

Mech 3871

Chapter 3871 Putting Down Roots

During a time where the Golden Skull Alliance was preparing for an imminent battle against the so-called Phase Kingdom, a completely different event temporarily distracted the soldiers stationed in Fort Fishblood.

A wedding was being held in the middle of the base!

Much to everyone's surprise, a Larkinson and a Glory Seeker actually chose to cross the boundaries of their respective organizations and form a first-of-its-kind marital union.

This was rather confusing. Why would a Larkinson and a Hexer possibly hook up together? It didn't make any sense! Even if the Larkinson Clan possessed an unusually close entanglement with the Hexadric Hegemony, their cultures were still different!

Everyone knew that the Hexers were all crazy people. Their abnormal elevation of women over men to the point where they actually invented a religious belief around their doctrine was so repulsive that no one really wanted to befriend them in normal days.

The Larkinsons might be weird in their own way, but since they consisted of people who originally came from other cultures, the clan had developed an open and fairly tolerant society that was closely aligned to mainstream human standards.

An ordinary Larkinson would never think about marrying an ordinary Hexer.

Then again, the bride and groom were hardly ordinary in this case.

Venerable Brutus Wodin was not an ordinary Hexer. He was a mech pilot and a demigod to boot!

As the strongest individual combatant of the Glory Seekers, Brutus was their sole champion and standard bearer. Although his status within the Hexer unit was a little awkward due to belonging to the underprivileged male population of the Hegemony, his pedigree was impeccable.

Such a precious 'boy' was actually quite a catch in Hexer society. He was obedient, useful, polite and well-trained. Hexer women who liked to share their time with someone more exciting had already sent many inquiries to the Wodin Dynasty.

Yet for some reason or another, Brutus did not follow the arrangements of his dynasty. He did not allow his mother to arrange a match for him which was tradition.

He instead crossed over to the Larkinson Clan and hooked up to a woman that no one expected!

Not many people had a good idea of what Commander Sendra was like. While she was not a low-key figure who liked to lurk in the shadows, she wasn't as storied and renowned as her predecessors.

Commander Lydia was forever remembered as the founder and the ancestor of the Swordmaidens. She presented a vision. She arranged the funding. She led the initial organization. She guided its growth. She recruited the first batch of women. She trained her poor and malnourished girls into elite, battle-hardened warriors.

No one could top her prestige even if Lydia's Swordmaidens was incomparably weak by the current standards of the Larkinson Clan.

The successor of Commander Lydia could not match the founder's deeds, but she didn't need to. By dedicating herself to elevating her martial strength, she had broken through and become an expert pilot that served as the example and the goal that every other Swordmaiden mech pilot strove to reach.

If Commander Lydia played the role of a deceased ancestor to the mech legion, then Venerable Dise served as its living ancestor!

Unlike the Sentinel Commander, Venerable Dise did not focus her efforts on leadership and command. While she had taken numerous leadership roles over the years, that was only because the Swordmaidens naturally respected strong mech pilots and powerhouses.

There was no benefit to letting her get distracted by the minutiae of running an expanding mech legion, so another figure had to take over the mantle.

That mantle currently rested on the bride of the unexpected wedding. Commander Sendra was not as historically significant as Commander Lydia nor possessed the inhuman willpower of Venerable Dise.

She was Sendra Larkinson, a Swordmaiden that led her fellow sisters and did a decent job at that. Though she was not as inspiring or competent as Commander Casella Ingvar, a figure like that only emerged once in a hundred years.

Every Swordmaiden was pretty much satisfied with Commander Sendra in charge. She was part of the original band that had survived all the way up to these times.

Unlike many of her rougher and cruder sisters, Commander Sendra also adapted a lot better to the drastic changes over the years. She had become a fixed presence in the upper echelon of the Larkinson Clan and adequately represented the interests of the Swordmaiden Mech Legion.

Even if a handful of other Swordmaidens spent more time in training and became stronger than Sendra on the battlefield, none of them thought about initiating a challenge.

There was no reason to replace Sendra. The warriors whose skill and valor exceeded that of the Swordmaiden Commander had set their sights on apotheosis instead of a glorified desk job. Even if their chances of breaking through was miniscule, they never wavered in their goals and did not intend to give up until they were physically unable to interface with mech!

Besides, the Swordmaidens of today had already changed a lot. Though the women cherished their traditions and tried to preserve them whenever possible, that did not mean they rejected the demands and expectations of the Larkinson Clan.

As long as they became stronger, then it was not such a bad idea to adopt new customs!

As the head of the Swordmaidens, Commander Sendra played an undeniable role in furthering the harmonious cooperation between the mech legion and the Larkinson Clan. Her support and her steady leadership contributed a lot to the integration process.

This was why Ves and Calabast cared a lot about her future. The patriarch of the Larkinson Clan and the secret mastermind that moved a scion of the Glory Seekers into the eager arms of the Swordmaiden Commander both stood at the periphery of the wedding celebration at this time.

Brutus and Sendra were the stars of the show today. No one should deprive them of their limelight even if the wedding was hastily organized.

Only a Swordmaiden would have come up with the bright idea to hold a wedding in the middle of a military base located right inside a dangerous pocket space infested with millions of hostile alien beasts!

"This is one of the strangest weddings that I've attended." Ves quietly remarked as he held a glass of champagne while wearing his Unending Regalia which he had embellished for the occasion. "If I didn't know any better, I would have thought that the Swordmaidens were intent on holding a martial ritual that will give them extra blessings in our upcoming battle against the Phase Kingdom."

The wedding was held in a center square that was ordinarily used to station a lot of mechs. Most of them had been moved away but a few of the Second Swords and Bright Warriors stayed behind in order to enhance the atmosphere.

The thousands of wedding guests that received permission to attend the wedding were overwhelmingly servicemen. There were significantly more women than men in the crowd, and many of them carried greatswords on their backs.

None of the people attending this wedding wore suits or dresses. The location was too dangerous and the alert level was still high, which meant that everyone was obliged to wear protective, vacuum-sealable suits at all times!

Fortunately, the members of the Golden Skull Alliance did not have to leave their helmets up all the time, or else Ves would have to drink his glass of champagne out of a straw!

It was under these all of these odd and abnormal circumstances that Brutus and Sendra kissed each other while looking as if they were ready to hop into the cockpits of their mechs at any time!

"Calabast."

"Yes?"

"Do you think they will be happy together or is this purely a politically-motivated match in your eyes?"

The spymaster shook her head. "It's both, of course. Did you think I would only pick one when I can have both? Commander Sendra is a key figure in our clan and she still has potential. Pairing her up with a husband will do a lot of good to her. Not only will she be able to balance out her life by raising a family, she will also be sharing her life with an actual man for a change."

"And that is important because...?"

Calabast turned to face Ves. "Let me ask you this. In the years that have passed since the Swordmaidens joined the Larkinson Clan, how many of its female members have started relationships and entered into marriage?"

"Uhh..."

"Exactly. While the members of other mech legions such as the Avatars of Myth and the Living Sentinels are beginning to breed like rabbits, the cold women of the Swordmaidens are more attached to their greatswords than the ones that require the protection of a codpiece rather than a scabbard."

Ves looked back at the crowd of enthusiastic Swordmaidens and other wedding guests and noticed that few of the Swordmaidens were accompanied by men. It was clear to see that they were all unmarried. If they had any relationships, then they were more likely to hook up with their fellow sisters than anyone else!

"I see what you mean." He said.

Calabast smiled. "When I learned that Venerable Brutus urgently needed to get married, I just saw a good opportunity to improve the continuity and long-term health of our clan. Facilitating a union between a prominent Swordmaiden and a man that many women still regard as a good catch will serve as a good example to the remaining bachelorettes. I expect a lot more Swordmaidens will enter the dating scene in our fleet after the current campaign has come to an end."

"This will coincide nicely with my intention to bring the fleet back to the Davute System and settle down for a few years. We should more actively encourage relationships in our clan so that many more Larkinsons have an opportunity to put down their roots in the coming years. Our clan will become a lot more turbulent once we have completed our extensive fleet expansion and mech rearmament programs. I hope that all of the newly-weds enjoyed their honeymoons in a time of relative peace and calm by then. I am not content with laying low all the time. Once we have the strength to match our ambitions, I intend to go deeper into the Red Ocean."

Calabast didn't say anything about that. She knew what Ves was like and how he would never be able to enjoy decades of boring and familiar routine.

She was already glad that Ves had come to his senses and agreed to do a proper job of upgrading the expeditionary fleet. Even she underestimated how far behind they were. The Golden Skull Alliance was too fragile and would become easy prey once the MTA escort ship left the fleet!

As Calabast thought about all of the drastic changes that the patriarch was plotting, she asked a pertinent question.

"Will you leave any families behind in whatever super base you intend to build on a planet?"

Ah. That was an important question. It was also a sensitive matter. Ves had struggled about what to do about this ever since he came up with the idea of building a major fortress and industrial compound on a planetary environment.

"I haven't decided yet." Ves replied. "I am thinking about setting it up as a branch of the Larkinson Clan."

"What do you mean by that, exactly?" Calabast curiously asked.

"It will be like the scheme that I set up back in the old galaxy. In my opinion, the Larkinsons that are rooted in our fleet are the true members of the clan. Those that choose to live a different life and wish to pass years at a slower pace will be free to relocate to the branches that I intend to set up in the future. However, once they make this choice, they must leave the core of our clan. What do you think about this setup, Calabast?"

"I think it is a good approach." She praised. "It doesn't sound fair enough, though. If there is a mechanism to move from the fleet to a branch, then you must also set up the reverse where branch members can be promoted to the core. You should expand this idea further."

"I will."

Chapter 3872 Superior Growth Environment

The wedding held in the middle of Fort Fishblood started and ended in joy.

Brutus Wodin became a husband for the first time while Commander Sendra set a fantastic example to her still-unmarried female subordinates.

Interestingly enough, neither of the newlyweds decided to change their names despite their change in marital status.

This was due to a combination of personal choice and political considerations.

It was not that simple for members of different organizations to marry each other.

While humans were technically free in the sense that they were not bound by their states, employers and so on, the situation was more complicated in the expeditionary fleet.

The Glory Seekers all pledged their loyalty to their organization and the Wodin Dynasty that funded and supported the mech force. Leaving was not easy as they had all signed contracts that bound them to the organization for the long haul.

The Larkinsons dedicated their lives to the clan they had signed up for. It was not a state where they could leave its borders whenever they wanted.

Just the logistics of making this marriage work was complicated. It wasn't as if the Star Dancer Mark II could casually enter the hangar bay of the Wild Torch without warning.

It also wasn't simple for a Larkinson legion commander to randomly visit the Indigo Tremor and spend the night with one of the key mech pilots of the Glory Seekers.

Although the Glory Seekers and the Larkinson Clan were fairly reasonable and already set a few ground rules, they were far from ready to allow for free and unrestricted movement between their ships.

In short, even if Brutus and Sendra became wife and husband, they were still active servicemen that needed to put their duty above their personal lives.

Fortunately, neither of the two were unreasonable in this regard. When Ves spoke to the couple and talked about how they would spend their lives together in the future, they sounded fully cognizant of the limitations they had to endure due to their tangled union.

"I needed to get married with haste in order to get my mother to end any attempt to arrange a match of her choosing." Brutus told Ves after most of the festivities had ended. "Now that I have completed my objective, I do not have to accelerate my schedule anymore. We can progress our new relationship at our own pace."

Commander Sendra smirked as she bumped her elbow against her new hubby's side. "Hey, don't act like I don't exist anymore. I'm your woman now. Do you think you can just go back to your job of piloting mechs like before?"

"What do you mean by that, Sendra..?"

"A lot of people are having kids these days, hehe. Do you think that I want to be left out? If I have my way, you're going to be a father soon."

"What?!" Brutus looked distressed! "We haven't even broached this topic yet! We have only been together for little over a week. It is far too soon to think about having children."

"Why not? Your sister, who is younger than you by the way, is already raising a baby of her own. As her older brother, how can you tolerate the fact that you are falling behind? Face it, Brutus. We're going to have a baby soon!"

