but there are limits to what it can do. The Norigo organ can meet the difficult demands of the Marigal organ much faster and more efficiently. In simple terms, you will not only be able to make your body much stronger while eating less, but also produce gains in a matter of months rather than decades."

Phase lords tended to grow and develop slowly. It was not unusual for them to make incremental gains across decades or even centuries. They were generally long-lived and could afford to take their time, but only if they lived in a fairly stable society.

Red humanity was in a completely different situation. The latest ambush had increased Ves' sense of crisis and taught him that people would continue to screw him around despite his recent rise in status.

From that perspective, the Marigal organ offered huge defensive benefits that were difficult to attain through other means.

Ves briefly skimmed the list of other greater phasewater organs. The Arena Lord's carcass offered a sizable selection of highly developed organic products. As a high-status native god, he had access to a lot of good stuff, a few of which could easily make his blood run faster.

"I accept your suggestion." Ves decided. "You are right. The Marigal organ is powerful enough on its own, but can function much more effectively in combination with the Norigo organ. The Larkinson Biotech Institute will find a way to integrate the benefits of both in my true body."

That locked in his selection of greater phasewater organs. The Arena Lord of Ya'gwasa still had a lot more to offer, but the Red Association and other contributors to the recent victory also needed to be rewarded.

Ves did not feel too much regret at missing out on so many premium phasewater organs. He had already claimed the most valuable phasewater production system, and he guessed that he had also picked up the foundation of the Arena Lord's success as a martial phase lord.

Even if Ves found it distasteful to unfold his true body and proceed to enter into a fistfight against other big threats, it was better than retaining a flimsy physique that could easily be broken like that of the Distance Shaper.

The orven greater phase lord served as a negative example among phase lords as far as Ves was concerned.

In his list of priorities, strengthening his offensive abilities ranked very low. He would never pursue a development strategy that was similar to those high-and-mighty 'space wizards' as they tended to be called.

Jovy modified the listing on the projected screen to remove all of the entries related to the premium phasewater organs available from the corpse of the Arena Lord of Ya'gwasa. The only entries that Ves could choose from came from the 3 arche lesser phase lords. "The condition and availability of phasewater organs from these specimens are much worse." Jovy flatly explained. "Their injuries and manner of death has a lot to do with it. The hyper nanomachine plagues that you have unleashed upon the arche phase lords have engaged in indiscriminate destruction. They especially loved to devour the less dense and tough forms of biomatter. If not for the fact that phasewater organs tend to concentrate much more phasewater than unusual, nothing would be left for us to

salvage."

"I see. What... happened to the hyper nanomachine plagues, by the way?" "They obediently shut down and self-destructed after the captain of the Babylon Excavator activated the killswitch. Many of the mechs and starships that we have left behind are keeping their eye out on any spec of nanomachines that have refused this command for whatever reason. They have not detected any rogue nanomachine plagues so far, but we are still keeping our guard up. We may even have to quarantine the entire star system for at least a year!"

The Red Two took nanomachine plagues extremely seriously, as they should. Quarantining the Mazepan System was not an excessive demand at all. The modifications made by Ves had increased their risk factor even further.

Ves had no desire to preserve and keep a few of the nanomachine plagues for himself. Their product line had already reached a dead end and was destined to get eliminated

by the times.

It was far better and safer for him to develop his own hyper nanomachines, this time integrated with phasewater technology. This would form the basis of the very first Polymetal mech according to one of his plans.

Ves did not waste any more time and proceeded to scan the list of lesser phasewater

organs.

He did not care too much about how they were smaller and weaker. He also did not pay too much attention to how much damage they incurred. As long as the core organic components remained intact, then it was still possible for the Larkinson Biotech Institute to study and reverse engineer the alien organ specimens.

One organ eventually stood out to Ves.

"This Sympatico organ looks interesting. Its name is a lot more straightforward than the other ones. Who names these phasewater organs, anyway?"

"The names are largely bestowed by the head of our research group on the study of

phase lords." Jovy answered. "We try to avoid translating the names used by the native aliens for various reasons. The labels used to distinguish the phasewater organs are not as important as their properties. The Sympatico organ is believed to be a specialty product of the arche race. According to our researchers, it is a utility organ that can enable arche phase lords to interface with archetech objects through skin contact or maybe even a short distance away if they are further developed."

That caused Ves to look confused. "Isn't the ability to interface with archetech an inherent ability of the arche race? Why do the phase lords need a specialized Sympatico

organ?"

"That is because the arche can only interface with their archetech by slotting in their archeshells into specially designed depressions. That not an issue if the arche has normal proportions, but when he grows to the size of a phase lord..."

"Oh. I see. A Sympatico organ makes sense under those circumstances. Does it merely enable a phase lord to interface with archetech, or does it also come with other enhancements?" Ves asked.

"Our scientists believe that a Sympatico organ may enable a deeper and more extensive connection with archetech, but they are not clear how. Whatever the case, if you want to make better use of



archetech, this organ can provide you with indispensable aid." That was a very interesting choice. The Sympatico organ did not fit his criteria, but its utility was interesting for several reasons.

It was perfect for Gloriana. Even if she was not able to become a phase lord, the Larkinson Biotech Institute could still research the Sympatico organ and deduce its working principles. The biotech researchers could then proceed to make use of their newfound knowledge to develop a smaller implant or larger electronic device that would effectively enable Gloriana to interface with archetech much better!

At the very least, this should offer his wife a far more superior solution than relying on the clunky combination of Hekkel and her crude and primitive Archglove!

Ves on the other hand did not anticipate to benefit as much as his wife. Sure, it might be useful for a mech designer to more easily interface with archemechs such as the Dark

Zephyr, but he doubted he would be able to understand all of the input. Aside from that, he had already decided to commit to using smart metal when developing a Polymetal mech for his own use.

Smart metal was incompatible with archetech. The latter relied on the construction and

combination of solid pieces of archemetal. Their special and intricate alien architecture produced a phenomenon called electronic resonance that enabled pieces of archemetal to work together in an elegant fashion.

Other mech designers and developers had already attempted to produce archetech with the use of nanomachines, but none of their attempts succeeded. Archemetal could only ever consist of solid metal.

This meant that if Ves wanted to develop the best possible combat gear for himself, he could either choose from archetech or smart metal, but never both.

Since Ves had already become heavily invested in the concept of Polymetal mechs, he decided to leave everything related to archetech to his wife.

From this context, Ves found difficult to justify the selection of the Sympatico organ. Should he pick it anyway in order to surprise his wife with a wonderful anniversary gift, or should he select another phasewater organ that provided much more straightforward benefits to himself?

#### Chapter 6384 Symp Organ

"Have you made your decision?"

Ves nodded and smiled. "Yes. I'll take the Symp organ. I don't have much use of it myself, but my wife will love it, I am sure. I can't keep all of the good stuff for myself. Archetech has become a core competency of the Larkinson Clan, so it makes sense to invest in it. If this phasewater organ can help my wife gain a deeper understanding of archetech and develop better archemechs as a consequence, then that will allow our clan to become a lot stronger. You have seen what Saint Tusa has been able to do with a relatively basic archemech like the Dark Zephyr."

"To be fair, the Dark Zephyr is strong due to a particularly rich and diverse collection of advantages. Archetech is far from the only contributor." Jovy argued.

Archetech was bound to become more prevalent in the future. Ves already decided to implant a version of the Symp organ into his body once the Larkinson Biotech Institute had concluded its research on it. Even if he was not as compatible with it as Gloriana, he may be able to make good use of it when fighting alongside other archemechs.

"I know. Anyway, please mark down the Symp organ for me. This should leave me with a quota of two more lesser phasewater organs, am I correct?"

"That is correct. I advise you to overlook the more exotic phasewater organs and settle for the more basic choices. Try and produce more synergies instead of attempting to branch out and acquire more abilities."

Ves agreed with Jovy. He had already deviated from his original selection plan several times. He needed to stop following his whims and try to fulfill his goals as honestly as possible.

When he studied the list again, he deliberately focused his attention on a few organs that he already possessed.

"This Kelsis organ is more developed than my own." He said. "Do you have a better indication of how much better it is? It certainly looks like its previous owner has invested quite a bit into improving its capabilities."

Every phase lord and phase whale started out with three fundamental phasewater organs.

The Kelsis organ produced spatial barriers that served as a strong layer of defense. The Locos organ granted enhanced senses towards spatial and gravitic phenomena. The Maracos organ allowed for the bending and manipulation of the fabric of space at varying distances.

While they started out relatively weak, their ubiquity caused phase leaders to develop many different development trajectories for them. After many rounds of successive upgrades and modifications, one phase lord's Kelsis organ may look completely different from that of another phase lord!

This was why Ves could not rashly choose a more developed Kelsis organ than his own basic one. He first needed to learn whether the more advanced version came with the right features.

