

Mech Touch 6941

Chapter 6941 Unstoppable Descent

Ves underwent an hour's worth of checks. He already received a short inspection at the damaged operating chamber, but many of the scanners and instruments could no longer be relied upon.

This was why it became imperative for Ves to undergo a proper physical inspection at the medical facilities that remained intact at Diandi Base.

The biotech experts in charge of examining his current state emphatically told Ves that he must not unfold his true body or do anything else for that matter. They clearly understood the risks of doing so and did not want to trigger another accident.

While Ves patiently endured all of the scans and poking, he could also feel he was being studied through more metaphysical ways.

The Saint Kingdom of the First Sword Mark III and the Command Field of the Minerva Mark II never ceased to scrutinize about Ves that they could reach.

While Ves was pretty sure that they could not read his mind or anything, he still felt awfully exposed by their unscrupulous examinations.

Others joined the party as well. Many design spirits spread their awareness to Diandi Base and cautiously probed Ves to verify that he was still the same person for the most part.

The Golden Cat, Lufa, the Illustrious One, the Phase King, Gaia and even the Superior Mother extended a sliver of their power to refamiliarize themselves with the new Ves.

Fortunately, Ves never sensed any malice behind all of the probing. Ves had built up good relations with many of them, and that alone was enough to earn him the benefit of the doubt.

Ves could sense the tension and paranoia among the surrounding clansmen fade.

They did not necessarily doubt his identity, but they could not afford to let down their guard.

The Larkinsons needed to be 100 percent instead of just 95 or even 99 percent.

Perhaps a single favorable data point might not sound convincing enough, but when many different data points supported the same conclusion, then the Larkinsons tentatively relaxed.

Only partially, though.

Ves continued to wait until a Larkinson bodyguard finally led him to a familiar conference room.

It had already been secured using the super-class gadgets that he relinquished before the surgery.

The powerful Saint Kingdom of the First Sword Mark III continued to maintain a strong degree of privacy and security.

Ves nodded in approval at the men and women who had already taken a seat at the conference table.

It was rather convenient that the furniture still remained, though the members of the Premier Branch had already emptied it of much of the artwork and various other objects.

"Meow."

A certain gem cat kept lounging on his shoulder. His continued presence served as a reassuring endorsement.

Though Lucky largely played the role of a mascot these days, many clansmen knew that the cat was not stupid. If he thought that a foreign entity had taken over Ves' body, then he would have meowed his suspicions!

"Vice Director Abselon." Ves greeted the head of the Larkinson Biotech Institute.

"High Captain Gilbert de Raanvanchas." He nodded his head towards the captain as well as the de facto fleet commander of the Premier Fleet.

"Gavin." He made a another greeting to his personal assistant.

All three of them maintained serious expressions. They certainly had an inkling of what happened to him. While Maria and Gilbert shouldn't be too familiar with him, the same could not be said for Gavin Neumann.

His personal assistant was among the people who were highly familiar with him and his unique personality. He could easily distinguish between the normal Ves and the strange alter ego that posessed delusions of godhood.

There was one more person in the conference room that was arguably more familiar with him on a personal level.

"Hello, honey."

"Ves..."

Gloriana Wodin's expression towards her husband conveyed both vigilance and distress.

This made Ves more curious about how his other self behaved in the short amount of time he was in charge of his true body.

The differences must have been really obvious for his own clansmen to continue to regard him with suspicion!

"I need to know what happened." Ves broke the awkward silence. "I lost awareness of what was happening after the implantation of the lesser Pelmir organ. It is clear that an unknown party launched an attack on us. Given that my body is hale and healthy, I assume we managed to beat back the attackers without suffering serious damage. However, it is clear that my true body did not remain prone and unmoving. I need to know. I need to see it for myself."

Another awkward silence ensued as the Larkinsons tried to figure out a proper response.

"Show the footage." Saint Commander Casella Ingvar transmitted to the conference room. "Each of us deserves to obtain clarity, including the patriarch himself. Let him see the enemies that have befallen us and how 'he' reacted against this incursion."

A projection came to life. It depicted the events that took place in the operating chamber on a large scale.

The initial minutes proceeded without issue. The implantation of the lesser Dofner organ and the lesser Pelmir organ came with numerous risks, but Ves' true body remained under control.

When the surgeons asked whether Ves was ready and willing to commence the fourth and final organ implantation, Ves deliberately blinked his eyes and made another thumbs up gesture.

"That was not me." Ves plainly admitted. "My awareness already started to fade by the time my body hooked up with the lesser Pelmir organ. I was completely out of it by the time my body formed a connection to the lesser Arcis organ."

Vice Director Maria Abselon frowned. "Our readings of your physiology indicated that you were in a greater state of calm than usual. We assumed that contrary to our initial expectations, you have managed to improve your control over your true body. This assumption turned out to be false. A different intelligence had already begun to emerge."

"Dise. Casella. Did you manage to detect anything amiss?"

"No."

"It is difficult to notice any differences while you remain in a state of calm. Your serenity made you so still that it was difficult for us to detect any deviations. It was only when your true body was forced to defend itself that we recognized that you were not yourself anymore."

Shortly after the surgeons began to wrap up the surgery and close the holes in his massive true body with the help of advanced biotech instruments, the ceiling suddenly collapsed!

The footage paused.

"That shouldn't have happened." Ves said with a frown. "While the facility is not buried too deep, it is being held together by multiple layers of transphasic hyper alloys and thick soil. On top of that, the entire facility is also covered by a modern medium-sized titan shield. Then there is the First Sword Mark III's Saint Kingdom. How could an enemy possibly penetrate through all of those defenses and collapse the ceiling all at once?"

"The rules have changed, sir." Saint Commander Casella Ingvar said. "From what we have been able to surmise with the help of the Devos Ancient Clan, one of the orbital defense platforms had become compromised. One of its gauss cannons launched an exceedingly powerful kinetic projectile at the fastest possible speed towards the surface at an angle. The parameters of this orbital attack made it difficult for us to intercept in time. Although my Vassals and Minerva Mark II attempted to shoot down the rapidly closing projectile as it cut through the atmosphere, none of our attacks were effective."

That sounded strange. As fast as the projectile must have descended from orbit, an ace commander should have been skilled and fast enough to intercept it in time!

Another projection came to life. This one depicted a zoomed-in image that did a good job of tracking the special gauss projectile as it soared down towards the surface of New Constantinople VIII like divine punishment.

Several points stood out to Ves. The first was that the projectile was considerably smaller than expected. The second was that it resisted intercepting attacks extremely well!

Ves almost rose from his seat in shock when he figured out the reason.

"That... that's a superdimensional projectile!"

It was no wonder why it descended from above so quickly!

Compared to transphasic projectiles, the superdimensional round pretty much behaved as if air resistance did not exist.

Resonance-empowered laser beams repeatedly struck the projectile, but the solid round resisted the energy attacks without exhibiting any notable signs of damage!

As the projectile managed to get a lot closer, other projectiles such as gauss rounds, plasma bolts and phase disintegrator bolts struck the round.

Nothing worked.

The superdimensional round withstood all of the damage with unnaturally high momentum.

This round was way more advanced than it appeared on the surface!

"It's... a weapon-grade superdimensional round." Ves reacted with shock. "This... this is too extravagant!"

It was not until the round was close to crashing into the surface that it began to bloom and increase its surface area!

The rarity of weapon-grade superdimensional matter was the highest! Many parties yearned to obtain them in order to make excellent infantry-grade or mech-grade equipment. Ves could hardly believe that an unknown party was willing to squander so much of it just to facilitate an assassination attempt!

"As wasteful as it may be, it worked." Gloriana stated. "Look."

It was not until the round was close to crashing into the surface that it began to bloom and increase its surface area!

If it did not do so, it would have phased right through the soil without inflicting enough impact damage to the underground facility.

The result of this was that all of the layers of soil and hard metallic alloy failed to offer any significant form of resistance against this superdimensional hammer from the skies.

The titan shield became a joke as it offered virtually no resistance against this projectile.

Just as the round breached into the large operating chamber and was on the verge of shredding through Ves' vulnerable true body, Saint Dise finally took action!

Her First Sword Mark III had been stationed right inside the chamber so that she could take action to prevent possible threats from harming Ves when he was in his most vulnerable state.

Although this decision prevented the ace swordsman mech from intercepting the superdimensional projectiles before it struck the planet, the First Sword Mark III moved quickly once the round threatened to devastate the entire chamber with Ves still inside.

The footage had to be slowed down in order to give Ves a clear view of what Ketis' latest masterwork had done.

The superdimensional swordsman mech simply took position at the exact center where the projectile was about to pass through and mobilized the power of her Saint Kingdom.

Saint Dise did not choose to employ her new sword fey.

A single sword was enough in her opinion.

The Decapitator already began to glow with accumulated energy.

Once Dise judged the time had come, the wondrous superdimensional greatsword swung upwards with a metallic radiance!

After that, the optical sensors briefly became blinded by the collision!

By the time they recovered, nothing was left of the superdimensional projectile aside from billions of metallic particles floating away from the newly created gap!

"Impressive!" Ves said in a clear tone of appreciation. "Has the Decapitator incurred any damage from striking this projectile?"

"No." Saint Dise responded. "I was able to protect the blade with a combination of true resonance and metal energy. I also employed a technique to protect and harden the blade further. The Decapitator only requires slight maintenance and polishing."

"I see."

Weapon-grade superdimensional matter was most vulnerable against itself. This orbital attack could have inflicted serious harm onto the First Sword Mark III if she had yet to undergo a superdimensional conversion!

Ves thought that it was quite soon to be making use of a full superdimensional mech, but he had overlooked the possibility that he might need such a machine to protect him from forward-thinking enemies that already devised ways to make use of this new kind of material!

Chapter 6942 Lighting Application

Although it was just the opening strike, the fact that an enemy not only managed to get its hands on weapon-grade superdimensional matter, but decisively expended it on an assassination attempt against Ves showed real commitment!

There was an enemy out there that was willing to waste extremely valuable resources just to make Ves dead!

Many people frowned when they thought about who might have a reason to eliminate Ves and who possessed the qualifications to obtain the highest grade of superdimensional matter.

When they put these two lists together and identified which parties happened to be present in both, there was still a fair number of individuals and organizations that happened to be on both at the same time.

Perhaps the Larkinson Clan might be able to narrow down the possible culprits further by attempting to collect additional intelligence on the suspicious actors, but Ves did not think that his spies could gain any conclusive answers.

His personal assistant concurred. "The groups that have received a batch of weapon-grade superdimensional matter are known to us, but it is dangerous for us to accuse any of them for being responsible for bombarding the facility where the operations took place without solid proof. We can conduct all of the data analysis we want, but it is all circumstantial at best. If it is too difficult for us to obtain answers, then it is best not to seek them out and risk making the wrong judgments."

"The Devos Ancient Clan bears culpability. That cannot be denied." Casella Ingvar stated. "It is clear that a third party has secretly compromised the orbital defense platform and hacked it to launch the superdimensional round at us, but that does not excuse the negligence shown by the Devosans. Not only did they miss the transfer of an extremely rare and dangerous superdimensional gauss round, but none of its personnel had successfully managed to detect and report the discrepancies in time."

Ves casually waved his hand. "The kind of people that are able to obtain weapon-grade superdimensional matter is not average. These top powers have plenty of ways to compromise the security of one of many orbital defense platforms. That does not necessarily excuse this security breach, but I don't blame the Devosans for their failure. We would have been just as helpless if we took their place. There is no need to give them a hard time."

