

Mech 4511

Chapter 4511 Reluctant Customer

The Thunderer Mark II could barely be called a living mech at its current state.

As the possessed Everchanger slowly retracted its metal palms and cautiously exited the formidable ace mech's Saint Kingdom, the ace mech could finally resume its job.

Though Ves hadn't been able to do as much as he wanted out of this moment of contact, he was proud of the work he had done to the ace mech.

When he came up with the plan to change an ace mech, he became aware that it was impossible to turn it into a different machine.

A heavy artillery mech that centered around inflicting massive area damage through propagating kinetic shockwaves would probably fare poorly if it switched to using laser cannons all of a sudden.

Mechs at this level weren't pure machines anymore. They had all become avatars or vessels of their respective Saints.

As much as Ves hated what Patriarch Reginald Cross had done to the Mars, the man simply didn't know any better. His methods aligned with the more traditional theories and approaches that many of his peers had relied upon before.

In the brief moment that Ves came into contact with the Thunderer Mark II, he could sense that Saint Osenring was a similar kind of person. The man was extremely possessive of his Thunderer Mark II and did not tolerate any unauthorized changes.

This gave Ves both a headache and a challenging puzzle. How could he make the Thunderer II stronger and more alive while retaining its original character as much as possible?

Ves decided that the answer would be to make its current identity more pronounced.

Rather than trying to steer it away from its original state, Ves sought to enhance it by making it alive while making as few changes as possible.

This resulted in a rather rudimentary and imperfect life form that was more comparable to the first order living mechs that he used to design and make in the past.

The only way for him to turn it into a second order living mech was if he could tinker with the physical design of the ace mech, but that was out of the question.

As it was, infusing the Thunderer Mark II with life while refraining from making any further alternations had worked to an extent.

Even now, Ves could already feel the Thunderer Mark II reaching out to its ace pilot in a more active and affectionate manner than possible.

If Saint Osenring was accustomed to piloting living mechs, then he would have accepted the love and trust expressed by his own machine.

Instead, the man had become so touchy and freaked out by all of the changes that he had become more distant to his ace mech instead!

This was a sad state of affairs and it reminded Ves that living mechs had a long way to go before they became a universal standard in the mech community.

It also didn't help that Ves had to make more essential alterations to the heavy gauss cannons of the ace heavy artillery mech.

These proud weapons were by far the most important systems of the Thunderer Mark II. Saint Osenring understood quite well how they worked and how they were constructed.

Yet now that the ace pilot tried to resonate with those very same guns, he began to encounter a lot of alien and unfamiliar elements.

This was the most iffy part of Ves' plan. He had little choice but to implement more drastic changes to the heavy gauss cannons in order to align them to the Phase King.

Fortunately, Ves didn't have to worry about tying the Phase King to the Thunderer Mark II even though it had only barely transformed into a living mech.

The Phase King only needed a small window of opportunity to latch on to the powerful ace mech.

After Ves had made additional changes to the spiritual foundation in relation to the potent weapon systems, the armaments had even turned into blessed weapons of sorts. Forming the connections were easy due to how much phasewater they contained.

Of course, Ves wasn't happy with his rush job. The Instrument of Doom wielded by the Amaranto maintained much greater ties to the Phase King. The amount of influence the design spirit could exert on that standalone energy cannon was astounding.

As for the Thunderer Mark II, Ves could perceive through the Everchanger that Saint Osenring struggled to open up his defenses to the foreign and alien design spirit.

Ves was tempted to open his mouth and give the man a reminder, but he figured that anything he said would backfire.

Ace pilots were stubborn like that. Ves had already learned his lesson after his last mech-related interaction with Patriarch Reginald Cross.

Right now, the Thunderer Mark II was taking a lot more time to open fire. Dozens of seconds went by as the gauss cannons were charged and ready to unleash their latest salvo of shield bypassing rounds at the distant unclean whale.

"This stupid idiot." Ves muttered.

It was unfair to blame Saint Osenring for his hesitation. Ves had imposed a drastically different mech paradigm on him all of a sudden, but the fool of an ace pilot should have been able to tell that the changes weren't meant to inflict any harm!

The more time the ace pilot wasted, the greater the chance the unclean whale could inflict horrible damage against the other ace mechs!

Already, those slender toothed tentacles had already brushed against the Saint Kingdoms of some of the melee mechs.

The Jedda Sandivar which was trying to occupy the unclean whale at the front was having it worse than most. There were times where the ace light skirmisher mech had almost been boxed in by a forest of tentacles.

Fortunately, the Adelaide Mercenary Company did not skimp on the armor of the Jedda Sandivar, so the phasewater-infused teeth only managed to graze and scratch the upper layer of the ace mech's armor.

Still, the unclean whale continued to refine his methods as time went on. Even the Mars had been smacked by a tentacle as Patriarch Reginald foolishly tried to cut through his opponent's blubber with the Whale-Cutting Saber.

"I don't have time for." Ves muttered. "Joshua! Switch the glow of your expert mech to the Solemn Guardian and try to amplify it as much as possible!"

"Uhm, are you sure about that, sir?" Joshua responded. "Saint Osenring will not take it well."

"Just do it! We are still comrades in arms, so the man won't attack you or anything. I just want you to nudge this guy into action seeing his personal feelings are getting in the way of his duty!"

The ever-adaptable Everchanger smoothly switched its design spirit once again.

Though Ves had lost his intimate connection to his favorite expert mech, he smiled when the aura and the demeanor of the Everchanger swap in an instant.

The Solemn Guardian was one of his earliest, weakest and least impressive design spirits.

Ves had thought many times about butchering before putting his early work back together in a stronger and more improved form.

He never acted on this impulse because he feared his other design spirits might not trust him anymore after he cut apart one of their own kind.

He was glad that he did so because the Solemn Guardian's glow was much simpler and less alarming than that of other glows.

The Everchanger naturally exuded a sense of trust. It conveyed the image of a patriotic war hero that sought to inspire fellow soldiers to do their part in the field.

After Venerable Joshua resonated with his expert mech and deliberately amplified the reach of its current glow to the point where it wrapped around the Saint Kingdom of the Thunderer Mark II, there was no way that Saint Osenring could ignore this new influence!

The Thunderer Mark II shook a bit.

For a moment, Ves feared that the ace mech was about to turn one of its many formidable guns towards the Everchanger.

The ace mech eventually did not do so. It instead kept its guns aimed squarely at the true enemy.

"I think it's working, sir!" Venerable Joshua reported. "Saint Osenring isn't hesitating as much anymore."

This became clear when the heavy gauss cannons of the Thunderer Mark II began to glow and convey an entirely different presence.

Though the Phase King was unable to channel much of his energy into the newly-blessed cannons, he gained just enough access to change the way that phasewater affected their output.

It was as if a cleaner had entered a messy apartment and began to clean up the messes. Nothing had been added or removed, but the simple act of rearranging the crude transphasic design application was starting to produce measurable changes.

Soon, they fired.

Ten powerful gauss cannons boomed at once, propelling potent resonance-empowered transphasic rounds at blazing speeds!

When they finally crossed the distance and impacted the spatial barrier of the distracted unclean whale, the rounds initially shattered into pieces like before.

Many observers who paid close attention to this attack salvo became disappointed, but their mood quickly surged when they saw that a small portion of the gauss rounds had actually succeeded in phasing through the powerful defensive barrier!

"Impacts registered! We have detected 9 individual impacts onto the hide of the unclean whale. The Thunderer Mark II's latest attack salvo has successfully managed to pass through the target's energy defenses for the first time!"

Cheers already erupted at a few places, though their celebrations were still premature.

Ves furrowed his brows as he zoomed in on the image of the impact sites. Only small shards of solid alloy managed to phase through the spatial barrier. There was so little left of the original gauss rounds that the unclean whale didn't even feel the attacks!

However, this was just the start.

When Saint Osenring saw that the odd changes to his ace mech enabled his last attacks to inflict real damage to his adversary's flesh, he became a lot less wary and suspicious about the alterations.

As he became hungry for more, he slightly lowered his vigilance towards the alien creature that had connected his machine. Though the ace pilot still didn't trust this phase whale-like presence too much, his desire for greater firepower pushed him to embrace the changes.

When the Thunderer Mark II opened fire once again, the Phase King had been able to exert even more influence on its gauss cannons.

The next rounds slammed against the spatial barrier once again, but as the powerful projectiles shattered into pieces, the shards that successfully phased through this obstacle had become larger than before!

This time, the unclean whale slightly shook as his hide began to get struck by the remnants of the Thunderer Mark II's firepower.

When the third salvo struck the corrupted phase whale's flesh, the creature actually began to experience pain as the shards not only pierced deeper through the blubber, but also unleashed noticeable shockwaves that tore a lot of nearby biomatter!

By the time the Thunderer Mark II fired its fourth salvo, the unclean whale noticed that the shockwaves coursing through the side of his massive body was killing or damaging an even larger portion of his flesh!

"The target is visibly showing pain reactions! The Thunderer Mark II is inflicting more harm on the unclean whale than any other ace mech!"

"The beast isn't able to heal the damage inflicted by the Thunderer Mark II as fast as other injuries. Too much biomass has to be shaken apart at once for the unclean whale to regenerate in a timely manner!"

"We recommend the other ace mechs concentrate their firepower on the body sections softened up by the Thunderer Mark II in advance! This is our chance to get past the blubber and land our attacks on the internal organs of our adversary!"

"Pass on this suggestion to the other ace mechs. We cannot afford to squander the openings generated by the Thunderer Mark II!"

Chapter 4512 Wounded Whale

As the others began to adapt to the latest turn of events, Saint Osenring's attitude towards his ace mech was beginning to shift.

With each pull of the trigger, his ace mech inflicted a bit more damage than before.

With each pull of the trigger, Saint Osenring allowed this so-called 'Phase King' to affect his ace mech in an intrusive way.

With each pull of the trigger, Saint Osenring became more and more addicted to the increased penetration power of his ace mech.

The ace pilot had utilized the heavy gauss cannons so many times that he knew exactly what they were capable of. He understood what sort of defenses they could penetrate.

This was why he had become frustrated with his current opponent. The unclean whale that had burst out of the Palace of Shame hardly weakened his defenses after all of this time!

To see that his ace heavy artillery mech was finally able to inflict actual damage on this powerful foe for once was a powerful motivator!

By the time his Thunderer Mark II unleashed its twelfth salvo, Saint Osenring's conversion had reached an advanced stage!

While he could never look up to a completely foreign entity, he appreciated the help provided by the Phase King.

The whale-like creature's comprehension of phasewater was so great that Saint Osenring couldn't even begin to understand what was going on. All the ace pilot knew was that this alien could pull off a lot of tricks and was firmly on his side!

The ace pilot even took the initiative to communicate with the alien spirit.

"So you're called the Phase King?"

"..."

"I see. It's close enough. How is my mech? Do you like it? Are my guns good enough?"

"..."

The ace pilot and the design spirit knew nothing about each other. They could only figure out what they could sense from each other, but when Saint Osenring earnestly tried to learn more about the Phase King, their compatibility began to rise, much to the detriment of their shared opponent!

The unclean whale began to suffer more and more serious injuries after the Thunderer Mark II truly got to work!

Though the shield bypassing rounds still wasted a lot of their power after passing through the powerful spatial barrier, what was left still struck the surface of the unclean whale with thundering force.

Entire craters of flesh collapsed and turned to mush as the impacts spread expanding shockwaves.

Blood and phasewater sprayed into open space as torn flesh and veins could no longer contain the powerful life fluids.

Saint Osenring constantly tweaked and changed the shockwaves generated by his true resonance after every pull of the trigger. Some of the effects inflicted greater damage than others, so the ace pilot constantly optimized his power expression in the hopes of maximizing the damage with every hit!

The other ace pilots gleefully took advantage of the massive weak points opened up by the Thunderer Mark II!