"Our researchers understand the functioning of the Kelsis organ much better than the more exotic phasewater organs. We are much more confident in our analysis of this particular specimen." Jovy said. "What you need to know is that it originates from an arche phase lord. Every member of the arche race is obsessed with defense. However, they primarily prefer to invest in the strength of their archeshells rather than rely on intangible spatial barriers. The somewhat intact Kelsis organ that we have managed to identify is therefore not the most favorite organ of that phase lord. However, that is not entirely disadvantageous to you, as your researchers should easily be able to decipher its relatively simple construction."

"Does it do anything special?"

"Well, our analysis has revealed that the Kelsis organ is tweaked to resist physical damage much better than other forms of damage. It can help you resist explosions, gauss rounds, melee weapon strikes and so on without depleting the strength of your spatial barrier as quickly. This makes a certain degree of sense as archeshells are much more effective at resisting energy damage. They rely on their Kelsis organ to compensate for their weakness."

"I see."

This was not the most flashy defensive enhancement that Ves had heard, but that did not diminish its usefulness.

"Okay, mark this down for me. Out of the three basic phasewater organs, upgrading the Kelsis organ is my highest priority. I am not in a hurry to upgrade my Locos organ and Maracos organ.

It was not a good idea to ignore the uses of the latter two organs, but Ves was not a normal phase lord to begin with. His needs and circumstances were different. He also preferred specializing in a few core strengths rather than spreading out his competences too much.

Now that he only had one quota left, he needed to stick to an organ that satisfied his most urgent needs as opposed to obtaining a luxury feature.

Ves proceeded to examine other lesser phasewater organs.

There was one that offered camouflage capabilities, which enabled Ves to pass off as a random piece of space junk.

There was another organ that was able to vibrate solid objects at high speeds, causing them to get shaken and stirred to the point of collapsing.

Ves also encountered a much more developed Locos organ.

"This particular Locos organ has received valuable enhancements that significantly extends the range of a phase lord's spatial senses." Jovy said. "The arche phase lord is probably the designated scout among their group. He is much more capable of detecting enemies from far away. He can also detect the presence of hidden pocket spaces and other spatial anomalies. Most importantly, he can direct instantaneous teleportation with much greater accuracy and precision at longer distances. This Locos organ pairs well with another phasewater organ that offers stronger teleportation capabilities." "Did this arche phase lord possess such an organ?" Ves questioned.

"No. We believe that this arche lesser phase lord may have been saving up to procure a teleportation organ later in his life."

"I see. That is a pity. That would have been another powerful combination."

Ves gradually learned that phase lords did not blindly focus on obtaining the most individually powerful phasewater organs.

Synergies were also important. A phase lord or phase whale could only fit so many phasewater organs inside their true bodies. The more developed their body cultivation, the more stuff they could fit in, but there was always a finite limit to how many organs they could accommodate.

Since space was limited, phase lords needed to plan out their organ development and pick the right synergies to make up their personalized combat systems.

If the list contained an organ that enabled long-range teleportation, then Ves would not have hesitated to drop the Symp organ or the upgraded Kelsis organ in favor of picking up this fantastic combination.

Ves could still choose to pick up the upgraded Locos organ in advance and wait for a future opportunity to acquire a teleportation-oriented phasewater organ.

The best place to find one was at Yernstall, which just happened to be his next

destination.

Did he want to bet that he could obtain a teleportation organ in Yernstall and pick up the upgraded Locos organ first?

Even without this obvious synergy, a powerful Locos organ was useful in many other ways. Ves even had a suspicion that it may help him design, fabricate and upgrade transphasic mechs a lot better.

Yet... an upgraded Locos organ did not offer as much direct value in combat. It enabled him to perceive enemies and events a lot better, but did that necessarily help him fend off stronger attacks? Not necessarily.

Ves ultimately decided to reject the upgraded Locos organ for this reason.

"I will let this one pass. Every phase lord and phase whale possesses a Locos organ. It shouldn't be too difficult to find another one, though maybe not with these precise

enhancements."

"You are correct." Jovy said. "Phasewater organs are not prevalent enough to be traded in the open market, but it is easier to find a party willing to trade a Locos organ as opposed to the more exotic options. What else would you like to choose?"

Ves spent a few more minutes examining the other options. There were many decent

options, but nothing really stood out. The arche lesser phase lords were much weaker than the Arena Lord, so they did not have the ability to obtain anything particularly

strong.

One weird organ with dubious value was a lesser phasewater organ that was somehow able to transmit a subtle spatial vibration that could hypnotize weaker organisms!

"How does this even work?!"

"I have no idea, and I do not think that any of our scientists can figure it out either." Jovy shrugged his shoulders. "We have actually encountered other instances of this phasewater organ before. The enemy phase whales are able to interfere with the concentration of the crew members of a starship before space suppressors became available. It is not effective against mech pilots, as the man-machine connection offers

good protection against this form of attack"

"I see."

There may be ways to upgrade or mutate this phasewater organ so that it could produce surprising results on the battlefield.

Ves even saw how it could be useful in social settings.

However, all of that

ed a lot of research and development. Ves could not ask the Larkinson Biotech Institute to allocate their resources on a research project that was

not as essential as the others.

Ves eventually focused on one entry that was pretty useful enough for his current self, but also offered a lot of potential synergies in the future.

"This Arcis organ seems a bit out of place. According to the description, it can generate stable and reliable electric currents which are suitable to power a whole range of

technological equipment."

"That is correct, Ves."

"Why does a phase lord need this Arcis organ in the first place? It sounds no different

from a power reactor to me. Can't they just equip themselves with a raiment that also comes with its own power source?"

"They can, but the nature of a raiment or a suit of armor means that the power reactor is always placed in a relatively vulnerable and exposed position." Jovy patiently explained. "The Arcis organ removes this vulnerability and ensures that you always have a reliable power source available. Our research has not confirmed this, but it is also possible that the Arcis organ can supply additional energy to other phasewater organs, allowing them to perform at slightly higher levels." That made an Arcis organ a lot more interesting to Ves.

"I see. This Arcis organ sounds especially useful for phase lords that want to rely more

heavily on their raiments to enhance their combat power. Is there anything else that is special about this phasewater organ?"

Jovy nodded. "Our researchers have developed another theory that should be relevant to you. The Arcis organ partially derives its energy from other dimensions, so it can never be completely exhausted. In order to operate at its best, the Arcis organ must be fed with high-density nutrients or phasewater. What makes this relevant to you that a phasewater production system can completely

satisfy the input requirements of the Arcis organ. Any greater phase lord can continually draw a large amount of electrical power from this phasewater organ."

That was right! Ves' eyes lit up as he thought about this combination.

As a mech designer, Ves would never neglect the value of good equipment. The Battle of

Mazepan had taught him the hard way that participating in a fight without the best gear would only make life a lot harder for himself!

Since Ves had vowed to address this shortcoming in the near future, possessing a

phasewater organ that was tailor-made for this purpose would definitely serve him well.

"I'll take it." Ves decided. "It is not a choice I expected to make, but I have too many uses

for this Arcis organ."

"Very well. I have noted this selection and the other ones. We will make sure to harvest

them carefully and deliver them to New Constantinople VIII."

In the end, Ves was pretty happy with his selection.

The acquisition of a PPS, a Norigo organ, a Marigal organ, a Sympatico organ, an upgraded Kelsis organ and an Arcis organ would form the framework of his much-improved combat system as a phase lord!

#### Chapter 6385 The Value of Debts

Ves became pleased with his selection of loot. Most of his gains would form the capital of his future combat system as a... hybrid between a mech designer and a phase lord.

Once he got his very own Polymetal mech up and running, his exquisite gear would complement his powerful new phasewater organs and vice versa. The potential synergies he could achieve with all of these factors should definitely allow him to overpower the average phase lord!



Ves did not dare to ask for more. Defeating an ace mech like the Dark Zephyr was out of the question, especially now that Saint Tusa had taken a liking for the tier 3 Destroyer

spear.

His main priority with all of these measures was to enhance his survival chances and allow him to withstand assassination attempts that would fell any other mech designer. He had no desire to lead troops from the front and earn glory on the battlefield. Others were far more suitable for this role.

No. Ves reminded himself that he should be the man at the top, the power behind the scenes and the leader who sent other poor sods to die on the battlefield.

If the situation had become so dire that Ves was forced to enter the field himself, then he had already failed.

The Battle of Mazepan was no exception in this regard. Now that the Bluejay Fleet was underway again, Ves managed to gather a lot of unsettling information from the mechers

and other sources.

The more information he obtained, the more it became clear that this entire battle had been anything but a random occurrence!

"Meow meow meow. Lucky continued to relay what he witnessed during his infiltration attempt even as he devoured the high-grade exotics and hypers salvaged from the battlefield. "Meow meow meow meow!"

Ves' expression grew uglier and uglier as he took in the words of his cat.

Much of the clues he gathered so far mostly amounted to claims and hearsay. The fact that Lucky managed to stumble across a Titled Hunter on a cosmopolitan starship was the first piece of hard proof that confirmed his suspicions about the connivances of the bigshots.

