

Mech 4591

Chapter 4591 A Man Driven By Hatred

Otrus Magrin hated this universe.

He also hated himself.

These two hatreds defined his life.

He hated that he was born into the Age of Mechs. He hated that he lived in a time where the Big Two kept people like him locked into cages. He hated that he was born in the galactic rim where people like him received the fewest chances to grow stronger. He hated that the MTA and CFA forbade anyone from possessing real power by depriving them of the right to employ warships and weapons of mass destruction.

Without ultimate power, how could Otrus ever fight and rise above every rival that sought the same goal as him? How could he ever grasp the opportunities he needed to build a dominion that rivaled the New Rubarth Empire in its heyday?

Ever since he was young and formed these great ambitions, he became frustrated by all of the reasons that held him back!

Otrus Magrin learned early on that the competition was rigged from the start. The mechers, fleeters and other first-raters practically hoarded all of the best power and resources for themselves, giving no chance for anyone else to get a seat at the table.

"There is no equality in human society."

After a lot of research, Otrus found out that the only way for him to break the shackles of his birth and break out of the cage built by the Big Two was to become a part of their club!

The man had not been born into one of those powerful but elusive spaceborn clans, so he had no hope of entering the ranks of the Common Fleet Alliance.

The Mech Trade Association recruited more openly, but their standards were either random or exceedingly demanding. Only a fraction of people ever got to be lucky enough to become a peripheral member of this mighty organization!

Thus, the only remaining viable way he could ever rule over humanity was to become a god pilot.

"No matter how humble they were in their early lives, as long as they break through enough times, even the mechers and the first-raters will bow in front of a mech pilot that has become a god!"

Over 250 years ago, god pilots were much less common. Each was incomparably precious and powerful, and the Association had no qualms about publicizing their great might in order to keep the CFA on its toes.

Young Otrus had become fascinated by the impressive heroes who wielded powers that went far beyond the confines of technology!

Ever since Otrus learned of their might as well as how influential they became, his eyes burned with desire and passion.

He needed to become a god pilot! Every fiber of his being had united as one around this goal. By doing his utmost to advance up the ranks of the mech piloting profession, he would be able to traverse the path of godhood.

Otrus had no doubt that he would be able to reach the end of this mythical path! Even though he was still young and rather ignorant back then, he possessed an unrelenting conviction that he would be able to succeed where many other mech pilots failed!

He held onto this belief throughout his youth and did his utmost to prepare for his future studies at a mech academy.

It all came down crashing when he reached his tenth birthday.

[Genetic aptitude: F]

The projected readout from the examination machine cruelly cut off his dreams and ended his plan before he could even start.

His entire world collapsed as he struggled to accept the reality of his own inadequacy.

"This can't be... I was supposed to become a mech pilot..."

The fact that he was a part of the 96.5 percent of people who lacked the genetic aptitude to pilot a mech had devastated him. The news not only crushed his mood, but also his dreams and ambitions.

Many other children quickly adjusted themselves after a week. The odds of developing the right genetic aptitude to become a mech pilot was slim to begin with, so they had already been taught by their parents to treat it as a lottery.

The kids around Otrus soon returned to their normal lives and became occupied with attending a normal school instead of a mech academy.

Many children experienced this important test after their tenth birthday. To the vast majority of people, it was a transformative experience that brutally taught them that reality did not care about their wishes.

These individuals took these lessons to heart and seriously devoted themselves to what they could accomplish as normal humans. There were still plenty of ways for them to excel in a galaxy that still provided a lot of other opportunities.

Otrus was different. He recognized that his quest for ultimate power would always be impossible to fulfill because the only viable ways to do so became closed to him, yet he was unwilling to resign himself to this reality.

It was then that he figured out a loophole of sorts.

Perhaps he might never be able to become a god pilot and use his enormous might to take over the MTA, but who said anything needing to wield great strength to get his way?

"I shall be like the kings and sovereigns of old. There shall be no need for me to leave my throne in order to defeat my enemies. I merely have to wave my hand and send out my champions!"

In any case, Otrus Magrin only wanted to rule over humanity. The means in which he used to put himself in that position didn't matter.

Just because he couldn't become a god pilot himself didn't mean he could build an army of god pilots around him that unflinchingly executed his orders!

As he settled on this new strategy, he devoted himself to business as he recognized that only money would allow him to develop his own organization from scratch.

By learning how to start and manage a business, Otrus continually expanded and refined his new master plan.

He quickly encountered a problem when he realized how difficult it was to maintain the loyalties of a high-ranking mech pilot.

It was well known that they were uncommonly stubborn and principled. The more powerful they became, the more pushy they became. There had been many people who once held similar ambitions as Otrus but got burned when their own expert pilots and ace pilots left them due to fundamental disagreements.

He soon learned that there was only one way to truly maintain the loyalties of a warrior that was more powerful than himself.

Only the bonds of family could ensure their loyalty!

Love and family were some of the strongest binding forces in existence. As soon as Otrus learned what he needed to do, he quickly sought to produce as many children as possible.

"My flesh and blood shall pave the way for my ascension."

He did not bother with the rituals of marriage as the power of love could not trump his desire for power. Women were mere tools to him as they were only useful for providing him with offspring.

After fathering more illegitimate children than he could count, he put all of his growing brats through a strict regime. Whether they had the potential to become mech pilots or not, none of them should ever grow up without developing absolute loyalty to their father and their 'family'!

Though the vast majority of his children failed to live up to his high expectations, Otrus always remained patient and kept fathering more children.

If he could win the lottery with one ticket, then he would get two. If two tickets weren't enough, then he would obtain four!

He created so many 'lottery tickets' over the years that he eventually managed to win the jackpot!

Though he wasn't as promiscuous as the Star Emperor, he easily fathered over a thousand children himself.

He would have wanted to raise even more children, but wouldn't be able to provide them with the training and growth resources needed to turn them into excellent mech pilots.

Still, out of the small number of brats who ended up developing the right genetic aptitude, one of them managed to excel and display great talent.

His son Neville was everything Otrus was not. The mech pilot was handsome, courageous, talented, disciplined and utterly filial due to his lifelong indoctrination.

As Otrus recognized that he had managed to pick up a diamond from the rough, he constantly polished and cherished his new jewel until it began to turn into an increasingly more lustrous gem.

"My genius son..."

With Otrus' constant help and training, Neville Magrin not only broke through all of the bottlenecks that stumped many other hopeful mech pilots, but also strengthened his unreserved trust and devotion towards his own father!

Nowadays, Saint Neville Magrin was already well on his way to helping his father fulfill his great ambition!

Otrus truly needed the strength of his most powerful son. As he worked to build his own company, he initially thought that he could rely on his intelligence and business acumen to conquer greater market share and displace the competition.

He thought too simply.

The more his business grew, the more he encountered barriers that were increasingly hard to defeat.

It turned out that the markets didn't offer a level playing field at all. Insiders and powerful trans-galactic enterprises had carved up most of the good stuff for themselves, leaving only scraps for grassroots players such as Otrus Magrin.

The more Otrus tried to enter into the upper ranks, the more he became rebuffed by all of the conspirators that sought to maintain their oligopoly over wealth and power.

After experiencing one failure after another, Otrus eventually snapped.

"I HATE THIS GALAXY!"

There was no way to defeat the established powers when he wasn't one himself.

This was why he let go of his scruples. He realized at the time that the only way to climb on top of his competitors was to climb over their bodies.

Not only would he be able to remove the obstacles that stopped his rise, but he would also be able to use their nutrients to fuel the growth of his empire.

"So what if I am called a vulture? At least I can fly higher while the rest of you remain stuck in the dirt."

As his son Neville and his mech forces became stronger, Otrus Magrin steadily tackled increasingly stronger opponents.

It was too bad that he acted too hastily in the end!

Back in the old galaxy, he gained too much notoriety. Though his son and his forces grew fast enough to match his expectations, everyone else became increasingly more hostile towards him. He ended up creating more obstacles than he removed!

This was why the opening of the Red Ocean was such a crucial chance for him. Though Otrus was never able to clean up his stinky reputation that made it difficult for him to partner up with others, becoming a pioneer in the new frontier allowed him to operate more freely than before.

Not only were the rules of the new frontier a lot looser, but the brand-new environment provided a lot of fantastic opportunities that would never be available in the old galaxy!

It was here that Otrus Magrin knew that he would be able to feed upon his rivals and competitors with much less restraint than before!

So many pioneers and their fleets disappeared all of the time that no one really cared about their passing.

Everyone was so busy with trying to climb on top of everyone else that Otrus Magrin actually looked no worse than them.

The Red Ocean seemed to unlock everyone's inhibitions, causing them to make bolder and riskier decisions that they would have never made when they were still residing back in the Milky Way!

This was Otrus Magrin's new sanctuary and homeland.

This was where Otrus Magrin intended to train his most talented son into a powerful god pilot.

This was where Otrus Magrin would build his empire atop the bones of his adversaries!

Right now, there was only one enemy that he wanted to crush beyond everyone else in the Red Ocean.

"Golden Skull..." He spoke with hatred flowing through his veins. "I will not rest until I have crushed each and everyone of your bones!"

Chapter 4592 Hasty Investigation

Barely one human fleet left the brown dwarf star system before another one arrived!

Emerging at roughly the same orientation as the first fleet, the second collection of starships immediately began to deploy mechs to secure the surroundings and respond to any possible ambushes.

Fortunately for the latest arrivals, they encountered no imminent threats, even though they half-expected their latest enemies to prepare another welcome surprise.

It wouldn't have worked. With the help of enough skilled drive engineers that Cenatus Prospecting had painstakingly trained, the entire fleet arrived considerably far away from any predicted ambush site!

That did not mean that the men working for Cenatus Prospecting could relax.

"Where is the Golden Skull Alliance?!" An aged but muscular man demanded from the throne installed in the middle of the bridge of his flagship.

His wild black hair and his forest-like beard made him look a lot more ferocious than the other men of his age.

While most people above the age of 200 years tended to polish their image so that they could come across as elder statesmen, Otrus Magrin eschewed all of this refinement in favor of making himself look formidable to his men and his enemies.

He understood all too well that an intimidating appearance would complement his powerful image. Weakness had to be avoided at all costs.

This was one of the reasons why he urged his fleet to enter this small and unusual star system.

After getting hit by a foul and sudden attack, Otrus Magrin had become livid!

The powerful leader turned to his subordinates. "Tell me your current findings."

"We are still in the process of mapping out SDDD-4343X-AER-232666410, my lord." An officer replied. "Most of our sensors and scanners have primarily focused on inspecting our immediate surroundings, but our long-ranged modules have yet to detect the presence of any starships or artificial traces, human or alien."

"Keep searching!" Otrus shouted at his men! "The fleet of the Golden Skull Alliance came here for a reason! Send a scouting unit to the planet. If those

cretins have already left this star system, then I want to know what they have managed to dig up and in which direction they have left."

"Acknowledged, my lord."

As time passed by, most sensors detected nothing that looked out of place in a brown dwarf star system like this. Ordinary asteroids and space dust were not worth their attention.

It wasn't until one of the vessels sent in the direction of the brown dwarf star managed to pick up traces of refined alloys in the vicinity of the planet.

"My lord! We have a notable quantity of refined alloys on the surface of the planet!"

"Investigate! Tell our scouting vessels to hurry up! We need to gather clues as fast as possible!"

Though Otrus Magrin and many of his men found it rather suspicious that they had yet to find anything solid aside from what appeared to be debris from a starship, their desire to repay the Golden Skullers for their unprovoked attack drove them to take a closer look.

"Send the rest of our fleet closer to the planet." The leader commanded. "If we are to find anything that can help us figure out what the Golden Skull Alliance is doing, we have a better chance of succeeding if we don't stay in an empty region of space."

"My lord?" One of his deputies looked hesitant. "The Golden Skullers have already tricked us once. We are safer here where we can transition back into FTL travel as soon as we encounter a dangerous trap or ambush."

Magrin dismissed the man's concern with a snort. "Our sensors have yet to detect anything aside from chunks of debris in the distance. The Golden Skullers also aren't strong enough to ambush a second time now that we are

better prepared. What we need the most is speed. We need to react quickly to whatever we manage to uncover from that planet."

"Understood. We will pass on the new orders right away."

Time passed by as Magrin's fleet moved towards the inner system. This did not take as much time as usual because of the comparatively tiny size of the star system.

