

The Mech Touch

Chapter 7208: Expedited Development

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The meeting between Ves and the four collies did not last long.

They did not have much to discuss considering that Ves did not feel it was appropriate to make important decisions about the Phase Lord Department.

The collies therefore left the recovery room disappointed as they hadn't been able to resolve a lot of lingering issues.

At least Ves promised to let the Dark Apostle out later in the day. That should finally allow the Red Collective to take concrete steps to claw back the Phase Lord Department from damnation.

Before that could happen, Ves first wanted to handle his own business.

He already reassured his children, so he sought out his wife to see how she was spending her time.

"Ugh, my body..."

The painkillers started to wear off now that many liters worth of chemicals were no longer being pumped into his bloodstream.

That caused him to feel a growing amount of aching inside his entire torso.

Fortunately, the pain was bearable for the time being. If it ever grew bad enough, then Ves could always retire early and let the Dark Apostle suffer the consequences of his own actions.

It was his fault that their shared true body deteriorated to this state!

For the time being, Ves allowed a bot to freshen him up and adorn him with a clean set of smart clothes.

He decided to tackle the most immediate issue straight away, which was placating his wife before her anger boiled over.

Ves did not need to inquire about her present location aboard the Tarrasque. He headed straight down to her private design lab and found her straight away.

Just as he expected, Gloriana immersed herself in her mech design work.

Lucky lazily hovered beside her head while he chewed on a mineral.

"Meow..."

The gem cat made a perfunctory greeting towards Ves, showing no sign of happiness to see him up and about again.

Gloriana studiously kept her attention on her terminal. She was borrowing a significant fraction of the Tarrasque's processing power in order to run simulations on various design solutions of the Riot Mark III Project.

The two of them were originally supposed to complete the upgrade of the Riot by this time, but Ves' old habit of getting distracted by the latest shiny had postponed this important event.

This clearly did not please his wife.

"Honey..."

Gloriana did not react to him at all when he was sure she registered his arrival. In fact, she must have received a notification as soon as he woke up. The fact that she did not bother to put down her work to visit him at the recovery facility was a statement in itself.

"Do you know what you did wrong this time?" She finally broke the silence.

"I... have a few ideas..."

"Then why did you recklessly put your life at risk, Ves?! You did not have to answer to the Oscillating Fist's provocations! You and that other personality of yours are both the same! Your egos are too big and your desire to gamble your lives is too strong! Do not tell me that everything is excusable since you got what you wanted. The problem is that you accepted a needless risk from the start! You did not have to go so far to take over the Phase Lord Department! Winning 3 duels was supposed to be enough. Starting the fourth one was pure hubris! Have you ever thought that if you died, you would not only lose your life, but leave our children without their father?!"

Ves winced as Gloriana castigated him. As much as he wanted to deny it, her words rang true.

"At least it worked out this time, right?"

"That is not an acceptable answer." His wife growled. "This is worse than the previous incidents. At least those were one-off events that we could eventually put behind us. This time, you and your alter ego became so adamant about proving your ability to lead from the front that the Ascended Giants will expect you to fight with the same degree of courage and recklessness as you have shown in the 4th duel. That has become the new standard as far as they are concerned."

She made a decent point, but Ves tried his best to ease her concerns.

"Fights like these should be rare. I was forced by circumstances this time. Now that I am in control, I can pick and choose where I want to go and which enemies to confront. I have the Bluejay Fleet and the Ascended Giants should be able to take care of most opponents given their comprehensive

strength. If I need more assistance, then I can always call over the Premier Fleet. There should be no need for me to contribute my strength against most opponents we come across."

His wife did not accept this argument.

"I know you well enough that you will not be able to resist. You have never been a typical mech designer. For whatever reason, you can never allow yourself to stay in the rear and let the professionals do their job, especially now that you and your larger self have gained the power to intervene directly on the battlefield. The Dark Apostle will insist on putting his life and your life on the line on repeat. Do you know how frustrating it is to not know whether you will return from the battlefield? It is one thing to allow for ordinary soldiers to fight and die on our behalf. It is another thing to subject yourself to the same risks and dangers!"

