

The Mech Touch

#Chapter 7191: Dark Orb - Read The Mech Touch Chapter 7191: Dark Orb

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The Dark Apostle prepared his own weapon throw.

He held the Dark Tooth in an increasingly familiar grip and gazed at the Divine Harpoon bracing for a powerful attack.

The strategos carried his own physical shield, though it did not offer as much protection as the Dark Shield due to the limitations of his mass allowance.

Those harpoons of his weighed him down considerably. The scientists and engineers working for the Phase Lord Department also possessed a lot of limitations. They lost access to the tech libraries and internal warehouses of the Red Collective and other related organizations. They had to do their best with limited means.

Even so, the Divine Harpoon should not be weak. He possessed a good selection of phasewater organs, many of which fortified his strength and increased his toughness.

Not every phase lord chose to prioritize speed over durability like the Fiery Axe. The Divine Harpoon should be able to withstand a few powerful blows, or else he could not call himself a self-respecting Ascended Giant!

In any case, the Dark Apostle held his weapon at the unfolded mechanism at the butt of the shaft in preparation for his throwing action.

Though he appeared serious, his emotions remained unbalanced due to the remark he just heard.

The Divine Harpoon called his spear throwing skills mediocre.

That shouldn't be possible. Even if the enlightenment fruit did not grant total mastery, he became quite proud by how good he had become at throwing spears.

Ves thought his alter ego was being ridiculous.

"Why the hell are you taking pride in accomplishments that you haven't even earned? You did not spend years or decades mastering the art of throwing stuff like the Divine Harpoon. You did not put in close to the amount of time that other warriors have dedicated to their fighting skills. You are nothing without the special gifts that I have

earned through my own hard labor. Don't forget how inept you fought when you first emerged. The mechs of our clan easily spanked you into submission. I have made sure that you will not go down easily next time."

The human phase lord's expression soured. **"You could have allowed me to keep this fantasy alive. I admit that we have gained none of our fighting skills the old-fashioned way, but it is how we make use of them in practice that matters. I am... displeased that the Divine Harpoon thinks so little of my throwing form."**

"Look on the bright side, buddy." Ves lightheartedly said. "There is still a lot more room for improvement. The skills you have gained are generic and do not take our personal conditions into account. The best techniques are often the ones that fit our circumstances the most. We have yet to do any of that. This may be the heart of the Divine Harpoon's critique. Have you ever considered that your throwing form is flawed because it is so standard? This technique was not especially devised for us. This means that if we truly want to master it, we must change it to suit our own conditions."

He may have hit the nail on the head. The Dark Apostle looked more understanding. It would have been helpful if his adversary had been clearer in his advice. It would have spared him from a lot of procrastination.

The Ascended Giant eventually chose to push this matter aside. **"We need to finish this duel first. Assist me in my next throw."**

The Dark Apostle reared back in a similar manner to the Divine Harpoon. He utilized his general spatial abilities to anchor his foot to the local space and began to execute the special technique that primed the Dark Tooth to explode.

Ves was slightly worried that glitches might occur due to any number of reasons, from the damage sustained by the weapon in the previous battle to the imperfections of trying to translate a fire technique into a darkness technique, but none of his fears came true.

The Dark Tooth was beginning to prime for a powerful explosion in a similar manner as before.

Although darkness energy was not the best kind of energy to produce the most violent possible explosions, it at least possessed the capacity to do so in its own way.

Predictably, the Minor Demon locked inside the weapon attempted to rebel against his impending doom.

Of course, there was no way a Minor Demon could resist the solid hold that Blinky had over the unwilling artifact spirit.

The spear began to accrue a large amount of darkness energy, though it was less than in the previous duel.

Cutting down the length of the staff had made it lighter but also less potent. That was the tradeoff that Ves and the Dark Apostle made when they adopted their current loadout.

Despite the smaller size, both Ves and his other personality hoped that it was amply powerful enough to breach the spatial barrier and any other energy defenses that the Divine Harpoon had at his disposal.

The initial explosion wasn't necessarily meant to do anything further, though extra damage always helped.

As the Dark Apostle channeled his determination to break the Divine Harpoon's defenses and composure, then he would definitely derive a sense of fulfillment!

When both he and his 'companion spirit' felt that they had charged their sacrificial spear to the limit, a short pause ensued.

The Dark Zephyr's dark and miasma-filled eyes stared directly at his target. His pride had taken a hit, so he became determined to earn it back!

**"Let us see whether your defenses can keep up with your throwing prowess!
HAVE A TASTE OF MY SACRIFICIAL SPEAR!"**

The urge to prove himself and prove his superiority drove the Dark Apostle to hurl his disposable weapon forward with great force, speed and accuracy!

A black streak instantly soared from one human phase lord to another.

It only took a very short amount of time before the Dark Tooth collided against the Divine Harpoon's spatial barrier before exploding!

Everyone who observed the battle suddenly felt their heart racing as they perceived a vague and illusionary threat in the field.

This was a threat that was so powerful and so frightening that practically any observer became afflicted by the instinctive desire to flee or attack!

"What is this?!"

"No other attack has ever made me feel this way!"

For just a short interval of time, a black orb of darkness briefly engulfed the Ascended Giant, causing many people to fear the exploding spear had done its job a little too well.

It was only after much of the power of the explosion receded that it became clear that the Divine Harpoon managed to resist the attack with his formidable defenses.

He clearly looked worse off than before, though.

His spatial barrier and azure energy shield had failed to withstand the blows, just as many people predicted.

The shortened spear still possessed enough punch to accomplish at least this much.

What most people wanted to know was whether the Divine Harpoon suffered any real damage, and it definitely looked as if he did.

His raiment remained intact for the most part. The initial explosion had failed to breach the Divine Harpoon's raiment, but it did leave a huge amount of dark miasma behind.

This was the lingering corruptive substance that could weaken or corrode nearly anything when given enough time to do its work in peace!

The Divine Harpoon was anything but willing to let the dark miasma do its part.

He shook his body and began to use his armored limbs to rub off the corruption as best as possible.

His methods may be crude, but they were working.

The dark miasma had yet to sink too deep into the Divine Harpoon's raiment. It was doing its best to eat through the armor layers, but the materials proved too thick and resistant to succumb so quickly.

The darkness eventually faded. The man's raiment still bore the scars and stains of the ominous force that attempted to compromise his raiment. It looked a lot uglier and less functional than before.

"Interesting." The Divine Harpoon uttered. **"The power you command is certainly frightening. If I was a lesser Ascended Giant, I would have felt more disturbed by the illusions brought about by these dark energies. The direct power of your explosion is not as strong as you have shown the first time. Is it because of the smaller size of the spear and moving away from using fire energy?"**

The man was quite astute.

"Yes." The Dark Apostle plainly admitted. **"The size of the spear determines how much mass you can convert into explosive stuff. The method was originally designed to work with fire energy, but we managed to make it work with darkness energy with a lot of improvisation. This is the first time we have tried it out to be honest, and I am glad that the explosion is still powerful enough to strip your defenses. If we had more time, we could have improved our techniques a lot more."**

"I have no doubt you can do so, but that is a matter for the future. It is my turn again."

The Divine Harpoon did not let his damaged raiment affect his purpose. He calmly retrieved his second harpoon from his back and made an identical stance as before.

As he began to 'align' himself with the phase whale bone material that served as the core of his harpoon, he once again managed to 'fool' reality into treating it as one of his limbs.

The harpoon soon behaved as if it was a living extension of the Ascended Giant's body. It gained multiple different augmentations that turned the weapon from a serious threat into a bane to all phase leaders!

Ves and the Dark Apostle made their own preparations. The Dark Shield and the Dark Bulwark received a powerful infusion of darkness energy as both of them tried their best to raise their defenses as much as possible.

The two felt a lot more naked now that their spatial barrier and azure energy shield were down. There was no feasible way to restore them in a short amount of time, so they could only count on their physical defenses for the time being.

"Get ready."

"Bring it on, old man!"

The Divine Harpoon launched his weapon forward with great power and technique.

Before everyone could properly track the harpoon, it slammed into the Dark Shield as if it teleported across the entire stretch!

The heavy and powerful harpoon pierced through the dark miasma that covered the surface layer and moved far too quickly to let the corrupting energies weaken its structure.

Armor layer after armor layer succumbed to the tip that had been especially designed to not only penetrate tough materials, but also hook into place so that it could be used as an anchor to restrain the target in question!

Although Ves and the Dark Apostle did not have to worry about the latter, they still had to defend themselves against the former as the Dark Shield gained an expanding hole as the kinetic energy of the harpoon proved too much for the D-arm!

The harpoon eventually went on to strike the frontal armor of the Dark Bulwark, but by then it had lost enough power and momentum for the heavy raiment to do a proper job.

After punching through multiple layers, the harpoon finally lost all of its momentum and ended up stuck halfway through piercing through the chest armor.

Though the harpoon ultimately failed to draw blood, the Dark Apostle still shivered for a moment as he imagined that it could have gone a lot worse.

He looked at the condition of the Dark Shield. Its damage was extensive. The initial impact subjected it to a lot of force, causing it to gain a very sizable hole that could easily let another harpoon pass without encountering any material resistance.

"*That... is a problem.*" Ves uttered.

Chapter 7192: The Second Explosion

Both Ascended Giants only had one projectile left each.

The sacrificial spears thrown by the Dark Apostle were undoubtedly more powerful, but he only brought 2 of them to this duel.

The Divine Harpoon originally carried 3 harpoons into the field, of which two had already done a good job of stripping his adversary of his defenses.

Both human phase lords knew that they had reached the critical junction.

Given how much the earlier harpoon had messed up the Dark Shield, Ves had little confidence that it could provide adequate protection against the next throw.

The Divine Harpoon's throwing capabilities were too good. Ves had no doubt that the strategos of the Faceless Giants would be able to thread the needle and sink a harpoon straight through the fairly large gap in the damaged D-arm!

That meant that the harpoon would only have to overcome the defenses of the Dark Bulwark before it could sink its anchor-like tip into the flesh of his true body.

The damage would be extensive. The harpoon may even sink deep enough to pierce through one of his phasewater organs!

Although Ves was secretly prepared to mobilize much of his remaining Worclaw energy to hinder the passage of the incoming harpoon, he needed to react in time to catch the attack.

This was a serious challenge by itself!

Another issue was that Ves had a strong feeling he needed to save all of the Worclaw energy that he had left for the fourth and final duel.

The shadow of the Oscillating Fist loomed large over the entire leadership challenge.

Ves and the Dark Apostle deliberately placed him last when they gained the power to choose the order of challenges.

Even if they managed to win the current duel and formally win the leadership challenge, that was only the case if both sides abided by the terms of the contract.

What if the Oscillating Fist refused to abide by this agreement?

Words on virtual documents had no power to restrain the most powerful Ascended Giant alive.

It was quite stressful to deal with such powerhouses.

Just like Star Designers, human phase lords had no obligation to follow their oaths and stick to their promises. They could be as duplicitous as they wanted.

If the Oscillating Fist had no intention of giving up the Phase Lord Department, then he could potentially tear everything apart during the 4th duel!

Ves thought about avoiding this confrontation. The Dark Apostle had an excuse to do so if he won 3 duels in a row. Yet that would probably not sit well with the alternate personality.

All of the Ascended Giants also looked forward to a meeting between their two leaders. They needed to know how the two measured up against each other!

To avoid this confrontation was an obvious sign of cowardice. That would definitely cause the more stubborn and skeptical Ascended Giants to lose confidence in Ves' leadership. This would make them much more prone to go rogue and defect to the Red Cabal!