No one took the brown dwarf star seriously. It was just a boring, weak little gas giant that just happens to be large and heavy enough to pretend it was a star.

Only a small team of astrophysicists studied the properties of the star out of habit. Some stars generated precious exotics or held clues that pointed towards ancient ruins left behind by fallen alien races.

Most scientists and specialists paid much closer attention to the asteroids clouds, the small moon-like planet and the strange debris that continued to capture their imagination.

"My lord? We have a new report. Our fastest scouting vessel has come close enough to determine the mineral composition of the debris found on the far side of the planet. We can almost rule out the possibility that it comes from a human-built starship or mech. We only have to get within touching range to confirm this theory. We can also conduct further studies to determine how long ago the debris has gotten loose."

Otrus Magrin looked thoughtful. "Is the debris composed of remnants of an entire alien ship?"

"There isn't enough to suggest that this is the case. We believe the Golden Skull Alliance or another alien force may have only managed to damage a part of an alien ship."

"Then get closer so that we can see for ourselves!"

Once his fleet finally neared the planet, his men were finally able to conduct a proper investigation.

Numerous specialized mechs and shuttles were already scouring the planet for any notable traces.

So far, the relatively tiny planet presented nothing interesting aside from showing signs that another mech force had already investigated the surface before.

There were no signs of mining, tunneling or retrieval actions outside of the debris that looked oddly out of place. This suggested that the alien ship did not emerge from the planet or that it emerged from a different space.

Otrus Magrin became disappointed by the lack of results from the surveys, so he set his sights on the alien debris that his fleet had managed to secure.

In order to see what the Golden Skullers had left behind, Magrin donned a protective suit and moved over to a spare cargo bay where a scorched and broken piece of the exterior of a warship rested under close to zero gravity.

A lot of men had already inspected the debris in advance to confirm that it was safe and free of any threats.

Of course, to ensure that none of them had missed anything superior or advanced enough to escape their notice, Otrus had personally assigned his greatest reliance to the same hangar bay!

As soon as the owner of the fleet approached the hatch leading into the cargo bay, he felt the strong but reassuring Saint Kingdom from his proudest son.

In fact, as far as Otrus was concerned, he only had a single son. All of the other brats he had fathered over the years were merely minions who were a little more useful and reliable than his hired help.

Not only did his kids require less pay to work for him, their loyalty was also assured with all of the measures he took to ensure their obedience.

Many of the core positions in the fleet were occupied by his children and their descendants. It was an enormous pyramid where his bloodline ran from top to bottom, ensuring that his influence was present on any ship, department and work team.

His only regret was that too few descendants had entered his mech force, but the presence of his only real son ensured that everyone who hadn't been born a Magrin would still dance to his tune.

"Father." The permanently open communication channel between father and son became active again. "You have come."

"I have." Otrus said as he temporarily ignored the exotic alien wreckage in favor of admiring the Unrelenting.

The ace mech was a machine that he would have loved to pilot if his genetic aptitude hadn't sabotaged his future.

Otrus had personally imagined Neville's mechs over many decades. Each time his proud son needed to switch to a stronger and newer machine, he pulled out one of his archived mech sketches and commissioned a team of mech designers to convert his idea into a fully fledged mech.

Neville took to them like fish to water. Ever devoted to his father, the talented pilot sincerely worked to adapt to the mechs that allowed him to fight, raid and maintain the initiative no matter the circumstances!

Even if Neville originally wasn't suited to pilot fast and relatively lightly armored hybrid mechs, long years of training and adjusting himself to this classification of mechs had turned him into a master of employing them in battle!

"What are your impressions of this debris?" Otrus said as he stopped fantasizing what it would be like if he was the one sitting in the cockpit of the Unrelenting. "Have you managed to capture anything that our scientists have missed?"

"I did, father. It is difficult to describe. I have never sensed anything like this before. It is hard to explain in words, so I suggest that you experience it in person. Your men have already prepared a route towards the interior of the wreck."

Otrus' curiosity grew.

He lifted off the deck and approached an opening where a pair of armored guards were awaiting his arrival.

As soon as Otrus reached the entrance, the guards moved ahead and led him deeper inside the strange construction.

The heavy damage and traces of dead alien remnants clearly showed that the wreckage had gone through a lot of abuse.

The only reason why it managed to stay in one piece was because the aliens hadn't cut any corners in the construction of their ship.

"Which race built all of this?" Otrus asked with a frown. "I do not recognize this architecture."

"The ship was built by a local race called the tikkirs, my lord." One of the exobiologists assigned to study the wreckage answered. "The tikkirs used to maintain a sizable presence in this star region, but they have been driven out after our race took over all of their territories. It is uncommon but not completely implausible that remnants of this race are still hiding this region."

"How long ago did the aliens build this ship? What is the classification of this vessel? When did this wreckage split off from the whole?"

"Our preliminary dating methods suggest that this ship was built over four standard decades ago. The ship is already fairly old by our standards." An engineer responded. "We are confident that this debris belongs to a warship. While we have not found any weapon batteries from this wreckage, we have detected ship parts that are primarily designed to support their operations. The event that resulted in the separating this wreckage from an alien warship happened fairly recently, though the environmental circumstances has made it difficult to give you a more precise timeframe. There is still a notable quantity of lingering heat from the damage produced by energy weapons."

"Interesting."

Where was the rest of the ship? Where was the Golden Skull Alliance? The absence of both of these parties suggested that his current adversaries had managed to capture the alien ship and get away.

A pursuit was out of the question. Most native warships did not possess human-style FTL drives, so the only way they could escape pursuit was to activate their warp drives.

If that was the case, then the light produced by this chase should have exposed this pursuit.

Nothing of the sort had been detected, which meant that no ships had engaged in medium to long-ranged warp travel in this star system.

All of this meant that Magrin was still short of answers.

"Is this what you wanted to show me, my son?"

"Not quite, father. Please enter the next compartment. I have already verified that it is safe."

When Otrus Magrin's armored form floated through the open hatch, he halted when he sensed something pressing against his mind.

"What is affecting my mind? Why do I feel as if I am being stared at by a giant beast?"

An enthusiastic crowd of scientists were surrounding a strange object that was placed in the center of the alien compartment.

The object was some sort of scratched and ancient alien statue.

Its appearance wasn't important.

What interested Otrus Magrin the most was that he felt... as if it contained the soul of a powerful alien beast!

Chapter 4593 The Hatred Of Getting Killed

The statue looked like a piece of rounded abstract art.

Otrus Magrin had lived long enough to gain a good understanding and appreciation of fine art, but the sheer variety of alien tastes and aesthetics made it impossible for him to make any solid conclusions at this moment.

Since he wasn't able to rely on his subjective judgment, he focused on objective data instead.

The odd and confusing alien artwork may be able to make him feel as if he was in the presence of an enormous beast, but the physical aspects of the object itself was not that complicated to study.

The scientists who specialized in the study of alien artifacts did not require much time to decipher the age, mass, density, dimensions, material composition and other useful data.

It soon became apparent that the alien artwork was as old as the warship where this wreckage came from. It was rooted to the deck and below and it had always received excellent care from the tikkirs who operated the vessel.

The only reason why it looked scratched and damaged was because of the same incident that produced the debris.

While it was unusual that Cenatus Prospecting had found few traces of debris of the same alien warship on the planet, most of the investigators assumed that the Golden Skull Alliance left this piece of debris behind because it didn't contain anything important or valuable.

Although the scientists managed to provide increasingly more details about the physical construction of a suspected alien religious idol, they failed to provide as much clarification as Otrus Magrin expected.

He had a mystery on his hands.

Otrus hated mysteries.

"My son. Tell me more about the alien life that you have managed to sense from this... relic."

The ace pilot whose mech was standing right outside the wreckage had to figure out how he could best describe his impressions.

"It is difficult to put into words. I feel... as if I have gained a distant glimpse of a powerful alien beast god."

"Is it a phase whale?" Otrus asked as his heart started to beat a little faster.

"No." Saint Neville replied. "I have never met a phase whale in person, but I am convinced that this is not related to such an alien. I am getting the impression that I have made tentative contact with an old, bestial mind, one that is smart and powerful enough to reject my Saint Kingdom. I can try to learn more by pressing harder, but that will cause my willpower to override whatever invisible mark the alien beast has left on this relic."

Otrus Magrin began to circle around the alien artwork. No matter what angle he looked at it, there was little to no apparent meaning whatsoever. The jumble of shapes that had been mashed together looked completely random and devoid of any patterns.

What did this have to do with an alien beast?

"Are you sure this artifact is related to a god?"

"I... cannot say." Neville admitted. "I have never encountered this before. What I can tell you is that the mental effect it exerts on nearby people reminds me of the descriptions of the glows that are iconic to the mechs produced by our latest enemies."

Otrus immediately made the obvious conclusion. "So the two are related somehow. Ancient alien relics that are tied to strange alien gods may be the secret ingredient that allows the Larkinson Clan to empower all of its 'living mechs'. If that is the case, then that may be the true reason why the Golden Skull Alliance has traveled to this star system and sought out this tikkir warship!"

This possible theory had a couple of holes. If the Golden Skullers sought out treasures like this strange alien artwork, they wouldn't have left it behind.

Perhaps the Golden Skullers or more specifically the Larkinsons didn't find it worthwhile to pick up something so weak. The trace of the unknown alien god was noticeable but not that strong in Otrus Magrin's opinion.

"Can you tell me more about this supposed god, my son?"

"It may be a female alien beast god or goddess." Saint Neville said as the domain field extending from his ace mech continued to examine the alien artifact. "I feel hints of emotions that remind me of motherhood, children and hopes. Nothing is coherent as this alien is much closer to a beast than a sentient and intelligent race, but I have the impression that this alien beast is... angry."

"Angry?" Magrin was quite familiar with that emotion. "Angry towards what?"

It took more than a dozen seconds before his son spoke again.

"Father."

"Yes, my son?"

"I want you to try something. Can you project an image of the fleet of the Golden Skull Alliance in front of the relic? I think that might evoke a response from this alien beast goddess."

Otrus had studied the Golden Skull Alliance for a long time. He easily called up one of the snapshots of the enemy fleet that his flagship had taken back in the previous star system.

As soon as the shapes of ships such as the Spirit of Bentheim, the Dragon's Den, the Wild Torch, the Hemmington Cross and the Indigo Tremor became visible, even Otrus could feel a spike of rage and fury from the alien religious idol!

"It worked!"

"Yes, father! I can make much more sense of the emotions produced by the alien goddess! I... I have never experienced these emotions from any human other than those who have either been mortally injured or lost a very close relative."

"What do you think, my son?"

"I think... this alien beast goddess wouldn't get angry because the Golden Skullers managed to kill her offspring." Saint Neville said. "She is too old and ancient to care that much about her children. I am guessing that this is much more personal to her. She either died or sustained severe losses after a fight against the fleet of the Golden Skull Alliance."

"Hm, that may explain it, but let us not get ahead of ourselves. There are still too many mysteries here. Can you figure out whether the alien beast goddess truly hates the Golden Skull Alliance? What if she is pretending?"

"I can guarantee you that this alien isn't faking her resentment." Saint Neville personally vouched. "The hatred and animosity for suffering at the hands of this fleet in battle is very real. You can't fake this kind of raw emotion."

Otrus Magrin relaxed. This was good news. He could make use of this insight.

"Can you try and communicate with this alien beast goddess? If she is as old as you suggest, then she should understand the meaning of the phrase 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. If not... then we can teach her. The hatred she harbors for the forces based on this fleet is strong."

Saint Neville Magrin had fought many of his father's enemies. Whenever his father pointed out a target to be destroyed, he unflinchingly did as instructed, killing mech pilots as well as ordinary people in order to complete his instructions as thoroughly as possible.

He fought so often throughout his long career that he had witnessed almost every kind of emotional reaction that humans could make.

Feelings of hatred, anger, fear and remorse were most prominent among these reactions. Every ace pilot inevitably became intimately familiar with these emotions.

This was why Saint Neville was confident that he correctly identified the reason why the alien beast goddess expressed this kind of rage. No matter whether he was dealing with a human or an alien, emotions were largely universal among the races.

After he figured this out, Saint Neville cautiously tried to engage into a dialogue with the alien beast goddess.

He never had the need to do this before, so he tried several different methods to initiate contact.