The Devos Ancient Clan had shown a lot of goodwill towards the Larkinson Clan. The two maintained friendly relations as well as a few ongoing business agreements. Ves was not keen on disrupting this mutually beneficial relationship.

Several people nodded after Ves had made his case.

"Our clan is prepared to demand moderate concessions from the Devosans." Gavin said. "The ancient clan will most definitely oblige to our requests, if only to rebuild trust and win back the honor it had lost for allowing such an important guest to become exposed to elevated danger."

This should not be a difficult matter. Ves believed that his staff could take care of this issue by themselves.

The footage of what happened in the operation chamber resumed.

By this time, a number of mechs had become affected by the surprise attack. Those that were located close enough had suffered varying degrees of damage!

Now that a giant hole had formed that led directly down to the operation chamber, it became clear that a follow-up attack became likely.

Many mechs scrambled into action. They activated their strongest active sensors while moving into tighter formations.

The Dracoloids, Omega Threshers and E-MULES all utilized their own bulk to partially fill up the large gap and prevent any external parties from intruding into the operation chamber.

Their attempts to form a blockade looked cute, but it had been utterly useless against the next foe!

They initially emerged from the shadows. Parts of the entire floor that had been shrouded before suddenly became a lot darker!

The shadows initially grew darker and more ominous. Then they appeared to gain definition as different shapes emerged from those shadow pools!

Within a matter of seconds, over a hundred strange existences turned from shadow into reality!

Though the creatures remained predominantly dark, their transformation into a more physical existence caused their appearances to become more defined.

"Are those... phase lords?"

The dark aliens initially looked like undersized phase lords. They were roughly as large as mechs, but did not come in greater sizes.

Their contours clearly resembled that of the major races that had fought against red humanity.

The dark aliens possessed body shapes that correspond to orvens, nunsers, juregs and even humans!

Yet they did not behave like any of those aliens. As they came to life, they immediately began to show their hostility by trying to converge onto Ves, who was still lying on the operating table at this time!

Naturally, the first-class multipurpose mechs of the Premier Branch immediately went into action.

Dozens of Dracoloids tore into the strange apparitions while the Omega Threshers provided support further away.

The Saint Commander did not want to leave anything to chance and Enfeoffed as many of the friendly machines as possible.

However, much to everyone's surprise, these new enemies were able to put up a much better fight than anyone anticipated!

They seemed to possess a fraction of the strength of phase lords.

However, their main element was no longer space, but death.

"These enemies came across as 'undead' to me." Casella Ingvar said. "They possessed many traits that reminded me of enemy phase lords. I have searched the database for phase lords that have perished during the Red War, and I have found numerous matches between the slain phase lords and the death-based ghosts that came to life earlier today. Despite losing the strong physical bodies that phase lords are proud of, their death-infused forms are able to corrode and kill anything it comes into contact with. My Knights and Vassals were only able to resist this dangerous attack vector by relying heavily on my true resonance."

The footage reflected the struggles of the Minerva Mark II and the mechs under her command. Their combined combat power was already high.

For them to falter before the Premier Fleet took its first true step into the stars would set a bad tone for the rest of the campaign!

Compared to the ace command pilot, Saint Dise fought more directly. Her superdimensional ace mech possessed unparalleled lethality against all manner of life forms, and she took advantage of that to clear a safe zone around Ves' true body.

The ace swordsman mech managed to shred all of the dark ghost-like beings that crossed an invisible circle around Ves!

Yet despite these efforts, the superdimensional First Sword Mark III ultimately met its match when she got mobbed by three nunser-like aliens that wielded their own versions of Saint Piercer arms!

Even though their superdimensional weapons were not based on solid matter, they seemed to gain a lot more lethality after this transformation!

"These enemies are terrible to fight against." Saint Dise shared her evaluation. "The copies imitate the power, abilities and weapons of the dead, but also put their own spin on them. That results in half-baked superdimensional weapons that are nonetheless steeped with death energy and other negative energies. These beings are filled with pure evil. While it shouldn't have taken too long for my battle partner and I to wipe them out, we were being held back long enough for other dark ghosts to threaten your life."

More of the dark shades that reminded Ves of the fiends deployed by the Phobos.

For whatever reason, he could see the obvious parallels between the two. He did not think they were precisely the same kind of existences, but just the comparison was enough for Ves to grow vigilant towards the maker of these death shades, if such a being was even real!

Whatever the case, numerous death spectres emerged from the shadows cast by the operating table. They emerged close enough that few mechs were in the position to beat them back!

Multiple first-class multipurpose mechs had already shifted their ranged weapons to open fire at the would-be assassins.

However, many of them demonstrated exquisite evasion capabilities and were ready to strike directly at Ves' true body!

That was until 'he' fully woke up and activated his strengthened spatial barrier.

"Insolent!" Ves roared as he also stimulated his lesser Acris organ to release a powerful discharge of electrical energy!

Though Ves originally meant to use this phasewater organ to power up his own tech, it turned out that the radial lightning attack successfully kept the native aliens at bay!

This generated enough room for him to rise from the table and stand upright. The unawakened Ves also took the opportunity to increase the size of his true body, causing him to gain significantly more mass and leverage!

The expression on his face displayed a familiar kind of anger, but those who knew him well should be able to tell that this was not how he usually expressed his fury!

"You filthy deathborn parasites! You dare to desecrate my holy physique?! My true body is my temple! It is the center of my divinity! You deserve annihilation for your blasphemous transgressions!"

After shouting those completely conceited, arrogant and foreign words, Ves began to tear into the attackers.

He skillfully wielded the capabilities of the lesser Arcis organ. His body appeared to gain a notable immunity to electrical attacks. He fearlessly surrounded himself with lightning bolts and used his energized body as a powerful counter and deterrent against the dark alien shades!

"The lighting power that you have been able to call from your latest phasewater organ is not that powerful." Gloriana commented. "It shouldn't have killed those dark aliens so easily when other weapons struggle to eliminate them entirely. The only explanation that makes sense in this situation is that strong positive energy can counter strong negative energy."

The Ves whose body was controlled by an alter ego fought well.

In fact, he fought with far greater skill and deliberation than he had ever shown before.

This enabled Ves to remain competitive in a fight against the undead beings!

It looked glorious. For all of his boasting, the alter ego of Ves actually knew how to fight and make skillful use of his phase lord physique!

Due to his active involvement, the dark shades were ultimately unable to finish off their target.

They were only able to cripple a notable amount of mechs and kill a few mech pilots outright.

The Premier Fleet had suffered its first true casualties before it embarked on its long-awaited war campaign!

The Ves who clearly had no qualms about abusing the lesser Arcis organ continued to throw lightning punches left and right.

Though there were a number of times when the unknown enemies got close to inflicting serious harm to Ves, he relied on the power of his enhanced Kelsis organ and Arcis organ to push back his enemies and keep himself out of harm's way!

"You foul cheaters of death shall meet your ultimate end at my hands! Your cursed existence shall befoul us no more! Only the living deserve to earn the mantle of godhood!"

Though the Larkinsons continued to suffer casualties in their attempts to suppress and defeat these enemies that came from the shadows, their threat quickly came to an end when they were no longer being replenished.

The deadly shades soon lost their numbers advantage and rapidly dwindled until nothing was left.

In the end, Ves remained frozen while also holding the disconnected arm of a friendly mech.

The footage ended at this point. Ves already knew what happened next.

"So this is what you all fought against." He whispered in both awe and confusion. "Who are these aliens? How can they emerge from the shadows? Why have sacrificed so much in an attempt to deprive me of life? This is intolerable!"

These new mystery aliens generated way more questions than answers. Trying to figure out who they were and where they came from might not be easy considering that they never left any records behind in the Red Ocean.

Who were these guys?!

Chapter 6943 The Deathborn Race

"..."

When Ves looked at his own performance, he wondered how he was able to fight so well.

His second personality may hold delusions of godhood, but it turned out that he was not a complete blowhard.

He did not need any training to make effective use of his brand-new lesser Arcis organ right at the start!

Ves could not recognize himself when he saw himself fight under the previous circumstances.

The entire situation was a confusing mess. Not only did an unknown enemy launch a superdimensional projectile at the underground facility, it also resulted in the spawning of lots of evil adversaries.

"What do we know about these creatures?" Ves asked. "So far, I have only been able to figure out that they are energy-based life forms. That explains how they were able to emerge from the shadows without needing to enter the site in a normal fashion. They are also based on negative energy. I can vaguely sense from the recording that they are predominantly dominated by death, darkness and other negative attributes. If I didn't know any better, I would have thought that they were demons."

"Are they?"

"...Maybe." Ves responded. "I am pretty sure they are not. These creatures have a different vibe. They are overwhelmingly based on death energy. Their personalities, as little as I can perceive it, possess even less rationality. These are beings who are constantly hungry to devour the living. Does anyone else have anything to share?"

"These dark shades appear to be based on phase lords and other beings that used to be alive." Gloriana noted. "That is not a coincidence. There must be a connection between the two. We are dealing with a new and unfamiliar phenomenon. If we cannot understand what we are dealing with, then we will remain just as vulnerable to a surprise attack from beings that have proven the ability to hold back a superdimensional ace mech, if only briefly."

That was way too scary to Ves and other parties. Whoever harnessed the power of these death specters could definitely target people who were not as alert and well-equipped to defend against sneak attacks!

"Perhaps my sister can tell me more."

He retrieved a small totem of the Daughter of Death. Helena arrived promptly in the form of a small manifestation.

"Brother. You have fallen into serious difficulties."

"Can you tell me what is going on with me and this and everything else?"

The apparition of his sister grimaced. "I can share my perspective on what you have done to yourself, but... you and your friends should be able to derive the answers to most of your questions. I am only here to offer clarification of the deathborn."

Ves and several other people raised their eyebrows.

"My... other self used the same term, though in a pejorative manner. I thought it was an insult or a nickname."

"Perhaps it may be a curse to certain groups of aliens, but it is a factual description of their origin." Helena patiently explained. "The deathborn are not ordinary life forms. They are not spawned from living organisms. They are spawned from death. Battlefields are their cradles and nurseries. The larger the battle and the more beings have perished during it, the greater the chance that unusual phenomena might occur."

Ves widened his eyes. He already constructed a basic theory on what happened.

Ever since the Red Ocean bathed in the exotic radiation of Messier 87, the rules had changed.

In the old days, a battlefield where tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands or even millions of soldiers belonging to both sides perished in the same area was nothing special.

Both sides tried their best to respectfully retrieve the remains of their own soldiers while ruthlessly wiping out the carcasses of their adversaries.

Yet now that they had entered the Age of Dawn, Ves feared that the strong and intense emotions that soldiers produced during the moments before death may have affected the surrounding environment.

The overwhelming fear, resentment, anger and unwillingness towards death had caused their spirits to mutate into these 'deathborn'.

"What makes these deathborn special?"

"You have already identified a number of their core traits, Ves. The deathborn are the children of death. They are violent creatures from birth and barely manage to gain more control over themselves when they survive and grow. The deathborn are natural enemies of living beings, and are willing to invest all of their efforts into wiping out all life in the territories within their reach."

"What makes them different from demons?"

"Demons are inherently chaotic and irrational." The Daughter of Death explained to Ves and the other Larkinsons. "There is not much difference between demons and deathborn at the start. You can even treat the latter as death demons. What causes them to diverge is time and growth. The older and more powerful a deathborn becomes, the more rational he becomes. Although there is a limit to how smart they can become, this is undoubtedly frightening. Powerful demons are still driven by their baser emotions and instincts. Powerful deathborn still maintain their hatred towards the living, but have become intelligent enough to command armies of weaker deathborn into waging war. The more deathborn are born on battlefields, the greater the chance that an army of the dead will sweep across our dwarf galaxy!"