To say he was angry was an understatement!

"That damn bastard! Who does he think he is?! Who gave him the right to turn the entire Red Ocean into his personal hunting ground?! And why is he pulling the strings just to set me up?! Is he trying to fatten me up just so that I can serve as his prey?!" Perhaps he was being a little too uncharitable towards the Huntsman. Ves knew that all high-ranking mech pilots tended to be mentally ill. They just differed by degree.

Ves thought that the Huntsman leaned towards the more reasonable side of the mental instability spectrum, but I was clear that he had vastly underestimated the god pilot's rationality.

He normally did not have a problem with this, but that changed as soon as these crazy god pilots started to meddle with his life!

"Why are they wasting their time on me? Don't these god pilots have better things to do? Am I that big of an investment in their eyes?"

The Destroyer of Worlds. The Evolution Witch. The Huntsman. That was three god pilots so far that had become entangled with his life.

Ves did not mind the support from the Destroyer of Worlds. Despite her fearsome moniker, she came across as a lot more human and reasonable in private. It also helped that she always harbored goodwill towards the mech designer who ultimately set her up for success. He did not dare to abuse this relationship and ask for too many favors. He possessed a much more ambivalent relationship with the Evolution Witch. He needed her backing and support, but he despised the way she unilaterally imposed her demands on him, knowing that he could never resist her arrangements. It was only her secret alliance with his mother that Ves did not lower his evaluation of this notorious god pilot even further.

As for the Huntsman... this particular god pilot had just proven himself to be an even greater headache than before. Out of all of the 8 god pilots of Red Humanity, the Huntsman increasingly behaved like a maverick.

Although the Huntsman did not transmit any direct signals, his Hunting Association had made numerous policy decisions that were clearly out of lockstep with the rest of human society.

The Hunting Association and by extension the Huntsman showed an increasing desire to stand apart from the established institutions of red humanity. The Hunters did not show any willingness to become aligned with any of the Red Three.

How could Ves not interpret this behavior as anything but a desire to become an independent power bloc?

If the Hunting Association wanted to abide by the rules, then it should obediently register as a sect at the soon-to-be-founded Red Collective.

However, Ves harbored increasingly less confidence that he would be able to persuade this relatively new organization to follow this arrangement.

Now that he found out that the Huntsman, or at least a figure who was high up in the hierarchy of the HA, deliberately facilitated an ambush on the Bluejay Fleet, Ves had lost a lot of respect towards this hunting-obsessed god pilot.

Was the Huntsman still willing to protect red humanity?

Yes. Ves did not doubt the god pilot's loyalty and commitment to his race.

The problem was that everyone had their own idea on how to best protect and preserve the human race. The Huntsman evidently allowed his biases and preferences to color his decisions so much that his plans seriously disrupted the arrangements of other leaders.

Ves included!

Ordinary people could never get away with this, but the Huntsman was different. The god pilot was too powerful to suffer the consequences of stepping on other people's toes. So long as he did not go far enough, other god pilots saw no reason to take him to account.

"Ugh, I really hope that no one else will try to get in my way. This is getting really tiresome."

"Meow" Lucky affirmed as he took his last bite of his sumptuous meal.

Time passed by. The Bluejay Fleet had already passed the most dangerous junction of its journey and was finally about to enter the Sapphire of the Red Ocean.

Ves already relaxed as it was virtually impossible for enemies to lurk around and prepare another ambush in a region that centered around the most prosperous and important star system after the Bridgehead One.

Before he was ready to enter Yernstall and immerse himself in politics at the galactic level, he first contacted his wife in order to discuss the gains from the most recent

battle.

"How fantastic!" Gloriana reacted exactly as he anticipated. "I adore this gift of yours! I shall tell Vice Director Maria Abselon to reassign her best biotech experts to the study of the Sympatico organ. If the analysis of the mechers is accurate, then this phasewater organ may serve as the key to allow not just myself, but other humans to interface with archetech without relying on intermediaries!"

This was indeed a very important development. Gloriana had gradually mastered archetech to the point of becoming a small authority in this alien tech base, but even she was not able to draw out the full potential of archetech.

The acquisition of the Sympatico organ gave her hope that she would be able to interface with her own tech by sight!

"You can't unilaterally decide the LBI's priorities." Ves gently pushed back against his wife. "I have claimed a number of valuable spoils, and their importance is no less than the Sympatico organ. It is impossible to implant these gigantic alien organs directly into my body. Even if phase lords have vastly stronger constitutions and can tolerate a lot more foreign matter than normal, I will still suffer a range of health problems if I try to implant them in my true body. We need a lot of biotech experts to meticulously study the phasewater organs and reverse engineer their working principles. The ultimate goal is for our researchers to cultivate human-adapted versions of the same organs that can safely be integrated in my true body, preferably within a year or two. These are heavy demands, so the LBI will have to invest a huge amount of high-end manpower on the

new projects."

The projection of Gloriana adopted a skeptical look. "I am not an expert in biotechnology, but even I can tell that these are difficult research projects. The LBI does not have enough senior researchers and specialists in phase lord biology to make brisk progress in all of these projects. Do not forget that they are already preoccupied with a large amount of existing projects, many of which are too important to abandon."

Ves sighed. He knew what must be done.

"I will speak to the Vice Director about increasing her budget. Again. We need the biotech researchers. I cannot afford to let all of these precious phasewater organs sit and do nothing for so many years. The researchers still haven't made any gains related to the Dofner organ and the Pelmir organ."

"That is because you are asking too much from them, Ves. No matter their qualifications, they are all new to this emerging field. The biotechs know far too little about how phasewater organs and phase lords work. They also have to learn a large amount of hard physics in order to understand the properties of phasewater before they can begin to learn how this material interacts with living organisms. Since everyone is starting from scratch, there are no readily available experts that can handle phasewater organs as if they worked on them for decades."

She was right. Ves felt frustrated at the absence of truly good help, but the painful reality was that the Larkinson Biotech Institute needed to train all of the specialists from

scratch.

"If the LBI cannot complete these important projects by themselves, then I will arrange collaborations with other competent biotech institutions." Ves decided. "Confidentiality is important, but speed is also of the essence. I am weak, you know. As a phase lord, I have done little to nothing to develop my personal combat prowess. Blindly increasing my phasewater concentration will only make my problem worse. The only way I can make effective use of my physical gifts is to upgrade and acquire a set of powerful phasewater organs. I do not like to rely on them, but reality isn't giving me any choice." "You do not have to do all of the fighting yourself, Ves. That is what mech pilots are for. I will try to see if I can speed up the completion of the Minerva Mark II Project. However, I cannot truly finish this upgrade project if you fail to come back to New Constantinople with a Mentalist Crystal in your hands. You better find a way to exchange one in Yernstall if you want to enjoy the best possible protection from an ace commander!" Gloriana did not fully understand his difficulties, but then again, she did not undertake the same degree of risks.

That was also why she remained a simple Senior Mech Designer while Ves had become an emerging leader of red humanity at a young age.

"I haven't forgotten about this demand of yours. I will look for a Mentalist Crystal, but I cannot give you any guarantees. The finances of our clan will become even more stretched after funding an

expansion of the LBI. I suppose I can still make use of my political leverage, but it is not a good idea to give away lots of favors without receiving

any in return."

His wife crossed her arms. "What is the point of becoming the leader of the Upper

Council of the Red Collective if you are not allowed to abuse your political station? You

are being too reticent about taking advantage of your power. Integrity is important, but so are interests. As long as you can protect yourself better, you will live long enough to slowly pay back all of the debts you have accrued. The parties who you have borrowed from will be glad to see this happen. They have a vested interest in your continued survival and success. Make use of that, Ves. Weave a web between these interest groups

and tie them to your chariot."

Ves looked impressed. "That... is sound advice. I did not expect to hear that from you. Did you come up with

that yourself?"

"No. My mother taught me that. She wanted me to pass on that you should not forget to fulfill her request. She is still waiting to receive an appointment to a respectable office in the Red Collective!"

Chapter 6386 Yernstall

Yernstall.

The Sapphire of the Red Ocean.

The new de facto capital of red humanity.

The central star node had risen up to become the most important haven of humans in the Red Ocean.

It was one of the few 'neutral' star systems in human-occupied space where Terrans and Rubarthans were able to tolerate each other's presence.

Many different groups that had the money to operate in the central star node preferred to conduct a lot of trading in this pivotal location.

The Yernstall Central Star Node featured the greatest variety of goods and services. Almost anything could be obtained in this commercial paradise. As long as consumers possessed enough wealth and status, they could always come away with emptier pockets but more satisfied expressions.

Ves hoped to be one of them. He had an entire list of goals that he wanted to accomplish while he visited this storied central star node.

He did not have enough confidence to obtain everything on his wish list, but he would already be happy if he completed half of his goals!

As soon as the Bluejay Fleet entered the Yernstall Central Star Node, it immediately came under the jurisdiction of traffic control.