"It isn't working." The ace pilot said. "The alien beast goddess is not... social. She is distant and self-absorbed. If I try to push deeper, she will automatically shove me back."

That was a disappointing outcome, but Otrus Magrin did not blame his son. It was already good of him to supply this much information. He had enough experience to know that it was rarely possible to gain all of the answers to his questions in a single round.

"Keep trying, my son. Alien gods like these might not take humans like us seriously at the start, but we may be able to make a breakthrough if we keep trying."

"I will do so and stay here for as long as I can, father."

Once Otrus Magrin exited the wreckage a short time later, he turned towards the Unrelenting and admired the ace mech for the umpteenth time.

He could never get tired of appreciating this powerful machine. Seeing it constantly stimulated his imagination. He always had the tendency to imagine himself piloting the Unrelenting in the battles of the past.

Instead of his son, it was Otrus who drilled holes into the hulls of starships with the help of the Unrelenting's shoulder-mounted gauss cannons!

It was Otrus who bravely commanded the Unrelenting to charge and impale an enemy ace mech with its lance!

It was Otrus who instructed the Unrelenting to lift up an arm and spout blazing hot sprays of burning propellant that scorched dozens of enemy mechs at a time!

The leader of his own company and pioneering force had to wrench his attention away from the Unrelenting before he could indulge himself any further.

As nice as it was to imagine himself doing all of the fighting himself, what happened in reality was far more important. Otrus would never allow himself to ruin his plans because he indulged in one of his weaknesses.

He shook his head and left the cargo bay. The Unrelenting and its ace pilot silently watched the powerful man disappear.

The Cenatus Prospecting fleet continued to look for further artificial traces in this star system.

It took two more hours before Saint Neville Magrin made an announcement.

"Father! It worked!"

Otrus stopped reading the status report. "It did? What did you manage to do? Is the alien willing to converse?"

"Not exactly." Neville replied. "I only managed to obtain a single actual response from the alien beast goddess. After trying to get it to talk with me by communicating in many different ways, the alien responded to something that I had said by showing me an image."

"An image?" Otrus became confused. "What does it look like?"

"I have tried to interpret the image in my mind as best as I can. I have converted this mental image into a file with the help of my cranial implant. I am transferring it to you right away."

When Otrus called up the image file that he had just received, he looked at what appeared to be a stylized image of a glowing gas giant along with various other markings that appear to be local stellar objects.

What was particularly interesting to Otrus was that the picture also showed another piece of ship debris!

There was something about this piece of wreckage that aroused his interest. His gut feeling told him that there was something valuable and special stowed

in this ship section. He became convinced it held something more than a simple alien artifact!

It did not take much thinking to conclude that he was looking at a snapshot of the current star system.

The question was where this specific image was taken.

"Do you know where this is, Neville?"

"No. I don't think the alien beast goddess can point the location on a map."

"I will pass it on to my scientists and let them identify the coordinates of the depicted view. There is enough detail in this image to find a match."

It took a lot of processing time, but eventually the supercomputers finally managed to pin down a small range that corresponded to this view!

Even though a lot of stellar objects had moved and rotated since then, it was still possible to 'rewind' what the star system looked like given all of the available data.

"Where is it?" Otrus Magrin demanded.

"If we have identified this location correctly... it is much closer in orbit to the brown dwarf star than the planet that we are currently parked at." An astronomer explained. "We will have to send a ship on a journey in order to reach this position."

"Then do so." Otrus Magrin said. "No wait. Forget about sending a ship. Let us bring the rest of our available ships as well. We haven't found anything interesting on this planet. Let us move closer to this site so that I can look at this second wreck in person."

Chapter 4594 Saint Neville Magrin

As the main fleet under the command of Otrus Magrin set course for the coordinates that corresponded to the mysterious image transmitted by an alien beast goddess, Saint Neville Magrin began to entertain doubts.

It was not often that ace pilots doubted themselves or their judgment. It was pretty much mandatory for those who had pushed their willpower to such great heights to develop an unreasonable amount of confidence in themselves.

Ace pilots had many reasons to be confident in themselves. They had succeeded in reaching a level of strength that countless mech pilots could only dream of. They had survived battles where they should have died, won duels against opponents that were supposed to be stronger than them and recognized their true selves.

The only warriors that could bring Saint Neville Magrin to heel were senior ace pilots and god pilots, but they were so rare that the chances of encountering them in the wild was miniscule.

Even if it was possible for him to confront them on the opposite side of the battlefield, he knew that his father was far too shrewd to make this happen in the first place.

However, despite his father's great track record, Saint Neville couldn't help but think that the current circumstances were a bit... wrong.

"Everything has become more complicated since we entered the Red Ocean." He muttered as he stood at the side while a crew of mech technicians performed routine maintenance on the Unrelenting.

His father demanded the highest possible care for the proud ace hybrid mech. After each deployment, it had to go through an extensive round of inspections.

Anything that even looked slightly wrong had to be marked and analyzed to determine whether it needed to be replaced immediately or a few weeks later.

This pace of replacement was way too exaggerated and always made Saint Neville feel off-put by his own machine. The fit between himself and 'his' ace mech never felt completely right as he constantly had to readjust himself to the minute changes induced by the frequent swapping of parts.

Nonetheless, the performance of the Unrelenting always managed to remain close to its factory peak. Saint Neville knew without a shadow of a doubt that he could always count on his ace mech to perform reliably and endure exactly as much stresses as described in the manual.

Yet despite the formidable strength and combat power of the Unrelenting, Saint Neville still grew concerned that it wouldn't be enough to survive the latest tide.

"This entire star system is dangerous." He concluded.

The Red Ocean was always dangerous to begin with. Ace pilots like him possessed keen intuition that was far in excess to that of normal people.

Though plenty of scientists who studied this phenomenon claimed that ace pilots unconsciously predicted future events by extrapolating many little clues, Saint Neville had always thought that it worked differently.

Those people who always spoke with complicated and confusing words never knew what it was like to stare down a gun barrel that was strong enough to punch through the cockpit of a mech.

How could they know that mech pilots such as himself generated an inexplicable sense of threat and danger?

It was too bad that as sensitive as Saint Neville had become towards danger, it still possessed many limitations.

The reason why the unknown saboteurs had managed to cripple nine combat carriers as well as the Roaring Berann was because the culprits never targeted him and those closest to him in the first place.

The infiltrators had managed to sneak their way through every checkpoint without fearing discovery from either the crews or Saint Neville himself.

It disconcerted a lot of people in Cenatus Prospecting. Many of them had become assured that no one around them had the guts to attack a fleet watched over by an ace pilot.

That a severe incident happened anyway was a personal failing of Saint Neville.

He had never expected the Golden Skull Alliance which had developed a good reputation over the years to launch such a detestable attack!

Though Saint Neville knew that his father intended to take advantage of the Golden Skull Alliance somehow, the Golden Skullers should have at least waited for a casus belli before they initiated hostilities.

For them to strike without bothering to find an excuse threw many people in Cenatus Prospecting off-guard.

No matter what, people had died under his watch. No matter what reason drove his father to shadow the Golden Skullers, the fact of the matter was that blood had been spilled.

This was why he never questioned his father's decision to enter SDDD-4343X-AER-232666410 and figure out exactly what the Golden Skull Alliance had been up to in this part of space.

Yet now that they had arrived, Saint Neville grew unsettled despite his unflinching confidence in his own strength.

The first indication that everything was not quite right was the absence of his father's current target.

Even though the fleet of the Golden Skull Alliance had probably lingered in this star system for a week or so, it had left by the time that the fleet of his own group arrived.

The second indication that something may be amiss was the mysterious abandonment of a piece of alien ship wreckage.

Though Cenatus Prospecting hadn't been able to dispatch a scout vessel to this brown dwarf star system in advance, it was still possible to monitor what happened in the past by exploiting the speed of light.

By dispatching a scout vessel equipped with a warp drive far away from the center of the star system, they could eventually reach a distance where they could capture light that depicted everything that happened a few days in the past.

It was a relatively new tactic that humanity had taken over from the indigenous alien races.

While the effect sounded magical, the results weren't as impressive as everyone initially thought.

Due to the inverse-square law, the rapid dispersal of light rapidly made it more and more difficult to observe fine details.

Other factors such as the strength of the light source, the size of the subject of interest and the angle of observation further limited the amount of information that could be derived from this method.

From what their distant warp-capable scouting vessels reported back, the fleet of the Golden Skull Alliance hadn't appeared to have done anything remarkable in the star system.

The first human ships to have arrived in this star system appeared to have lingered in orbit of a tiny planet for a long time until they departed by moving to a Lagrange point.

The scout vessels weren't able to glean any further details and they saw no sign of any battles or major movements.

What was particularly frustrating was that this method of 'looking back in the past' could not only capture any footage about a potential confrontation against an alien warship due to the orientation of the planet, but also because the details provided by the dispersing light would be too fuzzy at that time.

It didn't help that a brown dwarf star wasn't a strong light source to begin with, so the resolution of the past footage was already fairly low in quality from the beginning!

All of these circumstances seemed a little too convenient for the Golden Skull Alliance, and that caused Saint Neville to smell something wrong.

It didn't help that his sense of latent danger had grown stronger despite the apparent emptiness of the star system.

The threat shouldn't be acute, but Saint Neville was definitely convinced that this small brown dwarf star system wasn't as harmless and empty as it looked.

Though a part of him wanted to warn his father about the increased threat, he refrained from bothering the older man.

Every star system in the Red Ocean was dangerous, so much so that ace pilots had to tune out the constant awareness that a powerful alien warfleet could drop in at any time and lay waste to everything in sight!

Pretty much all of the indigenous alien races of the Red Ocean were hostile towards the invading humans. The enormous hatred and animosity that they

held towards humanity was affecting the 'air' of the dwarf galaxy, as silly as that sounded.

This ironically made it harder for people like Saint Neville to discern threats because there were so many of them. There could be multiple reasons why this small and relatively inconspicuous star system could be dangerous.

"I hate this place." The ace pilot growled under his breath.

Another reason why Saint Neville didn't want to bother his father about his concerns was because he didn't want to stop his father from pursuing the current mystery.

The alien warship debris and the strange alien idol were both authentic. The alien beast goddess that he had tentatively made contact with harbored no particular ill will against he and his father, and the location transmitted by the creature made him feel more excited for some reason.

Whenever he recalled the image of a position that was a bit closer to the brown dwarf star than he would have liked, he felt an increasingly stronger desire to visit this place in person.

There was something special about the chunk of alien ship debris depicted in this mental image. His instincts told him that there was something hidden in this wreck that could help him do a better job at protecting his father and fulfilling his great ambitions.

"Let's wait and see, then." Saint Neville decided.

His desire to explore this mystery ultimately exceeded his need for caution.

That didn't mean he would drop his guard, but he felt there was little harm in seeking out a piece of alien wreckage floating in a star system that was devoid of enemies.

Time passed by. The Unrelenting had just completed its latest round of servicing while Saint Neville woke up from his power nap.

His father contacted the ace pilot shortly afterwards.

"My son. Our fastest scouting vessels have just approached the location described in the 'oracle' sent by the alien goddess. The image is accurate. We found another chunk of alien ship wreckage, apparently from the same vessel of the debris that we found on the planet."

Saint Neville became a lot more interested when he heard this. "So it is true! How fares the investigation?"

"Several teams of engineers, exoarchaeologists and other scientists have just boarded the second piece of wreckage." Otrus Magrin said over the private communication channel. "They have yet to discover anything of value, but I expect that to change. They are proceeding slowly and cautiously for fear of damaging delicate alien artifacts. I would like you to be close at hand when they breach the most central chamber that our most scanners have mapped out in advance."

Saint Neville nodded.

He hurried to the cockpit of the Unrelenting and deployed into space.

By now, the main fleet had drawn close enough that it didn't take long for a speedy ace mech to reach the site in question.

It struck Neville that the wreckage indeed looked identical to the image provided by the alien goddess that apparently held a grudge against the Golden Skull Alliance.

Before his ace mech even came close, Neville already felt an increasing attraction to the wreck or more precisely whatever it held inside its depths.

Since he was too impatient to wait for the exploration team to reach the central chamber, Saint Neville cautiously brought the Unrelenting closer until the edge of its Saint Kingdom encompassed this compartment.

His eyes widened as he came into contact with a different influence.

"What..."