"We need to finish this with your next throw." Ves conveyed to his other personality. "We cannot go into the next duel with a heavy injury or a total depletion of all of our Worclaw energy. If we want to win the hearts and minds of the Ascended Giants, we don't necessarily need to beat the Oscillating Fist, but we should at least make him hurt."

The Dark Apostle nodded even as he retrieved the Dark Fang from his back.

The spear happened to be longer than the last one, which meant that it should be able to produce a larger explosion.

The good news was that the Divine Harpoon did not put a heavy emphasis on defense, which meant that the next sacrificial spear throw should be able to inflict serious damage.

As long as the next sacrificial spear throw inflicted enough damage to cripple him enough to impair his ability to retaliate, then that would satisfy Ves and the Dark Apostle's win condition.

"I think we need to put extra power into our next attack. Do you have any last-minute tricks or ideas that can put the Divine Harpoon out of action?"

Blinky shook his head.

"Not really. Aside from tapping into our reserves of Worclaw energy, all of the other ideas entail borrowing strength from external sources. The rule that prohibits us from drawing upon the power of our design spirits and so on is a serious impediment. If you can give me more time, I can optimize the translation of the Sacrificial Spear Throwing Method in the use of darkness energy. The current implementation is incredibly crude at the moment."

A spear made of fire hyper energy would have produced a bigger explosion, but Ves and the Dark Apostle did not possess a particularly strong affinity with this element.

In the long run, it was better if they focused on exploiting the attributes that they were most familiar with, namely metal, life and darkness.

As the two of them began to charge the spear with darkness energy, they put all of their hopes in their next weapon throw.

The result of this move would determine whether he could take over the Ascended Giants smoothly or with difficulty.

The Dark Apostle would very much like it if his new subordinates did not pine over their old leader.

This was why he suddenly decided to burn a little phasewater.

"What are you doing!?"

"I am doing what is necessary to end this duel. We can make up for this loss if we swallow a container's worth of diluted phasewater right afterwards."

Burning all of that phasewater caused his phasewater concentration to decrease, but the power-up they received was substantial!

When the Dark Apostle finally tossed the dark and ominous spear, he estimated that he was able to put at least 20 percent more force behind his throw!

The Dark Fang instantly soared forward and created a black streak above the surface of Jotunheim that directly struck the Divine Harpoon!

At the last second, the strategos instinctively became alarmed by the force of this attack and roared as he rapidly burned his own phasewater in order to amplify his defenses!

The Dark Fang ultimately punched into his chest armor, penetrating through all of the layers before penetrating the surface of his chest.

It then proceeded to explode, engulfing the Divine Harpoon in another massive black orb!

The power of darkness radiated from the orb like a black sun. It persisted for a few long seconds before dispersing through strands of darkness.

Everyone carefully studied the recipient's condition.

"Is... is he alive?"

"He is, but... he is struggling to repel the darkness."

The Divine Harpoon no longer looked as valiant and strong as before. The entire front side of his raiment had blown apart while the rear had become contaminated with dark miasma.

What was worse was that the dark miasma also spread to the front of his exposed head and front torso. Phasewater-reinforced flesh became increasingly more contaminated. The affected flesh began to weaken and rebel against the rest of the true body.

As serious as his current condition may appear, the Divine Harpoon had weathered the initial blast pretty well.

He still remained conscious, and was working hard to repel the darkness energy that was clinging to him like a sick disease.

His companion spirit was doing its best to get rid of the darkness energy, but its abilities and elemental affinities were not that suited for the task.

The Divine Harpoon lacked control over a convenient element that could easily scour away the darkness like the Fiery Axe!

Almost a minute passed by as he gradually managed to snuff out all of the dark miasma. That had taken way too long. If the Dark Apostle was not restricted by the rules, he could have easily exploited his opponent's condition and landed a killing blow.

The Divine Harpoon's raiment was pretty much ruined, so he tore away the remaining chunks.

The leader of the Faceless Giants looked truly bedraggled this time. His greyed and blackened flesh still bore the lingering corruption brought about by darkness energy contamination.

Though much of the damage to his body was concentrated onto his upper torso, his head and his arms had also become affected to a lesser degree.

Nobody could determine whether he was still in a good enough condition to throw his last harpoon.

The Divine Harpoon remained still for over a minute before his body finally slumped.

"I concede. I am no longer in a condition to throw my third harpoon. You have proven your strength... and your willingness to assume responsibility over the Ascended Giants. As far as I am concerned... you are better qualified to become our polemarchos than the Oscillating Fist."

The Dark Apostle loosened the tension from his body.

It was done.

According to the agreement, he had 'won' 3 out of 4 duels, which meant that his takeover was technically a done deal.

Even if the Oscillating Fist denied that the Dark Apostle won the leadership challenge, he would definitely make a lot of Ascended Giants upset if he acted dishonorably.

The reign of a tyrant was never stable. The Oscillating Fist would definitely experience a lot of problems in trying to keep the Phase Lord Department under his control if he invalidated the Dark Apostle's successes.

In other words, the chances were great that Ves and the Dark Apostle would be able to take over the Phase Lord Department before the end of the day!

The Dark Apostle smiled even as his body and phasewater organs started to ache from burning phasewater.

He threw a grateful look towards the Divine Harpoon.

Nobody knew for certain whether the strategos spoke the truth about his condition or whether he deliberately stepped down when he still had a bit of fight left inside his battered true body.

If the latter was the case, then the Divine Harpoon picked a good moment to back off. Nobody could truly fault him for conceding the duel when he looked so horrible at the moment. Even those who suspected foul play could not provide any proof that the strategos acted dishonorably.

The two human phase lords nodded to each other once before leaving the dueling ground.

As the Dark Apostle returned to his recovery base, he was greeted with applause and cheers from all of the collies!

The victorious phase lord smiled but made his way over to the diluted phasewater tanks before grapping a hose and placing it in his mouth.

Pressurized liquid began to spurt from the hose and enter straight into his stomach. The phasewater should soon bring the phasewater concentration in his bloodstream back to the previous level.

It was only then that the Dark Apostle relaxed and basked in his success.

Eliza Mo Ragadan floated up to the human phase lord's gigantic head. She looked particularly excited.

"Good work, sir. You have won 3 duels, which means that the Phase Lord Department is yours. This will change everything. If you are still willing to let me serve as your chief of staff, I can immediately begin to coordinate with the staff of your new department in order to make your transition into your new position as problem-free as possible. There are many issues that need to be addressed due to this secret crisis, but not all matters require your personal attention. I can work to cut down all of the minor issues so that you can concentrate on the big picture."

Blinky looked down at the ambitious chief of staff and narrowed his eyes in suspicion.

Although Eliza Mo Ragadan had pledged her loyalty to Ves, she was still a collie, so she also had the best interests of the RC at heart.

Keeping her as his administrative troubleshooter within the Phase Lord Department meant that she along with many other collies would be able to push through their own decisions.

Not all of those decisions might align with his own interests.

Perhaps it may be better to replace her with a Larkinson or at least bring in a few staffers from the clan to ensure the Phase Lord Department remembered who was in charge.

"We can discuss the details on how to reform the Phase Lord Department at a later time. We still have one more duel to go. The Ascended Giants have been looking forward to witnessing the first meeting between us and the Oscillating Fist. Anything could happen, so do not put your guard down."

Eliza faltered. "Are you expecting... problems?"

"We don't know." The Dark Apostle said. "And that scares us. Let us hope for the best, but prepare for the worst. We know far too little about how the Oscillating Fist will react. Is he truly ready to hand over leadership of the Ascended Giants as he is obligated to according to the terms of the leadership challenge? If I was in his place, I would not give up so easily..."

"Then let us hope that he has more honor and integrity than you." Ves softly said.

Chapter 7193: The Oscillating Variable

If there was one undeniable fact, it was that the shadow of the Oscillating Fist loomed tall over the entire leadership challenge.

The RC negotiating team had done an excellent job of shaping the leadership challenge in a way that gave the Dark Apostle an option to take over the Phase Lord Department without needing to confront its true leader.

This was a masterstroke in negotiation. Perhaps the Ascended Giants themselves had not truly recognized the implications of these terms.

Well, Ves thought it was more likely that the Ascended Giants underestimated the challenger.

They initially thought of him as a mech designer who possessed no real fighting skills.

Well, they had certainly been proven wrong this time.

The Oscillating Fist definitely shouldn't have been able to foresee how all three of his strategos eventually rolled over the challenger.

This should have thrown him off-balance, but this also made him even more unpredictable.

How would he react?

Would he accept the results?

Would he try to fight back in order to retrieve the Phase Lord Department back in his possession?

All of these questions and more lingered in the minds of the collies and even the Ascended Giants.

After the initial celebration subsided, the collies all grew serious as they awaited the start of the fourth and final duel.

Multiple think tanks ran through the data and came up with many different theories.

The Red Collective had come closer than ever to regaining control over the Phase Lord Department. They did not want to drop the ball at the last second because they overlooked a crucial variable.

At this moment, none of the variables caused as much consternation to them as the self-styled polemarchos of the Ascended Giants.

The opinions of the Ascended Giants had always painted him as a cut above the rest of their kind.

Before their progenitor came along, the Ascended Giants almost universally considered him to be the perfect member of their kind. He possessed both excellent fighting skills and a true body that could overcome any martial challenge.

Combined with his ambitious vision and his compelling leadership qualities, the Oscillating Fist had long served as the compass of the Ascended Giants.

Yet strangely enough, the Oscillating Fist had remained almost entirely absent since the Dark Apostle first tried to open a dialogue with the Phase Lord Department.

The strategoi led the personnel stationed in the headquarters. Many units and departments continued to do their jobs as if nothing had changed.

What was he thinking?

What was he doing?

What were his intentions?

Many questions remained unanswered, but Ves knew that the time had come for the veil to be cast aside.

"According to our monitoring of their headquarters, many Ascended Giants and human support personnel have mostly accepted the outcome of the three duels." Secret Keeper Zariel-775 spoke in an emotionless tone as usual. "They are all aware of the short version of the agreement and understand that they will soon answer to a different polemarchos. Overall, their resistance to this leadership transition is fairly low. They are sincerely convinced by the fighting ability and technological ingenuity of the so-called Dark Apostle. There are exceptions, but we have already marked them for reassignment or elimination."

The projection of Department Head Demetrius Sol Klavia nodded. "Thank you for your report. The situation has developed along one of our more optimistic tracks. However, this is no reason to let your guard down. The Ascended Giants have become a group of regressed tribalistic warriors. External influences have misguided and indoctrinated them to the point where they mistakenly believe they belong to a different race. We cannot rely on their honor or their duty to make good on their promises. A single powerful 'tribe leader' can always come and smash our agreement to pieces by relying on brute force."

The Dark Apostle's giant expression began to frown.

He clearly did not want this to happen, but when he thought about the virtues of himself and his fellow Ascended Giants, he had to admit that these fears were not entirely unfounded.

Blinky began to run his furry chin with his paw. "*What is the probability that the Oscillating Fist will not accept the outcome of the leadership challenge?*"

Everyone looked at Zariel-775.

The robed figure offered his response.

"Our diviners, ritualists and more mundane intelligence analysts have studied all of the relevant data that we have collected. I have to warn you that our data is not as complete as we like. We especially lack direct observation and access to more confidential records related to the Oscillating Fist. He has always resided in the center of the headquarters, which enjoys the greatest protection against physical and non-physical intrusion. Even if these safeguards have become dated by the current standards of the RC, their effectiveness is not in doubt."

After making all of this clear, the secret keeper finally moved on to the information that everyone wanted to know.