"BURN!" Patriarch Reginald Cross roared as he vented his frustration and repressed fury through his mechanical incarnation!

The ARCEUS System of the Mars fired multiple powerful positron beams that easily passed through the torn and ruined flesh before striking the deeper parts of the unclean whale's body!

Other mechs quickly followed up whenever possible. The Embodiment of Love and Sacrifice channeled the combined true resonance of the Gemini Saints and fired a singular, powerful energy beam that exploited the hole expanded by the Mars and finally managed to punch through a deeper flesh layer!

The creature visibly shook and arched his back in pain as the resonance-empowered attack launched by the combination ace mech damaged one of his more important organs!

"The target's spatial barrier has weakened by 3 percent!"

The news encouraged the ace mechs to step up their efforts. The Mars and the Embodiment of Love and Sacrifice continued to attack other damaged sections in order to wound or destroy as many phasewater organs as possible.

While it was a shame to burn or vaporize all of those phasewater-rich organs, Ves and the others would rather throw away additional loot because it meant that they could finally end this humongous threat!

As the damage to the phasewater organs gradually weakened the unclean whale's spatial barrier, it became easier and easier for the Thunderer Mark II to do its job.

The more its gauss rounds phased through the spatial barrier, the greater the kinetic forces and by extension the shockwaves tormented the corrupted whale!

The unclean whale tried his best to strengthen his main form of defense, but that meant that he would weaken his efforts to repel the other attackers.

If the powerful beast did not concentrate enough on trying to repress the small but highly threatening intruder inside his body, the parasite would be able to reach his sensitive brain a lot sooner!

If the whale did not concentrate enough on its tentacles to keep the other ace mechs at bay, the small but extremely powerful machines would be able to attack its body with impunity.

Given time, the cannibal whale would have been able to defeat any of his current opponents in isolation, but the problem was that the enemy did not hesitate to rely on the power of teamwork to assail his body!

Though the monstrous creature was able to keep going for a long amount of time by virtue of his massive body, sooner or later his enormous buffer would bottom out. Once there was no more fat or flesh to absorb the incoming attacks, the whale would suffer the ignominy of getting killed by these mechanical voribugs!

No matter what, the unclean whale had no choice but to break the status quo and fight for his survival!

"Watch out! The target has decided to go on the attack!" Saint Marissa Lewandowski warned as she sensed a lot of aggression from the massive creature.

Intact flesh transformed into strange organs that resembled organic weapon batteries.

Even the tips of all of the tentacles began to grow similar organs!

Many of the nearby ace mechs retreated out of action and were all poised to evade the unclean whale's counterattack.

Soon enough, the powerful organic weapon batteries fired over a hundred powerful gamma laser beams!

Many of them focused on whatever ace mech was nearby, but the small and nimble machines easily evaded the telegraphed attacks, much to the unclean whale's dismay.

The only ace mech that got struck by these powerful graser beams was the Thunderer Mark II!

The ace heavy artillery mech had utilized its thick, spider-like legs to anchor itself to an asteroid.

This made it difficult to evade the numerous powerful graser beams that were all powerful enough to irradiate the crews of notable capital ships.

Yet as soon as the volley of beams struck the Saint Kingdom of the Thunderer Mark II, they rapidly lost their strength until just a quarter of the power of those attacks struck the ace mech!

Even then, the graser beams failed to do more than scorch and melt a shallow layer of the ace mech's heavy armor plating.

Seeing that the Thunderer Mark II was much easier to hit than the other ace mechs, the unclean whale redoubled his efforts to take down this powerful artillery machine.

The monster grew more organic weapon batteries and did not hold back on expending his dwindling energy reserves to slay the Thunderer Mark II!

Though Venerable Joshua wanted to help block the damage with his Everchanger, he knew that he was not strong enough to contribute anything useful.

Just one of those powerful warship-grade graser beams would definitely be able to blast half of the frontal armor of his expert mech!

The old Shield of Samar would have been able to block at least a dozen more attacks, but even it had limits despite its thicker and more generous buffer.

"Relax, kid." Saint Osenring told Venerable Joshua the overall direct communication channel. The Santana ace pilot developed a much more favorable impression of the Larkinson Clan in the last few minutes. "I don't need your help. It might not look like it, but my Thunderer Mark II is almost just as tough as a space knight. It has been my experience that it is always best if my machine can take as much damage as it can dish it with its guns."

Although the repeated powerful graser beam attacks continued to melt more and more armor plating, the Thunderer Mark II hardly let up on the pressure.

"We shall help you, Osenring!" Saint Sandro Gemini shouted.

The Embodiment of Love and Sacrifice focused most of its power on launching attacks on the increasingly more exposed internal organs of the unclean whale.

However, the strange combination mech also carried a tower shield, which it used to good effect by positioning itself in the way of several gamma laser attacks.

It didn't even matter if the powerful gamma laser beams bypassed the ace combination mech.

As long as the beams passed through a portion of the combined Saint Kingdom of the Gemini Saints, they lost so much power that Saint Osenring could easily crush whatever was left!

The heavy artillery specialist no longer had to allocate as much power in his defenses, allowing him to put more effort into strengthening his attacks.

The Thunderer Mark II unleashed its most powerful shield bypassing rounds yet! They did not impact on ordinary flesh and hide as usual, but specifically converged onto the organic laser batteries within the ace mech's line of sight!

The unclean whale roared yet again as its powerful but fairly sensitive ranged attack organs were rent asunder by the succession of shockwaves!

As the unclean whale increasingly lost his ability to retaliate against his foes, the human ace mechs grew bolder.

The Mars dove forward and tried to cut the tentacles with its Whale-Cutting Saber again. This time Patriarch Reginald Cross managed to keep his ace mech safe by employing hit-and-run tactics.

The Jedda Sandivar continued to utilize its Saint Kingdom to blind and confuse the unclean whale's perception as much as possible, but the machine had also attempted to poke the creature's giant eyeballs!

The corrupted whale might have a vast reserve of flesh and blood, but its supply was not unlimited!

As the minutes passed by, the unclean whale continued to lose more strength. Half of his tentacles were gone while more of his surface layers were damaged than untouched.

"The target is growing lethargic. There are signs that the whale is suffering from massive trauma to his internal organs."

"The remaining tentacles are no longer attacking as vigorously as before."

"The target is generating less localized spatial phenomena than before. The strength of his spatial barrier has dropped below 50 percent of its previously recorded peak."

"The unclean whale's average body temperature is dropping!"

Ves and many other humans began to breathe lighter and lighter. They grew more relieved when they saw that their final adversary was slowly getting ground to death.

Though it was a pity that the human mech forces could not vanquish their monstrous foe with a single, dramatic combination attack, they would take what they could get. Everyone just wanted to put an end to this tiresome and stressful battle.

Just as Ves was thinking about how his clan should approach the rest of the coalition in order to demand a greater share of the spoils, he received an unexpected message.

"Sir, the Gemini Family has just sent an emergency proposal to us. The Geminis urgently requests your input."

"What do those incestuous bastards want now?" Ves frowned in irritation.

"The Geminis... are no longer in favor of slaying our current target. They... they want to capture the whale alive!"

"WHAT?!" Ves jerked his exhausted body. "Are they crazy?! There's no way we can control an enemy of this magnitude!"

"The Gemini Family is willing to give it a try. According to them, a living phase whale is at least ten times more valuable than a broken phase whale. The Geminis are already negotiating with the other members of the temporary coalition in order to earn their support. We have heard that the Santana Group and the Lehrer Foundation are already in favor of this proposal."

Ves fell silent for a moment.

He sighed. "I'm too tired for this crap."

Chapter 4513 Divided Interests

Ves was tempted to wring the Gemini Family and its supporters and ram his demands down their throats!

However, he resisted the impulse. He did not manage to get this far without recognizing the value of diplomacy.

As the unclean whale slowly lost more and more battle strength, the human pioneering groups that had temporarily united together under a single cause were already beginning to show their divisions.

Ves had read many stories in the regional publications about allies and coalition partners falling out due to disputes concerning safety and loot.

It just so happened that the current issue related to both of these issues.

To the people who respected and feared the phase whale race, the unclean whale that had emerged from the depths of the Palace of Shame was an extremely powerful threat.

Phase whales firmly occupied the top of the hierarchy in the Red Ocean. Even a delinquent member of this renowned and poorly understood race could still launch all manner of lethal attacks when it appeared to be in an infirm state.

Everything that Ves had learned during his stint in the System Space had given him a much greater understanding of the strengths of creatures whose bodies carried significant amounts of phasewater.

The locals considered them to be gods for more than just historical reasons!

Now that he had become a qualified exobiologist, he could think of too many possibilities for the unclean whale to hide a lot of surprises. It was impossible for the pioneering groups to control a massive beast that had so much phasewater and biomass at his disposal!

Ves wanted to complete the goal that he had been trying to realize for several months. He spent more time on trying to end the unclean whale as a threat that he could not accept an outcome where he left the job half-finished!

"Minister Shederin." He turned to the projection of his diplomatic leader. "Tell me why the Gemini Family along with the Santana Group and the Lehrer Foundation are so eager to keep this extremely dangerous alien powerhouse alive."

The older man did not need to look up any information to supply his answer. "It's quite simple, sir. None of the leaders who are in charge of the respective fleets are stupid. They understand the risks involved, but the payoff of keeping the phase whale alive long enough until the MTA takes over custody is extremely rich. You should already have an estimate of how many MTA merits we can earn for submitting a living phase whale to the mechers. The value of this particular specimen is even greater because it is a rare unclean whale variant."

This was not the first whale that Ves surrendered to the MTA. The Golden Skull Alliance already received a generous bag of MTA merits and others after the Purgatory Campaign.

Though Ves definitely did not object to the idea of earning millions of MTA merits, he had endured enough risks in one battle.

"What else is motivating those three pioneering groups to vote in favor of keeping this blasted whale alive?"

"The motives of the Santana Group and the Lehrer Foundation are simple enough. They are primarily interested in profit and research, respectively. The Santanas want to maximize their profit, and a living phase whale is many times more valuable than a dead creature. The risk that the Santanas lose all of their mech forces if they have made the wrong gamble is an acceptable risk in their eyes. The Lehrer Foundation is driven by the need to study such a rare and valuable specimen up close in order to understand their biology."

Ves deduced the underlying context of Shederin's words. "Ugh, so the Santanas and the Lehrers won't back off so easily?"

"Don't forget that the Santana Xenoarchaeology Division Fleet and the Lehrer Expeditionary Fleet are treated as the expendable arms of their respective organizations. It is their job to brave danger and incur risks in the hopes that their folks back at headquarters can reap all of the benefits. Their risk-benefit analysis is different from ours because their top executives aren't risking their own lives to secure a massive prize. That alone tends to skew every consideration towards greater risks. I think you should learn from their model."

In other words, if anything went wrong, the Santana Group and the Lehrer Foundation would only lose one of their many fleets!

"What of the Geminis?" Ves asked. "What drives these incestuous twins to take so many risks? They have been pushing us all to attack all this time."

"The Geminis are also interested in maximizing their yield, but not for the sake of money alone. The wealth gained from capturing a living phase whale and obtaining as much alien plunder as possible is likely reserved to fund the expansion of the colonies of the Gemini Family."

"Are you saying the Geminis aren't enough with the star system that they have colonized and wish to found their own state!? That's crazy! There aren't enough colonists who are willing to adopt their unique cultural practices!"

Minister Shederin was not as pessimistic about this ambition. "You would be surprised how many people are willing to abandon their principles and values in the face of a tempting reward. The greater the strength and prosperity of the Gemini Family, the greater the ability to build a regional powerbase. The Geminis have great ambition and think they can succeed as long as they can harvest enough rewards from this venture."

"What is your judgment? Do they have a chance to succeed?"

