

## Mech 3991

### Chapter 3991 Trust Gap

The first meeting with the Aduc Family ended on a decent note. Both sides maintained their caution while tentatively sharing a few details about themselves.

Of course, neither of them took the initiative to divulge their deepest and darkest secrets. That would be too exaggerated. Even though both sides showed plenty of goodwill to each other, it was still too premature to decide whether they could trust each other with secrets that could provoke a lot of trouble if they were leaked to the public.

"We're at an impasse." Ves said as he entered his office and sat down in his usual chair. "We were only put together because the Transhumanists directed us to do so. We have yet to form a good foundation of trust."

Under normal conditions, it would take months or years for the Larkinson Clan to become familiar enough with the Aduc Family to develop a close friendship. It would be even better if they bonded together in order to overcome their shared challenges.

This was how the Larkinsons became close comrades-in-arms with the Glory Seekers and the Crossers. The clan's alliance partners had proven with their deeds that they were fully worthy of trust!

"Do I need to go through the same song and dance with the Aduc Family?"

That would take far too long!

Time was valuable. Ves already formed many ambitious plans around the T Institute. He needed the Aduc Family to come and staff it as quickly as possible in order to expand the scope of his spiritual studies. He needed to accelerate the pace of spiritual innovations in order to quickly power up his clan and power base and make it easier to survive the many dangers of the new frontier.

Without enough strength, pioneering organizations were just begging to get crushed!

"I need to change the game, but how?" Ves furrowed his brows.

"Meow."

While he was trying to figure out a solution, his lazy cat hovered on top of his head and perched on the hairy surface.

A metal tail idly whacked the side of Ves' head.

Ves withdrew a chunk of medium-grade exotic from his desk drawer and threw it into his gluttonous cat's maw.

Crunching sounds soon spread throughout the office. Lucky always savored the times he got to eat a decent snack.

"I told you to keep an eye on the Aducs when they visited us. Did you spot anything I should know about?"

"Meow... meow... meow..."

"You didn't spot anything? What the hell am I paying you for? What about their equipment?"

"Meow meow."

"Hm, that's interesting, but only mildly so. The Aducs probably associated themselves with the Transhumanists for a long time. It shouldn't be a surprise that their gear is luxurious."

Though their robes covered up everything, the Aduc Matriarch and her offspring carried better equipment than Ves during the meeting!

The only way for Ves to equalize this situation was if he wore his Unending Regalia. Outside of that, any of the Aducs could have kicked his butt!

Their gear ranged from first-class protective vacsuits to shield generators that were at least an order of magnitude more powerful than his own. The Aduc Matriarch even carried a personal teleporter if Lucky's judgment was correct!

Ves encountered these expensive and highly desirable devices only a few times in his life. He was still amazed by how they could bring a person to safety at any time while being small and light enough to carry around without attracting attention.

In hindsight, the main reason why these life-saving modules were so small was because they probably incorporated a bit of phasewater.

Personal teleporters were extremely expensive at the moment. Not even Ves thought it was worth it to exchange so many of his MTA merits and resources to obtain one at this time.

The Aducs may be wearing better gear, but Ves did not think he and his clan were inferior in other aspects.

The Aduc Family possessed around 50,000 members, which was decent for a low-key family organization that never made any preparations to emigrate to the Red Ocean before its unveiling.

Their relative lack of preparation also meant that their military forces fell behind. The Aducs never stood out for their mech forces. Even if the Aducs expanded their security as of late, they weren't militaristic enough to protect their own fleet and assets.

"They're probably relying on mercenaries to protect their stuff while they are operating in the Red Ocean." Ves surmised.

He continued to go over his observations of the Aducs for a few more minutes until a chime interrupted his musings.

The hatch slid open to allow for the passage of Calabast. The spymaster sauntered into the office as if she owned it. Her relaxed expression signified that she wasn't overly worried about the topic that she intended to address.

"Calabast." Ves curtly greeted his strategic partner. "Tell me your thoughts about the Aduc Family. I'm told that your impression of them isn't too bad."

She nodded as she leaned against the side of the desk. "The Aducs are smaller and weaker than our clan. Even if they possess a good relationship with the MTA, there are limits to this relationship. It says a lot that the mechers have refrained from absorbing the family into their own ranks."

"It could be that the Aducs themselves don't want to get too close to the MTA. I would do the same if I were in their place."

"That is true. That said, our relationship with the MTA isn't too shabby either. The value you provide to the mechers has directly promoted your status by a few tiers at once. You might not be fully aware of this yet, but your improved status makes it much more likely for organizations such as the Aduc Family to treat you with respect. I bet that Matriarch Erexia Aduc wouldn't have been so cordial to you if you hadn't been elevated to a tier 6 galactic citizen."

"That actually make a difference?"

"Why do you sound so surprised, Ves? You are more important than many master mech designers according to this system. Of course, there are many other reasons why the Aducs are speaking to you as an equal rather than a superior. The living mechs that you have showcased made a powerful impression on them. Our alliance's superior military strength as well as our illustrious combat record completely overshadows what little military accomplishments the Aduc Family has accrued over its long existence."

Greater strength was a good basis of confidence.

The Aduc would be fools to mess around with the Larkinsons when they were weaker!

"What else can you tell me about their attitude?" Ves asked.

"As you can no doubt surmise from their lack of priority in their military development, the Aduc Family does not have a history of pursuing extravagant ambitions. They are completely focused on running their terraforming company. Aside from branching out into biotechnology, the Aducs have not significantly diversified their businesses any further. This shows that they are content with their place in society."

Ves nodded in understanding. All of these factors indicated that the Aduc Family did not pose much of a threat to his clan. Their interests didn't even compete against each other as their main businesses weren't even related to each other.

The Larkinson Clan primarily focused on developing and selling mechs while the Aduc Family indicated that it would continue to operate its terraforming company in the Red Ocean.

Normally, the two would never have any reason to come together. They might not be competitors but there was no reason for them to cooperate with each other either. Their industries were just too far apart.

The T Institute changed that. Now that it became apparent that the Larkinsons and the Aducs developed their own unique applications of spirituality, there was a wonderful opportunity ahead!

If both groups could pool their expertise together, they could produce brilliant new innovations!

The only problem was getting there. Ves still felt deeply reluctant to be the first one to share his greater capabilities.

"What do you suggest I do, Calabast? I want to get moving, but it is difficult to do so without sufficient trust. I don't want to take the slow route. The sooner we can get started with the T Institute, the better prepared we will be when we are ready to go on our next great expedition."

The spymaster crossed her arms and remained silent for a few seconds.

"The only way to achieve results when you are in a rush is if you take risks. This shouldn't be too difficult for you seeing as you do this all the time."

"Can you be more specific?"

"It's simple, Ves. If there isn't enough trust, then you need to force a change by extending your trust towards the Aducs first. Go schedule another meeting with them,

but this time you should take the initiative to visit their flagship instead. This is a sign that you are willing to trust their hospitality."

Ves was ordinarily disinclined to visit a complete stranger's ship. There were too many ways for events to go wrong. If a threat truly emerged, then he would be stuck with hardly any ways to get away!

However, given that the Aduc Family was not aggressive and built up a decent reputation over the years, he did not believe that anything would go wrong during a visit.

"Then what?"

"You hand over a valuable gift." Calabast simply stated. "Minister Shederin could probably explain this to you better, but one of the simplest and most effective ways to build trust and gain another party's appreciation is if you provide them with a gift. In this case, the best way to break the impasse you are in right now is if you shock the Aducs by transferring a gift of great value to them. Even if you have failed to build up a sufficient amount of trust, the other party is still obliged to reciprocate it in order to maintain a good reputation. Unless the Aducs are more shameless than I thought, you won't suffer a loss in this transaction."

"I see..."

She made a great suggestion. Ves should have thought about this sooner. In fact, he should probably consult Minister Shederin after he was done with talking to Calabast so that he could develop a complete strategy to woo the Aducs.

"What kind of gift do you think I should provide to them? I have a lot of different options, but it is difficult to determine what the Aducs truly appreciate."

"Don't give them anything mundane like mechs or starships. The Aducs can already take care of those themselves." Calabast said. "Since the Aducs have a metaphysical background, then I highly recommend your gift be attuned to that. I am not entirely aware of what you and the Aducs are good at, so you need to form your own judgment regarding the nature of your gift. I suggest that you take this upcoming visit to their flagship as an opportunity to learn more about them. Once you know what they are lacking, you can delight your hosts by offering them a gift that solves an important need of theirs. If you handle yourself well enough, then you will definitely succeed in forging a bond with the Aduc Family."

Ves and Calabast continued to swap a few more ideas. The spymaster also shared additional insights about the Aducs that may or may not be important.

"There is one more thing, Ves. I have tried to dig into the history of the Aduc Family in order to determine whether it still maintains ties with the Greater Terran United Confederation."

That aroused his interest. "Did you find anything solid?"

"No." Calabast shook her head. "Apparently, the Aducs have completely cut ties with the Terrans."

"Isn't that good?"

"Not necessarily. I don't have any proof, but I have a hunch that the Aducs might not have completely cut off all of their ties. For example, did you ever thought about how difficult it is to step foot on Old Earth these days? This is by far the most historically significant planet in human civilization. Trillions of people wish to go on a pilgrimage to our mother planet, but the Terran Confederation only approves a fraction of the applications, and most of them only concern first-raters. How is a second-rate descendant of a family of exiled Terrans able to go through this process without getting rejected? Have you ever wondered about that, Ves?"

Now that he thought about it, this did sound a bit suspicious!

Chapter 3992 Terraforming Jobs

"If the Aduc Family still maintains secret ties with the Terrans, then why don't you deem them a potential threat to our clan?" Ves asked Calabast.

He was puzzled by her previous remark. Shouldn't this be of greater concern?

The leader of the Black Cats did not express any noticeable signs of concerns, though. She kept staring around his office while continuing to lean against his desk.

"Maintaining ties with the first-rate superstates is not necessarily a cause for concern, Ves. Aren't you thinking about cooperating with a Rubarthan institution yourself? Even though the Terran Alliance and Rubarthan Pact are rivals to the Red Ocean Union, the boundaries aren't so strict. So long as total war doesn't break out, it doesn't matter if anyone makes friends across the aisle."

"That may be so, but what if the relationship between the Aduc Family and a Terran group exceeds that of a normal business relationship? The Aducs used to be a part of the Terran Confederation. This makes it probable that they still maintained their ancestral ties with at least some of their allies at the time."

Calabast shook her head. "I don't think it is that severe. All relationships are at least partially based on interests. Centuries ago, the Aduc Family may have been worth befriending by powerful Terran groups. Nowadays, it has devolved into a second-class organization, and not a particularly big or powerful one. Whatever ties have survived up to this day should not be too significant. If not, the Aducs would have been able to rise back up to a first-class organization with the help of its Terran buddies."

"Hmm, you have a good point, though it may be that the Aducs do not want to rise again because they will invite repression from their former enemies."

"There is another reason why I believe the Aducs are not strongly aligned with the Terrans. They are associates of the MTA, more specifically the Transhumanist Faction. From what I have gathered, most mechers do not look kindly to the first-rate superstates. It is impossible for the Aduc Family to maintain close ties with both the mechers and the Terrans. It has to pick a single side, and all evidence suggests that it has chosen the shelter of the MTA over whatever friendships it could still call upon from the Terran Confederation."

The logic was sound. The Big Two and the first-rate superstates had always been rivals.

On top of that, the animosity between the Transhumanists and the Terrans was probably even worse. Ves had seen first-hand how Master Dervidian did not hesitate to experiment with the lives of hundreds of first-raters, among which were many elite and high-ranking Terran citizens!

Therefore, there was no way that the Aduc Family could become an ally or an agent of the Terrans!

"If this is the case, then I don't need to worry too much about this, correct?"

"It depends." Calabast said. "The Aduc Family's decision to side with the Transhumanists means that it cannot maintain any strong and overt relationships with the Terrans. At best, the Aducs can still call upon favors every now and then. If you are able to befriend the family one day, then you can borrow this channel in order to get in touch with the Terrans."

This might be useful one day. The Terrans were incredibly arrogant, but they weren't powerful for nothing. Their heritage was unsurpassed even if they were in decline. They still possessed a lot of unique advantages that Ves might want to get his hands on in the future.

It was practically impossible to approach the Terrans without an existing connection. The elitist first-raters disdained anyone that was lesser to them. They even saw the mechers and fleeters as upstarts who just got lucky enough to get the upper hand in this age.

Ves grew more interested in the Aduc Family's connection to the Greater Terran United Confederation. He felt it was important to understand the nature of this bond.

"Let's prepare for a visit to the Aduc fleet. I want to move quickly."

Ves proceeded to prepare and plan for the meeting. He notified Gavin to schedule a meeting. He then held multiple meetings with Calabast and Minister Shederin to



determine his diplomatic approach and learn what he needed to pay attention to when he stepped aboard the Aduc Family's flagship.

Fortunately, he did not have to visit the Aducs alone. Ves planned to bring along a small entourage to advise him and handle various responsibilities on his behalf.

A day later, a shuttle escorted by a troupe of mechs departed from the Larkinson fleet and approached another fleet orbiting Davute VII.

The Aduc Family's fleet was not that impressive to Ves, but it stood out by its inclusion of many notable terraforming vessels.

These ships formed the foundation of Gaia Worldcrafting Services.

There were starships that were specialized in adding mass to planets by hauling asteroids to them. There were also other starships that specialized in the removal of large landmasses through various methods.

The fastest and most dramatic way of reducing the size and mass of planets required a huge amount of force, so some of the terraforming ships actually possessed a huge amount of sieging power!

Terraforming companies had to receive special permission from the Big Two to own and operate these dangerous vessels. They also had to impose a lot of safety controls in order to prevent any accidents.