Though the presence was brief, he felt an invisible force stirred his thoughts in a way that stimulated his willpower!

While he could have easily blocked this influence, he did not do so because his instincts strongly urged that it was beneficial to him if he allowed himself to subject himself to this influence.

What was it? How could it have made him feel more self-assured? Why did it feel so... human?

Upon a hunch, Neville called up the logs that tracked his resonance strength.

He discovered that his resonance strength had momentarily spiked past his previous record!

Excitement ran throughout his body as he increasingly became hungry for more.

As an ace pilot, there were few desires that were more tempting than an opportunity to grow stronger.

He knew right then and there that he could definitely become stronger than he was before as long as he subjected himself to a stronger and more long-lasting version of this effect!

"I need more!"

Chapter 4595 Nunser Watering Pool

While the Cenatus Prospecting fleet had become increasingly more fascinated by the chunk of ship debris that was orbiting close to the brown dwarf star, a certain human was having a bad time at the moment.

To be fair, Lord Pearian Yorul-Tavik never enjoyed a good day in the past few months. His dirty and marred face had long turned numb.

Back when he was captured, he completely forgot his training and utterly lost his dignity as he screamed, cried and rage against all of the misfortune he experienced.

It wasn't fair.

He had managed to raise a decent first-class pioneering fleet, one that should have been strong enough to handle most problems in the field.

Entering the Red Ocean and making achievements in the new frontier should have given him a chance to prove to his clan that he wasn't as useless and befuddled as before.

He wanted to put all of his childish foibles behind him and show his parents and his many doubters that he was finally ready to be an adult and assume serious responsibilities!

Yet instead of proving that he could contribute to the Yorul-Tavik Clan, he only ended up damaging it further.

The proud and expensive first-class starships that comprised his fleet were gone. The overwhelming firepower and the relentless pursuit of the nunser warfleet had whittled down the carriers and mechs under his command until even his own flagship had become vulnerable.

Even though the nunser warships had already suffered a heavy blow from the MTA, that didn't help much as surviving enemy ships persisted in their original goal.

What pained Lord Pearian the most was that he didn't even know why the aliens targeted him to begin with! What had caused the nunsers to send a sizable warfleet deeper into human-occupied space and target a random first-class pioneering fleet?

The fleet was nothing special and it hadn't picked up any treasures worth fighting for. While Pearian was proud of his identity, he possessed enough self-awareness that he was nothing special compared to prominent Terrans and Rubarthans who were backed by much powerful states.

"Why then?"

Even now, the scion of the Yorul-Tavik Clan still couldn't figure out why the aliens targeted him in particular!

He at least knew by now that the aliens specifically targeted him as opposed to his fleet.

One of the reasons why his flagship was able to survive for so long was because the alien pursuers never targeted her directly. At most, the enemy warships sought to disable his vessel's defenses and thrusters.

When his flagship was finally on her own, a strange warship had come and finished the deed.

Whenever Lord Pearian closed his eyes, he relived the moments where his trusted friends and subordinates fell in droves. Their beaten and exhausted first-class multipurpose mechs had run out of options and could do very little when struck by the powerful gun batteries of the odd alien battleship!

When his only remaining fleet carrier lost all of her mechs, the strange warship that employed a mix of different technologies had dispatched alien boarding troops that proceeded to start a massacre.

The fighting within the hallways and compartments was brutal. The internal defense systems of his flagship were strong, but an alien coalition of nunsers, puelmers and other alien races systematically bulled their way through the opposition.

The power of these boarding troops exceeded anything the defenders could throw at them. The alien footsoldiers managed to disable or destroy every defensive measure through a combination of overwhelming firepower and advanced technology!

Lord Pearian was sad to admit he lost his nerve that day.

Instead of making a heroic stand and retaining what little dignity he had left, he threw it all away and sought to escape by himself!

He first tried to use his emergency teleporter to get himself out of his ship, but the device malfunctioned because the mixed alien battleship blocked any form of spatial manipulation!

He then tried to head to a secret hangar bay where a number of stealth shuttles were supposed to be on standby.

The alien battleship had blasted the entire section into pieces by firing a volley with her secondary gun batteries!

Pearian then ran to the nearest escape pods, only to stuff himself into a device that the aliens had already disabled beforehand.

By the time an elite unit of alien commandos had finally come and apprehended his broken self, his former flagship became drenched with the blood of his people and crew.

"Why?"

He kept asking this question out loud. He hoped to get a response out of his alien captors.

Despite all of the effort and sacrifices it took to capture him, the aliens had left him alone for weeks on end.

It broke him even more to see that after all of the fighting and killing, his jailors didn't feel the need to interrogate him. They were taking their sweet time!

The only reason why he knew that his alien captors hadn't forgotten about him entirely was because they made sure to feed him at irregular times.

He could feel the steps of their heavy hoofs vibrating through the metal cell floor before they appeared into view.

On the other side of the translucent energy screen that held him contained in this alien cell, he could see that two large armored figures had appeared.

The pair of nunsers troopers looked identical to the footsoldiers that had unleashed a bloodbath throughout his flagship.

Their blue-furred forms were completely covered up by their heavy armor. They moved ponderously as the force of gravity on the ship was as high as 1.4 g, which caused Lord Pearian to constantly feel as if he was overweight.

Though the nunsers had developed articulating forelimbs through evolution, they preferred not to use them if possible.

The nunsers were in their most natural and comfortable posture if they kept all four of their limbs to the ground.

This was why the pair of nunsers footsoldiers mounted their weapons and other equipment on the exterior of their heavy armor. They resembled miniature tanks rather than human soldiers.

The nunsers preferred to manipulate objects with the help of transmitting wireless commands, making use of external artificial limbs or simply holding onto stuff with their teeth.

This time, Pearian again felt disgusted as the armored nunser guard on the right held a nutrient pack between his herbivorous teeth.

The massive teeth and jaw possessed enough strength to cut and grind a human limb into mulch, but the nunser guard at least had the decency to control his bite strength to prevent the wrapping from getting punctured this time.

It was a lot worse in the early days.

"Gyughheahha."

Pearian frowned. "I already told you a million times that I can't understand your alien speech. If you hadn't disabled all of my implants, I would have been able to hit you back with my own insults!"

He still smarted at the loss of most of his implants. Disabling them was one of the first procedures they performed on him after he fell into their alien hands.

No matter whether they were biological or mechanical, the aliens who crippled him showed no mercy!

If not for the fact that all of his implants were designed to remain safe and prevent any possible side effects from occurring under these conditions, he might have actually died!

As it was, Pearian only felt that he had become slower, weaker, more tired and less capable of forming complex thoughts.

People like him heavily depended on their cranial implants to remember lots of information and to perform lots of analyses.

He distinctly remembered that he had downloaded a language pack in his cranial implant so that he could talk with aliens without relying on outside help.

Unfortunately, the aliens weren't making it easy.

"Yhyuhaaaagahu."

"I SAID I DON'T UNDERSTAND YOUR STUPID COW LANGUAGE!"

The nunsers guards didn't deign to address him any further, but Lord Pearian was sure they were laughing at his expense.

As the pair of soldiers turned around and headed towards the exit, Lord Pearian silently waited before he lifted himself from the barren cell floor and moved over to pick up the nutrient pack with an ugly expression.

"There is at least a third more alien drool than usual."

Lord Pearian did not dare to pick up the pack with his bare hands. He instead opted to remove the plain shirt provided by his captors and used it to grab a hold of the pack.

He then brought it over to a small pool of water that functioned as both his water source and his toilet.

Apparently, the nunsers race saw no distinction between the two. While they were careful enough to employ different technologies to keep their watering pools clean and free of germs, it still took less than a day before Lord Pearian resigned himself to the inevitable!

His feeble attempt to force the aliens to provide him with a decent source of water quickly failed when he became too thirsty to maintain his strike.

It didn't help that the nunsers only provided him meals in the form of nutrient packs that were filled with incredibly dry matter in order to make them as compact as possible.

The packs were designed to be filled with water in order to make them more palatable.

Eating a pack dry had been a horrible mistake that significantly broke down his resistance!

By the time he dragged himself over to the watering pool where he had voided himself only half a day ago, he dunked his entire head into the pool and greedily sucked up as much water as possible!

This was why each time Lord Pearian looked at a nutrient pack, he recalled this traumatic failure. It left him with no good thoughts about this type of meal.

Still, he couldn't feed himself off his complaints, so he moved over to his 'toilet' and dunked his shirt as well as his drool-covered nutrient pack into the water pool.

He vigorously stirred his limbs a couple of times before he pulled up his shirt and nutrient pack.

He set aside the former so that it could dry on the ground and shook the latter in order to shake off the water dripping from its exterior.

After that, he skillfully ripped off a small button. He used his fingers to pinch a small, flexible straw and pulled it out so that he could dip the end into the watering pool.

The pack automatically sucked a decent amount of water from the pool and deposited it into the main pocket.

The insides began to heat up upon contact with water. The pack remained comfortably cool and slightly wet on the outside, but Pearian knew that it soon became piping hot on the inside.

He waited until a strip on the packaging turned green.

His meal was ready.

There were two ways for him to eat this particular pack. He could either use the same straw to suck the liquified nutrient mush directly into his mouth. This was mainly helpful under zero gravity conditions as it prevented foodstuffs from flinging in every direction.

Lord Pearian did not want to use the straw.

He instead ripped off the top of the packaging and unclasped a small composite spoon that was attached to the side of the interior of the pack.

He steadily began to spoon the contents of the pack into his mouth.

The food was palatable, more or less. The quartermaster in charge of stocking his flagship with energy food had at least paid extra to stock up on quality nutrient packs that were appetizing to most highly augmented humans.

"...Tastes like chicken. Again."

The variety of flavor options left a lot to be desired. This was the sixth day straight that he was eating a chicken-flavored nutrient pack!

Once he finished his meal, he softly burped before he dumped the empty pack and spoon into the watering pool.

Aside from functioning as a toilet and a drinking source, the pool also served as a garbage chute!

With that done, Lord Pearian went back to sitting on the ground as the aliens didn't even give him the courtesy of providing a chair or a bed.

As his naked back pressed against the side of his cell, he looked out at the semi-transparent energy shield on the other side, expecting to see nothing but the entrances of other cells.

"Who!?"

Instead, he practically jumped on his feet as he saw that he had a visitor!

"You... you're human!"

It turned out that while he was eating, a strangely dressed human figure had moved in front of his cell!

This visitor had mysteriously disguised himself by wearing a silver mask that was shaped like a distinctly human face and a purple robe.

Although it was possible that this figure may be a member of a humanoid alien species, Lord Pearian instinctively knew that he was facing another human!

"You... who are you?! Why are you here? Are you a prisoner or a... guest?"

Silence ensued as the newcomer declined to answer his questions. Lord Pearian became more and more apprehensive as the silent figure continued to oppress him by doing absolutely nothing.

Chapter 4596 The Silver-Masked Man

"Are you a Terran? A Rubarthan? Who do you work for? Where do you come from? ANSWER ME, PLEASE!"

Lord Pearian's lethargy had completely disappeared now that someone other than the fixed pair of nunser guards showed up. He had experienced so many monotonous days that he had almost reached the end of his rope!

He had never been so alone in his life as this period of captivity!

Isolation was a completely foreign word to him. Ever since he was born into the Yorul-Tavik Clan, he was constantly surrounded by people, many of whom catered to his needs.

His guard troop ensured his personal safety.

His team of maids took care of his ordinary daily needs.

His personal assistants took care of his administrative obligations.

His fellow clansmen increased his sense of belonging to the Yorul-Tavik Clan.

His friends made him happy and felt he was among his equals.

His subordinates helped him fulfill his ambition to become an adventurer by running his pioneering fleet on his behalf!

No matter what, Lord Pearian was never left alone for an extended amount of time.

The only solitary moments he enjoyed was when he did his bathroom business, but even then a hidden monitoring system constantly tracked his condition. The absence of people only provided him with an illusion of privacy.

These past few weeks had therefore been the worst period of his life. The mental torture of never being able to share his thoughts with someone was agonizing to someone who had never been alone in any time in the past.

If not for the fact that those alien guards came in person to toss a nutrient pack into the cell every once in a while, he would have probably cracked by this time!

Now that a human had apparently shown up in front of him, Lord Pearian was determined not to extend his spell of isolation!