"They have." Shederin replied. "Their odds are greater than you think. Just look at the Hexers. The Red Ocean is big enough to accommodate all kinds of ideologies and beliefs. By the time the new frontier is filled with so many different human states that the only way to obtain territory is to take it from others, the state founded by the Gemini Family should already have a solid foundation. This is what the Geminis are banking on. The more they invest in their own private kingdom at an early stage, the greater their chance of establishing a successful state. Do you understand now why they are so desperate to secure greater rewards?"

"I do..."

Operation Lighthouse played an essential role in helping the Gemini Family become the rulers of a large and thriving colonial state. This had become such

a driving obsession to the Gemini leaders that they were probably willing to take unreasonably risks to earn a big payout!

While a part of Ves definitely sympathized with their situation, he did not see the need for him and his clan to suffer for other people's mistakes!

He still had plenty of MTA merits on his record and his clan wasn't short on capital either. It did not really make that much of a difference for the Larkinsons if they were able to keep the unclean whale alive.

Now that Ves learned that half of the temporary coalition was more than willing to play with fire, he needed to know whether there was enough counterweight.

"What do our allies think, Shederin?"

"Well, the Glory Seekers are fully in favor of minimizing the risks while the Cross Clan is indifferent. They will follow our lead as long as we express a strong opinion to neutralize the threat."

Ves smiled. He could always count on them to have his back.

"That is good to hear. What about the remaining two coalition partners? Have they expressed their stances?"

"General Herman Foraine has already sent us a missive stating that the Adelaide Mercenary Company is opposed to the Gemini Family's proposal." The foreign affairs minister replied. "Mercenaries tend to be highly sensitive towards risk considering that they must put their lives at stake on a constant basis. The best ones tend to learn when they should put down their greed and let go. They wouldn't be able to last that long if they blindly pushed to do more."

"It is good to hear that the Adelaides have regained their senses. What of the Boojay Family?"

"The Boojays have yet to formulate an official answer to us, which is telling in itself. We can still make inferences. The Boojays have yet to colonize their own planets. They are currently nomads just like us. They have even concentrated most of their assets in a single fleet. This tells us that the Boojays should not be enthusiastic about keeping the whale alive."

"Better follow up on that, Shederin. It is best to obtain a strong commitment from their corner. In any case, if all of what you have said is true, then both sides will enter a deadlock where neither of us can get our way."

Minister Shederin grimaced. "Not quite, sir. The balance of power is skewed towards the side of the Geminis. They not only have one more ace mech at their disposal than us, but they also have the best whale and ship-killing ace mech on their side. You cannot deny that the Thunderer Mark II has played the leading role in defeating the massive beast. If the talks between the two sides ever deteriorate past a critical point, the opposing side can exert much greater leverage than us. They will keep the whale alive by force if necessary."

Those were indeed good points. While it was doubtful whether the two sides would come to blows, the Golden Skull Alliance along with the Adelaide Mercenary Company and the Boojay Family simply didn't have the strength or numbers to push their stance.

Perhaps he was being a bit paranoid about worrying about all of the tricks that the unclean whale had up his sleeve, but Ves simply felt it was bad news to keep such a hostile beast alive.

Perhaps he could go behind everyone's back. He could discreetly instruct his new cyborg cat to destroy the alien brain of the massive unclean whale, but doing so would definitely get traced back to the Larkinson Clan.

"I do not think it is as difficult as you think to persuade the coalition into slaying the unclean whale." Minister Shederin said in an encouraging tone. "We merely need to take a closer look at the different parties and their motives."

When the man outlined his analysis and action plan, Ves felt that it all made sense. He became eager enough to try out the foreign minister's proposal!

"Let's do it your way, then." Ves grinned. "Do I need to talk to any of the leaders in person?"

"You do. Not all of their representatives will take me seriously, especially under battlefield conditions. Only you can speak for our entire alliance."

"Understood. I guess I will have to pull out my old Devil Tongue again." Ves sighed.

Time was of essence so he did not delay any further. He opened a private communication channel to the Thunderer Mark II which had slowed down its rate of fire by this time.

Its potential of destruction was great enough to topple over the unclean whale's defenses, but now that capacity for mass destruction had become a costly liability at this stage of the battle.

Saint Osenring no longer had to devote as much attention towards attacking the final remaining foe, so he readily accepted the communication request.

"Thank you for altering my ace mech, patriarch." The ace pilot charitably began. "I had my doubts about the changes that you have enacted through that little expert mech of yours, but the results do not lie. Your actions may have saved us today."

Ves smiled at the grateful Saint. "Are you enjoying the new enhancements to your ace mech?"

"I do. I have only scratched the surface of what you have done to my Thunderer Mark II, but if I can retain this level of penetration power, no ace mech or warship will be able to resist attacks for long. Are these changes permanent?"

"That... depends."

The ace pilot narrowed his intense and steely eyes. "On what, exactly?"

"On whether the suits in charge of your fleet are willing to make a transaction with our clan." Ves smirked.

Chapter 4514 Allure Of Effective Firepower

Ves wanted to play no part in the schemes hatched by the Gemini Family.

Though the powerful pioneering group had meticulously abided by all of the terms of their shared agreement, the Geminis had left out too many truths and details about the assault on the Palace of Shame.

It became clearer and clearer to him that the Gemini Family harbored no goodwill at all towards the other pioneering groups that it had fooled into participating in this assault.

The Golden Skull Alliance almost suffered a loss due to the Gemini Family's reticence towards sharing any intelligence related to the formidable orven battleship and the recently awoken unclean whale.

While the collective might of the Larkinsons and the other human participants eventually prevailed, the margin was far too close to Ves' liking.

He did not like being pushed into a corner.

Part of the reason why he wanted to push back against the Geminis was because he believed that the unclean whale could still pose a massive threat as long as the massive beast still retained a single breath of life.

However, he readily admitted that he was also driven by the need to smack the Geminis in the face and teach them that messing with him and his clan was a bad idea!

This was why he did not feel guilty about trying to undermine their little alliance.

As Ves continued to speak to Saint Jellmer Osenring, he put the ace pilot in a difficult position.

"I should never even be listening to what you have to say according to company protocol." The ace pilot of the Thunderer Mark II stated. "I am not a neophyte in this arena. I am cognizant that you wish for me to defect to your side in the hopes of dragging the rest of the Santana Xenoarchaeology Division Fleet to your camp. Such actions are highly dishonorable. The only reason why I have not shut down this channel is because you have contributed greatly towards our victory, but do not take that as a sign that my tolerance is infinite."

The powerful ace pilot made a good point, but if there was one thing Ves had learned about negotiations, it was that it was best for him to avoid falling into someone else's rhythm.

Ves did not bother to address Saint Osenring's points directly, because that would only pull him deeper into a losing argument.

He instead focused on the subjects that he had greater control over.

"I am not asking you to compromise your principles." Ves told the ace pilot. "I am merely asking you to support the more prudent course of action. If you do so, I am willing to give you a reward for your intercession between myself and your nominal superiors."

"What does this reward entail?"

Ves gestured in the man's direction. "Do you think the rush job that I have applied to your Thunderer Mark II is the greatest extent of what I can do? Take a look at the battle footage of the Amaranto. My expert rifleman mech was able to overwhelm the defenses of energy warships with exceptionally piercing strikes. Did you know that the Amaranto's new energy cannon can only penetrate through a couple of medium-sized asteroids under normal usage conditions, but that it has managed to penetrate sixteen asteroids when it is firing at full power!"

"You are boasting."

"I am not. I have not spoken a single falsehood since we have started to talk to each other." Ves wasn't foolish enough to slip a lie past the sharp intuition of an ace pilot. "Humanity is still new to phasewater and all of its applications. The method I employed relies on the deep and profound expertise of a long-lived alien intelligence that has played around with phasewater long before our race has developed a coherent civilization. Given this massive disparity in age and expertise, it shouldn't be so outlandish to hear that my design solution could have allowed your Thunderer Mark II to bypass the segmented multi-layer energy shields of the V'gahnt-Zezne or the spatial barrier of the unclean whale with ease."

Perhaps Ves was boasting a bit, but he truly believed that this scenario was plausible.

The only reason why the Instrument of Doom failed to penetrate the aforementioned defensive measures was because Venerable Stark and the Amaranto simply weren't strong enough. The underlying tech and approach were still sound. They just had to be applied to the ace mech level in order to produce clear results against greater opponents.

"Look, I don't have the time to explain my work any further to you." Ves said. "Let me tell you what I want. If you take our side and agree that the unclean

whale must be killed, I will promise you that I will take the time to properly work on your ace mech so that the Phase King can bless your damage output with exceptional penetrating properties. You don't have to activate it all of the time. You should only employ it when necessary. That already provides your ace heavy artillery mech with a massive edge compared to other ace mechs. While I can't promise you that your shots will penetrate 8 or 16 times more effectively than before, it should definitely be stronger than the preview that your Thunderer Mark II enjoys at the moment."

"And what if I refuse?" Saint Osenring plainly asked.

Ves pressed his lips. "Then I will take back what I have given to your ace mech."

"Can you do that when we deny you access to my machine?"

"Heh, don't underestimate me. I won't elaborate any further, but know that the Phase King will no longer provide its services to your ace mech. You will have to go back to firing your ace mech's heavy gauss cannons the normal way."

It was one thing for Saint Osenring to never know that his ace mech could wield so much effective firepower.

It was another thing for Saint Osenring to have a taste of strength from the 'demo' that Ves provided!

Right now, the ace pilot became conflicted.

It was rare for a man as certain as him to be torn between two different issues, but Ves had presented the ace pilot with a difficult dilemma.

Saint Osenring had been trained and educated for all his life to obey the orders of his superiors.

While the man had received a greater say in matters as he became stronger, he was still a firm adherent to the belief that those trained to lead were much better qualified to remain in charge.

Yet another part of him struggled to give up on the power that he had just tasted. This was strange because he normally had an aversion to tools that relied too much on external power to produce excellent results.

Yet despite the fact that the converted heavy gauss cannons fell into this category, seeing his rounds bypass the strong spatial barrier of the unclean whale had given him a massive boost in confidence.

The ace pilot knew extremely well that every human in the Red Ocean needed as much power as they could get in order to survive the trials and tribulations of the coming century.

Saint Osenring couldn't care about how relying too much on an external influence for power might stunt his growth.

The Phase King might not be a part of his own strength system, but the man would not hesitate to welcome the design spirit's aid if they faced a fleet of powerful puelmer warships!

The thought of giving up the power to penetrate the defenses of powerful alien warships was too painful for him to comprehend. His love for firepower was much closer to his heart.

As such, he made a tentative decision.

"I will make my voice heard, Patriarch Larkinson. Is that what you wanted to hear?"

"Yes." Ves grinned. "Please do your best to persuade your buddies in the Santana Group that whatever profit they expect to gain is nothing compared to the gifts that I can provide to you. Even if your co-workers can salvage

something useful from the remains of the different warships and the Palace of Shame, do you really think they can make your ace mech stronger? Rather than putting your hopes on unknown alien technology, you might as well enjoy my services as my work is fully attuned to human tech. Tell your executives that our clan will always be open for further cooperation if they support my initiative."

"I shall pass that on." The ace pilot affirmed.

When Ves closed this channel, he soon opened up another one. Saint Robert Montagne was still making sure that the unclean whale remained under control. His adaptable Infinite Gear had switched over to a striker mech configuration that burned a lot of tentacles.

"What is it, Patriarch Larkinson?" The ace pilot snapped.

"I want to make a deal with you and the organization that is behind you." Ves succinctly stated as he knew better than to withhold his intentions in front of an ace pilot. "The Gemini Family has persuaded your Lehrer Foundation that the unclean whale is better off alive than dead. I happen to hold the opposite opinion. I hope that you can help your fellow Lehrers see sense."

The ace pilot shook his head. "You should contact our leaders through the appropriate channels. I am only a soldier."

"You are one of the Lehrer Foundation's few ace pilots. You can absolutely sway the opinions of the technocrats in charge of the Lehrer Expeditionary Fleet. You only need to raise your voice in front of your fellow comrades."

