

The Mech Touch

Chapter 7351 Central Willpower Chamber

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A few days passed by. The laboratories turned into hives of activity as every scientist or engineer with decent qualifications conducted R&D activities related to the priceless research specimen.

With permission, they harvested carefully chosen samples from the Goliath in stasis before proceeding with their own projects.

As far as coordination was concerned, every group and subgroup pursued their own goals.

Total coordination was impossible. The Rubarthans, mechers, fleeters, Cybers and Larkinsons all had their own ambitions. While they agreed to share their common research results with each other, that did not mean they intended to share all of their secrets.

Besides, their diverging specializations made it difficult to communicate across disciplines. Ves found that there was not much use in listening too much to the technical explanations of other specialized researchers. Their vast depth in fields such as biotechnology far exceeded his eclectic knowledge base.

Fortunately, Ves already had enough work on his plate. After his discussion with Gloriana, he and his Larkinsons continuously engaged in their own research.

Since Ves possessed the most coherent idea out of them all, he took on the role of project lead and determined the overall direction of the experimental research project.

He not only served as the glue that put the different pieces together, but also offered vital help related to imparting life into previously lifeless objects and constructing abstruse E-technology solutions.

Gloriana set her sights on developing a substitute for a Mentalist Crystal and developing a basic interface between this object and the anticipated distributed intelligence.

She was quite suited for this task as she had first-hand experience with Mentalist Crystals herself.

The female mech designer had acclimated herself to her cranial implant set for several months now, and she had gained considerably more advantages out of it than anyone had expected.

Mentalist Crystals appeared to be dead and static, but Gloriana had a different perspective on the matter. She viewed it like a vessel that possessed the touch of life and therefore had the potential to grow.

She consciously trained herself and made heavy use of the sophisticated calculation and inference capabilities of her cutting-edge cranial implant set.

By continuously engaging in the same kind of exercises, she found that the Arachne 01 gradually performed faster and more efficiently with every passing week.

Although the growth rate was not as dramatic as she wished, she grew delighted with the results!

The progress showed that the hardware limitations of the Mentalist Crystal fragments were not completely set in stone, but could be forcibly raised upwards on an incremental basis!

After conducting more experiments on herself, she eventually found out that strong spirituality also had a significant influence on the operation and expansion of functions of the Mentalist Crystals.

She did not have a clear idea how the Red Association's research institutions managed to harness the Mentalist Crystal fragments effectively at the start, but she vaguely learned how to upgrade them by utilizing her mind and spirituality alone.

For example, radiating them with Alexandria subtly increased their coordination and decreased their latency.

Conducting high-intensity math calculations marginally raised their peak processing power.

Not all of these experiments produced the desired results.

Each of them came with an element of risk. She found that channeling strong emotions into them was counterproductive. The crystals actually resonated with strong feelings such as anger and joy and amplified them even further!

She quickly ended this reckless trial as a result in order to minimize the chances of losing control.

In any case, her own experiences with manipulating the Mentalist Crystal fragments gave her enough of an understanding to make an attempt at designing an artificial substitute.

Though she had to force herself into developing a product that would definitely be full of flaws and shortcomings, she knew that this was a necessary step to mastery in a highly promising new field.

She had to tap into many different disciplines in order to make substantial progress.

Not only did she have to study a lot of academic literature related to Mentalist Crystals, she also had to tap into her own limited understanding of spiritual engineering in order to design the intangible aspects of her experimental work.

Although Gloriana did not possess the same depth and passion in cultivation science as her husband, she did not neglect this field in the slightest.

In order to ensure her present and future collaborations with Ves remained smooth, she had to invest at least a few hours every week into studying his more accessible theoretical advancements.

She also kept up with the most mainstream developments in the rapidly growing field of E-technology. Gloriana possessed enough awareness to know that she did not have what it took to excel in this field, but it was not necessary for her to go so deep.

As long as there was anything she did not understand, she could always save up her questions and ask them to her husband whenever they encountered each other again.

Ves did not always have the answers, but his insights often led her to the right direction.

Through her focused efforts, she gradually managed to develop a basic model of a 'central willpower chamber'.

This was the standard terminology that the scientists in the escort fleet had already adopted when referring to their own attempted substitutions of the Mentalist Crystal.

Initial calculations and experiments revealed that there were huge theoretical and empirical gaps between their own rudimentary devices and the real deal.

"I still do not know how Mentalist Crystals are formed and what makes them so good at harmonizing and amplifying mental activity." Gloriana exasperatingly explained to her husband one day. "One of the more accepted theories is that Mentalist Crystals appear to be the E-energy crystallization of strong mental activity. I am not so sure about that, but they are a universal solution to many problems related to this field. They can do so much that it is ridiculous. That regrettably also makes them highly desirable to anyone with a use for them. This is why the need for substitutes is growing stronger with each passing day."

"And you guys are having trouble with that?" Ves asked.

His wife responded with a brittle smile. "I have not worked on this matter for too long, but I have already crashed into many different walls. It is impossible. A Mentalist Crystal is already the perfect vessel for all forms of mental activity as far as I am concerned. It is the philosopher's stone of mind-based E-technology. Even the force of willpower falls within its extremely wide domain. How can I possibly develop a substitute of perfection when I can only make due with lesser materials and highly flawed theories? I would be lucky if I could create a substitute that possesses just 0.01 percent of the capabilities of a Mentalist Crystal of an equivalent volume."

Ves noted a very important implication in her words. His eyes lit up as he considered a possible way to succeed, if not as conveniently as he liked.

"Is it possible to scale up your experimental substitute so that it can potentially perform at a similar scope as the one used by the Ixith Goliath?"

Gloriana immediately frowned. "It is not that simple, Ves. Many of us have already thought about it. Perhaps we can forcibly increase the raw processing power and other simple parameters by

constructing a central willpower chamber the size of a heavy mech, but it will still fall short in programming, versatility, malleability and other important parameters."

"These shortcomings may be serious, but we are not looking to develop a perfect substitute for a Mentalist Crystal. We just want a product that works on a basic level. This is what a proof of concept is all about. Even if we cannot shrink the central willpower chamber in the future, it doesn't matter. Large warships have so much available capacity that they can easily fit a module the size of a city block inside their massive hulls. Will you be able to construct a central willpower chamber that is large enough to produce measurable levels of stolen resonance?"

His wife frowned in thought. This was a difficult question.

"It depends on whether your work and that of others are effective enough. I can only tell you that the results on my end will be limited. As far as scale is concerned, I can attempt to make a central willpower chamber that is roughly as large as a mech. We do not have enough workshop space and high-grade materials to produce anything larger. It is also excessive in my opinion."

"That is okay. I just want you to work on a component that is large enough to be effective. The stronger your work, the lower the burden on the rest of us. We are all working on new and uncertain fields."

"How is your own work progressing, Ves?" His wife curiously asked. "Have you managed to develop adequate substitutes to the so-called sentient organic components?"

Ves smiled back. "That is much easier, actually. I am basing my works off smart metal. Nanotechnology is the ideal inorganic base for my experimental attempt. I have already conducted a fair amount of studies in advance in preparation for the development of my highly anticipated Polymetal mech. In fact, I am already dreaming of incorporating stolen resonance with this upcoming elemental Carmine mech, though the scale requirements are a major setback."

If Gloriana and the others truly couldn't shrink the size of the central willpower chamber, then it was not feasible to integrate it into standard-sized mechs.

Perhaps they might be able to get away with inserting them into juggernauts, but that was a whole different story.

It was better than nothing. As long as the Hunting Association could not increase its output of Mentalist Crystals, this special hyper material would always remain in very short supply, the same as superdimensional matter.

As one of the few parties in the Red Ocean that controlled the supply of superdimensional matter, Ves was well aware of the difficulty of acquiring monopolized resources.

Unless the Larkinson Clan was willing to trade significant amounts of superdimensional matter or other extremely scarce goods with the Hunting Association, it was impossible to acquire a second whole Mentalist Crystal anytime soon!

The relationship between the Larkinson Clan and the Hunting Association was also very complex at this time.

While there were signs of improvements now that the Hunting Association developed a growing desire for his theorized Mergewater mechs, they had yet to move into solid action.

Perhaps he needed to contact the Hunters and make actual progress in their cooperation.

Still, Ves did not expect to obtain too many Mentalist Crystals. The demand remained too high. There were much more powerful people that could offer much greater concessions for the same good.

Tier 1 galactic citizens such as god pilots, Star Designers and fleet admirals had much greater wealth and capabilities at their disposal. The Larkinson Clan could not compare to these giants at this time.

Even Ves could only offer limited benefits to the Hunting Association. Mergewater mechs may have their strengths, but Hunters had more ways to become strong enough to influence the balance of power than relying on an advanced version of a Carmine mech.

The Hunting Association clearly did not intend to put all of its eggs in a single basket. Now that it had grown in scale, it was prudent to engage in broad development.

Ves had no doubt that the HA already contracted many other mech designers to develop machines that were also suitable to be used by Hunters.

The Huntsman was still a mech pilot, so it was impossible for this leader to neglect the value of mechs in this age.

Ves needed to bring more to the table if he wanted to entice Hunters into trading more Mentalist Crystals to him. He needed them if he wanted to develop more powerful but also fairly compact machines, including his own personal Polymetal mech!

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Chapter 7352 Sentient Inorganic Components

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Ves felt disappointed when he learned that Gloriana could not create a compact central willpower chamber.

An excessively large substitute for the Mentalist Crystal imposed many design limitations. It was practically impossible to make anything practical for individual mechs, let alone humans.

Aside from using Mentalist Crystals or possibly Mentalist Crystal fragments, there was no easy way to overcome this scale restriction.

However, his wife came up with a possible idea on how to circumvent this hard limitation.

"What if we construct the CWC out of superdimensional alloy?" She proposed one day.

"Superdimensional technology has advanced to the point where we have just begun to develop products that are ultra-dense to the point of possessing impossible features if we do not account for the spatial warping. Just as how a phase lord such as yourself is able to fold your massive true body into the size of a normal human, we should theoretically be able to develop a central willpower chamber that is actually the size of a heavy mech but occupies the space of a heavily armored trooper."

That... actually sounded like a viable idea!

Ves quickly calmed himself down before he got too excited about this proposal. "It sounds viable, but I think the gap between idea and realization is much bigger than you think. Superdimensional technology is by no means simple. From what I have observed from your work so far, the CWC is bound to become a complicated piece of engineering in both the material realm and the imaginary realm. When you spatially compress all of that stuff into a volume that is at least a hundred times smaller, a lot of funky physics takes place. Everything will get out of whack. We will have to do a lot of work to untangle the knots and troubleshoot all of the bugs. In the worst case scenario, it might require the lives of phase lords to overcome the restrictions imposed by all of the spatial shenanigans."

All of that sounded vague and dubious, but Ves tried to account for the worst-case scenarios.

He did not want his wife and everyone else to think that superdimensional technology was their jail-out-of-free card. Nothing came for free.

His wife grew more composed after he set her straight.

"Hmm, regardless of whether we can shrink the size of the most essential part by utilizing superdimensional alloys, the cost is bound to be excessive. Superdimensional matter is just as scarce as Mentalist Crystals for most parties. We are an exception to this rule due to controlling the supply of this critical resource, but... that may not be enough to justify the effort of developing this special solution."

The Larkinson Clan could pursue many different research directions. That did not mean that its researchers should pursue every shiny idea.

The clan's R&D capacity remained limited. Ves and the others could not afford to waste their time on trying to realize overly niche and impractical ideas.

"We can conduct a viability study when we have enough time later on." Ves told his wife. "The idea still has merit, but we need to know more on how much it will cost and how much work we need to do in order to make this possible."

For now, it was best to shelve the notion of developing a superdimensional central willpower chamber. They absolutely could not afford to add more variables and introduce more complications in their studies.

Gloriana therefore resumed her work on developing a large and unwieldy CWC despite her personal dislikes.

Ves meanwhile spent his time on developing the sentient inorganic components.

At this stage, all of the researchers had accepted his definitions for the large number of sub-units tasked with producing the mental activity required to stimulate the CWC.

The original Ixith Goliath was largely made up of sentient organic components.

These were very small lifeforms that could easily fit in the palm of a person's hand.

While they looked and acted like static blobs of alien flesh, they were actually living and thinking organisms.

Many of the samples taken from the Goliath in stasis had definitely proven the sapience of these SOC.

Even if they were extremely stupid and simple-minded, there was no doubt that they could generate just enough thoughts and emotions to satisfy one of the conditions of generating stolen resonance.

There were many different wonders related to SOCs. What concerned most of the researchers was how to increase the scale of stolen willpower manifestations.

The Ixith Goliath broke the rules as far as expert pilot-level true resonance was concerned.

The massive creature was able to empower a body with the volume of a large city with stolen resonance.

The reach, consistency, strength and abundance of stolen resonance far exceeded what any individual expert pilot could generate under the same circumstances!

Therefore, the most crucial demand was to figure out how to scale up resonance manifestations.

As long as they deciphered this crucial secret, it may be possible to apply principles of this tech to mechs, thereby allowing expert pilots to empower much larger mechs with true resonance!

It even gave birth to an outrageous idea!

What if an expert pilot interfaced with a 'mech' that just happened to be designed and built like a warship in almost every other aspect?

This warship that happened to be made out of lots of sentient components and incorporate a neural interface may just qualify as a 'mech' just enough for an expert pilot to empower with true resonance!

Of course, this was another advanced application on the level of a superdimensional willpower chamber.

The Larkinson Clan could not afford to engage in such research, but the story was different for the Red Fleet.

As long as the fleeters believed that this crazy concept could be realized, they should easily be able to assign a research institution to study its viability.

That was the advantage of large and well-established superorganizations.

The RF may have suffered a lot of setbacks after the Great Severing, but its foundation was still solid. It was still a giant that could rival the RA in most aspects.

Ves did not think about these possibilities yet. He would just be making it harder for himself if he tried to develop a product that could readily be used.

For now, he focused on developing a proof of concept and nothing more. He needed to learn how to walk before he could learn how to run.

His only indulgence was to substitute sentient organic components with sentient inorganic components.

All of the other research teams made use of SOCs.

These sentient organic components either consisted of authentic samples taken from the crippled body of the Ixith Goliath or lightly altered clones.

This was hardly ideal for them, but they had no better choice at the moment. It was by no means easy to develop small organisms that were stable, controllable and still possess enough of a capacity for sentience.

Of course, it was not impossible for red humanity to grow large amounts of small sentient creatures.

Ves looked at Clixie who was currently playing with Andraste during one of his rest breaks.

"What if we can grow a large batch of sentient cats and fuse them all together around a CWC somehow?" He idly wondered.

"Miaow!?"

Clixie immediately felt threatened. She jumped from Andraste's lap and looked vigilantly in every direction.

Though the idea had promise, Ves quickly discarded this idea.

Cats were too cute to be utilized this way!

"There is no need to shape the SOC's into animalistic shapes. A simple organic block will do." He concluded.

This was not his business anyway.

Ves had a better option than all of those other researchers.

From the beginning, he was convinced that he could substitute SOC's with SIC's.

He just needed to produce a lot of identical or nearly identical inorganic units that were large and 'strong' enough to carry individual spiritualities.

Ves had already read the research reports related to the SOC's. He also took a sample and studied it in person.

The Ixith Goliath's SOC's were very weak. Ves did not become impressed by their level of intelligence and their capacity to generate strong emotions.

As far as he was concerned, the mutated voribugs heavily prioritized haste and efficiency to come up with these SOC's.

This was good news, because that meant that Ves did not have to impose heavy demands on his own SIC's.

Ves believed he could develop sentient inorganic components that were much smaller than the SOC's but still contain a comparable amount of spirituality.

Even if the magnitude was not as large, the differences shouldn't be significant enough to massively distort the outcome.

This was why Ves experimented with smart metal.

Ves initially experimented with individual nanomachines, but quickly encountered a lot of hurdles.

He quickly concluded that he was not ready to tackle this particular challenge.

"I will come back to it when I have become a Master Mech Designer."

Instead of trying to instill spirituality into every single individual nanomachine, Ves tried to do so on a larger scale.

He continuously combined nanomachines together into larger constructs.

These amalgamations of nanomachines were still very small, especially at the start.

A machine that measured several micrometers was too small for people to observe with the naked eye, but it could still be made out of a large number of nanomachines!

Ves basically engaged in limit testing when it came to his personal ability to instill life into objects.

How large did they need to be before they could stably contain their own spiritualities?

He never conducted this experiment in the past, and he felt regretful about that. He gained numerous important insights and gained a better idea on what was needed to carry spirituality.

Individual nanomachines lacked this capability because they could not fit a strong spirit, at least at the start.

Their spiritual capacity was limited by their miniscule material forms.

When Ves forcibly tried to bring them to life, their spiritualities dissipated almost instantly because they were too weak to sustain themselves.

Ves theorized that every spirit needed to surpass a threshold in order to maintain their own existence in the imaginary realm.

That made sense. Whenever he observed the imaginary realm, he noticed that it was filled with strange corrosive winds.

Those winds constantly battered against every spiritual existence that occupied a place in the realm.

Without a certain degree of strength, those spiritualities could not withstand the winds for long.

What was also important was that they needed to be anchored to living creatures, because only then would they be able to replenish the energy that was being expended to resist the eroding forces.

In any case, Ves continually increased the size of his constructs until he managed to create a block the size of his thumb.

"Finally."

Once he reached this stage, Ves finally managed to instill it with spirituality that did not immediately disappear.

Though it still deteriorated at a slow and steady rate, Ves finally obtained hope that he would not have to make his constructs much larger in order to satisfy his goal!

He temporarily suspended his repetitive work and studied his latest SIC in fascination.

While it was still made out of smart metal, he underestimated how much he needed to bring together in order to create an SIC.

"Is there still a point to using nanotechnology?"

Perhaps not. Smart metal still provided a lot of conveniences, but it also produced a lot of complications. The cost was much greater and the nanomachines were also more vulnerable to exploits.

If this was the smallest possible size of a SIC, then Ves believed it was better to switch to conventional technology.

Perhaps it might make more sense to create SICs out of nanomachines when he advanced to the rank of Master Mech Designer and drastically increased the strength of his Spirituality.

"My work is still heavily dependent on my personal capacities." He frowned. "I need to become a lot stronger if I want to accomplish more."

Chapter 7353 The Meaning of Senior Mech Designer

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The Larkinson Clan's attempt to create an artificial copy of the Ixith Goliath hit a wall.

It was not for lack of trying. Ves did good work when it came to developing his sentient inorganic components.

Although there was a lot of depth in the original SOC's that Ves may have overlooked, he believed that his SICs satisfied all of the basic requirements to fulfill their intended roles.

Gloriana also made decent progress. Her work was a lot more multi-disciplinary and complicated, but she was not a timid researcher by any means.

She was accustomed to working on projects that bridged the intangible with the tangible. Her experiences with working on strange and exotic technologies also helped her accelerate her comprehension of Mentalist Crystals and its potential substitutes.

Though she could only conceive of a construct that was many times larger than an authentic Mentalist Crystal, it didn't matter so long as it could do the job.

What Ves and Gloriana had trouble with was how to fill certain gaps in their theoretical frameworks, how to bridge the enormous divide between the central willpower chamber and the SICs and how to program these devices.

The Miracle Couple enlisted the aid of numerous relevant experts in the Design Department.

Alexa Streon proved to be of considerable assistance. She possessed both depth and breadth due to her impeccable education and cleverness.

She possessed a solid foundation in many relevant fields such as biotechnology and software engineering.

It was not without reason that Gloriana at one point promoted her as the vice-director of the Design Department of the LMC.

This was a major responsibility and one that invested her with a considerable amount of power.

The fact that Alexa managed to earn Gloriana's approval said a lot about her competence and ability to overcome certain difficulties.

In any case, Alexa quickly proved herself to be an excellent assistance. She was able to provide valuable help to both Ves and Gloriana whenever they needed a second opinion or an extra hand to complete a difficult assignment.

Ariana Roux and Kelsey Ampatoch provided valuable help on the software front. Their expertise in computer systems allowed them to contribute specialized help when it came to developing brand-new software packages to fulfill functions that had no historical equivalent.

However, all of their collaborative efforts may not be enough to complete a viable proof of concept in time.

"We are mech designers." Gloriana complained during a team meeting. "Our main responsibility is to design mechs, and we have been neglecting that in favor of an experimental project with a very strict deadline. It is not even centered around developing a legitimate mech. Instead, we are attempting to bring a very poor inorganic imitation of the Ixith Goliath to life. This is an abomination that has no practical use in the short term. It involves so many new technologies and methods that we are doing the scientific version of groping in the dark. Our current work is based on so many assumptions that it can easily collapse like a house of cards."

The other Larkinson mech designers frowned, but they did not voice their disagreement with their director.

Their current project was highly ambitious, but not every promising idea was worth pursuing.

They all agreed that they were trying to reach far beyond their own competences.

It was not comfortable for them to leave their comfort zones and spend their time on completely different research.

Ves may be more accustomed to it than most due to his habit of pursuing weird side projects, but the others were much more serious mech designers than himself. They could not acclimate as well.

He knew that one of the reasons why his fellow Larkinson mech designers did not feel satisfied was because they were groping in the dark without a strong expectation of success.

They lacked optimism and did not possess enough courage to stride forward despite all of the uncertainties.

These happened to be among the handful of qualities that a mech designer needed to progress beyond the rank of Journeyman Mech Designer.

A truly qualified mech designer did not stick to following the footsteps of his predecessor, but deviated from the norm and pursued true innovation.

They already had a taste of this when they advanced to Journeyman, but that was child's play compared to what they had to achieve going forward.

Becoming a Senior Mech Designer might be regarded as an easy challenge to most people, but it was still a hurdle that kept many Journeymen back for several decades if not a century!

This was because not every mech designer adapted to the changing needs of their profession as their seniority grew.

The reason why a Senior Mech Designer earned this name was because he truly proved his ability to be a leader and mentor among lesser mech designers.

A Senior could already be entrusted to lead independent mech design projects and supervise the work of others.

That did not mean that Apprentices and Journeymen lacked competence in these areas.

Ves had done plenty of both since the early years of his career.

It was just that earning the rank and title of a Senior Mech Designer provided a minimum guarantee that was verified by the Kingdom of Mechs or the Red Kingdom themselves!

There was no stronger guarantee in the mech industry as far as everyone was concerned.

A Senior Mech Designer could be generous, mean, petty or soft-spoken.

Regardless of his personality, the fact that he managed to get this far in his profession meant that he possessed at least a minimum degree of knowledge, vision, teaching ability, altruism and more.

Even Gloriana who still possessed a lot of traits that Ves considered less than desirable had come into her own as the director of the Design Department.

She did not let her strong personal feelings and Hexer upbringing get in the way of treating her subordinates fairly, or at least as much as she could manage.

It was times like these when Ves most noticed the difference between himself and the Journeymen of the Larkinson Clan.

He had already begun to immerse himself in higher affairs while the rest could not extricate themselves from their lower and baser preoccupations.

While Ves felt tempted to stand up and lecture all of these Journeymen, he did not act on this impulse.

Certain lessons had to be learned by the individuals themselves.

Simple lecturing did not hit as hard.

It was not the job of a higher-ranking mech designer to hold the hands of their lessors and pull them up without any reserve.

Mech designers constantly needed to prove themselves and overcome their own challenges in order to truly earn the recognition and appreciation of their respective Kingdom.

The fact that none of them had yet to be promoted indicated that they still needed to cover a significant amount of ground before they entered the next stage of their careers.

Ves crossed his arms. This was quite disappointing. He had high expectations of a number of mech designers, but so far the only ones who truly showed signs of transcending beyond their immediate circumstances were Ketis and Alexa.

His former student had matured exceptionally well in his opinion. Despite choosing to go her own way to an extent, she was thriving as a more independent mech designer and leader figure.

Her dual professions and responsibilities slowed her progress to an extent, but her access to the Mech Designer System largely made up for this disadvantage.

So long as she could quickly close her knowledge gap, Ves saw no reason why she would be able to become a Senior Mech Designer in the near future!

As Ves mused about when he would welcome the third homegrown Senior Mech Designer of the Larkinson Clan, his wife posed a very important question.

"Ves, since all of us are beginning to encounter an increasing amount of blocks that we cannot overcome with our current capabilities, I have been thinking about engaging in more extensive collaboration with third parties. What do you think?"

So far, the Larkinsons did a good job of keeping their research in-house.

They still participated in the knowledge sharing sessions that every participating researcher organized every day, but they only shared results that were not essential to their respective research projects.

Every scientist and engineer possessed the ability to discern between private and public information.

If they wanted to gain more specific solutions from outsiders, then they needed to share a lot more details about their own private research and solutions.

This was quite a sensitive matter to say the least.

Ves rubbed his hairless chin in thought.

"I have been thinking about it myself to be honest. I am sure that we can solve many problems related to programming and coordination if we join hands with Commodore Zonrad Reze of the Red Fleet. He is the best authority on AI systems and software engineering within our reach. I am fairly good friends with him. He can be trusted to an extent. He will not shortchange us if that is what you are afraid of. It is just that choosing to cooperate with him will inevitably expose our entire work on this experiment project to the fleeters."

This would bring their parity closer and make it more difficult for the Larkinson Clan to maintain an uncontested advantage in the new markets.

"If we have to choose a party to cooperate with, then the Red Fleet is not a bad choice." Gloriana reasoned. "The fleeters are much more desperate for progress than others. The fleeters also have a strong base of researchers who are highly competent in any field that is not directly related to mechs. They have no choice but to be sincere with us as long as we bring them the expertise that they happened to lack. Furthermore, I am sure that strengthening our relations with the RF will be of great assistance to our firstborn daughter. Aurelia should have just begun her studies at this time."

Both Ves and Gloriana developed a stronger affection for the fleeters for this reason. It was not an easy decision to entrust the education of their precious girl to a very different organization.

Still, as much as Ves wanted to give her daughter another boost, he knew that he also needed to protect the interests of the Larkinson Clan.

Even if he had already resigned from the position of patriarch, he could not forget his roots.

"Let's not be too hasty to resort to outside help." He said as he leaned forward. "I have an alternative suggestion. We are not without solutions to the problems that you have mentioned earlier. In my earlier works, I managed to get away with inventing a lot of crazy and groundbreaking stuff by cheating."

"Cheating?"

Ves smirked. "In a manner of speaking. I am pretty sure that if we reformulate our design from a generic experimental device into a totem of Titania, we may be able to use the power of life to spontaneously bridge over many gaps. If a totem is not enough, then we can attempt to design an unprecedented living mech to achieve an even stronger effect!"

Multiple mech designers widened their eyes!

This sounded crazy, but Ves had relied on the same approach to succeed time and time again!

Gloriana immediately looked thoughtful. "Titania... a design spirit derived from an astral beast that has once demonstrated many traits that possess obvious similarities to the Ixith Goliath. The mutated voribugs may have even used this particular astral beast species as one of the templates to develop this high-level Goliath strain. The fit between Titania and our potential end product is indeed high. This is a good suggestion, but only as long as you are right in your assertion."

"So do you approve?"

"It is worth the attempt." She responded in a neutral tone. "I hold no judgment. Let the results show whether this is a viable shortcut or whether it is a waste of time."

Chapter 7354 Relying on Shortcuts

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Ves and the other Larkinson mech designers debated on whether they should turn their work into a more mystical direction and borrow the power of a design spirit.

"For once, I prefer to complete a project without resorting to 'magic'." Alexa Streon quietly voiced. "I believe that our science and ingenuity is in no way inferior to the task at hand. Everything has a solution, we merely have to work hard for it. The setbacks we are enduring right now exist as motivations for us to reach beyond our familiar tools and develop new ones in order to fulfill our ultimate goals. If we rely too much on shortcuts, the integrity of our work will suffer. We will end up creating a device that is not under our full control and do not fully understand. Is that truly what we want?"

The former Terran brought up a number of important issues. Her philosophical question demanded a proper answer.

"I am inclined to agree with you, Alexa." Ves gently said. "Your arguments are not without merit. It is indeed a rather cheap and lazy move to rely on the power of life and design spirits to circumvent the problems that we are currently unable to resolve. However, the results matter more than the process at this time. We do not have an unlimited amount of time and endless resources at our disposal. Our expertise is not comprehensive enough and we do not have a lot of processing power on hand."

His wife reluctantly agreed. "We have entered into an implicit competition right now. The first party to successfully reproduce the phenomenon of stolen resonance will earn both renown and recognition. If we want to raise the reputation of our Larkinson Clan and make all of the major parties take us more seriously, then we need to prove that we can complete this difficult assignment faster than everyone else. We can perfect and refine our design solution over time. We are still in a very early stage of exploring stolen resonance technology. Expecting to design a proper and more perfect solution in the first weeks is unrealistic."

That must have been a difficult admission for a woman and a mech designer that constantly demanded perfection in her work.

However, she was not as young and naive as before. Having worked on many design projects under many different circumstances had caused her to become more in tune with reality.

Every mech designer faced constraints that prevented them from designing the absolute best mechs. Gloriana recognized that it was better to strive for the best that she could manage under the limitations imposed by herself and others.

Ves turned to the other mech designers in the meeting room. "What about you guys? Do you have anything to say?"

Neither Ariana Roux nor Kelsey Ampatoch wanted to take a stand.

"I am sorry, sir, but my contributions are not important enough to matter. I am okay with either proposal."

"My opinion is the same as hers. I am not particularly obsessed with trying to succeed, but it would be nice if we manage to be the first to win this 'competition'. I will support whatever decision that you make."

Ves ended up exchanging glances with Gloriana.

Both of them understood each other well enough to understand their choices without needing to convey them with words.

"Alexa, we have listened to your well-intentioned words, but have decided to take advantage of the power of Titania anyway." The director of the Design Department eventually declared. "It is true that we are relying on an external source of power to conveniently make up for our shortcomings, but our clan already has a history of depending on design spirits."

"Alexa, we have listened to your well-intentioned words, but have decided to take advantage of the power of Titania anyway." The director of the Design Department eventually declared. "It is true that we are relying on an external source of power to conveniently make up for our shortcomings, but our clan already has a history of depending on design spirits."

Ves concurred.

"Design spirits are not detrimental to us. Instead, they are the opposite. They are one of the not-so-secret weapons that our clan has always relied upon to leapfrog over problems that stump other mech designers and publish mechs that give consumers a chance to harness power beyond their usual means. Think of what innovative machines such as the Valkyrie Redeemer, the Ferocious Piranha and the Doom Guard have done with the help of their design spirits and their glows."

Alexa did not possess a strong hostility towards design spirits to begin with, so her adversarial position was not that strong. She inclined her head in acceptance.

"Very well. I accept your proposal, sir. How exactly will we make use of Titania?"

"We will need to redraft our original plan and try our best to design a massive totem of our chosen design spirit. We need to do our best to maintain discipline and avoid adding superfluous features. Speed is of the essence. The other research teams are not lightweights. Even if they are not the best, they can still rely on abundant remote support from numerous research institutions. They are much better qualified to pursue proper solutions than us. The only way we can get ahead of them is to give Titania the best possible stage to exercise her power."

Titania was one of the design spirits that Ves had not worked with as often as others. He still lacked a bit of familiarity with her, but that did not mean he was reluctant to tap into her capabilities when the situation called for it. Every design spirit had a purpose.

Once the meeting broke up, they all went to work. Ves and Gloriana quickly made changes to the tentative design that required all of them to change their work approach and make a large amount of changes.

In order to ensure that their giant totem was able to establish a proper connection to the design spirit, Gloriana deployed her companion spirit and united everyone in a single design network.

Alexandra's red spiritual threads connected to every participating mech designer's brain and caused them to become a lot more united than before.

This effect looked familiar.

"Wait." Gloriana said. "Do you think that the Ixith Goliath relies on a version of our design spirit to connect all of the sentient organic components into a single hive mind? Is this the secret to coordinating an entire distributed intelligence?"

The idea sounded interesting, but Ves quickly shook his head.

"No. The design network is different from the central influence exerted by the Mentalist Crystal. My first-hand observations of the Level 8 Goliath does not support your theory. I cannot easily describe what I felt when my other self fought against the research specimen, but I can tell you that a design network is not the way to go. Your network is a means for free thinkers to share their complicated thoughts and allow others to understand them on a more intuitive basis. The 'network' used by the Ixith Goliath seeks to synchronize the SOCs as much as possible and crush any form of individuality that they may possess."

His wife looked intrigued. "That sounds familiar to the work of a certain Master Mech Designer that you have often drawn inspiration from in the past."

Ves responded with a sardonic smile. "Now that you mention it, you are right. We can reference his works if we end up hitting another wall, but I do not think that a design solution applied to mechs can be transplanted to our current project."

They continued to work while leaving this possibility in the back of their mind.

With the help of the design network, the mech designers worked a lot smoother than before. It did wonders to know what others were doing and what their works relied upon to fulfill their functions.

They wasted less time on resolving misunderstandings and more on productive work.

Soon enough, they cobbled together a very rudimentary totem out of a messy combination of smart metal, conventional components and a massive central willpower chamber.

The latter was so large that its height almost touched the ceiling of the private workshop!

"Couldn't you have made it shorter?" Ves idly complained.

"I could have, but I calculated that the results will not be as good as we would like." His wife calmly responded. "The Mentalist Crystal of the original Ixith Goliath closely matched that of a

sphere. I think it is important for our artificial version of it to maintain the same dimensions as much as possible. That unfortunately leads to this outcome. I tried to make it as large as possible while still being able to fit within the dimensions of this chamber. If not for this restriction, I could have made it twice or thrice as tall, thereby ensuring a stronger effect."

It was a good thing that they were merely trying to produce a proof of concept. Otherwise, a CWC of this magnitude may not be sufficient for their needs.

"Let us proceed with doublechecking everything before we commence our initial trial."

The mech designers proceeded to do just that. This was an unprecedented construct. It may look and behave completely differently from the captured Ixith Goliath, but it was theoretically a machine that was able to generate stolen resonance, if only reluctantly!

Ves and the others had conducted enough studies and spent enough time on figuring out their theoretical model. The work they just completed represented the culmination of their hasty efforts.

Due to the luxury of not needing to solve every major problem, they easily managed to outrace every other research team in the escort fleet.

While the other researchers did not share every secret about their own works, they still tended to brag and boast about some of the accomplishments they made.

This gave him an overall sense on how far they progressed. He believed that even the best research teams had yet to reach 75 percent completion in their own projects!

This realization made their experimental attempt all the more significant. Though it radiated a fairly presence of Titania, as long as it worked, anything could be excused!

Ves already communicated his intentions with the design spirit.

It took a bit of bargaining, but he managed to get Titania to agree to exert a significant amount of power to facilitate the functioning of the device. She needed to do her best to make it work even if she had to expend far more energy on it than she did on a typical living mech!

Once everyone withdrew to safety and stood behind their personalized work stations, Ves and Gloriana finally enacted the activation sequence.

The totem that had been shaped to resemble Titania back when she roamed the Red Ocean as an astral beast began to emanate weird energies.

Ves could feel that the SICs that he had bestowed with life en masse became more agitated now that they were being fed with electrical currents.

The central willpower chamber also began to come online. This was a huge and arcane device that Gloriana had somehow puzzled together in record time.

Ves had tried his best to understand how it worked, but he didn't have enough time to conduct an in depth study. He could only hope that Gloriana had done a good enough job.

"The central willpower chamber has begun to activate the remnant willpower source." Gloriana said. "It has yet to resonate with anything. It needs to form connections with the SICs."

"Then let us do that next."

Every element of the massive device started out isolated from each other. In order to activate it, the mech designers needed to form many different connections between every component.

This was an area that Titania excelled at. The device started to form both data connections and spiritual connections between the central willpower chamber and the SICs.

It all looked overwhelming. Ves was afraid that the CWC or the SICs might not be able to endure the sudden loads, but so far the data readings looked stable.

The connections gradually become stronger and more concrete. Despite all of the activity, the design spirit somehow kept everything organized.

It was beautiful.

Ves felt as if he was witnessing the performance of a symphony instead of a cacophony.

The critical moment had come.

Chapter 7355 Strong Resistance

Chapter 7355 Strong Resistance

The critical time had come.

After multiple days of hard work and ingenuity, the Larkinson mech designers managed to cobble together a large and clunky device that promised to generate stolen resonance that could mechanically be harnessed like any other force mastered by human technology.

Everyone grew nervous. Ves truly had no idea what might happen. Their theories were half-baked because everything was still brand-new.

The Ixith Goliath in stasis merely provided an alien blueprint to its captors. Interpreting it and figuring it out could not be done in a handful of days.

The time pressure forced everyone to cut corners.

They could not invest the proper amount of time and attention on conducting exhaustive experiments to validate their theories.

The Larkinsons could only rely on their own judgment and hope that their confidence was not misplaced.

As the experimental device began to draw in a large amount of energy, a change suddenly occurred!

Many of the scientists present in the control room stared intently at the resonance meter.

These resonance meters received very recent updates.

They could now distinguish between true resonance and stolen resonance.

The devices also gained new settings which enabled them to measure and convey very specific data on a number of interesting traits that were unique to stolen resonance.

For a few seconds, the resonance meters all registered a few errant blips.

It looked as if the experimental device was struggling to climb over a very tall hurdle.

The machine began to produce a few stress noises that sounded very disconcerting.

"Heat levels are rising! Energy consumption is continuing to spike!" Gloriana alarmingly said. "We may have to initiate an emergency shutdown if this continues!"

Nobody knew what was taking place. This was one of the downsides of skipping so many steps. They had no way to explain the excessive energy consumption and why the resonance meters barely registered any activity.

Gloriana turned to her husband. "What do you see?"

While everyone else had been looking at their control panels, Ves chose to rely on more direct observation.

He utilized Blinky's senses to observe and track the flow of extraordinary energies within the massive device.

Ves could clearly feel the central willpower chamber becoming increasingly more active. All of the stimuli caused the CWC and its captive willpower source to become a lot more agitated than before!

He could also observe that under the direction of Titania, the CWC attempted to form simultaneous connections with all of the surrounding SICs.

This turned out to be a much more difficult task than expected.

The CWC behaved too reluctantly. It was as if Titania had to resort to force in order to make it connect with the SICs.

The sentient inorganic components also exhibited anomalous activity.

The sentient inorganic components also exhibited anomalous activity.

The spiritualities instilled in their relatively small forms previously proved to be stable, but as soon as the CWC began to exert its influence, it was as if these small and weak units met a hurricane that threatened to tear them apart!

This was hardly the only problem with the experimental device, but Ves felt this was the most serious of them all. The CWC and the SICs had been designed to work in unison. They were not supposed to be at loggerheads!

The experimental device began to convey more distress. Red alerts began to chime in the control room as multiple sensitive parts had begun to overheat.

The experimental machine was not that fragile. Even if it had been designed in haste, the extensive use of mid-to-high-grade materials should have made it very resistant towards overheating and other stresses.

Even so, it was not a good idea to let the device grow its energy consumption without limit.

"Should we throttle the energy supply?"

"Not yet, Gloriana. Wait a little longer. Something will definitely happen once it gains the strength to break the current equilibrium. I cannot tell whether the impending result is benign or catastrophic, but stopping now is too useless. We need a real outcome to verify as many theories as possible."

His wife frowned as she looked back at the increasingly more strained device.

Energy shields already surrounded it, but she felt more and more uncertain about whether these measures could contain the damage in the event of a sudden explosion.

"Can you ask Titania about the current state of the experimental device? I can tell that she is active and at work, but I cannot determine her specific actions and challenges. What difficulties has she encountered? Is she confident that she can keep it all under control?"

Ves started to look concerned as he silently communicated with Titania on a spiritual level.