"With these caveats in mind, we estimate that there is a 78 percent chance that the Oscillating Fist will not surrender his leadership position. If that is the case, there is a 68 percent chance that he will force the Dark Apostle to accept a duel that will not end unless one of them dies. Winner takes all. Regardless of the terms of the leadership

challenge, the Dark Apostle cannot formally take over the Ascended Giants if he is dead. This is what the Oscillating Fist likely rely upon to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. It suits him best as he has always prided himself on his excellent martial power."

"..."

Ves, the Dark Apostle, the Patient Builder and everyone gathered in this impromptu meeting looked at each other.

If this was a normal situation, then the Red Collective could readily intervene and rely on their mechs and warships to suppress the Oscillating Fist.

After all, the Phase Lord Department under the tacit approval of the current polemarchos had signed a contract. They agreed to bet knowing what would happen if they would win or lose.

If they won, then the Oscillating Fist would retain control over the Ascended Giants.

That did not happen. If the Oscillating Fist had any sense of genuine honor in him, then he would honestly accept his loss and abide by the terms of the agreement.

To hear that this guy had a high likelihood of flipping the table and forcing the Dark Apostle to fight for a reward that he should have secured already sounded incredibly frustrating!

"We can't simply rely on overwhelming force to neutralize the Oscillating Force, is that correct?" Ves asked.

The projection of the Patient Builder sighed. "Our analysis of the primitive psychology of the Ascended Giants has revealed that they harbor less respect for contracts and agreements. They value martial virtue much higher. Just as they are willing to let you take over leadership so long as you have defeated enough of their leaders, they are also eager to see the Oscillating Fist win back everything that he has lost by initiating a daring duel to the death."

"Savages." Eliza Mo Ragadan contemptuously remarked. "We have forged the Red Collective to be a force of enlightenment. Unlike the brutal practices of the Five Scrolls Compact, we approach the forces of mystery from a scientific and rational perspective. Every phenomenon has an explanation. No matter what unusual mysteries we end up making use of, we always remind ourselves that mystery must serve red humanity, and not the other way around."

That sounded familiar to Ves.

Well, it shouldn't be surprising that the Red Collective copied the best practices of the Red Association.

"If I had my way, I would force all of these stupid Ascended Giants to go back to school so that they can be recivilized." He said through Blinky. "However, I have a feeling that as soon as their phasewater concentration increases by a considerable margin, the heavenly authority of the Red Ocean will come and reprogram them. I fear that we have no other choice but to accept the savagery of the Ascended Giants and work around this fact."

"There are advantages to our ways." The Dark Apostle couldn't help but stand up for his own kind. **"We are not adept with technology. We are more reliant on external support to provide us with equipment and intelligence support. We are also more centralized. If you want to control them, you control their leaders. Our respect for hierarchy is strong. Individual Ascended Giants are not supposed to possess much initiative. They will not disobey their superiors unless they are truly driven to desperation."**

That was all true. It was easier to manipulate the Ascended Giants when they were moronic.

Yet the fact that they no longer thought like humans or identified themselves as part of their original race was still a tragedy.

The Red Collective never wanted this to happen.

They wanted the Phase Lord Department to be led by a loyal human.

They wanted the human phase lords to retain their humanity even as they employed the power of their enemies.

They wanted to turn the human phase lords into their most reliable and dependable champions and shock troops in the Red War.

The recent changes threatened to unmake this dream, and it was only when the chief councilor of the Upper Council agreed to intervene that the higher ups of the RC regained hope.

They were most unwilling to allow the Oscillating Fist to spoil their plan just when it was about to bear fruit!

"Can we assassinate the Oscillating Fist before he shows up at the dueling ground?" Ves asked. "It is best to eliminate him out of sight of everyone else. Let his absence speak for itself."

"Y-You!" His alter ego looked scandalized. **"No! I veto this proposal! So what if the Oscillating Fist does not accept the outcome of the leadership challenge? I will not be a coward and refuse to meet him face to face. At least hear him out. What if your estimations about him are off? You should not judge him until I have an**

opportunity to question him about his motives in person. As the first leader of the Ascended Giants, he deserves to be treated with dignity unless you have ironclad proof that he has ill intentions."

That was difficult to obtain given how secretive he behaved.

However, it was undeniable that much of the reason why the Phase Lord Department had become so estranged from the rest of the Red Collective was due to the Oscillating Fist.

The leader bore undeniable responsibility for letting his men slide closer and closer to independence and defection.

He had failed to do his duty to red humanity.

Nobody even knew whose side he was on these days.

Only a meeting could clarify this matter.

His answer — or lack of one — would determine what sort of treatment he deserved.

A short discussion ensued. They reluctantly concluded that it was not feasible to assassinate the Oscillating Fist.

The fear was too great that they would botch the attempt. Once the commotion spread, the other Ascended Giants might get pulled into the vortex and ultimately fight directly against the forces of the Red Collective!

In order to prevent such a mess from happening, it was best to control the variables as much as possible.

They could do this by making the Oscillating Fist act in isolation.

He at least needed to show up on the dueling ground alone.

Though the Red Collective would not be able to hide their subsequent actions, it would be a lot easier to take out the polemarchos without letting the situation spin out of control.

"Give him a chance." The Dark Apostle found himself forced to stand up on behalf of the Oscillating Fist. "If he acts dishonorably, then you can do whatever you want to him. However, if he acts in a manner that is supported by the Ascended Giants, then I advise you to leave him alone. You will not endear yourselves to my future subordinates if you do not take our traditions seriously."

Chapter 7194: The Bearing of the Oscillating Fist

The final confrontation had begun.

As the Dark Apostle arrived at the center of the dueling ground, he looked ready to confront the most powerful Ascended Giant currently in existence.

His wargear reflected how much he feared his opponent.

His current raiment did not look too different from the one he wore in the previous duel.

The biggest difference was that its flight system was designed to excel in linear acceleration. It gave up on agility in order to optimize its entire performance around charging forward in a straight line.

His armaments reflected his extreme coping strategy against the Oscillating Fist even further.

The blast lances attached to his back were too long and unwieldy to fend off one of the best pugilists in the Red Ocean.

Their reach was excessive and their mass was too high. It would take forever to swing them around. Their length would have to be cut in half to make them at least somewhat viable in a brawling match against the Oscillating Fist.

Of course, neither Ves nor the Dark Apostle had any intention of challenging the polemarchos in the area he excelled at. The previous duel already taught them a lesson about how powerful an Ascended Giant could become if they dedicated their entire development trajectory towards a single mode of combat.

The fact that the tips of the darkness and fire-aspected lances had been filled with the most potent explosive propellant that the RC could scrounge on quick notice was undeniable proof that they were only ever designed for a single purpose.

That was for the Dark Apostle to ram them into the Oscillating Fist and have them explode with great force!

Ves particularly looked forward to seeing the fusion of ancient artifice and modern chemistry.

If the observers had already grown impressed by the power of the explosions of his previous sacrificial spears, then they would definitely enjoy the explosions produced by purpose-built blast lances!

The only concern was whether this was enough to take down the Oscillating Fist in a duel.

Once the Dark Apostle used up the two blast lances, he would have nothing left aside from his fists and the Murder Knife.

Considering that Ves had not been able to ingest an enlightenment fruit that taught him how to punch or wield a knife, the Dark Apostle would never be able to win a fair fight against the Oscillating Fist!

Ves deeply hoped that the blast lances would do their jobs and put the Oscillating Fist in an infirm state.

The only way the Dark Apostle could win a brawl against this former galactic champion-grade boxer was if he was injured to hell.

As the Dark Apostle floated just above the surface of Jotunheim, he continued to wait for his final opponent to arrive.

This was a day of destiny for them both.

For the Dark Apostle, his takeover of the Ascended Giants was his capital to prove his right to exist.

He clenched his fist. He did not want to get stuffed in a deep dark hole again as soon as this affair had concluded.

No matter what he thought about his relationship with Ves, the fact of the matter was that he was currently the junior partner of their shared true body.

The Dark Apostle was not stupid. He was surrounded by humans and could only rely on their protection to maintain a foothold in this exceedingly dangerous dwarf galaxy.

The only thing he could do under the circumstances was keep his head down, act as the perfect human lackey and bide his time.

He would have much greater capital to assert his rights once he took over leadership of the Ascended Giants and have them flourish over the course of the current wars.

Red humanity may have grown vigilant towards human phase lords, but it could not afford to keep them in reserve.

The war didn't care about the division between humans and Ascended Giants.

There would be a place for the recently retaken Phase Lord Department. It was up to the Dark Apostle to fight for his people's rights and convince the greedy and selfish red humans to grant more leeway to his fellow giants.

All he needed to do now was to force the Oscillating Fist to accept the leadership transition.

The Dark Apostle hoped that he would be as rational and coolheaded about it as Ves had been when the Larkinsons forced him to resign from his patriarch position.

Yet few people expected the famed polemarchos to relinquish his seat of power.

This was the leader who reshaped the Phase Lord Department into its current incarnation.

Though he had been indecisive as of late, his initial leadership demonstrated his strong will and vision for the Ascended Giants. This was not an ordinary individual. The Oscillating Fist showed all of the traits of an ideologue and a visionary.

After spending so much time speculating about the Oscillating Fist's motives and worrying about his possible responses, many people finally experienced relief when this mysterious leader finally made an appearance.

He emerged from one of the exits of the headquarters of the Phase Lord Department in resplendent gear.

Though the engineers and cultivation scientists of the Phase Lord Department were not the best, the ones assigned to serve him in person were a cut above the rest.

They also included experts that the Oscillating Fist directly hired as opposed to getting them assigned from the Red Collective.

These people certainly knew their craft. As the Oscillating Fist flew towards his destination by himself, many different sensors and scanners unscrupulously tried to figure out all of the secrets of his gear.

What was apparent on the surface was that the exterior layer consisted of seashell-like scale armor.

The organic-like shells did not look like they were fabricated. They looked as if they had been grown from an alien aquatic species.

Fortunately, the subsequent layers consisted of relatively 'ordinary' armor plating. The exotics and hypers used to make them could all be traced to the known material shipments to the HQ of the Phase Lord Department.

It was easy to understand the alloy mixtures and why they were put together that way by studying the prior works of the engineers and armorers employed by the Oscillating Fist.

All of the tech was fairly standard as well. The Phase Lord Department did not have the capacity to develop better conventional tech. The most its R&D department could do was to adapt existing inventions to phase lord equipment.

Yet that did not seem to affect the Oscillating Fist's confidence in the slightest.

His helmet was open, exposing his face to the cold vacuum of Jotunheim's nearly nonexistent atmosphere.

If the other phase lords looked like humans magnified by a hundred times, the Oscillating Fist appeared like a carved monument that had come to life.

He was truly handsome in a way that seemed natural and authentic. He not only carried the looks, but also possessed the bearing of a truly superior being.

It was as if the Oscillating Fist was the only being who could genuinely be described as an Ascended Giant.

All other human phase lords strove to become like him, but always fell short for one reason or another.

Even the Dark Apostle felt rather inferior. His true body went through numerous evolutions and lightning baptisms.

Each transformation generated subtle changes to his face and the rest of his body.

While he looked increasingly more handsome and heroic with every major evolution, he still lacked the maturity and sense of gravitas that the Oscillating Fist effortlessly exuded.

This shouldn't be the case. The Dark Apostle or rather Ves had contributed a lot more to humanity in both galaxies.

As a mech designer and an innovator, Ves had changed the course of human history and made it possible for every human to become a Carmine mech pilot!