He could understand her concerns. Unlike him, her own foundation was not strong enough to maintain their combined influence and network.

Many arrangements would fall apart as soon as Ves got himself killed somehow.

However, Ves had no intentions of discouraging the Dark Apostle from fighting.

"You know why I cannot agree with you, honey. We are locked in a state of total war. The Red War is developing at a fast pace. The native aliens still remain dominant in the Red Ocean while the mutated voribugs have proven to be a new galactic scourge. It remains to be seen whether the return of the Cybernetic Empire will help to stabilize the border regions. The lack of deep and earnest cooperation between all of the major players risks fracturing our united front. Order is continuing to break down."

His wife finally turned away from her terminal and faced him directly.

"What are you trying to say?"

"We have made many friends, but when it comes down to it, we can't rely on them to go out of their way to save us." Ves flatly said. "It is ultimately better if we grasp power directly. The requirements of leading the Phase Lord Department are harsh, but it is worth it. Trust me. Including me, we have 360 Ascended Giants in total. That is a formidable army in itself. I bet we could easily conquer an entire zone by ourselves. Even if I can't afford to transfer them all to the Bluejay Fleet, just a squad or two of Ascended Giants is enough to make a qualitative difference in the field. They can do stuff that ace mechs cannot."

"Ace pilots are superior to lesser phase lords." Gloriana argued back. "Our champions are incorruptible. The ones that hail from our clan are completely loyal to us. We do not have to worry that any of them will defect to the Red Cabal. I cannot say the same for the human phase lords that you love so much."

Ves crossed his arms. "Ace pilots have their merits, but it is incredibly difficult to raise them. We only managed to obtain a bunch because we have persistently invested a disproportionate amount of resources into their mechs. Phase lords require a lot of phasewater to produce, but we can get a lot of it if we continue to defeat enemy phase leaders on the frontlines. The Premier Fleet is doing quite well in the Terran Alliance, especially when the Minerva Mark II is teaming up with the First

Sword Mark III. Do you know that I have been thinking about raising a new phalanx that is exclusively made up of members of the Larkinson Clan?"

Gloriana looked surprised. "Wait, is that even permissible? The conflict of interests would be massive."

"You are technically true, but a deal is a deal." Ves smirked back. "The collies have promised the Dark Apostle and I complete authority over the Phase Lord Department in the next 20 years. While that doesn't mean I can do what I want without limitations, using its knowledge and resources to raise a phalanx that is made up of Larkinsons and only answers to our clan is not a big deal so long as I don't go too far."

His wife fell into thought. "If that is the case... then I may see this gambit of yours in a better light. It would be best if we can enjoy the permanent protection of 60 human phase lords that hail from our clan."

"This is just the start." Ves grinned. "There are plenty of other ways to take advantage of a public institution, especially one where the RC has agreed to place under our care. So long as we are clever about it, we can continually squeeze benefits out of the department while still making sure it fulfills its most essential responsibilities."

"Your term only lasts 20 years, correct? Are you not afraid that the RC will deny a renewal of your appointment?"

Ves shrugged. "Not so much. A lot can change in 2 decades. I will become a much stronger mech designer at that time. I should be able to make enough contributions to the war effort that minor rule violations get forgotten. If I have learned anything from the god pilots and Star Designers that I have come into contact with, it is that when you become powerful enough, the rules don't constrain you anymore. Instead, you get to impose them on others. Becoming the department head of the Phase Lord Department has already put me very close to this threshold."

He grinned as he spoke those last words.

Why did he fight so hard?

Why did he allow the Dark Apostle to fight to his heart's content?

Why did he agree to let the 4th duel unfold?

It was because he could shave several years off his timeline.

If he had a choice between becoming a chess player today as opposed to 5 years later, he would definitely pick the former option!

He was already thinking about how he could put his newfound leverage to good use.

"20 years is a long time, Gloriana." He said as he approached his wife and softly embraced her from behind. "For the time being, I think we can treat this as if we have inherited a very powerful mercenary company. The Ascended Giants at our disposal are trained for war, but they are not particularly committed to any state or organization aside from their ethnic group. We will have to

be careful about indulging in their racial ambitions, but other than that they should be happy at being given a chance to fight and prove their strength."