It didn't matter to him whether the figure standing on the other side of the cell was a false projected image of a human.

At this time, Lord Pearian was desperate for any companionship!

He even ran towards the energy shield and banged his fist against the energetic surface!

"SPEAK TO ME ALREADY!"

It was at this point that the desperate prisoner finally heard another person speak to him in standard language.

"Lord. Pearian. Yorul. Tavik." The mysterious person spoke in a synthesized voice.

"You... you can talk..."

The ragged Pearian almost couldn't believe that he had heard the robed figure address him like he was an actual person. "Hahaha... you can talk... YOU CAN TALK! HAHAAAAHA!"

The scion of a powerful first-class clan became completely beset by a cocktail of emotions!

If his implants were still functional, then they would have regulated his emotions so that he wouldn't lose his composure like this. As it was, Pearian couldn't care less how undignified he looked.

Someone had finally come to talk!

Tears practically welled in his eyes as he gazed at the mysterious masked figure as if he was the most beautiful lover in the cosmos.

Warmth and joy radiated from the desperate prisoner as he savored this moment. He did not want to miss this opportunity to regain a part of his humanity again after so many weeks of being treated like unwanted cattle!

"Please... talk to me." He begged the figure. "Are you... real?"

Surprisingly enough, the other figure no longer maintained his silent and stoic demeanor.

"I am physically present here." The figure spoke with normal dictation this time. "Before you ask, I am a human like yourself. I am the only human aboard this homeship."

Now that Pearian finally managed to get within reach of a human that responded to his questions, he did not want to miss this opportunity to obtain the answers that had eluded him for such a long time!

"What is this warship we are on?" Lord Pearian desperately asked. "Why does it look different from other nuser ships?"

The robed figure remained silent for a few seconds before his synthesized voice spoke again.

"The vessel whose translated name roughly corresponds to the Fractured House of the Collapsing Star is not strictly a nunsers ship. She belongs to a multi-racial alliance that has members of every significant alien race of this dwarf galaxy. She is primarily led and crewed by nunsers, but she also hosts a sizable minority of other alien crew members. She is one of many multi-race warships that will serve as one of the most prominent symbols of cooperation beyond racial lines."

Lord Pearian really didn't care about all of that. He only cared about learning the name of the ship and finding out that there weren't only nunsers crewing this vessel.

Now that he satisfied a part of his curiosity about the ship, he turned his attention to the strange human who the aliens hadn't restrained in any obvious way.

"Why are you not in a cell like me? Are you on parole?"

The silver-masked figure faintly shook his head. "I am not in captivity. I have voluntarily chosen to reside on the Fractured House of the Collapsing Star to liaise with her 'housemaster' and the alien alliance that he represents."

"...What?" Lord Pearian looked shocked. He took a few steps back from the energy barrier. "You mean... you're one of those traitors who has been leaking human technology and secrets to the natives?!"

Pearian became horrified with the realization of crimes committed by this other human.

Even an incompetent pioneer like Lord Pearian knew that there were a couple of lines that could absolutely not be crossed, and what the mysterious human

figure had admitted to doing just now was enough to damn him to an eternity of punishment!

"Who... are you?" He asked again. "Who do you belong to? What is your agenda?!"

"I am not here to pamper you, 'Lord' Pearian. You may call me Jugal Meren if you wish, but I do not have time to satisfy your curiosity. Come with me. The housemaster of this ship has called you forth in order to test your mettle."

"What do you mean by that, Mr. Meren?"

The robed figure declined to say anything else. He merely waved his hand and caused the energy shield to drop.

"Come." Mr. Meren's synthesized voice commanded in a way that conveyed great authority.

Despite Lord Pearian's fear and revulsion at the other person, he instinctively obeyed his instructions and cautiously followed the human liaison.

He made sure to wear his damp shirt. He did not want to meet an alien savage when he looked more uncivilized than the primitives who occupied this galaxy.

"Lead the way."

Pearian knew better than to attack Mr. Meren or take him hostage. There were so many invisible security measures around him. Aside from that, someone who dared to collaborate with the native aliens was bound to have a lot of protection!

He instead sought to engage the other human in conversation again while carefully studying the decor of the interior.

The corridors and compartments were larger and wider than what Pearian was accustomed to, but they were still a bit cramped for the nunsers. Space

was at a premium on this starship and there were only a few large halls that provided enough of a stomping ground for the quadruped aliens to run free and go wild.

Few aliens were about at this moment, but perhaps the alien commander had already cleared the way in advance.

"Which state do you hail from, Mr. Meren? Are you a Terran or a Rubarthan?"

"My origin is not your concern, Pearian." The man replied in a more emotionless tone. "I would be much more concerned about how you are about to present yourself to the master of this ship."

Lord Pearian knew that, but he didn't really care about talking with an alien whose language he couldn't understand anymore.

He would much rather extract more answers from this human who had gained the privilege to walk freely on an alien ship!

From the lack of reactions of the few aliens that were present along their route, Mr. Jugal Meren was apparently a common sight on this homeship!

They eventually arrived at a massive elevator that could fit a dozen nunsers and began to ascend upwards.

The cells were apparently located close to the bottom of the mixed alien warship. The ride upwards would probably take a fair amount of time as the speed of ascent wasn't that impressive.

Lord Pearian used this time to ask many questions related to Mr. Meren's identity, organization and motives.

The filthy collaborator refused to provide any answers! His mask and robes made him difficult to read, so there was no way to infer any responses by studying the man's body language.

"Fine!" Pearian threw up his hands. "Tell me about this housemaster."

"The Trampler of Stars is a renowned warlord among the nunser people." Mr. Meren spoke again. "He not only holds authority within nunser society, but has also earned the respect of numerous alien races. He is part of the cadre of the aforementioned multi-racial alliance and can summon many warships to further his objectives. Do not disrespect him. If you anger him in any way, I will not be able to prevent you from getting trampled by his hoofs."

Lord Pearian became more pensive. He never learned how to talk or engage in diplomacy with aliens because it hadn't been needed in the past.

Right now, he felt that was a serious shortcoming! He knew too little about nunsers or whatever else Mr. Meren talked about.

Pearian briefly froze. What was he doing right now? Why was he obeying the instructions of a traitor?

"No."

"..."

Mr. Meren's masked head stared back at Pearian.

"No." The captive dressed in basic prisoner clothes repeated. "I will not take any further step until you tell me exactly who you are and what you are trying to accomplish."

"You are scheduled to have an audience with the Trampler of Stars."

"NO! I am not going! I may have fallen into the most pathetic state of my life, but I am still a human! I will not betray my race by collaborating with this trampler alien!"

"...We will drag you in front of the housemaster if that is what it takes."

"Then I will do my best to spit on the alien commander and deny him any satisfaction!"

The masked human fell silent for a slightly longer period of time before he made a concession.

"Very well. What do you wish to know? I will answer your questions until this elevator has arrived at its destination."

"What is your agenda?" Pearian asked this question again. "I need to know. What do you intend to accomplish by helping these aliens?"

"...I am human, as you know." Mr. Meren's synthesized voice spoke. "My agenda is extensive, but my goals are clear. Despite your impressions, I am not a traitor to the human race."

"Pardon? That sounds like a contradiction to my ears. Your actions pose a direct harm to humanity!"

If Mr. Meren didn't wear a silver mask, he likely would have smiled at Pearian.

"Your logic and comprehension are deficient. While I readily admit that my ongoing collaboration with the local alien races will cause humans to incur greater losses, it is all worth it in the end. Our true enemy is the Big Two, not humanity as a whole. The Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance have held human civilization captive for too long. It is time for them to be swept aside in an uprising of immense proportions, but humanity cannot do so without an impetus spurring them forward."

Lord Pearian began to feel intimidated by the strong conviction conveyed by the synthesized voice.

"What... impetus are you talking about?"

Mr. Meren gestured his robed arm around him. "The remarkable and diverse aliens of the Red Oceans are more resilient than you realize. They may not be as technically advanced as humanity, but that can be remedied by our actions. Once the local alien resistance has grown strong enough to resist and

push back the Big Two's unwarranted encroachment of their ancestral territories, their infallible reputation will crumble into pieces! Once the vast majority of humans realize that they are not strong enough to win every battle and that the alien opposition can wipe them out if they become any stronger, our people will soon change their minds about their own invincibility!"

"W...What?"

"Don't you see, Lord Pearian?! We humans have won too much! We have defeated too many alien civilizations and conquered too much territory! This pattern will lead us to a dangerous future if it persists any further. There are existential threats on the horizon that will take more than human supremacy to defeat! The only way to wake up our conceited race and teach every human that it is better to cooperate with our alien neighbors is to strengthen the latter so that they can prove our point!"

It was at this time that Lord Pearian finally recognized what kind of crazy fellow he had been talking to all of this time.

He took a few more steps backwards as his eyes shook with fear.

"You... I know who you are. You're... you're a cosmopolitan!"

A cosmopolitan!

Lord Pearian thought that they had all gone extinct, but apparently they managed to survive long enough to interfere with the invasion of the Red Ocean!

This was a disaster!

Chapter 4597 Cockroaches

A long time ago, humanity was not the domineering and all-conquering race that everyone in the Milky Way and the Red Ocean was familiar with. When humans escaped the confines of their home planet and spread across the stars, they did so with a lot of hope and optimism.

It was too bad that the galactic scene of the Milky Way was already old. Many different alien races had risen up much earlier than humanity and already carved up everything of value.

The situation back then largely resembled the state of the Red Ocean but at a much larger scale.

Many of the more powerful alien races that had come to dominate a significant amount of territory had reached a stalemate against their neighbors and competitors.

This produced a shaky balance of power that occasionally broke from time to time, allowing different civilizations the opportunity to alter the circumstances in their favor.

Diplomacy and cooperation was therefore just as common as war and conflict. Interspecies communication was common and it was rare for an alien civilization to declare war on everyone else at the same time.

When humanity was still young and weak, there were many among them who embraced the rules of the galactic community. The people who had always dreamt of forging friendships, alliances and other forms of cooperation with different alien races enjoyed their golden age as they threw themselves into their exciting vocation!

These diplomats and communicators largely embraced their work with good intentions. They had all been appointed by their respective star nations or organizations to further the development and ensure the survival of the human race.

This was an enormous responsibility to these diplomats. They prepared as best they could, and a crucial part of that was learning how the aliens worked.

Without understanding their counterparts, how could these professionals possibly forge greater ties between humanity and different alien polities?

This was where things started to go wrong.

When these bright-eyed humans started to go on exchange and immerse themselves in different alien cultures, they began to get assimilated by the alien societies they sought to understand.

The naive humans never realized that the aliens had been playing this game for a much longer time.

These cunning aliens utilized sophisticated strategies and approaches to indoctrinate and bewitch many of these aspiring diplomats!

Over time, many humans became more sympathetic to alien causes and less willing in representing the interests of their own race.

Of course, it wasn't as obvious at the time. The different alien races held back for the most part, so when it was time for these human diplomats to do their work, they merely gave up a bit more ground than usual.

Were they traitors back then? That could never be fully determined as people could easily argue that many beneficial treaties would have never come about if humanity hadn't made so many concessions.

Still, it wasn't until these alien sympathizers became more and more blatant about selling out humanity's core interests that these diplomats and their supporters no longer enjoyed a broad mandate.

Instead of waking up to the reality that they were pissing off their fellow humans, the cosmopolitans remained deaf to all of the complaints and continued to hollow out humanity's fragile pride and independence.

After a few outrageous incidents, the cosmopolitans eventually incurred an enormous backlash, causing them to completely lose all of the power influence they held in human society!

One of the great fathers of modern human civilization, Supreme Marshal Caramond Perle, successfully smashed the cosmopolitan status quo and united the surviving nations and factions of the human race by ushering an explosive new movement!

The death of the Cosmopolitan Movement marked the end of the Age of Stars!

The rise of the Human Supremacy Movement heralded the much more glorious Age of Conquest!

Ever since then, the concept of human supremacy had become baked into the fabric of human society.

Every human had grown up with the uncompromising belief that their race was stronger, better and most importantly superior to all other sentient alien races in their galaxy!

Such an extreme and hostile stance towards the entire collective galactic community should have caused humanity to ultimately succumb under the weight of its own arrogance.

After all, how could a single race in the crowded Milky Way Galaxy possibly survive by provoking so many enemies while at the same time no longer bothering to forge alliances with other alien civilizations?