This development was too fast. Brutus couldn't adjust to Sendra's desire for haste. Why was she in such a hurry? Didn't she have her own career to worry about?

"Sendra, your body..."

The woman dismissively huffed. "It won't be a problem. Ketis already explained the ins and outs to me. We just have to scrounge a few hundred MTA credits and contract a genetics company like Witshaw & Yeneca to formulate a designer baby that my body can safely bear."

"I'm willing to throw in a thousand MTA credits or so." Ves spontaneously offered. "Consider it a wedding gift of mine. It's the least I can do for my brother-in-law and one of my key military commanders."

"Thank you, patriarch! That is great news! Did you hear this, Brutus? We'll have many more options for our designer baby than before!"

The Larkinson Clan had yet to reach a level of prosperity where Ves could casually fling away enough money to casually buy eight limited edition two-toned lavender-and-white puelmer leather giarna handbags.

However, it was worth it for Ves to show his sincerity and magnanimity by investing in two key mech pilots. The happier they became, the more likely they were willing to fight and die on his behalf!

If their wonderful and precious child was born as a designer baby, then Brutus and Sendra would have even more reason to fight at their hardest and sacrifice their lives if necessary.

Although Ves did not deliberately scheme to encourage the two newly-weds to raise an expensive designer baby in the hopes of increasing their commitment to defend the fleet, it would be a nice bonus if that happened.

"Will your first kid be a boy or a girl?" Ves casually asked.

"Girl of course." Sendra immediately replied. "We can discuss having a boy as our next baby, but the first one absolutely has to be a girl. I need someone to follow my footsteps."

"Will she grow up as a Larkinson, then?"

"All of our children will become Larkinsons first. If they want to join their dad over at the Glory Seekers when they are old enough to make their own decision, I'll let them, but that is for the future."

While Sendra announced all of her decisions as if they were already decided, her new husband raised his hand in protest.

"Sendra! You should talk to me about these important matters first."

The new wife snorted. "And what? Raise our children among Hexers instead? I don't want my daughters to grow up as carbon copies of Gloriana. The Larkinson Clan is a much better place for children to spend their childhoods. We have access to complete facilities in our fleet. There are schools, mech academies, abundant living and recreation spaces, biomedical experts that are good enough to keep our designer babies healthy and more. What can the Glory Seekers offer that is better than what our clan can already provide?"

That was a good argument and one that instantly squashed Brutus.

Compared to the rich and prosperous development of the Larkinson Clan, the Glory Seekers grew in a more narrow and limited fashion.

The Hexer mech force was primarily a military organization and did not really do anything else aside from fighting.

The Larkinson Clan on the other hand was a lot more rounded. It did not only consist of soldiers, but also carried a large number of civilians.

These non-combatants might not be able to pilot a mech or repair them when they were damaged, but they fulfilled all kinds of other roles that were more prevalent in ark ships than carrier ships!

If any parent in the fleet had a choice of where they wanted to raise their children, then the Larkinson Clan was definitely on top of this list!

With an impressive collection of civilian capital ships such as the Vivacious Wal and the Discentibus, the Larkinson Clan was by far the most well-prepared to support the formation of new families in space!

The only ways for the Glory Seekers and the Cross Clan to catch up was to host their families and children in a planetary environment. Discussions regarding that had already begun, but in the short term the Larkinson Clan possessed a definite advantage.

After seeing that the two newlyweds had the situation well in hand, Ves and Calabast chatted with them a bit more before letting the couple enjoy their honeymoon as best they could in a military fortification on foreign soil.

The festivities surrounding the wedding celebration did not last. Soon, the rhythm of the expeditionary forces returned to normal as Task Force Fisherman prepared for a massive battle where many unpredictable factors would collide on a single battlefield.

A lot of officers, planners, analysts and other experts were pouring over the limited amount of data in their possession to determine how to best topple or at least crack open the Phase Kingdom.

Although their efforts were severely hampered by the lack of scouting data on the Lake Continent, the information that Ves had received from the Cerebral King helped fill in plenty of the gaps.

The supply chain also worked to form a transport fleet that was capable of transporting all of the large and heavy goods that the Golden Skull Alliance and the Evolution Kingdom intended to exchange.

Ves and a few other dignitaries watched from the side as a small fleet of cargo shuttles passed through the portal and entered Fort Fishblood.

Each of their small cargo holds contained numerous valuable goods that were ready to be shipped to the Evolution Kingdom.

"What do you think about the stuff we are trading away, Ranya?"

The director of the Larkinson Biotech Institute looked impassive. "I am still withholding my judgment. I am not a negotiator so I don't know whether you made a good deal or not. In my opinion, the cargo carried by those shuttles aren't particularly valuable to us. We can build entire batches of mech-grade power reactors easily enough with the Spirit of Bentheim. The nutrient packs are even cheaper despite their considerable volume, and I am sure the story is similar for the batches of low-grade exotics that you are prepared to transfer. The only real item of note is the ship-grade power reactor. From my understanding of shipbuilding, a reactor that is big enough to power a ship is an impressive feat of engineering."

"You're correct." Ves nodded. "To me, the Evolver fish-whales and the Cerebral King are sort of like mechs or biomechs if you will. Their bodies are their mech frames and their powerful organs play the same role as mech parts. While the phase whale bioscience inherited by the Cerebral King possesses a lot of unique advantages, energy generation is a persistent limitation due to the lack of technological development and lack of resources in Purgatory."

Ranya nodded in understanding. "I've read the reports and watched the footage. I truly envy the Cerebral King for gaining access to a portion of the scientific accumulation of the ancient phase whale race. Civilizations that pursue a pure biotechnology route are rare, but the biggest among them have developed a lot of impressive applications that would be considered high technology in our industry."

"Phase whale technology is impressive, but the Cerebral King only has limited access to it. The fish-whale organs responsible for generating energy are highly optimized, but their base is too low. Our power reactors are much better off in that regard. There are massive industries in human space that support the development of power reactors and producers have access to a much wider variety of materials to build more impressive products. Even a basic power reactor is already a technological leap in the eyes of the fish-whales."

Ranya chuckled. "Now that I think about it, this scenario sounds similar to how we have adopted luminar crystal technology. This time, it is the aliens that are making use of advanced human technology instead of the other way around."

Ves laughed with the exobiologist. This indeed sounded like an absurd scenario. It painted humanity as the ancient and advanced race that happened to let one of its technologies fall into the hands of alien races that were much further behind on the technological ladder.

This was a simplistic view of the situation. While it was true that he looked down on the lack of development of the fish-whale race, the Cerebral King still had plenty to teach to the humans if it was willing to share the so-called inheritance of god!

The fact of the matter was that neither side were clearly ahead of the other. Combined with the fact that the Cerebral King was likely over a million years old, it remained to be seen who were the savages in this relationship!

Chapter 3873 Being On Top

"Are you sure you want to come with us for our second trip to the Evolution Kingdom?" Ves questioned. "The journey is risky and you will have to ride in a cargo shuttle that isn't designed to operate on a battlefield. It is much safer for you to wait in Fort Fishblood or better yet return to the Dragon's Den on the other side of the portal. The Larkinson Biotech Institute should have lots of qualified biotech experts on payroll. Why not send them out instead?"

"For the same reason as you insist on meeting with the fish-whales yourself. There are certain jobs that you just need to do yourself."

Ves and Director Ranya Wodin looked out at a small fleet of cargo shuttles that had been especially prepared to transport delicate and valuable bioproducts.

Both of them had conducted a quick inspection to make sure that the vehicles were properly configured to bring back the highly valuable fish-whale organs that the Evolution Kingdom promised to exchange.

"Did you consult your husband before you made this decision?"

Ranya chuckled. "Tusa is an open-minded mech pilot. He doesn't object to my decision, mostly because we will be returning to Fort Fishblood under escort as soon as we have concluded the trade. It helps that he will be present to protect me should the Swarmers launch an unexpected attack."

"I see. How is your marriage with him doing these days?"

"It's doing okay." She replied in a calmer tone. "Neither of us intend to move as fast as Brutus and Sendra. We spend time together whenever possible, but those moments are few and far in between. There is just so much for us to do that we have only met less than ten times this month."

Ves frowned. He knew that this was partially the fault of the current events in the Garimel System and the phase whale enclave, but it was also because of the heavy responsibilities shouldered by husband and wife.

He turned to one of his most trusted advisors. "You always comment about your heavy workload whenever we meet and talk about various topics. While I think it is good that you take your job seriously, you should elevate a few more deputy directors in order to spread your burden. It is not efficient for you to address every problem in your institute."

Just do like I did with my chief ministers and let knowledgeable and competent people do all of the actual work."

Ranya sighed. "I understand. I keep pushing it off because I find it important that everyone working for the Larkinson Biotech Institute is on the same line. I don't rashly want to appoint a couple of deputy directors only for them to become so important in the hierarchy that they command more respect than me. I need to make sure that my stamp on the organization is strong enough before I am comfortable with delegating my power."

Ves gave her a curious look. "Are you afraid of losing control over the institute?"

"I'm afraid that you will replace me and put a better director in charge." She plainly answered. "Let's face it. I am too young for my current position. While you put me in charge in a time where our clan was much smaller and there wasn't as much talent at our disposal, our conditions are a lot different this time. Compared to many of the senior researchers that we have hired in recent times, my qualifications have remained far behind. I don't have the intellect, knowledge base, academic achievements and leadership experience to serve the director of such a major institution."

Whenever someone thought of the Larkinson Clan, they thought about its mechs. Hardly anyone directed their attention to the Larkinson Biotech Institute.

However, its importance as well as its business operations have steadily picked up without anyone noticing. The LBI absorbed a lot of investment, but all of that paid off as its large teams of Lifer biotech researchers had begun to release many different biotech solutions, a few of which were actually commercially viable!

While the LBI's ability to commercialize its research was fairly limited due to being based on a moving fleet, there were still ways to go around this inconvenience.

If nothing disastrous took place, then the LBI would likely soar and cement itself as the second economic pillar of the Larkinson Clan!

"You don't need to put yourself down like that, Ranya." He tried to reassure her. "If you want to conduct high-level research, then sure you need to possess all of those qualifications, but this is different. Leading the Larkinson Biotech Institute only requires you to be smart enough to know what the hell your researchers are doing. I trust that you have already met this standard. Aside from that, the reason why I want to keep you in charge is because you possess a major advantage that the other people in your institute lack."

"Trust. You trust me." Ranya said.

"Correct. As long as you don't go behind my back and abuse your authority, you will do fine even if you step away from the day-to-day running of the LBI."

"I understand that, but it is exactly because you trust me that I feel compelled to do what I can to improve my situation. You might not care much about this because you are already sitting at the top of the hierarchy, but I am only a director by appointment. You can replace me at any time for any reason. I don't dare to rely on the trust you have extended towards me as the sole guarantee that I can keep serving as director. If I want to convince you to keep me as director for the long term, I have to concentrate on making myself as valuable in my position as possible."

That... was quite a rational but also cynical way to go about it. She was right that he did not feel the same pressure as her. What he didn't understand was why she insisted on clinging to her job so much.

"There is more to life than being a director, you know. You can move on to other jobs."

"Unacceptable." Ranya shook her head. "Just like how you are able to gain full control over your design activities by becoming a patriarch, I can fully set my own budget and requirements for my own research projects. As soon as I leave the director's chair, I will have to answer to someone else, and that will make it much harder for me to conduct my more ambitious research projects."

Ves wanted to scratch his head. It sounded as if the two had a lot more in common than he expected. They were both filled with ambition and needed enough power, wealth and authority to make their dreams come true.

He decided to branch out from this heavy topic.

"Does your research also encompass the fish-whale organs that the Evolution Kingdom is willing to exchange?"

Ranya shook her head. "No. While the data on them is highly fascinating, these bioproducts fall outside of my specialty. There will be other specialists such as Dr. Perris that possess much more relevant knowledge. I will leave the task of studying, reverse engineering and reproducing the alien organs to my other researchers."

"Ah. I recall. You are much more interested in studying exoplants. Have you made any solid gains?"

