

The Mech Touch

Chapter 7301: A Quiet Approach

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As the remaining time passed by, the scouting vessels had begun their daring deception.

They all pretended to be another regular scouting unit assigned to uncover the battle moon's secrets.

The veteran spacers all did a good job of underselling the true capabilities of the small and nimble starships.

The mutated voribugs certainly had no reason to suspect that this batch of vessels was any different from the ones that approached in the previous hours.

"So far, so good."

The Ascended Giants of the Ur-Titan Phalanx and the Faceless Giant Phalanx all got ready to fulfill their missions.

While they still remained human-sized, they were ready to unfold their true bodies as soon as the ships got close enough.

Before they deployed, Ves decided to address them in person.

Although he preferred to let the Dark Apostle speak with them, that was currently not possible.

There was simply not enough room inside the starship he was on to accommodate a body that was several times bigger than a mech!

Therefore, when the giants equipped with nothing but smart metal suits got ready to deploy into space, a projection appeared into each of their faces.

"Men and women of the Ascended Giants." Ves began. "Very soon, you shall embark on your first formal mission since my takeover. It has taken a considerable amount of time to get you here, but this is it. I am aware that many of you have dreamt of fighting against the phase leaders who answer to the Red Cabal, but the mutated voribugs present their own challenges. Do not underestimate them. The Goliath Hive in particular has not only developed its own Goliaths, but have also unveiled a battle moon of a scale that is unprecedented to the insect race."

The Ascended Giants did not take this warning to heart. Gear or not, they still possessed the confidence to go in and out without letting their spatial barriers fall.

Ves felt that they were being way too overconfident. One of his goals with this speech was to burst their bubble in advance.

“We are not solely fighting against weak and mindless bugs. If any of you still harbor this stereotype, then I advise you to take a good look. Our enemy has evolved. The Goliath Princess is intimately familiar with our champions and our methods. Even if we have not yet spotted any Goliaths in the vicinity, we cannot rule out that there are several of them on guard beneath the surface of the fleshy moon.”

The VOBM looked peaceful and quiet on the surface.

However, Ves knew better than to judge a book by its cover, at least in this instance.

Who knew whether the surface would explode into action and reveal lots of gun barrels when 30 giants looked as if they were about to raid the VOBM!

“Safety first.” Ves emphasized to this audience. “The mission is important to be sure, but it is not critical to us. If you are about to get overwhelmed by the swarms, then you should turn back without hesitation. Do not try to be the hero. Our goal is not to fight. Our objective is to gather intelligence. Nothing more and nothing less. Since we know so little about the battle moon, stay sharp and maintain your caution. Do your best to cover your fellow giants if they are in trouble. None of you are meant to fight by yourselves. Teamwork has always been at the core of your phalanxes. Together, the giants shall triumph.”

The response to his speech was lukewarm. The giants respected and answered to the Dark Apostle, not Ves. They sort of gotten used to the reality that their leader possessed a split personality, but that did not mean they were willing to look up to his weaker human self.

Nonetheless, the giants had learned to tolerate Ves, knowing that the Dark Apostle would just back up anything his human self had said.

Ves paid attention to the projected plot. The scout vessels had split up earlier so that they could approach the organic battle moon from multiple directions.

This introduced a delay and an additional risk. Ves and the Rubarthans were afraid that the mutated voribugs would figure out that they had been approached by assets way more significant than a bunch of small scout ships.

Sweat dripped from the brows of the Rubarthan officers as they carefully tracked the flight trajectories of all of the loose voribug patrols.

While the nearest bugs had already diverted from their previous flight paths in order to intercept the incoming human vessels, they did not seem too alarmed at what was taking place.

All signs showed that the Goliath Hive lazily sent a bunch of bugs towards the ships in order to scare them away.

The cannon fodder bugs were not particularly fast. Whatever means they used to navigate in space was not that powerful for the less advanced subspecies. This meant that the patrol had no chance of catching up to the scout vessels, but only as long as the latter tried their best to run away.

The voribug patrols still served as an effective deterrence so long as the human ships insisted on getting closer. The deeper they penetrated, the greater the risk of getting surrounded and damaged.

This was how a number of shuttles, mechs and starships got damaged earlier on. The Rubarthan scouts couldn't obtain any critical data if they played it safe, so they pushed the envelope and sometimes suffered for their dedication.

Subsequent scouts pulled back a bit, but never ceased their attempts to probe the VOBM. Its size and its unsettling appearance made it impossible to ignore. It made complete sense for the Rubarthans to remain obsessed with the organic megaconstruct.

What the mutated voribugs might not know was that the Rubarthans deliberately sought to create a pattern.

Ever since they came up with the plan to use the Ascended Giants to gather critical data, the Rubarthan soldiers had already set it up by conditioning the stupid bugs to lower their appraisal of human scouting attempts.

The price was not light, but all of the effort paid off when the mutated voribugs still behaved in a manner that suggested that they had no clue of the dangerous passengers that were secretly standing by inside the small ships.

Ves couldn't help but curl his lips in amusement.

He and the Dark Apostle never thought about employing their human phase lords in this manner.

For too long, both of them had gotten used to the open and upright manner in which the native aliens deployed their own phase leaders.

To them, their phase lords and phase whales were gods. It was incredibly shameful and dishonorable for gods to deliberately hide their presence and skulk about as if they were thieves.

The high-and-mighty alien leaders who deluded themselves into thinking that they were gods could not stand for such behavior!

In fact, the same applied to the Ascended Giants as well, but to a lesser degree. Since they used to be humans and had not yet become indoctrinated to a strong galactic-wide institution that had lasted for eons, the fresh and inexperienced human phase lords could still be redeemed.

"How long?" Ves asked.

"Minutes. Seconds. Any time now." A Rubarthan commander responded.

Time continued to pass by. Ves counted every second that passed without incident. He already felt proud that his 'boys' managed to hold themselves back for so long.

Under the deliberate control of veteran helmsmen, the scout vessels tried to maneuver around the intercepting voribug patrols. The ships managed to press closer and closer while delaying interception.

While their agile maneuvering succeeded in dancing around the initial patrols for a time, they slowly got boxed in as more and more voribug patrols arrived from different angles.

When it looked as if a collision became inevitable, the Rubarthans finally issued the fateful command!

“Now! Scramble all human phase lords! Good luck!”

The hatches of all of the scout vessels slid open.

30 Ascended Giants who had been holding themselves back all this time finally jumped into space!

The entire situation drastically changed!

The mutated voribugs did not appear to realize what was happening at first. Its cannon fodder bugs did not try to squeeze their potential to the utmost as they lazily enveloped the scout vessels.

It was only when a couple of dozen humans turned into Asended Giants and smashed apart the nearby bugs with their fists and legs that the Goliath Hive seemed t do a double take!

“The cat is out of the bag!”

“Finally!”

“These bugs are disgusting.”

“Don’t waste time! Advance! Stick to the mission plan!”

“Pick up your sensor spikes before you move!”

The frustrated giants had been holding themselves back for a long time. Now that they finally commenced their mission, they eagerly crushed the last of the bugs within their reach before flying towards their assigned coordinates with as much speed as they could muster!

As they distanced themselves from the scout ships, they did not forget to pick up the bundles of rods that had also been ejected from the cargo holds of the small ships.

The Ascended Giants fumbled with the components. They had to unbundle them from each other before slotting their ends to each other. This eventually allowed them to assemble segmented spears that formed complete sensor spikes.

The custom-made devices lit up in green to confirm that they had properly been put together.

Ves and the Rubarthans sighed in relief when they saw that none of the giants had botched thai step.

For all of their unruliness, they were still professional soldiers at heart. They knew how to follow instructions when it was time to get serious.

The giants looked very different from each other. Though they all wore silvery smart metal suits that automatically bore the emblems of the Red Collective and the Phase Lord Department, their sizes were not uniform.

The main reason why the Ascended Giants had to abide by a uniform scale was due to equipment constraints. Their raiments were made out of rigid alloys and could not change in size, so the human phase lords had little choice but to conform to the limitations of their equipment.

This time, there was no need for them to do so, so the giants did not hesitate to unfold their true bodies to the limit.

As expected, they were all able to grow beyond the limitations of their gear.

The ones that showed the smallest increase in stature were the members of the Faceless Giant Phalanx.

That made sense. The Faceless Giants were too numerous. The Phase Lord Department couldn't spare too many resources for them. They only received the necessary amount of phasewater before they had to work hard to earn subsequent servings through hard work and distinctions.

The Phase Lord Department already had a rudimentary reward structure in place. The more excellent giants could always find a way to earn more phasewater by reaching and exceeding performance targets.

Even if the quantities of phasewater earned through these methods was not great, every contribution helped. So long as they remained dedicated, even the most ordinary giant could grow exceptional one day.

Many Faceless Giants possessed plenty of motivations to pursue more growth. One of the prerequisites of transferring to an elite phalanx was to meet their minimum size requirements.

This meant that they needed to digest a lot more phasewater if they wanted to become more than the giant version of cannon fodder!

It was clear to see that the Faceless Giants possessed a lot of ambitious soldiers. Outside of the Divine Harpoon who was clearly the largest out of the bunch, over half of them exhibited significant growth that far surpassed the confines of their wargear.

These should definitely be the future talents of the Phase Lord Department!

Once the elite phalanxes suffered losses, they could easily replenish their ranks by requesting transfers from the Faceless Giants.

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Chapter 7302: Divergent Growth

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"Impressive." The physical projection of Lord Richard Brownstone uttered now that the Ascended Giants had revealed themselves. "Although we planned for it, I am still amazed to see how a handful of scout vessels managed to transport 30 giants to the vicinity of the Voribug Organic Battle Moon. The ability to change your sizes to such an exaggerated extent is one of your greatest powers. It is truly perplexing that the native aliens disdain to make tactical use of this advantage."

Now that the cat was out of the bag, there was no need for the scout vessels to pretend anymore.

They utilized their upgraded mobility and control to deftly maneuver away from the intercepting voribug patrols.

The ships also no longer remained silent. Even if there was no sign that the mutated voribugs possessed the ability to intercept and interpret communication signals, it was still a good habit for the humans to limit their signal traffic on the battlefield.

Now that they were exposed, the Rubarthan scout vessels no longer isolated themselves from the local command net and linked back up with the rest of the defenders.

This was how Richard Brownstone was able to communicate with Ves while he remained back at Philester Crestia III.

"I don't know what the native aliens are thinking either." Ves idly commented. "It is indeed impressive to see how far my boys have grown since they have embarked on this new life."

Over half of the Faceless Giants exhibited moderate signs of growth beyond their minimum baselines, but it was the Ur-Titans that truly grabbed his attention.

As the original phalanx of the Phase Lord Department, the Ur-Titans received a greater allocation of phasewater, phasewater organs and other resources.

That clearly showed when they were all able to surpass their designated scale by a noticeable extent.

Although they were not accompanied by an established strategos that had a lot of time to accumulate resources, the individual Ur-Titans all showed plenty of ambition as the greatest among them grew as tall as 7 mechs stacked on top of each other!

These giants were so much taller than their peers that the size disparity was quite significant.

It was also quite easy to distinguish the Ur-Titans and the Faceless Giants from each other.

The members of the elite phalanxes simply had more opportunities to further their cultivation.

This was because the Phase Lord Department already intended to nurture the Ur-Titans into its first greater phase lords.

Even if this was destined to become an expensive and time-consuming affair, the Ur-Titan Phalanx needed to take the first steps if it wanted to go anywhere.

In the meantime, the other phalanxes such as the Faceless Giants had to make do with less.

This was why none of them were able to match the physical growth of the Ur-Titans aside from the Divine Harpoon.

The presence of the latter was the only reason why the Faceless Giants hadn't been completely outshone by the Ur-Titans. Rank had its privileges, and the strategos received a much greater allocation of resources.

Ves or rather the Dark Apostle wished that he was among the giants advancing towards the VOBM.

Unfortunately, the risks were too high to justify his deployment. It made little sense for the polemarchos of the Ascended Giants to take part in a risky reconnaissance mission, especially if he needed to do so without his superdimensional raiment.

As a tier 2 galactic citizen, Ves was way too important to put himself into such a precarious situation.

The most he was able to do was to board one of the scout vessels and stay in reserve in case an accident took place.

Many Rubarthans expected for the VOBM to present new challenges to them once it came under serious threat.

The approach of 30 Ascended Giants would definitely alarm the Goliath Hive!

They were all big and their spatial fluctuations could not be missed. The fact that so many lesser phase lords unveiled themselves at once would intimidate many enemies!

"Detecting unusual activity from the VOBM! Its surface temperature has increased by 5 percent. The exterior... is rippling!"

Ves found the appearance of the VOBM to be more disturbing than normal. It already looked eerie due to its organic shell.

Now, the battle moon evoked even more disgust as pustules and other features started to emerge.

The enormous flesh ball behaved like a mutated lab sample that had grown way past its initial size.

Under the direction of the Goliath Hive, the flesh ball kept rippling while generating greater emissions.

It was definitely becoming more active!

"Keep an eye on those organic gun barrels! Have they shown any activity?!"

"Most of the organic gun barrels are warming up. Our sensors are struggling to parse more data from them. The activity levels across the entire surface of the battle moon are rising! This is making it more difficult to analyze what the battle moon's guns are doing."

As the sensor operators struggled to make sense of the changing observation data, the giants had already begun to reach their assigned positions.

The scout vessels had already come quite close to the VOBM, so the giants only needed to fly for a handful of minutes before they all reached their assigned coordinates.

Although each of them became more and more swamped with defending voribug patrols, their weak attack power made it impossible for them to breach the spatial barriers in a short amount of time!

At the very least, the Goliath Hive needed to dispatch stronger voribugs or attempt to overwhelm the human phase lords by relying on sheer numbers.

Unfortunately, the Rubarthans had already done a decent job of diverting all of the Goliaths away from the battle moons.

By deploying a number of expert mechs and ace mechs to the other sectors of the Philaster Crestia System, the local defenders had been able to spread out the core assets of the alien insects and make it less likely for Goliaths to remain by the side of the massive construct.

If the Rubarthans showed any determination to attack the VOBM, then the Goliath Hive would have ample warning to withdraw its Goliaths and bring them back.

Unfortunately for the Goliaths, the ruse enacted by the Rubarthans and the Ascended Giants prevented the bugs from executing the most crucial step!

Even as the nearby Goliaths did not hesitate to abandon their current missions and flew back to the VOBM with great haste, it would still take a while for them to get back!

This granted the Ascended Giants ample time to complete their mission without getting blocked by the most powerful bugs in the star system!

"This is actually going smoother than I thought." Ves commented.

Although the surrounding bug swarms immediately tried to envelop the intruding giants, their approach was not efficient.

Instead of concentrating their numbers on a handful of Ascended Giants, the patrols blindly attacked the nearest enemies.

The result of this braindead approach was that millions of cannon fodder bugs split up and diluted their formidable numbers.

Instead of converging their forces on 5 giants or whatever, they sought to attack all 30 of them at once, which meant that each intruder only had to fend off tens of thousands of bugs at most!

Although that still sounded like a huge amount, in practice it was not enough to turn them into buzzing flesh balls.

The spatial barriers of the largest giants could easily fend them off for a longer period of time.

The only giants that had entered a more precarious state were the Faceless Giants that had not been able to earn much merits up to this point.

Their smaller sizes may have made their surface areas smaller, but their spatial barriers were also much weaker than that of their peers.

This meant that these giants were most at risk of suffering a collapse!

"Hurry up! Get in position and throw your sensor spikes!"

"Damn! These bugs keep blocking my vision!"

"Keep paying attention to the state of your spatial barrier. If it dips below 50 percent, then toss your sensor spike and leave regardless of other instructions."

Though the swarming bugs made it progressively more difficult for the giants to observe their surroundings, their smart metal suits thankfully solved this problem by helping them navigate.

None of the giants failed to reach their assigned coordinates. Once they had all assumed equidistant positions around the battle moon, they unflinchingly reared back their arms backwards.

"Let loose!"

The giants uniformly tossed their sensor spikes straight down to the surface of the VOBM!

Though there were a number of bugs in the way, the enemies were too small and weak to pose much of a hindrance. The power behind the throws were simply too great to get bogged down by these minor speed bumps.

It did not take much time for the sensor spikes to get past the feeble obstacles and sink their tips into the surface of the battle moon.

"All 30 sensor spikes have landed on the VOBM! Multiple sensor spikes have gone off-course by over 7 degrees, but remain within acceptable boundaries."

Not all of the giants were expert throwers like the Divine Harpoon. It was normal for their aim to drift. Although the sensor spikes contained small inertialess boosters that could correct their course, their compact sizes limited their power.

The cannon fodder bugs that attempted to block their passage also caused them to deviate from their course. It was already a small miracle that all 30 sensor spikes managed to reach their assigned zones without severe deviations.

Once the Rubarthan commander confirmed that all of the sensor spikes had reached the battle moon without getting destroyed or knocked off target, he did not hesitate to issue the important command.

"Commence sensor pulse!"

All 30 sensor spikes fulfilled their primary objectives at the same time. Each of them had already been primed in advance. Once they received the signal from the scout vessels, the devices discharged their power all at once in order to conduct a deep scan of the interior of the battle moon!

The surrounding space seemed to condense for a moment as 30 powerful energy pulses rippled into the battle moon's fleshy interior.

The sensor spikes not only generated all of these huge pulses, but also received whatever got bounced back or managed to pass through to the opposite side.

Once the spikes received all of these signals, they automatically commenced the next phase.

"The data modules are about to eject!"

Just as planned, the exposed tops of the sensor spikes blasted away from the surface and desperately tried to climb upwards!

Fortunately for the Rubarthans, much of the roving patrols rabidly tried to intercept the intruding Ascended Giants.

The threat posed by the latter was so high that very few bugs had been assigned to attack the sensor spikes.

This meant that there were very few bugs in position to intercept the data modules.

However, their smaller sizes and weaker thrust power meant that every collision slowed them down to a much greater extent.

Some of the data modules gained altitude without encountering too many enemies.

Others weren't as lucky and bumped into many more cannon fodder bugs, each of which slowed down the momentum of the small data modules to a greater extent.

"6 data modules retrieved. 12 data modules retrieved. 14 data modules retrieved. 17 data modules retrieved."

"The remaining 13 data modules have lost almost all of their momentum! They are being bogged down by a greater quantity of bugs!"

"Retrieve them as quickly as possible! Their defenses are limited! Pay attention to whether the nearby bugs are attempting to bring them away."

"Tell the giants to do their best to retrieve the 13 missing data modules!"

This was a risky endeavor. Ves felt mixed about ordering the giants to get closer in order to bring back the remaining devices, but he did not object to this instruction.

"Don't make the same mistake as the bugs and spread out. Work together to bring back at least 6 of them. You have 3 minutes. Once this time is up, cease pursuing the data modules. You need to get out before too many bugs are pressing on your spatial barriers."

Chapter 7303: The Eyes

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Ves clenched his fist as he saw the giants scramble to retrieve the remaining ejected data modules.

They had known in advance that this would definitely be one of the most dangerous phases of the mission.

While the Rubarthan engineers had tried their best, the data modules were too small and weak to possess much ability. They struggled hard to escape the gravity well of the moon and also the obstruction of all of the cannon fodder in the way.

The fact that most of them succeeded to break free could already be regarded as a minor miracle as far as Ves was concerned!

Unfortunately, miracle or not, there was only so much the small data modules could do in the middle of alien-controlled space.

Ves knew that the retrieval of 17 data modules constitutes a success, but only partially. Even if they were roughly evenly distributed across the surface of the battle moon, the gaps in the data would make it harder to figure out the full depth of the alien superconstruct.

Therefore, retrieving at least half of the 13 data modules that struggled to escape voribug interception became critical.

He consented to ordering the Ascended Giants to go forward and do their best to retrieve more data storage devices.

Inwardly, his heart sank as he witnessed his soldiers engage in risky actions. He had a feeling that he may have condemned some of those earnest Ascended Giants to death due to this decision.

Sending the Ascended Giants closer to the surface of the intimidating Voribug Organic Battle Moon was already bad enough. Doing so while they had shed all of their weapons and raiments was especially egregious!

Already, the cannon fodder bugs assigned to protect the VOBM wised up to the human tricks.

The Goliath Hive apparently realized that the scout vessels were not as pathetic as the ones sent in the past. The superior mobility and navigation of the current ships made it impossible to intercept them so long as they did not fly any closer.

The Goliaths therefore made a very important strategic shift.

Instead of trying to catch up to the fast and elusive scout ships, they all abandoned their current targets and flew back to intercept the giants!

"Careful, soldiers!" Ves immediately conveyed to his vulnerable subordinates. "All of the cannon fodder in this area are moving to intercept you all! It will become much more difficult to get away! Do your best to group up and do not hesitate to set aside your latest orders if you think the situation has grown too precarious. Ur-Titans, do your best to shield the Faceless Giants. Their lack of body cultivation makes them much more vulnerable to defeat!"

At this time, the Ascended Giants did not care that Ves was a weak human. They all understood how critical it was to group up and to escape the area around the VOBM.

However, they did not want their first mission under the new leader to end up with such meager results. They understood enough to know that the importance of retrieving a handful more data modules was high.

For these reasons, the Ascended Giants ignored their growing discomfort and squashed the voribugs in the way so that they could retrieve more compact data storage devices!

They were well on their way of doing so. The bulk of the VOBM's protectors had been lured too far away from the giants due to their prior obsession of chasing after the scout vessels.

This meant that there was still a window of opportunity for the giants to complete their current instructions without too much hindrance.

However, the cannon fodder bugs were not the enemies that the human phase lords needed to worry about.

Ever since the sensor spikes had first breached the fleshy exterior of the battle moon, the huge alien megaconstruct had begun to shake and ripple.

If it was a moon, then all of this activity could easily constitute a city-destroying earthquake!

The Ascended Giants no longer paid attention to the anomalies related to the battle moon. They were too busy with trying to fend off the mutated voribugs that stuck to their spatial barriers while also trying to save the data modules.

With more and more cannon fodder bugs moving to intercept the Ascended Giants, the window of opportunity to complete their jobs and leave without getting flooded by bugs was rapidly closing!

"Not good, sir! The VOBM's heat emissions have risen by over 300 percent! Its surface is undergoing strange mutations!"

Ves paid close attention to the projection displaying the organic battle moon. He began to feel more and more unsettled by its activity.

It was as if the battle moon was previously dormant but got rudely awakened by the deep scanning attempt.

Now that the voribugs understood that the humans had fooled them, the reprisal was sure to be considerable!

"How many of the missing data modules have we retrieved so far!?"

"3, no 4! The remaining ones are more difficult to obtain because the voribugs have managed to stall their ascent. The bugs are doing their best to destroy their transphasic alloy exterior as we speak."

"Then give up on them! Tell the Ascended Giants to abort any remaining attempts to retrieve the remaining data modules and withdraw immediately."

This was clearly not in the best interest of the Rubarthan defenders, but it couldn't be helped.

The missing data modules would cause certain gaps to appear once they gathered all of the salvaged devices together, but that was better than letting human phase lords perish for a reconnaissance mission.

Out of an abundance of caution, the Rubarthan commander was willing to resist the temptation to grab one of two more missing data storage devices so long as this could prevent complications.

"The giants are withdrawing, sir!"

However, just as the giants increasingly grouped up and forcefully pushed their way from all of the converging bug swarms, a massive change occurred.

"The battle moon... IS ALIVE!"

"What?!"

"Eyes... eyes... THERE ARE TOO MANY EYES!"

"AAAAAHHH!"

A spontaneous outburst of hysteria engulfed the scout vessel's command center. All of the Rubarthan officers and specialists took one look at the projection of the battle moon and felt as if an immensely powerful predator had locked onto their souls!

They felt incredibly exposed. The battle moon was more than a massive mound of meat. To the Rubarthans affected by its anomalous existence, they felt as if they were ants that were about to get crushed by a god-like being!

It was not just the crew of the scout vessels that became affected by this sudden shift.

The Ascended Giants also became paralyzed for a moment!

So long as the VOBM entered their peripheral vision, they could not help but lock eyes at one of the many eerie eyeballs that had risen from the surface of the fleshy moon.

It only took less than a dozen seconds for the battle moon to spawn more than a thousand eyeballs the size of city blocks or greater!

The degree in which they disturbed the nearby combatants went beyond their unsettling visual appearance!

For whatever reason, the battle moon carried a powerful consciousness that momentarily overwhelmed the giants and humans.

The only one in the vicinity who managed to resist this effect was Ves, and even he was feeling the pressure!

"WAKE UP!" He roared over the communication channel! "Don't look at the moon! Focus on retreating!"

The paralyzed soldiers gradually managed to get their act together. The Ascended Giants woke up sooner due to their transcendent nature.

Even if their minds and souls had not grown as extensively as their true bodies, they still weren't as weak as ordinary humans!

The elite spacers serving on the upgraded scout vessels woke up a little later. Despite their tempering and discipline, it had truly been a struggle for them to regain their wits.

"What... what happened?"

"I feel so cold..."

"Deal with this later! Focus on the mission! The threat has not passed!"

The strange effect had quietly passed. Even Ves had not noticed when it disappeared. All he knew was that when he looked at the projection of the eyeball-covered battle moon, it no longer exerted as much pressure as before.

Ves briefly frowned.

There was no way that this kind of mental effect was normal. He only experienced this kind of pressure from True God-level entities.

Had the mysterious Devourer Queen extended her greater awareness to the battle moon in person so that she could take a peek of what was taking place?

"No way..."

It sounded absurd, but that may be exactly what just happened!

Though the battle moon apparently hadn't been able to maintain the effect for long, it was already scary enough that it had managed to maintain this effect for a short duration!

This was because the momentary disruption not only disrupted the flight of all of the scout vessels, but also caused the Ascended Giants to become passive for this duration!

This not only caused them to become mobbed by a greater number of voribugs, but crucially delayed their withdrawal!

"Get out of there!" Ves shouted!

He felt a lot less at ease now that the 'battle moon' had woken up! Its emissions continued to rise, which meant that it was definitely about to take action!

The giants in the field clearly understood the urgency. They tried their best to make it out regardless of whether they carried a data storage module or not. The earlier event had already spooked them. They had no intention of staying any longer than necessary. Even the most arrogant Ascended Giant knew that it was a bad idea to fight against the battle moon!

Unfortunately, the Goliath Hive did not intend to let them off. The previously dormant organic guns began to open fire!

"The Ascended Giants are under attack!"

The guns predominantly launched low-powered plasma bolts, many of which ended up burning voribugs or passing through empty vacuum.

Despite the flawed accuracy of all of the organic guns, plenty of plasma bolts ended up striking the spatial barriers of the Ascended Giants.

The integrity of their energy barriers dropped at an accelerated rate. While the power of an individual plasma bolt was not enough to tear down the spatial barriers, the quantity of organic guns was too much!

With so many guns firing at once, the Ascended Giants quickly ended up in much more precarious situations.

Without any serious gear, their defenses and mobility were much less impressive than before.

This would make it much harder for them to get away before the plasma bolts began to burn their flesh.

"Withdraw! Ur-Titans, cover the Faceless Giants as much as you can!"

Despite the chaotic situation, the Ascended Giants did not forget their training.

The Ur-Titans conspicuously fell behind the Faceless Giants. The elite human phase lords were able to withstand considerably greater damage. This meant that they possessed a responsibility to cover for the weaker giants.

None of the Ur-Titans complained. Their phalanx possessed a strong defensive focus from the start. Even without thick and sturdy raiments, none of them feared getting burned by dozens of plasma bolts.

Of course, just because they were dedicated to their mission did not mean that they were eager to get burned. The Ur-Titans pushed their smaller colleagues forward just so that they could move out of the effective range of all of the organic plasma guns.

However, this was not the only means the battle moon relied upon to defend itself!

"WATCH OUT, GIANTS! TENTACLES INCOMING!"

Within seconds, hundreds of tentacles burst out of the fleshy exterior of the battle moon and struck over half-a-dozen giants!

Many of them suffered severe kinetic impacts and flew off-course!

Though the giants recovered quickly and continued their desperate flight, the tentacles kept growing longer and longer until they tried to envelop the escaping interlopers!

Though numerous giants managed to slip away, three giants got caught!

The tentacles pressed onto their faltering spatial barriers and threatened to bring them back!

Chapter 7304: The Divine Dilemma

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A major accident occurred!

Three giants got caught by the battle moon's tentacles!

One of them was an Ur-Titan that possessed a fairly large body.

The other two consisted of Faceless Giants who possessed much smaller bodies.

Despite his size, the Ur-Titan inspired greater confidence. His expression showed that he was still full of defiance. His superior strength and phasewater concentration meant that he was tougher to take down. He was able to exert more force and his spatial barrier was also a lot more resistant.

The condition of the latter happened to be a lot more pessimistic.

The Faceless Giants were much smaller relative to the tentacles. Although that also made it harder for multiple tentacles to latch onto them, that was not that big of a problem as they simply stacked on top of each other.

The smaller giants already started to disappear from sight!

"Get off!"

"Save them!"

Both Ur-Titans and Faceless Giants briefly converged on their trapped comrades. They relied on a combination of physical force, spatial abilities and companion spirit abilities to dislodge the tentacles.

They achieved a lot of initial successes. While the tentacles appeared thick and strong, the reality was that they were made out of low-quality flesh and materials.

In the face of the power of many phase lords, the tentacles broke and spilled blood in every direction!

Multiple tentacles tore apart as they sought to free their trapped comrades.

However, the battle moon's greatest strength was not its resilience, but its abundant resources!

Even as tentacle after tentacle got torn away, more of them spawned into existence and replaced the existing ones.

The Divine Harpoon scowled as he relied upon his bare strength to tear a tentacle apart by himself.

Unlike his subordinates, his size and strength was much greater on account of being a strategies. This made it much easier for him to destroy the alien entanglement, but he was just a single combatant.

When matched up against a battle moon that could dynamically spawn more tentacles by relying on its vast flesh reserves, his strength was ultimately feeble, especially when he was not specialized in close-ranged combat!

In fact, most of the giants were proficient in melee combat, but that did not matter all that much when they were lacking in gear.

Without the right weapons and armor, their combat effectiveness was just a fraction as powerful!

The Divine Harpoon clearly saw that there was no end to this threat. Even as he and his subordinates kept tearing apart the tentacles by relying on their collective strength, the battle moon's rate of replenishment proved to be too great!

Without inflicting serious damage to the VOBM, the alien megaconstruct could easily spawn new tentacles at will.

In fact, the amount of tentacles that entangled the three human phase lords had not decreased, but increased!

The situation was growing worse over time!

Not only was the quantity of tentacles increasing, but the biological plasma cannons had never ceased firing.

The mutated voribugs no longer swarmed the giants directly, but showed a bit of tactical acumen by circling around so that they could form a blockade around the escape routes.

In short, the longer this situation persisted, the greater the probability that more giants would end up getting stuck!

The Divine Harpoon clearly fell into a dilemma. It was too hard for his men to put up a serious fight without adequate wargear. The difference it made was far too great. Many giants already resembled the decision to deploy without their arms and armor.

The giants now faced an agonizing choice. They could either choose to abandon their trapped comrades and flee with their remaining lives and bounty intact, or they could persist and risk losing the lives of more giants in the process!

This dilemma paralyzed them for a time.

While the Rubarthans kept transmitting instructions for the Ascended Giants to cut their losses and abandon their trapped colleagues, the human phase lords felt unwilling to abandon their comrades!

Regardless of whether they were Ur-Titans or Faceless Giants, they all considered each other kin. They were like a huge extended family. Abandoning their brothers and sisters in the face of this alien peril would be an agonizing decision!

Though most of them used to be professional soldiers who knew that they needed to be cold-blooded at times, their new lives as Ascended Giants had given them the illusion that they had become powerful enough to ignore these tradeoffs.

They never expected their first mission under their new leader to put them back in such a dire situation!

At this time, the giants failed to form a single consensus on the problem, and that turned into a problem.

With more and more tentacles converging on the giants, the rescuers may end up needing saving in short order!

It was at this time that they needed clarity and decisiveness the most!

Just before the tentacles enveloping the trapped Ur-Titan grew strong enough to reel him into the fleshy embrace of the battle moon, sharp and powerful shards of ice suddenly appeared from the distance and cut into the fleshy appendages!

The sharp ice shards cut and wounded the tentacles with unusual effectiveness!

Even if the ice elemental attacks failed to sever the large and thick tentacles straight away, the damage they suffered was already enough to weaken them by 10 to 50 percent, which was more than enough for the surrounding giants to tear them apart in short order!

"I HAVE ARRIVED!"

Reinforcements had arrived. Against the strong recommendations of the Rubarthans, Ves had chosen to step onto the battlefield in person.

He chose to let out the Dark Apostle.

While his alter ego lacked the high-quality wargear that had been prepared back in the Bluejay Fleet, he was better off than the rest of his giants.

That was because he could still resort to other solutions.

At this time, the value of a size-changing artifact had skyrocketed.

Previously, Ves had begun to favor the Oceancaller less and less.

He no longer held much interest in deepening his understanding of the water element now that he had roughly formed his foundation in this field.

As a pure melee weapon, Ves could easily make use of other armaments that were much more effective at close range.

He could rely on a plasma weapon if he wanted to burn lots of voribugs.

He could also wield a superdimensional spear if he wanted to penetrate the spatial barriers of enemy phase leaders.

Whacking them apart with the physical bulk of the Oceancaller seemed much less effective and more primitive by comparison.

At the same time, the boost in water manipulation may be considerable, but Ves never regarded himself as a qi cultivator who specialized in the water element.

His ability to leverage the water element to attack, defend or other tasks was not impressive.

Even if he was actively making use of Blinky's talent in energy control, he and the Dark Apostle's lack of comprehension and affinity in water hindered their applications.

However, it just so happened that their mediocre water manipulation capabilities proved helpful during this crucial stage!

Due to the positioning of the ship that Ves previously boarded, the Dark Apostle was only able to lend a hand to the trapped Ur-Titan.

Although he also wanted to rescue the pair of trapped Faceless Giants, they were positioned on the other sides of the large battle moon!

Even if the Dark Apostle could circle around and launch ice shards at the tentacles that trapped his other subordinates, the time expended on this plan was too great!

The spatial barriers of many Faceless Giants had already reached their limits at this time.

In fact, the Dark Apostle already observed a couple of them that had backed away because their spatial barriers had already broken apart!

Their bodies became vulnerable and a few of them even started to suffer serious plasma burns!

"Rescue the Reed King!" The Dark Apostle roared over the communication channel!

Now that he had stepped in, he did not want his efforts to go to waste. This was no time for the giants to waver. They needed to rescue the precious Ur-Titan at all cost!

"Sir! What about the Divine Wheel and the Divine Aporia?" The strategies of the Faceless Giant Phalanx asked.

"I have called for Rubarthan reinforcements to assist in their rescue. They have 20 seconds."

The Rubarthans had not just sent out their upgraded scout missions to the VOBM.

At this time, dozens of hidden assets turned off their cloaking technology and began to open fire with whatever weapon systems they possessed!

Stealth mechs and stealth shuttles launched precision attacks that did not possess a lot of power, but helped with severing one tentacle after another.

However, the Divine Wheel and the Divine Aporia still remained trapped!

The stealth assets were divided among the two due to their positioning. It was far too difficult for them to concentrate their fire. They had no choice but to keep up their current efforts, yet that failed to change the status

quo.

The battle moon kept regrowing the damaging tentacles in less than a minute!

Its rate of replenishment was too fast, especially when the composition of the tentacles was not that complicated

in the first place.

The simpler the flesh structure of the mutated voribugs, the easier it was for the insects to regenerate the damage.

While the gesture of the Rubarthans briefly boosted the morale of the giants, the trapped giants still remained under the entanglement of too numerous tentacles.

In fact, the pressure they endured became so great that their spatial barriers eventually collapsed!

"Ahhhhh!"

"My bones are getting crushed!"

Just as the Dark Apostle's assistance proved timely and helpful enough to free the trapped Ur-Titan, he simultaneously made a painful decision.

"WITHDRAW! THEY CAN'T BE SAVED ANYMORE. DO NOT LET THEIR SACRIFICE GO TO WASTE. YOU CAN AVENGE THEM LATER, BUT DON'T LET THE BATTLE MOON TRAP YOU AS WELL.

As unwilling as they felt, the Ascended Giants hadn't lost their sanity. They still retained enough good sense to understand the meaning of sacrifice.

As their expressions betrayed their inner turmoil, the remaining giants nonetheless abandoned the Divine Wheel and the Divine Aporia to their fates.

Even as the pair of the Faceless Giants screamed and broadcasted their final tortuous words, the giants Armed up their massive hearts and focused on withdrawal.

While many of them had lost their spatial barriers at this time, the strength of the Ur-Titans proved decisive

enough.

Not only did they lead the vanguard and smash through the obstruction of hundreds of thousands of mutated voribugs, they also relied on their larger bodies to swat and push away lots of enemies!

Though bug after bug landed on their unarmored bodies and tried to gnaw on their skin and flesh, their progress was too slow due to their horrible efficiency of burrowing into the flesh of a phase lord.

With the help of the Dark Apostle's water manipulation and the precision attacks of the Rubarthan stealth assets, the remaining giants eventually managed to escape the reach of the VOBM's plasma cannons and tentacles.

The giants hastily returned to the waiting scout vessels and eagerly shrunk in size until they reached the scale of

ordinary humans.

At this time, their reluctance to return to their human-sized statures no longer mattered.

Their greatest priority was to get away with their lives intact!

They could worry about the decision to abandon two of their comrades later. Right now, they needed to retreat to

space that red humanity still controlled!

The further they moved away from the scary battle moon, the better!

Many of the giants closed their eyes and ignored the haunting screams of the Divine Wheel and the Divine Aporia.

By this time, their communications with the entangled Faceless Giants had cut off. Whether this was due to signal blockage or worse, they could not tell. (More chapters t.me/+z7ieNjQSLFMzMmY6)

Chapter 7305: Bitter Truths

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The mood among the Ascended Giants assigned to the Bluejay Fleet remained glum during the return journey.

As soon as the Dark Apostle reluctantly shrunk his true body and relinquished control back to Ves, the former also foisted this mess onto his other self.

"I am not good with this stuff. You deal with this problem."

Ves grimaced but did not reject this responsibility.

As a leading figure and a former patriarch, he was no stranger to sacrifice. He had driven the lives of many Larkinsons to their deaths due to his decisions and mistakes.

This time was no different except for the fact that this was the first time that two Ascended Giants fell as a consequence of his orders and decisions.

He could not escape culpability for the losses suffered during the reconnaissance mission.

Suffice to say, the surviving giants did not feel happy about this. They had been thrown into an adverse situation and had been forced to confront a completely unfamiliar alien super enemy.

If their luck was any worse, they could have easily suffered double or even triple losses!

Even so, the unfortunate demise of the Divine Wheel and the Divine Aporia was already far too much as far as most giants were concerned.

Ves also thought this way. He still felt that if he formed a more meticulous plan or let the Dark Apostle accompany his troops from the start, he may have been able to prevent the losses from occurring.

He shook his head.

Thinking too much about what-ifs was a dead end. Ves had led enough operations to overcome this kind of guilt.

If he wanted to atone for any perceived mistakes, then he needed to focus on doing better next time.

He already began to formulate a few ideas on how to prevent this outcome from happening again. He needed to have a good talk with the cadre of the Phase Lord Department in order to explore which ones they should pursue.

For now, he was more interested in learning whether the sacrifice had been worth it. Had they managed to retrieve enough data?

"We are still analyzing the data, Ves." The projection of Lord Richard Brownstone responded. "Your men have retrieved 21 out of 30 data modules. That is less than ideal. While the remaining 9 data spikes transmitted crucial data to the scout vessels, they only managed to do so for a short amount of time before the battle moon crushed them apart. Whether that is enough to understand the full scope of the battle moon remains to be seen. From what we are able to gather so far, the VOBM is anything but a simple collection of low-quality flesh. There are significant anomalies hidden beneath the surface that have taken all of us by surprise. We should have preliminary answers available to you by the time you return to Philaster Crestia III."

That sounded rather mysterious. The Rubarthan analysts may have gotten stumped by what the data had shown to them. That reinforced the theory that the enemy battle moon possessed a hidden secret.

If nobody took the initiative to probe the VOBM at an early stage, then it may have been able to catch the Rubarthan defenders off-guard during a critical moment!

"Tell me everything once I get back." Ves responded in a serious tone. "My troops have suffered. I at least need to know whether their sacrifice was not in vain. I hope you will also abide by the agreement of compensating my department for our losses."

"No problem." Richard said. "We have no intention of hiding the results of our analysis. We know who is responsible for helping us understand the depth of the enemy battle moon. You are entitled to know the full details. As for compensation, we have no intention of reneging on our promises. The Brownstone Principality is already arranging a shipment of phasewater and other precious materials to the headquarters of the Phase Lord Department. We estimate that this should be enough to nurture two human phase lords."

The compensation could not bring back the dead, but the resources should at least make it a lot easier to replace the losses. That was all Ves could ask for. He did not dare to issue any excessive demands.

"That is all I wanted to hear for the time being. We will talk more once I return."

The call ended.

Ves spent a few minutes on paying attention to enemy pursuit.

The voribugs originally assigned to guard the battle moon had become incensed after the phase lords damaged the exterior of the castle.

Although the VOMB maintained its position for the time being, hundreds of thousands of mutated voribugs still chased after the retreating vessels. The annoying bugs showed no sign of giving up. It would be problematic if other bugs appeared and blocked their passage.

The Rubarthan spacers were not blind. They could think up this possibility as well, which was why they took more precautions.

Strangely enough, no surprise ambushes took place during the return trip. The bug swarms chasing after the scout vessels never turned away. The Goliath Hive simply sent them on a chase without bothering to command them to stop for whatever reason.

The defenders of Philaster Crestia III eventually wiped them out as soon as the insects entered into weapon range. They all died without achieving anything important aside from deterring the scout vessels from attempting a second reconnaissance mission.

Maybe that was the point. More than a few people started to suspect that the mutated voribugs initiated a secret change.

Ves was not so sure about this theory. He was much more inclined to believe that the Goliath Hive simply issued a casual order to all of those bugs before forgetting about their existence.

In any case, they were not a problem anymore. He briefly accompanied the giants as they transferred back to the Armitage and remained in control over their emotions.

Most of the Ascended Giants definitely harbored varying degrees of discontent in their hearts. If Ves did not address them right away, their approval towards him would definitely suffer a significant blow.

Fortunately, the return trip gave Ves enough ideas on how to resolve this problem. He did not let the Ascended Giants rest, but instead called them over to a large assembly hall in order to hold an important discussion.

As they all filed into the cavernous chamber, the entrance closed. No mortal human was allowed to listen in to this conversation.

All of the Ascended Giants had restored their true bodies to the size of a mech by this time.

Ves naturally did not insist on addressing them in his human form. He took a deep breath before he began to unfold his true body.

The Dark Apostle took over again. Though he possessed a different mind, he could still reference the thoughts and plans of his weaker self.

Ves knew the Dark Apostle too well, for his plans just so happened to align with his goals and ideology.

The polemarchos of the Ascended Giants twitched his lips. The giant leader did not appreciate the blatant manipulation, but he truly saw no better way to address this problem.

He stared into the gazes of his subordinates. The Divine Harpoon and a couple of other giants still maintained their trust in their leader. The rest showed signs that they were upset with their new leader.

The Dark Apostle intended to address the latter. He did not necessarily need to conquer all of them. Even a partial success could already stabilize his position among the powerful troops.

"Giants." He began. "Today is not a good day. Two of our comrades have left our side. The Divine Wheel and the Divine Aporia will be remembered as the first giant casualties of the Voribug War. I will not pretend that we could have avoided this outcome if we approached this mission differently or refused it outright. I bear responsibility for this. You can blame me all you want for ordering you to approach an biological battle moon with completely unknown capabilities. However, rather than blaming me or obsessing over the details, it is best if I clarify a few truths."

"What truths may that be, sir?" The Divine Harpoon asked in genuine curiosity.

"First, you all need to shed whatever arrogance lingers in your mind." The Dark Apostle firmly stated. "Ever since I took over, I told you guys that dreaming about independence is a fool's errand at this stage. Most of you have only just ascended to your current forms in less than a year. You are practically babies compared to more seasoned alien phase leaders. Whatever delusions of grandeur that you have gone through in the process is an illusion. If you cannot match the strength of just a single hastily grown Voribug Organic Battle Moon, what makes you think you can challenge the human race or other alien races of the Red Ocean?"

Nobody could refute this logic. The Dark Apostle could observe from the changing expressions that the giants reluctantly swallowed this bitter pill.

Good.

Their critical thinking ability had not completely atrophied. That made this situation a bit better.

The Dark Apostle was not afraid of dealing with stupid giants. What he truly could not tolerate were giants who refused to learn and do better.

"This is just the first truth that you must acknowledge. Without sufficient strength, it is useless to think about greater ambitions. Wait until one of you has become an Ancient Phase Lord before thinking about setting up your own independent group. Follow the example of the Huntsman and the Polymath. Do not make a move before you have gained the power of a True God."

Whether the giants would abide by this recommendation remained to be seen. Subsequent rounds of indoctrination from the Red Ocean would lead them astray again.

"Another truth that I wish to impart to you all is that we truly cannot do without human support. You may dislike the humans all you want, but they are highly accomplished in science, engineering and most recently cultivation science. Now that you have completed an operation without the use of human-designed and human-produced wargear, do you think you can develop this all by yourselves?"

The Dark Apostle sardonically smirked. "Thought so. I have told you this before, but I will repeat my words again. Technology is an incredibly powerful asset. It can give weaklings the power to destroy the strong. This is why we must do our best to take advantage of human innovations. You have witnessed first-hand how weak you are without your raiments and your giant-sized armaments. I believe that this will not be the last time that you will be forced into a fight without the right equipment at hand."

Several giants scowled. They hated the reminder of their recent helplessness.

"How can we become stronger, sir?"

The young polemarchos grinned. "I am glad you asked. In my opinion, we need to rethink our approach towards combat. We have obsessed too much over drawing our strength from rigid wargear that we have neglected other sources of power. Phasewater organs can grant us strength and allow us to manipulate the fabric of space. Our equipment also needs to fit us better. If we can develop scalable gear or find a way to carry pocket spaces with us, we will be able to fight our enemies at our full strength at any time."

This was clearly a big subject that required a lot of debate and exploration. The Dark Apostle needed to sit down with the cadre of the Ascended Giants and have a good talk about fleshing out the combat system of their kind.

One of the most important lessons that Ves and the Dark Apostle had learned on this day was that trying to imitate mechs was not a good idea.

The Ascended Giants possessed their own distinctive traits. Their mentalities also differed from alien phase lords and phase whales, which meant that they were open to embracing new ideas.

As far as the Dark Apostle was concerned, the Ascended Giants were still young enough that they could be

molded like clay!

They could turn into anything so long as the giants were still in a transitional period. More chapters t.me/+z7ieNjQSLFMzMmY6

Chapter 7306: The Core of the Battle Moon

Chapter 7306: The Core of the Battle Moon

After spending a bit of time and effort, the Dark Apostle gradually managed to placate his giants.

He reframed the events and painted the casualties in a different light.

"We are not the chosen ones in this galaxy or reality." He told the gathered giants. "We are the underdogs. Just as the human race had to struggle for survival throughout the Age of Conquest, we must constantly prove our right to exist now that we have entered the Age of Dawn. Courage. Strength. Persistence. These are the qualities we need to develop if we want to gain a sustainable foothold in this dwarf galaxy. Currently, we are unable to satisfy this minimum standard, which is why two of our brothers has failed to pass this test. We have failed to pass this test."

The giants all looked subdued and admonished. The Dark Apostle spoke in a judging tone because he truly felt that he and his people failed to do a good enough job of proving themselves during this ordeal.

They clearly could not go on like this. At the very least, the Dark Apostle wanted to wake his fellow giants up and remind them of certain truths.

"Power is not bestowed. It is seized. The recent mission shows what happens to giants who fail to do the latter. The qualities that you have demonstrated during the encounter with the battle moon is decent, but far from enough to survive the subsequent ordeals. Gear is not enough to establish your strength as Ascended Giants. Our race has other advantages, from phasewater organs to qi cultivation. Neglecting these means of strengthening is stupid. Since we are so weak that even the Goliath Hive can topple us over, we do not have the luxury to neglect these aspects."

The Dark Apostle continued to hammer the point that the Ascended Giants needed to work a lot harder to become strong enough to survive the Red Ocean.

Acting as if they had already become the favored sons of the Red Ocean just as they turned into human phase lords instilled the wrong mentality in their heads.

He knew that words alone could not fully shake off their acquired sense of arrogance, so he had to be more unscrupulous and take advantage of an awful incident like this to truly hammer home his point.

Fortunately, it worked. More and more Ascended Giants found it difficult to maintain their pride and conceit during this debriefing.

Even if it was not quite fair for him to blame the deaths of the two giants on these reasons, it was still a good way for the Dark Apostle to cast aside responsibility and divert the attention of his men.

"Make no mistake, giants." He said as he stared into everyone's eyes. "Tests like these will keep coming. Even if the new frontier is at peace for a time, I will not allow you to grow too comfortable. The Ascended Giants must continue to fight and struggle in order to definitively prove our right to exist. This is non-negotiable as far as I am concerned. In this respect, the weakest groups of our kind must fight the hardest. It is not a coincidence that a pair of Faceless Giants has perished today. They are challengers who have yet to earn a place in an elite phalanx. So long as this is the case, they will always be smaller and weaker than an Ur-Titan or a Flesh Chopper."

The Faceless Giants grimaced. The last incident had made the differences between them and the Ur-Titans a lot more pronounced.

The difference in scale, skills and judgment had become particularly obvious during the reconnaissance mission. Even the weakest Ur-Titan had still managed to prove a lot stronger and more resilient compared to the strongest Faceless Giant after the strategos.

It was as if the Faceless Giants were still children compared to the Ur-Titans!

This was how big the difference between the two groups had become!

The Dark Apostle grinned at the frustration and resentment shown by the Faceless Giants.

"That is it. Those are the looks I wanted to see from you all. Without ambition, how can you pursue strength? It is only right for you to acknowledge that you are weak. Only then will you fight with greater sincerity. As far as I am concerned, more and more Faceless Giants will perish as the Red War and the Voribug War progress. It cannot be helped. Your strength is weak while our opposition is strong. Only by confronting our enemies on a repeated basis will you learn how to cope with worthy foes and earn your place among the strong."

Ves and the Dark Apostle both agreed that this was necessary. Instead of cherishing the lives of every single Faceless Giant as if they were delicate treasures, was better to treat them as raw ores.

They all had the potential of greatness, but they were too immature at this time.

Only by tossing them into the crucible of war would the Faceless Giants be able to develop their strength and realize their potential in the shortest possible time.

This was an inherently harsh and cruel process. War was not kind to participants, and the Dark Apostle had no doubt that dozens more Faceless Giants would die or become crippled in the coming years.

He was already prepared to treat the standard phalanges as the proven grounds for the strong.

Even if there was no crisis taking place at the moment, he could always manufacture one in order to put the Faceless Giants through a dangerous ordeal.

A part of the Dark Apostle might feel guilty about this, but this was necessary step to nurturing the strength of

his kind.

The Societal Revival Theory did not apply to the human race alone. It was universal enough to apply to the giants as well.

The lecture continued. After the Dark Apostle conveyed his main points to his subordinates, he began to cast his vision to the future.

"We will all do better in the future. The latest incident has exposed very glaring shortcomings that we must address in one way or another. It will become necessary for all of you to embrace methods that you ordinarily do not approve of. You will learn the details in time once we have managed to flesh out the details."

The Dark Apostle was not yet willing to discuss the specifics because he had not yet set them all in stone.

His vision for the ideal version of an Ascended Giants had to be multifaceted and comprehensive.

However, Ves understood that it was not realistic for his men to develop in multiple different fields at once.

All of this demanded a lot of consideration from himself as well as others. He did not dare to make decisions by himself in this important matter.

Once the session came to an end, the Dark Apostle dismissed the giants.

While they grew curious about the results of the deep scanning attempt, the polemarchos did not have the answers.

"I shall share the details later once I have finished my next appointment. The Rubarthans will give us answers soon enough."

When the giants reluctantly exited the assembly chamber, the Dark Apostle waited for a few more minutes until the projection of the Rubarthan liaison came online.

"Thank you for your patience, Ves... or is it the Dark Apostle?" Lord Richard Brownstone sounded a little uncertain.

"The latter." The Dark Apostle calmly answered. "You promised answers. Now give them, human."

The Rubarthan mech designer did not look pleased when addressed in this manner, but he knew better than to cause an incident.

He instead activated a projection that showed a simplified model of a cross section of the Voribug Organic Battle Moon.

"This is what the VOBM looks like on the inside. As you can see, the level of detail is not entirely sufficient. There are gaps and areas of uncertainty where greater clarity remains absent. Nonetheless, with the complete data of 21 units and the incomplete data of 9 units, we have been able to gain a detailed enough overview to make a number of crucial deductions."

The projection of Richard lifted his finger and pointed at the very center of the cross-section.

"Does this shape look familiar?"

The Dark Apostle frowned as he took a closer look at the strange shape at the center. It initially looked like an irregular spherical core, but now that he studied the contours a little more, it did not appear to be a uncomplicated gathering of higher-density matter.

It took half a minute for the Dark Apostle to make a gradual realization.

The cross-section image did not make it too obvious, but he was sure he could connect dots a lot sooner if he obtained a three-dimensional image of the scan data.

"Is this... an embryo?"

Richard nodded. "We are 90 percent of this. Our initial assumptions were inaccurate. We believed that the VOBM was large but not particularly outstanding. Although it has absorbed modest quantities of higher-grade materials during its short existence, we thought that the battle moon would disperse them across its entire structure. The scans disproved this theory. The battle moon deliberately concentrates more precious materials to the core. All of the flesh around the center can be regarded as a colossal shell."

"It looks as if the Goliath Hive has created a giant incubation chamber." The Dark Apostle concluded.

"We believe so as well. While we are still convinced that the VOBM is meant to function as a massive siege engine, this is not its sole purpose. We have modeled different scenarios of how the decisive battle might unfold. This will undoubtedly become a difficult struggle where our side will suffer considerable losses. That is already bad enough, but when we take into account that the mutated voribugs can scavenge our defeated assets, the scenarios become much darker. Think about what happens if the bugs can retrieve our defeated mechs, warships and orbital defense platforms."

The Dark Apostle widened his eyes. "They will probably throw it all into the battle moon!"

"Exactly! We believe that the battle moon will be able to process the wrecks at a very fast pace. Low-grade materials will get broken down quickly and be used in the production of cannon fodder bugs. Higher-grade materials will be transferred to the core where they will contribute to the growth and development of a formidable Goliath. At the very least, the VOBM acts as an incubator for a Level 7 Goliath. The more pessimistic scenario is that the battle moon serves to incubate a Level 8 Goliath."

Level 8 Goliath!

That roughly corresponded to the strength of a greater phase lord or a senior ace pilot!

If this was true, then the birth of such a powerful Goliath would spell the end of the Battle of Philaster Crestia!

Even with 28 Ascended Giants in the star system, the Dark Apostle found it difficult to believe that his troops would be able to rely on numbers to overcome the absolute gap in strength!

Maybe their situation would become a lot more optimistic once they acquired better gear and gained more experience, but they were not ready to confront enemies of this magnitude at this time.

As the Dark Apostle continued to stare at the diagrams and images, he had a feeling that the VOBM truly meant business in this star system. More chapters in t.me/+z7ieNjQSLFMzMmY6

Chapter 7307: Hungry Moon

Chapter 7307: Hungry Moon

The Rubarthans eventually made a number of important conclusions about the Voribug Organic Battle Moon.

First, it would take a lot of firepower to destroy it. The outer and middle layers of the battle moon were not particularly tough, but they were very thick. What was worse was that the megaconstruct could rapidly regrow its missing mass as long as the attack intensity was not too high.

Second, the defenders could not underestimate the offensive capabilities of the VOBM. Even if it did not concentrate enough high-quality materials on the surface to grow particularly large or powerful weapon systems, the surface area was still so great that it was able to cover its entire exterior with plasma cannons and other uncomplicated weapon systems.

The quality did not matter too much. So long as the numbers were great enough, the VOBM could easily overwhelm the defenses of any warship or orbital fortress, especially at closer ranges.

Third, this was just a prototype. The Goliath Hive would definitely grow more battle moons in the future due to how useful they may be. Using them to assault heavily-defended planets might yield exaggerated results depending on their properties.

The Rubarthans already theorized that the Goliath Hive might develop other variations of battle moons. They labeled the one that showed up in the Philaster Crestia System as an Incubator, or more formally a Class I Voribug Organic Battle Moon. Out of all of the races in the Red Ocean, only the voribugs possessed the capability to rapidly grow and nurture a Level 7, Level 8 or maybe even a Level 9 Goliath in the field!

"The Goliath Princess is going out of her way to differentiate her hive from the other ones." Lord Richard Brownstone passed on the conclusions of the Rubarthan experts. "In the nascent and rudimentary politics of the voribug race, every hive is in competition with each other. They must not only justify their existence, but also earn enough victories to divert more resources in their direction. We do not believe that a race as diverse and fast-growing as the mutated voribugs are content with limiting themselves to 6 hives."

That depended on the thoughts of the mysterious Devourer Queen. The Dark Apostle still knew way too little about the leader of the mutated voribugs. He only knew that she was extremely powerful given what Ves had felt during the moment the battle moon spawned all of those eyeballs. The moment of exposure started and ended so quickly that it was impossible to glean much details about the alien queen's personality.

As the Dark Apostle continued to stare at the projection of the so-called Incubator, he began to frown. "It shouldn't be so easy for the mutated voribugs to produce a Level 7 or Level 8 Goliath." The leader of the Ascended Giants remarked. "Power comes from sacrifice. The higher the rank, the more exaggerated the price. How can we prevent the voribugs from spawning a powerful Goliath during the next engagement?"

Richard's projection smiled. "We have already formed a number of theories related to this subject. It is absolutely true that the Goliath Hive is seeking to win a battle by relying on its unique rules and principles. Conquering this star system by flooding our defenses with cannon fodder bugs is a lazy approach that will not do much to grant the hive an advantage. Only by using large units as the fulcrum will the Goliath Hive prove its worthiness in front of the Devourer Queen."

This was an analysis that relied on a lot of spurious and unproven assumptions. Ves wondered whether the Rubarthans were projecting their own selves into the voribugs too much.

Just as the New Rubarth Empire was supposed to be a highly centralized group that acted upon the will of a single ruler, the mutated voribug race also happened to fit this description. Perhaps these similarities encouraged the Rubarthans to think that their latest enemies operated along identical political rules.

In their eyes, the hives practically served as a mirror to the principalities of the Rubarthan Pact. Just as how the Rubarthan princes still fought against each other to decide who among them deserved to ascend to the throne, the leaders of the hives sought to earn the status as the crown princess and the successor to the Devourer Queen.

The Dark Apostle inwardly shook his head. There was no need for him to point out this idea. The Rubarthans would probably take offense if they learned about this comparison. "Can you be more specific?"

Richard pointed at the core of the battle moon. "The birth of a high-leveled Goliath is highly dependent on the input. High-grade exotics and hypers of greater quantities are needed to form a very strong body that can withstand the attacks of ace mechs and greater phase lords. However, we do not believe that matter alone can make up the difference. The mind and soul becomes increasingly more important to high-level Goliaths. Even if they are not the focus of the mutated voribugs, they have no choice but to elevate them if the mutated voribugs want to support the emergence of ever more powerful Goliaths."