Ves would be lying if he said that he wasn't impressed.

The shuttle he was riding on slowly approached the hangar bay of the largest ship in the Aduc fleet.

The Green Dream was a 4.3 kilometer-long capital ship that possessed an extensive amount of terraforming functions.

The Aducs relied on her a lot whenever they wanted to make localized or regional changes to a planet's ecology!

All of the power of the terraforming ship came at the cost of her survival capabilities.

Even though the Green Dream was a heartland-level capital ship, she was not developed with frontier conditions in mind. Her long and broad hull structure made her so slow and sluggish that she would definitely be a liability in any battle!

What was worse was that her hull armor was too thin to withstand too much further. If the Aducs did not overhaul this massive weak point, then it was far too risky to send out the capital terraforming ship on a mission!



"We're approaching the hangar bay. Please stand by, sir."

Ves patiently waited for his shuttle to slip inside and land in a prepared area. No surprises occurred.

Soon enough, a handful of guards stepped outside and formed a ceremonial display.

Ves and his chosen entourage slowly stepped out after receiving the right signal.

The main hangar bay of the Green Dream did not stand out to Ves. Only a handful of mechs were visible. Much of the hangar space was dedicated to holding and prepping various different kinds of terraforming vessels.

There were transport shuttles dedicated to transplanting organic life forms.

There were seeding vehicles that specialized in planting seeds and small plants over lots of terrain.

There were even digging vehicles that were mostly used to create new lakes.

All in all, the Green Dream was truly a vessel dedicated to the transformation of planets that were initially hostile to human life.

Matriarch Erexi Aduc did not choose to receive the guests this time. Instead, her heir and first-born son assumed this responsibility by himself.

"Patriarch Ves, welcome aboard the Green Dream. She may not possess any mechs of interest to you, but we can still offer you a tour of our terraforming vehicles if you wish."

"Please do. These are fascinating vehicles. I have heard about them but never come close to any of them. They're not exactly common."

"That is true." Kievenar Aduc said. "With our ships and vehicles, we hold the power to expand humanity's habitat across the stars. It is a great honor and responsibility to play a role in our race's expansion."

The Aduc heir held a brief tour through the hangar bay. Just like Ves, the man attempted to impress his guests upon the power and grandeur of the Aduc Family.

While Ves was genuinely impressed by how extensively these assets were capable of transforming the conditions of a planet, none of them were relevant in battle.

Kievenar did not show off any of the Aduc Family's mechs throughout the tour. The truth was that the Aduc's did not possess any mechs that were good enough to impress an accomplished mech designer like Ves!

"It is really impressive how your family can make an entire planet livable in a matter of years." Venerable Joshua commented.

The expert pilot was one of the clansmen that Ves had chosen to bring along. Joshua possessed a rare life domain, which might be useful for this visit.

"We generally prefer to take our time with terraforming projects." Kievenar explained. "We believe that every planet has great potential. It takes extensive terraforming to draw out their hidden advantages. Many of our projects generally take two or three decades to complete. The time to completion may be long, but the results are undoubtedly superior to the outcomes of rapid terraforming projects."

It appeared the Aduc Family looked down on rapid terraforming. Gaia Worldcrafting Services emphasized quality over speed!

Minister Shederin, who was also part of the delegation, made an insightful observation.

"By my knowledge, most clients in the Red Ocean demand rapid terraforming. The competition for territory is so great that pioneers cannot afford to wait decades before they can build their colonies. They paid much in order to enter this dwarf galaxy early and must continue to rely on speed to capitalize their advantages. This is why the power blocs responsible for colonizing the Davute System did not hesitate to rush in transforming Davute VII."

"Davute VII is not a good planet at all." Kievenar shook his head in disappointment. "Laymen such as yourselves may not be able to notice the differences, but exogeologists can clearly distinguish the many faults and imperfections that have emerged due to moving so quickly. The ecosystem of this planet is not balanced at all. Even now, the controllers of this planet must constantly employ a fleet of vehicles that are dedicated to maintaining the planet's delicate balance. If no intervention happens, then it is highly likely that a drastic ecological change will occur. Temperatures may rise. A toxic gas might spread throughout the atmosphere. City-destroying earthquakes may occur."

Ves was surprised to hear all of these possibilities! He never realized that a planet that had undergone rapid terraforming could become so sick!

"This can be fixed, right?"

"Only in part." Kievenar answered. "Many large-scale changes can only be performed when the planet is not yet inhabited. That is because they can trigger large-scale disasters. The colonists of Davute VII have chosen to build their settlements as soon as possible, which means that they cannot employ the most effective methods to correct any imbalances. The only way to mitigate the remaining issues is to perform minor changes over many decades. Even then, not every problem can be resolved through

gradual change. Davute VII will always remain flawed and incomplete to us. This is why taking your time in terraforming planets is key."

Ves did not entirely agree with the Aduc scion's stance. The downsides mentioned by Kievenar did not sound pleasant, but it was not too difficult to handle the sequela of rapid terraforming.

Many pioneers would gladly pay this price if they were able to colonize a planet in a matter of years rather than decades!

"If you don't accept any rapid terraforming missions, how will your company be able to generate revenue in the Red Ocean?"

"There is still demand for deep terraforming. These commissions usually come from pioneers who have already settled on planets transformed through rapid terraforming. Now that they have quickly established a foothold in this dwarf galaxy, they can afford to wait to obtain a better planet."

"I see. You will have plenty of business, then."

## Chapter 3993 The Green Sanctum

Deep terraforming was a massive and intricate process that required a huge amount of planning and patience.

The Aducs were quite suitable to perform these commissions. They were steady and stable. They also valued thorough and complete transformations. Their desire to create planets that were as friendly to human life as possible meant that they were willing to wait in order to finish the job!

Though Ves already learned a portion of the information shared by his tour guide, he also gained a deeper understanding of the Aduc Family and its approach towards its business activities.

Terraforming was not just a means of living to the Aducs. It was also a passion for them! Gaia Worldcrafting Services never remained stagnant. It employed many researchers who were all dedicated to inventing new methods and solutions to deliver even better planets to their clients!

A few hours passed by as Kievenar continued to show Ves and his fellow Larkinsons around.

While the Aduc heir did not bring his guests to any places that contained anything related to spirituality, Ves still appreciated the opportunity to get a glimpse of the many functions of the Green Dream.

If the Aducs truly needed to, they could complete an entire terraforming mission by relying on their flagship alone!

Of course, doing so would also double or triple the time it took to complete the transformation process. This was highly inefficient and most clients simply weren't willing to wait that long to obtain a good planet.

After Kievenar showed his guests around a biolab where a lot of Earth species underwent targeted modifications in order to fit a specific habitat, the man led the Larkinsons to the center of the capital ship.

Ves soon realized that they were about to step inside the most important compartment of the Aduc Family's flagship.

The amount of reinforcement surrounding this central compartment was much higher. The surrounding decks and bulkheads consisted of higher-quality alloys that were not only capable of withstanding more damage, but also disrupted any signals that passed through the materials.

This was a major deviation from the remainder of the capital ship. All of the other sections of the Green Dream conformed to the standards of a non-combat vessel. Only this location was different!

"Due to safety precautions, we must ask you to leave your guards outside this entrance. You may choose to decline, but if you do, we cannot allow you to pass any further."

Ves frowned a bit. Though he wasn't too worried about his safety, he would feel a lot more vulnerable if he had to proceed without his honor guard.

He realized that this was a matter of trust. Ves had to take a leap of faith and believe the Aduc Family did not harbor any ill intent towards him and his clan.

He tried his best to extend his senses past the gate, but the space behind it was so huge that he wasn't able to pick up anything special within his sensing range.

"Meow."

Lucky, who pretended to be a mere mechanical pet, did not sense anything suspicious either.

If not for the fact that the Aduc Family might find out and take offense, Ves would have sent out Lucky or Blinky to slip past the obstacles and take a peek of what the Aducs were hiding behind the gate.

Ves eventually shrugged. "Very well. Our guards will stay behind."

The Aducs would be fools to screw him over. Besides, the main reason why he paid a personal visit to the Aduc Family was to build up trust. Displaying an unreasonable degree of suspicion was not conducive towards this goal!

Kievenar and the Larkinsons soon passed through the opened gate.

The space behind it turned out to be a massive hall converted into a biome. Ves noticed that the air circulating through this massive compartment was substantially different from the rest of the vessel.

It wasn't as sterile and filtered as the air that typically cycled through a large starship.

Ves lowered his head and dug his feet into the grassy surface. The green carpet was anything but uniform. Differences in shading, water sources and interactions with fauna caused the grass to be shorter in some places and longer in other places.

Up ahead was a small natural-looking forest. The Aducs did not appear to have employed any form of planning at all as the forest environment looked a bit messy.

As Kievenar slowly led his guests down a dirt path, Ves wondered at the purpose of this biome.

"What is this place, Kievenar? Why put so much effort into guarding this compartment?"

"You will see. We will have to bring you to the center before we can give you an explanation."

They traversed through the forest for a couple minutes before they approached a large clearing.

As soon as the group strode outside the thick bushes and overhead leaves, they all gained a clear view of a large and ancient oak tree that was planted atop a low hill.

The tree looked extremely remarkable!

It had many large and thick branches that extended from its trunk in such a way that they curled down due to their substantial weight.

The branches also bore many leaves, each of which were so vibrantly green that Ves felt tempted to take a bite of them! He was already wondering whether he should make a request.

The group slowly climbed up the hill until they encountered a few familiar faces.

Matriarch Erexí Aduc along with Tierna and Pesca Aduc had already gathered in front of the trunk of the ancient oak tree. They were all wearing their elegant green-and-beige robes, which looked particularly fitting in this nature-filled environment.

Ves and Joshua did not pay attention to the presence of the Aduc leaders.

Instead, the central tree had completely captured their attention!

"Ves..." Joshua wondrously uttered.

"I know. I can sense it as well. The vitality of this tree is..."

The tree was alive in a way that caused all of the other trees to pale in comparison!

It possessed a passive form of spirituality that reminded Ves of a hibernating bear!

If the majority of the trees in this biome represented an asteroid belt, then the central tree was akin to a star!

Even though the ancient oak tree was not too massive, its age and its primordial quality instantly demanded respect. Even the most ignorant person would be able to recognize that it was special!

While Ves and Joshua continued to be captivated by the ancient tree, Matriarch Erexí slowly stepped forward with her bare feet pressing upon the grassy soil.

"Welcome... to our green sanctum." She spoke with gravity in her tone. "You are one of the few guests who has received the honor of approaching our greatest heirloom. When our family was at its height, our ancestors received a great privilege. They were allowed to take a young sapling as well as a patch of soil from Old Earth. Throughout the years, we have allowed the tree you see behind me to grow under the most natural conditions possible."

Ves widened his eyes. "Are you saying... that this is a genuine tree from Old Earth?"

"Yes, it is. The oak tree is a completely natural Earth tree. Her genetics have remained untouched and we did not make use of any artificial supplements to accelerate or fortify her growth. For centuries, this oak tree has flourished under our possession. We did not grow her aboard a ship, but planted her in several different territories depending on the planets where we chose to settle. It is only recently that we have relocated her to the Green Dream."

Ves found it weird that they referred to the tree as if it was female.

"An heirloom like this should have a name. What is it called?"

"We call her the Old Lady." Matriarch Erexī smiled. "We are aware that oak trees are hermaphroditic in nature. Nevertheless, our ancestors honored and revered her as a woman, so we have carried on this tradition."

"Each member of the Aduc Family has an obligation to visit the Old Lady in order to honor her and the Earth she came from." Kievenar Aduc explained. "We should pay her a visit at least once a year, though we usually pay homage once a month or once a week if it is convenient."

"Amazing." Ves softly said. "Is this part of a religious ritual?"

"Not particularly, though we have formed many special beliefs about the Old Lady. She is arguably one of the most remarkable trees that humanity has brought into the Red Ocean."

Ves believed in this claim. The old oak tree might not have started out as anything special, but the Aduc Family's extreme reverence of Old Earth's natural wealth caused its members to worship the Old Lady as if she was a religious totem or idol!

Centuries of accumulated worship has slowly imparted more and more spiritual feedback to the oak tree. The ideology of the Aducs remained consistently consistent over the years. The vast majority of its members were surprisingly homogeneous regarding their views on nature.

This meant that whatever spirituality they rubbed off on the Old Lady was highly uniform!

This led to the current situation. By now, the Old Lady had developed a strong and vigorous spirituality. The only flaw was that she was not really 'alive' in the way that Ves was accustomed to. The oak tree was essentially a vegetable.

"Can you feel her, Patriarch Ves?"

"I can feel she is alive." He replied. "She has accumulated a fair amount of power. Your Old Lady has truly become a priceless relic."

Matriarch Erexī let out a brief sigh. "I was asking whether you can feel what is wrong with the Old Lady."

"Pardon? I'm not an expert on trees, but it doesn't look like there is anything wrong with this tree."

"She is not doing well as of late. Her growth has stalled and she has even regressed in several areas. Our best biologists have tried their best to restore her health without ruining her integrity, but we have failed to develop an effective solution. After studying



her conditions for many years, we have formed the conclusion that her ailments cannot be cured through biological means. She can only be healed through other means."

"You mean..."

"The reason why we have invited you here is to consult with you on this problem that has been plaguing us for over a century. While the Old Lady is still stable, we fear that her condition will deteriorate further if this problem is left unattended. Patriarch Ves, we formally wish to borrow your expertise. If you can diagnose and solve the problem, we would be immensely grateful to you and your clan."

Though the Aduc Matriarch did not explicitly mention what they would do in return, Ves did not think the Aducs would be stingy in repaying their debts!