"A few." Ranya smiled. "They're not big enough to warrant your attention, but I have not remained stagnant despite the amount of hours I have to spend on herding research-obsessed cats."

"That reminds me, have you worked on the new coin trees that I have come up with? They're a bit odd, but they play an important role in my research. How much have they grown?"

"The good news is that the ones that we are cultivating are all growing quickly and healthily. You won't have to wait too long before they can begin with growing coins. It is a pity that my expertise is not enough to understand the full depth of these odd trees."

"That's what the T Institute is for." Ves explained. "The LBI is good, but it should retain its focus on biotechnology above all else. The T Institute that I have in mind will assist me in conducting research on more.. metaphysical applications. The new coin trees are an important proof of concept to my research efforts. As long as they work..."

Not even Ves knew what he could do with such a potent method at his disposal. While living mechs and growth mechs would always remain his primary focus, he did not want to give up on coming up with a means to improve the norms of his clan.

Of course, Director Ranya didn't look too happy at the moment. Ves hadn't founded the T Institute yet, but the clan had already made a lot of preparations.

The MTA had already dispatched a potential candidate to lead this new research institution as soon as it opened its doors.

Although Ves was not comfortable with putting a goon of the MTA in charge of such an important and sensitive group, he cared more about obtaining useful research results than keeping his gains a secret from his overlords.

Ves was confident that even if the T Institute produced groundbreaking results, he would probably be the only person who could make full use of the new applications!

"I hope it is worth it for you to put someone affiliated with the mechers in charge of one of your key research organizations."

"It will be fine."

The two eventually completed their discussion and separated. Ranya went on to board the most well-equipped shuttle.

Meanwhile, Ves floated over to the Everchanger and hopped into the cockpit before sitting down at his familiar elevated seat, but not before performing one necessary action.

"Lucky? That's my chair. Get out, please."

"Meow..." The gem cat lazily dozed.

Ves grew annoyed. "If you don't get your furry butt off my chair, I'm going to sit, is that clear?"

"Meow..."

"Okay, that's it! You asked for this, Lucky!"

Ves turned around and plopped himself down on his chair. The cat underneath him instantly yowled as the backside of the Unending Regalia pressed him down on the cushioned seat!

"MEEEEOOOOOWWWWW!"

If not for the fact that Lucky was tough enough to handle the pressure of getting sat upon and if not for quickly turning his body intangible, the precocious cat might have suffered a lot more!

As it was, Lucky was deeply pissed off by Ves' rude action. The cat quickly phased through the underside of the seat and floated up to eye level before giving the clan patriarch a piece of his mind.

"Meow meow meow meow meow!"

Ves merely rolled his eyes. "Serves you right for napping in places where you don't belong. Whenever you pull something like this off, I have to keep picking you up and placing you somewhere else before I can take my seat. I'm tired of doing that, so consider this a lesson to do better next time."

"Meeow meeow meeeow!"

"It's not animal abuse! I would have relocated Clixie if she was dozing at the same spot."

"Meow!"

"What do you mean? That's not gender or species discrimination! Her body is built differently from yours. You can probably survive having a mech step on you. Clixie on the other hand will definitely get squished to pieces!"

"Meow meow."

Lucky was tired of arguing with Ves. The cat petulantly turned around and settled his body on the only other available seat instead!

When Venerable Joshua entered the cockpit five minutes later, the expert pilot briefly stopped and stared at the gem cat that was in the way.

"Lucky? Could you do me a favor and move so that I can sit down? You can rest on my lap if you want."

"Meow~"

Much to Ves' surprise, Lucky had no problem with following this instruction!

The cat obediently floated off the chair, giving Joshua enough room to take his place on his throne.

Lucky dropped his body onto Joshua's lap a second later, causing the two to look like a harmonious whole.

"Meow."

Ves grew jealous at the sight!

Chapter 3874 Metal Organs

Task Force Fisherman departed Fort Fishblood with much greater fanfare than before.

After gathering all of the trade goods and adding additional escorts to the supply caravan, the large group of mechs snuck through the Swarm Kingdom's territory once again.

The mechs and shuttles moved a lot more carefully than before. Ves and many others were concerned that their larger and more imposing movement increased the chance of triggering the surrounding Swarmer fish-whales to raid their convoy.

In order to reduce the chances of that happening, the task force split itself in half. Whether this made a difference or not, the Swarmers did not pay any particular care towards the distant mechs this time.

The humans arrived in front of the Evolution Kingdom without incident once again!

Everyone relaxed now that they reached their initial destination. Though the Evolver fish-whales roaming above the surface of the Lab Continent most certainly noticed all of the human mechs and vehicles parked above their territory, they did not show any excessive degree of caution or vigilance this time.

It appeared that the Evolvers still recalled the friendly roughhousing from before. A couple of the bolder alien beasts such as the bladed fish-whales even took the initiative to flip their tails in greeting.

"They look more active than usual. Could it be that they have been preparing to attack the Phase Kingdom as well?"

"Maybe. It must be incredibly frustrating for aggressive fish-whales to stay on the defensive all the time. No one wants to keep repelling attack after attack without any hope of breaking the deadlock."

The fish-whale race was aggressive and combative by nature. This could be seen from the Swarmer fish-whales who exhibited this behavioral pattern the most. As the most primal variant of fish-whales in Purgatory, the Swarmers possessed the least rationality so they acted closest to their instincts.

The Evolvers were much more sophisticated in that regard, but that didn't mean their savage side had disappeared. It was much more likely that they buried all of their desire to attack and plunder because they knew quite well that it would only be self-defeating in the end.

It was only after the arrival of the strange humans with their large metal machines that the game had changed!

For the first time, the Evolution Kingdom could finally emerge from their territory and fight to their heart's content!

When Ves observed the reactions of the Evolver fish-whales, he nodded in satisfaction.

"The Cerebral King is sincere about his desire to cooperate with us. That's good."

Although he was confident that he had managed to sway the Cerebral King to work together with the expeditionary forces by relying on both logic and mutual self-interest, who knew if the big fish was willing to go through with the deal?

As a primitive species that apparently had no experience with trade and alliances, Ves had to be careful that the fish-whales didn't pursue immediate short-term gains over long-term satisfaction.

Fortunately, it appeared that the Cerebral King was still clever enough to know that the Evolution Kingdom had no chance of winning its eons-long contest against the other fish-whale kingdoms if the status quo persisted.

As the shuttles began to land on a relatively flat area next to the cluster of giant lab structures, a group of fish-whales carefully approached and seemed to inquire about the trade goods brought by the humans.

There was no easy way to communicate with the fish-whales, but the mech pilots figured out a few basic ways to convey a few meanings during their previous meeting.

A handful of mechs raised their palms in order to make sure that the fish-whales didn't get too close and scare away the personnel that were about to bring out the promised goods.

It was quite interesting to see the various reactions from the fish-whales as one crate after another emerged out of the cargo hatches.

Of course, not all of the shuttles unloaded their cargo at this time. So far, the fish-whales hadn't brought any of the items that they agreed to exchange with the expeditionary forces. Wouldn't it be stupid to pass on the power reactors and materials only for the fish-whales to stall and pretend they didn't agree to provide anything?

If the Evolver fish-whales really dared to scam the humans, there was no good way to rectify the situation! The Lab Continent was the adversary's home turf and the total combat strength of the nearby fish-whales were considerably stronger than the entire task force!

"Damn, what is taking the fish-whales so long?"

"Are they really planning to screw us over?"

"Shut up and be patient! The fish-whales don't experience time like us. They live a lot longer than us and there is no day-night cycle in this pocket space. Remain on guard but don't do anything. Let us see what happens when their king fish appears."

It did not take too long for the Cerebral King to appear from the entrance of his underground lab compound.

Although it was a bit worrisome to see that the Evolver fish-whales still made no effort to bring over their own trade goods, the Cerebral King did not show any suspicious or dangerous behavior.

The Everchanger flew out of the group of mechs and met the Cerebral King halfway.

"Greetings from humanity." Ves said and mentally conveyed as soon as he felt the powerful mind of the opposite fish make contact with his own. "Did you remember the conversation we had last time? We concluded a trade deal. Now, we want to complete the exchange of goods. We have brought enough power reactors, precious exotics and nutrient packs to satisfy your immediate needs and prepare you for our joint assault on the Phase Kingdom."

SATISFACTION. SHOW METAL ORGANS. MUST INTEGRATE METAL ORGANS IMMEDIATELY.

"Whoa, not so fast! An exchange is never one-sided. Can you bring us the fish-whale bones and organs that you have promised to trade with us? Once you bring them out, we can both conduct an inspection on each other's goods. As long as both of us are happy with what we have brought, we can complete the exchange. Does that sound good?"

...WAIT. WILL BRING OUT. MUST BE CAREFUL. ORGANS WILL NOT LAST LONG.

"Don't worry about that. We have made our own preparations to keep the organs alive."

The Cerebral King used its powerful mind to issue a few orders to its subordinates.

A group of fish-whales split off from the crowd and entered a few of the more intact lab structures.

Soon, they appeared once again while carrying the trade goods that the Evolution Kingdom had prepared.

The fish-whales had no tradition of using crates, so their method of carrying stuff was a lot cruder.

"Are those... giant shopping bags?"

"What are they made of? Wait... aren't those fish-whale hides?"

"Ugh! Disgusting!"

"Hey, it's fine as long as it works."

It took a fair amount of time for the porters to carefully bring out all of the sacks of specialty products. Once they set down all of the giant sacks, both sides began to inspect each other's goods.

Not anyone was qualified to check up on the bones and organs prepared by the fish-whales. A team of exobiologists and other biotech experts led by Dr. Ranya fearlessly emerged from one of the shuttles and flew over to the giant sacks.

They soon whipped out their various scanners and other inspection gear and began to do their jobs.

Meanwhile, a handful of mechs guarded the team. The Dark Zephyr piloted by Venerable Tusa vigilantly observed the nearby fish-whales. If anything went wrong, he would definitely escort his wife back to safety!

As this went on, the Cerebral King along with a couple of other fish-whales slowly approached the human side and directed a curious gaze towards the various crates.

ORGANS?

"No." Ves shook his head. "Organs are inside these metal boxes. We will open them so you can look."

He transmitted a command that prompted one of the nearby cargo handlers to activate a command that automatically opened a crate.

An ordinary second-class mech-grade power reactor came into view.

Though the expeditionary forces did not scrape the bottom of the barrel this time, they did not bring out their premium goods either.

Ves and the others had made a careful choice on which model of power reactors they wanted to trade.

Out of all of the members of the Golden Skull Alliance, they eventually decided to trade away the ones that the Cross Clan had in inventory.

The power reactors that the Larkinson Clan tended to favor for its current models were able to support peak performance but were not particularly long-lasting.

In contrast, the ones used by the Cross Clan were a lot more stable and could endure considerably more abuse without compromising their output.

Now, one of those steady power reactors graced the Cerebral King.

ENERGY... ORGAN...?

"Correct. Let me show you how it works. You need to form a connection with at least two ports. In order to help you make use of it, we have marked the ports with bright and obvious labels."

Ves briefly explained the basics of electrical theory to the king fish. No matter whether the creature already knew all of this or not, it didn't hurt to give the creature a refresher course.

The last thing he wanted to see was the Cerebral King accusing the humans for wanting to backstab the Evolution Kingdom after one of its fish-whales short-circuited itself due to incorrectly integrating a power reactor!

After issuing repeated warnings and remember, he finally let the Cerebral King take a mech-grade power reactor to its underground lab compound.

One of its larger fish-whale subordinates also followed after the king fish. No matter what, the Cerebral King needed to see with its own eyes whether the metal organs that were capable of providing a constant output of energy actually worked!

The wait was shorter than Ves expected. The two fish-whales reappeared only ten minutes later!

The smaller fish-whale still exhibited a cut on the flank of its body that was healing even now. Its large abdomen looked a little more bloated than before, and it was easy to guess the reason for this change!

"Please monitor and scan this fish-whale. Can we detect the power reactor implanted inside its body?"