His wife looked up at him while raising an eyebrow. "A mercenary company, huh? Well, that certainly fits your profile. Who will keep the income?"

I don't intend to exploit the Ascended Giants if that is what you are implying." Ves briefly frowned. "I haven't studied the ledgers yet, but even I know that it is insanely expensive to raise, equip and maintain the upkeep of 360 phase lords. The costs will only balloon further if the Larkinson-exclusive phalanx gets off the ground. We have little choice but to put our earnings right back into the Phase Lord Department. As for whatever is left... I am sure we can put it to good use in a number of R&D projects."

The money was not the point. Ves had many ways to earn more cash.

What truly mattered was power, leverage and access. Now that he became a department head, a lot of doors opened up for him. He had become the equivalent of an admiral if he joined the Red Fleet.

This effectively meant that he could draw upon a lot of exclusive knowledge and resources so long as he made enough contributions to the Red Collective!

"I wonder if the big shots will finally decide to raise my galactic citizenship tier."

Chapter 7209: A Golden Harvest

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Ves found it increasingly less acceptable that he still remained stuck as a tier 3 galactic citizen.

Although the Red Collective was still too young and lean to elevate any of its members to tier 1, Ves knew for a fact that every department head reached tier 2 galactic citizenship.

This was an appropriate status. They were nowhere near as influential as individual god pilots and Star Designers, but their office granted them widespread influence that could change the course of human history.

There was no excuse to keep him at tier 3.

Not when he commanded the loyalty and obedience of 359 human phase lords.

The greatest impediment was the Evolution Witch. She was responsible for blocking her promotion. If she had made a promise about it, then it would be difficult to defy her directive given how much she cared about the matter.

Ves hoped that this was not the case. Given Divine Lucie Miyazaki's history as a radical and a rule breaker, she shouldn't be as rigid as he feared. He would give the Red Three a few weeks to get their act together and elevate him to a tier 2 galactic citizen.

If they still refused to give him what he deserved, then he had no qualms about using the three phalanxes at his disposal to apply leverage.

After all, what was the point of gaining so much power if he did not make good use of it? He not only had to demonstrate that he was able to command all of those Ascended Giants, but that he was also willing to use them to his advantage.

As Ves continued to talk to Gloriana in her design lab, she gradually filled him in on a number of developments.

“There are already inquiries within our clan on how to apply to join the Phase Lord Department.” She told him. “Our infantry soldiers are especially eager to become a part of the exclusive gathering of human phase lords. They do not fully understand what they are getting into, but I doubt that warning them about the changes to their cognition will deflate their enthusiasm by all that much. Each of them have relit the fires in their heart.”

While Ves was glad to hear that there were plenty of Larkinsons who were willing to undergo phase lord conversion, he knew that he and the Larkinsons couldn’t afford to rush this process.

At the very least, Ves wanted to conduct more research on how to prevent or reduce the brainwashing from the Red Ocean!

So long as everyone who managed to raise their phasewater concentration past a threshold mistakenly believed that they were gods, it would be hard for them to remain members of the Larkinson Clan in good standing!

Kinship was one of the central concepts of the clan.

The Golden Cat was the ancestral spirit of the Larkinsons for good reasons.

She may not be the most powerful, knowledgeable or flashiest of spiritual entities, but she embodied the importance of love and family above all others.

Ves feared that the Larkinson giants would become so brainwashed by the heavenly authority of the Red Ocean that not even the Golden Cat could set them straight anymore.

Once they embraced the allure of godhood and believed with all of their heart that they deserved to rule over mortal humans as if they were slaves, then they could never treat their fellow Larkinsons with genuine love and respect anymore.

They would have to be removed from the clan rolls. There was no other possibility. Ves at least managed to stay in the clan because only his alternate personality developed a god complex.

Ves would be happy if other Larkinson giants managed to stay true to their hearts in the face of the Red Ocean’s coercive persuasion, but he did not get his hopes up. The standards were too high. Perhaps only 10 percent or so of Larkinson candidates would eventually retain their original personalities.