The Old Lady was their most important relic and heirloom! The sheer quantity of spirituality stored inside the tree was a clear sign of her immense importance to the Aduc Family.

"Can I step closer?"

"You may, but please note that the Old Lady is under heavy protection."

As Ves stepped forward, he was able to gain a much more detailed impression of the Old Lady's spirituality.

He did not sense anything wrong or problematic at first. The spiritual character of the old tree was gentle and passive. Its spiritual attributes were remarkably consistent and mostly consisted of wood, earth and life.

As Ves struggled to find out what was wrong, Venerable Joshua quietly strode to his side.

"I know what is wrong." The expert pilot said.

Ves turned to his friend in surprise. "You do?"

"Yes. Don't look at how strong and healthy she feels. Instead, focus on whether she feels at home. I am afraid that the Old Lady is anything but comfortable. She is quietly suffering."

This was a shocking remark! Ves quickly changed the way he observed the Old Lady and tried to sense what Joshua had described.

He widened his eyes a moment later.

"You're right, Joshua! The Old Lady's spirituality is rejecting her physical body. It's as if her soul is stuck in the wrong body!"

How could this be possible?! Ves was cycling through ideas as he examined the Old Lady's spiritual character with great attention.

He eventually formed a shocking theory.

"I think I know what is going on!" He said. "The Old Lady... is an Earth tree that is not on Earth! She's homesick! As long as she isn't planted on humanity's home planet, she will never feel comfortable!"

This was a serious ailment! Ves had no clue how he could remedy such a problem!

### Chapter 3994 Incompatible Identity

The revelations from Ves and Joshua completely flabbergasted the Aducs.

Matriarch Erexia Aduc and her three children looked so shocked and confused that they looked as if their cranial implants had crashed.

The Old Lady was the greatest treasure and heirloom of the Aduc Family. From the beginning, The Aducs took extremely good care of her. As proficient terraformers, they also excelled in botany and other related fields. They consistently made sure that the oak tree was able to grow under the most healthy conditions possible without resorting to artificial means that could taint her growth.

There was never a time when the Aducs had deliberately neglected or mistreated the Old Lady in any way. They had installed many safety measures such as energy shields and air filtration systems around the tree to make sure that no possible accident or attack could disturb her growth and existence.

For centuries, the Aducs had been rewarded for their efforts. The tree they cared for and revered with all of their hearts grew into a majestic organism. Her bark grew thick and strong while her canopy became more green and lush.

Every Aduc celebrated the gradual but unstoppable growth of the Old Lady. She was a genuine extension of Old Earth, the home planet of the human race and the start of their great civilization!

It was only after a few centuries that the Old Lady started showing signs of decline. For inexplicable reasons, the tree stopped growing as steadily as before. She even began to deteriorate as her branches began to droop while some of her leaves lost their green.

These changes completely distressed the Aducs. Their best botanists and biotechs studied her from top to bottom to determine the source of her affliction. When that didn't

work, they acquired the services of other experts. They even paid millions of MTA merits in order to borrow the expertise of one of the Association top scientists, to no avail!

The Aducs had gone from alarm to escalating concern.

The good news was that the Old Lady's nature as a tree granted her a lot of time before her condition deteriorated too much.

The bad news was that none of them were able to find a solution to this problem! Were the Aducs destined to witness the slow and unstoppable death of this unique and magnificent gift from Old Earth?

Even though it was not impossible to procure a new sapling from Old Earth by paying a high price, it simply wouldn't be the same.

Matriarch Erexí and all of the predecessors and descendents of the Aduc Family had revered the Old Lady from the beginning of their lives!

It had been a tradition for them to worship the revered oak tree from the moment they gained enough awareness to do so. Visiting the Old Lady was like attending church to them. The Aducs became so attached to her that they equated her resilience as a representation of their family's luck.

Ever since the Old Lady's health had stalled and deteriorated, the Aducs became a lot more distressed about their future. Had they committed a grave sin? Were they not sincere enough in caring for their precious tree? Was the decline of their family already set in stone?

Many Aducs feared that their family would no longer have the capital to survive if the worst scenario took place!

The Aduc Family without the Old Lady would no longer have a heart. There was no tree or other growth that could replace the role of this priceless heirloom.

This was also why the Aducs found it extremely difficult to accept the explanation given by their guests.

Matriarch Erexí's expression grew incredibly grave. Though she wanted to deny the claims made by the Larkinson expert pilot, she possessed enough rationality to consider the matter seriously.

At the very least, this was the first time they heard an explanation that could adequately explain why the Old Lady had grown sick!

Many other experts who were much smarter and more knowledgeable than anyone else had tried and failed to form a satisfactory diagnosis!

Now that the Aducs finally obtained one, they should not reflexively deny it out of hand just because they didn't like what they heard!

As a matriarch, Erexí Aduc still knew what to prioritize. The pride and reputation of their family was not as important as reversing the Old Lady's decline!

"Please... explain it to us." She spoke with a heavy voice. "How could she not feel at home? Our family has taken exquisite care of her since we obtained her. Though our family has relocated to several planets after our exile from the Terran Confederation, we have always located and settled on the most ideal Earth-like planets that we can reach. Even this artificial biome we are in right now simulates a temperate climate of Old Earth to an accuracy of 98.763 percent. There are hardly any other technologies available that can increase this rate any further."

The two spiritually sensitive Larkinsons both exchanged glances with each other. Neither of them looked particularly optimistic about the Old Lady's spiritual condition.

Ves was actually surprised that Joshua sensed the Old Lady's ailment before himself, but after a bit more thought, he supposed it made sense.

Ves was a creator by nature and tended to look at spiritual existences as potential sources of ingredients.

In contrast, Venerable Joshua genuinely respected the life and personalities of different life forms. He saw every human, creature or spiritual entity as a potential friend. As long as he tried hard enough and as long as his counterpart wasn't hostile, he was confident he could befriend anything that was alive!

While the Old Lady was definitely alive, she wasn't as sophisticated as the mechs and design spirits that Joshua interacted with on a daily basis.

Nonetheless, the Old Lady still developed a measure of spiritual life, akin to a second order living mech.

Instead of answering Matriarch Erexí's question, Venerable Joshua made a presumptuous request.

"Can I get close enough to touch her trunk, ma'am? At this distance, I can only sense what the Old Lady is feeling on the surface. I need to get into contact with her in order to get a better feel. I might even be able to talk to her, though I'm not sure trees can even do that. I won't hurt the tree. I promise."

"I'd like to get close as well." Ves quickly said. "My abilities are a bit different, but I should be able to confirm Joshua's diagnosis and offer a different perspective."

"You may... approach. Please be mindful of your behavior. An energy shield will immediately appear if you make any improper movements."

"Mother!" Tierna Aduc looked shocked! "We have never allowed a foreigner to touch the Old Lady! Even the mechers that we have invited to diagnose her condition utilized remote scanning equipment to study her physical state."

"Those rules exist to protect the Old Lady. Now that she is ill, we must not let our dogma hinder us from finding a cure for her problem. If the very same rules no longer safeguards the Old Lady but instead contributes to her continued decline, then we should not hold on to them any longer. Otherwise, our family would never have been able to survive up to this point!"

That was a good approach. Ves respected the matriarch a bit more for that. A family led by a good leader was a much better ally and partner than one led by an impulsive idiot.

With the matriarch's blessing, Ves and Joshua slowly approached the base of the Old Lady's trunk, though Lucky and Minister Shederin had to stay behind.

Fortunately, Lucky found it more interesting to explore the surrounding forest while Minister Shederin passed the time by chatting with the Aduc scions.

"This is truly a special tree." Venerable Joshua remarked as he became more affected by the spiritually strong tree strength and accumulation. "I can feel the age and life force of the Old Lady. It's truly a pity that she is in pain."

The pain that Joshua referred to wasn't the pain that came from stabbing a knife into a person's thigh.

The Old Lady suffered from a different kind of pain, one that behaved like a chronic affliction that slowly and steadily wore away at her spirituality.

It was an erosion that came from within.

As both Ves and Joshua pressed their palms onto the oak tree's bark, they used their own senses and abilities to learn whatever they could and figure out if they could correct whatever was ailing the Old Lady.

Several minutes went by. Neither of the two dared to move too quickly and disturb the equilibrium of the Old Lady's spirituality.

Ves became more impressed and fascinated by the existence of her spirituality. The Old Lady was a natural totem that had been formed under rare conditions.

While there were many different human groups that had worshiped different relics and icons, it was nearly impossible for their persistent efforts to create a totem.

This was because most of the spiritual feedback from the worshippers were too mixed and heterogeneous. Ves had learned that a high standard of purity had to be met in order for spiritual accumulation to achieve any significant results.

The Ylvainans and the Hexers had reluctantly succeeded in doing so, but even then the totems weren't powerful enough to do anything until Ves had come along.

The Old Lady was different from Ylvaine's nutrient pack wrapper or a piece of the original statue of the Superior Mother.

This tree was not only alive in an organic sense, but consistently gathered much higher qualities of spiritual feedback than normal!

Ves turned his head towards the four Aducs standing further back. Each of their spiritualities were strong and activated. Their attributes were also the same, which was highly unusual.

What was even more remarkable was that they were hardly the only Aducs aboard the Green Dream that possessed life and earth domains!

Over a quarter of the crew members that Ves had encountered during the hours-long tour through the capital terraforming ship possessed the same characteristics!

Their age was the main factor to their strength. The older and more higher-ranking Aducs possessed spiritualities that could rival that of Matriarch Erexia Aduc!

Ves initially thought that the Aducs developed these highly uniform traits due to their diligent worship of the Old Lady, but he rejected this hypothesis after a bit of thought.

He failed to detect any component within the Old Lady's spirituality that could actively pass on a part of its strength to others.

Furthermore, the Old Lady's spiritual attributes were slanted towards wood, earth and life.

Ves hadn't met any Aducs that developed a domain related to wood!

He concluded that whatever secret method the Aducs utilized to develop their spiritualities, it wasn't related to the Old Lady!

Nonetheless, the Aduc Family's unique strength gave it the ability to influence the Old Lady's spiritual development.

If the Aducs had been more cognizant of how their worshipful thoughts shaped the Old Lady's personality, they would have been more careful about what they passed on! It was unfortunate that they did not restrain their obsession towards Old Earth whenever they honored the oak tree.

In fact, these detrimental thoughts had peaked because of the Old Lady's direct connection to humanity's home planet!

"It's... bad." Ves slowly said as he completed his examination. "The Old Lady is like a woman who has been raised to believe she is a man. Perhaps she never saw any problem with this when she was younger and more ignorant. It was only when she developed a slightly greater ability to think and understand that she realized that her current state is wrong. She recognizes that she is a woman, but her own body and everyone else around her keeps insisting that she is a man. This naturally puts her into a state of inner conflict. You could have resolved this earlier if you did not insist on reinforcing the wrong ideas, but now it is too late. She cannot be persuaded anymore."

The Aducs looked aghast. They wanted so badly for the Larkinsons to be wrong, but Ves spoke with so much certainty that his diagnosis sounded credible!

#### Chapter 3995 Ves the Tree Doctor

"I don't mean to doubt you, but can you provide any proof to your claims?" Pesca Aduc asked in a defensive tone. "I would like to believe you, but we cannot afford to believe in a guess that might turn out to be wrong. We need hard proof if you want us to accept your words."

Ves did not reply directly to the Aducs. Instead, he turned to his fellow Larkinson. "Joshua?"

"I think... I can do it. Let me give this a try." The expert pilot whispered.

He closed his eyes and reached out to the Old Lady. A dozen seconds passed by before the Old Lady's leaves and branches shook!

Much to the Aduc Family's astonishment, a subtle green glow emanated from Venerable Joshua and the Old Lady!

"What... what is happening?!" Pesca asked as she tried to make sense of this phenomenon!

Ves softly chuckled. "Venerable Joshua... is resonating with the Old Lady."

"Shouldn't that be limited to expert mechs?"

"Joshua is not a normal expert pilot. He's my expert pilot. There's a difference."



Even though the soft light show looked impressive, in reality hardly anything happened. Pesca wasn't entirely wrong in doubting the current display. It was not as if the Old Lady would spontaneously uproot herself and transform into a wooden mech-like monstrosity! Such ridiculous events only took place in fantasy dramas!

Resonance was a phenomenon that happened whenever two different living entities grew close enough to form a bond of mutual understanding and strengthening. It came in many different strengths and forms, and it wasn't exclusive to expert pilots.

However, out of all of the possible professions that Ves was aware of, high-ranking mech pilots were by far the best at achieving resonance!

The main shortcoming of this was that this ability was generally confined to their mechs and more specifically their high-ranking mechs.

Venerable Joshua happened to be an exception to the rule. His life domain as well as the nature of his power expression lowered the threshold that determined whether resonance could be achieved with different life forms.

There was little practical use of this ability in most cases. There was no way that resonating with an old oak tree could provide any practical help in actual battle.

Nonetheless, Venerable Joshua's unique advantage happened to play a useful role in this situation!

Not only was he able to convince the Old Lady to open up to him, he also provided strong support for his claims!

After all, even if the Aducs weren't particularly interested in mechs, they still knew the basics. It was absolutely remarkable that an expert pilot was able to resonate with the Old Lady!

The light show quickly ended as Venerable Joshua no longer forced a connection with the living tree. Achieving resonance was a strenuous exercise. The Old Lady was not an expert mech and was never meant to achieve this state with anyone.

Everyone carefully paid attention to the Larkinson expert pilot when he turned around.

"What my patriarch has said is right. The Old Lady is a living tree that you have extensively brainwashed with the belief that she is not only a part of Old Earth, but that she belongs there. When I bonded with her, I tried to convince her that it is okay for her to live outside Old Earth, but she is absolutely adamant that there is no other place for her but what she believes to be her true home."