"Our design spirit is not doing so fine at the moment. The strain of trying this messy device is incredibly strong. She is also facing strong resistance from many different sources. The experimental device is actively rejecting her influence."

"What? How?"

A few seconds of silence passed. Ves did not have a clear idea of what was going on, but he had a few guesses.

"I think... we have underestimated the potential conflicts between the disparate elements." Ves responded. "Our selection of the willpower source has introduced an adversarial and outright hostile variable to the equation. I had hoped that the design of the CWC and the active intervention of Titania would successfully suppress any potential problems from this angle, but I may have been mistaken."

Gloriana grew upset. "The central willpower chamber serves as the core of our experimental device. If anything significant has gone wrong, our entire model will collapse!"

Everyone grew more concerned. As the activity of the experimental device continued to grow without any sign of moderation, the researchers grew increasingly more concerned about accidents.

Only their own curiosity and need to allow the initial trial to proceed without interruption prevented them from initiating an emergency shutdown procedure.

Ves suddenly gasped. "Be careful!"

For a split-second, the central willpower chamber radiated a lot more strength than before!

A very brief wave of oppression swept across the workshop and the adjacent control room.

Multiple individuals groaned and buckled as they experienced an invisible force that seemed to crush their souls!

Fortunately, none of them were particularly weak. Even if they were noncombatants, they were all Journeyman Mech Designers with companion spirits that engaged in one form of auxiliary qi cultivation or another.

Alexa fared better than the rest. She winced and tried her best to straighten her posture as quickly as possible. Her superior upbringing granted her a great advantage despite her relative youth and inexperience. Just her ego alone did not permit her to bend her knees at the slightest!

Gloriana only showed a brief frown before she continued to study telemetry. Whether it was her pride, her strength as a Senior Mech Designer, her extraordinary cranial implant set or her experience in dealing with crises, she had experienced worse events in the past. The current incident did not even rank in the top 5 as far as she was concerned.

Of course, none of them fared better than Ves. Not only did he remain completely unaffected, his companion spirit also deployed a basic protective field that blunted the sharpness emanating from the experimental device.

Shortly after the wave of oppression passed, another sudden event occurred.

The experimental device abruptly lost power and crumbled into pieces!

"What is happening?!"

Their expressions sank.

They previously feared the possibility that their painstaking work would explode, but what was happening in front of their eyes was not much better.

The oversized machine seemed to have lost its shape and collapsed in a pile of disorderly metal!

Ves' eyes sharpened as he looked closer.

"It's not as bad as it looks." He said with obvious relief in his voice. "The central willpower chamber does not appear to be heavily affected. It is made of high-quality solid components, so it won't fall apart so easily. It is only the smart metal aspect of our latest work that has lost their integrity. It appears that our initial activation attempt has scrambled them to the point of losing their power, programming or both."

Since nothing appeared to be blowing up, the mech designers steadily relaxed.

They continued to observe the unfolding disaster until all of the dead nanomachines had settled onto the deck like a pile of metallic snow.

The unexpected collapse of the sentient inorganic components largely exposed the central willpower chamber, which showed slight signs of damage but otherwise looked intact.

An awkward silence ensued.

Nobody in the control room had any words to describe what just happened.

Why did the experimental device suck up so much energy?

Why did it release a very brief wave of oppression?

Why had the SICs behaved in this manner?

While the first outcome was most definitely a failure, it still yielded a lot of data.

Once the mech designers confirmed that the situation had stabilized and that there were no obvious hazards, they quickly began their investigations.

"Have the resonance meters registered any resonance activity?" Ves asked.

"No." Gloriana shook her head. "Just before we all got swept by a suppressive field, the resonance meters registered a brief blip, but the amplitude is so weak that it is difficult to take seriously. I cannot say with certainty whether our experimental device has succeeded in generating stolen resonance, even if it lasted for a fraction of a second."

Ves called up the data and had no choice but to agree with her assessment.

Perhaps she was speaking a little too conservatively, but science demanded greater rigor than what he was satisfied with. He might be satisfied with unsubstantiated assumptions, but many others could never accept a new theory without obtaining ironclad proof.

A small bot soon arrived in the control room and presented a box that contained a small heap of metallic dust particles.

Blinky appeared from Ves' forehead and carefully examined the remains of the sentient inorganic components.

"What did you find?"

"It's strange, Gloriana. These SICs are dead. I will need to use instruments to check their physical integrity, but I think that the nanomachines are probably intact. What is more baffling is that they have lost all signs of life. Their spiritualities have disappeared. That alone shouldn't have caused the smart metal to lose its shape and collapse in such a dramatic fashion, so I suspect that their programming may have become compromised as well. I will need to use instruments to know for certain. All I can say for now is that I will need to put in a lot of effort to bring these sentient inorganic components back to life."

Mysterious.

The initial trial presented several mysteries.

"Titania must know more." Gloriana asserted. "Please ask her to explain what she experienced when she tried to command the experimental device."

"Already on it, honey."

Ves wordlessly communicated with the design spirit. He soon started to frown.

"Well?"

"From her perspective, the willpower source put up so much resistance that it was impossible to form a harmonious connection with the SICs." He explained. "This is a problem with our experimental design. The Ixith Goliath may have been able to succeed at harnessing the willpower of hostile expert pilots, but our experimental device is unable to do the same. Either the CWC that you have developed for this project cannot replicate all of the functions of a Mentalist Crystal, or we have overlooked other variables."

Gloriana did not look too pleased at hearing that her work was chiefly responsible for the failure, but she was not the kind of mech designer who could not withstand criticism.

The ability to recognize one's own shortcomings and striving to reduce them was an essential step in the path to perfection.

"I think that both may apply in our situation." She expressed her own view. "It is undeniable that the central willpower chamber is a poor substitute for the Mentalist Crystal. It is also difficult to argue that we have faithfully replicated the mechanisms of the Ixith Goliath in another form. We need to conduct a thorough examination to map out these problems and discrepancies as much as possible."

Chapter 7356 Dr. Zeron Khabeel

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When it came to experiments, failure at the first attempt was a pretty normal occurrence.

Neither Ves nor the others felt too upset about the outcome.

The worst that could happen was nothing. The amount of data they could gather from such a depressing outcome would be minimal.

While the mass deaths of all of the SICs may seem catastrophic, Ves and the others did not necessarily think so. They obtained plenty of interesting readings and could derive a lot of conclusions by analyzing them all. This would bring them much closer to developing a qualified product in their subsequent attempts.

Of course, that was easier said than done.

As the Larkinson mech designers returned to their labs and began their investigation, they encountered far too many mysteries.

There was a lot of data, but not all of them led to solutions. The researchers kept studying the numbers, but without a solid theory, it was too difficult to determine what went wrong and what they missed.

This was why they had begun to talk about conducting a second trial.

They needed to make a second attempt because they needed more data, preferably yielding a different outcome than the last one.

Ves did not quite agree with this request. "It is troublesome to recreate the SICs and breathe life into them again. I don't want to go through all of that trouble only to see them all die in the exact same manner as before. We need to change the variables in our original design. Have you figured out any improvements?"

"I have." His wife responded. "The central willpower chamber is clearly the culprit behind the dramatic result. I have added numerous restrictions and blocking components in an attempt to stifle any further outbursts that may cause serious harm to the SICs. If my latest additions work as intended, then the CWC will automatically activate a circuit breaker of sorts that should immediately close off its access to the SICs and deprive it of energy. However, my modifications will increase the volume of the CWC by at least 20 percent."

"That is a huge increase in size, Gloriana. The second iteration of our experimental device will become even more unwieldy than before. We are moving a step backwards from our aspiration to reduce the size of the CWC to the point where it can be used in mechs."

"Do you think I am not aware of that?! I hate this as much as you do, but we have no choice! In order to achieve success, we must eliminate the most egregious points of failure first! At the very least, adding in this safety feature will at least allow us to preserve the SICs and start another attempt without going through a wasteful rebuilding process."

She made a good point. Though Ves still felt very resistant towards making the CWC more bloated than before, they had no other choice.

It would have been great if they could obtain a Mentalist Crystal. The magic material provided so many conveniences. They could skip a lot of problems if they made use of such an ideal component.

However, the significance of producing a successful outcome without relying on such scarce and exceedingly rare material was much greater.

Relying on more conventional materials to reproduce stolen resonance proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that red humanity could harness this new phenomenon on a massive scale!

The desire to attain this accomplishment fueled the motivations of the Larkinsons. They did not give up despite all of the hurdles in their path.

The desire to attain this accomplishment fueled the motivations of the Larkinsons. They did not give up despite all of the hurdles in their path.

However, there was only so much they could do in the face of limited data and conditions.

While Ves, Gloriana and the others proposed numerous improvements that should hopefully make their second attempt a little less terrible than before, they still lacked a critical advancement that could lead to a real success.

"All we are doing is applying band-aids to a dying patient." Ves told his wife. "I am completely unsatisfied with what we have so far. I am sure that all of these improvements can make a difference, but... their scope and effects are not as great as I hoped. I am no prophet by any means, but I have a strong suspicion that the second trial will produce another disappointing result."

"That is not necessarily detrimental to our research, Ves. I am certain that we will gain enough new data to further iterate our design."

Ves let out a tired breath. "I know. I am well aware that this is a normal process, but it is too time-consuming. We have better things to do than repeatedly slam our foreheads into a wall in slightly different ways and hope that we don't get hurt one day. If we want to win the race, we need to be more adventurous and come up with a more radical solution."

Gloriana stared at him with judgmental eyes. She could already tell that he wanted to go crazy and indulge in his more reckless side.

She felt very mixed about that. While his radical innovations often yielded pleasant surprises, they also introduced a lot of stress and complications.

Still, those downsides seemed a lot more manageable than repeatedly getting confronted by failure.

For this reason, she chose to set aside her habitual objections.

"Very... well. If you have a better idea, then please inform us first before you take action."

With that, Ves proceeded to go on a quest to find a real solution to their problem.

He no longer set his sights on conventional technology.

He believed that he and his Larkinsons had already come fairly close to reaching their current limit of what they could accomplish with ordinary tech and materials.

It would be much better to seek an improvement on the extraordinary side of his creation.

The E-technology aspect of their work was still highly incomplete and immature. This was why they resorted to borrowing the power of Titania in the first place.

If Ves could come up with a qualitative improvement to the spiritual design, then he could potentially achieve an early success, thereby obtaining lots of benefits as a result.

This should be the ideal time to leverage his exalted status within the Red Collective.

Out of all of the superorganizations in the Red Ocean, the RC had the greatest expertise in this field.

In order to convey his commitment to his goal, he especially boarded a shuttle that brought him over to the Moloch at the earliest opportunity.

The light cruiser was a bit of an oddball in the Bluejay Fleet.

While the warship was not the largest by any means, her extraordinary factor was much stronger than the likes of the Tarrasque or the Armitage.

She could easily rival Spirit of Bentheim, the original factory ship of the Larkinson Clan, in terms of spirituality due to being built as a prototype artifact warship!

While Ves could clearly judge that methods employed by the collies at the time fell far from achieving the desired result, it was still a significant leap compared to a few years prior.

He heard that the Artifact Warship Department had been making continuous progress, especially when it was actively cooperating with the Red Fleet.

Both the RC and the RF had a vested interest in the development of true artifact warships.

In the two ongoing wars, regular warships had long proven to be inadequate. Their combat power was significant, but red humanity couldn't field enough of them to overcome the absurd numbers disparity.

The only way out was to massively improve the quality of every individual hull.

Just as the fleeters and the collies sought to convert their warships into massive artifacts, Ves sought to develop a miracle solution that could bestow them the gift of stolen resonance.

This was why he felt confident that the collies would be happy to cooperate with him. Their goals matched pretty well this time.

While Ves had to withhold a lot of specific details, he saw no harm in explaining the basic setup to the Farseer.

The female Formation Master looked mildly fascinated.

"Ambitious." She responded. "There are obvious problems with your experimental design, but it is indeed possible for you to succeed sooner than others by relying on your so-called shortcuts. It is hardly a proper attitude for a serious academician, but it is excusable this time. Please give me a moment. I need to reference our database and contact a number of experts."

Ves patiently sat and waited for the head of the Moloch Squadron to do her work.

As a former university professor and dean, Andrea Vos possessed much stronger research qualifications than a bunch of mech designers.

Over 20 minutes passed before the Farseer addressed Ves once again.

"I believe we have a possible solution for you." She said in a slightly optimistic tone. "We can make no guarantees, but I am personally willing to vouch for the proposal that we have prepared for you. It is not the most ideal or rigorous method, but it should give you enough hope for success. Let me lead you to the office of one of our resident experts."

The Moloch housed many different groups of experts, each of which represented a different faction of subgroups within the expansive Red Collective.

Ves noticed that they had entered a department that was filled with strange and religious symbols.

From altars dedicated to the god pilots of the Red Ocean and the Milky Way to painted images of abstract mathematical formulas, the compartments seemed to be dedicated to worship of every conceivable greater power!

Ves had a bad feeling about this, but he restrained himself because he believed in the Farseer.

They eventually entered a small office that at least looked a little more normal aside from the projections of pentacles and other occult shapes.

A middle-aged-looking man sat behind his desk. He looked as if he was busy with running calculations.

"Welcome, guests. Please take your seats."

The researcher quickly concluded his latest calculations before he waved his work interface away.

"This is Dr. Zeron Khabeel." Andrea Vos introduced her fellow academic colleague. "Before the Age of Dawn, he made a name for himself as a philosopher and a theoretical physicist. He distinguished himself by committing his life to pursuing the answers of grand questions such as the origin of the universe, how our existence changes its fabric and so on. He is currently a ritualist."

Interesting.

Ves looked intrigued. He already had a better idea on what the collies wanted to propose.

"Hello, doctor. I am sure you know who I am. Are you a philosopher more than a theoretical physicist?"

Zeron Khabeel nodded and smiled. "That is correct. I consider myself to be a questioner. I cannot live my life without making an earnest attempt at seeking answers that have plagued every human society since the dawn of our existence. Studying physics is a means to an end. I am by no means an authority in this field. I only know enough to better support my true research activities. Before you ask, the same applies to ritualism."

In other words, the ritualist did not enter this field because he was obsessed with magic, but because he saw it as a tool to pursue esoteric truths.

Ves respected that a lot. He also felt reassured that he was not dealing with a superstitious fanatic. He would have been quite upset with Andrea Vos if she chose to lead him to a madman.

While Ves did not have a good impression of ritualism, he vaguely understood that it was capable of producing great feats as long as it was practiced correctly.

Those who engaged in the study of ritualism either possessed strong beliefs or great ambitions.

It was certainly a lot more mysterious than formation studies, which relied on much more concrete and objective principles.

Ves did not fully understand the differences between the two if he was being honest. Perhaps the two collies might be able to enlighten him on this subject.

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Chapter 7357 The Myth Reproduction Theory

Chapter 7357 The Myth Reproduction Theory

Ritualism was not a popular discipline within the ranks of the Red Collective.

Compared to formation studies, it was filled with vagueness and ambiguity. The lack of hard sciences underpinning its principles made it difficult for most scholars to transition into genuine ritualists.

It took a special mindset for people to understand the essence of rituals to not only conduct existing ones with great competence, but also develop new ones that could achieve unprecedented effects.

However, out of all of the disciplines within the broad field of cultivation science, people often believed that ritualism possessed the highest upper boundary.

Through mysterious principles that most people had no clue about, rituals could truly achieve the impossible and create massive changes that could not be replicated through ordinary means!

Before they could discuss any specific proposals, Dr. Zeron Khabeel first spent a bit of time explaining the basic foundation of ritualism to Ves.

"You have a record of successfully utilizing rituals in the past, so there is no need for us to emphasize their power and potential." The former philosopher and scientist said with a smile. "What you may not be aware of is the underlying rules and theory that make it all possible. Have you ever thought about what rituals actually represent?"

Ves frowned. "Not really. My understanding is... highly deficient in that matter. I am not afraid to admit that most of my experiments relating to the extraordinary domain have mostly been... ad-hoc. I had to explore almost everything by myself. While I have steadily come into contact with bits and pieces of ancient heritage, much of it is rather low-level or narrowly specialized. Even if they include a handful of rituals, the descriptions only focus on execution rather than understanding."

Dr. Zeron nodded in understanding. "That is normal. The creation, improvement and modification of rituals is a difficult and abstruse endeavor. It is all too easy to waste resources or cause unintended consequences that can inflict great harm on oneself. That is why this is a practice that is best left to professional ritualists of high-ranking qi cultivators."

"That... sounds logical, but... I have rarely encountered such accidents in the past."

"That is because the context and environments are all different." The ritualist responded. "You cannot compare the conditions before the Great Severing with the conditions after this life-changing turning point. The light of Messier 87 has introduced many new possibilities, but has also begun to introduce new imprints that may or may not be welcome."

"What do you mean by that, doctor?"

The older man smiled. "What I am about to explain to you is a new theory that has steadily gained dominance in our academic circle. It has not yet gained a status that is indisputable, but we believe that it comes closest to describing the truth than all of the alternate theories. We welcome any information that you can give us that can either validate this theory... or disprove it. Either way, after more of my colleagues have adopted this theory, we have been making significant progress in the development of new rituals, a number of which will hopefully be of great use in the Voribug War."

The Red Collective was not a superorganization for nothing. Despite its short existence and shallow foundation, every core member was an able administrator, a respected scholar or a valiant soldier.

This was why even a field as strange as ritualism experienced rapid development. Everyone who had chosen to become a ritualist was not a pushover and was eager to make achievements during this early period!

"So what is this theory, exactly?" Ves asked the expected question.

"We call it the Myth Reproduction Theory." Dr. Khabeel stated with a more solemn voice. "To summarize, it claims that every ritual is a reproduction of a great feat called a myth that other life

forms, not necessarily humans, have conducted in the past. The original myth is usually a grand historic event that has created such an impact on an entire society or galaxy that it has left a permanent imprint on the ethereal plane of existence. This plane which hosts both extraordinary energies as well as the mental activity of sapient existences is susceptible to such influences, especially when it has directly and uniformly altered the mental activity of large populations. That is how truly enduring myths are born."

Ves looked astonished. He recognized numerous familiar ideas in this theory. Perhaps his personal experiences already caused him to discover a number of these points as well, but he had never gone through the effort of connecting the dots.

It was only after he received a clear explanation that he recognized how it all tied together!

This theory was likely true!

"So myths are grand and extraordinary feats that leave a distinct 'imprint' in the ethereal plane of existence." Ves said as the wheels already began to turn in his head. "Then according to your theory, rituals can give others a chance to reproduce the same effects by following much the same steps. Since the imprint already exists, I bet that the barrier of entry is much lower. This can allow much weaker people to benefit from such rituals. Of course, the magnitude and comprehensiveness of the outcome will also be inferior, especially if there is a greater deviation between the original process and the ritual."

The ritualist smiled wider. "I am glad to hear that you have already deduced this much from my brief explanation. What you have described is indeed the central premise of the Myth Reproduction Theory. Ritualists who comprehend and believe in this theory have all been able to accelerate their progress and create successful rituals."

"That sounds nice, but that may be a coincidence." Ves cautiously said. "Do you have any solid proof or examples that can support this particular theory?"

"I do. I can present two profound cases that are especially relevant to you. First, let me ask you a question. What is the strongest myth of the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy?"

Ves briefly grew stumped when he heard this question, but it did not take long for him to present an answer.

"Phase lords. Phase whales."

"Exactly, sir. The Red Ocean is an environment that bears the strong imprint of the phase whale race. Even if it does not dominate the dwarf galaxy in the material plane of existence, it is absolutely dominant in the ethereal plane of existence. This may be one of the reasons why the phase whales never developed a strong desire to conquer the new frontier outright. They have already conquered the other native races in a spiritual fashion."

That made a disturbing amount of sense.

Ves suddenly made a shocking connection!

"Wait! If the phase whale race created such a strong imprint on the Red Ocean in the distant past, then that may have been responsible for birthing phase lords among the other races that inhabit the same dwarf galaxy. The nunsers, orvens, zzamayels, juregs and so on originally did not possess the capacity to imitate the body cultivation of the phase whales, but because the latter race has created such an overbearing myth over many years, the other races have eventually gained an opening to become phase lords."

Dr. Zeron Khabeel clapped his hands. "That is indeed one of the explanations that we have derived from this theory. The fact that phase whales are not only born with significant traces in their bodies, but can gradually evolve into superdimensional life forms can be explained by their obvious artificial design. However, this does not apply to the other native races who have naturally evolved from their respective home planets."

"So you are not a believer in the theory that all of the major races in the Red Ocean are all artificially developed by a single progenitor race?"

"Absolutely not." Dr. Zeron shook his head. "I am not an exobiologists, but I have read the articles that conclusively determine that most of them are naturally evolved. Since this is the case, how can all of these different and diverse races practice the exact same kind of body evolution when their individual biological traits are so different from each other? No biological process can enable such a radical transformation for so many diverse organisms. The fact that the major races all rely on strange and frankly unscientific processes to occasionally produce new phase lords is proof that the working mechanisms fall outside of conventional biosciences."

Normal explanations no longer sufficed anymore. Only a radical one like the Myth Reproduction Theory could provide a sound logical basis to this phenomenon!

"This also explains why phase lords have it much harder than phase whales." Ves said as he realized the implications for not only the other major races, but also his own Phase Lord Department! "We are all intentionally or unintentionally conducting rituals that allow us to reproduce the myth originally established by the phase whales. However, since our means and methods are not as good as theirs, our results have many more shortcomings. This explains why it is more difficult to become a phase lord, why phase lords are generally weaker than phase whales of the same level and why phase lords cannot develop their own Phasewater Production Systems."

Imitations could never be as good as the originals.

Phase lords would always remain a step behind phase whales as long as the former stuck to imitation.

This was also why it became even more important for the Ascended Giants to move away from the shadow of the phase whales!

The human phase lords needed to work harder to develop their own combat doctrines and methods.

Compared to following the footsteps of an existing great race, it was much better for the Ascended Giants to create their own myth!

Ves could already guess that his other self would feel the same way!

There was no way that the Dark Apostle would remain content if he realized the truth of his own existence.

It would be unbearable for him to accept that he could only exist as an inferior copy to a phase whale!

"Okay, the phase lord phenomenon is certainly a powerful case that favors your theory." Ves responded. "However, it is not entirely solid. The same phenomenon can also support other theories."

"Then let me introduce another example to you, Professor Larkinson. This one happens to be much closer to your heart. Since the Red Ocean is imprinted by a myth that has birthed an entire tradition, the same can happen to the Milky Way as well. What do you think are the dominant traditions of the old galaxy?"

Two answers immediately came to mind.

"Mech pilots and mech designers." Ves uttered without hesitation. "Wait..."

Dr. Zeron leaned forward. "Correct. Compared to the myth established by the phase whale race, the myth created by the humans of the previous generations is much stronger and more systematic. I believe that there is a clear difference between the two cases. The myth established by the phase whale race has likely developed organically, which explains why it is so flawed and inconsistent. In contrast, the myth established by humans at the end of the Age of Conquest is most likely an act of deliberate and premeditated creation. This is why the progression of mech pilots and mech designers is much more accessible and consistent."

This was true!

Ves was not sure whether Dr. Zeron Khabeel had been informed about the existence of the Kingdom of Mechs and the Red Kingdom, but their existence aligned pretty well with the Myth Reproduction Theory!

Perhaps the Progenitors of Mechs not only believed in this theory, but actively exploited it to create their pinnacle work, thereby freeing the human race from the tyranny of the Five Scrolls Compact and bringing forth the much more enlightened Age of Mechs!

Ves also saw the act of splitting the Red Kingdom from the original Kingdom of Mechs in a new light.

The Polymath boldly initiated this extreme action with the hopes of gaining complete control over this spiritual embodiment of the greatest human myth!

Chapter 7358 Surpassing the Original

Chapter 7358 Surpassing the Original

Ves had no idea that the Myth Reproduction Theory could not only explain the phenomenon of phase lords, but also explain some of the mechanics behind the Kingdom of Mechs and the Red Kingdom!

Compared to the former, the latter obviously accommodated more optimized and streamlined rituals.

In fact, mech pilots and mech designers did not deliberately have to follow too many specific steps in order to reproduce past myths. They just needed to do their jobs well in order to advance.

In comparison, the growth of phase lords was much more troublesome. From getting started to increasing their phasewater concentration, they had to take many specific actions while receiving inconsistent feedback in return.

This clearly showcased how much better the human race had leveraged the Myth Reproduction Theory in the past.

It also gave ritualists hope that they could also develop well-designed rituals in the future!

While Ves could still recognize a few gaps in the proposed theory, he was already convinced by this time.

"Not everything is perfect, Professor Larkinson. One of the implications of our theory is that peak ace pilots in our dwarf galaxy face much more resistance in breaking through than if they remained in the old galaxy."

"Huh?" Ves looked surprised. "How does that work?"

"This involves more theories and data points than just the Myth Reproduction Theory. First, we believe that gods can never be imitated through following rituals alone. The gap between 'mortals' and 'the divine' are so great that conventional methods cannot bridge this enormous gap. Only by accomplishing a feat so great that it can move the galaxy or universe to do the impossible can a Star Designer or god pilot come into existence. In other words, each ascension to godhood must be profound and unique, and therefore constitutes a myth by definition."

That... sort of matched the data. The number of Master Mech Designers and ace pilots far exceeded their superior counterparts.

Many Masters and peak ace pilots who had shown plenty of talent and promise over their lifetimes ultimately failed to complete the ultimate steps.

Perhaps they may have been able to achieve smooth progress over their careers because they followed the easy trajectories established by the Kingdoms, but once they reached the end, they could only proceed forward by themselves.

"What else supports your earlier statement, doctor?"

"We also have reasons to believe that the higher concentration of E energy in the Red Ocean and other variables has created different standards when it comes to myths and rituals. During the Red War, many peak ace pilots fought heroically, yet they failed to achieve a breakthrough. In fact, many of them have reported that they do not dare to take the first step, as their intuition is warning them that they will absolutely perish if they move rashly. One of our theories attempts to explain this by stating that the more energetic and power-filled environment of the new frontier has raised the standard of a qualified myth."

"You can think of it as the difference between moving through air and moving through water." Andrea Vos broke her silence. "Both acts are similar, but the environmental differences drastically change the difficulty and requirements. You need to undertake different actions in order to get from A to B."

That was a good analogy. Ves became a lot more convinced by these assumptions. His own intuition felt an affinity for the new theories. It sounded right in his opinion.

"This is bad news for us then." Ves grimaced. "We are all hoping for the first new god pilots to emerge and relieve the pressure of the frontlines. According to your explanations, we may be forced to wait a bit longer. The threshold to a successful breakthrough is a lot higher than in the old galaxy."

Dr. Zeron Khabeel did not express too much pessimism. "The same theories may indicate that this is the case, but they also predict that anyone who is able to break through under these circumstances will gain greater rewards than the older generation of god pilots. A stronger environment breeds stronger gods."

"I hope that this is the case."

While Ves would love to explore these profound theories and implications further, he did not forget about his main responsibility.

Now that he became acquainted with the Myth Reproduction Theory, they could finally move on to more relevant business.

"I think I understand why you took the trouble to enlighten me with your theories." Ves said with interest. "We can increase the success rate of our experiments by taking advantage of the mutated voribugs. Through the laborious act of gathering resources, pooling them all into an Incubator, capturing human expert pilots and stuffing them into the mix, our enemies established a new myth with the birth of the first Ixith Goliath. If we want to develop a comparable creation that is able to generate its own form of stolen resonance, then we can perform a ritual that replicates all of these steps as closely as possible. We do not have to be too literal or accurate, but the smaller the differences, the better, am I correct?"

"Yes, but that is not the only course of action that you can take, professor." The ritualist said. "The more superior alternative is to establish a new myth that is much greater and more profound. This allows our race to reproduce devices that can generate stolen resonance under our terms instead of that of our enemies. Obviously, the difficulty of accomplishing this feat is excessively high. Creating a new myth that can not only ripple across the ethereal plane of existence, but also override the older one created by the Goliath Hive is unrealistic."

Perhaps only the Star Designers could achieve such an amazing feat in a reasonable timeframe.

Ves knew his limits.

He quickly set aside any ideas about doing the latter and focused on the former.

What mattered the most was expediency. There was no need to think about effectiveness or practicality at this early stage.

"So if I am getting you right, if we want to improve the success rate of our next attempt, we should devise a ritual that will enable us to replicate the incubation process of the original Ixith Goliath. In more concrete terms, we need to create our own version of an Incubator, feed it lots of high-quality materials, let it cook and hope that it will birth a living device that can generate stolen resonance."

"You have accurately summarized my proposal."

"Will it work?"

"That, I cannot guarantee." Dr. Zeron Khabeel honestly admitted. "A theory still remains a theory. I can present a large collection of case studies to you, but as you have mentioned before, other theories cannot be ruled out. You must ultimately use your own judgment and make your own decision on this matter. The costs of developing and enacting this ritual are significantly greater. You may end up wasting it if you are wrong or overlook an important variable."

Ves frowned in uncertainty. "I... will need to discuss it with the rest of my Larkinsons. I am mostly convinced, but this is too big of an issue for me to decide alone. Besides, maybe my wife or the others are able to provide useful input."

"If you do decide on this course of action, then please allow us to assist and cooperate." Dr. Zeron earnestly requested. "Your project will become an important case for us. Whether your ritual succeeds or not will be an important piece of data for us. We can make many useful contributions. We have already developed a small but reliable repertoire of methods and techniques that can reduce the variance and increase the reliability of your upcoming ritual."

"Hmm, we will discuss that as well. Not everyone will agree to letting people outside of our clan gain access to our research project." Ves carefully responded. "However, I think that your expertise in ritualism makes it worthwhile to let you in. It is much better to rely on a professional on a task of this magnitude."

While Ves possessed a reasonable amount of confidence in his ability to homebrew his own rituals, he ultimately did not specialize in this strange field.

It made much more sense to outsource this particular job to an actual ritualist who could rely on a systematic foundation to produce his work.

Ves moved quickly. He called for a meeting where he presented a brief version of the ritualist's theories to the other Larkinson mech designers.

Just like him, Gloriana and the others already looked convinced.

"That makes a disturbing amount of sense." One of them commented.

"Since the Red Collective have already derived results from this theory, then it is worth our consideration." Gloriana stated. "The more important question is how we can make use of what we learned. What do you propose, Ves?"

"We should try to devise a ritual that follows the steps that led to the birth of the original Ixith Goliath... within reason, of course."

Though the suggestion sounded absurd, according to the Myth Reproduction Theory, even a shabby and incomplete imitation should qualify as a valid ritual!

So long as the imprint of the original myth was strong enough, whatever ritual the Larkinsons came up with would likely activate the right trigger!

Of course, this was assuming that the theory was correct and that the Larkinsons applied it correctly.

In any case, once the Larkinsons learned that developing the right ritual may allow them to overcome the many problems that plagued the first trial, they began to work with gusto on puzzling out the ritual.

It was not easy to adapt the formation of the Incubator and simulate its function on a much smaller scale and with much greater limitations.

The current working conditions were far from ideal.

Ves felt that even if they devised the best possible ritual under the circumstances, it may still end up producing a disappointing result.

If he wanted the ritual to succeed, then he had to make it bigger and stronger somehow.

Somewhere along the way, Ves suddenly thought about the willpower choice.

Compared to the original myth, feeding the artificial version of the Incubator with a hyper material containing the stale and old spirituality of a defeated expert pilot did not align very well.

If he wanted to recreate the myth a lot closer to the actual truth, then it would be best to capture a hostile expert pilot and directly feed it into the Larkinson version of the Incubator!

"Wait!"

Why settle for an accurate imitation when there was a chance to make it bigger?

Ves suddenly recalled that the source of willpower of the Ixith Goliath came from a handful of captured expert pilots.

As powerful as they had become, these expert pilots were trivial compared to ace pilots!

What if... they attempted to usurp the original myth with one of their own creations?

Naturally, this should have been an uphill battle with very dim chances of success, but Ves did not agree with this assessment!

The difference between feeding an Incubator with an expert pilot and an ace pilot was huge!

By relying on these immense qualitative differences, Ves hoped that the Red Ocean or other higher authorities would overlook the very clear shortcomings of his experimental work and appreciate it for trying to repurpose the willpower of an ace pilot by force!

Normally, the thought of capturing an ace pilot and cruelly using his willpower as the power source of a stolen resonance generator would have come across as abhorrent.

There were many lines that decent human beings should never cross.

He would never stoop to hunting down real and earnest ace pilots.

Yet Ves still couldn't resist the urge to formulate a plan.

He just so happened to know of a group of extremist mech pilots who were willing to sacrifice their lives and betray red humanity to protect their ideals!

If there were any ace pilots among them, then they would definitely lose at least a part of the protections afforded to their class.

That meant that they had become fair game!

Using them to fuel the birth of a homebrew generator of stolen resonance was their fortune!

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Chapter 7359 Ves the Overeager Researcher

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"No."

"Really? Won't you reconsider, Jovy?"

"Absolutely not, Ves. None of my superiors is in favor of your latest proposal. In fact, they are horrified by it. Have you become so obsessed with power that you have completely disregarded the dignity of our heroes? Please reiterate the purpose of our profession."

"Mech designers exist to serve mech pilots." Ves parroted the familiar phrase.

"Exactly. What part about serving mech pilots do you not understand? Even if you have a history of subjecting them to great risks for a fleeting possibility of a greater payoff, the plan that you have just presented to us has little to do with that! You are asking us to deliberately allow a party of dissident ace pilots to intercept our escort fleet just so that you can harvest them in your perverted attempt to reproduce the birth of the Ixith Goliath! We do not see how allowing you to desecrate the dignity of the entire mech pilot profession will benefit them in the future!"

"I think you are not giving my proposal enough credit." Ves pushed back. "Sure, the sacrifice of a few ace pilots is awful, but we have a chance to create an improved set of rituals that can reliably enable us to produce devices that can generate stolen resonance. According to the Myth Reproduction Theory, it is highly probable that we can fulfill our goal by following the recipe established by the mutated voribugs, but this is an implicit form of surrender, just like how the Ascended Giants are forced to follow the methods of the phase lords no matter whether they like it or not. Rather than let the enemy dictate the rules, I would rather have us take the initiative and take control."

Jovy Armalon listened to the most famous Larkinson and promptly shook his head in rejection.

"We can understand your arguments, but the answer remains the same. No. Even if we have any inclination of executing your suggested actions, it is not your prerogative to perform them. This is a heavy responsibility that will taint those responsible forever. Our highest leaders are not cowardly enough to avoid the stigma that comes with sacrificing the lives of respectable saints. You... are too young and promising to bear this unforgivable sin."

That... sounded both disappointing and reassuring.

Now that Ves started to calm down a bit, he suddenly realized that he may have been acting a bit too hastily.

His plan did not even have the full approval of his fellow Larkinsons. He just felt the need to do more than the basics. Just retracing the steps of creating the Ixith Goliath on a small scale did not seem ambitious enough to him. He wanted to gain control over the process so bad that he became insensitive to the incredible harm to his reputation if he actually went through with his crazy initiative!

Now that Jovy had woken him up, he gradually realized that he had almost set himself on a path to no return.

Ves often criticized other mech designers in the past for going so far in their research that they no longer held the wellbeing of mech pilots at the top of their priorities.

Admittedly, he himself had been skirting this fundamental principle at times. What he had been thinking about this time far exceeded his usual scruples!

What was wrong with him? Why did he lose sight of his boundaries? Had his competitive desire overtaken his common sense?

He inwardly shook his head. He clearly needed to clear his head and regain his perspective on the matter.

His research gains should not come at the cost of his integrity.

Even if he managed to produce an incredible result, the complications arising from his controversial methods would end up dogging him for many years to come!

He let out a tired breath. "You... you are right, Jovy. I have... overlooked the considerations that you have mentioned. I will no longer push for this suggestion. Even if we get confronted by a bunch of dissident saints at a later date, they... deserve better than to become sacrifices in a process that represents the ultimate evil that they are fighting against."

While all of that sounded good and all, an awkward moment of silence ensued.

Since the MTA clearly conveyed the intention of defending the principle that mech pilots and especially high-ranking ones should never be turned into consumables to create stolen resonance devices, where the hell should they gain their willpower sources?

Without this vital 'ingredient', it was impossible to impart stolen resonance onto artifact warships and other massive works!

This was truly a case where the ends may end up justifying the means.

The method may be horrifying to the mech industry, but red humanity needed the power demonstrated by the first Level 8 Goliath so much that it may end up breaking the rules.

At the very least, Ves did not think that the Red Fleet would be as insistent on maintaining the sanctity of high-ranking mech pilots as the Red Association.

The RF may or may not regard mech pilots as vermin, but the fleeters would never put mech pilots up a pedestal like the mechers!

Once the RF began to argue the opposite standpoint, there was a high likelihood that sparks would fly!

As a tier 2 galactic citizen who maintained ties with both superorganizations, he had enough influence to intervene in this debate if he was willing to disregard Jovy's warning.

Should he meddle into this affair anyway, or should he honestly back away and let the bigshots sort out this problem?

Jovy clearly read Ves' intentions and made a dissuading gesture with his hand.

"Do not think so much. You are too closely involved in the initial incident, so it is understandable that you have lost perspective. I advise you not to overthink the matter and give us time to resolve

the problems that you have no doubt ascertained. There are many possible solutions, some of which fall outside of your imagination. We shall definitely give you an answer when the time is right."

Perhaps the Survivalist was right. Perhaps the RA already had a more acceptable way to deal with this problem.

"I... thank you." Ves said with a hint of relief. "I won't be happy if you are wrong, but if it is true that you are working on a better solution, then I am happy to cede the initiative."

"As you should. Do not forget that we are the Red Association. Just like our predecessor, we are the foremost authority when it comes to all matters relating to mechs and mech pilots. You may have climbed to the upper ranks of the Red Collective, but your mandate covers an entirely different set of responsibilities. Let us not get mixed up over them. You are entitled to exert your authority over your own domain, and the same applies to us. This is how order is maintained."

Ves truly needed this reminder. He had become involved in so many diverse affairs that it became increasingly more difficult for him to maintain his sense of proportion and discretion.

Perhaps he should look into streamlining his obligations. At the very least, he should not allow his recent takeover of the Phase Lord Department to displace all of his mech designer responsibilities.

Once he was done with the immediate matter, Ves privately vowed that he would remain in Yernstall until he finished his collaboration with the Terrans.

The development of his much-anticipated Woodsap mechs had reached a late stage. The Terrans had already proven to be extraordinarily motivated to bring the first advanced Carmine mechs to life.

So long as Ves incorporated a small portion of his latest insights into the design project, he believed he could quickly give birth to the most incredible mech design since the unveiling of the Carmine System!

"Since you have denied my admittedly stupid suggestion, how likely is it that our fleet will get intercepted along the way?" Ves asked in a more relaxed tone.

"That is a complicated question to answer. Our monitoring and control over the surrounding regions is growing increasingly stronger when we are drawing closer to our destination. However, most of our war-capable forces are deployed in the front. What assets we have stationed in the rear are either dispersed or concentrated into strategic locations that must never be compromised. Therefore, intercepting our interceptors is not feasible. Avoidance is the name of the game here. We must do our best to rely on the superior mobility of our escort fleet to outmaneuver the dissidents."

"Is that doable?"

Jovy smiled. "Very much so. There are many stars, but not that many forces that have made the extreme decision to forsake everything for a misguided goal. They do not have as much intelligence and resources as us, so it is not that difficult to run circles around them. So long as we can avoid a confrontation entirely, we will not be confronted with the need to make unpalatable decisions."

The mechers did not want to encourage fractures within the mech community.

Although a growing number of mech pilots had taken a stand against stolen resonance technology, so long as they limited their actions to complaints, everything was fine.