Saint Motagne's expression grew ugly. "What you suggest goes against our mission and our foundation's directives. I work for a research institution that can decipher and reverse engineer a lot of tech from studying the unclean whale's body. If the beast expires, our researchers can no longer study its organs and the workings of his body. Our research and development projects

will fall behind to the point where our competitors will overtake our foundation. We will not compromise our future because we are afraid of a subdued whale."

Ves could already see that this was going to be a challenge.

"Your ace mech is weak."

"BE VERY CAREFUL WITH WHAT YOU SAY, PATRIARCH LARKINSON."
The ace pilot warned.

"I don't mean your ace mech is useless. It's just weak." Ves continued as if he heard nothing. "Just look at its performance and compare it with the feats of the Jedda Sandivar and the Thunderer Mark II. While the latter two mechs are extremely specialized, they also gained strong advantages that had allowed them to prevail against the last two big opponents. Compared to the aforementioned ace mechs, what has your Infinite Gear accomplished?"

"My ace mech is a modular platform that has always maintained its combat effectiveness in every situation!"

Ves snorted. "It's a jack of all trades, and not a particularly intimidating one at that! Look, I know what I'm talking about. I've designed multiple versatile mechs, so I understand how difficult it is to make them stronger and more competitive against more specialized ace mechs. What if I can remedy this problem of yours? What if I can bestow your Infinite Gear and all of the weapon systems that are currently at your disposal a permanent offensive boost comparable to the one that I had bestowed to the Thunderer Mark II?"

The Lehrer ace pilot subsided his anger all of a sudden. "What do you mean by that, Larkinson?"

"Imagine all of your attacks punching through the energy shields and armor of an ace mech, a warship and or giant organic monster. That is what I am talking about. Look, I get why it is important for your foundation to obtain new

research materials to develop their future products, but that is a matter for the distant future."

"What is your point, mech designer?"

"It will probably take a decade or more for your Lehrer Foundation to convert these gains into profit. In the meantime, your Santana Xenoarchaeology Division Fleet could really use a more immediate boost of strength. We are still stuck in dangerous space. What if you encounter a strong competitor in the border region that is hellbent on wiping your fleet off the board?"

"We will vanquish or evade our competitors." Saint Montagne declared.

"You can't run from every enemy. Some of them will seek to corner your fleet. What will you do, then? The weapon systems of your Infinite Gear are all decent, but they do not have any pronounced strengths. Let me change that by applying the same design solutions that I have applied to the Thunderer Mark II onto your modular machine. This way, you can serve as a powerful guardian of your own fleet and foundation that won't get stumped by powerful defenses like you did during this battle. You failed, Saint Montagne. Let me make it so that you won't lose again. You just have to complete a single favor for me in return. Doesn't that sound like a good deal?"

"I..."

"Think about what you can do if your Infinite Gear is able to strike almost as hard as the Thunderer Mark II." Ves encouragingly said. "You won't have to form a coalition and split the loot with several powerful pioneering groups anymore. Your ace mech will have the power to slay any isolated phase whale by itself! Won't that solve the problem of securing additional research materials to your foundation?"

"That... is a compelling idea."

Chapter 4515 Change Of Heart

By the time Ves ended his talk with Saint Robert Montage, he became surprised at how easy it had been to gain the agreement of two foreign ace pilots.

For a long time, Ves did not have the best impression of ace pilots. His first true encounter with them was when Saint Yila Mayorka and her Olympus Mons brutally taught the Larkinson Clan a lesson.

After that, the successful advancement of Patriarch Reginald Cross had added a friendly ace pilot to the Golden Skull Alliance, but not one that came without problems.

Reginald was a stubborn, prideful warrior that was brilliant in mech combat but incompetent in everything else. He was a poor clan leader and only managed to make it work somehow because too many of his Crossers looked up to him to acknowledge his many faults.

When Ves initiated a dialogue with Saint Jelmer Osenring and Saint Robert Montagne, he expected to spend a lot more time on arguing.

Yet instead of being met with the stubbornness that he was accustomed to encountering during every difficult talk with Patriarch Reginald Cross, he instead managed to persuade the other two ace pilots without too much time or effort.

Ves didn't even have to resort to the more tricky arguments that he had held in reserve. He also didn't need to make additional concessions in order to make his case!

He did not have to contact any further people at this stage. If everything went as planned, then persuading the earlier two ace pilots should be enough to get the ball rolling.

Minister Shederin certainly liked his performance. "You did well, Ves. Your persuasion skills have undergone a drastic improvement. You have a core of strength and a degree of authenticity that makes you sound much more authentic than you actually are. That makes you extremely suited to communicate with high-ranking mech pilots."

"It helps to have a lot of practice."

"That is true. I have spent a lot of time collecting the feedback of my customers and attuning my work to their demands. Some mech pilots are especially difficult to deal with due to their inconsistent and uncertain demands. It takes a lot of effort to interpret all of their requests."

"While it is true that practice makes perfect, you have a talent for whispering in the ears of mech pilots."

Ves understood what Minister Shederin was alluding to. Ever since he had completed his first sublimation, he not only turned into a human design spirit and gained his own glow, but also passed through a mental journey.

Though his tests were probably not as challenging and ruthless as the tests that mech pilots had to go through, the fact that these processes were similar was undeniable!

This unexpectedly brought him closer to the expert pilots and ace pilots that he increasingly interacted with. People who had gone through these mental journeys were relatively easy to recognize by those who had confronted the demons of the heart.

"It will not take long for us to notice changes." The old Purnesser predicted. "The ace pilots wield great influence in their respective organizations. Their official ranks may not be the best, but their influence over their groups is massive."

No matter how much the Santana Group and the Lehre Foundations indoctrinated their mech pilots, those who had elevated beyond the limits of mortality came in touch with greater truths, ones that were much more difficult to color with different biases.

At least, Ves hoped that was the case.

"Do you think we should talk to the Geminis?" Ves asked.

"No. Not yet. Let us refrain from tipping our hand." The older man replied.

"The Geminis will become justifiably angry at us for tipping their hand and preventing them from realizing their dream to the fullest. We may be saving our lives through this move, but it will also spoil our relationship with the Gemini Family. Are you prepared to accept the consequences of this move?"

Ves dismissively waved his hand. "The Geminis screwed us over first. They deserve what is coming for them. It would have been better if they treated us with greater sincerity, but since they didn't, we have no obligation to show any consideration for their demands."

"The Santana Group and the Lehrer Foundation won't be happy with us after they find out that you have managed to manipulate their ace pilots. Their leadership may defer to the demands of their war heroes, but that doesn't mean that they will embrace their new stance."

That was more problematic, but still manageable to Ves.

"We're not going to stick around this region any longer than necessary, Shederin. If everything goes well, we won't be meeting the Santanas and the Lehrers again. They are just two of many pioneering groups in the Red Ocean. There is enough space in the new frontier for us to go our separate ways."

While there were definitely benefits to befriending the pioneering groups that the Golden Skull Alliance had fought alongside with, Ves did not want to complicate this situation any further.

"Sir, several ace mechs are showing renewed activity!"

It appeared that his efforts paid off. Ves grinned wider and wider as he saw several ace mechs up the pace and intensity of their attacks.

Previously, the powerful machines fought as if they were half on standby. They only inflicted enough damage to keep the heavily wounded unclean whale's regeneration ability busy without restoring the massive creature to full health.

This time, powerful mechs such as the Thunderer Mark II and the Mars disregarded their previous instructions and flooded the unclean whale with unrelenting firepower!

"Stop it! You are destroying our wealth!" Saint Sandro Gemini desperately urged. "The MTA will reward us with only a fraction of the worth of this phase whale if we are only able to hand over a broken carcass."

At this time, the deterrence factor of the Gemini Saints had dropped after they were no longer able to maintain their combined state.

The Embodiment of Love and Sacrifice had split up, forcing the ace rifleman mech and the ace space knight to fight separately if they wished to intervene.

While it might be possible for the Gemini ace mechs to stop one or two rogue machines from disobeying instructions, it was another story if five of them intensified their attacks at once!

"You... you... you are deviating from our plan! You are violating our agreement!"

"We aren't breaking any rules, Gemini. We are merely eliminating an active threat that launches a lethal attack at us at any time. I don't know about you, but back home we don't have a habit of letting our enemies stay alive long enough to retaliate."

Though the Embodiment of Sacrifice tried to approach the Mars in order to stop the latter's ARCEUS System from burning through lots of precious whale biomass, the difference in speed was too great.

There was no way the Mars would allow the defensive mech to catch up and block its shots!

With the Thunderer Mark II joining in with its destructive shockwave attacks, the health of the unclean whale dropped at a prodigious rate!

"Stop it! You are destroying tens of millions of MTA merits worth of research value!"

"Haha, you may be able to stop one of us, but you can't stop all five of us! You Geminis need to sit back and let the adults do the work."

It didn't take long for the Gemini Family to figure out the culprit behind this coordinated act of defiance.

"LARKINSON!" The double voices of Patriarch Kobal Gemini and Matriarch Sena Gemini shouted over the command channel. "WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS!?"

Ves already knew that this was coming. He already formulated a response.

"I made my case to the other coalition partners who were still on the fence."
He replied in a gentle tone. "This isn't my first encounter with whales. They are far deadlier than you think. They can pull off plenty of deadly stunts even if they are nearly dead."

"WE HAD IT UNDER CONTROL!"

"I'm sorry, but your words and promises have proven to be less than reliable in the past. We cannot take you at your word. While I acknowledge that we may be overreacting, first look at the state of our mech forces. Do you think we are equipped to fight another pirate force or rampaging phase whale in our current states?"

The mechs employed by the coalition partners were far from their prime. They had fended off swarms of starfighters as well as hordes of warships, causing them to expend a lot of energy while also increasing their wear and tear.

Aside from that, the mentalities of the mech pilots were far from their peak. They had endured a lot of mental stresses over the course of the asymmetric battle.

The pilots had to adapt to a lot of new circumstances because the alien pirates simply didn't play by the rules of humanity.

In any case, Ves wanted to emphasize how little enthusiasm the mech pilots had left. They had become a lot more vulnerable and easy to break for powerful enemy units.

The leaders of the Gemini Family weren't insensitive towards other people.

It was the opposite in fact. Their ideologies and their highly social nature made them keenly aware that tens of thousands of mech pilots were just tired of this entire battle.

None of them wanted to spend any time on tense and nerve-wracking guard shifts, knowing that their mundane mechs could inflict virtually no damage to an opponent of such might and bulk.

The leaders of the Gemini Family briefly exchanged glances with each other.

From the moment the Santana Group and the Lehrer Foundation abandoned their camp, the outcome of this battle had already been set in stone.

The Geminis were merely expressing their attitude and displeasure towards this turn of events.

Ves was even smart enough to deduce that the charade was meant to increase the Gemini Family's share of the spoils.

After all, the Larkinsons and the others disobeyed an instruction from the nominal leader of the coalition.

That wasn't all. Ves and the Larkinson Clan were the main instigators of this miniature betrayal, and would probably have to give up valuable concessions in order to soothe any hard feelings.

While Ves was okay with surrendering a bit of his shares, he did not want the others to claim his hard-earned rewards.

He worked so much to put down this unclean whale! He did not want to leave this battlefield empty-handed!

"Sir... the unclean whale's body is continuing to fail. The monster's regeneration ability is completely overwhelmed."

Ves nodded in understanding. "Try to preserve as much phasewater organs as possible. That is where most of their juice is stored."

"The ace pilots are already aware of this necessity."

As the ace mechs continued to launch their attacks at their adversary, the unclean whale began to resemble a collapsing flesh palace.

It was eerily uncomfortable to see such a powerful whale getting utterly humiliated by a bunch of tiny war machines.

Ves leaned forward as the phase whale gradually weakened. The cyborg cat didn't even need to intervene anymore in order to hasten the creature's death.

"Helena." He whispered.