Ves nodded in support of Joshua's argument.

"My analysis conforms to Joshua's description. When I studied the Old Lady closely, I noticed that the strong beliefs and assumptions that you have passed onto her has thoroughly penetrated her heart. This has taken place for such a long time that it is impossible to convince her otherwise. Perhaps your family might still have a chance if she was younger, but she has grown too old and set in her ways to begin with persuading her to change all of the assumptions that she clung to for her entire life."

Matriarch Erexí frowned. "What if we start right away? Now that you have identified the problem, we can adjust our thoughts and slowly try to correct the Old Lady's mistaken assumptions over time. We can be patient. We do not care if it takes a century or two to correct our mistakes as long as our tree is restored to health."

"You're not listening to me, matriarch. The ailment afflicting the Old Lady is rooted in her very existence. You might not know this, but I'm an expert when it comes to matters like this. I may be relatively young, but I have met and interacted with many powerful and remarkable life forms over the years. There is no mistaking what is wrong with your relic. She is dying because she has been taught her very nature is wrong."

Ves felt as if he was a doctor who just announced to a family that the patient under his care had contracted an incurable disease!

"Can the MTA help?" Kievenar Aduc asked. "We have friends within the Association. Now that you have identified the problem, there has to be a mecher who can correct what is wrong."

"The MTA failed to understand what is killing the Old Lady. Do you think it has the tech or means to resolve the problem? While I can't be completely certain about this, I don't think the mecheers can save your tree."

The logic was sound. The MTA may possess a degree of understanding in psionic power, but it was far from extensive.

"If the MTA cannot help us, what about you, patriarch? Can you and your clan offer us a solution that can make the Old Lady whole again?"

"There are two ways out for your family in my opinion." Ves straightforwardly said. "The fundamental problem is that the Old Lady is 100 percent convinced that she is an Earth tree that should only exist on Old Earth. As long as you send her back through the greater beyonder gate and ship her all the way to Old Earth, you or an agent on your behalf can attempt to plant her on Old Earth's soil. I can guarantee you that this will definitely make the Old Lady feel a lot better."

"..."

This was not a practical solution. The cost to ship any item from the Red Ocean to the Milky Way, particularly a large and heavy oak tree, was astronomical!

As for transporting her all the way to Old Earth, this was nearly impossible to accomplish. Humanity's ancestral planet was a highly protected and regulated heritage location. There was no way that the touchy and sensitive Terrans would permit the transplantation of a random tree!

It didn't matter if the sapling originated from Old Earth. As soon as the tree that eventually became known as the Old Lady left the atmosphere, she had become exposed to foreign and alien contaminants. Recklessly introducing traces of them into Old Earth's ecosystem might mess it up. The risks were too great and the Terrans had no reason to abide by the Aduc Family's request!

However, the biggest problem of this potential solution was that the Aducs simply did not wish to part with their precious tree!

"We can't ship the Old Lady back to her original home." Matriarch Erexu shook her head. "It is already impossible for us to gain the necessary permissions. Even if we can overcome this issue, we still do not wish to separate from her. Our tree is our center. She is our mother and has always grown alongside our family."

"I can offer you an alternative solution if the more straightforward option is not acceptable to you." Ves stated. "It is much more practical but also radical. It is not for the faint of heart. You will have to make a hard decision if you want to consider my second option."

"Tell us what you have in mind, patriarch."

Ves let out a sigh as he glanced towards the old and sturdy trunk of this tree. "Your tree's personality and character are already fixed. There is no easy way to remedy her faults so that she can grow in an environment outside Old Earth. The option that I am suggesting to you is to kill her and use her remains to create a better and corrected version of the Old Lady."

"Preposterous!"

"What are you talking about?!"

"Killing the Old Lady is out of the question!"

The younger Aducs couldn't accept what Ves was suggesting. They would rather tackle the impossible challenge of trying to ship their living heirloom back to Old Earth than to approve this insane plan!

At the very least, the first option at least granted the Old Lady a glimmer of survival, even if her chances were extremely minute.

If they went for the second option, then the Old Lady's death was assured! How could they possibly embrace this plan when they would essentially lose what mattered the most to their family?

Even Matriarch Erexia felt she shouldn't entertain this alternative option any further. She had lived a lot longer than her children and developed an even greater degree of affection towards the Old Lady. Her reaction towards any mention of killing the tree made it difficult for her to maintain her composure!

However, her high position and her obligation to do right by her family forced her to consider the matter seriously. So far, the Larkinsons had been quite credible in their claims. She did not think that Patriarch Ves was joking with this suggestion.

"Please explain your thoughts further. Why would we possibly want to kill the Old Lady?"

"It's not really killing her." Ves lied. "It's rebirthing her. The Old Lady will still be fine as a tree. Her physical body will remain untouched. My suggested treatment will only affect her spirit, the intangible quality that makes her so remarkable. Her spirit is incurably sick, so what I propose is to break it and put the pieces back together so that she can be reborn. As long as I do this right, I can change her spirit so that she will feel completely at home regardless of her habitat. It is similar to erasing the original operation system of a mech before replacing it with an updated version."

The analogy was simple to explain, but the implications were anything but casual!

The Aducs weren't willing to gamble with the life of the Old Lady! They would rather continue their search for help from other people than to approve this insane plan!

Ves saw that his hosts needed a bit more persuasion, so he decided to give them another show.

"The rebirth process that I am talking about is not a mere treatment. It is a metamorphosis that can enable your Old Lady to evolve into a higher life form! This is an immensely valuable opportunity for her! Not only that, the opportunity to transform your heirloom into a true living life form is an exclusive privilege that you cannot obtain anywhere else! Let me give you an example of the life forms that I have created through my own methods!"

Ves pulled his Hammer of Brilliance from his belt and raised it above his head!

Soon enough, Vulcan's presence descended on the hill! A large silhouette of a dwarf briefly flashed behind the Larkinson Patriarch's back!

"This is Vulcan, a spirit that embodies craftsmanship!"

He put his hammer back to its original place and channeled a different spiritual entity.

A giant translucent hand appeared above the Old Lady and actually stroked the oak tree's canopy!

What was amazing was that the spiritual hand actually managed to make physical contact with the Old Lady's branches!

"This is the Superior Mother, the spirit of the Hexer people!"

Nyaaaaa!

The Golden Cat briefly materialized into view. She cutely circled around Ves' body as power exuded from her form.

"This is the Golden Cat, our clan's version of your Old Lady! If you agree to my suggested treatment, then your oak tree can also become an ascended spiritual life form!"

Matriarch Erexu may have been able to sense the design spirits during her previous visit to the Spirit of Bentheim, but this was the first time she encountered them in this form!

Even though she had witnessed many remarkable sights throughout her life, nothing could compare to this unique demonstration!

"Patriarch Ves... we are unable to form an immediate decision. We will discuss what you have shared with our other leaders and advisers. Once we have settled on a course of action, we will contact you once again."

"Take your time. The Old Lady still has a lot of life left in her, so there is no hurry to go for my solution. Just keep in mind that I am not offering my services for free. I hope that you will be ready to make concessions if you decide to accept my help."

The meeting ended shortly after. The Aducs were no longer in the mood to entertain the Larkinsons.

Ves and the rest of his delegation returned to their shuttle and returned to the Larkinson fleet.

## Chapter 3996 Three Demands

Ves estimated that it might take weeks if not months for the Aducs to come to a consensus on what they should do with the Old Lady.

There was no way that a single meeting was enough to decide the life and death of their most important relic!

The significance of the Old Lady was so great that the Aducs needed to weigh every possible option carefully.

What was worse was that the vast majority of the members of the Aduc Family had developed a strong emotional bond to the Old Lady.

Their regard towards their Earth tree went far beyond mere respect. They worshiped her as if she was the Aduc Family's ancestor and patron saint!

All of these symbolic and emotional entanglements meant that it was impossible for the Aducs to settle for the most rational chance with the greatest chance of producing a favorable outcome.

This made little sense to Ves. Attempting to ship the stupid tree back to Old Earth was futile and self-destructive behavior.

The Aducs couldn't possibly be selfless enough to part with their precious heirloom and hollow out their spiritual foundation.

Ves was confident that his alternative solution was the best option the Aducs could settle for! Perhaps they might be desperate enough to look for help from other corners, but no one knew whether they could actually find a helper who could provide a better solution!

"I don't expect we will have to wait too long before we get a response from the Aduc Family." Minister Shederin said shortly after the delegation returned to the Larkinson fleet. "You should make preparations to conduct your procedure soon. Once the Aducs have made a decision, you should move quickly before they have second thoughts."

It turned out that Shederin's prediction was accurate!

Only a day after visiting the Green Dream, Ves received a notification from the Aduc Family that its matriarch requested another meeting. She was already boarding her shuttle in order to talk to Ves in person on his flagship!

"You can smell the urgency from the Aducs." Shederin smugly told Ves. "Your read of the Aducs is not wrong, but you have underestimated one crucial detail. The Aduc Family is a fairly centralized and unified family organization. While its members may struggle to make the right decision, Matriarch Erexu Aduc will not hesitate as much. A good leader can make all the difference."

It didn't take long for Matriarch Erexu to arrive at his office.

Due to the sensitivity of the current matter, Ves decided to meet her in private.

When the woman passed through the hatch, Ves was just finished with teasing Lucky. He tossed a half-eaten mineral across his shoulder. Lucky instantly dashed past his shoulder in order to catch his snack!

"Meow!"

Ves gestured to the nearby chair. "Please take a seat."

The head of the Aduc Family did so even as she looked around the office. She could learn much about the person she was talking to by studying how he decorated his workplace.

The various projected visuals and furnishings did not look too remarkable in her eyes. The leader of the Larkinson Clan clearly left the interior design to others.

The only truly personal touch he added to his office was his display case. There were several odd and strange trinkets on it. She only spared a brief glance towards the masterwork mech figurine but gave the prosperity tree a deep look.

The miniature tree was far from comparable to the Old Lady. Nonetheless, the small plant was still a notable specimen in her eyes.

Her demeanor lightened a bit as she finally reached the front of the desk before taking her seat.

"Thank you for allowing me to meet with you on short notice, patriarch. It would have been more convenient to talk over the galactic net, but the nature of our discussion does not allow for that. I also do not wish to waste too much time by communicating through our intermediaries."

Ves directed an odd glance towards the Aduc Matriarch. Her words as well as her actions showed that she had put herself in a lower position than the Larkinsons. This essentially exposed the Aduc Family's urgency and desire for a quick resolution.

This did not do their bargaining position any favors!

"My door is always open to friends and allies." Ves said in a calm tone. He needed to avoid getting caught in the matriarch's rhythm. "What can I do for you, matriarch?"

"You should know why I am here. Our family... held an important discussion about the future of the Old Lady. After weighing our choices and considering every conceivable alternative, we have decided to accept your offer of assistance."

"...That's remarkably efficient."



"Just because we value stability does not mean we are unable to accept change." The woman spoke with a determined tone in her voice. "Our family has lived through many difficult periods including the transition from the Age of Conquest to the Age of Mechs. There are times for deliberation, but there is also time for decisive action."

"Are you sure you want to proceed so quickly?" Ves skeptically asked. "Your tree is still in decent shape. I already told you that your oak tree's spirit will not die off anytime soon."

"We are aware of that, but the Old Lady has already suffered far too long. Her pain is our pain. It is unconscionable for us to go about our day as if nothing is wrong when there is hope for a better future. There is no use in procrastinating."

"Hm. That makes sense. I applaud your family's decisiveness."

"Can you help us, then? We would be immensely grateful if you can evolve the Old Lady to a state where she has overcome her suffering."

Ves subtly shook his head. "Your gratitude is appreciated, but I can't fill my stomach with it. I don't mind helping out your family, but you should be aware of the value of the service that I am offering to you. Evolving your Old Lady will grant you and your fellow Aducs a vast amount of benefits. As the leader of a large and growing clan, it would be irresponsible for me to aid you without fair remuneration."

What he was able to do for the Old Lady went far beyond the level of a favor, and both of them knew it. No matter the risks, the potential benefits were too great to be sold at a bargain!

"We will not demand your aid for free. Our family is not particularly large, but we have built up an interesting collection of resources over the years. One of the benefits of terraforming planets is that we can gain extensive access to rare planet-based goods."

Matriarch Erexidid well to hide her anxiousness, but Ves clearly knew he held a commanding position in this negotiation.

There was no way that Ves would squander this golden opportunity!

Ves leaned forward while folding his hands on his desk. "I'm not interested in ordinary minerals or alien tissue samples. We can obtain much of that on the open market. Money is even less interesting to us. Our financial position is stronger than ever and our mech company is bound to rise in the Red Ocean."

Matriarch Erexid frowned. "Then what do you require from us instead? We are willing to pay a price, but not if it cuts into our foundation."

"I have three demands." Ves straightforwardly declared before raising a finger. "First, I want your family to cooperate sincerely with our Larkinson Clan. The Transhumanist Faction brought us together because I asked for people with special abilities to engage in extremely sensitive research. The results we can achieve may be drastic enough to change the course of human history. Given how much of this research is based on my work, I think my clan deserves 80 percent ownership of the T Institute. If the help of your Aducs is effective enough to accelerate the progress of its research projects, then I am willing to give your family the remaining 20 percent."

"20 percent is not sufficient. The T Institute will only be an empty shell without the researchers from my family. Give us 40 percent."

"25 percent, but no higher. Having a lot of researchers doesn't mean anything if they don't have any viable research directions."

Matriarch Erexu curled her lips. "Let me hear your other demands first."