“By the way, Ves.” She said. “Since you have learned a number of new tricks, have you gained any special insights that you want to apply to the Riot Mark III Project? You have become much more

proficient in spearmanship than before. Is there anything about the design that we have overlooked? Since we have already delayed the project's fabrication date, we may as well take advantage of the additional time to apply additional tweaks based on new insights."

That was an interesting suggestion. Ves was not opposed to the idea. He began to lean forward and study the design of the Riot Mark III Project.

"On the surface, you have already done a good job of designing it to complement Venerable Rosa Orfan's aggressive fighting style." He said. "I can make a few suggestions here or there, but the differences will not be significant enough to justify the additional time and effort needed to alter the design. It is more than satisfactory in my eyes. We can save the subsequent refinements and adjustments when we are ready to start the Riot Mark IV Project in the far future."

"Hm, fair enough. I am glad to hear that a qualified spearman such as yourself has given a positive evaluation as our subject matter expert."

Ves grinned. "The Dark Apostle and I aren't good enough to call ourselves spearmen. Our second daughter certainly thinks we are not true warriors yet, and I am inclined to agree with her. We have the skills, but not the practical experience that is needed to evolve and optimize our new arts."

His wife frowned. "I can already guess that the Dark Apostle will be eager to remedy his lack of experience by throwing himself onto the enemy at every opportunity. This means that our children and I will constantly have to be worried about whether you will return with injuries... or worse."

He let out a sigh even as he reassuringly patted her hand. "As I have said before, trust in our armed forces. The Bluejay Fleet will become stronger than ever after a bunch of Ascended Giants have joined up. If that is not enough, we can join up with the Premier Fleet again."

"Why are we not doing that right away?"

"Because the Saint Commander deserves to run the clan without my interference, whether deliberate or not." Ves answered in a firm tone. "If we want to transition the Larkinson Clan into a multi-generational institution that can withstand the test of time, then it needs to become accustomed to regular leadership transitions. My prestige within the clan is so high that Casella Ingvar needs space in order to make her mark. It is best if I keep my distance from her for at least a few more years. However, if the new frontier is deteriorating a lot faster than expected, then we can group up again for safety."

The situation had not reached that point. The native aliens or the mutated voribugs would have to achieve great success in their incursions before the Larkinsons needed to consolidate their strength.

After a bit more talking, their discussion quietly ended.

Both Ves and Gloriana became engrossed with testing and finalizing the Riot Mark III Project.

At the same time, they paid close attention to the clock.

Gloriana had quietly signaled a desire to meet up in the System Space through a secret code and gesture.

They both waited until the right time had come before activating the command to enter the System Space.

Their surroundings changed. Ves immediately felt more comfortable as the aches of his true body faded a bit. He did not know why this was the case, but he had no complaints about the effects.

“So what do you want to talk about?” He asked.

“You still do not remember?” She asked.

“Uhhh...”

Gloriana let out an exasperated breath. “Follow me, then.”

They both climbed up the steps before the female mech designer turned to the clearing that held the Tree of Possibilities.

A big change occurred since their last visit.

Ves stared with incomprehension as he beheld two rotting corpses.

The great Unshakeable King and the mighty Oscillating Fist had fought valiantly in the last hour of their lives, yet both of them had been reduced to collection of bones, sinew and skin.

Furthermore, the two phase lord corpses also happened to be tangled and half-buried into the roots of the Tree of Possibilities!

“Have your memories recovered?”

“No.” Ves said as he tried to reconcile his previous impressions of the polemarchos and the strategos with the disgusting sight before him. “What I do recall is a recent System upgrade to the Tree of Possibilities. I think... I understand now why I insisted on claiming these corpses. The bodies needed to be fresh, mostly intact and killed by me in person in order to dedicate them to this big tree, right?”

Gloriana nodded. “Yes. You cannot cheat the System by attempting to dedicate corpses killed by others. It is also too late to submit your kill to the Tree of Possibilities if you delayed for more than a standard day.”

No wonder why he tried his best to remain conscious at the time!

He must have kept these new rules in mind when he urgently sacrificed the phase lord bodies.

“Well, whatever I did has yielded success. Those two golden enlightenment fruits look ripe and ready to be used.