"We can! The volume of the creature hasn't grown too much but its mass and density are higher. The creature is radiating more heat than normal and we have detected a higher metal content from its body. All of these signs conform to a successful installation of the power reactor."

Ves looked quite impressed. He was afraid the Cerebral King would screw up the implantation process or forget one of the many warnings that he had issued.

It turned out that he had underestimated the king fish's intelligence and ingenuity. Even if it was the first time that the Cerebral King worked with a metal component, it was not that complicated to make use of the power reactor.

Of course, the humans deliberately simplified the parts and locked out a lot of settings and features in order to prevent the fish-whales from triggering anything dangerous.

The results appeared to be good so far, but the fish-whale had yet to demonstrate what it could do with the new metal 'organ' inside its body.

DEMONSTRATION.

The strange fish-whale opened its giant maw and shot out a laser beam that was not that different from the ones fired by the fish-whales of the Hot Kingdom!

The damage output of this attack was impressive, but not particularly threatening against powerhouses like the bladed fish-whale and the Cerebral Kingdom.

"This is the laser fish's base attack." Ves figured out as the sensors did not spot any sign that the creature had drawn additional power.

The laser fish paused for a moment before it was finally able to activate one of the buttons that turned the power reactor active.

Soon, the body of the laser fish warmed up further, but the creature did not look too uncomfortable with the change.

It took a few more seconds to charge its next attack. After accumulating enough energy, the laser fish finally unleashed a laser beam that was at least several times thicker and more energetic than before!

The difference was clear to see for everyone!

"Whoa!"

The Cerebral King grew excited at the sight! Even though the power amplification wasn't dramatic, any increase in strength was precious!

SATISFACTION. TRADE THE REST. MUST OBTAIN ENERGY ORGANS. SHOW LARGE ENERGY ORGAN.

"Okay, okay. Don't rush too much. They're all here."

Chapter 3875 King-grade Organ

While the Cerebral King happily inspected the remaining power reactors brought by the expeditionary forces, the humans did not sit still either.

A team of biotech experts studied the giant fleshy organs prepared by the fish-whales. Ranya enthusiastically inspected the data provided by the specialized scanning gear that her subordinates had brought for the occasion.

While it was difficult for these portable scanners to penetrate deep into the organs, the biotechs had already anticipated this outcome.

"We need to bring out the lab scanners."

They requested a mech to bring out a larger scanning module from one of the shuttles. While it was a lot more troublesome to use this device, its power was enough to give the biotech researchers the data they needed to verify the functioning of the organ in question!

Half an hour passed by as the researchers investigated multiple organs and sets of bones. While they didn't have the time or heavy-duty equipment to perform thorough verifications, they could at least make a preliminary judgment on the soundness and authenticity of the organic products.

They spent a lot more time examining the contents of the biggest sack brought out by the fish-whales. The king organ contained within exuded far greater power than the other organs. It was such an impressive specimen that the biotech researchers had become completely fascinated by this marvel of phase whale bioengineering!

The Everchanger soon floated to their side in order to check up on the fish-whale goods.

Venerable Joshua, the Everchanger and Ves both used their own extraordinary senses to survey the different organs.

While none of them were proficient in biotechnology, they were all sensitive towards slightly different aspects of life.

They were quite capable of detecting whether any of these organs were sick or unhealthy!

"They look fine to me, sir." Venerable Joshua said after he finished going over the different organs. "This big one is definitely stronger than the rest. In fact, it gives me the feeling that it possesses its own consciousness of sorts. There's something odd about this thing."

Ves briefly frowned. "I know what you mean. We'll have to conduct a more thorough investigation of them once we ship them back to the Dragon's Den. We should let the professionals do what they do best."

Speaking of professionals, Ves wanted to hear what the biotech experts had to say about the precious bioproducts. He opened a communication channel to Director Ranya.

"What's your verdict so far, Ranya? Are the organs the real deal?"

"We have not gathered any evidence that suggests that they are counterfeit products." She answered. "What we have observed so far largely line up with what we have observed from the bodies of the Swarmer fish-whales. This is a good sign as the biological makeup of the organs of different subspecies shouldn't diverge that much. The age, health and quality of these fish-whale organs suggests that they are all freshly-grown through an automated process. Although they need to be fed and given additional time to reach their mature states, I believe that they are all usable."

Ves smiled. "That is good to hear. What can you tell me about the consistency and the probable functions of these organs?"

"The organs all look as if they were grown by an advanced biofactory, sir. They are highly consistent and share many similarities to each other. As for their functions, we cannot determine them as our conditions are too suboptimal to perform any proper studies."

"Can you give me a preliminary judgment, at least? I just need to hear your overall sentiment on whether the Cerebral King secretly screwed us over by tampering these organs."

Ves didn't sense anything amiss when he studied the organs with his own senses, but he wasn't the expert here. Biotechnology was still a prominent gap in his knowledge base.

Director Ranya did not want to make any mistakes, so she carefully gathered her thoughts for a moment.

"As I have mentioned earlier, the organs appear to be sound and our scanners have detected no red flags. That doesn't rule out the possibility of foul play, but if there are any, the tampering should be subtle and deeply hidden. We won't know the truth unless we bring them back and perform intensive studies on them for a couple of months."

There were too many ways to sabotage bioproducts. It was one of the many reasons why few humans were enthusiastic about adopting them. Conventional metal parts were much easier to verify, which was one of the many reasons why humanity favored them over organic alternatives.

Neither Ves nor Ranya underestimated the Cerebral King. The big fish was not only smart but spent a huge amount of years learning how to develop new fish-whale organs. This immense knowledge and tech advantage gave the alien a lot of different ways to tamper with the organs that were not that obvious!

After asking a few more questions, Ves knew that it was difficult to obtain more answers.

"Okay, I intend to proceed with the exchange since the organs all look fine on the surface. We can perform more thorough studies when we bring them back home."

"Don't worry, sir. Even if the organs are not as sound as they look, we can fix that afterwards." Ranya smiled in a mysterious fashion.

He knew what she meant. They had discussed this issue beforehand.

The main purpose in trading so many fish-whale organs was to perform many different experiments on them. They were all experimental materials in Ranya's eyes!

The Larkinson Biotechnology Institute could perform much deeper and more extensive experiments without worrying about ruining the organs. With thirty specimens, there was enough redundancy to get to the bottom of their organic construction.

Even if the Cerebral King secretly tampered with them in any way, the truth would come out eventually after lots of examinations!

It didn't matter if the LBI destroyed all 30 normal fish-whale organs. As long as the biotech researchers made enough gains, they would eventually be able to grow more of them by themselves!

This was the strength of humanity! While humans originally did not excel in any form of technology, they were quite talented at stealing alien tech and reverse engineering their principles so that they could make their own versions of products.

Although this was not exactly the most ethical or proper way to advance the technological standards of an entire civilization, it didn't matter as long as it worked!

Ves tried to suppress a smirk. It wasn't appropriate for him to gloat at the moment as he was still in the middle of a fish-whale stronghold!

"Can you tell me more details about the king-grade organ? This is the single most valuable concession that we have managed to obtain from the Cerebral King."

Ranya bloomed a smile this time. "While we cannot verify whether it is authentic and unadulterated, we already have a high confidence that it is a proper bioproduct. When we compare the data that we have gathered of this powerful organ with the data obtained from observing the Cerebral King, we have found many matches. I am quite certain that the organ here can seamlessly integrate in the king fish's body. The only hurdle is that the recipient needs to free enough capacity in his body to accommodate the extra organ."

It was just like slotting in new parts into the frame of a mech. Part of the reason why the Cerebral King was so powerful was because his body was larger than any of the other Evolver fish-whales. This granted him an immense amount of capacity, allowing him to fit far more organs in his body!

The king-grade organ stood out because it was especially developed for the Cerebral King. While it was considerably larger and more cumbersome than the normal organs, its power level was at least 10 times greater according to the preliminary conclusions of the biotech experts!

"Have you figured out what it can actually do?" Ves asked.

"Not exactly, sir." Ranya shook her head. "We have gathered numerous clues that can narrow down the possible options. First, there is no phasewater in the organ, so it is unlikely that it has anything to do with the substance. Second, our scans have revealed a large amount of organic tissue that relates to absorbing, converting and transferring bioelectricity, so we presume that the king-grade organ is incredibly power hungry. My team is currently in the process of studying its core tissue which we assume is responsible for activating the main effect, but we haven't been able to narrow down the possibilities extensively yet. All I can state for now is that the clues lean towards a defensive application, which matches our demands."

"What if it's an offensive organ?"

"That is a possibility, but unlikely, sir. There are no obvious ports or other features that look as if they are meant to output destructive energy."

"Okay. Hopefully you're right, because we'll be in deep trouble if this massive organ turns out to be a giant biolaser weapon."

Although Ves would be happy to obtain an organ that could spit out lasers of doom, the problem was that the Big Two wouldn't be as happy!

A weapon as big as this definitely violated the taboo on overly powerful weapons. While Ves believed he could tentatively get away with it if the king-grade organ was smaller, this was impossible because it was just too large!

After all, the Cerebral King was a fish-whale that was equivalent to a juggernaut or a small warship. The weapons and other core systems integrated in its massive body were also similar to the components of those massive constructs!

There was no good way for Ves to make use of a massive alien biolaser organ unless he received express permission to build a juggernaut mech.

The MTA didn't hand out those permits on a casual basis. Only powerful and wealthy first-class individuals or organizations had any chance of getting a permit.

Therefore, the only way for Ves to get this extravagant permit was to make a huge contribution!

Many difficult problems could be solved as long as Ves was willing to exchange a huge amount of MTA merits!

He wasn't stupid enough to go through with it, though. Juggernauts went out of vogue for good reasons.

They were stupendously expensive to build and maintain.

They required a lot of manpower and time to design.

Only highly specialized pilots were able to control these monstrosities.

Transporting them from one location to another was extremely cumbersome and demanding.

Going through all of that effort just to make good use of a king-grade biolaser organ was too excessive!

If this was the case, Ves would rather hand it over to the MTA so that he could collect a large bag of MTA merits.

After Ves asked a few more questions to Ranya, he became reasonably sure that the Cerebral King acted sincerely.

Even if there was anything wrong with the valuable bioproduct, he wouldn't think about making use of it until the Larkinson Biotech Institute succeeded in reverse engineering fish-whale organ design and production.

"Okay, everything appears to be fine. Let's complete the exchange!"

The swap was fairly simple and proceeded without issue. The fish-whales didn't hinder the humans from taking away the giant sacks of bioproducts in any fashion.

When the mechs carrying the sacks neared the cargo shuttles, they carefully placed their payloads in the empty containers.

Once the containers closed up, they automatically froze the interior, causing the bioproducts to freeze in an instant!

The cargo handlers did not freeze all of the organs in case the freezing process dealt irreparable harm to them. Half of the normal-grade organs as well as the king-grade organs were left in their current state in case this was the best way to preserve their health until they were shipped back to the expeditionary fleet.

"Alright, the shuttles are packed and ready to go. Let's return!"

Now that the two sides had concluded their trade, it was time for them to proceed with their follow-up agreement.

Ves turned his attention to the jubilant Cerebral King. "Let's talk about our upcoming attack on the Phase Kingdom."

Chapter 3876 Power-Hungry Fish

Both sides still needed time to prepare for the upcoming assault on the Lake Continent held by the Phase Kingdom.

Out of all of the landmasses in Purgatory, the Lake Continent probably held at least 60 percent of all of the phasewater produced in this pocket space!

In fact, this was only the most conservative estimate made by the analysts. There was a high probability that it actually contained 80 percent or more of the total amount of phasewater reserves available to the fish-whale race!

There was so much phasewater on this continent that the very space around it wobbled all the time.

If not for the fact that the continent itself seemed to stabilize the surrounding space, the landmass would have long fractured apart!

Naturally, Ves wouldn't make the mistake of breaking open the Lake Continent only to find himself unable to take away his loot. The Golden Skull Alliance already prepared special containers and vessels that should be able to carry a certain amount of phasewater without inducing any damage.