Security was paramount in Yernstall. After witnessing what happened to Bridgehead One, the Red Association and the Red Fleet bolstered the defenses of this central star node and tightened the rules yet again.

Nobody was allowed to bring their mechs and starships wherever they wanted. The right to bring mechs around for protection had been curtailed even further. People were not even allowed to carry weapons for self-defense.

If they had any implanted weapons inside their bodies, then they had to submit

themselves to the security services, who would subsequently lock the activation of those integrated weapon systems.

It became almost impossible for visitors and residents to apply for exceptions to these onerous rules.

Fortunately, Ves remained one of the few leaders who still deserved special treatment. Considering that the Bluejay Fleet hailed from the Red Association, the incoming starships only had to undergo an accelerated inspection. This was mainly to inspect that the native aliens hadn't secretly snuck aboard a ship and disguised themselves as humans or whatever.

The temporary reinforcements that Ves managed to borrow from groups such as the Terran ancient clans and the Pantheon of Modern Gods were not allowed to accompany Ves any further.

The core ships of the Bluejay Fleet also separated from the Tarrasque. Each of them had gone through a serious battle and required serious repairs and upgrades in order to fulfill their mission to the best of their abilities.

Even the Babylon Excavator had to separate from Ves. Captain Zonrad Reze had distinguished himself in combat, but also needed to account for the liberal use of weapons of mass destruction.

The Red Admiralty definitely had questions about the 'reckless' use of hyper nanomachine plagues!

In the end, only the Tarrasque remained as the only remaining secure means of transportations between the planets of Yernstall.

Ves took a moment out of his busy schedule to head to an observation room and look outside the viewport.

The augmented view was magnificent. The most eye-catching feature was the three stars following a complex interconnected orbit with each other.

Yernstall did not originally feature so many stars. Back during the start of the Phasewater Generation in the previous age, mechers and fleeters had simply dragged a couple of nearby stars over to Yernstall in order to increase the energy generation of this important star system. They also brought in numerous planets as well in order to expand the local living space.

Ves had no idea how the MTA and the CFA could accomplish such an amazing feat.

In any case, the mechers and the fleeters subsequently built Dyson swarms around all three suns. The quantity of solar collectors floating at a remarkably close distance from a star was so high that it was impossible for the local industries to produce them all in a short time frame.



The solar collectors had all been produced back in the Milky Way Galaxy before getting exported to the Red Ocean. This was one of the many benefits of maintaining a transportation channel to the most powerful civilization in a large galaxy.

From the moment the greater beyonder gates got cut off from each other, red humanity could no longer rely on handouts from the prosperous Milky Way to solve all of its problems with ease.

Ves knew enough about the state of red humanity's industrial outlook to know that it was prohibitively expensive to build another Dyson swarm.

Therefore, the existing ones that partially blocked the energy radiating from all three fiery globes had become priceless!

It was not too difficult for the Red Two to replace a dozen solar collectors that always malfunctioned due to their extreme exposure to the radiation of a star, but it was impractical to replace the entire set!

This was why red humanity absolutely could not afford to lose Yernstall to the native aliens. Once the Red Cabal took over this central star node, the Dyson swarms would definitely be gone one way or another!

In order to prevent this outcome from happening, the mechers and the fleeters invested a lot to defend this crucial location.

Aside from all of the mech forces, defensive fleets and security regulations, the Red Two also relied on more formidable means of protection.

From the deployment of strong and ultra-long-range interdiction fields to the installation of massive grand work-level superweapons designed by Star Designers, nothing less than a civilization-ending invasion force could threaten humanity's hold over this strategic location!

Ves felt proud that his race managed to build up such a magnificent stronghold and commercial center. He should have visited this central star node sooner.

"Somewhere out there is my little shipyard." He muttered.

He had been looking forward to paying a personal visit to Starfarer Berth. He had toured the facility numerous times before by remote, but it just wasn't the same. However, he needed to address so many priorities during his stay in this star system that he was not sure if he could spare the time to visit his shipyard.

His schedule was about to become busy very soon due to an important event that would change his life and career forever.

A short time later, Ves ended his moment of contemplation and reunited with the other Senior Mech Designers aboard the Tarrasque.

They all gathered in the design lab where the central projection already displayed a map of their destination.

"This is Yernstall V, otherwise known as La Reine." Jovy pointed towards the heavily developed planet that was surrounded by several moons and a large amount of orbital works. "This planet is the main commercial and industrial center of the mech industry in Yernstall. The Red Association is mainly in charge here, but La Reine welcomes visitors from nearly every branch of red humanity aside from the fleeters. It is also the planet where we will hold the product reveal for the completed works of the Swarm Project." Ves and several other mech designers couldn't help but smile. After so many months of hard work and after overcoming an attempt to stop them from introducing their revolutionary products, they were finally approaching the end of their difficult ordeal! "At the request of Ves, we have scheduled the date of the product reveal to take place 3 days later." Jovy continued to brief the others. "This should give us enough time to inspect the Palace of Mechanical Marvels and prepare the site to receive an enormous

amount of guests."

The projection changed to show the mech museum and exhibition center that was built in one of the most expensive and high-end districts of La Reine.

The entire palace possessed an anachronistic appearance. The blending between ancient architectural elements and ultra-modern metallic materials resulted in an enormous structure that looked completely out of place in any time period.

Jovy quickly explained the background of the venue to the people who were unfamiliar

with the place.

"The Palace of Mechanical Marvels is first and foremost a museum. It is built and run by the Mech Supremacist Movement, and features many unique and priceless mechs of great historical significance. Its collection is so impressive that it is considered the best. museum if you want to learn about the development of mechs from the beginning of the Age of Mechs. It also offers more than enough space to host product reveals and symposiums. We could have chosen to hold our event at larger and more fully featured exhibition centers, but we have selected this palace in the end." Lord Richard Brownstone looked impressed at the selection of this venue. "This is an apt choice. The Palace of Mechanical Marvels commemorates every significant advancement of the mech industry. The work we have done to develop the first commercial Carmine mechs holds just as much historical significance if not more. We can donate the first copies of the final iteration of the mech designs of the Swarm Project to the museum as a grand gesture. Our works will become celebrated and admired by many visitors in the years to come."

The expression of Lady Romanda Devos looked especially emotional at the moment. She

had worked hard to prove that her concept of ultra-large enhanced cockpit systems had

a place in the mech community.

To place a series of Carmine mechs that featured her oversized cockpits in one of the most prestigious mech museums in the Red Ocean was the ultimate vindication of her

life's work!

However... Ves knew that Lady Romanda was clearly afraid that her invaluable contribution to the evolution of mechs may become stricken from the record. She had revealed herself to be a cosmopolitan to Ves. Even if she belonged to a different cell from the ones that masterminded the ambush, that still did not change the fact that she was a member of the most hated human terrorist organization!

Ves had not confronted her about her double identity after the Battle of Mazepan. He

did not rat her out to the authorities because he was not quite sure what to do with this

'opportunity!

Should he keep Romanda close to his side and use her as a channel to cooperate with the more reasonable cosmopolitans?

He did not feel motivated to expose her to the Red Two. She was not high-ranking

enough to know anything important. The revelation of her true allegiance would also taint Ves and his Carmine mechs at a time where they could least afford to carry this

blemish!

For now, Ves preferred to keep his options open. He only gave Lady Romanda a silent signal that she should remain patient before putting this issue aside.

He had much more important affairs to deal with than to decide the fate of a little

cosmopolitan.

"Can we expect the attendance of a lot of important guests?"

"It depends." Jovy said. "Every major organization has confirmed that they will send representatives to attend the product reveal. We have given out enough hints that they will regret it if they miss this event, but we are not certain whether they will send people with authority or mid-level managers that hold little actual power. We have done the best we can under the circumstances."

"Will there be any... tier 1 galactic citizens among the VIP guests?" Ves carefully asked. "There will be, Ves. I am told we should be ready to accommodate the presence of at least one Star Designer, but that attendance is not guaranteed. Any further information related to this topic is classified and falls outside of our responsibilities."

"I see. We better make sure we do not embarrass ourselves in high company." Compared to Ves who felt rather nonchalant about the potential attendance of a Star Designer, the others looked a lot more nervous and insecure than before! This was a Star Designer, an individual who reached the apex of their profession! How could they not remain calm when they learned that they might have to perform in front of such esteemed company?

Chapter 6387 Preparation Period

Ves had a lot of plans and ambitions for his visit to Yernstall.

He wanted to seal his appointment as the head of the Upper Council of the Red Collective.

He wanted to purchase more phasewater organs.

He wanted to meet with the Terrans and see if he could trade his services for more high-tier Destroyer weapons.

He needed to meet with the leading representative of the Hunting Association and obtain clarity about the organization's stance towards the Red Collective.

He also needed to do his best to persuade the Hunting Association to sell him a Mentalist Crystal.

He had to find a way to meet the Evolution Witch in person, not just to obtain much-needed answers from the capricious god pilots, but also collect on a promise.