Multiple Larkinsons couldn't help but fear such a scenario!

"Is there a way to prevent these deathborn from being born on a battlefield?"

Helena responded with a single nod. "Yes. Either destroy the remains of the deceased, or conduct a ceremony that is adequate enough to guide the restless dead to the afterlife or the next step of their journey. So long as the dead are soothed, they have no reason to turn themselves into abominations that seek to devour and destroy all life in the cosmos."

All of that sounded nice, but anyone who possessed a good inkling about the intensity of warfare between the two sides should know how impossible it was to give every deceased soldier and civilian a proper send-off.

High Captain Gilbert de Raanvanchas immediately understood how bad it may be. "The Red Tide Offensive has resulted in a rapid escalation of fighting and killing. The native aliens are not above wiping out all humans living on settled planets. If no one is willing to stand up and give all of those dead their last rites, these battlefields will all turn into potential deathborn breeding grounds!"

Everyone shuddered at the thought.

Ves turned towards his sister. "Do any of the higher ups at the Red Three and the first-rate colonial superstates know?"

His sister smirked. "I doubt it. These deathborn have only recently shown up. I do not think the native aliens know anything about this. The only reason why I am able to learn so much about them is because of my domain. Did you know that the deathborn are the first true extragalactic invaders from Messier 87."

"What?!"

Helena had given the Larkinsons another massive shock!

"It is true. Well, you can't consider the deathborn to be a proper invasion. It is more proper to regard them as the invasive species brought by exposure to a different galaxy that possesses its own extraordinary power source. Whenever E energy radiation courses through regions teeming with life, the deathborn will inevitably emerge among them. If you want to completely evade this new threat, then you should find a way to return to the Milky Way."

In other words, the deathborn were like weeds that came when trying to grow new crops. They were akin to a natural phenomena that could easily escalate into an extinction-level disaster if left unchecked!

When Ves thought about how many battlefields went unpoliced, he could already foresee that the rise of the deathborn would be unstoppable.

There were way too implications about their existence and what sort of threat they posed. He needed to figure out how much information he should share with different parties.

The big players undoubtedly possessed their own means of gathering information, but VEs had a feeling that a clear and sober description from a death goddess may offer a lot more clarity.

"That is all I can say about the deathborn up to this point." Helena said. "As I have said, I have only recently gotten in touch with them, and there is no means to establish peaceful communications."

"Oh? Shouldn't you be their goddess?"

"It does not work that way, Ves. The deathborn are beings of great hatred towards life. It is their ideal to completely wipe out all life in the universe and cause everything to descend into darkness. I cannot agree to such a destructive ideal. I respect the living as well as the dead. I help guide souls that are too attached to the material realm to move on. I am quite happy with the current state of the cosmos."

If that was the case, then the two groups were utterly irreconcilable to each other!

Helena respected the cycle of life.

The deathborn wanted to trample on it until it broke.

The differences were pretty clear.

"Can you do anything to stop their spread or slow down their emergence?" Ves asked.

"Aside from properly cleaning up the corpses on a battlefield, you can try and spread my faith among the humans as well as the aliens." Helena suggested. "If I gain stronger influence over a region, I may be able to suppress the emergence of the

deathborn. Even if I cannot prevent them from coming, I can at least transmit a notification that will direct you to the mission site."

Ves was not too sure whether that was a good idea. Perhaps Helena may be able to do it, but at what cost?

After the initial discussion surrounding the deathborn subsided, they carefully addressed one of the elephants in the room.

"Helena, before you go, can you confirm that my apparent split personality will not lead to extreme self-harm or reckless endangerment? My other self appeared out of nowhere and possesses a strong god complex."

"Ves... it is not my place to describe your new personality to you. The answers will come in time. All I can say is that your second personality is not necessarily your enemy. It is the person that you could have become if you completely embraced your identity as a god."

"Can I get rid of it?" Ves flatly asked.

"This is not within my area of expertise, brother. Our mother may know more, but she is unlikely to share her insights. This is your tribulation. You must deal with it by yourself."

At least Ves got confirmation that he suffered a personality split due to a tribulation event.

"Understood."

"I am rooting for you, Ves."

After Helena's manifestation faded away, Ves turned to the others.

"You heard her. My advancement as a phase lord has accidentally caused me to spawn a second personality. While I can't sense him at the moment, I am pretty sure that he is

lingering close at hand. I have a feeling that if I unfold my true body, he will take over, just like before."

"Can you guarantee that, Ves?" Gloriana asked. "None of us want to talk to you, only for you to have switched to your other self. Who knows how much damage your second personality can do to our interests."

His wife raised a legitimate concern. "The differences between me and him are pretty drastic. However, I will work on a solution that should be able to give you a clear signal which personality is dominant. I cannot guarantee that my other self will stay quiet if I stay in this human form. We will just have to wait and see. All I am asking from you is patience and tolerance. This is a problem of my own making, but I will find a way to fix it one way or another."

His wife did not look pleased, but she was willing to give him a chance.

"If you are confident that you can handle this issue, then I see no problem with giving you the space to do so. We should still implement additional security measures. You must endure greater scrutiny at all times. Only then can we be assured that we are talking and working with the right version of Ves."

"That is... reasonable."

Chapter 6944 Compromised Leadership

The rise of powerful new aliens that possessed obvious demonic traits but also demonstrated the potential to form armies sounded alarming to say the least.

However, there was not much the Larkinson Clan could do against this newly discovered menace.

If the analysis of the Daughter of Death was accurate, then the so-called death born presented a galaxy-wide threat against the living occupants of the Red Ocean,

Red humanity and the native aliens should have been able to contain this threat if they maintained relative peace with each other.

In fact, it would have been acceptable if they maintained the previous state of warfare from before the collapse of the fifth defensive band.

At least back then much of the fighting and killing that took place in the dwarf galaxy were contained in the frontlines of the Red War.

If any deathborn emerged from the mass graves of quickly forgotten battlefields, then the human or alien garrisons stationed at the star systems would have been able to strange these ominous energy-based life forms in their cradle.

Even if a handful of them slipped past the nest and managed to grow up in relative isolation, their threat level remained limited if they were unable to organise in greater numbers.

From what the Premier Branch encountered on the surface of New Constantinople VIII, the actual situation was much more pessimistic.

The downfall of the fifth defensive bands, the genocides committed on the planets filled with far too many human colonists and the escalating deaths between human and alien champions all increased the death quotient of the Red Ocean by an astronomical degree!

These circumstances pretty much sounded like the most ideal conditions to breed large amounts of scary deathborn in a short amount of time!

If these dark and violent entities were as mindless and irrational as they looked, then that was not necessary a detriment to red humanity.

After all, the native aliens not only possessed the vast majority of territories of the new frontier, but also conquered much of the star systems where much of the killing took place.

This should logically cause the deathborn and the native alien occupants of the conquered star systems to come into conflict with each other!

The more the deathborn dragged down the native aliens who assumed that they had cleared the retaken territories, the more logistical problems the alien assault fleets would suffer!

If the territories to the rear became plagued with raids and massacres committed by increasingly larger amounts of deathborn, then the native aliens would soon have a full-blown crisis on their hands!

In this context, the deathborn aided the cause of red humanity. Even if these dark beings were hostile to all forms of life, at least they bothered the native aliens a lot more than others.

The enemy of my enemy is my friend.

At least that was supposed to be the case.

Yet the fact that these deathborn quietly spawned on the worst battlegrounds of the Red War and managed to keep their worst impulses in check contradicted Helena's description.

For these deathborn to keep themselves hidden so well until they finally decided to expose themselves by committing a bold assassination attempt against a well-protected target was undeniable proof that a greater power or multiple greater powers commanded these undead beings!

Ves already had an idea or three about the conspirators behind the mobilisation of these deathborn. The identities of one of them was so sensitive that he did not dare to mention his name lightly.

The Larkinsons attending this briefing could already tell that this subject was way above their pay grade.

Any matter that directly related to the much more powerful native aliens of Messier 87 was no longer an issue that the Larkinson Clan could resolve on its own.

Only the greater powers possessed the qualifications to address the threat posed by the latest group of aliens that possessed strong extragalactic origins.

For this reason, the gathered Larkinsons moved on to a problem that affected them a lot more directly.

Gloriana rose up from her seat. Her imperious expression indicated that she took this issue extremely seriously.

"For the first time in the history of the Larkinson Clan, we are confronted by a problem that is more threatening than any of the overt enemies that have fought against us in the past. We are forced to acknowledge the truth that our patriarch and my husband is no longer a reliable leader and pillar of the clan he founded. This is a problem that can undermine or even collapse all of the trust that he has earned from us. As long as there is a realistic possibility that the Ves Larkinson we all know and love can be replaced by a completely different personality, it is irresponsible for him to retain as much power and authority over us as before."

"..."

None of the Larkinsons wanted to think about it, but that would not make the problem go away. Gloriana merely did her duty by clearly describing the problem at hand rather than trying to bury it into the ground.

High Captain Gilbert de Raanvanchas decided to speak up. "As one of the more recent members to join our clan, I still have an outsider's perspective. Compared to the much older and larger Dermont Ancient Clan of where I previously hailed from, the Larkinson Clan is indeed much more dependent on its founder and leader. This is an unavoidable circumstance as it is still new and in a state of development. It is good that our patriarch has already delegated much of his power and authority to other offices and institutions. His sudden absence from leadership should not cause our clan to collapse. This is a much more optimistic state than what I have seen in other young outfits."

Organizations founded brilliant and charismatic leaders tended to shoot up like rockets. Yet if their visionary leaders held onto power too tightly, their groups might fall apart like a house of cards the moment their founders disappeared!

Many of the organisations that that possessed long heritages such as the surviving Terran ancient clans never put all of their eggs in a single basket.

The leaders who were farsighted enough to think past their lifetimes made sure to nurture talented and capable subordinates. They also build up plenty of departments

and institutions that could systematically address matters within their scope of responsibilities.

As long as they did a good enough job, their organisations should successfully be able to survive and thrive for many centuries or even millennia!

There used to be far more Terran ancient clans, but their numbers had steadily whittled down in the years that passed since the Age of Stars. Very few newcomers managed to rise up and take the place of the fallen.

The clans that used to reign at the top of Terran society yet collapsed due to their inability to solve the problems that threatened their survival had rightfully been forgotten by most people.

Only the most authentic ancient clans managed to endure.

Their governance models had withstood the test of time. Its leaders continued to respect the rules as well as the intentions of their predecessors and never sought to usurp all authority in their own hands.

By continuing to distribute power across multiple institutions, the ancient clans protected themselves against collapse induced by one crazy and incompetent leader!

Many other clans and organisations that failed to institutionalise their power base lasted far shorter than the honourable ancient clans.

Did this mean that every organisation should follow the same model?

Not necessarily.

Not every group needed to be founded with the assumption that they had to last for thousands of years.

However, the Larkinson Clan most definitely harboured the ambition to lay permanent foundation for its descendants.

It was no coincidence that the Larkinsons imitated many other people and imitated the highly successful model of the Terran ancient clans.

In fact, Ves had defied the pattern of other young and energetic leaders and had been more proactive in transferring his power to other subordinates!

Of course, it had been a helpless move in his case.

Ves was no career politicians or statesmen.

He was a mech designer, and a highly successful one at that. He could never spare the time to exercise proper leadership in his clan.

Since his time was far too precious to waste on leadership and management, he delegated all of those responsibilities to people such as Gloriana, Casella Ingvar, Ketis and so much more.