The Dark Apostle nodded in agreement. Ves had very strong ideas about this. The explanation fell in line with his theoretical framework. He soon began to connect the dots. "Wait. By input you do not necessarily mean materials, right? The reason for the Goliath Hive to create a costly battle moon and drive it to a heavily defended planet is to absorb our champions, is that correct?"

The scion of the Brownstone Principality grimly nodded. "In hindsight, we believe that the appearance of the Voribug Organic Battle Moon may have been a trap. The mutated voribugs have noticed the presence of a large amount of Ascended Giants in our sun system. If the sentient and intelligent members of the voribug race has paid close attention to this location, then they could have predicted that we would have sent the Ascended Giants to scout the battle moon in question."

"Which is exactly what the Goliath Hive wants. Damn. We put our giants right at the doorstep of a battle moon that is hungry for transcendents!" In order for the Incubator to spawn a Level 8 or Level 9 Goliath, it not only needed to absorb the phasewater of captured Ascended Giants, but also devour their powerful spiritualities!

While the spirits of body cultivators were not particularly excellent, they were not too weak, or else they were unable to support their oversized physiques. What made this situation worse was that the spiritualities of the Ascended Giants were noticeably stronger than alien phase lords of

equivalent progress. This was because every Ascended Giant had swallowed a companion spirit fruit and developed their own companion spirits!

As elites meant to fight on humanity's side, this benefit came as a standard package to them. While that made the Ascended Giants stronger and more perceptive, it also turned them into juicier targets to the Goliath Hive!

Lord Richard Brownstone's expression turned grim. "The Goliath Hive has demonstrated a certain degree of cunning and unpredictability. It is a mistake to think that our new enemies are primitive and incapable of complex strategy. Of course, there is a chance that we are attributing intent among the voribugs where there happens to be none, but it is better to err on the side of caution. What matters is that your two captured Ascended Giants have significantly contributed to the growth and maturation of the Goliath being incubated."

The battle moon turned out to be a hungry soul-devouring maw. It yearned to absorb as many high-ranking mech pilots and phase leaders as possible. Their physical bodies would feed the corpus of the Goliath while their powerful spiritualities would end up strengthening the intangible elements of the megabug.

Realizing this put the upcoming battle in a very different context. "I understand now." The Dark Apostle said. "In the decisive battle, the Goliath Hive will try its best to defeat our champions. Not only that, the mutated voribugs will do their best to capture the remains and throw them into the battle moon. Expert pilots, ace pilots, Ascended Giants and even qi cultivators are all attractive food in the eyes of the mutated voribugs. The more we lose, the more the Goliath Hive will gain. Once the Incubator has absorbed enough high-quality food..."

An entirely new monster would emerge on the center of the battlefield! A Level 7 Goliath already proved difficult to resist. The Dark Apostle could not imagine how much worse a Level 8 or even a Level 9 Goliath would be. The ridiculous regeneration capabilities alone would make it impossible to defeat such a giant alien in a short amount of time!

This was especially the case if the battle moon remained intact for the most part. Its very existence alone would boost the performance of all Goliaths solely due to the fact that it could serve as an immense biomass reserve! Anytime a Goliath suffered severe injuries, it only needed to approach the VOBM and transfer enough biomass to heal the damage.

It would take a long time to exhaust all of the biomass of the battle moon! Even if it ended up sacrificing all of its remaining organic matter, the Goliath Hive could simply resort to sacrificing lots of regular voribugs in order to make up for any shortfalls.

In short, the adversary would be going into the next major battle with fantastic advantages if the engagement turned into an hours-long slog. The more the fight devolved into a battle of attrition, the more the balance would tilt in the favor of the Goliath Hive!

"The Incubator is a hungry moon." Richard concluded his analysis. "Feeding it will favor the enemy. All we need to do is to prevent that from happening."

"That... sounds difficult given that we have posted a lot of high-quality food around this planet. I suppose I can order my Ascended Giants to withdraw, but that will leave Philaster Crestia III with a huge shortfall in protectors. I imagine that your armed forces are suffering from the same

dilemma. Sending away your expert pilots and ace pilots will deprive the battle moon of the opportunity of swallowing high-quality food, but it will leave the remaining defenders vulnerable to getting overwhelmed."

The Goliaths were too strong. No matter what substrain they came in, every megavoribug possessed the capacity to break human defenses and cause huge amounts of disruption! If the Goliath Hive employed enough strategy and specifically utilized the Goliaths in this manner, then there was virtually no chance to hold this star system.

For better or worse, the Rubarthans needed the strength of its champions to hold this location. The fall of this sun system would deprive the Rubarthan Pact of a relatively important link in its defensive lines.

Richard's projection stared into the Dark Apostle's eyes and nodded. "I see you have made the same conclusions. The Goliath Hive may have developed the Incubator in order to use our strength against us, but we will not let its existence intimidate us into withdrawing our own champions. The loss in morale alone will condemn us to defeat. No matter what, we must hold the line and instill our confidence in our own assets. We can devise more effective countermeasures later once we have observed everyone's performance."

In other words, the Rubarthans regarded the decisive battle as a test. They wanted to see whether their current defensive measures could hold up against the Goliath Hive's latest measures. At the same time, they wanted to see whether the mutated voribugs proved clever enough to develop an effective counter against red humanity's high- ranked assets.

"I am not sure about whether it is a good idea to let my Ascended Giants participate in this battle." The Dark Apostle said. "If there is an elevated risk that they will be captured and tossed into the hungry moon, then it may be better for them to keep their distance."

Chapter 7308: Successful Treatment

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Time progressed. Now that the Rubarthans had gathered lots of data and completed their analysis, they began to make targeted adjustments in order to better meet the incoming enemies. The Rubarthan high command did not hide its terrible conclusions. Information began to spread among the ranks, causing numerous soldiers to develop a whole new level of fear towards the so-called Class I Voribug Organic Battle Moon!

When Ves regained control over his true body, he tried to make the most of the remaining time. The Goliath Hive no longer hung back any longer. Now that the Rubarthan defenders exposed the true capabilities of the Incubator, the mutated voribugs had begun to advance towards the main planet that still remained in human hands.

When Ves returned to the Tarrasque, Jovy Armalon immediately sought him out in order to hold a private meeting. "What is it now, Jovy? There is not much time before the decisive battle happens. I need to use every minute to upgrade my gear and figure out a way to undermine the Incubator. I

can't let the mutated voribugs get away with killing two of my giants. We at least need to inflict a heavy blow onto the aliens. So what did you bring this time?"

His friend gestured for Ves to calm down. "I have good news and bad news for you. What would you like to hear first?"

"Let's get the bad news out of the way."

"Very well, Ves. I can tell you that no more reinforcements are forthcoming. The frontlines of the Rubarthan Pact are already strained. All of the mercenaries and private forces that can be mobilized at this time are either committed, ruined or too far away to reach the Philaster Crestia System in time. High-ranking mech pilots are especially in short supply. Outside of the Bluejay Fleet which is operating under your purview, the RA and the RF have withdrawn all military assets from Rubarthan space. This is the price of freedom. Since the Rubarthans are so eager to forge an independent sun empire, they must have the ability to defend their territory against all aggressors."

"What if... they aren't able to hold their borders?" Ves tentatively asked.

The tension in the compartment grew. The consequences of failure were too great. While the fall of the Philaster Crestia System alone would not trigger a domino effect, its fall at this stage of the Voribug War definitely made it harder to hold onto the surrounding sun systems.

The Red War already taught red humanity that every location needed to be fought over. A failure in one star system could easily compromise the defensive efforts of dozens of surrounding star systems. While Ves was not a grand strategist, he had spent enough time on this front to learn that the Rubarthans struggled to build up their defenses. They previously did not prioritize this front. It had also been a lot easier for them to resist past alien incursions by relying on the forces of the Red Association and the Red Fleet.

Now that the voribugs sought to launch a full-scale offensive at the same time the mechers and the fleeters withdrew from the Rubarthan Pact, defenses that previously looked adequate had now turned into glaring holes! The timing of the Day of Pestilence was awful. If the mutated voribugs bided their time for a year, then the Rubarthans could have established multiple layers of defensive fortifications. At that time, even if the enemy managed to conquer the Philaster Crestia System, the mutated voribugs would not be able to take advantage of this victory to break into the Rubarthan Pact's core territories.

In short, the longer the Rubarthans could hold onto this star system, the better. It was not necessary to fend off the voribugs entirely, just delay them long enough for subsequent arrangements to realize their gains. The Cybernetic Empire had little choice but to send a substantial amount of forces to the Rubarthan front. The nature of the mutated voribugs posed too much of a threat to red humanity. Letting them snowball by devouring one territory after another was an awful idea. The best way to win the Voribug War was to block their invasion right from the start.

As much as Ves disliked the Polymath, he never questioned her logic and intelligence. A control freak like her would never allow an uncontrolled variable like the mutated voribugs run wild and escalate into a galactic exterminator!

Ves and Jovy continued to chat about the threat posed by the Goliath Hive and the mutated voribugs. While the Goliaths attracted a lot of attention due to their size, the other hives were no pushovers. They relied on their own advantages to present new challenges to their enemies.

However, Ves was already so preoccupied with figuring out how to counter the Goliaths that he had little energy to spare on other issues. He may have become a tier 2 galactic citizen, but even he couldn't figure out how to defeat a single hive, let alone all 6 of them. Their diversity and evolution speeds were too great. "The mutated voribugs are a young race, though it is also clear that they possess an extensive background. Their history remains unclear. We cannot take them too lightly."

"I agree." Jovy responded. "In an ideal universe, both humans and native aliens would negotiate a cease fire just so that we could all attack and eradicate the mutated voribugs. We do not live in such a reality. We live in a universe where powerful alien civilizations can easily decide to wipe us all out if we just look at them wrong."

Ves frowned. Enough time had passed for the voribug invasion to inflict serious damage, especially in the space occupied by the native aliens. Although red humans had difficulty keeping track of the latest developments of the voribug invasion in alien space, what rumors and intelligence that Ves managed to get his hands upon made it clear that the war was not going well outside of human-occupied space!

The native aliens that previously waged a righteous war against red humanity now fell victim to the same kind of mass invasion! The mutated voribugs proved to be just as unreasonable as the native aliens when they targeted the human race. Ves found it profoundly ironic that the intelligent races gathered under the banner of the Red Cabal suffered an unprovoked invasion that was already responsible for the deaths of trillions of sentient beings.

This was not necessarily a good development. Even if the Rubarthans no longer sustained as many attacks from the native alien races, the rapidly expanding voribugs simply took their place and continued to press into the Rubarthan Pact's territories! "To be honest, we are afraid that the native aliens will continue to remain so divided and distracted by petty egos that they will fail to unite around a single threat." Jovy shared his opinions to Ves. "This is why negotiating an alliance with any native alien race is of paramount importance. I am aware that you have feelings about it, but the native aliens are in the same predicament as us. The sooner they wake up and realize the grave threat posed by the mutated voribugs, the better."

The difficulty of bridging this gap was too high. Red humanity was still trapped in the throes of human supremacy, while the native aliens continued to hold so much territory that small-scale local events failed to produce a sense of urgency among the higher ups. Their concern towards Ves and his antics were far greater than the threat posed by his old name!

"Has there been any progress that you can share with me?" Ves asked with the mentality of trying his luck.

Jovy hummed in thought. "We have tried to communicate with the native aliens and mutated voribugs. None of these attempts bore fruit. The orvans and the nunsers are most empathetic towards the losses they have incurred. They care greatly about their lost brethren, but are still clinging to their mistaken pride and inhumanly stubborn planetary ruler. They are unable to reconcile these two inflicting emotions."

"Ugh! Pride! Honor! I wish I could get rid of them. These native aliens need to learn that the mutated voribugs care little about their dealings." Ves complained.

The pair of mech designers did not linger too long on this subject. Jovy had already conveyed enough news on the ongoing war effort. Even if they did not share too numerous details, Ves was pretty sure that the sources likely spoke the truth.

Jovy soon brought up the second reason why he wanted to talk to Ves. "Let us to go the workshop. The experts that I have brought from Yernstall have recently reported a development in the recovery of Saint Rosa Orfan. We believe that we have... woken her from her slumber."

That was good news! Ves had been waiting for Rosa Orfan to wake up from her botched breakthrough. Even though she had successfully become an ace pilot, she also happened to be the first one who had permanently merged into her own mech's structure!

Suffice to say, the Red Association and most notably the Mech Supremacists as well as the Transhumanists developed a strong interest in the Riot Mark III. The mechers had been spending all of their time since their arrival to recover Saint Orfan without producing any additional complications. They could only use the gentlest of methods for fear of incurring Ves' disapproval.

Their efforts worked. Ves was not too interested in the specifics. All he cared about was that Saint Orfan not only became awake and conscious enough to converse with other humans, but was also able to control her mech with a high degree of skill and proficiency!

"Has Saint Orfan made any threatening actions since she woke up?" Ves eagerly asked.

Jovy shook his head. "No, but we cannot rule out this possibility. According to the information sent by one of my contacts, Saint Orfan is in a daze most likely. We are not certain whether she is fully awake or still stuck in a half- sleep state. She cannot recognize us yet, but she occasionally calls for your name."

"My name?"

"Yes. Your name carries a great amount of weight in her mind. You have become the anchor of her fraying humanity. We believe it is also best for you to interact with Saint Orfan in person."

They moved to the workshop in question. The area had already been closed off in order to prevent information from leaking. The Riot Mark III still looked as mutated and twisted as before. It also showed definite signs of movements that happened to be consistent with human body language!

The mech did not behave as if its pilot was in pain. That was a relief. As Ves continued to study the Riot Mark III, he knew that Saint Orfan was studying him in turn. He had already entered the range of her Saint Kingdom.

Ves slowly lifted his arm and waved. Silence ensued. It was only until half a minute passed by that the Riot Mark III reciprocated the wave. The machine only looked eerier when it performed this particular gesture.

Ves and Jovy continued to step forward. They hoped that Sait Orfan would not suddenly grow mad and launch an attack on the mech designers. It was still hard to tell whether Saint Orfan would remain calm at this time.

The closer the distance, the more Ves was able to peek into the curtain. He could feel the ace pilot's surging emotions. Even when Rosa Orfan was still in the process of waking up, Ves could already tell that she was absolutely eager to test her mettle on the battlefield. She had not lost her warrior's heart. So long as it remained intact, then Saint Orfan still had hope of growing stronger and overcoming her new affliction!

Ves was not in a hurry to engage Saint Orfan in a conversation at this time. He was willing to wait until she had regained full lucidity.

Chapter 7309: Awakened Rosa

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Ves and Jovy continued to study the mutated Carmine expert mech as they waited for Saint Rosa Orfan to regain her awareness as an individual. There was plenty to observe. Now that the ace pilot started to become conscious again, the Riot Mark III began to exhibit many new changes. It was no longer a pure machine. Due to the partial physical merger between the mech and mech pilot, the Riot Mark III had technically turned into Rosa Orfan's body of sorts.

Of course, her human body still remained partially intact, so the mech could not be considered her true body in full. Even so, it became increasingly more clear to Ves that the fusion had reached a fairly advanced stage. Numerous signs ranging from finger twitches to heartbeat-like energy pulses indicated that Saint Orfan had begun to control the Riot Mark III as if it was her body rather than her mech.

There was a distinct difference between the two control modes. Most mech pilots, even Carmine mech pilots, still controlled their mechs as vehicles but in a more extensive way. Neural interfaces and Blood Pacts could not directly produce the outcome of controlling a mech as if it was a body. Only specialized technology such as the Terran-developed human body surrogate control system could enable mech pilots to control large multi-ton mechs as if they were controlling their own bodies, and this only applied to humanoid machines.

Outside of that, mech pilots absolutely would not control their machines like the present version of the Riot Mark III. Humanoid mechs may resemble the bodies of their mech pilots, but that was no reason for the latter to reproduce their own habits to such an extent. Any professional mech pilot that had a tendency to develop this kind of behavior always got rid of it through training. This was one of the numerous purposes of a mech academy.

What Ves could see, Jovy could see as well. The RA mech designer turned to look at the specialists that had set up in the workshop. The Red Association had developed a fascination for the anomalous transformation of the Riot Mark III.

With Ves' permission, the Bluejay Fleet assigned a team of mech designers, engineers, medical specialists, neural interface experts and psychologists to study and care for Saint Rosa Orfan and

her D-mech. They had spent a considerable amount of time on figuring out how to wake Saint Orfan up and how to decrease her physical discomfort. Jovy's supply fleet just happened to bring a lot of useful assistance such as custom-made elixirs, medicines and additional scientists.

The research value of the Riot Mark III was absolutely high. Both the Mech Supremacists and the Transhumanists eagerly wanted to study and experiment on the Riot Mark III. Its design was absolutely remarkable and the unknown means that Ves used to Demoncast it had made the machine even more unique. The mechers badly wanted to replicate and perfect his crude methods!

It was only because the ace pilot and D-mech 'belonged' to Ves that the mechers restrained themselves. They meticulously abided by the rules set by the Larkinsons and diligently avoided any experiments that could pose a risk to Saint Orfan. Though Ves had taken a risk by trusting the mechers to take care of Saint Orfan and the Riot Mark III, it paid off. Their diligent efforts improved the ace pilots condition and brought her back to a state where she could not only talk to Ves, but perhaps also fight on the battlefield.

That last part became particularly important after learning about the strength that the mutated voribugs intended to bring to the battlefield. The Incubator loomed over everyone's shoulders. With the Rubarthans reluctant or unwilling to employ more destructive means, every champion turned into a crucial weapon against the latest trump card of the Goliath Hive.

Of course, Ves was well aware of the risk that the Riot Mark III might falter in the next fight and succumb to the unconventional attacks of the mutated voribugs. It was very reckless to ask an ace pilot who had befallen an accident and only just woke up to fight for the survival of the Rubarthan defenders on short notice, yet Ves still intended to proceed with this course of action.

He did not think that Saint Rosa Orfan was a person who would refuse to act in this situation. The more she began to wake, the more he could get a feel of her mental condition. Her Saint Kingdom vibrated with a certain degree of energy and anticipation. Perhaps her intuition already subconsciously warned her about the battle that was about to start in a handful of hours.

With the main forces of the Goliath Hive in this star system bearing down on the third planet, the Riot Mark III would definitely bear an enormous amount of responsibility if it took part in the defense effort.

As Rosa Orfan became increasingly more conscious, she did not rush to speak with Ves. Perhaps she already sensed that it was not wise to talk and make decisions when she remained mentally impaired. This led to a period of prolonged silence as Ves and Jovy ran out of topics to talk about.

Both mech designers ended up waiting for numerous minutes until another colleague joined. Gloriana arrived a bit later after she learned about the latest development related to this case. As one of the main contributors to the design project, she could not keep her distance.

Despite her obvious distaste towards Demoncasting, Gloriana still felt a strong sense of responsibility over what had happened to the Larkinson Clan's latest ace pilot. "Is she awake?"

"Mostly." Ves responded. "Her actual condition is really complicated, but it is clear that she is becoming more and more aware of her situation. So far, it doesn't appear that she is in pain, but we will know for certain once she conveys her own condition to us. Her Saint Kingdom feels... encouraging."

The domain field of an ace pilot reflected their deepest feelings and convictions. The stronger, the better. Ves clearly sensed that Rosa Orfan's Saint Kingdom was not weaker than any newly ascended ace pilot.

Gloriana clearly held the same idea. "It seems we will need to rush the Riot Mark III's long-awaited upgrade into an ace mech. If Saint Orfan wants to participate in the next battle, then she clearly cannot deploy in this state. Her mech frame will limit the expression of her true resonance."

That caused Ves to frown. "I don't disagree, but we will have to race against time. Both of us will need to overhaul a mech that has undergone a certain degree of physical mutations. Since the mech has deviated from its original design, we don't exactly know how to disassemble it or how to switch the resonating materials. This is especially problematic if the choice of resonating materials is not appropriate."

"There is no need for concern, Ves. I have already completed the preparation work." His wife smugly responded. "I already anticipated this situation, so I spent time on preparing two different upgrade plans. Both of them are based on a different selection of resonating materials."

Ves looked surprised. He had been unaware that her preparations had been so thorough. He regretted that he had been too distracted with other matters since the completion of the Riot Mark III. He really should be paying more attention to what his wife was doing. "Can you tell me about the resonating materials in consideration?"

"We can wait until our new ace pilot is ready to talk." Gloriana responded. "The RA supply fleet has just brought the necessary quantities of resonating materials to the Bluejay Fleet."

"That is correct." Jovy responded. "Past tests have shown that Saint Rosa Orfan is compatible with the two resonating materials, but we were not clear that this has remained the case after her... accident. This is why our engineers have just concluded a new compatibility test. The results show that her compatibility has changed, but not to extent of invalidating the choices."

Both Ves and Gloriana looked surprised. "I thought that a high-ranking mech pilot's compatibility with resonating materials is constant." The latter remarked.

"That is not entirely the case, madame. Your statement is mostly true because expert pilots and ace pilots are predominantly consistent individuals. They tend to hold the same beliefs and cling to the same convictions for most of their careers. They can remain steadfast and dedicated to their originals for decades if not centuries. Even if they eventually change employers or experience enough growth to assume different responsibilities, their core personalities often remain the same. But this is not absolute."

Ves nodded in agreement. "There are heroes that have suffered such a great blow that they become very different people. I think that Saint Rosa Orfan's case is definitely not the worst in this regard."

"Correct, my friend. The results actually speak well for Saint Rosa Orfan. Despite her radical physiological changes, the fact that her compatibility with resonating materials has not changed too much is an indicator that she is mostly the same mech pilot that we are familiar with. If the accident had completely flipped her personality, then there is little chance that her compatibility profile remains intact."

These were good signs. Ves grew a little less worried, even though he also knew that large parts of Rosa Orfan's soul had become contaminated with negative energies. What ultimately made the difference was willpower. So long as Rosa Orfan's extraordinary willpower protected her original personality, her contamination would never be able to gain control!

All of a sudden, the Riot's speakers began to speak. "UH... WHAT... HAPPENED TO MY BODY?"

The three mech designers all looked at the expert mech. The surrounding mechs immediately stopped their work and withdrew. It was not a good idea for them to stick around in case the ace pilot had a temper tantrum.

"Saint Rosa Orfan." Ves began to address the awakened pilot. "First off, congratulations for breaking through. I am not sure how much you remember about your breakthrough attempt, but you succeeded. You beat the odds and managed to trigger your second apotheosis. The problem is that you did so under difficult and anomalous circumstances. What happened to your body is... the biggest side effect of that. How much... are you aware of your current physical state?"

"I HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO YOU THREE SPEAK FOR A WHILE. YOU... TALK ABOUT ME AS IF I AM A BOMB THAT IS ABOUT TO BE ARMED. IS MY CONDITION TRULY THAT BAD?"

Ves and the others frowned. It was rather weird that Saint Orfan regained enough awareness to speak to them, but not to the point of understanding her strange physical state.

"Rosa, can you answer a question for us, please?" Gloriana gently asked. "Please examine your own 'body'. Do you think you are in control of a body of flesh or a body of metal?"

"I... WAIT... WHAT IS THIS..."

Several beeps began to sound. Ves called up a projection and began to study the various graphs and numbers. Many of them started to show signs of increasing activity.

"THIS IS NOT... MY BODY... WHERE IS... MY REAL BODY... WHO ARE... I AM THE PROPHET'S BANE! I AM YOUR NEW-SCREW YOU! I AM IN CONTROL! I REMEMBER NOW! YOU TRIED TO TAKE ME OVER!"

Ves, Jovy and Gloriana immediately backed off. The Riot Mark III struggled against its restraints and started to become more and more volatile! Fortunately, Saint Orfan's resolve firmed up. She not only managed to suppress her new demonic aspect, but also willed the Riot Mark III into obedience!

Ves had been afraid that Saint Orfan's split condition had caused her to turn into a much more unstable individual. The fact that she was able to assert herself so quickly relieved his concerns.

"Are you... alright, Rosa?" Ves tentatively asked. Secretly, he was ready to unfold his true body in an attempt to physically restrain the D-mech, but he really hoped he was just being cautious.

"I'M COOL... I THINK." More chapters in t.me/+z7ieNjQSLFMzMmY6

Chapter 7310: A Healthy Mindset

Chapter 7310: A Healthy Mindset

Saint Rosa Orfan finally became fully awake in full.

She not only regained consciousness, but also entered a state where she was able to inspect her own condition.

It became clear that she belatedly discovered that her original human body had fallen out of reach to her current self.

She had fulfilled one of her biggest dreams by successfully breaching the barrier that held her back from attaining sainthood, but the price she paid was much more severe than expected.

Several minutes passed after the mech designers exposed Rosa Orfan's actual physical state to herself.

Instead of possessing a normal human body like any other saint, Orfan could no longer consciously feel or control her own flesh and blood!

No matter how hard she tried, she could no longer do it anymore. Even though she knew for a fact that her original was still present for the most part, not a single shred of her own mind, spirit or willpower granted her the possibility of moving a single limb or uttering a single word from her lips.

A profoundly scary realization struck the ace pilot at that time. Her mech frame briefly shuddered as it reflected her unraveling mental condition.

It was only because Rosa Orfan had indeed become an ace pilot of sorts that she managed to stabilize herself before she suffered any further negative consequences.

No matter what, the current outcome was far better than dying!

"I... DO NOT KNOW WHAT I HAVE BECOME AT THE MOMENT, BUT WHAT MATTERS IS THAT I HAVE GAINED THE POWER OF AN ACE PILOT AND RETAINED CONTROL OVER THE RIOT MARK III. THAT... IS ENOUGH TO MAKE ME SATISFIED, I SUPPOSE."

"Are you sure you are happy, Rosa?" Gloriana asked with concern. "Compared to the likes of Saint Tusa and Saint Dise, you..."

The Riot Mark III transmitted a snorting sound, even though it did not have nostrils.

"I WAS LUCKY TO BREAK THROUGH IN THE FIRST PLACE. I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN YOUR WARNINGS. I WENT INTO THIS KNOWING THAT I WOULD DIE IF I FAILED TO TAME THIS MECH. WHILE THE OUTCOME IS FAR FROM IDEAL, I DO NOT HAVE MUCH GROUNDS FOR COMPLAINT. I AM STILL MYSELF AS FAR AS I KNOW, AND I AM CONFIDENT THAT I CAN CONTROL THE RIOT MARK III TO THE FULLEST."

“What about the Prophet’s Bane?” Ves asked with a slight amount of concern. “According to my own observation of your intangible condition, your spirit has merged with the spirit of your living mech. The boundary between you and your machine has blurred. This is already concerning enough, but you should know much better than anyone else what I have done to make your Riot more powerful at the cost of stability. That darkness has become a separate part of yourself. If your willpower ever slips...”

Her earlier words already betrayed the continued existence of the Prophet’s Bane. This was both good and bad as far as Ves was concerned.

The Middle Demon not only maintained its existence as an unequivocally malicious entity.

Though it clearly lost its dominance for the time being, getting rid of it was out of the question.

This meant that as long as it managed to wrest control over the Riot Mark III, the Prophet’s Bane would no doubt convert the powerful mech from an asset into a liability!

What was good was that Saint Orfan should have obtained at least partial control over the strength and abilities of the Prophet’s Bane.

Since the two had merged to such a powerful extent, the Middle Demon did not possess the capital to withhold its power.

The willpower of an ace pilot, even a fresh one, was domineering enough to force the Prophet’s Bane into compliance.

“THE DEMON IS... UNDER CONTROL.” Saint Orfan truthfully transmitted from the speakers of her mech. “THERE IS NO NEED FOR YOU TO WORRY SO LONG AS I AM IN CONTROL. IF MY THAT IS NO LONGER THE CASE... THEN I WILL DO MY BEST TO ISSUE A WARNING. I DON’T EXACTLY KNOW WHAT I HAVE BECOME, BUT ALL THAT MATTERS IS THAT MY WILLPOWER IS THE REAL DEAL. THAT IS WHAT MATTERS THE MOST. THE FACT THAT I CANNOT FEEL MY ORIGINAL BODY AT THIS TIME IS... NOT GOOD, BUT IT COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE.”

Ves relaxed a bit after hearing this. Saint Orfan sounded remarkably stable at this time. She understood her current condition well enough, and did not succumb to the negativity that had tainted much of her soul.

While the possibility of losing control always hung in the background, the latest ace pilot of the Larkinson Clan maintained a surprisingly healthy mindset. She did not blame herself or Ves for ending up in such a weird condition.

Of course, Ves knew better than to take this outcome for granted. Rosa Orfan had only just woken up. She became too enamoured by her newfound strength as an ace pilot to fully understand the ramifications of losing control over her old organic body.

She no longer had access to the simple joys and comforts of a human.

From consuming delicious meals to speaking to others as fellow humans, Rosa Orfan could no longer enjoy these experiences anymore.

The longer these basic pleasures remained out of her reach, the more humanity she lost over time.

She was not a machine, but she threatened to become one if she ever forgot how to live like a human.

The source of her willpower and conviction was not endless. All of it was derived from her drive and ambition as a human.

If this side of her grew weaker over time, then her willpower would not only stagnate, but also regress!

Without any corrective measures, Ves predicted that the dark side of her soul may one day overpower her dominant will!

Though all of this remained conjecture at this time, he was pretty sure about his theory. Ves did not dare to bet on her continued stability.

The only way she could retain control over herself was to continue her climb.

So long as she progressed, she was keeping her demonic side at bay.

When Ves looked at the Riot Mark III, he knew that Saint Orfan understood this truth as well, if not as precise.

The good thing was that her breakthrough had rejuvenated her fighting spirit. Her willpower felt strong and vigorous. Ves believed that she should be fine even if she suffered a few setbacks.

As the mech designers continued to talk with Saint Orfan, they all began to relax as they no longer believed that the Riot Mark III would go out of control anytime soon.

“Ever since you woke up, the volatile activity generated by your Chaos Armor has diminished by at least 90 percent.” Gloriana remarked with clear interest. “Are you able to exert your Saint Kingdom to suppress the remaining activity of your mech frame?”

A brief pause ensued as Saint Orfan strengthened her willpower exertion.

The data reflected her new condition. The Riot Mark III’s inherent chaos and volatility became even more suppressed than before!

Though the ace pilot failed to silence her machine entirely, it was already remarkable that she was able to stabilize it to this extent.

“I CAN DO SO... FOR A TIME.” Rosa Orfan said. “MAINTAINING THIS STATE... IS EXHAUSTING ME. I WON’T BE ABLE TO CHANNEL MY WILLPOWER LIKE THIS FOR TOO LONG.”

“Estimate?”

“A COUPLE OF HOURS. A LOT SHORTER IF I AM IN THE MIDDLE OF A FIGHT. THIS IS MUCH HARDER FOR ME TO DO IF I AM DISTRACTED.”

Ves exchanged glances with his wife.

“It is very important for you to be able to maintain your present level of control over your mech.” Gloriana explained. “Now that we have confirmed that you have regained consciousness and retain effective control over the Riot Mark III, it is time for us to complete your metamorphosis. The final step to obtaining the power of an ace pilot is to upgrade the Riot Mark III into a genuine first-class ace mech. In order to accomplish this, we need to integrate ace mech-grade resonating materials into your machine. With the help of Master Laila Rebecca Devos, I have prepared two separate refit plans.”

“TELL ME MORE.” Rosa Orfan immediately sounded intrigued.

She knew that the selection of upgrades would have a massive impact on her subsequent career as an ace pilot.

In the past, the Miracle Couple presented Saint Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson with options that suited them best.

Now it was her turn to decide upon the emphasis of her ace mech.

Although her ‘battle partner’ was already loaded with lots of technological features, an ace mech was ultimately defined by its potent resonating materials. It was the lodestone that shaped the development of the ace pilot.

A careless choice could easily stall her career and ruin her future!

Seeing that she was ready to make this life-changing decision, Gloriana did not hold back.

“Plan A is to select Kaminsky Alloy. This is a brand-new ‘superdimensional resonating alloy’ developed by the Resonating Smith. It is a blend between traditional resonating exotics, hyper materials and most importantly a small proportion of mid-grade superdimensional alloy. It operates along the same principles as Sydney Particle Weapon Technology, but without the need for advanced tech and circuitry. To put it in very simple terms, as long as you resonate with Kaminsky Alloy, you can open up restricted one-way portals to higher dimensions. This will allow you to channel very exotic energies with very unusual properties for various purposes.”

“...WHAT CAN I DO WITH THIS?” Saint Orfan sounded bewildered.

“Theoretically, anything.” Gloriana smiled. “Red humanity has only begun to investigate the properties of every higher dimension in depth, but we already know that there are a number of them that contain highly potent and useful energy and matter. While Kaminsky Alloy cannot draw upon the strength of matter in the higher dimensions, energy is a different story. It will take a long period of exploration and experimentation, but as long as you have managed to identify a handful of dimension with useful energies, you should be able to channel them in battle to produce specific effects such as hardening your mech, enhancing the destructive power of your attacks or slowing down your opponent.”

This did not give Saint Orfan as much clarity as she wished. While she comprehended the explanation, she found it difficult to imagine how much stronger she could become.

“THIS SOUNDS... PROMISING... BUT ALSO TROUBLESOME. ARE YOU TELLING ME THAT I HAVE TO EXPLORE THE HIGHER DIMENSIONS ONE BY ONE AND RANDOMLY FIND ENERGY THAT IS USEFUL IN ONLY A FEW SITUATIONS?”

“...Basically.” Ves said. “It is difficult for us to guarantee the power and effectiveness of Kaminsky Alloy. As my wife has mentioned, it is a very new invention, thus it is difficult to prove for certain that it is a worthwhile upgrade choice. You will essentially be test-driving it for the Resonating Smith. That said, I do not believe that the work of a Star Designer can ever be subpar. If he is confident enough in the development of Kaminsky Alloy that he is willing to let ace pilots make use of it, then its performance should at least be satisfactory. The only point of uncertainty is how much time it takes to realize the greater potential of this resonating alloy. It may take years or even decades for you to build up a catalog of useful higher-dimensional energies and become strong enough to channel them in sufficient quantities.”

In other words, Kaminsky Alloy was a typical resonating material that would probably be underwhelming at the start, but promised incredible benefits at the later stages of Saint Orfan’s career.

Its versatility was its strongest advantage. Saint Orfan would not limit herself to an offensive or defensive specialist if she selected this upgrade path.

After all, the higher dimensions were so diverse and numerous that she could potentially gain access to everything!

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Chapter 7311: Terran Destroyer Amplification Material

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If Ves was in Saint Orfan's shoes, he would be awfully tempted to select Kaminsky Alloy as the resonating material of her ace mech.

What it lacked in power, it made up for it with versatility.

In fact, Ves that Kaminsky Alloy should be much more suitable for the Everchanger, who happened to live and breathe versatility.

However, the Riot Mark III had to fulfill multiple roles at once as well.

It did not shock Ves all that much that Saint Orfan happened to be compatible with the newly developed superdimensional resonating material.

Yet just because she was compatible with Kaminsky Alloy did not necessarily mean it was the right choice.

At the very least, the immense learning curve meant that it would take far too long for Saint Orfan to become proficient in its use.

There was no way for her to gain anything immediately useful from the use of this resonating material. Integrating it into the Riot Mark III effectively meant that Saint Orfan would forgo any immediate power-up in the upcoming battle.

While Ves did not want to pressure the ace pilot into making a decision based on short-term merits, the thought still lingered in his mind.

He and the others patiently waited for Saint Orfan to evaluate this choice and voice her sentiments about the resonating material.

After a bit of thinking, the ace pilot issued a preliminary verdict.

"KAMINSKY ALLOY SOUNDS POWERFUL, BUT... ONLY IN THE RIGHT HANDS. I AM NOT SURE I AM THE RIGHT PERSON FOR IT. I WILL TRY TO MAKE THE MOST OF IT IF I HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE, BUT... IT SOUNDS TOO FIDDLY TO ME. I LIKE TO KEEP THINGS SIMPLE. ALL OF THIS STUFF ABOUT ACCESSING MANY DIFFERENT HIGHER-DIMENSIONAL ENERGIES SOUNDS WAY TOO COMPLICATED. UNLIKE CASELLA INGVAR, I DON'T LIKE TO THINK SO MUCH WHEN I FIGHT. PILOTING AN ACE MECH WITH THIS RESONATING MATERIAL WILL FORCE ME TO BECOME A DIFFERENT KIND OF WARRIOR, ONE THAT I DO NOT NECESSARILY WANT TO BECOME."

Her analysis and opinion sounded surprisingly coherent and logical. Ves couldn't help but nod in agreement. His assessment concurred with her own. Kaminsky Alloy was undoubtedly strong, but its properties did not necessarily conform to her preferences.

"It is a powerful option." Gloriana mentioned. "I advise you not to dismiss it in haste. The Riot Mark III is a powerful spearman mech, but that does not change the fact that it is sorely lacking in versatility. We originally designed it to serve as a powerful counter against both human ace mechs and alien phase leaders. We never anticipated that it would be deployed against an enemy as overwhelming as the mutated voribugs. Ace pilot or not, the restrictive configuration of your ace mech will heavily constrain your combat effectiveness against these swarming enemies. In cases such as these, introducing a large degree of versatility by integrating Kaminsky Alloy is an effective remedy to this problem, though admittedly in the future."

Her logic was sound as well, or else she wouldn't have insisted on introducing this resonating material to Rosa Orfan.

As a Senior Mech Designer and an important contributor to the Riot Mark III, she understood the strengths and weaknesses of the Riot Mark III extremely well.

She also possessed a good understanding of Saint Orfan's personality, fighting habits and even her future development trajectory.

In her opinion, Saint Orfan relied too much on spearmanship without excelling in it. This was different from Saint Dise who truly lived and breathed swordsmanship in each and every day.

Rosa Orfan was simply not the kind of soldier who could dedicate her entire passion to mastering spearmanship to the extreme.

To her, the spear was a handy weapon that she just happened to be familiar with the most.

There was nothing with that, but high-ranking mech pilots were defined by their obsessions.

The stronger they became, the more she was able to warp the fabric of reality by strengthening her extraordinary willpower!

Gloriana assumed that since Rosa Orfan was not able to derive a strong obsession from her spearmanship, the saint urgently needed to diversify her combat solutions.

So long as she gained access to the right features, she could accelerate her progression and turn into a much more fearsome presence on the battlefield!

This was the foresight of a Senior Mech Designer.

Unfortunately, the ace pilot who had become permanently wedded to her mech did not appreciate Gloriana's thoughtfulness.

The ace pilot clearly remained dismissive about the endless potential of Kaminsky Alloy.

Saint Orfan did not even care that the Resonance Smith personally developed this coveted experimental product!

After conveying the first choice of resonating material, Gloriana presented the next option.

"If... you are unwilling to consider Kaminsky Alloy, then you may choose a different product called Terran Destroyer Amplification Material, otherwise known as TDAM."

It was clear that this was a Terran product as opposed to a mecher one.

"The latter is very much the opposite of the former." Gloriana continued her explanation. "Whereas Kaminsky Alloy is a cutting-edge experimental work, the Terran Greater United Confederation completed the development of TDAM more than a century ago. The Terrans invested a great amount of resources and talent into this project in order to develop a resonating alloy that can not only help an ace mech withstand the power of a Destroyer weapon, but also synergize with it. They succeeded. Ever since then, TDAM has become moderately prevalent among Terran ace mechs."

TDAM sounded very useful to ace mechs that made use of Terran Destroyer weapons.

Gloriana made sure to emphasize this fact. "Terran Destroyer Amplification Material exists for only one purpose, which is leveraging the power of Destroyer weapons and Destroyer particles to a greater degree. By shaping its power more extensively with the idealistic willpower of a saint, TDAM can enable you to strengthen the annihilating properties of a Destroyer weapon. This is only its most direct application. TDAM is also used to generate what the Terrans call pseudo-Destroyer particles."

That confused Rosa Orfan. "WHAT MAKES PSEUDO-DESTROYER PARTICLES DIFFERENT FROM THE REAL DEAL?"

The female mech designer smirked. "The pseudo particles are not real. They are temporary duplicates brought into existence by a specialized application of your willpower. It is not necessary for you to employ a sophisticated technique to achieve this. TDAM takes care of that. The only requirement is your willpower as input. The higher your resonance strength, the greater the quantity of pseudo-Destroyer particles you can generate. High resonance strength and deeper comprehension of the concept of destruction also positively correlates with stronger and more realistic pseudo-Destroyer particles."

Terran Destroyer Amplification Material sounded way more exciting than its admittedly boring name!

The Riot Mark III's Saint Kingdom grew more active and charged. This was a clear indicator that the ace pilot had grown more excited about this resonating material!

"I CAN MAKE MY OWN DESTROYER PARTICLES?"

"Yes, but only temporarily." Gloriana emphasized. "You will have to spend time on comprehending the power of destruction if you want your mimicry to become as effective as the real thing. So long as that is not the case, do not expect the Destroyer particles to be too strong. You should be able to simulate the performance of low-tier Destroyer weapons with a bit of effort, but it is much harder to match the performance of high-tier Destroyer weapons." Silence fell as Saint Orfan took in these words. Terran Destroyer Amplification Material was not as uncomplicated as it sounded. Its mechanics possessed a bit of depth. She could not adopt it as straightforwardly as she wished. Ves decided to clarify the positioning of TDAM. "If you are thinking about working with Terran Destroyer Amplification Material, then you have to keep in mind that you are locked into a commitment. Unlike other resonating materials, TDAM is only effective if the mech in question wields a Destroyer weapon. In other words, if you do not intend to fight with the tier 3 Destroyer spear that I have prepared for you, then it is better for you to choose an alternative, whether that is Kaminsky Alloy or another compatible resonating material. TDAM only truly shines when integrated in ace mechs that are equipped with high-tier Destroyer weapons."

This was a very important reminder.

The Larkinson Clan currently only possessed a single Destroyer weapon that was powerful and suitable enough to be wielded by the Riot Mark III.

Saint Rosa Orfan grew worried about the implications of that fact.

"YOU MEAN THAT IF I CHOOSE TDAM, I WON'T BE ABLE TO UNLEASH MY TRUE STRENGTH UNLESS I WIELD THE TIER 3 DESTROYER SPEAR?"

"Yes."

"WHAT IF I LOSE IT ON THE BATTLEFIELD? WHAT IF I HAVE GROWN POWERFUL ENOUGH TO OUTGROW A TIER 3 DESTROYER WEAPON?"

Ves tried to reassure her with a smile. "These problems are not as big as you think. It is true that the Terrans of the Red Ocean have lost the means to produce Destroyer particles and by extension Destroyer weapons. However, the Terrans of the Milky Way retain this core capability. As a member of the Oblivion Gate Consortium, I can attempt to import tier 2 and maybe even tier 1 Destroyer weapons. Of course, this will be an extremely costly trade. It will take a substantial quantity of superdimensional matter and other costly concessions in order to persuade the Terrans of the Milky Way to bequeath such a valuable strategic asset. Therefore, if you are not 100 percent committed to wielding Destroyer weapons for the rest of your career as an ace pilot, then forget about selecting TDAM."

In effect, choosing to integrate TDAM into the Riot Mark III meant that Saint Orfan would remain wedded to Terran Destroyer weapons for a very long time.

While the Riot Mark III could still wield other weapons that lacked Destroyer particles, it would be a considerable waste of its potential. An ace mech was defined by its resonating abilities. If Saint Orfan was unable to employ them due to the absence of a critical weapon, then that would set her back for a long time!

The choice before her became clear. Was she willing to bind her future as a champion to an exclusive Terran weapon system?

Was she willing to forgo other options in favor of specializing in the use of Destroyer weapons?

"You do not have to pair Destroyer weapons with TDAM, Rosa." Gloriana said. "There are many Terran mech pilots who favor the versatility of a multipurpose mech. Wielding a Destroyer weapon is only one tool in their diverse arsenal. It is more reasonable for them to make use of more universal resonating materials that can boost their machines regardless of their weapon choices. The same may apply to you as well. TDAM will not give you any form of strengthening if your Riot Mark III wields a plasma halberd or a superior superdimensional polearm."

That was a severe disadvantage. Many Terran mech pilots had to make a difficult choice on this matter.

TDAM truly brought a lot of benefits to an ace mech equipped with a Destroyer weapon, but it turned worthless in any other situation.

Ves also couldn't guarantee whether the Riot Mark III could be supplied with other Destroyer weapons.

The physical trade between the two galaxies had only just begun. Ves was also uncertain whether his mother was able to establish a strong enough connection with the Greater Terran United Confederation to persuade it to exchange a much more valuable tier 2 or tier 1 Destroyer weapon.

Such weapons did not grow on trees. They were exceptional arms that stuffed so many Destroyer particles that they should have long blown into pieces if not for the application of super-grade materials and highly sophisticated production methods.

If the members of the Oblivion Gate Consortium could not facilitate this trade, then Veronica would have to go out of her way and approach the Terrans of the Milky Way for a deal.

Fortunately, there was no need to accomplish this right away. A tier 3 Destroyer spear should be more than sufficient for Saint Orfan for the coming years. Ves still had plenty of time to solve her future needs.

"Do you have any more questions, or are you ready to make a decision?" Gloriana politely asked. "If you are dissatisfied with the selection of Kaminsky Alloy and TDAM, we can select other ace mech-grade resonating materials that possess properties that are more to your liking. However, we do not have them on hand, and we must spend several days planning the upgrade of your volatile machine. Choose carefully." Saint Orfan did not intend to drag out her decision. She had already thought it over.

"I HAVE BEEN DREAMING ABOUT WIELDING THE TIER 3 DESTROYER SPEAR FOR A LONG TIME. NOW THAT IT IS WITHIN MY GRASP, I WILL GO ALL THE WAY. I PICK TDAM. I SHALL BECOME THE SPEARHEAD OF DESTRUCTION! I WILL BREAK ALL ATTACKS BY HARNESSING THE POWER OF CHAOS! MY RIOT SHALL BECOME A FORCE OF PAIN AND MAYHEM TO OUR FOES! THROW ME ONTO THE BATTLEFIELD AND LET ME MAKE YOUR

ENEMIES SUFFER HELL!"

Chapter 7312: Vestigial Body

Chapter 7312: Vestigial Body

Integrating TDAM into the Riot Mark III ended up a lot less stressful than expected.

Due to the Riot's Chaos Armor and its nature as a D-mech, the living machine had turned into an inherently unstable product.

As the first genuine adversarial mech designed by Ves, the Riot not only posed a threat against its own pilot, but also the people who serviced the mech frame.

Gloriana prepared detailed and extensive plans to modify the Riot Mark III's mech frame while it was still in a volatile state.

However, it turned out that her preparations turned out to be redundant.

Though Saint Rosa Orfan had only recently broken through, her willpower had already reached a height where she was able to suppress much of the Riot Mark III's inherent instability.

What Chaos Armor? What Prophet's Bane? Neither source of instability could overcome the resolve suppression of a genuine ace pilot!

This massively reduced the difficulty of upgrading the Riot Mark III. The mech designers should be able to complete the upgrade swift enough to give Saint Rosa Orfan enough hours to familiarize herself with the power of Terran Destroyer Amplification Material.

This was crucial for her upcoming participation in the imminent decisive battle.

After all, it was not a good idea for her to fight against the powerful voribugs without having stretched her new power at least once.

In fact, it was already rather hasty to deploy her on the battlefield so soon after recovering from her traumatic breakthrough event. Her case was especially bad due to partially fusing with her own machine.

By all rights, the Larkinsons should give her a few weeks or months of rest so that she could slowly figure out her new condition and get used to fighting with her adversarial mech.

However, there was no way an ace pilot as restless as Saint Orfan would remain calm under the circumstances.

Since she felt good enough to fight against an army of voribugs, then she should be allowed to participate in a hearty battle!

While Ves wanted to help with the upgrade process, Gloriana quickly made a decision after she found out that Saint Orfan was able to utilize her Saint Kingdom to suppress activity of her machine.

"Your assistance is not needed here." She flatly told him. "So long as the Riot Mark III remains stable, I alone can complete this task myself. Jovy here can help me complete the steps faster. I always found it regrettable that he hadn't been able to participate in the last upgrade run. Now that he has returned, he can make up for that by assisting me with my work."

Ves frowned. "I get the feeling you are not that eager to receive my help."

"That is your fault. Out of all of the mech designers that I know, you are by far the greatest and most unpredictable improviser that I have had the 'pleasure' to work with. Although many of your ideas and innovations have produced amazing successes, I am not looking forward to encountering any unexpected variables today. The conversion of the Riot Mark III into a proper ace mech needs to proceed as flawlessly as possible. I will not tolerate any risks. Not today."

"So am I supposed to move to the side and twiddle with my thumbs?"

"No. You can still do something useful for Saint Orfan. Haven't you developed those new exploding spears? Why not spend your time on fabricating a handful of them? I think that Saint Orfan will not refuse to wield them in battle. They can serve as a surprisingly strong weapon against the Goliath Hive."

Ves widened his eyes. "You're right! This is a much better use of my time! My exploding spears are already powerful when they are wielded by human phase lords like myself, but we don't have the ability to enhance them with true resonance. Ace pilots are different. The power of an exploding

spear will be much greater in the hands of the Riot Mark III! Perhaps they may become strong enough to put a large dent in the Incubator!"

This was not a fantasy, but a very realistic possibility!

The only regret was that there was not enough time for Saint Orfan to familiarize herself with the Sacrificial Spear Throwing Method. The efficacy of the exploding spears was partially dependent on technique. Without mastering it to a sufficient degree, it would be hard to trigger the weapons to explode.

Still, Ves did not hesitate for long. He first imparted the Sacrificial Spear Throwing Method to the ace pilot. Whether she could skillfully make use of the technique during the decisive battle remained unclear. It was not particularly complicated, but it demanded a certain level of intelligence and rationality.

So long as Rosa Orfan still retained a human mind, then she should be able to get started with the method in time.

If her partial fusion with the Riot had caused her to become more irrational, then her learning ability would definitely be affected. If this was the case, then expecting Saint Orfan to burst out with greater power would remain a pure fantasy!

Several hours went by as the mech designers went to work.

Ves did not experience any particular challenges in his work. He already possessed multiple existing designs of exploding spears, and he could easily adapt them according to the availability of local resources.

Gloriana and Jovy worked together quite well over at her workshop. The Riot Mark III hardly held any secrets to her. While she did not understand the principles of Demoncasting and so on, the mech frame hadn't been distorted quite as much as expected.

Saint Orfan's resolve played a pivotal role in this. She had become the master and the ultimate controller of the mech frame.

That said, no one turned complacent after witnessing this amazing degree of control and power projection.

Ace pilots would not be able to maintain the full expression of their Saint Kingdoms for long.

This meant that it was best for the Riot Mark III to stay in reserve for a while longer.

"Based on past patterns of voribug invasion, any assault against the defensive network of Philaster Crestia III would encounter a lot of setbacks!" Ves grinned. "Even if the Terrans or the mechers are able to hold the line for a day, there is no telling what the Incubator would do if no one is around to stop it from advancing."

This was pure speculation in his heart, but it was enough for Ves to fixate on this remote possibility.

So long as the enemy Goliaths and VOBM did not approach the defensive installations too soon, Saint Orfans should have enough time to perfect her practice and take stock of her current capabilities.

This motivated Ves into creating more exploding spears. Perhaps he should fabricate a couple for his own use.

He quickly shook his head in rejection. That sounded a bit unnecessary at this time. He should obediently follow instructions and contribute to the defense of the star system in any way possible.

After Ves fabricated a handful of exploding spears suitable for use by the Riot Mark III, he paused his endeavors and checked in on Gloriana and Jovy.

"How is it going so far?" He asked.

"Almost ready." His wife responded as she carefully controlled the bots and robotic arms from a safe distance. "I have been taking the opportunity to study the mutated internal structure as I worked. It is truly interesting to observe how the mutations have subtly shifted the mech frame away from the original design. What is more interesting is that the mech frame has become more... malleable for a lack of a better expression."

"Oh? What do you mean by that, Gloriana?"

She took a few seconds to compose her words. "What I have discovered is that the Riot Mark III is no longer a pure physical construct anymore. Rather, ever since you 'transformed' it into an adversarial mech, its physical form has become a function of its spiritual form. This is not normal. I do not fully understand why this is happening, but I can still ascertain that this phenomena exists. If we can figure out the principles behind them, then we may be able to produce similar results in the future without introducing excessive risks."

Demoncasting was an inherently dangerous and risky activity. Gloriana hated the lack of control over the outcome. She also detested the use of demons in principle.

If she had a choice, then she would never involve Demoncasting in any of her precious high-end projects.

Alas, since Ves remained fixated on their promise, she was destined to encounter them in the future.

All Gloriana could do was to accept this new reality and seek to understand Demoncasting from her own perspective.

"What you have just said is indeed a mystery." Ves responded. "However, I think it will be difficult to construct a neutral or positive version of rapid physical mutation. It is not that easy for a mech to cross the boundary that separates its physical body from its intangible form. Demons are special because they are highly corruptive and very resilient. Imbuing them into objects produces immediate results. That is not the case for other methods and materials."

He was not that optimistic about this research.

It was much better for pilots and living mechs to strive for breakthroughs.

As for D-mechs and D-arms, their power came from a common but problematic source. This made them a lot more potent, but also a lot more difficult to wield.

He knew why this was the case. He wanted to research mitigation. He also wanted to learn more about Rosa Orfan's condition.

Now that she had stayed awake for a couple of hours, Saint Orfan and the experts dispatched by the RA made a number of important conclusions.

"What do you mean her body has turned vestigial?"

"Her original human body has lost most of the qualifications for life." Jovy seriously responded. Half of her body is fused with the cockpit chair. Her spine does not really exist any longer and so do several other organs."

"If that is the case, then Rosa..."

Jovy shrugged his shoulders. "According to our analysis, we can interpret this as a sign that Saint Orfan has successfully transferred her consciousness to the Riot Mark III. Even if we cut away her organic body from the piloting chair, the ace pilot will still remain in the Riot Mark III. She may decide to enter into inclusion if this was the

case."

What he revealed sounded shocking enough. Numerous mech designers familiar with the ace pilot's condition had never given up on helping Saint Orfan restore her original human body.

It was a pity that their strength was enough.

Ves closed his eyes for a moment. "Should we keep the organic body, or send it off? What does Rosa Orfan think?"

"She does not understand these matters. They are too profound for a simple champion such as herself. Her answer remains unclear. For now, we recommend that you abide by the status quo and avoid any mischief."

"Fine."

"Have you completed the exploding spears?"

"I did." Ves nodded. "Don't worry. They should be incredibly potent, especially in the hands of a genuine ace mech. The only constraints are resources and time. It is very expensive to fabricate a single of them. They should only be used against the strongest of enemies in order to justify the colossal expenditures. Even if I can make more of them, I do not dare to do so because they are truly resource hungry."

Even if Ves and the Larkinson Clan could easily obtain resources, red humanity as a whole was still suffering from

a lack of supply.

It would be too extravagant for Ves to expend valuable resources to produce single-use exploding spears!

Gloriana clearly agreed with his sentiment. "These exploding spears are similar to missiles in this regard. Few can bear the cost of using them in every battle." More chapters in Telegram: t.me/+z7ieNjQSLFMzMmY6

Chapter 7313: The Battle of Philaster Crestia

Chapter 7313: The Battle of Philaster Crestia

The decisive battle had begun.

After several hours of waiting, the Voribug Organic Battle Moon had stopped a short distance away from Philaster Crestia III.

Though the moon did not advance into weapons range, just the fact that it was orbiting relatively close by already exerted a lot of pressure towards the defenders.

The Rubarthan soldiers gritted their teeth and tried their best to focus on their immediate responsibilities.

The Goliath Hive did not deploy its Goliaths right away.

Instead, tens of millions if not hundreds of millions of cannon fodder bugs began to flood the orbital defense network.

A huge number of guns opened fire onto the seemingly unending swarms. Even though the soldiers all knew that the Goliath Hive actually fielded the least amount of cannon fodder out of the 6 hives, it certainly did not feel that way given that there were bugs in every direction!

The mech pilots, spacers and orbital techs all felt pressured as they tried their best to repel the onslaught of mutated voribugs. From their perspective, there was no such thing as too few voribugs.

They were already straining to hold back the tide, and this was when they were still in the early phase of the battle!

Many of them endured so much strain that they began to call for reinforcements to relieve their beleaguered positions.

Unfortunately, there was not enough backup to go around. The Goliath Hive did not attack the planet from every angle, but its forces had spread out just enough to lock down many defending units in place.

Although it sounded counterproductive for the mutated voribugs to spread themselves out and attack the planet from multiple angles, conquering a planet was not easy.

The enemy needed to thoroughly dismantle at least half of the orbital defense works in order to secure one side of it from bombardment.

Attacking from multiple angles also had a very negative effect on morale.

All of the soldiers knew that if the enemy bugs maintained their blockade, it would become increasingly harder to feed the locals.

Whether out of a sense of duty or self-preservation, the soldiers assigned to the areas under siege all experienced complex but ultimately firm emotions.

“Shoot! Shoot! Shoot!”

“Don’t hold down the trigger. Conserve your ammunition. Our resupply schedule can’t keep up with your ammo consumption!”

“Requesting backup! My orbital platform is about to get overrun!”

Even though it was just the prelude to the most intense phase of the battle, soldiers already began to suffer and die.

The voribugs attacked with such ferocity that hardly any human could take a break.

Out of all of the assets that came under siege, the orbital platforms suffered the brunt of the damage.

All of the mechs and warships in the field were mobile enough to evade the initial enemy attack waves.

The much larger and more formidable orbital defense fortresses could withstand much more damage with the help of their titan shields.

The smaller orbital defense platforms lacked such defenses. They were built with a certain degree of economy in mind. Once their azure energy shields shattered apart, they could only rely on their relatively thick layers of medium-grade armor plating to withstand the attacks of the voribug swarms.

The crews of the orbital platforms never survived once the voribugs ate their way through all of that armor.

Yet the remaining ones still fought as if their lives were on the line. They all understood the stakes. They could not afford to retreat prematurely, but neither could they stand their ground and endure wave after wave of cannon fodder bugs.

The psychological impact of fighting against these swarms was very bad.

The Goliath Hive clearly bred these cannon fodder bugs with the cheapest of materials in the Philaster Crestia System. The voribugs simply converted worthless asteroids and mundane materials into the weakest and most common of subspecies.

The value of a single bug was far too low, yet because they were so numerous, the defenders had no choice but to expend valuable energy and ammunition just to mow them all down.

“These bugs never end...”

“Is the Pact doomed from the start?”

“I won’t... die to these worthless bugs...”

At least the native aliens possessed a semblance of honor and dignity. As murderous as they may be, they were still opponents that humans could understand. Dying to an honorable alien soldier was preferable to getting devoured by a multitude of weak and pitiful voribugs!

Several hours passed by as the defenses continued to endure attacks.

Since the Goliath Hive was not in a hurry to bring out the big guns, the defenders tried their best to conserve their resources.

Everyone knew that fighting against the mutated voribugs always ended up in a battle of attrition.

Even in a battle against the Goliath Hive, any force that failed to last against the swarms had no capital to win.

The enemy willingly squandered the lives of all of the cannon fodder bugs in order to gain an advantage in the subsequent rounds.

By the time the megavoribugs made their advance, the depleted defenders might not be able to endure for long!

This was why it became crucial for the champions and elite units to hold back and conserve their resources as much as possible.

While there were expert mechs roaming about in order to plug any gaps that had emerged across the orbital defense network, the ace mechs and other powerful assets conspicuously remained absent on the battlefield.

Deploying them early meant that they would not be able to fight against the Goliath and the Incubator with their full strength. They could afford to lose this confrontation, so as much as these heroes wanted to tear into the voribugs, they did their best to restrain their restless hearts.

This naturally included the 28 Ascended Giants. They found it more difficult than the other soldiers to remain inside the Armitage.