Ves had more items on the agenda, but these were his main priorities. It would be great if he could meet all of these goals in one visit, but he had a feeling he would end up partially satisfied with his gains at the end.

The mech designer sighed.

This was going to be an uphill battle, so he intended to fulfill most of his goals after he unveiled his Carmine mechs to the public and gained a position of leadership in the Red Collective.

He needed all of the reputation and renown he could get in order to encourage other major players to open their doors to him! Ves not only needed to gain a higher position, but also prove through his work that he was a visionary who was bound to uplift red humanity to a higher level!

Only then would the high-and-mighty god pilots respect him as a more equal and deserving compatriot. Perhaps it may be enough to curb the arrogance of the Hunting Association and allow him to purchase a Mentalist Crystal at a reasonable price.

"Maybe not." Ves shook his head.

The Huntsman did not appear to be a person who placed a lot of importance in such matters. The information relayed by Lucky gave Ves a better understanding of the god pilot behind the name.

Though Ves did not have much hope of winning over the Huntsman, he still had to do his best.

In any case, the few days that Ves had left before he presented his Carmine mechs to everyone served as a buffer period.

Ves only had light duties on his schedule during this period. He did not dare to

undertake any major priorities for fear of any accidents and because he wanted to improve his reputation first.

He mostly spent his time at the Palace of Mechanical Marvels on La Reine. The stately and classical mech museum was undergoing a large amount of renovations in order to present the best possible venue for the historic product reveal.

Wherever Ves moved, numerous mechs constantly kept watch over him from every direction.

The security restrictions on La Reine were extremely tight, but Ves was still entitled to a lot of armed protection.

Since La Reine mostly fell under the management of the Red Association, the mechers were easily able to reassign a lot of units to guard the Palace of Mechanical Marvels.

A few mech units were even assigned to shadow and protect. Ves directly! One of them happened to be the Dark Zephyr. Saint Tusa provided the strongest guarantee of protection for Ves. Even if he did not strictly need the protection of an ace pilot as much as other VIPS, the presence of this powerful first-class ace light skirmisher still acted as a strong deterrent against potential troublemakers!

This was especially the case when Saint Tusa's feats became publicized. The mechers took the initiative to publish heavily sanitized and edited footage of the Battle of Mazepan to highlight the courage and heroism of the Larkinsons during the fight.

Not only did the brief clips of footage show Ves fighting against a bunch of arche phase lords by himself, but they also showed the moments where the Dark Zephyr crippled and killed the Arena Lord of Ya'gwasa!

In any case, the Distance Shaper already told everyone that he would make the aliens at Ya'gwasa know what happened to their former arena lord. That would make it much harder to keep all of the details confidential.

The only sensitive parts that the mechers insisted on keeping out of view were the widespread use of weapons of mass destruction. Even if word of their usage had already leaked to certain circles, it was not a good idea to give the public the impression that they were willing to launch weapons of mass destruction like there was no tomorrow. This could be regarded as an appetizer and a means to build up hype. It also boosted the glory and reputation of Saint Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson and turned him into a hero who was ready to receive admiration from more than the members of the Golden Skull Alliance.

The only issue was that the mechers still tried to impose a title on Saint Tusa without making it look as if they were trying too hard.

Not only did the propaganda pieces highlight the unusual fact that Tusa 'inherited' the title of Arena Lord from its former alien holder, the footage also included segments where the mech pilots madly repeated the title Phase Bane after the battle.

For this reason, Saint Tusa had already begun to become associated with the two titles that he did not really like, but had not rejected up to this point.

Ves could feel Saint Tusa's ambivalence and irritation towards this development as he oversaw the preparations of the upcoming product reveal.

"You know, you could stop all of the nonsense if you just spoke out, Tusa." Ves turned around and looked up at the Dark Zephyr floating from above. "I do not think it is a bad idea to accept either of the two titles, but you need to be the one to make this choice. Will you accept one of the monikers bestowed by others, or will you discard them and wait for a time where the masses will propose another title?"

The Dark Zephyr remained unresponsive for a time.

At first, many of the workers repeatedly glanced above in order to admire the famous masterwork ace mech that managed to kill a greater phase lord.

Fortunately, they gradually became used to the Dark Zephyr's presence and resumed their work without any significant interruptions.

If the Dark Zephyr kept hold of the tier 3 Destroyer spear, then he would have been able to look a lot more heroic and imposing.

However, the security services did not favor the appearance of such a lethal weapon, so the Destroyer weapon remained behind aboard the Tarrasque.

"I still cannot make up my mind on this matter" Saint Tusa transmitted. "I still need to think about it. I want to observe other people to find out what they think about calling me the Phase Bane or the Arena Lord. There is power in these titles, but they also come with the shackles of expectation."

"No one is truly free in our society." Ves softly shared his own thoughts. "We are all connected in a complex social web. Rules, customs and expectations may try to put us all into neatly labeled boxes, but these roles also bring a lot of clarity and stability. That is what red humanity needs the most at the moment. I don't blame the mechers for attempting to use your feat of heroism as a vehicle to reassure the masses. The people here in Yernstall are well-off, but the situation is much different in the more rural and less developed star systems. Many people are fearing for their lives and future when they repeatedly hear that our defensive lines are becoming more precarious."

"I am not blind to that, Ves. I am willing to step up and do my part, but I prefer to do it on my terms instead of that of others."

"Then you need to give us all a more definitive answer. I don't think it is a good idea to withhold your answer all of the time. I expect you to make up your mind and decide what sort of ace pilot you want to become by the time I am ready to depart from

Yernstall."

"Hmmm, that is fair. I promise you that I will give you a definitive answer on what I want

at that time."



The Dark Zephyr's Saint Kingdom grew a little more subdued and less confused. This

eased the tension in the Palace of Mechanical Marvels and helped everyone work a little more effectively than before.

While Ves continued to supervise the prep work for the upcoming product reveal, he also dealt with intermittent issues that popped up from time to time.

His personal assistant approached him during one of his lunch breaks and conveyed a message.

"Has the office of the Evolution Witch finally given me a response to my request for an audience?" Ves eagerly asked.

Gavin Nueman nodded. "One of her secretaries has informed us that Her Holiness intends to hold a major announcement 3 days after the founding of the Red Collective. Once she has addressed the public, she is willing to meet with you in private."

Ves let out a sigh of relief. "Finally. I was afraid that she would use a lame excuse to avoid a meeting with me. I haven't been able to get in touch with her at all since she forced me to lead the Interim Leadership Council in her absence. Has the office of the Evolution Witch told her what her upcoming announcement is all about?"

"No. We will just have to wait like the rest of the public, boss. From what little I can gather from my virtual meeting with her secretary, the Evolution Witch is confident she can command the attention of red humanity. I am fairly confident that she is planning to unveil something explosive."

That sounded... concerning. Making a shocking announcement fit the profile of the Evolution Witch. She was a more youthful god pilot who lacked the patience to lay low and boldly attempted to realize her ambitions. Her radical ideology compelled her to become more than just a silent guardian, and she was not shy about engaging in politics. "Well, whatever she has in mind, I am glad that she is willing to wait until I am done with my public dealings. I don't have to be afraid that she will steal my thunder."

If a god pilot intended to make a major announcement, then it had to be a big deal!

Ves had a suspicion that whatever devious plot that the Evolution Witch had in mind may cause him to get involved as well. This could be either good or bad depending on what she intended to unveil.

He did not have enough information to make reasonable guesses about what she intended to do, so he quickly stopped this line of inquiry and focused on more concrete

matters.

"The fact that she is willing to meet with me in private gives me hope that she is ready to fulfill one of her obligations to me." Ves couldn't help but smile as he looked forward to what may come. "I'll be able to grow stronger if all goes well. Things are looking up. Maybe I can even persuade the Evolution Witch to remove the block that is preventing my galactic citizenship tier from going up. A leader of the Upper Council of the Red Collective cannot remain stuck at tier 3."

Even as he said that, he personally had little hope that she would change her mind. God

pilots just loved to test him and mess around with him. The Battle of Mazepan had given him a deeper understanding of their behavior.

Gavin slightly bowed his head. "It is a great honor to meet with an exalted god pilot. The fact that you are able to gain a private audience with her is already a sign of favor that will open more doors for you. It will become easier for us to gain access to more exclusive circles where you can fulfill some of your objectives."

Chapter 6388 Ves the Pet Project

One day before the start of the increasingly more hyped product reveal, Ves received an important guest at the Palace of Mechanical Marvels.

Ves suspended his supervision and met with the guest on an upper floor,

Down below, he could clearly see the various historical exhibits showing a portion of the seminal works that defined the Age of Mechs.

From half-broken and salvaged knight mechs to a rare surviving copy of a famous superlarge quintuple combination mech, the mech museum offered visitors a glimpse of the wonders that mech designers came up with in the past.

Not every invention became successful enough to gain widespread adoption, but that did not stop them from influencing the direction of the mech industry and make other products stronger.

Mech designers only had a relatively short time to build up a legacy, but they managed to become extraordinarily productive during the Age of Mechs.