Ves raised another finger. "My second demand is that your Aduc Family forms a permanent partnership with our Larkinson Clan. You can choose which form you prefer. If possible, I would like to bring your family into our Golden Skull Alliance. However, you will have to implement many changes to the way you operate while our existing alliance partners will also have to make a lot of accommodations. If this is not viable, then your family could choose to become a fixed member of our Open Consortium or simply partner with our Larkinson Clan on a bilateral basis."

This was a more foreseeable demand. Matriarch Erexu didn't have much of an objection regarding this as the Transhumanist Faction already wanted to bring the Larkinsons and the Aducs together.

The only problem was determining the exact nature of the partnership. Joining the Golden Skull Alliance was anything but simple! Just thinking about all of the enemies it had made and all of the battles it had fought over its short existence already prompted her to reject this option in her heart!

Ves raised another finger. "Third and most importantly, I want to obtain whatever secret method your family employs to develop your spiritualities. During my visit to your Green Dream, I have observed that many of your Aducs have built up strong affinities for life and earth. I have never witnessed such a high concentration of spiritually activated humans in my life. What is even more improbable is that their alignment to life and earth is so uniform. There is no way that this is natural. I want your family to pass on the method responsible for producing these results."

"Impossible! Your last demand goes too far!"

"Why?"

Matriarch Erexí let out a tired breath. "I don't know how you are able to learn so much about us, but your deduction is close to the truth. We indeed possess a special means that has helped us become more effective at terraforming planets. This special method is the greatest secret of our family. Our ancestors have sworn an oath to maintain its secrecy, and every Aduc since has made the same pledge! It is unthinkable for us to break our promises!"

"If the very same rules no longer safeguards the Old Lady but instead contributes to her continued decline, then we should not hold on to them any longer. Is this not what you have taught to your children a day ago? Why are you unwilling to follow your own advice?"

"This is different, Patriarch Ves. Breaching our oath may save the Old Lady, but it will doom our family."

"Why? To whom did your ancestors pledge this oath of secrecy? Are the counterparts still around? If they are, do they have the guts to show up and punish your family for violating a centuries-old promise?"

"...The matter is complicated. Please change your request. Our family will not agree to your last demand. You are asking too much."

"I don't see it that way." Ves retorted. "Think about what your family will be getting in return. I am offering more than salvation. I am offering ascension. Your Old Lady will become far more than a mascot to your family. Just like the Golden Cat, it will become your literal guardian spirit, binding you to her existence so that she can always stay connected with you and your family members! There are so many benefits to the transformation that I have in mind that I cannot even explain it all. Compared to all of these changes, why bother with maintaining an obscure secret for no apparent reward? You won't lose anything by sharing your secret method to us. Our clan will promise to you that we will not pass it on any further."

"You are persuading us to breach our oath by guaranteeing that you will not break your promise to us. Do you not recognize how you are contradicting yourself?" Matriarch Erexí remarked.

"Promises only matter if they are based on contemporary interests as opposed to ancient covenants." Ves glibly replied. "Tell me the truth. Who are you benefiting by upholding your old and outdated oath?"

"I... cannot say."

Chapter 3997 The Final Resistance

Centuries of stability and gradual growth had made humanity complacent. Much of human society had grown stagnant to the point where wars had become extinct in many star sectors.

People's lives had become too orderly and upwards mobility was no longer possible due to the abundance of older and more established powers that monopolized most of the territory and resources available in a given region.

Several societal changes had completely changed the status quo!

The biggest of them was the opening of the Red Ocean!

With the opening of a brand new field of stars, the most ambitious people and groups who previously found it difficult to develop in their home regions suddenly found a lot of room for expansion!

The absence of entrenched human states and organizations meant that no one possessed an overwhelming advantage. Those that wished to found their own states or capture entire new markets finally received the opportunity of their lifetimes!

From young Rubarthan princes to 400-year old Master Mech Designers, a small but impressively high concentration of human talents had gotten loose in the Red Ocean!

The repressed ambitions and grand plans that they held in their hearts could finally be realized now that they no longer faced walls in every direction!

While the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy had definitely become the current focus of human civilization, that did not mean the Milky Way had become irrelevant!

Even if humankind only conquered roughly half of it, the galaxy which housed Old Earth was a behemoth that contained a vast amount of star systems. The amount of resources, living space and other necessities available to existing human powers was massive!

Old conflicts still raged on even as new ones occurred due to other changing circumstances.

Across human society, bonds of trust eroded while the order in many star sectors deteriorated.

For more than a year, the Crown Uprising had managed to upend every human state in the Milky Way!

Not even the most secure planets of the Terran Confederation or the Rubarth Empire had managed to escape the constant waves of suicide attacks!

The sheer amount of crazed fanatics emerging from the population while yelling about returning some sort of stolen crown was mind-boggling!

A lot of people's cognition of human civilization and the reach of large, trans-galactic organizations had irreversibly changed!

Previously, most people only thought their biggest threats were their neighboring and rival states. It was rare for them to think at all about whether they should fear threats originating from another star sector or star cluster.

Their views on society simply didn't extend that far! The galaxy was simply too big for them to comprehend and it was extremely unlikely for them to be able to move too far to get into contact with distant human groups.

The Crown Uprising along with the establishment of the Galactic Gate Network changed all of that in a single year!

The former caused many people to realize that they were directly affected by great events taking place in distant parts of human space. It was no longer enough for people to limit their awareness to their star sectors or even their own state anymore.

Many people began to speculate around the mysterious but terrifyingly huge force behind all of the activated sleeper agents. Though few knew the truth about the Five Scrolls Compact, some of their guesses became increasingly more accurate!

Already, many people became convinced that a secret faction operated in the shadows of human civilization. Its goals weren't quite clear, but what little they exposed showed that they definitely had the power and numbers to threaten the Big Two!

"Are the first-rate superstates about to overthrow the MTA and CFA? This is awful! Why can't we all get along and open up new territories like the Red Ocean in peace? There is plenty of space to go around."

"Doomsday is coming! No matter who wins or loses, our race will definitely grow weaker again! We have learned nothing from the Age of Conquest!"

"The hubris of humanity knows no bounds. The twilight of our race is at hand!"

What was worse was that the huge diaspora of humanity finally became a lot more connected due to gaining access to the beyonder gates.

The lesser beyonder gates that were able to bridge tens of thousands light-years revolutionized long-distance travel for everyone that could afford the high price of passage!

Journeys that previously took decades to complete now took days or weeks!

The various powers and groups that had long saturated their development in the galactic center suddenly found it a lot easier to expand their reach to the galactic heartland and the galactic rim.

The flow of funding, goods and people between every single star cluster had exploded!

This not only channeled a huge amount of development in regions that were previously considered remote, the changes also sparked a lot of new friction that frequently blew up into brand-new wars!

With the incitement of the Crown Uprising, even the most peaceful states and societies expanded their defense budgets.

Every layer of human society became affected in one way or another. More and more mech pilots were being called to arms while the production of mechs and war materiel reached record heights!

Security forces and mech armies quickly expanded their ranks and began to patrol their assigned territories more overtly.

Even when it appeared that the Crown Uprising was finally petering out due to the depletion of sleeper agents, the tensions that had been building up between different states and powers did not drop in the slightest.

Instead, they became even more intense than before! With less people worrying about guarding their homes against undetectable terrorists, they became less restrained about starting other fights!

The Yeina Star Cluster was no exception to this rule. Even though the build-up of aggression wasn't as high due to the remoteness of this region, already states such as the massive Garlen Empire were showing signs that they were no longer content with holding their existing territories.

The Friday Coalition became aware of the looming threats as well. The import of vital resources that were necessary to sustain a major war began to dwindle as they no longer became as readily available.

This along with many other signs caused the Fridaymen to have a bad feeling. Their urgency prompted their mech armies to accelerate their invasion plans and seek to topple the Hexadric Hegemony as fast as possible!

As long as the Friday Coalition was able to swallow up the territories of the crumbling Hexer state, its victorious people would be in a much better position to defend the Komodo Star Sector.

"The Komodo War must end. This war has already led to far too much destruction."

Tristan Wesseling, who was serving alongside the tired and battered elements of the Fortune Legion, became concerned about the future.

The Carnegie Group had suffered badly during the first half of the Komodo War. The initial invasion of the Hex Army had devastated many star systems.

Even though the Carnegies had already made a lot of progress in rebuilding places such as Leemar, it was undeniable that the balance of power within the Friday Coalition had changed.

If not for the fact that external powers were casting their gazes at the Komodo Star Sector, perhaps the stronger Coalition partners such as the Gauge Dynasty would have already made their moves towards their former allies!

Even if the Coalition partners reluctantly agreed to continue their cooperation in order to maintain a united front, Tristan was afraid that the cracks had already emerged.

"No one will be able to remain calm when there is so much conquered territory available!"

The fall of the Hexadric Hegemony was already set in stone. The Fridaymen just had to overcome the remaining opposition.

However, even as the Hex Army continually suffered losses across hundreds of battlefields, its surviving soldiers became increasingly more stubborn and deadly.

While the disparity in numbers may have grown too great to give the Hexers a chance of making a comeback, this did not weaken their willingness to fight at all! In fact, they became even more adamant about killing the Fridaymen!

"Kill the invaders!"

"The Hexer dream shall never die!"

"Death is not our end! All of us shall return to the Superior Mother's embrace in the end!"

The Fridaymen forces that were pushing deeper into Hexer territory started to notice that their opposition became increasingly more irrational on the battlefield.

Even as their highest leaders and most elite soldiers quietly pulled out in order to accompany the evacuation fleets as they fled to the Red Ocean, the remaining grunts and soldiers did not become demoralized.

Instead, they became more feverish in their opposition! Entire Hexer mech armies and mech divisions launched head-on attacks at the invading Fridayman forces.



The ferocity of the Hexers rose even as their access to supplies, mechs and mech pilots had dwindled!

No matter the state of their mech units, the Hexer soldiers did not entertain any notion of retreat or surrender.

The Fridaymen fighting against these rabid women and their simpering boys could not understand why the opposition did not lose heart after the departure of so many leaders.

By now, the six matriarchal dynasties had already abandoned the Hegemony entirely!

Even the smaller groups such as the Wodin Dynasty had left behind much of their territories and fixed assets in order to escape with whatever they could carry away on short notice.

"Why aren't you laying down your arms, already? Your state is already gone! Your leaders have already run away! There is nothing left for you to fight anymore!"

"We must defend our people!"

"You are not doing your fellow Hexers any favors by fighting! The more we have to fight, the more your civilians will suffer."

"They will gladly sacrifice their lives to preserve the righteousness of female superiority!"

"You stupid witches! You are all dying for a lost cause. The Hegemony is already over. Your boys will finally learn how to live like men. There is a brand new future for Hexers such as yourself. As long as you go through our reeducation programs, you will learn that there are much better causes for you to fight for. Don't you have enough of this war?"

"The Superior Mother demands our devotion! Blood must be spilled to satisfy our Supreme! If not yours, then mine shall be our sacrificial offering!"

"You're crazy! All of you deranged witches have gone utterly crazy!"

The remaining Hexer leaders who were left to fight the Fridaymen exhibited similar behavior. The Fridaymen simply couldn't understand why their opponents had lost their sense of self-preservation.

Over time, the Fridaymen didn't even bother to think about it anymore. All they knew was that every armed Hexer needed to be killed without exception.

No matter whether they were women or boys, every citizen of this collapsing state was more than willing to sacrifice their lives in order to take down at least one Fridayman!

What was even more ridiculous was that many surviving Hexer mech factories had stopped with fabricating other mech models. They exclusively focused on producing as many Valkyrie mechs as possible!

A lot of surviving Hexer mech armies ditched their previous combined arms doctrine. They threw away their balanced mix of mech models in favor of fielding overwhelming numbers of Valkyrie Redeemers and variants.

A lot of invading Fridaymen mech units started to encounter death on a frequent basis as they pushed into the interior of Hegemon space.

Thousands if not tens of thousands of Valkyrie mechs frequently emerged on the battlefield. Many of them barely bothered to organize themselves before launching all-out suicide charges at the Fridayman positions!

"Death comes to everyone!"

"Let us reap their souls!"

"The Superior Mother shall reign in the end!"

Many Hexer star systems turned into killing fields due to the radical behavior of the remnants of the Hex Army.

The Fridaymen suffered badly but the Hexers lost even more lives!

The number of battle-ready Hexer soldiers dwindled at an unprecedented rate. The cloud of death hanging over the Komodo Star Sector grew even heavier as the potential of many strong and healthy humans were cut short by the final resistance of the Hexer people.

"Is it worth it to die for an imaginary god?" Tristan once questioned a captive Hexer officer.

The spiteful woman in restraints responded with a smirk. "The Superior Mother is no figment of our imagination. She is very real. Soon I shall join her side in death and fight for her for eternity!"

"That's nonsense."

"The Superior Mother does not care for your opinion. All she wants from us is blood and death, hahahaha!"

"Hahahahaha!"

"HAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

## Chapter 3998 Rallying Call

"You are no emperor."

"You are a second-class rat."

"You have come to the wrong state."

A large number of heavily-armored dwarven troops had barged into a ceremonial throne room.

The palace that incorporated the throne room was a new addition to Copperblock IX, a planet that was located within the territory of a prosperous first-rate state.

What caused the planet to stand out among other highly developed settlements was that it was larger and more massive than ordinary globes.

It was a heavy gravity planet where ordinary people would get crushed by their own weight if they wandered around without protection!

Even though every first-class citizen had the means to obtain this protection, most humans preferred to stay away from these troublesome planets.

This meant that the vast majority of people living in this particular space consisted of heavy gravity variant humans, otherwise known as dwarves.

For centuries, the dwarves that had settled in this prosperous star system had avoided the fate of many of their lessers and built up many massive companies and alliances.