Yet from the moment the first group of dissident mech pilots fought openly against the escort fleet, the matter could not be downplayed anymore!

The serious escalation would force everyone to make hard decisions that they would rather avoid.

Both winners and losers would end up in a worse position than before!

For this reason and more, the Red Association was highly invested in bringing the escort fleet back to Yernstall without any incidents.

Though Ves wished the mechers luck, he did not have as much confidence in their ability to succeed.

Ace pilots should never be underestimated. So long as they became utterly convinced of their goal, they would definitely make it happen one way or another!

It was not impossible for them to outsmart the mechers and get in the way of the escort fleet.

Ves grew curious how the RA intended to handle the matter when such a scenario came to pass.

Would the mechers attempt to be lenient and forgive the attackers for trying to destroy a priceless research specimen?

Or would the mechers establish its authority and execute the dissidents to deter anyone else from aiming their hostility at the Red Association?

He did not envy the RA for being forced to take a difficult stand!

Perhaps it was indeed better that Ves did not meddle directly into this issue. He truly did not bear this heavy responsibility. Since the mechers were so eager to handle it themselves, then he should do the clever thing and get out of the way.

"Since this is the case, our research team will hopefully produce a result in the coming day or two." Ves said as he shifted his focus back to the original plan. "It is taking a bit of time for us to design and create an Incubator out of the limited resources that we have at our disposal. Once it is complete, we will conduct a very simplified ritual and hope that the Myth Reproduction Theory is accurate enough to produce a successful result."

Jovy nodded in approval. "I have heard of this theory. It has a logic to it that makes me inclined to believe that it has the ring of truth, but I doubt it is that simple. Whether it is valid enough to guide your experiment to success is another matter. Do not be afraid of disappointment. Not every phenomenon is straightforward enough that it can be explained with a simple theory. Ritualism is still a field that is filled with uncertainty. The same rituals can produce the desired outcome on one day, but produce catastrophic explosions the next day. You should hope for the best, but prepare for the worst. Do not skimp on security measures."

"Understood..."

Chapter 7360 Collaborating With Ritualists

Chapter 7360 Collaborating With Ritualists

Though the higher-ups shot down his request to make an attempt to establish a stronger myth, it may have been for the best.

When Ves reflected on his mindset at the time, he readily admitted that he had been overtaken by hubris.

He went too far.

His competitive urges had acted up when he learned about the nature of myths and rituals. He did not feel content with reproducing an existing myth in a pathetic manner. The difference in scope, scale, accuracy and other factors made him feel so inferior that he felt shamed at all of the inadequacies.

His inner Gloriana must have made a resurgence, prompting him to devise a much more elaborate plan that actually involved the kidnapping and ritualistic sacrifice of actual ace pilots!

Now that he regained his sanity, he gradually realized that harvesting the lives of actual saints for the express purpose of reusing their spirituality in a macabre experiment would taint his name and reputation forever!

Perhaps it would bring him a lot closer to realizing one of the visions where his society turned against him and shackled him in an ominous chamber.

Though Ves knew that the higher he climbed, the more he could get away with transgressions, he had yet to join the ranks of the true power players.

Until he became as powerful as the likes of the Polymath, he needed to remain careful about his words and deeds. He could only occasionally dictate the rules whenever he introduced a grand new invention or convinced the public to accept his crazy ideas.

Outside of that, he was still a part of the same society as everyone else, which meant he needed to abide by its various rules.

In a civilization that had been influenced by a strong and ubiquitous mech culture for centuries, mech pilots and especially the ones who had tread on the path to godhood earned an exalted status among humans.

They were more than simple soldiers and warriors. Anyone could become a fighter if they joined a dojo or enlisted in an infantry or naval unit.

No. Mech pilots possessed greater honor and valor because they had not only been blessed with compatible genetic aptitude, but chose to develop their potential and become professional mech pilots in an age where they bore the main burden of engaging in warfare.

Even though the age where mechs had nearly completely displaced other war platforms such as infantry, tanks and warships had come to an end, that did not diminish their status in the present age all that much.

God pilots remained overbearingly strong. With these immensely powerful standard bearers taking the lead in protecting fragile human space, it became natural for other mech pilots to benefit from their existing glory.

This was especially the case for ace pilots, who had made it much farther on the path of godhood than most of their peers!

For these reasons and more, openly talking about sacrificing 'disobedient' ace pilots still remained a definite taboo.

It did not matter whether they betrayed their oaths and turned their hostility against their fellow humans.

It did not matter that they harbored intentions to destroy life-saving research samples and technology.

It did not matter that their actions forced red humanity to scramble scarce forces and resources that could have been better spent at combating the alien threats.

So long as millions upon millions of mech pilots fought at the frontlines and served as examples to other people, they would continue to retain the honor and status that they had rightfully earned.

Under this climate, it was a really bad idea to earn the universal hostility of the entire mech piloting profession.

It was especially egregious for a mech designer like Ves to become tainted with this stigma!

Even if he harbored nefarious intentions towards mech pilots, he should not act stupid and engage in forbidden experiments directly.

Instead, he should learn from examples such as the Xenotechnician who regularly attracted suspicion, but had never been caught red-handed.

Relying on proxies and remote-controlled dummies was the kingly way. Ves had climbed too far on the ladder to put his primary identity at risk.

As Ves grew increasingly more sober, work on the second trial continued to progress without interruption.

Dr. Zeron Khabeel and his associates from the Ritualist Department provided a huge amount of external assistance.

The only downside was that it became necessary to expose these external consultants to many details of the Larkinson Clan's attempt to reproduce stolen resonance.

There was no way that the details would remain confidential for too long.

Ves possessed a strong awareness of how many players had gotten involved in the Red Collective. Many members originated from groups like the Red Two, the first-rate colonial superstates or other distinctive organizations.

Aside from the Cybernetic Empire, every other major player would soon gain a lot of information about the methods and solutions that the Larkinson Clan intended to employ in their own experiments!

This meant that Ves and his fellow Larkinson researchers had a limited amount of time at their disposal.

If they could not produce a successful result in the next handful of days, the other research teams within the escort fleet would definitely combine their own advantages with the 'best practices' of the Larkinson Clan and win the race!

"There is no need to be too afraid, sir." Dr. Zeron told Ves. "Our Ritualist Department is not that large. We also prefer to work with true insiders such as yourself. The mechers, fleeters, Rubarthans and so on have called on our department's aid after they all learned that our rituals may be able to play an indispensable role in their respective research projects, but we are merely fulfilling our obligations towards them. Helping you is much more to our liking."

Ves gave the ritualist a deep stare.

This was not a casual remark. It was a pretty strong declaration of support.

It made sense. Ves may not consider himself to be a full RC insider, but his role in founding the superorganization and shaping its structure was undeniable.

More importantly than that, taking over the Phase Lord Department and rectifying it caused his name to become even more tied to the Red Collective.

Yet these reasons should not be enough for the Ritualist Department to take a bet on Ves.

The other groups possessed many capabilities that surpassed his own.

The ritualists needed to bet on a winner.

If they invested in the wrong party, then they would not only waste their time and resources, but also fail to gain enough backing.

Though neither Ves nor Dr. Khabeel had not mentioned any explicit terms, they had both entered into an implicit agreement.

As long as the ritualists helped Ves succeed in this race, he would need to pay them back with political and material support.

This was nothing new or special. It was only fair for him to stick up to his new 'friends' after they had lent a hand to him when he needed it the most.

Ves felt a little reluctant to get into bed with the ritualists. Though Dr. Khabeel and his associates all behaved like normal academics, he knew that ritualism was not a field that promoted sanity.

Just as Ves almost succumbed to the temptation of sacrificing living ace pilots to establish a new myth, other ritualists most likely experienced similar situations!

In his opinion, ritualism was just as dangerous as biotechnology.

Both fields had a predisposition to ethical violations.

So long as the researchers who specialized in these fields broke the rules, they could potentially achieve huge breakthroughs in their R&D activities!

The temptation would never go away. It would continue to exist and grow stronger as the circumstances around them continued to deteriorate.

The increasing pressure exerted by two major wars against implacable alien foes had already caused numerous incidents, many of which never made it to the news.

Nevertheless, the damage that these deranged researchers inflicted on themselves and others could not be remedied so easily.

People were willing to do practically anything to achieve groundbreaking progress.

The overall situation was still relatively good for the time being.

Ves predicted that true madness would only break out when major regions and states started to fall like dominoes.

At that time, red humanity would suffer so many losses that nobody would have any energy to care about ethics violations at the time!

Until that critical moment arrived, Ves and other eager researchers needed to do their best to hold their urges back.

It was not yet time for them to go all-out.

This was why he remained fairly docile as he and his collaborators carefully constructed an artificial Incubator.

Of course, the version created by the Larkinsons could not possibly turn into a moon-sized monstrosity.

They created one that could barely fit inside the available workshop space.

To be honest, the large metal sphere shared very little in common with the real Incubator.

However, that did not matter all that much. The point of a ritual was to borrow the power of an existing myth to make it easier to generate specific reactions and transformations.

It made no sense to invest an excessive amount of resources into a ritual, only to gain a reward that was not as valuable.

"A good ritualist must never strive for perfection." Dr. Zeron Khabeel readily shared his insights to Ves. "In fact, we must do the opposite. We must strive for efficiency. We need to develop rituals that enable us to obtain the greatest possible reward with the least amount of investment. Cutting corners is not a sin. It is a virtue in our discipline. Our difficulty is to cut as much as possible without risking the integrity of the ritual."

This was a relatively unusual approach. Ves never expected ritualists to adopt such an 'economical' mindset. He suddenly understood this bunch a bit better. He did not expect them to adopt a mentality similar to cutthroat businessmen.

They sounded little different from corporate raiders who swept into bloated companies and stripped them down to the bone while still keeping them functional, if only barely.

As a mech designer, Ves was not unfamiliar with this approach.

Though he tended to value quality a bit too much, he knew that commercial mech designs often needed to make a lot of compromises in order to make them affordable.

The same applied to rituals.

A long and tedious process that involved lots of expensive materials and difficult preparation served nobody.

What red humanity needed the most was not an extravagant ritual that could only produce an excellent result once, but a cheap and cost-effective ritual that could easily produce acceptable results a thousand times!

Ves admittedly grew a little concerned when Dr. Khabeel and the other experts continued to simplify the experimental design, but he still placed his trust in their expertise.

Since he agreed to cooperate with the ritualists, he should give them enough space to do their jobs.

The outcome of the second trial would determine whether Ves had made the right choice.

As the preparations neared completion, Ves already learned a lot of lessons about modern ritualism.

Just observing them at work and listening to Zeron's lectures was enough for him to strengthen his basic foundation in this essential area.

Since this was a rare opportunity for Ves to learn useful knowledge, he frequently asked questions.

"I have noticed that your work in our project is not as simple as it looks on the surface."

"Oh?" Dr. Khabeel adopted an attentive expression. "That is sharp of you, sir. What have you noticed exactly?"

"The ritual that you have designed is... complicated and made out of many different parts. I can sort of recognize the ones that correspond to the original myth, but... I feel like you guys have added more parts to them that do not bear any direct relations to the actions of the Goliath Hive. You seem to have tacked them onto the design for whatever reason."

"That is observant of you, Larkinson. Your understanding of ritualism has reached a deeper stage if you are able to identify this much."

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Chapter 7361 Alchemy Schools of Thought

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"In fact, we are not conducting a single ritual per se." The ritualist explained. "We have actually incorporated dozens of smaller rituals to fulfill smaller objectives in order to provide more support for the main ritual. This is a major reason why we are able to limit the size and scope of our artificial Incubator."

"Other rituals?" Ves looked puzzled. "Where do they come from? Won't they interfere with the main process?"

Zeron Khabeel confidently smiled. "Rituals can definitely interfere with each other if you do not truly know what you are doing, but it is our job to make them fit together like matching puzzle pieces. The main ritual is the only one that is derived from a myth established by the mutated voribugs. The minor rituals that we have attempted to integrate into the experimental design are completely different. They are based on old or ancient myths established by our distant ancestors. They may be archaic, but their age along with the extensive amount of documentation at our disposal has allowed us to gain enough mastery over them. We have already reached the stage where we can treat them as modules that we can slot into larger rituals."

That sounded like an important development. It clearly conveyed the success of the Ritualist Department. It had managed to systemize and demystify the practice of holding rituals to the point where engineers would feel right at home!

"Your department's progress is impressive." Ves said with a clear tone of appreciation. "I can imagine that all of this development doesn't take place in a vacuum. There has to be an acute

demand for your rituals if there is a strong push for practicality. What are they most used for? Are they being adapted by cults and churches who have a great need to display the majesty of their beliefs?"

The ritualist softly laughed. "I think you would be surprised by my answer, Professor Larkinson, but that is actually not the case. The industry that makes the greatest use of rituals is actually the alchemy industry."

"Alchemy... industry?"

"Correct. The Alchemy Department is a close ally of the Ritualist Department due to this dependence. You see, much of the gains made by our alchemists are due to the discovery and successful reproduction of ancient alchemy formulas. We have discovered that these old formulas have such long traditions that they have long established their own myths. As long as modern-day alchemists adopt the right attitudes and do their best to reproduce them, they can achieve surprising successes even if the reagents and proportions are somewhat divergent."

That... sounded incredible!

Ves never knew that alchemy possessed such a strong association with rituals, but now that he thought about it, the explanation made a lot of sense!

"So because the alchemists are relying on the power of rituals, they can make a lot of mistakes in their attempts to reproduce an ancient formula, and still get a usable pill or elixir out of their efforts?"

"Yes, but it is not as simple as it sounds." Dr. Khabeel said with a more serious expression. "The outcome of rituals are always plagued with variance. It is difficult to homogenize the output and minimize the error rate. You can attempt to reproduce the same ritual twice and obtain two completely different elixirs at the end. This is an incredibly serious issue. When it comes to any form of pharmaceutical, deviations in dosage, toxicity and other factors are quite egregious. Different individuals also react differently to the same medicines. Think about what happens when both the former and the latter are inconsistent."

That indeed sounded like an incredibly huge problem.

A person with a ridiculously strong physique such as Ves or another Ascended Giant could easily swallow a barrel of raw sewage and experience no health problems at all. Their true bodies could already endure the hazards of phasewater. Many lesser toxins simply had no chance of weakening a body that could float comfortably in deep space.

However, many other humans were much weaker. Even if they practiced various forms of qi cultivation, hardly any of them strengthened the physique, as that was the least useful aspect in modern warfare.

A strong body did not help people improve their ability to pilot mechs or operate the control of warships.

This was why elixirs that exhibited undesirable variance had to be screened out in advance before they could be delivered to their end users.

All of this sounded like a headache to Ves.

"The Alchemy Department holds its personnel to the highest standards." Dr. Khabeel stated. "We are determined to never repeat the mistakes of the geneticists who recklessly blended alien genes with human ones during the later half of the Age of Conquest. We are also not as conservative as the adherents of the Chosen Human, for not everyone is naturally endowed with strength and potential. The alchemists under the employ of the RC try to set an example to everyone by maintaining a balance for the good of our society."

The sentiment sounded noble, but Ves doubted whether those alchemists would be able to stick to their bottom lines when their alien foes gained the upper hand.

"So a lot of elixirs end up getting trashed?"

The ritualist half-nodded. "Not entirely. I can tell you that every alchemical product undergoes strict screening. Only the ones that have passed the safety standards are distributed to others. The unqualified products either get recycled or are used to research new products. Even failures have their use. Accidents can easily create new toxins, but can occasionally produce novel effects. The greatest problem at the moment is that the failure rate is rather high. Our alchemists are doing their best to improve their output, but their lack of knowledge and experience is holding them back. They need more time. We all need more time."

That was a common problem for everyone, not just the members of the Red Collective.

This must be one of the reasons why the RC set the prices of elixirs so high. The demand was high, but the supply was far too inadequate.

"Is the Alchemist Department able to resolve these issues and meet the demand of the market in the future?" Ves asked.

"I would not get my hopes up, sir. It is difficult to become an alchemist. You must not only be intelligent enough to study modern biology and chemistry, but also comprehend cultivation science and incorporate its principles into your work. Our society is able to train biochemists in large numbers, but we have found that it takes a specific mentality as well as talent to transform them into qualified alchemists. Currently, the conversion rate is too low, and I do not expect to see a large improvement in the next three years."

Personnel shortages. Of course. Practically every RC department was short of talented and useful workers.

"I see. What about after that, assuming our civilization still exists?"

Dr. Zeron Khabeel shook his head. "Even if the Alchemy Department has resolved its initial problems, I do not expect their supply situation to improve as much as you are hoping. What you may not know is that its members are split into at least two different schools of thought. There is the Traditional Alchemy School and the Modern Alchemy School. The former advocates for the heavy use of rituals. The latter abhors them and tries to apply as many modern scientific methods and techniques as possible."

Ves could already understand the gist of this conflict.

"I see. The traditionalists are probably in favor of an artisanal approach to alchemy, am I correct? They are artists who seek to create more powerful alchemical products, so much so that they are willing to sacrifice consistency and efficiency in favor of hitting the jackpot."

"That is an astute view of yours. You are largely correct. The Traditional Alchemy School seeks to explore the limits of transmutation of matter. They are obsessed with creating the so-called philosopher's stone, believing that such an object will enable them to break past their current limitations and create elixirs that even gods may find useful."

In other words, the traditionalists were the 'Gloriana-type' of alchemists. They set their sights so high that they had already lost perspective of the needs of the masses.

"And the modernists?"

"The Modern Alchemy School seeks to introduce as many modern standards and methods to the field of alchemy as possible. The modernists are not necessarily opposed to traditions, but they are not blind adherents to them. They hate rituals because they require alchemists to waste their valuable time on production. This is why they are heavily invested in deconstructing existing rituals or applying a pure pharmaceutical approach to their field. Their goal is to convert manual processes into fully automated processes. So long as the latter can be achieved, it will become possible for factories to mass-produce simple pills and elixirs."

The obvious implication of the modern approach to alchemy was that it was mainly targeted towards the lower end of the market.

The difficulty of mass-producing high-grade alchemical products was too high. It was too unrealistic to completely separate skilled alchemists from the complicated process of producing a powerful elixir.

From this sense, the Alchemy Department was split between two bitterly opposed factions.

One of them embraced the artisanal approach and primarily wanted to meet the needs of the most powerful members of red humanity.

The other faction was rooted in modern values and sought to address the most basic needs of the masses.

Ves quickly understood the fundamental problem with this split.

A strong divide at this early stage would cause both factions to experience significant delays in their own endeavors.

Neither side would be able to accomplish rapid progress if they had to split resources between each other.

"Which school is dominant at the moment?"

"The traditionalists have a clear advantage, but the modernists have formed a strong core within the department." Dr. Khabeel answered. "I believe that the former will always maintain the upper hand. There is a belief among them that as long as they master more rituals, they will increase

their overall success rate to the point where they can alleviate some of the supply constraints. The traditionalists also believe that the development of more powerful alchemical products is vital to their own self-improvement. The Alchemist Department is actually the highest consumer of its own output on a per capita basis. Not a day goes by without an alchemist imbibing his own product."

Of course. Alchemists mainly tried to improve the quality of their output in order to better satisfy their own needs. This personal motivation was so powerful that the Traditional Alchemy School easily achieved dominance.

Ves actually found it quite impressive that the Modern Alchemy School managed to gain a foothold at all. These were the only alchemists who still stuck their roots as modern scientists and maintained a strong sense of duty towards their society.

He could understand this divide quite well because it also played in his own work.

His elemental Carmine mechs promised greater benefits at the cost of affordability and convenience.

He could not deny that he had been motivated to commit to their development due to his personal needs.

If he wanted to develop a Carmine mech for himself, then he had better make the best one possible.

Though Ves had high expectations for his upcoming elemental Carmine mechs, he still was not quite sure whether it had been the right decision to focus on the upper end of the mech market.

As the two wars continued to pressure red humanity, the quality of life of ordinary people continued to decline.

Their ability to fight back against the aliens remained limited. They were both outnumbered and outgunned.

If Ves knew that the voribug race had mutated into a galactic-scale threat, then he may have made a different decision at the time.

It was too late for that, though.

Ves had already made his commitment. The least he could do was to see it through the end.

Chapter 7362 The Second Trial Begins

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The Larkinsons finally completed their final checks.

The second trial had begun.

The scenery had changed significantly since last time.

Since the consultants from the Ritualist Department had begun to 'advise' the Larkinsons, the newcomers made many proposals.

This was why they especially converted an experimental chamber into a zero-g vacuum environment with a dark, starry backdrop.

The illusion was almost convincing to most people's eyes. The artificial Incubator truly looked as if it was floating in deep space.

The Incubator also looked a lot more disturbing than the initial design.

Although it was completely mechanical, the Larkinson mech designers simulated the appearance of an organic construct by processing the materials in special ways.

This meant that any layman who glanced at this down-scaled imitation would probably be fooled into thinking that it was an actual organic creation!

Of course, this was not the case. The escort fleet did not possess the facilities and resources necessary to generate a high-quality biomechanical construct within the necessary timeframe.

Ves also did not deem it safe to play with biotechnology at this time. He knew more than most people that blending the power of life with organic matter tended to produce a host of complications, thereby causing the risk factors to balloon.

Perhaps it may be a lot easier to create a miracle amidst all of this chaos, but Ves did not necessarily ask for this time.

He and his fellow Larkinsons only wanted to achieve their primary objective with as little complications as possible.

They could think about fulfilling bonus objectives at a later date. For now, they first needed to worry about whether their work so far was not in vain.

Ves truly could not estimate the success rate of the second trial.

While everyone harbored varying degrees of awe towards the artificial Incubator, Ves did not share the same sentiment.

He had seen, studied and even faced the Incubator and the Ixith Goliath up close. His impressions of the real deal spoiled his appreciation for these crude imitations.

The fake Incubator possessed none of the scale and organic power of the original Class I Voribug Original Battle Moon.

The 'Goliath' that it was supposed to incubate was also a fake in many aspects.

Although the resemblance between this experimental design and the real event was less than 10 percent, the ritualists believed that they had exceeded their minimum standards.

While they cut a lot of corners out of necessity, they did not try to go to the extreme in this case.

Minimizing costs was not the main priority this time. They needed to raise the chances of success as much as possible as the conditions allowed, so they went out of their way to simulate a deep space environment, down to artificially generating background radiation and battlefield interference effects.

This mix of obvious falsehoods and earnest attempts at realism made it seem as if the entire experiment was suffering from schizophrenia.

This was probably one of the reasons why Ves felt unbalanced behind this trial.

Nonetheless, he could not think of any improvements. They had all exercised their best judgment at this time. They still had too little data and information to formulate any meaningful improvements.

"We are ready to begin, Ves." Gloriana announced as she stood behind her workstation. "Do we need to take any steps to commence the ritual?"

"No." Ves shook his head. "We incorporated all of that stuff into the Incubator. We only need to start it up and let it do its job while we feed it bits and pieces of metal. That is the main ritual in a nutshell."

There was no need for them to wear dark robes and light up candles and such.

According to the Myth Reproduction Theory, what truly empowered rituals were twofold.

First, the closer the ritual simulated the process of the original myth, the greater the resonance between the past and present.

To put it differently, a more accurate ritual could unleash greater power as it generated a 'stronger' signal to the myth that had been imprinted in the imaginary realm.

Second, the quantity and power of sentient beings who witnessed or participated in the ritual also determined its outcome.

It was easier to produce more dramatic outcomes if a large number of people actively took part in the rituals.

It was also easier to generate stronger and more specific outcomes if the main participants happened to be strong in mind and spirit.

The current 'ritual' did not involve a lot of people, but it just so happened to include notable individuals such as Ves and Gloriana.

To prevent any unintended contamination, the Larkinsons deliberately stationed Saint Rosa Orfan away from the experimental site.

Her willpower was too strong. She could easily interfere with the processes and cause the experiment to fail.

Other than that, Ves believed that the gathered Larkinsons and other people were powerful enough to fulfill their obligations.

The stolen resonance generator did not need to be powerful. It just needed to work at a scale that was strong enough to be measured.

If Ves wanted to create a truly battle ready module, then he would have attempted to involve many more individuals in order to raise the power of the experimental product even further.

Perhaps he should reserve that suggestion for his needs in the future.

For now, the limited involvement in the ritual suited everyone well enough.

They all grew solemn as they witnessed the Incubator spark to life.

The artificial construct that made a passable attempt of being organic soon began the fundamental process of raising its 'child'.

Random pieces of metal and debris started to get tossed in the Incubator's direction.

The device haphazardly attracted each of these broken parts and steadily subsumed them within its structure.

The highly advanced processing systems of the Incubator rapidly broke down the 'free' salvage.

The resulting raw materials are directly fed into different systems responsible for converting them into smart metal and other essential components.

Ves felt grateful that he was able to make proficient use of first-class technology.

Only the first-raters developed a smart metal production system that could be heavily miniaturized to the point where it could squeeze between the outer layers of the artificial Incubator.

The relatively thin construction modules were not fast or efficient by any means, but they worked, and that was enough.

As the Larkinsons continued to observe the experimental product closely, they invested their earnest thoughts and emotions directly into the statue.

They had all been introduced to the Myth Reconstruction Theory, though their understanding of its principles varied considerably.

However, the hope of accomplishing the impossible by borrowing the power of ritualism sounded more appealing than the other alternatives.

"It looks so disturbing."

"Do you think so? It doesn't look as formidable as that old antique bot."

"Do not get distracted by the visuals. What matters is that it undertakes the same actions as the original Incubator."

Situated within the center of the Incubator, the embryo gradually started to radiate excitement.

Ves grew curious about the life form that was slowly taking shape. Would it turn into an abomination that resembled the original creature in shape as well as thought?

"That shouldn't be the case."

Biotechnology was still weird to most people. It had been the cause of many accidents, but also introduced many life-saving technologies.

Since the Larkinsons excluded it from the second trial, Ves had given up on overcompleting his goal in favor of producing a stable outcome.

Ves still could not tell whether the experiment would succeed, but he felt a strange wave of anticipation coursing through his body.

He continued to observe the Incubator as its spawn gradually started to take shape in the center.

There were no sensor systems hooked up to the Incubator.

They had the option of doing so, but Ves explicitly rejected it. Cooking food without a fire was certainly inconvenient, but it was not impossible.

Ves just felt that this decision was right. His intuition certainly insisted that this was the case.

He grew suspicious at this point. He thought back on his many successes and what happened to make it all possible.

When he studied the data on his past encounters from a detached and analytical position, he found that many lucky breaks may not be so random and coincidental.

Perhaps Ves' actions unconsciously resonated with this higher power, transforming an experiment that was doomed to fail into a success.

Luck could not explain this pattern of success.

Perhaps one of the true reasons why he had been able to make so many 'lucky' breaks was because he unconsciously resonated with a past myth.

That certainly sounded like a much more logical explanation than any esoteric crap that others could devise in their minds.

Of course, this theory did not entirely disregard his own judgment and efforts. Even if Ves received a few nudges here and there, he still completed all of the groundwork and other affairs.

This also highlighted the importance of doing the hard work himself. Without putting things together by hand, Ves would grow more detached from his core projects and subsequently make it harder for himself to create wondrous works.

The Myth Reproduction Theory also happens to do much to explain why Ves and Gloriana were able to create masterwork mechs on demand in essence.

Perhaps their first attempts at creating masterwork mechs were true miracles that had become a part of their personal myths.

After that, their subsequent attempts became a lot easier because they were recreating their own myths.

It was much easier to follow an established route once it was made.

Of course, just because Ves had unintentionally created a myth that he could use to his own advantage did not mean it had turned the act of creating masterworks into an automated process.

Ves still needed to commit to his high-priority projects. He had to invest his time into them. If he could not love his own work, they could not bear a greater part of himself, thereby denying them the opportunity to turn into high-grade artifacts.

In essence, he still needed to put in so much work and effort into his projects that the differences between the true miracle and the subsequent rituals was not that great in his opinion.

It was still nice to understand a bit better how Ves and Gloriana were able to churn out masterwork mechs with greater ease, though.

There was true value in earning a masterwork certificate. Just one of them was enough to change a mech designer's reputation for the better.

"The Incubator has made 50 percent progress." Gloriana announced. "The embryo of the end product is taking on a more mature shape. The rapidly-produced nanomachines are following our instructions to the latter. We have yet to notice any significant deviations or error rates."

As the experimental device gradually became more mature, it began to exude a subtle pressure that was difficult to perceive by most people.

Blinky's excellent senses managed to detect it the soonest.

Ves narrowed his eyes in suspicion.

He could vaguely feel the experimental device coming to life, but in a different manner than before.

It was as if the artificial Incubator was not a fake, but genuinely tried to grow a new monstrosity for the mutated voribugs!

The pressure exuded by the device located in the core of the artificial Incubator therefore radiated a sense of undeniable menace and hostility.

Despite its relatively meager size, the incomplete experimental product felt like it was as big as the first and only Level 8 Goliath to exist at this time.

This was clearly illogical!

There was no way the experimental product could match the heights of the original!

Yet Ves and the others increasingly suspected that the ritual may have powered up the process a bit more than expected.

The Larkinsons gradually began to worry about whether the experimental device would generate a strong willpower without warning, just like last time!

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Chapter 7363 Unexpected Input

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As the experimental device approached the end of its incubation process, the artificial Incubator began to generate a lot more activity.

The sensors picked up increasing emissions of all kinds. From heat to vibrations, the Incubator had clearly grown more energetic even as its integrity began to suffer.

Just as designed, the final minutes of the Incubator were spent on sacrifice.

Just as the original VOBM sacrificed its own vitality and high-quality matter to supply the final nutrients to its maturing embryo, the artificial Incubator broke itself down in order to feed the hungry experimental device.

The transfer process did not encompass matter alone. It also channeled notable amounts of E energy that the artificial Incubator previously accrued.

From parent to child, an age-old tradition took place once again, only this time involving completely artificial constructs as opposed to genuine organic beings.

It was this aspect of the ongoing incubation ritual that started to produce deviations.

Although the Larkinsons and their consultants did not have a good idea of what to expect, they could still use their judgment to determine what was normal and abnormal behavior.

At this moment, the artificial Incubator generated far more emissions than Ves and the others had projected!

"Why is the Incubator generating so much excess heat?! This is not supposed to happen! It was specifically designed to channel as much energy to the experimental device as possible." Gloriana complained.

She was right. The partial smart metal construct should have reached a stage of completion where it should easily be able to receive and store a large amount of electrical energy.

When Ves inspected the relevant section of his workstation, he noted that the nearly-complete experimental device had indeed reached the required stage.

Other readings showed that it was absorbing energy without too many issues aside from the problems associated with excess heat exposure.

Ves voiced his own thoughts. "According to my interpretation of the data, the interaction between the Incubator and the experimental device is largely unfolding as intended. The latter is receiving the appropriate amount of energy. However, that still leaves a large amount of unused energy that has emerged from nowhere all of a sudden. It is this unexpected accumulation of energy that is causing the Incubator to release so many emissions."

His wife furrowed her brows in consternation. "This does not make sense. I am certain that we have not fed the artificial Incubator with excess materials or a large enough quantity of high-energy matter. I cannot deduce where it draws all of its excess energy from. It cannot simply appear out of vacuum, correct?"

Dr. Zeron Khabeel chose to make a remark.

"I believe that the origin of all of this excess energy is obvious. It is a consequence of an excess input of E energy."

That answer sounded more plausible than others. Although the short answer left out a few links, Ves immediately became convinced by the answer.

"Maybe you are right, Zeron, but where is it getting all of that additional energy from?" Ves scratched his head.

The ritualist looked around before settling his gaze on the tier 2 galactic citizen.

"I see now. We have completely overlooked a number of variables. The short answer is that you are responsible for the complications that have occurred so far."

"I knew it!" Gloriana quickly said. "It is always Ves that is at fault! What did you do this time?!"

"Nothing! I haven't done anything crazy this time! We all worked together on this project. Did you really think I could sneak in a few surprises when there are so many people around me? You know as well as I do that I have made a serious effort in restraining my creative urges. I admit that I felt tempted to implement additional ideas and innovations, but I rejected them due to the need to get the basics right."

His explanation caused Gloriana to relax, if only slightly.

"Hm, you are not lying. I believe you, but that does not discount Dr. Khabeel's words. What is it about you that is responsible for the deviations?" She wondered loudly. "Doctor?"

The ritualist was waiting for this. Since no one guessed correctly, the ritualist briefly explained his suspicions.

"We have been overlooking a major variable when it comes to working alongside an individual as exceptional as your former patriarch. That is the complications arising from the use of a kinship network."

Ves blinked all of a sudden. Out of all of the possible answers, he honestly did not expect to hear that the Larkinson Network may be responsible for the odd readings and activity!

"You will have to explain that further. Do it quickly." He commanded.

"The chain of logic is not that difficult to comprehend, sir. Just think about what we have been doing. We devised a ritual around the artificial Incubator that has not accounted for the influence of a strong and well-designed kinship network. This web connects many individuals to each other. Theoretically, this can enable a prominent individual to channel the power of the entire collective. While nothing as drastic as this has occurred, even an unconscious draw from the power accumulated by the kinship network can produce a myriad of changes."

Although this explanation made sense, Ves still harbored a bit of skepticism.

"I would have noticed if I was channeling a lot more energy than intended."

"Perhaps it did not involve the direct transfer of E energy, but other forms of energy that are less detectable." Dr. Zeron Khabeel gently responded. "In my opinion, you occupy a very high position in the hierarchy of your Larkinson Network. You are the founder and former patriarch of your clan. You are also its most successful inventor and mech designer. All of your contributions place you in a position of supreme importance. Is it not a surprise that you can influence the minds of many of your Larkinsons and draw small amounts of power from them to amplify your own activities? So long as you continue to maintain your grip on your kinship network, you will never truly work by yourself."

Ves continued to furrow his brow in thought. He could vaguely understand the other man's argument and may even agree with them. Still, that did little to soothe his unease at the bizarre situation.

"If... if you are right, Dr. Khabeel, then all of my work is connected to this phenomenon. Everything I do will get amplified no matter whether I want it or not. This is certainly annoying for us all. Our models and calculations have become largely useless due to all of the changes."

The more he thought about it, the more he became convinced that the Larkinson Network indeed played an unexpected role.

The ritualists failed to account for this variable because they never directly worked alongside a tier 2 galactic citizen.

Now that they became aware of it, they felt confident they could revise their models and produce more accurate numbers.

However, that was a matter left for later. At this time, it was more important to stabilize the ongoing experiment and make sure it did not blow itself up in the process.

Gloriana and the others had already begun to implement emergency measures in order to siphon away the excess heat and so on. It was easy enough to bleed away the excessive heat.

Once the artificial Incubator began to show signs of resuming a more normal trajectory, it had finally reached the end of its life cycle.

The non-organic Incubator began to fall apart.

Many parts of its hollow structure got cannibalized by the experimental device.

At this point, the ritual not only strengthened the creation of the potential source of stolen resonance, but also fed it with lots of 'nutrients'!

This caused the emergence of a smart metal construct that vaguely formed a large but rippling sphere.

This was the base form of the experimental device. Ves could feel that it had truly come to life through his own sharp senses.

Just like the previous experimental product, the second device possessed a sense of both unity and separation.

Many groupings of nanomachines comprised of sentient inorganic components.

Compared to last time, the SICs were considerably stronger and more intelligent this time.

While Ves needed to get closer in order to study the SICs in greater detail, he could already tell from distance that they were undeniably higher in quality.

In fact, the increase in strength, responsiveness and other factors exceeded his expectations.

They were a lot stronger and more functional than he expected!

This was both good and bad.

The good news was that the stronger SICs increased the success rate of their experiment.

The bad news was that the stronger SICs may also cause problems if the experimental device ever lost control!

Ves grew concerned and quietly activated a few security measures in case this went wrong.

He even called Saint Rosa Orfan to bring her ace mech a little closer in case they needed to borrow her power.

Chapter 7364 Sacrificial Sources

Chapter 7364 Sacrificial Sources

Whether they actually needed her intervention remained unclear.

As the remains of the Incubator either got absorbed by the experimental device or faded into pieces, everyone held their breaths.

The experimental device slowly began to change its shape.

It turned from a wobbly sphere into a slightly more humanoid form.

Gloriana frowned at this display. "I have a bad feeling about this..."

"Sir!" Alexa Streon suddenly called! "Look at the resonance meter! Our experimental device... is beginning to move the needle!"

Ves immediately looked at the relevant section of his workstation and indeed saw the resonance meter beginning to pick up readings.

This was a significant event. Though the experimental device had yet to produce stolen resonance that was strong enough to declare this trial a success, their latest work clearly possessed the potential to accomplish this historic feat!

However, the various complications concerned him. While the experimental device had yet to channel any form of willpower in an effective manner, it had vaguely fallen under the control of a single dominant entity, one that still saw itself as human.

That became obvious as the smart metal continued to adopt the shape of a proud human in uniform.

Ves already recognized the identity of the projected individual.

His heart grew heavier as he saw the smart metal beginning to shape the specific contours of a strong-willed champion's face.

That expression conveyed a clear sense of strength but also frustration.

"That is...!" Gloriana recognized that face.

Though it had been years since the Larkinsons last had dealings with this contentious individual, Venerable Ghanso Larkinson had long been relegated to infamy within their clan!

The existence of Ghanso Larkinson served as the archetypal example of a traitor.

Despite his trueblood origins, he had sided with the enemies of the clan. Not only that, he entered the battlefield and fought directly against his fellow Larkinsons!

His misguided crusade had eventually ended in failure. Ves had managed to harvest a portion of his cousin's spirituality, though it had soon disappeared in the vault.

If not for this occasion, Ves might never think about Ghanso's remnant spirituality. Its condition was extremely shabby from the beginning, and it had hardly recovered over the years.

Yet every resource had its use. After a long time of dormancy, the Larkinsons finally had a need for Ghanso's last breath of life.

Ves had thought carefully about utilizing this particular resource. The clan preserved the spirituality of several defeated high-ranking mech pilots. All of them came from the enemies that once stood on the opposite side of the battlefield.

Honor demanded that these former heroes and champions received a dignified rest. It also aligned with the norms and values of the mech community, who revered powerful mech pilots above all others.

Ves did not choose to let the remnant of Venerable Ghanso rest.

Though he fully acknowledged that the fractured spirituality of his traitorous cousin constituted a life of sorts, that did not stop the mech designer from deliberately utilizing it for an arcane experiment.

Perhaps Ves might hesitate when it came to the spirituality of a friend and comrade like Saint Tusa or Venerable Joshua, but he harbored no affection towards the only Larkinson mech pilot who directly sought to harm and kill his fellow family members.

Ghanso had attempted the unforgivable, so did not deserve respect as far as Ves was concerned.

Of course, that was just an excuse that he told others.

To be honest, Ves still felt that the mech community had a point about respecting the remains of high-ranking mech pilots, but he knew damn well that this rule was not always absolute.

If the MTA did not secretly shy away from harvesting the brains of deceased ace pilots in order to use them as the key ingredients of high-grade life-prolonging treatment, then he would have respected this rule.

Yet the fact that the mechers themselves took advantage of the heroes they propped up indicated that the respected Association had never been as honorable and upright as it appeared on the surface.

The Polymath encapsulated the spirit of the MTA rather well. Just like her, many of the mechers were obsessed with knowledge and possessed a willingness to break the rules in order to advance their high-minded goals.

Their intentions may be noble, but many of them believed that the ends justified the means.

Of course, not all of the mechers could be characterized in this way, but Ves believed that there were enough of them to define the leadership of the MTA and most importantly the RA.

This was why Ves became convinced that he could get away with using Ghanso's fractured spirituality as the key ingredient of his experimental project.