"You've changed, brother!" She replied to him without manifesting her body. "You have finally become one of us! I have lots to teach you about your new state, Ves!"

"Can it wait, Helena? I have a more important task for you. Do you see that big whale?"

"Uh huh. The pilot of the Blade Chaser Mark II has been firing his Gray Lotus at this terrible looking whale for a while now."

"Well, seeing as the unclean whale is about to perish, can you... harvest his spirit for me?" he requested. "I would like to do it myself, but... I'm too far away."

His sister placed her hands on her hips. "I'm not your errand girl, Ves. You can do it yourself. I can clearly sense that you've buried another incarnation of yourself inside that dying whale. You can just harvest the soul of the whale through that instead."

Ves wanted to palm his face. "Why didn't I think of that? This makes it much easier than before!"

Chapter 4516 The Beginning Of The Party

"The unclean whale must die."

This became the consensus among the temporary coalition.

The Golden Skull Alliance, the Adelaide Mercenary Company and the Boojay Family were firmly in favor of permanently eliminating the dangerous alien monstrosity as a threat.

The local leaders of the fleets hailing from the Santana Group and the Lehrer Foundation initially wanted to derive more benefits from this valuable prize, but the powerful appeals from their ace pilots 'persuaded' them to prioritize their safety over any potential increase in value.

No one held back in their attacks. The only relief obtained by the unclean whale was that most of the ace mechs no longer attacked the monster's body and surviving phasewater organs.

They were too valuable to spoil.

Instead, the ace mechs focused on cutting off the connections between the organs and the larger body while also trying to breach the hard and massive skull that housed the brain.

According to different sources, it was rare for phase whales to grow second brains. While it wasn't entirely unheard of, only the smartest and most advanced of their kind were able to develop and integrate these difficult components.

Ves paid close attention as the ace mechs drilled through the thick and naturally transphasic bone.

Upon the moment the Mars finally managed to penetrate through the thick skull matter with the Whale-Cutting Saber, the cyborg cat moved into action.

Enough time had passed for the camouflaged divine artifact to sneak past every obstacle and infiltrate the massive brain cavity of the unclean whale.

Though the cat hadn't been able to phase through the brain matter itself, it was enough to get inside and study the brain carefully in order to figure out how to kill the cannibal whale with the least amount of damage.

Ves still wanted to preserve as much of this brain matter for his own if possible.

"It's time."

As the Royal Jeem began to stab its spear through the massive and disgusting-looking brain from the top, the cyborg cat secretly started to inflict

targeted damage, including severing all of the nerves that connected the brain to the rest of the massive creature's body!

The effect was immediate. The entire bulk of the unclean whale started to go stiff as if it was a mech that had lost connection to a mech pilot.

As the whale slowly died, the cyborg cat became more alert even as it used its camouflage ability to hide in the surrounding biomatter.

The divine artifact opened its tiny maw and began to suck a large and powerful spirit into its gullet!

The effort of trying to contain the spirit of a recently deceased unclean whale was massive, but the cyborg cat somehow managed to keep it inside its body without breaking it down any further!

This was one of the many new abilities that Ves had bestowed on his divine artifact. Though the cat was clearly struggling to contain the powerful whale spirit, it was not a problem to keep the traumatized entity contained for the time being.

The cyborg cat discreetly phased away while keeping its camouflage abilities active.

Though a couple of nearby ace pilots such as Patriarch Reginald and Saint Kalasandra Boojay noticed a few oddities, they were mainly concerned with the state of the unclean whale.

"The beast is dead." Reginald stated as he could clearly feel the spread of death throughout the carcass.

"Let us make sure that is the case."

Once the ace pilots tentatively confirmed that the whale had perished, the battle was finally and truly over.

That didn't mean that every possible threat had been neutralized, but the human coalition had gained extensive control over the battlefield.

Even if there were still plenty of aliens alive, they could no longer muster the mechs or warships to threaten the invading human forces.

Search and rescue operations finally commenced as the fleets of the temporary coalition converged upon the broken asteroid base from six different directions.

Many mechs had returned to their respective motherships in order to resupply the machines or put them out of the way for the time being.

However, the human forces did not completely stand down their mech forces. They had all agreed to keep at least half of their remaining combat troops in the field.

Many mech pilots remained on guard in case the remnant alien pirates were planning to launch a counterattack.

There was also a significant chance that enemy reinforcements might drop in. Everyone's greatest fear was the possibility that a phase whale might enter the star system to check up on the Palace of Shame and its prisoner.

If that happened, the human mech forces would definitely be in for a difficult fight!

Still, for all of their preparations, many other people no longer put any thought on attacks and instead directed attention to more relevant matters.

For example, the battle produced an extensive amount of alien loot and debris!

Broken starfighters littered the battlefield, with many of the disabled machines steadily soaring away on a ballistic course until they collided against the many asteroids in the surrounding environment.

Few people were interested in the starfighters, though. The better ones might possess interesting alien tech, but what truly fascinated the salvage parties were the broken but intact warships!

Hundreds of warships littered the battlefield. Though many of them were rather small and unimpressive, there were also numerous more that were large and powerful enough to contend against high-ranking mechs, if only barely.

The 3.2 kilometers wide battleship known as the V'gahnt-Zezne was the grand prize.

Despite the extensive amount of damage she had incurred, the orven warship still retained enough structural integrity to preserve a lot of alien tech and valuables!

Already, every coalition partner had dispatched large and heavily armed boarding troops to the damaged battleship.

The V'gahnt-Zezne still boasted plenty of surviving ovren crew members, and they had already begun to arm themselves to repel the intruders!

What was even more serious was that the crazier orvens had even begun to sabotage their own ship as they wished to deny anything useful to the hateful humans!

This was why it became important for the human boarding troops to wipe out the alien opposition and stabilize the damaged battleship before she deteriorated any further!

With all of the fuss that happened with Ves and everything else, few people noticed that a certain Larkinson mech designer had already left the Spirit of Bentheim.

"OUT OF THE WAY."

The boarding team that attempted to breach an armored hatch hastily stepped out of the way as soon as they heard the command.

The female voice exuded so much steel and power that they automatically did as instructed.

A squad of elite Swordmaidens in heavy armor stomped through the corridor. Each of the footsoldiers wore black and menacing suits of medium combat armor that provided a good balance between defense and mobility.

Their characteristic alloy greatswords all looked hungry to carve through enemies.

Normally, the squad of Swordmaidens should have attracted a lot of attention, but this time they were all overshadowed by the singular powerful armored warrior that wore a contrasting red suit of combat armor.

The bloody greatsword held by this leading warrior actually started glowing as it began to exude the overwhelming need to cut!

With a wordless cry, the female swordwielder chopped at the thick hatch that was covered by a strong and protective energy shield!

The blade not only managed to slice straight through the energy shield as if it was a piece of paper, but also hacked through the thick alloy hatch itself!

The powerful swordmaster hacked the wide and circular hatch several times before lifting her armored leg so that she could launch a powerful kick!

A large rectangular piece of metal fell onto the other side.

"Watch out, Ketis!"

It turned out that the orvens holed up on the other side of the hatch had already prepared an ambush.

The dozen or so desperate alien crew members were unusually well-armed. Not only did they acquire plasma weapons that could easily melt through the combat armor of a typical footsoldier, but they also had access to other powerful toys!

First, a group of alien bots flew forward and began to hack at the intruding human forces with strange and deadly looking electrified batons!

Second, a pair of orven spacers had managed to deploy a crew-mounted plasma machine gun behind a sturdy work console. Several deployable gadgets erected strong energy shields around this emplacement, allowing the powerful plasma machine gun to fire straight through the barriers without worrying about getting hit in return!

Third, the remaining orven spacers had spread across the compartment and hid behind different forms of cover, allowing them to fire their deadly plasma rifles at the humans that were pouring out of a single point of entry!

The ambush should have been able to shred the first human troopers to enter the compartment. Armor or not, the arsenal of the defending orvens were too powerful.

It just so happened that the alien crew members were fighting against a greater enemy than they were accustomed to. From the moment the red armored human entered the compartment, nothing was going according to plan!

Ketis lifted her glowing Bloodsinger. She resonated with her blade, allowing it to suck up and absorb all of the electric energy outputted by the alien bots.

"Hah!"

With a single sweep of her blade, she unloaded all of the electric energy her weapon had caught, frying the bots with their own attacks!

Meanwhile, a torrent of plasma bolts rained down on her position from multiple directions.

Ketis had already begun to sidestep the initial attacks and continued to stay on the move in order to frustrate the aim of the enemy crew members as best as possible!

Though she wasn't able to dodge every attack, the plasma bolts that got too close were either blocked by a barrier produced by her willpower or an energy shield generated by the inbuilt defensive systems of her combat armor.

"Hahahaha! I've missed this so much!"

Ketis had become so immersed in this fight that she had even started to bat aside some of the plasma bolts that threatened to exhaust her defenses!

She couldn't keep this up forever, though. The large machine gun alone could have shredded all of her accompanying Swordmaidens, so she rapidly sprinted closer until she was about to collide against the alien energy shields that protected the emplacement!

Instead of slowing down, Ketis continued to sprint faster!

"BREAK!"

Before her armored form collided against the energy shield, her Bloodsinger sang once again and cut straight across the barrier, causing it to fizzle out in an instant!

The two orven crew members that wanted to shoot Ketis down with the machine gun suddenly found themselves vulnerable.

The panicking aliens shouted alien words as they pulled out several weapons ranging from a plasma cutter and a grenade.

Neither weapons saw any use as Ketis rushed up faster than what the inadequately trained orven crew members could pull off with their respective weapons.

Swish!

Only a single, smooth cut was all Ketis needed to slice her Bloodsinger through the armored torsos of the hapless aliens!

With the greatest threat down, the remaining Swordmaiden troopers easily dealt with the remaining opposition.

Plasma bolts struck over half of the aggressive Swordmaidens, but their fast movements and sturdy armor protected them from actual injuries.

Each of the greatsword-wielding soldiers approached their respective targets and swung their weapons to put an end to the resisting aliens!

Many of them found that one cut was already enough to eliminate their opposition. The few Swordmaidens who had to launch a second attack felt ashamed for needing to swing their weapons again!

Ketis did not rush to compete for their kills. Instead, she looking down at her fresh alien kills so that she could savor this moment.

Her Bloodsinger shook as Ketis grew more and more excited at all of the surviving aliens that she could kill.

She truly hoped that the orvens wouldn't take the initiative to surrender. It would be a lot less excusable to cut down enemies when they had already expressed their willingness to admit defeat.

She needed to hurry up and kill the diehards before the other troops put them down!

"Let us proceed to one of their data vaults and secure what is left." She commanded her troops. "We cannot allow these orvens to wipe their databases clean! For Lydia!"

"FOR LYDIA!"

The Swordmaidens recovered as best they could before following their champion further inwards!

Chapter 4517 Share Of The Loot

The party commenced.

Shuttles and other craft ferried boarding party after boarding party to the many disabled but reasonably intact alien warships across the battlefield.

Some of the large but irresponsible alien hulls had to be towed in order to stop them from drifting away and getting crushed by nearby asteroids.

The attempts to secure the interior of all of the vessels did not always proceed smoothly. Different pirate groups tended to adopt all manner of defenses to protect their greatest assets.

Some of the alien races and individuals were also much better armed and armored. Combined with the fact that certain species were much stronger infantry combatants than humans also produced a lot of human casualties.

Yet no matter how many troopers got injured or died, the morale among the soldiers never dipped.

Each of them were grateful for putting their long hours of training to good use. For once, the mechs no longer stole the entire show.

As the boarding parties steadily cleared the alien warships, more teams arrived.

The combat engineers and other specialists began to tackle every hazard before they harmed the ships even further. The specialists also cataloged every valuable resource or piece of alien technology for future retrieval.

Some of the teams dispatched by other pioneering groups didn't even wait for retrieval parties to pick up the loot. They already started to claim their trophies and grab anything that looked shiny and valuable enough.