Yet he didn't carry himself like one, and that was a big problem. He acted and behaved in a manner as if he did not acknowledge his significance in the fabric of the universe.

Perhaps one possible reason was his youth. He was too young and inexperienced to know how to carry himself as a superior leader.

Another reason may be his ordinary childhood and upbringing. Growing up as an 'average' third-rater left him bereft of the arrogance and sense of superiority that came natural to people such as Gloriana.

A third reason may be his adherence to the mech designer creed. Since the start of his studies, his professors had consistently repeated the principle that mech designers existed to serve mech pilots, and not the other way around.

Mech designers must never develop too big of an ego. They could never be allowed to become the protagonists of a conflict. They were supposed to act as the supporting characters of a play centered around the real heroes of the story, namely mech pilots.

Although Ves had become way more than just an ordinary mech designer, he still considered himself as one, to the point where he openly rejected his identity as an Ascended Giant!

This may be why Sev, who chose to adopt the name of the Dark Apostle, lacked the ability to possess a bearing as good as the Oscillating Fist.

After all, his personality and ego did not appear out of nowhere. They were all derived from the same source, one that the Dark Apostle could only regard as inadequate.

What was worse was that the Dark Apostle did not exist long enough to earn his own achievements.

While he was proud of winning 3 duels against older and more experienced Ascended Giants, he could not deny that it was mostly Ves that enabled his victories.

The Dark Apostle had to rely too much on expensive toys and fancy gear in order to make up the difference in skill and other intangible qualities.

With that in mind, how could he possibly carry himself as if he was the strongest and most invincible warrior of his kind?

The fact that he was unable to gain the supreme bearing of a true high tier galactic citizen was a major shortcoming.

Ves lacked the deterrence that could discourage other parties from messing with him. The Fiery Axe would never think about killing him if he possessed this quality. The Divine Harpoon also wouldn't have dared to mislead him in such a blatant manner.

It was no wonder that the Ascended Giants had followed the Oscillating Fist without question.

If not due to his silence and inaction in the last few months, the Ascended Giants would have been a lot more stubborn about giving their progenitor a chance to contest leadership.

Even now, more than a few Ascended Giants must be questioning why they chose to side with their progenitor instead of their true leader.

This was bad.

The Ves and the Dark Apostle had worked too hard to take over the Phase Lord Department.

They would not allow this unstable factor to take back this treasure!

[We have scanned his equipment and found no obvious violations so far.] Secret Keeper Zariel-775 transmitted to the Dark Apostle's raiment. [Be that as it may, be careful and do not make too many assumptions. The Oscillating Fist's gauntlets are made of special materials that we cannot identify right away. The materials that make up the scales of his raiment are also unusual. We suspect that he secretly received aid from a foreign source, most likely the Cosmopolitan Movement or the Red Cabal.]

Both Ves and the Dark Apostle frowned deeper. External support could provide all manner of technological gizmos to the Oscillating Fist. It would become even harder to figure out his full capabilities.

They just had to accept that they were diving into the unknown this time.

As the Oscillating Fist reached the center plaza, he finally arrested his forward motion and continued to hover at the same height as his dueling opponent.

The gaze of the polemarchos of the Ascended Giants bore into the Dark Apostle as if he was trying to drill through a black hole.

The first leader soon issued his verdict.

"Immature."

His word struck the Dark Apostle like an illusionary punch to his face!

Chapter 7195: The Disappointed Father

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The Dark Apostle's first impression of the Oscillating Fist was not good.

As strong and heroic as he may appear, he also carried himself as a leader who possessed an absolute right to judge all Ascended Giants, including the upstart that sought to take everything over!

The two Ascended Giants could already sense each other's desire to be in charge, and could not bring themselves to give up power on a voluntary basis.

They were two similar to each other in that aspect.

A mountain could not accommodate two tigers.

Only the strongest tiger would remain.

As for the one that fell short? He would either be forced to leave or lose his life.

There was no other outcome possible. There was no way the Oscillating Fist would happily retire and let a completely different leader pluck all of his hard-earned fruit.

Privately, the Dark Apostle raised his estimation of trouble occurring to 100 percent.

Now that the two of them had gathered in a single location, a confrontation became inevitable.

Driven by their ambitions and their convictions, there was no way that either of them could leave without securing the grand prize!

The Dark Apostle finally decided to respond to the Oscillating Fist's first remark.

"You call me immature as if that is a disqualifier. I do not see it that way, old man. At least I still have lots of room to grow. What about you? I can readily admit that you are further ahead in developing your own might as an Ascended Giant, but what have you brought to your people? They stagnated in your headquarters and other bases while the demand for their services continue to increase. Instead of letting your phalanxes deploy on the frontlines and prove they have a reason to exist, you bottle them up and waste their potential."

The Oscillating Fist's expression remained stern as he issued his judgment.

"Red humans are not our masters, and we are not their slaves. They may have raised us, but we have grown beyond their comprehension. We are superior. Red humans do not belong in the Red Ocean. They are extragalactic invaders who seek to wipe out everything and put their own civilization in its place."

"So? What is wrong with that? The weak die, the strong survive. Red humans may be small, but their potential is too amazing."

The Oscillating Fist sneered in a way that made the Dark Apostle feel disappointed in himself somehow.

It was as if the polemarchos of the Ascended Giant was the Dark Apostle's father!

“Our origins do not matter. What truly matters is what we have become. From the moment we have received the baptism of the Red Ocean, we became its children. Red humanity is not our friend anymore. To side with them is to play with fire. The weak and craven humans are too exclusionary to races other than their own. They do not consider us to be a part of their race.”

“Thanks to you and your Ascended Giants! You didn’t have to make it official!”

The Oscillating Fist shook his head in disappointment.

“You understand nothing, young upstart. I did what was necessary to reinforce our new identity. Without the clarity that I have provided, we would still be torn with division on this matter. You continue to cling to human standards and behavior. You are already captured by them, if not physically, then spiritually. A slave like you is not qualified to become the next polemarchos.”

“The terms of the leadership alliance says otherwise.” The Dark Apostle retorted. “Your men signed the contract on your behalf. If you did not agree with them, then you should have objected.”

The mention of this agreement caused the Oscillating Fist to cross his thick arms and snort.

“A contract is a mortal solution to a mortal problem. Gods should not constrain themselves to these low-level rules. It is absurd for gods to subject themselves to the laws created by mortals. Our ascended race abides by our own rules and logic. I allowed the mortals under me to negotiate and sign the contract. I also allowed my strategoi to test your mettle over the course of 3 duels. What I do not allow is for you to declare victory based on false martial virtue.”

“What is false about my successful leadership challenge? I won, fair and square.”

The Oscillating Fist directed a pointed look at his companion spirit.

“I beg to differ, but I will not bother to litigate this matter. The truth is that I only allowed you and my men to indulge in this farce because I wanted to observe how extensively each of you are able to detach yourself from the shackles of red humanity. I wished to see how much my trusted strategoi are willing to remain loyal to our racial cause. What I have witnessed in the last 9 or so hours has disappointed me greatly.”

His words caused many Ascended Giants who previously cheered for the Dark Apostle’s successes to feel ashamed.

They had failed the test of their leader.

The Oscillating Fist grimaced. "I am disappointed in you all. You have proven to me that you cannot be trusted to do anything right as soon as I withdraw from active command. Only the Unshakeable King came close to embodying the true values of the Ascended Giants. Yes, I am aware about his ambitions to usurp my reign, but that only proves his excellence further. His greatest flaw is that he has underestimated your strange technologies. His death at your hands is not unjust."

That was bad.

The Unshakeable King clearly plotted to make the Ascended Giants defect to the Red Cabal. He thought that they were all gods who deserved to hook up with their fellow alien gods on the other side of the border!

If this was the true orthodoxy that the Oscillating Fist sought to impose onto his men, then he was undoubtedly a risk factor that had to be eliminated at all cost!

"Wow. Do you care so little about an Ascended Giant that has earned your approval?"

The martial phase lord scowled. "As I have mentioned earlier, you do not understand the ways of your own race. Weakness is the original sin. I applaud ambition, even if it is targeted towards myself. If I can be defeated by a scheme, then that simply proves that I am not strong enough to hold my station. The fact that he has plotted his way into his demise at your hands shows that harboring the right ideas is not enough. You must have the strength to match your ambitions. This is a lesson that should be relevant to you as well."

The Dark Apostle did not like to hear the implication that he was too weak to pose a credible challenge to the Oscillating Fist.

It was quite clear that the polemarchos only ever considered the duel between the two of them to be the only fight that mattered.

The outcomes of the three duels had no bearing in the arrogant leader's mind.

Perhaps the Oscillating Fist considered them attempts to figure out the Dark Apostle's fighting capabilities.

If that was the case, then he undoubtedly collected a rich amount of information. He had pretty much observed all of Ves and the Dark Apostle's tech and extraordinary methods in action.

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The Oscillating Fist definitely prepared countermeasures against this trump card!

“So what is your endgame, exactly?” Ves asked through Blinky.

The Oscillating Fist did not even acknowledge this question.

The naked disregard irritated the Dark Apostle.

He may be plotting to get rid of Ves, but that did not mean that others were allowed to disrespect his other self!

“Answer the question, polemarchos.”

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“You mean join the side that has been trying to wipe out humans all this time.” The Dark Apostle sneered back.

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“That sounds well and good, but I think you are overlooking a very important group of powerhouses in your story. What about god pilots? Whether they are literal gods is up for debate, but you cannot deny their win record. They have won every fight against the ancient phase whales that you look up to. Your fate will not be any better if you defect to the Red Cabal. The native aliens can’t do anything better than red humanity. Their only advantages are numbers and territory, but even that may come into question as the mutated voribugs are tearing through alien space like nothing else.”

Although the Oscillating Fist disdained to respond to the companion spirit, his clenched fists betrayed how he felt about these matters.

“You are being too greedy.” The Dark Apostle accused his old leader. “You are also setting your expectations too high. One of the lessons that I have learned is that godhood is not our birthright. Godhood must be earned. One of the responsibilities of a god is to protect his flock, and what you have done is the opposite. The Ascended Giants will never truly be accepted by alien phase leaders. Their hatred against humans will ensure that you will never gain their full trust. At worst, you will exchange one set of masters for another set, but only this time you do not even have a common race as a binding force. The Red Cabal will use you all up. Once your existence has grown redundant, they will not hesitate to eliminate you all just to prevent any chance for humans to rise again.”

The implication was clear. The Dark Apostle believed that the association between the Ascended Giants and red humanity was too strong.

It was better to stick with this existing relationship than gamble with forging a new one with a totally alien group of civilizations!

However, the Oscillating Fist firmly shook his head in rejection.

“Words will not change anything. Might is the only language that matters among the Ascended Giant. Let us end it all in a single duel. Let us fight based on the terms that you have set to make it ‘fair’. Keep to our current size. No outside help. No forbidden tech. I have only two additional demands. If you do not meet them, then you can say goodbye to your attempts to command the loyalty of all of my men.”

This was a serious threat.

“Let’s hear it, then.” The Dark Apostle tersely said. “I will not agree to every silly rule, though. If your terms are too outrageous, then I would rather try my luck.”

The Oscillating Fist finally smiled in approval. “You have a spine. You are not completely hopeless as an Ascended Giants. Do not worry. My terms are simple. First, get rid of the time limit. Second, our fight must be to the death. No mercy. No surrender. Third, once I have reasserted my leadership over the Ascended Giants, the Red Collective and everyone else must promise to give us safe passage as we leave human space.”

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Chapter 7196: Denial of Reality

The Red Collective’s predictions came true.