If they happened to obtain more phasewater than what they could carry, then they could ask their temporary fish-whale allies to act as porters.

Time passed by as both sides got ready to launch an ambitious raid.

One of the biggest reasons why they needed to wait was because the Cerebral King was busy with implanting the newly-received power reactors into the bodies of its strongest and most elite fish-whales.

Each creature that emerged out of the underground lab compound looked as if they had all been reborn.

None of their bodies showed any signs of rejection. In fact, they looked as if they were plants that were previously deprived of light but suddenly gained access to open skies!

Now, they just needed to gain a lot of water to further their growth even further. Each of the Evolver fish-whales looked hungrily in the direction of the Lake Continent.

The atmosphere around the humans and the Evolvers became more charged as they mentally got ready to fight a major battle.

Neither of the groups were stupid. They both knew that this would be a hard battle. The Phase Kingdom had managed to survive the survival game for so long because of the destructive abilities of its members.

They were so good at cracking and warping the physical dimensions that it was not advisable to attack them with melee mechs!

Letting them get close just made it easier for the Phaser fish-whales to mop them up en masse.

The safest way to attack the powerful creatures was to attack them from afar with spread ranged mechs. As long as the machines did not crowd around each other too much, the efficiency of enemy area attacks was much reduced.

However, this was not a proper way to attack the Phase Kingdom at all. The Cerebral King already told Ves that the Evolvers attempted to attack the Lake Continent by relying on massed ranged attacks.

None of these attempts succeeded!

The Phaser fish-whales were not only proficient at attacking, but were also good at erecting shields!

As long as enough of them generated overlapping shields, virtually no ranged attack could get through!

The only way to break apart the strong defenses was to flood the shields with a huge amount of charging fish-whales. The price to do so was too great so the Cerebral King never thought about attacking the Phase Kingdom anymore.

It wasn't until the humans presented it with another chance that the king fish reconsidered its decision, but that didn't mean it was ready to launch an immediate assault!

It was time for the humans to prove that they were able to enact a realistic plan to assault the Lake Continent without suffering an excessive amount of casualties.

As the Everchanger and the Cerebral King gathered together again, the latter already looked as if it had been reborn!

While the other Evolvers such as the bladed fish-whale and the silver fish-whale all looked pumped up due to the addition of their new power reactors, the difference was much greater with the king fish!

Out of all of the recently-augmented fish-whales, the Cerebral King obtained the most powerful human gift!

"This big fish..." Venerable Joshua frowned as he studied the sensor readings. "It's as if we are approached by a volcano that is ready to set off at any time. There is so much dormant power hidden in its body!"

It was not a surprise for him to develop this impression. The Cerebral King of now was not the same as the Cerebral King of before.

Ves roughly compared the king fish's situation to an extremely powerful hybrid mech like the Bolvos Rage.

The biggest difference was that the Cerebral King's previous situation was too unbalanced. The Organ Forge allowed it to develop a lot of powerful organs, each of which was capable of converting energy into useful output.

Whether it was launching devastating attacks or generating formidable shields, the Cerebral King possessed a lot of different options, each of which was enough to tilt the outcome of a battle in its favor.

The biggest issue was that all of those king-grade organs were power hogs!

It couldn't be helped. Everything had a price, and the Lab Continent's lack of resources made it difficult for the Cerebral King to feed all of its hungry organs.

Now, this shortcoming was no longer as big of an issue as before. Out of all of the assets that humanity relied upon, starships were definitely among the most potent and

powerful of them all. Many of them required enormous power reactors just to keep them running!

Although the Golden Skull Alliance only handed over the smallest starship-grade power reactor that it had on hand, the energy output of this large component far exceeded that of a mech!

One of the reasons why the Cerebral King appeared to be brimming with suppressed energy was because it was steadily nurturing all of its powerful but starved organs.

The king fish no longer had to operate as if it was put into a low power mode anymore! With the abundant amount of energy produced by a ship reactor, it had turned from a homeless beggar into a wealthy business overnight!

SATISFACTION. POWER REACTOR GOOD. EVOLUTION PLAN HALF-COMPLETE. GRATITUDE TO HUMANS. MUST ATTACK GODBLOOD KING. MUST OBTAIN GODBLOOD. MUST COMPLETE EVOLUTION PLAN.

Ves smiled. "That's what I want to talk about."

From what he could tell about the Cerebral King, there was no way this ambitious fish-whale would leave a project half-complete!

Phasewater was too important to the fish-whales. Since their species was derived from the phase whale race, it was far too difficult for them to round out their growth if they lacked this essential resource.

Although the Cerebral King accumulated a respectable amount of phasewater over the many years of its existence, it simply wasn't enough. Perhaps it might take another couple of million years until its body was finally full, but would it even be alive at that time?

The other three fish-whale kingdoms weren't sitting still! The other three fish-whale kings were all accumulating strength in their own way. Since each of them had access to large amounts of specific resources, their strength would undoubtedly grow over time!

This was the greatest reason why the Cerebral King must act soon. It was smart enough to recognize it was living on borrowed time.

Ves and the Cerebral King rehashed their attack plan and made sure their troops didn't get in each other's way when the assault commenced.

Neither side were eager to get too close to the Phaser fish-whales, but that did not solve the fundamental problem of cracking open their formidable defenses.

NEED SWARM KIN. NEED THEM TO ATTACK PHASE KINGDOM. WILL NOT ATTACK WITHOUT SWARM KIN. HOW TO MAKE THEM ATTACK?

"We have prepared several different solutions based on what we have researched and what we have learned from your information package." Ves replied to the big fish. "We will first try to provoke the fish-whales with our own unique method. Joshua, can you give the big fish a demonstration?"

"Sure thing, sir."

The Everchanger switched its design spirit from the Golden Cat to Zeigra. This immediately caused its demeanor to change!

Previously, the Everchanger was like a kitty.

Now, it had turned into a ferocious tiger!

The change was so dramatic that not even the Cerebral King remained unaffected! While it didn't back off or anything, its body grew tenser than before.

However, the king fish's eyes did not show much elation.

NOT ENOUGH. WILL NOT WORK.

"We have taken that into account." Ves replied. "This is why this is just one of several solutions that we have prepared."

WHAT SOLUTION?

"Let me explain..."

Ves explained the various tricks and schemes that he and the other experts of the Golden Skull Alliance had come up with. When he mentioned the last potential plan, the Cerebral King's body shook.

GOOD PLAN. WILL WORK. WILL MAKE SWARMERS FURIOUS. GOOD GOOD GOOD.

"I am happy to hear that you are confident about our chances." Ves smiled. "Do you agree to proceed with our attack? My forces are ready to depart at any time."

MUST GO. MUST ATTACK PHASE KINGDOM. MUST KILL TRAITOR AND OBTAIN GODBLOOD.

With the Cerebral King's enthusiastic assent, the alliance between the humans and the fish-whales agreed to cooperate with each other.

Both groups had set their sights on the Lake Continent!

However, before they reached this heavily-defended place and launched their offensive, they first needed to pick up their batch of cannon fodder.

This was why they diverted to another landmass that just happened to be situated next to the Phase Kingdom.

The continent wasn't that remarkable among the ones in control of the Swarm Kingdom. When Venerable Tusa made his scouting run, he called the medium-sized asteroid the Spiral Continent because of the peculiar shape of the landmass.

One of the interesting parts about the Spiral Continent was that it hosted a lot of Swarmers. The landmass bordered both the Evolution Kingdom and the Phase Kingdom, so the Hive King made sure to station extra troops in order to raise the price of conquering this strategically-located asteroid.

Now, it looked as if one of the concerns of the Hive King was about to come true!

Although the allied force composed of human mechs and many different Evolver fish-whales did not get too close, the Swarmers should definitely notice that something was wrong soon!

The Everchanger flew out of the group and approached the Spiral Continent under escort.

The Dark Zephyr and a particularly fast Evolver referred to as the redline fish accompanied the expert hero mech.

Ves went over the plans one last time before he was ready to start luring the fish-whales out of their places.

"Okay, Joshua. Let's try a couple of experiments. Start with stimulating them with Zeigra's glow."

"Roger that, but... are you sure you want to remain in my cockpit? I don't think it is necessary for you to stay anymore. We already made a deal with the king fish and we both agreed on what we should do. Our task force can complete our objectives without your help."

"I'm not going anywhere." Ves shook his head. "The attack on the Phase Kingdom must succeed. I need to be there when it happens because we might be able to plunder other valuables aside from phasewater. I also need to make sure that we can keep communicating with the Cerebral King in case the situation spins out of control."

He never thought about leaving the cockpit. Although the risks were considerable, the Everchanger wasn't weak by any means. He trusted his machine to keep him safe!

Besides, how many times would he be able to experience a massive battle as exciting as this? While ordinary mech designers would definitely scream and run away as far as possible, Ves was the opposite!

His body grew hotter as his blood circulated faster in his body. His mind grew more active and his imagination already conjured up new ideas for mech concepts that would be able to contribute even more to this battle!

Chapter 3877 Front Line Mech Designer

"This is it. What happens next will be fraught with danger. We need to be at the top of our game here, or else we will most certainly suffer."

The combined group of humans and Evolver fish-whales had reached the periphery of the Spiral Continent.

Each of the mech pilots and fish-whales exhibited a variety of emotions. Fear, apprehension, excitement, hope, ambition and so on drove them to this point.

The repercussions of the next series of actions were grave.

To the Golden Skull Alliance, the upcoming battle would likely be the culmination of the Purgatory Campaign.

All of the effort they put into fighting against the initial waves of Swarmer fish-whales and opening up a beachhead on the Gate Continent needed to yield a return on investment.

The Larkinson Clan, the Glory Seekers and the Cross Clan already paid a substantial price to make it this far. Not only did they deplete a lot of ordnance and supplies, they also lost a lot of mechs and the lives of actual mech pilots.

The deaths of people weighed heavily on the survivors. To fall against indigenous alien savages was not the most glorious way for them to lose their lives.

In order to make certain that these deaths were not vain, the Golden Skull Alliance was determined to raid the Lake Continent!

Only by returning with an immense bounty of phasewater would everyone be able to justify the campaign.

With enough phasewater, the alliance partners would be able to expand their wealth, increase their assets, strengthen their security and obtain more assurances of their continued survival!

In other words, the Golden Skull Alliance would enjoy such a massive boost that its foundation in the Red Ocean would be assured!

No longer would the Larkinsons and their allies be labeled as marginal figures. The fame, wealth and power they could gain from submitting a lot of phasewater to the MTA and selling them to strategic trade partners was immense!

This was what the mech pilots were fighting for. Everyone understood the stakes. Though the prospect of fighting against thousands if not tens of thousands of phasewater-rich fish-whales sounded intimidating, they did not embark on this offensive without a plan.

Many of them were confident that their leaders and commanders would guide them to victory! With prominent personalities like Commander Casella Ingvar, Patriarch Reginald Cross and Patriarch Ves Larkinson entering the battlefield in person, there was no way that they would lead the soldiers astray!

In fact, Ves still received messages that urged him to return to friendly lines, but he resolutely ignored these concerns no matter how well-founded they were. If anything ever happened to him, the Larkinson Clan and the Golden Skull Alliance would most certainly suffer an existential crisis!

He was not ignorant of the burden his presence imposed on the mech pilots of Task Force Fisherman.

However, he did not waver in his unusual decision to witness a battle by riding a mech that was expected to play a central role because of several reasons.

"I understand your position, but remember who is ultimately in charge here." Ves stated to Casella over a private channel. "You don't have the authority to push me away. I need to take part in this battle. It's not just about being able to maintain communications with the Cerebral King or being present to issue new orders. I'm doing this because I am trying to push my design philosophy and my mech design capabilities to the next level."

"Sir..." Commander Casella hesitated. "Mech designers rarely if ever enter the battlefield. While I am willing to admit that you are able to contribute more to our victory than other mech designers, that still doesn't change the fact that the gains do not outweigh the losses. As I have iterated before, we can take care of ourselves. What we can't take care of is dealing with the aftermath of your sudden and untimely death due to a preventable mistake! You can still change your mind, patriarch. There is no dishonor in returning to Fort Fishblood for a non-combatant such as yourself. In fact, as a VIP it is your duty to stay out of the line of fire."