In any case, the stolen spirituality had to come from somewhere.

There were only two possible ways that Ves could think of to acquire this necessary prerequisite to creating a stolen resonance generator.

The first was to harvest the spirituality and extraordinary willpower of a deceased high-ranking mech pilot.

This was where the Ixith Goliath derived its stolen resonance.

After its defeat and capture, the researchers who gained access to the Goliath in stasis had spent many hours scanning and examining the crippled monster.

Yet no matter how deep they looked, they found no material trace of the Rubarthan expert pilots that had the misfortune of falling in the hands of the mutated voribugs.

The Ixith Goliath had completely broken down their expert mechs and presumably assimilated the fragile bodies of their pilots.

It was an awful way to die, and the worst part about it was that parts of their souls still remained captive inside the Mentalist Crystal that gifted the Ixith Goliath with so much stolen resonance!

Ves had 'faithfully' tried to emulate this method by utilizing the spiritual remains of Venerable Ghanso Larkinson.

Though the condition of this fractured spirit was noticeably worse, it shouldn't matter too much as long as it retained at least a bit of extraordinary willpower.

He could have made a different choice.

There were numerous research teams trying to become the first to develop an actual working stolen resonance generator.

It was impossible for each of them to have the spiritual remains of a dead expert pilot or ace pilot at their disposal!

A scandal would definitely erupt if they boldly tried to kill an expert pilot for the express purpose of making their experiment succeed!

Ves had heard from others that these research teams resorted to a different method to fulfill the most essential condition.

They actually harvested the spirituality of the friendly expert pilots they had on hand at the time!

This was easy for the Rubarthans, but not so for the mechers, fleeters, Cybers and other groups!

The latter had no choice but to pay an astonishing prize to their hosts in order to harvest very small amounts of spirituality from the Rubarthan expert pilots.

This was not as effective as it sounded.

Ves did not possess a full understanding of high-ranking mech pilots and extraordinary willpower, but he knew that the latter could not be divided into neat little pieces and used for different purposes.

Willpower originated from the thoughts and emotions of particularly notable individuals.

It could not exist by itself unless their originator successfully traversed the path to godhood to the end!

Therefore, outside of rare cases where god pilots felt generous enough to bestow others a small piece of their divine willpower, everyone else had little choice but to demand a costly sacrifice from expert pilots or ace pilots.

Though the other groups did not share the details with the Larkinsons, Ves could already deduce that the Rubarthan expert pilots had suffered severe and possibly even permanent damage to their psyches in order to pass on the seeds of their extraordinary willpower.

Ves could not think of any other alternatives that could give his competitors the core resource necessary to develop their own stolen willpower generators.

Unless the Rubarthan expert pilots in question resorted to extraordinary means to mend the very serious gaps in their own spirituality, they would always live on as mentally crippled individuals.

Their mentalities became incomplete, which meant that losing a portion of their memories was just the start. The more serious consequence was the loss of part of their cognitive functions.

Ves seriously questioned whether these expert pilots would still be able to retain their current resonance strength, let alone grow stronger over time.

Although this problematic trade may be the more acceptable alternative to harvesting the souls of deceased expert pilots, it was not much better as far as Ves was concerned!

Either way, the creation of a stolen resonance generator inevitably arose due to the sacrifice of a willpower cultivator.

The community of mech pilots still had valid reasons for concerns towards the emergence of this experimental tech.

Even Ves could not formulate an acceptable policy on how the Larkinson Clan should derive the core ingredients of their own stolen willpower generators.

For a short time, the Larkinsons might be able to get away with the use of the remnant spiritualities of enemies slain so long ago that hardly anyone in the Red Ocean knew about them, let alone heard their names.

Yet once the Larkinsons exhausted their vault of this precious resource, what next?

Ves was not ready to answer this question, and believed that this was no different for his fellow Larkinsons.

The good news was that Ves no longer held any responsibility for this decision.

Unless the Red Collective issued a joint directive on this controversial matter, the matriarch of the Larkinson Clan would be the one to determine the policy.

Of course, no matter what Casella Ingvar eventually decided, she had not yet issued any verdict, which meant that Ves was free to use Ghanso's fractured spirituality for his latest experiment!

The good news was that this particular ingredient had contributed to the success of the experiment.

When Ves glanced at the resonance meter, he could see that the experimental device was slowly beginning to generate a small but stable degree of stolen resonance.

Even if the sensors only measured 0.000027 laveres worth of activity, this was still much greater than 0!

"The experimental device... is beginning to stabilize." Alexa Streon spoke with a voice that expressed a measure of her awe. It... is working, if only barely."

What she did not say was that the experimental device had apparently taken a life of its own.

As the remnant spirituality of Venerable Ghanso increasingly exerted control over its new vessel, the smart metal facsimile of the expert pilot 'gazed' directly at the observation chamber where Ves and the other researcher currently resided.

[#\$%#&&\$@&...]

The experimental device opened up a communication channel and transmitted electronic garbage.

Though no one could understand its words, Ves could definitely tell that whatever message the experimental device conveyed was not friendly in the slightest!

Seeing that the Larkinsons did not issue a response, Ghanso's expression conveyed fury!

"We are detecting a sudden willpower spike!"

The resonance meter readings suddenly peaked at 0.27 laveres before a sudden accident occurred!

The experimental device reformed into a spiked tentacle before driving its sharp tip straight at the observation window!

The force of this strike was so sudden that hardly anyone was able to react in time!

Multiple mech designers shrieked, raised their arms or stepped away!

None of their panicked reactions made any difference.

Before the smart metal spike could drive its tip through the observation window, multiple layers of azure energy shields had already surged to full strength.

The power of this physical blow fell far from the threshold of overcoming the resistance of just one of those energy shields, let alone several of them in quick succession.

Ves smirked at the sight. Even with the enhancement of a minute amount of stolen resonance, the nanomachines never had a chance of breaking out of its cage.

[#\$%#&@#!]

The communication channel continued to convey aggressive but unintelligible noises, but Ves paid no mind to the remnant spirituality's indignant feelings.

All he cared about was the outcome of this trial.

"I think this qualifies as a success." He grinned.

Chapter 7365 Ves the Hypocrite

Chapter 7365 Ves the Hypocrite

Due to the nature of the experiment, Ves, Dr. Khabeel and others accounted for many possible accidents.

The use of Venerable Ghanso Larkinson's remnant spirituality evoked a lot of contentious discussions among the Larkinson mech designers.

Multiple of them harbored a lot of misgivings about the use of this resource.

Some of them thought that it was simply wrong to use the dead remains of an expert pilot, even if it came from an infamous traitor to the Larkinsons.

Others believed that the use of an involuntary willpower source would cause the experiment to backfire.

If there was anything coherent and intelligent left of Venerable Ghanso, then he would never contribute his strength to an endeavor meant to help the Larkinson Clan rise!

"He is livelier than I expected." Gloriana remarked after they finally concluded the second trial.

At this moment, the experimental device had become inert again. There was no reason to allow Venerable Ghanso's spiritual remnant to repeatedly lash out and damage precious components.

Fortunately, the experimental device had multiple redundant shutdown features.

The simplest way to stop the experimental device was to cut off the power system.

Ves only had to transmit a single command before the stolen willpower generator froze.

Only a very low amount of energy coursed through its structure. It was barely enough to keep the most essential functions of the central willpower chamber and the sentient inorganic components, but not much more.

Aside from that, Ves also activated hardware-level contingencies that forcibly blocked any movements.

The various measures successfully reined in the unruly device, but it also suppressed whatever was responsible for generating stolen resonance.

Ves glanced at the resonance meter.

"Nothing." He sighed.

That had lots of implications, but for now, they needed to make sure they managed to control the situation.

The mech designers and other researchers quietly worked to perform checks, contain the experimental device and confirm that nothing dangerous had somehow snuck out of containment.

Reality slowly began to sink in as they wrapped up their second trial.

"We did it." Gloriana said.

"Yup."

"It feels... unreal."

"Why?"

"This is too easy." She said with a frown. "I feel as if we do not deserve this accomplishment. Only one major complication occurred, and it was one that we had easily foreseen. Outside the hostility displayed by the willpower source, nothing particularly problematic occurred, and that makes me feel uncomfortable. I feel as if we do not deserve to claim credit for this invention."

Ves smiled in understanding. "I understand what you are talking about. To be honest, I kind of feel the same way. The biggest reason why we were able to produce a successful result was because we collaborated with the Ritualist Department. Without their expertise, we probably needed to

conduct at least several more trials before we managed to narrow down the correct way forward. We managed to save a lot of time by relying on the expertly crafted rituals."

The ritualists in the control room looked prouder after he mentioned their invaluable contribution.

However, Gloriana did not see this as an entirely positive development.

"I cannot deny that their work has allowed us to fulfill our goal sooner than the other research teams, but there is still so much that we have failed to understand. Shortcuts are convenient, but they are handwaving several problems away. We are not being subjected to the pressure of trying to understand the underlying issues and painstakingly devising proper solutions to them. Perhaps the true reason why I do not feel much satisfaction from our work is that we cannot reproduce this result without the use of rituals that I still do not understand."

Dr. Zeron Khabeel understood the female mech designer's discomfort, but he disagreed with her views on ritualism.

"Rituals may carry an undesirable label, but it is not as unscientific as you believe. We have already lectured you on the basic theories and mechanics behind our work. All we are doing is manipulating an aspect of our universe that had previously been closed off from much of our society. Just because strange cultists abused rituals for their own purposes in the past is no reason for human civilization to ignore their possibilities. To ignore the potential of rituals is as foolish as disregarding the value of phasewater or superdimensional matter. Their power already exists in the fabric of our reality."

Gloriana still did not look at ease. "Just because we can does not mean we should. From the moment we become dependent on the convenience of shortcuts, we will no longer be in control of our own technology. I am afraid we are starting a trend where we will no longer understand how our creations work. We need to establish stricter rules when it comes to substituting proper problem-solving for rituals. At the very least, we need to be much more restrained in using them. They should be our last resort, not our first."

She made a few good points.

Ves ordinarily would have agreed with her, but having fought against the enemies of red humanity in person, he knew that such a lofty sentiment had little place in their current society.

"If we do not make use of them, then our enemies will." The ritualist emphasized. "The mutated voribugs have already proven themselves capable of creating their own myths. The native alien races on the other hand are predominantly religious and have spent many ages deepening their imprints in the Red Ocean. They may even be ahead of our own race when it comes to exploiting the power of rituals on a large scale."

"I have to agree with him." Ves voiced his support for the Ritualist Department. "Just because rituals are uncomfortable and difficult to understand does not mean we should ignore the latest tool in our toolbox. Red humanity does not have the luxury to pick and choose its own salvation. Only when we have gained a position of superiority in the Red Ocean can we think about solving our problems the right way rather than the expedient way."

"For what it is worth, the Ritualist Department is not ignorant of the danger of relying on rituals to skip essential processes." Dr. Zeron Khabeel said in a conciliatory tone. "We are still debating on how we need to withhold our work in order to prevent your fears from coming true. Many of us are scientists and engineers ourselves. We have not turned our backs on our past professions. The Ritualist Department is very much in favor of finding an acceptable equilibrium between the rigor of conventional technology and the convenience of modern rituals."

That sounded nice, but Ves was sure that not every ritualist ascribed to a balanced approach.

There were probably ritualists who advocated for no restraints within their department. Their voice might not be strong enough to dictate policy, but that might change in the future.

Ves quietly reminded himself to pay attention to the Ritualist Department.

It definitely had the potential to cause a lot of trouble in the coming years.

Perhaps it might not go rogue all at once like the Phase Lord Department, but it may turn into a breeding ground for extremists who had no qualms about sacrificing other humans in order to power their deranged rituals.

His expression suddenly sank.

He belatedly recognized that most recent works all involved human sacrifice in one fashion or another.

Although he wanted to deny it, he could not refute the fact that extraordinary works like the Riot Mark III and the experimental device derived much of their awesome power through the sacrifice of other human beings.

In this regard, Ves had no right to judge the ritualists for crossing ethical boundaries!

As Ves thought how he may have become a bigger problem than the members of the Ritualist Department, he tried to figure out when he had crossed the line.

Was it from the moment he first dabbled with Demoncasting?

From the moment the Mech Designer System presented the option to him, he felt compelled to embrace its forbidden possibilities.

He allowed himself to get manipulated by the illusion of choice.

Though the System presented a handful of highly enticing upgrade tracks at the time, Ves did not believe that it was ignorant of his decision-making process.

In situations like these, Ves almost always selected the most exciting option rather than the most effective option!

From the moment he locked in this upgrade track, his descent into darkness truly took off at that point.

While Ves acquired an affinity for the darkness element at an earlier date, he believed he had done a good job of combining it with his existing works.

He mainly focused on the concepts that resonated with him the most such as struggle and adversity.

That sounded like a decent position. How did he transition into sacrificing actual human lives just to power up his creations?

The answer was simple.

He did not go from point A to point B overnight.

He took baby steps. He made a gradual transition.

As long as the process was dragged out over several months or years, Ves wouldn't be able to sense that his judgment had become impaired until it was too late.

In other words, he was the frog that got boiled in a pot.

It was too late to realize that he had gone too far. From the moment he conspired with Helena to harvest the souls of human beings and torment them to the point where they devolved into demons, he had already engaged in an unforgivable act.

Though Ves lamented his fall, he had no intention of going back.

The Survivalist in him believed that red humanity needed his tainted works.

Creations such as the Bitter Scimitar and the Riot Mark III may not be 'innocent', but no one could deny their effectiveness, especially when compared to more ordinary equivalents!

After Ves confronted his own darkness, he was no longer in the mood to be hypocritical towards the ritualists.

"Let us get back to work." He suggested instead. "We still need to analyze the data and supplement our theoretical frameworks. We may not be able to plug all of the gaps, but we should at least gather enough clues to point out areas of improvement. A stolen willpower generator that can only generate an output of 0.27 laveres is practically useless."

That was not entirely true.

Distorting reality at this magnitude was already enough to turn impossibilities into reality.

However, the limited degree of reality distortion put a hard limit on what could be done.

True resonance only truly started to reach game-changing levels when it reached 1 lavere. That was partially what the scale was based upon.

As the various mech designers and researchers studied the abundant amount of data, the Larkinsons already received a lot of messages of congratulations as well as additional inquiries.

The latter ranged from exchanges to offers for further collaboration.

Ves was not in the mood to engage in them, and neither was his wife.

"Our focus should not remain on stolen resonance technology." Gloriana softly declared. "This may have been an interesting diversion, but the reality is that it is too impractical to be used on mechs. We are mech designers. We have certainly broadened our horizons and learned many lessons. We should use what we learned to design mechs that can fight better alongside other units that make use of this emerging tech. If red humanity can deploy warships that are just as resilient as the Ixith Goliath, then our mechs no longer have to withstand as much damage on an open battlefield. The two can compliment each other better. Let the fleeters and the others invest their vast manpower and resources into this new field. They are much better equipped for this task than our clan. With our connections and our contributions so far, we have already earned the qualifications to leech from their efforts."

Her message did not sound particularly noble, but she was right.

The Larkinsons only gained an advantage this time because the research specimen had yet to be delivered to the Yernstall Central Star Node.

Once proper research institutions got their hands on the captured Ixith Goliath, the big players would definitely be able to advance their understanding of stolen resonance technology by leaps and bounds!

Rather than try to compete directly against these bigshots, the Larkinsons should obediently stay in their lane.

At most, the clan might set up a dedicated research unit that was focused on developing a very narrow application of stolen resonance that most aligned with the Larkinsons, but that was the best they could do for the time being.

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Chapter 7366 Stolen Resonance Constraints

Chapter 7366 Stolen Resonance Constraints

While Ves did not feel too accomplished about being the first to develop a working stolen willpower generator, that was not the case with other people.

Ves and the Larkinsons had proven their ability to innovate once again!

They manage to be the first to artificially replicate the stolen resonance phenomenon, thereby providing definitive proof that red humanity could harness its power under its own terms!

Winning the race not only burnished the reputations of the Larkinsons even further, but also granted concrete benefits to their clan.

From gaining access to high-end research results to obtaining the rights to purchase high-end goods, their latest success cemented their place in high society a little further.

However, Ves did not pay much attention to these gains. He had lost his fascination for stolen resonance technology, especially now that he had already overcome the most difficult hurdle.

There were still a lot of challenges that he could overcome, but they involved deep secrets and mechanics that fell increasingly more outside of his core specializations.

Ves knew that this was not the time for him to indulge in side activities. Stolen resonance technology promised to grant immense boons to constructs other than mechs. Due to its many limitations, there was very little prospect of applying it to mechs.

Currently, the only way to integrate a stolen willpower generator to a mech-sized entity was to make use of a very rare Mentalist Crystal.

The supply of this incredibly versatile hyper material was incredibly limited. There was no way of boosting it in the short term. This meant that their very limited quantities needed to be prioritized for more strategic and cost-effective uses.

In practice, that meant installing stolen resonance generators into the largest constructs possible, such as artifact warships and Masterwork installations.

Red humanity was not extravagant enough to install the most compact version of a stolen resonance generator into a mech.

If the mech pilot was powerful enough, then he most certainly managed to break through on his own merits.

A hero that gained the capacity to generate true resonance had no reason to covet stolen resonance.

As for pilots that lacked this capacity, their value on the battlefield would still remain low even if they managed to harness the power of stolen resonance.

The power of a high-ranking mech pilot was not solely determined by resonance. Their skills, judgment and intuition had all reached extraordinary heights. They were transcendence who had broken through the human limit. True resonance merely completed the package.

Therefore, in terms of cost-effectiveness, the subject needed to possess incredibly powerful qualities from the start in order to make it worthwhile to give it access to stolen resonance.

That obviously included large constructs.

It could also apply to Ascended Giants.

"We need this power." The Divine Harpoon stated to his superior. "The Ixith Goliath butchered two of our Ur-Titans because of the absolute disparity generated by stolen resonance. Their mid-grade superdimensional equipment offered very little protection against a large monstrosity that borrowed the power of a human expert pilot. Such enemies will continue to emerge among the mutated voribugs. The native aliens will not take long before following suit. Their habit of copying human technology practically ensures it. In fact, their ability to harvest Mentalist Crystals is much stronger, meaning that they are much better placed to bestow stolen willpower generators to their own phase leaders!"

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As cynical as it sounded, the leader of the Faceless Giants probably guessed correctly.

Now that the Larkinsons had successfully replicated the stolen resonance phenomenon, they proved that it could be reproduced under controlled conditions so long as they understood the core principles.

It may be a lot more difficult to develop a stolen resonance generator without direct access to the Ixith Goliath, but it was impossible so long as the research team in question obtained the most crucial batch of knowledge.

Even if the major organizations managed to make a lot of strides in purging treacherous cosmopolitans from their ranks, traitors and informers always existed.

Ves had no doubt that there were many of them who possessed enough ingenuity to circumvent the monitoring of kinship networks.

His access to the inner workings of the Red Collective already exposed him to groups of people that had quickly managed to master a large amount of extraordinary capabilities in a short amount of time.

The Cosmopolitan Movement had always been excellent in terms of infiltration. Ves had no doubt that they possessed enough clever minds to still retain essential contacts among the upper echelon of red humanity.

This meant that all of the confidential information about stolen resonance technology may have already been leaked to the Red Cabal at this point in time!

In that sense, the appearance of the Ixith Goliath was equivalent to opening Pandora's box.

It was already a foregone conclusion that other civilizations would gain the power of stolen resonance.

Perhaps the only consolation was that the native aliens could not build stolen resonance generators willy-nilly.

Theoretically, their supply of Mentalist Crystals was much greater, especially now that they had a compelling reason to harvest this strategic resource.

The problem was that the native aliens did not possess their own native willpower cultivators as far as everyone knew.

They absolutely did not have the ability to nurture their own high-ranking mech pilots.

They also did not have any traditions equivalent to traditional or reformed swordsmanship.

The only practical way for them to obtain the most essential 'ingredient' necessary to instill a stolen resonance generator with willpower was to capture an expert pilot on the battlefield!

This would not be easy, especially once expert pilots caught on to their precarious situation.

Ves felt a bit sorry for these expert pilots. They already subjected themselves to plenty of danger by fighting against formidable alien opponents without adequate support. Now they had to be on guard against deliberate capture operations due to the value ascribed to their extraordinary willpower!

Even humans suffered a headache on the question where they were supposed to obtain their own willpower sources.

These factors and more made it very difficult for the Ascended Giants to fulfill their latest wish.

"According to my other self's understanding, there is no feasible way for us to acquire the compact version of stolen resonance generators from the Red Collective." The Dark Apostle stated to his most trusted giant subordinate. "I want to obtain this power as much as you, but compared to giving them to us, they would rather install it on warships and other big machines."

The other Ascended Giant frowned. "Those warships and so on are huge. They should have plenty of space to spare for the bigger version of stolen resonance generators. You told me that the bigger ones do not require the use of Mentalist Crystals."

"That is right, but there are more differences between the two versions. The bigger device is inferior because the so-called central willpower chamber is a very poor and incomplete copy of a Mentalist Crystal. The former can only replicate a couple of traits of the latter, and very badly at that. Even if the Red Fleet can produce the bigger versions in large numbers, their performance will always remain a shadow of the 'real thing'."

Technically speaking, red humanity had yet to develop the small version of a stolen resonance generator.

Ves and the others did not have a spare Mentalist Crystal on hand.

Yet Ves felt confident enough about his theories that he already became convinced that a stolen resonance generator built around a Mentalist Crystal would perform at a much higher level!

This was obviously bad news for the Phase Lord Department.

It was filled with lesser phase lords who could make good use of stolen resonance.

Yet because there were warships and other constructs that could arguably offer better value on the battlefield, the Dark Apostle could already guess that they would gobble up the vast majority of available Mentalist Crystals!

He sighed.

It couldn't be helped.

The Ascended Giants had failed to prove their value during the Battle of Philaster Crestia.

Though they had suffered serious losses and setbacks due to unforeseen setbacks, that was no excuse for failure.

The Riot Mark III encountered the same set of difficult circumstances, but it had performed above and beyond anyone's expectations.

The latest battle essentially reinforced the strategic value of ace mechs and diminished people's expectations towards the Ascended Giants.

It didn't help that the Phase Lord Department still suffered from a trust deficit. Even with all of the recent reforms, it had not yet shed the taint of betrayal.

The Divine Harpoon realized this as well. His expression grew even more severe.

"So we will not be able to join the sequence of groups that can partake in this new technology."

"Not entirely." The Divine Harpoon said. "We may have a chance... but only as long as we do it ourselves. The Larkinson Clan has earned the right to keep up with the overall development of stolen resonance technology. That means that it can always build stolen resonance generators that are relatively up to date. So long as we gather a willpower source and a Mentalist Crystal, we can solve our own problems."

That was a potential way out, but it could never solve the needs of hundreds of Ascended Giants.

"Is there a more practical solution, sir?"

The Dark Apostle sighed. "Yes. Time. As long as we wait long enough for our true bodies to grow to the size of a battleship, even the bigger version of a stolen willpower generator will look comparatively small to us. We can readily integrate it into our raiments."

There was a huge flaw with this setup.

"That may be true, but if we want to retain the protection of superdimensional armor, our demand for superdimensional matter will skyrocket. Unless the supply of the latter has exploded, it is impossible to wield the power of both stolen resonance technology and superdimensional technology at the same time."

Both of them winced.

These were the latest and most cutting-edge high technologies developed by red humanity. Either of them could be described as gamechangers.

The most ideal situation was for the Ascended Giants to possess the power of both, yet that was clearly impossible.

The Ascended Giants faced many technical and material limitations.

Under the current circumstances, the Dark Apostle could only ensure that he could meet the needs of himself and possibly one or two strategoi under his command.

While that would ensure that the leaders of the Phase Lord Department retained the power to contend with powerful alien champions, it left out the vast majority of Ascended Giants, even the more outstanding ones.

The Dark Apostle felt bad about this. He wanted to change it, but there was nothing he could do. Brute force could not solve the fundamental problems that hindered mass adoption.

Only a creator and innovator like Ves could find a way out for his subordinates.

"Let us not think about it for the time being." The Divine Harpoon had already adjusted his mentality. "Soldiers like us are expected to complete our missions with the weapons in our hands rather than the weapons that only exist in our imagination. We have fought without the power of resonance in the past, and we shall do so going forward. We have our strengths. Alien phase lords have fought and contended against human ace mechs in the past, so there is no reason for us to do so as well."

"Hm, you're right. Let's talk about something else. I am tired of this subject."

"Then let us talk about our upcoming reorganization and combat deployments. We have suffered too much of a reputation loss due to the outcome of the previous battle. In hindsight, it was premature for us to tackle brand-new enemies when we have yet to fully master our own skills and doctrines. I advise you to turn away from the mutated voribugs for the time being and focus on winning battles against the native aliens. We need a whetstone to sharpen ourselves, and there is no better choice than our alien mirrors."

Chapter 7367 Consolidation Plan

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The Battle of Philaster Crestia may have caused painful losses to the Ascended Giants, but it had also done a lot of good.

It deflated the unreasonable overconfidence of the human phase lords.

They no longer bought into their illusion of omnipotence and invincibility that the heavenly authority of the Red Ocean had forcibly rammed into their heads.

Their brainwashing finally broke now that reality had cruelly taught them a lesson.

However, the Ascended Giants became so discouraged that their leaders had to take measures in order to prevent them from wallowing in their depression.

This was why the Divine Harpoon suggested for them to embark on a more reasonable campaign against their more familiar adversaries.

While the native aliens were constantly evolving due to technological and doctrinal advancements, they were still far more predictable than the new and bizarre mutated voribugs.

The weakened and demoralized Ascended Giants needed greater certainty in order to recover their fighting spirit.

True powerhouses possessed the capability to deal with unexpected surprises no matter the situation, but the Ascended Giants had not yet reached that level.

They possessed the brute force to contend against champions equivalent to Level 7 Goliaths, especially with a numbers advantage.

Yet their many shortcomings also caused them to turn into easy pickings against enemies equivalent to Level 8 Goliaths.

The gap between the two could not entirely be bridged by relying on an increase in brute force alone.

Skills, equipment, strategy, logistics and many other variables had to be raised before the Ascended Giants became strong enough to cement their places among the ranks of powerhouses.

This was clearly not a one-dimensional issue.

The entire Phase Lord Department had to invest an immense amount of effort to rise to the occasion.

The Ascended Giants also had to lower their egos and intensify their collaboration with other human powers.

They clearly couldn't solve all of their problems by themselves!

They needed to forge a gathering of strong allies that could offer powerful material and technological assistance.

Naturally, there was no way these groups would help the human phase lords for free.

The Ascended Giants could not offer a wide variety of goods and services, but they happen to excel in one particular area.

Military force.

Even if the Ascended Giants could not measure up against ace mechs in numerous aspects, they still had one powerful advantage.

They were numerous and they were largely 'uncommitted'.

Although the Phase Lord Department had already split them up into squads and spread them out across the frontlines of the Red War, these small units could easily be recalled and redeployed in a more deliberate fashion.

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In their search for allies, the Dark Apostle and his leadership team racked their brains for options before settling on a suitable option.

The first-rate colonial superstates or rather empires possessed the most acute need for military support.

The Rubarthan Pact was in the worst shape. Even with the reinforcements promised by the Cybernetic Empire, it would still be difficult to stop the mutated voribug invasion entirely.

However, the Dark Apostle and his subordinates quickly ruled out the option of approaching the Rubarthans for a contract.

They had lost all willingness to fight against the mutated voribugs.

Even if the Ascended Giants deliberately avoided the Goliath Hive, the Superswarm Hive and the Solari Hive were not any weaker!

The latter two hives might lack their own Goliaths, but they made up for it with sheer numbers of cannon fodder!

The Ascended Giants at their current level lacked the endurance and other strengths to wipe out huge amounts of swarming bugs.

The big and clumsy phase lords were simply the wrong tool for the job.

This was why the leadership team quickly settled on offering the power of their Ascended Giants to the Terrans.

Even if the mutated voribugs had recently caused the Rubarthan front to become the center of attention of red humanity, that did not mean that the native aliens had ceased to become a serious threat.

Perhaps the major alien races stationed closer to the rapidly expanding territory conquered by the mutated voribugs had eased up on their assault against human-occupied territories, but that did not apply to the ones stationed further away!

The ancient phase whales and most senior leaders of the other alien major races were not stupid.

From their perspective, the mutated voribugs had become the most acute threat in the short term, but red humanity most definitely remained the greater threat in the long term!

The long and exhausting history of the human race exemplified their ability for growth and adaptability.

Every serious alien empire that contended against human civilization in the past inevitably lost because they underestimated the hairless pinkskins!

No matter how weak they seemed, the humans always possessed the ability to turn from prey into predator as long as they enjoyed enough development time!

Their technological progression was unnaturally fast. Their leaders possessed an abundant amount of cunning and foresight. Their soldiers possessed both the skills and tenacity to confront superior adversaries.

In other words, it was a mistake to underestimate the human threat!

Humans had already conquered half of a much bigger galaxy than the Red Ocean in the past.

There were plenty of reasons to believe they could do so again!

Therefore, the Red Cabal still insisted that the native aliens persist in their extremely costly assault against red humanity!

Many individuals, both human and alien, did not understand the logic of these high-and-mighty alien leaders, but that did not affect the latter's judgment in the slightest.

The Terran Alliance suffered the brunt of the intensified alien aggression.

The native aliens on the Rubarthan side had reoriented themselves to defend against the rapidly expanding mutated voribugs.

The alien assault fleets assigned to invade the Red Ocean Union achieved no significant results as of late due to colliding against the concentrated forces of the Red Association and the Red Fleet.

Now that the Red Two's vaunted god pilots and dreadnoughts no longer bore the burden of defending the Terran and Rubarthan fronts, they did a far better job of defending the narrower front of the only territories that still submitted to their authority.

This was the price the Terrans and the Rubarthans paid for their rash act of declaring independence!

Certain conspiracy theorists even suspected that the mechers and fleeters would be happy if the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact got overwhelmed by the alien invaders!

While Ves did not think that their relations had deteriorated to the point where they secretly wished they would get destroyed by the aliens, their cooperation remained lukewarm at best.

The only reason why they stuck together was because they all understood the fundamental truth that the loss of any major human power would push the remaining ones closer to extinction.

As long as this remained the case, the human polities would never completely fall out with each other.

Of course, almost everyone lacked strength. Even the Red Ocean Union could benefit from additional reinforcements.

It was just that the Terran Alliance was in a much worse position.

While the Light of Sol was by far the fastest god pilot in the Red Ocean, he alone bore the burden of protecting the Terran front.

The Red Cabal understood this truth very well and directed more assault fleets towards the Terran border regions as of late.

While the Terrans were still hanging on for the most part, the increased pressure accelerated the depletion rate of both mobile and fixed assets.

Ves could easily deduce from this information that the Terrans had a greater need for reinforcements than before.

He even had access to intelligence that indicated that the Terran Alliance had entered into negotiations with the Cybernetic Empire.

The latter still had a respectable amount of high-tech war planets and warfleets on standby.

Of course, just like the Rubarthans, the Terrans definitely had to make a lot of concessions if they wanted to convince the Polymath to dispatch her forces to another front.

This happened to be an excellent opening for the Phase Lord Department.

When he discussed his plan with his chief of staff, she sounded quite supportive.

"This is a good turning point for the Phase Lord Department." Eliza Mo Ragadan said after a moment. "The prior actions and not-so-stellar combat record of the Ascended Giants has caused their trust and reputation to plummet. We have received reports that state that their deployments alongside other human forces have encountered plenty of friction. From personality clashes to a fundamental lack of trust, it is clear that our strategy of ingratiating themselves alongside random fighting forces is not working. Recalling them and deploying them to the Terran front where the local defenders cannot afford to be picky is a much wiser course of action. Consolidating them will not only allow them to leverage their teamwork further, but also keep them disciplined. This will make it much more likely for them to leave a positive impression behind."

It sounded silly, but public relations was essential. The Phase Lord Department needed to earn a lot of goodwill in order to regain everyone's trust and receive greater support from the Red Collective and other major players.

"I think it is time to put the gang back together." Ves stated. "The Premier Fleet has been fighting on the Terran front for a while now. Saint Commander Casella Ingvar and the other Larkinsons over there have a much better grasp of the local and regional conditions than us. I believe it will benefit us all if the Premier Fleet and the Bluejay Fleet consolidate in a single force. Combined with reinforcements in the form of dozens more Ascended Giants, we will become far more than a volunteer force. We will not be able to smash practically any alien invasion force that descends on a Terran star system, but also launch a counterattack and take the fight to the enemy!"

Eliza Mo Ragadan was sharp enough to tease out his underlying ambition.

"It sounds as if you are planning to do more than consolidate your Ascended Giants. Are you intending to recall the other Larkinson ace pilots that are currently fighting independently?"

Ves grinned. "Exactly."

He had enough of spreading his assets and the assets of the Larkinson Clan around!

Compared to the benefits of spreading them around and letting them broaden their horizons, Ves would much rather have access to all of their power and capabilities!

The most recent battle against the Ixith Goliath had scared him quite badly. The same engagement had also given him a lot of respect towards a concentration of power.

He believed that he and his Larkinsons could no longer afford to muddle around across half-a-dozen different battlefields.

They needed to take the initiative. Only by forming an invincible fist that consisted of multiple ace pilots as well as a phalanx's worth of Ascended Giants would they be able to smash apart any alien resistance and complete more ambitious missions!

His chief of staff looked thoughtful. "I can understand your desire to concentrate your forces, but your authority over your clan is not as absolute as before. If you want to realize your plan, you will not only have to convince its new matriarch, but also every single Larkinson ace pilot."

"Leave it to me." Ves confidently said. "The Saint Commander may be a leader in her own right, but she respects my opinion. As for the other Larkinson ace pilots, they have spent enough months

on their individual tours. I believe that they have already begun to miss the times where they fought alongside their fellow clansmen. It will do a lot of good for them to converge again. Compared to fighting alongside random forces, it is much more meaningful for them to lead the Larkinsons to victory."

"Very well, sir. That should cover the Larkinsons. Do you need me to initiate contact with the Terrans?"

"No. Not yet, Eliza. I have several friends among the Terrans. I will introduce my proposal to both the Devos Ancient Clan and the Streon Ancient Clan. As long as they are willing to host us, our negotiation team can handle the rest. We still need to make sure that we turn this into a profitable venture. They may be our friends, but business is business."

"Of course, sir."

Chapter 7368 Principled Matriarch

Chapter 7368 Principled Matriarch

Ves contacted the necessary people in order to get the ball rolling.

Just as he predicted, the Larkinson Clan did not object to his proposal.

"This is a radical switch in strategy." The physical projection of Saint Commander Casella Ingvar warned. "Recalling our ace pilots early will incur certain costs. We will disappoint multiple parties if we attempt to transfer our saints away on short notice. I advise that we take our time on consolidation. It is not necessary for us to gather together at the fastest possible speed. If we extend our timeline by several months, there will be much less friction and hard feelings."

Ves thought for a moment before nodding. "That sounds reasonable. Let us do that, then. I am not in a hurry to get into action again. We can use the additional time to deepen our preparations and wait for other developments to fall into place."

"Outside of having your Ascended Giants fight against more suitable opponents, are there any other reasons why you are insistent on campaigning over here?" The Saint Commander asked.

He nodded. "There are multiple reasons, of which two of them are particularly relevant. The first is that the development of Woodsap mechs will soon reach a stage where they conduct trials of workable prototypes. The complexity of my elemental Carmine mechs surpass that of any mass production models that I have worked on in the past. Biotech is inherently more dangerous, especially when it directly interfaces with the human body. It is for this reason that my latest Carmine mech design project demands a more thorough and extensive testing process. Compared to managing the prototypes by remote, I would much rather test them right under my nose."

While Ves had been occupied by many affairs as of late, he had never forgotten about the development of Woodsap mechs.

Due to the immense amount of technical support from the Terrans, Ves did not have to invest a lot of design work on the highly complicated biomech.

He adopted the role of a distant project manager. He mainly set targets while sparing what little time he could spare on the more essential features such as the Carmine System and the spiritual foundation of the Woodsap mech.

He could leave the very complicated bioengineering and other design tasks to the R&D teams that the Terrans had mobilized for this secret but highly anticipated national project.

Although not all of the Terran ancient clans participated in its development, enough of them had seen value in his upcoming Woodsap mechs to give their blessing as well as more concrete forms of support.

As such, even if Ves wanted to increase his involvement, it would have been quite difficult to do so as most of his skills could not surpass that of Terran specialists who dedicated at least a century in their respective fields.

It didn't matter too much to Ves. While his ownership in his first elemental Carmine mech design project was not as high as it would like, he considered it to be a worthwhile tradeoff.

However, now that the development of his Woodsap mechs approached the prototype testing phase, he no longer wanted to be as hands-off as before.

No matter how little Ves invested in this collaborative design project, it would still bear his name first and foremost.

Its impact on his reputation and prestige would be massive, second only to the release of the Yellow Jacket series, the very first Carmine mechs available to the public.

While the Yellow Jackets granted norms the ability to pilot mechs for the first time, the cheap and accessible nature of these Carmine mechs heavily limited their value on the battlefield.

Pairing poorly-trained Carmine mech pilots with mechs that were easy to mass produce made sense from an industrial perspective, but military strategists barely had any use for them. The Yellow Jackets could only serve as cannon fodder for the time being.

While the mech industry tried to compensate for this by designing ever more elaborate variants of the base model, there were clear limits to how far they could deviate from the initial template.

This was due to Ves' limitation as a Senior Mech Designer.

Unless he broke through, only he could develop a truly elite version of the Carmine mech.

The demand was overwhelming. Not a day passed by without thousands of virtual letters arriving at his public inbox that begged him to design a Carmine mech that could keep up with the more powerful machines on the battlefield.

Ves had no time to read any of them in person, but Gavin had let him know that those messages never stopped arriving.

As a mech designer, he felt an obligation to meet the needs of the public.

In the past, the uncompromising limits of existing neural interface technology at least gave people like Ves an excuse to ignore the complaints of helpless norms.

That excuse no longer applied anymore.

By releasing the Carmine System, 96.5 percent of the population now had a valid reason to demand mechs of their own!

Therefore, Ves would definitely be able to lift a heavy weight off his shoulders once he finally finished the Woodsap mechs.

Not all of the weights, but at least one of them. The fact that the Terran Alliance had already claimed exclusivity on Woodsap mechs heavily limited their availability outside of the colonial star empire's borders.

"What other reason do you have to insist on consolidating our forces?" The physical projection of the Saint Commander asked. "You previously stated that you wanted to spend time with the Rubarthans because you have already familiarized yourself with the Terrans. Your new plan contradicts your previous goals."

Ves nodded. "You are not wrong, but circumstances have changed. The Rubarthans are not happy to see me and my Ascended Giants go, but both of us have agreed that I have fulfilled my obligations to the Rubarthan Pact in advance. The star empire is the biggest beneficiary of the Battle of Philaster Crestia. They have not only secured a significant share of ownership of the captured Ixith Goliath, but also have additional opportunities to capture more Goliaths with similar properties. Thanks to developing a successful proof of concept of a stolen willpower generator, the Rubarthans stand to become the leader in stolen resonance technology."

Transferring the first and only known Ixith Goliath to the Yernstall Central Star Node was not as big of a deal as it looked.

Assuming the Goliath Hive would keep pumping out Level 8 Goliaths with stolen resonance capabilities going forward, the rarity and uniqueness of this research specimen would definitely fall in the coming months and years.

There was only so much R&D that the other major players could conduct on a single captured Goliath.