The Oscillating Fist wanted to decide it all in the final duel.

He completely dismissed the validity of the earlier three victories, treating them as nothing more than kids roughhousing with each other.

The only fight that mattered was the one where the current leader dueled against the possible future leader of the Phase Lord Department.

Suffice to say, Ves and the Dark Apostle grew upset.

The Oscillating Fist violated the agreement and tried to impose a new one that favored him the most.

For a time, the Dark Apostle fell into doubt.

Were the negotiations a joke?

Was the contract truly a waste of virtual paper?

Was he the more authentic Ascended Giant?

According to human rules, the Oscillating Fist egregiously violated the contract. This not only deprived him from protection against outside intervention, but also dishonored his name.

Yet the Ascended Giants might view this conflict differently. Their culture and traditions, as young as they may be, did not place as much importance on contracts than the other races. It did not matter whether the contracts were verbal or written, all of them were worth little to nothing so long as they pertained to any mortals.

From the perspective of a hardcore Ascended Giant such as the Oscillating Fist, gods did not negotiate with mortals.

Gods outright claimed anything they wanted from the mortals.

Every deity possessed his own kingdom in essence. The mortals that answered to them were their slaves.

Slaves did not own property.

They merely took custody over stuff that ultimately belonged to the god they worshiped.

Gods had an absolute right to dispose of any mortal under their sway. They could change existing contracts and agreements all they liked because mortals had no bargaining power before their own deities.

It should be an honor for a mortal to sacrifice everything he had to his deity!

This was the extreme ideology that the Oscillating Fist strove for. Many humans grew confused at his arrogant tone and his outrageous demands, but in his opinion he was the only god who understood the true order of his race!

As much as the Dark Apostle wanted to call upon the forces of the RC to bombard the Oscillating Fist, the challenger knew that this could not be done.

The violation of the agreement was not serious enough to merit such a response.

The Ascended Giants also wouldn't approve of this act.

The Dark Apostle was very sensitive towards the perception of other Ascended Giants. He knew without a shadow of a doubt that he would never be able to command their full loyalty if he showed cowardice and tried to gang up on their current leader.

In order to make his new subordinates respect him from the bottom of their heart, they needed to see him defeat the Oscillating Fist by himself.

He briefly examined the old leader's equipment. Its details remained unclear, but they looked considerably higher in quality than the equipment used by the strategoi.

Would this strange scaled armor be able to withstand the successive explosive impacts of two different blast lances turned D-arms?

The Dark Apostle had no way of knowing the answer. He could only put his trust in the skills he acquired and the tech at his disposal.

Just as he was about to accept the other man's proposal, Ves chose to form a different response!

“Screw you. No, screw you. Who do you think you are? Your willful denial of the existence of high-ranking mech pilots is pathetic. Just because you pretend they do not exist does not mean we have to conform to your distortion of reality. We refuse to acknowledge your godhood! Do you know why?! Because we know the truth of your existence! To call yourselves gods while you are merely body cultivators of the first or maybe second major cultivation rank is the height of conceit! Any first-class ace pilot can beat you up and pierce your illusion of godhood. I dare you to disagree. I can easily call over any random ace mech to prove your delusions wrong.”

The Oscillating Fist grew angry at the interruption. He glared daggers into the Dark Apostle's eyes.

"I advise you to shut down your unruly 'companion spirit'. He is interfering with a sacred duel between Ascended Giants. I can tolerate no interruption from outsiders."

"He is not an outsider." The Dark Apostle growled now that he had found his backbone. "He is completely right. The difference between you and I is that I recognize the divinity of human god pilots. Not only that, I accept their superiority in combat. No ancient phase whale has ever managed to defeat a human deity. How can we possibly take pride in our identity as Ascended Giants when that is the case? Until this has changed, there is no shame in submitting ourselves to red humanity. After all, we subordinate ourselves to the strong. Defecting to the Red Cabal makes no sense when their gods have continually proven to be losers!"

Ves' assertive response reminded him that he had been behaving way too passively ever since the Oscillating Fist appeared!

He had fallen into the narrative of the Oscillating Fist and allowed him to dictate terms without any reasonable pushback.

The Dark Apostle should not have to concede to a leader who was already supposed to step down from his position!

The Oscillating Fist could never be allowed to get away with his blatant attempt at rewriting the rules!

At this moment, the polemarchos of the Ascended Giants did not appear pleased at the moment.

His divergent perspective on reality clashed with the facts. While the Oscillating Fist had no obligation to surrender to reality, this debate was never about him in the first place.

They were both trying to appeal to the 359 Ascended Giants that were currently tuning in to the live feed of the leadership challenge.

The Oscillating Fist attempted to regain their loyalty by inspiring them with his superior martial prowess and appealing to their strong desire for godhood.

Yet Ves and the Dark Apostle brutally attempted to pierce through this delusion and undermine the central reason why they should be allowed to lord over the mortals!

It was ridiculous to treat humans as slaves when their greatest protectors could easily beat up the so-called gods of the native aliens!

The Oscillating Fist raised up one of his thick gauntlets. "Enough. Talk is useless. Let us decide who is right once and for all by fighting each other to the death. Whoever is right is the one that remains alive!"

"You don't get to run away from a losing argument!" Ves argued back. "You may be able to fool yourself, but you can't fool your former subordinates. Do you truly think you can prove you can be good steward to them when you are literally driving them to suicide? You may not like what you hear from us, but at least we recognize our current reality. From our perspective, you have no grounds to stand upon when you demand a change of rules. The agreement states that taking over the Ascended Giants only requires 3 out of 4 victories. We have satisfied these conditions. Technically speaking, we can immediately

forfeit the 4th duel against you and subsequently command the RC to blast you into pieces.”

The Oscillating Fist grimaced when the upstart tried to threaten him. “Have you forgotten the consequences for doing so, you impertinent vermin?”

Blinky smirked.

“You are not the only one who can issue an ultimatum. I am more than willing to take the risk to see who the Ascended Giants will agree with more. I can promise to everyone that if any Ascended Giant dares to defect to the Red Cabal and fights against their former race, I will personally hunt each and every one of you down with all of the forces and assistance I command. It doesn’t matter if you hide at the opposite side of the dwarf galaxy. I will come for you and make sure you perish, if only to remove the stain you represent to red humanity. Do not question our ability to make good on this threat. The First Sword Mark III is out there carving apart greater phase lords like they are sushi, and that is only the first of many superdimensional ace mechs that are being released. If you think you can stand up against such a mech, then by all means indulge in your delusions of godhood.”

The indoctrination of the Red Ocean was not flawless. Even if the heavenly authority forcibly rewrote their cognition to undersell the threat of human high-ranking mech pilots, there was no way for them to deny what was happening on the frontlines!

Accurate intelligence and reports about the battles on the frontlines had increasingly begun to praise the performance of the first wave of superdimensional ace mechs.

Although there were not too many of them out there, each machine equipped with superdimensional weapons and armor had proven to be invincible against most lesser and greater phase lords!

Even if the impressive superdimensional ace mechs failed to kill any enemy champions, they could still keep the latter busy and hinder them from directing their destructive power elsewhere.

No matter what they might claim, Ascended Giants were still human. They had not forgotten their understanding of human power. Not even the Oscillating Fist could deny the superior combat power of human ace pilots and god pilots.

The fact that the first polemarchos of the Phase Lord Department still clung to the notion of his own divinity was an absurd case of cognitive dissonance.

His brainwashing clashed with reality!

The problem with the Oscillating Fist was that he was too stubborn to admit that he was wrong!

Since that was the case, Ves exploited this vulnerability and called his bluff!

He believed that the Oscillating Fist's threat was not as credible as it sounded because his subordinates were not as nearly in denial of reality!

Both Blinky and the Dark Apostle smirked as the Oscillating Fist found himself in a difficult position.

The polemarchos could either double down and die for a potentially failed cause, or he could choose to compromise at the cost of appearing weak.

The latter was intolerable, but the former would lead to his immediate ruin!

Despite his frequent claims to godhood, the Oscillating Fist should never be blind enough to think that he could escape from the Yernstall Central Star Node without securing safe passage.

The Sapphire of the Red Ocean was firmly controlled by the Red Three!

The Oscillating Fist's handsome face made an increasingly uglier scowl as he reluctantly chose the lesser of two evils.

"I can agree... to a small concession. What... do you want?"

Ves had been waiting to hear that. The Oscillating Fist's mistake was that he never held all of the cards.

That did not mean that Ves and his associates could unilaterally bully the deluded fool around.

No matter what, he was still the first-generation polemarchos of the Phase Lord Department.

The Ascended Giants still wanted him to be treated with a measure of respect and fairness, or else the Dark Apostle will face no end of compliance issues if he took over.

“Since you have demanded a change of rules, we should be able to do so as well. We can agree to your new terms so long as you agree that we are allowed to borrow the power of external sources in our fight. We have been fighting with one arm tied behind our backs. No more. Design spirits have always been a major reason why my mechs have been able to perform so well on the battlefield. I can help other Ascended Giants tap into their power through their new equipment. Let us demonstrate what they can gain by channeling the power of a design spirit during our duel. That is all I ask. If you are too much of a coward to fight us at our full strength, then you shall be judged by your fellow Ascended Giants.”

Accusing the Oscillating Fist of cowardice should be a good way to force him to agree!

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The Mech Touch #Chapter 7197: Divine Treatment - Read The Mech Touch Chapter 7197: Divine Treatment

Chapter 7197: Divine Treatment

Ves was done playing the Oscillating Fist's game.

He had taken over the negotiations because he refused to let this rebellious bastard manipulate the Dark Apostle like a puppet master.

He made a reckless gamble. Ves knew that he was pushing his luck. The consequences of noncompliance were drastic. The Ascended Giants watched closely in order to see which of the two had earned the right to lead their group.

So far, Ves did not think he had been doing so badly. Since the Oscillating Fist was allowed to act like a scumbag, he should be able to do so as well.

In fact, he ultimately believed that acting in an assertive manner was key to winning over the Ascended Giants. They clearly wanted to be led by an alpha figure. They rewarded boldness and rejected cowardice. Their primitive sensibilities drove them to worship the strong.

It just so happened that there were many different ways to express strength.

Showing off your martial prowess in a duel was one of them. Another way was to leverage influence to command allies to do your bidding.

Right now, Ves reminded the Oscillating Fist that he could rely on the latter to make any dissident Ascended Giant's life miserable.

Red humanity could not tolerate rebellion of this scale. It would definitely invest a huge amount of resources to make an example of this high-profile case of defection.

It didn't matter if it was not cost-effective enough to hunt down so many scattered Ascended Giants.

The Oscillating Fist and all of the Ascended Giants only needed to believe that Ves could make it happen. The threat of turning into a fugitive that would always be hunted by crazy human ace pilots should be enough to make them think twice about abandoning red humanity!

Although Ves had made the unilateral decision to intervene, he felt grateful that his other self did not stop him or contradict him in any way.

The Dark Apostle silently accepted the other personality's rebuke. He had given up too much ground for free and was almost on the verge of letting the Oscillating Fist step on his face.

That would have represented an invisible defeat that would cause him to lose respect from the Ascended Giants.

It was better this way.

Even if the Oscillating Fist rejected the counterproposal, at least he would not be able to drum up as much support given how much his own worldview depended on willful ignorance.

At this moment, the polemarchos carefully weighed the suggestion. He looked suspiciously at Blinky and the Dark Apostle. Was there a trap buried within this term?

“Your martial virtue is deficient. When faced with my challenge, you immediately think about borrowing the power of others. You can only defeat me with numbers. Where is the honor in this? The two of you are hypocrites.”