Each of them had already donned their raiments, yet none of them received permission to sortie and display their heroic demeanor in front of the Rubarthans.

“Sir, when will we be allowed to fight?”

“When the enemy sends out its Goliaths and battle moon.” The Divine Harpoon calmly answered for the umpteenth time. “Only several hours have passed so far. The Goliath Hive is not done with exhausting the defenses of the nearby planet. This assault is unlike any other. The voribugs no longer have a need to test their Goliaths against us, so they are doing their best to get our more valuable units to exhaust their resources against their least valuable ones. If you have any functional brain in your giant skull, you would know this already.”

Each Ascended Giant used to be an elite soldier or combat back when they lived mortal human lives. None of them should have asked this kind of question.

“Where is our polemarchos? He should be leading us in our time of glory.”

“The Dark Apostle is handling other matters at the moment. He will arrive before us when the time has come and not before.”

The leader of the Ascended Giants was not with them at the moment.

As a mech designer as well as a human phase lord, Ves saw no point in fulfilling the role of the latter at this phase of the battle.

Instead, he remained in his workshop and kept tinkering with his raiment and his weapon systems.

After fabricating a handful of exploding spears for the Riot Mark III, Ves no longer spent his time on making additional ones.

While they would definitely be able to make a regular Goliath hurt, the more powerful ones were not that easy to eradicate.

Their greater size and rapid regeneration capabilities made it impossible to eliminate them in one fell swoop.

As long as that was the case, the Level 7 Goliaths would easily be able to restore their bodies by absorbing large amounts of cannon fodder bugs.

This was by far their most annoying trait. Burning their flesh with plasma weapons helped to inhibit their regeneration, but the efficiency was too low.

Regardless, the Rubarthans had supplied scaled up plasma weapons to every Ascended Giant attached to the Bluejay Fleet because they had nothing better on hand.

Ves received a weapon from them as well.

The hyper plasma halberd featured plenty of reach and could project a fairly long plasma blade.

Since the Rubarthans specifically designed it for Ves, they went out of their way to improve its materials and craftsmanship.

Although it was not a masterwork weapon, any Ascended Giant would be happy to wield this powerful plasma halberd.

Not Ves.

When Gloriana visited his workshop, she conspicuously noticed that the gifted Rubarthan weapon still rested inside its container.

It turned out that Ves hadn't even bothered to open the massive 'gift box'.

"What are you doing, Ves?"

"I am figuring out how to upgrade my superdimensional spear?"

"The Sting, right? Why are you so invested in this last-minute endeavor? Is it not enough for you to make use of the Rubarthan gift? Aside from its energy consumption, it is truly a powerful weapon." Gloriana remarked.

"Plasma weapons are band-aids. You know that as well as I do." Ves argued back as he continued to tweak his design for his upgraded weapon. "Fighting against the Goliath Hive does indeed require strength, but it also demands a counter against the attrition warfare doctrine that the mutated voribugs so love to employ. We need to expend the least amount of resources to inflict the maximum amount of destruction. We can't do that by using plasma weapons willy nilly."

His wife frowned but did not argue back. She knew his points were valid. If there was a possibility to develop a better weapon, then it was worthwhile to explore this possibility.

"What do you have in mind?" She asked.

Ves pointed at the container set on a nearby table. "Do you remember the Corrupting Orb that I managed to obtain in the past?"

"I do. You used it during the leadership challenge. Wait, are you thinking of using it to corrupt the flesh of the voribugs?"

Ves grinned. "Something like that. Recently, I built a high-grade dimensional spear mixed with TE wood for myself. Back when I designed it, I already had this possibility in mind. I want to combine as much of my knowledge related to hyper technology, E-technology and qi cultivation into the creation of a spear that can not only pierce through anything, but also wither the bodies of my enemies. To put it differently, I am basically trying to convert my knowledge on how to load the withering curse into my weapon artifact."

That caused Gloriana to raise her eyebrows!

“That sounds difficult. You are treading new ground with this. At the very least, you will have to employ runes in order to program the weapon.”

“I know. Runes are not as mysterious as before, Gloriana. The Ascension Runes that third-order living mechs are able to accumulate over time. The Red Collective has also built up a respectable database of runes. The true challenge lies in combining them and applying them to an artifact. I may have the Oceancaller as a reference, but the traditional craftsmanship put into this work is so deep that I can’t replicate the production methods. I still have to figure out a lot of stuff on my own.”

“That does not sound as if you can meet your goal within a short amount of time.” His wife responded with a frown.

“Hehe, normally you’d be right, but who do you think I am? Creating living objects is my expertise. I have always bypassed the stringent requirements of traditional craftsmanship by making my stuff alive. The conversion from a dead object into a living entity often creates new possibilities. I have often used this to fill up the gaps of an incomplete design. Right now, I am gambling on whether the incomplete framework of a withering spear can be completed by turning it into a basic high-level artifact.”

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Chapter 7314: The Structure of Artifacts

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Although Ves sounded casual about it, what he attempted to create was absolutely astonishing!

He did not know whether the RC had made any progress in this area, but he was pretty sure that attaching a spell into an artifact was pretty rare if nonexistent in the modern age.

If he succeeded, then he could take advantage of this new design solution to diversify the capabilities of his mechs as well as his personal wargear.

Ves already looked forward to wielding the spear that he desired. Compared to letting Blinky cast the withering curse by himself, it was much more efficient to outsource most of the work to a dedicated artifact, particularly one that already integrated the Corrupting Orb!

Though he was currently busy in his own research, he did not mind sharing his thought process and speculation to his wife.

Gloriana might not specialize in hyper technology and E-technology as much as her husband, but she was no slouch in these areas, or else she wouldn't have been able to become a good collaboration partner.

She nodded several times as Ves espoused his theories.

"So if I am understanding you correctly, you are trying to automate the process of performing a cultivation technique as much as possible. You also want to increase its reliance on external sources of E energy in order to minimize the consumption of the wielder."

"That's right, Gloriana."

His wife was sharp enough to deduce the possible implications of this attainment.

"Are you trying to create an artifact that can perform a powerful cultivation technique that is completely independent from the cultivation attainments of the wielder? I can think of many useful applications. Ascended Giants armed with your artifacts can launch withering curses without knowing anything about qi cultivation. Mechs can cast spells by relying solely on exotic radiation as input. Even the newly developed artifact warships can mount massive upscaled modular weapon artifacts that can produce all kinds of effects, allowing them to come closer to matching the performance of dreadnoughts!"

If Ves was able to make any of these ideas come true, then red humanity would have a lot more capital to defeat its enemies!

The two mech designers sincerely cooperated with each other as they tried to upgrade the original Sting. They did not work on a set blueprint, but instead chose to experiment with different ideas.

Unfortunately for the both of them, their confidence did not match their results. Several precious hours went by as they repeatedly tried and failed to produce significant results.

Although they gathered precious data and learned what did not work, all of this would only benefit subsequent research and development.

Ves was much more interested in immediate gains. The experiment only yielded partial success in this regard.

As the Withering Sting eventually took shape, he grew disappointed.

While the upgrade did manage to bring about numerous improvements, the end product fell short of his high expectations.

His wife patted him on the back. "This is already a good experimental result in my opinion. You cannot expect to develop a fully independent weapon artifact that can poison massive alien organisms without requiring any meaningful input or technique from the user. You would have to create a work on par with the Heavensword if you want to meet your ridiculously high criteria. It is already good enough that we managed to build a weapon that can assist your efforts to afflict your enemies with the so-called withering curse."

The Withering Sting ultimately earned its new name, if only barely.

Along its dark superdimensional metallic shaft, Ves had painstakingly carved dozens of runes.

Ves and Gloriana had carefully chosen each and every rune. They roughly understood their meaning, but did not know what would happen if they attempted to string them together into larger sequences.

They had too little time on their hands.

The proper way to go about it was to start sub-projects centered around experimenting with different rune sequences.

However, due to the urgency of the ongoing battle, the Miracle Couple had little choice but to set aside all of that trouble and rely on a combination of existing academic literature and extrapolations of their own theoretical frameworks to complete this attempt.

The success rate of such haphazard and directionless experimentation was never high in the first place.

Ves still hoped to attain greater results, but reality rudely smacked him in the face.

As he examined the newly upgraded weapon artifact scaled at 3x, he tried to imagine how well the Dark Apostle would be able to wield this armament.

“Blinky, or rather me, will have to expend a significant amount of focus and energy to cast the withering curse.” He sighed. “My goal was to make it foolproof to the point of allowing my other self to wield it without needing any conscious input or technique, but... this is a lot harder than I thought. I feel like we have missed a few crucial steps in our process.”

He once again lamented that he had yet to redeem the Divine Blacksmith Records from the System.

The knowledge gap was enormous.

He knew what was possible, but he did not know the steps required to produce the desired results.

This frustrated him beyond belief, especially when he learned first-hand the difficulty of closing the gap.

His wife was right, though. It was far too unrealistic to expect instant results. Not every goal could be met at the first attempt. This was clearly a research subject that he would have to investigate over a longer period of time. It may take at least several years before he could produce a truly qualified end product.

“I suppose this will be enough for the time being.” Ves said with a sigh. “The Withering Sting will help, but only to an extent.”

The Dark Apostle still had many shortcomings when it came to equipment. Every human phase lord possessed inadequate equipment.

Ves yearned to complete his Polymetal mechs. Once he completed this elemental Carmine mech design project, he would finally have a Carmine mech of his own that was infinitely adaptable and could easily serve as a superior alternative to a phase lord raiment.

Although his Superdimensional Giant Regalia possessed astounding defensive properties, it lacked the tech and flexibility that a mech designer could exploit to the fullest.

“The problem that is vexing me most is the size changing aspect of artifacts.” Ves said while nursing his forehead. “I just can’t figure out how it is done.”

He summoned the Oceancaller and sent out a mental command that caused the artifact flute to spontaneously grow larger.

“Is this artifact able to grow larger because of its runes? That sounds unlikely. Ever since we discovered the existence of superdimensional matter, I developed a hypothesis that artifacts are able to change their size by incorporating materials with phasewater or superdimensional matter. However, I am not sure whether this is true. The Withering Sting certainly does not possess any trace that suggests that it can change size.”

Gloriana frowned in thought. “You have raised a number of interesting theories and possibilities. I have not put a great degree of thought on these matters. In my opinion, the most likely answer involves a combination of two. Runes are essential because they serve as the programming code of this esoteric ability. Superdimensional matter is also needed to form the root of the size-changing aspect, but I do not necessarily think we should limit it to a narrow range.”

“What do you mean by that, honey?”

“Do you think that all of those ancient blacksmiths and artisans all had access to phasewater or superdimensional matter during their lifetimes?”

That was a difficult question to answer.

“I am not sure. Ancient records mention lots of wondrous materials, but it is rather curious that none of them have spoken about phasewater or superdimensional matter in-depth. Of course, this may be the cause because those sources were too low-level to gain access to the good stuff.”

“I think that it is too extravagant that every crafter at the time had access to phasewater or superdimensional matter.” Gloriana plainly said. “As far as we know, phasewater is a unique resource of the Red Ocean, and it may not have been produced in large volumes at the time. Superdimensional matter has not appeared naturally outside of the 365th dimension. Under these circumstances, it is not realistic to think that ancient blacksmiths relied on these materials to create size-changing artifacts. I believe that they have relied on other tricks to accomplish the result.”

Ves took a closer look at the Oceancaller. While the replica artifact possessed a lot of depth that he was not able to analyze in depth, his intuition told him that it didn’t incorporate any phasewater or superdimensional matter that he could recognize.

This meant that Gloriana’s theory may very well be true!

In order to produce a size-changing artifact, it was not necessary to rely on the miraculous properties of phasewater or superdimensional matter!

“Interesting.” He said while idly waving the Oceancaller around. “Since you don’t think phasewater or superdimensional matter is strictly necessary, then what else can explain this ability?”

“I think... that we are looking at artifacts from the wrong perspective, Ves. We are too used to treating our works as fixed material objects. There was nothing wrong with that idea in the previous ages, but times have changed. Now that we have entered the Age of Dawn, we need to rethink this assumption. We know now that every artifact has a material and a spiritual component. As you are the pioneer of living mechs, you should understand this truth better than others, correct?”

“Correct.” Ves responded. “What are you getting at, Gloriana?”

“Think about the end point of mechs and artifacts. Whether it is god mechs or the Heavensword, both of them blur the line between energy and matter. God pilots and god mechs are perfectly fused together, which ordinarily shouldn’t be possible. The reason why it works is because god pilots are predominantly energy-based life forms while god mechs are predominantly material objects. The overlap between the two is not too strong, which means that they can slot together. So long as the fusion is good enough, one can easily borrow the strength of another.”

Ves narrowed his eyes in suspicion. His wife had a specific destination in mind, but he was not yet able to figure out what she was trying to convey.

“Go on.”

Gloriana smirked at him. She clearly believed she had drawn a conclusion that her husband had yet to form on his own. That gave her a particularly strong sense of superiority.

“Think about it, Ves. While it may be presumptuous on my part, I believe that the perfect fusion between god pilots and god mechs can serve as a model for high-level artifact creation. It is not the material side of artifacts that is responsible for changing their size. It is the spiritual side that is responsible. So long as it possesses the right properties and programming, I believe that it can affect the material nature of objects. We already have proof that such a relation exists in the form of demonic mutations.”

She was right!

The physical mutations of D-arms and D-mechs directly proved that the spirit could affect the material.

What if Ves substituted the demon for a spiritual product that knew how to change its size?

The spiritual entity’s ability might get passed onto the object, thereby allowing the latter to grow huge!

Ves suddenly sobered up. As much as Ves wanted to believe in this theory, it was not rigorous enough to win his approval.

“You don’t have proof, right?”

Gloriana’s smile cracked. “That is currently the cause...”

“We can test your theories out at a later date. I think this research subject is too high-end for us to delve into right away. For what is worth, I think your guess is one of the more likely ones to be true.”

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Chapter 7315: Taking a Toll

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According to Gloriana's latest theory, the physicality of artifacts deserved further investigation.

An artifact was neither fully material nor fully spiritual in nature. It was a combination of both, though neither Ves nor Gloriana could supply any further details.

Ves intuitively felt that there was a lot of depth in how the spiritual affected the material.

He really wanted to investigate this matter and conduct experiments but this was clearly not the time.

Besides, even if he proved the validity of this assumption, that did not necessarily mean that he was able to convert his gains into tangible benefits.

Ves inwardly shook his head and decided to set this profound subject aside for the time being.

"Thank you for sharing your theory with me." Ves told her. "Your perspective is quite refreshing. You have certainly given me a lot of food for thought."

Though she did not lead him to develop a solution, she at least got him to think. New possibilities already began to pass through his mind. So long as he spent enough time investigating them, he may be able to solve the problem one day.

"I do not think that size-changing artifacts are attainable at the moment." Gloriana shared her opinion with him. "Do not let your newfound responsibilities with the Phase Lord Department detract you from your true vocation. You are a mech designer first and an Ascended Giant second. No matter how physically strong and imposing you become, a phase lord will always be inferior to true manifestations of strength. God pilots always triumph over everything else. We should do our best to strive to become Star Designers."

Ves nodded in agreement. "You don't need to remind me, Gloriana. I will get to work on our ongoing mech design projects as soon as this battle has come to a conclusion. I do not intend to abandon our current campaign, but we will definitely need to take time off in order to learn from our lessons and prepare more thoroughly."

The battle outside was still ongoing. Even if nothing exciting happened due to the voribugs being content to throw lots of cannon fodder at the defenses, the situation could grow worse at any second.

The more time passed, the greater the probability that the Goliaths would finally enter into play.

That was when the defenders would truly get tested!

After completing the Withering Sting, Ves no longer bothered to fabricate additional gear.

Perhaps he could still put his time to good use by rushing to fabricate a handful of exploding spears, but the material costs were too high.

Ves felt it was better for him to pay more attention to the ongoing battle now that it was approaching a red-hot stage.

After all intelligence was essentially to earn a clean victory. Without understanding the details of both sides, it would be difficult to pursue a solid goal.

"I intend to head over to the command center." Ves announced to his wife. "Will you come as well, or do you prefer to stay?"

Gloriana pressed her lips. "I will not be joining you. I do not have an eye for strategy. You can go ahead and liaise with the Rubarthans. As for myself, I intend to stay behind and lead the Design Department into assisting with repair and maintenance work. The initial first-class multipurpose mechs deployed by the Bluejay Fleet have already begun to return to replenish their supplies and undergo emergency maintenance. I can speed up this work especially for the more powerful mechs."

"As you wish. Just be careful, alright?"

They talked a bit more before they finally went their separate ways.

When Ves entered the command center of the Tarrasque, he entered a space where all of the officers and specialists were already engrossed in their own work.

His entry did not attract much attention. All of the mechers had become consumed by the heavy responsibility of coordinating the Bluejay Fleet's participation in the ongoing battle.

While the Bluejay Fleet was not one of the main participants of this decisive clash, its warships could still provide a lot of fire support. The RA contingent also sent out at least half of its mechs.

The frontlines sorely needed elite mech units to serve as 'firefighters'.

Anytime a defensive installation started to show signs of getting overwhelmed timely reinforcements could prevent a catastrophe from occurring. Even if the defensive site had incurred too much damage, an elite mech unit could still buy enough time to evacuate any crew and salvageable supplies.

At this time, the battle had already lasted long enough to exhaust the fighting power of numerous mech units and defensive platforms.

The ordinary mech units organized by the Rubarthan Pact were not pushovers, but even if they consisted of excellent first-class multipurpose mech units, they still possessed limits.

Ves observed mechs that had fought continuously for many hours and began to falter for various reasons.

Mechs with strong melee combat features slowed down and started to make more mistakes as their pilots could no longer maintain their focus.

Mechs that had blocked many attacks with their azure energy shields started to suffer real damage.

Even their shield link transceivers declined in effectiveness due to how heavily they had been used.

Unless a mech was truly high-end, the quality of their components could not endure repeated high-intensity combat.

Ves' expression turned grave as he witnessed how extensively human fatigue and mechanical breakdowns degraded the combat power of the defensive troops in real time.

"How insidious." He whispered to himself.

He suddenly felt that the mutated voribugs possessed an excellent understanding of red humanity.

The voribugs had deliberately sent out swarms of voribugs at the defenders of Philaster Crestia III in order to deplete the defenders.

The previous scale of conflict induced enough pressure to prevent the soldiers from relaxing entirely.

It also caused their hardware to get worn down at an accelerated rate.

What was most important about this was that the Goliath Hive never gave the defending units enough time to recuperate and repair all of the worn down gear.

Though the Rubarthans tried their best to rotate their soldiers and perform deep maintenance on heavily used assets, they were fighting an uphill battle.

The difference in numbers was simply too great.

All of this meant that the efforts of the preceding days finally bore fruit for the Goliath Hive!

As Ves continued to observe the data, he easily noticed that much of the accumulated attrition from the previous days pushed the defensive assets to their breaking point.

The rate of human errors and machine-driven malfunctions continued to pile up with every passing minute.

The mech pilots and other soldiers had tried and failed to reach their peak conditions at the start of the battle.

The hours-long slog where a seemingly endless tide of voribugs continually threw themselves at their guns only worsened their conditions further.

The efficiency of the defenders deteriorated over time, exactly as the Goliath Hive intended.

The fact that the mutated voribugs understood strategy to this extent and leveraged it to their advantage was frightening.

Ves was far from the only person to make this scary realization. The others simply kept their mouths shut because they were too busy with their own pressing responsibilities.

If this was what the mutated voribugs could engineer in one star system, Ves did not have much hope for the other locations on the Rubarthan front.

The Rubarthan Pact alone could not hold back such a competent alien adversary.

Only with the help of reinforcements from 'allies' such as the Red Collective and the Cybernetic Empire could the Rubarthans hope to withstand this invasion.

"This is going to be tough, but we are not without hope."

Ves manipulated the projected interface and checked the condition of the reserves.

He manually examined the reserves and noted that the Rubarthans had been very careful about activating them. The elite units that represented the best and brightest in the Philaster Crestia System had only partially taken

action up to this point.

This included the Bluejay Fleet's mech contingent.

While they possessed a lot more fighting spirit, the Rubarthans acted very restrained up to this point.

Aside from sending them out on rotation to put out fires and punish overly aggressive voribug swarms, the elite mech units had yet to truly exert themselves.

Ves understood the need to hold back the elites. The regular ops bore the brunt of the current assault without too much backup because their lives were ultimately more expendable.

Although it was cruel to admit it, the Rubarthan Pact was still big enough to be able to replenish regular manpower without paying an excessive price.

The same could not be said for the elites, who not only received top-notch training and augmentations, but also possessed much better talent and pedigrees.

It did not make much sense to throw them into the vortex of attrition warfare where the aliens held all of the advantages.

They were among the sharpest blades the Rubarthans had in their arsenal, which meant that they should only be employed where they could do the most damage, and not before.

That time had not yet come.

Ves felt rather frustrated about that. He understood the logic behind the decision to hold them back, but he could not accept it on an emotional level.

The elite soldiers themselves must be feeling frustrated as well. They were not blind. A gradual slaughter took place before their machines, yet they received strict instructions to remain on standby or rest.

It must be agonizing for them to hold back while their fellow comrades were being hammered by the enemy.

Such a situation most certainly took a toll on their morale.

After examining the friendly forces, Ves began to examine the enemy ones next.

The adversary had brought out almost all of the cannon fodder bugs that it had accumulated in the sun system to

this point.

Even if the Goliath Hive did not place too much emphasis on quantity, the amount of bugs identified by the sensor systems exceeded his imagination.

Easily hundreds of millions of individual bugs had already thrown themselves onto the humans.

Many more were ready to catch a laser beam or absorb a kinetic round. Their lives were cheap, but each one that forced the defenders to expend their resources was another one that fulfilled its life mission.

Due to the sheer quantity and increasingly more chaotic signal interference generated by the voribugs, it was difficult to make exact estimates on their quantity.

It did not help that the voribugs were decently competent at rooting out many hidden listening posts and other

sensors.

The species had a knack for discovering tech and refined alloys.

Stealth devices could only help so much, especially when they were surrounded by bugs on all sides.

The only devices able to evade their detection were too small and weak to covertly transmit their signals back to

the Rubarthans.

This led to a situation where the fog of war covered large parts of the enemy swarms.

While it was still possible to examine their composition based on pure visuals, the lack of stronger and more precise data made it difficult to identify the presence and strength of the Goliaths that must be hiding in the rear.

Ves stepped closer to Jovy, who had been overseeing the battlefield in the last few hours.

"Jovy."

"Ves."

"How is it going?"

"You have already seen it for yourself. We are still in the attrition phase, though there are signs that it is about to come to a close. The swarms are thinning out, just as expected. Unlike the other hives, the Goliath Hive does not insist on overcoming our resistance by relying on quantity alone. The time is almost ripe for the megavoribugs to

enter the stage."

"That will be the moment when the Sigma Drift and the Riot Mark III will make their debut on the battlefield." Ves

remarked.

"The same goes for you and your Ascended Giants." Jovy mentioned. "Are you ready?"

"Not really, but I don't think I have much of a choice." Ves helplessly said.

Chapter 7316: Giant Speech

Chapter 7316: Giant Speech

The most crucial phase of the battle was about to commence.

Ves could feel it. Others could deduce it as well.

He accelerated his information gathering activities and rapidly absorbed a lot of data.

From the conditions of all of the mech units to the efficiency of replenishing spent supplies, Ves gained a much more thorough understanding of the conditions in the field.

He particularly understood how extensively the voribugs strained the logistics of the defenders.

For example, the Rubarthans had only recently begun to proliferate shield link technology.

Support link technology used to be exclusive to the RA and the RF, but after the Terrans and Rubarthans declared independence, the latter no longer abided by this rule.

The implementation of shield link technology across many different mech models should have extended the lifespan of Rubarthan mechs to a significant degree.

When employed against the native aliens, the survivability of all mechs and warships that made use of shield link technology should have tripled or quadrupled!

However, shield link technology proved much less useful against the mutated voribugs than expected.

Shield link technology did not magically create shields or reinforce faltering ones for free. It merely granted combat assets the ability to share shield power with each other.

Multiple shielded units were therefore able to pool together their resources and enjoy much better protection as a result!

This normally worked well against conventional enemies. So long as their firepower was not high enough to instantly demolish a target, a shield-linked unit always enjoyed constant protection.

However, the mutated voribugs were different because they generally did not employ such strategies.

There were simply too many voribugs. So long as a swarm managed to engulf an entire force of shield-linked units, they would all suffer so much combined damage at the same time that shield link technology practically lost meaning.

More importantly than that, the mutated voribugs developed enough of a familiarity with shield link technology to deliberately block the linkages.

Even if a single bug was not powerful and resilient enough to block a shield link for more than a second before getting vaporized, a huge number of bugs could definitely maintain a sustained blockade!

The enemy had grown wise enough to develop special voribug subspecies that possess an unusually high capacity for energy absorption.

Not only were they able to resist laser beams and plasma bolts with great effectiveness, they also happen to be extremely effective at blocking shield links!

In short, the voribugs were so effective at countering support link technology that it was not able to give the Rubarthan the decisive advantage they sought.

This further damaged human morale. Their vaunted high technology did not avail them against the weak and primitive cannon fodder bugs.

If not for the fact that the Goliath Hive was about to run out of voribugs at this rate, everyone's confidence would have dipped even further.

"It is time." Jovy spoke up. "The Incubator has begun to accelerate. Its emissions are growing. The organic battle moon's surface is shifting. We have not yet determined the reason for this activity, but our analysts are doing their best to decipher its secrets."

"Have the enemy's Goliaths begun to move as well?"

"We are not quite sure, Ves. We are not able to observe them directly. They are still hiding in the middle of the densest swarms. However, all of the swarms are advancing forward in waves. If the Goliaths are matching pace, then they will likely enter into engagement range in the next 10 to 30 minutes."

"Understood. My services as a mech designer are no longer needed. I think it is time for my other self to come out. Let's see if it is possible for us to demolish the enemy battle moon. Teleport me over to the Armitage."

"Got it. Oh, one more thing."

"What is it, Jovy?"

"If you and your Ascended Giants are unable to destroy the Voribug Organic Battle Moon before it has spawned a hypothetical Level 8 Goliath..."

Ves turned back to stare at Jovy.

"Despite our superdimensional arms and armament, you know as well as I do that there is a mismatch in equipment. I cannot make any promises. The VOBM is bizarre. Depending on how many Goliaths are thrown in our direction, we may not have the muscle and manpower necessary to take down the organic megaconstruct. If that turns out to be the case, what will you guys do? Don't tell me you're going to resort to weapons of mass destruction."

"That decision is not up to the Bluejay Fleet." Jovy grimly responded. "The Rubarthans started to weigh this decision shortly after the discovery of the VOBM. As far as I know, they have yet to make up their minds, but that is because the situation is not desperate enough to demand an immediate answer. If the enemy battle moon's performance is too dominant, then the Rubarthan commander may decide that they do not have a choice in the matter. It is best not to drive them to this point."

Ves nodded in agreement. Although the current scope of warfare was already dangerous enough, he did not want each side to throw superweapons at each other as if there was no tomorrow.

Once all sides adapted to this destructive mode of warfare, the battlefield would become extremely hostile against ordinary troops!

As a mech designer, Ves did not want to see superweapons turn mechs into an afterthought.

It was in his best interest for every side to restrict their firepower and play by the rules. Only then would mechs and mech pilots continue to maintain their relevancy in the new frontier.

Therefore, Ves had no reason to disagree with Jovy. It appeared that his alter ego and his band of Ascended Giants needed to work extra hard to defeat the Goliath Hive.

"Wish us luck."

"We will."

A short time later, the Dark Apostle emerged fully equipped from the bowels of the Armitage.

Ves had already retreated to Blinky. The fluffy companion spirit granted him a means to stay awake and keep an eye on what his phase lord self was doing.

It also granted him a medium to participate in the upcoming fight, if only in an assisting capacity.

While Ves felt tempted to speak up or take charge, he did his best to suppress his control freak tendencies and allow the Dark Apostle to exercise his authority.

Ves and the Dark Apostle had already made an agreement where the latter could do as he wished so long as he did not betray red humanity.

In any case, the Dark Apostle walked forward while clad in his full superdimensional gear.

The Superdimensional Giant Regalia might not be as promising as his planned Polymetal mech, but it still offered an excellent degree of protection.

In fact, the Dark Apostle would never be able to deploy onto a dangerous battlefield if his protection was not as good.

As for armaments, the human phase lord already mounted a handful of exploding spears onto his back. In order to make them a little more interesting, Ves had slightly tweaked their designs. The minor experimentation should hopefully yield a lot of interesting data once thrown.

Aside from that, he also carried 2 main weapons. He already mounted the Rubarthan plasma halberd on his back while simultaneously holding the Withering Sting in one of his hands.

Although Ves believed that his partially failed experimental product may still be incredibly effective against the mutated voribugs, his phase lord self could still switch to the plasma halberd if his calculations ended up wrong.

The Dark Apostle felt very confident in all of his arms. He might not agree with Ves on everything, but he greatly respected the latter's craftsmanship.

Though Ves very clearly regarded the Withering Sting as a failed experimental product that fell short of his expectations, the Dark Apostle considered the superdimensional spear to be a qualitative evolution.

What failed product? It was clearly better than the shoddy weapons that he wielded during the leadership challenge!

With this weapon, the Dark Apostle felt confident in his ability to withstand any challenge from his fellow Ascended Giants. He did not believe that they were strong enough to withstand the withering curse cast with the help of the upgraded weapon.

His lips curled into a grin as he stood before his fellow giants.

They had all changed into their own equipment.

15 Ur-Titans stood tall and conveyed an aura of absolute strength. At 2.5x scale, their hull-grade superdimensional raiments made them appear like immovable walls. They all understood that they were about to face difficult enemies, but none of them lost their courage.

Any human phase lord candidate that possessed more fear than guts had already been weeded out a long time ago. The individuals who managed to pass the Phase Lord Department's stringent tests naturally possessed greater courage, so there was no reason to doubt their willingness to fight.

The Faceless Giants looked like a mixed bag in comparison.

With a uniform height that measured only 1.5x, the Faceless Giants initially looked like a squad of oversized mechs.

It was only when people bothered to study them seriously that their nature as Ascended Giants became clear.

The difference in scale clearly emphasized that the Faceless Giants were on trial this time. They had already lost two of their compatriots. The probability was great that more of their members would disappear in the giant creature's stomach.

"Ur-Titans. Faceless Giants. I see that everyone has already assembled here. As you know, excluding the previous battle where we attempted to pry the secrets of the Incubator, we are about to embark on our first true battle. We, the Ascended Giants, shall become fully exposed to the public."

The giants all looked serious. None of them felt particularly eager about being monitored so closely.

The Dark Apostle stared at the Ur-Titans for a moment before switching his gaze to the smaller but still formidable Faceless Giants.

"As challengers, my expectations for you are not too high. Even if you can do little more than take a beating, you can still make yourselves useful in this battle. The Goliath Hive is dispatching many different megavoribugs. These alien champions are extremely difficult to

eradicate. The Rubarthan defenders do not have enough champions to block all of these aliens while simultaneously leaving enough manpower to confront the VOBM."

Without their presence, it would have been way harder for the Rubarthans to persist up to this point.

The entire Rubarthan defensive strategy may have turned much more desperate if not for the presence of so many Ascended Giants.

The Dark Apostle's expression sharpened. **"Fight within your means. We are all lesser phase lords here. If the Incubator manages to spawn a Level 8 or Level 9 Goliath, then you must focus on withdrawal as the only way to defeat these powerful foes is to deploy multiple senior ace mechs."**

Even that may not be enough in certain cases!

The unknown presented many terrifying possibilities. Nobody knew what a Level 8 or 9 Goliath was like, but it was probably exponentially more dangerous!

This was why everyone constantly tried to remind the Ascended Giants to rein in their arrogance and curb their appetite.

The Dark Apostle gripped his spear tighter in anger as he watched the projection of the Incubator.

"Giants!" He called. **"The Incubator remains our primary target! As the cause behind the Divine Wheel and the Divine Aporia's demise, we must do our best to destroy it by relying on our own means. Let the Incubator choke on giant blood! No matter what foul creature it is attempting to nurture, we must teach it to never covet our flesh and bones! Only by fighting back to the greatest extent will we be able to deter the enemies of our race! For victory!"**

"For victory!"

"For the Ascended Giants!"

"For the polemarchos!"

The Ascended Giants all sounded enthusiastic enough. After issuing a few more instructions, the Dark Apostle chose to let them loose onto the battlefield!

Chapter 7317: Gamma Scorcher Adaptations

Chapter 7317: Gamma Scorcher Adaptations

Pandemonium.

The battlefield was massive.

It encompassed the extended orbit of an entire terrestrial planet.

The orbital defense network was being pressured from all directions, though the Goliath Hive's main attack vector aligned with the trajectory of the Voribug Organic Battle Moon.

Ultimately, victory and defeat hinged around whether the defenders could stop this gigantic organic satellite.

Though the defenders carefully directed every unit and asset on the battlefield, it was difficult for ordinary soldiers to identify any form of order and precision within their viewpoints.

Mech units flew in every direction while the orbital defense network had grown increasingly more ragged.

Warships carefully flew forward only to withdraw in haste as they began to get mobbed by voribug upon voribug.

At this phase of the ongoing battle, the Rubarthans had finally deployed their reserves.

The entry of many different elite mech units on the battlefield instantly changed the equation in numerous different sectors.

At one angle, the Gamma Scorchers dispatched by the Cybernetic Empire finally let loose with their modified graser rifles!

Whereas many Rubarthan mechs had tuned down the power settings of their energy weapons in order to increase their staying power, the Cybers had chosen to make different adaptations.

Their incredibly advanced mechs and weapon systems gave them enough flexibility to modify their signature gamma laser weapons.

The Gamma Scorchers had evidently chosen to make two separate variants of their standard rifles.

Half of the Gamma Scorchers wielded smaller versions of their regular rifles. It was easy to deduce that they had been downsized in order to dial down their power levels. While they were still capable of firing gamma laser beams, they were no longer powerful enough to penetrate through transphasic alloys or irradiate shielded targets.

Instead, it appeared that the Cybers had chosen to return to simplicity. The relatively low-powered gamma laser beams had become a lot thinner, but that also allowed them to accurately piece through distant targets with less wasted energy.

The Gamma Scorchers armed with these precision armaments acted like marksman mechs. They hung back and took up relatively safe positions in order to surgically remove strategically valuable enemies.

Even though the vast majority of voribugs consisted of nearly worthless cannon fodder, there were still millions of bugs that were a lot more impactful on an individual basis.

These bugs fulfilled many functions, from healing wounded friendlies to generating interference.

The most strategically valuable bugs outside of the Goliaths were the artillery bugs. They were larger and possessed the capacity to launch large plasma bolts at stationary or slow-moving targets.

Even though their accuracy was atrocious, their quantity alone allowed them to launch dozens if not hundreds of plasma bolts at any significant orbital structure!

Although the existing defenders were putting in a significant effort to clear them all out, there was always more in the background.

What was even worse was that there were lots of cannon fodder bugs that voluntarily acted as their shields and bodyguards!

This made it difficult to directly target them. Many attacks had to go through the bodies of lots of bugs before reaching the plasma artillery bugs, but by then they had either weakened or got blocked entirely.

The only way to effectively eliminate these cannon fodder bugs was by relying on overwhelming firepower, which was very inefficient, or get close enough to defeat them at close range.

The Gamma Scorchers adopted a different approach. Their precision rifles carefully aimed at their targets before opening fire.

Thin but powerful gamma laser beams shot out and pierced through the bodies of many cannon fodder bugs before accurately striking at different sensitive parts of the real targets!

Due to their specialized function, the plasma artillery bugs were not that good at taking damage, especially their glowing bellies, sensory organs and other delicate parts.

Despite all of the cannon fodder in the way, the Gamma Scorchers surprisingly managed to maintain a 90 percent hit rate.

A lot of plasma bugs suddenly faltered or outright exploded shortly after getting hit!

Out of all of the mech units in the field, the elite Gamma Scorchers eliminated more plasma artillery bugs

The only regrettable part about this impressive display was the disappointing quantity of Gamma Scorchers armed with precision rifles.

Their numbers were not high enough. If there were ten times as many of these machines, then the plasma artillery bugs would no longer pose a problem to the defenders stationed in one or two quadrants!

The other half of the Gamma Scorchers wielded larger and more massive weapons that purposefully defocused their emitters. This turned the guns into energy shotguns, making them extremely suitable for swarm-clearing duty.

The Gamma Scorchers armed with this exciting weapon eagerly moved forward and took considerable risks in order to bring as many voribugs within their effective range as possible.

Once these machines pulled the trigger, all of the enemies in front of the modified armaments immediately got blasted by a lethal dose of gamma radiation!

All of the bugs within the firing cone did not even get to suffer. The energy pumping through their weak and fragile bodies got exposed to so much energy that they instantly vaporized.

The bugs located much further away that managed to avoid this outcome did not do much better.

Their bodies either got burned or got exposed to so much radiation that it blasted their alien DNA and other sensitive biological properties into pieces!

Many bugs immediately grew weaker. Their coordination worsened and their bodies no longer possessed as much strength and vitality as before. Depending on how much radiation they absorbed, they could still display a good amount of combat power, but as soon as they suffered the slightest injury, they collapsed right away.

The Gamma Scorchers managed to alleviate a lot of pressure with the help of the modified energy weapons. They were particularly helpful in rescuing orbital fortresses that were being swarmed and bombarded at the same time.

While the mechs couldn't do much to block the plasma bolts launched by dedicated voribug subspecies, they were still able to clear away millions and millions of the more basic cannon fodder bugs.

Energy shields crackled as errant bursts of heat and radiation pressed against them. With so many mechs and bugs fighting against each other, it was impossible to completely avoid collateral damage.

Nonetheless, the Cyber mechs were well-protected enough to be able to withstand the pressure with ease. This was especially the case when all of the machines were equipped with support link technology.

Of course, unlike other mechs, the Gamma Scorchers did not have to worry too much about getting swarmed. As long as their energy reserves lasted, they could keep firing their powerful energy projectors.

In order to ensure that these mechs did not drain themselves too quickly, the Cybernetic Empire's combat carriers and warships followed the machines from a moderate distance.

The vessels carefully controlled their firepower. Their role was not to act as artillery platforms, but to serve as giant energy batteries. Their formidable power generators allowed them to channel a lot of energy through the links with the Gamma Scorchers mechs.

This massively boosted the performance and staying power of this powerful mech unit!

Due to the abundant energy output of all of those starships, the mechs in the field effectively operated without an energy limit.

They could fire their powerful gamma energy blasts as fast as their armaments allowed!

The only real limitations that the advanced machines had to worry about were overheating and breakdowns.

Unfortunately for the Cybers, most repair functions could not prevent the mechs from gradually suffering more malfunctions and breakdowns after several hours of continuous fighting.

The Rubarthans made many adaptations to their existing mechs. These changes were supposed to improve their ability to withstand attrition, but the relentless pressure exerted by the Goliath Hive had caused even the most perfect systems to falter for inexplicable reasons.

Mechs that had been designed to operate for days, weeks if not months without requiring serious maintenance had been failing left and right after a few hours of high-intensity combat.

It couldn't be helped. While the voribugs were individually weak, their vast quantity could only be cleared away through lots of attacks.

Far too many mechs were being pushed to perform way above their original level.

Humans had become far too accustomed to fighting two kinds of battles.

There was the classical decisive battle where both sides fully committed their forces and achieved a resolution in an hour or several hours at most.

Then there was the slow grind where both forces held back and tried to nibble at each other over weeks, months or years.

Humanity had not encountered an enemy like this for a long time. The mutated voribugs were bizarrely capable of applying intense pressure over a much longer interval than typical decisive battles.

This also explained why so many well-designed mechs failed so badly after several hours of continuous fighting. The disgusting tactics employed by the voribugs were not particularly tricky or intelligent, but they could only be defeated by relying on hard power.

This was also the reason why an elite mech force such as a detachment of the Gamma Scorchers only took action at the start of the latest phase of the battle.

If they had already been fighting since the start of this assault, the powerful machines would have been worn down to the point of struggling to clear away so many voribugs.

To be honest, Ves was not quite sure whether the Cyber mechs would last until the end of this battle. These machines were packed with high technology. This caused them to gain a lot of power, but also made them a lot more complex and prone to suffering malfunction when pushed beyond their limits.

It appeared that not even the Polymath anticipated that an enemy as different as the mutated voribugs would emerge and put her empire's technologically superior mechs to the test.

The performance of the Gamma Scorchers made it clear that the Cybernetic Empire had no competitive advantage when it came to adapting mechs to this new style of warfare.

The Cybers were on the same starting point as everyone else, which caused many people to lower their judgment on CE tech.

Of course, anyone intelligent enough understood that CE tech still had its advantages. It was genuinely a lot further ahead in many technological fields. The biggest problem was that it had all been developed in isolation based on battlefield realities that had already become outdated at this time period.

Ves inwardly sighed.

Even he suffered from the same problem.

While he was not able to observe much from Blinky's perspective, he could still see that all of the other elite mechs had not received enough adaptations to thrive in this new mode of warfare.

Their weapons were too powerful. From plasma weapons to gauss weapons, many of their armaments had been designed for the express purpose of draining azure energy shields and piercing through transphasic alloys.

This was considered a necessity when fighting against native alien or rival human forces, but it was severely overkill when employed against the mutated voribugs!

In fact, Ves believed that practically all first-class weapons systems were overkill when used against the voribugs!

The Rubarthans and their helpers were better off if they employed second-class or even third-class weapon systems.

It was just that their inherent elitism and superiority complex prevented them from resorting to this solution. They would rather downgrade the power settings of their fancy weapons than to swap to weaker armaments outright!

"Silly."

As a former third-rater, Ves did not possess an aversion to utilizing second-class or third-class solutions.

However, he was aware that first-raters thought very differently on this matter. Their pride simply wouldn't allow it. The Rubarthans used to be one of the leaders of the human race.

That compelled them to counter the voribug threat by exploiting their technological superiority rather than borrowing the weak and pathetic solutions of their lessers!

Chapter 7318: Too Many Goliaths

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Ves did not quite understand why the first-raters insisted on using weapons worth hundreds of thousands if not millions of MTA credits when guns worth dozens of MTA credits could already do the job.

It seemed as if the mechers, Rubarthans and Cybers had become so arrogant in their technological and economical superiority that they could not conceive of an instance where it was better to make use of low-tech armaments.

Of course, they had their reasons to stick to their existing tech.

Their entire R&D, logistics and infrastructure was geared towards high-tech products. Switching to low-tech products en masse would generate colossal disruptions in many different sectors. Entire supply chains might collapse depending on the abruptness of the changes.

Another reason why the first-raters felt reluctant to downgrade to second-class or third-class weapon systems was because they were convinced that they could eventually develop first-class armaments that were truly effective against the mutated voribugs.

Only a short time had passed after the outbreak of the Voribug War, so it was not too surprising that the defenders were still stumbling in their attempts to counter the latest foes.

Everyone was looking for the magic bullet. Ves was no exception to this. A large number of mech designers and developers were brainstorming their own solutions to the problem. While most of them had yet to make any meaningful progress, they should definitely be able to deliver useful results in a couple of years.

Red humanity just had to last long enough to benefit from this collective research endeavor.

As the orbital battlefield continued to rage in every direction, Ves continued to examine other mech units in action.

The Gamma Scorchers were not the only unit that made a splash once they participated in the battle.

There was one Rubarthan elite mech unit stationed not too far away that also performed quite conspicuously.

The first-class multipurpose mechs were armed with large belt-fed shotguns that kept launching razor-sharp flechettes at a high frequency.

The dispersal angles of the flechettes were quite big, enabling them to clear away a large number of cannon fodder bugs with every shot.

What was interesting about their performance was that they kept firing their weapons without any regard for conserving ammunition.

Ves could tell that the mechs made excellent use of the Brownstone Modular Mech Ecosystem.

While this was not the only mech unit that made use of this handy automated resupply system, its priority was much higher.

The combat mechs were even accompanied by a dedicated company of support mechs!

The latter provided various services such as remote shielding, field repairs and gravitic repulsion.

With the help of the support mechs, the elite mech unit advanced unhindered and was successfully able to relieve a damaged orbital fortress that was under heavy attack.

As soon as the elite mech unit arrived, a storm of flechettes engulfed the cannon fodder bugs while also inflicting considerable damage on ranged voribugs.

When Ves observed the remarkable performance of this Rubarthan elite mech unit and turned his gaze to the Ascended Giants, he felt awfully disappointed.

He belatedly realized that the Ascended Giants lacked robust battlefield support services.

It was not a good idea for his latest subordinates to deploy into battle without adequate support.

Although it was difficult to provide meaningful support to human phase lords that were much stronger than the average mech, the help was not entirely useless.

From intelligence gathering to evacuating wounded champions, the Ascended Giants would find it much easier to complete their mission if they had adequate helpers at their disposal.

Ves briefly glanced back at the current controller of his true body.

Just as expected, the Dark Apostle remained ignorant of the differences between his Ascended Giants and the Rubarthan elite mech units.

Since the Rubarthans were fighting within their territory, they had ample opportunities to provide extensive support to its mech units. It was only due to attrition problems that they were unable to assist every mech unit in need.

Guest units such as the Gamma Scorchers contingent lacked such robust support. Their performance reflected this reality. The Cyber mechs were doing their best in this battle, but it was quite clear that they were unable to focus fully on inflicting damage without abandon.

Ves inwardly sighed. The Ascended Giants were not without support of their own, but he did not evaluate their effectiveness highly.

The Bluejay Fleet's firepower had experienced an increase, but the addition of so many Ascended Giants to the Bluejay Fleet had diverted the original reinforcements upon his promotion to a tier 2 galactic citizen.

At this stage, the dearth of true capital ship-grade firepower heavily limited the Bluejay Fleet's hard firepower. The various sub-capital ships could inflict sustained damage against most Goliaths, but Ves found it hard to appreciate their contribution.

The only other form of support were the mixed groups of qi cultivators from the Moloch Squadron.

While they were technically composed of the more formidable professionals of the Red Collective, their lack of accumulation was really obvious.

The various formation masters, curse masters, elementalists and etc. were practically infants compared to the Ascended Giants!

While Ves did not underestimate their potential, much of it remained unrealized for the time being.

They sorely needed additional time and cultivation resources to boost their power and methods.

At this stage, they were only able to provide marginal assistance. All Ves could say that it was better than nothing. He only truly valued their ability to provide intelligence at this time. Anything else was still too weak to make a difference at a battle of this level.

In summary, the Ascended Giants still had a long way to go before they could match the roundedness of a true combined arms force.

"You are distracted, Ves. What are you thinking about at this time?"

"I will tell you later. It is not critical for the time being. Focus on the matter at hand." Ves responded through his possession of Blinky. "Let's see how many Goliaths will assault our lines."

The Rubarthans already formed a good estimate on the quantity of Goliaths that the enemy hive was about to deploy, but it was harder to ascertain their levels.

It was not until they had emerged from the middle of dense voribug swarms that it became clear just how many Goliaths the enemy had accumulated in the Philaster Crestia System up to this point.

Once the planetary command relayed the information to every commander, many people's mood immediately fell.

Though they still maintained their fighting spirit, they all felt a heavy cloud of oppression from the enemy.

"Over 200 Goliaths!"

"Agh! We don't have enough expert pilots and ace pilots to block their advance!"

"Is our effort doomed to fail?"

This was the frightening aspect about the voribugs. They never had trouble building up their numbers.

It was only after receiving follow-up information that the mood among the commanders recovered.

While the quantity of Goliaths was absolutely a lot, many of them consisted of relatively weak organic monstrosities.

Most of them consisted of Level 3, 4 and 5 Goliaths. These were clearly hastily grown in the past week or two. The weakest among them could be blasted apart easily enough through sustained firepower alone. The remainder could be beaten by expert mechs so long as they weren't mobbed.

However, the numbers disparity was still too great. The strategic importance of the Philaster Crestia System was not the highest, so it was already good for a couple of dozen of expert pilots to be stationed in this location.

This meant that they were all outnumbered. It would be difficult for them to win if they lacked enough fire support from other friendly units.

What was worse was that multiple Goliaths

Ace mechs could get rid of the weaker Goliaths with relative ease, but they did not have it easy either.

The Goliath Hive invested enough resources into nurturing Level 6 and Level 7 Goliaths to keep the meager amount

of ace mechs occupied for the time being.

This also included the brand-new Riot Mark III.

As much as Ves valued Saint Rosa Orfan's advantages, she had not yet settled into her new state.

He also questioned whether the Withering Sting and other hasty adaptations gave her the edge she needed to turn into a nightmare for the mutated voribugs.

While the ace mechs could not avoid the fate of getting outnumbered, Ves did not think that they were at risk of

falling today.

However, if they had to prioritize survival over killing, it would take much longer for them to defeat the Goliaths!

The best everyone could hope for was for the ace mechs to keep the high-level Goliaths occupied.

Seeing the Goliath Hive deploy so many megavoribugs put the defenders in a bind.

"Without our assistance, the high-ranking mechs are forced to fight while heavily outnumbered." Ves analyzed. "It is impossible for them to defeat all of the Goliaths in a reasonable amount of time. In fact, the disparity in numbers is so great that expert mechs and ace mechs are at significant risk of falling."

The odds were too slim. Even saints would not begrudge the decision to abandon this battle and retreat. Honor was important, but it did not compel them to needlessly throw their lives away.

Yet would the expert pilots and ace pilots retreat in the face of this onslaught?

Ves did not think they would do so. They all understood the importance of defending this star system.

More importantly, they all knew that there were 28 Ascended Giants fighting by their side.

So long as all of the human phase lords joined the fight against the Goliaths, most of them would probably get

crushed.

Yet diverting so many of them to this threat left the Voribug Organic Battle Moon virtually unopposed!

If the Incubator was allowed to advance without serious opposition, then it would smash right through the orbital defense network and crash onto the planet!

At that point, it did not matter much if the Goliath embryo resting in its center remained unborn.

The Incubator could simply spread out all across the industrial planet and devour all of the high-quality alloys and machines that were present on the surface!

The VOBM needed to be opposed by more than a simple bombardment.

Ves and the Dark Apostle both felt troubled by this difficult situation. The mutated voribugs came in order to win this battle. This was why the Goliath Hive invested so much resources into spawning so many Goliaths!

What should they do? Should they go all-out into eliminating the Goliaths and hope that they had enough time left

to block the VOBM?

Or should they leave the high-ranking mechs to fend for themselves while the Ascended Giants did everything they could to stall the Incubator?

Nobody knew what to do. The adversary left them with hellish choices, each of which came with dire consequences and implications.

The wrong decision could easily spell the demise of many promising heroes and billions of citizens!

"Polemarchos." Jovy contacted the Dark Apostle directly through a command channel. "System command has chosen to gamble with everyone's lives. They urgently request you and your Ascended Giants to split up and fight against both the Goliaths and the VOBM."

"What?!"

Both Ves and the Dark Apostle possessed the exact same reaction to this half-baked plan!

To describe this strategy as a gamble was an understatement!

From their perspective, the Rubarthans could not stomach the dilemma presented by the adversary and tried to

have it both ways.

They wanted to defeat all of the Goliaths while at the same time block the VOBM from crashing into the planet!

The obvious issue with this plan was that diverting powerful combat assets to achieve both objectives risked a

complete failure!

Not only that, but spreading out the Ascended Giants meant that the Goliaths had a greater chance of killing their adversaries, thereby allowing them to deliver more high-quality 'ingredients' to the Incubator!

This meant that the plan chosen by the Rubarthan commanders greatly increased the probability that the Incubator would succeed in its mission and spawn a dreaded Level 8 or Level 9 Goliath!

Chapter 7319: Opportunistic Collaboration

Chapter 7319: Opportunistic Collaboration

"*Are those guys crazy?!*"

"No." Jovy replied over the communication channel. "The Rubarthans are not crazy. Maybe their strategic direction sounds reckless when you only take the Battle of Philaster Crestia into account. What you are overlooking is the wider strategic outlook of the Rubarthan Pact. The newly independent colonial empire will inevitably encounter more Incubators over the course of the Voribug War. If the Incubator spawns a high-level Goliath, then the intelligence gathered from it is more valuable than preserving the lives of every soldier. Even the loss of the star system can be excused."

When Jovy put it like that, Ves basically understood what was going through the minds of the Rubarthan leaders.

The Voribug War was destined to unfold into a lengthy multi-year marathon.

Individual victories and defeats mattered less than the overall trend. Right now, the defending humans sorely lacked understanding of their adversary. Deliberately letting the Incubator do its job and give birth to a horrifyingly powerful Goliath at this early stage made sense in this context!

Of course, it would be great if the high-ranking mechs and the Ascended Giants could team up and defeat both the Goliaths and the VOBM without any complications.

Yet how likely would they be able to accomplish both objectives when the Ascended Giants had to spread themselves out at the direction of system command?

They would definitely struggle just to preserve their own lives!

Ves found it difficult to accept the very human cost of this greedy decision.

"Bastards." The Dark Apostle gritted his giant teeth. "They are practically hoping for their men and our men to die and get fed to the Incubator. Why the hell should we play along?"

The Bluejay Fleet was technically a volunteer force. It had no obligation to abide by the orders of local command. There was nothing stopping the Ascended Giants from retreating from the battlefield, especially when they had valid justification.

Nobody liked to be treated as cannon fodder, especially guests who did not hail from the Pact!

The Rubarthan leaders clearly understood that the Ascended Giants needed additional incentives to fulfill their designated roles.

"In any case of victory or defeat, the Bluejay Fleet will receive the highest priority when selecting spoils." Jovy Armalon informed the two. "The Rubarthans will also expand their support for your men for the duration of your current campaign. They will grant access to their internal intelligence database on the mutated voribugs. Our entire fleet is entitled to free and expedited repair and resupply services. We will also receive 120 percent compensation in phasewater and other valuable resources for every Ascended Giant that has fallen on the battlefield."

The concessions silenced both Ves and his other self.

They couldn't help it. The Rubarthans had been quite sincere when they presented these chips.

Arguably the least valuable concession was the free and expedited services.

Unless it suffered heavy damage, the Bluejay Fleet's mechs and warships could take care of their own business easily enough.

Ves did not have to pay for anything. The RA and RF were already responsible for servicing them, so at most the fleet would have to travel all the way back to the Red Ocean Union in order to get back to full strength.

The compensation for lost Ascended Giants was considerably more valuable. It pretty much negated the losses suffered by the Phase Lord Department.

It was one thing for old and experienced giants to lose their lives on this unworthy battlefield.

It was another thing for months-old 'baby' giants to fail their initial trial by fire!

Although Ves and the Dark Apostle valued the lives of every giant, they also recognized that these unpolished gems needed to undergo a lot of refinement before they truly turned into irreplaceable assets.

Treating the ongoing battle as a crucible was not necessarily a bad thing. This was especially the case for the weaker and less qualified Faceless Giants.

So long as they managed to survive this battle and pass the test, they would undoubtedly experience a huge amount of growth!

Ves clearly understood that battle had always been the best catalyst for progress!

The deadlier the engagement, the greater the returns, but only if enough soldiers managed to survive the ordeal!

This was another reason why Ves did not immediately reject the Rubarthan strategy.

Though the danger factor was higher than he was comfortable with, he knew that putting his men through this arduous test would definitely transform them into highly competent combatants in the shortest amount of time.

If the Ascended Giants played along this strategy, then they could either win big or suffer a complete catastrophe!

Just as the Dark Apostle was about to accept, Ves spoke up first through his companion spirit.

"Not enough. The Rubarthans are asking us to go far beyond what a typical mercenary organization is expected to deliver on a typical contract. They should know damn well that the Ascended Giants fight much better in groups. Expecting us to split up our forces will give the voribugs a greater opportunity to defeat us in detail. Casualties are a certainty."

Just because the strategy chosen by the Rubarthans fell in line with some of his goals did not mean that Ves was going to roll over and let them have their way.

No matter what, the lives of the Ascended Giants should not be thrown away for a pittance.

Ves understood that this conversation had already turned into a negotiation. If he accepted the terms offered by the Rubarthans right away, then he would definitely regret this decision in the future.

Although Ves had to admit that the Rubarthans had not been dishonest and offered a good amount of sincerity, there should still be room for more.

Jovy understood this as well. "I am not cleared to negotiate terms with you, Ves."

"I know. Doesn't matter. Contact Lord Richard Brownstone for me. I will negotiate with him instead."

A short time passed before Ves was able to establish a private communication channel with the liaison from the Brownstone Principality.

While he was clearly not authorized to make decisions on behalf of the Rubarthan Pact, he was directly in communication with those that did possess this power.

"I have been informed that you are not entirely satisfied with the benefits that we have prepared for you and your force of giants." The Rubarthan scion spoke.

"What you guys are attempting to do is dangerous. While I do not necessarily disagree with the logic behind your choices, what I object to is the fact that you expect us to pay a price on your behalf."

A short pause ensued.

"We know." Richard sighed. "Believe me, we know. We are paying a much greater price considering that we are putting all of our assets in the Philaster Crestia System at risk. However, the intelligence we gain will benefit all of red humanity, not just us. I believe that the Red Collective is not unwilling to accept this argument. The Phase Lord Department that you have recently taken over may be under your direct command, but your Ascended Giants are never meant to be your personal armed force. As a fighting force that has been raised by pooling together the resources of our entire society, it is not unreasonable for us to ask your soldiers to repay us for our contributions."

What a devious response. Ves had to admit that the Rubarthan mech designer raised a valid point. The Red Collective was never meant to serve as an independent power. It was deeply intertwined with the other major powers of red humanity from the start by design. Even the Rubarthans had made serious contributions to its inception and expansion.

While Ves and the Dark Apostle had made a deal with the Red Collective about commanding the Ascended Giants, the Phase Lord Department was still under the nominal control of the Red Collective.

This meant that the Ascended Giants should at least pay lip service to the goals and interests of their supposed parent organisation.

While Ves could act shamelessly and openly defy this expectation, he knew that the Ascended Giants would pay a significant price for this willful behavior.

His bargaining position had weakened. While he felt he could still ask for concessions, he obviously couldn't push the Rubarthans too far.

Likewise, the Rubarthans also understood that they could not use the current excuse to command the Ascended Giants.

If both sides fell out with each other, then both of them would lose far more than they would gain. That was clearly not in their best interest.

As a newly elevated tier 2 galactic citizen, Ves was not ignorant of these considerations.

"Fine. I won't ask much from you." He responded over the communication channel. "Aside from the benefits that you have already offered, I want to request full cooperation from your mech industry. I won't need it now, but when I am ready, I want your mech designers and other R&D personnel to obey my order in an important collaboration project of mine."

Lord Richard Brownstone was not ignorant of what Ves was up to these days. He only needed a few seconds to come up with a guess on the nature of the collaboration project.

"We have heard that you have established close cooperation with the Terrans and the mechers on two special Carmine mech design projects."

"Yup, and that is not the extent of it. I intend to develop special high-end Carmine mechs whose Carmine Systems are augmented by the power of the five classical elements. Currently, I already have plans for four of those elements. The only one that is left untouched is earth. While it is the last one available, it is not a weak choice by any means. I have long felt clueless about how to develop an earth-based Carmine mech, but recent events have fueled my inspiration. I already have a tentative idea on how to develop a powerful machine. If my ideas pan out, it may even be useful in the current war against the mutated voribugs."

Richard perked up when he heard that last part. "Are you serious, Ves?"

"I never lie." Ves lied. "I am not boasting with you. One of the reasons why I have traveled all the way to the frontlines and sought to experience the ferocity of the voribugs in person is to figure out how to beat them. I have spent enough time here to come up with a few tentative ideas. While I cannot promise you that my Earth Carmine mech can serve as an adequate solution, it will certainly not be weak."