Ves huffed and crossed his arms. "Don't lecture to me about duty! I am the most dutiful member of the Larkinson Clan. Do you know how much work and effort I put in my mech designs so that we obtain the strength and prosperity to make it this far? Do you know how many risks I braved to leap above my peers and uplift the clan into a rising second-class organization? I have gone above and beyond to climb my way up, but I am only part of the way to my destination. There is still a long road ahead if we want to promote to first-raters. Hardly anyone except myself and maybe Ketis can allow our clan to reach this goal, and in order to succeed, we must continue to take the risks that others shy away from because that is the fastest and most realistic approach to greatness!"

The Red Ocean was a dwarf galaxy filled with opportunity, and Ves was not about to waste that. Stumbling into Purgatory was an unexpected event, but one that provided him and his clan the most promising and lucrative opportunity to leapfrog decades of development and hard work!

Aside from that, Ves truly wanted to witness a battle between his mechs and a formidable opponent up close.

Although taking part in a mech battle in the cockpit of a mech was not actually a novelty to him anymore, the various Mastery experiences he enjoyed in the past were all lacking for various reasons.

First, he didn't really have a strong stake in the struggle. He couldn't care less about the affairs of people like Ivan Barley or Eloise Pelican.

Although other people such as Rion Aaden and Axelar Streon were not as easy to ignore, Ves ultimately wasn't on their side. The lack of friendship, camaraderie and shared goals made it difficult for him to appreciate their motivations.

Second, the mechs they used and the enemies they fought against were complete strangers as far as he was concerned. He did not deny the benefits of experiencing how different mech pilots fought with mechs that were different from his own designs, but that left a lot of relevant aspects untouched.

Ves anticipated that he could gather a lot of rare and unique insights if he observed his work in battle from this distance.

He had spent a long time theorizing and imagining how mechs such as the Everchanger dealt with different battle situations.

He witnessed a lot of his mechs in action from a distance.

Yet how often did he have the privilege of seeing his work fulfill their intended purpose while sitting in one of the front seats of the entire show?

He would be able to enjoy the best possible view if he stayed in his current seat!

There was something indescribable about entering into battle while sitting in the cockpit of one of his proudest works. He felt more alive than ever and that was not because Venerable Joshua and the Everchanger exuded a lot of vitality.

He felt more alive because he believed he could design better works if he exposed himself to the same risks and danger as the mech pilots he was serving!

This was an argument that convinced few people, and Ves did not blame them for thinking he was crazy.

It was too bad that the Larkinson Clan did not have a rule that prohibited crazy people from becoming its leader!

"Hahahaha! I truly can't wait for us crack open an ancient fish-whale kingdom and plunder all of its accumulated phasewater reserves!" Ves cackled as the excitement got the better of him. "There are so many old and new mechs taking part in this battle that I will definitely get a lot of ideas on how to improve them after today!"

"Meow!"

Lucky became spooked by Ves' outburst. He abandoned his previous perch and flew closer to Venerable Joshua as if to take refuge in the expert pilot's stability!

"Ahem, ignore that please."

Once Ves managed to regain his composure, he checked the readiness of his troops and waited to receive the final word.

Commander Casella eventually got in touch again.

"Our task force is ready to proceed to the next phase. Can you confirm if the Evolvers are also ready to take action?"

"The Cerebral King and his army of fish-whales are already waiting for us to finish our business. They are more than ready to take action, commander."

That was an understatement. The Evolvers had a much more personal stake in this fight. Even though it was extremely risky to attack the heart of another fish-whale kingdom, the cost of forgoing this opportunity was greater!

The Evolvers could either wait for their enemies to grind them down to nothing over time or take the initiative and break the current pattern with one, powerful blow!

Ves briefly glanced towards the Cerebral King. The powerful fish-whale made certain that his fish-whale troops followed his arrangements in the upcoming fight.

Charging forward and fighting the Phaser fish-whales head-on was the last thing they should do! Only by fighting against their instincts and following a specific strategy would they be able to obtain victory without paying too much of a price.

Perhaps not all of the fish-whales were smart enough to understand the greater implications of their actions, but the Cerebral King definitely knew what was at stake!

Seeing that the Evolvers were truly ready to take action, Ves briefly closed his eyes before he decided to pull the trigger.

"Start the operation. Commander Casella, make sure our mechs aren't close enough to attract the attention of the Swarmers that are about to pass through. Venerable Joshua, please approach the Spiral Continent."

"Yes, sir!"

Every human and fish-whale became more alert as the Everchanger finally flew out of the main formation. The masterwork expert mech attracted a lot of attention as it openly soared towards the spiral-shaped continent that was claimed by the Swarm Kingdom.

"Switch the glow to Zeigra."

"Are you sure, sir? The Cerebral King said that it is unlikely to work."

"I understand that, but let us test that out for ourselves before we resort to our other solutions. Consider this an experiment of sorts."

To Joshua, switching the Everchanger's glow was as easy as turning a dial.

Though Ves was already familiar with this function, he gained a new appreciation of how quickly and easily his best expert mech was able to call upon other design spirits.

The Everchanger instantly gained a more ferocious, aggressive and predatory demeanor. Although the mech itself was still capable of inspiring friendlies on the battlefield, the tone of its aura had definitely taken a more offensive turn!

As the expert mech finally approached the nearest cluster of Swarmer fish-whales, Ves spotted immediate reactions from the grunt fishes.

The white fish-whales hardly noticed the Everchanger beforehand, but from the moment the glow of the expert mechs stimulated their minds, the stupid creatures instantly got riled up! It didn't matter if they had never encountered a mech in their dull and forgettable lives.

All they knew was that a potential enemy had come close! The grunt fishes were genetically programmed to defend their territory and defeat any enemies that didn't belong to their subspecies, and that was exactly what they did when provoked by the swooping expert mech.

"There are thousands of fish-whales on your tail, Joshua! Keep going forward and don't slow down!"

"I'm already trying, sir!"

Since gathering enough cannon fodder to consume the strength of the Phase Kingdom was an essential part of the offensive plan, Venerable Joshua did not ignore the larger hordes of enemy fish-whales and boldly flew over their heads.

The fish-whales were all provoked! The space behind the Everchanger became filled with fish-whale after fish-whale as each of them sought to bite or smash the enemy intruder into pieces!

"Hahaha! That's it! That's the spirit! You're doing great, Joshua! We've almost attracted the animosity of a hundred-thousand fish-whales, but that's not enough. Keep going until you have spit on the faces of half a million fish-whales. That should be sufficient for the next phase of our plan!"

Chapter 3878 Existential Threat

"Sir, we can't keep provoking more Swarmers! Our maneuvering space keeps getting smaller. The enemy fish-whales aren't blindly chasing after the Everchanger anymore. They have begun to employ more sophisticated tactics such as trying to encircle us. The longer we stay here, the greater the chance we'll get surrounded!"

It did not take as long as Ves thought to rile up the Swarmers milling about on the Spiral Continent.

Large amounts of white fish-whales interspersed with the occasional elite fish-whales had entered into a rabid frenzy as soon as they discovered the presence of a foreign element that was definitely not on their side.

It was as if the Everchanger had killed their mother and taunted them by dangling her corpse in front of their eyes!

When Ves gazed at the projected map, he spotted so many red dots pressed together that they looked like a tide of red!

He grimaced a bit when he saw that they were still short of their target of attracting 500,000 Swarmer fish-whales. If they didn't lure enough cannon fodder to the Phase

Kingdom, then the humans and the Evolver fish-whales would have to make up for the shortfall with their lives!

"Alright, you can pull away from the Spiral Continent, but before you leave, expand the Everchanger's glow to the maximum possible range you can reach."

"What?! Didn't you theorize that this will attract the attention of the Hive King?!"

"Look at the increasing degree of coordination displayed by all of these Swarmers. I think it is safe to say that we have already attracted this powerful mastermind's attention!"

The original plan called for trying to provoke the Swarmers into chasing the Everchanger without alarming the Hive King, but Ves had already taken into account that they would fail in the latter goal.

The Swarm Kingdom may be big, but it was difficult to hide a disturbance affecting hundreds of thousands of fish-whales from a central leader.

The shift from instinctive reactions to purposeful maneuvers was not obvious at first, but when the fish-whales started to circle around instead of trying to chase after the Everchanger, even a fool could see that the Swarmers were being directed by an overarching leader!

A gigantic tide of fish-whales didn't necessarily pose a threat to Ves. No matter how numerous they became, as long as they only behaved instinctually, then how could they possibly stop any mech from coming and going?

It was unfortunate that the threat level of the Swarmers had reached an entirely new level now that the Hive King or another powerful Swarmer commander had taken charge of all of the riled-up troops.

Ves could even see that groups of fish-whales that the Everchanger had yet to provoke begin to stir as well. They moved up and spread themselves out in order to cast an increasingly wider net for the mech.

There was no way for the Everchanger to escape if the net closed. He knew his own work well. The expert hero mech he designed was a versatile machine but it did not excel in blockade running.

Sure, it was possible for the Everchanger to force its way through a dozen or so grunt fishes if Venerable Joshua tried his best, but there were way more Swarmers in the way than that! No matter what, even an expert mech could get trapped and exhausted to death if it ended up in the middle of a ball of thousands of rabid fish-whales!

"Pulling out now, sir!"

Venerable Joshua concentrated hard as the Everchanger squeezed more speed and acceleration out of its flight system in an attempt to escape the noose.

At the same time, the expert mech abruptly expanded its glow, causing it to rile up many more fish-whales in the surrounding environment.

The angry fish-whales didn't like this at all. Their fury became more intense as they tried to close in on the annoying mech that had trespassed on their territory!

"Haha, we're out!"

Fortunately, the Everchanger made its way out of the Spiral Continent well before the fish-whales could complete their envelopment. The grunt fishes and the elite fishes had no choice but to chase after the expert mech's wake in order to kill the enemy that dared to disturb them and provoke them into action.

When Venerable Joshua noticed that the tide of Swarmers were beginning to fall behind, he slowed down the Everchanger's advance in a gradual and controlled fashion. This made it seem as if it was getting tired and that it had lost a bit of steam.

The distance between the expert mech and the hundreds of thousands of angry fish-whales no longer widened.

As Ves kept studying the expressions of the fish-whales in order to see if he could gather more clues, he noticed that they were already beginning to calm down.

Most fish-whale varieties didn't excel at speed. The Swarmers did not even possess a single variant that was able to fly faster than the sergeant fish-whales, and that was mostly because the blue fishes needed to build up a large amount of momentum in order to deal a lot of damage when their skulls collided against their targets.

"Slow down a bit more, Joshua. Give the Swarmers the illusion that they can catch up to you if they chase long enough. Try and wobble your flight path a bit and make the Everchanger look less pristine in its performance. They can't give up this soon!"

"I will try, sir!"

The Everchanger soon made the adjustments. Venerable Joshua was skillfully pulled off the subterfuge and truly made the expert mech seem as if it had overloaded itself and was starting to reach the limits of its stamina.

If the Hive King and the Swarmer fish-whales were unfamiliar with the properties of mechanical constructs, then they should assume that the Everchanger behaved like an organic creature that could grow tired over time.

"Let's hope the Hive King isn't too smart or knowledgeable about mechs."

The chase continued for a couple of minutes. Over 400,000 fish-whales had joined the chase. Each of them crowded each other so much that Ves pretty much only saw white if he looked at the rear view!

Joshua also put up a better act of pretending that the Everchanger was on its last legs. The expert mech's surface fizzled as its thrust power dropped by more than 50 percent all of a sudden.

This stimulated the humongous amount of grunt fishes, causing them to see red and squeeze more speed out of their bodies!

When the distance between the Everchanger and the chasers kept shrinking, the yellow fish-whales took action.

Hundreds of spitter fish-whales launched globs of corrosive projectiles.

Although the Everchanger could have easily dodged or evaded the spit, Venerable Joshua deliberately downplayed the maneuverability and responsiveness of his machine and only made a lackluster attempt at evading the incoming projectiles.