The Human Supremacy Movement prevailed. Somehow, the human race not only survived, but thrived with the help of this belief!

The unbridled spread of this movement along with the complete prohibition towards its counterweight had caused human supremacy to become the prevailing consensus.

Nowadays, the core values and principles of human supremacy had become so widespread that the Human Supremacy Movement didn't really exist anymore.

There was no need to advocate for human supremacy anymore when pretty much every human agreed with its values and principles!

Many of the powerful human groups that came to dominate human civilization after the Age of Stars consistently supported the ideals of this transcended movement.

When the Greater Terran United Confederation, the New Rubarth Empire, the Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance all unanimously agreed to uphold the standards of human supremacy, there was no way for cosmopolitanism to experience a resurgence in human civilization!

The latter had no chance to make a comeback!

Yet just because the Cosmopolitan Movement had been decapitated and driven out of human society didn't mean it had disappeared entirely.

Like cockroaches, the descendants and inheritors of cosmopolitans managed to keep their heavily marginalized movement alive by surviving in the dark.

There were still plenty of regions of space where orthodox humans had no power over. The surviving cosmopolitans either lived by themselves or had actually managed to attach themselves to a 'friendly' alien race!

There were also a lot of secret sympathizers among the people living in normal human society. They never revealed their true allegiances and had become good at disguising their efforts to help their fellow cosmopolitans.

The existence of these two groups ensured that the Cosmopolitan Movement never truly died out. No matter how extensively human supremacists tried to exterminate these bugs, more always seem to crawl out of the cracks!

Right now, Lord Pearian's expression grew ugly.

As the slow elevator was on its way to ascend to the upper decks of the alien homeship, he realized that he had the distinct pleasure of meeting one of the cockroaches his clan had always warned about.

Though Pearian admitted to himself that he hadn't always been diligent in learning his lessons, he still remembered quite well collaborating with cosmopolitans was a death sentence!

If the Big Two hadn't come around to chop off his head, then his own clan would surely do the deed itself to prevent others from exploiting this scandal!

"What is wrong, Lord Pearian?" The silver-masked man asked in a synthesized voice that sounded much more ominous to the captive scion than before. "Are you experiencing difficulties with comprehending the logic of our actions?"

The wisest decision that Pearian could make in this circumstance was to shut up and avoid any entanglement with a cosmopolitan.

However, he had become so socially deprived in the past few weeks that he couldn't bring himself to remain silent.

"It's not your logic that's the problem." The disgraced scion spoke up. "It's your values and your goals that are flawed. Do you have any idea how many humans will die because of your actions? Arming hostile aliens with superior human technology is crazy!"

"My fellow compatriots and I have an understanding with the local residents of this dwarf galaxy." Mr. Jugal Meren reiterated. "We only gifted them with the means to close the gap against the Big Two for the express purpose of regaining their rightful territories. We have been quite careful about our actions. It is not our purpose to threaten humanity in the Milky Way, so we

made sure that the aliens will not have the means to fight any further. We merely wish to strike a blow against the Big Two."

This sounded incredibly dangerous to Lord Pearian! These cosmopolitans hadn't learned anything from the Age of Stars. They were making the same kind of mistakes all over again as far as he was concerned!

"There is no way these nunsers and puelmers will help you reform humanity because you gifted them with our toys. They will just accept everything you give them but continue to kill as many of us as possible! If you're not careful enough, you might make the native aliens so strong that they may even launch a counter-invasion! The feuds that we have forged in the past years have become so severe that the Red Ocean aliens won't stop until our race is wiped out in its entirety!"

Mr. Meren crossed his arms. "Humanity is not weak. That is a belief that we happen to agree with the human supremacists. Our race is much more entrenched in much of the Milky Way. No alien incursion will be able to do much damage before our collective might will repel the invaders. This is especially the case when we have succeeded in freeing human society from the bondage of the Big Two. As long as the Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance are overthrown, states can finally take their destinies in their own hands, allowing them to field proper warships and regain their true warmaking potential!"

"That's mad!" Lord Pearian gasped as he almost couldn't handle how many taboos Jugal Meren violated in a single minute. "We can't go back to the dark days of the Age of Conquest. The times where humans will wipe each other out en masse will return if you and your cosmopolitans succeed in your insane conspiracy!"

The mysterious cosmopolitan chuckled in his eerie artificial voice. "He. He. He. I respectfully disagree. Just like any other intelligent alien, humans have the capacity to learn from our mistakes."

"You make it sound as if you are doing all of this for the good of the human race, but I don't believe you." Lord Pearian deliberately spoke in a provoking manner. "Everything you and your deranged friends are doing will cause humanity to become weaker and less united. Everyone's lives will deteriorate as a result of pursuing your grudge match against the human supremacists. You're only doing this out of spite, not for any noble and honorable reasons!"

He may have lost his implants, but he still retained enough awareness to recognize that he could extract useful information from the alien sympathizer by poking and prodding at his cosmopolitan beliefs.

Sadly, Mr. Meren possessed way too much self-control to blow up after hearing Lord Pearian's provocative accusation.

"You are too blind and ignorant of the truth." The silver-masked man said in a pitying tone. "Humans have become too arrogant over the millennia. The enduring belief in our own supremacy has caused our race to lose the ability to respect and compromise with all other sentient alien races in this universe and beyond."

"What's the problem with that, cosmopolitan?"

"The fact that you cannot recognize the threat of this development is proof of your ignorance. You see, maintaining this belief only works as long as humanity only comes into contact with weaker alien races. While we are all fortunate enough that we have met nothing but alien powers that cannot catch up to our comprehensive might, that will not last forever."

"Do you know something about that?" Lord Pearian suspiciously asked.

"Perhaps. Sooner or later, the human race will make first contact with a much more powerful alien race that can never be defeated on the battlefield. The only way to preserve our race is to persuade the overpowering aliens to cease their aggression, but how can we possibly do that when our only acceptable form of diplomacy is waging war?"

"...We'll just have to win, then."

"And when that has failed?"

"We keep fighting...?"

"I rest my case."

Chapter 4598 The Trampler Of Stars

The elevator finally stopped after reaching the right deck.

As the elevator doors opened, Mr. Meren led Pearian out into a wider and more well-lit series of hallways.

A greater variety of aliens appeared every now and then as well. The nunsers were still the most ubiquitous ones that Pearian came across. Their large, quadruped bodies were mostly covered up by solid armor, but there were occasionally times where non-combatants moved around in lighter and more utilitarian garb.

He also encountered the occasional puelmers. They looked much more different from the nunsers. Instead of towering over humans, these ball-like aliens were mostly the size of human torsos.

The dozens of small limbs that poked out of their unusually shaped bodies weren't large enough to lift them too far off the ground. This caused their bodies to remain below the wastes of most humans.

Lord Pearian tried his best not to burst out in laughter at the comical sight of these rolling ball aliens.

The puelmers were well aware that they were among the shortest and smallest sentient alien races of the Red Ocean, but they were also incredibly sensitive about this issue.

Ridiculing their short statures was an easy way to start an all-out battle!

Even the relatively tall and aggressive nunsers had learned to restrain their temper around the irritable puelmers. The ones serving aboard this starship probably received special training in order to increase their ability to cooperate with other races.

Pearian encountered a few more alien crew members, from orvens that looked fairly close to humans to weird aquatic fish-like creatures that needed to wear suits filled with water to work on a ship that was filled with air.

The Fractured House of the Collapsing Star was primarily a nunsen warship, so her life support systems were mostly attuned to the tolerances of their race.

Baseline humans would probably get poisoned by the air composition of the alien warship, but Lord Pearian's genetically modified body was able to cope with a wider variety of alien environments, so he was able to remain healthy to an extent.

The same probably applied to Jugal Meren.

The cosmopolitan had fallen silent as the two humans walked towards the chamber where the 'housemaster' held court.

The hallways became increasingly larger and the decor became more elaborate. Numerous alien markings, symbols and artwork made it seem as if they had gradually entered a palace of sorts.

"Before we begin your audience, let me warn you that it is best to cooperate." Mr. Meren's artificial voice spoke again. "The Trampler of Stars is not a tolerant or forgiving alien leader. He is used to getting his way by force or

submission and he expects the same from you. He has met several humans before you, but each of them have irritated him to the point where he has trampled them beneath his feet. I sincerely hope you will not become his latest human victim."

Surprisingly enough, Lord Pearian did not feel as afraid as he should. He cherished his life and wanted to preserve it if possible, but after suffering so many losses, the guilt and recrimination welling up inside of him caused him to feel remarkably nonchalant about his possible death.

"I would rather die as a human than live as a traitor to my own people." Pearian stated with much more conviction than he had ever expressed in his life.

Smack!

"Fool!" Meren scolded as he slapped the captive scion's head from behind. "Your dogmatic inflexibility will accomplish nothing! It is only by living that you will be able to continue to survive and accomplish your goals. I do not expect a man who has grown up in a society saturated with human supremacists to surrender to an alien warlord, but you should at least show enough forbearance to extend your life for the time being. If you cannot prove to the Trampler of Stars that it is worthwhile for you to occupy a cell in his house, then you will fail at this juncture."

Though Lord Pearian had given up on the belief that he would ever be able to escape the clutches of these aliens alive, he still retained a tiny bit of hope.

Perhaps the cosmopolitan had a point. Pearian just had to remind himself to never cross too many lines.

"We are here." The robed figure stated as they stopped before a circular gate.

Twenty heavily armed and armored nunser guards stood before this entrance. Their resplendent blue and bronze armor and wicked side-mounted cannons caused them to look like a unit of tanks.

Their helmeted heads all turned towards the two approaching humans. The way they were positioned not only made them more intimidating, but also showed that they were incredibly united.

Lord Pearian was ashamed to admit that he feared these powerful aliens. His resolve had already weakened before he met the great nunser warlord himself.

It didn't help that he was bereft of his pioneering fleet, his loyal bodyguards, his personal equipment and his implants!

Almost half a minute passed by until Jugal Meren finally spoke, yet instead of speaking normal human words, he began to speak in the language of their hosts.

"Yahhaughauhaha."

The lead nunser guard seemed to stare down even harder at the two humans. "Yewefewghuuaaah!"

"Yhhuugswafahgvwa. Yuuxzefahnnangoah."

"Yuuahwaa!"

"Eooofgahaa!"

Lord Pearian almost lost his composure as Mr. Meren seemed to get embroiled into an argument against the powerful alien guard.

In his opinion, no human should ever speak in this language. It was utterly alien and sounded like absolute gibberish in his ears.

The best way he could describe nunser speech was that it sounded like evolved cattle noises. The nunsers didn't exactly have the kind of mouth and throat structure to speak more articulate words.

He couldn't imagine how much effort it took for a human to learn a fluent nunser language. Pearian had little doubt that Mr. Meren was speaking nunser words on his own without relying on any translation tools.

Finally, the nunser guards relented. They steadily moved to the side, opening up a channel for the humans to proceed inside.

When Pearian and his human minder passed through the opened gates, he stopped and beheld the central chamber where the Lord of Stars held court.

It did not look like any human court. The space was dominated by a large round pit that sunk into the ground. Dozens of alien guards and high-ranking officers were standing around a large pillar that exhibited a lot of unknown alien markings and symbols.

Standing before the pillar was the Trampler of Stars himself.

Equipped with an even larger and more elaborate armored suit, not a single piece of hide or fur was exposed. High-quality weapons were built into the sides and Pearian could also spot a few elements that were probably responsible for flight.

If Pearian possessed a greater technical understanding of phasewater technology, then he would have recognized that the entire suit of armor was transphasic!

Even though Pearian was still far away from this alien leader, he already felt a cloud of oppression hanging over his head.

The Trampler of Stars exuded power. He was strong in more ways than one, and a part of the captured scion instinctively wanted to make himself smaller.

It took quite a lot of effort for Pearian to keep his back straight.

The two stepped on a ramp and descended into the pit. They continued to move forward, ignoring the silent alien courtiers and officers who answered to the alien leader.

Once Mr. Meren stopped at a respectful distance in front of the nunser warlord, Pearian realized that the Trampler of Stars was at least 50 percent larger than any other nunser.

Even with his high-quality armor adding a lot of bulk to his body, the alien was definitely a giant among his kind!

It was at this point that Jugal Meren began to address the housemaster.