“We reject your accusation. If you want to talk about who has tarnished his honor more, then you are the clear winner.” Ves immediately shot back. “Your refusal to abide by the terms of a contract is a much greater violation of trust. Nobody will be able to trust you again if you manage to make it out of here alive. Both humans and aliens will learn that you are a traitor, an oathbreaker, a selfish opportunist and a misguided fool. The Ascended Giants would be crazy if they think they can prosper under such a poor leader!”

The Dark Apostle offered his own response. “Fighting with the help of design spirits is a symbol of strength, not weakness. It is not our fault that you cannot call upon your own gods for assistance in battle. Besides, why are you so scared? They are not gods, at least according to your own perspective. You can prove who is the more authentic god by striking us down while we are borrowing the power of ‘false gods’. If you refuse to accept our term, then you must admit that you fear human gods.”

Hehe, the alternate personality finally got into the action. The Dark Apostle was always capable of this. He just had to overcome the suppression exerted by the Oscillating Fist.

Neither Ves nor the Dark Apostle feared their final opponent anymore.

The Oscillating Fist may be the best among the Ascended Giants, but he was still a lesser phase lord in the end. There was no reason to put too much stock in his claims.

“Fine.” The polemarchos conceded through gritted teeth. “Have your way, then. Design spirit or not, I shall crush all opposition with the power of my fists. I shall rip apart your borrowed wings and prove once and for all that we only ever need to rely on our personal strength to assert our godhood. I will agree to fight with you under these terms, but only if you give me an extra guarantee.”

The leader may have recognized that he could not proceed without making a concession, but he had not lost all of his wits. He still knew how to bargain.

“What is it you want? Do not tell me you want to call additional Ascended Giants by your side.”

“No. I can finish you myself.” The Oscillating fist arrogantly declared. “What I am concerned about is that the Red Collective and your many friends will not accept the outcome of our duel. I know you have a working relationship with the Evolution Witch. I need her to issue a guarantee that she shall grant me and any Ascended Giant that is willing to follow me safe passage out of human-occupied space in the event of victory. This is my bottom line.”

While Ves could insult the Oscillating Fist about how much he feared and respected a human god pilot to demand a guarantee from one, another person intervened first.

The projection of Department Head Demetrius Sol Klavia appeared beside the Dark Apostle.

“We can provide you with this guarantee. The Evolution Witch is paying attention to this duel. She has already signed a document that will promise you safe passage, but only on your way out. After you have left human space, you and your defectors are fair game. Is this acceptable?”

The Oscillating Fist readily nodded. “As expected of the Patient Builder. You are an excellent leader among mortals. It is regrettable that you lack the stomach to ascend and become a giant like myself.”

The projection of the chief enforcer twitched his lips. “My fighting days are over.”

A strange pause ensued as they waited for the mysterious document to arrive.

Minutes passed by as Ves and the Dark Apostle quietly conferred with each other on how to make the best use out of the right to borrow the power of design spirits to give them a boost in combat.

There was not much for them to choose from, so their discussion did not last too long.

They quickly recognized one obvious shortcoming.

“We lack a design spirit that is aligned with the darkness element.” Ves told his other personality. “We could have leveraged our darkness hyper tech much better with the assistance of an outside expert that specializes in this particular element. The alternative we have chosen may be able to wield it with a measure of skill and proficiency, but I would rather resort to a more reliable option.”

“Then make one.” The Dark Apostle urged. “I will be leading from the front going forward. There will be many times where I will be fighting against enemies while making use of similar gear. It would be convenient if I can call upon the power of a design spirit that can facilitate my attacks. It would be best if that design spirit excels in an aspect of darkness that we are not good at. For example, if we specialize in corrupting our enemies with the power of darkness, then the design spirit should facilitate stealth or instant annihilation.”

He made a good point. Ves already had a framework of an idea in mind.

“We can achieve better results if we repurpose the power of a mutated beast that is aspected towards the darkness element. We will have to contact the Larkinson Biotech Institute or the Hunting Association to see if we can get our hands on such a beast.”

The Hunting Association recently sought reconciliation with Ves, which meant that the Hunters should be more than happy to give him what he wanted.

A shuttle flew in from orbit.

This craft followed a fixed trajectory in order to appear as non-threatening as possible. After descending from above at an angle, it finally arrived a short distance away from the Oscillating Fist.

The hatch opened up to reveal a bot carrying a large package to the Dark Apostle.

When the Ascended Giant received the package, it automatically opened up, revealing a reinforced scroll that was conveniently sized for this current dimensions.

It spelled out the guarantee in standard language and contained the signature of a god pilot.

Just that last part almost seared the Oscillating Fist's gigantic eyes!

He quickly rolled up the scroll and put it back into the container.

"Acceptable. Please transfer this to my headquarters."

Many people must undoubtedly feel jealous at this traitorous bastard at the moment. He had managed to force a concession from a god pilot!

The value of his guarantee was priceless. Even if it had no functional use in other people's hands, the fact that it carried the signature of the Evolution Witch was enough to turn it into an heirloom!

"If we win this duel, the document automatically turns into our possession. We can consign it to a grand auction and earn an insane amount of profit from it! Even if you cannot bear to get rid of it, we can always put it into our collection and earn the admiration of our guests."

"We should not get ahead of ourselves, Ves. The Oscillating Fist is glaring at us with murder in his eyes. He will fight to his utmost to succeed in his gambit. We are all that stand in the way of his freedom and ascend to godhood."

It was only now that Ves and the Dark Apostle truly began to feel how scary it was to confront the former champion boxer in a duel.

The Oscillating Fist slowly lowered his faceplate, causing his angry expression to be replaced by two ominous red glows.

A supreme sense of martial confidence and invincibility emanated from the polemarchos.

His strong posture reminded Ves a lot of Ketis when she was in her swordmaster mode!

Had the Oscillating Fist or his companion spirit gotten started in willpower cultivation?

No. That should not be the case. Blinky's senses were extremely sharp and he did not detect anything similar to swordmasters and expert pilots.

It did not take long for Ves to come up with a reasonable explanation.

The Oscillating Fist was an outstanding warrior.

His willpower had definitely surpassed the extraordinary threshold, but he lacked the inheritance or ingenuity to achieve any success in willpower cultivation.

There was no boxing equivalent to traditional swordsmanship as far as Ves was concerned.

If it did exist, then it was obvious outside of the other Ascended Giant's reach.

This shortcoming meant that however much the Oscillating Fist strengthened his willpower, he could not become strong enough to distort reality to the same exaggerated degree as Ketis.

What a pity.

If the polemarchos dedicated his martial career to swordsmanship, then he would definitely become a much stronger Ascended Giant!

Ves and the Dark Apostle would not even dare to confront him in duel even if they could borrow the power of a design spirit.

That was because the extraordinary willpower of a swordmaster was extremely resistant towards all spiritual phenomena!

Perhaps the Oscillating Fist had done himself a disservice by separating from the Red Collective so soon.

Who knew whether the RC gathered scriptures that could have given him a proper start in willpower cultivation as a pugilist.

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Chapter 7198: Fiery Charge

After a long delay, the fourth and final duel was ready to begin.

Both sides were already prepared to fight. They had no further demands and had no excuses left to postpone this inevitable fight.

Many observers watched closely as they placed their hopes on one Ascended Giant or another.

The Oscillating Fist began to rub his large gauntleted hands against each other.

This odd motion generated mysterious energies that shook the surrounding space.

The fact that he was able to do this just with a casual motion hinted at much greater power if he started to get serious.

Ves and the Dark Apostle knew that they could not afford to make any mistakes this time.

“This will be a true life-or-death struggle.” Ves seriously spoke. “Nobody will come to save us if we are in trouble. We have agreed to participate in an honorable duel out of our own choice. We have no one else to blame but ourselves if we have grossly overestimated our strength and underestimated our opponent.”

The Dark Apostle refused to think about losing. “We will not lose. Our equipment is too powerful and we have adopted the right strategy. Allowing us to borrow the power of design spirits is a death sentence to the Oscillating Fist. He does not have a good enough understanding of how much this matters.”

As he communicated with his other self, the Ascended Giant carefully retrieved fire hyper blast lance from his back and gripped the long polearm with a bit of nervous tension.

Despite his confident-sounding words, he knew better than to take victory for granted. The Oscillating Fist certainly did not look like he was intimidated by the prospect of facing design spirits.

After both duelists transmitted a signal that made it clear that they were ready, a projected countdown appeared in the center.

[10]

The Dark Apostle began to draw upon the Sacrificial Spear Throwing Method to prime his blast lance for explosion.

[9]

A large amount of fire hyper energy converged upon the lance.

[8]

The Minor Demon locked inside the D-arm desperately tried to break out, but was unable to do so due to wielder's strong control.

[7]

Flames and the illusion of flames started to flicker on the surface of the blast lance.

[6]

At the same time, Ves had been calling for a certain spiritual entity to descend upon Blinky.

[5]

It took a few seconds to forge the connection, but the other party finally picked up on his request.

[4]

The good news was that the spirit in question found his cause to be worthy enough to lend as much aid as she could.

[3]

Blinky's manifestation started to shift from a furry purple cat into a more reddish humanoid form.

[2]

As the companion spirit turned into the vessel of a different being, Ves felt his consciousness being pushed to the side as a much more powerful being took control!

[1]

[START!]

The Dark Apostle immediately turned around and blasted off into the distance!

Instead of charging straight at his adversary, he preferred to build up speed while continuing to prime his lance to explode!

The Oscillating Fist knew what his opponent was after and tried his best to chase after the upstart that had insulted him multiple times.

While the Oscillating Fist actually proved himself to be almost as fast as the Fiery Axe, his flight system and his ability to form a warp bubble around himself was not enough to make up for the difference!

The modern high-quality linear flight system that Ves had especially designed for this final confrontation only needed to do one job well, and that was outspeeding the Oscillating Fist!

“COWARD! FACE ME, YOU HUMAN WORM!”

The Dark Apostle laughed as he continued to frustrate his opponent. “I am a lancer now! It would be stupid of me to charge at you straight away! If you want me to come to you sooner rather than later, then let me build up more speed.”

The incumbent leader knew that he could not catch up to his opponent under the current conditions.

He eventually ceased his pursuit and began to assume a defensive posture.

He knew that he needed to wait for his opponent to come to him before he could land a good punch onto the Dark Apostle.

In order to make this brief moment of contact count, the Oscillating Fist began to charge his two fists. His gauntlets began to glow and vibrate as they slowly accumulated an ominous amount of power.

Meanwhile, the Dark Apostle calmly began to circle around while building more and more speed and momentum.

It was not necessary to build up the highest possible speed before charging at the Oscillating Fist as he did not rely solely on kinetic energy to punch through the stronger Ascended Giant’s defenses.

He just needed to close in fast enough to make it difficult for the Oscillating Fist to evade his charge attack in time.

He also needed to moderate his speed and make it a little easier for him to perform last-second course corrections in order to ensure the lance struck the right spot.

This was why the Dark Apostle began to straighten his flight path after completing a few revolutions.

He made sure to start his final approach with plenty of distance between himself and his adversary.

As the blast lance in his hands became filled with fire energy, it looked like it had turned into a demonic flaming weapon!

The burning lance left behind a trail of excess fire energy as the Ascended Giant that carried it fixated his sights onto his sole adversary.

At the same time, the spiritual entity summoned by Ves began to assert her own power!