The only way they could expand their research on the genuine articles was to make a deal with the Rubarthan Pact to exchange their military assistance for the right to claim valuable spoils on the battlefield.

This was especially important as any Goliath with stolen resonance capabilities presumably possessed a core made out of Mentalist Crystals!

This should do much to relieve the acute shortage of combat assets at the Rubarthan front.

Therefore, the recent departure of the Bluejay Fleet and other forces had already been made up by the arrival of fast-reaction forces dispatched by other groups with the assent of the Rubarthans.

Ves and the rest did not have to feel guilty for 'abandoning' the people assailed by the mutated voribugs.

"About the stolen resonance generator that you have just made." The matriarch of the Larkinson Clan narrowed her eyes. "What is its current condition?"

"It is... stable, Casella. It is a highly experimental design, so the fact that it hasn't exploded or fallen apart despite all of the radical new stuff that we have put into it is a small miracle unto itself. It is not an effective product, though. Its efficiency is extremely poor, mainly due to our lack of understanding and the immature design. It will take both time and effort to raise the effectiveness of this device. The good news is that we don't have to do most of the work. The other major players will invest their own effort into its development. We have the right to borrow their more general and less specialized advancements in our own works. The downside is that unless we develop specialized design solutions of our own, we won't be able to produce anything that surpasses third-party works."

"That is not what I am interested in." The Saint Commander responded. "Let me rephrase my question. What is the condition of the source of willpower that you have employed?"

Oh.

As an ace pilot herself, it made sense that she cared more about the spiritual remnant of a fellow pilot rather than the rest of the device.

"He... it... has been forced into dormancy." Ves awkwardly responded. "As you know, the source is derived from a former enemy of ours. Despite spending years in isolation, the spiritual remnant has never let go of its unending hostility towards me and our clan. Before you ask, I frankly do not see any way to reconcile with it. I even think that the only reason why it is able to maintain a sliver of extraordinary willpower is due to its obsessive hatred towards us. This also makes it dangerous for us to rely on the stolen willpower generator for any real applications."

The ace commander nodded in understanding. "I think it is important to establish our bottom line on this matter. As much as I can foresee how many lives we can save by repurposing the willpower of our defeated enemies, we cannot afford to stoop to this level. This is not because I sympathize with Venerable Ghanso and the others, but because I believe that it is more important for us to maintain our honor and stay true to our principles. As contemptible as your defeated cousin may be, he was still a human and a soldier. How we treat our fellow humans defines our character. I do not want our clansmen to forget the value of life and adopt overly utilitarian mindsets."

Though the Saint Commander sounded a bit too soft and forgiving in Ves' ears, she still made a good point.

"I agree." Ves hesitantly said. "Maybe not as wholeheartedly as you, but I can support your principled stance. Honor and respect for life are what defines the Larkinson Clan. It sets us apart from the rest who do not cling to those notions as consistently as us. As much as I can think of how to make good use of Venerable Ghanso's spiritual remnant, it is not strictly necessary for us to

exploit it. I can promise you that once we have concluded our research on our experimental device, I will disassemble it and put my fallen cousin's remnant back into storage."

Casella Ingvar smiled. "That is for the best. Do not misunderstand me, though. I am not going as far as forbidding the use of this willpower source. I just think that you should look for more acceptable alternatives first before you resort to this particular option. What are the prospects that you can succeed in this effort?"

Ves shrugged. "Honestly? Very poor. As you should know, stolen resonance cannot come from any artificial sources. It has to be derived from the extraordinary willpower of a real individual. Sadly, the only known willpower cultivators that we know of are human high-ranking mech pilots and human swordmasters. That means that they are the only ones we can use to 'activate' stolen resonance generators. I have extensively discussed this problem with the other researchers in the escort fleet, and none of them have come up with any better alternatives. The only suggestion that sounds remotely realistic is to develop a willpower cultivation method that can be practiced by the major alien races of the Red Ocean. Suffice to say, this is an extremely controversial proposal."

Only the Cosmopolitan Movement would be in favor of this crazy idea!

Chapter 7369 The Importance of Influence

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Although it sounded insane, both Ves and Casella knew that as long as the incentives grew strong enough, people would make it happen somehow.

Stolen resonance technology could only proliferate if red humanity managed to fulfill one core condition.

Not even the heavily limited supply of Mentalist Crystals posed a hindrance to this cutting-edge technology.

It merely limited the amount of compact applications of this tech.

The Red Fleet already planned to incorporate the bigger version of stolen resonance generators into plenty of cruisers and battleships which should have plenty of space to spare for a new module.

No, the real imitation of stolen resonance technology was the availability of 'acceptable' willpower sources.

If everyone abided by the contemporary rules and customs of the Red Association, then no acceptable willpower source existed at this time.

The repurposing of dead expert pilots or ace pilots for the sole purpose of activating stolen willpower generators was a horrendous violation of their rights!

Perhaps people might argue that the use of alternative willpower sources such as swordmasters may be more acceptable, but they were still humans, and deserved to be treated better than commodities!

This presented a persistent problem to red humanity.

All of the major players had enthusiastically embraced the possibilities promised by stolen resonance technology, but awkwardly tried to ignore the horrendous cost of proliferation.

The creation of any stolen resonance generator inevitably demanded the sacrilege of at least one high-ranking mech pilot or swordmaster.

Was it worthwhile to create a super warship if it demanded the sacrifice of a hero of the human race?

There was almost no way that the big shots could reconcile this agonizing contradiction!

Therefore, if red humanity wanted to create a more 'acceptable' source of extraordinary willpower, the idea of granting this power to the native aliens inevitably rose up in people's minds.

It was a thoroughly forbidden idea, yet its allure could not be denied.

If the goal was to create as many stolen resonance generators as possible, then it made complete sense to 'teach' the native aliens how to nurture willpower cultivators among their own population!

However, such a suggestion was thoroughly taboo.

Even if the aliens could not pilot their own mechs for various reasons, allowing them to raise their own 'high-ranking phasefighter pilots' or whatever would still do much to strengthen their warmaking potential against red humanity!

The native aliens would master a new path to godhood that was much more accessible to the common alien than becoming phase lords.

The consequences would be severe. The population of aliens was much greater than that of humans in the new frontier.

Thousands or maybe millions of willpower cultivators might emerge in the span of a few years!

Even if they were all relatively weak at the start, they were still a lot more powerful than their peers.

If they all got organized and sent to invade the territories of red humanity, then they would be able to win a lot more battles!

Would the rise of a new extraordinary soldier class among the native aliens do more damage to red humanity than all of the stolen resonance generators that could be made from their defeated remains?

Ves could not possibly answer this question.

One important complication to this scenario was the simple fact that the native aliens may very well decide to keep their willpower cultivators away from the Red War.

If they did not fight against red humanity, then their enemies would not be able to harvest them and use them to make more stolen resonance generators!

Therefore, anyone who secretly wanted to seed willpower cultivation among the native aliens had to consider many thorny issues.

A thoughtless implementation could easily spark disaster!

Yet was that enough for desperados to stay their hand?

Ves did not think so. He knew what humans were like. Greed could not be separated from them. Even if there were plenty of people who stubbornly clung to notions of honor and righteousness, there were always enough individuals who possessed very little scruples.

This applied to every level of society, including the top!

Ves did not believe that all of the tier 1 galactic citizens unanimously supported the 'correct' viewpoint.

It only took a single deviant with ulterior motives to teach the native aliens how to cultivate their willpower.

In his opinion, the most likely culprit would be the Polymath.

Due to special reasons, the Cybernetic Empire possessed the weakest mech piloting tradition by far. It also possessed an abundance of warships as well as humongous war planets, each of which could derive a huge amount of benefits from stolen resonance generators!

Despite her roots as a mech designer, the Polymath was well-known for her extreme rationality and utilitarianism. It was highly likely that she harbored little to no respect towards mech pilots.

She probably regarded them as tools in human form. They were useful, but they did not deserve special treatment unless they had attained godhood.

Yet it was not just the Polymath who had the incentive as well as the willingness to break the rules.

The Red Admiralty had long been dissatisfied that their proud dreadnoughts never managed to catch up to the power and majesty of god mechs.

This was their chance to close the gap further. Even if it was impossible to close the gap in terms of quality, the Red Fleet could still resort to quantity to mass produce artifact warships equipped with stolen resonance generators!

So long as the fleeters managed to accumulate thousands of them, they could probably undertake the responsibility of defending the border regions by themselves!

Ves could think of numerous other tier 1 galactic citizens who might wish to bestow the aliens the ability to form their own willpower cultivators.

From the Xenotechnician to the Evolution Witch, any of them could choose to disregard the rules and change the balance of power of the new frontier by themselves!

This was their privilege as those who became powerful enough to dictate the rules!

With so many potential mavericks at the top alone, Ves honestly expected for the native aliens to 'coincidentally' produce their first willpower cultivators in less than a year!

Of course, just because he suspected imminent foul play from the people upstairs did not mean that it was wise to voice his suspicions.

Both Ves and the Saint Commander only exchanged a single meaningful glance before diverting to safer topics.

One of them happened to be the Myth Reproduction Theory.

When Ves briefly explained what he knew about it, the Saint Commander looked intrigued.

"I have to admit that there is a compelling logic behind this theory." She said even as her domain field grew more active due to how much mental power she was devoting to these new ideas. "It would certainly explain why no ace pilot has yet to break through up to this point. It is still difficult to believe that there is an invisible plane of our universe that can be locally shaped by our thoughts and emotions. How credible is this theory in your opinion?"

"While nothing is ever absolute, my confidence level in the core premise of this theory has surpassed 95 percent." Ves straightforwardly replied. "This is because many of my personal experiences from the past align neatly with this theory. I know it is difficult for people with a strong materialist mindset to accept that reality works this way, but I am not one of them. For better or worse, we need the power of rituals to overcome the limitations of existing technology and materials."

Saint Commander Casella frowned as she thought of a dangerous implication. "I can see how ritualism can offer a great amount of convenience to red humanity, but what about the native aliens? Their population is much greater. They occupy so many star systems for so many years that their ability to establish imprints in the local galaxy far surpasses our own. Unless we can conquer large swathes of alien-occupied territory, I cannot see how our race can compete with the native aliens."

"It is not as bad as it sounds." Ves responded. "It is true that our population is far smaller, but we are qualitatively superior. The Red Collective has spurred on a collective embrace of qi cultivation. By combining ancient mysticism with modern science, the collies have enabled trillions of red humans the ability to strengthen themselves in a relatively short amount of time. The more progress they make, the stronger their imprints in the other realm. Then there are god pilots and

Star Designers. Their ability to create and deepen their imprints on the new frontier is unfathomably great. I doubt that ancient phase whales can match them on a 1-to-1 basis."

The mental and spiritual development of phase lords and phase whales generally fell far behind their physical evolution.

This was not a strange idea. It was a logical consequence of trying to conserve resources.

It also gave red humanity a reprieve.

Their own gods might not be as physically imposing as ancient phase whales, but their presence in the imaginary realm was far greater!

This difference was extremely important. It may even be a decisive factor in red humanity's eventual turnaround in the Red War.

The Saint Commander gradually realized the implications for themselves.

"Your imprint." She almost gasped. "Your strength as a mech designer and a phase lord may not be particularly high, but your influence is disproportionately immense. All of your achievements propelled you to a level of fame and notoriety that is impossible to match by the other members of your generation. The fact that you have been promoted to a tier 2 galactic citizen is an official recognition of your influence over our society. With everything that you have done since the Great Severing, the imprint or imprints that you have left behind has already reshaped a significant part of our universe. As long as you remain prominent, you should be able to do the same."

This may be the true meaning behind the galactic citizenship system.

One of the core criteria that determined an individual's galactic citizenship may be their ability to create an impact on the imaginary realm.

Those with no galactic citizenship of any kind possessed so little influence that they literally did not matter in this discussion.

Whether they lived or died had no noticeable effect on the imaginary realm.

Those with low-tier galactic citizenships became strong and influential enough to nudge it slightly. They might not amount to anything by themselves, but had the potential to exert a measurable influence if they acted in a large enough collective.

As for high-tier galactic citizens, their influence had reached such a height that they could single-handedly create or alter imprints in the imaginary realm!

This applied to both god pilots with extremely high individual combat power as well as fleet admirals who may be individually weak but possessed enough authority to move around thousands of warships across different battlefields!

It also applied to noncombatants such as Star Designers whose inventions could easily change the balance of power in the Red Ocean.

In this 'ethereal battlefield', Ves clearly recognized that he already ranked among the top, just below the tier 1 galactic citizens!

Ves understood a bit better now why the bigshots valued him so much and encouraged him to innovate.

Now that he became aware of these hidden dynamics, he believed that he had a lot more room to play.

There was a big difference between staying ignorant and becoming aware of the power of myths and imprints.

A grin slowly appeared on his face as he thought of the many possibilities.

As long as the Myth Reproduction Theory truly worked according to the rules as he understood it, then he had a lot of room for manipulation.

This was of great importance. It could not only change the future of the Ascended Giants, but also power up his upcoming mech designs, particularly his highly anticipated elemental Carmine mech designs!

It became even more important for him to return to the Terran Alliance in order to supervise the final development of his Woodsap mechs.

This collaborative mech design project will definitely offer an excellent stage for him to blend myths into mechs!

Chapter 7370 Inhuman Demands

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Ves spent the next few days reorienting his focus to supervising the elaborate design process of his Woodsap mechs.

The Terrans invested so much manpower and resources into the elemental Carmine mech designs that it became a challenge to stay on top of every single development.

His collaborators were not just satisfied with publishing a single model.

They split up the project into several different branches, each led by a different team of Master Mech Designers.

This way, the Terrans not only promoted greater diversity, but also increased the fault tolerance of the overall effort.

All of this increased the complexity of the Carmine design project. Too much was at stake here. The Terrans thoroughly considered it to be a prestige project, one that could reinvigorate their national pride should it meet their more ambitious goals.

This was good news for Ves as the Terrans assigned some of their best talents to the project. While it was difficult for Ves to assert his authority over academics who dedicated at least a century of their life to their chosen fields of specialization, he was still glad that he had nearly unreserved access to their wisdom and problem-solving skills.

The physical projection of Master Laila Rebecca Devos looked particularly pleased with the progress the Terrans had made so far.

"We are roughly on schedule. Our progress has been brisk. While we have faced many difficulties, most of them are related to the overly ambitious goals set by our researchers and developers. The core design formula is solid as far as we have ascertained. We want to make the new Woodsap mechs widely available as soon as we have unveiled them to the public, so we have decided to tighten up the scope of our R&D. Our mech designers will spend less time on exploration and more time on optimization."

Ves smiled. "That is good. You can design more ambitious and unusual variants after we have completed the initial batch of Woodsap mechs. The ones that are currently in the works should already satisfy many of the Terrans that have rejected the Yellow Jackets for their cheapness."

The Woodsap mechs as intended not only possessed enough power to compete against the more impressive first-class multipurpose mechs in use today, but also offered a much lower learning curve.

Due to the special technologies applied by the Terrans, the early testers had already begun to experience a new way of controlling their biomechs.

Rather than piloting their mechs as if they were two distinctly separate entities, the individuals who piloted the Woodsap mechs controlled them as if they controlled their own bodies!

Although the early tests already revealed a host of problems and complications to this novel method of controlling a machine, Ves had faith that the Terrans would be able to work out most of the technical problems in the coming months.

In the past, the mech industry never had a strong incentive to develop this alternate control system to the fullest.

While it offered a much lower learning curve, it imposed severe restrictions to the mech design in question.

For example, it had to adhere closely to the humanoid form and could not deviate too far from the proportions of the pilots in question.

The alternate control system also promoted a sense of laziness that could prevent many mech pilots from exploiting their machines more effectively by performing actions that were impossible to replicate with normal human bodies.

It was only because the Terrans prioritized the Woodsap mechs so much that they invested serious resources into solving many known problems while tolerating the rest.

The Terran Alliance couldn't wait for five to ten years for the first batch of Carmine mech pilots to complete their accelerated training programs.

The norms-turned-Carmine mech pilots needed to make their Woodsmap mechs combat effective as soon as possible.

The best candidates outside of potentates were trained infantry soldiers.

The Terrans had already begun to train tens of thousands of handpicked troopers.

Each of them had already scored high in terms of martial arts, marksmanship and teamwork.

They only needed to learn the theory and practice of piloting multi-ton humanoid war machines.

The importance of this initial batch could not be overstated. They would bear a great amount of responsibility in debuting the Woodsap mechs. Their performance would directly determine everyone's first impressions of the first advanced Carmine mechs in existence!

While it was fairly easy to teach them the necessary knowledge to pilot their future machines, the job demanded more than just theory.

Their physiques needed to undergo fairly radical modifications in order to gain the qualifications to interface with their upcoming biomechs!

This was the most controversial aspect of the collaborative design project.

"How is the augmentation of the prospective pilots proceeding?" Ves asked. "Last I have heard, your people have generated plenty of disputes about this subject."

The physical projection of the Terran Master Mech Designer made a troubled expression.

"It is not a question of whether we can do it. We can already execute the necessary steps needed to transform a 'normal' Terran citizen into a tree-human hybrid. The greatest issue is that our mastery of the relevant technologies is not extensive enough to minimize all of the sequelae. This is how the first sequence of fully-transformed Woodsap mech pilots appear."

Master Laila Devos transferred an encrypted data package over the communication channel.

When Ves decrypted the package and projected the contents to the side, he immediately frowned.

The physical transformation was worse than he expected.

The people who voluntarily agreed to undergo experimental augmentation regimes had lost the elegance and suppleness of the human form.

They grew taller and thinner.

The worst cases had grown at least 50 percent taller than their previous forms, causing them to appear so inhuman that they could scare any child!

What was worse was that every test subject had lost their healthy pink human skin.

Instead, their bodies all became covered by bark-like textures.

The most severe cases had lost a lot of mobility due to the rigidity of all of the bark covering their exterior forms.

Fortunately, the milder cases still retained enough mobility to prevent too many hindrances to their daily lives, but they still resembled trees more than humans!

As a mech designer, Ves had long learned the lesson that appearances matter.

An attractive product always earned more favorable reviews than ugly ones.

The mechers conducted plenty of studies where mechs of varying appearances performed quite differently despite possessing nearly the exact same performance parameters.

The mechs that possessed greater visual appeal always delivered better actual performance!

This was because their aesthetics boosted the confidence and morale of their pilots.

It was much more likely for them to appreciate and enjoy the act of piloting visually inspiring machines.

In that sense, Ves did not have confidence that the test subjects could perform anywhere close to their maximum potential.

Their sheer inhumanity had become so blunt and obvious that it would be a miracle if they still regarded themselves as human!

Ves was quite familiar with such problems having undergone radical physical transformations himself.

At least he was lucky enough to retain an outwardly human appearance.

Even though he had already lost most of the physical aspects of his humanity, so long as he could still pass off as a human in a crowd of regular people, then he could still preserve his sanity!

That may not be possible for these poor test subjects. They looked like treants who had just uprooted themselves from the soil more than humans who tried to cosplay as trees.

Many of the test subjects had even lost their natural hair. Branches and leaves had taken their place!

Suffice to say, the radical transformations had a strong effect on the psyche of the test subjects.

This already exacerbated the altered brain chemistry of the transformed individuals.

Even if the augmentations tried to minimize the physical alterations to the brain and central nervous system, they could not be avoided entirely.

This was because the entire bodies of the test subjects needed to substitute blood for Woodsap.

Without gaining a compatibility for Woodsap, the prospective pilots would never be able to satisfy the physical requirements to interface with Woodsap mechs.

Now that Ves became enlightened by the Myth Reproduction Theory, he knew that the Carmine System essentially served as a vessel for the Blood Pact.

Since Venerable Jannzi Larkinson forged the very first Blood Pact in existence with the Bastion, she established a myth that enabled the operation of the Carmine System.

Ves very much doubted that the Carmine System would work if not for this accidental miracle!

While he was grateful that this happenstance eventually resulted in an innovation that broke the genetic aptitude tyranny, he felt somewhat regrettable that the Blood Pact could not be separated from the mutual exchange of blood between man and machine.

This was not a big deal as long as the fluid in question consisted of the blood that already flowed through the veins of Carmine mech pilots.

Yet in his desire to draw out the greater potential of Carmine mechs, Ves could not stop himself from experimenting with more potent mediums than mere human blood.

The Woodsap Mech Design Project was his first systematic attempt at developing an elemental Carmine System.

He already accounted for setbacks and complications.

Yet he still found the results of the physical transformations to be repulsive.

"This is not acceptable." Ves plainly stated his opinion. "We cannot force the brave pilots of our upcoming Woodsap mechs to sacrifice their humanity in exchange for piloting more potent Carmine mechs. Even if these individuals are otherwise competent in piloting their new biomechs, they can never earn the trust and admiration of the masses in this form!"

They practically looked like aliens who evolved from alien trees!

Master Laila Devos shook her head. "I agree with you, but... according to the geneticists and biotech researchers that I have spoken with, reducing the side effects for entire groups of humans is a difficult and time-consuming endeavor. The necessary augmentations are so new and radical that the augmentation sector is forced to navigate uncharted waters. In these cases, it normally takes decades to produce acceptable results. It takes too much time to perform all of the calculations and verify them through iterative testing. It is unrealistic to compress this extensive development cycle in a span of a few months or years."

"What are you saying, Master Devos?"

"If we have failed to make any breakthroughs in this area, the pilots paired with our Woodsap mechs.... will continue to maintain these forms. At most, we can wrap their bodies up with false organic human shells, but that only covers up a part of their inhumanity. Their altered mentalities and brain chemistry are much harder to repair."

Ves frowned deeper. He did not miss the unspoken implications of her words.

While Ves felt extremely bothered by these flaws, not all of the Terrans felt this way!

Perhaps they believed that any sacrifice was worth the ability to pilot the most powerful Carmine mechs that they knew of. The native aliens posed such a great threat to the Terran Alliance that a whole line of soldiers stood ready to sacrifice their humanity in order to protect their people!

"Is there really no way to solve this problem in the short term?" Ves asked with a frown.

"Well... it is not entirely out of the question, Ves." Master Laila Devos responded with a slower cadence than before. "While we are confident in our biotechnology, there are still many facets of human augmentation that we have yet to master as extensively as we would like. The Transhumanist Faction of the Red Association may be able to offer helpful solutions to this problem. There is also a fringe group that claims that Woodsap mech pilots can retain their humanity through mysticism. They believe that the right application of rituals can avoid the worst manifestations, but they have yet to produce solid results. Perhaps you can lend a hand once you arrive."

Chapter 7371 Terran Pride

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Ves sighed in relief.

It turned out that there was still a potential way out. Several ways, in fact.

So far, the Terrans tried their best to keep the Woodsap Mech Design Project as in-house as possible.

Aside from collaborating with Ves, they avoided any third-party entanglements, believing that they already possessed the capabilities to bring the project to completion.

They were partially correct in that assumption.

While the other aspects of the collaborative mech design project progressed decently, Ves did not feel satisfied with the consequences to the mech pilots.

Even if there were plenty of Terrans that willingly traded away their humanity for a chance to pilot one of the most powerful standard mechs to appear on the battlefield, Ves considered this tradeoff to be a symptom of failure!

A proper mech should never force its pilot into a devil's bargain.

It was one thing for Ves to offer a risky bargain tailored to specific individuals such as Venerable Joshua and Saint Rosa Orfan.

They had tried the normal approach and lost patience with the persistent lack of results.

However, for all of those Terran citizens to give up their human form and willingly transform into tree-like monstrosities went too far in his opinion!

It was too indiscriminate and maybe ultimately self-defeating.

How could these Carmine mech pilots sincerely fight for red humanity when they had given up their own identity as humans?

Ves had personal experience how form defined one's identity. The Ascended Giants had become so enamoured with their giant forms that they had embraced as their default states.

This was the reason why they needed a dedicated troop carrier vessel like the Armitage. The compartments and hallways of regular human starships could not accommodate their true bodies!

Ves on the other hand was different. While he admittedly kept his body to human proportions in order to avoid losing control over it, he had insisted on retaining his human form even before the emergence of his other self.

He and the Dark Apostle may be two sides of the same coin, but their preferences fundamentally defined them as different individuals.

Ves abhorred the inhumanity of his phase lord form while the Dark Apostle thought that his original human form exemplified weakness.

It could have been worse.

At least the pair retained the same human face and proportions.

The same could not be said for the Terran test subjects. Even if the biotech researchers managed to tweak and optimize the process so that the next batches looked a little less horrendous, Master Laila Devos clearly warned him not to expect any breakthroughs.

Ves strongly argued in favor of seeking outside assistance.

The Master Mech Designer shut down this notion pretty quickly.

"What you say has merit, Ves." The old woman spoke over the communication channel. "Yet the Terran Alliance cannot bring itself to accept your proposal. The Arboreal Project and all of its related subprojects must remain a Terran initiative from beginning to end. You may have grown accustomed to collaborating with third parties, but we are not as eager to share and leak our confidential trade secrets with our rivals. Woodsap mechs must remain exclusively Terran. We will not accept any risk that slightly increases the possibility for others to imitate the Carmine mechs that are exclusively ours."

Ves frowned in response.

The Terrans were far too stubborn about this. The issue at hand was not even directly related to the core technologies that made the Woodsap mechs so much better than regular Carmine mechs.

He just wanted them to seek outside assistance to reduce the side effects of the necessary augmentations.

He continued to argue in favor of borrowing the expertise of others, but Master Laila Rebecca Devos remained unflinching.

Even if she harbored another opinion, she did not represent herself, but channeled the will of the Terran Alliance.

Unless Ves was able to persuade a majority of the leaders of the Terran ancient clans, it was impossible for him to succeed in this effort.

After the older Terran woman made it abundantly clear how the Terrans were willing to settle with worse products in order to defend their exclusivity, Ves had little choice but to accept this reality.

"If you truly insist on this course of action, then we need to work harder to sort out this problem." He said as he did not give up on addressing this obvious flaw. "I will come up with possible solutions, and I hope that you guys do so as well. We cannot allow our greed to override our responsibilities. Mech designers exist to serve mech pilots, not the other way around. I do not want our Woodsap mechs to end up doing more harm than good for their users. I think it is important that we do not lose sight of the fact that it is our job to design mechs that adapt to their pilots."

As a vaunted Master Mech Designer, Laila Devos could not possibly be ignorant of this principle.

Her expression softened to an extent. "The conditions of the test subjects are far from ideal, but the Terran Alliance is under significant pressure. We need the power of Woodsap mechs to replenish our depleted mech armies and reignite hope among those that have begun to lose confidence in our ability to defend our space. Each delay will lead to the fall of another handful of border systems. The sooner we release our Woodsap mechs, the sooner we can shift the Red War in a more favorable direction."

The Terran Alliance had to weigh many different priorities. Time was an ever-present source of pressure.

While Ves himself did not mind if he had to delay the development of Woodsap mechs for a couple of months, the Terrans had to pay a much bigger price for the same action.

He sighed. "I understand. Let us take the time to figure out a better way to augment your prospective Woodsap mech pilots. It will take a couple of weeks before my Bluejay Fleet has completed its current mission and crosses into Terran space. I want to examine the test subjects in person. Perhaps I can devise a new solution after I have understood the condition of those warped individuals in person."

"You are welcome to pay a visit to one of our confidential research sites, Ves. I will take care of the necessary permissions. Be aware that only you will be permitted entry. We want to maintain the

confidentiality of our project as much as possible. That also includes information related to the test subjects. Please keep our demands in mind. Do not share what you have learned beyond the authorized list of personnel. What I have told you earlier still stands. We will complete this project without resorting to the expertise of the Red Association, the Red Collective or the Cybernetic Empire."

This would severely limit what Ves could get away with, but there was no other choice. He could only respect the wishes of his client no matter how foolish they sounded in his ears.

Oh well. At least he had a chance to develop his own solution. He did not have a solid idea on how to tackle this problem, but he still had plenty of time to figure out a viable way forward.

Even if he could not borrow directly from outside expertise, he could still acquire textbooks and other teaching materials to develop a foundation in different fields.

Ves suddenly desired to spend more time with Dr. Zeron Khabeel and the other ritualists.

He knew that these mysterious figures possessed the ability to harness E energy at a larger scale, all without expending a disproportionate amount of energy and matter!

He had a slight hunch that he would be able to find a potential solution to this problem if he resorted to ritualism.

Yet this field was way too broad. Ves only became exposed to the basics of ritualism. His practical ability fell far behind, and he did not master any of the essential techniques.

Even if he chose to mess around and construct a random ritual without any systematic design, the results would likely be highly inconsistent!

Perhaps his self-made ritual might actually work and produce Woodsap mech pilots that only had a few patches of bark on their skins.

Yet because the stability of this shabby ritual was too poor, other Woodsap mech pilots might transform into a tree that was indistinguishable from the real thing!

The hint of human transforming into a literal tree that could no longer move or do anything remotely human would ignite a lot of outrage from the public!

This was what the Terrans most certainly did not want to see. They had already marked the Woodsap mechs as the most definite prestige project of this decade.

The Woodsap mechs had not yet completed their development, but the Terrans already treated them as their pride and joy in advance!

Ves found that attitude to be a bit perplexing. To him, the Terrans were already counting their chickens before they hatched.

With all of the new technologies and phenomena tied to the Arboreal Project, it would be prudent to expect other setbacks to occur in the coming weeks.

Still, the Terrans were not weak by any means. Even if they had exposed their limitations in a single field, they were still very competent in many technological fields. They should be capable enough to squash 99 percent of design issues before they grew serious enough to point out to Ves.

He and Master Laila Devos continued to discuss a number of other subjects related to the Arboreal Project.

Only after they had run out of relevant subjects did they begin to talk about other developments.

"You are returning to the Terran Alliance at a good time." Master Laila Devos said with a mild smile. "The Arboreal Project is not the only major project that we have invested a great amount of manpower and resources into. We have completed a number of confidential and not-so-confidential projects that will prove helpful in strengthening our forces. I think you will be pleasantly surprised when we introduce some of them to you. It is possible that one of them may offer substantial assistance to the development of our Woodsap mechs."

"Can't you be more clear than that, Master?"

"I apologize, but you will have to wait until you arrive here in person. We are taking confidentiality and espionage more seriously now that we have formally seceded from the Red Two's unjust regime. Much of the reason why the mechers and fleeters have been able to keep our people under their thumbs so effectively is their highly effective monitoring and spying capabilities. If we want to stand our ground as a sovereign colonial empire, then we cannot allow third parties to keep treating our secret research institutions as their communal dining halls. While we cannot do much to improve security on your end, we can at least clean up our own domains."

She sounded a bit cynical about that. She had good reasons to. It was undeniable that Ves was currently housed within a heavy cruiser of the Red Association.

Even if Ves and the Larkinsons stationed on the Tarrasque made an effort to utilize their own equipment, they could not avoid the use of ship systems entirely.

From processors to security measures, the Design Department still worked under the auspices of the mechers.

Ves felt increasingly less comfortable about this situation. He became a little more eager to reunite with the Premier Fleet.

This was especially the case when Ves might not be able to maintain a tight relationship with the mechers, or at least some of them. His relationship with the Transhumanists remained tight, but his bond with the Survivalists was clearly becoming more lukewarm.

This trend might not persist, but Ves had to take the worst-case scenario into account.

In the end, it was much safer and more comfortable for him and his fellow Larkinsons to stay on their own ships.

Chapter 7372 The Voice of Liberty

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One of the biggest uncertainties of the journey from the Philaster Crestia System to the Yernstall Central Star Node was getting intercepted by rogue human warbands.

Ves and the big shots really did not want this confrontation to happen.

The debate on how red humanity should acquire their willpower sources continued to rage across the galactic net and beyond.

Emotions grew hot.

A strong movement consisting of disgruntled and paranoid mech pilots passionately advocated for a complete ban on stolen resonance technology!

The fact that it required the extraordinary willpower of a high-ranking mech pilot of a swordmaster already made stolen resonance generators taboo in their opinion.

Rather than letting the newfangled technology tempt the greedy into killing human heroes, it would be better to remove the option from the board entirely!

While Ves could understand this sentiment, he personally thought that these mech pilots were too naive.

The cat was already out of the bag. The appearance of the Ixith Goliath changed the course of the Red Ocean forever.

There was no way that every single human group would calmly agree to collectively bury this powerful new technology.

It only took one rogue actor to bring this tech to life and force everyone else to adopt the forbidden technology as well lest they fell behind!

Even if every single human leader including the Polymath miraculously abided by this gentleman's agreement, what about the aliens?

The native aliens would definitely be able to reproduce stolen resonance technology sooner or later.

Since that was the case, it became imperative for red humanity to gain a head-start and make sure that its stolen resonance generators performed better and became available in greater quantities.

At least, that was what Ves thought. Not everyone shared the same sentiment, so he carefully evaded discussion on what had to be done.

Yet just because he was keen to avoid this debate did not mean that those with strong opinions allowed him to get away without a word.

As much as the major players tried their best to prevent a collision between the escort fleet and the radicals who objected to stolen resonance technology, they eventually failed.

The escort fleet came to a very rude stop all of a sudden after it somehow got accurately interdicted by a relatively small force.

Alarms immediately rang throughout every ship of the Bluejay Fleet and the other vessels assigned to escort the captured Ixith Goliath!

Mechs sortied into space while warship-grade weapon systems began to lock onto any target that could be hostile.

The surrounding space quickly became flooded with high-powered sensor signals as well as many forms of signal interference.

Confusion briefly reigned as the officers of the escort fleet tried to get their bearings and figure out why they got intercepted.

"This is impossible! This star system along with the surrounding star systems are all monitored! Our listening network should have been able to detect the enemy fleet. Why did our systems fail?"

"Our latest scans suggest that we are not confronted by a fleet of regular starships or warships. We have encountered a specialized task force of stealth ships that are equipped with surprisingly effective warp interdiction field generators! This is a fleet that is tailor-made for evading patrols and intercepting crucial convoys behind enemy lines!"

It shouldn't have been a surprise that this ambush-oriented task force managed to succeed despite everyone's best efforts!

This was a ridiculously specialized configuration of stealth vessels!

"Who created this task force, how did they lose control over it during this sensitive time?!"

"The ships are not hiding their identification data. They all hail from the Red Association."

The expressions of many people turned sour after learning about the origins of the ambush force.

The mechers of the Bluejay Fleet felt especially bad about the fact that they had been waylaid by their own comrades!

Of course, the probability that members of the Red Association would go rogue and act against the escort fleet had always been high.

No one else wanted to destroy the physical key to stolen resonance technology more than the people who dedicated their entire lives to mechs!

"Orders, sir?"

"Despite their stealth and interdiction capabilities, the opposing hulls do not pose a serious threat against our forces. They are all sub-capitals with fragile hull plating and mediocre gun batteries. Their missiles may be surprisingly high in yield to facilitate their ambush operations, but as long as we maintain our distance to the enemy vessels, we have a high likelihood of intercepting any missile salvos fired in our direction."

Small ships could easily punch above their weight if they had been loaded with antimatter missiles or more terrible warheads.

This was why the escort fleet could not afford to underestimate the ambushing force. The other side might be misguided, but that did not necessarily mean that the opposing officers were stupid.

Still, it was difficult to imagine that the enemy task force could defeat the escort fleet.

Even if the opposing force only cared about destroying the research specimen, they would have to get through a lot of mechs and warships.

Hundreds of mechs had already deployed in each direction.

They did not only guard against the visible enemies, but also against those that may still be lurking in stealth.

The starships and warships on the other hand began to position themselves around the research vessel that held the all-important Goliath-in-stasis.

The warships clearly conveyed their willingness to block any attacks with their own energy shields and hulls just to protect their charge!

The Armitage conspicuously remained silent at this time.

Ves had ordered the Ascended Giants to suit up but refrain from appearing in open space.

"That may be the most prudent choice." The Divine Harpoon voiced his approval. "We do not yet know what to expect from this confrontation. Our giants are strong in some areas, but have proven to be vulnerable in other areas. There is no harm in waiting to see how the situation unfolds."

While the Ascended Giants held back, the most powerful combat asset in the escort fleet could not remain absent.

The Riot Mark III deployed into space and quickly took up a guard position close to the research vessel in case enemies tried to sneak their way past everyone's notice.

The most advanced stealth systems may be able to fool high-powered sensors, but they definitely shouldn't be able to circumvent the Saint Kingdom of an ace mech!

After the Riot Mark III assumed its place, a tense period of inactivity ensued.

Neither side appeared to be in a hurry to resort to open action.

They merely observed each other.

Ves did not understand why the rogue mechers did not take immediate action.

They had somehow evaded every form of detection and accurately managed to intercept their target.

If they laid mines or launched a huge barrage of high-yield missiles at the time, they could have inflicted significant damage to the ships that got stranded for a time!

By refusing to take advantage of the temporary weakness of the escort fleet, the rogue mechers squandered their advantage.

If hostilities broke through afterwards, then the enemies would definitely suffer significantly greater casualties than if they made the sensible decision!

This told Ves a lot about the kind of opponent he was facing this time.

He already felt an undercurrent of energy and passion from one of the distant stealth vessels.

His senses perceived a distant wave that conveyed a sense of exuberance that he never encountered in the past.

"The stealth vessels aren't the problem." He concluded. "Their presence has halted our fleet, but their threat level is not high. Our mechs should be able to crush them without requiring the support of our warships. However, there is a stronger enemy lurking aboard one of those ships."

The distant adversary stirred.

He conveyed clear signs of awareness of what was taking place.

The energy levels kept rising around one of the enemy stealth vessels.

It soon became clear where all of those emissions were coming from, because a powerful machine emerged from the hangar bay of that vessel.

Many people immediately got taken aback by the appearance of a new mech that possessed an undeniable presence in the field.

It couldn't be helped. Not only was the machine larger than usual, but it also possessed a striking appearance.

The ace mech, for it could be nothing else, possessed a purple and bright yellow coating that was designed to attract attention, similar to the Riot's own striped orange coating.

The weapon wielded by the ace mech also looked striking. It possessed the shape and contours of a battleaxe, but it also carried strings similar to a musical instrument!

That pretty much allowed any decent mech enthusiast to identify the champion that led the opposing force.

Not many ace mechs boasted a combination of purple and yellow coloration.

Paired with the unique and practically iconic Guitar-Battle-Axe, only a single machine fit all of the criteria.

"Our deep scans have confirmed it. The ace mech that has emerged from one of the stealth ships is the Sound of Revolution." One of the bridge officers reported with a solemn voice. "This is the exclusive ace mech of Saint Conrad Morgenstern, who bears the title of the Voice of Liberty. Instead of executing his orders, he has chosen to disregard them and misused RA assets to intercept our fleet."

Ves furrowed his brows. "I can understand it if a single rogue ace pilot and a handful of sympathizers might resort to treason in order to stand up for their principles, but those ships are large enough to be crewed by at least several hundred personnel. Are they all in support of this crazy confrontation?"

"They are mortals. Their opinions can easily be swayed by a charismatic leader. Ace pilots inherently possess a charm that can compel anyone into following them to the gates of hell. The Voice of Liberty happens to excel in this. As soon as he begins to speak, you will find out how effective he is at convincing you to believe in his cause."

As the seconds passed, Ves rapidly tried to recall everything he knew about the Voice of Liberty.

The man possessed a mixed and turbulent past. He had a history of antagonizing authority.

It was not up to Ves to judge whether Saint Conrad's cause was righteous or not. The fact of the matter was that the latter fought a long and brutal civil war against his state.

The ace pilot not only managed to win the war, but did so while performing a guitar solo during the decisive battle at the end!

As Ves quickly caught up to the Voice of Liberty's biography, it became increasingly more clear that if anyone would choose to defy the orders of his superiors for a different cause, he would definitely rank in the top 10!