The cosmopolitan did not do so as a human.

Instead, the purple-robed figure slowly bowed, but not out of greeting, but so that he could place his arms onto the deck!

Pearian began to look increasingly more shocked as Meren began to assume a posture that looked outright bizarre!

Mr. Meren bent and shifted his body so that he was able to stand on all four limbs.

He did not do so by going onto his knees.

Instead, he made sure to keep both his feet and his hands pressed onto the deck while keeping his back perfectly straight and his head looked forward!

It became evident that Meren had substantially modified his body as no baseline human could assume such a ridiculous beast-like posture.

The cosmopolitan's arms had to be artificially lengthened in order to make him look more like a nunser!

"Yahehuguaaaa!" The cosmopolitan barked with a firm but not too aggressive tone. "Ghuawawha!"

Though Pearian looked absolutely horrified that a human was willing to debase himself in this manner in order to connect with the nunser race, perhaps it worked because the Trampler of Stars did not crush Mr. Meren beneath his hoofs.

Those hoofs were another part of the alien warlord that looked deadly. The armor around the nunser's limbs were thickened and strengthened. Numerous technological features such as retractable spikes allowed the Trampler of Stars to inflict damage with his hoofs in various different ways.

There was no way that Pearian wanted to die by getting crushed by one of those armored hoofs!

After a brief pause, the Trampler of Stars finally responded to the human liaison.

"HUUYUGHAUAAGHAHAA."

The air around the chamber seemed to shake and vibrate due the powerful alien's speech!

Pearian felt as if his entire body was at the mercy of the alien warlord's voice alone!

This was no ordinary nunser individual!

Jugal Meren gazed downwards while lowered his posture a bit further, making it look as if he was offering his complete surrender to the Trampler of Stars.

"Quhhuahahweodh."

This seemed to satisfy the powerful alien leader. The large nunser's intensity dropped to an extent.

'YHWAHWFWEFEHAH. HUUWHFHAHWHWHADFWAH."

"Fuhuwaaoahahheoh."

It was at this point that the Trampler of Stars clearly shifted his attention from Mr. Meren to Lord Pearian.

The scion felt as if an apex predator was one step away from harvesting his life. He tried his best to remain as unmoving as possible!

"HUUWHAH."

"Introduce yourself to the housemaster of this homeship." The cosmopolitan that was still 'standing' on all fours interpreted for the alien leader.

"I am Pearian, descendant of the Yorul-Tavik Clan. I hail from the Omter Republic of human space in the Milky Way Galaxy. I am a pioneer who has accepted a mission to assist humanity with the exploration and conquest of the Red Ocean Galaxy."

Mr. Meren translated everything that Pearian said in native nuser speech. The captured scion felt even more disturbed to hear his own message being twisted by alien words. This was profoundly wrong!

"YHYAHUGAHHAW. WERHUAFWAHAUA."

"Why do you not submit in front of the master of the Fractured House of the Collapsing Stars? Kneel and bow your head in front of the breaker of human cowards and weaklings."

"Never!"

The Trampler of Stars didn't need to wait for a translation to understand Pearian's defiance!

Before Mr. Meren could intercede, Pearian abruptly felt a powerful force pressing down on his body!

"Ahh!"

His weakened body failed to maintain his footing and fell onto the deck in an undignified fall!

His jaw hurt as a part of his head collided against the cold and solid surface. The invisible force acting on his body continued to press it down until he laid almost entirely flat on the deck!

"HHUUWHAHARAWUA. HUWAFAWHHA."

"This generous and forgiving warlord is generous enough to forgive you for your insolence. You humans are uncultured and slow to learn. It is beneath this housemaster to sully his noble hoofs with the worthless blood of your pathetic species."

Pearian gritted his teeth. Though he felt more afraid than ever, he possessed a spark of defiance that kept him from asking forgiveness!

Chapter 4599 Proud Warlord

Eventually, the invisible force acting upon Lord Pearian's body disappeared. Perhaps the Trampler of Stars felt that he had made his point.

If so, then the alien leader had miscalculated.

The pride ingrained in Lord Pearian's bones had remained as strong as ever.

In the face of Jugal Meren's ridiculous subservience, Pearian felt it became more important than ever to show this native alien that humans were strong and uncompromising!

He stubbornly climbed up to his feet and regained his straight-backed posture.

Even if his weakened body wasn't able to remain completely still, it was clear to the surrounding alien courtiers that this captive human did not respect the instructions of the Trampler of Stars.

Yet instead of crushing his body yet again, the powerful alien disdained from taking action again.

"HUUAHAHAGUAH. WEHHUSHAH."

"This warlord has little time to waste on futile human trickery. You may keep standing like a two-legged mammal if you wish, but do not think that you are permitted to deny your instructions."

What could Pearian say to that? He opted to remain silent in order to prevent himself from making any further offenses.

The Trampler of Stars took a few steps forward.

Each stomp of his armored hoof seemed to echo unnaturally loud in the chamber. Even Pearian felt as if he was experiencing a minor earthquake as the deck vibrated from the force of the steps.

This shouldn't have been possible!

The deck of this important compartment was extremely strong. It should have never been able to vibrate as if it was a string on a guitar.

Something about the Trampler of Stars made it so that each of his steps channeled an unnatural amount of strength that far exceeded what his limited form could produce.

"YEWHHAHUAHAGAH."

"What is the strength of humanity?" Jugal Meren obediently interpreted for the Trampler of Stars.

Lord Pearian grew annoyed. Even though it wasn't wise for him to continue to push the lines, he couldn't care less about his preservation at the moment.

"I am not going to play this game with you, filthy alien. I refuse to answer a question that you can easily obtain from your human slave over here. My

value to you is much greater than a source of basic information about human civilization, so skip this stupid inquiry and tell me what you truly want from an ordinary pioneer like myself. I may not be as strong as you, but my race is far superior to your nunsen race! Do not forget that, alien."

Mr. Meren did not immediately translate Lord Pearian's defiant words to the alien warlord, but he had no choice but to do so despite his great reluctance.

The air steadily grew heavier in the chamber as the Trampler of Stars made his obvious displeasure known in a strange and invisible way.

Lord Pearian could feel that the alien warlord had come a lot closer to trampling his vulnerable human body.

If that happened, the scion would welcome it, for he would at least be able to prevent himself from committing any treasonous acts!

Sadly for him, the alien warlord did not play along.

"HUWEHFAHAW! YUWHFAHW! HUUWAHHAFHWEEHAA!"

"You are a weak and pitiful human! The only reason why your race has the upper hand at the moment is because you have access to superior resources and stolen technology! The Red Cabal shall protect the rightful occupants of the Red Ocean and wipe out every life that does not belong in due time!"

Pearian had to admit that the cosmopolitan was doing a good job at interpreting for the alien leader. If not for the fact that Mr. Meren completely disgraced his race by standing on all fours like he was cattle, he would have earned more respect!

"We shall see." The first-class scion said. "Why did you capture me? Why target me when there are so many more valuable pioneers and other individuals that you could have taken? I do not understand why you have

made so many sacrifices and suffered so many losses just so that you can toss me into a cell and forget about me for a few weeks."

Silence descended in the audience chamber. The Trampler of Stars did not appreciate Pearian's attempt to grasp the rhythm of this conversation.

"HUWAH."

The Trampler of Stars took a powerful stomp forward.

"WAHHHUAH."

The alien took another powerful stomp forward.

"HHUUHAHAAA."

"You are a human-shaped voribug." Mr. Meren translated. "You have little to no value to this warlord. There is no special meaning or purpose behind your capture."

"...Excuse me?" Lord Pearian asked. "I do not understand. You brought your warfleet into human territory and arbitrarily targeted my pioneering fleet out of all of the other human fleets for no specific reason?!"

"HAHHE. WEFEWHAHS. WEGAHHW AHGHA."

"Yes. The Trampler of Stars kills whoever he pleases. It is not humanity's business to limit his actions. No human is pleasing to him, but on that day, this warlord has decided to turn you and your fleet into his latest kills to satisfy his need to retaliate against your weak and insolent race."

Lord Pearian couldn't accept this answer. It had to be a lie. There was no way that the Trampler of Stars went through all of that trouble and lost almost his entire fleet to MTA retaliation because this alien was irrational.

There had to be a greater purpose behind capturing him in particular!

This was the only way for Pearian to maintain at least some sense of his circumstances.

If it turned out that the Trampler of Stars truly didn't have any other reason to destroy his pioneering fleet aside from being in the wrong place at the wrong time, then Pearian might probably wish to get trampled by this tyrannical alien!

"Why am I here then?" Pearian asked in a softer tone of voice. "What is the point of interrogating me? Do you want to ridicule your latest captive? If that is your purpose, then you have succeeded."

The Trampler of Stars stepped to the side. Each of his powerful steps shook the deck just as strong as before.

"EHHUUAAAAH. HEWFEUAH. WSFWAHUUUHA."

"Your false assumptions and your inability to accept reality is not this warlord's concern. Since you are in his possession, you may as well prove useful. This warlord has plans to break the human spirit. Are you willing to submit and become his servant slave, or will he need to surrender you to his puelmer associates so that they can transform your mind into a more pliable and obedient tool?"

Lord Pearian grimaced. This was an impossible question. If his implants were still working, he would have commanded them to end his life beyond the point of recovery.

It was too bad that he had been reluctant to do so when he still had the chance. He was too much of a coward at the time.

"I do not agree with being used like this, you overgrown cow! Kill me if you have to, but I will never let myself be toyed by you filthy aliens!"

In order to strengthen his point, he even spat in the direction of the Trampler of Stars!

It was too bad that the 1.4 g gravity along with the distance caused his spittle to land far short of its intended target.

The cloud of oppression grew much greater this time. There was no way that the Trampler of Stars would be able to misunderstand the grave insult in this action!

Just as Lord Pearian became convinced that he would become the latest human kill of the Trampler of Stars, the powerful alien warlord became distracted by a new development.

A puelmer entered the chamber and rolled down the ramp before moving deeper into the large pit.

The small ball alien continued to roll until he arrived a fair distance away from the master of this homeship.

The puelmer looked a little fancier than the other individuals of his kind. His leathery surface was almost entirely covered by a black hardsuit that integrated my small but powerful technological modules.

Even his tiny arm limbs were covered by armor, making him look like a metal sea urchin.

The newly arrived puelmer and the Trampler of Stars appeared to be communicating in private over a private communication channel.

This prevented Jugal Meren from eavesdropping on the conversation, though the man who maintained his inhuman posture didn't look as if he minded.

The Trampler of Stars made a single powerful stomp before a sense of energy and anticipation radiated from his body.

"AAHFHEWWUHAH."

After receiving this single instruction, the puelmer made a weird salute by wiggling numerous armored limbs before rolling his way back out of the pit.

The Trampler of Stars then turned towards the cosmopolitan.

"HWEHAUFWAH. HAHAHWFUAH. HAWUFHAAAA."

"Huwhahfhawh. HShduaaahh."

"YAWHAWEFH FWFWH FWAUAH!"

"Hufufwhaa hawh ewo."

The conversation lasted for a short moment before the Trampler of Stars evidently became satisfied with what Mr. Meren said.

"What... what is happening?" Lord Pearian asked in confusion.

"The Fractured House of the Collapsing Star has detected the intrusion of an unexplainable metal object. The Trampler of Stars has ordered his subjects to investigate and ascertain whether it is a threat."

This caused everyone to halt. The Trampler of Stars appeared to have lost interest in interrogating Lord Pearian any further.

It was rather eerie to the captured scion that everyone just decided to remain completely still and silent.

Perhaps the Trampler of Stars was still talking to someone over a private communication channel, but Pearian didn't get the sense that the alien warlord was doing anything but waiting.

The aliens showed a remarkable degree of patience and discipline.

Mr. Meren also followed suit. If the aliens wanted to remain frozen, then this cosmopolitan would also stay frozen!

Lord Pearian found all of this disgusting, and he was tempted to break the equilibrium so that he could mess up the mood of the Trampler of Stars.

He refrained from doing so because a part of him grew curious about what had caused the mighty warlord to shift his attention away.

As much as hope bloomed inside his heart, Lord Pearian did not dare to assume that his clan had finally come to rescue him from the clutches of this tyrannical nunser.

He couldn't tell how much time had passed without his implants, but he guessed that roughly twenty minutes had passed before a change occurred.