Both Ves and Gloriana approached the trunk of the Tree of Possibilities and bowed respectfully.

Whether they wanted to show respect to the Tree of Possibilities or honor the ‘sacrifice’ of the two deceased phase lords remained unclear.

A sense of solemn dignity emanated from the entire clearing. So long as the Tree of Possibilities was still in the process of breaking down the two giant corpses, the site would continue to come across as a graveyard as opposed to a repository of knowledge.

“Let’s see what these golden fruits are all about.”

The pair proceeded to study the description of the special golden enlightenment fruits.

[The Immovable Flesh Giant Method Golden Enlightenment Fruit]

Imparts a multi-disciplinary body training method developed by the Unshakeable King to exercise a human phase lord’s true body. This method relies on a combination of stimulating the lesser Marigal organ, refining the use of the lesser Tarsei organ, contemporary human exercise physiology and a fusion of over a dozen martial arts.

Practicing the Immovable Flesh Giant Method may enable a human phase lord to match or surpass the physical durability and toughness of a phase whale of an equivalent rank, but due to the immature, incomplete untested nature of this body cultivation method, the practitioner must be prepared to make frequent corrections and expansions.

Requirements: Strength must be higher than 15, Endurance must be higher than 20, Spirituality must be higher than 5.

“The Unshakeable Fist’s legacy.” Gloriana whispered with a sense of awe. “This can definitely make you more difficult to kill.”

[The Oscillating Fist Technique Golden Enlightenment Fruit]

Imparts a martial arts technique that can only be exercised by humanoid phase lords. The Oscillating Fist Technique is the culmination of a lifetime of training and fighting by a champion boxer turned phase lord. It encapsulates the essence of many boxing and martial techniques, decades of diligent practice, profound insights, the support of a compatible companion spirit and an unswerving drive to surpass mortal limitations.

The Oscillating Fist Technique is completely personalized around its creator. Teaching this technique to other pugilists will lead to poor results as it is too difficult for others to satisfy the same requirements as the creator.

Requirements: Strength must be higher than 20, Endurance must be higher than 15, Spirituality must be higher than 10.

“This...” Ves trailed off for a moment. “This is more than I could have hoped for. I thought the System would screw us over by extracting one of the Oscillating Fist’s lesser skills, but it went straight for the main prize. This golden fruit... is amazing.”

“Then what are you waiting for, Ves? These are your spoils.”

He shook his head. “Not so fast, honey. I am not entirely sure that these skills are suitable for me and the Dark Apostle. I already have a prototype combat system in mind that does not entail focusing on defense or rely on fisticuffs to wear down our future adversaries.”

“Why not?! You deserve to acquire these skills! If you insist on letting your other self fight on a regular basis, then I would feel much more reassured if he can withstand more attacks and launch lethal attacks even when he is unarmed!”

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Gloriana could not understand.

She could easily deduce the value of the two golden enlightenment fruits.

The Tree of Possibilities had extracted the proudest skills from the two defeated Ascended Giants and condensed them into two easily digestible packages.

They were made for human phase lords. The harsh physical requirements needed to absorb them could not be matched by anyone bound by mortal constraints. Expert pilots and ace pilots simply could not replicate the methods given how they required transcendent physiques, which they did not possess.

“You don’t understand.” Ves said. “Every fighter has their own combat system. Their training, their physical aptitudes, their talents, their obsessions and their field experiences all shape them into different organic combat machines. Just like mechs can be divided into swordsman mechs and rifleman mechs, fighters can be divided into many different categories and specializations. These two golden fruits correspond to entirely different approaches to combat than what the Dark Apostle and I prefer.”

His wife placed her hands on her hips. “That does not mean that these fruits are irrelevant to you. I can understand that you lack the time and interest to master the methods imparted by these two fruits, but you can still draw a large amount of lessons from them which you can use to supplement your own ‘combat system’. Aside from that, it is still handy to know how to take a hit and punch with greater effectiveness in an emergency. You do not have the time to develop these skills from

scratch. Swallowing the fruits will at least allow you to master the fundamentals, enabling you to skip decades worth of basic training.”

He acknowledged her points, but did not weigh them as highly. He still shook his head.