It didn't matter if they refrained from surrounding their shiny loot to their respective organizations.

There was so much plunder that no one was able to swallow it all! Their fleets simply didn't offer enough cargo space to raid everything of value!

This was why everyone prioritized the smallest and most portable valuables!

Crates filled with high tech gear and exotic alloys continued to fill the holds of various transports.

Some of the pioneering groups even tried to secure as many alien prisoners as possible.

This wasn't always easy as there were plenty of hostile alien pirates that fought to the end rather than surrender themselves to the mercy of the humans.

The Lehrer Foundation happened to be especially enthusiastic about capturing live alien specimens!

The greater the variety of species, the better!

In the meantime, the assault on the Palace of Shame also attracted a lot of attention.

The only complication was that much of the large asteroid had been sundered in order to attack the unclean whale that had been buried in the middle of its structure.

Many halls and chambers either collapsed or had been wiped out entirely due to incurring a lot of damage.

Kilometer-sized pieces had also broken loose and floated away from the larger hole.

Whatever was left of the asteroid was largely broken and riddled with holes.

Even then, there were still a lot of intact sections left that harbored plenty of valuable goods.

Many troops began to enter the more intact but still fairly hazardous remains of the Palace of Shame. They neutralized every surviving alien force in their way and began to loot anything that looked valuable enough.

The human troopers encountered plenty of dangers throughout their search, but many of the intrusions yielded a lot of profit as shuttles became filled with precious exotics, powerful alien gear and most importantly phasewater.

Of course, the greatest prize of all was the alien creature that was at the heart of it all. The enormous carcass of the unclean whale was a precious treasure in itself, and much of it held great value to the pioneering groups!

Pretty much everyone was interested in the abundant amounts of phasewater spread throughout the body. They were largely concentrated in specialized organs that were responsible for generating different phasewater abilities, but there were also trace amounts of phasewater concentrated in the massive creature's blood!

If not for the fact that the concentration was awfully low, everyone would have scrambled to bleed and cut up the carcass in order to squeeze out every single drop.

In any case, disputes immediately broke out about how to divide the loot. Though the pioneering groups had all signed an agreement that outlined the

loot distribution beforehand, it was not so easy to determine everyone's exact contributions to the battle.

The Gemini Family for all of its perceived faults still deserved a double share for organizing Operation Lighthouse in the first place. None of the others would have been in a position to vanquish one of the rare cannibals of the phase whale race if not for the solicitation from the Geminis.

That said, none of their temporary allies had any desire to hand additional loot to them. The Embodiment of Love and the Embodiment of Sacrifice may have shown great strength in battle, but neither of them played a crucial role in overcoming the challenges they faced.

The Santana Group and the Golden Skull Alliance had played substantially greater roles over the course of the battles. Without their help, the temporary coalition might have lost the battle!

Although none of the pioneers denied this truth, there was still a lot of room to determine how much their contributions were worth.

After a tense and heated round of negotiations, the pioneering groups came to a consensus on how to split the overall loot.

The Gemini Family earned 2 shares, just as previously agreed.

The Santana Group earned 1.25 shares on account of the Thunderer Mark II's incredibly high damage contribution. Their ace heavy artillery mech had been the most suitable war machine to fight against the natives of the Red Ocean.

The Golden Skull Alliance was entitled to receive 1.5 shares due to its powerful interventions that either wiped out a lot of enemies at once or created crucial openings that led to the defeat of powerful opponents.

The Adelaide Mercenary Company, the Lehrer Foundation and the Boojay Family all had to make do with 1 share each.

Their forces had definitely pulled their own weight, but they did not perform greater than expected. They merely did their jobs, and that was enough.

"Only 1.5 shares?" Ves furrowed his brows. "Are those guys crazy? It's because of me that we managed to kill the unclean whale in the first place! None of our vaunted ace mechs had been able to punch through the defenses of that beast in the first place. I employed an incredibly powerful trump card to breach our final opponent's spatial barrier. Aren't we entitled to greater compensation after I expended this strategic resource?"

The projection of Minister Shederin Purnesse looked stoic.

"This is the best we can do, sir. The extra 0.5 share bestowed on us is the extent of the respect and gratitude that the remainder of the coalition is willing to give. It would be too shameless for the pioneers to deny us this much. After that... well, any further unity has to make way for naked self-interest. The greater our share, the less the others are able to claim for themselves. It is not in their interest to reduce their own benefits. This has been a costly battle for everyone involved, and do not forget that we have earned the ire of the Geminis. Their lack of support played a crucial role ruling out any further share increases."

Ves grunted in disappointment. "I get it. I truly wish that we could have secured more rewards, but that big whale was too dangerous to be left alive. Are there any signs that the coalition is falling apart?"

Ves was no longer inside the bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim.

As soon as the immediate crisis had passed, Nitaa and the rest of the honor guard 'insisted' that Ves should pay a visit to the labs of the Dragon's Den in order to check up on his new condition.

He was in no position to refuse.

This was why he had been stripped of his Unending Regalia before being stuffed inside an all-round scanning chamber.

Ves could feel the scanning rays trying to pass through his body so that they could generate useful readings.

Unfortunately for the doctors and biotech researchers employed by the Larkinson Biotech Institute, his new camouflage capabilities probably scrambled every form of intrusive inspections.

This caused him to remain stuck in this chamber for a longer time than normal.

The clansmen at least allowed him to keep in touch with the leaders of his clan.

"Everything is stable... for the time being." Minister Shederin Purnesse reported. "Openly, there is little appetite for breaking off relations. Anyone who dares to assume a confrontational stance will quickly be met with united opposition from the remaining groups. That doesn't mean that plots may be brewing in the dark. You would have to speak with Director Calabast to report her findings on this matter."

Ves had no doubt that such activities were taking place, but that didn't necessarily mean that former allies would come to blows. Everyone had already dealt with more than enough trouble. They had little appetite for more close shaves. No one wanted to suffer greater casualties and loss of materiel just to prevent their rivals from claiming their own shares.

Ves talked a bit more with Shederin. While neither of them was afraid that the other pioneering groups would turn on the Golden Skull Alliance, they were greatly concerned about missing out on valuable pieces of loot.

There were still many ways the other groups could secretly abscond with entire containers filled with phasewater. This was why all of the looting parties

increasingly had to be accompanied by observers hailing from the other pioneering groups.

Ves was glad to hear that no one acted outrageously, though the looting spree was still at an early phase.

"What is our progress in carving up the body of the unclean whale?"

"It remains a point of contention, sir." Minister Shederin said. "There are groups in favor of keeping the carcass as whole as possible. The MTA rewards more for intact specimens. The mechters will award significantly less MTA merits for a whale that has been chopped in many different pieces."

Ves frowned. "We have enough MTA merits."

Compared to MTA merits, Ves would much rather get his hands on lots of phase whale biomatter.

Even if he could only obtain the relatively inadequate body parts of a delinquent whale this time, that was still a step up from astral beast and fish-whale biomatter! Ves didn't even need the expertise of a biotech expert to be able to determine the approximate value of the enormous carcass and all of its organs.

"The Geminis, Adelaides, Santanas and Boojays want to keep the carcass whole, but they have reluctantly given us and the Lehrers permission to cut the body parts that will make up our respective shares."

"Hm, sounds reasonable. What do the Lehrers want the most?"

"The Lehrer Foundation is especially keen on claiming the brains and nerves of the whale carcass." Minister Shederin told Ves. "Aside from that, they have selectively tried to claim several whole phasewater organs that are still intact. While they have tried to take samples of as many different organs and other

discrete alien tissue as possible, they have fought hard on these two priorities."

Ves furrowed his brows. "That is what I have instructed our clan to secure as well."

"Great minds think alike, it seems."

"It will be annoying to compete against the Lehrers for the same stuff." Ves grumbled.

The only good point was that the unclean whale was enormous. The dead creature contained plenty of organs and other powerful flesh that still remained relatively undamaged. All of them held great value, especially to the parties that knew how to put them to good use in their own research projects!

Ves had great plans for all of that unclean whale flesh. He had made sure to send a somewhat detailed list of specifications on what sort of whale meat he wanted to secure.

If his clan secured enough high-quality materials, he might be able to develop an interesting biomech in the near future...

Chapter 4518 New Conclusions

A needle poked his arm.

At least, it attempted to. It met with an unreasonable amount of resistance, so much so that it had to exert lethal force before it ceased its attempt in order to prevent any possible accidents.

"You know what? I give up." Director Ranya Wodin exasperatingly said as she waved away the bots that had been trying and failing to take tissue samples.

"Do you believe me, now?" Ves innocently asked as he sat up from the examination table.

He felt awfully annoyed at being forced to wear a thin medical garment that completely failed to hide the innate charm of his newly evolved body.

Director Ranya did not even hide her fascination for his radical changes. No matter how much he employed his innate camouflage ability to hide how special he had become, it was primarily effective at hiding his insides from intrusive scans.

It did little to obscure the changes to his outward appearance.

It also wasn't entirely effective at suppressing his glow, which was a thing now that he had acquired some of the traits of a spiritual entity.

"You at least know that I'm still me, right?" Ves asked. "I'm not a clone that the MTA had secretly cultivated and swapped with my original body through a secret teleportation process."

Ranya smirked. "I don't have any doubts about that. Clones are always flawed and we do not believe the MTA has managed to overcome their flaws. The longer a clone talks and interacts with the people you know, the more inconsistencies it will expose. While we have definitely noticed lots of changes from you, they can mainly be ascribed to your... inexplicable evolution. What I mean to say is that a covert replacement clone would try a lot harder to blend in rather than stand out. You must be the worst clone that I have ever met for exposing so many physical and mental differences from your old self."

"Well, I guess it doesn't really matter anyway when the Golden Cat and the other spirits that we are familiar with have already vouched for me." Ves casually said as he moved over to the changing room in order to exchange his outfit for a proper uniform.

"Ugh. Our understanding of these 'spirits' that you consort with is too inadequate." Ranya complained. "It would have been better if you taught us more details of what you know about this subject."

Ves sighed. "Now is not the time. There is way too much stuff going on for me to give you a lesson. Besides, much of the research centered around spirituality takes place in the T Institute for a reason. The people who work over there are at least somewhat capable of working with spiritual energy. The same can't be said for your researchers. You guys simply lack the expertise."

"Then teach us, sir!"

He paused for a moment. "I am going to need your help on a lot of future biotechnology-related projects. I have become a lot more interested in adding biomechs to our lineup after seeing the power of that big whale. If your LBI can accommodate my new ambitions, I can teach you more about spiritual energy than what limited information that I have disclosed to you in exchange."

"That is excellent news, sir."

"We can talk about this later. I'm more interested in the whale carcass. Did we get the good stuff?"

"That depends on your definition of 'good stuff'." Ranya replied in her professional tone. "We are making good use of our allowances. We have secured portions of the brain and harvested several whole phase whale organs. Making use of them is another question. Phase whale tissue is different from fish-whale tissue. Fish-whales are simplified versions of phase whales. The latter is much more valuable but also much more difficult to shape to our advantage. Our researchers will need to spend years on studying the intricacies of phase whale biology because it is so intertwined with phasewater."

Ves nodded in understanding. Any organism that contained phasewater was pretty much a demigod or god in native terms, so it was not surprising that it would be difficult to make use of phase whale remains.

It was worth the effort. The MTA wouldn't have been so enthusiastic about capturing and dissecting phase whales. The high bounties they promised for any phase whale specimens was a clear sign that the mechers had also grown interested in the extraordinary power of this powerful race!

Compared to the MTA, Ves didn't think the Larkinson Biotech Institute could gain as much benefit out of the tissue samples. The biotech researchers working for the Larkinson Clan simply didn't have as much expertise and resources at their disposal.

That didn't mean that Ves was ready to suspend these research efforts. He possessed a lot of expertise in spiritual engineering and he had recently acquired an affinity for phasewater. He could give his research teams a powerful push in the right direction if he leveraged both of these advantages.