While most of the spit projectiles missed anyway, half-a-dozen of them still managed to splatter onto the resonance shield of the expert mech.

This sight excited the Swarms! The yellow fish-whales enthusiastically spit more projectiles towards the Everchanger.

With hundreds of them firing at the expert mech from different angles, it became more difficult for Joshua to evade the entire rain. More and more corrosive spit landed on the resonance shield, but the actual damage dealt to it was minimal due to its inherent resistance against normal attacks.

The shield kept going even after it got hit more than a hundred times!

As Ves kept observing the Swarms, he frowned. The spitter fish-whales did not look like they were starting to run empty, but they were already slowing down.

"Drop the resonance shield. Let their attacks hit your frame."

Venerable Joshua did so even though he questioned the wisdom of this action. The Everchanger may be covered by Unending alloy, but the rear was always the most vulnerable portion of its frame. The corrosive spit had a chance of hampering the flight system's performance if they hit its more delicate subcomponents.

The expert pilot had to be a little more active at dodging the incoming spit volleys. Any globs of foul and corrosive liquid that reached the expert mech inevitably splashed on the arms, lower back or legs of the machine.

The Unending alloy did its job. It did a fine job at resisting the corrosive substance that kept accumulating over time.

Despite this success, the tide of Swarmer fish-whales slowed down after a few minutes.

"Slow down a bit further. Try and attack them with your rifle."

The Swarmer hordes did not speed up again despite these changes. They just slowed down more and more as if they were approaching a border that they did not dare to cross.

"Damnit. The Cerebral King was right. The Swarmers aren't so easy to fool after all." Ves cursed.

The fish-whale tide eventually came to a stop. No matter how many times the Everchanger fired at the Swarmers, they simply did not advance any further.

When Ves zoomed in so that he could see the expressions of the fish-whales, he saw that they were still angry and eager to continue the chase.

He could still feel the wave of anger and hatred of the Swarmers!

"They're not moving forward anymore."

Venerable Joshua tried a few more tricks up to and including swooping close to them, but it became clear that the Hive King probably smelled a trap!

Seeing that the Swarmers weren't cooperating as he wished, Ves let out a sigh.

"You can stop with your current attempts. The controller of these fish-whales isn't eager to sacrifice so many bodies. We need to employ another solution.

Ves thought about the situation. The influence of an intelligent controller caused him to doubt many of the other solutions that he and his staff had prepared.

Seeing that the Cerebral King was right about the behavior of the Swarmers so far, he figured that it might be wise to defer to the king fish's judgment on the only solution that should take effect.

"Bring up your resonance shield and other defenses." Ves instructed Venerable Joshua. "I'm not sure if this will work, but if it does, the Swarmers are liable to get truly angry."

Venerable Joshua's expression turned grave. "I understand. I think it will piss off the Swarmers as well since it touches their nerves."

The Everchanger approached the unmoving wall of Swarmer fish-whales. Although the spitter fish-whales kept trying to land their corrosive projectiles at the expert mech, the resonance shield easily resisted them without any issue.

"Are you ready, Joshua?"

"I am always ready."

"Then begin!"

Venerable Joshua concentrated and mentally turned the dial that allowed him to change the active design spirit of his battle partner once again. He stopped turning the dial when he found the right setting.

Soon, the aura of the Everchanger experienced another abrupt switch. Zeigra's aggressive feline glow disappeared.

In its place, an entirely different glow came into exchange. The mech began to take on a more ancient demeanor. Anyone looking at it would have the mistaken impression that the Everchanger was far larger and older than it appeared!

Hundreds of nearby fish-whales became agitated in a different way. As Ves studied their reactions, he grew hopeful.

"Expand the glow! Let as many of these fish-whales experience the Titania as possible! If we can't avoid the attention of the Hive King, then let's blow a horn in its face!"

Joshua resonated with a specific part within the Everchanger, causing its glow to stretch out across several kilometers around its frame!

As the Titania's influence suddenly reached out to thousands more Swarmers, it began to influence the unintelligent fish-whales in a specific manner.

The Titania attempted to take control over them! Even though its attempts to do so were relatively weak due to its relative weakness and being of a different species, the design spirit's actions definitely caught the attention of the existing controller of the fish-whales.

This was a different threat towards the Swarmers!

Of all of the enemies the Hive King might fear, a new and unexplainable opponent that was able to challenge its control over the Swarmer fish-whales was definitely at the top of its list!

It could not allow this existential threat to proceed with taking over the Swarm Kingdom!

"Run!" The Hive King has grown angry! I can feel its anger leaking from all of the fish-whales!"

The Everchanger fled just as the fish-whale hordes completely became subsumed by the Hive King's fury!

Chapter 3879 Ever Changing

The latest attempt to lure the Swarmer fish-whales into chasing after the Everchanger succeeded!

It yielded so much success that the fish-whales did not hesitate to cross the border that they were ordinarily not allowed to cross!

The reason why the Swarmers behaved so differently was because the Everchanger's latest violation crossed the line as far as the Hive King was concerned.

This distant and unfathomable brother and rival to the Cerebral King was probably the most successful fish-whale in the phase whale enclave.

The disparity in territory was the most obvious indicator. While the Swarm Kingdom did not manage to capture key landmasses such as the Lake Continent and the Blue Light Continent, the fact the Swarmers managed to overtake the other three kingdoms and swallow up almost half of the available territory was an undeniable sign that they were on the winning side!

At this point in time, the threat posed by the remaining three kingdoms was not as great as before.

Though it would still cost the Swarmers a lot if they tried to attack the heavily defended strongholds of the other kingdoms, the Hive King's advantage only grew over time.

If the status quo continued, the Hive King would definitely be able to overtake the others as the others failed to keep up. Purgatory's game had lasted for so many years that waiting a bit more to guarantee the demise of the other fish-whale kings made a lot of sense.

Just when the Hive King thought that it could sit back and relax while its chances of beating its remaining rivals rose by the day, the Everchanger's latest provocation risked upending the game!

Ves found it rather amazing that the Hive King cast aside all of its caution. Instead of remaining rational and sticking to its well-reasoned formula of slowly grinding the other three fish-whale kingdoms to death, it completely switched to an all-out strategy of attack!

The Everchanger was no longer just a weird metal enemy to the Swarmers anymore.

It had turned into an existential threat that could one day rob the Hive King of its foundation!

"What a weak-willed loser!" Ves insulted the sensitive enemy. "Can't even take this challenge like a real leader. This is the downside of ensuring obedience through direct control."

The Swarm Kingdom was set up in a completely different fashion from both the Evolution Kingdom and human organizations.

It was strong due to its vast quantities of fish-whales, but managing all of those creatures was difficult if they all did what they wanted.

By designing them so that they received all of their higher-level instructions from a wiser and more intelligent leader, they could put their collective strength to much better uses.

Yet this model of governance also had its downsides. There were many famous stories in human history where power-hungry leaders refused to rely on a workforce consisting of chaotic and selfish humans.

Instead, these control freaks relied entirely on automation in one form or another to take complete control over their own empires.

Being able to run a company, a city, a planet or a state by issuing orders to unflinchingly obedient bots and AIs sounded like a great way to avoid failures and undesirable variance.

The more perverse leaders even resorted to taking more heavy-handed control over their human workforce!

Whatever minions they chose to do all of the dirty work, the arrangements they set up worked great until they didn't.

Nothing ever lasted forever. No system could remain perfect. Even the best laid plans had a way of tripping over after a time.

By centralizing governance to the point where a single connection could completely change everything, enemies and malcontents could easily target this vulnerability and wrest control from the leader!

Once this happened, all manner of disasters could unfold! From the downfall of entire states to the downfall of trans-galactic corporations, there were no limits to how extensively someone's empire could collapse like a house of cards!

Eventually, humanity learned the hard way that the most solid foundation was to spread out power and incorporate many redundancies in human societies.

The Evolver Kingdom was the closest to following this relatively egalitarian model. The Evolver fish-whales gained the most autonomy and self-awareness out of all of the fish-whale species and could take care of themselves if the Cerebral King died one day.

Of course, the situation over there wasn't ideal as the Cerebral King was clearly the only fish-whale smart enough to operate the remnant lab equipment left behind by the creator of the race.

However, Ves would still pick the Evolvers over the Swarmers any day. The latter was so dependent on a single alien individual that tweaking the Hive King's emotions completely caused the rest of the kingdom to go mad!

The fear and fury the Hive King held towards the Everchanger with its current glow was so out of proportion right now that it looked as if it had completely lost its mind!

These heightened emotions also bled through the Swarmer fish-whales that this unseen king controlled through unknown means.

That meant that while Ves couldn't look at the Hive King in the face, but he didn't need to. He just had to look at the expressions of its minions to make a rough approximation of what the leader of the strongest kingdom was feeling at the moment.

"This guy looks angry enough that he is probably summoning the minions of his other continents as well!"

If that happened, then the raid on the Phase Kingdom would take on an entirely new dimension!

The ideal situation was that the Everchanger lured a fixed group of Swarmer fish-whales over to the Phase Kingdom so that both groups wasted all of their combat power on each other.

Once the Swarmers did their job of exhausting the defenders, the allied force of mechs and Evolver fish-whales would swoop in and take control of the Lake Continent.

As long as they were able to stay on this crucial, resource-rich continent for a day, the multi-racial force would be able to harvest so much phasewater that Ves couldn't even imagine the reaction from the MTA when Task Force Fisherman returned to normal space!

"That's probably not in the cards anymore." Ves frowned.

One of the reasons why he had been so reluctant to resort to the latest solution was because he didn't know how hard the Hive King wanted to destroy the new and unexpected threat to its authority.

Given that there were plenty of signs that the remaining fish-whales on the Spiral Continent were madly dashing over to the fleeing mech, Ves feared that he had truly painted a bullseye on the Everchanger's back!

"You're doing a good job leading the Swarmers over to the Lake Continent, but the Hive King is completely obsessed with us instead of the Phaserse. We need to adjust our plans." Ves told Joshua.

"What do you want to do?" The pilot asked as he remained tense in his seat.

"Meow..." Lucky attempted to reassure the pilot but could not do much to alleviate the stress of being in this position.

Just like Ves, Venerable Joshua was also sensitive enough to notice all of the hostility directed towards his expert mech!

The smoldering stares of hundreds of thousands of fish-whales were pinned right onto the Everchanger!

"We need a way to transfer the heat from your expert mech to the Phase Kingdom. If we can't do that, then the Swarmers won't attack the Lake Continent seriously enough to exhaust its defenses."

"Uhhh..."

"The way we can do that is to give the impression that the Everchanger is an ally or even a direct member of the Phase Kingdom." Ves patiently explained.

"Aren't we allies of the Evolution Kingdom? It will be difficult for us to fake a friendly relationship with the Phaser fish-whales. Don't they try to scramble anyone and anything that gets close to their territory?"

"I am aware of that." Ves sighed. "You either need to brave those initial attacks or we need to figure out another solution. It is important that we make a decent effort at convincing the Hive King that we are truly aligned with the Phase Kingdom."

The cockpit fell silent as both humans fell into thought.

In the meantime, the journey to the Lake Continent continued. While the Everchanger may have gotten spat upon a few hundred times, much of the corrosive fluids sticking to its rear surface had long flung away or lost effect, so the damage to its frame was minimal.

Venerable Joshua could even activate a resonance ability to restore the damage to the armor, but that would induce a substantial drain to his reserves, so he let it be for the time being.

The Swarmer fish-whales never let up on their haphazard chase. So many fish-whales were following after the expert mech that it looked as if a river of white was cutting through the void between asteroids!

So far, the Swarmer fish-whales did not show any signs of cooling their fury. The fishes and more specifically the Hive King looked as if they were determined to strangle the threat while they had the chance!

"Sir, the Lake Continent is within sight! We are getting closer and closer to it. What should we do once we enter the range of those Phaser fish-whales? Should we ask for help from the Cerebral King or the rest of the task force?"