All of that paid off. Ves smiled with pride when he estimated that his clan would remain just fine if he took an extended break for whatever reason.

"While my judgment may be questionable, I would like to mention that I do not think it is likely that I will be able to get rid of my second personality in the short-term." Ves mentioned. "From what I am able to surmise, this is an unwelcome side effect to advancing my phase lord cultivation. I am not sure if I am the first human phase lord to be plagued by this issue, but I have a feeling that this is hardly a unique condition."

Vice Director Maria Abselon frowned. "I have spoken extensively with Formation Master Andrea Vos of the Moloch Squadron. She has concluded that it is almost certain that the Phase Lord Department of the Red Collective is aware of this particular issue. However, she is also not very confident that its leaders will agree to 'solve' this problem. This is because their own human phase lords may have shown a different attitude towards this tribulation if they happened to encounter it during their own cultivation."

Ves knew what she was talking about. "I have a feeling that I wouldn't have to suffer the indignity of relinquishing my true body to my newly born alter ego if I accepted

the arrangement presented by the heavenly authority of the Red Ocean. For whatever reason, this dwarf galaxy wants every phase lord to embrace the delusion of godhood. For mortal beings that were previously frail and did not have anything else to rely upon, the temptation is far too great for them to refuse. Even the loyal humans of the Phase Lord Department is susceptible to this trap as becoming stronger will increase their chances of survival. I think I am one of the few rare exceptions who refused this trap because I have already made far more attainments as a mech designer. No single phase lord can exceed the contributions that I have made by releasing Carmine mechs to the masses."

A phase lord was not that much different from a god pilot in his opinion. They were both powerful in personal combat, but struggled to project their power across an entire society.

What power and respect they managed to earn was solely predicated on the fear and respect of other people.

Ves thought that was pathetic.

A mech better leader ought to be a more productive member of society.

It was all well and good to put a lot of trust in soldiers who were strong enough to defend a group against external threats, but that did not necessarily make them good at running domestic affairs.

A lot of alien phase lords admittedly used to be capable and successful leaders in their mortal stages of their lives. The delusion of godhood admittedly fit their inclinations a lot better.

However, Ves rejected the notion that this was good for red humanity. He despised the human phase lords who all found reasons to accept the Devil's bargain made by the Red Ocean.

They were much more compromised than him as far as he was concerned!

At least Ves proactively sought to preserve his humanity. Those other human phase lords probably exhibited much less hesitance when they were asked to sacrifice their mortal sensibilities!

In a period where the native aliens were making too much progress in the Red War, the human phase lords were probably willing to sacrifice a lot more in exchange for power!

Maria Abselon's expression echoed Ves' concerns. "The Farseer shares our fears that the Phase Lord Department has quietly become compromised. It would explain the oddities that she has observed. Whatever the case, we cannot expect to receive any assistance from the Red Collective."

That was bad.

Chapter 6945 Leadership Candidates

The inability to seek assistance from the Phase Lord Department of the Red Collective was a heavy blow to the Larkinson Clan.

No other institution knew more about phase lord body cultivation than the experts who possessed the best qualifications in human-occupied space and dedicated a lot of time into researching the secrets of alien body cultivation.

Perhaps the only organisation that could come close was the Transhumanist Faction of the Red Association.

The problem was that many of its original biotech researchers that studied this new and exciting phenomenon had transferred over to the Phase Lord Department!

After all, the Red Association was largely meant to focus on mechs.

Systematic cultivation had become the mandate of the Red Collective, so it was not excusable for the mechers to continue to work on matters outside of their core jurisdiction.

There were few other trusted allies to turn to for assistance. This was a problem that affected the founder and leader of the Larkinson Clan. Anyone who harboured ill intent could take this opportunity to inflict crippling damage to the interests of the Larkinsons!

This made it difficult for the gathered Larkinsons to see a quick resolution to the latest crisis that had befallen their precious clan.

Trust had always been one of the main foundations that glued them together.

The Larkinson Network had done a good job in creating the conditions for radically different humans from every facet of human society to unite their efforts to work towards a common cause.

Ves played an indispensable role in this development. He was hardly the best leader, but his restraint and his principles had contributed to the rise of an organisation that already had the potential to withstand the test of time at a relatively young age.

It was for this reason that the Larkinsons had one clear solution to this problem.

"We must find a solution to the latest problem." Gloriana said. "However, if the prospect for doing so is not optimistic, we must work with the assumption that our current patriarch will always remain compromised for the foreseeable future. To that end, I suggest we activate one of our contingency plans related to succession. Since our situation is not as acute as we feared, we do not have to resort to haste. We can take our time to formulate a proper plan on how to arrange a proper transition of power."

Several Larkinsons nodded in agreement. It was clear that none of them objected to the necessity of appointing another leader of the Larkinson Clan.

Ves did not object to this matter either. He never really held much enthusiasm for holding so many leadership responsibilities. He would be lying if he claimed he wanted to cling to power.

The main reason why he remained reluctant to resign from his office was because he did not trust others with the same authority.

He had painstakingly built up the Larkinson Clan through his own efforts. It was just as precious as his mech designs if not more.

He would hate it if a complete outsider came in and wrecked his entire vision out of ignorance or differences in opinion!

Yet the current circumstances no longer gave Ves the luxury to procrastinate over this issue.

One way or another, the Larkinson Clan needed a new leader, one who could be relied upon to remain sound of mind and heart no matter the circumstances.

At least Ves could console himself with the fact that the Larkinson Clan should have matured enough that it was ready to enact such a transition.

"It is not entirely necessary to depose our current patriarch." Vice Director Maria Abselon stated. "We have already invested many powers to the chief ministers and the Larkinson Assembly. They are already responsible for deciding at least 90 percent of the affairs of our clan. The chief ministers originally served as the deputies of the patriarch. We can keep disruptions to a minimum by transferring additional power and responsibilities to them. Since there are three of them, they can continue to hold each other in check."

It was not a surprise that she would advocate for the solution that changed as little as possible.

Ves had always extended a lot of material support to the Larkinson Biotech Institute. He was personally responsible for channeling vast amounts of funding and resources to this expensive arm of the Larkinson Clan.

Yet for all of its largesse, the LBI had yet to truly repay the enormous investments. Now that the deterioration of red humanity could result in growing shortfalls, it became increasingly less justifiable to pamper the biotech researchers.

After all, much of their R&D projects did not have an immediate impact on the combat effectiveness of the armed forces of the Larkinson Clan.

Why waste so much money and scarce materials on research that did not help them defeat the native aliens?

It did not help that the LBI undoubtedly dropped the ball by contributing to the current problem.

Even if the biotech researchers who worked on the phase water organs were not directly responsible for compromising their own patriarch, they could not escape all of the blame.

They should have paid more attention to the unknown risks of implanting alien-derived organs in their patriarch's body.

It would have been better if they applied their risky experimental procedures on a test subject first!

In any case, once the news of what happened to Ves Larkinsons started to spread among the rank and file, there would probably be a lot of clansmen who believed that the LBI needed to be taken down a notch!

The vice director could clearly foresee this development. It was in her best interest to maintain the current status quo as much as possible so that her research organisation could maintain as much of its prosperity as possible.

Gloriana shook her head in disagreement. "With respect, the chief ministers are adequate at their jobs, but they are not up to the task of leading our clan through the greatest crisis of our civilisation. Neither Magdalena Larkinson, Abigail Evern, Novilon Purnesse, Raymond Billingsley-Larkinson and the other senior statesmen have managed to stand out and proven themselves to be good enough to command the loyalty and dedication of the vast majority of clansmen."

They were not incompetent to be certain, but they were painfully mediocre compared to more outstanding visionaries.

"In a time of war, it is not advised to delegate power to a council of civilians and politicians." High Captain Gilbert mentioned. "It is customary to centralise power in order to streamline decision-making and increase efficiency. This may come at the expense of the rights of many stakeholders, but if our survival is under threat, then addressing it is our highest priority. No other goal can be allowed to compromise our central directive. We should not be afraid to appoint a single leader that can be trusted to navigate our clan through dangerous waters. To be more specific, the rule that

advocates for a separation between the civilian and military arms of our clan can be... relaxed."

"Are you suggesting that we appoint one of our military leaders to the highest office of the Larkinson Clan?" Gloriana asked.

"Yes. I am not entirely clear whether this is a more acceptable notion in our clan, but I believe that it is best to subordinate our civilian interests to our military interests. The former can make us wealthy, but the latter is responsible for guaranteeing our continued survival."

Ves inwardly shook his head. He did not necessarily agree with this notion.

"We need a strong leader." Saint Dise transmitted her own voice. "Many soldiers will lose confidence if they are being led by a committee of squabbling politicians. What they need is a leader who can project confidence and give clear directions for us to work towards. We need a leader who can do more than to sustain our present status quo. We need a patriarch who can inspire us to rise above our limitations and vanquish all of the enemies that stand in our way, no matter whether they are gods or demons."

"Or matriarch." Gloriana pointedly amended the ace pilot's speech.

A handful of names immediately stood out as possible successors to the patriarch the Larkinson Clan.

"Swordmaster Ketis Larkinson has proven her leadership capabilities in the last few years." Saint Dise did not hesitate to promote her fellow sister and Swordmaiden. "Even if she does not hold as many responsibilities as our patriarch, she has always been a good steward of the Swordmaidens, the Heavensworders and the expeditionary fleet. No one doubts her heart towards the Larkinsons. She has also risen up to become one of the supporting pillars of our clan by becoming the wielder of the Heavensword and the only known gatekeeper of the Blue Dimension. She is also a good mech designer who learned much of her craft from our current patriarch."

Although Ketis was a completely different kind of person from Ves, both of them were young mech designers that managed to become legends in their own right.

It was not unthinkable for many Larkinsons to pass the mantle of leadership to the mech designer in the Larkinson Clan that most resembled their first patriarch in this regard. Her military and civilian qualifications were both good, though whether this translated into a good matriarch of the Larkinson Clan remained questionable.

Ves had no objections towards this proposal. He trusted Ketis to do a good job. He wouldn't have chosen to initiate her into the Mech Designer System before anyone else if he harboured any significant doubts about her loyalty and competence.

However, Gloriana did not quite agree. She made an exaggerated cough.

"Ahem, as much as my fellow mech designer from the Swordmaidens has risen above the occasion and matured as a leader, I feel the need to remind you all that she suffers from a similar problem to my current husband. Ketis is also not entirely able to guarantee that all of her decisions are her own. The Heavensword is arguably as powerful as a god mech. Ketis cannot become contaminating by it after holding it day and night. Her growing dependency on the blade that can cut through the walls between dimensions may cause her to become its puppet. Do not forget that the ancient relic weapon already has a history of doing so in the Heavensword Association."

What a fatal strike!

In just a single argument, Gloriana managed to torpedo any prospects that Ketis might have at assuming leadership over the Larkinson Clan!

After all, the same argument used to justify the removal of Ves from the office of patriarch could also be applied to Ketis.

There was no doubt that the Heavensword possessed a mind of its own. It was ancient creation that possessed very different values and ideals from the Larkinson Clan.

Elevating Ketis to a matriarch risked turning the clan into the Heavensword's personal kingdom.

In fact, Ketis always bore the risk of becoming enslaved to the powerful grand work. The disparity in power between the two was too great. She had no possible way to resist its forceful actions.

By keeping her separated from the core of the Larkinson Clan, she would not pose too great of a risk of taking it over.

Turning her into the second generation leader of the Larkinson Clan would have the opposite effect.