As Ves changed his uniform and wore most of his equipment again, he stepped out of the changing room and looked around for his Unending Regalia.

"Where's my combat armor?"

"We took it back to your grand stateroom. We requested your wife to look over your combat armor just to make sure it is the same one that you have made use of all the time. We can never be too careful, sir."

Ves already expected his clansmen to check up on his Unending Regalia, but he didn't expect them to hand it over to his wife!

"It will be in good hands." He replied.

Although his Unending Regalia was capable of recording logs, he had made sure to disable that function and wipe out any possible incriminating data before he returned to realspace. He was not afraid that Gloriana would find any compromising materials in his suit of combat armor.

At most, she would probably become annoyed at how his combat armor had suddenly become incomplete and a lot less perfect than before.

Ves and Ranya continued to talk about how to handle and make use of the harvested phase whale flesh. There was so much R&D value to them that securing these spoils alone already paid off this mission as far as he was concerned!

He smirked for a moment.

What no one realized except for him was that he had also harvested an even greater ingredient from the unclean whale.

Though his cyborg cat was still away from him, the divine artifact successfully retrieved the unclean whale's rebellious spirit.

Containing it for a longer period of time was a massive problem, but for now his new pet was keeping it firmly contained.

The cyborg cat even managed to hitch a ride back to the Larkinson Clan's fleet. Ves just had to make an odd request for the Everchanger to fly up to the carcass and pretend to do something while the cyborg cat sneakily jumped over.

Ves actually felt tempted not to retrieve his divine artifact.

One of the greatest advantages of his latest incarnation was that it didn't have to stay close to him. Unlike Blinky that could only go so far until hitting a range limit, his cyborg cat could go anywhere and Ves would still be able to maintain an active connection.

The reason for this was because the divine artifact contained a portion of his Divine Core which was the more important essential part of himself. He wasn't

really sure what it actually represented, but he roughly understood what he could do now that it was split off from the larger whole.

His cyborg cat didn't have to travel in the same fleet as him. He could send it out to a completely different location and have it serve as a backup for his own life.

If his fleet ever ran out of luck and got wiped out one day, most of his clansmen would probably die without a doubt.

Not Ves.

He knew that as long as his cyborg cat remained alive and far away from the battlefield, he could always make a comeback somehow.

Of course, he didn't have to restore his original self. He could choose to stick to living like a cat and mooch off other people.

It was quite nice to... not carry around so many burdens anymore and use his second chance at life to relax and stop worrying about complicated human affairs.

However, if Ves still retained the heart of a mech designer, then he wouldn't be happy with living like a cat.

There had to be some way of restoring his human body and perhaps the rest of himself. The journey might be long and arduous, but it should definitely be possible to climb back up again.

He even theorized that his mother may be going through the same journey.

It would explain a lot, actually.

He knew that his mother possessed a special identity that was tied to the Five Scrolls Compact.

For some reason, she left all of that behind and became the wife of a rather ordinary mech pilot hailing from a small and forgettable third-rate state.

Ves couldn't imagine how a spiritual sorceress that used to wield so much power and knowledge could possibly be happy with living such an ordinary and unremarkable life.

His mother's decisions made a lot more sense if Cynthia Larkinson wasn't her main personality, but rather her incarnation.

An incarnation that was meant to serve as a lifeline for a spiritual sorceress on the run.

Ves felt mixed when he entertained a number of unsettling possibilities.

With the knowledge that he possessed today, he was pretty sure that much of his mother had 'died' already. The only part of her that was left was probably an incomplete shard of her Divine Core.

While she had successfully managed to cling to life, she would never be complete as long as her Divine Core had yet to restore.

This explained why she couldn't raise Ves throughout his entire childhood.

It also explained why she needed to harvest spiritual energy from Ves and other people.

He silently sighed. From what he knew, it took a long time and a lot of resources to restore a heavily damaged Divine Core. Just preventing whatever remained from falling apart already took a great amount of effort!

Ves understood a lot better how much it had cost for his mother to turn the Superior Mother into her incarnation.

Cynthia had to split off a piece of her already damaged remnant of her Divine Core to ensure that the Superior Mother remained bound to herself.

He could even guess that since Cynthia only split off the tiniest fraction that she could get away with, the connection between herself and the Superior Mother wasn't strong.

It wouldn't be like the strong and vigorous bond between Ves and his cyborg cat. The two remained constantly connected to the point where Ves could experience what his living divine artifact was going through at any time.

The connection between Cynthia and the Superior Mother should be inactive most of the time. It took too much effort from the former to activate her connection with the latter.

He sighed. He truly wanted to help out her mother and try to fix all of her problems. He was getting closer to doing so but he was still too far away from reaching her level.

"Sir." Ranya spoke up after a period of silence. "The first transports carrying the harvested tissue samples of the unclean whale have just docked with the Dragon's Den. The biomatter is already being brought to our storage chambers. Would you like to come and inspect the bounty?"

Ves grinned. "Heck, yes! This is our greatest trophy from this battle as far as I am concerned!"

He wanted to touch and take a look at that phase whale meat himself. That way, he could make direct and more intuitive comparisons between himself and the unclean whale.

How much did their bodies resemble each other?

Chapter 4519 Folded Meat

It was one thing to see a great and terrible unclean whale fight and struggle many kilometers away.

Despite the whale's ability to affect a massive area with his more wide area phasewater abilities, Ves never experienced the might of the unclean whale up close.

His most recent experience with a member of the phase whale race was when Master Dervidian invited him to view the revived occupant of the 'Royal Tomb' in the Garimel System up close.

Now that was a monstrosity beyond comparison. Though Ves had never figured out whether the super whale that had come to life was the mythical Flesh Conqueror or an evolution of the Cerebral King, there was no doubt that a titanic 12-kilometer long phase whale possessed awesome power!

It was the most powerful physical 'god' that Ves had ever encountered. The enormous bulk of that biotechnological monstrosity contained so much phasewater that he suspected that the super whale could only be matched by a god mech once the all-powerful beast got up to strength.

Ves had lucked out in encountering two different phase whales in their moments of weakness. Both the revived Flesh Conqueror or the resident of the Palace of Shame had been caught when they had just regained their freedom and their autonomy. The strength and powers they displayed was not proportionate to how powerful they ought to be based on their physical characteristics.

As Ves and Director Ranya stood a short distance away from the site where many heavy-duty lifter bots carefully brought in massive freezer containers, they could both feel the remnant power contained within the flesh.

"We haven't even taken a proper look yet, but I can already surmise that genuine phase whale biomatter is of much greater value than fish-whale flesh." Ranya said with an intrigued expression. "Our research teams will most certainly enjoy our new experimental materials. It is rather unfortunate that I

specialize in exoplants rather than exobeasts. You need to put more effort into obtaining samples of powerful alien trees and plants. My hairstyle could use an update."

Her protective suit featured a transparent helmet that showed off her leafy green hair. Her living hair swayed in the confines of the helmet as they happily soaked in the surrounding light to fuel their photosynthesis.

Ves used to get weirded out by her plant modifications, but now that he had become a qualified exobiologist and made extensive modifications to his own body, he appreciated the design and ingenuity of her self-augmentations.

Light was ubiquitous and provided a free source of energy in most locations. Even artificial light sources that did not convey much warmth due to their high efficiencies could be absorbed by Ranya's body and ease her need for sustenance in the process.

He could even see that if Ranya ever needed to, she could 'deploy' her hair into something resembling a massive tree canopy. She would be able to absorb a lot of energy which she could use to fuel plenty of unknown biological processes.

Perhaps Ves should look into turning his hair into light-absorbing organs as well. Then he shook his head.

He already had an alternate means to generate energy through unconventional means. His physical transformation not only granted him greater control over his upgraded Jutland organ, but also allowed him to absorb energy and nutrients by ingesting all kinds of materials that normal people wouldn't be able to digest.

Turning his hair into leaves would just be icing on the cake. He could think of much better uses for his hair, such as turning them into ultra-thin tentacles that could be merged into more combat ready organs!

As Ves continued to entertain all sorts of new and interesting ideas on how he should augment his body further, the procession of containers finally ended for the time being.

"Would you like to take a closer look, sir?"

"That goes without saying."

Ves and Ranya continued to chat about matters relating to all of the new research projects they could start after this. They finally reached a nearby lab where the contents of the incoming containers went through careful inspection under quarantine.

No one knew whether the phase whales possessed any supergerms that could devour human bodies in a matter of minutes, so it was necessary to thoroughly inspect the whale matter even if it had already been frozen.

When a square-ish block of phase whale flesh became visible, Ves held in his breath.

He could sense much more information about the dense and phasewater-infused alien biomatter now that he could lay his eyes on its powerful surface.

He could sense that the flesh still contained a strong echo of the unclean whale. From a spiritual perspective, the flesh itself still contained a weak but highly intertwined spiritual imprint.

It gave him the impression that he was truly looking at a piece of flesh harvested by an actual demigod.

"Interesting." Ranya said as she studied the initial scanning data. "The unclean whale is not as advanced in his physical metamorphosis as I thought."

"What do you mean by that?" Ves asked.

"Look at how much phasewater is infused in this block of flesh. If we do our best to squeeze every drop of phasewater from it, we will probably be able to extract half a kilogram at most."

That was quite low considering the immense bulk of this massive tissue sample.

"You think it should be higher?" Ves asked.

"All of the sources tell us that proper mature phase whales have greater concentrations of phasewater in their physical structures." Ranya replied. "It is their badge of strength. The unclean whale that we have felled had grown large and old enough to infuse a lot more phasewater in his body, but strangely enough the concentration is barely better than that of an adolescent phase whale."

Ves did not look too surprised. "Unclean whales are the scumbags and the delinquents of the phase whale race. They skip all of the hard work and resort to shortcuts instead. The creature we encountered today completely matches this description. That whale had neglected his studies in biotechnology so much that he had never been able to improve his phasewater concentration. The only organs that feature higher concentrations of phasewater are the ones that were clearly stolen from other phase whales, right?"

The director of the Larkinson Biotech Institute nodded. "That is correct. Those 'foreign' phasewater organs are much more valuable than the other body parts of the unclean whale because they are all derived from more proper phase whales. It is quite interesting how the unclean whale is able to integrate them to his body without any apparent rejection or incompatibility. It is as if the phase whale race is particularly suited to engage in cannibalism."

"Maybe that is why they are so non confrontational most of the time." Ves rubbed his smooth-shaven chin. "The only way for them to prevent

themselves from pulling off an Age Conquest is to impose strong rules and maintain strong discipline over their impulses."

Despite the passage of time, his face hadn't grown a stubble of hair. His control over his own body had skyrocketed so much after his first sublimation that he could essentially tell his hair cells to stop growing.

Ves would never have to command his shaving bot to do its work anymore! He could take care of this problem himself and wake up with a face that was as smooth as a baby's bottom forever!

Of course, he could also do the opposite. He just had to make sure that he was stocked with enough nutrients to command his face to grow a large and bushy beard.

"The density of our tissue samples is good, but far from the best." Ranya said in a disappointed tone.

Ves understood what she was talking about. "Something is better than nothing. No matter the quality, what we have managed to obtain is far superior to the biomatter that we have managed to harvest from the fish-whales and the previous incarnation of Titania. Phase whales have pursued a substantially different evolutionary direction that is arguably superior to everything else in the Red Ocean. Now that we have harvested many tons of phase whale biomatter, we can finally begin to study and experiment on the secrets of the phase whale race and potentially leverage their advantages for ourselves."

"I would caution you to temper your expectations, sir. It will take many decades for an interdisciplinary research project of this scope to yield useful results. You are talking about deciphering and reverse engineering one of the feats that has helped the phase whales become individual powerhouses."

Phase whales were large and massive, but they normally weren't as big as they could have been.