The Voice of Liberty's past had shaped his personality and outlook on life.

This was not a man who had a habit of bowing to authority.

He was a rebel at heart!

As long as he encountered any form of injustice, his most common response was to crusade against it regardless of how his actions might endanger or inconvenience other people!

This was a tricky customer for that reason alone.

Another reason for vigilance was the fact that the Voice of Liberty was not a solitary figure.

Part of the reason why he managed to become as powerful as he was today was due to the assistance provided by his patron.

It was not that big of a secret within the mech community that the Voice of Liberty regarded the Resonance Smith as his patron!

The Voice of Liberty's defiance against authority happened to align quite well with the Unbound Humanity Faction, thereby deepening his disobedient traits even further!

Ves immediately found it difficult to figure out how he should handle this tough customer.

Had the Voice of Liberty gone rogue on his own accord, or was he acting under the orders of the Resonance Smith?

How much was the Star Designer responsible for the current mess, and how would he react if Saint Conrad came to harm?

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Chapter 7373 The Sound of Revolution - FIXED

Chapter 7373 The Sound of Revolution - FIXED

Many questions swirled in Ves' mind.

The appearance of the Voice of Liberty exerted a lot of pressure onto the members of the escort fleet.

This was because this ace pilot possessed the potential to wipe out everyone.

Saint Rosa Orfan may be able to survive a bout against this infamous RA ace pilot, but it would be difficult for her to eliminate the opposing champion.

The disparity in resonance strength was too great.

Saint Orfan had only recently become an ace pilot. Her tainted breakthrough that caused her to become permanently merged with her machine also produced a number of sequelae that might affect her ability to respond to different challenges.

Saint Conrad Morgenstern was nearly the opposite in this regard. He was an older and much more experienced ace pilot. He had spent decades polishing his piloting skills and honing his craft by fighting against different enemies.

All of those years of fighting and training allowed him to progress his resonance strength until it approached the dreaded peak!

In other words, the Voice of Liberty's resonance strength had almost become great enough to assume the identity of a god pilot candidate!

That was a big deal, especially among the mechers!

The Red Association as a whole did not want to see this powerful senior ace pilot meet his end.

Treason or not, the misguided saint could still be returned to the light.

So long as the ambushers had yet to open fire, the 'misunderstanding' could still be resolved.

"Jovy." Ves turned to his mecher friend. "Has the Resonance Smith replied to our inquiry? We need to understand his intentions and his relationship with the Voice of Liberty. It would be better for everyone if the Star Designer initiate contact with his friend and tell this deluded fellow to halt his protest action. It is not too late to stop."

Jovy Armalon responded with a grimace. "We have been unable to contact the Resonance Smith directly. We have only been able to get a hold of one of his spokespersons. According to the representative, the Voice of Liberty is not a subordinate, and is not acting under the Resonance Smith's orders. The two are separate actors and do not share any responsibilities."

That sounded like a cheap excuse.

"Yeah right." Ves crossed his arms and snorted. "The Voice of Liberty only managed to make it this far with the support of the Resonance Smith. The former also joined the Unbound Humanity Faction under the invitation of the latter. Their relationship is probably similar to my own bond with Saint Rosa Orfan. When you dedicate so much time and effort into nurturing and enabling a mech pilot with your work, the relationship you build with that figure is anything but transactional. I do not believe that the Resonance Smith has washed his hands off one of his favorite clients so easily."

Though Ves had little qualms about questioning the Resonance Smith's motives and integrity, the other people in the bridge cringed or looked uncomfortable.

Their place in the hierarchy was not as high as that of Ves, so it was a lot more dangerous for them to engage in the same kind of questioning!

Even Jovy looked like he wanted to be anywhere else. "The Resonance Smith's response to our inquiry may not be satisfactory, but it is enough to convey his attitude. For all intents and purposes, Saint Morgenstern represents himself and his followers in the field. He does not stand for the Unbounders or the Resonance Smith. While we urge you to persuade the rogue ace pilot to reconsider his current actions, we will not blame you if you have to resort to violence. The only individual who is responsible for any unfortunate outcomes is the culprit, not the enforcer."

That sounded reassuring, but Ves wanted a more concrete answer.

"If the Voice of Liberty remains dangerous despite our best efforts to subdue him, are we permitted to neutralize him in a more permanent fashion?"

"Yes." Jovy directly confirmed. "As long as he remains unambiguously hostile towards us and our mission, you and any other forces are permitted to kill him. It goes without saying that we prefer capture over execution, so if it is possible to cripple the Sound of Revolution, then do your best."

That was a tall order. The Voice of Liberty was a senior ace pilot with a lot of experience. He was almost a god pilot candidate, and possessed the abilities as well as the resonance strength to match.

Perhaps the only upside was that the Sound of Revolution was not entirely dedicated towards direct combat.

Instead, it was an ace mech meant to amplify Saint Morgenstern's greatest strength, which was playing music and using it to sway the hearts and passion of both allies and enemies!

The Sound of Revolution could partially be considered a support mech in this regard.

Of course, as a bona fide ace mech, its Guitar-Battle-Axe possessed a razor-sharp edge that could cut through lots of resistance!

The question now was whether this musical axe made out of unknown but no doubt remarkable materials was powerful enough to chop through the Riot Mark III's Chaos Armor.

From a purely material standpoint, it shouldn't be possible for the weird axe to create any breaches unless it landed at least a dozen heavy blows on the same armor section.

However, the disparity between resonance strength was too great!

Saint Orfan's resonance strength was still in flux, but it should hover above 200 laveres.

Saint Morgenstern's resonance definitely surpassed 1500 laveres, and might even reach 1520 laveres when he was performing at his peak!

This was an enormous difference. It was completely wrong to assume that the Voice of Liberty's resonance strength was 8 times stronger.

Due to the non-linearity of the lavere scale, the actual difference was much greater!

"How old is his ace mech?" Ves asked.

"The Sound of Revolution is more than a decade old, but it was last updated more than a year ago." Jovy responded after consulting the RA's database. "The Resonance Smith was personally responsible for its creation and subsequent evolutions. The good news is that we have access to the design files of this machine. We are in the process of retrieving it without involving the Resonance Smith, which takes time due to the convoluted authorization process."

That was convenient. And dangerous.

Ves could guess that the RA was not willing to expose the design schematics of such a powerful and important machine lightly. Any leaks would not only teach enemies how to best dismantle the Sound of Revolution, but also leak potential cutting-edge proprietary design solutions!

Still, the Resonance Smith should have little to complain about. Since he refused to take direct action, the Red Association could only resort to other measures to limit the potential damage.

Ves wanted to take a close look at the design schematics of the powerful ace mech before he opened up a dialogue with the rogue actor, but the latter unfortunately lacked patience.

The Sound of Revolution hovered a little closer and began to spread out its Saint Kingdom!

Though it did not come too close to the escort fleet, the ace mech nonetheless radiated a much weaker energy field that somehow caused the people inside of it to hear... music.

This shouldn't have been possible.

The sounds did not pass through space, as there was no way for the vibrations to propagate in a vacuum environment.

The music did not pass through any digital signals either. The escort fleet had not yet established a communication link with the opposing ace mech.

Yet everyone heard the same guitar tune anyway. This was one of the many manifestations that made ace pilots so unreasonable. Their willpower could easily realize impossibilities.

Though a normal ace mech shouldn't have been able to spread its music across the entire escort fleet, the Sound of Revolution was not called this way for nothing.

As a work of the Resonance Smith, the ace mech had been specifically designed to amplify Saint Morgenstern's passion for music and help him spread his sounds as widely as possible.

The Resonance Smith must have utilized unknown resonating materials and other special technologies to create this astounding effect.

Was it worth it? The Voice of Liberty must definitely think so, because he had to give up other cool features!

"This song..."

Ves was no music connoisseur, but he could feel that the guitar tone conveyed a strong emotion and intent.

Right now, the ace mech conveyed a slow tune. The rhythm was slow and the notes only played a simple melody.

Aside from sounding good, the tune also caused everyone to relax and lower their guard.

Even Ves found it difficult to resist this influence!

While he remained alert enough to know that he had to resist this effect, the Sound of Revolution somehow made it difficult to keep his mind sharp!

How insidious!

Though the Voice of Liberty ostensibly approached peacefully, he had already launched his first attack on the escort fleet!

If he could dampen the resistance of the members of the escort fleet, then he could easily bypass any remaining resistance and eliminate the captured Ixith Goliath!

Ves was just about to force himself to unleash a roar, but Saint Rosa Orfan already acted faster!

Her own Saint Kingdom flared as she transmitted her words through an override channel!

"WAKE UP! DO NOT LET THIS GUY LULL YOU INTO SLEEP! HE IS THE ENEMY! NONE OF US DESERVES REST UNTIL WE HAVE GOTTEN RID OF THIS SPEED BUMP!"

Her crude words along with its underlying willpower produced the desired effect.

Everyone that had previously grown dull and lethargic suddenly jolted to alertness!

Though many soldiers found it a bit harder to regain their focus than others, they at least regained their fighting capabilities!

Seeing that his adversaries had managed to ruin his attempt to secure an easy win, the Voice of Liberty no longer played the relaxing tune anymore.

Instead, it changed to a more unsettling and discordant melody. It instantly produced a lot of tension. The song pressed on the hearts of the listeners, as if they were only a few steps away from suffering a horrible fate!

"STOP IT WITH THE PARLOR TRICKS." Saint Rosa Orfan growled as her ace mech pointed its tier 3 Destroyer spear directly towards the machine on the other side. "I WILL GIVE YOU ONE CHANCE TO CHANGE YOUR MIND AND GO AWAY. IF YOU DO NOT TAKE IT, THEN DO NOT BLAME ME FOR WHAT HAPPENS NEXT."

The Larkinson ace pilot certainly did not lack confidence.

Though her resonance strength was far inferior, she piloted the best junior ace mech in the Red Ocean. Its full superdimensional mech frame should hold up much better against the Sound of Revolution.

What further amplified Rosa Orfan's confidence was the huge disparity in other assets. The escort fleet comprised many first-class multipurpose mechs as well as a sizable complement of first-class warships.

They might not stand a chance against the Voice of Liberty by themselves, but they could provide a lot of fire support in this situation!

Saint Conrad Morgenstern finally spoke for the first time since he appeared. "I HAVE NO INTEREST IN SPEAKING WITH AN ATTACK DOG LIKE YOU. I WANT TO SPEAK TO THE PERSON WHO IS TRULY IN CHARGE OF YOUR OPERATION. VES LARKINSON, I KNOW YOU ARE THERE. COME OUT AND FACE ME. I WANT TO TALK TO YOU DIRECTLY. DO NOT MAKE ME WAIT."

"..."

The bridge fell silent as people processed the antagonistic ace pilot's demand.

Jovy slowly turned to his friend. "Will you...?"

Ves frowned. "I prefer not to put myself in front of a powerful ace mech that can go hostile at any time, but... I have an obligation to salvage this mess. If there is any chance I can talk him into retreating, then I have to take it. At least my superdimensional raiment should be able to prevent any instant kills."

Chapter 7374 Man of Principles

Chapter 7374 Man of Principles

Ves deliberately took his time to gear up. He left the bridge of the Tarrasque and moved down before he unfolded his true body.

The Dark Apostle soon began to take over his shell, forcing Ves to temporarily occupy Blinky's spiritual form in order to maintain a semblance of his agency.

"Are you afraid?" Ves asked through his feline vessel.

His other personality twitched his lips. "I would be lying if I said no. According to the records that you have skimmed through, Saint Conrad Morgenstern is known as a willful and rebellious hero. He is a rule breaker at heart. If he thinks that we are the enemy, there is a great chance that he will turn hostile against us. While our forces heavily outnumber his own, the Voice of Liberty... is way too powerful."

The absolute disparity in strength concerned everyone greatly.

Ves himself doubted whether the Riot Mark III could keep up with the Sound of Revolution in terms of speed, strength and most importantly skill.

The Voice of Liberty had progressed way too far as an ace pilot. Any saint that had managed to come close to touching the threshold to godhood had long left the boundaries of reality.

In more concrete terms, what Ves feared the most was the much more potent resonance empowerment of the opposing ace mech.

Strong enough true resonance could turn any trash into treasure. Weapons hit many times harder while armor could withstand blows that ordinarily should have caused breaches.

Although the Riot Mark III not only made use of more cutting-edge technologies, but was also clad in high-grade superdimensional armor plating, Saint Orfan's resonance empowerment was much weaker in comparison.

From the perspective of a mech designer, the Riot Mark III could not compete against the Sound of Revolution in a fair duel.

The Chaos Armor granted the ace spearman mech a formidable defensive advantage, but that was not enough to secure victory.

The enemy 'support' mech was much faster and could unleash surprisingly powerful blows. It would definitely be able to gain the initiative and keep it during the entire engagement.

The only way Saint Orfan could squeeze out a win was to rely on the support of the rest of the escort fleet.

Yet even then, Ves did not possess a lot of confidence that their combined efforts could secure an absolute victory.

"Divine Harpoon." The Dark Apostle called out his fellow giant.

"Your orders, sir?"

"Keep your giants on standby." The polemarchos instructed. "Against an ace pilot of this caliber, our Ur-Titans and Faceless Giants won't be able to help all that much. Any fight that ensues between our boys and that metal monster will just lead to the same kind of tragedy that happened during our first contact with the Ixith Goliath. The Voice of Liberty has the power, speed and skill to outmaneuver our clumsy giants and steal their superdimensional arms. We absolutely cannot hand any superdimensional weapon to an enemy that can amplify its penetrative power to a ridiculously high degree. Is that understood?"

The logic behind this decision was absolute.

As much as it pained the giants to admit that they would only make things worse for their side, they could not refute it in the slightest.

That earlier incident had shamed them too deeply.

Until they managed to overcome its shadow, they would not easily put themselves in the same helpless position again.

Besides, the Voice of Liberty was a far more threatening enemy than the Ixith Goliath.

The latter's resonance strength had only reached the level of an expert pilot. The massive Goliath hadn't developed any sophisticated abilities and techniques that could leverage the reality-distorting properties of stolen resonance more effectively.

In contrast, the Voice of Liberty was a genuine ace pilot who had thoroughly explored his ability to change the reality around him with his exuberant willpower.

One of the reasons why Ves did not have a lot of confidence that the other forces could assist Saint Orfan in defeating Saint Morgenstern was because the latter was able to brainwash the weak!

With his music and his long-ranged energy field, the Voice of Liberty was able to shake the thoughts and emotions of those who listened to his voice and his guitar music.

This applies to both friendlies and hostels!

He could make hardened soldiers cry and feel guilty about their actions.

He could make the most fearless mech pilots afraid and compel them to flee the battlefield.

He could amplify the negative emotions of his enemies, causing them to lose their rationality and make lots of mistakes!

This happened to be especially concerning to the Ascended Giants, whose bodies were strong but minds were relatively weak in comparison.

Their mental defenses could not effectively resist the influence of the enemy ace pilot!

The only way the giants could maintain their wits was to keep their distance, but that heavily limited their ability to contribute to the battle.

"Understood, sir. I shall make sure to keep our giants in line and out of sight." The Divine Harpoon seriously responded to his superior. "What about you, Dark Apostle?"

The giant leader in question had just completed his outfitting. Now wrapped in his Superdimensional Giant Regalia, he still did not feel entirely safe.

He looked down at the Withering Sting and sighed.

"Don't." Ves warned.

The Dark Apostle knew his other self was right. He reluctantly put the Withering Sting back onto the weapon rack along with his other giant-scaled armaments.

The polemarchos absolutely could not bring it onto the battlefield and give the Voice of Liberty an opportunity to snatch it from his hands!

"Are you sure you want to go out unarmed, sir?" The Divine Harpoon asked in concern.

"Certain? No, but that does not stop me from going out. I have to meet this challenge. I am a leader. I am responsible for you all. You can stay behind, but I cannot."

"Don't worry." Ves added as his purple form floated to the side. "I am not confronting a savage monster like the Ixith Goliath. Saint Morgenstern may be many things, but he is not a rabid beast."

He is a saint, a man of honor. If he wanted to kill me, he would do so openly and in an upright manner. Since he has not called for my head, that means that there is still room for negotiation."

After making a few more arrangements, the Dark Apostle finally launched into space.

Everyone paid attention to his giant suited form.

His high-quality superdimensional raiment attracted a lot of envy and greed.

It was only due to the exalted status and reputation of its wearer that most people squashed any desire to snatch it for themselves.

Even the Voice of Liberty harbored a desire to wrench away the valuable materials and demand a team of mech designers to integrate it into his own ace mech!

The powerful ace pilot briefly wondered what his guitar would sound like when it had undergone a complete superdimensional conversion.

His Saint Kingdom grew brighter and more volatile as his intuition hinted that the results would be extraordinary!

The Voice of Liberty quickly shook his head inside his cockpit and restrained his urges.

He did not come here to indulge in his desire for superdimensional technology.

He had greater priorities in mind.

The Dark Apostle flew forward at a sedate pace.

He deliberately took his time because it bought more time for the escort fleet to prepare for a possible collision against an extremely powerful opponent.

If a conflict could not be avoided, then the forces at hand needed to make use of every possible weapon and tool to target the weak points of the Sound of Revolution.

The greater the delay, the greater the preparations.

This was why the Dark Apostle maintained a pace that was rather slow but not intolerably so. Several more minutes passed before he reached the side of the Riot Mark III.

The polemarchos felt safer within the protective envelope of the Larkinson ace mech's Saint Kingdom.

At the very least, the Sound of Revolution's mind-altering energy field could not pass its boundaries.

"Larkinson." Saint Morgernstern spoke up again. "We finally meet. You are... more abnormal than I expected. No matter. At least one of you is the person that I wanted to talk to. You are an inventor. You are the harbinger of both wondrous and disastrous technologies. The Carmine System is but

one example of this. You have given many people hope of becoming mech pilots, but it is a false one. Far too many workers who could have lived more fruitful and productive lives as scientists, naval personnel and so on have instead become obsessed with wielding power that they do not always deserve to wield."

This was not an uncommon opinion among the existing class of mech pilots. The older generation especially felt a strong sense of ownership towards their former exclusivity.

"Are you a supporter of the theory that mech pilots are uniquely blessed and therefore the only rightful candidates to pilot mechs?"

"Not at all." The opposing ace mech slightly shook its head. "I do not begrudge norms for desiring to pilot your Carmine mechs. Now that you have single-handedly advanced our technology to make that possible, many people who could have become future heroes and possibly even gods are no longer hindered by a trait as arbitrary as genetic aptitude. My problem with this new technology is not its existence, but its implementation. It is too chaotic. Far too many dreamers are being led astray. The same applies to stolen resonance technology. The potential damage it can do to our society is greater due to the terrible cost it demands."

"You don't sound like a member of Unbound Humanity Faction." Ves calmly retorted. "You are advocating for restricting and regulating the potential of red humanity. Shouldn't you be in favor of unleashing it instead?"

The Voice of Liberty huffed in response. "There is a limit to everything! I am an advocate for freedom, not anarchy! Besides, I am my own person. Just because I am grateful to the Resonance Smith and joined his faction does not mean I share all of his goals and passions. We are of two different minds when it comes to this subject. I have no objection to most technologies, but stolen resonance tech is different. This is a work of evil. An expert pilot must sacrifice his life for every device that can reproduce a semblance of his willpower. Such technology goes too far and cannot be allowed to exist. For the sake of the future of my fellow expert pilots and ace pilots, I cannot allow you to deliver your cargo to Yernstall."

Damn. The Voice of Liberty truly stood on principle on this matter.

Though it reassured everyone that he confirmed in his own words that he did not collude with the Resonance Smith, he could still pose a considerable hindrance by himself!

"We cannot allow you to act unilaterally, Saint Morgenstern. The stakes are too great. More powerful leaders than you and I have already debated on this matter and come to a consensus that stolen resonance technology is too powerful for us to ignore. While you have valid concerns, this is absolutely not the right place and time for you to issue your objections, let alone act in complete violation of your orders."

The Sound of Revolution made a menacing shift forward. Its Saint Kingdom became a little more active.

"I. DO. NOT. CARE. THE CAPTURED GOLIATH MUST DIE. YOUR EXPERIMENTS MUST BE TERMINATED. EACH OF YOU MUST MAKE A SOLEMN PROMISE TO ME AND THE ENTIRE MECH COMMUNITY THAT YOU WILL NEVER WORK ON ANYTHING RELATED TO STOLEN RESONANCE EVER AGAIN. WE ARE BETTER THAN THIS. WE SHOULD NOT RELY ON TAINTED TECHNOLOGY

THAT IS BASED ON EVIL ALIEN PRINCIPLES TO WIN OUR WARS. I INTEND TO CUT OFF ALL TEMPTATION NO MATTER WHAT MEASURES I HAVE TO RESORT TO. DO NOT TRY MY PATIENCE, LARKINSON. WILL YOU COMPLY?"

Chapter 7375 Unreasonable Voice

Chapter 7375 Unreasonable Voice

The Voice of Liberty issued a strong demand.

He spoke from his heart, deliberately choosing to defy the current order that had already decided to exploit stolen resonance technology.

By doing this, he had crossed a very important line.

No matter what, Saint Conrad Morgenstern could no longer remain an upstanding member of red humanity.

His unilateral actions directly opposed the plans and intentions of not one, but all of the major players!

From the Rubarthan Pact to the Red Fleet, none of them felt pleased that this impulsive and rebellious ace pilot wanted to destroy the research specimen and force the researchers to renounce their studies.

Shortly after the Voice of Liberty issued his ultimatum, the Ves and the Dark Apostle received numerous urgent messages.

They all conveyed the demands of the superorganizations that had a stake in the current affair.

The captured Ixith Goliath could not be allowed to perish at the hands of this rebel pilot.

The research value of this amazing exobiological specimen was enormous.

In the days that had passed since the Battle of Philaster Crestia, the Goliath Hive had yet to present any other Goliaths with stolen resonance capabilities.

Who knew how long it would take for the mutated voribugs to produce other ones. The enemy might even decide that growing them through a laborious process only to see them captured by greedy red humans may be a self-defeating maneuver and suspend this initiative.

If that was the case, then the captured Ixith Goliath's value would skyrocket!

As the only biological construct of its kind, its uniqueness had to be preserved and studied at all cost!

This possibility, though faint, raised the stakes of this confrontation even further.

Even if the Goliath began to pump out more Level 8 Goliaths in a few months, the head-start that researchers could enjoy by getting their hands on the research specimen could make a huge difference in the war effort.

Therefore, Ves could not afford to give up the research specimen even if the Goliath Hive began to produce comparable biological monstrosities in the future.

Ves knew that he could not remain silent for long. Remaining speechless was a sign of weakness. No matter what, ever since he became a high-tier galactic citizen, he knew he assumed an obligation to protect the interests of red humanity.

Although people could argue what was best for their race and civilization, there was a proper time and place to debate on weighty decisions like these.

It was absolutely not acceptable for a single rogue ace pilot to unilaterally force a decision on an issue with galactic implications!

"Respectfully, Saint Morgenstern, we do not recognize your authority." Ves slowly responded through his purple companion spirit form. Despite its small and furry appearance, it did a decent job of maintaining a dignified demeanor. "You are a powerful ace pilot, and that grants you a louder voice than many other people. Yet you are no god pilot of Star Designer. You are not an admiral of a serial innovator. You do not lead any major departments or rule over a sizable territory. You do not represent anyone's voice aside from your own. Why must we listen to your voice over that of others?"

Point out that the Voice of Liberty lacked both authority and legitimacy was a good way to take the wind out of his sails.

Unfortunately, the effectiveness of this argument was heavily limited when applied to individuals who never respected authority in the first place.

"Semantics. My galactic citizenship is not as high as yours, but letting the top make every decision is wrong in itself. I had hoped that you would be more sympathetic, Larkinson, seeing as you founded the Red Collective, but your words have betrayed your true colors. You are just as elitist and power-hungry as other so-called high-tier galactic citizens. Power is poison. From the moment you rise above the grassroots that form the true foundation of our civilization, you have already begun to treat yourself as a god among mortals. You have become so far removed from the plight of the humble that you are gradually transforming into a cancer of red humanity."

The naked accusations ignited a spike of fury within Ves!

Though people often regarded a powerful ace pilot's words as truth due to their hatred of falsehoods, they could still be wrong!

Reality was much more subjective to high-ranking mech pilots. When they gained the power to distort the fabric of the universe around them, they became accustomed to judging everything through their own highly distorted lenses.

Ves believed that the Voice of Liberty suffered from a particularly bad case of this phenomenon!

"You do not know me nearly enough. I have done far more to contribute to the life and prosperity of our people than nearly everyone else. I care about the common folk. I used to live alongside them in the first half of my life. The difference between us is that I have embraced the leadership responsibilities that come with higher status. There is already a mature system on how decisions are made. It is not perfect. Nothing ever is. However, we are operating in war time. It is only natural to concentrate much more decision-making power on the most worthy and knowledgeable among us. We cannot afford to waste years on debating the same matters and allow our bureaucracy to get bogged down by useless minutiae."

Though Ves believed he was making a reasoned argument, the opposing ace pilot grew frustrated by all of this talk!

"BLABLABLA! All I hear are useless excuses! Sweet talkers like you just love to use words to confuse and gaslight the weak and powerless into sacrificing their time, money, labour and eventually their lives! You say that you and the other high-tier galactic citizens possess the authority to decide on whether to make use of stolen resonance technology. Well, I and every mech pilot disagree with this notion! The only ones who are allowed to decide on the treatment of our profession are us and no one else!"

Blinky did not look impressed.

"There are 8 god pilots in the Red Ocean. Even if not all of them have shared their opinion on this matter, their influence is still great enough to advance or hinder the adoption of stolen resonance technology. Out of all of the mech pilots in our dwarf galaxy, they are the most worthy to decide on matters related to your shared profession. I can tell you right now that certain god pilots such as the Evolution Witch are in favor of embracing this new technology. Of course, they have also imposed additional demands in order to make sure that we use it safely and responsibly. If you stand down and leave right now, you may be able to earn a seat at the table. The details can still be negotiated."

"NOT ENOUGH!" Saint Morgenstern roared, causing many people in the vicinity to feel a surge of anger boiling within their hearts! "YOU ARE TRYING MY PATIENCE, LARKINSON. IF YOU SOUGHT TO CONVINCE ME TO STAND DOWN, THEN CONGRATULATIONS, BECAUSE YOU HAVE DONE THE OPPOSITE. SO MUCH FOR THE ELOQUENCE OF THE DEVIL TONGUE. EACH WORD YOU SPEAK IS POISON TO MY EARS. YOUR DISDAIN FOR THE COMMON MECH PILOTS GROWS EVER MORE OBVIOUS. YOU AND THE GREEDY MONSTERS THAT YOU REPRESENT WOULD GLADLY SACRIFICE THE LIVES OF HUNDREDS OF EXPERT PILOTS AND ACE PILOTS IF THAT WAS WHAT IT TAKES TO PRODUCE AN EQUIVALENT NUMBER OF STOLEN RESONANCE WARSHIPS."

Blinky's tail whipped around in a more agitated fashion.

Ves found his words failing at this time!

His heart already sunk as he found himself stumped at how to disarm this tense situation.

High-ranking mech pilots were too unreasonable!

Ves belatedly realized that if he did not outright make concessions to the rogue ace pilot, the latter would likely resort to violence in order to meet at least one of his goals.

That would be a disaster.

It would also be a huge failure on his part. He would not only get blamed for reigniting human-to-human conflict, but also bear responsibility for the substantial damage and deaths that might ensue!

He took a mental breath before carefully formulating his next words.

"I am genuinely sorry that you feel this way. It should never have come to this. If you controlled yourself better, then you could have made your case at a more proper venue than in the middle of space. While I can acknowledge that you are fighting for a cause that you believe is just, there is no right or wrong in this situation. Stolen resonance technology has too much potential. When the lives of billions if not trillions of humans are at risk of perishing in the coming year, we need to resort to extraordinary measures in order to prevent these calamities. I am not saying we have to sacrifice the lives of our most admired heroes in order to make this possible. There are always multiple solutions available. Trust me. A lot of groups have already begun to research alternatives to minimize the cost of this nascent technology."

A short moment of silence ensued as the ace pilot seriously parsed those words.

"I cannot take that chance." Saint Morgenstern said in a more subdued but menacing tone. "You have managed to earn back a little respect from me. I can tell you are being weighed down by the same terrible equation that plagues every leader. However, if you think that this can persuade me to give up, then you are wrong. What you are describing is a slippery slope. No matter how little you traverse it, you will eventually slip and slide to the bottom. The best way to prevent you and everyone else from falling to the depths is to destroy the slope entirely. If there is nothing slippery left, then no one will ever make the mistake of tripping and sliding to the abyss."

He believed in this with all of his heart and will.

The Sound of Revolution became more intense. Its Saint Kingdom expanded slightly while lighting bolts started to crackle inside of it. The thrum of notes made people increasingly more apprehensive.

The enemy ace mech shifted its grip on its hybrid weapon and musical instrument.

It looked about ready to burst into action.

Saint Rosa Orfan clearly sensed the elevated threat.

Her powerful ace mech floated protectively in front of the Dark Apostle. The tier 3 Destroyer spear exuded a bloodthirsty aura. It felt as if the weapon wanted to challenge this powerful opponent head-on!

If Saint Orfan still had control over her body, then her lips would have curled in frustration.

Her mech and weapon may be eager to test their mettle against the Sound of Revolution, but Saint Orfan did not possess as much confidence in her ability to fend off this opponent!

The Ixith Goliath was not as threatening as the senior ace mech.

The latter not only performed better in the areas that mattered, but was also controlled by one of the best and most skilled mech pilots in the new frontier, period!

The skill and intuition of an old and experienced saint such as the Voice of Liberty could not be underestimated.

They could easily make the difference between an even fight and a humiliating defeat!

As the Voice of Liberty sounded more aggressive, Saint Rosa Orfan felt more and more pressured.

It was as if a black hole threatened to strip her willpower and engulf her body and mech!

Though the younger ace pilot tried her best to shore up her confidence, she could only do so much.

She basically knew that she could not count on the rest of the escort fleet.

They could provide distant fire support, but that was all. Even that would not be too effective as the Sound of Revolution was both fast and resistant towards attacks.

Only the Riot Mark III could defeat the enemy machine.

As the talking between the two sides fizzled out, the tension in the field grew increasingly more severe.

Hostilities could break out at any second.

The only question was who would make the first move.

Chapter 7376 Cat and Tongue

Chapter 7376 Cat and Tongue

The tension between the two sides had grown sharp enough to cut through steel.

The opposing ace pilot's Saint Kingdom grew increasingly more energetic and lethal.

The guitar notes sounded increasingly more frazzled. This did not bode well for the Voice of Liberty's attitude.

Ves' mood sank.

He failed to defuse the situation. The more he spoke, the more he antagonized the saint with a chip on his shoulder.

The Voice of Liberty grew less and less restrained. His ace mech adopted a more prepared posture. Its specially designed fingers already looked like they were about to strum his unholy combination between a guitar and a double-sided axe.

Saint Rosa Orfan got ready for action as well.

Her Saint Kingdom gained a darker undertone.

Ves keenly caught this shift.

He grew concerned about the Larkinson ace pilot.

Though she kept her demonic side firmly suppressed, her control might slip at any second.

She was already thinking about whether it was necessary to borrow the dark power of the Prophet's Bane in order to gain an edge in the coming clash.

It took a lot of courage for her to make the conscious decision to play with fire once again.

She had almost gotten burned last time, but before she came under attack from her own D-mech, the machine managed to perform well above normal parameters.

The fact that Saint Orfan thought it was necessary to resort to this dangerous measure right away already indicated how poorly the ensuing battle might unfold!

Ves still believed that there was a chance to defuse this incredibly tense situation.

He had an obligation to prevent a tragedy from occurring.

Unfortunately, Ves found it difficult to come up with an argument that would land better than his last ones.

If he was still in control over his true body, then he would have gulped by this time.

"Do you have any bright ideas?" He whispered to his other self.

The Dark Apostle responded with a despairing chuckle. "It is truly wonderful to see you getting stumped by a saint with an attitude. What is the matter? Cat got your tongue? Whatever you are thinking about, stop it. You cannot stop the inevitable. The enemy ace pilot did not come here to get persuaded. He came here for a fight, possibly the last one of his life. From the moment he appeared, he had already cast aside his status, his relationships and more. Only his mission remains. He will do whatever he can to preserve what he thinks is more important than his own life. We should get ready to take action and coordinate with our combined forces."

Well, that was helpful.

Not.

The deployed mechs and warships had already begun to spread out. Every soldier was familiar with the playbook on confronting powerful champions.

Concentrating forces was the worst possible approach to fighting a powerful ace mech.

Just the risk of getting enveloped in the enemy's Saint Kingdom was unacceptable!

In order to make it more cumbersome for the enemy ace pilot to eliminate the supporting units, it was best to split the latter up and spread them around as far as possible.

Of course, the dispersal came at a cost.

It became harder for them to coordinate their actions and cover each other.

The growing distances also reduced the accuracy of their guns. It was already difficult enough to land a hit on a fast-moving ace mech. Trying to accomplish this when the target in question was far away became exponentially harder!

However, they had no choice. The combat assets could only play a useful role so long as they remained intact. They could not afford to get eliminated all at once or in quick succession, so dispersing their coordinates was the only effective solution.

As the various mechs and warships all transmitted their readiness to open fire on a powerful machine that should have been fighting by their side, Ves knew that time had pretty much run out at this point.

"I have one more question." Ves asked the crusading ace pilot . "Do you believe in your cause to the point where you are willing to have human blood on your hands?"

This was both a request and trap all at once. If Saint Conrad Morgenstern admitted that he was willing to kill the people in his way, then he would lose a lot of his moral high ground.

It was one thing to disobey orders.

It was another thing to slaughter honorable and upright human soldiers!

The sounds from the Sound of Revolution briefly grew discordant.

The ace mech's turbulent Saint Kingdom betrayed its pilot's discomfort at this line of questioning.

The Voice of Liberty quickly regained his composure.

"I... do not take up arms just to murder the regular men and women who have dedicated themselves to honorable martial pursuits. They are not my enemy. That does not mean I will refrain from taking action against the machines they have weaponized against myself. The battlefield is never safe. I cannot issue any guarantees, but I can promise you that I will do my best to disable the obstacles in my path without shedding any blood."

That was good enough. Ves could not expect for more.

Before he could say anything else, the Sound of Revolution finally began to take serious action.

"ENOUGH! Let me test your resolve! Listen to my song of liberation! Unshackle yourselves from your mental boundaries and lose your fear of your superiors! Think for yourself, and decide

whether it is right for you to contribute to the development of a new and heinous branch of technology!"

The opposing ace mech began to play his gigantic weapon-guitar for real this time.

Ves and the others could not properly describe the tunes that the Sound of Revolution was passing on with the help of its special long-ranged energy field.

There was a big difference between the music that the Voice of Liberty generated on a passive basis, and the music that he generated by playing his instrument!

The notes did not become louder, but they gained a transcendent character that caused them to influence the minds of every listener in a more effective manner!

Thousands of people grew frantic and neurotic. Their hearts pumped faster while their imagination became filled with fears and paranoia.

It was as if the music was literally driving up their fears and anxiety!

The effect of the Sound of Revolution's impromptu concert was far greater than the glows that Ves had dabbled in the past!

"Rainbows! Rainbows! Rainbows!"

"There are too many colors! I am growing sick!"

"Block the stimulation! Remind yourself that none of this is real!"

The more the Sound of Revolution played his tune, the stronger and more persistent his music became!

Nothing worked to block the sounds. Plugging their ears was absolutely useless as the opposing ace mech somehow transmitted its music directly into their minds and spirits!

As the seconds passed, more and more people stationed inside the cockpit of a mech or the bridge of a medium-sized warship started to act out in various different ways.

Some started to scream and hold their heads in pain!

Others lost their perspective on reality and started to jump around like rabbits.

The most dangerous cases were the ones that had gone crazy and started to mash the buttons of their instruments or control panels in a random fashion!

It was a good thing that every ship was on full alert. As soon as any crew member showed any indication of committing potential harm to oneself or others, the internal monitoring system immediately flagged the anomalous behavior and activated precise restraint measures!

While it was easy to knock them out, the problem was that more and more people started to reach their limits and behave completely irrationally!

Ves witnessed all of this happening from his position in space.

Though he was not able to observe what was happening inside every vessel, his senses were still sharp enough to notice the spread of anarchy.

An urgent transmission reached the Dark Apostle.

"The escort fleet will not be able to provide adequate support as long as the Voice of Liberty keeps up its mass interference effort!" Jovy urgently stated. "We are working on numerous countermeasures, but it will take time that we do not have. Please command Saint Orfan to entangle the enemy ace mech. As long as your Riot Mark III can pressure the Sound of Revolution into a direct fight, then that would be best."

The plan was clear. The Riot needed to press the enemy machine so hard that the latter would have no opportunity to strum his giant guitar!

"Saint Orfan."

"I understand. I will do my best, but I urgently need support."

The Larkinson ace pilot mustered up her courage and commanded her bonded ace mech to charge forward!

Now that Saint Orfan had made the first aggressive move, she became a lot more focused than before.

She had briefly skimmed through the report that detailed the enemy ace mech's design and potential weaknesses.

Though the reality might differ from the months-old documents, Saint Orfan still believed he could get the enemy ace pilot to shut up by striking the right places.

As her Riot Mark III rapidly closed the distance, her Saint Kingdom started to get enveloped in destructive energies.

She was preparing to channel all of the destruction energy that she could spare into one of the frontal weak points!

Just as the blazing Riot was on the verge of thrusting its tier 3 Destroyer spear into a specific point on the waist of the opposing machine, the Sound of Revolution abruptly produced a sharp tone from his guitar!

This surprising move not only boosted the enemy ace mech to the side, but also released an invisible shockwave that passed through Saint Orfan's domain field and sapped a substantial amount of momentum from her Riot!

All of this caused a brief delay that the Voice of Liberty took advantage of by moving his machine out of the way.

By the time the Riot Mark III was supposed to collide against its target, its Destroyer spear hit nothing but vacuum as the Sound of Revolution had already jerked over a hundred meters away!

"Damn." Saint Orfan cursed, but her machine already began to turn around to make a second attempt!

The Riot Mark III charged towards the Sound of Revolution yet again, but before they made contact with each other, the latter managed to move out of the way yet again!

This wasn't working!

The enemy senior ace mech might be a little outdated, but it was obviously built to very high standards!

Combined with its much more potent true resonance, it clearly held the advantage in mobility.

This was an extremely disadvantageous situation for Saint Orfan!

A small but absolute disadvantage in mobility meant that the more powerful ace mech essentially held all of the initiative.

Without a strong helper, there was little that the Riot Mark III could do to hinder the Sound of Revolution or force it into a close confrontation!

Multiple times, the Riot Mark III tried to close the distance, only to fail as the Sound of Revolution deftly evaded the incoming attacks.

All the while, the Voice of Liberty never ceased his musical performance.

His ace mech did not move or evade in random directions.

With every second that passed, his ace mech always moved a little closer to some of the elements of the escort fleet.

As the Voice of Liberty's willpower somehow managed to touch the spiritualities of his enemies, the various vessels began to experience numerous problems.

They responded slower to commands. Their gun batteries fired slower and their hit rates sunk even lower.

This was psychological warfare on an extraordinary level!

As long as the Voice of Liberty was able to keep this up, he probably wouldn't need more than 15 minutes to neutralize the bulk of the escort fleet!

Chapter 7377 Disparity in Willpower

Chapter 7377 Disparity in Willpower

The battle against Saint Conrad Morgenstern started off badly for the escort fleet.

The senior ace mech moved too fast.