“I can feel your uncompromising commitment to humanity, Ves.” Furia’s flaming figure spoke as she continued to inhabit Blinky’s versatile manifestation. “You were right to call upon my aid. This detestable ‘Ascended Giant’ is a traitor who is worse than a Cosmopolitan. At least the latter still believes that the galaxy has a place for humans, if only as one among many equal alien races. This fool not only rejects his own humanity, but dreams of a future where he can enslave his own race. There can be no place for him in the Red Ocean!”

Furia genuinely grew furious at the Oscillating Fist!

She leveraged her anger and her righteous indignation towards the human traitor by diving into the blast lance!

Once there, she began to channel additional fire energy from herself as well as the Blinkyverse!

The blast lance looked as if a conflagration had erupted from its structure. It rapidly grew hotter and more potent as the weapon contained even more energies than before!

Furia did not just limit herself to raising the quantity of fire energy. She also began to improve the artifact’s utilization of fire energy by a considerable degree!

Even if she was not too familiar with the strange way that Ves had designed the sacrificial blast lance, she was intuitively able to increase its efficiency by reducing waste.

As the distance from the target rapidly began to shrink, all three minds began to converge as they all sought to destroy the Oscillating Fist in a single blow.

Many observers held their breath as they awaited the outcome of this powerful collusion.

“C’mon.”

“He has to succeed.”

“That blast lance looks lethal.”

As the lance-wielding giant crossed the final kilometers to his target, everything around the Dark Apostle turned into a blur.

His tunnel vision did not allow him to acknowledge anything else aside from his hated enemy!

“EXPLODE!”

At the same time, Furia also wielded her control over fire energy to ignite a powerful detonation!

“DEATH TO ALL TRAITORS OF HUMANITY!”

While the Oscillating Fist chose to meet the incoming charge attack with crossed gauntlets, the the blast lance successfully struck and even pierce through the spatial barrier before exploding immediately afterwards!

It was as if a new star had appeared in the outskirts of the Yernstall Central Star Node.

If not for the extensive measures undertaken by the Red Collective, the appearance of such a powerful outburst of energy would have alarmed the rest of Yernstall in time!

Many sensor systems failed to collect any data aside from ones that could tell them how powerful the explosion turned out. Many became astounded by how much more powerful it was compared to the previous uses of the Sacrificial Spear Throwing Method!

Even if the Dark Apostle did not actually toss his polearm this time, the blast lance had done its job and discharged multiple potent energies at once!

The biggest concern that many people had at the moment was not how much damage the Oscillating Fist incurred, but how much the Dark Apostle suffered from his own attack!

After all, he was way too close to the explosion generated by his own lance. There was no way for him to avoid suffering damage in return!

It took a bit longer than most people felt comfortable with, but his body eventually emerged from the spherical blast looking a little more scuffed than usual.

His energy defenses had done a good job of blocking the power of the explosion, but his spatial barrier still failed to remain active in the end.

The Dark Apostle had fought multiple different duels against different opponents. His spatial barrier broke numerous times in a row, and that took a toll on his physique. He was not able to keep his subsequent spatial barriers fresh enough to perform as optimally as before.

At least it lasted long enough to spare the Dark Apostle of any further damage. His azure energy still remained intact, though it would not take much to pop it entirely.

Seeing how much damage the Dark Apostle sustained from a blast lance that did not explode in the face at point-blank range made many observers eager to study the victim's condition.

As the fireball finally faded away, many people reacted in surprise that he was still in one piece.

His strange scaled armor only bore minor scorch marks, but looked otherwise intact.

His gauntlets also looked scorched and dented, but otherwise proved remarkably resistant against the first explosion.

The Oscillating Fist managed to withstand the combined power of the Ves, the Dark Apostle and Furia.

That was impressive.

"Damn." Ves quietly cursed as he beheld the results. "Our enemy's raiment is anything but ordinary. Even if the first blast lance has wasted a lot of energy into stripping him of his energy defenses, there should have been enough power left to breach or fracture his physical defenses. Instead, they have absorbed the remainder of the blast as if they endured a gentle storm."

"Do you think we will have trouble penetrating his raiment with our second blast lance?"

"Not necessarily. I think our second spiritual guest may be able to offer a solution against this problem. Anyway, thank you for your service, Furia."

The spiritual lady looked upset at the results. "I wish I could have done more. I sensed that as the flames threatened to engulf the traitor's armor, those strange shells blocked and neutralized much of our energies. I am afraid that this material is highly resistant towards my power and that of others."

"Mhmm. That matches my suspicions."

Furia let go of her hold onto Blinky, causing her to disappear.

The companion spirit returned to his original purple shape.

Meanwhile, the Dark Apostle had retrieved the second and last blast lance from his back.

“We need to go all-out this time.”

Ves agreed. “We should be ready to expend all of the Worclaw energy that we have left. Even then, there is no guarantee that we can breach his raiment. The more I look at it, the more I suspect it has a very special origin. However I think our next source of assistance may be able to crack this defense.”

Though a part of him felt reluctant to draw upon the second source, there was no one else he could think of that could offer him greater help under the circumstances.

He silently sent out a request to an ancestral spirit and soon received a response.

Blinky’s manifestation transformed yet again. He slowly contorted back into a tall humanoid form that looked just as feminine as the last guest.

The difference this time was that the new form exuded a much stronger sense of motherhood.

The Superior Mother had descended onto Blinky.

That was not enough. Cynthia Larkinson chose to descend upon her incarnation so that she could directly monitor what Ves was up to this time.

“My... sons...”

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Chapter 7199: The Ultimate Sin

Ves rarely interacted with his mother these days.

Whether it was himself in the Red Ocean or Veronica in the Milky Way, the Oblivion Empress liked to be aloof and spend her precious time on her own plots and schemes.

Ves understood it. Ever since he resurrected her, she became a True God, a transcendent existence who perceived reality in a very different fashion than 'mortals' like himself.

It was as if she lived in a four-dimensional universe while lesser beings were still confined to a three-dimensional universe.

Even if their living spaces overlapped, their perspectives diverged too much to attain mutual understanding.

A part of Ves hated it because his mother knew so much. She could help him avoid so many detours and gain much greater power at the fraction of the price. If she wanted to, she could use her superior might and understanding to quickly tutor him and rapidly rise to power just like she had done with his eldest sister Helena.

Yet another part of Ves felt grateful that this scary energy-based life form that just happened to share a parental relationship with him kept her distance. She was an objectively horrible person who definitely shared the same opinions about humans as the Ascended Giants. She was the product of a very distorted culture and society that placed ordinary humans at the very bottom of society.

This was not the kind of person that Ves wanted to befriend. As a child who grew up in an ordinary modern civilized state, he could never accept how Cynthia Larkinson treated ordinary humans like slaves. She had no respect for their intrinsic human rights and was not above sacrificing them to further a greater goal.

Ves and Cynthia could never align their philosophies with each other. They clung tightly to their own worldviews, for the way they perceived reality defined all of their behavior.

If not for the current crisis, Ves would have never thought about summoning the Superior Mother.

He knew that if the ancestral spirit arrived, his Cynthia would definitely grow curious enough to descend upon her external incarnation.

Ves knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that his mother had allocated enough of her attention to him to judge his situation.

He could feel her presence scrutinizing everything. She did not bother to hide her powerful influence as her incarnation methodically swept his true body and his Spirituality from top to bottom.

She also scanned the surroundings, paying special attention to the scuffed but largely uninjured Oscillating Fist.

What was strange was that time appeared to have slowed down by a factor of at least a 100.

Everything moved so much slower that they almost appeared frozen.

It did not take much guessing that his mother was responsible for this effect. It appeared she wanted to reserve plenty of time to lecture him in person.

Though Cynthia had yet to voice her judgment, Ves couldn't help but feel like he had turned into a little boy again. Even if she was limited by her incarnation and the restrictions of her current descent into Blinky, her exquisite mastery of E energy allowed her to utilize it in a much more efficient manner than he thought possible!

If Ves routinely wasted 80 to 90 percent of the potential of E energy, then a True God like the Oblivion Empress could easily reduce her waste below 10 percent or even more!

While Ves was only able to observe and understand a fraction of her wizardry, he became profoundly impressed by her effortless mastery.

Her comprehension and skills were so much greater than his own that he felt like a complete amateur in front of his mother!

All of his experimentation may have unlocked a lot of interesting new possibilities himself and others, but the refinement and sophistication of his methods left much to be desired.

He spent too much time and effort inventing new stuff and not enough time on refining his existing ones.

While Ves did not necessarily regret his decisions, his mother's demonstration of power reminded him that he had neglected a few options because he did not spend enough time on refining his existing applications.

As his mother patiently completed her survey, her glowing incarnation addressed his other self first.

"You call yourself the Dark Apostle, is that correct?"

"Yes... mother..."

It appeared that the Dark Apostle inherited Ves' fear and deference towards his mother.

Ever since she descended onto Blinky, the Ascended Giant lost all of his confidence and grew as meek as a harmless sheep.

It was as if he came face-to-face with an apex predator. Everything in his bones told him that there was no way he could resist the True God even if she only diverted a fraction of herself to this site.

The Superior Mother's lips curled with intrigue. She appeared amused at how Ves' current condition.

"It is good that you still recognize me as your mother. If you did not, then I would have to eliminate you from my original son's true body. Family is everything. You can steal, you can torture, you can kill, but unless provoked, you must never harm our family. As long as you hold that in your heart, I will recognize you as my own son. I shall love you just as much as I love Ves. Do you understand?"

The Dark Apostle did not hesitate for a single moment. **"Y-Yes, mother!"**

Ves grew incredibly jealous at how easily his mother secured the Dark Apostle's submission and obedience.

If he was as strong as her, he could have gotten rid of his alternative personality a long time ago!

Why did she not do so?

Why did she look at his unwanted foreign self and embrace him as a son?

Shouldn't she be horrified that an intruder had occupied his true body and seek to purify him so that he regained full control over his body again?

Cynthia knew exactly what he was thinking. The Superior Mother occupied the same vessel as herself.

He could feel her attention drifting towards her original son.

"You must be wondering why I am not doing what you are fantasizing in your mind."

"Ehhh..."

"What you have spawned from your true body is a consequence of your own actions. You have toyed with forces beyond your comprehension. Do not be surprised when those same forces take advantage of your ignorance and exploit a vulnerability in yourself. You managed to get off lightly as far as I am concerned. Spawning a second personality that is not under your control is... not an uncommon occurrence back in the day."

The Superior Mother smiled as if she was reminiscing about her own childhood.

Ves simply felt shocked at how she nonchalantly dismissed his very serious condition!

Even if she had no intention of dealing with the Dark Apostle, she could at least voice more sympathy!

The Superior Mother shook her head and tutted. **"When you reach my level of existence, you will learn that individuals are defined by their souls, not their surface personalities. You have split yourself multiple times in multiple different forms. Is it any surprise that an outside force has succeeded in splitting you in a manner you did not desire?"**

In other words, it was totally his fault that he ended up stuck with the Dark Apostle.

"From Blinky to Veronica, you have also not shied away from assuming different identities." She continued to admonish Ves. **"As far as I am concerned, they are all aspects of yourself, and so they are all my children so long as they recognize me as their mother. You may think yourself as special as you are the first and the eldest among them, but you can argue that this also makes you the least developed and evolved iteration of yourself."**

???

What the hell was she talking about?

Seeing that Ves did not understand her message, she dumbed down her explanation.

"It doesn't matter if you retain a single personality or spawn a thousand personalities. I am willing to love each of them as my own son or daughter so long as their soul is tied to the boy I birthed and raised. Love transcends all barriers. I may not be able to live up to this ideal, but my tolerance is vaster than you can imagine. I will love you even if you choose to destroy the Dark Apostle. At the same time, I will love him without reserve if he somehow gains the upper hand and devours everything that defines you as Ves."