Giant monstrosities such as the revived Flesh Conqueror and the astral beast version of Titania possessed so much bulk that they could form a new mountain range on top of an entire metropolis with all of their flesh and bone.

However, their immense physical dimensions weren't treated as a universal advantage. An enormous body was not only too clumsy and unwieldy, but also made it much more difficult to travel across the stars.

Therefore, most phase whales tended to control the size of their bodies so that they were as large as sub-capital ships rather than capital ships.

Yet despite limiting their physical dimensions, they somehow found ways to increase their mass as if they were twice, thrice or even ten times larger than their actual sizes!

The more clever whales even managed to increase their body density without increasing their mass, allowing them to accelerate and maneuver light starfighters despite the fact that they resembled lumbering warships more!

The secret to all of this was phasewater.

One of the benefits of integrating phasewater into an organism's body was that it enabled the organism to fold the space occupied by his body, thereby increasing the density of organic matter in a weird, space warped fashion!

Few alien races had managed to master this advanced and extremely dangerous method.

It was almost certain that the most powerful phase whales and other god-like organisms of the Red Ocean had managed to squeeze their bodies in a limited amount of space like a closed accordion.

There were many theories about what made this possible. The most prevailing ones claimed that the phase whales essentially transferred a part of their enormous bodies to different dimensions that remained unused.

As long as the blood, flesh and other parts of a phase whale was infused with enough phasewater, it was possible to maintain this effect on a permanent basis!

The strength of this effect wasn't particularly strong with the tissue samples harvested from the unclean whale. There were rumors that the strongest phase whales who had replaced their blood almost entirely with phasewater were able to reach ridiculous ratios!

Some of them might have grown to the size of planets, but because they were able to fold their own bodies to such a degree that they were only as large as a heavy cruiser when looking from the outside.

Anyone who thought they had the firepower to destroy a relatively 'small' phase whale would be in for a rude surprise!

If the Larkinson Clan managed to obtain so much high-quality flesh, Ves could probably leverage this powerful trait to develop a biomech beyond comparison!

Unfortunately, he had to make do with phase whale flesh where the matter folding effect was barely adequate enough to occupy his attention.

If he could crack the secret of the unclean whale's low-level internal spatial folding technique, he might be able to apply it to his own body one day!

As much as his metamorphosis had turned him into a native demigod, he didn't make full use of the fact his body now contained phasewater.

If he could activate his phasewater-infused blood and flesh, he might be able to grow a denser body while maintaining the illusion that he was still as large as a regular human.

In other words, he had the potential to transform his body into the equivalent of a biomech without making it obvious!

Chapter 4520 Knowing Wife

Ves had so many uses for the unclean whale flesh that were currently undergoing a thorough examination process.

From the phasewater organs to the neatly cut slices of alien brain matter, he could think of so many ways to repurpose them into biomechs.

Technically speaking, it was extremely difficult to shape foreign biomatter into biomechs. The biomech designer needed to possess an extensive understanding of the source of the powerful flesh in order to transform it into variations that were more suitable for their new roles.

The large amount of time, manpower and resources needed to develop the Titan-5 Project to its current iteration clearly taught Ves that he needed to invest a lot in such a project!

Ves didn't think it would take that long to convert all of this phase whale biomatter into useful biomechs.

Compared to other biomech designers, Ves possessed a lot of advantages after his transformation.

He would have to start a new biomech project in order to be certain, but he might be able to cobble together a workable phase whale-derived biomech in two years rather than two decades.

That reminded him of the Blood Knight Project that he had designed when he was residing in the System Space.

He was tempted to show it off to Director Ranya, but he refrained from doing so. He never invested any serious effort into learning biotechnology and biomech design, so he couldn't explain how he was able to design a complete biomech all of a sudden.

Once Ves had his fill of staring at the harvested biomatter of the unclean whale, Director Ranya brought up one more topic.

"Our boarding teams have already captured over a thousand individual alien pirate crew members." She reported. "They range from orvens to intelligent alien horse-like beings that are too large to fit through normal man-sized corridors. They are currently held in the derelict vessels they were captured in, but that is not a long-term solution. If we want to hold them in the Dragon's Den over the long term, then we have to prepare different biomes that can provide a comfortable living environment for every unique alien race. That will impose a significant burden to our facilities, but we can do it as long as we limit their space."

This was a good question. He was sure he could put all of those captured alien pirates to good use, but the question was whether it was worthwhile for him to spend his limited time and resources on experimenting with all of those random alien species.

He eventually shrugged. "I will leave this matter to your discretion, Ranya. You can make your own judgment on preserving the captives that are derived from interesting alien races. The only aliens that I want you to put aside are the orvens from the Unspoken pirate fleet. They are incredibly interesting for the advanced knowledge that they possess and their potential for greatness. Try to capture as many of them as possible. Their lower caste members are interesting enough, but I am much more interested in their higher caste members."

"It will be difficult to capture any of the latter." Ranya warned. "The leaders and officers of the Unspoken will immediately try to commit suicide when it becomes clear that they have run out of options to resist. The only ones our men have managed to capture alive are those that have been taken by surprise."

"Tell our men to do their best. Contact the Black Cats to ask for help with capturing high-value orvens alive. They are truly useful to me. If there are enough captives, you can go ahead and turn an entire biome into an internment camp like we did with the pakklavons."

"That is a major commitment, Ves." She frowned. "I'm not sure what the point is of keeping all of those pakklavons on my ship. I am aware that the T Institute has been experimenting with the alien captives for several years, but what do you gain out of those research projects?"

"You'll find out soon enough." Ves smirked.

Ves wanted to stick around longer, but he had many other responsibilities on his plate. He bid farewell to Director Ranya and shuttled back to his flagship.

Before he did any further work, he needed to update his loved ones on some of his recent changes.

"Well, I can't postpone this forever." He sighed.

The sense of vigilance from his surrounding honor guard showed that his clan was still spooked by his massive transformation.

From the way the suited clansmen reacted to him as he made his way through the corridors, they all took notice of his glow.

That was a problem that he needed to work on. He did not want to travel around and catch people's attention all of the time because he couldn't stop himself from acting like a spiritual beacon.

There had to be better ways for him to dial down his glow effects. He just needed to invest time on experimenting with his new powers. Perhaps Helena might have a few useful tips as well. She had learned a lot of theories and techniques from their 'mother'.

When stopped in front of the armored hatch that led into his grand stateroom, he hesitated for a moment.

This would be the first time he properly presented himself to the people he loved the most.

This was his family. Would they still accept him despite his massive changes? His mentality and perspective had gone through a major shift. He had climbed so high up the transhuman tree that it became a lot more difficult for him to sympathize with the common people.

"...Then again, none of my wife and children are normal people."

Humanity was no longer a strong trait in his little family. Gloriana and their three children were all designer babies that were derived from mixing together a lot of artificial genes while Ves had ascended into a higher life form.

Each of them had become vastly more competent than most of their peers of their respective ages. Ves had become an even greater freak than before, but his children were practically freaks from conception. There was no reason for him to think that he had grown distant from his loved ones.

No matter how much he changed, he had vowed to himself that he would never forget the intimacy he built up with his friends and family. Those contacts anchored him to reality and prevented him from drifting away too far from the standards of humanity.

Once Ves regained his composure, he took a deep breath and entered his abode.

His wife and children already awaited his return. Each of them still wore their thin protective suits and didn't seem to have grown too worried about their absence.

Gloriana was actually in the process of tinkering and inspecting the parts of his Unending Regalia.

The three children occasionally paid attention to what their mother was doing with the suit of combat armor but became a lot more engrossed in their virtual board game.

"That's not fair, Aurelia!" Andraste complained as her animated purple bear dropped after getting hit by an arrow launched by her older sister's game character. "How can you attack again on the same turn? That's not in the rules!"

"I told you that we are running on the latest update to the game." The black-haired girl grinned and said as her archer character approached the bear corpse and looted it of anything of value. The developer has introduced new skills that allow for follow-up attacks as long as you can satisfy the conditions. Read the rules next time!"

Marvaine didn't bother to pay attention to the argument. His herd of killer cows had already been defeated in an earlier stage of the ongoing match.

Instead, he entertained himself by cuddling and playing with Lucky and Clixie.

"Meow~"

"Miaow~"

Everyone quickly stopped what they were doing once they finally noticed that Ves had returned.

"Ves!"

"Papa!"

The three children rose to their feet and ran over to hug Ves' legs. None of them showed any hesitation despite the many obvious changes to their father.

"Meow meow."

"Miaow!"

Lucky and Clixie greeted Ves in their own way. Their relaxed postures showed that they had no doubts that Ves was still the real deal.

Gloriana had put aside her tools first before she turned around and approached her husband.

She stopped a short distance away from Ves. Now that she could observe him without as many distractions as before, she became more aware of how he had changed on a physical and non-physical level.

The woman ignored the physical changes for the time being and utilized her senses to see how much stronger and more evolved her husband had become.

Her eyes narrowed as she began to pick up a lot of strange clues.

Maow.

Alexandria even popped out of her mind and flew over to Ves' as he was still in the process of attending to their children.

The red companion spirit floated around Ves and began to perceive a lot more irregularities with her sharp spiritual senses.

Once the Queen Cat returned to where she belonged, Gloriana had made her conclusions.

"You've become a proto-god."

"What?!" Ves became startled as his wife used that dreaded word.

Gloriana placed her hands on her hips. "You can't hide it from me, Ves. I know you like the back of my hand and I have extensive exposure to all of your other so-called design spirits. I don't know how you have done it, but a part of you has become a lot more comparable to the likes of Helena."

"...I guess you're right."

"Why are you acting as if this is just another tuesday?! Don't you realize how massive this is?! You've taken a step to actual godhood, Ves! The fact that you have turned yourself into a genuine proto-god means that you have the potential to become an actual god and more some day! Perhaps you might even be able to catch up to your mother if you have been a good boy!"

"Good boy! Good boy! Good boy!" Andraste chanted for no apparent reason.

Ves ruffled his second daughter's hair in order to stop her from chanting those words.

"You know I don't prefer that terminology, Gloriana. Please don't describe my current state with those words." He said despite describing his own state as a half-native demigod. "I can't tell you much, but I have been exposed to certain... processes... that has made me grow in many different facets. I'm sure you have noticed my glow already. That has become a thing now. I am sure that I can do more with this once I develop my new powers further, but I do not have any intention of propping up any religions by proclaiming myself as a god of humanity."

His wife's eyes lit up with glee. "I have to tell the Glory Seekers and my parents all about these changes! My husband has finally begun to graduate from being a boy. The entire Hex Federation will definitely hold a celebration in order to welcome a future god of our pantheon. My mother will be so happy now that the Wodin Dynasty is directly tied to a proto-god."

"Waaait! Don't be in such a hurry, Gloriana! Don't spread any misunderstandings to the Hexers. At least wait until you have heard me out. We need to proceed extremely carefully now that I have become less human than before."

His wife didn't listen to him. She instead became engrossed in her own thoughts.

"Wait, what about Aurelia? What about me?" Gloriana soon closed in and placed her hands on his shoulders. "TELL ME HOW YOU HAVE BECOME A PROTO-GOD!"

"I can't!"

"YOU CAN'T, OR YOU WON'T?!"

"The walls have ears, honey! We need to be more discreet!"

"You can enjoy your privacy after you have told me how you have turned into a proto-god! Do it for our children if you don't want to do it for me! You cannot leave Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine behind! Tell me that you are not neglecting our offspring!"

Ves tried to calm her down. "Hey, don't worry about that! I want them to become strong as well. It's just that this is way more difficult and dangerous than you can imagine. It will take a lot of time for me to help our children. In the meantime, I think it is best to maintain a low profile and prevent any news from leaking out. We can get in a lot of trouble if people think that I hold the secret of at least one form of human ascension."

"The sooner we spread the news to the Hexers, the sooner the Wodin Dynasty will become primus inter pares in the Hex Federation!"

"Have you been listening to me at all, Gloriana?!"