"No! That will risk exposing the truth to the Hive King. As angry as this touchy fish appears to be, there is always the chance that it will regain its sobriety if there are too many suspicious elements. Our forces need to remain out of sight for this phase of the plan. Let me think this through."

Ves made a lot of mental calculations. He thought about the powers exhibited by the Phaser fish-whales and tried to figure out whether the Everchanger could survive a pass at close range.

He felt that this was a dead end. While the population of Phasers was not that great, each of them were powerful with few exceptions. They had so much phasewater at their disposal that even their clumsiest attacks could induce an enormous stress on the Everchanger's frame!

Venerable Joshua made a suggestion. "We need to fool the Phaser fish-whales into treating us as friends."

"How do we do that?!" Ves complained. "Most fish-whales might be dimwitted, but they are still designed to identify and fight hostiles. An unknown mech soaring right into their territory will definitely be repelled with extreme prejudice!"

"Can't we make use of a glow that can do the opposite to what we have done to the Swarmers? If we can employ a glow that can rile the fish-whales up, there has to be a glow that can encourage the fishes to hold their fire."

"Let me think!" Ves said as he quickly went through his collection of design spirits. "Lufa! Use Lufa! I'm not sure if his glow has the same effect on the Phaser fish-whales as humans, but we don't have time to experiment. Just switch to this design spirit and blast its glow at maximum range, understood!?"

"On it, sir!"

The distance to the Lake Continent was shrinking by the second. The Phaser fish-whales had already noticed the mech and the massive horde of Swarmers approaching the key territory of the Phase Kingdom!

The Everchanger's cockpit beeped an alarm as the mech detected the Phasers beginning to prepare their devastating attacks!

Ves tried his best to keep his mind cool as he was more than aware of how badly this could end for him. He no longer felt so good about his decision to take part in this operation in person!

However, as soon as the Everchanger switched its design spirit and amplified the range of the new glow, the expert mech acquired yet another demeanor!

The machine exuded a sense of calm as it seemed to look a lot more solemn and quiet than before. The entire space around the Everchanger seemed to have turned into an invisible sanctuary as the new design spirit quietly imposed its own presence.

The Angel of Tranquility had descended into Purgatory.

Chapter 3880 Mirror of ves

At this moment, Ves had the sudden realization that the Everchanger truly was his quintessential work.

With Lufa's glow strongly imposing a sense of calm in the surrounding environment, Ves found that he had gained additional clarity on his existing work!

Out of all of his mech designs, the ones that managed to become masterworks stood out. Each of the latter possessed a unique spark of ingenuity that made them brilliant and memorable even if a hundred years had passed.

It was not an exaggeration to say that Ves treated each of them as his children. From the bad boy Devil Tiger to the mother hen Minerva, each of them exemplified a handful of traits that Ves had always wanted to impart into his mech designs.

The Everchanger was special, though. As Venerable Joshua braved the violent phasewater fluctuations generated by the Phaser fish-whales and the phasewater-rich Lake Continent itself, Ves experienced an illusion where time slowed down and where he gained a more thorough understanding of the Everchanger and its significance to his progression.

"The Everchanger... is the closest mirror to myself." He realized. "Many of its traits and functions are a reflection of my own traits and functions. I never noticed this before. Why did it take so long for me to recognize the similarity?"

As a mech, the Everchanger was defined by its adaptable nature. Although its core always remained the same, it was able to use its rotation of design spirits as masks that allowed the mech to adopt completely different personas and demeanors.

This sounded similar to what Ves was accustomed to doing when meeting with different people.

He became bossy and willful towards his subordinates.

He acted lovingly towards his wife and daughter.

He projected strength and confidence towards his allies and trading partners.

He lowered his head and tried to ingratiate himself towards the Big Two.

Just as how Ves put a lot of effort into molding himself according to the situation, so did the Everchanger!

The current engagement prominently showcased this feature as the Everchanger went from completely provoking the hatred of one group of fish-whales to trying to pass himself off as a harmless friend towards another group of fish-whales!

"And it's actually working!"

If Ves was known as the Devil Tongue, what kind of moniker would become associated with the Everchanger?

The Devil Mech? No. Ves already had the Devil Tiger.

The Shapeshifter? That wasn't quite right as the expert mech's physical form remained unchanged.

Ves shook his head. This wasn't important right now. What he truly cared about was finding out how extensively the Everchanger reflected its designer.

Did he subconsciously insert himself into a mech in order to make up for his regret for not being able to pilot a mech himself?

It sounded like a ridiculous proposition, but... who knew how much his latent desires bled through when he worked on this design project.

As a highly passionate mech designer, Ves was accustomed to letting his emotions, instincts and gut feeling guide his design choices even if there was no obvious rationale for making them at the time.

Perhaps the choices had always made sense to him. He just overlooked the underlying context in those instances.

The Everchanger was completed a year ago, but it took a close experience like this for Ves to gain this crucial insight about one of his proudest works.

Did he truly know his mechs as well as he thought?

The question sounded silly. Why shouldn't a creator know every single detail about his own work?

He led the design project and invested considerably more time, energy and passion in it than the other expert mech design projects he was working on at the time.

With how much of himself he put into his expert mech, he thought he already knew how it performed like the back of his hand.

"I was wrong. Even a maker doesn't necessarily know everything about his product. There are still depths to the Everchanger that I can still explore!"

As Ves turned his attention to the Everchanger, Venerable Joshua completely invested himself into his expert mech at the moment.

The burden on his shoulders was massive. Not only did he have to ensure that the pursuing Swarmers got fooled into thinking that he was in the camp of the Phasers, he also had to make sure that the Everchanger, himself and most importantly the Larkinson Patriarch managed to survive this brazen battle!

Fortunately, Venerable Joshua was not the sort of pilot who crumbled under pressure. No expert pilot easily succumbed when faced with danger.

Joshua stepped up and immersed himself even deeper into the Everchanger. Two almost became one as both of them became aligned by a common purpose.

Both of them united in purpose and will as they navigated the space while still trying to radiate Lufa's glow as far as possible.

Over a hundred fish-whales became affected by this new and completely unfamiliar phenomenon!

Since the Phaser fish-wales weren't known for their intelligence, they were not on guard against this effect at all. Even if they felt there was something wrong, the tranquility effect caused them to become a lot less alert about their current conditions.

"It's working!"

The Everchanger in its current form successfully managed to approach the Phasers without encountering overwhelming resistance!

Many fish-whales did nothing as the foreign mech flew over bodies.

However, that didn't mean that Venerable Joshua and the Everchanger enjoyed a comfortable ride.

There were plenty of Phaser fish-whales that were situated many kilometers away!

Unlike the fish-whales that were being affected by Lufa's grace, these more distant creatures weren't strongly affected. They only considered the Everchanger to be a little less threatening, but that didn't mean they would withhold their attacks.

The space surrounding the Everchanger wobbled and cracked as if it was a clay pot that was being tossed around by a bunch of hooligans!

"Aggh!" Venerable Joshua uttered as his willpower became strongly impacted by the burden of resisting the dangerous spatial attacks. "It's getting harder and harder to endure all of these attacks. It's like trying to swim through sand!"

Scores of Phaser fish-whales were exerting their phase water-derived abilities towards the mech in the distance that intruded into their territory! Their hostility was clear. The Everchanger did not belong here and needed to be destroyed or driven away as fast as possible!

Ves could feel the space around him becoming tense and uneasy. A normal mech would have folded or shattered after trying to navigate through all of the spatial disturbances.

The only reason why the Everchanger managed to remain minimally affected was because its resonance shield was openly resisting against the effects!

The true resonance formed by Joshua and the Everchanger was capable of resisting nearly every form of harmful effect.

Since the Phaser fish-whales did not employ true resonance themselves, their attacks which were ordinarily capable of devastating other fish-whales had much less effect against the Everchanger at this time!

Still, despite remaining intact for the time being, the drain to Venerable Joshua was considerable. As the weakest element of the pair, the expert pilot was still too new and underdeveloped to endure the rapid drain on his mental capacity.

Seeing that his willpower was being worn out at a distressing rate, Ves no longer cared as much about trying to deceive the approaching Swarmer fish-whales as much as possible.

If they stayed here for a minute longer, the Everchanger and its occupants might not be around anymore!

"Pull out!" Ves immediately ordered. "We've done enough. Ascend and try to circle around the Lake Continent. We can't go back the other way but we shouldn't distance ourselves from this landmass either. We need to make sure the Swarmer fish-whales get close enough to the Phasers to collide with each other!"

"I know! I'm on it!" Joshua replied while gritting his teeth!

The Everchanger rapidly rose up, causing it to open up its distance to all of the Phaser fish-whales.

Since the latter adopted a defensive posture, this meant that they had to exert their phasewater abilities over an increasingly greater distance.

This became an increasingly more difficult endeavor to the Phasers! The nature of their abilities meant that they were at their most devastating at mid range combat. It was difficult for them to maintain their power over longer distances as a lot of the energy they invested in their attacks were spread out in the surrounding environment.

All of this meant that while the Everchanger's glow no longer affected any of the Phaser fish-whales, the burden on the expert mech lightened considerably!

The space around the Everchanger was no longer as unstable as before. The Phaser fish-whales down below found it increasingly more difficult to exert their attacks on the fast but surprisingly tenacious metal machine.

Ves no longer paid attention to the Everchanger's condition. The data already told him that the burden had dropped to the point where the expert mech was able to endure the weaker spatial disturbances.

Even those were beginning to fade as the Phaser fish-whales no longer directed their attention towards the distancing expert mech.

Compared to trying to attack a foreign mech that exuded an ambivalent vibe, the Phaser fish-whales became a lot more concerned about the tide of Swarmer fish-whales that appeared to be descending right on top of the Lake Continent!

Even though the enormous flood of Swarmer fish-whales were still hellbent on chasing after the Everchanger, their pursuit inadvertently brought their vanguard to a height of less than ten kilometers from the surface of the landmass.

This distance already violated the Phase Kingdom's territorial integrity!

With roughly half a million Swarmers bearing down on the Lake Continent, the Phasers made the inevitable conclusion.

The Hive King sought to invade the Lake Continent!

Even if the attack wasn't meant to destroy the Phase Kingdom outright, an attack of this magnitude would almost certainly deplete the strength of its occupants!

The Phasers had no choice. When one of their archenemies had come this close to their core territory, the defenders were compelled to take action!

Each and every Phaser fish-whale on the landmass received an invisible signal that caused them to converge towards the invasion site so that they could do their part in blocking the tide of Swarmer fish-whales!

Storms and other exotic phasewater attacks enveloped the leading Swarmer elements!

The bodies of tens of thousands of fish-whales immediately tore apart or got cracked beyond oblivion!

A hurricane of red spilled in the space above the Lake Continent! The low gravity of the asteroid gently pulled down the spilled blood and contaminated some of the nearby water pools.

Surprisingly few chunks of flesh rained down, though. Before the remains of dead Swarmers could fall that far, rabid groups of hungry grunt fishes eagerly devoured the free pieces of food.

Hundreds of them began to slow down as their white hides began to grow blue, red and other colors.

However, these figures were utterly insignificant compared to the tide of thousands more white fish-whales that were diverting from their pursuit in order to approach the Phasers that had sought to destroy their group!

"It's working!" Ves grinned. "The Hive King must have gotten fooled by the earlier display! The Swarmers and the Phasers are colliding against each other!"

The rapidly unfolding battle made for an apocalyptic display. So many angry Swarmer fish-whales were braving the unrelenting storms and other weird phasewater attacks cast by their opponents!

None of them managed to make it to the surface. The Phasers were simply too good at destroying tightly-picked groups of opponents!

Yet no matter how many Swarmers lost their bodies, more were mindlessly driving their bodies forward!

In the meantime, Ves made a startling observation.

The elite fish-whales that ordinarily accompanies the cannon fodder were not moving forward!

Instead, they kept hovering beyond the range of the Phaser attacks.

What was even more concerning was that their numbers grew over time!

The elites coming from the rear along with the fish-whales that had recently evolved to their current states all converged into an increasingly more formidable assault wave.

"The Swarmers are getting serious!"