Richard did not respond any further. He was likely stuck in a private discussion with his superiors.

At this stage, Ves' elemental Carmine mechs was certainly not a secret to well-informed bigshots.

The Woodsap mechs that Ves was developing together with the Terran had already progressed quite far. Many mech designers and research institutions had banded together in order to contribute to the development of this epoch-changing mech for the Terran Alliance.

The mechers had begun to make their move as well, and the Cybers were not too far behind.

Even the Hunters had shown renewed interest in collaborating with Ves!

There was no way the Rubarthans felt satisfied at being left out of this party. If the Rubarthan Pact ended up as one of the only major powers left that had not secured the rights to an 'exclusive' elemental Carmine mech, then that might definitely cause them to fall far behind compared to their peers!

Under these circumstances, the Rubarthans had little right to refuse.

"Acceptable." Richard eventually replied. "While we are reluctant to put our entire mech industry at your disposal, we are not unwilling to let you command a dedicated research group that is supervised by our most trusted Master Mech Designers. Is this an acceptable arrangement, Larkinson?"

"How you organize your personnel is your business. Just make sure they will accept my instructions. Don't worry. I will not abuse their trust or anything. All of my orders will only serve to progress the earth-based Carmine mech design project. If this is not the case, then feel free to raise your objections."

"Very well. We can draft a contract later. We should first address the more immediate threat. Do you have any plans or comments about our intentions towards our shared enemies?"

Chapter 7320: Commanding the Giants

Chapter 7320: Commanding the Giants

Ves observed the advancing Goliaths through Blinky's senses.

There were so many Goliaths. Most of them advanced along the same axis as the Voribug Organic Battle Moon, but there were also dozens more that had swung around to pressure the orbital defense network from the sides.

That made it tricky to neutralize their threat. Despite their decision to split up their forces, they still brought so many Goliaths that they easily outnumbered the defending champions stationed at every quadrant.

If the Ascended Giants could allocate their numbers proportionally to every side, then they might be able to prevent any enemy group of Goliaths from breaking through in every direction.

Even a single breach could result in catastrophic consequences. As long as the mutated voribugs managed to get inside, they could not only ravage the remaining planetary facilities that were still operational, but also cut off the surface-to-orbit supply lines that kept so many assets useful.

Not all Rubarthans evacuated from Philaster Crestia III in advance. While they had made a lot of strides in automating their factories and logical facilities, a certain human presence was still necessary in order to ensure that everything ran smoothly in an increasingly more complex environment.

One of the main reasons why the defenders were able to persist for so long was that the surface factories constantly launched energy cells, ammunition and spare parts into orbit.

The surface was also home to large-scale surface-to-orbit defensive cannons. While they were only useful against large targets, they could still serve as an additional source of suppression against enemy Goliaths. Their downfall would make it much harder to wear down the enemy flesh monstrosities.

In short, the defenders could not afford to give the native aliens an uncontested route to the surface.

The lower the number Ascended Giants allocated to the quadrants, the lower the success rate and the higher the casualty rate.

Ves and the Dark Apostle found it far too difficult to decide how to divide their forces. They were ultimately not professional soldiers or commanders.

Since that was the case, it was better to punt this matter to a more competent individual.

"Divine Harpoon." The Dark Apostle contacted the strategos. **"What are your thoughts?"**

Though it sounded obvious that the supposed polemarchos of the Ascended Giants had no idea what to do, the Divine Harpoon tactfully sidestepped this issue and voiced his proposal.

"The allocation of our forces should be determined by our goals and priorities. Not every giant is the same. Outside of myself, an Ur-Titan is at least twice as strong as a Faceless Giant at minimum, but the latter also possesses a greater variety of capabilities. What do you value the most? What do you value the least?"

"

"I want our giants to grow stronger. That is what I value the most. This battle is an opportunity for them to temper themselves. While it is important for them to experience true peril, I do not want to leave this star system with half of them in coffins. As for what I value the least, I don't care too much about holding this planet. I just don't want to lose too badly."
The Dark Apostle replied.

The Divine Harpoon nodded at his leader in understanding. **"Your priorities align closely to mine. If I was in control of our deployment, I would split up our forces in six groups as opposed to two. We should first form 4 four teams consisting of 1 Ur-Titan leading 3 Faceless Giants. I have already worked out the team compositions in advance in order to achieve optimal synergy and survival chances."**

That was a clever idea!

Although a team consisting of 4 Ascended Giants was not that strong or numerous, it should at least be strong enough to reinforce the quadrants and prevent them from collapsing too quickly.

"Next, 8 Ur-Titans will be assigned to slow down the advantage of the Incubator. I do not have much hope that they can stall the battle moon entirely, but they are powerful enough to take care of themselves. Their existing familiarity and teamwork will allow them to fight alongside each other with little friction. This is important as a mistake could easily cause them to fall into the VOBM. Such an accident must never be repeated."

Now that they understood the Incubator a little better, the giants must never be caught off-guard like the Divine Wheel and the Divine Aporia.

"What about the remaining giants?" The Dark Apostle asked.

"The remaining 3 Ur-Titans alongside you and I will be part of the reserves. I shall oversee the different teams and coordinate with the other human forces if necessary. The remaining Ur-Titans should primarily be responsible for guarding you and creating opportunities for you to perform. Your new weapon looks formidable, and I can sense it may be particularly

effective against our current enemies. Your main responsibility is to stand by any teams in danger and to exploit any promising opportunities that arise."

That sounded like a remarkably comprehensive plan. Ves and the Dark Apostle did not possess the expertise to critique this proposal, nor did they have any desire to do such a thing.

The Divine Harpoon certainly came up with a much better set of instructions than they could have devised!

"Alright. Let's go with your suggestions. You take command. I will act under your direction seeing as you are the professional here." The Dark Apostle readily conceded.

Just because he managed to take over the Phase Lord Department did not mean he possessed the qualifications to command them in battle.

Though the Dark Apostle hated to admit it, he still felt that he could have prevented the deaths of the two Faceless Giants if he just managed to figure stuff out a little better. Even if the enemy battle moon seemed harmless at first, he should have figured out a better solution to collect intelligence from the alien megaconstruct.

It was too late for that now. The only remedy that the Dark Apostle could make was to step aside and let a professional commanding officer like the Divine Harpoon take charge.

The giants all began to fly in different directions after they received their respective assignments.

The more Ves observed them, the more the allocation made sense in his eyes.

The Ur-Titans did not cooperate often with the Faceless Giants, but they still shared the same root more or less. The latter also looked up to the former, so the men did not show any discomfort or rejection.

The Ascended Giants soon began to intervene in the fighting.

The ones assigned to the four quadrants immediately moved into action. None of them could afford to stand aside because the existing human forces proved inadequate in holding back the Goliaths.

"Ignore the Level 4 and 5 Goliaths for now." The Divine Harpoon guided the troops. **"Although they are strong, ordinary expert mechs combined with heavy fire support can hold them back for a time. The Level 6 and 7 Goliaths are much more threatening. Focus on eliminating them first."**

The Level 7 Goliaths were especially destructive against the defenses. They were stronger, faster and much more durable than all of the other megavoribugs currently in the field. The strength that enabled them to contend against ace mechs also turned them into unstoppable wrecking balls whenever they managed to get close to the orbital defense network.

They were putting such immense pressure on the orbital fortresses that the soldiers stationed in the vicinity were already alarmed!

Few conventional weapon systems could inflict any significant damage to their large and bizarre bodies!

Even when all of the battleship-grade cannons mounted on a space station concentrated their firepower at a Level 7 Goliath, the massive creature only suffered surface damage that could easily be patched up after devouring a large amount of smaller bugs.

The severe shortage of high-ranking expert mechs and ace mechs on this battlefield made it difficult to put down all of the high-level Goliaths in a short amount of time.

As a Goliath from the formidable Ekstrom strain approached an orbital fortress, it quickly lowered its head before charging forward!

The massive bug did not care that the orbital fortress was still protected by a half-depleted titan shield.

It instinctively knew that as long as its momentum was strong enough, its horn should be able to shatter the energy shield and punch a hole deep into the orbital fortification!

Creating a single breach was enough. The millions of cannon fodder bugs following in its wake could easily do the rest once it took advantage of the newly created gaps!

The fall of a single orbital fortress might not sound much, but was actually disastrous. Each of them formed the linchpin of a section of the orbital defense network. Its sudden absence would spark ripple effects that would make it a lot harder to hold back the voribugs.

For this reason, the giant team assigned to this quadrant did not hesitate to give up other goals. The orbital fortress could not be allowed to fall so soon.

Different from their prior performance during the reconnaissance mission, the Ascended Giants now confronted the Goliaths in full gear.

This was much more familiar territory to them. Many of them had already sparred against the Goliaths in past skirmishes, though this was the first time they did so in a large-scale engagement.

What was also new was their Rubarthan-issued plasma weapons. The 2.5x plasma halberd wielded by the Ur-Titan looked especially formidable.

Its active plasma blade alone could rival the length of some of the plasma swords wielded by mechs!

Of course, its energy consumption was also astonishing, which was why the Ur-Titan's raiment also included an upgraded power reactor on its back.

As the Ur-Titan took the lead, he bravely confronted the Level 7 Ekstrom Goliath!

While the smaller and weaker Faceless Giants spread out and tried to surround the Goliath from different directions, the plume-helmeted Ur-Titan did not choose to break the Goliath's charge directly.

Trying to stand in the way of an Ekstrom Goliath's charge was as foolish as trying to stand in the way of a crashing starship!

Instead, the Ur-Titan also began to circle around before building up a lot of momentum!

He charged straight into the side of the Ekstrom Goliath, using his shoulder pauldron as a battering ram!

The massive horned beetle-shaped bug suffered such a serious blow that he helplessly flew off-course!

Before the bug could correct its flight, the Ur-Titan began his offensive. He proficiently used his plasma halberd to slash and burn through the Ekstrom Goliath's hardy exoskeleton.

While a Level 7 Goliath's exterior was not that easy to overcome, this was a plasma weapon made for giants!

Even if it was not derived from a particularly special or unique design, it bore most of the characteristics of Rubarthan plasma weapon technology, which also included the ingenious improvements made by the legendary Plasma Shaper.

This meant that the weapon possessed many advancements that others found difficult to replicate!

Even if the mechers and the fleters had always tried their best imitate or reverse engineer the Plasma Shaper's latest works, they could never surpass her in her field of specialization.

The plasma halberd vaporized much of the exoskeleton upon contact.

Though a single hit was not able to penetrate the thick shell of the Ekstrom Goliath all at once, the Ur-Titan remained patient. A Level 7 Goliath was not that easy to kill, certainly not a Goliath strain that was known for defense.

Yet with every plasma weapon strike, the Ur-Titan continually weakened the megavoribug. From the joints of its limbs to the softer and thinner abdomen, the Goliath that was known to be a formidable brawler failed to avoid the injuries.

It could only ignore the burn wounds accumulating on its exoskeleton and do its best to hit back!

With the help of its multiple long and sharp limbs, the giant insect managed to strike the Ur-Titan numerous times.

However, the Ascended Giant's superdimensional raiment easily resisted the attacks while suffering nothing but shallow scratches!

It was only because the Ekstrom Goliath concentrated phasewater at its limbs that it was able to inflict noticeable damage at all. Yet when a phasewater bioweapon had to contend directly against superdimensional armor, the latter obviously won out even if its grade was only medium!

Chapter 7321: Fully-Geared Ur-Titan

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While the Ur-Titan immediately managed to gain the upper-hand through skill and superior equipment, time was not on his side.

The true challenge in fighting the Goliaths never lay in defeating them. So long as the voribugs did not pull off any fancy tricks, they were not that difficult to defeat.

What truly hindered people from eliminating Goliaths quickly were the incredible vitality of the megavoribugs in question and the constant interference of the surrounding cannon fodder bugs.

The Ur-Titan clearly gained the upper hand from the beginning and continued to press the advantage like there was no tomorrow.

However, now that it became clear that the Ekstrom Goliath was in trouble, the surrounding swarms immediately converged on their position and began to get in the way!

A quarter of the converging bugs flowed into the Ekstrom Goliath's mouth so that they could be turned into biomass and energy to fuel the enormous creature's regeneration.

The remainder of the swarm mobbed the Ur-Titan and turned into a massive ball of alien insects!

Even if the Ur-Titan was strong enough to overcome the resistance of all of those bugs, he had completely lost his vision!

"Filthy bugs! Your disgusting tactics are useless! The radiance of the sun shall cleanse you from my divine body!"

A burst of heat instantly burned and seared away the surrounding bugs!

The Rubarthan plasma halberd had already incorporated a number of quick and easy solutions in response to the novel challenges introduced by the mutated voribugs.

One of them happened to be a setting that allowed the wielder to briefly loosen the containment of the plasma energies concentrated at the blade.

Though it only generated a brief pulse of heat, the sheer magnitude of thermal energy released from this move directly burned or vaporized the bugs within a range of dozens of meters in each direction!

While the heat pulse did not clear out all of the bugs that crowded around the Ur-Titan, the insects that were positioned a little further away were not doing so well at the moment.

The burn damage suffered by these bugs impaired their effectiveness and caused them to turn into deadweight.

Only the bugs that previously hadn't been able to press closely onto the Ur-Titan's armored form managed to get away without suffering significant damage.

Despite what just happened to their alien siblings, these healthier bugs did not hesitate to fill the void and mob the Ur-Titan yet again.

The Ascended Giants sneered and activated the same setting again, causing the surrounding bugs to suffer the same fate as the ones from before!

This time he was not content to let the swarm continually converge on his armored form. He switched the setting to a lower intensity before starting to swing his polearm in every direction!

The soldier executed a sweeping technique that caused the leaking plasma blade to swing in every direction in the shortest amount of time.

Plasma and heat energies did not concentrate in place, but began to flow outwards and damage much greater portions of the bug swarm!

Over a million cannon fodder bugs failed to resist the dance of thermal energy and burned like candles in the cold void of space!

Of course, these powerful effects came with an equally severe price.

Ordinary plasma weapons were never designed to output so much energy in a sloppy manner.

The plasma halberd's power consumption skyrocketed while its emitters and other components experienced much greater strain than before!

The weapon's lifespan was deteriorating at a rapid rate!

Ordinarily, the plasma halberd should have been able to function normally without requiring any maintenance for at least several lengthy engagements.

However, if the Ur-Titan kept up this performance, it would be questionable whether the plasma halberd would last more than half an hour.

Yet what did it matter? So long as the weapon held up, it should easily last long enough for the giant to defeat the Ekstrom Goliath!

He already received instructions to pass the plasma halberd to a specialized support mech so that it could undergo field repair. While these hasty fixes could not address every problem, it should still be enough to restore the high-tech weapon to a more functional condition.

The Ascended Giants cared little about preserving the long-term health of the plasma halberd.

This was the decisive battle. Let alone sacrificing their new weapons, they were even willing to sacrifice their superdimensional raiments in order to earn glory and blood in battle!

After the Ur-Titan affirmed his current strength, his confidence and aura soared.

Amidst all of the dead and burned bugs, the giant stared straight at the Ekstrom Goliath that was struggling to heal all of the burn wounds on its exoskeleton.

"Your end has come!"

The Goliath Hive was taken aback by the elite Ascended Giant's effective countermeasure.

While there were still many weak bugs in the vicinity, they temporarily lacked the numbers to pose any significant hindrance to the human phase lord!

Technology made all of the difference!

The advanced sensor systems integrated into the raiment were able to overcome the visual obstruction and keep track of powerful opponents at relatively close range.

The superdimensional raiment was sufficiently strong enough to resist the attacks of Level 7 Goliaths, which meant that ordinary cannon fodder bugs were completely unqualified to leave any mark!

Together with a plasma weapon adapted to the Voribug War, the Ascended Giants were much better equipped to fight against the mutated voribugs than before!

However, just as the Ur-Titan was burning his way past the Ekstrom Goliath's thick shell, other Goliaths were moving in to reinforce their troubled insect brother!

These Goliaths may just be Level 4 or Level 5, but they were still large and strong enough to hinder an Ascended Giant.

Numbers had always been the greatest advantage of the voribug race!

The Goliath Hive prepared well enough to field 200 Goliaths. Even if many of them had split up to assault different quadrants, they still outnumbered their human counterparts!

At this time, 6 of them received an overriding instruction that caused them to drop their immediate goals and move directly towards the duel between the Ur-Titan and the Level 7 Ekstrom Goliath!

There was not much the Ur-Titan could do against half-a-dozen inferior Goliaths.

Even if they were not strong enough to last long against the giant, their quantity alone turned them into a much more effective hindrance than millions of cannon fodder bugs!

Fortunately, the Ur-Titan was not fighting by himself.

"Bombard the designated Goliaths! Delay their passage as much as possible!"

Warships, defensive platforms and orbital fortresses all diverted a portion of their firepower towards these reinforcing Goliaths.

While the cannon attacks were not strong enough to halt the Goliaths entirely, their traversal inevitably slowed down, and that was enough.

Numerous expert mechs chased after different Goliaths and immediately entangled them at close or medium range.

Their resonance-empowered attacks inflicted effective damage and granted them capabilities that the Goliaths found difficult to overcome.

The expert mechs came in many different shapes and sizes, but they were always faster and more agile.

Even if their offensive power was not strong enough to kill the Goliaths outright, the experienced expert pilots knew exactly how to exploit their advantages to guarantee a kill.

Their combat acumen was much better than Goliaths whose actual ages only amounted to a week or less!

This knowledge and experience gulf was so vast that it was impossible for any Goliath to outfight an expert pilot of the same level!

It was a pity that there were not many of them available at the moment.

So many expert mechs had already been tied down by other Goliaths that only 2 of them could render immediate assistance.

That left 4 more low-level Goliaths to close the remaining distance and reinforce the much more important horned Goliath!

It was at this time that all but 1 of them got stopped by the other giants of the team!

The Ur-Titan had already instructed the 3 Faceless Giants to intercept the remaining Goliaths by any means necessary.

Though the scale of the Faceless Giants was only 1.5x, they were facing much weaker opponents at this time!

The Level 4 and Level 5 Goliaths were only rated to fight against expert mechs.

Against the Faceless Giants that could already be compared with the weakest ace mechs, the gap in strength proved too much for these megavoribugs!

The plasma swords in the hands of the lesser giants might not be able to inflict much damage against a Level 7 Ekstrom Goliath, but they were more than enough to burn deeply into the more fragile bodies of the lower-level Goliaths!

Even if their tenacious vitality and the frequent interference of cannon fodder bugs delayed their demise to an extent, that did not change the fact that it would only take minutes for them to lose their lives!

In fact, one of the Faceless Giants did not wait to finish off the weakest Level 4 Goliath before disengaging in order to chase after the remaining Goliath that previously managed to fly away without hindrance!

This was how the giants assigned to this particular Ur-Titan fulfilled their purpose and made themselves useful.

The Ur-Titan received more than enough uninterrupted time to cripple the Ekstrom Goliath before finally sinking the strained plasma halberd's blade deep into the head and thorax of the tough opponent!

The Level 7 Goliath's redundant organs and remaining vitality tried their best to resist true death, but the Ur-Titan was in no mood to play this game.

He finally retrieved his original weapon from his back, which happened to be a mid-grade superdimensional halberd!

This was the weapon that was originally designed to earn him glory in the Red War.

Though it had yet to be christened with the phasewater-enriched blood of a phase lord, it cut through the heavily damaged exoskeleton of the Ekstrom Goliath without too much hindrance!

The mutated voribugs may have concentrated a lot of phasewater into the body of the Level 7 Goliath, but there was no way the alien insects invested any superdimensional matter.

Since this was the case, the superdimensional halberd efficiently dissected and cut apart the Goliath that was already on its way to the grave!

Now that the Ekstrom Goliath was crippled to the extent that it could no longer launch any effective attacks, the Ur-Titan completely let itself loose at this time!

"Face the power of blade and plasma!"

Though it was normally incredibly foolish to wield two halberds at the same time, the Ur-Titan did not care about this and recklessly swung his two high-tech polearms with no abandon!

A true opponent could easily exploit the Ascended Giant's theatrical display, but the victimized Goliath was in such bad shape that it could only serve as a target for the two different weapons!

In the end, the Level 7 Goliath failed to last long enough to stall Ur-Titan much further.

The offensive of the twin halberds proved too much in the end.

Seeing as the powerful ace mech-grade opponent succumbed without any complications, the Ur-Titan uttered a heartfelt roar!

"Witness my power!"

Of course, how much of his victory could be attributed to his strength as a phase lord and his high technology equipment was a matter of debate.

Yet none could deny that a properly outfitted Ur-Titan could no longer be defeated by a Level 7 Goliath anymore!

Though the victorious giant managed to defeat his adversary fairly quickly, not all of his colleagues had it easy.

The other quadrants were under considerably greater pressure. Instances where the Ascended Giants fought against 1 Goliath at a time were still rare.

It was much more common for the Ur-Titans and Faceless Giants to fight against multiple Goliaths each!

On top of that, they also had to wrangle against millions of cannon fodder that continued to do their best to run interference!

"There are too many bugs! We are drowning in insects!"

Chapter 7322: Limited Defense

Chapter 7322: Limited Defense

A large battlefield encompassing the orbit of a planet was a large tapestry of violence.

Chaos reigned more than order.

The mutated voribugs primarily attacked from one direction. While the Goliath Hive diverted a large amount of Goliaths as well as swarms of smaller bugs to the flanks, the main thrust of their offense closely aligned with the trajectory of the Incubator.

At this range, the VOBM no longer served as a purely psychological weapon.

It had come close enough to intervene in the surrounding fights.

The planet did not only serve as a womb for a scarily powerful Goliath.

It also functioned as a massive moon-sized battle fortress!

The Incubator took advantage of its organic nature and rapidly grew thousands of cannons on its surface.

Each of these cannons began to besiege anything that crossed their sights!

Plasma cannons launched large and formidable plasma bolts at distant orbital fortresses.

Their accuracy was so terrible that more than half of the attacks missed the large and stationary targets.

It was clear that the mutated voribugs had yet to make much progress in advancing their proficiency in fire control systems.

However, with hundreds of cannons firing at a brisk frequency, the Incubator could afford to miss so many shots!

Many attacks struck the titan shields of the orbital fortresses and exerted a lot more strain onto the defenses.

Their situation rapidly deteriorated as most of the structures were already half-damaged or largely depleted from having to fend off prior attacks.

One massive structure that had born the brunt of the Incubator attacks outright lost its titan shield.

This instantly caused the surrounding swarms to descend onto the exposed structure and begin to eat into its metallic exterior!

The Incubator and other ranged voribug units did not cease in their attacks. They launched plasma bolts, laser beams, physical projectiles and acid bombs without any form of rhythm or coordination.

The chaotic attacks often struck many cannon fodder bugs that just so happened to be in the way before finally striking the vulnerable orbital fortress.

Yet the Goliath Hive clearly did not care about the friendly fire. The swarms massively hindered evacuation efforts while lowering any chance for the defenders to save the key defensive asset.

The enemy bombardment methodically chipped away at the structure of the orbital fortress.

To the credit of the Rubarthans, they had not skimped on the physical construction of the fortress in any way.

The prideful first-raters had long progressed the designs of their orbital defenses to a very high standard.

Even if the Rubarthans largely guarded against the Terrans and the Big Two, the incredible hardness of much of the orbital fortification meant that just breaching its exterior was not enough to knock it out of commission!

Many anti-swarm defenses went active. Bombs, firestorms and lethal radiation continually cleared the approaching swarms and bought time for the crew to do their jobs and take more bugs with them as they went down with the crumbling fortification.

Such an event was not unique on the battlefield. While the defenders had been able to hold out for multiple hours, now that the Goliath Hive had made its most serious push to date, many units and structures had been pushed past their breaking point!

As brave men and women continued to fight and die across the orbital battlefield, the champions on both sides struggled in their own ways.

Of the four quadrants of the orbital battlefield, only one of the teams of Ascended Giants was doing fairly well.

Those stationed in the remaining quadrants were having a much more difficult time!

For example, Ur-Titan in charge of defending one of the flanks roared in frustration as he fended off an avalanche of attacks from two Level 7 Goliaths!

While a proper Ur-Titan should handily defeat a Level 7 Goliath without suffering any harm, facing two of these massive creatures at the same time was a different story!

The Ur-Titan wielded his Rubarthan plasma halberd like a furious wildcat, choosing to stay as mobile as possible in order to avoid getting caught.

The most acute threat was a Level 7 Goliath of the Sudhar strain. This was a monstrous beast of claws and acid.

Not only did it possess the disgusting habit of spitting acid into the face of its enemies at random moments, its claws struck quickly and relentlessly.

What was worse was that the Sudhar Goliath were also capable of grappling!

The Ur-Titan in question constantly had to remain on guard to avoid getting caught by the enemy. He needed to utilize the reach of his plasma halberd very carefully to avoid giving the clawed Goliath an opening.

The second Level 7 Goliath made this a lot more difficult!

The Korcho Goliath was normally known as a ranged specialist. It was unusual for such a creature to move closer to a formidable human champion and make itself vulnerable to reprisals.

However, the Goliath Hive had apparently cooked a variant of the usual Korcho Goliath.

Instead of growing a long-ranged artillery specialist, the latest variant bore with multiple kinetic cannons.

Their calibers were not big, but they possessed an impressive firing rate while simultaneously possessing enough power to knock the Ur-Titan aside!

Though the penetration power of the projectiles was not good enough to punch through the Ascended Giant's mid-grade superdimensional raiment, the concussive force was still strong enough to break the phase lord's rhythm!

If this was the sole contribution of the Korcho Goliath, then the Ascended Giant did not necessarily have to take this second alien champion seriously.

What truly scared and infuriated the Ur-Titan was that the Korcho Goliath was constantly trying to strike the plasma halberd in his arms!

Though the weapon was designed with very hard transphasic alloys, the high-tech weapon was ultimately not as durable as a superdimensional weapon.

Worse than getting damaged, a powerful enough hit could actually dislodge the weapon from his hands!

This was why the Ur-Titan constantly had to be on guard. He had to maneuver in more complex ways to prevent the Korcho Goliath from striking his hands or his precious weapon.

Fortunately, his superior training and prior combat experience as a human soldier saw him through.

He was not that easy to defeat. He boldly relied on his superdimensional raiment to endure attacks that he would normally have to guard against.

This single piece of equipment massively improved the fault tolerance of the Ascended Giants and allowed them to get away with a lot of outrageous stunts.

However, it was wrong to treat the raiment as an invincibility cheat.

Even against a relatively 'poor' opponent as the mutated voribug race, the Level 7 Goliaths still possessed enough attack power to degrade the protection of resonance-empowered transphasic armor systems.

A mid-grade superdimensional raiment that lacked resonance empowerment may actually be tougher than the defenses of most ace mechs, but its durability ultimately had a limit, even if it was a lot higher than anyone had seen before.

The continuous attacks gradually took a toll on the raiment. Superdimensional or not, any attack that left grooves could steadily dig through the layers.

The two formidable Goliaths were not ignorant of this fact. After learning that the physical defenses of an Ascended Giant was not so easily breached, they relied on constant pressure along with focused attacks to consistently weaken a set number of weak points!

With swarms of cannon fodder bugs regularly moving in to inconvenience the Ur-Titan, the latter found it difficult to extricate himself from his difficult situation!

"Fight me fair and square, you bugs!"

Sadly, the Goliaths saw no need to respond or acknowledge the request in any way.

They were voribugs. Fighting fairly did not exist as far as they were concerned.

Bullying individually superior foes with numbers was their primary, secondary and tertiary combat solution!

Against this onslaught, the Ur-Titan truly found it difficult to gain any advantages. His plasma halberd was able to inflict serious damage to the Sudhar Goliath, but the need to defend from incoming attacks caused the giant to miss many opportunities to damage the enemy further.

The Ur-Titan did not rely on his spatial barrier to fend off the attacks. He knew that it would just get drained at a record pace. His gear provided him with much more protection. He would only activate his spatial barrier if there was no other choice.

"I need help!"

"We can't! These Goliaths are getting in our way!"

The Ur-Titan was accompanied by 3 smaller Faceless Giants, but the latter were all being pressed away from their nominal leader.

The Faceless Giants tried their best to stay close and avoid any further separation. Their familiarity with each other allowed them to weave into each other's attacks and bail out any one of them that had landed in trouble.

However, the Goliaths were not prohibited from grouping up either.

A scattering of Level 4, Level 5 and Level 6 Goliaths surrounded the group of 3 giants and inflicted constant harassing attacks.

Though none of the Goliaths were equals to any of the Faceless Giants, when 9 of the megavoribugs combined their forces, the human phase lords could only thank their raiments that they were able to last so long despite getting outnumbered!

"We can't last as long!" One of the Faceless Giants cried out in desperation.

While the weaker Goliaths were not able to hit that hard, their frequent and varied blows still caused the raiments to suffer increasingly deeper and more numerous scratches.

At a scale of just 1.5x, the raiments of the Faceless Giants not only possessed a much smaller surface area, but their thickness was also significantly lower.

This meant that the smaller Ascended Giants truly couldn't withstand as many blows as their larger counterparts!

Seeing that the giant team had fallen into considerable trouble, the Rubarthans tried to assist the foreign helpers by bombarding their position with warship-grade gun batteries.

While the attacks significantly distracted the Goliaths, their vitality allowed them to endure the blows.

Their attacks only slowed down, but they did not cease!

"We need more help than that! Fire support is not enough!"

When the Dark Apostle noticed the team in trouble, he turned around and prepared to rescue his beleaguered subordinates before a large armored palm smacked into the chest plate of his Superdimensional Giant Regalia.

"Divine Harpoon?"

"There is no need for you to intervene. Have you forgotten about the ace mechs?"

Ves and the Dark Apostle had become so fixated on observing the performance of their men that they had momentarily overlooked the other powerful assets on the battlefield!

The ace mech that advanced towards the troubled team approached with incredible momentum.

The machine did not possess any inherent stealth systems. Its emissions were hot as the ace mech spared little effort to speed up its flight.

While the Goliath Hive registered the rapid advance of the ace mech, it had already made a move in response.

Just as the humans learned to employ reserves in order to respond to new developments, the mutated voribugs had learned to do the same!

A second Level 7 Sudhar Goliath abruptly flew forward and clearly sought to intercept the advancing ace mech.

The alien megavoribug did not need to defeat the ace mech. Just stalling it was already enough. It just needed to buy enough time for the other Goliaths to crack open the superdimensional shells of the giants in trouble!

The ace mech uncharacteristically did not rely on its superior mobility to circle around or evade this opponent.

It maintained its straight trajectory and fearlessly charged forward until it collided straight against the Sudhar Goliath!

A catastrophic collision occurred!

Seconds afterwards, the ace mech emerged fully intact!

Its exterior remained undamaged. While its momentum had been sapped, it continued to advance as its pilot had not forgotten her initial goal.

As for the Sudhar Goliath in question, his insectile body was in awful shape!

A massive puncture wound had dug straight into his exoskeleton. What exacerbated his injuries was not the giant hole, but the destructive energies that took root in its wounded flesh and continued to annihilate its organs.

Pure destruction energy ravaged the Sudhar Goliath both inside and out!

The Riot Mark III had struck its first blow!

Chapter 7323: No Quitting Half-Way

Chapter 7323: No Quitting Half-Way

Rosa Orfan did not know what she was anymore.

Life after getting partially merged with the Riot Mark III was weird to say the least.

As she gradually regained her wits after her life-changing contact with her so-called D-mech, she eventually realized that she may have underestimated the danger posed by her new machine.

The Riot Mark III was so much more than an ace mech and a Carmine mech.

While Ves had made an attempt to explain what she was in for, his words failed to convey the immense magnitude of what he had brought to life.

Now that she had become fused with the machine, she understood that the Riot Mark III was actually a demon in the shape of a humanoid mech.

The Prophet's Bane had turned it into a shell.

It had also merged with her soul, whatever that meant.

While she lacked the knowledge and expertise to understand the mechanics behind the soul fusion, she most certainly experienced the consequences of this drastic action.

One of her initial observations was that the fusion was far from perfect. Rather than blending together into a single entity, Rosa and the Prophet's Bane remained discrete for the most part.

They were like a couple that had forcibly been married together. They had no intention of sharing anything between each other. It was just that circumstances had conspired to put them in a permanent union.

Neither Rosa nor the demonic entity were happy with this arrangement.

The Prophet's Bane could not hide its greedy and hateful intentions towards Rosa. It had come close to taking over her soul. If not for the fact that she managed to trigger her apotheosis and strengthened her willpower, the Larkinsons would have attended her funeral by this time!

At this moment, her extraordinary willpower suppressed the demon. Though it forced her to remain vigilant and split her attention, she did not dare to slack off and become complacent.

The demon's unambiguous hostility had never faded. In fact, it was the opposite. Getting blocked at the last moment had frustrated it beyond belief. The continued suppression only caused his anger to grow over time.

What concerned the ace pilot even more was that she could feel the demon growing stronger!

Ves had warned her about this. The Riot Mark III was a living mech, so the demon that had taken it over was naturally capable of growth.

This was normally a fact to be celebrated, but because the Riot got converted into an adversarial mech, it had turned into a double-edged sword!

Given these circumstances, Saint Rosa Orfan clearly understood her own situation.

She needed to progress faster than the demon.

While it seemed as if she currently gained absolute control over herself and her mech, that was just a temporary state.

With the demon growing stronger with every passing day, Saint Orfan knew she needed to work hard to stay ahead of this foreign invader.

She knew it was not enough to maintain a small lead.

The lower the power disparity between the two, the more the demon could bleed through her willpower barrier.

If she suffered a mishap that caused her to lose her wits, the demon might even be able to launch an attack and take over her body and soul in one fell swoop!

After understanding the reality of her new life, Rosa Orfan did not feel about this outcome.

A lesser soldier might have broken down from losing her body or having a demon lurking in wait to take over her life.

She was not a typical soldier.

She was an ace pilot, a half-god whose willpower had reached a higher transcendental state.

Just like how the legendary Evolution Witch managed to advance fast enough to completely overtake the congenital defects of her original human body, Saint Orfan believed with all of her heart that she could conquer her own doom!

She felt incredibly brave not because she had no other choice, but because she truly had no way out of this predicament!

Ves, the doctors and other experts had fussed over her partially fused body and found it impossible to separate her from her living mech.

The original Blood Pact that she forged with the Riot Mark III had mutated into an unbreakable shackle that forced Rosa Orfan to commit to her original gambit.

She needed to evolve or die.

Naturally, an ace pilot such as herself was not resigned to die. Her fighting spirit grew stronger after learning that she could not stop half-way like her colleagues.

Other ace pilots such as Saint Tusa, Saint Stark and Saint Commander Casella may be just as committed to becoming a god pilot, but they could always drop out of the race if they ever changed their mind.

Even if it was a shameful act, the option to retire still existed in their minds. There were many possible reasons why they would want to take advantage of it in the future.

Perhaps they might suffer injuries so substantial that they could no longer engage in combat anymore.

This was the most common reason for expert pilots and ace pilots to retire. Even if human medical science had advanced to a very high level, not every injury could be remedied.

Another reason why champions might choose to retire was because battle no longer excited them anymore.

It was not unusual for high-ranking mech pilots to stagnate as their perspectives changed and became more fixated on other goals such as raising a family.

All of these reasons and more constantly tempted powerful pilots into taking it easy.

Even if they did not decide to retire outright, just a change of mentality was enough to render them stagnant.

Saint Rosa Orfan could not afford to let this happen to herself.

She could neither suffer a blow so heavy that she wanted to quit, nor fall into a state of complacency that would cause her progression to stall.

She only had a single choice, and that was to go full throttle and progress at a brisk pace no matter the cost!

All of this made her feel as if she had turned into a funeral pyre that had just been lit.

So long as the flames lasted, she still had a chance to fight for her life and change her fate.

Yet the longer the flames burned, the closer she came to her inevitable demise.

She needed to be proactive and tackle challenges head-on as opposed to playing it safe.

Her margin of error was so slim that most mech pilots would have gotten crushed under all of the weight.

Not Rosa.

Though she never considered herself to be a particularly outstanding or brilliant champion, she still believed she had what it took to succeed where the overwhelming majority of saints ultimately failed.

For one, she arguably had the best junior ace mech in the Red Ocean at her disposal.

The support of a powerful mech was absolutely essential. She could not think of any first-class junior ace mech that was more powerful or loaded with exemplary features as her own superdimensional masterwork.

Another reason why she felt confident in her success was her tenacity.

No matter what, to be able to become a saint when she was on the verge of getting completely consumed by a demon had to be proof that her ability to withstand setbacks was excellent.

She was not invincible, but so long as she remained alive, she could always pick herself up again.

Her willpower surged whenever she thought about that, so that meant she had to be on the right track.

Another source of her confidence was the spear in the arms of her mech.

Though she had wielded the tier 3 Destroyer spear for only a short amount of time, she already felt as if she embraced her destiny.

Sure, the stories about the threat posed by the powerful weapon were not exaggerated.

Saint Orfan knew that if she did not constantly exert her willpower over the weapon, it would quickly lash out and spread destructive energies all over her machine.

Considering that the Riot Mark III had not only turned into her Carmine mech but also her new 'body', the female ace pilot absolutely could not afford to lose control over the weapon!

However, Saint Orfan did not feel intimidated by the Destroyer spear.

She already faced a similar situation with the Prophet's Bane. Compared to a demon that could not be eradicated due to how much it had fused with her own soul, Saint Orfan felt even less pressure towards a destructive weapon that could be let go at any time.

Yet Saint Orfan could not stomach the idea of letting others take the precious Destroyer weapon away.

This was her dream weapon.

Now that it finally fell into her hands, she owed it to herself to master this weapon in full!

Besides, ever since the Riot Mark III had incorporated Terran Destroyer Amplification Material as its key resonating material, the ace mech had become permanently tied to Destroyer weapons as a source of strength.

Saint Orfan could feel a greater connection when holding the tier 3 Destroyer spear.

The resonating materials helped in many different ways. It not only enabled her to gain a closer connection to a weapon that ordinarily resisted her presence a lot more, but also allowed her to simulate Destroyer particles!

This unprecedented closeness had permanently changed her perspective on the tier 3 Destroyer weapon.

In her opinion, the Terran polearm was no longer a dangerous weapon, but an amplification of her destructive power!

The Riot Mark III was already formidable by itself, but the tier 3 Destroyer spear completely multiplied its combat power.

It was like adding wings to a tiger!

The boost to her combat power was so significant that her confidence swelled.

After entering the battlefield, Saint Orfan already set her mind on her personal goal.

"The strongest weapon should be used to fell the strongest foe."

Saint Orfan set her sights on the so-called Voribug Organic Battle Moon from the moment she heard about its emergence.

Although the difference in scale between her Riot Mark III and the Incubator was ridiculous, she did not think it was impossible for her to smash the latter.

The planet was big, but most of it was made out of relatively soft organic materials!

The ace pilot was also exceedingly confident that her tier 3 Destroyer spear could neutralize the ridiculous regeneration capabilities of powerful voribugs.

This was why she felt confident in declaring that the VOBM must die by her hand!

Saint Orfan did not want to start her first proper battle with a failure. She had effectively cornered herself even harder by making such a bold declaration.

As an ace pilot, she could defy her promises, and while her earlier words might be absolute, it was still a serious statement of intent.

If she failed to realize her words, then her progression would definitely suffer as a consequence!

"I cannot afford to take half-measures and be soft on myself. I need to grasp opportunities as much as I can. If that means cornering myself in my very first battle, then so be it. If I do not have the courage to challenge enemies above my own level, then I should give up right away!"

Saint Orfan grew determined to become the brightest and most powerful combatant of this battle!

She did not want anyone to outshine her, nor did she think that it was even possible.

Of course, she was not stupid enough to charge straight at the Incubator.

She first wanted to warm up and become more accustomed to the power at her disposal.

This was why she chose to turn away from the VOMB and start her fight from the flanks where the intensity was lower.

"Let me test my might against these easier bugs first!"

Of course, from her perspective, Level 7 Goliaths were far from enough to threaten her newfound strength!

They should serve as useful practice targets by her logic!

Chapter 7324: The Demon's Influence

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An ominously glowing speartip sank directly into the battered exoskeleton of a Level 6 Goliath.

The Sudhar Goliath in question immediately buckled in pain!

Yet even as it suffered a serious injury, the alien megavoribug did not get paralyzed by the blow.

Every voribug strain and species was bred for war. Pain only served to warn them of threats. The creatures did not know fear. The only proper response to pain was to lash out against the source of their injury!

As such, the Sudhar Goliath demonstrated an unusual amount of velocity by swiping its claws right back at the ace mech that dared to penetrate its exoskeleton!

"PATHETIC."

Saint Rosa Orfan never took the Level 6 Goliath seriously from the start. She had picked it out among the numerous megavoribugs besieging a team of Ascended Giants because it was strong enough to offer resistance but not to the point of delaying her too much.

With the power at her disposal, it would be shameful for her if she was not able to eliminate a mere Level 6 Goliath within a minute.

The pressure exerted by her Saint Kingdom already made a substantial difference to the beleaguered giants.

Not only was the Level 6 Sudhar Goliath completely unable to follow through on its attacks, the other lesser Goliaths within range started to experience an unsettling degree of pain and discomfort.

While the pain was nothing to them, the unusual effect slightly disoriented them. Their coordination suffered as they seemed to move out of sync with each other.

The Goliaths quickly tried to move away from the Riot Mark III. It was only after they left the range of the Saint Kingdom that their coordination got fully restored.

Saint Orfan did not pay attention to them. They were too weak in her opinion. They should be left for the giants.

Ever since she partially merged with her living mech, the way she perceived reality had changed.

Her mind and her perception expanded to a degree that was frankly inhuman. Even without deliberately paying attention to her surroundings, her Riot easily evaded the attacks launched by ranged voribugs.

The ace mech's resonance-empowered flight system allowed it to weave a slightly oblique path that enabled it to charge towards the injured Level 6 Goliath!

The voribugs did their best to hinder her advance. Not only were the attacks of ranged voribugs increasing in volume, they also sent a swarm to engulf and interfere with the ace mech's performance.

"MERE GNATS."

Saint Orfan did not bother to launch a deliberate attack against the cannon fodder bugs that attempted to block her mech's vision and interfere with her flight.

As soon as the bugs entered the range of her Saint Kingdom, the pseudo-Destroyer particles began to do their work!

The ace pilot stimulated them as best as possible, causing them to become more active and generate more destruction energy.

While the concentration of destruction energy was not particularly high, it still posed a serious hazard against the weak bodies of the basic variants of voribugs.

They only lasted a few seconds before the power of destruction eroded their eyes, their exoskeletons, their internal organs and most importantly their small and vulnerable brains.

Every bug that entered the Saint Kingdom appeared to be corroding and decomposing at an unnaturally fast rate.

Not a single bug managed to withstand the hostile environment long enough to reach the Riot Mark III!

What impressed and frightened observers the most about the Riot Mark III's extraordinary domain field was that its effectiveness remained constant even as the mutated voribugs attempted to overload its capacity.

Having fought against many different expert mechs and ace mechs since the start of their invasion, the mutated voribugs had discovered long ago that Saint Kingdoms were not inexhaustible.

They were the amplified manifestations of the extraordinary willpower of ace pilots.

Willpower sounded magical, but it was actually just another form of energy. High-ranking mech pilots could make use of it to bend reality according to their will, but they could not do so without a price.

Everyone had a limit!

Even Saint Orfan could only wear down the bodies of so many cannon fodder bugs by expending her surging willpower.

Despite this consumption, she was not afraid.

This was because her machine turned out to be well-suited to clear these bugs!

It would have been a different story if she had chosen to integrate a different key resonating material to her expert mech, but Terran Destroyer Amplification Material perfectly fit her current needs!

TDAM acted as an incredibly effective amplifier in her ability to wield the destructive power of her tier 3 Destroyer spear.

While it mainly served to strengthen the direct offensive power of her main weapon, Saint Orfan appreciated its other functions a lot more.

The most annoying part about fighting the voribugs had always been to deal with their swarms.

With the help of TDAM, Saint Orfan gained access to a low-cost swarm-clearing solution. Even a relatively fresh junior ace pilot such as herself did not need to exert that much resolve to continually erode the bodies of every bug that entered her domain field!

Saint Orfan did not care too much about these bugs, she felt pleased that she did not have to resort to more intensive moves to clear away this obstruction.

The problem that significantly slowed down other defenders posed no obstacle to her! There was nothing the voribugs could do to stop her ace mech from going for the kill!

As bug after bug continued to get annihilated without achieving any noticeable result, the group of Goliaths struggled to form an effective response.

They clearly wanted to reform their formation and attempt to assault the Riot Mark III from multiple directions, but the Ascended Giants that previously suffered the brunt of their attacks got in their way!

Now that the tables had turned, the Faceless Giants that had escaped the specker of death unleashed their fury on lower-level Goliaths!

Their plasma weapons burned against squirming flesh and dull exoskeletons. Their armored bodies circled around and purposefully blocked the retreat of the frantic Goliaths.

"It's payback time!"

Saint Orfan did not acknowledge the Faceless Giants, but her ace mech flew more aggressively due to their actions.

They demonstrated an implicit degree of coordination without exchanging any words. They understood each other's intentions quite clearly.

As such, nothing stood in the way of the Riot Mark III.

It was going straight for the kill.

The Sudhar Goliath in question clearly understood the threat. It did not bother to adopt a defensive posture.

Instead, it triggered a strange mutation that caused its hard limbs and exoskeleton to fuse until it had formed a giant clawed appendage.

The Goliath clearly sought to inflict a crippling blow against the Riot Mark III before it went down!

Saint Orfan simply huffed at this development.

"YOU ARE NOT QUALIFIED."

With this dismissive remark, the Riot Mark III uncharacteristically did not evade the powerful claw, but allowed it to directly strike at its Chaos Armor even as the ace mech slammed its dangerous spear directly into the Goliath's

massive body!

Enveloped within a field of willpower, chaos and destruction energies, the Level 6 Goliath remained frozen as its giant alien eyes stared at the state of the living ace mech.

The Riot's Chaos Armor remained completely spotless. The machine had not bothered to active its energy shield and did not channel a great amount of true resonance through the armor plating.

Saint Orfan intuitively knew that the Level 6 Goliath's most desperate attack could not possibly pose a threat against her machine body.

She just wanted to see the results for herself.

Only when the outcome took place before her new senses did she grew reassured that her judgment and intuition did not lead her astray.

If she still had control over her human body, she would have grinned like a shark.

Compared to the spotless state of her exquisite D-mech, the Level 6 Sudhar Goliath already looked disabled.

The first spear strike had breached its exterior while spreading a copious amount of resonance-empowered destruction energy into its internal body issue.

While the resilience of its higher-quality biomass allowed the Sudhar Goliath to withstand the energies much better than a cannon fodder bug, it lacked the extraordinary power to neutralize the devastating power.

This was the biggest deficiency of the Goliaths. The power granted by their genes could not produce a force that could effectively counter such an attack!

The Sudhar Goliath could only resort to the most stupid solution, which was gradually wearing down the destructive energies by sacrificing a lot of biomass.

It worked to an extent. So long as it did not suffer another blow, the Goliath would have been able to recover after devouring a lot of cannon fodder bugs.

Saint Orfan did not give the Goliath the reprieve it needed.

The second blow not only destroyed a number of important organs, but also flooded the surrounding flesh with even more destructive energies!

The Sudhar Goliath already reached a limit. Too much of its biomass was getting corroded. It took far too much resources and effort to repair all of the damage in a short amount of time.

Its exoskeleton was half-broken.

Its long and mutated claw had lost all of its strength.

The Level 6 Goliath had lost its qualification to act as a speed bump against the formidable new superdimensional

ace mech!

While Saint Orfan could have left the job of finishing it off to the surrounding giants, a sudden impulse insisted on doing the deed herself!

Only when her spear plunged into the disgusting flesh of the megavoribug and crushed all of the vitality remaining in its body would she gain true satisfaction from this small victory.

Even as her ace mech circled around to inflict the killing blow, a part of her awareness grew critical at her latest

thought.

"Am I still... myself?"

She had a feeling that the Prophet's Bane had already begun to bleed through her personality.

This was despite her constant effort to isolate the corrupted part of her soul!

From what she could surmise, it was not that simple to keep the demon out of her actual self.

It did not take much time for her to come up with a possible explanation.

Anytime she engaged with an act that closely aligned with the nature of the demon, she might subconsciously draw upon its strength to amplify her actions.

She already managed to observe that the persistence of her destruction energy already exceeded her expectation.

Compared to what she recorded during her practice sessions, the destruction spread by her attacks exceeded her estimates by at least 30 percent!

This was a noticeable power boost. It could mean the difference between injuring and crippling a Goliath!

Though Saint Rosa Orfan welcomed the damage boost, she also knew that taking advantage of it would give the Prophet's Bane an opportunity to resume its takeover attempt.

"So what? I am not afraid of you. Since you tried to take me over, I will do the same to you. I will turn myself into a

demon if that is what it takes to erase your hold onto my soul!"

Staying on the defensive was not her style.

Saint Orfan wanted to do more than outlast the demon.

She wanted to conquer it in full!

Therefore, the idea of loosening her suppression and giving the Prophet's Bane enough space to exert its power

started to sound increasingly more attentive.

Saint Orfan knew that she was playing with fire by contemplating such a dangerous proposal, but she believed the

only way for her to overcome this lethal challenge was to demonstrate unparalleled bravery!

Fear beget fear.

Constantly remaining on guard against the Prophet's Bane would only cause her to increase her sense of inferiority

towards this foreign invader.

Only by staring the demon in the eye and proactively attempting to conquer its power did she see hope in overcoming her trial!

Chapter 7325: Demonic Outburst

Chapter 7325: Demonic Outburst

When the Riot Mark III charged forward in order to strike the Level 6 Sudhar Goliath for the third time, its momentum suddenly surged.

Many observers who had taken notice of the remarkable performance of a rare and exceedingly precious superdimensional ace mech already became impressed by its demonstrated attributes.

Yet that did not necessarily mean that the Riot Mark III could run roughshod over the mutated voribugs.

Their own expert mechs and ace mechs experienced many difficulties in their own fights against the Goliath Hive.

Their design applications were primarily focused on countering the native aliens.

Their ability to fight against an enemy that lived and breathed pure attrition warfare was severely lacking.

Although the third parties were not able to decipher the full properties of this remarkable superdimensional ace mech, their mech designers possessed excellent judgment.

They all deduced that the Riot Mark III was not a mech designed to fight against the mutated voribugs.

To be fair, almost no mech designed in the current generation satisfied this requirement.

However, the mech was still recent enough that Ves Larkinson had likely been able to implement a handful of last-minute adaptations to its design.

The Riot Mark III's Saint Kingdom proved unusually effective against swarms of very weak voribugs. This advantage could not exist without the deliberate incorporation of Terran Destroyer Amplification Material.

It was clear that the Riot Mark III possessed far more special properties than its bold selection of key resonating materials.

Despite their youth and lack of working experience of its principal mech designers, the Miracle Couple had long proven to be creative, inventive and effective.

The more perceptive and knowledgeable among the observers even deduced the presence of demonic or unnatural entities within the machine.

Only the Red Association and the Red Collective possessed a much clearer idea on what had befallen the Riot Mark III and its ace pilot, but even they could not understand the full depth of this remarkable D-mech.

This was why few people expected for the Riot Mark III to burst out with greater power and surround itself in a more ominous dark corona during its charge!

Many people began to feel an obvious source of danger and malevolence from the ace mech!

Those who were close enough to stare directly at the ace mech soaring through space felt this threat more acutely, but even those who merely watched the Riot Mark III through a projected display felt uncomfortable.

It was as if an evil predatory monster had just swept its gaze in their direction!

Even if the unknown entity did not deliberately cast its attention to them, any red human could not ignore the slight degree of malice directed towards their souls.

Fortunately, the D-mech's hostility remained chained to the pilot of the machine.

Normally, other people shouldn't have been able to detect more than a faint sense of threat from the Riot.

It was only when Saint Orfan boldly chose to loosen her suppression on the Prophet's Bane that the Riot partially lost control!

Dark energies began to burst out of the mech frame as the Middle Demon's overwhelming anger and frustration leaked out and began to distort the surrounding space!

This was clearly an anomalous condition!

Not only was it radiating a more dangerous aura, but its physical exterior also became subjected to random mutations.

Spikes grew out of its armor plating while its existing edges grew sharper.

A pair of horns actually started to emerge out of its head!

The changes to the mech frame partially affected its performance and range of motion, but the Riot Mark III still remained functional somehow.

Saint Orfan may have eased the pressure, but that did not mean she had retracted her willpower entirely.

She gave enough room for the Prophet's Bane to exercise a portion of its power, but not enough for him to sabotage her machine!

By using her willpower to corral the Middle Demon, she was able to direct a part of its malevolent power along the shaft of the tier 3 Destroyer spear.

“DEATH!”

The striped orange mech briefly darkened just before it struck the Level 6 Goliath with its tier 3 Destroyer spear!

This time, the blow produced an explosion of power that chaotically expanded outwards!

Even as the Riot Mark III quickly flew out after completing its charge attack, the energies it left behind made it difficult to ascertain the condition of the enemy Goliath.

The latter's condition definitely shouldn't be good!

It was only after the various resonance-empowered energies dispersed that people were able to ascertain the state of the Sudhar Goliath.

“Is that... a Goliath?”

“It is nothing but a ruined mass of flesh... and even that will not last long...”

Although a Level 6 Goliath was ultimately not a match against a genuine ace mech, the former shouldn't have been defeated so easily!

Their vitality and their annoying ability to regenerate their physical injuries had long turned them into time-consuming obstacles. Most ace mech still needed to expend a significant amount of effort to kill them entirely.

Yet the Riot Mark III only needed 3 attacks to accomplish the same result.

Nobody could explain precisely what Saint Orfan managed to do or what hidden function her ace mech just employed, but the result was undeniably effective!

The Sudhar Goliath no longer retained a whole body. Its exoskeleton and internal organs had all been shattered into several dozen chunks of damaged and eroding flesh.

The dark glow of destruction energy continued to cling to them, which not only suppressed their regeneration, but also further undermined their structure.

It was clear that the Goliath had sustained so much damage that there was no way for it to recover anymore!

Even if the Goliath possessed the magical capability of mending its body after getting cut in half, the Riot Mark III's latest strike vastly exceeded its limitations!

Just as people were beginning to come to grips with the Riot Mark III's astonishing result, Saint Orfan already moved on to the next target.

Killing the Level 6 Goliath was just an appetizer in her opinion.

Her true adversary was much bigger and stronger

Before she challenged the Incubator directly, she first wanted to gain more proficiency by attacking other targets.

She already managed to learn a handful of lessons after she first eliminated the Goliath with the help of her demonic side.

Right now, she grew curious whether she could use the same methods to make mincemeat out of Level 7 Goliaths.

Fortunately, there were at least three ace mech-grade megavoribugs in the vicinity.

Aside from one Level 7 Goliath that she had previously brushed past, there were 2 more Goliaths of the same level that were still busy with tying down the Ur-Titan.

The difference was that the Level 7 Sudhar Goliath and Level 7 Korcho Goliath clearly understood that they were next.

Instead of splitting up or retreating, the latter two high-level Goliaths intensified their assault on the Ur-Titan!

The powerful Ascended Giant relied heavily on his skills, combat experience and most importantly his mid-grade superdimensional raiment to withstand the onslaught.

The giant had already thrown away his pride under this unremittent assault. He no longer thought of earning any glory by felling the Goliaths himself.

All he wanted to do was to last long enough for the nearby Larkinson ace mech to come to rescue!

Time was running out. Despite the formidable defensive power of his raiment, the Goliath Hive clearly understood how to defeat it in the most effective way possible.

While the Korcho Goliath continually ran interference, the Sudhar Goliath consistently attacked a small number of joints and weak points.

The repeated attacks rapidly caused the relevant armor sections to weaken!

So long as the Goliath managed to create a single opening, he would have multiple different ways to inflict effective damage to a human lesser phase lord!

The Ur-Titan clearly understood that his life was at stake. He did his best to protect his weak points and even took the initiative to absorb blows with the more armored sections of his raiment.

Unfortunately, skills and tactics had their limits. A mid-grade superdimensional raiment was not omnipotent, particularly one that happened to be an early-generation product.

Perhaps future versions of mid-grade superdimensional raiments would offer much greater protection at the same price levels, but these suits were so new and hastily designed that they offered very little excess value.

Soon enough, an elbow joint couldn't take it any longer. The latest heavy claw strike from the Sudhar Goliath created a small breach!

Even though it was only several centimeters long, once this weakness emerged, it became a lot easier for the ferocious Goliath to expand this opening!

Phasewater-infused blood began to flow as the Ur-Titan finally showed signs of pain and weakness.

Yet just as the invigorated Level 7 Sudhar Goliath could sever the arm entirely, a destructive Saint Kingdom briefly enveloped its large body!

A brief period of confusion occurred before a deadly Destroyer spear accurately struck the Sudhar Goliath's forearm!

Though the Goliath tried to evade the attack at the last second, Saint Orfan easily managed to keep her weapon on target.

The Riot Mark III easily managed to complete its goal!

Though the severing of a single arm was not that big of a deal to a Sudhar Goliath, it still took time and biomass to regenerate the organ.

Before the Goliath managed to regrow the arm, its offensive power dropped by a noticeable degree, preventing it from finishing off the Ur-Titan.

Not that Saint Orfan intended to give the Level 7 Goliath any chance to complete its job.

“YOU ARE NEXT!”

Instead of following up on her initial attack, the Riot Mark III abruptly changed course and completely ignored the injured but still very much functional Level 7 Sudhar Goliath in favor of targeting its brother!

The Level 7 Korcho Goliath did not pose any threat to a superdimensional ace mech like the Riot Mark III.

However, the ranged combatant possessed quite a lot of siege capacity. It would be annoying for it to retreat and continue to perform fire support duties at the rear of enemy lines.

In fact, the Goliath Hive pretty much wrote off most of the Goliaths in this quadrant of the battlefield entirely. It attempted to retreat the Korcho Goliath so that it could provide value elsewhere, but the battle hungry ace pilot did not intend to let one of her prey take flight!

“WHERE ARE YOU GOING!?”

Even though it was absolutely pointless to say anything to a mutated voribug, even if it was a much more powerful specimen than usual, Saint Orfan found it increasingly difficult to maintain her wits.

However, she found out that the more she drew upon the Prophet’s Bane’s strength, the more power she was able to exercise in combat!

Even if this power was impure and full of chaotic malice, Saint Orfan’s willpower still allowed her to direct it outwards rather than inwards.

At this time, she was not in a hurry to attack the Level 7 Sudhar Goliath.

Unlike its weaker Level 6 counterpart, the Level 7 one was significantly larger and tougher.

The Korcho Goliath on the other hand was just as large but significantly more fragile!

As a ranged combatant that was normally used for bombardment duties, the Korcho Goliath only needed to be tough enough to withstand ranged counterattacks.

It was absolutely unable to cope with a powerful melee mech like the Riot, and it showed as soon as the D-mech launched its first attack!

Empowered by both true resonance and demonic energies, the tier 3 Destroyer spear not only penetrated the Goliath’s exoskeleton in one go, but also set off a powerful explosion from within!

The Korcho Goliath’s body shook and rippled as a large chunk of his front side blew into pieces!

That was not all. Instead of retreating, the Riot Mark III fearlessly pressed on. Its Destroyer spear continually struck the injured Level 7 Goliath, causing its condition to rapidly deteriorate!

Though the Korcho Goliath tried its best to fend off the attacks, its ability to do so was wholly inadequate!