No matter how much the Larkinsons respected the Heavensword's power, they valued their independence. They loved the clan because of what it stood for and what it tried to become. They contributed to its growth and shaped a part of its culture and institutions. Nothing should be allowed to deprive their accumulated work.

"Who do you propose to appoint instead if Ketis is not a viable choice?" Saint Dise asked Gloriana directly. "Are you thinking of taking over your husband's job and lead the Larkinson Clan during a time where courage and decisiveness matters more than anything else?"

The clansmen would never accept a leader that had very little association with the more militant arm of the Larkinson Clan.

This was especially the case during a time of war!

Chapter 6946 Relucant Resignation

Gloriana's expression remained composed.

"As much as I would like to lead the clan, I am cognisant enough of my own weaknesses. I agree with you all that a strong military leader is preferable to a civilian mech designer such as myself. Ves is able to overcome this limitation due to his repeated acts of courage, but I cannot replicate those feats. Ideally, one of our children should have assumed leadership of the clan, but... they are still too young."

Although the Larkinsons would not particularly mind if Ves and Gloriana engaged in an act of nepotism, it still had to be somewhat reasonable on the surface.

There was nothing reasonable about appointing a preteen child to become the leader of a clan comprising of several million Larkinsons!

In any case, Gloriana did not try to mount a fight that she could not possibly win. She saved everyone a lot of trouble with that. The issue of who should lead the clan must not become a source of infighting. No one could afford the consequences of reckless fighting.

The Larkinsons began to think of another candidate. Only one name stood out among the remainder.

"Casella." Ves mentioned her name. "I think that many Larkinsons will feel relieved if you assume the mantle of leadership after me. You have proven your competencies in both commanding troops and handling administration. You are one of the strongest mech pilots in our clan, and you definitely have the biggest brain among them all. Your unique combination of strength and intelligence makes you the best candidate in my opinion. The clan will need to rely on both to navigate the uncertain waters ahead."

She was the obvious choice. Ves was not the only one to hold this opinion. He just channeled their voice.

"The Saint Commander has the necessary prestige to become the matriarch of our clan. There are very few Larkinsons who do not respect her and her leadership abilities." Vice Director Maria reluctantly admitted. "It is also the right time for her to take over your responsibilities, sir. Your judgment and abilities has served us well when we had to navigate a mostly peaceful galaxy and society, but we have now entered an era where we are active participants of a war that can lead to the death of our race."

High Captain Gilbert nodded as well. "I have studied the Saint Commander's conduct and decision-making in detail before I joined the clan. The records that I have studied after I gained access to them does not change my judgment. Casella Ingvar does possess the capital to lead the Larkinson Clan. While her age and her lack of experience may lead to greater uncertainty, I believe it is within an acceptable range. The current patriarch was much younger when he founded the clan, so age alone should not be a reason to disqualify the Saint Commander's candidacy."

The Larkinson Clan was too young. It lacked a large cadre of long-standing members with proven leadership material. This made it more acceptable to turn to younger and inexperienced candidates.

Of course, the Larkinsons did not have as much prejudice against relatively younger leaders than others. As long as Casella's age was not too absurdly low, no one would take issue with her ascension because of this reason.

"I can respect Casella as our supreme leader. She knows what she is doing, at least." Saint Dise spoke on behalf of the champions of the clan. "I am worried that her administrative duties will weaken her ability to command us in battle. The latter must never be compromised. We need all of the advantages on the battlefield that we can get. The last incident has proven that there are always stronger enemies lurking in the shadows."

The Saint Commander finally voiced her own opinion regarding her nomination.

"I am... honored by your trust and belief in my leadership. I have to admit that I have considered the possibility of taking over the clan, but I never expected it to become real so soon. To be honest, I am willing to take over the mantle of leadership, but solely out of duty to the clan and our people, and nothing else. I do not think that I am the most ideal candidate to assume overall leadership of the clan. As Dise has said, I am already burdened with enough obligations as the commander of the Premier Fleet. I will need to delegate more responsibilities and juggle between two very different leadership positions if I am expected to become the effective leader of the Larkinson Clan. It... would be better if you consider other names before my own. You should only treat me as an option of last resort."

The female ace commander made her preferences clear. It was good news that she did not dismiss the possibility outright. It spoke much about her integrity that she was still willing to give others a chance. She clearly was not too eager to add to her many burdens.

"Who else possesses better qualifications than you?" Gloriana asked.

"There is Saint General Ark Larkinson." High Captain Gilbert mentioned. "I am... aware that he is a figure of controversy, but his dedication to the Larkinsons is undeniable. He is older and more experienced than the Saint Commander. He is stronger than the Saint Commander in strength of arms, and he has also proven to be a capable battlefield commander. His organisational qualifications are even better. He has much more extensive experience in navigating bureaucracy and fulfilling administrative duties. He has a greater history of leading independent units and understands how to operate without abundant internal and external support. As long as the clansmen are willing to trust in his leadership, he has the capacity to do well."

Maria Abselon shook her head. "The Saint General is too much of an outsider to earn much trust from most of us. As powerful as Ark Larkinson may be, everyone knows that he has a strong ego. We do not question that he cares about the Larkinsons, but the way he expresses it is different from our expectations. I think that many clansmen are reluctantly willing to let him lead our clan, but only in the absence of better alternatives. That is not the case at the moment."

"I agree." Saint Dise said. "Ark puts himself before the Larkinsons, while it is the other way around for Casella. You would have to ask most of my peers to be certain, but I think that many of the expert pilots and ace pilots of the clan will cast their vote to Casella. She has stayed with the expeditionary fleet and led us all to victory after victory. Ark on the other hand took over the Davute Branch and devoted his service to the Colonial Federation of Davute. If he is allowed to take charge of our clan, there is a risk that he will do the same as before and sell us to a state."

That caused numerous Larkinsons to frown. This was not an outlandish possibility.

The discussion continued a little further. People considered Saint General Ark Larkinson as well as a few other names, including those who were not immediately available.

Unfortunately, the Larkinson Clan suffered from a senior leadership deficit. There were many candidates who were probably competent enough to maintain the status quo, but they were far too mediocre to everyone's liking.

The founder and first-generation leader of the Larkinson Clan had proven himself to be a bold and visionary leader.

Many clansmen hoped that the second-generation leader would be just as brilliant. He or she did not have to be a carbon copy of Ves, but should at least be strong enough to proactively pursue a better future for the Larkinsons.

In the end, the gathered Larkinsons could not help but circle back to the Saint Commander. She was by far the preferred choice.

Saint General Ark Larkinson possessed enough qualifications to compete against her, but his popularity could not match the former Sentinel Commander.

"Perhaps it would be best to hold a short election." High Captain Gilbert suggested. "Even if Casella Ingvar is the superior option, we should give the clansmen an opportunity to express their own will and make them feel they have a choice in the matter. Winning the popular vote will also grant her a strong mandate. Few will be able to deny that she has a right to issue orders to the Larkinsons."

Ves nodded in agreement. "Good suggestion. I know that Ark will not be able to stand by if Casella is appointed as the second leader of our clan. A decision like this should not be made by us alone. We should at least involve other representatives and executives. Turning it into a popular vote is a decent alternative, but only if we can ensure it can be done in a reasonable timeframe. We cannot afford to let this matter drag on for months."

"It shouldn't be a challenge to hold a popular vote in two weeks." Gavin Neumann stated. "Our clan is still small enough that there are not too many barriers in our way. The lack of rules regarding succession and holding elections will take time to resolve. This is why it is better to wait for at least two weeks. We do not want the popular vote to be tainted by cheating or irregularities. I cannot imagine that the candidates will need to do much campaigning anyway."

They hashed out an initial plan to hold a popular vote.

In order to make it comprehensive enough, they would not only allow for Casella Ingvar and Ark Larkinson to campaign for office, but also other Larkinsons in good standing.

This may make the election a little more chaotic, but it would also strengthen the legitimacy of the vote.

If the clan suffered a much more acute crisis before it could be held, then the Saint Commander was permitted to take charge outright, but the probability of that happening was low.

"In two weeks, our clan will decide our next leader." Gloriana summed up the discussion. "We should ask the Larkinson Assembly to pass our proposal, but I do not think that will be an issue."

Ves watched and listened on as these clansmen essentially decided his own successor.

He knew that if he pressed hard enough, he could have pressured everyone into appointing Saint Commander Casella Ingvar outright. He felt tempted to do so in order to save everyone a lot of unnecessary time and effort.

However, he refrained from doing so because it would give her more trouble in the long run. It was better to make it clear to everyone that she earned her leadership the right way.

Ves actually felt a sense of liberation from these proceedings. He had always thought about surrendering his patriarch position to another member of the clan. Now that he had a good excuse to do so, he he pounced on it and made peace with the fact that he would no longer hold all of the authority of the clan anymore.

He would be lying if he said that he was resentful of the sudden confluence of events that forced him to resign from his leadership position outside of a time of his own choosing.

He would have preferred more to hold more agency over the matter.

At this moment, Ves just hoped that the Larkinsons wouldn't see any need to deprive more rights and privileges from him. He no longer needed to be in charge of everything in order to design his mechs, but it would be much harder to create what he wanted without access to all of the funds and strategic resources of the clan.

Still, there were many other parts of the Larkinson Clan that needed those goodies as well, so Ves should learn how to share.

A good mech designer needed to be flexible. Ves was not opposed to going back to creating works while being subjected to greater restrictions than before.

Chapter 6947 5.1 Percent

"The Larkinson Clan is undergoing a leadership transition!"

"Did something happen to our patriarch?!"

"What is wrong with the Larkinsons? Why is Patriarch Ves Larkinson resigning from his post? This is one of the worst times to enact such a massive change! This only makes sense if the Larkinsons have decided that he is completely unsuited to lead them through these turbulent times."

"An election in two weeks? That is too soon! Our clan has never held such an important election in the past! Do you know how much of an organizational nightmare it is to check all of the necessary boxes in so little time!?"

The news came as a shock to the Larkinson Clan and other parties!

Suffice to say, nobody expected the Larkinsons to hold an election to replace the current patriarch.

Plenty of parties quickly inquired whether Ves Larkinson was still alive and well. While his office replied that he was still alive and in good condition, the staffers declined to mention the reason for his abrupt decision to resign from the highest seat of the Larkinson Clan.

The lack of answers confounded everyone. Only a small circle knew the true reason why Ves needed to distance himself from such an important position.

The news about his possible compromised state would leak out sooner or later. Ves and the others never held any expectation that it would stay a secret for long.

The main reason why they tried to delay the proliferation of the news was to conduct more research on the current issue. The more answers they were able to provide at the start, the less panic would ensue.

Right now, the leadership of the Larkinson Clan had been making decisions out of haste. They only saw a single instance of Ves going out of control before immediately deciding to replace him as their leader!

If Ves hadn't personally set the rules and contingency plans relating to this issue, he would have assumed that his own clansmen were plotting to commit a bloodless coup!

As it was, Ves did not resist the current initiative because he would have made the same decisions if he was in their place.

An organization should never tolerate a leader who could no longer guarantee that he could diligently and unswervingly serve the interests of his constituents.

If Ves truly cared about the Larkinson Clan, then he would never subject it to incompetent or unreliable leadership.

It was pure selfishness if he insisted on remaining in charge.

He would only tarnish his legacy and harm his fellow Larkinsons if he tried to cling to power like a failing despot.

In any case, after the conclusion of the meeting that decided how to approach the succession of the Larkinson Clan, Ves decided to get to the bottom of his current issue.

After contacting the recently arrived representatives of the Red Collective, he moved to the medical bay of the Moloch in order to thoroughly examine his altered condition.