Under their collective efforts, mechs had become stronger, more efficient and more intertwined with human society than ever before.

It was hard to imagine that mechs could lose their popularity at this point. Not even the rise of cultivation and the imminent founding of the Red Collective could damage the eagerness for people to admire and worship mechs.

The only reason why mechs failed to expand its footprint into people's lives was because only a fraction of humans possessed the genetic aptitude to pilot mechs.

Whether the 3.5 percent figure was accurate or not, there was no denying that the heavy limitations of neural interface technology disqualified many hopeful children from pursuing a career in mech piloting.

While this requirement also ensured that most states wouldn't become overmilitarized, it had ruined the dreams of far too many people.

How many of these hopefuls possessed the seeds of greatness that made them no less talented or capable than the likes of the Chosen Human?

Yet because of a single disqualifying trait, so many humans never got the opportunity to prove their mettle.

As Ves looked down at the historical exhibits, he became increasingly more cognizant. that his invention would change everything.

He did not possess enough foresight and understanding of human society to account for all of the disruption his Carmine mechs would cause, but that was okay.

The mechers possessed plenty of intelligent people who could account for all of the shocks his invention would produce once it became known to the public.

This was why the Survivalist Faction and the Transhumanist Faction needed Ves to keep his Carmine System a secret for so long. The mechers had been frantically working to prepare red humanity for the introduction of the Carmine System.

"You are doing well for yourself." Master Dervidian noted with a pleased expression as he lifted up a delicate tea cup and took a gentle sip of his exotic brew. "The Battle of Mazepan has not shaken your resolve. That is good. Many parties are watching you and evaluating you. Even now, they continue to devise more ways to test your qualities to see whether you will fail their high expectations."

Ves frowned. What the Transhumanist just said spoiled his mood. He did not even bother to drink his tea, not that it did anything to quench his thirst anyway due to the size of his true body.

"I am not too happy with the Evolution Witch and those other figures who are hovering above my head. Why do they have to meddle with my life so much? Can't they just leave me alone and invest their valuable time in their own projects?"

Master Dervidian ruefully chuckled at that. "Oh, Ves. Your excellence is exactly the reason why they have decided that you are valuable enough to merit their attention. You may not like to hear this, but you have become one of their latest pet projects. The individuals who outrank you cannot help but test you and temper you in order to ensure that you have what it takes to become a competent and responsible steward of red humanity. If they ever retire from their leadership roles, they want to know that the next generation of leaders can take over their mantle without abusing their newfound power." That only made Ves feel even more disgusted at this behavior.

"Am I the only one who receives so much 'special treatment' from the bigwigs, Master?" "Yes... and no. Other emerging leaders usually come from established institutions that have developed a mature and time-tested talent development system. Talented mechers such as Professor Jovy Armalon and scions of Terran ancient clans such as Lady Alexa Streon have been raised and educated to exacting standards. Their training does not end after graduation. Once they enter the workforce, their employers will continue to test their limits and realize their potential. Through this semi-structured training regime, many talents eventually reach their limits and exhaust their potential. What matters is that a minority will find a way to break past their bottlenecks and continue to excel in the face of

difficulties. These are the promising young leaders that we most look forward to taking over after the passing of our generations."

As the patriarch of a large and growing clan himself, Ves kind of understood this approach. He admittedly employed a bit of this to the Larkinson Clan.

However, he felt he was being a lot more fair about the process. Ves had always emphasized transparency. He hated it when people played games and toyed with the lives of others.

As far as he was concerned, the Larkinson Clan should offer plenty of opportunities for

talents to excel and promote themselves, but never force any of its clansmen to embrace a life of stress and constant performance.

This was why Ves also insisted that only the main branches of the Larkinson Clan should put pressure on the clansmen to unlock and realize their potential.

If there were any Larkinsons that just wanted to do their duty and relax in their free time, then they were free to join one of the many planetary side branches. Life in those idyllic branches was much slower and less consumed by competition.

Of course, the members of the side branches shouldn't expect to earn as much either. The rewards had to be commensurate with risks and responsibilities.

The Evolution Witch, the Huntsman and all of those other high-and-mighty figures apparently engaged in the same activity, but at a much grander scope.

Red humanity was much bigger and more important than the Larkinson Clan, so the tier

1 galactic citizens imposed much higher expectations to the best of emerging young

leaders.

The more outstanding Ves became, the more those bigwigs acknowledged that Ves deserved a place in this exclusive club!

The problem that Ves had with this unwritten arrangement was that nobody ever asked him whether he wanted to receive this kind of treatment!

What really happened was that the Evolution Witch forced him to become the Deputy Chief Councilor of the Interim Leadership Council. That was probably the signal flare that unofficially announced his participation in this high-level rat race.

If the damned Evolution Witch did not force Ves to prematurely take part in high-level politics, he bet that there was a large probability that the ambush would have never

occurred!

The journey from New Constantinople to Yernstall should have turned into an

uneventful trip.

Ves sneered. "So the fact that I essentially rose up from nowhere and don't have a big state or organization to supervise my growth means that I am fair game to all of those meddlesome god pilots and Star Designers?"

The RA Master Mech Designer did not deny this. "The short answer is yes. We are aware that you have a prominent mother, but... since she has not taken the initiative to prepare you for your future responsibilities, other prominent individuals have taken upon themselves to do her job. This may sound unseemly to you, but it is more common than you think. What you need to remember is that the aforementioned tier 1 galactic citizens have good intentions when they invest in your life and career. It is not their intention to torment you. You will become better off as long as you satisfy their expectations. Haven't you managed to claim a rare and much-coveted phasewater production system after your latest battle? This is a treasure that you can never attain through normal means."

He may be right about this, but Ves felt anything but goodwill towards all of this meddling. He refused to accept that those tier 1 galactic citizens harbored good intentions towards him! As far as he was concerned, those bigwigs were just bored and wanted to have fun by torturing their juniors.

"I don't need a PPS so soon." Ves grumbled and crossed his arms. "It will be years or decades before I am eligible to promote to a greater phase lord. My original plan was to patiently build up my retinue of first-class ace mechs and sic them onto any greater phase lord that is stupid enough to

fight my greatest champions instead of fleeing on the spot. I don't need any help from others to obtain my own phasewater production

system."

Master Dervidian clearly saw that Ves felt far too upset to accept this explanation, so the older mech designer did not insist any further. He had come forward to explain the behavior of some of his superiors, but that did not mean he was obligated to defend their

actions.

"I can tell you that the Evolution Witch is particularly satisfied with your performance. When you meet with Her Holiness after she has concluded her planned announcement, she is willing to grant you a more thorough explanation. You are a crucial element in not just one, but several of her plans. Since you desire to obtain clarity, she will try to oblige you at that time."

Though Ves felt skeptical towards this promise, it was acceptable enough to melt a

portion of his hostility.

"Fine. She better have a good story when the time comes. Are you aware of what she is planning to announce?"

"I am." Master Dervidian curtly nodded. "She has recently disclosed one of her projects to a small group of confidantes. Her plan is... highly disruptive, perhaps even more so than the unveiling of your Carmine System. Unlike your work, we do not have much advance warning to prepare the rest of our society for the widespread changes that will follow after she has initiated her plan, but I think that our society will be eager to embrace this upcoming development."

That aroused Ves' interest. "Oh? Can you tell me what she is working on besides fighting

the native aliens?"

"Your name is not on the list, so I am not allowed to divulge any information. You will

have to learn the news at the same time as everyone else. It is only a week, so be patient. If the Evolution Witch successfully executes her ambitious plan, then she may very well end up saving red humanity from extinction."

"That sounds like a big deal." Ves looked both impressed and wary. "Please tell me that she doesn't intend to pull off another Polymath or anything." Dervidian laughed. "Oh, not at all! We would not remain silent if that was the case. We are not as unreasonable as the Survivalists. I can promise you that the Evolution Witch does not seek to subvert or take over our civilization. What she has in mind will

genuinely benefit us all. In fact, you have played a small but indispensable role in this endeavor. This is one of the other reasons why she favors you to an increasing degree."

"That sounds... nice."

"This will be a week of change. The first revolution will begin tomorrow when you finally present your Carmine System to society at large. Since your invention threatens to upend the oldest and most established rules of the mech industry, be prepared to face a large amount of skepticism and challenges. There will be individuals who will seek to put your Carmine mechs to the test."

Ves frowned at that. "My Carmine mechs aren't exactly... premium. Their Carmine pilots

are not professional either. They won't perform all that well compared to conventional machines controlled by professional mech pilots."

"There is no need for concern. Everyone will take the limitations of Carmine mechs into account. We shall make sure the challenges will not be excessive. What matters is that

your work can prove that the basic concept works. People will already become satisfied if a norm can pilot a mech. There is no immediate demand that a norm can perform well enough to defeat a potentate. You can work on that in the future."

Chapter 6389 Humans Always Need Enemies

After a final day of preparation, the big day had finally come.