By the time a minute had passed, the Korcho Goliath finally expired!

“Too fast!”

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Chapter 7326: Harchul Goliath

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The Riot Mark III made a powerful impression on the battlefield.

Saint Rosa Orfan's debut instantly rejuvenated the surrounding defenders.

Many mech pilots and other soldiers had long longed up to ace pilots, and this time was no exception.

Even if the sight of the Riot Mark III generated a moment of apprehension within their hearts, that did not stop them from admiring its unstoppable advance!

From the moment Saint Orfan chose to channel her new demonic side, the ace spearman mech became the star on the battlefield.

Its performance readily overshadowed that of rival ace mech fielded by the Rubarthans.

Although the ace mechs of a former first-rate superstate were not weak by any means, they lacked the superdimensional superiority that enabled the Riot Mark III to completely disregard pretty much any attack launched by the mutated voribugs.

Yet it was her offensive prowess that truly made a difference on the battlefield. Outlasting the voribug race was never a good idea.

As time went by, Saint Orfan clearly grew more proficient in channeling the power of the Middle Demon.

The Riot Mark III continually released more energy. Through the shaping of its Saint Kingdom, much of this power did not go to waste. Instead, the impassioned ace pilot made sure to draw out more strength upon the moments of contact with her enemy.

Multiple Level 7 Goliaths struggled to withstand her unexpectedly fierce aggression.

The entire quadrant turned into an arena where the Riot Mark III methodically hunted down the toughest and more formidable megavoribugs.

After finishing off the Korcho Goliath, the Riot Mark III proceeded to hunt down the high-level Sudhar Goliaths, Ekstrom Goliaths and even the rare and recently introduced Harchul Goliath!

The Sudhars and Ekstroms failed to last more than a couple of minutes against the Riot Mark III.

Their melee combat capabilities were not weak, and their defenses were usually good enough to last for at least 10 minutes against most junior ace mechs.

Yet in the face of a superior machine such as the Riot Mark III, none of them managed to put up any effective resistance.

Even the latest Harchul Goliath failed to leave a scratch on the Riot Mark III's impervious Chaos Armor!

This was remarkable as the Harchul Goliath was a scavenger strain. Its strength partially relied on the high-quality alloys salvaged from the battlefield.

Whether it was debris taken from damaged warships or mechs, the Harchul Goliath possessed the uncanny ability to process and fuse the materials into its highly malleable body structure.

This caused the Harchul Goliath to resemble human mechs more than most!

With their patchwork armor plating and stolen mech weapons, the Harchul Goliath's combat power was largely reliant on the quality of its stolen goods.

While most of its equipment was not great, the Goliath in question did not place too much value on its salvage.

Whenever the defenders managed to destroy or overcome the scavenged gear, the Harchul Goliath shamelessly disengaged from battle and sought to maneuver around the battlefield in order to scavenge more human-built debris!

Sometimes, the Harchul Goliath did not even have to make a move. Other voribugs took the initiative to deliver salvage directly to the megavoribug!

Suffice to say, the Harchul Goliath might not possess enough strength to crush its opposition like the other melee Goliaths, but its tenacity and ability to make a comeback was superior to that of other strains!

Unfortunately, the new Goliath had met its match this time.

When the Riot Mark III charged straight at the Goliath that loosely resembled a classical mech, Saint Orfan grew a lot angrier all of a sudden!

“INSECT! YOU DEFILE THE SACRED FORM OF MECHS! FOR THAT, YOU DESERVE DEATH!”

Mech pilots tended to be a proud sort. Any successful pilot developed a sense of ownership towards their profession.

They hated battle bots for trying to imitate what they considered to be their exclusive preserve.

To see an alien race attempting to mimic the power of mechs affronted far more people than Saint Orfan!

If not for the fact that the imitation was merely skin-deep, the Harchul Goliath would have attracted a much fiercer counterattack!

As it was, just the Riot Mark III alone was enough to teach it a lesson.

The ace mech's strengths just happened to counter the Harchul Goliath a lot better than other targets.

The resonance and hatred-empowered tier 3 Destroyer spear punched straight through multiple layers of salvaged armor plating.

The Harchul Goliath previously compensated for its lack of energy shields by stacking multiple sheets of salvaged armor plating on its body.

While this provided it with enhanced protection, none of the transphasic hyper armor plating lasted long enough to halt the incoming Destroyer weapon!

Even if the tier 3 Destroyer spear was not a superdimensional product, the myriad of energies empowering the already potent Terran polearm was still overkill when employed against regular modern armor plating!

Once the spear managed to punch deep into the relatively soft and less resilient internals of the Harchul Goliath, the weapon proceeded to spread a large amount of destructive energies.

Empowered by the true resonance as well as the burning hatred of a trapped demon, the power of chaos and destruction, the Harchul Goliath practically disintegrated from the inside!

“FILTH.”

Saint Orfan subsequently dismissed her opponent. Even if it was still clinging to life, too much of its internal organs was doomed.

The Harchul Goliath's flexibility came at the cost of resilience. It possessed less redundant organs than the other strains. It remained invincible so long as it could keep absorbing attacks with its salvaged armor plating. Once an attack managed to overcome this troublesome routine, the megavoribug collapsed like a house of cards.

The Goliath Hive clearly needed to iterate the design of its latest Goliath strain a few more times before it was rounded enough to competently deal with adversity.

In any case, Saint Orfan already had her fill. Her mutating ace mech already surged away in order to hunt down her next prey.

As the Riot Mark III continued to rampage across the quadrant, the Goliath Hive clearly struggled to come up with a countermeasure.

At first, it began to gather all of the remaining Level 6 and 7 Goliaths in the quadrant. These dozen or so megavoribugs all possessed a formidable amount of combat power when cooperating closely with each other.

While they previously dispersed in order to pressure the Rubarthan defensive lines, now that the Goliath Hive dramatically raised the priority of the Riot Mark III, the alien insects clearly needed to employ a different strategy!

Multiple Sudhars, Korchos, Abedos and other strains ganged up on the Riot Mark III, hoping to rely on the time-tested method of superior numbers to stall the dreaded ace mech.

Perhaps the Goliath Hive already concluded that its current forces could not hope to defeat the powerful new D-mech, but so many Goliaths should at least tie down the Riot Mark III and exhaust the ace pilot's willpower.

Unfortunately, that was not quite how this development unfolded.

The Riot Mark III was too fast. The seven-generation living archemec was stuffed with cutting-edge systems.

Its flight system might not be too special compared to the Chaos Armor, but it was still designed to provide superior thrust power when it mattered!

The Riot Mark III's energy consumption spiked as Saint Orfan did not hold back on this front!

Even if the ace mech did not become as fast and agile as the Dark Zephyr Mark III, it did not matter so long as it managed to outaccelerate the Goliaths by a significant margin!

Soon enough, the Riot Mark III became surprisingly elusive. The relatively inferior tracking and targeting capabilities of the ranged Goliaths made it difficult if not impossible to land a single hit on the machine.

Few of their plasma bolts, kinetic projectiles, acid bombs or energy beams managed to scrape the ace spearman mech.

Even if an errant attack struck the machine, that was mostly because Saint Orfan felt too lazy to evade a relatively weak and harmless strike.

Attacks that could destroy or severely damage a typical first-class multipurpose mech presented no acute threat to a machine as good as the Riot Mark III!

Every incoming attack weakened as it passed through the Saint Kingdom. By the time it struck the surface of the Superdimensional Chaos Armor, the strike got neutralized or bounced away!

Nothing worked!

The Abedo Goaliths even tried to employ their imitations of phasewater organs to destabilize the surrounding space and create hindrances for the Riot Mark III, but their efforts were utterly futile when employed against a genuine ace mech.

Saint Orfan's willpower easily resisted every field effect!

The Riot rammed through unstable space and forged its own straight path, as was proper!

"Hmph."

Rosa Orfan did not even bother to pay attention to the Abedo Goliaths.

The mid-ranged megavoribugs may be a nightmare when employed against mundane mechs and small installations, but their battlefield manipulation capabilities seemed utterly weak and underpowered from the perspective of an ace pilot!

The only annoyance was that resisting the field effects depleted Saint Orfan's willpower a little faster.

Nothing was truly useless.

Even if the Abedo Goliaths failed to impede the Riot Mark III, the latter still needed to expend more resources to maintain its performance.

The domineering fight progressed.

While the ranged Goliaths proved themselves to be useless, the melee Goliaths served as the last hope of the invaders to hold the D-mech back.

They gathered together. Several swarms of cannon fodder bugs reinforced them shortly afterwards.

The substantial concentration of power immediately reshaped the enemy assault in this quadrant.

By pulling away so many Goliaths, the defending champions of this quadrant breathed a lot easier than before!

"What is happening?"

"It is the latest superdimensional ace mech from the Larkinson Clan. The Riot has literally started a one-mech riot. Just look at how the Goliaths are trying and failing to surround the orange machine."

The Riot Mark III made a mockery of the chasing melee Goliaths. For all of their formidable vitality and regeneration capabilities, mobility had never ranked at the top.

While the Sudhar Goliath was the fastest strain among its peers, voribug evolution consistently failed to match or exceed the high technologies of red humanity.

Considering that every Goliath consisted of a mix of original biocreations and plagiarized designs, it was clear that the enemy had limits when it came to pursuing the latter!

"After all, I do not think that there are any cosmopolitans who are crazy enough to pass on stolen technologies to the Devourer Queen... right?"

In any case, even if they were partially built for speed, the Riot Mark III completely outpaced it at this time.

This granted Saint Orfan all of the initiative she needed.

Her ace mech did not stupidly charge straight into the gathering of Goliaths.

Instead, Saint Orfan proved devious enough to rely on hit-and-run attacks.

For the purpose of lowering her energy consumption, the Riot Mark III evaded most attacks while demonstrating enough aggression to pierce the bodies of the Goliaths with her Destroyer weapon!

Many Goliaths started to suffer!

Due to all of the destructive energies transmitted from this moment of contact, every attack continued to linger and exacerbate the wounds.

So long as the Riot Mark III did not fly too far away, Saint Orfan found that it was relatively easy for her to maintain or even refresh the true resonance passed on to the Goliaths!

Since many of the Riot Mark III's attacks managed to pierce the exoskeleton of the formidable Level 6 and Level 7 Goliaths, each of them started to suffer from the inside!

The breached exoskeletons did not hurt them all that much, but the damage spreading to their internal organs was much more severe!

By the time 5 minutes passed by, few if any of the Goliaths managed to remain in good condition.

The destructive energies rioting across their bodies had weakened them by at least 50 percent!

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Chapter 7327: Sudden Change of Strategy

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As the Riot Mark III continued to go on rampage to the point of forcing the Goliaths to band together, many people developed a growing interest in the mech and its secrets.

The Dark Apostle received multiple inquiries about the 'tech' used to grant the Riot Mark III access to a new 'energy source'.

Even if anyone with decent intelligence and perception could clearly deduce that the ace spearman mech was making use of a power that was not benign in the slightest, that did not reduce people's cravings for it in the slightest.

What did the Rubarthans need the most now that it was beset by the much more troublesome mutated voribugs?

Power!

At this point, the Rubarthans did not care too much whether it came with any strings attached.

So long as the price was not worse than literally getting devoured by an endless tide of alien insects, anything was acceptable!

Ves was supposed to accompany the Dark Apostle in battle. He had very little interest in explaining the Riot Mark III to his current hosts.

“The design solutions used to make the Riot Mark III so much more powerful are currently exclusive to the Larkinson Clan.” He patiently responded to the latest inquiry through Blinky. “No, the Earth Carmine mech design project that we have agreed to collaborate on does not include this particular design application. An adversarial mech is a costly variation of traditional craftsmanship, which cannot be mass produced in the foreseeable future.”

Lord Richard Brownstone made another request.

“I can’t accept commissions where I deliver adversarial mechs for individual mech pilots at this time. My design schedule is already overloaded. Besides, all of this is still highly experimental. A life-changing accident has already occurred. I do not wish the fate of Saint Rosa Orfan to one of your own heroes. If not for the fact that she is part of my clan and that she has accepted all of the risks, I would have been in a lot more trouble for botching this experiment. Yes, you heard that right. What I have made is so new and untested that safety cannot be guaranteed.”

“Ves.” The Dark Apostle said. “Saint Orfan is doing great, but the other fronts are not doing as well. It looks as if the Goliath Hive is about to get serious.”

That sounded grave.

Ves quickly suspended his current discussion with the Brownstone mech designer and cast his gaze across the battlefield.

While he was not able to observe much from his current perspective, he also activated a projected map from the Dark Apostle’s raiment that conveyed a lot more data.

It turned out that the Goliath Hive had already formed a response. It was not stupid enough to double down on a losing bet.

Seeing as the Larkinson ace mech was not only invincible when fighting against a mob of Level 4 to 7 Goliaths, but also kicked their butts despite their desperate teamwork, the mutated voribugs made the most extreme but also correct decision.

“The Goliaths at the other quadrants are repositioning!”

“What are they doing?”

“Wait, they are capturing our expert mechs!”

While the Goliaths confronted by the Riot Mark III were having a bad time, the remaining megavoribugs had all shifted their strategy in response.

The enemy should be intelligent enough to predict that once Saint Orfan dismantled her current set of opponents, she would move on to another quadrant and do the same thing over again.

While her energy consumption was rather high, she should be able to persist long enough to single-handedly defeat a hundred Goliaths.

That was more than enough to change the course of the battle in the favor of the defenders.

Instead of letting the Riot Mark III defeat all of the Goliaths piecemeal, it was better for the hive to leverage their immediate value more effectively.

The solution?

Switching from assault to capture!

While the Level 4 and 5 Goliaths continued to pressure the frontlines and keep most of the enemy champions occupied, the Level 6 and 7 Goliaths across the remaining quadrants no longer fought to kill.

Instead, they ignored their current opponents as best as possible and grouped together before swooping in to capture weaker and more vulnerable expert mechs!

Of course, the ace pilots and Ascended Giants that previously fought against these Goliaths grew indignant at the sudden change in strategy.

“Get back here!”

“Not on my watch!”

“I am your opponent!”

While the defending champions did their best to block and interfere with whatever the Goliaths attempted to do this time, they were still outnumbered.

They could block and eventually defeat Level 7 Goliaths, but all of that took time.

During this crucial interval, other high-level Goliaths readily bypassed the occupied ace mechs and Goliaths and warfare and shamelessly swooped down onto the expert mechs that their hive prioritized for whatever reason!

The power disparity was too great.

So long as the expert pilots had yet reached the higher tiers of their progression, their resistance was not strong enough to prevent the Goliaths from grabbing their machines and taking them away!

Even if the expert mechs in question inflicted a large amount of damage to the bodies of their kidnappers, the Goliaths easily resisted the blows or recovered from it afterwards.

In order to make sure the Goliaths remained intact long enough for them to complete their mission, much of the remaining swarms of cannon fodder bugs converged upon the high-level Goliaths in order to replenish the latter's biomass.

This luxurious treatment prevented the mutated voribugs from maintaining pressure elsewhere, but by this time, they had largely completed their original missions.

The orbital defense network was no longer as pristine and complete as before.

Hundreds of orbital platforms had been knocked out or torn apart. Almost a dozen large orbital fortresses had fallen as well.

The orbital defenses that remained intact fared little better. Many of them had lost their titan shields and suffered visible surface damage.

What was worse was that the mutated voribugs infiltrated their structures. One of their most insidious forms of attack was to simply let their voribugs loose onto a human facility.

Just a single bug could devour the surrounding alloys and rapidly reproduce so long as it was not immediately hunted down.

The newly born voribug might not be particularly large or powerful, but what was important was that it could replicate the actions of its parent straight away.

2 voribugs turned into 4 voribugs, 4 voribugs turned into 8 voribugs, 8 voribugs turned into 16 voribugs and so on. Given that a single cycle could take place in as little as a couple of minutes, a damaged orbital platform could soon become infested by thousands of metal-eating bugs!

During this battle, far more than individual voribugs infested the orbital platforms.

As long as the orbital facilities lost their energy shields, it was trivially easy for the voribugs to land on their exterior and begin to worm their way to the interior.

If other attackers had managed to breach the surface layers, then that was even better!

The voribugs could directly enter the facilities and begin to eat it apart from the inside.

This was a lot more effective and also much more troublesome to clear.

At least any nearby mechs could come and clear away the voribugs that remained stuck outside.

When the bug infection had reached the internal structure of the orbital platforms and fortresses, mechs could no longer play a useful role anymore.

Infantry troopers, combat engineers and bots had to take over and manually clear the infected sections. This was a slow and painstaking process.

If not for the fact that the Rubarthans had also upgraded the internal defenses of these facilities, the bug infestations would have been a lot harder to control!

Even so, the brave soldiers fighting to cull the voribugs gnawing at bulkheads and important components could only suppress their expansion.

Keeping the insect numbers down was still doable, but eradicating each and every intruding bug was too much to ask!

Unless an ace mech happened to be available to swoop in and make use of its Saint Kingdom to detect and strangle any weak bug that managed to escape persecution, clearing out every bug in the short term was not a realistic demand!

As such, even if the orbital facilities still looked intact and functional from the outside, their internal conditions were much worse.

For all of their redundancy, the voribugs did not aimlessly devour random metal objects. The Goliath Hive directed each of them to prioritize strong alloys or delicate components.

From power transmission systems to the inconspicuous bots that fulfilled many useful functions, the voribugs targeted all of them with suicidal fervor!

In short, the orbital defenses could no longer provide as much support on the greater battlefield as before.

Combined with the heavy losses suffered by the mechs and the less serious damage suffered by the warships, it remained questionable whether they could withstand another heavy assault.

The good news was that the mutated voribugs paid a ruinous price to wear down the defenses to this extent.

The swarms of cannon fodder bugs previously seemed endless, but at this time they had almost run out of bodies to throw into the grinder.

It was impressive how much the Goliath Hive expended weeks worth of accumulation in a matter of hours.

The Rubarthans had been unable to count the exact quantity of voribugs that lost their lives so far, but even the most conservative estimates easily exceeded several hundred million insects!

While the amount of bugs that sacrificed their lives was astronomical, they at least managed to make themselves useful in the short time they fought.

Even without the assistance of the Goliaths, the small and weak voribug subspecies managed to drive the defenders to the brink.

It was therefore peculiar that the enemy did not make the final push that everyone was expecting.

The Goliaths were originally supposed to push past all of the resistance and deliver the finishing blows to the damaged and weakened orbital defenses.

Their sudden withdrawal gave the orbital defense network a crucial reprieve. Their crews could focus more fully on clearing the bug infestations while constant resupply shipments from the surface replenished the resources of many more combat assets.

Exhausted mech units and battered warship squadrons all withdrew from the front in order to take stock of their current conditions and reorganize.

While not every voribug had ceased their attacks, their offensive pressure was nowhere near as heavy as before.

With only the ranged voribugs maintaining their attacks, the human defenders almost began to take it easy as they no longer had to keep their focus at 100 percent all of the time.

However, not many soldiers dared to believe that the Goliath Hive had enough.

The kidnapping of expert mechs and expert pilots continued.

It was pure bullying for Level 7 Goliaths to ignore the enemy ace mechs and target the low-tier and mid-tier expert mechs instead!

For all of their vaunted first-class high technologies, the limited strength of their respective pilots made it difficult if not impossible to resist physical capture!

Not even their resonance shields could prevent them from getting captured. They only truly offered protection against direct attacks.

The more clever expert pilots attempted to escape capture by ejecting their cockpits at the last moment.

Yet that did not avail them much when their vulnerable cockpits got captured by the swarms that attended the Goliaths!

Without sufficient protection, it was impossible for the expert pilots as well as expert mechs to escape captivity.

The Goliaths did not kidnap the expert mechs without reason. As soon as they latched onto their prey, they flew all the way to the Voribug Organic Battle Moon and plunged directly into its massive fleshy interior!

The Incubator devoured both the captured expert mechs as well as their accompanying Goliaths!

“Stop them! The Goliaths are feeding the Incubator! Something very dangerous is brewing inside!”

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Chapter 7328: Trial of Control

Chapter 7328: Trial of Control

When the voribugs switched up their strategies, Saint Orfan grew annoyed.

The enemy Goliaths deliberately avoided her ace mech!

Once she was done with beating up her existing prey, she left the weakest Goliaths for the other defenders and tried to hunt down more serious opponents.

Yet whenever her Riot approached a Level 7 Goliaths, all of the other high-level Goliaths immediately flew away!

Even the targeted Goliath did its best to waste as much time as possible by fleeing from the Riot.

The mutated voribugs clearly understood that there was no escaping the bloodthirsty ace pilot.

More than a dozen Goliaths had already fallen at her hands, but that was far from enough to sate her growing need for alien blood.

Her anger continued to boil and surge within her mech frame, yet the opportunities for venting began to dwindle as the Goliath Hive played hard to get!

“COME BACK HERE!”

Yet no matter how much she admonished the enemy, the Goliaths continued to act without honor or pride.

Saint Orfan's mood continued to worsen as the enemy Goliaths reduced her killing efficiency with their despicable tactics and maneuvering.

They constantly led the Riot Mark III into obscure directions. By the time her machine caught up to its prey and butchered it with the tier 3 Destroyer spear, the next closest target would take many minutes to intercept!

“AARGGGHH!”

Her frustration continued to assail her mood. Many thoughts began to leave her mind as her anger occupied a greater part of her mind.

Her change in demeanor reflected onto her ace mech. The Prophet's Bane clearly exerted a greater influence on its form as its mutations grew sharper and more severe.

Its current appearance differed significantly from its initial form!

Multiple asymmetrical spikes extended from its chest plating, shoulder plating and arms.

The angles and proportions of its limbs grew sharper and more deformed.

Its head began to mimic the features of an angry demon.

Even its coating began to shift from bright orange to a more ominous shade of crimson!

Perhaps the only parts about the Riot Mark III that remained untouched by all of the strange mutations were its weapons.

The sacrificial spears endured light to moderate mutations, but the more crucial tier 3 Destroyer spear remained unsullied!

The reason for this remained unclear.

Perhaps it was because they counted as separate equipment, or because of the interference produced by Destroyer particles.

Barring this exception, much of the Riot Mark III had deviated from its initially perfect contours and turned into a metallic beast that radiated violence and disorder in equal terms!

More and more people grew concerned at the visible deterioration of the Riot Mark III.

Whatever unholy tech that Ves employed onto the ace mech clearly possessed a great amount of complications.

Ves tried his best to calm Saint Orfan down or at least redirect her attention!

“Rosa! Stop! You are not accomplishing anything by chasing after lone Goliaths! The enemy is deliberately leading you on a wild goose chase! Calm down and come back! The final phase of the battle is approaching. We need you here where you can do the most good.”

His communications seemed to fall on deaf ears. Ves only received incoherent screams in response!

“It sounds like this gambit of yours is not as successful as you thought.” The Dark Apostle couldn’t help but comment. “You can’t expect for Saint Orfan to perfectly isolate herself from the Middle Demon that has taken over 90 percent of her soul. That would be like denying the core of what you are. It is unnatural.”

Ves had the feeling that his other self was alluding to more than just this case.

Blinky turned towards the armored Dark Apostle. “Give me a break. We can discuss whatever issue you have with me at a later date. We need to address the immediate issue first. Something has clearly gone wrong with Saint Orfan. Her resonance strength remains stable, but her emotional stability has dropped. We need to intervene before she directs her aggression against allies. I don’t like the way she is looking at nearby mechs.”

Surprisingly, his other self did not agree with this decision.

“Give her time.”

“Pardon?”

“This is her trial.” The Ascended Giant voiced his opinion. “As far as I am concerned, unless she has crossed the line, it is better to let her solve her own problem. This is clearly an issue that will happen again in the future. Relying on others is not a permanent solution, especially when we are talking about proud ace pilots such as her. As one warrior to another, I do not wish to steal her chance to redeem herself. Trust me, Ves. She will be much happier with us if we leave her to find her way back to sanity with her own strength.”

“ ... ”

While Ves did not feel good about this suggestion, he had to admit that the Dark Apostle made a powerful argument.

The downside was that the outcome was highly uncertain.

What if Saint Orfan took an hour to extricate herself from her volatile mindstate?

The longer she remained in this condition, the greater the probability that the Prophet’s Bane would complete his takeover!

Even if the worst outcome did not come to pass, just the fact that the Riot Mark III remained unresponsive for such a long period of time would have devastating consequences for this battle!

“Fine.” Ves sighed. “Since I have already taken so many bets on the Riot Mark III, I suppose it doesn’t hurt to make another one. I won’t try to wake her up for the time being. This does not apply when she actually harms any friendlies. I really hope she has not lost control to the point of treating her allies as enemies. Even if I won’t take action, the Rubarthans cannot stay still.”

With that dealt with, both of them turned their attention back to the Incubator.

Enough time had passed for the Voribug Organic Battle Moon to approach Philaster Crestia III.

At this time, the gravity generated by the VOBM had begun to exert tidal forces onto the planet.

Many different orbital defenses along with over a hundred warships opened fire onto the planet.

Even the large-scale surface-to-orbit weapon systems that the Rubarthans built on the globe had begun to bombard the Incubator!

All of this damage ravaged the ‘landscape’ of the moon-sized organic construct.

Craters and ash continued to accumulate at a rapid rate, yet none of the attacks came close to hurting the core of the Incubator.

The VOBM was much more resilient than an ordinary planet or moon!

In the time preceding its unveiling, the mutated voribug gathered a large amount of high-quality exotics and hypers from the outer system.

As the Goliath Hive commenced their final assault, a large number of voribugs assumed salvage duty. They sought out useful pieces of high-quality debris and diverted them to the battle moon.

Through this unremittent effort, the Incubator managed to absorb many pieces of broken warship hull plating and broken mech frames.

The Incubator rapidly digested all of this salvage en masse. The best materials probably got diverted to the core, while everything else went on to reinforce the outer and middle structure of the battle moon.

All of this feeding made it increasingly harder to penetrate the deeper layers of the enormous battle moon.

Siege weapons designed to annihilate cities and shatter continents produced unexpectedly low yields when employed against the massive flesh satellite.

Attacking the Voribug Organic Battle Moon was as difficult as attacking a full alloy war planet!

“We need to bring out the planet killers!”

“Not yet! Their effectiveness is not guaranteed, and we need higher authorization to escalate the war.”

“If we do not destroy this Incubator soon, it will crash through our orbital network and crash into the planet! What is worse is that we are giving whatever Goliath is gestating in the core enough time to mature!”

While the Rubarthan commanders argued whether to employ the most destructive weapons of mass destruction at their disposal, the Ascended Giants all regrouped so that they could face the ultimate threat.

Previously, they had done a good job of holding back the quadrants. The teams of Ur-Titans and Faceless Giants worked well with each other. They had managed to hold back or take down dozens of Goliaths, though most of them were admittedly low-level specimens.

The only group of Ascended Giants that failed to make a lot of accomplishments were the Ur-Titans assigned to stall the Incubator.

Despite being armed with powerful ranged weapons, their absolute firepower was a far cry from that of a typical sub-capital warship.

Their spatial abilities were useless against an enemy construct of this scale.

Perhaps they may have been able to sabotage the VOBM more effectively if they descended onto the surface, but they did not dare to do so as they still recalled how they almost got captured by the tentacles spawned from the surface.

As such, the Ur-Titans could do little aside from bombarding the organic cannons from a distance and hunting down the voribugs and Goliaths that constantly delivered salvage.

The good news was that they never experienced any serious danger. Even as they clashed against the Goliaths assigned to escort the Incubator, the Ur-Titans relied on their Rubarthan plasma halberds and their serviceable mid-grade superdimensional armor to achieve superiority.

The reserves, which included the Dark Apostle and Divine Harpoon, previously dispatched a handful of Ascended Giants to reinforce units that looked like they needed assistance.

The two leading giants chose to hold back at this time. Their power remained unused, which was good because they most definitely needed all of the strength that they could muster against the final opponent.

The eradication of the voribug swarms and the defeat or withdrawal of over 200 Goliaths did not make the defenders feel as if they had won this engagement.

None of these enemies mattered if they were being truthful. Everyone could figure out that the true threat had always been the Incubator from beginning to end.

While the Goliath Hive indeed suffered enormous losses, much of it consisted of bug variations that could easily be replenished over time.

This also included Level 7 Goliaths!

While it demanded a considerable amount of time, energy and high-quality resources, as long as the hive possessed the ability to produce them on demand, they remained dispensable.

What truly mattered was the unknown but most definitely remarkable Goliath that was continuing to absorb high-quality resources.

The behavior of the Goliath Hive had been clear to everyone. All of the voribugs on this battlefield acted in service of the Incubator.

Nothing made this clearer than the brazen attempt to kidnap the expert mechs.

While the Rubarthan ace pilots did their best to chase after these shameless Goliaths and rescue their weaker compatriots, their numbers were not enough to rescue every expert pilot.

It pained them to see the Goliaths toss one expert mech after another to the surface of the VOBM.

Tentacles eagerly reached out to tangle and envelop these precious shells.

Just as the trapped expert pilots transmitted their final words, the tentacles mercilessly shoved the powerful machines below the surface of the battle moon.

All transmissions ceased shortly after that. Few people believed this was because the VOBM successfully jammed every signal.

“Monstrous.” The Divine Harpoon said. “Those Goliaths attempted to kidnap our Faceless Giants as well. If not for the fact that they grouped up and enjoyed the shelter of our Ur-Titans, those filthy insects would have sacrificed our kind as well. The fact that none of our giants or the Rubarthan ace mechs have befallen this fate is a success in my view. We managed to prevent the worst from happening. The Incubator cannot derive as much ‘nutrients’ from those captured expert mechs. Even the Goliaths that dove straight into the battle moon won’t be able to offer much either.”

The Dark Apostle nodded in agreement. “That is all true, but... even if we have prevented the birth of a suspected Level 9 Goliath, do we have enough assets left to stop a Level 8 Goliath?”

“...We shall see.”

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Chapter 7329: Helpless Giants

Chapter 7329: Helpless Giants

For a long time, the Incubator accumulated a lot of resources.

It did not indiscriminately devour every piece of trash it came across. In fact, the longer it existed, the more the Voribug Organic Battle Moon grew picky about the salvage it devoured.

The Goliath Hive clearly wanted to feed the best quality resources to the unknown entity gestating inside its core.

Throwing low-quality materials in the mix would force the Incubator to sort out the good from the bad and waste a lot of time and energy in the process.

It was due to the very deliberate discernment of the organic megaconstruct that the opposing humans so easily managed to deduce the Goliath Hive's intentions.

Even if the Ascended Giants did not complete their costly reconnaissance mission, the Rubarthans would have put the clues together eventually.

However, it was exactly because of the advance warning given by the giants that the defenders had time to figure out a number of countermeasures.

Not all of them were acceptable. The Rubarthans still hesitated whether to employ the most powerful planet crackers available in the Philaster Crestia System.

Knowing that such superweapons existed yet deliberately denying their usage must have been an agonizing decision to the local commanders.

Due to the resilience of the VOBM, there was no option of employing lighter and more constrained weapon systems.

Conventional arms produced very little results so far. The proportion of mid to high-quality materials of the battle moon was high enough for it to be able to withstand the bombardment from the remaining Rubarthan assets all day.

Perhaps the story might have been a little different if the orbital defense networks and other defensive units had not gone through hours of grueling attrition warfare.

The heavy voribug assault at least managed to accomplish this much.

Combined with the sudden kidnapping of over a dozen expert pilots and expert mechs, the defenders possessed very few cards that they could use to destroy the Incubator!

At this moment, the emissions generated by the Voribug Organic Battle Moon had grown significantly compared to before. Heat and other energies constantly leaked from its structure.

Part of it was generated by the organic cannons that were spread across its surface. These guns expended a significant amount of energy and matter in order to fend off attackers and exert pressure onto the orbital defense network.

However, Rubarthan data analysis suggested that all of this surface activity only accounted for a third of the energy emissions of the Incubator.

This meant that the Incubator was doing a lot of other stuff!

Nobody knew how much effort it put into generating a more powerful Goliath than the hive had produced in the past, but the consumption had to be astronomical.

None of this reassured the remaining defenders.

As the Ascended Giants regrouped around the Dark Apostle and the Divine Harpoon, numerous of them looked clueless and directionless.

They had been raised into phase lords for the express purpose of beating the native aliens at their own game.

Entering into battle with the mutated voribugs already threw them off their game. The fact that red humanity possessed very little intelligence about the true depth of this new enemy caused them to feel even more lost.

The bizarre existence of the Incubator vastly exceeded their imagination. Let alone defeating it, they did not even know how to inflict damage onto its structure!

"We are not equipped to fight against a battle moon of this level." The Divine Harpoon plainly stated. "Up close, the battle moon will devour us. Our superdimensional armor may be able to delay this process, but the fleshy cage will be able to crush our protection sooner or later. From a distance, our firepower is nothing special. All of the cannons and other ranged weapons that we can employ are worse than the gun batteries of most warships. I do not take pleasure in telling you this, but if we cannot make any useful contributions, it is best to retreat in advance."

The strategies made a well-reasoned argument, one that most Ascended Giants would never think of making. This was also exactly why Ves and the Dark Apostle appreciated the presence of the centuries-old military officer. They truly needed the expertise of a professional soldier.

"Retreating without making a serious attempt to defeat the Goliath Hive's scheme disgusts me." The Dark Apostle scowled. "We are not going to slink away like ineffectual cowards. There are 29 of us here. I refuse to believe that so many giants cannot do anything to the Incubator... or the Goliath that is growing inside. Perhaps... we will have our chance once the latter has spawned."

The mention of that discomfited the giants even more.

"Whatever Goliath is brewing inside is obviously bad news." One of the Faceless Giants commented. "Do we have to stand by and let our enemy complete its scheme to fruition?"

The Divine Harpoon maintained a stoic demeanor. "The decision not up to us. We have already tried and failed to damage the Incubator. Since none of our attacks so far has significantly hindered its activity in any way, we should be frank and admit that staying here will not lead to anything productive."

"Let us not be too hasty." The Dark Apostle said. "It is true that we cannot do much against the Incubator, but its primary purpose is to grow a powerful Goliath. Once it has fulfilled its mission, it will likely be discarded. Our only remaining enemy should be the Level 8 Goliath."

"The question is whether we are qualified to fight against such an opponent. I am not too optimistic, sir. The scale of the Incubator suggests that the new Goliath will be at least two orders of magnitude larger than us. The agglomeration of high-quality biomass alone will make it extremely difficult for us to inflict significant damage in a reasonable amount of time."

"You may have a point, Divine Harpoon, but we are not alone in our struggle. The remaining orbital defense network can still provide enough fire support, and there are enough ace mechs left to take the lead, chief among them the Riot Mark III."

The mention of the Riot Mark III generated a bit of concern among the Divine Harpoon and other giants.

They had seen or heard about Saint Orfan's loss of control. While her fury had not risen any further, it had not subsided either. She remained affected by the Middle Demon that had almost managed to take over her body and

soul.

"The Riot Mark III is undoubtedly the best and most appropriate combatant to take the lead against this possible Level 8 Goliath." Ves spoke through Blinky. "However, don't count the rest of us out either. The Rubarthan ace mechs are not weak and should be powerful enough to pressure the Goliath. It is too bad that they are all piloted by junior ace mechs."

The Philaster Crestia System was ultimately not important enough to receive reinforcements in the form of senior ace pilots or a precious god pilot candidate.

This should have been fine, but it was bad luck that the Goliath Hive chose this very specific star system to debut its Incubator. Now, the only asset that was theoretically able to contend against a Level 8 Goliath was a certain superdimensional ace mech, but its pilot had yet to regain her rationality.

This left the rest of them in an awkward position. Eventually, the Divine Harpoon chose to end the discussion. "We are the Ascended Giants. We should not grow reliant on letting others carry us to victory. We can excuse this behavior to an extent because we are still starting out, we must produce our own heroes among our ranks. If we do not possess the capability to defeat Level 8 and eventually Level 9 Goliaths without the assistance of human ace mechs, then what is the point of our existence? Our lack of preparation against the mutated voribugs is not a valid excuse. New enemies may appear at any moment, and none of them are friendly enough to give us time to study them and develop effective counters."

The strategies of the Faceless Giant Phalanx made a very good point. The giants needed to justify their own pride in themselves, and they cannot do so if they keep looking up to human ace mechs for help.

Of course, pride was a luxury that was best reserved for the future.

Neither Ves nor the Dark Apostle wanted to throw away the lives of their subordinates just to make a point.

Minutes passed by in relative peace. While the voribugs had not ceased their fighting, the large-scale withdrawal of Goliaths and swarms produced a relative lull on the battlefield.

Many human groups took this opportunity to replenish their supplies and conduct emergency repairs and maintenance.

Whether any of these mechs, warships and orbital facilities could accomplish anything useful in the next phase of the battle remained to be seen.

Even if they ended up too weak to make any meaningful contributions, they could at least be used to escort an evacuation fleet out of the sun system.

The giants maintained contact with the Rubarthan military during this time.

The Divine Harpoon began to confer with his Rubarthan counterparts about possible cooperation and contingency plans.

Ves and the Dark Apostle continued to exchange information with Lord Richard Brownstone over another private communication channel.

"Now that the Incubator has come so close, our most powerful orbital scanners have been able to gather more clues about the suspected Goliath that is growing inside." The Rubarthan scion said. "We have obtained more data that indicates that we are dealing with a larger and tougher version of any of the existing Goliath strains. Once it emerges from the battle moon, we will not be confronted by anything known and familiar such as an Abedo, Korcho, Ekstrom or Harcul. We will likely have to designate a new name for the unknown but undoubtedly

formidable entrant."

That was not good news.

"Based on the gathered data, can you tell us anything useful about this new Goliath? What is its size? How thick is its exoskeleton? Is it focused on melee or ranged combat?"

Lord Richard sighed. "We cannot provide any conclusive answers to you at this time. We are wondering about these matters as well, you know. I have studied the data myself. I cannot call myself well-versed in exobiology, but in my personal judgment, the creature that is growing inside is unusually well-armored. Large quantities of mixed high-grade exotics are being combined into curved organic plating. All of this organic plating is subsequently used to create chambers containing muscle, organs and other important biomass. I am sure whether the Goliath is a pure melee unit or has gained mixed attack capabilities, but an entity as powerful as this should probably be capable of both."

"What are your best estimates of its size?"

"It is much smaller than the Incubator, that is for certain. We believe this is not just because the Goliath Hive is limiting itself to using high-quality resources. It is also so that the Goliath is able to maintain strong control over every single organic cell of its body. As you phase lords already learned, bigger is not always better. Perhaps the Goliath Hive is taking cues from more modern alien phase lords as well as our ace mechs. The scale of the Level 8 Goliath will likely reach the scale of a large city, but likely not any further than that. This will make it large enough to resist numerous attacks. We cannot say how sluggish it will be. If it does not employ any special solutions, then any ace mech should be able to outmaneuver it for the most part. If it does gain any mobility enhancements, then its threat level is absolutely high."

Mobility was the greatest uncertainty about the Level 8 Goliath.

This was a crucial data point.

A powerful Goliath that could keep up with the maneuvers of an ace mech was absolutely a nightmare to fight

against!

Chapter 7330: Pitiless Eyes

Chapter 7330: Pitiless Eyes

The lull period was destined to end fairly soon.

Ever since the remaining Goliaths enacted their kidnapping spree, the remaining expert mechs withdrew from the front.

Lacking easy targets, the enemy Goliaths did not bother to chase after the remaining prey. They had already managed to capture plenty of expert mechs.

Ves paid special attention to a certain mech from the Bluejay Fleet.

He wondered whether the mechers managed to succeed in their experiment to induce a breakthrough with the combination of a high tolerance neural interface, a Pilot Breakthrough Elixir, and the transcendence glow.

In his opinion, such a combination was so powerful that success should be certain as long as the pilot was adequately prepared.

Major Jankowski might not be the best expert candidate that Ves had encountered, but he should definitely possess the qualifications to undergo apotheosis. He just lacked opportunities due to the Bluejay Fleet's irregular combat encounters.

Though he found it a little regrettable that he hadn't been able to pay attention to Major Jankowski and his custom mech in person, he should still be able to call up the data that would tell him whether the experiment fulfilled everyone's expectations.

"Well, he's lucky enough."

Just as he expected, the combination of new methods and technologies enabled him to breakthrough minutes after he had begun to fight.

This early breakthrough turned out to be a blessing in disguise for him. While his forced resonance state allowed him to elevate the performance of his custom mech beyond regular limitations, he exhausted himself shortly afterwards.

This forced him to return to the Tarrasque long before the Goliaths switched assault to capture!

Ves could easily deduce that Major, no, Venerable Jankowski would have been an easy mark for the alien megavoribugs.

Without a proper expert mech, the new RA expert pilot would not be able to outrun or generate any meaningful resistance against a Level 7 Goliath!

Even if his resonance strength was still weak compared to more established expert pilots, he still transformed into a genuine demigod. His willpower became extraordinary and precious for that reason!

Though Simon Jankowski coincidentally managed to avoid the worst fate, the same could not be said for other expert pilots.

These powerful figures along with their quality expert mechs all turned into sustenance for the Level 8 Goliath. Ves and many others frankly did not possess too much concern about the devouring of expert mechs.

What truly made them strong and special was not their high-grade exotics and hypers.

Though expert mechs could easily be distinguished from standard mechs by the inclusion of resonating materials, that alone was not the principal reason why they performed so much more brilliantly on the battlefield.

It was their pilots that truly made the difference.

Therefore, everyone grew concerned when the Incubator devoured more than a dozen expert pilots.

These low-tier and mid-tier expert pilots might not possess willpower that was strong enough to generate reality-defying domain fields, but they were not trivial either.

Who knew what benefits the Level 8 Goliath gained from absorbing these demigods.

"It is probably impossible for the Goliath to derive extraordinary power comparable to that of an ace pilot by devouring all of these scattered expert pilots." Ves made a guess. "Things don't work that way. You can't blindly stack low-quality resources to achieve the same outcome as using a single high-quality resource. Mostly, I do not think the Incubator is remarkable enough to be an exception to the rule. My guess is that the Goliath will gain just enough extraordinary power to support his strengthened body, but not much more."

Organisms, especially intelligent ones, could not grow to the size of cities, continents or moons so quickly without the mental strength to control so much biomass.

It was reasonable to guess that the Incubator eagerly devoured the expert pilots in order to shore up the weak mentality of the unborn Goliath.

While this meant that the suspected Level 8 Goliath would not be able to wield extraordinary power as extravagantly as a high-ranking mech pilot, the unprecedented megavoribug would still be far harder to fight against than a Level 7 Goliath.

Ves had many guesses in his mind, but the lack of data made it difficult to form any definite conclusions.

All they could do was to wait and see the culmination of the enemy's greatest effort in this sun system.

"We are detecting a large amount of anomalous signals! Emissions are dropping! We believe that the Incubator is about ready to give birth!"

"Abandon our heavily damaged orbital facilities! Activate their self destruct programs so that they won't spawn too many voribugs. Signal the evacuation fleet to depart as soon as we transmit the signal."

The elevated activity from the Incubator was becoming increasingly more obvious.

Its organic cannons had fallen silent as the entire organic megaconstruct channeled all of its remaining energies to its core.

All of the intact or damaged flesh across its enormous surface began to wither and deflate.

While it did not shrink like a leaking balloon, the sight still looked eerie.

The Goliath Hive actually chose to sacrifice its battle moon.

To be honest, Ves found it hard to believe that the enemy would go through with this decision.

The defenders of Philaster Crestia III had become so battered that it was questionable whether they could be more useful than speed bump in front of this moon-sized organic calamity.

Yet instead of letting the VOBM push through the crumbling orbital defenses and crash onto the surface of the planet, the Goliath Hive readily threw away this advantage in favor of spawning a super special Goliath!

Ves did not think that the mutated voribugs were irrational to the point of sabotaging their own performance.

This meant that the value of this Goliath exceeded that of the Incubator.

Perhaps its significance was not due to its superior hard power, but instead its combat methods, growth potential or other traits.

Whatever the case, Ves had a growing feeling that the appearance of this new adversary would start a new chapter in the Voribug War.

So long as this alien experiment yielded successful results, the Goliath Hive would definitely pump out more of these super special Goliaths.

Whether they could be defeated by individual senior ace pilots and peak ace pilots remained uncertain.

However, just the fact that the mutated voribugs could produce such a powerful champion in a matter of days or weeks was an incredibly distressing fact!

If all it took to produce these powerhouses was to sacrifice a bunch of Goliaths as well as ordinary expert pilots, then such potent enemies would soon be able to emerge all across the border systems under assault by the Goliath Hive!

The only consolation was that the other 5 hives likely would not copy this method. Their war doctrines were vastly different. They did not have a history of fielding titanic and overly costly megavoribugs.

Even so, the more the Goliath Hive relied on this measure to achieve success, the more territory it would sweep.

Greater territory translated into greater access to resources.

Greater access to resources subsequently led to much more voribugs!

In this way, the mutated voribugs would naturally learn which hive and which set of doctrines produced the most victories.

"Do you think we have a chance?" The Dark Apostle quietly asked.

"I don't have any more information than you, buddy." Ves casually replied. "It would be great if we can rely on the strength of the Riot Mark III. Saint Orfan's problems aside, her strength is still the real deal. If she doesn't come to reinforce us, then we are in for a much tougher fight. I am quite confident in the power of our Withering Sting. In theory, an adversary that is strong in flesh but weak in mind and spirit is the ideal target for this weapon. However, this is a simplistic view of the situation. I am sure that it is far more difficult to inflict effective damage to our enemy."

"What do you think will give us the most trouble?"

"I can think of at least 3 factors. First is interference from other Goliaths and ordinary voribugs. Their numbers may have diminished by a lot compared to the start, but there are still enough of them left to get in our way."

"We'll have to rely on teamwork to overcome this challenge."

"Second is the sheer size and mass of the suspected Level 8 Goliath. I have no doubt that the Withering Sting can inflict damage onto the enemy, but I am not sure how quickly the corruption can spread. If the Goliath is too big, then it may take hours for the withering curse to spread across the entire body. This is way too much."

This was Ves' primary concern. The high-grade superdimensional spear may be able to penetrate through anything, but what did that matter if its length was a fraction of the height or width of the gigantic insectile foe?

"Third is the combat power of this Goliath. I am quite sure that once this new enemy learns that the Withering Sting is able to inflict somewhat effective damage to it, we will become the focus of its aggression. Can we withstand its onslaught? Can we fend off its attacks?"

"Our superdimensional raiment is much better than that of the other giants, Ves. Have faith in your own work. This new Goliath may be larger, stronger and a little more extraordinary than the ones that have come before, but it won't be easy for it to kill us, especially if it lacks superdimensional weapons of its own."

Underestimating the enemy was dangerous. Ves did not dare to assume that their raiment would offer perfect

protection.

Enough time had passed.

After so much activity, the Incubator no longer conveyed any signs of life.

The only exception was its core, which still generated a lot of emissions!

Suddenly, a faint but piercing wave swept across everyone on the battlefield.

It reminded them of the brief moment when the Devourer Queen briefly extended her awareness to this corner of

the Red Ocean.

The difference between that past incident and the present one was that the latter was weaker!

However, just the fact that the Goliath possessed the strength to evoke such a reaction was enough to confirm a

few conjectures!

Seconds later, the withered remains of the Incubator began to tear as a powerful new entity literally ripped its way

to the surface!

The brand-new Goliath was covered in thick and deep brown exoskeleton. It was already larger than many Level 7 Goliaths stacked together.

While its movements seemed slow, its absolute size meant that this was partially an illusion.

In truth, it demonstrated a level of speed and agility that defied its massive organic structure!

All of the high-quality materials put into its growth did not just focus on covering it with thick and powerful

biological plating.

Its muscular system must also be incredibly formidable. It was both fast and strong, ensuring that the Goliath could pose a certain degree of threat to enemies that made use of superdimensional armor!

As the massive creature continued to emerge from the vestige of the once-formidable organic battle moon, its alien aura grew stronger and more vigorous.

The massive enemy had only just been born, but it projected so much strength that many of the battle-hardened soldiers on the battlefield resisted the urge to fall on their knees!

Strong!

Intimidating!

Alien!

The creature did more than radiate menace. It wordlessly declared its superiority against all of the remaining defenders in the star system!

Its pitiless alien eyes briefly took stock of the surroundings before fixating on the combined group of ace pilots and

Ascended Giants.

Though the group was quite formidable in every respect, numerous of the ace pilots and giants felt that they were not equipped to defeat an opponent of this caliber.

Just the lack of intelligence on this unprecedented new Goliath put them at a heavy disadvantage!

Chapter 7331: The Ixith Goliath

Chapter 7331: The Ixith Goliath

The dark brown monstrosity that emerged from the ruined Incubator possessed an unmistakable insectile form.

The Goliath Hive did not attempt to breed a megavoribug that imitated any known human or native alien form. The massive creature exemplified the aesthetics of the voribug race.

The monstrous creature possessed many limbs, though not all of them were identical to each other.

The frontal limbs were clearly optimized for slashing while the remaining limbs were more suited for locomotion as well as grappling.

Amidst all of the sharp and angular shells, the creature also boasted a number of short protrusions that vaguely looked like cannons.

These organic cannons looked a little haphazard. It would be difficult to point them all in a single direction.

Nonetheless, their positioning allowed the new Goliath to launch attacks in every direction if it wished.

The final notable trait of the new Goliath was its massive set of mandibles. Due to the immense size of the new megavoribug, the mandibles alone were large enough to crush mechs as well as Ascended Giants!

Shortly after its appearance, many soldiers managed to wake themselves up from their moment of paralysis.

Though the newly emerged Goliath radiated an aura of menace that threatened to freeze their minds and chill their hearts, their discipline and courage resisted this effect.

“Open fire!”

A large quantity of cannons quickly became active. Thousands of projectiles and energy beams of varying sizes and power levels crossed the void of space and struck the Level 8 Goliath.

Strangely enough, the new megavoribug did not evade the incoming barrage when it clearly had the power to do so. Its pitiless eyes continued to stare up at the human combatants as they desperately tried to nip this threat in the bud.

When the initial attacks faded, the Rubarthans carefully studied the Goliath.

“No visible damage!”

“What?! How?! According to our surface scans, the Goliath’s exoskeleton is made out of an organic blend of high-grade materials. Their projected defensive value should not exceed that of the hull of a CFA battleship!”

A traditional CFA battleship was one of the toughest vessels of the Milky Way. While the exotics used in their construction was not the best, their quantity was impressively high. Every layer of hull plating was meters thick in order to ensure they could resist the destructive power of many weapons of mass destruction at least once.

The massive Level 8 Goliath might look completely different from a CFA battleship, but its enormous insectile form should be based on similar principles.

Even if the materials and the construction method were different, the laws of physics should apply equally to both instances!

There was only one possible explanation why the Goliath was able to resist so many attacks at once.

“This Level 8 Goliath is much more special than it looks.” Ves analyzed. “Compared to its predecessors, this big fellow is actively able to control extraordinary power. I just don’t know what kind. Is it able to manipulate E energy directly like a qi cultivator, or has it grown phasewater organs that enables it to project a bug version of a spatial barrier?”

There was too much distance for Blinky to discern important details. It did not help that the Goliath itself produced a lot of messy activity. It radiated a lot of heat and other signals that acted as a natural interference field.

“What happened to the captured expert pilots?” The Dark Apostle wondered. “Even if this Goliath devoured them all, all of that potent willpower has to go somewhere, right?”

“What are you implying, buddy?”

“The HUD of the raiment that you have built for me has detected multiple different sources of resonance. It actually got confused for a moment before it figured out how to separate the different readings. According to the data, the Goliath managed to empower its exoskeleton with something that resembles true resonance... multiple forms of true resonance.”

Blinky widened his feline eyes! His black-tipped tail straightened in surprise!

“What?! That’s impossible! None of this makes sense!”

The cat waved his incorporeal paw, causing the small projected interface to display the data readings from the resonance meters built into the raiment.

Of course, compared to a brute like the Dark Apostle, a mech designer like Ves was able to glean many more insights from the same set of data.

Yet just because it offered a possible explanation did not mean that he could accept it! Much of the conclusions did not make sense from his perspective!

“This is... this is crazy! I can’t understand it! Perhaps... perhaps the resonance meters are not up to the job! They are all designed and calibrated to measure the resonance strength of expert mechs and ace mechs. They were never made to make sense of whatever this new Goliath is doing. It isn’t even a mech, and its resonance profiles do not match any known form of resonance.”

Ves had worked with multiple different forms of resonance over his career. He was most familiar with true resonance, but he possessed an adequate familiarity with false resonance, forced resonance as well as the now-outdated prime resonance.

Each of those forms of resonance possessed their own distinctive traits and patterns.

The resonance generated by the newborn Goliath possessed a few similarities, but ultimately exhibited so many deviations that it made up its own form.

This was unprecedented.

Ves already struggled to accept that a Goliath, a non-mech entity, was somehow able to resonate with itself.

He had no idea what was going on with this alien form of resonance!

A sudden fright coursed through his borrowed spiritual form!

Had the mutated voribugs managed to accomplish a feat that had eluded the native aliens?

Try as they might, the native aliens never managed to harness the power of mechs or willpower cultivation in the past few years.

In contrast, the mutated voribugs had only just appeared on the galactic scene, and already they had managed to steal the power that made human mechs special across two galaxies!

Even if the unknown Level 8 Goliath was technically not a mech, the fact that it was able to generate its own version of resonance represented a direct challenge to the monopoly of the human mech community!

It was far too much to hope that the Goliath was a one-of-kind miracle creation that could never be replicated.

The mutated voribugs did not play that game. Their bug variations had always been based on evolving templates that could be reproduced over and over so long as the right resources were in place.

This meant that this resonance-wielding Goliath would be the first of many confounding enemies that would use their stolen power against its originators!

“This can’t be right!”

“The voribugs have stolen what is ours!”

“I refuse to believe that the willpower of these filthy bugs is stronger than mine!”

Mech pilots and other humans had long taken for granted that the road to godhood was their exclusive domain.

The thought that other species could imitate this power and leverage it for themselves was so outrageous that nobody dared to entertain it in the past.

Some people still clung to the hope that they had been too hasty in drawing their conclusions.

Perhaps their instruments got the details wrong.

Perhaps the analysts interpreted the data incorrectly.

Yet what happened in reality could not be denied.

The fact of the matter was that the Level 8 Goliath perfectly resisted damage that should have scratched or broken its outer shell given its apparent material composition.

Since the resonance meters definitely measured activity that they were sensitive towards, it was very hard to attribute this result to other sources of protection.

“I hate to say it, but we should not allow our pride to blind us from the truth. Unless there is data that proves otherwise, I think we should accept the initial explanation no matter how counterintuitive it sounds. The mutated voribugs... have replicated the power of resonance.”

Other mech designers and scientists repeatedly scoured over the data readings.

They even began to cross-reference the data from other sources. No matter whether it was mechs, warships or one of the many orbital facilities that still remained in operation, their resonance meters all produced data that was nearly identical to each other!

This meant that the conclusions drawn from them could not deviate too much from each other!

The truth began to sink into the minds of the soldiers who had fought against the mutated voribugs.

The news did not remain contained for long.

As the explosive revelations began to spread across the Philaster Crestia System and beyond, all of red humanity grew alarmed!

Many more people began to pay attention to the decisive battle in this star system!

As people struggled to come to grips with what they learned, Ves received a bunch of new messages and communication requests.

Jovy spoke to both Ves and the Dark Apostle at the same time.

“The Red Association has just conferred with the Rubarthan Pact. We have exchanged a large amount of data with each other and managed to ascertain vital clues. We have initially designated this new variation as the Ixith strain of Goliaths. We cannot state with certainty whether lower-level versions can emerge, but the evidence so far suggests that this is unlikely to happen.”

“You sound pretty sure about that.” Ves responded.

“That is because our most powerful scanners have detected enough clues to develop a possible theory on how the Ixith Goliath is able to generate a new form of resonance.” Jovy responded. “We have detected an extremely large Mentalist Crystal in the ‘central brain’ that is strategically located in the center of its body. It is true that our scanners have difficulty penetrating the center of the Goliath’s extremely dense and multi-layered body, but a Mentalist Crystal is such a remarkable piece of organic crystal that it stands out among other materials. If you know what to look out for, it is possible to distinguish it from a crowd of other matter.”

Ves had not installed a specialized Mentalist Crystal detector in his Superdimensional Giant Regalia, so he could not confirm this news.

However, he did not think that the mechers and the Rubarthans made a mistake.

The presence of a large Mentalist Crystal offered a possible explanation why the so-called Ixith Goliath was able to harness the power of resonance!

“Are you saying that the Ixith Goliath is able to generate resonance with the help of this Mentalist Crystal?” Blinky began to frown. “That may be the case, but I doubt it is the only factor. It would be too easy for others to do the same just by owning a crystal of their own. There has to be more to this story.”

“True. We... have formed a number of explanations, most of which have to do with how the Ixith Goliath has assimilated the captured expert pilots. None of the data readings that we have gathered can support any further conclusions. This is why we urgently need to conduct a detailed examination of the Ixith Goliath. Both the Red Association and the Rubarthan Pact desired its capture. We would like to issue a request for you and your men to do your utmost to subdue the new Goliath and bring it back as intact as possible.”

The Dark Apostle sputtered at this insane demand. “Impossible! That Goliath is many times larger and heavier than all of our giants put together! Forget about capturing it alive and whole. I don’t think we will be able to retrieve anything but broken pieces by the time we are done, and that is assuming that we have managed to gain the upper hand!”

“I agree.” Ves backed up his other self. “Don’t try to convince us with another deal. No amount of concessions can persuade us to undertake an impossible mission. If you want to capture this guy in the most intact state possible, then you should send out your own goons. Otherwise, let us fight without trying to abide by excessive demands. We should focus on defeating it first before thinking about other objectives!”

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Chapter 7332: Stolen Power

Chapter 7332: Stolen Power

The Ixith Goliath did not make any immediate moves after getting attacked.

It seemed to relish in the shock and fear caused by its initial demonstration of power.

Since the Goliath Hive was not in a hurry to put its latest asset to the test, the human defenders did not open fire either.

Everyone needed time to process the latest revelations.

When all of the analysts across human-occupied space accessed the same set of data and performed their own studies, their conclusions largely resembled each other.

Even if they wanted to spin the answers in a direction that was more to their favor, they simply couldn’t do so without denying the obvious evidence.

As scientists, they should be fair and impartial in their work.

However, their human identities made it difficult for them to maintain this stance.

Too much was at stake. If it turned out that the mutated voribugs truly managed to replicate a source of power that was previously exclusive to the human race, then the threat posed by this race had to be reevaluated!

The existence of the Ixith Goliath directly threatened the interests of the entire mech community.

There was no way that mech pilots and other members of the mech community could remain neutral when confronted by this thief!

Even the Terran Alliance which was located on the other side of human-occupied space had to pay more attention to an enemy confronted by one of their rivals.

Jovy continued to share more information to Ves.

“The characteristics of resonance briefly acting on the Ixith Goliath shares a vague resemblance of the true resonance patterns generated by the captured expert pilots.” He said. “There are many differences, but comparisons show that there are still enough similarities to form connections. This is why we have decided to designate this phenomenon as stolen resonance. Whether this means that the expert pilots are still alive but stuck inside the body of Goliath, we cannot say. This is why it is important for us to defeat this new megavoribug without subjecting its body to excessive damage. In the most optimistic scenario, it may be possible for us to rescue the expert pilots.”

“I don’t think they are alive.” The Dark Apostle cynically commented. “The mutated voribugs don’t have a history of cooperating with anyone that is not a part of their race. They also devour everything they have come across. It is difficult to imagine them restraining their hunger for any reason. Instead of borrowing the power of human expert pilots, I think the bugs are much more comfortable with devouring them before using what they have gained to imitate their strength.”