Its flight system was quite powerful. Although it was based on an older design, its specifications were extremely high, both from a design and material standpoint.

Even if the Resonance Smith did not pull out all of the stops when he designed and updated the Sound of Revolution, the Star Designer still managed to squeeze out the potential of every single component and material.

Almost nothing went to waste!

Combined with an average level of resonance strength that easily surpassed 1500 laverses, the guitar-axe-wielding ace mech could already be described as a half-divine work.

Everyone struggled to keep up with its amazingly fast movements and incredibly small reaction windows.

Tertiary and secondary warship gun batteries tried their best to bombard the Sound of Revolution or at least increase the consumption of its Saint Kingdom.

However, their efficiency was abysmal. Over 98 percent of their energy beams and kinetic projectiles missed their targets due to the fast and tricky evasion patterns of the hostile ace mech.

Most of the warships in the escort fleet did not even bother to fire their biggest primary gun batteries. These weapons possessed much slower tracking speeds and possessed significantly greater delays. That made it virtually impossible for them to hit a small and exceedingly fast-moving target.

In fact, even if they managed to strike their targets, much of their potency would get sapped by the target's Saint Kingdom!

The reality distortion of an ace pilot as powerful as the Voice of Liberty was able to weaken incoming attacks to a much more impressive degree than any of the Larkinson ace pilots!

The opposing ace pilot was able to snuff out most weak attacks while reducing the intensity of stronger attacks by over 80 percent!

If any of these weakened attacks struck the exterior of the ace mech, the Sound of Revolution's sophisticated armor system easily bounced them away!

As the Dark Apostle backed away from the fighting, Ves tried his best to observe the performance of the opposing ace mech while recalling the details from the design schematics.

The Resonance Smith incorporated many of his ingenious design solutions to the armor system of the Sound of Revolution.

Their effects and benefits were too much to mention, but one of their standout features was that an ace pilot was able to empower them with true resonance a lot more effectively than normal!

While the Sound of Revolution was not clad with superdimensional alloy, the ridiculously high degree of resonance empowerment enabled the machine to come a lot closer to matching the performance of this scarce alloy!

Due to these reasons and more, the entire escort fleet failed to leave a single scratch behind thus far!

"We are wasting our ammunition! We are missing nearly all of our strikes, and the ones that do manage to hit fail to inflict effective damage. We are useless!"

"You are wrong. We are providing assistance, if only slightly. The Voice of Liberty has to expend more energy and focus to evade most of our attacks. Every hit or near-hit drains his willpower a little more. The greater the intensity of our attacks, the more pressure he is under. As long as we keep this up, we can drive him to exhaustion. His ace mech much easier to fend off once Saint Morgenstern has depleted his willpower."

The various mechs and warships still made a difference.

Even if they could not open fire whenever the Riot Mark III clashed against the Sound of Revolution, Saint Orfan made sure to back off frequently in order to give the other assets a chance to unload their guns.

"Good work, Rosa!" Ves conveyed to the Larkinson ace pilot. "You have little chance of beating the Voice of Liberty by yourself, so working together with the rest of the escort fleet is your best way to fulfill your mission objectives. Remember that defeating your foe is not a necessary win condition. The overarching goal of our task force is to bring our priority cargo to Yernstall. You just have to tire the enemy out and leave him behind."

The Riot Mark III continued to maneuver around the battlefield while trying its best to successfully strike at the opposing machine with its tier 3 Destroyer spear.

Unfortunately, a high-tier Destroyer weapon made no difference on how effectively the wielder would be able to land a hit!

"A destroyer weapon. How quaint. What did you do to the Terrans to convince them to pass one to your clan? Regardless, the use of this weapon will make no difference. You are too slow. Your weapon handling skills are decent, but they are lacking a personal touch. You are truly an immature saint. If not for the impressively hard shell of your ace mech, I would have run you through already."

Saint Orfan did not get discouraged by his enemy's critique. She continued to drive her Riot Mark III to intercept and land a hit on the Sound of Revolution!

"I have already thought about everything you said. There is no need for you to remind me of my shortcomings. It is a good thing that this is not a duel. I might not be a match for you at this time, but I am fighting alongside many allies this time. Together, we will grind you into dust!"

She sounded incredibly arrogant to the senior ace pilot. The Voice of Liberty had experienced many more battles and did not think that he would get tripped up by his current adversaries.

Even as his Sound of Revolution continued to evade incoming attack salvos while simultaneously staying one step ahead of the Riot mark III, it was undeniable that the enemy machine was moving closer to the research vessel!

Saint Orfan did her best to block the Sound of Revolution's meandering advance, but the disparity in mobility was great enough to render most of her efforts useless!

There was effectively nothing she could do to inhibit the mobility of the senior ace mech!

For this reason, the gap between the enemy ace mech and the research vessel that contained the extremely valuable research specimen was steadily closing.

Many people were starting to feel the pinch.

"Ves, it may be time for you to deploy your Ascended Giants." Jovy Armalon suggested to Ves over a special communication channel. "If the risk of losing their superdimensional arms is too high, then we can arm them with more conventional weapons in a hurry. They can do much more to hinder the enemy's movements by using their superdimensional-covered bodies to get in the way of the enemy ace mech."

The idea sounded plausible, but Jovy was missing a very important flaw!

"The Voice of Liberty is brainwashing anyone that can hear his music." The Dark Apostle retorted. "I will not subject my giants to this music if they will only get brainwashed within a minute."

Ves concurred with this statement. "The closer you get, the stronger the effect. It is not impossible for our giants to go out and contribute to the battle, but they will have to maintain their distance while firing any ranged armaments they have on hand. I do not think their efforts will amount to much, though. Their firepower will almost certainly be inferior to that of any warship."

"..." Jovy remained silent for a moment before he passed on his next instruction. "Perhaps you are correct, but the Sound of Revolution has already closed the gap by 33 percent since the start of this engagement. We need to devise effective solutions quickly before it is too late."

He was not exaggerating. The Sound of Revolution flew through entire corridors of lethal attacks. The machine easily danced around the slower and clumsier Riot Mark III and continued to fly closer to its primary target!

Throwing in more than two-dozen Ascended Giants clad in basic superdimensional raiments would definitely make it easier to hinder its movements, but only if they coordinated their movements perfectly and possessed the courage to withstand multiple attacks from the enemy machine.

Ves personally did not feel confident that the giants possessed the discipline and esprit the corps to sacrifice their lives if necessary.

Nothing was working.

While the Voice of Liberty was indeed expending willpower at a much higher rate than normal, the senior ace pilot possessed such vast reserves that he would be able to keep this up for an extended amount of time!

His ace mech forcibly suppressed the Riot Mark III's destructive domain field, which not only minimized its interference traits, but also weakened its ability to amplify all of its actions with true resonance.

The two Saint Kingdoms did not exist on the same level!

Whereas the Riot Mark III's Saint Kingdom was still relatively empty, shallow and superficial, the Saint Kingdom of the opposing mech was practically a paradise!

The depth and development of the Voice of Liberty's domain field reflected his growth and lengthy years of existence.

He had stumbled and fallen multiple times, only to pick himself back up and resume his fight. His willpower was not clean and spotless. It possessed invisible scars, each of which possessed their own stories.

Regardless of how much the Voice of Liberty had lost, he never gave up on himself.

The fact that he was able to win the Resonance Smith's appreciation was a powerful testament of his persistence.

Now, the fact he had cast aside his future and much of his relations only invigorated him further!

There was no retreat from his current position!

"Too weak!" He roared as he easily evaded the Riot Mark III's spear charge. "I do not know how you managed to become a saint, but you are clearly not as worthy as the others that I have met. Your self-control is abysmal. Your attacks lack conviction. Your willpower is far too brittle even when compared to other recently ascended ace pilots. You are the most embarrassing ace pilot that I have met on the battlefield. I would be ashamed to call myself a saint if I was in your shoes!"

He punctuated his judgmental words with a guitar shred that conveyed his growing contempt towards Saint Rosa Orfan!

The Larkinson ace pilot would have gritted her teeth if she was still in control over her original human body.

As it was, she chose to remain silent and concentrate fully on driving her attacks home!

Saint Conrad Morgenstern only expressed further contempt towards his main adversary. "You are too young. If you settled down for a decade or two, you would have been able to polish your skills and hone your intuition to a more acceptable standard. As it is, the only reason why you are not positioned at the bottom is due to your admittedly impressive ace mech. Its superdimensional tech and Destroyer tech are the main reasons why I haven't eliminated you yet. It is not worth it for me to waste my precious time on crushing your superdimensional can. It is a good thing that you are slow enough to be bypassed."

As much as Saint Orfan tried to disregard her opponent's words, they still had an effect, especially because they rang with the truth of a more powerful high-ranking mech pilot.

As her emotions became a little unbalanced, her control over the Riot Mark III started to slip in subtle ways.

The superdimensional ace mech missed its attacks by a wider margin. Its reaction speed slowed by a few milliseconds. Its Saint Kingdom deflated by a small margin.

All of these subtle signs showed that the Voice of Liberty's acidic words succeeded in disturbing his opponent's confidence and composure.

This had serious consequences.

As Saint Orfan's control started to slip, her demonic side began to act up in small ways!

The Riot Mark III began to gain a more menacing edge. Its exterior form started to mutate in a manner unlike anything the Voice of Liberty had seen!

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Chapter 7378 Chaos Trigger

Chapter 7378 Chaos Trigger

The Voice of Liberty approach to combat was unconventional compared to his peers.

Instead of relying solely on devastating attacks with the weapons of his mech, he also chose to lean in on his machine's insane potential for psychological warfare.

With the help of his mood-altering guitar music, the Voice of Liberty often relied on his rhetoric and conviction to force his enemies into submission or surrender!

In his opinion, a proper victory did not consist of beating down his enemies with the crudest and most destructive weapons.

Saint Morgenstern only believed in a victory where he managed to convince his enemies into accepting his ideals and principles!

This kind of victory not only removed precious assets from the enemy side, but also added them to his own side!

This effectively doubled the gains compared to a normal battlefield victory!

Therefore, the Voice of Liberty constantly trained and exercised his guitar skills and rhetoric, knowing that they constituted his best 'weapons' as a high-ranking mech pilot!

Today, he employed these armaments against Saint Rosa Orfan and the crews of all of the surrounding starships.

Their effectiveness against ordinary personnel was so great that many of the elements of the escort fleet could only attack from far away, causing their hit rates to diminish even further.

As for Saint Orfan, her mood continued to worsen even as she continued to believe in her own strength.

Her willpower continued to provide her with a bulwark against criticism, but it was not a perfect form of defense.

Ace pilots were still human in many ways.

Increment by increment, Rosa Orfan's anger and frustration accumulated.

How dare the rebel ace pilot belittle her when they belonged to completely different generations?

Back when Conrad Morgenstern was at her current age, he could only dream of becoming a saint!

The only reason why the Voice of Liberty gained the upper hand was due to his much longer development time.

This fight was as fair as an adult beating up a teenager!

Instead of trying to voice her complaints, Saint Orfan chose to remain silent.

She knew that she would only fall even deeper into his adversary's rhythm if she played along with his game.

That became evident when the Sound of Revolution's intense and discordant guitar music grated in her ears.

The grinding of distorted notes fueled her negative emotions despite her best efforts to ignore the sounds.

Her control over herself started to slip, causing the Middle Demon that had almost taken over her soul to gain an opening to assert its own existence.

This became evident from the outside as her Riot's exterior began to show signs of morphing.

Though it had yet to reach the phase where it grew sharp and wicked spikes, it became clear that the ongoing circumstances did not do Saint Orfan's mentality any good!

Ves grew concerned about her deterioration.

She had already lived through a bad case not too long ago. The Larkinson ace pilot had less than a month to get past her moment of weakness and shore up her defenses. That was way too little time for her to regain her swagger and strengthen her mental defenses.

This was why he felt tempted to call her back.

Putting so much weight on her shoulders was not fair. This fight was not winnable from the moment a saint as powerful as the Voice of Liberty appeared.

Although Ves could tell that the Voice of Liberty tried his best to hold back and avoid any regrettable casualties, he clearly stated that he ultimately placed his ideals over any other rules.

Was it worth it to risk Saint Orfan's life for a cause that was already lost?

No.

Ves believed that the Larkinson ace pilot had already demonstrated sufficient resolve in this engagement.

Since the disparity in strength was so obvious, few people would blame him for pulling back this asset.

The escort fleet may be big, but the lack of high-level assets capable of contending or even hindering Saint Morgenstern rendered it almost useless.

The powerful but unwieldy gun batteries of the various warships mostly unloaded their ordnance in empty space.

The same went for the mechs deployed in space.

The only way their firepower could achieve any meaningful hits was to coordinate their firing angles and saturate the entire region surrounding the coordinates of their target.

Not that the few actual hits managed to affect the Sound of Revolution in any visible manner.

Most attacks had become so weakened that the armor system easily bounced them off without incurring any damage.

Only the more powerful warship-grade attacks achieved slight results, but all they did was leave minute scratches behind!

"Useless." Blinky shook his feline head in disappointment.

What about reinforcements?

None were on their way as far as Ves knew of. He had already checked beforehand. His contacts all reported that the nearest troop detachments take at least a day to arrive!

That was long enough for the Voice of Liberty to destroy the research specimen a thousand times in a row!

Since the escort fleet had no realistic prospect of achieving victory, Ves would rather focus on loss mitigation.

The captured Ixith Goliath would soon be destroyed, but no one else had to suffer along the way.

Giving up the fight may be a shameful decision, but as the leader who bore overall responsibility, Ves had an obligation to make the hard but necessary choices.

Although Ves would get blamed in the process, he knew his many merits would easily compensate for this blemish.

He would probably be able to redeem himself in the public once he completed the development of the Arboreal Project.

Since that was the case, he issued the decisive command before Saint Orfan lost control over herself.

"Pull back, Rosa." He transmitted. "You have done enough, but it is clear that you are outmatched. The gap in strength is too great, and the support from the rest of our assets cannot make up for the difference."

"What?!" Venerable Orfan transmitted back with clear agitation in her synthesized voice. "You are telling me to give up so soon? I still have plenty of fight left in me! I am not letting this bastard fly away without doing my best!"

"I know you still have a lot of fight left in you, but the same goes for the Voice of Liberty. He has not struck against any of our mechs and warships and he has not specifically concentrated his attacks against your Riot Mark III. If you become an actual nuisance to him, that will change very quickly. Do not force him to go lethal, either against you or the rest of our fleet. There is still room for deescalation as long as he hasn't killed anyone. If anything happens to you... the Larkinson Clan will never be able to let this go, and so will others. Sometimes... giving up is the most optimal choice you can make."

The opposing side of this political affair had the potential to transform into the second coming of the Cosmopolitan Movement if pushed to the extreme!

This outcome had to be avoided at all costs!

Unfortunately, Saint Orfan did not think this way.

She had no perspective for the grand scheme of things. She had become completely caught up in her tunnel vision. Her only goal at the moment was to defeat her extremely annoying and infuriating opponent!

"I have a better idea." She responded even as her ace mech tried and failed to thrust its Destroyer spear into the opposing ace mech. "Activate the Chaos Trigger."

Blinky's tail immediately straightened in alarm!

"Do you know what you are talking about, Rosa?!"

"I know."

"I don't believe you do! The Chaos Trigger is the special Ultimate Module of the Riot Mark III, and should be considerably more powerful than the other Ultimate Modules that I designed for past projects. What is important to note is that I designed it based on the assumption that you not only broke through without complications, but that you can easily keep your D-mech under control. As it is, you satisfy neither of these two criteria, which means that the risks of activating this trump card is much greater than my initial projections. This is why I made the decision to lock it down to prevent you — or more specifically the Prophet's Bane — from recklessly activating it. This caution is very much warranted considering my original design for the Chaos Trigger."

Not every design choice suited the actual situation at hand. The gap between conception and realization was substantial enough for any variable to create a mismatch between the two. This was exactly what happened with regard to the Riot Mark III's Ultimate Module.

This was why Ves resolutely applied a quick fix to disable any unilateral activations of this function.

The only way to pull the Chaos Trigger was for Ves and Saint Orfan to simultaneously input a code!

In other words, the only way for the Riot Mark III to initiate its extremely powerful Ultimate Module was for Ves to explicitly give his permission.

The Riot Mark III could not pull the trigger on its own accord!

Of course, Ves speculated that if the Riot's physical mutations went deep enough, it may be able to override the multi-layered hardware and software restrictions.

That was unlikely to happen at the moment. It would require very targeted mutations to occur, which was hard to accomplish when the mech was more focused on creating jagged angles and pointy spikes.

In any case, instead of reflexively shutting down this dangerous idea, Ves seriously considered the Larkinson ace pilot's request.

If anything could give the Riot Mark III the ability to launch a slightly more serious counterattack against the Sound of Revolution, it was a metaphorical button that would remove a lot of limiters.

Yet Ves could not ignore the obvious dangers associated with the Chaos Trigger.

What he said earlier could not be discounted. He designed this Ultimate Module as a calculated risk.

The problem was that the assumptions that he initially used in his calculations diverged too much from the actual situation!

Given Saint Orfan's highly concerning spiritual contamination, the Chaos Trigger may very well push her over the edge as soon as they pulled the trigger!

"Decide quickly." She urged. "We are running out of time."

She was right. This was not the time for Ves to explore his doubts and calculate every variable. The situation was too urgent for that. He needed to make up his mind quickly.

"Tell me one good reason why we should activate this high-risk solution in a battle that you can afford to lose."

"Giving up is unacceptable to any pilot that wants to ascend to godhood. The odds aren't fair, but that is not a reason for me to do less than my best. I will not let my... affliction be used as an excuse to withdraw from this battle. I will not be haunted by my own demon, which is exactly what will happen if I avoid it all the time! If I want to maintain the upper hand against this parasite, I must build up the courage to confront it directly. As far as I know, pulling the Chaos Trigger is the most direct way for me to confront my own demon."

"...If you are doing this, you are betting your entire life and freedom on your ability to confront the Prophet's Bane. There is no way to walk back this decision. As long as we pull the Chaos Trigger, there will only be a single winner and a single loser. There is a significant chance that the latter will be you. Are you sure you want to proceed?"

"Do it." She responded with a decisive tone. "If not now, then never. I may as well give up the path of godhood if I am this timid."

Though Ves had obvious misgivings about this decision, this was not the time for him to procrastinate.

He resolutely shoved aside his doubts and decided to put his full trust into his ace pilot.

If Saint Rosa Orfan believed she was up to the task of confronting her demon, then she deserved his support!

Chapter 7379 Pulling the Triggers

Chapter 7379 Pulling the Triggers

Giving up was not Saint Orfan's style.

Ves may be more hesitant about this decision, but he ultimately chose to set aside his doubts and place his unconditional trust into the female ace pilot.

Although Saint Rosa Orfan possessed questionable judgment even in the best of times, this was ultimately a part of her personal struggle.

The conflict between Saint Orfan and the Middle Demon that originally inhabited just the Riot Mark III had been ongoing ever since they first bonded with each other.

The tainted Blood Pact forged between the two ensured that neither of them could rest unless they resolved their struggle.

The Prophet's Bane was strong and unquestionably hostile. The same strengths that turned the Riot Mark III into a powerful D-mech also threatened to subsume Saint Orfan's willpower and assimilate her soul!

Therefore, Ves would prefer not to witness a direct collision between the two forcibly merged partners.

He did not think that Saint Orfan was truly ready for this confrontation.

Yet it was not his place to tell an ace pilot how to overcome her own challenges.

The path to becoming a god pilot was exceedingly difficult. Only the very best of ace pilots could ever hope to pass the ultimate test.

In preparation for this great leap, ace pilots often subjected themselves to many difficulties in the hopes of gaining more practice and cultivating an aura of invincibility.

True courage could only emerge from actual struggle!

Without suffering enough hardships, it was very difficult for high-ranking mech pilots to persist in their long and arduous journey to godhood.

Ves understood Saint Orfan's rationale, but understanding did not necessarily equate to agreement. The risks were not in proportion to the rewards from his perspective.

However, he was a mech designer. His expertise lay in mechs. He may claim to understand the people who used them, but he could never fully put himself in the shoes of his clients.

Mech designers existed to serve mech pilots.

In this context, it meant giving Saint Orfan the benefit of the doubt.

Unless her judgment had clearly become impaired, she alone retained the right to choose how far she was willing to push herself in order to fulfill her goals.

Ves still felt uncomfortable about putting all of his trust in a clearly unstable ace pilot, but he also had faith in her ability to succeed strangely enough.

He could not properly explain why he felt this way. This was dangerous because feelings alone could not determine success or failure.

He decided to make a leap of faith anyway.

In any case, high-ranking mech pilots never played by the rules.

"Get ready." Ves said as he briefly concentrated in order to descend on his nearest masterwork mech.

Blinky's form winked out as he got used as a medium to conduct the remote avatar channeling technique!

As soon as a portion of Ves' consciousness landed inside the Riot Mark III, he immediately experienced a great deal of pressure and hostility from his own creation!

It was one thing to extend his consciousness into a friendly and benign masterwork mech, it was another thing to do it onto a powerful D-mech!

Fortunately, Saint Orfan still maintained a decent amount of control over her machine. Her extraordinary willpower immediately pushed the Middle Demon's hostile influence away.

That felt better.

While Ves was able to endure the current circumstances, he felt anything but comfortable at the moment.

The conversion of the Riot Mark III into a D-mech profoundly corrupted its spiritual foundation. Almost every aspect had become tainted by a demonic touch.

This included the extraordinary seed that he had subconsciously placed into the Riot Mark III upon upgrading the mech into a masterwork!

Ves only theorized about the consequences, but now that he came into direct spiritual contact with his latest work, he found out that he severely underestimated the consequences!

Strange laughter and a surging feeling of malice welled in his heart.

The only person that knew him best happened to be himself!

The consequence of all of this was that Ves became tormented by indescribable interactions.

The Riot Mark III did not feel like a welcome home to him. Instead, he felt as if he had plunged himself in a pit filled with thousands of alien worms!

Even if these worms possessed very little lethality, the feeling of having them crawl all over his body was highly disconcerting!

Ves wanted to get this over with as soon as possible. He could not last for long in here without losing his sanity or getting corrupted by his own work.

Unlike Saint Orfan, Ves did not possess any extraordinary willpower that he could use to fend off this hostile influence!

He did not dare to delay any further. Blinky's intangible form quickly moved to various internal sections of the Riot Mark III and made very precise and specific modifications to the internal structure.

Each of these actions disabled another physical lock that prevented the Chaos Trigger from activating.

Ves had to expend a lot of effort on this process. He had to expedite it as much as possible, which was difficult when the Riot Mark III was not only mutating in bizarre ways, but actively tried to corrupt him or eject him from his own work!

There were numerous times where the normal steps no longer applied because the internal structure of the Riot Mark III had become warped due to odd mutations.

Its nature as an archemehc made it even more difficult for Ves to puzzle out improvised solutions. He had to rely on multiple disciplines to perform many different calculations in his mind.

If he botched his solution, he risked more than a delay. He might cause the mutating Riot Mark III to malfunction or behave in an unpredictable manner!

Fortunately, his familiarity with the Riot Mark III remained high enough that he was able to successfully disable the hardware locks without causing anything to explode.

"Done! The hardware parts will no longer pose a hindrance."

"Can I finally pull the trigger?"

"Yes, but I will have to pull a second trigger at the same time."

Blinky's purple feline form reappeared inside the cockpit of the Riot Mark III.

It had changed considerably due to the accidents that occurred during Rosa Orfan's botched breakthrough.

While nobody knew for certain whether the ace pilot's remaining human body held any importance, the Larkinsons had converted the cockpit seat into a heavily shielded and padded preservation capsule.

Many high-tech integrated modules tried their best to preserve the life and vitality of the human body parts that hadn't been assimilated by the structure of the mech.

As Blinky flew towards the side, he activated a few secret switches. A hidden control panel soon emerged that was specifically designed to be manipulated by his feline paws.

The Star Cat awkwardly inputted multiple codes before grasping the solid handle.

He got ready to pull the trigger.

Saint Orfan meanwhile prepared to pull the trigger on a different device.

While she could no longer reach out with her human arm, the cockpit sat at the heart of her Saint Kingdom.

She only had to divert a small proportion of her willpower to exert a precise amount of force.

"I am starting the countdown. This is your last chance. Are you sure you want to proceed?"

"Start the countdown already."

Her answer was clear.

"Three, two, one, pull!"

Both of them pulled the trigger at the same time!

As soon as they completed this synchronized action, a moment of silence ensued.

Then, the Riot Mark III's Saint Kingdom became more volatile.

"You need to leave." Saint Orfan warned Ves as her willpower suddenly experienced a lot more strain than usual. "I will need to devote all of my attention to myself."

Ves knew the dangers as well as her. "Understood. Good luck, Rosa. Stay strong and stay true to your heart. Do not lose yourself in the power that is about to explode from your machine."

He did not dare to stay any longer. Ves quickly ended his remote channeling technique, causing Blinky to disappear from the Riot Mark III and return to the Dark Apostle's side.

As soon as the Star Cat reappeared in his original position, Ves immediately directed his attention towards the distant ace mech.

The Riot Mark III had been falling behind in the past minute. The Sound of Revolution had advanced a significant distance due to experiencing less hindrances.

The only reason why the enemy ace mech had not advanced even further was because the warships of the major powers had finally launched their missile salvos!

Dozens and hundreds of them launched in total synchronization.

They fanned out before angling to strike at the ace mech from many different directions at the same time!

As soon as these missiles launched into space, the Voice of Liberty finally experienced a more serious threat from the rest of the escort fleet.

The senior ace mech responded in two different ways.

First, hidden gun ports opened up across the mech frame.

The Sound of Revolution's characteristic Guitar-Battle-Axe served as its iconic weapon, but that did not mean that it became harmless once it had lost this armament.

The RA ace mech integrated multiple highly compact and sophisticated energy weapons, each of which was capable of wiping out cannon fodder and intercepting a large variety of enemy ordnance.

The Sound of Revolution currently utilized its energy weapon hardpoints to launch rapid volleys of low-powered energy beams and plasma bolts.

Each of these attacks precisely struck an incoming missile and put it out of commission!

With the amplification of true resonance, the integrated guns only had to attack at their lightest settings to completely eliminate the missiles, many of which had been designed to shrug off weak point defense fire!

While the ace mech single-handedly intercepted dozens of missiles, it was not enough.

The escort fleet was too big and many of its vessels contained multiple missile launcher platforms!

As such, the Sound of Revolution had to rely on an additional measure to prevent itself from getting blasted by repeated explosions.

Although the missiles lacked resonance amplification, their warheads were highly potent and were easily capable of inflicting significant localized damage!

Just the act of sapping their strength and potency with the ace mech's Saint Kingdom demanded a significant expenditure of energy.

This was why Voice of Liberty decided to change his song and strum his mech-grade guitar weapon in a different manner.

The Sound of Revolution soon began to project invisible but very much dangerous energy waves in multiple directions.

Each time they passed through a cluster of incoming missiles, the ordnance in flight wobbled and malfunctioned to various degrees!

Some even exploded outright!

Many more missiles proceeded to stumble and fail to complete their short journeys.

In the end, only less than a dozen missiles had crossed the entire distance and exploded close to their target!

The Sound of Revolution's Saint Kingdom had already assumed a more defensive posture. It had been responsible for weakening the missiles that slipped through to the highest possible degree.

Even then, the powerful explosions strained the enemy ace mech's exterior plating!

Subsequent missile salvos quickly emptied the inventory of high-yield missiles among the various warships, but their officers could not care less.

This was exactly the time where they needed to expend their most potent and flexible ordnance!

As long as they could overcome this ambush, the remaining route leading to the Yernstall Central Star Node should be devoid of any further threats.

Therefore, many crew members yearned to defeat the enemy ace pilot!

"Too many missiles are being intercepted! The few that managed to get through have failed to crack the Sound of Revolution's outer-most armor layer. We need to concentrate on our attacks!"

Though the escort fleet was sluggish to respond to changes, the crews of the various starships and warships were both professionals and elite material.

They studied the results, calculated a lot of numbers and revised their firing solutions just so they could slow down the Sound of Revolution even further!

Chapter 7380 Unlocking the Carmine System

Chapter 7380 Unlocking the Carmine System

Pulling the Chaos Trigger was a big deal.

The consequences were serious, particularly because Ves designed it as an extension of the Riot Mark III's Carmine System!

Yes, the Carmine System!

Ves did not fully understand his mindset during the time he came up with this idea and realized it, but he must have been in a particularly adventurous mood to experiment on the Carmine System.

This was not an ordinary modification. The Ultimate Module was the equivalent of a companion spirit of a living mech, and thereby existed in a semi-independent state.

This brought both advantages and disadvantages.

From a design standpoint, Saint Rosa Orfan formed a Blood Pact with the Riot Mark III, which the Chaos Trigger was technically a part of. Yet because the latter remained in a locked and dormant state most of the time, the Larkinson ace pilot had only ever piloted the 'incomplete' version of her battle partner.

Against most enemies, the Riot Mark III in its basic configuration sufficed. A superdimensional ace mech already possessed a crushing advantage against roughly equal or weaker adversaries.

Yet Ves did not solely design the Riot and its iterations to beat up the weak. He had many other assets at his disposal for this task.

The original purpose of the high-ranking spearman mech was to address the threat of qualitatively superior opponents.

The Riot Mark III needed to be able to punch above its weight while enduring powerful attacks in return.

Even if it could not win the duel, it should at least be able to hold out and delay the enemy as long as possible!

With that in mind, Ves devised the Chaos Trigger to give his work a more dangerous edge.

The Chaos Trigger was a double-edged sword. It could theoretically increase the lethality of the Riot Mark III by a huge margin, but also put great strain on the pilot as well as mech frame.

Before Saint Orfan could channel her explosive rise in power towards the right target, she first had to bear its impact through the overloaded Carmine System!

Pulling the Chaos Trigger directly disabled numerous hardware and software limiters.

In other words, the floodgates had been opened!

The most immediate consequence of this was that the volume of blood cycling through Saint Orfan's vestigial physical body and the Riot Mark III multiplied by at least 3 times!

Not only that, but the density of mostly artificial blood had increased due to the injection of additional stimulants and other substances.

Even the temperature had risen!

The biological components of the Carmine System endured significantly more stresses than normal as a consequence, but they were still able to bear the difficulties due to their completely artificial nature.

The same could not be said for Rosa Orfan's body, which still possessed many of the frailties of the human race!

If Saint Orfan still possessed a functional human form, then she would have cried out in pain at this time!

Any normal human being subjected to this inhuman treatment from the overloaded Carmine System would have suffered excruciating pain before suffering a total physical shutdown.

However, Saint Orfan's current physical condition happened to play to her advantage. The ace pilot had become so disconnected to her partially assimilated body that she effectively experienced none of its pain and suffering.

Of course, nobody knew what would happen if the vestigial body expired completely. It was not worth the risk to see what would happen. Preserving it still remained a priority.

This was where the Riot Mark III's Saint Kingdom came in. The only way for Saint Orfan to help her vestigial body tolerate the brutal treatment was to use her willpower to distort her reality.

Once true resonance fortified her remaining physical form, it no longer deteriorated any further. The remaining technological instruments integrated into the preservation pod also helped to repair and sustain the vulnerable human flesh.

While her physical condition reluctantly achieved stability, the same could not be said for her mental state.

The physical aspects of the Carmine System closely mirrored its intangible aspects!

There was a direct correlation between the Carmine System and the Blood Pact.

The latter therefore experienced profound changes, many of which appeared to be volatile and unstable.

The imperfect wall that mostly separated Saint Orfan from the Prophet's Bane collapsed!

Both the ace pilot and the Middle Demon that originated from her D-mech were forced to establish a closer and more intimate connection with each other.

The forced convergence between two powerful and very hostile actors sparked immediate conflict as both sides battled for supremacy!

Saint Orfan relied on her surging willpower to defend herself and launch counterattacks against the demon that had gained a huge grip on her soul.

The Prophet's Bane meanwhile relied on the strong base provided by its D-mech and its accumulated advantages to increase its ownership of the ace pilot's soul!

The conflict between both sides became a lot more intense than before. This was because the Chaos Trigger provided numerous boosts to both the pilot and machine!

Fortunately or unfortunately, the drastic changes did not significantly alter the balance of power between the two. They entered into a stalemate where neither side could achieve complete dominance over their archenemy.

"You will never be the death of me!" Saint Orfan spat at her own inner demon. "You can rage all you want, but I will gladly take your aggression and channel it at other enemies!"

This was the true purpose of the Chaos Trigger.

It sought to supercharge the Carmine System and cause a series of transformations that ultimately allowed the ace mech to exert much greater power than usual!

The changes went beyond the Carmine System and the Blood Pact.

Many limiters integrated into other components got removed as well.

The Chaos Armor began to spill over its chaotic and anti-prophetic traits into the rest of the mech frame, causing them to undergo increasingly less stable and more dangerous mutations!

The power reactor went into overload as well, causing it to output a drastically higher level of power at the cost of rapidly draining the Riot Mark III's energy reserves.

The flight system gained a destructive boost in thrust power while the tier 3 Destroyer spear became infected by additional energies, causing its energetic spear tip to sputter in a much more dangerous manner than before!

All of these boosts were powerful, substantial and self-harming in nature.

The various overloaded systems of the ace mech should have exploded or torn themselves apart in short order, but the ace mech's Saint Kingdom forcibly increased their durability and enabled them to tolerate a lot more abuse than before!

This was especially the case when the additional stimulation and the forced amplification of the Blood Pact caused the ace pilot's resonance strength to soar!

"The resonance meters are spiking!" Alexa Streon reported in a tone that conveyed both her excitement and concern! "The Riot Mark III's Saint Kingdom is undergoing an explosive expansion! Its radius has increased by over 27 percent! Saint Orfan's resonance strength has just surpassed 300 laves!"

The graph that depicted the overloading ace mech's resonance strength not only registered a steep climb, but also much greater volatility than usual!

This was expressed in much more frequent and intense hills and valleys!

The strong rise in volatility indicated that the ace pilot and ace mech's current conditions were anything but stable. Both of them were experiencing so many different stresses that it was a minor miracle that they could persist up to this point!

With every second that passed, anything could go wrong.

While the surging Saint Kingdom could suppress many problems, it was not capable of remedying every malfunction.

Saint Orfan knew she was on a timer.

She was expending her willpower at a much more prodigious rate. The Riot Mark III was beating itself up on the inside while also draining its energy reserves like no tomorrow.

Nothing lasted forever, but their current conditions were so concerning that they might not be able to retain their combat effectiveness beyond 5 minutes!

"Five minutes are enough." Saint Orfan determined.

She needed to secure victory within this narrow window of opportunity.

Even if she managed to persist for a few more minutes, she doubted it would matter because her opponent would have already destroyed the research specimen during this time interval.

Therefore, she may as well go all-out and fight at her absolute best!

"YOU!" She roared at the Voice of Liberty! "IT'S TIME FOR ROUND 2 NOW THAT I AM NOT A PUSHOVER ANYMORE!"

The Riot Mark III blasted forward with much greater acceleration than before!

Its overloaded flight system not only generated a greater amount of raw thrust, but the strengthened Saint Kingdom also provided stronger true resonance amplification!

The combination of these effects significantly boosted the Riot Mark III's mobility, enabling it to catch up to its adversary significantly better than before!

Just as the Riot Mark III was about to fly close enough to drive its tier 3 Destroyer spear into the back of the Sound of Revolution, the latter was finally forced to respond!

"How ugly." The Voice of Liberty still maintained his composure even as he was confronted by a very bizarre ace mech. "Whatever emergency measure that you have resorted to is more dangerous to yourself than your enemies. I can feel your pain. It is an ugly sound!"

The Sound of Revolution turned around just in time to deflect the Destroyer spear with its iconic Guitar-Battle-Axe.

As soon as the two weapons made contact with each other, the axe released a strange noise that not only disrupted Saint Orfan's concentration, but also shoved the powerful spear aside a little further than normal!

Strong vibrations rippled through the weapon and into the hand that held it. The vibrations continued to travel along the length of the arm before finally shaking the torso.

These were not normal vibrations!

They generated a strange form of resonance that amplified their destabilizing effects!

The consequences were quite serious.

Despite its excellent construction, the Riot Mark III briefly lost control over its mech frame!

The rebel ace mech tried to take advantage of this opening by spinning its weapon around to unleash a quick and devastating axe strike at the ace spearman mech!

However, unlike most machines, the Riot Mark III was able to withstand the resonating vibrations a lot better than other machines.

This was not only due to Saint Orfan's surging willpower, but also due to her battle partner's inherent nature as a full superdimensional mech!

Its actual mass and volume was far greater than its outward appearance!

The vibrations generated by the Sound of Revolution therefore had to cover a lot more matter, and got dispersed before they could inflict more debilitations to the internals of the ace spearman mech.

The Riot Mark III successfully parried the enemy ace mech's second strike and even managed to release a chaotic flare of destructive energies.

Though the enemy's willpower heavily suppressed this sudden outburst, it caused just enough damage and disruption to push back the guitar-axe wielding machine!

Saint Orfan did not relent on her offensive. She keenly smelled vulnerability in her adversary!

Even as the opposing ace mech sought to avoid a confrontation at close range, the Riot Mark III pursued with dogged determination.

Though its acceleration rate fluctuated due to all of the volatile activity, the Riot Mark III was still able to keep up and even gain on the Sound of Revolution!

The two machines continued to collide their weapons against each other.

If the Riot Mark III wielded a superdimensional weapon, then it may have been able to damage or destroy the Guitar-Battle-Axe in short order.

Unfortunately, its current polearm did not possess any superdimensional upgrades.

Even so, just the spillover of destructive energies caused significant harm to the opposing machine!

The Sound of Revolution's exterior became increasingly more pitted as the destructive energies attempted to corrode their way through the armor layers.

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Chapter 7381 Dark and Orange Monster

Chapter 7381 Dark and Orange Monster

The momentum of the battle had shifted.

The activation of the Chaos Trigger had caused the Riot Mark III to go mad!

Its mutations became increasingly more unstable and aggressive!

The overloaded components forcibly squeezed out all of their power and potential without much regard for their integrity and lifespans.

Saint Orfan's resonance strength had increased by almost 50 percent, which was practically unheard of. Not even Ves anticipated that the Chaos Trigger could lead to such an explosive growth in willpower!

Yet for all of the dramatic boosts, the consequences were very dire to the ace pilot and ace mech.

Ves never really took safety into account when he originally designed the Chaos Trigger.

Saint Orfan found it difficult to maintain a clear mind.

She was enduring too many sensations.

The strain of her ace mech, the aggressive encroachment of the Prophet's Bane, the increasingly more serious counterattacks from the Sound of Revolution and her own spiralling madness all gnawed at her sanity!

The dramatic changes to the Carmine System had drastically altered the way that Saint Orfan interfaced with her machine.

The line between herself and her living mech had blurred even further, causing her sense of substitution with the mech frame to grow even stronger.

She felt every attack that the opposing ace mech landed on the exterior of the Mark III!

She felt every single flaw and malfunction that broke out across her new body!

She felt the power reactor heating up to such a dramatic degree that she had the illusion that her own heart was burning her body up from the inside!

It was all too much.

The pain and sensory overload would have overwhelmed any ordinary human by this time.

Even an ace pilot who had endured many hardships throughout her career could hardly keep herself anchored.

She constantly reminded herself that for all of this madness, the power she gained out of her suffering was very much real.

The performance of both the physical and intangible aspects of her ace mech had been forcibly raised to a much greater height!

Saint Orfan was not ready for this. Even as her mutating machine moved faster and struck harder, its movements also grew sloppier.