From mining companies to mech companies, the industrious dwarves of the Copperblock System expanded their business across the state known as the United Kingdoms of Parnea.

The internal situation of Parnea was messy to say the least. Formed out of a partial fusion of different kingdoms, it was arguably the weakest first-rate state in human space.

Nonetheless, the power and wealth available to even the poorest first-raters far surpassed that of the second-raters!

It was due to the relative weaknesses and the many internal fault lines of the United Kingdoms of Parnea that a foreign dwarven ruler came from afar in order to build up more support for his cause.

The dwarven powers that had long divided Copperblock IX among themselves did not take kindly to the arrival of this dwarven loser.

Initially, they dismissed the presence of the Vulcanites. A bit of research revealed that they were nothing more than fleeing survivors of a fallen dwarven state.

Only sympathy towards their fellow dwarves caused these powers to leave the Vulcanites alone.

In any case, the refugees who had fled from afar were not poor. They had likely raided much of their former state's treasury before they ran away to the galactic center.

If not for the timely establishment of the Milky Way Galactic Gate Network, there was no way this group of refugees would have been able to reach the galactic center so quickly!

Even so, the Vulcanite immigrants drained their wealth remarkably quickly. The cost of everything was at least a thousand times higher than back in their home state. Some goods and services even cost a million times more than normal!

After paying for everything, the Vulcanites under the leadership of 'Emperor' Rion Aaden started to get dangerously low on funds.

This was extremely dangerous in first-rate states as the native population had little tolerance for broke people who only took up precious space without making any significant contributions!

While Rion was able to rely on foreign support to pay the bills, this did not change the fact that his organization continued to bleed a lot of money. This was especially the case when he still dared to pursue ambitious expansion plans!

This was why the Iron Emperor began to expand his influence among the dwarven natives of Copperblock IX.

For months, this eccentric dwarf ran around courting different dwarven people and organizations left and right.

A lot of powerful dwarves scoffed at this pathetic attempt. The balance of power on the heavy gravity planet had long been set in stone! Many companies were already aligned to the different power blocs that controlled Copperblock IX for many centuries. How could a bunch of second-class beggars possibly succeed in winning the support of these local elements, especially when the Vulcanites were lacking in so much money, strength and resources?

Much to the surprise of the complacent dwarven rulers, the Iron Emperor actually managed to achieve results.

Over thirty percent of the organizations courted by the Vulcanites eventually chose to break up their long-standing alliances.

Instead, these dwarven magnates and other important figures decisively threw their support behind the so-called Iron Emperor and his band of survivors!

The Vulcanites turned from a joke into a rising faction practically overnight!

When hundreds of successful companies and organizations united behind the Iron Emperor, the rulers of Copperblock IX finally realized that they could no longer afford to do nothing!

Already, the abrupt departure of so many long-term partners and allies had seriously affected the health of their own power blocs. Restoring the status quo became an acute priority!

This led to the current dramatic sight!

Several different mech forces under the control of the established local powers had descended onto the headquarters of the Vulcanites.

The powerful first-class multipurpose mechs overloaded the energy shields, demolished the defensive turrets, and overwhelmed the defending mechs by relying on their overwhelming superiority in numbers.

Not even Saint Yila Mayorka, who recently obtained a first-class ace mech courtesy of an allied dwarven mech company, was able to repel the invasion!

The Olympus Mons Mark II did not dare to move as it hovered over the main palace.

Eight opposing dwarven ace mechs surrounded the Mountain Hammer's new ace mech from every direction!

None of the powerful machines made any aggressive moves. Fights between ace mechs could easily escalate to the point of destroying entire cities!

Even if Saint Yila was outnumbered eight-to-one, if she truly wanted to, she could easily destroy a huge amount of infrastructure and kill thousands of dwarven citizens.

In fact, the local powers also hoped to win over the ace pilot.

The value of a halfgod was extremely precious, even for first-class powers!

While the chances of winning over opposing ace pilots was low, there was still a realistic chance of converting them as long as their 'owners' voluntarily relinquished their control over their champions.

This was why the elite assault troops that invaded the throne room did not immediately shoot their powerful plasma rifles and other formidable weapons at the massive, armored figure occupying the highest seat!

Instead, they made sure to disarm and secure the Iron Emperor's guards before waiting for further instructions from above.

Several projections soon came to life. Each of them displayed the leaders of the various major powers of Copperblock IX.

The center figure threw a disgusted expression at the leader of the guests from afar.

"Mr. Aaden."

[THE CORRECT PHRASE TO ADDRESS A MONARCH WHOSE RANK IS HIGHER THAN A PRINCE IS 'YOUR MAJESTY'.]

Chairman Merleus Davon snorted. "Mister. Aaden. In the last four months, Copperblock IX has generously given shelter to you and your ragged group of refugees. Based on our shared kinship, we have made several exceptions to our rules and allowed you to settle down on our planet and purchase land and property from our companies."

[WE DID NOT RECEIVE ANY CHARITY FROM YOUR ORGANIZATIONS. WE PAID EVERY FEE AND PURCHASED EVERY GOOD AND SERVICE AT FULL OR EVEN INFLATED PRICES.]

"We would have stopped you from entering our star system in the first place. Settling in a first-rate state is much more difficult than you can imagine. We gave you a chance to live on Copperblock IX, but instead you chose to bite the hand that fed you by taking over our business partners."

[YOUR 'BUSINESS PARTNERS' ARE NOT YOUR VASSALS. THEY ARE FREE TO DECIDE WHO THEY WANT TO COOPERATE WITH. NEITHER OF US HAVE BROKEN ANY LAWS. THE COMPANIES HAVE ALL PAID THE PENALTY FEES FOR PREMATURELY ENDING THEIR CONTRACTS WHENEVER APPLICABLE. THE REASON WHY THEY WERE GLAD TO JUMP SHIP WAS BECAUSE OF YOUR LONG-STANDING EXPLOITATION OF THOSE YOU REGARD AS YOUR LACKEYS.]

The chairman of the largest consortium on Copperblock IX grew angry! If not for his impeccable training and his sophisticated implants, he would have exploded at the pretentious foreign dwarf by now! As it was, he felt there was little point in continuing this discussion.

"Mr. Aaden, we have not come in order to hear your excuses. We have come in order to expel you and your disruptive group of Vulcanites from this planet and star system. You are to cease your business operations and other active ventures in our star system

within a week. We have given instructions to all of the relevant institutions to expedite the withdrawal of your organization. We are even willing to forgo all of the punishment clauses and pay full price for all of the assets that you must liquidate on short notice."

[IT APPEARS YOU ARE EAGER TO SEE US DEPART.]

"Copperblock welcomes you no longer. The sooner you and your followers return to your ships and go, the sooner our star system can return to calm. We only ask for one single concession to guarantee your smooth departure."

[AND THAT IS?]

"The allegiance of Saint Yila Mayorka. A declining private individual such as yourself is unworthy to command a heroic dwarven ace pilot. Free her from her oath of loyalty so that we may offer her a brighter future as a proud citizen of the United Kingdoms of Parnea."

[IMPOSSIBLE.] The Iron Emperor boomed as his giant armored figure rose from the massive throne. One of its bulky arms held an ancient banner while the other gripped an oversized hand cannon. [SAINT MAYORKA DOES NOT SERVE AN INDIVIDUAL. HER LOYALTY LIES WITH THE DWARVEN PEOPLE AS A WHOLE. SHE WILL NEVER ANY OBEY ANY INSTRUCTIONS THAT ARE DETRIMENTAL TO OUR SPECIES. UNFORTUNATELY FOR YOU, YOUR ACTIONS INHIBIT THE RISE OF DWARVENKIND.]

"What are you talking about?! We are all dwarves, here!"

The thick helmet of the Iron Emperor retracted to reveal a hard and grizzled dwarven head.

[DID YOU KNOW THAT THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF DWARVES IN HUMAN SPACE? THERE ARE DWARVES WHO BETRAY THEIR OWN BY COLLABORATING WITH HUMANS, AND THERE ARE DWARVES WHO EARNESTLY FIGHT FOR THEIR DIGNITY AND SURVIVAL. I KNOW WHICH GROUP I BELONG TO. WHAT OF YOU, CHAIRMAN?]

As Rion Aaden boldly spoke, the gems set onto his crown began to glow and shine with power!

At this point, the Iron Emperor appeared much more valiant and authoritative than the various kings that nominally rule over the United Kingdoms of Parnea!

Chairman Merleus Davon and many of his fellow dwarves couldn't help but stare at the crown that was resting on top of the supposed monarch's head.



Even though the powerful dwarven leaders had seen more opulent and luxurious crowns throughout their lives, the angular and blocky object somehow evoked many associations within their hearts and minds!

It was a pity that the effect was a bit muted due to distance. Chairman Davon was unable to appreciate the full splendor of the Imperial Crown because he was actually situated in an underground bunker located on the opposite side of Copperhead IX!

"We will not engage in your twisted arguments any further, Mr. Aaden. We have already given you our ultimatum. Either release Saint Mayorka from your service, or we will crush you and each and every Vulcanite with the full might of our strike force. Your time has come to an end, dwarf."

[YOU ARE WRONG. MY TIME IS JUST BEGINNING.] Rion confidently smiled. [IT IS YOU THAT SHOULD BE WORRYING ABOUT RUNNING OUT OF TIME. THANK YOU FOR SENDING YOUR ACE PILOTS TO US. YOU HAVE GIVEN US A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO PERSUADE YOUR CHAMPIONS TO FIGHT FOR TRUE DWARVEN JUSTICE!]

Chairman Merleus Davon and his fellow dwarven rulers wanted to dismiss the upstart's words as outright delusions, but they started to get a bad feeling about this situation.

The Iron Emperor did not care about their doubts. The massive armored figure lifted the arm that held the ancient banner and seemed to peer straight through the roof of the throne room!

Both of Rion's relics released a bronze glow that made every nearby soldier feel connected to a presence that was greater and more magnificent than any other dwarf they had met in their lives!

[SAINT VORKAN ESPRAN!]

[SAINT GWENDOLYN DAVON!]

[SAINT MORVOGEN QUAS!]

[SAINT DIMITAR ACLUSIEU!]

[SAINT RABARBA DONALD!]

[SAINT TONY KOONZE!]

[SAINT REYA AMETRE!]

[SAINT GULIN POLLINTER!]

As the Iron Emperor called out each ace pilot in the service of different Copperhead power blocs, the foreign leader spoke as if he had transformed into a divine emissary!

[IN THE NAME OF VULCAN, RENOUNCE YOUR FORMER LOYALTIES! SUBMIT TO MY LEADERSHIP AND HELP ME LEAD DWARVENKIND TO A BETTER FUTURE!]

Much to the surprise of Chairman Davon and the other Copperheads, the dutiful champions that had put much effort into strengthening their loyalties all commanded their ace mechs to lower the arms pointed towards the Olympus Mons Mark II!

The eight ace mechs that previously fought on behalf of the Copperheads simultaneously turned outwards while their pilots simultaneously issued their response to the Iron Emperor's rallying call!

"WE FIGHT FOR DWARVENKIND!"

### Chapter 3999 The Nyxian War

Since the outbreak of the Crown Uprising, every part of human space became affected in one way or another.

Some star sectors suffered outbreaks of wars. Other star sectors only became a little more turbulent.

Then there were places that had descended into so much chaos that madness reigned in every corner!

The Nyxian Gap had always been a weird and special place in the Yeina Star Cluster. Situated mostly within the borders of the Komodo Star Sector, the anomalous region had been so difficult to navigate and control that it existed as a stateless territory.

The only permanent residents of the Nyxian Gap were pirates, refugees and captives, because only the most desperate and helpless people were willing to take shelter in this seemingly endless field of asteroids.

For a long time, the nearby star sectors frequently withstood the raids launched by pirate groups emerging from the Gap.

All of that had changed.

The pirates and other scum in the Nyxian Gap no longer held sway in this anomalous region.

Instead, the existing pirate alliances and other messy groups had either gone extinct or chosen to pledge their loyalties to the newly-emerged superpowers of the region!

The Oblivion Empire had grown extremely quickly in a matter of years. It originated from a dark mercenary corps called the Oblivion Hand, which had not made a lot of waves for most of its existence.

The Oblivion Hand had slowly stood out and attracted more attention due to two major reasons.

First, it managed to achieve a string of improbable victories against larger and more powerful Nyxian groups.

Second, it was remarkably effective in converting captive pirates into its loyal soldiers!

Even then, the powerful pirate alliances that traditionally held sway in the Nyxian Gap never paid too much attention to this emerging power.

It wasn't until the Crown Uprising had started that the Oblivion Hand quickly expanded its reach across the inner periphery and the core regions of the gap!

A rapid process of conquest and conversion took place in many directions as the Oblivion Hand's troops expanded in numbers after every victory.

No one knew exactly how the Oblivion Hand was able to turn every sullen captive into loyal and eager soldiers.

However, a rumor had slowly spread throughout the Nyxian Gap and beyond.

As the Oblivion Hand continued to show its strength, it began to unveil more expert pilots than before!

Prominent pirate mech pilots who used to be known as mortals suddenly showed the strength of expert candidates and expert pilots in their next battles!

The rumor stated that the mysterious leader of the Oblivion Hand mastered a dark form of sorcery that was capable of granting forbidden power to mech pilots!

Those that had never proven themselves worthy of greater strength received the opportunity to ascend to godhood after being rewarded by the woman that took an increasingly more direct role in leading the rapidly-growing organization.

By the time the Oblivion Hand toppled one of the last resisting pirate alliances, the mysterious woman boldly stepped forward and announced the founding of the Oblivion Empire!

Although many outsiders found the entire notion to be extremely silly, the fact of the matter was that the Oblivion Empire had become a force to be reckoned with in the Nyxian Gap!