The date of product reveal had arrived.



No accidents or emergencies arose that could have canceled or postponed the increasingly more hyped event.

No one tried to assassinate Ves or any of the collaborators that worked on the Swarm Project.

Of course, Ves did not really expect anyone to be able to succeed, let alone get close enough to make the attempt.

The Red Association has bolstered the security in the entire district where the Palace of Mechanical Marvels was located. The mechers also bolstered their defenses in orbit and

tightened their inspections even further.

The Survivalists and Transhumanists had become so invested in the unveiling of the Carmine System that they absolutely did not want any accidents to occur at this time.

There should be no instance where a tier 1 galactic citizen deliberately tried to stir up trouble to 'test' Ves.

This reassured him to an extent, but also made him more cognizant that he needed to do a really good job today.

He could not afford to screw up. Everything had to proceed smoothly. A single imperfection could tarnish the entire event.

Though he felt increasingly more nervous about it, he had made enough high-profile speeches to endure the pressure.

Not all of his colleagues could keep their nerves under control.

Jovy and Vector looked fairly composed. Their education and training had prepped them a bit better for occasions like these.

Lady Romanda Devos and Lord Richard Brownstone should have been more prepared as well, but their mentalities were not as firm.

Ves had to spend a bit of his time to reassure them and keep them cool enough to play their own roles in the upcoming presentation.

Out of the two, Ves directed more attention towards Lady Romanda.

The reason for that was because she not only represented the Terran Alliance, but also the Cosmopolitan Movement.

That latter part was a secret, but it still contributed to her conflicted feelings towards her participation in the soon-to-be historic Swarm Project.

In order to make the presentation as impressive as possible, the mechers dispatched the best available stylists and makeup artists to shape the appearances of the 5 Senior Mech Designers.

Ves had to exchange his familiar red-and-white patriarch uniform for a resplendent ensemble of carmine-colored suit pieces. The long coat that resembled a cape, the golden filigree, the sharp lines, the reflective green gems and the black accents made him look like a dignified vampire elder.

At least that was what he privately thought. It made him appear a lot older and more stately than he was in reality.

That was probably the point.

He lamented the lack of cat symbols. The design of his outfit lacked any sense of playfulness that he preferred to wear on his sleeve. It was a silent hint that conveyed to others that they shouldn't take him all that seriously.

Ves would rather be underestimated than the opposite. The more people took him seriously, the more reasons they had to meddle with his life!

Alas, it was too late to play stupid at this junction. He had risen too far and passed too many tests to stay under the radar. From the moment he reluctantly chose to raise his profile, he was destined to present himself in the most imposing manner possible.

The other contributors to the Swarm Project also dressed in an impressive manner. Each of their suits thoughtfully adopted the colors and symbols that reflected their respective backgrounds and origins.

Though Ves did not know too much about fashion, he could clearly tell that the outfits of the other mech designers did not stand out as much as his own. None of them were supposed to upstage the person that invented the Carmine System.

"Are you ready to go down in history, Romanda?" Ves casually asked as he watched Lucky receive the pampering of a team of stylists.

They did not attempt to force a cat-sized suit on the gem cat. Instead, they adored the exterior of Lucky's plating and carefully oiled and polished the surface until it gleamed in the light.

They also placed flowers and jewels around the ears and onto the tail. These additions turned Lucky from a gem cat that was capable of depopulating a hostile starship by himself into a beautiful feline companion!

"Meowww..."

The cat in question clearly did not like his new look. It made him look a lot softer and harmless. His appearance became an affront to his pride!

It was a pity that no one cared about his complaints. They only wanted to make Lucky look as 'presentable' as possible.

Romanda meanwhile answered Ves' question. "I am on the cusp of receiving a large amount of recognition. My contributions do not deserve to be honored as much as

yours, but my work will soon become known to people in every corner of the new frontier. I do not reject this honor, but... I fear I may ultimately fail to live up to the expectations of the public. I am not comparable to you, Ves."

"I can understand what you are going through. You fear that you are ultimately unable to live up to people's expectations. You do not necessarily owe them anything. As a mech designer, you should

only be accountable to mech pilots or more precisely your customers. The voices of others are not as relevant. As long as you hold onto the ethos of our shared profession, I am sure you will continue to have a place in the mech

industry."

"That is not exactly what I meant, but I appreciate your sentiment." The slightly older woman replied. "No matter what, I am a mech designer first, and a Terran second. Today, my contribution will benefit our entire race and seek to bring balance in the ongoing war. I truly hope that our Swarm Project may ultimately heal the many fractures in our society. For all of our differences, we are ultimately the same. It is my hope that our works will encourage individuals to recognize their shared identities and find cause to drop their grievances with each other."

He could clearly hear the double meaning in her words.

"Oh? I did not take you for a pacifist or a uniter. Are you willing to let the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact shake hands and make friends with each other?"

"After working together with Richard Brownstone, I have long come to the realization that the historical conflicts between our states are a relic of the past." Romanda said. "I think that Terrans have become so accustomed to inheriting the hatred towards Rubarthans from their parents that they blindly pursue this behavior without thinking whether it is still merited. We have already entered an age where the original cause for hostilities has already become ancient history, but no one is doing enough to correct our perspectives to fit the modern era.""

Ves stared into her eyes. "I do not think that the Terrans and the Rubarthans are still locked in a life-and-death conflict. They have already eased into a milder and less harmful rivalry. So long as they both share a common enemy, they will not have any reason to go too far. I feel that people always need enemies to fight against. If they don't feel sufficiently threatened, they will grow complacent and start to turn their weapons against themselves. That is just who we are. I don't think we can ever achieve lasting peace in our society. We are just too different and diverse from each other."

The Terran mech designer clearly did not agree with this cynical sentiment, but she did not feel the need to argue her viewpoint any further.

Ves actually did not think his Carmine System would lead to greater unity. It should intensify existing conflicts because Carmine mechs had the ability to empower a lot

more people.

Giving people more weapons would definitely encourage them to use their new toys. That will definitely make human society a lot more lively than before, and not always in

a good way.

Fortunately, that was not his problem. The Red Association existed to regulate the use of mechs. Ves may not like this organization all that much, but he could not deny that it served an essential purpose. Mechs could have done a lot more harm to people if a strong regulatory institution did not exist.

As the stylists finished their jobs, Ves and the others waited for the Palace of Mechanical Marvels to welcome the invited guests.

Many people had come to Yernstall in order to attend this mysterious product reveal.

Unlike in previous cases, Ves had his collaborators had done a much better job at preserving the details of his mech design project. Few clever people missed the fact that the Red Association was unusually invested in whatever Ves had worked upon. That served as a signal that they should not dismiss the importance of this product reveal.

As such, the main exhibition hall of the Palace of Mechanical Marvels had been set up to receive several million guests. A large proportion of them were either people of importance or their representatives. Each of them expected comfortable and luxurious accommodations that fit their status.

Not everyone was able to obtain the treatment that they desired. The place was just too packed. The mechers had done a good job at hyping up this event, so there were far too many people who applied to attend the product reveal in person.

The target audience of the Swarm Project was the common folk. The first Carmine mechs did not feature amazing combat power, and Ves wanted to wait until he came out with more premium products to satisfy the needs of the elites.

This was why he insisted that a large proportion of the audience had to consist of

ordinary folk.

While Ves partially got his wish, it was difficult to satisfy this condition. Yernstall was an incredibly expensive place to visit and reside in. The people who gained the qualifications to visit the central star node were much wealthier and more successful by definition. There was no place for losers and poor people in the Sapphire of the Red

Ocean.

"Oh well."

As Ves continued to wait backstage as the guests slowly passed through the incredibly

strict security checks, he petted Lucky's oiled and shiny back and occasionally greeted the friends and acquaintances that he agreed to meet.

"Thank you for inviting me, Ves. I would have never been able to travel to Yernstall and witness your famous presentations in person without your help." Tristan Wesseling said as he openly eyed his friend's carmine outfit. "The mechers must be truly excited for them to dress you up to this extent."

"I can promise you that you will cherish this moment for the rest of your life." Ves

grinned.

"I cannot wait. Is there a place for my gems in your new works?" "Not per se." Ves honestly said. "Your gems will have the same effect on them as they do

on my older works. There is no special synergy as far as I can tell. That may change in the future. I will develop more premium and powerful products where your hyper gems can play a more material role in elevating their performance. The economics also makes a lot more sense in those cases. Nothing is certain in the future, but if all goes well, I will approach you in order to forge a long-term partnership with you. The premise is that your hyper gems are powerful enough to be worth my time. You are not the only mech designer that can offer comprehensive enhancements to my products."

"I have not been sitting still." Tristan seriously said. "I have made numerous discoveries and advancement since I produced my initial batch of positive and negative hyper gems.

I have not been able to suppress their cost, but I am continuing to discover new methods to make them stronger."

"That is good to hear. The more noticeable the changes, the better."

Chapter 6390 You Lose

Ves had a good talk with Tristan Wesseling.