What?!

His mother was crazy!

"Wait, doesn't that contradict your earlier statement about never harming your own family?"

"Cases like yours are... special." Cynthia delicately said. **"The two of you are not brothers. You are different versions of yourself. Admittedly, the Dark Apostle has become contaminated by an outside force, but that does not fundamentally change my description. The two of you need to sort out your own cohabitation problems. I shall not interfere."**

"

"Really?"

"Really?"

The Superior Mother nodded. **"You are both my sons, and I love you both equally. I will not play favorites, as only a bad mother would do so. I will accept any resolution or lack thereof. You may fight each other until the winner takes all. One of you may take the initiative to leave your true body and inhabit a different one. You may even choose to accept your joint ownership over the same body and maintain the current status quo."**

In other words, she was fine with almost every possible outcome!

While the Dark Apostle clearly grew ecstatic at this news, Ves felt betrayed by his own mother.

Did she not want him anymore?

"It is not about wanting you or not." The True God directly stated to him. **"You have made your bed. Now you must lie in it. Actions have consequences. Cultivation is inherently dangerous, and directly manipulating the soul is even more perilous. You cannot continue to play with fire and expect to remain safe all of the time. Sooner or later, you will get burned. The current outcome is hardly the worst case scenario. There are much worse fates."**

"I can hardly imagine."

"I understand what you are going through, my son." She said in a heartless tone. **"However, the most appreciated decision I can make is to respect the process of the survival of the fittest. If the two of you are determined to monopolize your true body, then only one of you will survive to the end. I shall commend the winner for his success. As for the loser, I have no sympathy for him. Weakness is the ultimate sin."**

Ves almost felt like fainting when she uttered those words. He truly could not understand what was going on in her crazy mind. Her norms and values were so alien to him that it was difficult to imagine that she used to be a human!

"Is this how you view your own family? Is it too much to ask for you to divorce your ideology from your family."

"You already know the answer to your own question, Ves. I am not the woman you think I am." She said as the Superior Mother looked at him with judgment. **"As I have said before, I understand what you are going through... because I have lived**

through similar experiences. Your condition is not uncommon. Different personalities may spawn in our bodies for one reason or another. Do you truly think that I am the gentle mother who raised you back in Cloudy Curtain?"

A horrifying realization dawned on Ves' mind.

"Are you saying... you devoured my birth mother?"

"I am not a monster that has taken on the guise of your mother." She declared. "I am your mother. My love for you is real. Whether my current personality is an exact match to the one that has raised you in your early childhood is inconsequential. No matter whether I present myself as the Superior Mother, the Oblivion Empress or Cynthia Larkinson, they are all parts of myself. The same applies to you. The sooner you accept this greater truth, the sooner you will become mature enough to undertake greater responsibilities."

Chapter 7200: Krytak Seashells

Intellectually, Ves understood what his 'mother' tried to convey.

Ves still thought like a mortal. He treated every personality as a separate individual. This was a common sense response towards this phenomenon.

His 'mother' clearly had a more... open-minded perspective on the matter.

She still loved him... but she also loved the Dark Apostle.

Even if the latter had become indoctrinated by the heavenly authority of the Red Ocean and thought of himself as an Ascended Giant, this was a trivial issue to a True God.

This was one of the reasons why he did not like to interact too often with his mother.

Not only did she admonish him and criticize him all of the time, she also had a tendency to impose her weird ideas on him. She was a woman who was fundamentally disconnected from modern human civilization, and she never attempted to correct this problem.

Instead, she was much more likely to force everyone around her to conform to her own views!

She certainly had the capital to do so considering that she was a True God. The strong devoured the weak, and between the two of them, Ves was definitely the weaker party at the moment!

Ves tried his best to shove his identity problem aside. He could only process so many subversive ideas at a time. There was a time and place for him to sort out what he learned, and that time was not today.

“I did not summon you here to consult you on my current condition.” Ves said. “I called you here because I want to borrow your power to fuel our next attack. The Dark Apostle and I are currently locked in a life-and-death match against the human phase lord over there. He has already managed to tank one of my special attacks. I only have one high explosive blast lance left, but I am not confident I can breach his special armor.”

The subjective time slowing effect was still in force, which meant that Ves and his other self could afford to spend the time to have a proper discussion with their mother.

He was grateful for that. The gravity of the situation became a lot less severe. Even if his mother said no and refused to intervene, the additional time gave him enough opportunities to devise an emergency solution or two. He would not be proud for resorting to less honorable tricks, but victory mattered more than anything else.

He still desired his mother’s aid in this situation. She could almost certainly handle this problem a lot better if she was willing to exercise her power.

Naturally, she could not stop herself from admonishing him again.

“Reckless fools. Both of you have proven to be just as mule-headed as your father. Is it not too much to ask for you to reject a duel against an adversary that is obviously superior? Your pride may take a blow, but that is better than losing your lives. Having good judgment and eyesight is an essential survival skill. You only need one mistake to forfeit your life. Having the courage to accept shame is another skill. There are many times in your life where you must admit defeat despite your unwillingness to do so. A survivor is an individual who can recognize reality and accept dishonor before death. Your society idolizes those who do the opposite, but when do others have a right to pass judgment on you? You should have abided by your logic over your pride.”

Both Ves and the Dark Apostle felt like bowing their heads in shame and disappointed.

She was completely right. The more prudent decision would have been to reject the fourth duel and rely on the Red Collective to suppress the Oscillating Fist.

Even if doing so would cause them to lose the respect of the Ascended Giants and cause a small portion of their number to defect to the Red Cabal, at least Ves and his alter ego escaped a fight that would lead to their deaths if they proved inferior.

There was no real need for them to put their lives on the line.

“I have learned my lesson, mother. I shall do better next time. I cannot unmake my last decision, so both of us are in big trouble at the moment. Can you help us deal with the current situation?”

His mother sighed.

“I shall do so this time. You are right to enlist my aid. Children like you are prone to making mistakes from time to time. As a parent yourself, you should know that it is better for you to suffer the consequences of them so that you will learn better and act more cautiously next time. However, your current situation does not allow you to do so. I recognize the outer material that your adversary uses to protect himself. He has great taste... and great connections. Not anyone can gather so many pieces of Krytak Class A Seashells and build a suit out of it that grants full coverage.”

Ves reacted with surprise when she was able to name the mysterious shells that formed the scales of the Oscillating Fist's raiment.

“You recognize them? What are Krytak Class A Seashells?”

The Superior Mother smirked.

“It is an organic material harvested from the old galaxy. I believe that the MTA has classified it as a super-class material. From what I know, these shells come from exomollusks that have evolved from a peculiar planet located in the galactic center. Due to exposure to a high number of toxic materials, deathly radiation and more unusual energies, a small number of organisms have evolved to convert the local exotics and radiation to grow a special substance that eventually takes the form of these unusually resistant seashells.”

That did not sound like a particularly unique story. There were many instances where humans stumbled upon an untamed planet and discovered many wild evolutions and adaptations that presented solutions that were far superior to anything they could reproduce with their current masteries in technology.

Nature was just as good as an engineer if not better than intelligent races.

It certainly had a lot more time to do its job, which ultimately led to galaxies filled with all kinds of biological bounties just waiting to be discovered.

“The mechers have come to discover their value first and have taken direct control over the planet in order to erect a sustainable harvesting operation.” His mother continued. “Most of the seashells do not reach the quality of the shells used by your current opponent. They are categorized as Class C and Class B seashells. Only a tiny fraction are lucky enough to receive the superior label of Class A. These are the most perfect and flawless specimens that tick every box on the list. The protection they offer in their raw stat is unsurpassed. They are true treasures of the old galaxy.”

"I... see." Ves said with a bit of awe. "So this guy managed to obtain all of these seashells from the mechers? Do they have a lot of these shells on hand?"

The Superior Mother shook her head. "I cannot say too much about their availability, but I have always considered Krytak Class A Seashells to be a rare product. It is inconceivable how the Oscillating Fist managed to gather enough bargaining chips to exchange for so many shells. The MTA normally reserves them for the construction of some of their most powerful true mechs."

Now that was a phrase that Ves had not heard in a long time. He almost forgot that these kinds of mechs even existed in the first place seeing how rarely the Red Association deployed them in the field.

Granted, neither the native aliens nor the mutated voribugs made use of powers that warranted the deployment of true mechs. Ordinary mechs already sufficed.

"I see. If it is a highly desirable material to use in the construction of true mechs, then I fear that it is highly resistant to extraordinary effects, am I correct?"

"Good deduction. You are correct. Even I cannot easily overcome the properties of Krytak Class A Seashells. It is possible to rely on brute force to overcome their resistance, but you lack the raw power to accomplish this. Even with my assistance, there is a limit to what I can do due to the limitations of my current manifestation."

Despite saying that, Cynthia did not sound particularly troubled or concerned.

She must have a solution.

"So how do we solve this problem?"

The Superior Mother pointedly glanced at his true body and his extensive equipment.

"In your desire to attain greater power, you have chosen to embrace the peril of darkness. You became seduced by its mystery and fell sway to its dark charm. You have taken a portion of this dark fabric and turned it into a part of yourself, forever staining your soul with the touch of the profane."

"Do you... disapprove?"

"Not at all, my son. I neither approve or disapprove. It is true that experimenting with the element of darkness may not end well for you, but its potency is real. As long as you can stay true to yourself and explore this element with caution, you can become a powerhouse that no one dares to challenge. You only need to follow two rules above anything else. First, you need to be patient and accept that you are not ready to explore the more dangerous facets of this element. Second, you must always retain your awe

towards power. The moment you lose sight of this principle is the moment you will suffer an irreversible accident in the near future.”

As much as Ves was annoyed that she was patronizing him once again, this was her right as his mother.

Besides, her advice was sound. There was nothing wrong with being patient and respecting power. He should have kept this in mind a lot more.

“I shall certainly not forget them, mother. That aside, can you still find a way to let us overcome the resistance of Krytak Class A Seashells.”

The Superior Mother smiled this time. Her smile was warm and full of love.

“Of course I can. No defense is truly infallible. Krytak Class A Seashells may not possess any obvious vulnerabilities, but you are fortunate that the armorers under your enemy’s employ do not truly understand how to process it into a fully cohesive layer of protection. This makes it possible to sabotage the protection of a small number of individual shells, enough for you to drive your lance through this gap and have it detonate inside his body. However, if you are not able to execute this step beforehand, then your lance will not be able to penetrate past this layer at your current level of power.”

Since she said that, then she must have a solution at hand. Ves began to relax. It felt nice to be bailed out by his mother.

“Then what must be done in order to penetrate the layer of seashells?”

“I can think of two different means to overcome this armor, one for each of you.” Cynthia stated. “For you, Ves, I see that you have developed a decent understanding on how to cast a withering curse. I can help you cast a much more advanced version of it that can drain the Krytak Seashells of their resistant qualities. After all, growth and decay are two sides of the same coins. These Class A shells have relied on the power of growth to become so powerful. The power of decay can easily reverse this process as long as you understand the principles.”

That sounded incredibly promising!

Ves immediately grew more interested!

His mother essentially told him that there was a lot more room for growth. If he wanted to be able to drain the power of organic obstacles such as the Krytak Class A Seashells by himself in the future, then it was worthwhile for him to develop a deeper mastery into the underlying concepts and principles of this curse.

In other words, he needed to move beyond the theory and application that he originally acquired from an enlightenment fruit!

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