It not only conquered many territories in the massive field of asteroids, but also grasped many rare and precious resource sites, which it could trade with many nearby states in exchange for precious mechs and starships.

If that wasn't impressive enough, the rumored ability of the Oblivion Empress, also known as Lady Nyx, attracted many mech pilots near and far. These former soldiers were all mortals who were unhappy with their inability to break through to the next rank.

Instead of surrendering to reality, the desperate mech pilots decisively abandoned the comfort of their current lives and traveled to the infamous Nyxian Gap in the faint hope of seeing whether the rumors were true.

Even if everyone around them thought they were fools to believe in this fairy tale, there were still plenty of mech pilots who were willing to do anything to become an expert pilot!

They were already desperate enough to dive into a literal black hole in order to get their chance. Entering a figurative black hole like the Nyxian Gap was not a big deal in comparison!

Fueled by the influx of foreign mech pilots and everything else they brought into the Nyxian Gap, the Oblivion Empire was rapidly able to develop its territories while strengthening its forces with mixed mech units.

While the anomalies that plagued the Nyxian Gap should have inhibited the rise of an actual state, Lady Nyx appeared to have gained the ability to tame the dangerous anomalies that could shred or disappear entire MTA or CFA warfleets from existence!

With the protection offered by the so-called Lady of the Night, her Oblivion Empire seemed poised to turn the entire Nyxian Gap into her sole dominion!

This would be an incredibly remarkable result! If the Oblivion Empire completed its conquest, the Nyxian Gap would turn into the only sovereign territory of humanity that did not answer to the MTA and CFA!

Yet before the Oblivion Empire could complete its conquest, a powerful and even more mysterious opponent had emerged from the depths of the Nyxian Gap!

Waves and waves of powerful mechs and actual warships erupted from the most central region of the massive field of asteroids and began to assail the Oblivion Empire from within!

"Who are these guys?!"

"I don't know, but their mechs and warships are too strong!"

It did not take long before the opponents of the Oblivion Empire made itself known!

"WE ARE THE SUCCESSORS OF THE HALLOWED ABYSS TEMPLE!"

"WE ARE THE HERALDS OF THE DARK GODS!"

"THE ABYSS EMPIRE SHALL SPREAD TRUE DARKNESS THROUGH THE NYXIAN GAP!"

Although the number of advanced mechs and warships bursting from the center of the Nyxian Gap was limited, the 'Abyss Empire' showed that its background was even larger than the Oblivion Empire!

Hundreds of random organizations originating from all over the Yeina Star Cluster randomly decided to pack their bags and travel to the Nyxian Gap!

Different from the fleets led by mech pilots eager to receive the blessing of the Oblivion Empress, the other groups decisively sided with the Abyss Empire!

No one knew why the Abyssal Servants as they became known all threw their lot with a random super cult from one of the most forbidden locations of human space, but it did not change the fact that the Oblivion Empire was being attacked from within and without!

While the Oblivion Servants had shown great strength against the original pirate forces that previously held sway over large parts of the Nyxian Gap, the successor of the Hallowed Abyss Temple was a completely different beast!

The core forces of the inexorable Abyss Army were almost undefeatable by regular troops. Part of it was because their black ships and black mechs were actually built to first-class standards!

"What!? Where the hell are the Abyss Servants getting the materials and tech to build all of these first-class war machines? Don't tell me that they are the secret sons of the Terrans or Rubarthans!"

"Feh! Who cares if they are first-raters who have come to take over our turf. Let us remind these arrogant pricks that not even the Big Two dare to send their warfleets in our Gap!"

The core forces of the Abyss Army soon met a huge amount of opposition as the Oblivion Army finally repositioned its own troops to answer the threat from the central region.

While the Oblivion Army did not possess any first-class war assets, they compensated for this shortcoming with other advantages.

Chief among them was the dark sorcery of the Lady of the Night!

Through a mixture of unknown technology and other mysterious methods, the space around the invading Abyssal troops turned into nightmares!

The black fleets disintegrated at a remarkable pace when the shadow of the Oblivion Empress herself descended upon the battlefield!

With one massive wave of her hand, the Lady of the Night called out the souls of the damned from an unknown dimension. The chained and shackled ghosts cycled through the hulls of every starship and warship only to harvest the souls of their crew!

With another wave of her hand, the Oblivion Empress summoned massive spatial anomalies in the midst of several mech formations.

The powerful first-class mechs that were strong enough to crush the Oblivion Army's shabby mech forces easily crumpled inwards or tore apart when the fabric of space itself turned into a weapon!

However, the Abyss Empire did not allow the Lady of the Night to perform her dark sorcery with impunity for long!

"One of our Dark Gods has come!"

"We are saved!"

The Abyssal Servants fighting against one of the fleets of the Oblivion Army all perked up when reinforced finally arrived.

Within the expanding conflict that became known as the Nyxian War, everyone learned that the only way to defeat a god was to bring another god!

As an empire that was originally based on one of the most powerful and secretive cults of the Nyxian Gap, how could the Abyss Empire not have the protection of its own deities?

Even though the former cult had lost contact with the Unending One, the Blinding One and the Inexorable One, a new generation of dark gods had risen from the abyss in order to fight for dominion over the Nyxian Gap!

Each of them appeared as massive humanoid energy apparitions that were able to phase through solid matter but also unleash devastating attacks whenever they wished!

Soon enough, Abyssal Servants began to whisper the names of the dark gods that watched over them and assisted them in battle.

"The Cold One!"

The dark god known by this moniker seemed to suck the warmth out of everything that came too close. Both allies and enemies had fallen victim to her frost as the calamitous entity resisted and counterattacked the Lady of the Night!

"The Massive One!"

This was one of the largest dark gods, and it was not without a reason. The Massive One was able to manipulate gravity, and used it to terrifying effect by generating devastating gravity wells in the middle of enemy fleets. His high density also made it difficult for his opponents to inflict harm on his massive bulk.

"The Patient One!"

This was perhaps the most terrifying enemy of the Oblivion Empire. The Patient One appeared as a giant human sage. His long beard along with his traditional robe made it seem as if this powerful entity belonged in heaven, but he wasn't called a dark god for nothing.

Lady Nyx herself struggled to resist his attacks the most! This was because the power mastered by the Patient One was time!

Every gesture made by the Patient One was able to achieve amazing effects!

From creating pockets of space that were frozen in time to accelerating the approach of entire warships, the Patient One had displayed an astounding mastery of the power of time!

If not for the fact that the Oblivion Empress had gained at least partial control of the Nyxian Gap itself, she would never have been able to fend off all of the dark gods that had crawled out of the woodwork!

The attrition suffered by the two sides was horrendous. Not a day went by when mechs and warships worth an astounding amount of money went asunder!

In numerous battles, the outcome of a fight wasn't even based on the efforts of human soldiers.

Instead, the duels between the gods determined who got to live or die!

"What are these things? Are they really gods...?"

"I think so. This is not a power that humans like us can harness anymore. If my guess is right, then Lady Nyx and the dark gods should be god pilots!"



"What?! God pilots?! Are you kidding?!"

"I'm not kidding. Their powers are just as powerful as that of other god pilots and god mechs! It turns out that we have been fighting in the presence of the most powerful mech pilots all along!"

"Damn! I need to fight even harder, then! If the Lady of the Nyx is truly a god pilot, then she can help all of us advance to her exalted rank!"

The spread of this new rumor practically invigorated those that were thinking about joining the Nyxian War.

Many mech pilots who previously started to get second thoughts after learning about the bloodbaths that took place in the Nyxian Gap all firmed up their resolve!

"Only gods and heroes will survive this war!"

#### Chapter 4000 The Battle of Gods and Heroes

As the Nyxian War continued to unfold, many groups of people flocked to the Nyxian Gap as if they were moths to a flame.

The fantastical rumors that spread through certain channels continually enthralled mech pilots that yearned to break past their mortal limitations and ascend to a higher state.

To many of them, the journey to the Nyxian Gap was their first step on the path of godhood!

It didn't matter if the battles were exceptionally cruel and deadly.

It didn't matter if entire fleets got destroyed at once due to the machinations of hostile god-like entities.

It didn't even matter that the majority of mech pilots who joined one of the two shadow empires did not appear to get any stronger.

Even a 0.1 percent chance to overcome their lifelong stagnation and weakness was enough for them to fight for the chance to rise to the same height as the likes of the Lady of the Night and the dark gods!

Most mech pilots who were free to choose their sides often flocked to the Oblivion Empire. Its members enjoyed more freedom and they received more support in their attempts to surpass their former selves.

They also adhered to the belief that the Oblivion Empress was the strongest 'god pilot' in the Nyxian Gap! Otherwise, how could she fend off so many other supposed god pilots throughout the war?

Worshiping the strong was a natural behavior of mech pilots!

That said, the Abyss Empire did not fall too far behind. Not only did it have a connection to an unknown first-class organization, it also attracted an unlikely collection of second-class and third-class groups throughout the surrounding regions.

A constant stream of mechs, starships, resources and manpower flowed into a hazardous region that was already known to be deadly in normal times.

Now, the collision between two different shadow empires had turned it into a meat grinder of unfathomable proportion!

Though the scale of the Nyxian War was unable to match the scale of the Komodo War, it devoured a huge amount of lives, assets and potential every day!

Normal states would quickly descend into ruination if their armed forces suffered so much attrition.

However, neither the Oblivion Empire nor the Abyss Empire lost any momentum!

Instead, both of them grew more powerful and expansive as they absorbed more newcomers over time.

It wasn't just the Yeina Star Cluster that replenished their losses anymore. People and groups from other star clusters also heard about all of the wondrous and terrible events that took place in the Nyxian Gap and chose to take part in the greatest war of their lifetimes.

"This is our only chance to fight in the presence of gods!"

"The only way for us to advance to god pilot is to fight against the gods themselves!"

"The Nyxian Gap is the paradise of true warriors!"

With all of these beliefs and more, the soldiers of the Oblivion Empire valiantly took up arms and valiantly fought against the troops of the Abyss Empire!

Some of these mech pilots even dared to fight against the dark gods themselves!

The increasing amount of troops traveling to the Nyxian Gap started to affect an increasing amount of states. Many of them found that they were losing an increasing number of mech pilots.

No matter whether they were working in the private sector or public sector, mech pilots represented an important source of strength for any state!

What was worse was that these ambitious mech pilots rarely departed by themselves. They not only brought their mechs along, but also their buddies as they still needed people to crew their ships and service their machines.

If this pattern continued, how would states be able to retain their ability to fight? If their pool of reserves and war material was already half-depleted, then it was impossible to gain any advantages in a war! The losses would far outweigh the gains in most scenarios!

A lot of leaders and officials began to beg the Mech Trade Association to intervene. The mechers needed to stop the bleeding.

Yet no matter how many high-ranking dignitaries knocked on the doors of the Association, its representatives remained silent on this issue!

The mechers didn't come out and deny the requests. Each of them seemed to have been ordered to remain silent even as the ripple effects of the Nyxian War grew far beyond the boundaries of the Nyxian Gap!

Few people understood why the MTA chose to pretend that nothing unusual was taking place.

Perhaps the mechers were too traumatized by all of the losses they suffered whenever they sent their warfleets into the Nyxian Gap.

Perhaps the mechers did not care about the horrendous loss of life and did not have as much power left to intervene after redirecting a lot of war assets to the Red Ocean.

There were even people who believed the mechers actually looked forward to witnessing the two shadow empires fight and unveil all kinds of abnormal abilities!

Whatever the case, a lot of people once again realized how useless and unreliable the Mech Trade Association had become as of late. The branches in the Yeina Star Cluster appeared to be especially incompetent!

"Have the mechers all replaced themselves with androids gone into hibernation or something?"

"I told you that these high-and-mighty first-raters don't care about us space peasants at all! They are already willing to see trillions of us fall against the aliens. Letting our entire star cluster suffer hardly keeps them awake at night."

"If this isn't a conspiracy, then I'm a Star Designer!"

As the Nyxian War continually escalated in intensity and scope, the Oblivion Empire recently started to receive a large amount of reinforcements from a close neighbor.

Large amounts of depleted and war-worn mech units of the Hex Army poured into the Nyxian Gap without any hesitation!

Each of these soldiers chose to fight on behalf of the Oblivion Empire after they answered a mysterious call.

There was nothing else left for them to fight anymore. The Hegemony's battle lines had collapsed. Their once-might state was losing star systems every day. Many of the leaders and elites that had taken charge of the Hexers for so long had chosen to run away to the Red Ocean like cowards instead of fighting to the end!

The fall of many Hexer planets was already assured. Trillions of honest Hexer citizens would soon fall under the sway of the terrible and tyrannical Fridaymen.

The victorious conquerors would surely take revenge on the Hexers by putting all of those innocent Hexer women and boys into reeducation camps where the prisoners would be forced to acknowledge that men were equal to women!

Faced with the horrific extinction of the Hexer way of life, the increasingly more ragged remnants of the Hex Army made several different choices.

The good ones were usually conscripted by the Hexer elites to accompany their evacuation fleets to the Red Ocean. There, they would have a second chance at starting a new and improved Hexer state.

The most fanatical and devoted followers of the Superior Mother became affected by a sector-wide mania that drove them to pilot as many Valkyrie mechs as they could get their hands on. Their only goal was to sow as much death as possible before they inevitably fell!

There was also a third group of Hexer soldiers that chose a different path. They did not desert from the Hegemony nor threw their lives away as if they were worthless.

The most hardened and experienced Hexer troops all gathered whatever mechs and ships they had left before leaving the crumbling battlefields. Each of their fleets left the Hegemony behind them and traveled straight to the Nyxian Gap!

At least tens of thousands of veteran Hexer mech pilots sought out the Oblivion Empire and joined the Oblivion Army on the spot!