“Much of the precious contents of the fruits will go to waste if I ingest them. In my opinion, it is best to reserve them until our Larkinson Phalanx is up and running. By that time, I can pass these fruits onto the strategos and his deputy if they are compatible with the fruits. That will quickly allow them to expand or deepen their combat systems and help them dominate the battlefield.”

Gloriana definitely did not like the sound of that! She still could not understand why Ves would pass over such an excellent opportunity to strengthen himself given how much he struggled to defeat the Oscillating Fist at the end.

“You are making a mistake.”

“Whether that is true remains to be seen, but I am sticking to my own logic, honey. Just because the golden enlightenment fruits are in my hands does not mean I should swallow them straightaway. I already have my own plan which entails combining spearmanship, the tech of a Polymetal mech, the mysteries of darkness qi manipulation and a bunch of other stuff. I will have to coordinate this with the Dark Apostle, but considering he is another me, I do not think he will disagree.”

His wife stared at him as if she did not believe in his words. “We shall see. I will not stop him if he decides to ingest the golden enlightenment fruits. We need to keep the best for ourselves.”

Ves really hoped that the Dark Apostle would not make this mistake. He had been serious when he talked about the combat system that he had planned out for himself and his alter ego. For efficiency’s sake, it was much better for himself and his armed forces if those fruits ended up benefiting other human phase lords.

What he did not tell Gloriana was that he did not mind it if he passed the golden fruits onto a trustworthy Ascended Giants that did not hail from the Larkinson Clan.

Now that the Phase Lord Department was in his pocket for at least 20 years, it was worthwhile to invest it in to make it stronger and more cohesive.

In addition, there was no rule that prohibited the Ascended Giants from joining the Larkinson Clan.

So long as they could overcome the brainwashing of the Red Ocean, Ves did not mind extending his trust towards them. There were plenty of talented fighters among the ranks of the Ascended Giants.

Right now, the Divine Harpoon already demonstrated a proactive willingness to support his new polemarchos. The Fiery Axe might follow suit.

Ves eventually decided to stash the golden enlightenment fruits in the Vault of Eternity.

There was no hurry to decide how to use them now that the immediate crisis had passed.

The rest of the day passed by in a blur. Ves finished the design session with his wife and took care of other matters of importance.

After he completed all of the paperwork and other issues that had piled up in the last few days, he decided that he had delayed the important moment long enough.

He decided to board a shuttle that would bring him to the surface of Jotunheim.

It was time for the Dark Apostle to present himself to his new subordinates.

He had already removed his bandages in order to change into his thick nanosuit.

The bruising on his skin did not look as bad as he feared. He still understood that his organs were in a considerably worse shape as they were not able to recover as quickly as ordinary flesh and skin.

For a moment, Ves felt tempted to swallow the enlightenment fruit that would allow him to master the application of oscillating force with his fists, but he resisted the allure.

He needed to apply a lot of planning and foresight to ensure the Phase Lord Department grew strong while also making sure that every Ascended Giant remained loyal to him. He could not imitate the Oscillating Fist and assume that pure strength was enough to overcome every problem.

“We have arrived, sir.”

Ves stepped out of the shuttle with his Apocalypse Warden bodyguards, not that they could offer too much protection to him these days. They were better off guarding his wife and children.

Even so, they were still good at keeping random folk at a distance and denoting his higher status to others.

The headquarters of the Phase Lord Department already received notification of his arrival in advance.

Many of the people assigned to the HQ had gathered inside the underground hangar bay.

Many uniformed human workers stood separate from the dozens of Ascended Giants who had appeared in their partially unfolded forms.

No matter the actual size of their true bodies, they seemed to have settled on limiting themselves to the height of a typical mech in their daily lives.

This made sense. A lot of human construction and infrastructure had been designed with the possibility of mechs passing through the halls.

While it was easy for most of the Ascended Giants to inflate their bodies further, they would have to scale up the headquarters and facilities to accommodate their drastically larger sizes.

That was not economical. Even the Phase Lord Department had to surrender to budgetary limitations and practicality.

Even so, the fact that so many humans had gained the ability to equal a mech in size was already impressive enough.