The flagship of the Moloch Squadron may be on the smaller side, but she possessed numerous facilities that especially catered to cultivators.

The medical instruments over there provided greater help when examining cultivators of many varieties. They were even able to gather greater information about human phase lords, though not as much as everyone hoped.

Ves had taken a measured risk by turning to the resident members of the Red Collective for help.

He did not think his own clan could provide significant assistance in solving his current problem.

The Larkinson Biotech Institute was way over its head when it came to dealing with phase lord matters.

While the Phase Lord Department should be able to provide the greatest amount of assistance, its lack of cooperation with the rest of the Red Collective put its reliability into question.

The abundance of human phase lords over there who may have made the other decision when confronted by the same dilemma caused Ves to distrust this increasingly more infamous department even more!

There were still clear risks when it came to entrusting the other departments of the Red Collective with information about his... condition... but who else could he turn to for assistance?

Unless he was determined to address this problem by himself, he needed to seek out experts who could cover the gaps in his own understanding.

Formation Master Andrea Vos, Vice Director Maria Abselon and Professor Vector Loban presided over several teams of biotech experts and other specialists.

They all crowded in the control rooms and meticulously studied the sensor readings.

For safety reasons, Saint Dise and the First Sword Mark III stood close at hand. While the mech was not able to enter the medical bay due to size restrictions, the Moloch was nonetheless able to displace a sword fey directly into the compartment, though the light cruiser's teleportation system endured far greater stress than usual.

With these tentative safety measures in place, Ves voluntarily allowed himself to get poked and prodded.

He maintained his most compact human form throughout this entire ordeal. Although that would have made it a lot more difficult to scan his true body in full, Ves did not want his alter ego to suddenly pop up and start a fight deep inside the hull of the Moloch.

That was why the superdimensional sword fey literally hovered over his body like the sword of Damocles. Its appearance alone should be sufficient to deter any unhealthy thoughts.

Fortunately, Ves' second personality did not emerge throughout the entire examination. He remained so stable and in control over himself that he began to entertain doubts whether his problem still existed.

"So what did you find out?" Ves asked.

"The concentration of phasewater in your blood has increased from 3.8 percent to 5.1 percent." Vector Loban said. "This might not sound impressive, but it represents an abrupt increase of more than 34 percent in a very short span of time. According to our instruments, your true body has reached a height that is roughly 5 times as tall as a typical mech, which is up from 3 times. You are actually significantly taller than you appeared during the recent assassination attempt."

Ves furrowed his brows. "That is a lot of extra phasewater. Have you confirmed that there is no phasewater missing from our vaults and other storage sites?"

"No one has detected any theft or unexplained transfers of phasewater, Ves. According to the data logs of the implantation surgery, your body spontaneously obtained more phasewater from an unknown source. It is... perplexing. It is as if a mysterious benefactor lurking in a hidden dimension periodically injected a generous quantity of phasewater into your true body right after the integration of every phasewater organ. If your heavenly authority theory is accurate, then that is the most probable culprit behind this unsolicited upgrade."

It was clear that not everyone could bring themselves to believe that the Red Ocean was alive and intelligent to an extent.

Although there were a lot of ancient sources that claimed that the heavens possessed their own personalities, people had yet to encounter solid proof that could corroborate those descriptions.

Ves knew that the galaxies were most definitely alive, but it was difficult for him to translate his personal experiences into convincing proof. His claims could only be regarded as hearsay in the scientific community.

"Any other findings?"

"Your phasewater organs have settled in nicely in your true body." Maria Abselon replied. "You can rest assured that none of them have provoked any rejection reactions. In fact, their integration is much more thorough than we expected. Are you experiencing any pain or discomfort in your torso?"

"No."

"That is a sign of perfect or near-perfect organ integration, sir. Pain is a signal. Its absence means that it is less likely for you to experience any problems with assimilating your new organs. That is actually more optimistic than we hoped. We are still new at developing phasewater organs and integrating them into the true body of a human phase lord. It is normal to expect complications to arise from experimental treatments and procedures. We can only attribute the lack of problems from the invisible influence of a third party."

That was actually quite an alarming conclusion. Her words implied that every procedure related to human phase lords may secretly be affected by the heavenly authority of the Red Ocean or a similar high-level entity!

After Ves asked a few more questions about his new physiological state, it was finally time to address the elephant in the room.

"What have you found out about my second personality?"

"Not much, as we have yet to complete our examination." Maria Abselon spoke first. "According to one of your theories, we need to observe you as you unleash your true body as a phase lord. You must deliberately bring out your 'second personality' under controlled conditions so that we can examine your physical condition under this abnormal state. We are also looking forward to interviewing your other self. We are sorely lacking in information and we do not have access to reliable sources. The best way for us to obtain the answers to some of our questions is to confront the problem rather than study it from an oblique angle. I am sure you understand what I mean."

As a mech designer and a scientist himself, Ves knew what she meant. It was often better for a researcher to gather primary data rather than rely on secondary or tertiary data obtained through other sources.

The obvious problem with this proposal was that Ves would put himself at risk by letting his second personality come out to play!

What if his other self wanted to stay and refused to relinquish control over his body back to its rightful owner?

Perhaps the only way to force his alter ego to retreat was to beat him into submission!

Still, Ves himself could not stand the fact that he knew so little about what was going on with his phase lord cultivation. He urgently needed answers. The only way he could obtain them was by taking a calculated risk.

"Fine." He said. "I take it that you don't want me to unveil my true body and bring out my other self in this cramped medical bay."

"We are already in the process of converting the interior of an asteroid into a somewhat secure and private testing site. It is not an ideal location to conduct this test, but it is the best we can obtain on short notice. We have made sure to inspect the surroundings and minimize the angles of attack."

They moved to the new testing site. The entire Premier Fleet and Bluejay Fleet mobilized to secure the section of the asteroid belt and prevent any repeat of the earlier surprise attack from occurring again.

For safety reasons, the armed forces of the Devos Ancient Clan remained absent.

The Devosans had already shown that they lacked control over their own assets. They had already locked down the orbital defense platform that had launched a superdimensional projectile without authorization.

Unfortunately, the inspectors that examined the compromised defensive platform found no answers. The party responsible for subverting its systems had left no discernable trail.

To be honest, Ves did not expect the investigations to bear any fruit. The masterminds behind the latest attack on his person were so high-level that their agents would never make any stupid mistakes. It would be a surprise if they left any clues behind that could enable the Larkinsons to identify the culprits behind the assassination attempt.

That did not mean the Larkinsons intended to give up so easily. The Black Cats and the other arms of the Larkinson Clan initiated their own investigations.

There were not that many parties that had managed to get their hands on the most exclusive weapon-grade superdimensional matter. The Larkinsons might as well try their luck and investigate each of them to find out whether they were up to no good.

Chapter 6948 Sev Larkinson

Ves felt apprehensive about the upcoming test.

He needed to know whether his true body held a second personality, one that held a completely contradictory stance towards the deification of phase lords.

There were several objectives to this test.

The primary one was to confirm the existence of this second personality.

Another goal was to ascertain the hostility of the other version of Ves.

Was it possible for the Larkinsons to develop an amicable relationship with this alter ego?

Aside from that, the Larkinsons also wanted to find out how to put the genie back in the bottle.

Was it enough for Ves to fold his true body, or did they have to meet other conditions in order to bring back his original personality?

The upcoming test could provide Ves and his fellow answers with all of the answers to their questions.

This was why it was so important to conduct it as quickly as possible.

They could not adequately plan for the future until they obtained solid data that could prove their theories and dispel a large amount of disturbing rumors.

As the news about Ves' potentially compromised state continued to circulate within a limited community, far more than just the Larkinsons desired clarity about the consequences of engaging in phase lord body cultivation.

All of this urgency forced the Larkinsons to speed up their preparations and conduct the test on the same day of the assassination attempt.

Suffice to say, Ves would rather take the rest of the day off, but the circumstances did not allow it. He changed to an upgraded nanosuit before entering a reinforced and shielded chamber that was large enough to fit his new true body as well as a handful of mechs.

The First Sword Mark III stood ready to subdue Ves.

Her Decapitator and her 33 sword fey were far too sharp and lethal for this purpose, so the Design Department had hastily prepared a hull-grade superdimensional rod that roughly matched the dimensions of the Decapitator.

The rod was exceptional enough to pierce through a spatial barrier with relative ease, but was still blunt and solid enough to non-lethally brutalize the flesh of a large and stubborn organism.

It was the perfect tool to subdue a certain naughty phase lord!

Ves felt intimidated by the sight of the First Sword Mark III wielding her new punishment rod.

The makeshift weapon could easily bash in his skull if the ace swordsman mech employed her full strength!

Fortunately, Saint Dise possessed enough skill and control that she should be able to exert just enough restraint to keep her attacks under control. Ves trusted her to apply the right amount of force.

"Alright, I am here. When do I start?"

"Please wait a moment, sir. We are still calibrating the newly installed scanner systems. This will take a few more minutes."

Soon enough, everything was ready. When Ves received the signal to initiate his transformation, he took a deep breath before he slowly unfolded his true body.

He gradually increased in size. His new nanosuit did an excellent job of keeping his body covered while at the same time gathering lots of data on his changing internal condition.

One of the strangest aspects of this gradual transformation was that Ves did not remain idle while he unfolded his true body.

He called up the incomplete design of the Arboreal Project and began to conduct actual work on the organic Carmine mech design project.

His multidisciplinary work involved mech design, biotechnology and Carmine Systems. This was not the sort of work that an average Journeyman or Senior could complete.

It was a crude way to determine which personality was in control of Ves' true body.

Of course, there was a possibility that Ves' alternate personality also knew how to design mechs. It would be a lot more difficult to distinguish any differences if they possessed the exact same skills and experience in designing mechs.

This was why Gloriana and several other mech designers who collaborated with Ves in the past paid close attention to his work.

A work always reflected its creator. If Ves suddenly experienced an abrupt switch in personality, his contributions to the Arboreal Project would definitely take on a different character!

No matter how much Ves' second personality tried to hide his emergence, his radically different attitude towards a range of different topics would definitely bleed into his mech design!

The transition from Ves to his other personality happened abruptly.

When his true body expanded to a height of roughly 3.5 times of a mech, he immediately ceased his mech design work.

His expression changed as well. A sense of subdued arrogance had taken the place of nervous anticipation.

After taking one careful look at his surroundings, the still-expanding phase lord straightened his back and assumed a defiant posture.

"I have no intention of hiding like a rat." He declared with an augmented voice that made it even more obvious that a different personality had taken over. "I am not as weak and lacking in confidence as my weaker self. I am a god. A superior being has no reason to feel ashamed."

The First Sword Mark III took an exaggerated step forward while bringing her new punishment rod to bear.

"If you are god, then you should easily be able to bear my attacks." Saint Dise spoke while increasing the intensity of her Saint Kingdom.

There was no way for Ves to compete against a superdimensional ace mech. His new change in personality did not come with a direct power boost. It would be stupid for him to accept this challenge!

"Ahem, there is no need to resort to intimidation. Hierarchies exist among gods. I have no objection to admitting my inferiority against a well-equipped saint. If you think that you can force me to deny my own godhood through this method, then think again. The truth is staring in your faces, yet you refuse to acknowledge it due to your human preconceptions."

Multiple people frowned. This new personality of Ves harbored strange ideas that his original self would never voice!

At least this other personality was willing to talk, if only to avoid an embarrassing smackdown.

"Before we proceed, it would be helpful if you choose a designation for yourself." Maria Abselon said. "How do you wish to be called?"