Ves did not think the poor schmucks were alive either. “I need to get a lot closer to gather more clues, but for now, I think my other self is right. Willpower is generated by a strong sense of self. I don’t think that any of the expert pilots can generate any form of resonance if they are still alive. Even if this is the case, I do not think they would voluntarily resonate with a hostile Goliath for whatever reason. I think the more likely explanation is that the Goliath managed to steal this power with the help of its large Mentalist Crystal.”

He even speculated that the voribugs may have fed the bodies and souls of the captured expert pilots directly to the Mentalist Crystal!

“If this is the case, then securing this crystal as intact as impossible is our highest priority.” Jovy said in a business-like tone. “As a liaison, I have no right to command you or your troops, but I can tell you that what I have said represents the will of the entire Red Association. Every faction is interested without exception. If they had a choice, they would have deployed their own key assets on this battlefield, but it is clearly too late for them to do so. Only you, your forces and the remaining Rubarthan ace pilots have a chance to make a large contribution to human civilization.”

Ves smelled a rich reward. “What can we get if we fulfill your needs?”

“We can discuss that later. The reward will be based on the condition of the Mentalist Crystal as well as the carcass. The lower the damage, the better. It is not impossible to grant you a minor

favor, but you can only receive it if you do your best to keep enough of the spoils intact to investigate the secret behind stolen resonance.”

That sounded way too vague and mushy. Ves hated the lack of clear and specific criteria.

The Dark Apostle dismissively waved his hand before colliding his armored fists against each other.

“Enough talk! The time for action is now! Stolen resonance or not, everything has a limit. I bet that this big guy can’t keep this up forever or under sustained bombardment. Resume your attacks! Keep firing at this bastard!”

Though the Dark Apostle was eager to put his new gear to the test, the Level 8 Ixith Goliath was too big and strong.

He genuinely feared the possibility of getting defeated in seconds if he dared to confront the city-sized monstrosity by himself!

The Dark Apostle at least needed to gain the strength and size of a greater phase lord before he could muster up the courage to confront such an enemy in a duel.

For now, he was content to rely on his allies to share the burden.

None of the other Ascended Giants disagreed with this decision.

They were not stupid either.

A scale of 1.5x or 2.5x was not even close enough to fight fairly against an opponent that was at least two orders of magnitude taller than themselves!

The mechs, warships and orbital facilities resumed their attacks from a distance, only to achieve the same results.

Though the mysterious Ixith Goliath did not generate a resonance shield, it still managed to generate stolen resonance with its own shells, thereby causing their defensive performance to become unnaturally high.

Of course, there had to be a limit to this measure. None of the human assets ceased fire this time. They continued to launch attacks with the belief that they could eventually breach the resilient Goliath’s exterior sooner or later.

The problem was that the Ixith Goliath was no longer content with remaining stationary.

Now that the fight had begun, the monstrously large insect had begun to move in earnest!

The Ixith Goliath immediately demonstrated much better mobility than its size suggested.

The organs responsible for enabling it to fly in space were made in the highest specifications that the mutated voribug had displayed to this date!

Their size, proportions, material composition and organic design were all top-tier, far exceeding that of other Goliaths!

What made the Ixith Goliath's mobility even more powerful was the enhancement brought by stolen resonance.

Although the resonance meters did not measure any activity stronger than 30 laves, what was remarkable was that Ixith Goliath was somehow able to apply the stolen resonance evenly across its entire body!

The mutated voribugs actually managed to break a limitation that had prevented humans from designing bigger expert mechs!

The reason why nobody designed expert mechs in the scale of juggernauts was because true resonance had a distance limit.

It made no sense to design a bigger mech when every part that was located outside this invisible sphere no longer enjoyed the protection of true resonance.

Yet it was the alien insects of all entities that managed to solve this problem, and in a big way no less!

The size of the Level 8 Goliath far exceeded that of a juggernaut!

While there were human battleships with double or triple the length of the Ixith Goliath, their profiles were usually fairly narrow, which meant that the volume of the megavoribug was absolutely greater.

How the hell was the Goliath Hive able to apply stolen resonance to all of that biomass?!

Nobody could provide the answer, but that did not stop people from wondering.

This impossible observation alone was enough to drive mech designers crazy!

Ves and the Dark Apostle were already beginning to receive crazy requests from Gloriana about trying to capture the Ixith Goliath or its Mentalist Crystal intact!

As a mech designer who specialized in designing high-ranking mechs, there was no way she would remain unmoved in the face of this phenomenon.

Her desire to decipher this novel display of power was far greater than that of Ves!

While Ves wanted to unravel this secret as well, he did not want to put his life on the line!

The Ixith Goliath did not remain idle during this time.

Its movements started off a little jerky, but as it grew more familiar with its formidable capabilities, the Level 8 Goliath's maneuvers became increasingly more fluid.

“This thing is not a mature organism. It... it’s an infant!”

While that was not entirely accurate description, many soldiers did have this impression.

The judgment displayed by the Ixith Goliath did not match that of a seasoned and experienced combatant.

It moved as if it downloaded a lot of theory, but the gap between knowledge and execution still affected its efficiency.

However, the dark brown bug was not an ordinary Goliath.

Its learning speed exceeded everyone’s expectations.

It took minutes to master what most soldiers mastered in months!

While Level 7 Goliaths also demonstrated rapid learning speeds, their mental evolution paled in comparison to that of the Ixith Goliath!

“The Mentalist Crystal must be responsible for this! The Ixith Goliath cannot be judged according to the standards of the other megavoribugs. Its intelligence is perhaps its greatest weapon!”

People also grew concerned whether it had managed to absorb the memories and combat acumen of the captured expert pilots.

While the Ixith Goliath had yet to give away clues that confirmed this theory, nobody dared to rule it out at this time.

Aside from evading as many incoming attacks as possible, the formidable megavoribug also started to retaliate.

It did not choose to move closer.

Instead, it began to channel energy to one of the many large organic cannons spread across its exoskeleton.

These massive warship-scale guns accumulated energy before opening fire as soon as they aligned to a target designated by the Goliath!

Multiple warships and orbital platforms immediately bore the brunt of its aggression!

“All of the Ixith Goliath’s attacks have landed!”

That was atypical for the voribugs. The race had never excelled in accuracy. Their wild movements, the shoddy tolerances of their organic ranged armaments and their lack of sophisticated fire control systems hindered their ability to reach a high hit rate.

However, the brand-new Goliath that the enemy had painstakingly grown inside an Incubator had evidently addressed these flaws.

As the Ixith Goliath began to spit out a second salvo of warship-grade plasma bolts and energy beams, it managed to land all of its attacks yet again!

“This guy won’t miss!”

“Wait, the damage inflicted onto our azure energy shield is greater than expected!”

“Stolen resonance! The attacks are empowered by stolen resonance!”

Not only was the Ixith Goliath a lot more accurate than its predecessors, it was also able to hit much harder than usual!

This was a deadly combination. As the Ixith Goliath launched its third salvo, it abruptly concentrated its attacks on an orbital platform as well as a warship.

Both targets received so many resonance-empowered attacks at once that they broke apart in an instant!

None of their crew had enough time to evacuate!

Many soldiers grew horrified at what just happened.

“We can’t let the Ixith Goliath bombard us at its leisure. Our champions need to approach and occupy it at close range. We cannot give it any space to launch any further ranged attacks against our less mobile assets!”

In the end, a champion could only be defeated by another champion.

The ace mechs and Ascended Giants prepared to enter the fray.

No matter what fears and apprehension they might have, they suppressed these feelings as best as possible.

Their pride did not allow them to admit defeat!

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Chapter 7333: The Unstoppable Voribug

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The Rubarthan ace mechs raced ahead.

Their mobility was stronger than that of the Ascended Giants. Their compact mech frames hid a lot of power. Their advanced technologies granted them strength and functionality far beyond the standards of other machines of their size.

Eclipsed only by more advanced ace mechs and god mechs, these machines possessed the capital to serve as an object of admiration by the soldiers stationed in this star system.

Even so, the ace mechs did not charge directly towards the massive Level 8 Goliath.

The ace pilots were not stupid. They may be more courageous than other mech pilots, but they still retained enough rationality to know that they were outmatched.

The mutated voribugs did not play by the rules of red humanity.

The so-called Ixith Goliath stole the power that should have been reserved to their own kind and stretched it beyond any known limits!

So far, observers had managed to ascertain that the effective range of the Ixith Goliath's stolen resonance was comparable to that of a senior ace mech's domain field.

No human mech pilot was able to replicate such a bizarre phenomenon.

The only phenomenon that was remotely comparable to this was the Command Field of a Saint Commander.

However, the latter possessed additional traits that were very much lacking in the Ixith Goliath's extraordinary power manifestation.

What else people found odd about the Ixith Goliath was that its stolen resonance was unusually abundant.

Due to its enormous mass and volume, the Ixith Goliath expended its resources at a much higher rate than a typical expert pilot or ace pilot.

To resonate with such a massive body and also empower a large amount of warship-grade attacks consumed so much willpower that a typical expert pilot would have been wrung dry by this time!

Yet the Ixith Goliath seemed to possess an infinite wellspring of willpower.

Nobody knew where all of its willpower was coming from. Was it able to resonate so much without breaking a sweat because it was leveraging its Mentalist Crystal in a new and unfamiliar fashion?

A growing number of mech designers and biotech experts suspected that this may very well be the case.

So what would happen if a human expert pilot or ace pilot leveraged a Mentalist Crystal in a similar fashion?

Perhaps this may lead to an epochal breakthrough that would enable any high-ranking mech pilot to stretch their willpower beyond their limits!

Expert pilots might be able to pilot juggernauts en masse!

Ace pilots could gain the ability to empower battleship-sized machines with true resonance!

When people beheld the performance of the Ixith Goliath, they did not necessarily see an unprecedented new enemy that had stolen the power of the human race.

They saw a brand-new application of willpower that could easily be applied to their own inventions!

This was the magic of racial diversity.

For too long, humans held a monopoly on mechs and willpower cultivation.

Now that a random alien race surprisingly managed to break this monopoly, its original take on age-old concepts inspired many mech designers!

Of course, while many people had begun to see the mutated voribug race as a novel source of inspiration, the soldiers on the battlefield did not have the luxury to fantasize about these distant prospects.

They still needed to overcome this final adversary!

The Ascended Giants cautiously advanced. The Divine Harpoon commanded them to control their pace.

There was no need for them to dive in blindly when the Rubarthan ace mechs had already taken the initiative to test the Ixith Goliath's combat capabilities up close.

The Rubarthan ace mechs possessed a diverse array of ranged armaments.

This made sense as their pilots mostly achieved success with more ordinary first-class multipurpose mechs.

While there were expert pilots and ace pilots who gradually chose to eschew diversity in favor of specialization, maintaining a rich set of armaments remained the norm.

The disadvantage was that every miniaturized weapon system was limited in terms of absolute firepower.

The advantage was that such mechs possessed enough versatility to be able to inflict effective damage to any conceivable enemy.

This philosophy played out once again as the ace mechs intensified their ranged harassment.

Unlike other combat assets, ace pilots possessed superior resonance strength. The quality of their willpower was much stronger than the 30 or so laverses that the Ixith Goliath could produce at this time.

This granted them a potent advantage in their attacks.

While the caliber of their guns were smaller than that of warships and orbital facilities, when their attacks struck the dark brown shells of the Ixith Goliaths, they mostly punched through!

Just as with the case in fights between two high-ranking mechs, the combatant with drastically stronger willpower was easily able to neutralize weaker willpower manifestations.

The weakest Rubarthan ace pilot was able to generate true resonance measuring at least 175 laverses.

This easily crushed any form of stolen resonance based on just 30 laverses!

Though the collisions between different sources of willpower made it seem as if a bunch of adults were beating up a child, other factors made the confrontation a lot less lopsided.

“The Ixith Goliath’s willpower is weak, but it is endless! There is no sign that the megavoribug is experiencing any strain or exhaustion!”

“Despite our superior willpower, it is taking more effort than necessary to push our attacks past this persistent layer of resistance.”

“The Level 8 Goliath is too big! Our attacks are leaving marks, but their scale is too limited. It is as if we are launching needles at a human!”

The stolen resonance was ubiquitous. The Ixith Goliath generously empowered his entire body with it, causing not only the outer shell but also the internal flesh to become significantly tougher to damage than normal.

Many humans grew indignant at this display of power!

High-ranking mech pilots usually took advantage of this trick. To see an alien abusing it on a much larger scale drove them mad!

“Thief!”

“The Goliath Hive must die!”

“Pay for the lives that you have deprived!”

Yet as their plasma bolts and high-density kinetic rounds struck the massive Goliath from multiple different angles, the enemy did not seem to care.

The power of stolen resonance alone was not enough to make it resistant against the attacks of the ace mechs, but when combined with its battleship-scaled body, it was able to endure every attack with ease!

What was even worse was that the Level 8 Goliath inherited the rapid regeneration capabilities of other Goliaths!

Before the first attacks managed to punch through the shell and damage the flesh underneath with difficulty, the Ixith Goliath's biomass surged and quickly filled up the gaps within seconds!

Even though the new enemy definitely had to expend a bit of energy and biomass to heal its injuries, it definitely was not short on resources!

The rapid regeneration prevented the human forces from working together to inflict lasting damage.

The Rubarthans hoped that their ace mechs would be able to create gaps in the shells that other units could expand with their own massed firepower, but the resonance-empowered shells healed so quickly that it invalidated this tactic!

None of the ranged attacks launched by the ace mechs was effective.

Kinetic rounds inflicted a large amount of kinetic damage, but this was rather trivial to a Goliath of this scale.

Energy beams inflicted a large amount of thermal damage, but voribugs happened to resist it pretty well.

The resonance-empowered exoskeleton absorbed all of the incoming energies pretty well, and only a small amount of flesh got burned.

Plasma bolts happened to be a little more effective, but their awesome power faced the same constraints!

It was not until the ace mechs managed to get close enough to entangle the Level 8 Goliath in melee combat that the situation became a little more favorable.

The ace mechs all drew their plasma swords or other melee weapons and began to launch power moves at the massive target.

Since these attacks received the full amplification of an ace mech's domain field, they were much more effective at overcoming the Ixith Goliath's stolen resonance.

Not only that, but now that the ace mechs were able to envelop parts of the enemy's body twitch their Saint Kingdom, they were actively able to hinder the enemy's willpower manifestation.

Other units suddenly found it easier to inflict effective damage onto the Ixith Goliath all of a sudden.

“Stay close, Saints! The longer you subject the Ixith Goliath to your Saint Kingdoms, the more our warships and orbital fortifications can inflict lasting damage onto this enemy.”

However, the Ixith Goliath did not allow his opponents to chip away at its body with impunity.

It began to make use of its formidable strength and superior mobility to spin around while flaying its sharp limbs in multiple directions.

The giant insect’s claws almost struck the ace mechs with blazing speed!

Even if the ace mechs would have been able to block the blades, the overwhelming kinetic force behind the collision would have shook and jarred the mech frames to hell and back.

The ace pilots had to squeeze the most out of their skills, intuition and combat experience to navigate through this storm of sharp limbs.

It became untenable for their machines to remain so close!

The Ixith Goliath managed to force the ace mechs to back off by a kilometer or 2. This was enough to draw away their Saint Kingdoms from its massive insectile form.

This was not the extent of the Level 8 Goliath’s response.

After trying and failing to strike the fast and agile ace mechs, the Ixith Goliath abruptly flew forward.

It built up a lot of momentum, only to crash into a nearby warship on support link duty!

The vessel was also one of many that had attempted to bombard the Ixith Goliath.

Her crew never expected to be targeted by the enemy Goliath, and the entire vessel paid for their mistake!

The Ixith Goliath utilized its massive strength and size to rip the hull to shreds. Most of the crew never had a chance to evacuate!

After finishing off the warship, the massive Goliath quickly moved on to the next target.

The attacking ace mechs desperately tried to keep up as the Ixith Goliath thundered its way to the orbital defense network.

“EVACUATE!”

The Ixith Goliath directly assaulted an orbital fortress this time!

Though the massive fortified space station was a lot larger than the prior target, the Ixith Goliath still possessed a notable scale advantage.

While the orbital fortress was firing its cannons at point-blank range, the damage was just as trivial as before.

The large defensive installation ultimately succumbed to the large and powerful claws. The Ixith Goliath continued to cut through the meters worth of thick armor plating as if it was opening a particularly thick can.

Other units tried their best to shake off the Goliath and force it to turn away, yet none of their attacks passed the threshold that could persuade the enemy to take the other threats more seriously.

It continued to savage the orbital fortress until it had finally torn apart the last power generator!

The massive creature's pitiless eyes had already turned to the next orbital fortress.

It surged from its position and utilized all of its flight capabilities to close in on the next major facility!

"Stop it! Stop it now! If we let the Ixith Goliath tear apart the orbital fortresses, this star system will lose its backbone! Once it dismantles our orbital network, it will most certainly go after our starships!"

Once it began to tear apart the ships, there was no way out for the remaining soldiers in the star system.

Even if the evacuation fleet had left in advance, nobody wanted to bet whether the Goliath Hive could still catch up and intercept the escaping vessels.

Throughout this rapid sequence of events, the Ascended Giants struggled to catch up and figure out their place in this battle.

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Chapter 7334: Not Effective

Chapter 7334: Not Effective

"Sir!" The Divine Harpoon contacted his superior. "The Ixith Goliath has exceeded our expectations multiple times. Its apparent threat level matches our most pessimistic scenarios. Do you wish for us to commit or would you like to initiate a tactical withdrawal?"

It was fair for the strategos of the Faceless Giants to ask this question.

The strength and capability demonstrated by the Ixith Goliath already made it as dangerous as a senior ace mech and a particularly developed one at that.

While it was not impossible for the Ascended Giants to inflict a lot of harm against this alien champion, they would have to withstand elevated risks if they wanted to participate seriously in this historic encounter.

The Dark Apostle genuinely found it difficult to decide whether it was a good idea to throw his men against this exceptionally powerful Goliath.

The strength disparity was too big and obvious!

However, if the Ascended Giants withdrew from this battle so soon, then not only would they paint themselves as cowards, but the morale of all of the remaining defenders would definitely plunge, which would exacerbate their losses!

Those poor sods did not deserve such a fate, and the Dark Apostle did not want to receive the stigma of abandoning his comrades in the line of battle.

Even if it was obvious to everyone that the humans were outmatched, not everyone was able to buy into this excuse.

In a time where the Phase Lord Department had garnered a lot of infamy and had yet to redeem itself among the big shots of red humanity, the Dark Apostle did not want to end his unit's deployment in such a shameful manner.

Besides, he had yet to truly utilize all of his new toys. He refused to believe that he could inflict any damage to this large organic opponent!

“Advance!”

Under the arrangements of the Divine Harpoon, the Ascended Giants split into several different groups.

The Ur-Titans assumed the vanguard positions while the Faceless Giants hung back in order to serve as backup.

The giants themselves did not believe that the Faceless Giants could make much of a difference in this battle.

Their strength was simply too weak to inflict much harm onto the Ixith Goliath, and their relatively thin superdimensional raiments made them vulnerable to getting killed.

Even so, the Faceless Giants themselves did not want to back off entirely.

Before Ves and the Dark Apostle fully invested themselves into battle, they briefly checked up on Saint Orfan's condition.

Gloriana had been keeping a careful eye on the Riot Mark III. No matter how far it had mutated from its original form, she still felt at least somewhat responsible for its subsequent development.

“I have been busy with transmitting soothing messages to Rosa Orfan.” She reported to her husband. “I am not entirely certain whether they are effective, but the Riot Mark III has not made any further moves so far. The withdrawal of nearly every voribug combatant has left her without any immediate enemies to vent her aggression. We were afraid that she would turn her Destroyer spear towards our allies, but she has managed to contain this urge. Right now, she is trying to fight to regain control over herself.”

“How soon do you think she can return to a more controllable state?”

“I honestly cannot say, Ves. Progress is slow but also difficult to track from the outside. Saint Orfan may be able to return to sanity in the next minute, or she may need an entire day to regain control. I do not think it is wise to develop plans based on her availability. The sequelae of your experiment relating to your ‘adversarial mech’ is simply too severe. Even if she is able to pull herself out of her current mind state, a confrontation against the Ixith Goliath may drag her back into an uncontrollable frenzy. In short, I do not recommend you base your battle plans on her availability.”

“We may not have any other choice, Gloriana. Victory demands a champion who can defeat an opponent that is equivalent to a greater phase lord or a senior ace mech in strength. The closest candidate that comes to mind is Saint Dise and her D-mech.”

“What about you? Didn’t you manage to win the leadership challenge not too long ago? You and your other self proved to be a potent combination all on your own. Compared to back then, you are much stronger now that you have built yourself a proper set of superdimensional gear.”

Blinky sighed. “You overestimate us, honey. Our scale may be larger than the others, but our but your body is still as small as a mouse in front of a monstrosity like the Ixith Goliath. Its superior mass, reach, strength and other factors will make it difficult for us to achieve much results. Our superdimensional gear is strong, but our extraordinary factors are too weak. The Riot Mark III is our only hope. It has the perfect combination of superior equipment, abundant combat experience, battle-honed intuition and strong extraordinary factors. At the very least, her attacks have a much greater ability to overcome the resistance generated by stolen resonance.”

“Then what do you want us to do then? Do you want us to wake up your hero?”

Ves felt conflicted for a moment. He was torn between two competing interests.

On the one hand, it would be best for Saint Orfan’s development if she woke up by herself.

On the other hand, they truly needed her combat power in the fight against the Ixith Goliath.

“Let her sort out her own problem for the time being.” He eventually responded to his wife. “I have faith in her. No ace pilot is average. Even if she is very far removed from the norm, her basic quality as a Saint is still guaranteed. If she is a champion who loses control over herself too easily, then she cannot be depended upon on the battlefield at her current stage. It would be better not to include her in our battle plans.”

Gloriana accepted these arguments. “Since that is the case, we should prepare for evacuation. We need to make sure we can distance ourselves from the Ixith Goliath if the situation deteriorates even further.”

The communication channel closed.

“It sounds like we need to confront the Level 8 Goliath without the Riot Mark III.” The Dark Apostle stated.

“Are you scared?”

The Ascended Giant grimaced beneath his helmet. “Does it count if I say I don’t know? Our gear is good enough that we can gain a slight advantage, but only if the big guy has already exposed most of its tricks. I am not confident enough we can do more than preserve our lives if the Ixith Goliath is a lot deadlier than expected.”

The Goliath Hive invested a lot of resources into bringing this megavoribug to life. There was no way this enemy was as simple as it appeared on the surface.

“The good news is that the swarms have grown scarcer.” Ves reminded his other self. “The Goliaths are much more difficult to deal with when they are surrounded by swarms of cannon fodder bugs. The Ixith Goliath cannot replicate that because many of the bugs have already been eliminated in advance. Even if there are a few sparse swarms left, the Faceless Giants and other supporting units should be able to wipe them out with ease.”

This was a major advantage, but it might not last. The more time passed by, the more the Goliath Hive could reinforce its units with swarms sent from the outer system.

As the groups of Ascended Giants closed in, the Ur-Titans cautiously approached the giant Goliath and began to strike with their plasma halberds.

The Ixith Goliath barely noticed the attacks. The plasma halberds were fine weapons when used against smaller and weaker megavoribugs, but proved much less effective when striking the resonance-empowered shells of this large foe!

The only instances when they managed to inflict more effective damage was when they struck the holes in the exoskeleton that had not fully healed.

Yet the results did not satisfy the giants.

“The shell is too thick and strong. Our plasma halberds can only burn shallow grooves onto the surface.”

“Targeting the weak points isn’t working either. This resonance-empowered flesh is resisting our attacks. It takes too much power to burn this biomass!”

“The Ixith Goliath isn’t even paying attention to us. It is continuing to prioritize other targets!”

Aside from tearing apart an orbital fortress, the limbs of the Level 8 Goliaths occasionally flailed towards the surrounding ace mechs whose Saint Kingdoms impacted the massive creature a lot more severely!

What did this indicate?

It told everyone that the Goliath had little to no reason to take the Ascended Giants seriously!

This revelation injured the pride of every giant!

“Just because we do not have resonance does not mean we can be ignored!” The Divine Harpoon roared to the men. “Forget about the plasma halberds. Draw your superdimensional weapons and proceed to carve into this monstrosity’s exoskeleton. Make sure you limit your attacks to the outer shells.”

The Ur-Titans did as commanded. They switched to the weapons originally assigned to their phalanx.

The hull-grade superdimensional halberds had been attached to their backs all this time.

Now, they pulled out the sharp and tough polearms while putting the plasma halberds in their place.

The weapons felt a lot cooler but more solid in their armored hands. With their superdimensional armaments, the Ascended Giants did not fear getting blocked by the enemy’s stolen resonance!

When the Ur-Titans struck once again, the blades of their superdimensional halberds carved straight through the tough organic matter without encountering too much resistance!

Although the Ixith Goliath predictably started to regenerate the wounds in real-time, the Ur-Titans did not let up and continued to swing their weapons at the giant target.

All of this savagery compounded the damage and caused parts of the Ixith Goliath’s exoskeleton to weaken.

However, the problem was that the difference in size still limited the magnitude of the damage.

Ves had the illusion that a bunch of armored mice tried their best to gnaw at the body of a thick-skinned bear.

While the comparison was not completely accurate, it still indicated how little of a difference the giants were making.

The only real consequence this time was that the Ixith Goliath finally started to take the ‘mice’ a little more seriously.

Though it still prioritized other targets over the giants, it began to spare a bit of its time to swipe its claws at the Ur-Titans!

The difference in reaction speed and mobility was too great.

Before the Ur-Titans registered the attack and attempted to move away, the claw had already arrived!

Each Ascended Giant struck by the claw immediately launched away from the Level 8 Goliath!

“No penetration!”

Fortunately, a single claw strike was not enough to breach the superdimensional raiment.

While the resonance-empowered claws managed to cut grooves into the hard and dense matter, it would take multiple strikes in the same place in order to break the superdimensional armor.

The Ixith Goliath could easily make this happen if it focused its full aggression on an Ascended Giant, but it did not deem that to be a worthwhile use of its time.

The Ur-Titans that had just been struck by the Ixith Goliath quickly recovered and resumed their offensive!

So long as their raiments could withstand more hits, they did not fear the Level 8 Goliath!

They persisted in their halberd attacks and tried their best to open up the exoskeleton so that other powerful units could bombard the gaps in the defenses.

While this tactic made it easier for warships and orbital stations to inflict effective damage, they suffered the same problem as the giants.

Their extraordinary factors were too deficient!

Aside from the modest boost provided by hyper technology, conventional arms simply weren't effective enough against the Ixith Goliath.

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Chapter 7335: Ves and the Dark Apostle Take Action

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The Ixith Goliath fought virtually alone against all of the remaining human defenders of Philaster Crestia.

This was not much of an exaggeration.

While the Goliath Hive still dispatched a handful of scattered voribug swarms to provide assistance, the Level 8 Goliath did not necessarily need the help.

Whether it was regenerating from damage to destroying the major orbital fortifications that represented the Rubarthan Pact's hold on this star system, the spawn of the Incubator performed as if it could do everything by itself!

What disappointed people the most was the ineffectual performance of the Ascended Giants.

Despite their rare and coveted superdimensional arms and armor, their results so far proved disappointing!

"These giants aren't big enough! They keep getting smacked around by the big Goliath."

"If not for their supertough armor, the Goliath would have cut them into slices already."

"Can't these giants do anything right?!"

The Ascended Giants previously performed pretty well when matched against an equal or slightly greater number of Level 7 or lower Goliaths.

Yet when faced with a much more powerful and remarkable Level 8 Goliath, their many shortcomings became exposed.

Their short elevation to their current life state left them with very little time to develop their true bodies.

Their superior scale should have been their decisive advantage in battle, yet when faced with an even larger and more massive adversary, the giants themselves fell victim to their own weapon!

However, their professionalism and their courage prevented them from giving up. They gritted their teeth and sought to undermine the large and monstrous Goliath as best as possible.

There was not much they could do, though.

Their spatial abilities proved too meager to harm or inhibit the Ixith Goliath.

Their plasma weapons lacked the resonance empowerment to neutralize the resonance empowerment that made his enormous body so resistant against damage.

The only weapons that proved reasonably effective were the mid-grade superdimensional weapons in their hands.

Superdimensional armaments happened to be the only known equipment that could effectively cleave through willpower manifestations.

Nobody understood the principles why this was the case, but right now a lot of people were grateful that they existed!

The Ascended Giants might not be large enough to confront the Ixith Goliath head-on, but they had numbers on their side.

They paired up and made sure to assault the alien entity from multiple directions.

This way, even if the Ixith Goliath managed to claw the giants in front of it away, other giants were able to assault the enemy from other sides.

“Do not blindly damage the shells! Focus your attacks on the joints! If we can cut off its limbs, its threat level will drop.”

Every Ur-Titan already got smacked a few times, but they bravely went back in order to fulfill their objective.

Their superdimensional halberds continued to cut at the joints and the shells around it. Their blades did not smoothly slice through all of the tough organic matter, but their effectiveness was just good enough to create substantial weak points with every strike.

If only the Ur-Titans and their weapons were larger.

Their 2.5x scale was still too small to cut deeper into the shells and flesh of the enemy Level 8 Goliath.

The giants had to rely on the ranged attacks from other friendly units to exploit the openings and force the Ixith Goliath to exert more power into regenerating its form.

This disappointed them. The Ixith Goliath possessed no strong weak points.

Even its joints were much thicker and harder to break due to their large size and dimensions. It was absolutely not simple to sever them and cut off the enemy's limbs.

Furthermore, the Level 8 Goliath was not a dummy.

As the Ur-Titans hacked and slashed at the joints with single-minded fervor, the Ixith Goliath began to take the armored humanoids more seriously!

Compared to the ace mechs who proved too fast to hit with any reliability, the Ur-Titans were much easier to strike!

They were larger and more sluggish. The Ixith Goliath struck so fast that it was nearly impossible for the giants to evade the incoming claws.

The situation of the Ur-Titans steadily became more precarious as a result.

Each of their raiments already showed numerous large grooves. The patterns thankfully did not overlap. The giants in question made sure of that as they always tried to turn their bodies at the last second so that they could spread out the damage.

The more the enemy claws struck the undamaged sections of their raiments, the longer they could rely on its protection!

Still, everyone knew that there was a limit to this measure.

After a period of observation, the Dark Apostle finally made his move.

He had moved close enough to gain the measure of his target, but maintained just enough distance to escape the frenzy of the ongoing struggle.

Ves and the Dark Apostle did this in order to determine where they could do the most damage.

Attacking blindly and without direction would only cause them to waste their time and resources in vain.

If they wanted to achieve a better result than their subordinates, then they needed to fight intelligently.

“Do you think we should target the joints in the hopes of severing the limbs?”

“No.” Ves responded. “We are different from the other giants. Our raiment is made of superior superdimensional matter, so we don’t have as much to fear from the resonance-empowered claws. Besides, I don’t think it is difficult for the Ixith Goliath to regenerate its limbs. If we want to beat this enemy, we need to target the roots of its power.”

“Are you talking about the Mentalist Crystal? It will be difficult to dislodge it since it is buried right into the center of its body.”

“It is not the stolen resonance produced by the Mentalist Crystal that is causing our side to experience so many difficulties. The Ixith Goliath’s monstrous vitality is another source of power. Its body is so massive and filled with the power of life that exhausting it is far too difficult. I think we can make a contribution in this area.”

The Dark Apostle looked down on his Withering Sting.

“I’m not as big of a thinker as you. Please tell me straight. What do I need to target?”

“The body. Just the body. Focus on damaging as much of the biomass as possible. We are going for magnitude here. You need to attack a large amount of flesh and force the Goliath to regenerate much more of its body than now. Meanwhile, I will use your weapon as the medium to spread the withering curse as far as possible. I will be devoting my full concentration on facilitating the latter process. Both of us need to excel at what we do best.”

They needed to cooperate with each other in order to make a meaningful impact in this fight.

The Dark Apostle was pretty strong on his own, but he would just end up as another Ascended Giant if he relied on his usual solutions.

Ves and Blinky possessed the capacity to attack the intangible attributes of their enormous enemy, but doing so without support would cause them to get exhausted before accomplishing anything.

Only by working together would they be able to gain the support they needed to achieve a potential breakthrough!

After a brief pause, they refined their battle plan and started to take action.

The Dark Apostle carefully retrieved one of the hastily made javelins from his back.

This was not a normal throwing weapon, but a sacrificial atlatl javelin designed to explode in an extraordinary fashion.

A special mechanism unfolded on the weapon, allowing the Dark Apostle to grip it from the end of the weapon.

He observed the Ixith Goliath carefully and waited for a brief moment just before it turned its head in a favorable direction.

Though attacking the head of a high-level Goliath had already been proven to be useless due to their redundant physiology and their rapid regeneration and adaptation, the Dark Apostle targeted it anyway!

While the giant gripped the javelin, Ves performed a specific method in order to prime the weapon to explode.

It began to glow ominously red as the fire energy locked inside the weapon became a lot more active and volatile than before!

With the skill imparted by the Sacrificial Spear Throwing Method, the Dark Apostle hurled the javelin, causing it to turn into a glowing red line before striking the Ixith Goliath precisely in the head!

A strong but silent explosion quickly engulfed the top end of the Level 8 Goliath's body!

Though this was far from the only powerful attack to strike the Goliath, this attack happened to be different due to the nature of the explosive payload.

As visibility returned, many people became surprised that the javelin managed to inflict considerably more effective damage than a warship-grade cannon!

Large chunks of exoskeleton had been blown away.

Most of its eyes had exploded.

One of the mandibles had even been torn away while the other had become deformed.

Though the head still retained its overall shape, it was clear that it had lost a lot of integrity!

While the Ixith Goliath was normally able to regenerate its injuries right after their application, the megavoribug struggled to do so this time due to the lingering flames spread after the explosion.

The fire energy burst out of the javelin possessed a hunger and a persistence that required a bit more effort to douse.

It was only a bit more effort, though. The Ixith Goliath's willpower was so vast and abundant that it was able to suppress the flames within a dozen or so seconds.

However, the Dark Apostle had already swooped forward by this time!

He took advantage of the gaps created by the earlier sacrificial javelin throw and plunged the tip of the sickly green glowing of his superdimensional spear deep into the exposed flesh of his enemy!

The Dark Apostle did not pause like an idiot. When the spear went as deep as it could be, the giant exerted his strength and began to withdraw his weapon only to stab his opponent a second time, and then a third time, and then a fourth time!

He unleashed a flurry of attacks. He did not pursue depth, but sought to spread the damage around.

As the Ixith Goliath moved to evade and counterattack, the Dark Apostle did not insist on attacking the head and moved in to attack whatever was convenient!

The high-grade superdimensional matter used to make the Withering Sting enabled the weapon to cut smoothly through resonance-empowered flesh and exoskeleton alike.

The brand-new weapon might not be large enough to cut through lots of biomatter, but no shell or bone could resist its sharpness!

The Dark Apostle was able to savage large amounts of thick exoskeleton plating, causing numerous holes to appear across the Level 8 Goliath's body!

Due to the complex and costly material composition of the outer shells, it was not that easy for the Ixith Goliath to repair the damage.

Unless it was able to reabsorb the shell fragments that managed to get loose, the monstrous insect could only redistribute its shells or cannibalize its own flesh to close the gaps!

What was worse was that the withering curse had begun to infect the Goliath's massive body.

Its stolen resonance did its best to resist the curse.

While it was quite effective at doing so, the Ixith Goliath was not actually that proficient at wielding the vast amount of willpower it had at its disposal!

Nothing was perfect. What it gained in quantity, it made up for it in quality.

The Mentalist Crystal could not compensate for the Level 8 Goliath's lack of control and familiarity over this new form of power.

Perhaps the story might have been different if the Ixith Goliath had been born a few weeks or months earlier, but only a short amount of time had passed since its emergence!

This was far too little time for it to become proficient in wielding its stolen resonance!

This gave Ves enough opportunities to spread the curse.

The repeated moments of contact between the Withering Sting and the Goliath's biomass caused a gradual buildup to occur.

During this time, Ves also grew more proficient in applying the curse on a resisting target.

Although the stolen resonance caused the curse to lose most of its effectiveness right away, Ves had begun to figure out a few tricks to improve his results!

"Its willpower is not invincible!"

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Chapter 7336: Distributed Willpower

Chapter 7336: Distributed Willpower

During the exchange of blows so far, Ves grew more familiar with what he was dealing with. The enemy was no longer as unfathomable as before.

Direct contact granted him a greater level of insight and understanding of his opponent than when he observed the powerful Goliath at a distance.

He quickly became intimately familiar with the structure, character and concentration of the Ixith Goliath's mysterious stolen resonance.

It felt substantially different from the many manifestations of true resonance that he had sampled many times throughout his career.

Ves not only confirmed that the source of all of the stolen resonance came from the Mentalist Crystal, but that the enormous scale of the Ixith Goliath most definitely tied into its power.

While he did not have proof of this, he began to guess that the greater the biomass, the stronger the resonance strength!

This was a very weird conclusion and one that never applied to human expert pilots and ace pilots in the past.

Yet Ves dared to make this guess because of what he perceived.

The more he came into contact with this alien megavoribug, the more he began to understand its essence as a life form.

As an expert in living entities, Ves had observed many fascinating creatures throughout his lifetime, but the so-called Ixith Goliath most definitely occupied its own category!

“This Goliath... lacks a singular brain or personality.”

“What?” The Dark Apostle questioned even as he continued to assault the Level 8 Goliath with his Withering Sting.

“I think I understand a bit better why this Goliath is able to generate willpower in abundance.” Ves made a bold claim. “It is a superorganism masquerading as a giant insect. To you, it looks like a big bug, but to me, it is a collection of trillions upon trillions of voribugs that just happened to be permanently fused together. I admire what the Goliath Hive managed to bring to life. It is no wonder that it required an Incubator to be born. This fellow is a masterful realization of an organic distributed intelligence. I don’t understand the details of how they are able to maintain individuality amidst their collective, but the Ixith Goliath somehow manages to obtain the advantages of both worlds.”

In other words, the new Goliath was a singular massive entity when it counted, and a large collection of individual cooperating insects when that happened to be more convenient!

“So how exactly is it able to harness the power of stolen resonance?” The Dark Apostle asked.

Blinky narrowed his glowing eyes. “I can’t fully explain that. My best guess is that every ‘sentient organic component’ is an entity that is intelligent enough to generate its own thoughts and emotions. These also happen to be the building blocks of willpower. As for how they are able to develop extraordinary willpower, I don’t think that they have managed to generate it by themselves. Instead, I think they stole it from the expert pilots that they have managed to assimilate. Stolen resonance is not a wrong description. They are not generating anything new. Instead, they are repurposing what used to belong to others.”

The Dark Apostle frowned beneath his helmet. He felt that the job of defeating the Ixith Goliath had just become a lot more complicated. How the hell was he supposed to defeat a ‘distributed intelligence’?

“So this is what you mean that it doesn’t have a single brain. Every part of its body can do the thinking for it. We can cut away 99 percent of its body, but the remaining 1 percent won’t grow any stupider! Wait, what is the role of the Mentalist Crystal?”

“Good question. I can only speculate, but I believe that the Mentalist Crystal plays a vital role in bringing it all together. It is too much to ask for all of these sentient organic components to cooperate perfectly with each other without a strong sense of hierarchy or direction. Don’t think that brains are useless. They are the primary regulating organs for complex bodies. The Ixith Goliath simply cannot behave normally if he lacks a crystal. Only with this precious object is it able to get every organic component to work in total sync with each other. It is not a brain, but it is still an essential regulating organ.”

“So in the end, it all comes back to the beginning. The only ways to defeat it is to eliminate the Mentalist Crystal or break down its entire body.”

It was too much. The Dark Apostle and the Ascended Giants who answered to him were too weak in all respects.

Their kind currently lacked the ability to storm their opponent head-on and expect to win!

“For now, just keep attacking. Your contributions are not useless. As long as you keep destroying its flesh, it will have less sentient organic components at its disposal. Even if it can regenerate lost biomass, the newborn organic components probably won’t be able to generate willpower as effectively. Still, the only way to kill this enemy for good is to destroy or remove the Mentalist Crystal. It is the creature’s central hub and the only thing that keeps this gigantic monstrosity in perfect coordination.”

The Dark Apostle huffed. “So nothing changes in effect.”

“That is not true.” Ves responded to his other self. “Ignorance is our greatest threat. Only by understanding the enemy can we figure out how to defeat it in the most effective manner. The insights that I have gained just now tells me that physical attacks alone are highly inefficient so long as they fall below a steep threshold. In order to defeat this big guy, we need to exploit the flaws of its distributed intelligence.”

The Dark Apostle almost paused in his maneuvers. “How? I haven’t figured out anything!”

Blinky smirked. “That is why I am the brains and you are the brawn. Distributed intelligence is not a new phenomenon. It has numerous advantages as well as disadvantages. The most efficient way to defeat it is to hack individual units and turn them against the collective. So long as the latter doesn’t have an immediate countermeasure, it is easy to turn the entire group against itself.”

“Can you do that?”

“No.” Ves flatly said. “I don’t have any plagues on hand that can be employed against this opponent. I have no time to prepare. We can only resort to a lesser method. The first step is to sever a limb or a decent chunk of biomass from the creature.”

“Wait, what?! Didn’t you tell me earlier that I should focus on attacking its main body?”

“You should still do that, Dark Apostle.” He said. “This is the best way to spread our withering curse. While it is not doing all that much due to the stiff resistance of stolen resonance, it is still forcing the enemy to allocate its willpower to countering our actions. This means that it is not able to focus as much attention and resources to defending its resources to defending its limb.”

“What happens next if we succeed?”

“Once we have severed a limb from the main body, it will temporarily lose its link to the Mentalist Crystal. You must get close to it once this happens. If my suspicions are correct, it won’t be protected by stolen resonance anymore, which means that I should be able to ‘hack’ it. Once I am done, we have to encourage the Ixith Goliath to reclaim its lost limb. The fun starts there. I can’t predict with total certainty what will happen, but I bet the Goliath is bound to feel uncomfortable. Hopefully, an opening will appear that will allow us to land the killing blow.”

The plan formulated by Ves did not instill his other self with much confidence. It depended on a large number of assumptions and conditions.

However, there was nothing better available. They barely understood anything about their latest adversary and all of their usual solutions proved less than effective.

After the Dark Apostle assented to this dubious plan, Ves rapidly composed a series of messages before transmitting them to the Ascended Giants, the Bluejay Fleet and the local Rubarthan commanders.

From that point onwards, the fight steadily shifted.

While the Level 8 Goliath still prioritized the destruction of the orbital fortresses, the human defenders around it fought with greater determination than before.

The shift was subtle, but those who understood warfare could clearly observe the difference.

The soldiers no longer fought as blindly as before. The insights shared by Ves enlightened the people and enabled them to lift a part of the veil that made the Ixith Goliath so intimidating.

Now that they had a better idea of what they were dealing with, they could formulate more targeted solutions against this adversary.

Ves’ plan was not the only one that the Rubarthan commanders wanted to enact, but they were at least willing to give it a try.

The ace mechs that circled around the Ixith Goliath attracted most of the attention from the enemy.

Their powerful Saint Kingdoms allowed them to inflict effective damage while also neutralizing their enemy’s stolen resonance.

Letting them get close would put the Ixith Goliath at a significant disadvantage, so the voribug monster always tried to fend them off with its attacks and maneuvers.

This gave the Ascended Giants an opportunity to slip in and wear down the joints that connected the forelimbs to the main body.

The Ur-Titans bravely flew forward and tried their best to keep up with the fast-moving Goliath.

One wrong move could easily cause them to get smacked by a claw or rammed by its main body.

Yet despite these dangers, the Ur-Titans withstood every blow with the help of their superdimensional raiments and tried their best to hack at the enemy's joints with their superdimensional halberds.

Compared to the Ur-Titans, the Faceless Giants were less ostentatious. They did not dare to get close, so they could only remain at a distance and use their ranged armaments to compound the damage done to the joints.

Though the intentions of the giants were very clear, the Ixith Goliath still did not pay much attention to them due to the fact that most of its other enemies focused on the other parts of its massive body.

Even the Dark Apostle went out of his way to focus his attacks on the head and upper body.

The effectiveness of the Withering Sting exceeded that of every other weapon on this battlefield.

In the hands of a proficient wielder like the Dark Apostle, its ominous blade continually cuts through the toughest layers of exoskeleton like a hot knife through butter!

The spear strikes not only caused substantial material damage to the Ixith Goliath, but also allowed the withering curse to spread and require more resources to suppress.

It was too bad that willpower cultivation's restraint against qi cultivation was too strong.

If not for the protection of stolen resonance, the withering curse should have debilitated the Goliath a lot more by this time!

Although Ves was able to come up with a few tricks to make his curse take root a little better, it made little difference.

"Now I understand why others hate fighting against high-ranking mechs so much. Resonance is too good at resisting damage!"

It was all-encompassing. Anything that was even remotely hostile against the target faced instant suppression.

Ves hated it, but he could do little else in his current state. He really wanted to research a more effective counter against willpower manifestations, but that was not a project that he could complete in an instant.

He shoved these thoughts aside. Rather than fantasizing about a solution that could not be attained in a hurry, it was better to focus on his existing means.

His focus shifted towards the Ixith Goliath's forelimbs. The joints had already taken severe damage. One of the limbs would definitely get severed sooner or later.

Once that happened, it would be time for him to implement his nefarious plan.

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Chapter 7337: The Compromised Limb

Chapter 7337: The Compromised Limb

As the Level 8 Goliath continued to rampage across the orbital network, the giants began to suffer their first setbacks.

It couldn't be helped. The Ur-Titans repeatedly threw themselves into battle, hoping that their mid-grade superdimensional raiments would see them through.

While their armor indeed kept them safe after getting struck half-a-dozen times by large and powerful claws, every strike weakened their structure by a variable degree.

Some Ur-Titans were luckier than others.

They turned their bodies around in time and managed to spread the blows across the front and sides of their raiments.

This dispersed the damage sufficiently to the point where they could still reliably tank a few more blows before they needed to worry about any breaches.

Others did not have such luck.

One Ur-Titan had been struck three times in the chest. Even if the armor layers were thickest in the chest region, the powerful transphasic claws still managed to inflict a lot of kinetic damage to this section.

Even if the cuts did not go too deep, much of the structure became compromised anyway.

The Ascended Giant was not ignorant of the condition of his raiment. The operating system of his suit beeped a warning and informed him of the issue. He appropriately reined in his aggression and fought a lot more carefully than before.

This should have kept him safe when fighting against a relatively consistent opponent.

However, the people who were fighting against the Ixith Goliath had made one big mistake.

They assumed that the Level 8 Goliath fought in a fixed pattern.

Everyone was caught off-guard when it suddenly turned away from its preoccupation with orbital fortresses.

After demolishing the fourth large fortified space station in a row, the massive alien insect abruptly turned its attention to the enemies assailing it from every direction!

Its resonance-empowered claws began to strike at the nearby ace mechs and Ascended Giants with greater speed and determination!

“Be careful!”

The ace mechs still managed to evade the attacks. The ace pilots had long been on guard and backed off as soon as their intuition warned them of the possible change.

The Ur-Titans failed to respond as quickly. Their intuition was nowhere near as good as that of a high-ranking mech pilot. Their combat experience also lacked relevance in scenarios like these.

All of this meant that almost every nearby Ascended Giant got savaged by at least several claws in quick succession!

Even the Dark Apostle received 4 continuous claw strikes, causing his body to get flung away due to the collisions!

While the Dark Apostle’s raiment suffered very little material due to its material superiority, the same could not be said for the other giants.

Their inferior raiments suffered such serious blows that several of them began to show gaps!

Meanwhile, the worst among them broke entirely from the front, causing his nanosuit body to become exposed!

The Level 8 Goliath did not hesitate. It exhibited an uncanny degree of combat literacy when it briefly ignored its other enemies and pounced on the vulnerable Ur-Titan!

“Stop it! Attack the creature at all costs!”

The Ascended Giants knew that one of their own was in trouble. They cast aside their usual caution and closed in on the Ixith Goliath in order to hinder its current actions.

However, the Ixith Goliath willingly withstood all of the attacks in order to take out the vulnerable Ascended Giant.

A powerful claw struck the giant on the chest!

Though the intact portions of the raiment prevented the limb from dissecting the Ascended Giant, the damage to his true body was much more serious this time!

Phasewater-enriched blood spilled from his chest and abdomen.

His phasewater organs got injured as well!

The pain and damage vastly exceeded his tolerance this time, causing him to lose control!

This caused him to turn into a sitting duck as far as the Ixith Goliath was concerned!

Even as the remaining Ascended Giants finally managed to sever one of the clawed limbs from the main body, the powerful insectile monster lunged forward with the intent to devour the injured giant!

Yet just as its wounded and partially decayed mandibles managed to bite the Ur-Titan in half, a sacrificial javelin plunged into its open maw and exploded inside, causing the Level 8 Goliath to suffer a substantial injury!

What was more important was that the powerful explosion just happened to stall its momentum!

“Good job, sir!”

This was all the Dark Apostle could do on short notice.

Unfortunately, the power of the sacrificial javelin only briefly interrupted the Ixith Goliath.

The massive city-sized creature possessed way too much mass and momentum to stop for this reason.

Even if it lost a claw and got dinged in the head, the Ixith Goliath still had many other claws at its disposal!

Just as it came close enough to completely shred the vulnerable Ur-Titan with its bloodthirsty limbs, a short harpoon flung towards the giant and changed direction, causing it to loop several times around the injured phase lord’s body.

Once the line grew taut, the Divine Harpoon along with several Faceless Giants worked together to pull it back, allowing them to reel in their wounded comrade!

They clearly intended to bring him to safety!

“Hurry up! The Ixith Goliath is still trying to kill him off! Do your best to hinder its mobility!”

“How is this insect able to move so fast?! It doesn’t have any wings or anything!”

“Voribugs are able to traverse through space by relying on organic versions of inertialess drives. These organs generate special forcefields that essentially push their bodies in one direction or another. It will be difficult for us to damage them as they are always located in the center.”

This meant that hindering their mobility was difficult if not impossible.

Even the best ace mechs were only able to inflict surface damage to the Level 8 Goliath for the most part.

Still, the defenders tried their best to hinder their opponent in other ways, from attacking the other limbs to damaging the body at large.

The deterioration of the orbital network significantly reduced the amount of fire support from the remaining defensive installations, but their contributions still made a difference, especially now that the Ixith Goliath's trajectory became a lot more predictable.

Eventually, the giants managed to ferry their injured comrade far enough that it became unfeasible for the Level 8 Goliath to maintain its pursuit.

The enemy monstrosity would probably turn its attention to other prey, but before it did so, the creature made an effort to retrieve its severed limb.

Although it did not necessarily need to reclaim it, the resources invested in its growth were still significant.

All of that would turn into waste if the Ixith Goliath let it drift off into the vacuum of deep space.

Given how much the voribug race paid so much attention to the effective utilization of resources, there was no reason for the Ixith Goliath to abandon its limb, especially when it did not take much time and effort to retrieve the severed claw!

The Goliath did just that.

Just as the Ixith Goliath was about to resume its offensive, it suddenly paused as it encountered an unexpected problem.

The claw that it just reattached to its main body had been compromised!

This shouldn't have happened!

It turned out that the Dark Apostle briefly hovered close to it a short time ago. He only poked the limb a few times with his Withering Sting, but did not linger around long enough to damage it any further.

Of course, he was not responsible for corrupting the limb.

Ves was the culprit.

He utilized all of the power that he and Blinky had at their disposal to apply multiple techniques on the temporarily isolated sentient organic components.

While they were previously strong and capable of generating stolen resonance, they had lost this capacity now that they were physically separated from the main body which contained the crucial Mentalist Crystal.

The loss of stolen resonance meant that Ves could finally get away with a lot of stuff that wasn't possible beforehand!

He immediately launched two separate attacks.

On the one hand, he utilized the inherent power of the Withering Sting to apply the withering curse to all of the sentient organic components.

The directionless and uncoordinated organic units resisted the curse as best as possible, but still fell prey to its effects.

Their vitality drained away at a measured pace. The insidious part of the withering curse was that it sustained itself from the power of life.

This meant that poorly defended but abundant sources of vitality happened to be the most vulnerable targets to this particular curse!

After the organic units grew feebler by the second, Ves applied a second debilitating effect onto the limb.

He stimulated the Corrupting Orb embedded into the Withering Sting and channeled the power of darkness into the alien biomass.

As the high-level voribug tissue became exposed to large amounts of darkness energy, the sentient organic components resisted as best they could.

If they were still healthy, then they would have been able to resist even if they were unable to coordinate with each other.

However, the withering curse just so happened to sap their vitality to the point where their ability to withstand the corruptive influence of darkness energy had weakened to a massive degree!

If this was not enough, Ves secretly worked together with his sister Helena to dump dozens of Minor Demons into the limb!

Even if Helena was only able to supply the weakest demonic entities, their hostility and insidious nature turned them into an immediate threat to the organic units!

Due to their weakened vitality and disrupted coordination, the sentient organic components were unable to resist the erosion and subversion of all of those Minor Demons.

The strong infusion of darkness energy only made it worse. The demons directly claimed this power and used it to accelerate their efforts to completely subvert the entire limb!

By the time the Ixith Goliath returned and reattached the limb, its condition had drastically changed compared to a few moments prior!

From the moment the compromised limb connected to the main body, an immediate confrontation took place!

The Minor Demons went on the attack!

While they encountered immediate resistance due to stolen resonance, they were still able to make limited progress, if at a much slower pace.

The Ixith Goliath became alarmed by the new threat and sought to push back the tide of darkness.

It almost managed to do so. Its lack of experience and its imperfect control over stolen resonance hindered the megavoribug's ability to drive back the demons.

In terms of mental strength and resilience, the Ixith Goliath clearly towered over these weak demonic entities.

However, Minor Demons possessed far greater ferocity and cunning!

They quickly set aside their mutual hostility towards each other and worked together to spread their influence into the Ixith Goliath's enormous body.

The Minor Demons joined forces to overcome the alien willpower's blockade before spreading out to infect different parts of the Goliath's body.

Meanwhile, the withering curse slowly spread across new vectors in the background.

While the Ixith Goliath was still able to slow down the invasion of foreign energies, its willpower was not as strong and abundant as before.

The defilement of its claw had caused it to permanently lose the strength of the affected sentient organic components!

This effectively caused its resonance strength to drop by a small but measurable degree.

"It is working! The resonance meter tells me that its resonance strength has dropped by 0.4 laveres!"

This might not sound much, but it was definite progress!

As long as the withering curse and the Minor Demons continued to expand their influence on the main body, then the drop in resonance strength would become a lot more significant!

Many people grew encouraged. The plan devised by Ves showed promise!

Yet it was precisely because his tactic produced results that the Ixith Goliath rapidly reevaluated his threat level.

The Ixith Goliath abruptly shifted its focus towards the Dark Apostle.

This Ascended Giant and accompanying companion spirit had inflicted actual harm against the Level 8 Goliath.

This meant that Ves and the Dark Apostle needed to be taken out a lot sooner than other targets!

“Be careful, sir! You have attracted its animosity!”

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Chapter 7338: The Growth of a Powerhouse

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The Ixith Goliath made a strong impression ever since it first showed up. It was clearly the crown jewel that the Goliath Hive invested a lot of time and resources into nurturing.

The Level 8 Goliath operated on a very different level from the other mutated voribugs that had shown up at this point.

Its existence completely eschewed the standard doctrine of the mutated voribug race, which was to rely on large amounts of inferior cannon fodder to overwhelm opposing forces.

The Incubator-born Goliath therefore represented more than just an outlier or an anomaly. It stood for a brand-new power system that may very well become a common fixture within the Goliath Hive!

Since the Ixith Goliath developed in the opposite direction from all of the other Goliaths, the existence of this special strain diversified the unit roster of the mutated voribug race.

Its birth directly elevated the threat posed by the space insects!

Its existence vastly increased the defensive pressure of red humanity.

Not only did they have to conduct a lot of R&D into developing more effective swarm-clearing weapons, they also had to field enough champions to counter any future Level 8 Goliaths that appeared in the future.

Fortunately, the Level 8 Goliath may have been a lot stronger than all of the other Goliaths that showed up in the past, but its design still had flaws.

The current performance of the Ixith Goliath emphasized this fact in front of everyone.

Previously, it demonstrated both might and control.

It possessed immense physical endowments, but that alone was not enough to elevate it into a big threat.

There were plenty of phase lords that could reach a similar size and scale, yet their combat effectiveness never reached this kind of level.

What made the Ixith Goliath different from most other enemies of this scale was its rationality and control.

Whether it was the external control from the true master of the voribug race or the extraordinary effects of the Mentalist Crystal, the Ixith Goliath not only demonstrated a lot of self-control, but also knew how to utilize its resources in an efficient manner!

The Level 8 Goliath did not display the most supreme skill, but that was mainly due to its novelty and lack of experience.

For a newborn entity of a brand-new megavoribug strain, the Ixith Goliath already displayed a remarkable amount of control and direction!

Yet due to the sabotage conducted by Ves, the Goliath was no longer able to leverage its entire body as effectively as before!

Its recently reattached limb had not only rebelled against its origin, but also turned into an invasion vector!

Under the leadership of dozens of desperate Minor Demons, the power of darkness and withering started to spread across the enormous Goliath's true body.

Even if the Ixith Goliath's stolen resonance successfully contained the spread of these corrupting forces, it still needed to dedicate a significant amount of attention and resources to maintaining its condition!

This caused the massive creature to experience increasingly more obvious problems.

Its reaction speed had dropped. Its movements became less coordinated. Its wounds regenerated at a slower rate. Its flesh grew more fragile. It no longer performed the most optimal moves under its present circumstances.

The soldiers clearly noticed these trends as they began to achieve more success in their actions.

"The Goliath has weakened!"

"Let us increase the pressure!"

"Do not waste this opportunity! We need to build upon our advantages!"

Ves' move had opened up a vulnerability that everyone was eager to exploit!

Fighting against a completely healthy and coordinated Ixith Goliath had proven to be an immensely difficult endeavor. Few people saw hope of gaining victory under those circumstances.

Now, the story was different.

Even if the Ixith Goliath still retained much of its stolen resonance, it no longer possessed the air of invincibility.

The human soldiers saw hope of defeating it with one attack at a time!

So what if it was big?

So what if its flesh could continually regenerate?

As long as they generated a 'regeneration deficit', they could ultimately force the Ixith Goliath to expend all of its vitality!

The giants might not be too clear about the details, but the Rubarthan ace pilots intuitively figured out the Level 8 Goliath's ailments by scanning its massive body with their Saint Kingdoms.

They bravely took the lead in attacking the Ixith Goliath, not hesitating to take more risks!

The ace mechs significantly increased their aggression not just because the Ixith Goliath was not able to fend them off as well as before, but also because their Saint Kingdoms worsened its condition.

The Level 8 Goliath's main source of resistance against the internal invasion was its stolen resonance.

By suppressing the massive insect's willpower with their Saint Kingdoms, the ace mechs directly made it easier for the Minor Demons and the withering curse to spread across the Goliath's enormous biomass!

Several minutes went by. The Ixith Goliath could no longer go on the offensive anymore. It focused on defense as much as possible, but could only prevent particularly threatening enemies such as the ace mechs and the Dark Apostle from digging deep into its body.

It still possessed a lot of claws and its organic plasma cannons also kept a lot of units at a distance, yet it was clearly on a downward trajectory.

Even if the defending forces only made incremental progress so far, the Ixith Goliath had no ability to turn the situation around!