The former Hexers-turned-Oblivion Servants quickly made themselves popular. Although many people found their Hexer beliefs to be annoying, their effective combat strength along with their military efficiency impressed a lot of other soldiers.

One of the more recent additions to the Oblivion Army was the Wrathful Doves.

At its height, the once-renowned mech army group fielded over 300,000 mechs!

However, as the Wrathful Doves continually threw themselves against their Fridaymen counterparts, their numbers kept depleting. The trickle of reinforcements could never catch up with the rate of attrition!

This had caused the Wrathful Doves to lose so many mech divisions and mech regiments that they only retained around 36,000 functional mechs when they joined the Oblivion Army.

Fortunately, the Wrathful Doves still maintained a strong core, even if many of their mechs and carrier vessels were falling behind in repairs and maintenance.

Of particular note to the Oblivion Army was the high-ranking mech pilots of the defecting Hexers.

Expert candidates, expert pilots and even ace pilots had chosen to continue their vocation in the Nyxian Gap rather than fight for the Hexer dynasties that had abandoned the Hegemony before the frontlines had even collapsed!

Each of these powerful elites received a lot of attention from the Oblivion Servants.

One day, a special expert mech descended upon one of the asteroid bases of the Oblivion Empire.

The mech resembled a Valkyrie Redeemer, but the difference was that it was built to the standards of an expert mech!

The Valkyrie Reaper was one of the first expert mechs the Hexers had developed!

While the Hexer mech designers were unable to design living expert mechs from scratch, they had discovered that there were still ways for them to build what they desired.

They simply had to take the frame of an existing living mech and upgrade it into an expert mech!

After a lot of trial and error, all of the Seniors and Masters learned that as long as their improved designs remained faithful to the spirit of the original Valkyrie Redeemer, the Superior Mother would still extend her blessing!

This enabled the rise of powerful expert mechs that perfectly complemented the new generation of expert pilots that had broken through while piloting one of the many Valkyrie mechs in service!

"Venerable Dorsa Avinx, reporting for duty." A weary expert pilot saluted an officer of the Oblivion Army.

The man responded with a sloppy salute of his own. "Welcome to Shardeen Fortress, Venerable Avinx. We have heard much about your exploits from your fellow Hexer comrades. You are one of the emissaries of a goddess."

"A Supreme is greater than a goddess." Venerable Avinx corrected the man.

"Whatever. We won't stop you Hexers from worshiping the Superior Mother as long as you don't bother anyone else. I am sure you have already read our rules. Just keep in mind that most of us respect the Lady of the Night over any other god or 'Supreme', do you understand?"

"It makes no difference to me. Lady Nyx is merely another Aspect of the Superior Mother."

"You best keep that belief to yourself. The non-Hexers among us don't take kindly to the notion that the Oblivion Empress actually thinks men should be treated as little boys."

Though Venerable Avinx really wanted to knock some sense into the officer, she knew that this was no time to crusade for her beliefs.

"You told me that I came at a good time. Why is that?" She asked instead.

The man's face quickly soured. "A large mech army from the Abyssal Empire is on its way. Shardeen Fortress is one of our most important strongholds. It is not only a junction between different zones, but is also one of the few sites where we have built a lot of infrastructure. If we lose this base, we lose the ability to repair and build a lot of mechs and ships."

Venerable Avinx did not care too much about the prospect of heading into battle again. She had fought so many battles that death had become a part of her being.

"I will be ready to fight. My expert mech is in decent shape as well. Can I ask..."

"The Lady of the Night will definitely fight with us. The Oblivion Army will certainly bring its own dark gods, so we cannot fall behind. This is going to be a major battle. We need heroes like you to help wherever you can. Will you help us defend Shardeen Fortress?"

The Hexer expert pilot decisively nodded. Even though the Oblivion Empire was nothing like the Hexadric Hegemony, Venerable Avinx fully accepted the need to defend her new state!

The battle that both sides were preparing for started only days later.

The Wrathful Doves and other new arrivals barely had time to integrate into the Oblivion Army's structure and chain of command when distant patrols detected the approach of a massive Abyssal fleet!

Hours went by as both sides readied hundreds of thousands of mechs for deployment. These mechs came from all kinds of sources. Second-class mechs deployed alongside third-class mechs as neither side were too picky about the quality and strength levels of those that joined their ranks.

Not only that, the Oblivion Servants and the Abyssal Servants also prepared their respective warships. Just like the Nyxian pirates that previously dominated the region, neither groups paid much attention to the Big Two's taboos!

Most of them were crude and lumbering vessels that had been designed and built by different pirate groups. What they lacked in sophistication, they made up for it with power!

"The Abyssal Army is coming! Get ready, men!"

The invaders did not employ any clever stratagems. The Abyssal Servants straightforwardly threw their mechs and warships at the defenses of Shardeen Fortress in the hopes of conquering it through brute force!

Soon enough, thousands of mechs were being felled with each passing minute!

Chaos reigned as the space around the two sides became flooded with energy beams and physical projectiles. Many asteroids that happened to stand between the way of the opposing mech armies had all been blasted to pieces as the main and secondary guns of warships and base turrets directed a lot of firepower at each other.

"Fight, sisters! We are already damned, so why hesitate any further? Let us fight against their gods and be rendered into dust!"

Even though the Wrathful Doves hardly got their bearings together, the veteran Hexer soldiers had fought in many pitches before. Even though they faced completely different enemies, none of them flinched against their current opponents!

Entire mech regiments of Valkyrie mechs soared into space and circled around to flank and harass the mixed and chaotic elements of the Abyssal Army.

The attackers this time did not emerge from the central region but instead came from outside. This meant that the attackers this time did not include any of the dreaded first-class warfleets that were often capable of demolishing entire strongholds if left untouched!



The waves of Valkyrie mechs led by war-hardened Hexer mech officers quickly adapted to the rhythm of the Nyxian War.

They maintained their distance from the Abyssal warships and mostly engaged the flanking and scouting mech troops of the Abyssal Army.

Most of the time, the Valkyrie mechs hovered in the distance while firing their pulse submachine guns at their opponents.

Once they saw an opening, the Hexer mech pilots quickly initiated a charge while also directing the glows of their living mechs towards their opponents!

Much to their surprise, the glows of their Valkyrie mechs were much stronger than they were accustomed to! The Abyssal mech pilots became so paralyzed by the threat of death that they hardly even readied their machines to meet the incoming charge!

This outcome took place in several other parts of the battlefield.

Even the Hexer expert pilots noticed the difference!

"The Superior Mother is with us!" Venerable Avinx shouted as she regained her enthusiasm for battle!

Her Valkyrie Reaper became surrounded by a strong gray corona as it charged straight towards an enemy expert mech.

The enemy machine had been cutting down Oblivion mechs with its large and oversized axe.

Upon noticing the intimidating approach of the Valkyrie Reaper, the expert axeman mech did not turn back but instead prepared to meet the charge.

However, just before the Valkyrie Reaper was about to reach the opposing expert mech, its resonating power spiked and shot out a wave of energy!

This deathly energy impacted the expert axeman mech's resonance shield, causing it to weaken and fade.

The Abyssal expert pilot became completely surprised by what had happened!

"What?! How?!"

"Face the power of death!"

The Valkyrie Reaper mercilessly drove forth its spear, shattering the weakened resonance shield with ease!

Before the enemy expert pilot could even adjust, a speartip had already pierced through the axeman mech's powerful chest armor and penetrated through the cockpit!

The Valkyrie Reaper had claimed the life of another enemy expert pilot!

Venerable Avinx felt a surge of energy as she reveled in the reaping of another soul. She felt as if she had dedicated yet another powerful life to the Superior Mother!

"More. I need more!"

Yet before the Valkyrie Reaper could hunt down another enemy expert pilot, the battlefield suddenly shook as a mutation had occurred!

"A dark god has come!"

"Who is it this time?!"

"It's... the Massive One!"

Thousands of Oblivion mechs that were fighting in the front lines suddenly lost control and got pulled in a massive intangible orb of black!

The Massive One's powerful gravitic forces quickly tore the defenseless machines apart. Freewebnovel.com.

Before the intimidating dark god could crush other defending mech units with his immense gravity, the Oblivion Empire quickly dispatched its response!

"The Lady of the Night has come!"

"Lady Nyx! Lady Nyx! Lady Nyx!"

The morale of every soldier of the Oblivion Army rose to meteoric heights as they all felt her powerful presence with the depths of their hearts!

The silhouette of a huge female figure hovered over the defensive lines. This dark-robed figure radiated an imposing amount of power that invigorated every Oblivion Servant while transmitting doom to the Abyssal Servants!

As soon as the Oblivion Empress materialized into place, the Massive One became more agitated.

"Return our stolen crown." He conveyed through a means inaudible to anyone else.

"You can take your filthy crown from my dead body."

"You will regret your defiance!"

The Oblivion Empress and the Massive One instantly came to blows!

Both of them fought with godly powers! Whereas Lady Nyx primarily leveraged her control over the space of the Nyxian Gap, the Massive One utilized his formidable resilience to withstand every wave of attacks!

The space above the battlefield became turbulent and even deadly to those that strayed to close.

Even so, neither mech armies took a break! The presence of their gods spurred the soldiers to fight even harder!

Every mech pilot hoped to prove their worth and be rewarded for their valor!

Yet just as Venerable Avinx was ready to charge into an enemy mech formation, a friendly mech company suddenly froze and lost all power!

"What?!"

"It's the Cold One! The Cold One has appeared!"

A second dark god had showed up this time!

The hearts of many Oblivion soldiers shook as the female dark god made an appearance.

It was rare for the Abyssal Empire to dispatch multiple dark gods!

For two of them to arrive showed that the Abyssals urgently wanted to topple Shardeen Fortress.

"Damn, this is bad! The Massive One is fully focused on entangling the Oblivion Empress! She won't be able to stop the Cold One!"

"Deploy the Saints!"

Three ace mechs shot out from Shardeen Fortress and quickly approached the position of the Cold One!

Two of them were strangers to Venerable Avinx, but her eyes lit up when she spotted the third ace mech.

"It's the Megara Hex!"

The Megara Hex was an ace swordsman mech that was piloted by Saint Catara Evern.

The Saint originally fought alongside a different troop of the Hex Army, but decided to accompany the Wrathful Doves to the Nyxian Gap.

Now, one of the most powerful champions from the Hegemony had answered the call and deployed against the Cold One!

"Can three of our ace mechs possibly stand against a god mech?"

Many Oblivion soldiers grew concerned as the two sides began to clash.

Venerable Avinx watched carefully as the Megara Hex began to resonate with power!

Saint Catara Evern's Saint Kingdom came into force as her ace mech attempted to slash the massive, intangible energy body of the Cold One!

Yet before the magnified slash of the Megara Hex could find its mark, the attack along with the Saint Kingdom froze after becoming affected by the powers of the Cold One!

"No!"

The other two ace mechs also failed to make their mark!

"The Cold One is too strong!"

A dark god was not to be trifled with. The gigantic female god not only resisted the ace mechs, but also pressured them by wielding her frost powers in many different ways!

If this went on, the three ace mechs fighting for the Oblivion Empire would definitely fall!

"The dark god will prevail if we don't do something!"

Just as Venerable Avinx contemplated the suicidal option of joining this deathly struggle with her Valkyrie Reaper, a massive tiger suddenly appeared out of nowhere and bit off the Cold One's arm!

The dark god's eyes widened even as a sphere of frost exploded around her form!

Hovering alongside the three friendly ace mechs was a machine that exuded much more power.

The Saint Kingdom around the winged tiger mech was so strong and infused with power that the Cold One no longer paid attention to her other opponents.

"It's the Dark Saint! We're saved!"

As one of the most iconic mechs of the Oblivion Empire, the Devil Tiger had undergone many upgrades and improvements.

It received the attention of several Masters that had joined the Oblivion Empire for one reason or another.

Not only that, the Devil Tiger was able to gorge upon the remains of numerous first-class mechs and warships that the Oblivion Army defeated in the past!

All of these changes and more had completely elevated the performance of the Devil Tiger to new heights!

Yet what was even more remarkable was the evolution of its mech pilot. Once known as the leader of the Oblivion Hand, now he had become the most iconic and admired champion of the Oblivion Empire!

The Devil Tiger only beheld the Cold One for a moment before it and its ace pilot moved to attack!

"Is the Dark Saint strong enough to fight against a dark god?" Venerable Avinx asked with a touch of concern.

"Hehehe. You don't know anything. Just wait and see!"

Much to the astonishment of the recent recruits, the Devil Tiger's Saint Kingdom began to shake with more power than they have ever felt from any other ace mech!

"THE ENEMIES OF MY FAMILY SHALL BE MY PREY!"

Slowly but surely, the manifestation of a massive cat came into form! It completely enveloped the frame of the Devil Tiger and started to fight against the Cold One without falling behind!

"What is that?!"

"Isn't that the legendary Unity of Man and Machine!? How can the Dark Saint attain this state so easily?!"

"The Lady of the Night has blessed the Dark Saint! There is no other explanation!"

Just as Venerable Avinx felt assured that the dark gods wouldn't be able to overrun the defenders, another unexpected incident took place as the Oblivion Empress became hit by a surprise attack!

"It's... it's the Patient One!"

"No!"

A third dark god had arrived!

The giant shape of an old, long-bearded man in robes had appeared alongside the Massive One.

The appearance of all three dark gods of the Abyssal Empire exerted a huge amount of oppression towards the soldiers of the Oblivion Army!

"How can we resist so many god mechs?"

"We fight! Don't lose faith! The stronger our belief in the Lady of the Night, the stronger she becomes! For the Oblivion Empire!"

"For the Oblivion Empire!"