"I am Ves Larkinson." The phase lord declared shortly after he had reached his full height. "You do not comprehend who you are addressing. I am a god. I am the master of this divinely blessed form. The previous Ves you have spoken with is merely an undesirable remnant that refuses to admit reality. His weak and mortal mind cannot possibly control this fine body, so I have emerged to embrace what he has denied. Between the two of us, I am clearly the superior Ves!"

"..."

"We shall call you Sev." Gloriana decided.

"I refuse to relinquish my name."

"Dise." Gloriana mentioned.

The First Sword Mark III went from standing still to almost instantly closing the distance before smashing her punishment rod right through Ves' spatial barrier and colliding directly against his head!

SMACK!

"OUCH! MY HEAD! THAT HURTS SO MUCH!"

"There is more where that is coming from so long as you remain stubborn. Now, will you be a good boy and agree to cooperate with us, Sev?"

Ves — or rather Sev — snarled. "You have me at a disadvantage. You are giving me no choice but to comply. I shall play along, but only if this mech over here refrains from enacting violence against my person. I am no match against this godbone-clad god machine."

It was rather surprising that Sev cooperated so quickly. He only needed a single good smack to head before he caved and agreed to play nice with the Larkinsons.

This showed a level of control that defied the stereotype of an arrogant and deluded phase god.

"Please give us a clear answer, Sev. Who are you and where do you come from?"

The phase lord made an annoyed expression. "I have already given you my answer. Is your comprehension ability flawed? I am the true master of this body. 'Ves' is incapable of controlling it. His mind is weak and cannot assert its dominance over this divine flesh and organs. Only a god is qualified to control the body of a god. This is so self-explanatory that I should not have to explain this fundamental truth."

"So you are only good at controlling the body of a phase lord?"

"Yes. I can do more than that. I have already mastered the use of my phasewater organs. I am made for combat. If I am equipped with a full range of godbone combat gear, I would readily issue a challenge against your sword saint over here. I do not believe I am inferior to her as long as we can attain parity in equipment."

Many Larkinsons doubted that. Those that studied the footage of the assassination attempt noted that 'Sev' fought with the skill of a competent warrior.

That was nothing special among trained and experienced soldiers. Most high-ranking mech pilots possessed exquisite skill and could easily draw out all of the potential of their machines.

The skill displayed by Sev at the time did not even reach the standard of an elite soldier. Of course, part of his display could be attributed to unfamiliarity and lack of training. So long as he regularly exercised his newly expanded true body, he should be able to fight considerably more effectively than before.

Even then, it was unlikely for the human phase lord to break past the extraordinary threshold and acquire skill that exceeded the scope of mortals.

Expert pilots and ace pilots were able to fight extremely well, but they did not gain their superhuman skills and abilities from scratch. They had dedicated years or decades to constant training in order to achieve a breakthrough in this aspect.

What separated Sev from all of these impressive champions was that the latter built up a lot of accumulation.

As for Sev, his combat skills were merely better than average. They actually looked pretty standard, but did not exhibit any obvious traits that belonged to a distinct school. It was as if he received a download of the most standardized set of fighting skills suitable for a humanoid phase lord.

"What is your stance towards the Larkinson Clan?" Gloriana asked next

A sneer appeared on Sev's face. "I am aware that I am unable to deceive you while I remain in the presence of the sword saint's aura, so I shall speak plainly. My clan exists to serve me. Your attempt to usurp control is nothing less than a betrayal of your oaths. The mortals among you are supposed to serve my whims. The gods among you have forgotten who has granted them their current strength. Without my divine works, they are nothing!"

What a disgusting opinion! Was this how Ves truly thought about his clan, or was it merely one of Sev's many delusions?

"What are your thoughts concerning me?" Gloriana asked.

"You are weak." Sev contemptuously said. "You are a weak and defenseless mortal. Your design capabilities are good, but that merely makes you a good slave. You are a banshee who harbors delusions of grandeur. The only credit you deserve is that you have spawned three children with the potential to become gods in their own right. Other than that, you have become utterly redundant to me. Your wealth, your connections and your affection holds zero value to me at this stage."

"H-H-How can you say that, Ves?!" Gloriana exclaimed while using the wrong name. "I am not worthless! I am a Senior Mech Designer just like you! My works are just as good as yours!"

The human phase lord contemptuously shook his head. He remained completely unmoved by her feeble words.

"You are admittedly a good mech designer, but you are hardly unique. There are many Senior Mech Designers that can offer comparable value to you. This is another reason why I look down on my weaker self. He refuses to acknowledge reality and remains faithful to you despite your lack of redeeming qualities. If I am in charge, I would apply for a divorce and cast you aside. Once I have liberated myself from you, I shall seek out a more advantageous relationship with a proper female deity. It is unfortunate that the Larkinson Clan is filled with traitors. I shall have to look elsewhere to find a worthy partner. Even a shrew is a better choice."

"..."

Chapter 6949 The Power of Alien Delusions

As unpleasant as it was to speak to Sev Larkinson, the session already bore a lot of fruit.

The Larkinsons and their partners gathered plenty of information about Ves' alternate personality.

So far, they have already managed to form a number of preliminary conclusions.

The first and most obvious conclusion was that Sev most definitely existed as a full and separate personality.

He was not a drunken or impaired version of Ves.

Sev existed as his own person. He possessed radically different views on a large variety of topics. The real Ves would never harbor those thoughts, let alone voice them with so much confidence and belief.

Second, Sev was rational and capable of communicating normally.

Sev did not willingly cooperate with the Larkinsons, yet that did not stop him from spilling the beans under coercion. He did not stubbornly refuse to divulge his true thoughts like an idiot, but surrendered to reality and did whatever was necessary to avoid another painful smack to his head.

Although it looked rather silly for a phase lord as large as Sev to exhibit obvious vigilance towards a mech that was several times smaller than his true body, the ace mech was just too powerful.

Even without her superdimensional conversion, the First Sword Mark III still had a high chance of defeating the human phase lord in a duel!

This process would just take a lot longer due the presence of a strengthened spatial barrier.

Another conclusion the Larkinsons made while interviewing Sev was that he was an unequivocal bastard.

Sev did not care about the feelings and opinions of 'mortals' and 'weaklings'. He firmly placed himself above the rest and expected everyone to do his bidding without question. He genuinely believed that he was a god and that it was his right to lord over those that failed to match his strength.

One important curiosity was that he reluctantly regarded ace pilots as gods in equal standing to his own. It was only due to their impressive combat power that phase lords such as Sev were forced to make this admission.

Perhaps the most important conclusion that the Larkinsons drew from the interview was that Sev possessed at least a portion of Ves' memories, but also acquired knowledge about phase lords that he originally shouldn't know!

He sounded as if he was Ves who got corrupted by the heavenly authority of the Red Ocean until he turned completely native!

After Gloriana took a break, others picked up where she left off and began to ask the questions.

Vector Loban asked one of the most important questions that all of them had on their mind.

"Which side of the Red War are you rooting for? Are you siding with the native aliens, who all possess the stance on phase lords such as yourself? Or are you still willing to side with red humanity, who have killed more native gods than you can count?"

Sev pressed his lips. "The Red War is a war fought between machine gods and the descendants of the Elder Gods. The former are individually strong, but that is only because they are much more extensively integrated with technology than the latter. The phase lords and phase whales have made an egregious mistake by neglecting the difference that good equipment can make. They have already begun to remedy this problem. Once they are able to reduce the parity between combat gear, the real gods of the Red Ocean shall vanquish the foreign gods. We are the blessed sons of this dwarf galaxy. This war shall end so long as the right gods regain complete control over our blessed galaxy."

That was a lot of information. Sev expressed an unusual stance towards the Red War.

He unambiguously sided with the native aliens, not even caring that they were committing a huge amount of atrocities against the human colonists!

What was more important was that Sev did not consider the Red War a struggle between races.

He instead considered it to be a war between different kinds of gods. The alternate personality completely disregarded the worth of mortals and solely interpreted the ongoing conflict as a power struggle between 'machine' gods and 'real' gods.

If Sev's opinions happened to be representative of the opposing alien phase lords, then the unspoken implication was that the two sides might be able to find enough common ground to coexist with each other!

Of course, the premise of all of this was for red humanity to completely abandon its high-ranking mech pilots and put their human phase lords into absolute leadership positions!

As the listeners deduced the implications of Sev's words, they began to harbor even more doubts towards the Phase Lord Department.

Was Sev the exception, or the rule?

Had other human phase lords secretly gone native and chosen to side with the Red Cabal due to holding the correct stance towards the deification of phase leaders?

If this was the case, then the Phase Lord Department became a lot less reliable than before!

Even if the collies who worked for this department were disciplined and loyal enough to maintain their allegiance to red humanity, the brainwashing of human phase lords would definitely lead to undesirable changes in policy.

Nobody dared to voice their suspicions about the Phase Lord Department. This was way above their pay grade. They should just pass on this information to the bigshots and let them handle this hot potato.

"One more question." Maria Abselon spoke up after a time. "If our clan is about to enter into battle against a hostile force of native aliens that is led by formidable enemy phase lords, will you agree to fight alongside our mechs?"

"As shameful as it is for me to fight on the wrong side of this war, I shall not capitulate. The gods of this dwarf galaxy are too blinded in their hatred against 'humans'. Besides, I can only secure my place in the Red Ocean if I demonstrate my strength. Just because we are the same kind of gods does not mean we automatically get along. I shall fight against my fellow gods because I must."

If Sev spoke the truth, then he could still fight on the 'right' side, but only if the native aliens were hostile against him. If for whatever reason the phase lords decided that they belonged on the same side, then that spelled a lot of trouble for the Larkinson Clan!

Fortunately, the notion that all phase lords belonged to the same group was not a given in the Red Ocean.

Not even the Red Cabal was able to unite all phase lords and phase whales. These native gods were quite selfish and conceited by nature. It would be difficult for them to truly set aside all of their rivalries and competitive tension.

After all, the Red Ocean was still a relatively small dwarf galaxy. Its territories and resources were limited. The new frontier could only support so many phase leaders at a time.

Many phase leaders likely chose to isolate themselves in their pocket spaces and hibernate for thousands of years at a time because they could not bear this competitive pressure.

Now that Sev answered the most acute questions, the Larkinsons were ready to wrap this session up and conduct an extensive analysis on all of the information they had gathered.

It was not a good idea to let Sev out for too long. The Larkinsons feared that the longer he remained active, the more control he could wrest away from Ves.

"It is time for you to withdraw and let Ves regain control over his body. Will you do so voluntarily, or do we need to instruct Saint Dise to give you another corrective tap?" Vice Director Maria Abselon asked.

Sev raised his palms. "Whoa there. Let us not be too hasty, here. The real gods shall vanquish the machine gods in time. I am patient enough to wait until that moment has arrived. Once that happens, I shall finally be able to discard my weak original self and embrace my true destiny as a god among mortals. I will even be generous enough and shelter you from the predations of other gods and aliens so long as you submit to me. I only ask for a couple of boons in return."

"You are not in a position to negotiate with the Larkinson Clan."

"Oh, I disagree. There is always room for negotiation. From the way I see it, you desire answers while I desire control. I would be happy to share the truth of the gods to you. I know more than you think. I merely ask that you grant me the time to exercise my divine body from time to time. My weaker self will agree, as letting me challenge other real gods and win may be the only way for 'us' to subjugate our enemies. The alien mortals resist your invasion because they reject your gods. Present them with an acceptable alternative, and they shall kneel before you before you know it. Only one kind of god deserves to rule over the Red Ocean."