"This Goliath is not as scary as I thought it would be. I didn't know it would turn out this weak."

"Pah! It is only weak because we managed to decipher its body and deploy an effective counter. If not for that, we would have suffered a lot more losses!"

"Do not grow complacent! Who knows what trump cards it still holds. This Level 8 Goliath still possesses a lot of healthy biomass!"

Despite their good fortune, the ascendant human forces failed to secure a decisive advantage.

So many attacks struck the Ixith Goliath, yet aside from damaging its exoskeleton and burning away at the flesh that was close to the exterior, its true foundation remained virtually untouched.

In other words, the human forces only managed to drain some of its buffer!

Until its enormous buffer began to run out, the Ixith Goliath still possessed enough strength to turn the tide of the battle.

The Dark Apostle was having the time of his life, though!

He had fought long enough to understand the Ixith Goliath's moves. His combat literacy was not low, so he became increasingly better at predicting and evading the massive insect's attacks.

This was especially the case now that its efficiency and coordination had dropped!

As the Ixith Goliath's problems worsened, its performance dropped even further.

This in turn allowed combat assets such as the Dark Apostle much more opportunities to inflict serious damage!

In fact, out of all of the forces resisting the powerful Goliath, the Dark Apostle had clearly become their leader!

This was due to the effectiveness of the Withering Sting.

Every strike not only cut through a lot of tough transphasic exoskeleton, thereby opening up new weak points, but also allowed the withering curse to spread across new vectors.

The curse began to impose an increasingly more severe drain of the Level 8 Goliath's vitality.

This was the root of its power!

The loss of vitality affected almost everything.

The Goliath grew weaker and more brittle over time, allowing both external and internal enemies to achieve greater results.

If nothing changed, the Ixith Goliath would truly get exhausted to death at this rate!

At this stage, the Ixith Goliath's escalating problems already made it unable to fend off the increasingly more skilled Dark Apostle.

The latter did not even need the protection of the ace mechs or the Ascended Giants in order to do his job.

Of course, that was no reason to become complacent.

The Divine Harpoon and several Ur-Titans with battered raiments had already withdrawn from the fight in order to form a reserve.

They remained on guard and prepared to act with haste as soon as an emergency occurred.

The Divine Harpoon clearly did not believe that their good fortune would last until the end of this battle.

“I do not believe the Ixith Goliath has reached its limit already.” The strategos prudently told his subordinates. “There is still a lot we do not know about this Goliath strain. Once an accident occurs, we need to be ready to contain the damage. If necessary, we will need to create an opportunity for our polemarchos to retreat to safety.”

Only truly calm and experienced leaders could hold themselves and their subordinates back.

They were not misled by any temporary advantages. Even if the giant insect had gradually turned into a giant punching bag, the Divine Harpoon still believed that the latest pride of the Goliath Hive possessed a lot of hidden depth.

It was a pity that Ves and the Dark Apostle had overlooked this reality.

It couldn't be helped.

The Dark Apostle had become fully invested in the fight. The rush of battle caused his phasewater-infused blood to flow faster through his veins.

With every minute spent on this titanic clash, the Ascended Giant felt as if his body, mind and will was undergoing a gradual sublimation.

Actual battle not only accelerated the growth of mech pilots, but also phase lords of every race!

The Dark Apostle happened to benefit more than his peers. Due to his many abnormalities, he possessed a much stronger foundation than his peers, but always suffered a deficiency in age and experience.

Now that he was fighting against a genuinely powerful enemy, he was rapidly making up for a number of his shortcomings!

There was nothing he could do about his limited age, but he could still acquire precious combat experience against a formidable opponent!

Even if the Dark Apostle was unable to convert these gains into immediate boosts of strength, his gains were not trivial in the slightest.

All of it served as the capital for his future growth!

A true powerhouse could never grow without undergoing sufficient struggle!

The Dark Apostle previously relied on his good gear and superior foundations alone as the source of his confidence, but he himself had to admit that there were limits to this dependence.

He could not continually beg Ves for help if he wanted to become an unparalleled strongman in his own right.

This was especially the case when he suffered a clear disadvantage against ace pilots and ace mechs.

Having fought against a Goliath who possessed the power of stolen resonance, the Dark Apostle now had a much better idea how much he fell behind compared to a genuine ace pilot.

The resonance strength of a saint was much stronger and more condensed!

Ace pilots defied the laws of reality much more blatantly, allowing them to patch up their weaknesses and enhance their strengths a lot better.

The Dark Apostle had no confidence in his ability to defeat any of the ace mechs that were currently fighting by his side!

Even if he did not pay much attention to them at the moment, he was still able to gauge their general combat power.

Their mobility, their Saint Kingdoms and their Rubarthan high technologies all granted them advantages that were difficult if not impossible to overcome together.

The Dark Apostle may have gained a lot of confidence when fighting against the Ixith Goliath, but that was only because his other self managed to figure out and exploit its weaknesses.

Ace mechs did not possess such vulnerabilities!

As one of the pillars of the large and prosperous human race, ace mechs possessed a level of refinement that far surpassed any other high-level assets.

Only phase lords equipped with Saint Piercer arms could pose a legitimate threat against these units, and that was only if the ace mechs were being careless on the battlefield!

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Chapter 7339: Purging Biomass

Chapter 7339: Purging Biomass

As the Ixith Goliath suffered more and more ailments, Ves keenly took advantage of the moment and analyzed as much of the remarkable creature as possible!

He knew that he had gained a unique opportunity to study this unprecedented organic creation up close before anyone else.

Even though there were plenty of mechs and warships on the battlefield that possessed powerful sensor systems, the data they could gather in this busy and interference-rich environment was limited and biased towards material properties.

Ves on the other hand was able to utilize Blinky's excellent senses to study the extraordinary biological makeup of the Level 8 Goliath.

While the enemy's stolen resonance heavily interfered with his own scans, he was still able to glean a lot of details, especially as the withering curse and the unleashed demons actively weakened the megavoribug's biomass.

Any piece of compromised flesh became fair game to everyone!

As Ves continued to absorb a large amount of data and insights, he already started to entertain wild and increasingly more outrageous ideas.

He was gaining a lot of inspiration at the moment!

The Goliath Hive introduced an entirely new framework that had never been introduced on a large scale in the past.

Though the Ixith Goliath possessed a number of shortcomings, that did not detract from the fact that it was able to leverage the power of willpower cultivation without putting in the hard work!

This alone was invaluable to the human race!

Ves and a growing number of other people saw hope of leveraging the exceptional strength and unlimited possibilities of willpower cultivation on a wider and more industrial scale.

This was not an exaggeration.

The Ixith Goliath was the product of an alien race that had only burst onto the scene relatively recently.

This indicated that the technological principles behind this phenomenon might not be difficult to reproduce.

What was truly valuable was the original idea and the unique voribug advantages that made this special strain possible.

Since the voribugs could steal the concept of resonance from red humanity and make their own version of it, red humanity should be able to steal the principles that made the Ixith Goliath as well!

A race had already kicked off, and Ves just happened to enjoy a headstart.

While his knowledge base, experience and industrial base could not compare to the other major players of human civilization, his competitors all happened to be stationed on planets and starships located many light-years away from the battlefield.

How much data and insights could they gather from remote observations and sensor data dumps alone?

Not as much as Ves' first-hand observations, that was for certain!

Ves did not ask to invent anything too big and ambitious.

For example, since the Ixith Goliath possessed the mass and volume of a very large battleship, could the Red Fleet develop a dreadnought that was able to generate its own form of resonance?

Such a vessel would be a gamechanger for the RF and all of the other big players!

Even if the resonance strength of these strange warships could not surpass a couple of dozen laves, that was already good enough to amplify their combat performance by at least an order of magnitude!

Of course, Ves did not even dream about inventing such a miraculous ship.

Instead, he thought about applying his inspiration on more relevant projects, such as the development of his elemental Carmine mechs.

If he wanted to create living mechs based on the Ixith Goliath, then he had to satisfy at least two requirements.

First, the mech needed to be composed of his own versions of the sentient organic components that made up the Level 8 Goliath.

Second, the mech had to possess a Mentalist Crystal or equivalent that was able to form the distributed intelligence and potentially act as a source of extraordinary willpower.

Getting his hands on a Mentalist Crystal and especially a complete one was very difficult, but not impossible.

If the output of Mentalist Crystals did not rise anytime soon, then the Hunting Association would profit immensely from the massive increase in demand!

People already developed a lot of useful applications of this rare and mysterious hyper material, but now that they knew they could potentially create works like the Ixith Goliath, their desire for it would shoot through the roof!

More and more enterprising individuals and organizations would definitely begin to research how to mass produce Mentalist Crystals, but Ves did not think that any of them could succeed in the short term.

Mentalist Crystals were exclusively grown by rare mutated beasts that randomly started to develop their intelligence rather than any more directly useful physical enhancements.

Such beasts were extremely rare no matter the ecosystems, and not every clever creature grew an actual Mentalist Crystal.

So long as this remained the case, the output of Mentalist Crystals was destined not to reach the scale of mass production, and that was a big shame.

This meant that Ves could only produce limited quantities of elemental Carmine mechs with stolen resonance capabilities.

It was not worth it to develop such machines for most potential customers, but it was a different story if he limited this invention for internal use!

Ves keenly saw an opportunity to harness the might of willpower cultivation without being a high-ranking mech pilot or swordmaster himself!

The Dark Apostle's combat effectiveness would definitely skyrocket if his future Polymetal mech and raiment combination also happened to generate its own resonance empowerment!

However, Ves was not yet certain whether it was even possible to create such an outrageous machine.

It depended on whether nanomachines could substitute all of the key functions of the so-called sentient organic components.

If Ves was not able to do this without resorting to biological products, then he could only limit this application to organic Carmine mechs.

It would be a huge disappointment if he could only impart the power of stolen resonance to his Woodsap mechs and his as-of-yet-unrealized Mergewater mechs.

Both mech concepts possessed a lot of advantages, but Ves possessed a clear preference for his Polymetal mech concept.

It was the only elemental Carmine mech type that perfectly leveraged his strengths as a mech designer.

The key to imitating the principles was figuring out the nature of these 'sentient organic intelligences'.

Ves knew too little about them to be honest. He could only vaguely sense their existence. While they were not as small as individual cells, they were not that big either.

The smallest ones were as small as rats while the larger ones could rival the size of a nunser.

Regardless, all of these semi-independent organisms possessed their own minds.

Ves had studied them long enough to ascertain their sapience and their ability to experience emotions.

Of course, that did not necessarily mean that they were as smart and aware as humans.

Their intelligence appeared significantly deficient, or else they wouldn't have been so susceptible against corrupting influences.

The Goliath Hive imparted the sentient organic components with enough intelligence to generate willpower, but not enough for them to develop true individualism.

Ves already had an idea on how to create a living mech that imitated such a construction.

He just needed to create a new variation of a multi-spirit living mech.

He had already theorized the existence of multi-spirit living mechs back when he developed the Fey Fianna, but this was a much more extreme version of his initial daydream.

Just like how he was able to bring a living mech with an Ultimate Module or several fey to life, he could extrapolate this method further in order to produce an even more extreme result.

What if he designed a living mech that was divided into millions of lives?

There would no longer be a dominant spirit among them! Each of them had to be as equal to each other as possible. Major variations and deviations in strength would make it exponentially harder to synchronize them with each other.

Such an extreme multi-spirit living mech may resemble the distributed intelligence of the Ixith Goliath just enough to satisfy one of the key requirements!

Of course, developing such a radical living mech was easier said than done.

He had already reached a limit when he developed the Fey Fiannas.

While they were able to spawn more subordinate spirits and accommodate more living fey as they grew older over time, this expansion rate clearly did not satisfy the demands for a true 'Ixith-style' living mech!

Blinky furrowed his feline eyes.

How could he overcome this limit?

He knew from past work experiences that there was a limit to how many times he could 'partition' a spiritual entity.

They were not like data chips where he could easily divide their digital storage spaces into as many drives as he wanted.

A living spirit was much more delicate and mysterious than that. Cutting them up was like cutting into a person's brain. A small slice or three shouldn't produce any noticeable differences, but a million slices would definitely cause the mind and consciousness to collapse!

Ves did not feel that this was an insurmountable problem to overcome, but he needed more time to think and experiment before he could come up with a solution.

That was assuming that he was willing to go through with this experimental project.

Just as he began to consider a few possible ideas, a sudden change occurred on the battlefield.

The Ixith Goliath was in much worse shape than before.

Though it had not suffered any truly catastrophic blows up to this point, all of the successive attacks from the Dark Apostle, the Ascended Giants, the Rubarthan ace mechs and heavy fire support from assisting warships and defensive installations all took their toll on the massive insect.

"Death by a thousand cuts."

The 'cuts' in these cases were attacks that were powerful enough to tear any ordinary first-class mech apart with a single blow, but given the scale of the Ixith Goliath, they were truly small under the circumstances.

Yet it was through these cuts that the Level 8 Goliath's physical condition worsened with every passing minute.

The protection afforded by stolen resonance gradually declined due to both internal and external sources of pressure.

Its immense buffer became more vulnerable and started to accrue damage far in excess to its regeneration rate, which had also become impaired.

The Goliath and its distant controller must clearly know that there was no feasible way for it to escape this deadlock as long as it stuck to its present methods.

The only way to escape this doom loop was to resort to drastic measures.

The switch happened in an instant. All of the attackers at close range suddenly became engulfed by a wave of biomass!

The Ixith Goliath blew up all of a sudden!

"Ahh!"

"Retreat!"

"A mutation has occurred!"

The Dark Apostle grunted as his armored form got struck by a giant piece of shell!

The impact was strong enough to interrupt his forward momentum and push him back on an uncontrollable trajectory!

While he quickly arrested his flight, he cautiously tried to figure out what just happened.

“Did the Ixith Goliath self-destruct?!”

“No.” Ves decisively responded. “It is very much alive, but... it has diminished itself somehow. It has managed to restore its vitality at the cost of sacrificing much of the parts of its body that have become compromised. Like a serpent cutting off its own tail, this Goliath has managed to rejuvenate itself by decisively excising all of its deadweight and hidden dangers!”

The Goliath that emerged from all of the drained and withered biomass was roughly half as large, yet seemed just as menacing as before.

It was... as if its lethality had become a lot more condensed than before.

Though the strange Goliath had lost much of its sentient organic components, what was left only had to cover a body that was a fraction of its previous size.

This meant that its stolen resonance was just as strong as before!

The shrunken and transformed Goliath not only managed to make itself smaller.

It had also made a number of adaptations to its body.

Its exoskeleton did not appear as thick as before. Its overall body shape had grown slender and shorter. It lost a number of limbs, but the ones that remained had become proportionately longer and more complex.

What concerned the remaining combatants a lot was the fact that some of its limbs had turned into claws that could grip and potentially trap its enemies!

“Its afflictions are gone!” Ves warned. “It has shed my curse and all of the other stuff that I used to weaken it from the inside!”

This was bad!

Just as everyone tried to figure out the implications behind all of the physical changes, the now-healthy and unbothered Goliath quickly took action!

It zipped across space and arrived in front of an Ur-Titan in no time!

While the former human soldier possessed solid reflexes and quickly raised his superdimensional halberd in to block the incoming claw, the transformed Goliath abruptly used one of its clawed limbs to grip the weapon and utilized its powerful physical might to wrench the armament from the giant’s hand!

“What?!”

Now bereft of his weapon, the Ur-Titan could do nothing to stop a pair of claws stab through the damaged and weakened torso plating of his raiment!

“No!”

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Chapter 7340 Getting Schooled

Chapter 7340 Getting Schooled

If the initial version of the Ixith Goliath functioned like a giant siege engine that was most suitable to smash fortifications apart, then the transformed version was clearly a lot more optimized to massacre enemy champions!

The loss of so much bulk did not diminish its lethality in the slightest.

Instead, it had become a much more threatening opponent against the remaining human combatants due to how much faster and more nimbler it had become!

The other Goliath strains had never exhibited any transformations where they drastically altered their biological configurations.

This had caused red humanity to develop an assumption that no Goliaths were capable of transforming into different forms on the battlefield.

Unfortunately, they were wrong.

The Goliath Hive never showed off this capability in the past because it was simply not worth it to include such a costly and complex ability to large versions of cannon fodder.

The Ixith Goliath was special. The value of the Incubator spawn vastly exceeded that of its lesser kind.

The timing was excellent. The defenders had used up a significant amount of resources to damage its original form.

The Level 8 Goliath had also utilized its massive form to smash enough orbital fortresses to deplete the current quadrant.

While it was still possible for the remaining fortified space stations to relocate and fill up the gaps in the orbital defense network, this was a very slow and cumbersome process, and could not be relied upon for the remainder of this battle.

Not that it mattered this time.

The transformed Ixith Goliath became a much smaller target, so large guns would find it a nightmare to land a single hit at longer ranges.

Combined with the megavoribug's vastly improved mobility, many long-ranged armaments had lost their effectiveness when employed against this enemy!

"Our hit rate has dropped to single digits! Its flight is too fast and unpredictable!"

"Be careful not to hit our allies! Friendly fire will only make everything worse."

"Where are our gravitic energy generators? We need to slow it down at all costs! It is tearing apart the giants!"

The Ixith Goliath prioritized easier targets over tougher ones.

While the Rubarthan ace mechs did their best to block and fight back against the transformed Goliath, the transformed alien creature exhibited a great amount of cunning.

It flexibly utilized its sinuous alien form to circle around the ace mechs so that it could strike at more vulnerable targets.

Currently, those targets consisted of the Ascended Giants.

The Ur-Titans had become a high priority to the voribugs!

Their superdimensional arms tore gaps into its exoskeleton, but they had also suffered damage in return.

All of the Ur-Titans fought with damaged raiments at this time. Prior claw strikes had damaged their superdimensional armor plating, making it easier for the lethal Goliath to pounce on them and tear their remaining protection apart!

The Ascended Giants became alarmed, but they did not panic.

They grouped up and tried to leverage their numbers against the Ixith Goliath, yet the megavoribug still took advantage of its significantly greater bulk and size and accepted all of the incoming attacks in order to grasp hold of another Ur-Titan!

The elite soldier turned human phase lord roared and counterattacked with his superdimensional halberd, but just like his predecessor, the many-limbed Goliath forcibly took hold of the shaft and utilized its superior strength to wrench the weapon from the giant's gauntlets!

"No! My weapon!"

The Ixith Goliath did not hesitate to turn the weapon around and plunge its razor-sharp tip straight through the chest plating!

Seconds passed as the Level 8 Goliath violently utilized its stolen implement to savage and tear apart the human phase lord's true body!

The remaining Ascended Giants became horrified. The changes happened too quickly.

In one moment, the Ixith Goliath presented itself as a massive but fairly clumsy insect.

In the next moment, it had become a leaner, meaner and far more lethal killing machine!

It was clear that the Ixith Goliath's second form was far more suitable in dueling against enemy champions.

Perhaps it was trying to work its way up to defeating the Rubarthan ace mechs that had done an adequate job of harassing it, because the Ixith Goliath went out of its way to collect the precious medium-grade superdimensional halberds!

Ves and the other soldiers grew especially alarmed when the Goliath's body grew malleable enough to the point where it could integrate the shafts of both stolen halberds into its forelimbs!

The halberd blades had essentially taken over the role of its claws!

"It... it is stealing our weapons!"

"It is worse... the Goliath is assimilating them. We are in for a much more dangerous fight." Ves grimly concluded.

"Sir! I am ordering our giants to withdraw!" The Divine Harpoon urgently transmitted to his superior. "We are not equipped to fight against this Goliath! The scope of this battle has vastly exceeded our mission parameters. Its threat level has skyrocketed now that it has acquired its latest set of weapons. I insist that you accompany us as well."

The Dark Apostle frowned. He did not want to retreat, especially after seeing two of his subordinates getting carved apart in front of his eyes. What kind of warrior would he be if he allowed himself to lose his courage after witnessing such an insulting display?

Yet warriors that foolishly charged towards an opponent while being heavily outmatched never tended to live very long.

The main reason why he hesitated about this decision was because his situation was a lot better than the others.

He was the only giant that possessed a set of full high-grade superdimensional gear.

The defensive properties of his raiment was vastly superior, and the sharpness of his Withering Sting exceeded that of the stolen weapons.

As the leader of the Phase Lord Department, the Dark Apostle felt a strong sense of responsibility for his subordinates, both living and dead.

He could not allow himself to back off when he still had a chance to exact revenge on this monster!

Still, just because he maintained the resolve to fight did not mean he had lost all of his rationality.

"Ves. Do you think we have a chance?"

"Difficult to say, really. Our gear is superior, but our overall strength and scale is subpar. The transformed Goliath is still very large and strong. If your skills and intuition are not up to par, the enemy will wrench the Withering Sting from your grasp before you know it. Even if we set aside this possibility, those superdimensional halberds pose a credible threat against your life. Sure, they are only made out of hull-grade superdimensional alloys, but the megavoribug is already amplifying their performance with its stolen resonance."

An important question came to mind.

What was stronger, regular armor-grade superdimensional alloy or resonance-empowered hull-grade superdimensional alloy?

Ves did not possess the answer!

His best guess was that the former was still superior, but that the gap between the two had become a lot smaller due to the reality-defying effects of extraordinary willpower.

Even at just 30 laverses, that was enough to make the superdimensional halberds exceed their original parameters.

It was very much possible for those weapons to perform as if they were a quality grade higher than before!

If this was the case, then the only piece of equipment that wouldn't easily get cut apart by those weapons was the Withering Sting.

Made out of the most scarce and precious weapon-grade superdimensional alloy, this was an artifact that was designed to cut or pierce through most other superdimensional equipment!

"I am going in." The Dark Apostle finally decided.

He couldn't fully explain his decision. He simply felt he needed to go forth and test his might against this powerful adversary.

Strangely enough, Ves did not object to this reckless decision.

"Go. I will assist as much as I can."

Strange energies began to course through the Withering Sting.

Even though the Ixith Goliath managed to purge all of its afflicted biomass, Ves did not think it had developed an immunity against the withering curse.

Vitality remained essential to this creature. The less life force it possessed, the weaker it became!

As the Dark Apostle charged forward, he understood this truth as well. He did not stick to a straight trajectory, but instead began to curve around in the hopes of catching the enem from an oblique angle.

Unfortunately, the Ixith Goliath was not stupid. It paid visible attention to the leader of the giants, whose larger size and better-quality equipment caused him to stand out from his subordinates.

When the Ixith Goliath began to swing both of its halberd-tipped limbs, the Dark Apostle felt himself come alive like never before!

He relied on his skill and intuition to deflect one of the halberds while moving his body to the side just so that the other halberd glanced off the side of his raiment.

"Tch."

More claws struck his raiment, but the Dark Apostle managed to block half of them, transferring pulses of withering and darkness energy through the limbs.

Since the Ixith Goliath's ordinary claws were unable to inflict any effective damage against the high-grade superdimensional armor, the alien creature simply didn't bother to use them anymore.

Instead, it concentrated on wielding its two integrated superdimensional weapons that it had just nicked from the Ascended Giants.

To see their own weapons used against them pissed off Ves and the Dark Apostle to no end.

These were rare and highly coveted weapons of great value!

To have them fall into the hands of the enemy was a massive failure and one that should never be repeated.

The Ascended Giants needed to figure out how to prevent scenarios like this from occurring in the future, because they really couldn't afford to give enemy aliens access to more superdimensional arms.

"Be careful, sir!"

The Ixith Goliath rapidly took the measure of its opponent.

At the same time, it became increasingly more proficient in the use of the integrated halberds.

Its skills and judgment improved with every passing second. The Dark Apostle quickly found himself overwhelmed as he struggled to fend off two weapons striking at him at the same time.

It was already a struggle for him to block one of the superdimensional halberds. He did not possess the speed, strength or limbs to block the other weapon at the same time!

All of this fighting started to take a toll on his equipment.

While the Withering Sting only received a few very minor scratches and grooves, his superdimensional regalia was faring a lot worse!

The armor-grade superdimensional alloy should have been able to block the hull-grade superdimensional halberds with a reasonable amount of confidence.

However, because of the Ixith Goliath's stolen resonance, it was able to inflict significantly more effective damage than when the Ur-Titans wielded the halberds!

This was absurd!

The entire identity and basis of strength of the Ixith Goliath was based on stolen property!

Though the Dark Apostle felt indignant about it, his raiment was rapidly accumulating more and more marks of damage.

The thickness of his raiment granted him a decent buffer, but that meant nothing if he failed to turn this situation around.

The Dark Apostle steadily became overwhelmed by the unceasing attacks.

His spearmanship did not grant him any solutions on how to gain the upper hand. His foundation as a warrior was too shallow.

He possessed excellent equipment but lacked the extensive skillset, combat experience and beastly intuition that expert pilots and ace pilots naturally accrued during their heroic journeys.

It was situations like these where one's shallow foundations became exposed.

Though Ves and Blinky did their best to help by cursing the Ixith Goliath, their efforts proved far too marginal due to the same obstruction they encountered the last time.

"The Ixith Goliath has become a lot more resistant to the withering curse." Ves found out! "It has shrunk its body and concentrated its remaining life force across a much smaller body. It is much harder for the withering curse to take root under such hostile conditions. The enemy's willpower has also become much more adept at countering the power of darkness. This... this is an opponent that learns and improves at a rapid rate! Its growth... outpaces ours!"

This was the first time that Ves encountered such a difficult adversary!

As a mech designer obsessed with Mutual Growth in Adversity, he actually found it deeply uncomfortable to be dominated by an insectile alien race that exemplified design philosophy better than himself!

In other words, he was being schooled by the mutated voribugs!

Chapter 7341 About Time

Chapter 7341 About Time

The Dark Apostle was losing.

He was losing badly.

He had already overestimated his capabilities when he challenged the Ixith Goliath head-on, but the fact that the latter improved at a rapid rate made the disparity even worse!

The more he fought, the more he had to go on the defensive.

The nimbler and meaner Ixith Goliath learned too quickly. It not only optimized its attacks and maneuvers, but also grew more familiar with its enemies, which happened to include the largest and most conspicuous Ascended Giant on the battlefield!

The Dark Apostle could do nothing to stop his adversary from figuring him out. He lacked the depth and foundation to catch the Level 8 Goliath by surprise and confound its calculations.

Despite his defensive posture, more and more resonance-empowered attacks struck his Superdimensional Giant Regalia.

The stolen superdimensional halberds made a huge difference in this regard.

Without the use of these unnaturally sharp weapons, it would have taken at least an order of magnitude more blows to inflict so much damage onto the raiment!

Everyone else realized this as well. Currently, the Dark Apostle was the only combatant left on the battlefield that could somewhat hold back the Ixith Goliath.

The Rubarthan junior ace mechs that had been trying to run interference all of this time had lost this qualification as soon as the powerful Goliath acquired its latest set of weapons.

Their transphasic hyper armor systems may have been quite respectable in the previous years, but the rise of superdimensional arms had completely altered the dynamics.

The ace pilots knew that no matter how much they reinforced their machines with their Saint Kingdoms, their ace mechs wouldn't be able to withstand a fraction of the amount of attacks that the Dark Apostle endured up to this point!

The sudden and rapid advancements in technologies and materials had already left them behind.

Due to this disparity, the ace mechs did not dare to get too close anymore. They shifted to attacking with their ranged armaments, using them to target specific organs and joints.

They focused much of their attacks on the joints that connected to the limbs that integrated the stolen superdimensional halberds!

However, the enemy Goliath had evolved.

Despite its reduction in size, its new form significantly reinforced the joints and limbs. Their exoskeleton had become much thicker. Their overall design sacrificed a bit of flexibility in exchange for a major boost in protection!

This also bought more time for the Goliath's rapid regeneration to do its work and restore the integrity of the shells.

Combined with the Ixith Goliath's faster and more responsive maneuvers, it became impossible for the ace mechs to sever the limbs in a short amount of time!

The Dark Apostle could not count on them for assistance.

This increased his sense of urgency and desperation. The dire circumstances stimulated his combat sense and forced him to improve his skills even further than before.

While he felt grateful to experience such improvements, his raiment became increasingly more battered by the minute!

While he felt grateful to experience such improvements, his raiment became increasingly more battered by the minute!

The Ixith Goliath continually slammed the blade of the stolen halberds against the front torso of the Ascended Giant's raiment.

With every impactful resonance-empowered strike, the superdimensional armor plating accumulated another mark.

Every collision reduced the Dark Apostle's buffer by another extent.

He and Ves tried their best to figure out a way to break this deadlock, but their options wore thin.

The nature of their current opponent made it far too difficult to find effective counters!

"I cannot keep this up! C'mon, Ves! I know you have a few more tricks up your sleeve. This big bug will surely impale us with our own superdimensional weapons if you continue to fool around!"

"I am not fooling around! I am continuing to channel the withering curse as well as analyze the transformed Ixith Goliath for any weaknesses that we may have overlooked. Before you ask, I haven't found any glaring holes that we can exploit. This fellow is a much more capable duelist in its latest form. Nothing about this is random or instinctive. Its entire organic form betrays clear signs of intelligent design. The leader or leaders of the mutated voribug race are absolutely not stupid. They may be savage, but their rationality cannot be in doubt anymore."

"What the hell does that mean, Ves?!"

"We are dealing with an enemy race that can and will develop counters against our units in real-time! When you think about it, the properties of the mutated voribug race are intrinsically set up to fight in this manner. There is no silver bullet. A single solution is unlikely to work as well in the future because the enemy can always implement a targeted change or mutation across all of its forces in a short amount of time. The organic nature of all of its units makes it very easy to modify their forms! This is an advantage that races that rely on conventional technology cannot match!"

This was an important insight and one that had massive implications for the Voribug War.

The Rubarhthan Pact had definitely encountered a nightmare opponent.

While the mutated voribugs definitely had their shortcomings, red humanity did not have the means to take advantage of them during these difficult times.

The Dark Apostle gritted his teeth. "I know you have Worclaw energy saved up. I think we might need it to break this alien's limbs or distract it long enough to disengage."

"Ah, don't be in a hurry. Worclaw energy is too valuable to be squandered. If we use it all up now, we don't have any of it left when we truly need the extra power."

"The superdimensional raiment you made for me is already breached half-way! We need to do something quickly or else there will be a big hole in our chest!"

Blinky smirked. "Don't worry. You have done your job. We have bought enough time for the true bane of the Ixith Goliath to appear. Our job is pretty much done at this point. Against my latest work, this Level 8 Goliath does not stand a chance."

It took a few seconds for the Dark Apostle to connect the dots.

His eyes widened behind his helmet.

"Do you mean...!"

"FALL BACK, GIANT. I CANNOT STAND THE SIGHT OF YOUR FORMULAIC SPEARMANSHIP ANY LONGER. I WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO TRULY DUEL WITH A LONG ARM."

A power presence approached from the side and charged straight towards the Ixith Goliath while it was preoccupied with outfighting the Dark Apostle!

Of course, the enemy megavoribug managed to detect the mighty mech's approach well in advance.

It abruptly withdrew its superdimensional halberds and instead utilized its body to slam into the Ascended Giant and shove his body backwards!

The Dark Apostle did not expect this move. His armored form helplessly flew away from the Goliath.

By the time the giant managed to arrest his involuntary flight, a new machine had already attracted the attention of the only significant Goliath left on the battlefield.

The Riot Mark III had returned in triumph, and it had struck its first blow against the current incarnation of the Ixith Goliath with its charge attack!

Saint Orfan had successfully driven back the demon that threatened to take her over!

Now that she had regained her rationality, she immediately channeled her fury and frustration at her own failures at the only significant punching bag left on the battlefield.

The results of her opening strike satisfied her a lot!

A devastating hole appeared on the torso of the massive insect. This hole was not only surprisingly large in diameter, but the surrounding shell and tissue already started to get eroded by destructive energies.

The tier 3 Destroyer spear inflicted much more devastating damage to the Goliath than expected!

The resonance strength of the Ixith Goliath dipped by 0.3 laves just because of this initial attack.

This was huge progress!

The abrupt drop in resonance strength implied that the Riot Mark III's singular attack had neutralized the willpower contribution of a significant amount of biomass!

So long as Saint Orfan could replicate this effect with her ace mech's subsequent attacks, she could successively weaken the Ixith Goliath, thereby making it even more vulnerable to the Riot Mark III's subsequent strikes!

The tier Destroyer spear practically glowed with bloodthirsty anticipation.

The Riot Mark III also became surrounded by a field of pseudo-Destroyer particles.

Just flying close to the Ixith Goliath was already enough to inhibit the latter's sentient organic components!

When Ves and everyone else observed the Riot Mark III remain in close proximity to the enemy Goliath, they noticed a familiar reaction.

"The Ixith Goliath has slowed down!"

"Its movements have become less coordinated!"

"Parts of its body that have fallen into the new ace mech's Saint Kingdom have fallen into disarray!"

The vastly superior Saint Kingdom easily overrode the stolen resonance empowerment that endowed extraordinary protection to all of the biomass.

That was not all. Any ace mech could accomplish this feat.

Unlike the domain fields of other ace mechs, the one belonging to the Riot Mark III was filled with the power of chaos and destruction.

When these two forces acted on the body of the deadly Goliath, their effects proved devastating!

The pseudo-Destruction particles generated by resonating with Terran Destroyer Amplification Material inflicted constant low-level damage across the entire Saint Kingdom, even when it penetrated deeper into the body of the Level 8 Goliath!

The magnitude of the damage might not be too high compared to the Riot's more direct attacks, but what made this devastating to the enemy was that it covered an extremely large volume!

This exerted a large burden on the Goliath that could not be blocked or avoided so long as the ace mech remained in close proximity.

The constant erosion from the power of destruction tied up a disproportionate amount of resources.

The Ixith Goliath had little choice but to expend energy and biomass to constantly regenerate and prop up its body.

It even had to engage in triage and abandon the less important parts of its body to preserve its more important muscles and organs!

Yet that was not the extent of the misery that the Riot Mark III inflicted on the insectile monster.

Its Chaos Armor exuded a subtle but undeniable sense of madness and disorder.

Though it was much more subdued now that Saint Rosa Orfan successfully managed to rein in her demonic inclinations, the aura generated by this special armor system proved especially disturbing to the Ixith Goliath!

The biomass affected by this aura immediately showed signs of delays, reduced coordination and even internal conflict!

The greatest strength of the Ixith Goliath was its distributed intelligence.

However, such a control scheme demanded much greater order and precision than what a normal organism of this scope had at its disposal.

The disorder spread by the Saint Kingdom was not particularly strong, but it just so happened to overpower any attempt made by the Ixith Goliath to keep its vast body under total control.

The Mentalist Crystal proved completely unable to block or mitigate this chaotic field effect!

The Goliath's stolen willpower proved far too brittle against a force of a higher order.

Saint Orfan's will pressed down upon the Goliath like steel did not relent for a single second.

As such, her Riot Mark III already gained the upper hand from the beginning!

The ace pilot did not waste this advantage. Her ace mech boldly faced the limbs that integrated the superdimensional halberds and fearlessly faced them without any intention of evading their unnaturally sharp blades.

The other ace mechs had to avoid them because their energy and physical defenses could not withstand a single blow against these arms, but the Riot Mark III was different!

In fact, even if the machine did not benefit from the cutting-edge Chaos Armor, Saint Orfan would still choose to confront the enemy up close!

"AMATEUR. THERE IS NO HEART IN YOUR MOVES."

The Ixith Goliath tried its best to contain its disorder and strike at the Riot Mark III with its borrowed weapons.

Yet in the face of the two fast attacks, the ace spearman mech skillfully evaded one of the superdimensional halberds before slicing off the limb that held the other halberd!

Too easy!

Before the Ixith Goliath could withdraw, the Riot Mark III swung its Destroyer spear a second time and easily cut off the second limb!

"What?!"

"Too fast!"

"The skill gap is too big!"

A single Rubarthan ace mech diverted its flight and quickly moved in to retrieve the oversized weapons before rapidly pulling away.

No matter what, the enemy could not be allowed to retrieve these strategic assets and use them against the human race ever again!

Chapter 7342 The Coincidental Counter

Chapter 7342 The Coincidental Counter

Morale across the remaining human defenders surged after witnessing the spectacular performance of the recovered ace pilot.

Saint Rosa Orfan may have disgraced herself by losing control over her psyche in the middle of a battle, but she had fully redeemed herself now that she had come to the rescue in the nick of time!

As soon as the Riot Mark III severed the stolen superdimensional plasma halberds from the Ixith Goliath, the monster posed no realistic threat to the ace mech anymore.

Unlike the other combatants on the battlefield, happened to be the only full superdimensional ace mech around.

Sure, the Dark Apostle happened to be clad in high-grade superdimensional raiment as well, but given the serious battering it had received, the leader had been unable to exploit this advantage effectively against this opponent!

The story was completely different for the Saint Rosa Orfan.

She was a genuine champion. She had been honed and tested beyond all reasonable standards. She had built up her spearmanship step-by-step until she developed a unique style that perfectly suited her dynamic if haphazard approach towards combat.

Her willpower, though far from perfect, surpassed that of Ves and the Dark Apostle countless times! She possessed the awesome ability to distort reality to literally give her an advantage in many ways, from moving faster to spreading destruction across her entire domain.

Combining all of that with a cutting-edge mech frame whose raw performance exceeded that of all of the Rubarthan ace mechs on the same battlefield, the sum total of all of these advantages resulted in an absolute disparity in the final phase of this lengthy and exhausting engagement.

Every exhausted soldier felt jealous and gratified that Saint Orfan decisively took over their final burden.

Perhaps the Riot Mark III may not have been suited to counter endless swarms of weak but persistent voribugs, but against single enemy champions, the D-mech was clearly in its element!

Ves could finally rest easy now that his latest and greatest work finally fought the way he intended it to perform.

"This is why I chose to investigate the Goliath Hive." He said through Blinky's form. "It is the only group of voribugs that can give Saint Orfan a stage to perform at her best. There were many twists and turns in this battle, but from the moment the Goliath Hive committed to investing in the Incubator, I already had a feeling that it would end this way."

The Dark Apostle did not look so happy at how events unfolded up to this point.

His mood was a lot more complex. Unlike his mech designer self, the leader of the Phase Lord Department had hoped that he and his men would have made a better first impression on the battlefield.

Unfortunately, their lack of adaptation against an enemy as different as the mutated voribugs cost them greatly. Two more Ur-Titans had died as a result of his overconfidence and rash strategic decisions.

Though he regretted the loss of two strong and capable subordinates, he believed that the Ascended Giants would ultimately learn from their mistakes.

At the very least, this heavy result should have curbed their ego and made them a lot less eager to strive for independence.

After all, if just a single Level 8 Goliath could inflict defeat on them, how could they possibly have the capital to set up an independent empire in the dangerous Red Ocean?

While the Dark Apostle thought about how he should handle the setbacks suffered by the Ascended Giants, the Riot Mark III continued to dominate the Ixith Goliath.

Although Saint Orfan had been distracted for a significant period of time, she was not ignorant about the threat posed by this powerful alien opponent.

She had already received a dense information package that summarized all of the important pieces of information that the humans had discovered so far.

They highlighted the transformed Goliath's reaction speed, judgment, fast regeneration and abundant vitality.

The condensed briefing also contained brief speculations about the distributed intelligence and the mechanism behind the Ixith Goliath's strange ability to generate stolen resonance.

She processed all of that information and put it to the test.

The results were evident.

The Riot Mark III circled around the larger and relatively more clumsy Goliath.

Every so often, the machine thrust its tier 3 Destroyer spear forward, striking a resonance-empowered blow that inflicted far greater damage than what it should have produced.

The exoskeleton of the Ixith Goliath was actually not that difficult to penetrate for an ace mech.

What was truly troublesome was its large scale and abundant biomass.

A superdimensional weapon was completely overkill in terms of penetration.

The tier 3 Destroyer spear was therefore a much more suitable armament, especially when used by a machine like the Riot Mark III.

With a perfectly matched key resonating material in the form of Terran Destroyer Amplification Material, Saint Orfan was able to amplify and expand the destructive potential of her main weapon.

She just had to refine her technique.

With every strike, the ace pilot became a little more proficient in channeling destructive energies outwards.

Saint Orfan consciously shaped her Saint Kingdom in a more offensive direction.

There was no need to prioritize defense.

The Ixith Goliath was not fast enough to land a hit on the Riot Mark III.

Even if it managed to land a claw on the ace mech, the latter's Chaos Armor could completely withstand an errant blow.

The only danger that Saint Orfan needed to take into account was the remote possibility that her opponent would suddenly envelop her machine and surround it with crushing biomass in every direction.

Although she was confident that her new D-mech would be able to handle this scenario and tear apart the Ixith Goliath from within, it would be an insult to her skill to allow this travesty to happen.

She had enough of taking risks. If there was a way to deliver victory without causing any accidents, then she would take it without hesitation.

She resisted the temptation to intensify her attacks and adopted a more sedate offensive rhythm.

This put the Ixith Goliath in an awful situation.

Its bulk and mass, while still reduced compared to its initial appearance, worked against the megavoribug.

More importantly, it also lacked the skill and intuition to predict and counter Saint Orfan's attacks.

The exchange of blows this time clearly showcased the difference between a genuine champion that climbed up to her current height step by step and an artificially-bred abomination that relied completely on bioprogramming and stolen resources to fight at the same level.

Minutes passed by as everyone else sat by and maintained their distance.

Saint Orfan did not ask for their assistance and clearly did not need any.

Nobody wanted to get in the way and ruin the moment.

As the Riot Mark III continued to thrust its devastating spear into its target, the Goliath became increasingly more pathetic.

Heavy injuries continued to accumulate. Much of its exoskeleton had become cracked and broken. An expanding amount of flesh and organs suffered varying degrees of erosion due to the continuous injection of destructive energies.

All of these debilitations made its counterattacks increasingly slower and more feeble, thereby making it even more impossible for the megavoribug to gain the upper hand.

The overall performance of the Ixith Goliath also dimmed due to the persistent exposure to the Riot Mark III's domain field.

The Saint Kingdom's wonderful effect against a Goliath controlled by a distributed intelligence of sorts proved many conjectures about this new strain.

Red humanity did not necessarily fear the Ixith Goliath.

As long as they gathered enough intelligence and made use of it to develop countermeasures, their subsequent contacts with this Goliath strain would definitely result in fewer losses!

It was just a coincidence that the Riot Mark III just happened to possess the right combination of properties against this specific Goliath.

Nobody looked surprised when the Riot Mark III ultimately managed to reduce the once-scary and deadly megavoribug into a broken and diminished lump of biomass.

While the Ixith Goliath still retained plenty of redundant organs, none of them were in good condition anymore.

The Riot Mark III had already sliced off or eroded significant chunks of its exterior.

What was left could still recover and restore the Ixith Goliath to full health, but the Larkinson ace pilot clearly did not want to give it an opportunity to make a comeback.

This was why her machine methodically began to spread its destructive power to the tissue that surrounded the all-important Mentalist Crystal.

Before the Riot Mark III had an opportunity to damage this vital component, multiple parties urged her to be careful.

"Rosa, don't damage the crystal!" Gloriana was urgently transmitted from the Tarrasque. "The Red Three, the Cybernetic Empire and the Rubarthan Pact have jointly designated the Ixith Goliath's Mentalist Crystal as a vital research sample. We need it as intact as possible! Please do not destroy or compromise it in any way!"

The commands irked the ace pilot.

"What do you expect me to do, then?"

"Defeat the Ixith Goliath, but do not kill it. You can shave away the unimportant biomass at the exterior, but try to preserve the tissue surrounding the Mentalist Crystal as much as possible for research purposes. It is not just the crystal that is valuable. How the mutated voribugs developed a bioconstruct to leverage its properties in such a novel and creature manner is even more fascinating for us. As long as we decipher its secrets, red humanity will benefit greatly from our gains. Our clan will be among the chief beneficiaries with your help. We are already negotiating with the other big players about participating in this high-level research project. Only you can reduce the Level 8 Goliath to a controllable state without annihilating it entirely."

The Larkinson Clan possessed a huge amount of leverage at the moment.

None of the remaining combat assets could do what the superdimensional ace mech could do at the moment.

If the Riot Mark III retreated, the Ixith Goliath would definitely be able to rejuvenate itself and beat the other combatants black and blue. Its foundation as a formidable Level 8 Goliath was still real despite its ragged appearance.

Therefore, the mechers, the fleeters and all of the other major players had little choice but to offer significant concessions to the Larkinson Clan in order to secure its cooperation!

The potential gains may sound a little vague, but Gloriana had a strong suspicion that they would definitely pay off the insanely high expenditures invested in the Riot Mark III Project!

This was pretty much a dream situation for the Larkinsons. There was no reason for them to refuse this beneficial deal.

"Very well. I will do my best, but if you don't have the means to contain this big insect, then that is not my fault."

"The Rubarthans are already dispatching a warship that is capable of putting the Ixith Goliath in stasis." Gloriana responded while also transmitting a technical document to her. "The premise is that you can not only cut the enemy down to a smaller sphere, but also weaken and immobilize it. The stasis effect is not too strong. As long as the Goliath can still protect itself with stolen resonance, it will likely be able to resist this effect. You will need to crush and break its willpower even further."

"No problem."

If Saint Orfan still had control over her corporeal body, she would have smirked by this time.

All of the damage she inflicted so far had created so much damage to the distributed intelligence that it had become a shadow of its former self.

Not only had so many sentient organic components died by her hand, but her Saint Kingdom continued to disrupt their coordination even further!

The resonance meter already showed that the Ixith Goliath was only able to generate stolen resonance at a magnitude of 12 or so laveres.

This was a far cry from its peak!

Chapter 7343 Disappointing Results

Chapter 7343 Disappointing Results

The battle no longer generated any suspense.

Though the Ixith Goliath pulled off a few weird moves, it had ultimately given up once the Riot Mark III showed no signs of relenting or taking risks.

Saint Orfan performed unusually steady during this remaining period.

In contrast to her contentious performance during the earlier phases of the battle, she displayed rock-solid discipline and control.

Her mood and emotions did not impact her decision-making in the slightest, and her quirky D-mech exhibited far fewer glitches and abnormalities than usual.

Everyone appreciated her stability.

There was no need for her to exert any additional effort to defeat her opponent.

By the time a Rubarthan fleet came close, the Ixith Goliath had already been mutilated many times over.

So much alien blood had spilled into space that it could drown an entire city.

The tier 3 Destroyer spear firmly proved its worth during this engagement.

It formed a near-perfect match with Saint Orfan and the Riot Mark III.

The only problem was that the ace pilot had only just begun to master the powerful and temperamental weapon.

She was unable to harness its power like a seasoned Terran peer.

Whenever Saint Orfan attempted to draw more power from the weapon, she couldn't channel it precisely enough.

This meant that a bit of destructive energies had infiltrated the deepest and most central area of the Ixith Goliath's reduced body.

Many vital nerves and organs had become wounded as a result, some of which were more critical than others.

It couldn't be helped. The Ixith Goliath remained defiant throughout the end.

Only by disrupting the interface that allowed the Mentalist Crystal to exert unified control over the segmented organic components could the monster be deprived of control.

This was essential as the Ixith Goliath showed signs of wanting to end its life at the final minutes of its struggle.

There was no way the humans wanted their precious research subject to terminate itself!

As such, the warships assigned to put the crippled Goliath into stasis hurried up and arrived half a minute faster than usual just so that they could complete their mission ahead of time.

Fortunately for everyone involved, no further complications occurred.

The Riot Mark III tenderized the final Goliath so heavily that it could only barely generate a bit of stolen resonance, which Saint Orfan easily suppressed to the point where it became a non-factor.

There were other ways to resist a stasis field, but the crippled monster had no chance to employ any of them before it became frozen in time.

Once the warships conveyed their successful result and reported that their systems remained stable, everyone let out a sigh in relief.

The First Battle of Philaster Crestia formally ended at this point.

That did not mean that every voribug had been erased from the battlefield. Millions of bugs had managed to sneak into orbital platforms and starships and continued to wreak havoc inside.

A fair number of them also managed to bypass the orbital defense network and sneak onto the surface of Philaster Crestia III!

With so many voribugs assaulting the planet at once, leaks could not be prevented.

Even if the defenders blocked every direct assault, the nefarious space insects often tried to infect clueless mechs and shuttles with microscopic subspecies that occasionally managed to escape detection due to heavy damage or interference.

Once these microscopic voribugs remained undisturbed for a few hours, they could ultimately complete dozens of reproduction cycles where their offspring progressively grew larger and more threatening!

Such patterns took place in a thousand different locations at once.

This prevented the soldiers from standing down completely.

Instead of enjoying a well-deserved rest, they had to rotate into shifts in order to search and root out every lingering voribug infestation that had managed to escape the initial sweeps.

The Bluejay Fleet was better off than most other vessels.

The visiting ships did not go all-out and fought with restraint, so they endured far fewer direct and indirect attacks than the Rubarthan hulls.

The mood among the mechers of the Bluejay Fleet was noticeably more jubilant.

They not only helped to defend the Philaster Crestia System, but also contributed to the historic capture of the first Ixith Goliath to appear.

Another source of celebration was the successful breakthrough of Major Simon Jankowski.

The expert candidate successfully became an expert pilot with the help of multiple artificial factors.

Although this was merely a single case, it still provided a small but crucial amount of support to the theory that it was possible to artificially boost the rate of breakthroughs by employing the right methods.

No single solution provided a strong enough increase in breakthrough probability, but as long as mech pilots made use of multiple of them at the same time, the results would definitely astonish the mech community!

Normally, Ves would have paid a lot more attention to this paradigm shift, but other priorities demanded his attention even more. He had little choice but to temporarily set this matter aside in order to meet his more urgent obligations.

Ves did not return to the Tarrasque.

Instead, he and the Dark Apostle accompanied the remaining Ascended Giants back to their own mothership.

Once they entered the Armitage, a large number of bots and human servants descended upon them to remove their raiments and deal with any issues such as injuries.

The good news was that the surviving giants remained in good physical condition. So long as their superdimensional raiments did not suffer any breaches, their true bodies remained healthy for the most part.

The bad news was that 2 Ur-Titans completely failed to return alive.

Before Saint Orfan woke up and decisively dealt with the Ixith Goliath, the Ascended Giants tried and failed to do the same.

The disparity in power and the obvious failures that occurred during their confrontation against a single Level 8 Goliath had thoroughly burst their bubbles.

The giants completely broke away from their illusions at this time.

Sure, there were special reasons why the Riot Mark III just happened to be able to dominate the Ixith Goliath by itself, but that did not excuse the fact that over two-dozen giants performed so poorly in comparison!

Once the giants shed their raiments and put away their weapons, they looked at each other as if they had lost direction.

The Divine Harpoon slowly approached his superior. "The men need guidance, but their moods are highly delicate at the moment. It is best if you give them a few words. Keep it short. They need to come to their own conclusions. Just give them a direction and they will do the rest."

The polemarchos of the Ascended Giants nodded in understanding. He gently requested the attention of his subordinates.

Their expressions revealed a mix of emotions. The more disciplined among them managed to maintain impassive faces, but others betrayed varying degrees of guilt, grief and doubt.

The two Ur-Titans that perished today happened to be the close brothers to the rest of the phalanx. They all knew each other and formed bonds of camaraderie with each other.

That made the losses a little more difficult to bear.

The good news was that none of them looked as if they blamed the Dark Apostle's leadership for the unfortunate deaths.

He wanted this to remain this way.

"Today... we have experienced the cruelty of the Red Ocean first-hand. The confidence instilled in us has led us to believe that we are the chosen sons of this dwarf galaxy, but the reality is that we have yet to realize our potential. Do not lose your faith in yourself. We still tower over almost all of the organisms in the new frontier, but that alone is not enough to excel in warfare. I hope that each of you can reflect on our mistakes and learn from them. I can promise you that we will not fight against the mutated voribugs again before we are much better prepared. Dismissed."

The giants all took in his words before quietly shuffling back to their assigned abodes.

Many of them had grown weary and could use a rest. None of them were in a mood to argue or dispute the decisions made today.

Perhaps that might change in the future, but for now, the giants were too damn tired to challenge his leadership.

The Dark Apostle turned to the strategos of the Faceless Giant Phalanx. "Please handle the remaining chores for me, will you? Coordinate with the human officers of the Phase Lord Department. I am sure they have prepared a whole laundry list of requests."

Though the old and dependable senior officer did not look forward to handling so much administrative work, he knew that it was necessary for at least one commanding giant to take charge at this time.

"You can rest assured, sir."

With that, the Dark Apostle finally shrank his true body and relinquished control over to Ves.

Ves had a lot of work in store.

There was no point in letting his phase lord self remain active now that his strength was no longer needed anymore.

Ves exchanged a few words with the Divine Harpoon before quickly departing from the massive chamber.

He boarded a shuttle that quickly ferried him over the Tarrasque.

There, he moved straight towards his private workshop.

He quietly sighed in relief when he observed the condition of the Riot Mark III.

The D-mech had calmly returned to the flagship of the Bluejay Fleet.

After entering the hangar bay, Gloriana immediately ordered the machine to be transferred over to this workshop in order to examine its condition and secure it more thoroughly.

Ves had been afraid that Saint Orfan would spiral out of control or suffer from the sequelae of pushing back her inner demon.

Fortunately, she and her ace mech continued to remain calm.

The Riot Mark III even relinquished its precious tier 3 Destroyer spear.

The powerful and extraordinarily destructive weapon had been placed back into its special container.

For safety reasons, Gloriana had already ordered the closed container to be transferred to a distant compartment of the heavy cruiser.

"How is she doing?" Ves quietly asked.

"She appears to be stable, but... I cannot say for certain." Gloriana responded even as she studied the projected data readings. "I have already questioned her for a couple of minutes. She sounds rational. She is clearly controlling her emotions."

"That sounds... good. Why do I get the impression that you are worried?"

"She is overdoing it, Ves. I am not as perceptive as you on matters such as these, but I know Saint Orfan well enough that she is never the sort of warrior that shows restraint. I fear that she may be overcompensating, leading her to assume a demeanor that is contrary to her actual self."

Ves did not look too surprised by this. Not too long ago, Saint Orfan had inadvertently fed her demonic side so much that it threatened to usurp her consciousness and wipe out her original identity completely.

After such a harrowing experience, Saint Orfan went from underestimating the Prophet's Bane to becoming terrified that she may one day slip up and fail to regain control in time!

While Ves could understand why Saint Orfan decided to become a lot more cautious than before, Gloriana also had a point.

Ace pilots needed to remain true to themselves if they wanted to progress at a fast rate.

They also needed to maintain a lot of courage over a long period of time.

The timidity shown by Saint Orfan might keep her safe for the time being, but did not favor her growth.

Ves believed that Saint Orfan should be aware of these considerations, yet the fact that she favored caution over boldness at this junction was not a good sign.

He sighed. "Do you think that I should have a talk with our resident ace pilot?"

His wife frowned. "I am not sure. It may be better to give her more time. Do not worry. I will continue to accompany her and monitor her condition. I will inform you as soon as soon as anything significant occurs."

Chapter 7344 A New Pandora's Box

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After Ves completed his inspection of the Riot Mark III, he entrusted all of the remaining matters concerning the D-mech to his wife.

Though Gloriana developed a strong interest in the captured Ixith Goliath, she could not contribute that much to the discussion and examinations at this stage.

She definitely intended to get involved when the research progressed to a stage where people tried to translate their gains into brand-new design applications.

Even then, her interest in the ability to generate stolen resonance was not as high as others.

After all, she became a mech designer to develop machines that fit their users perfectly.

Instead of designing mechs that already came pre-baked with borrowed willpower, she would rather design a mech that could draw out the potential of any mech pilot and allow them to undergo natural breakthroughs.

Only the strength that belonged to themselves was invincible.

Everything else was temporal.

That said, Gloriana did not discount the value of stolen resonance. The proportion of people who engaged in willpower cultivation was destined to remain small. Not everyone was cut out to become an exemplary soldier or warrior.

She would feel much safer if she ventured the stars on a warship that could generate her own form of resonance to protect herself against a wide spectrum of possible attacks.

Of course, she did not expect to see any results in the near future. This was why she reined in her expectations and managed to remain calm.

"Go have fun, Ves. Just make sure that you remind them all that the existence of our latest masterwork is the only reason why they managed to collect such a grand prize. Do not let them dismiss the contributions made by our clan. Saint Orfan deserves to be acknowledged for this historic accomplishment."

Ves adopted a serious expression. "I haven't forgotten, honey. I will make sure those guys won't forget us anytime soon."

As he left the workshop, he thought about how his forces fared in this battle.

The Ascended Giants definitely screwed up. He and the Dark Apostle already took the possibility of suffering losses into account, but when they actually occurred, he still felt caught off-guard.

He did not expect the human phase lords to perform so poorly against a single Level 8 Goliath.

While they had acquitted themselves decently well against Level 7 and lower Goliaths, that only meant that the giants were capable of bullying the weak and barely holding their ground against their equals.

It was very clear that the Ascended Giants was very much a work-in-progress. They lacked tempering and still struggled to find their niche in a fast-changing dwarf galaxy.

"They need to distinguish themselves and find a purpose that they can fulfill better than mechs." Ves made a preliminary conclusion.

The ability to harness the power of stolen resonance may be an opportunity for his subordinates to close the gap with ace mechs.

Even if borrowed willpower was only a fraction as strong as the Saint Kingdom of genuine ace pilots, the former had a powerful advantage over the latter.

The distributed intelligence model debuted by the mutated voribugs was highly scaleable.

This was an incredible data point, and one that drove many people mad!

Ves could not contain his excitement either.

Now that the urgency of battle had subsided, Ves was able to relax and let his mind wander.

He leisurely boarded a shuttle that flew towards the Rubarthan research vessel in charge of conducting initial examinations on the captured research specimen.

Many other people flocked to the same research ship.

Although the pre-planned evacuation of non-essential personnel left the Philaster Crestia System with a dearth of senior R&D personnel, there were still a number of mid-and-lower level personnel left that could perform scans and initial observations.

Every major player paid close attention to the Ixith Goliath, so the research vessel welcomed dozens of different shuttles from multiple important organizations.

Naturally, security became an important concern. One of the Rubarthan ace mechs had forgone rest in order to stand guard and keep an eye on all of the scientists and engineers.

Warships and mechs hailing from the Rubarthan Pact, the Red Three and the Cybernetic Empire jointly maintained an expansive perimeter guard around the vessel and the Goliath in question.

The Rubarthans even salvaged a large amount of metal debris to quickly construct a makeshift isolation chamber around the crown prize.

The spherical tomb did not look makeshift in the slightest. The Rubarthans utilized their best military construction machines on hand to process and reshape the random alloys into a structurally strong and sound space laboratory.

They had already begun to install azure energy shield generators to upgrade its protection even further.

Nobody wanted to see anyone causing any accidents. Security remained high due to fears that others might want to ruin this opportunity to study the first known alien creature that possessed the capacity of extraordinary willpower.

Word had already spread far wide across human-occupied space.

The news could not be suppressed considering how many different linefighters from the Rubarthan Pact and beyond participated in the recent battle.

The reaction from mech pilots and mech designers was surprisingly mixed.

While there were plenty of people who welcomed this development and looked forward to gaining access to the power of stolen resonance, others felt that the very existence of the Ixith Goliath and everything related to it should be declared taboo!

Many news portals and publications have already started to give voice to the opposition!

"Haven't you forgotten where its stolen resonance came from?! The Incubator that birthed this hellspawn devoured several expert pilots! The big Goliath must have absorbed their bodies and kept them captive. Is this how you want to treat our demigods in the future!? We cannot allow our greedy leaders to transform our heroes into willpower batteries!"

"Mere mortals do not deserve to wield the power of resonance. The naming of stolen resonance apt, because it does not belong to them in the first place. Stop this research and destroy this abomination immediately! Do not let its existence tempt us into transforming divinity into another commodity!"