The status between the two may have diverged even further in the past few years, but Ves never forgot the simple friendship they once shared.

This relationship enabled Ves to speak with Tristan on a more equal and casual level.

It became increasingly harder for Ves to speak to others without any regard for his elevated status and reputation, especially towards people outside of his clan.

This was why he still remembered Tristan and extended an invitation to him. There were many advantages to visiting Yernstall. Perhaps he may be able to find new customers for his products, or meet another mech designer whose design philosophy synergized well with his own.

Although Ves was willing to pay for Tristan's vacation, it was up to the former Fridayman to find his own opportunities on La Reine or any of the other planets in the large star system.

"There is a rumor going around that your product reveal is so important that a Star Designer may deign to attend. Is there any truth to this story?" Tristan cautiously asked. Ves merely responded with a mysterious smile. "Even if it is true, why do you think I am allowed to say anything about it? Don't talk about this topic any further."

"Understood, Ves."

They soon spoke about less controversial topics.

"So how is Davute these days?"

"It is doing fine for a second-rate colonial state in the Krakatoa Middle Zone." Tristan said. "Since our zone is adjacent to the contested Torald Middle Zone, everyone in Krakatoa is aware that they will face the brunt of alien aggression if the remaining two defensive bands ever collapse. That has spooked many colonists. Many cowardly families and organizations have already relocated to the rear of human space if they can afford it. Those that have remained behind mostly cannot afford to abandon their foundations and afford the overinflated prices that are being charged for real estate in the rear."

"Would you relocate to the Magair Middle Zone or another safer place if given the chance?"

"No." Tristan said with a surprisingly decisive tone. "I am done with running away. I severed my relationship with the Friday Colonies. I do not want to return in disgrace. I do not want to repeat the process of an immigrant trying to integrate into a foreign state a second time. The Colonial Federation of Davute is anything but perfect, but it is better than the Friday Colonies in any way. I wished I grew up in this state instead. If the war ever comes at our doorstep, I will leave the design lab and volunteer for military service. There is always a place for Journeyman Mech Designers in the military."

Perhaps Tristan may be overestimating his courage in the face of a genocidal threat, but Ves still admired his friend's courage and dedication.

Tristan Wesseling had lived through war once before and witnessed how ugly it could turn out. Yet despite being haunted by his trauma for many years, he still possessed enough of a sense of duty to take a more active part in a war once again.

Ves found it regretful that Tristan had yet to improve his design philosophy and his mech designs to the point of advancing to the rank of Senior Mech Designer. The former Fridayman's mentality was obviously in the right place, but that alone was not enough to get rid of his Journeyman status.

A Senior Mech Designer had to be capable of designing mechs that were clearly superior to the products they designed back when they were Journeyman Mech Designers.

If the difference in quality and performance was not significant enough, that person did not deserve to attain a higher rank.



It may take a decade or two for Tristan to advance to the rank of Senior by relying on his own efforts. This was a relatively average pace for a typical second-class mech designer, but it was incredibly slow compared to Ves.

That said, Ves did not urge Tristan to hurry up or lend any aid in order to speed up his plans. The man clearly had his own pride, and he was doing well enough compared to many other mech designers.

"If the Red War ever reaches Davute, you may have more than one way to contribute to the war effort." Ves gave his friend a coy smile. "Mech designers like us are no longer as limited by our physical constraints as before. We live in the Age of Dawn. There are many more wonders available to us than in the previous age. You need to correct your cognition and keep up with the times. If war ever comes, you will have many more tools at your disposal than before."

"I have seen the news footage where you fought against those strange arche phase lords. It is hard to believe that the giant human fighting against those arche with the help of smart metal is a mech designer. I do not think that becoming a phase lord is my thing, though. Just the cost of procuring the phasewater needed to expand my body to such exaggerated proportions is enough to end this fantasy."

Ves laughed. "There are more affordable ways for mech designers like you and I to become an asset on the battlefield. I can promise you that a lot of good stuff is in the works that will completely change the way we fight."

"Has the Red Collective prepared a 'cultivation method' that can strengthen mech designers?" Tristan asked with a slightly longing voice.

"Sort of. Just wait for the announcements, my friend. I don't dare to claim that red humanity's reversal is just around the corner, but the stuff I have been involved in will change our society forever"

As much as Ves wanted to chat with Tristan a bit more, he had to receive other important guests as well.

Once Tristan bid goodbye and left the backstage area, another notable guest arrived to meet with Ves in person.

He vastly preferred it if he did not meet with this particular individual, but her status demanded that he accepted her private visitation.

Lieutenant-Commander Astrid Jameson strode forward with purpose. She stopped before Ves and beheld his impressive appearance with an irritated expression. "Well-played, Hierarch of the Coalition of Faiths."

"Good morning to you too, Grandmaster-Protector of the Guardians of Order."

The two referred to each other by the titles that they used as of late in their political spars.

In the past few sessions of the Interim Leadership Council, Ves and Astrid had verbally sparred against each other numerous times.

Both of them represented the two broadest and most influential factions of the soon-to-be-founded Red Collective. It was impossible for them to befriend each other, but they at least grew familiar enough to build a measure of respect towards their political counterparts.

Though Ves still thought of Astrid Jameson as a spoiled brat who only managed to rise up the ranks of the Red Fleet due to the fact that she was a descendant of a powerful fleet admiral, he gradually learned that he was being unfair to this young lady.

For Astrid to gain opportunities to present herself to the public showed that she had managed to outperform many other scions of the Jameson line.

At the very least, Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson still saw enough promise in Astrid to support her bid to lead the Guardians of Order.

However, Ves had a strong feeling that Astrid's motivation to seek him out had little direct relations to the political affairs of the Red Collective.

"You found out, didn't you? You and your ancestor at the very least."

Astrid scowled. "We did. You and your fellow mechers have admittedly done well to hide the truth of the storm that you are about to unleash upon our society, but it is impossible for you to protect your secret now that it has been shared among too many

people."

Ves shrugged. "I never really insisted on keeping this secret for so long. It is the mechers who really wanted to keep you guys in the dark. I don't think they care too much if the Red Fleet knows about it now. Unless you invade La Reine right away, there is no way for you and your fellow fleeters to stop what is coming. It is too late. You have already lost

this game."

The fletcher's expression turned even uglier as she had no choice to admit the truth of

his words.

"Do you understand how much time, resources and manpower the Red Fleet has invested in the establishment and expansion of the Starfighter Corps? It had a modest start, but it has gained more acceptance over the following months. We have built up a thriving industry for starfighters, and we have organized enough training programs to mobilize hundreds of millions of starfighter pilots in the next 3 years. All of this work. All of this training. None of it will come to fruition because the mech-crazed space peasants will take one look at your so-called Carmine mechs and forget about our Starfighter Corps. What pains all of us is that we have no viable counterplay. You have already put

us in checkmate."

Though Ves wanted to feel smug about ruining the plans of the fleeters, his greater sense of responsibility towards human society couldn't help but decry all of the wasted

investment.

He sighed. "I did not want this to happen, but that is life. Technological progress always comes paired with wasted efforts. There are few winners and many losers. That is the reality of it. I do not necessarily consider the Starfighter Corps to be a waste. If my Carmine mechs did not work out, we can always count on your brand of small craft. Besides, my Carmine mechs impose heavy restrictions that do not work out for everyone. Your starfighters are much easier and more straightforward to control. It doesn't require a decade of training for pilots to meet professional standards." "We do not require your pity, hierarch." Astrid hissed. "We can recognize that we have lost. We are already planning to draw down our Starfighter Corps. There is still a place for it as you have said, but our dreams that groups will begin with more starfighters than mechs have come to an end."

Ves smiled in a good-natured way as he reached forward and patted her shoulder.

The lieutenant-commander scowled and quickly pulled back.

"Do not touch me, you scoundrel!"

"Hey, I am just trying to cheer you up. The Red Fleet shouldn't hate my invention. You

guys should embrace it instead! Have you not realized that my Carmine mechs rely on the same principles that have turned the Dominion of Man into a beast of a dreadnought? Now that I am about to publish my Carmine mech designs, your scientists and engineers will have a much easier time to reverse engineer my unique tech and independently develop your own Carmine warships."

The woman's expression changed. "Are you being serious, Larkinson?"

"I am. As far as I am concerned, you fleeters need to stop wasting your time on popularizing your own version of small craft. It does not fall into your core competences at all. You guys have always excelled in warship development, so you should stick with this. While I cannot promise you that it will be easy to adapt my Carmine System to large naval hulls on a practical basis, the existence of the Dominion of Man proves that this ambitious line of research does not lead to a dead end."

His suggestion caused the fletcher to fall in thought.

It was not easy to realize this ambition. The top minds of the Red Fleet had spent many

months on studying and deciphering all of the impossibilities that made the Dominion of Man so strong, but they had not come close to cracking one of the many working principles that turned this dreadnought alive!

Even so, it was better than nothing. The Red Fleet refused to let the Red Association gain the upper hand!