With that, Sev waved everyone goodbye before folding back his true body. His stature steadily shrunk until he slowly returned to human proportions.

During this transition, it became pretty clear when the real Ves managed to return.

Multiple indications including the First Sword's Saint Kingdom confirmed that Ves had definitely regained control over himself.

Everyone relaxed when they saw that Ves was still able to restore himself. There was a chance that Sev might have been able to replace his original self entirely, but that did not happen.

"Welcome back, sir. Are you aware of dialogue that we just held with your alternate self?"

"Yes, but not directly." Ves replied as he inspected his own nanosuit-clad body for any unpleasant surprises. "I can recall what you guys said to each other through Blinky's memories. When 'Sev' takes control, I am completely taken out of the equation. It is quite disconcerting. There is no way that Sev will voluntarily relinquish control to me if he can help it. He's just like me in this regard."

"That is what we suspect as well. Please stand still and allow us to scan your body. This will take a while, so please remain patient."

Ves had to subject himself to a battery of tests and examinations before he could leave the main chamber.

He soon entered the control room where a large amount of personnel were still in the process of analyzing the data. He soon moved to an adjacent room where Andrea Vox, Vector Loban and Maria Abselon sat around a table.

"I hope you have answers for me." He said.

"We have already developed 4 different theories of what has caused you to develop an alternate personality with delusions of godhood." Maria said. "We have yet to gather enough data that can enable us to determine which theory is correct, but the ones we have formed so far should at least give us directions to work towards."

That sounded productive.

"So what do you have?"

"The first theory that we have devised is based on the assumption that there is a mutual exchange between the so-called heavenly authority and dominant thoughts of all of the intelligent life forms in the Red Ocean. This theory is based on the observation that E energy both influences and is influenced by the thoughts and emotions of sentient beings. If the vast majority of residents in this dwarf galaxy believe that phase lords are gods, then the environment itself will begin to enforce and propagate this norm. The arrival of humans to the new frontier cannot shake this dominant assumption because their population is too small relative to the native aliens."

Ves looked thoughtful after hearing this theory. It aligned with his own theories, though it went a lot further than he imagined.

The theory sounded surprisingly plausible, though it would be hard to prove its validity based on the hearsay of Sev alone.

Based on this theory, Ves spawned a second personality because a phase lord must embrace his own divinity.

A phase lord that denied his own godhood was a contradiction that was not allowed to exist by the Red Ocean!

Since Ves was crazy enough to cling to his own humanity and mortality, the heavenly authority which was shaped by millions of years of alien delusions essentially tried to fix the glitch by clumsily inserting a more pliant personality in his true body!

It sounded crazy, yet it may just be true!

Chapter 6950 Ves the Fried Egg

Spiritual energy, or E energy, possessed both active and reactive properties.

Its presence exerted an influence on the thinking of living beings.

At the same time, it experienced changes as a result of being affected by those very same thoughts.

This had many different implications. One of the most important ones was how the thinking patterns of an astronomical amount of intelligent beings could affect the surrounding E energy radiation on a galactic scale.

While there were so many aliens in the Red Ocean that possessed very divergent thoughts from each other, what if they all happened to form a consensus on a number of topics?

For example, what if they all believed from the bottom of their hearts that phase lords were gods?

If that kind of thinking became pervasive enough, all of that collective belief most definitely affected the heavenly authority of the Red Ocean!

To put it simply, Ves posited that since the aliens believed that phase lords and phase whales were literal gods, this widespread assumption gained a power of its own. It essentially turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy that changed phase leaders forever!

Even if phase lords and phase whales originally did not possess more literal god-like traits, the changes to the environment altered the very reality around them until they fit the expectations of the masses!

It helped a lot that the vast majority of phase leaders did not resist this change. Instead, they encouraged it, either because of genuine belief that they had attained a form of godhood, or because they cynically saw it as a way to secure their own power base over the short-lived mortals.

Phase leader existed as a completely separate class of beings from the ordinary aliens that struggled to make a living in the Red Ocean.

Their bodies grew to titanic proportions.

They gained the ability to manipulate the fabric of spacetime without relying on technology.

Their lifespans multiplied by at least dozens of times, and they could potentially obtain organic immortality if their bodies evolved further.

The masses all worshiped them as good without needing to put any effort to reinforce this impression.

Without any significant pushback or source of opposition in the Red Ocean, how could these phase leaders possibly deny such a favorable circumstance?

The puelmers were the only natives that did not automatically believe that phase leaders were gods, yet that did not change anything.

They were just one of numerous races that inhabited the Red Ocean. They were just as outnumbered by the god-fearing aliens as the red human immigrants that arrived in the last decade.

The proportion of puelmers and red humans in the Red Ocean was too small to shake the dominant ideology of native godhood!

As Ves thought about the power of collective alien thinking, he realized that this theory may likely be true!

"If your first theory is true, then phase lord body cultivation is a poisoned chalice. Any human who practices it will eventually become affected by the heavenly authority of the Red Ocean. This is a collective will that is representative of the residents of this dwarf galaxy. Since the residents are overwhelmingly aliens with strong belief in the divinity of phase lords, I fear that humans who have chosen to walk down this path risk becoming assimilated by the aliens through this collective will."

The mood between the gathered people grew subdued as they thought about the unfortunate implications of this theory.

If it held any basis of truth, then every human phase lord was compromised one way or another.

At least Ves actively resisted the will of the alien heavens and managed to retain his humanity for the most part. So long as his alternate self could not unilaterally take over his body, he could tolerate his new condition.

What about others?

Were the professional soldiers selected and transformed by the Phase Lord Department able to resist the temptation to embrace godhood that had previously been exclusive to the vaunted high-ranking mech pilots?

Ves did not necessarily think that they were weak-willed, but when the heavenly authority of the Red Ocean dangled godhood in their faces, how numerous humans could cling to their original ideals and insist that gods did not exist?

Perhaps he was looking down on them too much. It may be possible that there were still enough human phase lords that held true to their original values and principles.

Yet that still left open the possibility that a number of them had become corrupted by the nefarious heavenly authority.

While Ves did not think they would be stupid enough to defect to the Red Cabal and actively fight to make humans extinct, their goals had already diverged to an extent.

This was quite dangerous. Red humanity assumed a heavy burden by allocating a share of phasewater and strategic resources to these large, hungry and ambitious human phase lords.

If half or more of them had secretly gone native, then much of those resources may ultimately end up going to waste!

Ves let out a tired breath. "Phase lord body cultivation is too good to be true. Nothing comes for free. The heavenly authority of the Red Ocean was definitely up to no good when it decided to 'bless' me with the physique of a phase lord. The more I develop along this trajectory, the more I conform to the alien standards of a god. That will subsequently empower the alter ego that is hidden within my increasingly more alien physique."

"If this is the case, then it is imperative that you suspend any efforts to strengthen yourself as a phase lord." Maria Abselon spoke. "The power you gain from this is dispensable. We are humans. We already enjoy the protection of our own 'gods', who are much more reliable than the alien variant. Now that we have recognized the dangers of phase lord body cultivation, there is no justification to continue your development along this trajectory."

Formation Master Andrea Vos nodded in agreement. "The Red Collective is grateful to you for exposing the strong indoctrination attempts of our current host galaxy. I fear that it may already be too late to reverse the degeneration of our Phase Lord Department, but it is not too late for you. There is no need for you to make any further personal sacrifices in order to get to the bottom of the strong alien influence on anyone who attempts to become a phase lord. I can already tell you that our department heads and other leaders are considerably alarmed by the latest revelations."

Ves turned his friend from the Transhumanist Faction.

"You have remained quiet for a while. What do you think, Vector?"

The biomech designer did not hurry to respond. He took a moment to compose his thoughts.

"I think that we should not be too hasty to dismiss the merits of phase lord cultivation." He said. "We have come up with three more theories that can provide us with alternate explanations for our discoveries. It is also important to note that you have actively fought to retain your humanity. That gives us hope that there is a way to have your cake and eat it too. So long as we can balance the power of a phase lord with an adherence to fundamental human principles, it is possible to become a powerful phase lord without going native."

"That is too much of a risk to take." Maria Abselon retorted. "Even if he is about to retire from his position as patriarch, he is still an important pillar of our clan. His mech designs are the heart of our armed forces. The Premier Branch is eagerly waiting for him to design a set of first-class living mechs for its eager mech pilots. We risk compromising his ability to design living mechs, Carmine mechs and more impressive miracle works just to make a single phase lord stronger. If we did not have our own expert pilots and ace pilots, then an argument could be made to invest in this dubious initiative. However, we already enjoy more than enough high-level protection."

There was no good justification for Ves to continue to develop as a phase lord.

The best possible solution was to reverse his phase lord body cultivation. That would make him weaker, but would also remove all of the hidden dangers associated with this alien cultivation method.

Unfortunately, there was no known means to reverse this transformation. Trying to undo a phase lord sounded as absurd as trying to restore a fried egg to an uncooked egg. It simply couldn't be done.

The next best solution was to hit the pause button. If Ves no longer made any attempts to advance his phase lord cultivation, then his problem would not grow any worse.

Yet Professor Vector Loban rejected this safe approach!

He essentially encouraged Ves to continue to develop as a phase lord! As long as he took more precautions and reinforced his control over his own body, he may just be able to succeed!

"Why do you think I should continue, Vector?" Ves curiously asked. "Everyone else thinks it is unacceptably risky for me to delve further as a phase lord. Why are you different?"

The Transhumanist smiled. "That is because progress always entails risk. I can tell you that this is not even the most outrageous case of human self-evolution that I have encountered. I believe that we should not blindly cling to our old human solutions when we have entered a brand-new age. We have gained access to many new possibilities of advancement. Phase lord cultivation is admittedly far too intertwined with alien paradigms, but that does not necessarily have to remain this way. The strength of humanity is not just our ability to copy alien solutions, but to break them down and rebuild them better than before. Instead of capitulating to the alien galaxy at the first setback that you have encountered, I advise you to keep fighting for a better future for yourself!"

That was a bold idea!

Although it was much riskier to continue advancing as a phase lord, the entire notion sounded a lot more appealing to Ves.

He was not the sort of person who gave up easily. Ves refused to surrender to the subversive methods of the heavenly authority of the Red Ocean.

He would much rather fight back and attempt to transform his phase lord cultivation into his own form of body cultivation!

Ves had already begun to entertain a few tentative ideas. Now that his thoughts turned in his direction, he felt it was very much possible to derail the plot devised by a nefarious dwarf galaxy and combine body cultivation with his own ingenuity!

One of the craziest proposals in his mind was to merge his phase lord physique with a superdimensional Polymetal mech!

It sounded absolutely crazy, but it might just work!

Of course, this was an exceedingly risky and dangerous idea. Ves could not afford to experiment on himself anymore. He would have to find a human phase lord and persuade him or her to undergo a dangerous experimental operation!

Ves did not think he would be able to find many volunteers. He may have to create his own phase lords among the clansmen before he could safely conduct human experiments without taking any excessive risks.

This was not the time for him to flesh out this proposal. Ves tried to rein in his enthusiasm and set the matter aside. He could always fantasize about it later when he was finally alone again.

"I think that Vector has a point." Ves said before he raised his palm. "Before you object, I do intend to be a lot more careful about this matter going forward. I will not implant any further phasewater organs in my body or proactively seek to raise my phasewater concentration. However, I will not blindly turn away from greater power. There has to be a safer and more human-friendly way to become more powerful in a physical sense. The fact that the native aliens will become much more inclined to surrender to me is a very nice bonus."