"Are you all stupid?! If those eggheads manage to reverse engineer the principles that the captured monster relies on to produce stolen resonance, how can we meet the demand for strong willpower? The only sources of that are exceptional human beings! Expert pilots are essential to defending our territories and keeping up morale with their powerful expert mechs. They cannot possibly be used for other purposes. As for swordmasters, each of them are model citizens who are infallibly honest and pure. Stealing their willpower will open up an ethical Pandora's box that will stain our people and civilization forever!"

People voiced valid concerns and doubts about the latest discovered phenomenon.

Red humanity couldn't possibly convert willpower cultivators into willpower batteries, right?

The mere idea of turning their honored heroes and champions into extraordinary batteries to empower warships and larger installations provoked a heated debate across human-occupied space!

The temptations were too strong!

For the first time since the start of the Age of Mechs, humans gained an opportunity to break the 'true resonance monopoly'.

Expert pilots, ace pilots and most notably god pilots had long kept the power of changing reality with their powerful will in their grasp.

Few people ever faulted them for that because it was truly a power that could only be borne from the most exceptional of warriors.

True resonance was their well-deserved reward.

For centuries, hardly anyone thought to question their monopoly on this extraordinary force.

Many clandestine attempts had been made to 'transplant' this phenomenon to other devices, but none of them had yielded any reproducible successes.

That had changed on this day.

Not humans, but aliens managed to break the monopoly!

That was one of the most absurd aspects about this development.

Humans had familiarized themselves with extraordinary willpower and true resonance for more than 4 centuries, and possibly much longer considering the long heritage of traditional swordsmanship.

Yet despite their expansive expertise in these phenomena, it took the early breakthrough of an alien race and a swarm-based one at that to do what they had long considered to be impossible!

The mutated voribug race embarrassed red humanity.

The former basically proved that the latter had become complacent and close-minded towards the phenomenon of extraordinary willpower.

In other words, humans had lost the ability to innovate in this field of science!

Naturally, this damaged the pride of a large number of scientists and engineers. Many of them felt eager to redeem themselves by working hard on converting the latest research gains into solid new design applications!

It was too bad that the vast majority of them had no chance of getting their foot in the door, especially at this early stage.

Ves did not concern himself over the complaints of the unqualified.

As his shuttle landed in the congested hangar bay of the research ship, he exited the vehicle and went through a mandatory security examination before he was allowed to go through.

A short time later, he entered one of the laboratories where a small army of junior researchers conducted basic examinations and experiments on biological tissue samples.

While the Ixith Goliath remained confined in stasis, it was not impossible to carefully dig out pieces of flesh without disrupting the ongoing effect.

Now, these young and eager researchers gained the privilege of conducting the first physical studies on the valuable alien flesh!

Ves did not pay attention to all of these trivial activities and instead moved over to a small briefing room where several important representatives had already gathered.

"Hello, everyone."

"Ves."

Multiple familiar faces greeted the latest arrival.

Ves noticed that this was not necessarily a gathering of the highest-ranking officials in the Philaster Crestia System, but all of them possessed the qualifications to speak on behalf of their respective powers.

Lord Richard Brownstone of the Rubarthan Pact looked eager to make progress.

Professor Jovy Armalon of the Survivalist Faction showed the least amount of enthusiasm towards this development.

Professor Vector Loban of the Transhumanist Faction could hardly keep in his excitement at all of the amazing research that could flow out of their latest prize.

Commodore Zonrad Reze of the Red Fleet did not even hide the desperation of his entire superorganization towards this game-changing opportunity.

Formation Master Andrea Vos of the Red Collective looked more intrigued than anything.

Ves knew these people and their respective organizations well enough to deduce their interests and arguments.

Two more individuals had arrived as well. Ves had never met them before, but they quickly introduced themselves to the tier 2 galactic citizen.

A fierce-looking bearded man covered in exobeast trappings bumped his fist against his chest.

"Hail, mech designer and warrior! I am Eric Manot, the most senior Hunter in this star system. I have been invited to this meeting in order to speak on behalf of the Hunting Association. I do have to warn you that I cannot agree too much without consulting my superiors."

That was understandable since the Hunting Association maintained a light presence in the Philaster Crestia System.

The absence of an untamed planet meant that the Hunters mainly busied themselves with controlling the much more tame artificial wilderness regions of Philaster Crestia III.

The other individual who displayed obvious metallic implants on her head and arms introduced herself as well.

"Dr. Gabriella Chamois of the Energy Weapon Tower of the Cybernetic Empire. I was temporarily attached to the detachment of the 24th Gamma Scorchers before my superiors assigned me to monitor and supervise this temporary research group. It is an honor to meet you, professor."

Ves smiled back. "Welcome, everyone. I guess we have a lot to talk about. Since I have the highest galactic citizenship tier, I will take charge of this meeting. Any objections?"

It may have been a little presumptuous for him to do so, but this was how he should play the game.

There was no reason for him to concede the initiative this time!

Chapter 7345 Dr. Gabriella Chamois

Chapter 7345 Dr. Gabriella Chamois

The Dark Apostle fought hard during the battle earlier, and now it was Ves' turn to put up a good fight.

Even if Ves did not strictly belong on the battlefield, that did not necessarily mean that his life was devoid of struggle.

Politics could be just as contentious as actual warfare!

Many rights, resources and opportunities were at stake today.

Although the Larkinson Clan had already formed an initial agreement with the big players about concessions, such a hasty and informal deal could not be completely relied upon.

They could not dispute the core terms, but they could still gain advantages by fiddling with the details.

Ves needed to assert his rights and authority if he wanted to prevent the other parties from nibbling away at them.

Only by putting up a firm demeanor would he be able to protect the concessions that he rightfully earned through his work and sacrifices.

Everyone present was smart enough to know that, so Ves did not envision any problems in this regard, especially since he knew over half of the people here in person.

In a situation where both sides understood each other's intentions, neither of them would be stupid enough to try anything foolish.

This meant that Ves only needed to show a specific attitude in order to steer the discussion to a more beneficial direction.

Before he arrived, it looked as if Commodore Zonrad Reze had subtly taken the lead.

This should not be a surprise.

Eric Manot and Gabriella Chamois did not enjoy a high status within their organizations. They should be ranked at the lower-middle of their respective hierarchies. They were important enough to wave the flag, but not enough to dominate the discussion.

Andrea Vos used to be a highly accomplished academician who specialized in mathematics, theoretical physics and humanist philosophy before she embraced the profession of a formation master.

Compared to the others, she belonged to an older generation and possessed much more qualifications. Not just any scientists could climb her way up to become the dean of a university department.

That she managed to beat out many highly intelligent competitors proved that her political acumen was not small!

However, it was exactly because of her cleverness that she maintained a more low-key and subdued demeanor today.

Not only was she 'outranked' by Ves, but the Red Collective she hailed from was too new and fractured.

Still, it didn't matter too much if she had to take a backseat. The Red Collective represented a broad swathe of people. It would always gain a share of the research results no matter the outcome. How much depended upon whether their expertise and specializations could play a useful role in the research project.

Everyone began to take their seats at the table. A moment of silence passed as they all waited for Ves to open his mouth.

He was not in a hurry to talk. He had concluded a battle not too long ago. The exertion of having to monitor everything while simultaneously casting curses on a massive Goliath had taken a spiritual toll on him. Even with the benefit of his companion spirit's powerful support, he could not help but feel weary after hours of tense strategizing and combat.

Compared to what he faced on the battlefield, a simple meeting like this seemed a lot more trivial in comparison.

He sensed a similar mood among Commodore Zonrad Reze and Formation Master Andrea Vos.

Both of them were senior leaders who were in charge of their respective military detachments.

They had played an integral role in leading their units and helping the Rubarthans defeat the voribugs.

Still, their duty had not ceased now that the fighting had come to an end.

Out of all of them, Sigrund bore the most pressure. The Ixith Goliath's existence unveiled a hidden side of technology that no human had ever conceived in the past.

So long as the researchers could fully decipher the strange biotechnologies invented by the mutated voribugs and devise a coherent theory from their subsequent experimentations, the existence of willpower-carrying warships became possible!

Such a vessel was no longer a fantasy anymore!

Although no hard proof existed at this time that red humanity possessed the capacity to realize such a radical concept, that did not stop the Red Fleet from raising the priority of this matter to the highest level!

In fact, Ves was aware that the tier 1 galactic citizens such as the fleet admirals and the Star Designers handled the real negotiations.

Commodore Reze only needed to ensure that the others did not quietly sneak the research specimen away or engaged in other dubious activities.

Aside from that, given his secret alien origins, Ves suspected that the humanized AI may be able to make substantially more contributions to the research project than anyone else suspected.

It had been years since Ves last thought about the sandman race, but now that he thought back on the Sand War, it appeared that the sandman race had a few things in common with the distributed intelligence behind the Ixith Goliath.

Although the two races were still very much different, Ves strongly believed that as long as they utilized the same model of controlling large amounts of weak subordinates, their methods should have many parallels!

This meant that Ves could not afford to ignore Commodore Reze's input for that reason.

As for the others, he could already sense their competitive spirits brewing behind their expressions.

No matter what ideas they might have, they had an obligation to secure as many advantages as possible for their respective groups.

The initial research into the captured Goliath was of great importance to them because it could give them a head-start into further studies.

Nothing was fair.

Nothing could be made fair.

Inequality always existed.

The key was to bend the scales in one's favor.

That was easier said than done.

As Ves collected his thoughts, he finally began the meeting.

"Alright, everyone. While I may not look like it, I am pretty sure that my galactic citizenship is the highest in this star system. Given that multiple parties have already expressed strong interest in the same research specimen, one that could only be captured with the help of one of my latest works no less, I think it is best if I have the final word on decisions being made today."

That sounded like an aggressive power grab, yet it might just work.

Professor Vector Loban responded with a smile. "Agreed. Everyone is aware of his accomplishments. He also has a reputation for honesty and integrity, which is one of the core reasons why his ascent to a tier 2 galactic citizen progressed so rapidly. Without the presence of a firm leader, we will all be spending hours arguing about the most trivial of decisions due to the strong demands from our respective leaders. Rather than waste our time, we should entrust Professor Larkinson to take charge of the initial research direction while we are preparing to ship our priceless cargo back to Yernstall."

The captured research specimen could not possibly remain in the dangerous frontlines of the Voribug War.

It needed to be transferred to the unofficial capital of red humanity as soon as possible.

Yet this common sense decision immediately invited dispute.

Dr. Gabriella Chamois immediately voiced her disagreement. "The Yernstall Central Star Node is not and has never been the safest star system of our civilization. That honor belongs to Bridgehead One, the first and ultimate stronghold of red humanity. It is located much further to the rear. Our war planets, Masterwork Installations and many other unfathomable high technologies have made the core of our empire impregnable against alien incursions. We have entrenched every light-hour of space for over half a century since the moment the ancient phase whales caught us by surprise. I respectfully recommend that the escort fleet should chart a route to Bridgehead One as opposed to Yernstall. The sooner it arrives, the sooner our Cybernetic Empress can begin to conduct her research on the Ixith Goliath in person."

"No!"

"That is out of the question!"

"Our leadership will never agree with transferring the research specimen to Bridgehead One!"

"I have to agree with the rest, Dr. Chamois." Ves spoke a few seconds later. "Logically, I do not disagree that Bridgehead One is more likely to keep the research specimen safe... against external enemies such as the native aliens and the mutated voribugs. That does not necessarily mean that it will remain 'safe' in the hands of an untrustworthy rival. I am sorry, but your Cybernetic Empire has not done itself many favors since its reappearance. I fully support the decision to escort the research specimen to the Yernstall Central Star Node."

The Sapphire of the Red Ocean was the most acceptable destination for this trip.

It was jointly controlled by the RA and the RF. It was also conveniently located at roughly equal distances from the borders of the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthn Pact. This favorable location turned it into a very popular trade and commerce hub starting from the early years of the opening of the Red Ocean.

In short, pretty much every major player maintained at least a decent presence in the massive star system!

The only ones who fell behind the rest were the Cybers, who missed a lot of developments in reality and worked hard to catch up on matters that they couldn't address during the time they stayed in isolation.

"Yernstall is not safe enough, nor is it a good location to conduct ground-breaking research on this fascinating organism." Gabriella argued.

Ves turned to the member of the Energy Weapon Tower.

"Doctor, this is not an issue relating to competence. It is a problem related to trust. The same reason why people are willing to give me the benefit of the doubt is also the same reason why it is denied to your star empire. The Polymath... does not have a good reputation for honesty and integrity in the Red Ocean. She has demonstrated not once, but multiple times that she is willing to break everyone's trust. Ostensibly, she is doing this to benefit our race as a whole, but in reality she always manages to place herself at the absolute top of the hierarchy. This is not a problem if she has proven herself to be a leader that we can trust."

Yet this happened to be a hurdle that no amount of technology could erase so conveniently!

"Our superiors would never agree to your proposal, Gabriella." Jovy Armalon told the scientist. "It is best to pick your battles carefully. Ves is correct. The Cybernetic Empire has shown very little goodwill since it has introduced itself. Your self-crowned sovereign prefers transaction over honor. That is her decision to make, but the consequence is that she has no right to demand our trust."

"Yernstall it is, then." Ves spoke. "We do not need to wait for confirmation from the higher ups. If they are not divided enough to enter into a gridlock, then they will definitely choose Yernstall."

The may be too noisy and far too congested, but it was the best compromise selection all-considered.

The research specimen might get transferred out not too soon afterwards, but that was not a relevant problem to him anymore.

Since the final decision on this matter was not up to them, the gathering did not linger too long on this subject.

The discussion soon moved on to another contentious subject.

"We require greater access to the Ixith Goliath." Dr. Gabriella Chamois said. "This is what we are entitled to based on our agreements with the Rubarthan Pact. However, we have received too few slots. Most of them are taken up by the Rubarthans themselves. What is worse is that we are not allowed to gather larger research samples."

Ves inwardly sighed. He could tell that this would probably take a while to resolve.

Still, it was better to be proactive than let others decide on these matters.

Chapter 7346 Earning Shares

Chapter 7346 Earning Shares

Much of the discussion dragged on for over an hour.

This did not surprise Ves all that much. Multiple powerful parties wanted to get a hold of the Ixith Goliath.

They preferably wanted to claim it wholesale, but that was clearly an impossible goal, so they settled on increasing their share of the spoils as much as possible.

In this zero-sum game, as long as one group managed to increase the size of their pie, they would inevitably take away bits from other groups.

Ves and the other gathered individuals all knew that the final distribution would be settled by the high-and-mighty tier 1 galactic citizens.

However, it would take at least a few weeks or so to securely transport the spoils back to the Yernstall Central Star Node.

This meant that there was a weeks-long window of opportunity where the local Rubarthans and other people who happened to be stationed in the neighborhood could gain access to the most coveted research specimen in the Red Ocean!

For many of them, this was the only chance they could observe and experiment with the Ixith Goliath in person!

Their qualifications were not good enough to enter the secret research institutions that would definitely be assigned to conduct proper studies on the research specimen.

This was why they had to fight hard to secure their rights and increase their share.

Ves was in the same boat as everyone. While he knew that his qualifications were a lot better than others, he was still a lightweight compared to the 14 Star Designers of the Red Ocean.

Even if he received an invitation to join one of those high-end research groups, he had no intention of accepting.

His place was in the mech workshop or in the field.

He could not forget that he was a mech designer first and an Ascended Giant second.

Trying to decipher and reproduce the phenomenon may be suitable for Star Designers who expanded their core capabilities to a wider range of products, but Ves had progressed two major cultivation ranks before he could do the same!

That said, Ves did not intend to waste this opportunity either. He already committed the Bluejay Fleet to serve as one of the core forces in the escort fleet.

"The recent battle has exposed severe shortcomings within my new giant army." Ves explained to the gathered representatives. "My Ascended Giants are set up to fight against the native aliens, so it shouldn't be a surprise they fared badly against the Goliath Hive. Nonetheless, their disappointing performance has dealt a heavy blow onto their confidence and morale. It is just right to retreat to their headquarters in the outskirts of Yernstall so that we can reorganize our ranks and rethink our combat doctrines. Since we are going back, we may as well offer our protection along the way."

This saved the other parties a lot of trouble. They were not ignorant of the insanely high value of the captured Goliath and knew that opportunities and malcontents might not be able to resist the urge to intercept the shipment along the way.

Even if infighting had subsided throughout human-occupied space, people's hearts could never be completely tamed.

Who knew whether a jealous rival or a cosmopolitan cell might pop up and deprive everyone else of the key to unlock stolen resonance for everyone!

The presence of over two-dozen Ascended Giants in full superdimensional gear and one of the few full superdimensional ace mechs in existence should provide a powerful deterrent!

Even if the giants did not acquit themselves well in the last battle, that did not mean that they were weak.

Sure, their performance against swarming aliens and the confounding Ixith Goliath might not be good, but they would definitely be able to pose a much greater threat against the native aliens or more conventional human forces!

Then there was Saint Rosa Orfan.

Since she had been able to defeat the first Level 8 Goliath in such a dominant fashion, her Riot Mark III would definitely be able to pose a significant threat against senior ace mechs.

Even if Saint Orfan could not defeat a fellow ace pilot with greater resonance strength, it shouldn't be a problem for her machine to tie down the enemy machine!

The presence of the Bluejay Fleet and its many high-level combat units massively increased the safety factor of the escort fleet.

Just hearing that a rising star like Ves and a powerful superdimensional ace mech guaranteed the protection of the research specimen should deter a lot of troublemakers right from the beginning!

It also meant that the other powers did not have to divert valuable combat assets to join the hastily organized escort force.

All of this meant that Ves and his clan gained more leverage in the negotiations.

While he tried to be somewhat fair, Ves was not an impartial moderator. He made sure to fight for his own benefits along the way.

His contributions and that of his subordinates could not be denied, so Ves was easily able to secure promises that he and his fellow Larkinsons could study the Ixith Goliath extensively while it was still in transit.

Of course, Ves also behaved carefully when he tried to establish a reasonable distribution of benefits for the other parties.

"Richard, since your Brownstone Principality can bring in high-level researchers the fastest, then you will occupy the greatest share of slots. Besides, far more Rubarthans fought and died in the last battle. They all sacrificed their lives in order to secure a future for their resurgent empire and its citizens. We cannot disregard their contributions, especially when the Rubarthans need the advancements from this new research direction the most."

No one could refute these arguments.

In the current war climate, people had no choice but to honor the sacrifices of all of the fallen.

This was the basis behind the willingness for every soldier to become a linefighter and participate in the brutal battles to defend red humanity.

While the rate of forced conscription was definitely on the rise, the vast majority of linefighters still consisted of volunteers.

This was of great importance as it was tied to national pride and other related factors.

The Rubarthan scion smiled in gratitude. "I am glad that you agree with my argument. Our men will rest easily knowing that their sacrifices have not been in vain."

It did not take Ves much thought to figure out that the Rubarthan Pact was in a diplomatically disadvantaged position at the moment.

Their state was getting hammered by the mutated voribugs.

Given that the new insectile threat had already begun to conquer native alien territory, the threat posed by the latter had diminished as of late.

Even the nunsers, orvens, puelmers and so on knew that trying to chew on a hard but relatively small bone like red humanity was pointless when the space cockroaches had begun to tear up their poorly defended hinterland regions!

The exceptionally fast growth and expansion rate of the mutated voribugs started to convince the native aliens that obsessing over defeating humans might not be a good idea anymore.

Even so, the gradual withdrawal of this threat did not provide much consolation to the Rubarthan Pact when the new enemy was so much worse!

Due to its territories becoming the frontline of the Voribug War, the Rubarthan Pact had no choice but to beg and plead for military support from the other major players.

Its poorly-timed declaration of independence only made things worse because it removed prior obligation for the RA and RF to defend this region of space.

Of course, the mechers and the fleeters would not actually withdraw completely and ignore this front.

They all knew that once the Rubarthan Pact fell, the mutated voribugs would just continue to roll over the Red Ocean Union and the rest of human-occupied space!

Everyone needed the Rubarthans to grit their teeth and hold on as long as possible.

So long as the damage was confined to Rubarthan space, everyone else could rest easy knowing that their populations and industries would not get ravaged by the devouring insects.

Nobody could deny that the Rubarthans needed the gains from this research project the most.

For these reasons and more, people were more willing to be a little more generous to the Rubarthan Pact during this sensitive time.

In any case, once the captured Goliath arrived in Yernstall, the Rubarthans would likely lose a lot of access from that point onwards.

It couldn't be helped. Their bargaining power was too poor. They relied too much on the assistance of other parties. This put them in a somewhat passive position.

Still, compared to the Rubarthans, they could still reassure themselves that they did not end up in the worst position.

That honor belonged to the Terrans!

While the Rubarthans could at least secure a seat at the table due to their earnest sacrifices, the Terrans had contributed almost nothing to the Voribug War.

Even if Saint Orfan managed to demolish the Ixith Goliath with the help of her Terran-made tier 3 Destroyer spear, that was not a reason for the Terrans to take credit.

The Larkinson Clan acquired the powerful Destroyer weapon by building up a mutually beneficial relationship with the Terran Alliance.

Once the Terrans passed on ownership of the tier 3 Destroyer weapon to the Larkinsons, they had renounced most if not all of their claims to the object.

What the Larkinsons did with the Destroyer spear was their business.

Besides, the Terrans did not even send a single volunteer to participate in the Voribug War.

While the Terrans and the Rubarthans had tentatively united around their shared opposition to the Red Two, they were anything but pleased with working together.

Their old animosity still caused their relations to remain relatively cool and distant. They cooperated out of necessity, not out of a shared sense of brotherhood.

The Rubarthans not only refused to stand up for the Terrans, but actively sought to exclude them as much as possible!

No one else spared any generosity towards the Terrans either.

They simply agreed with the argument that since the Terrans contributed nothing to the Voribug War or the Battle of Philaster Crestia, they naturally could not claim any share of the research in the early phase.

Perhaps they might be able to secure a handful of precious personnel slots during the real negotiations over in Yernstall, but that affected subsequent research activities.

"Our empire deserves the second-greatest share." Dr. Gabriella Chamois sternly argued. "We are the largest organized group that has committed core military forces to the Voribug War. I can present numerous clauses in the secret agreements that the Rubarthan Pact has signed with the Cybernetic Empire that entitles us to priority access to voribug research specimens."

"These contractual clauses may be valid, but this matter has grown way beyond the scope of bilateral agreements." Ves gently responded to the female researcher. "It is true that the Cybernetic Empire has made many promises, but it has yet to fulfill most of them. The war planets and bulk of military forces are still in transit. Only a small detachment of your 24th Gamma Scorchers Warfleet participated in the recent battle."

Gabriella's expression turned ugly. "I think you are underestimating the value of our commitments. We have provided valuable technical support since the first day of our formal cooperation with our Rubarthan brethren. The announcement of our large-scale mobilization to the Rubarthan front has

also raised the morale of every soldier and citizen. One of the principal reasons why our esteemed empress agreed to send our formidable warfleets and war planets to this front is because she has gained an understanding with the Rubarthans about the distribution of spoils and other concessions. Our future willingness to sacrifice the lives of our own soldiers is dependent on whether these terms are honored."

This was definitely true, so the Cybers could not be neglected in this regard.

No matter how much the Polymath exploited the weak bargaining position of the Rubarthans, the fact of the matter was that she ultimately agreed to deploy her forces to the bloodiest and most difficult front. The Cybernetic Empire deserved an equitable reward for this reason.

"Fine."

Chapter 7347 Hunter Rules

Chapter 7347 Hunter Rules

Compared to the Rubarthans and the Cybers, everyone else could only make due with lesser shares.

This included the Larkinsons, whose contributions in the Battle of Philaster Crestia were great, but whose impact in the greater Voribug War was minor.

Ves had a sense of proportion. He fought for slight advantages based on this position but made sure not to cross any red lines.

This way, he was able to secure himself and a bunch of Larkinsons stationed in the Bluejay Fleet extensive access to the research specimen.

Their numbers may be small, but they received expanded permissions in return.

Ves and the others had the right to collect significant quantities of research samples from the Goliath in stasis and borrow high-end lab instruments to conduct their studies.

This deal only lasted until the escort fleet arrived in Yernstall, so the others did not have much reason to fight to the death for the same benefits.

That did not mean the mechers and the fleeters had already given up this struggle.

Their eminent positions in Yernstall meant that they would ultimately claim the greatest shares of the spoils.

Of course, this would happen weeks later. The small delay granted enough time for the early movers to satisfy their own curiosity towards the mysterious properties of the Ixith Goliath.

"When it comes to research in AIs and distributed intelligence, no one can claim first place aside from the Red Fleet." Commodore Zonrad Reze strongly argued. "I happen to specialize in AI systems and other related fields. Just take a look at my credentials if you do not believe me. Give

me expansive access to the Ixith Goliath and I can promise you that I will do my best to construct a distributed intelligence model that has a chance of replicating the stolen resonance phenomenon."

Ves nodded in agreement. "I have worked together with him in the past. His qualifications are undeniable. He might not know much about biotechnology, but you can hardly find anyone better when it comes to developing or optimizing AI systems."

With Ves endorsing his secret AI friend, Commodore Zonrad Reze became satisfied with his benefits.

The others could only make due with less. The mechers particularly had to give up personnel slots and other benefits such as access to the most crucial Mentalist Crystal.

In any case, the Red Association would definitely be able to gain the upper hand in the main negotiations, so this small setback would only be temporary.

The Hunting Association was in a weird position.

To be honest, the Hunters did not make any direct contributions in the Voribug War, yet no one could ignore their importance on this matter.

This was because the Hunting Association was the only organized group that could consistently meet the insanely high demand for Mentalist Crystals.

Even if the other powers took control of the untamed planets in their territory, their expertise and specializations made them less suitable at managing exobeast populations and controlling dangerous mutations.

They would have to tie down valuable soldiers and mechs to hunting down and suppressing powerful calamity beasts.

The Hunters had proven themselves to be the best at controlling dangerous ecosystems with relatively small investments. They required a lot less personnel and large combat assets to keep the wild beasts contained.

They also happened to invest a lot of research into the origin, nature and mutation patterns of all kinds of exobeast species.

In short, the Hunting Association occupied an undeniable place in human society when it came to maintaining a stable and solid output of Mentalist Crystals.

"Mentalist Crystals have always been scarce since day 1." Eric Manot said in his gruff voice. "You fellows keep knocking on our doors for more of those magical crystals, but we can't get any more of them. There are only so many untamed planets, and there are only a small number of circumstances where random exobeasts develop the special mutation that leads them to growing their minds at a rapid pace."

"Is there nothing that the Hunting Association can do?" Commodore Reze asked with a frown.

The supply of Mentalist Crystal had the greatest impact on the fleeters, who were most desperate to build as many stolen resonance-capable warships as possible!

Their newfound dreams and ambitions might lead to a resurgence of the Red Fleet, but all of it would turn into nothing if they failed to acquire the core resource that played an essential role in their armament program!

"Territory." The seasoned Hunter responded. "We need more territory, unspoiled if possible. If you can conquer more star systems, our Hunters will be able to set up shop at any untamed or life-bearing planets that we can gain access to. Be aware that if you manage to double the size of human-occupied territory, we will likely be able to control more than double the amount of planets with ecosystems that are conducive to producing Mentalist Crystals. This is because the density of stars and planets is the least in the galactic rim, but much thicker when we move closer to the center of the dwarf galaxy."

That was true.

The Red Ocean might not be as big as the Milky Way, but their structures were somewhat similar.

There were many more planets and star systems closer to the center of both galaxies.

Those locations were also relatively more endowed with high-grade resources, which meant that the quality of exobeasts that evolved and mutated on those planets were generally stronger!

All of this meant that the output of Mentalist Crystals was definitely higher in the more desirable parts of the dwarf galaxy!

"If this is true, then the native aliens theoretically possess a much greater supply of Mentalist Crystals." Ves remarked with a frown. "Have they begun to harvest and make use of this strategy already?"

"Yes." Eric Manot replied. "The native aliens started out later than our Hunters. They are generally slower to act, but once they do, they move at a much larger scale. Mentalist Crystals have universal value. It is not only humans that can use them to make amazing stuff. The native aliens and particularly the puelmers have discovered a love for them. Not all of them make for good hunters who share comparable philosophies as ours, but there are enough of them that their own versions of our Hunting Association have begun to systematize the practice of hunting for the same crystals."

His words had massive implications.

The native aliens had known about the emerging threat of mutated beasts from an early period, but that did not necessarily mean they recognized how valuable it was to hunt them on a sustainable basis.

It was only after finding out about Mentalist Crystals and what it took to produce them that the native aliens became a lot more enthused about controlling and preserving untamed planets that were capable of producing this strategic resource!

Soon enough, the amount of crystals in the hands of the native alien races would definitely surpass the same amount in the hands of red humanity by at least two orders of magnitude!

The mere thought of it was enough to drive people like Ves mad with jealousy.

Territory was paramount, more than ever!

Territory translated into resources. With the meager amount of star systems that red humanity controlled, there was no way to harvest nearly enough Mentalist Crystals to satisfy current and future demand.

The native aliens were much better off in this regard!

They held vast stretches of territory, many of which happened to be quite resource-rich.

Even if all of those star systems were divided by numerous major races and thousands of minor races, the collective output of Mentalist Crystals would definitely be astounding!

There had to be a way for red humanity to obtain a share of this vast wealth.

Yet the most obvious solution was the most difficult one.

Invading native alien space was unthinkable at this moment.

The Red War heavily depleted the forces of red humanity.

Even if the return of the Cybernetic Empire brought lots of reinforcements, that was not nearly enough to switch from defense to offense.

People's willingness to attack alien space and conquer more territory may become higher after learning about the extravagant value of Mentalist Crystals, but how could they possibly fulfill their desires without enough force?

Even if they manage to claw back a few star systems, keeping them was an even greater problem.

The border regions had been on fire since the first day of the Red War.

Every human-occupied system came under regular attack. Those situated closer to alien space endured a lot more attacks, so the difficulty of holding recently conquered star systems was bound to be a bloody affair!

How could any group take the risk of investing manpower and resources into fortifying those star systems when the aliens would do their utmost to smash it all apart?

Ves pressed his fingers against his head in frustration.

Conquering territory was completely unviable in the current period!

How else would red humanity be able to gain more Mentalist Crystals?

A forbidden idea came to mind.

When Ves glanced at everyone else's expressions, he could tell that he was not the only one to make this realization.

It was because it was too obvious for them to ignore.

The other answer was trade.

By conducting an exchange of goods with the native aliens who controlled the vast majority of the Red Ocean, it was theoretically possible to acquire Mentalist Crystals at high cost.

However, Ves immediately ruled out this option.

Trade had several requirements.

Perhaps the meteoric rise of the mutated voribugs as a common threat may cause red humanity and the native aliens aligned to the Red Cabal to cool their hostilities and engage in limited forms of cooperation, but Ves did not believe that this would happen.

The hatred between the two sides had grown too much.

At best, they might make an implicit agreement to prioritize the eradication of the third threat before refocusing their efforts on their original enemies, but even that required both humans and aliens to withdraw the hatred that had been seething in their hearts.

Ves knew that this was too much to ask.

The only ones who were rational enough to promote this subtle form of cooperation were the cosmopolitans, but their outrageous treachery made them far too detestable to listen to them, let alone accept their suggestions.

Ves let out a sigh. "There has to be more ways to solve this problem than trying to do the impossible by expanding our territory. The fact of the matter is that red humanity will have to make do with our current meager territories for a long time, and that is only if we can hold back all of the alien threats. Isn't there a way to increase the yield in the untamed planets that are under the Hunting Association's control?"

The Hunter frowned when he heard that. "We are Hunters. We are the disciples of the Huntsman. We honor and revere the struggle between hunters and the hunted. To make such a proposal means that you do not have a good understanding of our creed. We hunt because it is our passion, not because of profit, resources or trophies. Those are side benefits at best. We sell captured exobeasts and valuable beast organs to outsiders in order to cover the expenses of our organization. To us, the true treasure is not the spoils, but the experience."

"Ah."

Ves realized his mistake. He had been too focused on acquiring Mentalist Crystals to remember that the Hunting Association was an organization that closely followed the Hunter's Code.

This was not an ordinary text, but a creed written and empowered by the Huntsman, one of the few god pilots in the Red Ocean.

"We are hunters, not farmers." Eric continued. "There is a big difference between the two. I cannot deny that selling Mentalist Crystals has been extremely profitable for us, but if we choose to deliberately tamper with the ecosystems of the planets for the purpose of increasing their yield, we have already deviated from the true meaning of hunting. Therefore, we cannot accept the practice of turning any of our existing hunting preserves into an overly artificial 'farm' for the sole purpose of producing more Mentalist Crystals."

Chapter 7348 Greed and Fear

Chapter 7348 Greed and Fear

The escort fleet departed from the Philaster Crestia System in a rush.

The higher-ups correctly judged that the grand prize needed to be brought back to safety as soon as possible.

The entire Rubarthan frontline was on fire.

The Goliath Hive may have faltered in the Philaster Crestia System, but they still had lots of swarms in the surrounding star systems. Who knew how long it would take for the mutated voribugs to dispatch another invasion force.

For these reasons and more, the Bluejay Fleet augmented by detachments hailing from the Rubarthan Pact and other major powers collectively moved to the nearest Lagrange point before entering into FTL travel.

What was important to note was that all of the ships in this newly formed task force consisted of fast movers. Each hull possessed a fairly modern superdrive, allowing them to travel to the Yernstall Central Star Node in weeks rather than months.

Ves had cemented his role as the overall leader of this impromptu task force.

As the only tier 2 galactic citizen in the neighborhood, no one else had the status or rank to contest his candidacy.

Perhaps there may be a few old and respected Rubarthan senior ace pilots in the region that could take over for him, but they were already busy with defending crucial Rubarthan strongholds against the voribug invasion.

The only other name that stood out was the 1365th Prince, otherwise known as Lord Richard Brownstone's grandfather.

While the man was an old and respected descendant of the Seventh Star Emperor, he was clearly so biased towards the Rubarthan Pact that he could not earn enough trust from the other major powers.

The same argument applied to pretty much any other prominent name from the colonial star empire.

This was why Ves managed to stay in charge.

He may not be anyone's first choice, but his strength was that he and his clan developed friendly connections with pretty much everyone.

That turned him into a consensus choice that pretty much everyone begrudgingly approved.

Ves felt honored by their trust. While he definitely harbored selfish motives of his own, he did not become a tier 2 galactic citizen by thinking about himself all of the time.

He deeply understood the importance of keeping the research specimen safe.

The native aliens would do everything to intercept it if they learned about its existence and its enormous research value.

That was not all. There were many other groups that had developed a strong interest in the Ixith Goliath. Ves could not underestimate their greed and desire to monopolize this prize!

"So how likely do you think our escort fleet will get intercepted along the way?" Ves asked.

"We cannot calculate that probability, director." Secret Keeper Zariel-775 responded.

The RC spy had been permanently attached to the Phase Lord Department for a while.

Despite his prominent role and important responsibilities, it was easy for most people to overlook his existence.

Whatever cultivation method he practiced not only made him easy to overlook, but also caused him to fade from people's minds a lot faster than usual.

This allowed Zariel-775 to observe a lot of people without making them too self-conscious about being observed.

Not even Ves knew the full scope of the spy's activities. He just knew that this was a necessary evil.

The Phase Lord Department still had to do a lot to earn back the trust of the rest of the Red Collective.

While Ves had taken this troublesome department over, he could only ensure the integrity of the top.

Other collies had joined the Phase Lord Department in order to reassert the main organization's control over the lower and middle layers.

Nobody reported any issues to Ves, so he assumed that everything was proceeding well enough.

Clearly, no problems had arisen that demanded his personal intervention.

As long as that was the case, Ves was too lazy to address any management problems that had emerged. The collies clearly possessed enough competence to sort out their own issues.

While Zariel-775's main responsibility was to monitor the loyalty of the Phase Lord Department and prevent a repeat of the past, he also served as a bridge to the Secret Department.

Right now, this mysterious department had collected a bunch of intelligence that necessitated a confidential meeting.

"While we cannot give you a precise calculation on how likely it is for our fleet to encounter enemies along the way, the odds are not zero." The spy said. "We have gathered indications that multiple clandestine and not-so-clandestine groups are urgently in the process of gathering what forces they can mobilize and dispatch them to our route as quickly as possible."

Ves furrowed his brows. "Since you guys know all of that, why haven't you done something already?"

"It is not that simple, Director Larkinson. The gathered forces may not necessarily be targeted against us. There are leaders who desire to acquire a Level 8 Ixith Goliath of their own, but they are also honorable enough to capture one themselves. They are urgently mobilizing their reserves in order to send them to the frontlines of the Voribug War. We cannot refuse their good intentions as you know as well as everyone how much the Rubarthans need the help."

Many people cast their covetous gazes at the research specimen captured by the Riot Mark III, but not all of them were crazy enough to break the rules.

Most leaders should be far-sighted enough to understand that it was best to earn one through their own efforts.

Previously, fighting against the mutated voribugs had been a thankless job, so not many powers had invested a large proportion of their available forces to this front.

This time was different.

Aside from the collective responsibility of defending red humanity against a common alien threat, the opportunity to acquire and study groundbreaking new alien biotechnologies had drastically increased in value!

The mutated voribugs had proven themselves to be a lot more innovative and ingenious than everyone thought!

What was even more important was that the Ixith Goliath may not be the only strain that could unlock radical new technological breakthroughs.

Perhaps a new voribug subspecies or Goliath strain may come along that could drastically improve another aspect of red humanity.

From wondrous new alloys to unthinkable new human augmentations, the mutated voribug race had proven itself to be a proven source of innovations!

A lot of ambitious people had already grown disappointed that they had missed a lot of opportunities to steal and adapt applications of phasewater technology during the early years of the opening of the Red Ocean.

Now, they could make up for past regrets by joining the first echelon of technological pioneers in the Voribug War!

Ves found it ironic that the desperate need to defend human civilizations from the omnicidal threat posed by the mutated voribugs failed to muster a lot of enthusiasm, but the possibility of radical new technological innovations had suddenly caused a significant spike in reinforcements!

"The Rubarthan Pact must be really happy this time."

"Yes." The hooded figure responded in an impassive tone. "This is not an ideal state of affairs, but it still constitutes an improvement, so we have no intention of discouraging such behavior. This also makes it difficult to discern whether these mobilizations are truly aimed at the mutated voribugs or this escort fleet."

Ves rubbed his hairless chin in thought. "Even so, I don't think that they should be stupid enough to try to intercept our shipment. Our task force is strong enough that only a large fleet has a chance to succeed, and it will definitely suffer a lot of casualties regardless of the outcome. It is impossible to hide the origins of all of those forces. Those who are already in high positions have no reason to throw away their futures and doom their entire organizations by harming the interests of every major player. Those who are weaker simply do not have the strength to contest our task force."

He really did not understand how anyone could be both strong and stupid enough to take such an insane risk.

However, Secret Keeper Zariel-775 saw it differently.

"Do not underestimate the madness of the human race. There are certain individuals who view the Ixith Goliath as an existential threat to their class or their profession. Driven by ideology, they have already voiced their strong opposition to the possible proliferation of stolen resonance technology."

"Ah. I see."

Nobody had derived any useful applications from the Ixith Goliath at this time, but that did not stop critics from voicing their fears.

Many mech pilots including high-ranking ones hated the concept of stolen resonance.

The fact that it apparently relied on the willpower that had been forcibly taken away from existing expert pilots turned it into a forbidden method in their eyes!

Not only did stolen resonance give people a reason to cause harm to high-ranking mech pilots, the existence of this phenomenon also introduced a 'competitor' that could take away their jobs!

Even if stolen resonance would always prove inferior to true resonance, the former could be applied to many more devices, which meant that they could surpass high-ranking mechs in value!

The Red Fleet harbored this dream most of all. To them, the development of so-called artifact warships barely allowed them to maintain their relevancy in the Age of Dawn.

If the fleeters truly wanted to become a force to be reckoned with, then they needed to produce stronger vessels, either dreadnoughts or the newly theorized stolen resonance warships!

While the fleeters would be more than happy to explore the possibilities of stolen resonance to the fullest, the mechers may not harbor the same degree of enthusiasm.

Mech pilots especially had reasons to reject this advancement.

So long as they were powerful and organized enough, it may not be out of the question for them to spontaneously come together and form a hastily organized punitive fleet for the sole purpose of destroying the research specimen!

Ves frowned deeper and deeper as he considered this insane but strangely plausible possibility.

"So the real threat is not the native aliens, the mutated voribugs or even the Cosmopolitan Movement." He said. "What we truly have to be concerned about is a mob of fanatic mech pilots who are willing to undertake a suicidal missions to defend the status of mech pilots, is that what you are trying to convey?"

Zariel-775 nodded under his mysterious hood. "Correct. There is so much movement taking place within the Rubarthan Pact and the Red Ocean Union that we cannot trace every single movement of starships and mechs. If the hostile parties are competent in counter-surveillance and so on, they may very well succeed in avoiding our tracking and secretly prepare an ambush at a point along our route."

"If they actually manage to pull this off, what sort of threats do we need to take into account?"

"The quantity of hostile mechs is unlikely to be high, director. If the movements become too large, they will likely be detected in advance. Our escort fleet can simply take a detour. The superluminal travel speed of our vessels are high enough that we can avoid contact against all but the most modern human forces. However, our enemies do not necessarily have to outnumber us in order to complete their objectives. It is not out of the possibility to encounter numerous expert pilots and even ace pilots."

That caused Ves to frown even further.

High-ranking mech pilots were all men and women with honor.

Yet that also made them a lot more dangerous than other people.

What if their warped thinking caused them to believe that the Ixith Goliath would enable the spread of evil?

As long as they could justify it, these madmen were capable of anything!

Ves could very well believe that certain high-ranking mech pilots would be willing to throw away their bright futures and fight against his task force just to destroy the possibility of popularizing stolen resonance technology!

Chapter 7349 Outdated Principles

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The thought of getting attacked by a small army of honorable mech pilots sounded ridiculous in this day and age, but the circumstances forced Ves to take this threat seriously.

He truly felt as if he had entered into a bizarre timeline.

Due to the appearance of a single catalyst for explosive technological change, those within human society who had reason to oppose the advances may actually choose to forsake their oaths and fight against their fellow brothers and sisters!

It all depended on what these deluded soldiers valued and how they interpreted their service.

Though Ves did not want to believe that these discontented fellows could muster up a force that was strong enough to threaten the safety of the research specimen, the Secret Department's warning made it clear that this was no joke.

"Remember that these extremists do not need to be strong or numerous enough to defeat the entire escort fleet." Secret Keeper Zariel-775 reminded him. "They only need to possess enough capabilities to destroy the Ixith Goliath that is currently frozen in stasis. If these soldiers are fanatical enough to disregard their lives and reputations, then they may be able to accomplish the impossible. Never underestimate the willingness for humans to sacrifice themselves for their ideals."

In other words, only the most insane and deluded soldiers would attempt such an insane operation.

As long as they committed to this action and successfully intercepted the escort fleet, a confrontation would be inevitable.

There was no way to persuade these misguided fools into breaking off their attacks.

This was because they were utterly convinced that the Ixith Goliath posed an existential threat against the honor and status of high-ranking mech pilots!

Ves tiredly rubbed his face. "These goddamn mech pilots. The MTA's generational propaganda has pushed their status to an unnatural height. For so many years, our entire society has treated them as the protagonists of the Age of Mechs. Now that we have transitioned to the Age of Dawn, it

appears that many of these supposedly honorable soldiers and warriors are unwilling to relinquish their monopoly on true resonance."

He could understand the perspective of this class of people. They enjoyed an eminent status because they all held the potential to become the ultimate human gods. Now that an emerging new technology appeared that had the potential to steal and commoditize their greatest strength, many of them would definitely feel pissed!

However, Ves felt this was a shortsighted perspective.

The Red War and the Voribug War had been grueling to red humanity.

The border regions suffered an enormous degree of erosion. Even if the frontlines hadn't been moved back by a lot, that was only because the major human powers had been expending a lot of military forces that they had previously imported from the Milky Way Galaxy en masse.

Those margins had grown dangerously thin after years of fighting.

Only the arrival of the Cybernetic Empire brought up red humanity's available troop numbers, but the vast military buildup of Bridgehead One alone could not possibly cover the needs of every front.

Red humanity needed the power of stolen resonance.

Ves readily acknowledged the ethical and moral problems related to acquiring sources of extraordinary willpower, but human civilization could not afford to let these issues hinder the development of a lifesaving branch of technology!

He made his stance clear to the secret keeper who undoubtedly received an assignment to determine his stance.

"These dissidents are not evil, but misguided." Ves honestly voiced his own thoughts. "Their honor exists to serve our race. Their principles exist precisely to contain their destructive power and limit the damage they can do to our society. When the changing times have caused a misalignment between their principles and the current needs of the human race, the correct response is to recontextualize their values. Their insistence on sticking to their outdated rules and their utter refusal to adapt themselves to the current era is unacceptable. We have no need for fossils who are obsessed with the glory of a fading age. As long as they become a hindrance... then destroying them is justified."

A solemn silence ensued as both Ves and the secret keeper contemplated the rich meanings behind those words.

"Well-articulated." Zariel-775 made a small nod in acknowledgement. "I suggest you turn that into a speech and broadcast it throughout the entire escort fleet. Let everyone know what is at stake and what the correct response should be. Do not make them regret turning their weapons against their fellow humans if the time calls for it. We cannot fail in our mission. The Ixith Goliath must reach the Yernstall Central Star Node."

"I guarantee that my forces and I will do our best." Ves responded. "I cannot make any other promises than that. I do not control all of the variables."

"Much of the safety of the research specimen relies upon the will of Saint Rosa Orfan. Can we trust her to do what is necessary and turn her deadly spear against fellow mech pilots and maybe even other high-ranking mech pilots?"

Ves smiled. "She will. She has her principles, but they are noticeably looser and less stuffy than that of others. Saint Orfan is a woman who chases after power. I do not think she cares too much about the possible rise of stolen resonance technology. She has her own destiny. If anything, the arrival of new competition will prompt her to fight harder."

"That is how a true strongwoman should think." Zariel-775 gave a rare hint of satisfaction. "Make sure to prepare your newest ace mech as well as your Ascended Giants for... anti-mech combat. The probability of facing warships is low, but the probability of fighting against mechs is 100 percent."

"There will be no problems in this regard." Ves confidently said. "My giants may have faltered when fighting against the Goliath Hive, but it will be a different story when they fight against more familiar adversaries. As for my Riot Mark III, it has very few challengers throughout human-occupied space. The only threat that we need to be serious about is another full superdimensional ace mech. Can you tell us if it is possible to encounter one of them along our journey?"

The secret keeper paused for a short moment. "We do not have all of the information, director. We have done our best to track every movement of mid-to-high-grade superdimensional matter, and we know where the Rubarthans and other powers have spent much of their bounty on, but... the veil of secrecy is hard to pierce. That said, I am of the opinion that this possibility is not high. Only the most trusted and proven of heroes have received the first batch of full superdimensional mechs. If they have disregarded their orders and chosen to take matters into their own hands, then they will have thoroughly burned their bridges and declared themselves renegades to all of red humanity."

In other words, it was not impossible for Saint Rosa Orfan to get confronted by an equal or superior opponent!

The very thought of it evoked a lot of frustration in Ves. Full superdimensional mechs had become the latest and greatest trump card of red humanity. These were ultimate weapons that needed to be employed against the real enemies of their civilization.

To have these magnificent machines turn their formidable strength against each other was a huge waste!

Regardless of who won or lost, red humanity would definitely bleed as a consequence!

Though Ves was not willing to believe that any of the major powers managed to lose control of a full superdimensional mech, he could not afford to disregard this possibility.

It would be safer to assume the worst-case scenario would happen and plan around this future.

"We have a lot of work ahead of us, then." Ves said with new determination. "My staff and I need intelligence. We need to know what possible threats of significance that we may face. Please gather any scrap of information you have on ace pilots with strong principles that are close enough to be able to intercept our fleet. They should be our focus. As for expert pilots and ordinary soldiers, I do

not see how they can pose a significant threat. Perhaps you can trace their movements if they are trying to act in coordination with hostile saints."

"Do not tell us how to conduct our investigations. We have already begun to monitor the individuals in question. The entire Astral Octagon has invested significant resources in assisting our work. This matter is too important to overlook even the smallest of details."

The two continued to talk a bit about specific measures. Security needed to be upgraded and communications needed to be locked down.

The escort fleet also needed to chart a more circuitous and randomized route in order to make interception harder.

This would unfortunately extend the date of arrival, but it couldn't be helped. Following a mostly straight line from Philaster Crestia to Yernstall was way too predictable!

"Is there anything else I should know?" Ves asked as the meeting came to an end.

"Yes. Although you have resigned from your position as the chief councilor of the Upper Council of the Red Collective, large developments have occurred that you should be informed about. Multiple groups of individuals have founded a number of cults. The individuals in question are both extraordinary and highly accomplished in their new fields. We believe that their cults have great potential and will become a fixture in our evolving society."

Ves nodded. "I am sure they are important and all, but I don't have time to examine them at the moment. The laboratory calls. I have been holding myself back long enough. Studying the Ixith Goliath now that it is still within my reach supersedes almost all of my other needs. If you have any other information that I should know, then compile a report and send it to me. You can contact me directly if anything happens that is directly related to the security of our package and our escort fleet."

He had lost his patience. He had enough of talking. Once the secret keeper confirmed that he had conveyed everything essential, Ves quickly said goodbye before leaving the meeting room.

Before he headed over to the laboratory, he briefly returned to his state room and met with his children again.

"Papa!"

"You're finally back!"

Ves temporarily shed his burdens and smiled as he bent down to hug his two children.

"I missed you so much." He said as he hugged and took in the scents of his son and daughter.

"Meow." Lucky lazily yawned as he rested on a couch.

"Miaow~" Clixie enthusiastically trod forward and pressed her body against his legs.

Most of his thoughts about the possibility of fighting against human extremists faded from his mind as he quickly brought his children up to date about his latest battlefield exploits.

His children had been scared when they saw the mighty Ixith Goliath beat up the Dark Apostle.

Ves felt rather embarrassed, but he tried his best to tell his children that he was not as threatened as it seemed.

"Your old man still has a few trump cards, you know. I never enter the battlefield without a trick or two. The Level 8 Goliath may have caught me by surprise by how powerful it turned out, but I am not that easy to kill."

"Liar." Andraste accused her own father. "That battle was way too close. Saint Rosa is the only reason why you got away so easily. Please don't be so reckless next time. Why don't you call back Dise and other powerful Larkinsons? We have so many of them, papa!"

"I would like to, but it is not that simple, my dear." Ves explained with a sigh. "The Premier Fleet is currently contracted to assist the Terran Alliance in defending its own frontline. That is not a responsibility that they can shake off lightly. Even if they want to come back and reinforce us, the distance is too far. They won't make it in time."

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Chapter 7350 Ves' Advantage

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After addressing and casting aside many distractions, Ves finally freed enough time to conduct his studies on the Ixith Goliath.

As he transferred to the highly secure lab compartment, he began to familiarize himself with the findings made by other researchers.

He surveyed the basic data and tried to fit that into his incomplete theoretical model.

Due to his greater contact and familiarity with the Ixith Goliath, Ves possessed more insights on the massive creature.

This caused others to ask many different questions. He answered them as earnestly as possible, though he cautioned the researchers that his analysis was highly subjective and lacked scientific rigor.

Nonetheless, the process of freely sharing knowledge and opinions with each other elevated everyone's mood and boosted their productivity.

Before they arrived at Yernstall, they were not so different from each other.

Their expertise and allegiances may differ from each other, but during the following weeks, they were all human researchers who had been brought together to pursue a common goal.

"Our work determines how quickly and how extensively our race and civilization may benefit from the research specimen." Ves addressed the eclectic mix of scientists and engineers. "Our lab instruments may be limited and our permissions even more so, but we are the pioneers of an entirely new branch of technology. Our labor will build the foundation of a potential solution to many different problems. We can be the saviors of red humanity, but only if we forget our borders and work as a united people."

Though his words might not convince the researchers to drop all of their guard against each other, they undoubtedly helped to promote a more beneficial atmosphere at the labs.

In order to encourage this mindset further, Ves deliberately restricted external communications even further. He did not want people to contact their respective superiors and receive orders that might turn out counterproductive in fostering earnest cooperation.

Of course, Ves had his own selfish motivations.

The Larkinson Clan was not big enough compared to the major players.

Its research institutions had grown considerably due to continuous investments, but they were still far behind the truly impressive R&D institutions.

While Ves already made a deal that ensured that the Larkinson Clan gained extensive access to the common research results of all of those cutting-edge institutions, the keyword here was 'common'.

More specific and specialized discoveries and design applications did not fall within this category.

This ensured that every major player could comfortably invest in their own trump cards without worrying about premature leaks.

The terms of the agreement meant that the Larkinson Clan could not completely sit back and relax while freeloading off other people's works.

Another reason why Ves wanted to promote cooperation was because he had greater ambitions.

He wanted to develop his own unique design application, one that was deep enough to make a difference and advanced enough to make it difficult to replicate.

In order to fulfill this goal, he needed to obtain a broad enough base of understanding of the mechanics behind the Ixith Goliath.

This was why he moved around and checked in on everyone's research efforts.

It did not matter whether he understood the complicated science behind their studies. He recorded all of the data and stuffed it somewhere safe so that he could make better use of it at a later date.

Talking to so many people not only allowed him to get into contact with so many different perspectives, but also broadened his horizons.

"Many of our colleagues have become obsessed with the Mentalist Crystal, but I think they are overlooking the real treasure." One biotech researcher told Ves. "As far as I am concerned, the neurological organs surrounding the large crystal are the true core of the Ixith Goliath. The mutated voribugs have discovered how to tap into the 'willpower' stored inside the crystal in a controlled manner. I am currently trying to map out and decipher the bioprogramming of the alien race. As long as we can obtain a 'blueprint' of the core neurological systems and translate it into a format that humans can understand, we can potentially replicate the process of generating stolen resonance on the same crystal."

"Your theory is quite sound." Ves said with an impressed voice. "You will have to start out from scratch, though. From what I have observed so far, the mutated voribugs have developed a completely independent approach to biotechnology. They use different theoretical models and standards."

The researcher nodded. "That is true, but the Rubarthan biotech industry has already made a start of reverse-engineering the biological systems adopted by the mutated voribugs. I can take advantage of their results so far and apply them to the Ixith Goliath's neurological systems."

"That sounds convenient. Will you be able to achieve faster results?"

"Not as much as you think. The depth and complexity behind the neurology of a Level 8 Goliath is many times greater than that of a low-level cannon fodder bug. The expansive use of high-grade materials is also hindering my work. Scan results are fuzzier and less precise than I would like, and it is much more difficult to simulate their operations in our existing computer systems. We are forced to cooperate with simulation program developers to upgrade and perfect their existing products. The only other alternative is to conduct live tests, but there are too many restrictions."

Live tests required the taking of samples.

This was heavily restricted because the bigshots back in Yernstall wanted to obtain a research specimen that was as intact as possible.

The state of the frozen Level 8 Goliath was already far from perfect. The Riot Mark III had extensively damaged the monstrosity before it finally entered into stasis. Further damage could exacerbate these wounds and lead to the permanent loss of valuable organic structures.

For these reasons and more, most researchers did not have permission to take samples.

The most senior scientists that did enjoy this privilege could only use it in a very limited fashion.

While all of this hindered their own research, it couldn't be helped. Their status and capabilities weren't high enough to entrust them with greater responsibilities.

Ves reached out and patted the other man's shoulder. "Do your best. Whether you can be selected to conduct experiments after we have arrived at our destination depends on your ingenuity. This is your chance to get involved in the next big trend."

After speaking a few more words of encouragement, he continued to circulate among the labs and absorbed everything relevant as if he was a sponge.

Once he had completed his rounds, he settled down and began to organize his gains.

His tentative ideas gradually became more solid as he filled up more and more gaps.

When Gloriana came to check up on him, she inquired what he had on his mind.

"I think it is possible for us to generate stolen willpower on an artificial basis before we arrive at Yernstall."

"What?!" His wife reacted with shock. "Are you joking?"

Ves responded with a confident smile. "Of course not. I am tentatively sure we can pull it off. My theoretical model is still untested, but I am confident that I have figured out enough of the mechanics to get close enough to the truth."

"This..." She still could not believe her husband.

"It is not as big as you think. I only want to conduct a small-scale experiment in order to develop a proof of concept. We can manage it in time as long as we take shortcuts and simplify as many variables as possible. I cannot do it alone, though. I need your help as well as the help of others. This will have to be a team effort."

Gloriana raised her eyebrow. "You need my help as well?"

"Yes." Ves responded as he stared at her head or more precisely what was inside of her skull. "You are the only person around who has a rare and exclusive cranial implant set that is based on Mentalist Crystal fragments. That not only gives you much greater personal experience with these miracle crystals, but should also give you a more intuitive understanding on how to interface with them. I need you to work on how to build a bridge between a stored source of willpower and the rest of the experimental device."

"That is... a reasonable argument. However, have you thought that we do not have any spare Mentalist Crystals on hand? You already used the one that you previously obtained from the Hunting Association on the Ultimate Module of the Minerva Mark II."

Ves nodded. "That is true, Gloriana, which is why we can only make due with creating an artificial substitute. It won't be nearly as good as the real thing, but it is better than nothing."

She narrowed her eyes in suspicion. "...I will trust you on that. Please give me as much data as possible so that I can begin my work. No. Give me access to the object that you claim can function as a substitute. I need to observe it myself in order to determine the veracity of your claims. I do not want to waste my time on an experiment that was never viable in the first place."

"I knew you would ask this question. I have already retrieved the item from my vault and kept it somewhere safe. Follow me, please."

Ten minutes later, Ves and Gloriana exited a secure chamber.

The latter's expression no longer showed any skepticism or incredulity.

"I had forgotten that you had taken those spoils." She said. "I still have doubts about whether we can effectively make use of them in the short amount of time we have available, but... it is worth an attempt. That I can agree upon. I can work with this. While I am convinced that the Mentalist Crystal plays an essential role in moderating and controlling the core processes of generating stolen resonance, if you only want to create a proof of concept, then our standards will not be as high. I will need to go back and study more academic literature related to Mentalist Crystals before I can give you a basic plan."

"Go ahead, honey. I have already spoken with a number of people about obtaining greater access to confidential research reports. Mentalist Crystals are one of the hottest resources in the Red Ocean. There are many parties that have developed their own unique insights and understanding of them. Obviously, we can't obtain all of them, but what we can get at this point should already be enough to make a start."

"I will do my best, but please take into account that I am not deeply versed in biotechnology. This has been your interest more than mine, Ves."

"That is okay." Ves smirked. "I think you are misunderstanding my intentions. It is not my goal to construct a biomechanical device. Biotechnology is strange and messy. My familiarity with it is not enough to complete my goal. I intend to replicate a very simplified version of the relevant processes of the Ixith Goliath in a mechanical construct."

His wife widened her eyes for a moment. "I... see. This is your unique advantage. Unlike others, life is a plaything in your hands. You can instill life in any mech or object as long as you work earnestly enough. I understand now. This... has potential. If you can truly make your device out of conventional technology, then it will be much easier for me to develop the necessary bridge!"

They enthusiastically exchanged their thoughts and fleshed out their ideas even further.

"If this is the case, why not make it out of archetech?" She suggested. "Archetech is derived from the biological systems of the arche race, so it is more 'natural' to use this tech base to simulate a process that is anchored to life."

Ves shook his head. "Let's not overcomplicate matters. We need to keep it simple. We can think about using archetech if we want to make a more feature-complete product."