The full garrison had presented itself. Each of the Ascended Giants wore uniform and livery that corresponded to their respective phalanxes.

Even if this was not their full numbers, Ves and other humans could feel the latent threat and power behind their collective strength.

An individual Ascended Giant might not be particularly strong, but dozens of them in full wargear and demonstrating excellent teamwork may just be able to tear down ace mechs and greater phase lords alike!

They made a good attempt at showing their value to their new polemarchos. Ves could see and feel their undisguised enthusiasm and motivation. They not only welcomed their new leader, but they also looked forward to taking part in actual operations.

Each formation was headed by their interim strategoi.

The Fiery Axe stood at the head of the Flesh Choppers. She showed very little sign of infirmity. Perhaps she was already relishing a sparring session!

There were not many women among the Ascended Giants. Granted, unless they lived in abnormal states such as the Hex Federation, females always tended to have less representation in the military.

Even so, the proportion of women among the Ascended Giants was not as much as Ves expected... or hoped. There had to be a reason for this disparity. The ratios were much worse for the native aliens. He intended to look into this matter later.

The Divine Harpoon calmly stood at the head of the Faceless Giants. His men appeared a lot more uniform and consistent, which was exactly the way their phalanx was supposed to work.

The old leader made the most dependable impression by far. Ves would be a fool to ignore the man's willingness to help with the transition of leadership.

The Grapple King presented himself in a stoic and neutral fashion. In his new capacity as the interim strategos of the Ur-Titan Phalanx, he must have his hands full with trying to fill the Unshakeable King's big shoes.

It remained to be seen how supportive he was of the new regime, but so far the man looked like he possessed a sufficient amount of tact.

Of course, many of the Ascended Giants were not particularly pleased at the moment. They arrived and lined up in order to greet one of their own kind, not a tiny human mortal that they could easily trample if they did not watch their steps.

Ves looked into their expectant gazes and sighed.

He had hoped that they would associate the Dark Apostle with himself, but these giant morons still did not form this connection.

He reached out to his neck. The prototype collar had broken in the last fight and no one had thought to make a replacement. This meant that he would definitely go dormant as soon as he made way for the Dark Apostle.

On the one hand, Ves did not want to stay awake all of the time and follow his alter ego like a persistent voyeur.

On the other hand, he was not quite reassured with letting him do whatever he wanted while he partially assumed his identity.

For now, he was willing to extend his trust to the Dark Apostle. Even if he harbored ill intentions, this was not the time for him to rebel against red humanity.

His body began to expand in size. His new vacsuit automatically spread out and continued to ensure he remained adorned in a basic suit.

Once he reached the size of a mech, he stopped his growth.

Ves frowned for a moment. He had not yet reached the threshold where the Dark Apostle automatically took over.

Perhaps there was a way to make this transition happen on a voluntary basis. He concentrated for a moment and soon found that this was possible.

“Here goes nothing.”

The transition happened seamlessly.

The switch became evident to plenty of perceptive individuals. Compared to Ves, the Dark Apostle carried himself in a much more confident demeanor. The fact that he had won an arduous leadership challenge had inflated his pride and made him feel as if he was invincible.

“Polemarchos!”

“Dark Apostle!”

“Hail!”

The Ascended Giants all voiced their jubilation now that their new leader had truly arrived.

The Dark Apostle grinned without reserve as he took in his biggest conquest up to date.

The humans may have their plots and schemes, but it would be foolish to think they could control the Ascended Giants!

After thinking about how he wanted to turn the Ascended Giants into a force to be reckoned with, he raised his fist in a powerful gesture!

“My fellow giants. Your first polemarchos lies dead at my feet. His ambitions are great, but none of that matters if he lacks the strength and wisdom to win the fights that matter. Thus, his service has come to an end. I shall pick up where he left off and make sure that everyone in this dwarf galaxy will respect us as a superior race! Under my leadership, we shall crush our enemies with our own hands! We are the ascended!”

“WE ARE THE ASCENDED!”

“WE ARE THE ASCENDED!”

“WE ARE THE ASCENDED!”

The booming shouts of dozens of giants completely flooded the hangar bay with their sound vibrations!

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