When the gates to the audience chamber opened again, a small procession of nunsers entered while escorting a floating metal container.

The heavy nunsers stomped their way forward until they reached a distance deemed acceptable.

Curiously enough, their loud steps failed to shake the deck.

"HUAUHWAHA." The Trampler of Stars addressed the latest arrivals.

The nunser guards all lowered themselves for a moment. "Hhhuauhaha!"

"HAHHAUWH."

"Yhahwuah."

One of the guards transmitted a command that caused the crate to lower to the deck. Another command caused it to open itself up so that it could reveal its contents.

Lord Pearian blinked as he tried to make sense of what he saw.

At first, he thought he was looking at a beaten and pitted statue of some sort of whale alien.

Though the material looked a little special, Pearian wasn't particularly impressed by the shape of the alien artwork.

It wasn't until the Trampler of Stars came closer and slowly raised one of his forehoofs before making contact with the metal statue that a drastic change had occurred.

"For a moment, a powerful alien presence woke up from the statue!

The armored guard instantly became vigilant and half of them pointed their mounted cannons at the recently retrieved alien statue!

"HUWAHHAHA!"

However, the Trampler of Stars immediately waved the guards to step back and stand down.

Everyone gazed at the statue with fascination as the presence that had come to life began to channel greater and greater strength.

Just as Lord Pearian suspected that the statue was about to explode, a glowing whale apparition jumped out of the statue!

The new whale creature looked almost identical to the whale depicted by the statue. The creature conveyed a lot of power and Pearian felt as if he was close to a source of phasewater for some strange reason.

The Trampler of Stars exhibited a much stronger reaction to the sight of this ghostly phase whale.

A small shockwave exploded from his large armored form, causing Pearian as well as Mr. Meren to lose their footing and get pushed back from the warlord!

None of the aliens seemed to care about what had happened to the humans. They all gazed at the ghostly phase whale as if they had encountered a god! Each of them lowered themselves in order to show respect.

Though the Trampler of Stars had reacted quite strongly to this development, he did not bow down like the rest. The nunser apparently had too much pride to submit himself to another alien.

"HHUWAHAHA. HAHWUAUAHAH. HHAUWUAFEWFA."

The phase whale apparition didn't appear to be doing anything. The aquatic ghost merely stared at the warlord for a few more seconds before he disappeared as if a call got interrupted.

The statue retrieved from space had become completely lifeless and inert!

"YAYHAHWAHW!"

The Trampler of Stars grew angry! The powerful creature raised his upper body and stomped both of his forehoofs down in a mighty gesture!

BOOM!

It was as if a bomb had exploded in front of the nunser warlord!

"Ahhhh!"

The captive human let out an undignified scream as the shockwave from the explosion flung his body off his feet again and threw him dozens of meters away!

"HUWAHAHA! HUAWAHWA! HUAUAHHW!"

Whatever happened had displeased the Trampler of Stars a lot! The nunser warlord not only raged, but also issued a series of orders to his subordinates.

Lord Pearian guessed that a lot was about to happen soon!

Chapter 4600 Learning Speed

A strange occurrence took place in the Ramage Repulsor System.

On one side, the fleet that belonged to Cenatus Prospecting followed a line of breadcrumbs and unknowingly moved closer to the brown dwarf star that was positioned in the center of the star system.

Not only had the fleet moved a lot closer to a relatively large stellar object than was strictly conventional, it had also moved away from the Lagrange points

as well as the outer system that offered a quick escape route to all of its starships!

Though a few officers and crew members were concerned about this vulnerability, too many of their colleagues assumed that the unremarkable brown dwarf star system was completely empty and devoid of significant threats.

On the other side, an angry and impulsive alien warlord had just commanded his powerful homeship to end her recuperation period ahead of schedule and begin to move out of the brown dwarf star she was using to escape further persecution by the aliens.

The diverse alien crew members might have developed their own thoughts about the wisdom of this move, but under the leadership of their tyrannical and domineering leader, they did not dare to raise their voice!

These two simultaneous developments caused both forces to unknowingly converge upon each other.

The best part was that neither side appeared to be aware of this risk!

Otrus Magrin's pioneering fleet had only recently entered this star system and had no idea that a threatening alien warship was hiding in the vicinity.

Cenatus Prospecting also had no cause to suspect that someone as sought after as Lord Pearian Yorul-Tavik turned out to be present right under its nose!

This was quite ironic as a fleet that was ostensibly set up to earn its keep through prospecting and mining possessed extensive scanning capabilities. Cenatus Prospecting was even capable of mining matter from gas giants, and possessed the capability to detect anomalies within gas giants as long as they pointed their scanners in the right direction.

However, a brown dwarf star was far from an ordinary gas giant. It possessed a bit too much mass and generated just enough heat and other energies that Cenatus Prospecting skipped this routine.

As for the Fractured House of the Collapsing Star, the new hybrid technology homeship was all on her own. She was designed to serve as a new generation of relatively small, compact but highly efficient warship that could quickly be mass-produced in order to help with stopping the tide of powerful human warfleets.

As such, she was originally meant to serve as part of a larger fleet. The Collapsing Star was solely meant to serve as a powerful capital ship-grade gun battery platform and nothing else.

After all, other duties such as scouting, planetary invasions and carrying large amounts of starfighters could easily be performed by other economic starships.

In the past, the nunsers and the other dominant indigenous alien races never experienced so much pressure to maximize their efficiency and utilization of resources.

It wasn't until humanity launched its full offensive and demolished alien warships by the thousands that many of the aliens that had grown too complacent eventually woke up to reality!

The insertion of foreign competition completely shook up the local scene and convinced even the most stubborn aliens that they had to get their act together!

Although the House of the Collapsing Star actually possessed fairly powerful sensors and scanners, mainly to assist with target acquisition and tracking, she was never meant to function as a scouting vessel or a survey vessel!

Her narrow and highly compact form that was highly conducive to lowering the materials needed to construct her hull also left her with remarkably little hangar space.

The few starfighters she was able to deploy mostly served an essential screening function. They were never intended to be parked in remote places and conduct lengthy scouting operations away from their motherships.

Though the Trampler of Stars could have forced the starfighters to be on the lookout anyway as long as he gave his crew enough time to modify the small craft, he chose not to do so in the end.

At the time, the Trampler of Stars found it more important to shake off pursuit and go completely incognito.

If he chose to deploy the Collapsing Star's complement of starfighters throughout the star system, the MTA or another powerful human faction might have been able to detect these craft!

Although the Collapsing Star also held a decent amount of other observation devices in her cargo bays, all of them were incapable of maintaining contact with a ship that was hiding inside the largest, hottest and brightest object in the star system!

One of the biggest shortcomings of the indigenous aliens of the Red Ocean was that they lacked a convenient means of instant interstellar communication.

The galactic net that pretty much every human took for granted was distant fantasy to most local aliens!

Although the major alien races all developed various means of rapid interstellar communications, including some that were based on quantum entanglement technology, they were way more expensive and impractical than their human equivalents!

This was why the alien battleship essentially remained blind to what was going on outside.

Even when her housemaster commanded her to rise out of the atmosphere of the brown dwarf star, the alien crew members did not dare to launch her starfighters.

The small and fragile craft would get eroded at a fast pace if they deployed into such a hostile environment!

It was for this reason that the Fractured House of the Collapsing Star boldly ascended without realizing that there was a human pioneering fleet converging close to her route.

The most ironic part about all of this was that the only people who were aware of this imminent collision weren't even present in this star system!

The masterminds behind this devious plan were light-years away, having already left the Ramage Repulsor System in advance!

This was a prudent safety precaution as their presence could easily disrupt their original arrangement.

After all, if both sides understood that they had been manipulated by a third party, the chances that the latter would become their punching bag was great!

While Ves watched these developments unfold in real-time through the live feeds transmitted by the hidden probes and observation devices planted in the star system, he patiently explained all of this to his oldest daughter.

"Do you see, my little pumpkin? Deploying mechs isn't the only way to defeat an opponent. While our clan and alliance are best known for smashing powerful opponents on the battlefield, we have more resources at hand. Subterfuge can be just as powerful in the right circumstances."

Aurelia currently enjoyed the lesson and the attention she received from her dearest father. She smiled as her suited figure sat on Ves' armored lap.

Despite wearing his Unending Regalia, the custom combat armor was alive and always conveyed a lot of warmth to the little girl.

Though Ves had increased the time he spent on tutoring his daughter, he was not detracting too much time from his work.

His split attention allowed him to allocate other partitions of his mind to other work. He was already conducting various other tasks at the same time such as tinkering on the Dullahan Project and studying textbooks related to specific fields of biotechnology.

It just wasn't obvious on the surface as he could perform much of that work in his mind with the help of cranial implant. There was no great need for him to work in the design labs unless he needed to collaborate with other mech designers or perform specific experiments.

In fact, his beautiful daughter managed to copy his method!

Of course, Aurelia's mind wasn't developed enough to split its focus in the same manner, but she had already been born with an additional personality in her mind!

Mew...

An adorable little companion spirit sat on a table. The white Persian kitten looked unusually serious as her cute eyes stared intensely at the projected contents of a math textbook.

Just because Mana was a companion spirit didn't mean she was incapable of learning!

She represented another side of Aurelia, which meant that they shared almost all of their memories and capabilities with each other.

What Mana learned, so did Aurelia!

The reverse was also true!

Although Mana's learning efficiency was lower due to various reasons, it was still an excellent use of a companion spirit, and one that Aurelia could openly use within a ship of the Larkinson Clan.

Further away, Marvaine briefly looked up from his latest Mekanos project and looked at his oldest sister with a jealous expression.

Denny was a lot younger and more fragile. What the infantile companion spirit needed the most was lots of sleep time, as that was the best way to strengthen and mature the younger kitten.

In any case, Ves was satisfied with the latest measures. Aurelia was able to learn more lessons without reducing her playtime by too much.

If these changes failed to yield the desired results, then Ves had seriously contemplated using the gifts of the System to augment his daughter.

As a designer baby of a lower tier than Marvaine, Aurelia was actually at a disadvantage. Though his eldest daughter actually benefited from a few other unique gifts, her raw intelligence and learning speed would not be able to match that of Marvaine once he reached her age.

Of course, this was also a result of specialization as Marvaine was genetically programmed to be a lot better at academic learning.

The disparity between the older children and the younger children would probably grow even larger when Ves and Gloriana got around to making their other three children.

Ves wanted to wait for the Larkinson Biotech Institute to digest the Gemini Family's starter pack on designer babies and develop brand-new Larkinson-specific formulas.

Once the geneticist completed their jobs, Ves predicted that he would be able to produce powerful new superbabies that came with capabilities that Witshaw & Seneca could never match!

Even so, he didn't want his two daughters to feel left out. They were his family as well. Perhaps he might visit the System Space in the near future to see whether he could pick up a few goodies to boost his lovely children.

This was also why he was looking into securing first-class virtual tutoring sessions for his two daughters.

Both Aurelia and Andraste possessed the raw cognitive strengths to keep up with typical first-class courses, but because they never attended a first-class school, they had fallen behind compared to their peers.

Providing them access to proper first-class virtual tutoring would go a long way into closing the gap.

The downside was that the learning results of tutoring weren't as good as attending a proper school. It also wasn't possible for his children to obtain prestigious and credible diplomas, which made it a lot harder for them to get accepted in first-class secondary schools.

He inwardly shrugged. He and Gloriana would deal with this problem in due time.

If the Golden Skull Alliance managed to obtain the favor of the Yorul-Tavik Clan, then all of these issues should easily be solved!

It was still a question whether he was able to rescue Lord Pearian Yorul-Tavik, however. The situation in the Ramage Repulsor System was about to become a lot more complicated.

"Are you having trouble keeping up with your studies so far?" Ves asked his daughter in concern. "If you have any problems with letting Mana out of your

mind for an extended period, please say so. I don't want you to suffer a headache."

His lovely daughter shook her head. "I am fine, papa. Mana is stronger and bigger now, see? I think it is good if I train her to get out more. I want her to be able to act like my second self. I can do twice as much work with her help!"

Ves grinned. "If that is what you want. I'm happy to see you making so much progress. I can arrange much better opportunities for you if you are able to attain more results. Keep learning. The society we live in is centered around clever people. The smarter you become, the more power you'll be able to secure in the future."

His daughter dutifully nodded as she internalized this lesson.