Yet despite all of these difficulties, she still valued the raw power that she had at her disposal.

This was because her ace mech finally had a chance to defeat the enemy machine!

While the gap in resonance strength was still too great, it was no longer as big of a gulf as before.

The Riot Mark III was able to accelerate faster, enabling it to catch up to the Sound of Revolution, if only barely!

This made all of the difference. So long as the gap in mobility got closed, the Riot Mark III turned into a real menace to the invading machine!

The two ace mechs collided against each other at a much greater frequency than before!

Different from the previous times, the Riot Mark III took the initiative. Saint Orfan gained more confidence in her agency. This became evident when her Saint Kingdom received another boost, thereby making her machine a little faster than a few seconds earlier!

This was the importance of confidence to high-ranking mech pilots. A better mood translated into greater performance, which subsequently boosted an individual's confidence even further.

Right now, Saint Rosa Orfan benefited from this positive feedback loop!

Her resonance strength had already surpassed 300, enabling her to reach an amazing personal record, but it turned out that this was not her limit!

"We are measuring 310 laves from the Riot Mark III!"

"Impossible! This is way too much of an amplification! How can a beginner ace pilot multiply her resonance strength to such an exaggerated degree without falling apart right away?!"

"It has to be the new control interface! The rules that used to apply to neural interfaces clearly do not affect Carmine Systems the same way."

As people continued to speculate about how the Riot Mark III was able to perform so much better than before, Alexa Streon turned directly to Gloriana.

"What exactly is... the Chaos Trigger?"

The director of the Design Department did not issue an immediate response. Instead, she pressed her lips and remained silent for a dozen or so seconds.

"To be honest, Miss Alexa, I cannot give you a clear answer." Gloriana tersely responded. "Nominally speaking, it is the so-called 'Ultimate Module' that my husband single-handedly invented and brought to life to the best of his ability. I do not understand all that much. It is rooted in the Carmine System, which I barely understand to begin with. You would have to ask your question to Ves if you want a clearer answer than that. All I can say is that Ves has obviously played with fire yet again when he chose to implement this particular interpretation of an Ultimate Module. He locked it down for good reasons I am sure."

"Then why did he choose to unlock it at this time?"

"Look outside, Alexa. Do you see how much the battle has turned in our favor? The Chaos Trigger has changed our fate. We are no longer completely doomed to suffer a loss. This is a precious opportunity that Saint Orfan has bought by putting her sanity and health on the line."

The performance of the present version of the Riot Mark III continued to astound observers.

The scrappy junior ace mech far exceeded its boundaries, causing it to turn into a hot and unstable dark and orange rocket that even a senior ace mech had to take seriously!

Yet despite bearing the brunt of this amplified aggression, the Voice of Liberty did not lose his own confidence!

Though he was forced to divert his attention from his main objective, he skillfully controlled his guitar-wielding machine in order to endure the destructive and chaotic releases of power.

The Sound of Revolution adopted a more defensive posture.

Its guitar music changed from an aggressive to a more guarded melody. Its entire Saint Kingdom vibrated in a different manner. The space surrounding the ace mech grew a little more solid, making it more difficult for hostile attacks to maintain their strength and integrity.

The rhythmic sounds increased both in amplitude and frequency, causing the shaking to grow increasingly more loud and high-pitched!

These keening noises assaulted everyone who happened to be close enough!

Many attacks launched by distant mechs and warships encountered even greater obstacles than before.

Kinetic projectiles went off-course.

Missiles shook apart.

Energy beams diffused before they had any chance of striking their intended target.

The entire escort fleet had been rendered even more useless than before!

Without the ability to negate the enemy's Saint Kingdom, all of their 'mortal' attacks remained susceptible to extreme reality distortion.

The story was different for the Riot Mark III!

With its unstable but boiling Saint Kingdom, the dark and orange monster invaded the senior ace mech's Saint Kingdom and forcibly vandalized the immediate territories before landing telling blows against the enemy mech's armor system!

Though the Sound of Revolution was able to block or evade all direct attacks due to the superior skill and combat experience of its pilot, the machine was not able to block the discharge of destructive energies.

The Riot Mark III's penchant for destruction had grown even more powerful!

With the help of its key resonating material, the machine stimulated the dangerous nature of its tier 3 Destroyer spear to the extreme.

The Terran weapon gained a degree of lethality that extended far beyond its destructive edge!

Destroyer particles, both natural and artificial, continually became stimulated by Saint Orfan's burning willpower, causing them to output greater destruction than before!

Yet for all of this power, the Riot Mark III visibly worsened before everyone's eyes.

Even outside observers could detect the signs.

"The flight system is falling apart! Cracks are forming on some parts while others are beginning to melt!"

"It cannot sustain this level of performance! It should have shut down 2 minutes ago! I cannot explain why it is able to persist for so long!"

"What have the Larkinsons cooked up to be able to transform a normal ace mech into such a demonic machine? It has become a vessel of pure evil!"

The physical mutations partially mitigated all of the damage, but they could not solve every problem.

Saint Orfan and her ace mech were on a timer.

Anyone observant enough could make this observation, and that included the Voice of Liberty!

"How sad." Saint Conrad Morgenstern transmitted. "Is it worth it to risk everything just to be able to gain just enough power to delay me from my objective? Whatever devil's bargain you have struck, it is not enough to drive me away. I do not even feel the need to attack anymore, as you are inflicting plenty of harm on your suffering machine. In comparison, the armor of my mech has become marred, but my guitar continues to play without interruption. I only have to wait until you have run out of fumes before I bypass you and save our society from the horror of stolen resonance technology."

His dismissive words enflamed Saint Orfan!

Her sanity dropped by a huge extent as both she and the Prophet's Bane hated being treated with contempt!

"DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE OUR POWER!"

The Riot Mark III exploded into action! The machine spontaneously turned into a dark-and-range streak that crossed the distance at a surprisingly greater speed than before!

The Voice of Liberty was genuinely caught off-guard this time. It was only due to his excellent intuition and razor-fast reaction speed that he was able to jerk his ace mech to an unexpected direction!

Even so, the Sound of Revolution suffered its first proper attack since the start of this engagement!

A fair chunk of its lower torso got demolished as the tier 3 Destroyer spear drove straight through the weakened armor layers and destroyed everything else in its way!

Although only a relatively small portion of the side suffered a direct impact, the explosion of destructive energies upon contact inflicted greater damage to the nearby internals!

The Sound of Revolution experienced many abrupt system failures. Though it had managed to preserve its precious Guitar-Battle-Axe, its melody suffered a brief interruption as the Voice of Liberty had to redirect a lot more focus towards suppressing the spread of destruction energies!

By the time the ominous orange streak had turned back into a faltering ace spearman mech, the enemy ace mech had quickly stabilized its own condition.

The enemy's aura of invincibility had cracked!

Despite his prodigious resonance strength, his Saint Kingdom could not mitigate every attack!

However, as soon people shifted their gazes from one machine to another, their moods sank.

The Riot Mark III did not launch an immediate follow-up strike.

The reason soon became obvious.

It couldn't.

Whatever damage it managed to inflict onto the senior ace mech, it was nothing compared to the devastation wrought onto the superdimensional archemch frame!

The last attack run had obviously pushed the already-overloaded mech frame past its limitations.

The 'wings' of its flight system had snapped and melted. The artificial musculature of its arms had ruptured. Its torso had become riddled with jagged cracks. Its power reactor had suffered a small meltdown and was leaking excess heat and energy.

Most importantly, its Saint Kingdom had lost all of its momentum and became unprecedentedly weak!

And this was just the damage that outside observers could detect.

Its true condition had to be worse!

"The Riot Mark III's resonance strength has plunged below 50 laves!" Alexa Streon reported! "Saint Orfan is still alive, but her willpower is... damaged! The data patterns suggest that she is barely conscious and in great pain. She and her machine need immediate relief!"

Gloriana's lips quivered at the sight of the current state of the Riot Mark III.

It was as if she had witnessed the self-destruction of her own child.

She already considered it a miracle that the Riot Mark III's overall shape remained intact.

It was very clear to her that her precious machine had lost all of its combat effectiveness.

The gambit failed.

Everyone knew what this meant.

"We lost." Gloriana unwillingly announced. "The Riot Mark III... has crippled itself. We do not have the means to repair its mech frame, let alone heal whatever invisible injuries that Saint Orfan has incurred."

The Sound of Revolution was no longer in good condition, but it could still move and fight!

"From now on, we are at the mercy of a hostile saint. Let us pray that he will not exact his punishment on the rest of us for conducting research on stolen resonance technology."

Chapter 7382 Deemed Unworthy - FIXED

Chapter 7382 Deemed Unworthy - FIXED

The Voice of Liberty won.

He won by virtue of lasting long enough to allow the Riot Mark III to cripple itself.

Though it was not a particularly impressive means of securing victory, that did not change the fact that the ambushing force had eliminated the only serious obstacle in its way.

Saint Conrad Morgenstern had attained complete control over the battlefield.

Technically speaking, the escort fleet still had a bit of fight left in it. All of its combat assets outside of its champion remained intact and undamaged.

Its mechs and warships were still positioned to bombard the Sound of Revolution from nearly any direction.

The Ascended Giants had finally made an appearance.

They no longer huddled inside the Armitage like frightened rats.

Despite their fears and misgivings, they all deployed into space.

Their numbers, their superdimensional raiments and their superdimensional armaments granted them a slight measure of confidence, but not too much.

For all of the damage that the Sound of Revolution had incurred from the Riot Mark III's final blow, anyone could guess that this was not enough to render the senior ace mech ineffective.

The Voice of Liberty's willpower remained strong.

The vibrancy of his Saint Kingdom had not even dipped after all of that fighting!

Even if his machine suffered twice as much damage, so long as his domain field remained stable, the enemy ace mech could still crush the remainder of the escort fleet with an absolute advantage!

This was the tyranny of a saint!

This situation also exemplified why so many branches of red humanity had developed an insatiable appetite for stolen resonance technology.

Only by developing and proliferating this new high technology would 'mortals' be able to challenge the supremacy of saints and gods!

Yet that effort was about to suffer a major setback once the Voice of Liberty completed his intended deed.

Red humanity would still be able to develop stolen resonance technology without the captured Ixith Goliath.

Yet without an authentic sample at their disposal, their progress would slow down by a significant extent until they managed to capture another Goliath with similar properties.

How many more people would die as a result of a single rebellious ace pilot's actions?

Key innovations may not come out until several months later than what was previously possible.

Entire star systems might fall because of the absence of upgraded battleships that had recently installed stolen resonance generators.

If the Voice of Liberty possessed a better understanding of the potential misery that might ensue due to his obsessive need to defend the honor and dignity of the mech piloting profession, he might have questioned the wisdom of his current course of action.

However, high-ranking mech pilots were not known for harboring doubts.

They were not only among the more decisive individuals of the human race, but sometimes possessed the power and clout to realize their ideals!

"The enemy is moving."

"Do we continue to open fire, sir?"

Ves made an immediate decision.

"No. Stop all hostile actions. The enemy ace mech is damaged, but it has probably retained over 80 or 90 percent of its combat effectiveness, especially considering that it is a machine that is personally designed by a Star Designer. There is no way our remaining combat assets can take advantage of this opening and neutralize the threat. Instead of annoying him further and inviting potentially lethal retaliation, it is better to admit that we have lost and cease hostilities. I mean it when I say that we are all at the mercy of a saint."

This was the terror of an individual that had almost become a god candidate.

Their chances of winning were already slim from the beginning, so the current outcome should have been anticipated by all of the major players.

There was no need for good men and women to throw their lives away in a senseless and wasteful display of duty.

All of these soldiers could still make themselves useful on other battlefields, particularly if the development of stolen resonance technology suffered significant setbacks and delays.

Nobody needed any convincing. Ves doubted that his tier 2 galactic citizenship made any difference in people's calculations.

Everyone, from the highest officers to the lowest of maintenance workers, expressed no defiance towards this order.

They obediently shut down their offensive weapon systems and made no further actions that could constitute a continuation of the battle.

Though many of them felt utterly defeated and vulnerable, they did not have much fear of losing their lives.

From the beginning, Saint Conrad Morgenstern had refrained from directing his attacks to the other forces in the engagement.

This indicated that he still clung to numerous bottom lines even as he abandoned other ones.

Of course, even if he didn't care for the lives of ordinary soldiers, it made little difference.

The power disparity between himself and the rest of the escort fleet was so vast that he had the privilege to disregard any other threats.

Even the Ascended Giants clad in superdimensional raiments appeared utterly vulnerable to a saint of his capabilities.

His ace mech was fast and strong enough to yank a superdimensional weapon from one of their hands.

The proportions may not match, but as long as the machine could still grip the weapon, then that was fine.

In fact, the Voice of Liberty did not even have to bother with this step.

His voice and music had always been his greatest weapons.

With the disappointing mental strength of the Ascended Giants, they had no chance in hell of defending themselves against the enemy's sound attacks.

This was why they continued to hover at the rear without daring to go forward. Approaching could be interpreted as a provocation or an intent to test their strength against the damaged but still very battle-worthy saint.

The Dark Apostle gritted his teeth as he once again felt how powerless he was against another type of enemy champion.

The Goliath Hive already trounced his boys with its massive Goliaths.

Now, a powerful senior ace pilot had once again rendered the numerical advantage of his men completely meaningless!

This incident proved to him in a visceral manner that once a champion became strong enough, most enemies could be treated as ants.

No matter how many feeble insects attempted to mob the powerhouse, the latter only had to exert a slight amount of effort to completely pulverize the opposition!

"I hate this." He cursed.

"I feel the same way, but control yourself." Ves responded to his other self. "He is heading right in our direction."

Because the Dark Apostle positioned himself in front of the research vessel, the Sound of Revolution had to get past him in order to reach his target.

It was quite intimidating for a somewhat hostile ace mech to fly closer and closer.

Though the Voice of Liberty had reined in his aggression, he continued to strum a guitar tone that signaled that he was not done with his business just yet. His intimidation factor rose. Combined

with the low-level energy field, even the most stubborn troublemakers could not muster any desire to resist at the moment!

Though the Dark Apostle increasingly felt the urge to fly to the side, he tried his best to suppress his nerves and maintain the dignity of his station.

He was the polemarchos of the Ascended Giant. He shared his body with the most brilliant mech designer of his generation. He was a part of the power structure of red humanity. Backing off would tarnish the dignity of the entire institution.

While many people focused on the Sound of Revolution's inexorable advance, a retrieval team finally arrived at the almost-derelict Riot Mark III.

Its condition had slowly worsened after the end of the fighting. Chunks of damaged superdimensional armor plating had fallen off. Minor electrical sparks riddled some of its holes. Excess heat radiated from its damaged and rent upper torso section.

Fortunately, its archemetal mech frame spared it from many other potential faults. The alien machine architecture was based on organic shells that had evolved to endure and mitigate a large amount of damage.

Its dense construction and its largely solid constitution meant that there was relatively little for components to leak, get displaced or turn into a secondary source of damage.

Though a large proportion of its internals had become warped and mutated, enough of its parts still retained at least a rudimentary degree of functionality.

All of this meant was that even if the Riot Mark III had been beaten black and blue, its damage control capabilities were particularly good.

This made the job for the retrieval personnel a lot easier. Though they did not understand anything about archetech, they at least possessed enough technical acumen to know which gaps needed to be sealed with special foam and how to handle the emissions leakages.

They also sent small shuttles in multiple direction to retrieve the pieces of loose-flying superdimensional alloy.

Though it was impossible to recover every single piece of superdimensional debris, they should at least be able to gather 90 percent of the Riot Mark III's original structure by the end.

The rest could only be treated as a permanent loss. The Larkinsons would have to dip into their reserves of high-grade superdimensional matter to make up for the shortfall.

These were concerns for later, though.

The Sound of Revolution seemed to fly slowly, but it somehow ended a small distance away from the Dark Apostle in no time.

Its aura of invincibility had grown stronger. Though the Riot Mark III had not posed a serious threat, its temporarily boosted strength at the end still granted it a measure of challenge.

The senior ace pilot did not choose to advance further, though it easily could have done so if it wished.

"PROFESSOR LARKINSON."

"Saint Morgenstern."

Ves felt incredibly nervous. The fact that the enemy chose to talk meant that not all was lost.

There was still a chance, however small, to pull the delusional ace pilot back from the brink.

However, he had very little confidence in his rhetoric at the moment. They had already exchanged words before, and he did not think he could add anything new to the conversation.

What was even worse was that the fall of the Riot Mark III had massively weakened his bargaining position.

This was clearly a situation where might makes right.

"BEFORE I FULFILL MY INTENTIONS, I WISH TO EXCHANGE A FEW WORDS. NOT WITH YOU, BUT A LEADER WHO REPRESENTS MY CLASS. TELL YOUR MEN TO OPEN A DIRECT CONNECTION WITH A GOD PILOT. I KNOW SOME OF THEM ARE WATCHING. IF THEY ARE SO CURIOUS ABOUT ME, THEN THEY SHOULD HAVE THE COURTESY TO EXPLAIN THEMSELVES TO MY FACE."

Technically, this was not a difficult request. He was probably correct about being observed by a handful of god pilots by remote.

Yet talking to them was an entirely different matter. People did not just call god pilot out of the blue. These were deities in human form. They had exceeded the limitations of mortality and could no longer fully integrate into normal society.

Just talking to them could easily contaminate an ordinary human being and turn them into obsessed and driven individuals who would stop at nothing to make their god proud!

While Saint Morgenstern was obviously a lot stronger than that, there were many other reasons why it was not always a good idea for pilots like him to come into direct contact with their betters.

Ves did not have to convey any requests. He merely waited for the officers of the escort fleet to make the arrangements in the background.

The Dark Apostle soon received a notification that caused his expression to fall.

Ves had already expected this response. He did not like it, but it was a typical response for those snooty bastards.

"I am afraid we cannot satisfy your request. You have not... proven yourself worthy for an audience. A high-level temper tantrum is no excuse for you to demand concessions from our gods. If you wish to speak with a person of authority, you can do so with me. No tier 1 galactic citizens has chosen to deign to negotiate with a traitor such as yourself."

The atmosphere grew even more dour.

The naked and obvious contempt rankled the Voice of Liberty!

Chapter 7383 The Decisiveness of a Rogue Saint

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The rejection must have stung.

After kicking up so much fuss, the Voice of Liberty failed to convince the true bigshots into revealing themselves.

This made the gap between ace pilots and god pilots more profound.

The former struggled to convince others to listen, while the latter already gained the privilege to ignore anyone they liked.

The decisive response from the powers of be constituted an answer in itself. It carried many undertones, some of which could only be understood by the recipient himself.

Even though Ves did not agree with his adversary's radical perspective, he could still empathize with the realization that you were too insignificant to be addressed.

Of course, he also recognized that this situation made things worse for himself.

Having been denied an audience by the high-and-mighty god pilots, the Voice of Liberty's became even more incensed!

The Sound of Revolution's specially designed fingers began to strum a more jagged and grungy guitar tune.

His Saint Kingdom and his long-range energy field seemed to increase in intensity. Everyone within the area of effect felt as if invisible sound waves tried to shake their heads apart.

Not even the Dark Apostle and Ves could block out all of the pain and discomfort. Saint Morgenstern possessed the rare ability to convert his own music into resonating sound waves that transcended ordinary boundaries.

Backed with his impressive resonance strength, his music gained transcendent properties that did far more than stimulate one's ears.

In his world, the only voice that counted was his own.

Unfortunately, his strength still remained inadequate.

He could not reach out across light-years and force the True Gods of red humanity to listen to his voice.

Without enough power, he ultimately lacked the qualifications to negotiate with them as equals.

To the tier 1 galactic citizens, Saint Morgenstern was little different from a terrorist who hijacked a passenger liner and threatened to crash the vessel into a planet.

While the losses that would ensue from such an incident was regrettable, the consequences were still tolerable.

Perhaps the bigshots had already written off the captured Ixith Goliath and formulated plans to capture other specimens.

The more the enemy saint thought about how he got dismissed, the more he became incensed!

As the only representative of the power structure that had cruelly rejected him and pushed him into extremism, Ves suddenly became the center of his attention.

He and the Dark Apostle could feel the saint's glare against their souls.

Multi-layered music assaulted their senses. It was as if the enemy saint tried to convey his displeasure in a language that only he had mastered.

"LARKINSON." Saint Morgenstern spoke with a greater timbre and echo, as if he had removed himself a little further from his own humanity. "I HAVE RECEIVED YOUR MESSAGE. MY RESPONSE IS THIS. SINCE THE DIVINITIES THAT I ONCE LOOKED UP TO HAS SEEN FIT TO INSULT ME WITH THEIR CALLOUS INDIFFERENCE, THEN I WILL FORCE THEM TO DIRECT THEIR FULL ATTENTION TO ME. PAY ATTENTION TO ME, MECH DESIGNER. REGISTER MY WORDS AND STAND WITNESS FOR WHAT I AM ABOUT TO EMBARK UPON."

Question marks appeared above Blinky's head.

"Huh? What are you... what are you planning to do, Morgenstern?"

The opposing ace mech's Saint Kingdom began to change. Its aura became sharper and more focused. It no longer compressed outwards, but started to press inwards, making it more condensed and concentrated.

The guitar music generated by the Sound of Revolution still possessed a lot of discordancy, but it was building up to something.

The multi-layered music began to follow a melody that possessed a more positive bent. It conveyed feelings of hope and aspiration.

Ves had no ear for music and did not possess the understanding or appreciation to interpret the meaning behind all of the notes.

However, even a dummy like himself could sense that the saint had made an extremely fateful decision that might save him or doom him forever!

"Ves!" Gloriana's voice shouted over the private communication channel. "The resonance meters have detected alarming activity from the senior ace mech. The Voice of Liberty is artificially stimulating his resonance strength. If our instruments are still accurate, it has already shot past 1530 laveres and is continuing to press upwards at a decelerating rate!"

"What?!"

"There is more! According to our other sensors, this growth process is highly abnormal. It does not appear to be temporary in nature. The Voice of Liberty... is deliberately paying a heavy price to permanently increase the upper boundary of his willpower!"

This was incredibly significant!

Due to the non-linearity of the lavere scale, an increase of just 1 lavere at the upper end of the scale signified a potent increase in actual power.

Senior ace pilots often had to struggle more to grow their resonance strength to the limit of their ranks.

It was already impressive for them to reach 1500 laveres, but at that point, they constantly needed to exceed their previous attainments and prove that they were worthy to become god pilot candidates.

Of course, most senior ace pilots that had overcome one challenge after another to reach this level were more often than not capable of meeting this demand.

Yet all of this still took time. Senior ace pilots had to pay much more attention to accumulation than others.

Speeding up may save them a lot of time, but it drastically increased the chance that they would incur flaws along the way.

This might not affect them when they still retained bits and pieces of their mortality, but such shortcomings had a very high likelihood of turning into their achilles heel when they attempted to complete their final leap towards godhood!

For the Voice of Liberty to disregard caution and grow his resonance strength to the limit in such a reckless fashion meant that he had truly made a decision that he could never take back!

A number of possibilities flitted through Ves' mind before a very shocking realization came to mind.

Both he and the Dark Apostle gazed at the increasingly brighter and more energetic ace mech in front of them. Their closer proximity gave them a much clearer opportunity to observe the ongoing processes!

What they sensed increasingly confirmed their frightening guess!

"Morgenstern! What are you doing?!"

"HAVE YOU NOT DEDUCED THE ANSWER ALREADY, MECH DESIGNER?"

Ves' mood grew even more turbulent. "Are you seriously thinking about... initiating the Mech Body Merger Process at this current time and place?"

"YES."

This reply shocked everyone.

Though there were certainly more people who managed to guess the right answer aside from Ves, it was only when the senior ace pilot unequivocally confirmed his intention that the situation truly became real.

"You... you don't know what you are doing! This is crazy!" Ves roared, his concern for the Voice of Liberty's future surpassing any other priority! "Your base resonance strength is already pretty high, but it is still far short of reaching the limit of 1545 laveres! Forcing yourself to skip so many steps to meet the minimum requirement to start a breakthrough will only doom your chances of success! Pull back! It is not too late!"

Unfortunately, the Voice of Liberty did not take his advice.

"MY MIND IS ALREADY SET. WEAKNESS IS THE ROOT OF MY FAILURE. IF I WANT TO START A REVOLUTION THAT WILL ENSURE THAT MECH PILOTS RECEIVE THE APPRECIATION THAT THEY DESERVE IN THIS NEW AGE, THEN I WILL HAVE TO STAND UP TO THEM IN THE ONLY MANNER THAT COUNTS. BECOMING A GOD PILOT WILL SOLVE ALL OF MY PROBLEMS."

The addition of a new god pilot was certainly an event worth celebrating about, but that did not mean that any ace pilot could embark on a breakthrough process!

"If you want to become a god pilot whose voice will definitely be heard, then you need to be more patient! There is no rush, Morgenstern! The path to godhood is a marathon from beginning to end. Trying to sprint at the last few legs of the journey will most definitely cause you to throw away all of the effort that you have invested in your progression!"

"I HAVE ALREADY FORSAKEN MY LIFE AND FUTURE FROM THE MOMENT I CHOSE TO STAND AGAINST YOU ALL." The Voice of Liberty responded in an almost fatalistic tone. His guitar music became more melancholic in order to match his mood. "THERE IS NO WAY BACK FOR ME ANYMORE. I AM A REBEL AND A TRAITOR IN YOUR EYES. YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I DO THAT MY ONLY FORM OF REDEMPTION IS TO BECOME POWERFUL ENOUGH TO FORCE A COMPROMISE." The Sound of Revolution continued to compress its strength, causing its form to become so bright that it seemed as if it was about to melt into a less substantial form!

"The Voice of Liberty's resonance strength has just surpassed 1540 laveres, Ves!" Gloriana panickingly informed him. "Though his upward trajectory has slowed to a crawl, he is still forcing himself to squeeze out his remaining potential. The point of no return is about to arrive!"

Could Ves persuade a stubborn ace pilot into stopping his self-destructive behavior?

Probably not, but he had an obligation to do his best!

"Listen to me, Conrad! I beseech you, not as a tier 2 galactic citizen, but a member of red humanity who you truly serve. It is true that we urgently need the protection of more god pilots, but that doesn't necessarily mean it is your turn to make your attempt. There are peak ace pilots who are older and more experienced than you who are still diligently accumulating their strength. If these older and wiser saints have decided that it is better for them to take their time, then your decision to rush through the final steps is incredibly risky and dangerous!"

"FEH. COWARDS." The Voice of Liberty conveyed his contempt towards his more powerful colleagues. "THOSE 'GOD PILOT CANDIDATES' THAT YOU ARE REFERRING TO ARE TIMID WARRIORS WHO THINK MORE LIKE MECH DESIGNERS THAN MECH PILOTS. THEY HAVE SLOWED DOWN SO MUCH THAT THEY HAVE BEGUN TO CALCULATE EVERYTHING AS IF THEIR BREAKTHROUGH IS A MATH PROBLEM. IT ISN'T. THE TRANSFORMATION OF A SAINT TO A GOD DEFIES ALL LOGIC AND RULES."

"Those rules exist for a reason!" Ves argued back. "The mech industry has witnessed the passing of thousands of peak ace pilots to figure out the factors that can promote and inhibit a successful breakthrough to the ultimate rank. There is a strong consensus that an ace pilot must not only have a resonance strength of 1545 laveres, but spend time to consolidate their willpower and upgrade their ace mechs to the prototype of a god mech. You satisfy none of these requirements!"

His well-reasoned argument was met with clear contempt.

"WHO SAYS THAT YOU NEED TO PAUSE AND WAIT FOR MANY YEARS AFTER REACHING 1545 LAVERES? OBSESSING OVER RESONANCE STRENGTH IS PUTTING THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE. THE TRUE QUALIFICATION TO BECOME A GOD IS TO POSSESS THE WILLPOWER THAT IS ALREADY APPROACHING THAT OF AN ACTUAL DEITY! AS FOR MY ACE MECH, IT HAS ALREADY REACHED A HIGH ENOUGH LEVEL."

"It is damaged! There is a hole in the side of the torso!"

"SO WHAT?" The Voice of Liberty scoffed. "I AM HARDLY THE FIRST ACE PILOT TO ATTEMPT A BREAKTHROUGH RIGHT AFTER WINNING A FIGHT. THE CONDITION OF MY MACHINE IS STILL GOOD ENOUGH TO SUPPORT ME TO THE VERY END."

"This..."

"WHY DO YOU CARE, ANYWAY? IF I AM TRULY ENGAGING IN SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR, THEN YOU SHOULD BE HAPPY ABOUT IT. AFTER ALL, IF I FALL SHORT OF MY GOAL, I WILL NO LONGER BE ABLE TO THREATEN YOUR PRECIOUS RESEARCH SPECIMEN. IF I SUCCEED BEYOND ALL ODDS, THEN I WILL NOT PERMIT OUR SOCIETY TO CONTINUE TO INVEST IN STOLEN RESONANCE TECHNOLOGY."

"I am not callous enough to celebrate the demise of a once-promising ace pilot and future god candidate." Ves softly responded. "I still do not think it is necessary for you to force this ultimatum on yourself and us. There are other ways to address the issues at hand. Please reconsider."

"NO. MY ANSWER REMAINS THE SAME, LARKINSON. A SUCCESSFUL BREAKTHROUGH WILL SOLVE ALL OF MY PROBLEMS. A FAILED BREAKTHROUGH WILL SOLVE ALL OF YOUR PROBLEMS."

EITHER WAY, THIS MATTER WILL BE DECIDED IN SHORT ORDER. I DO NOT HAVE THE PATIENCE TO DRAG THIS OUT ANY FURTHER."

The decisiveness of high-ranking mech pilots was unreal!

Once they made up their minds, they invested 100 percent of their effort into their respective causes!

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Chapter 7384 The Human Consensus

Chapter 7384 The Human Consensus

The Voice of Liberty did not listen.

This was typical for a rebel and an outcast like himself.

For his entire life, he had never quite fit in with others.

This was not due to selfishness or ignorance.

He was simply a principled man whose values did not quite fit with the current society.

As he continued to stimulate himself through unknown but undoubtedly costly means, he eventually reached the limit of his rank.

Then he chose to push through this barrier without any intention of holding back or delaying this life-changing decision until he was better prepared!

It was one thing to speak about it. It was another thing to actually go through with such a crazy plan!

Ves and the Dark Apostle both felt incredibly shocked as well as more uncomfortable.

They practically had a front-row seat to one of the most profound and impressive ascension processes that a human could embark upon!

To Blinky's spiritual senses, it was as if the potent extraordinary willpower of the opposing saint had chosen to compress itself to the point of breaking its equilibrium!

"Saint Conrad Morgenstern has done it." Gloriana transmitted to Ves through a communication channel that gained slight interference due to the rapidly rising signal interference from the senior ace mech. "As of this moment, he has become the latest in a long line of ace pilots who have chosen to shed the remaining parts of their mortality in an attempt to become divine."

Her words and tone conveyed a certain attitude that aligned with that of Ves and most others.

Ves took a metaphorical breath and issued a proclamation. "Please let it be known that we stand witness to Saint Conrad Morgenstern's attempt at attaining godhood. No matter his faults, sins, transgressions, it is all trivial compared to the potential rise of another deity of the human race. I, and the forces that answer to me, shall not do anything to inhibit or sabotage his breakthrough attempt. We shall stop and enact immediate punishment on anyone who defies this directive. At the same time, we shall endeavor to guard the Voice of Liberty against any third parties that possess malicious intentions."

It did not surprise Ves very much that the forces that comprised the escort fleet did not object to his latest command.

They very naturally agreed with the central idea that the rise of a possible ninth god pilot of red humanity outweighed every other concern or priority.

The politics surrounding stolen resonance technology simply did not matter anymore.

Even if the new god pilot would make every use of his newly gained power and influence to stop this controversial tech from proliferating, it was none of their business.

The tier 1 galactic citizens that had previously chosen to ignore and belittle the Voice of Liberty could take care of this problem case!

In fact, Ves doubted that any of the strong proponents of stolen resonance technology would take action to sabotage Saint Morgenstern's effort and doom him to annihilation.

Even they valued the rise of another god pilot that could shoulder the burden of protecting red humanity's borders.

This was a reflection of how much the human race valued its god pilots.

In a sense, the Voice of Liberty's fears may have been overblown.

Despite the fast-moving changes of the Age of Dawn, high-ranking mech pilots still had little to fear of losing their honored status in human civilization.

At most, they might have to welcome actual competition that could compete for them in terms of status and prestige.

Yet the fact that they were undeniably strong and capable of single-handedly winning decisive battles could never be disregarded.

The hope of gaining another invincible battle god was the main reason why everyone had suddenly taken Saint Morgenstern's side at this time.

Both of them may have been enemies earlier, but when it came down to it, they were both loyal members of the human race.

Ves actually believed that even if the Voice of Liberty professed to be a member and an ardent supporter of the Cosmopolitan Movement, he would still invite everyone's praise and service!

As he and his other self continued to witness the incredibly bright form of the Sound of Revolution beginning to melt and become more amorphous, Gloriana suddenly shared her speculation.

"I GET IT NOW, VES!" She announced! "The Voice of Liberty's decision to initiate his breakthrough at this circumstance is not a spontaneous decision. It is part of a premeditated plan of his! He intended to confront our fleet and defeat our opposition from the start. He also did not plan to complete his stated goal before he chose to make an attempt at completing his path to godhood."

Her speculation caused Ves to break out of his mindless admiration and apply a more critical perspective on the situation.

Blinky's glowing eyes widened in realization!

It was as if a curtain had parted before his eyes. Now that he figured out the truth, it became quite obvious what the Voice of Liberty intended all along!

"I think you're right, Gloriana! This bastard of a senior ace pilot did not impulsively choose to forsake everyone's expectations and defy the current order. He took a very calculated series of steps that not only caused him to burn all of his bridges, but staked his life on completing his stated goal! Only by defying all odds and succeeding where most of his kind has failed will he be able to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat!"

"Exactly!"

The path to godhood was a long and arduous journey.

Yet everyone knew that it was particularly perilous at the very end.

It was as if everything that came before the road to no return was simply preparation for the ultimate transformation.

Many ace pilots attempted to complete the final steps of their lengthy journeys, yet the overwhelming majority of them faltered and fizzled out, causing their legacies to meet abrupt and unsatisfying attempts.

Due to these constant and persistent failures, many ace pilots have begun to be more creative in planning their own attempts.

Raising the stakes was a very normal approach to such a massive endeavor.

Just putting their lives on the line was not enough for them to squeeze the limits of their potential during the most dangerous phases of the breakthrough process.

By putting their goals, their groups or their entire life's purpose on the line, they effectively raised the stakes and ensured that they had more sources of strength to draw upon when the critical moment arrived!

Ves now understood what the Voice of Liberty was talking about when he mentioned that he would solve all of his problems if he succeeded, and that he would solve everyone else's problems if he failed.

This was a clear declaration of his intentions to those who had deduced his true purpose!

"Wait." Ves made another realization. "Do you think the god pilots refused to parlay with him because they figured out his actual plan?"

"...You may very well be right." Gloriana could see the viability in this possibility. "Their decision to remain silent is not only a stance, but also a deliberate provocation on their part. They gave the Voice of Liberty a strong reason to pursue greater power. They essentially told him in his face that unless he manned up and became one of their peers, he would never earn their respect and consideration. To an ace pilot who cared strongly about his respective causes, this is indeed an effective stimulant for his attempted breakthrough."

The puzzle pieces fit together. It all made sense.

Ves found it strange to attribute planning and calculation to a brash ace pilot, but just because they were exalted warriors did not mean they lacked brains.

In fact, their accumulated age, experience and intuition often made them more thoughtful and insightful than many mortals.

It was just that they were more decisive than others that they acquired a reputation for being stubborn and willful.

They were all forces of nature in their own ways.

"I guess his fight against Saint Orfan is just a warmup." Ves depreciatingly said. "It was a nice extra that our latest high-ranking mech gave him enough of an exercise to get his blood pumping."

"You may be correct, but..." Gloriana hesitated a little. "According to the many rules and guidelines about the ultimate breakthrough, god pilot candidates often attempt to complete more dramatic deeds than bullying a junior ace pilot. Stepping on the road to no return is best done when you have built up as much momentum as possible. I am afraid that the Voice of Liberty has not done this as well as his colleagues. Then there is his inadequate resonance strength to consider. He has already started this irreversible process at a disadvantage."

That was all true as well. Ves truly did not know what Saint Conrad Morgenstern was thinking when he made his choice despite not reaching his optimal state at his current rank.

Perhaps in his mind, he invested so much in his cause and his goals that he believed that this could outweigh his slightly inadequate qualifications.

11:54

This was not a gamble that Ves would ever make if he was in the other person's shoes, but perhaps this kind of madness was exactly what an ace pilot needed to transcend to godhood.

All would become clear soon enough.

Most breakthrough processes did not take too long, though the actual duration varied considerably between different cases.

Every ace pilot and ace mech was unique. There were way too many variables to formulate a predictive model.

A part of Ves wished he was back at the ship so that he could stand behind a control panel and access lots of data.

Another part of Ves wanted to stay right here. It was not every day that an ace pilot came by and abruptly stepped on the road to no return at a relatively close proximity!

"What phase of the Mech Body Merger Process has he reached so far?"

"It is still the first phase, Ves. According to our instruments, which are not quite calibrated for the momentous occasion at hand, Saint Morgenstern is still in the process of forming a complete operation union with the Sound of Revolution. They have already reached an advanced stage as far as we can tell."

Blinky's head nodded in agreement.

"I can sense that the bond between man and machine has formed something that resembles a Blood Pact. There are many similarities, but this version is a lot stronger... and more intimate. The distance between the two is already quite close, perhaps dangerously so. Saint Morgenstern should only be able to maintain this state for a relatively short time before something bad happens, so he is truly forced to go all the way to the end."

It became relatively obvious that the Voice of Liberty initiated the next phase of the Mech Body Merger Process.

The saint had already made a head-start into compressing his Saint Kingdom, but now he was exerting a lot more force and will into compressing a high-level energy field that yearned to spread its wings!

This was an incredibly difficult and exhausting process for that reason. It was as difficult as trying to compress a cubic meter of water in a container the size of a human thumb.

This was normally impossible, so the only way to accomplish such an unreal feat was to break reality and distort the rules!

"RAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!"

The saint not only roared in pain and utter determination, but also played a faster and more energetic guitar tune at the same time!

Despite the strange condition of his ace mech, it had never ceased to strum its Guitar-Battle-Axe!

Ves could practically feel how much Saint Morgenstern was tearing himself apart as he forcibly tried to transform a fundamental part of himself.

The Saint Kingdom of an ace pilot that had reached a resonance strength of 1545 lavers was the most difficult to compress out of all, yet that was exactly what he needed to do in order to complete a domain union!

Only when his Saint Kingdom completely entered his ace mech would he be able to complete the second phase of the Mech Body Merger Process!

The Mech Touch

Chapter 7385 Unions

Saint Conrad Morgenstern managed to complete the first phase of the Mech Body Merger Process without too many complications or delays.

This signified that his bond with his machine had certainly reached a qualified level.

Although it was often the case that ace pilots managed to attain operation union with their machines with relative ease, that did not necessarily mean it was a trivial step.

There had been ace pilots in the past who managed to get tripped up by the first but still essential step!

Of course, this was most often the case with ace pilots who had abandoned their old machines for brand-new ones that had been specifically designed for their breakthroughs in mind.

Though well-intentioned, the god pilot candidates overestimated their ability to acclimate to their new machines and gained a misplaced sense of confidence in how much help it could provide.

Performance remained extremely important, but fit also played a huge role!

The transition between an old mech and a new mech should not be too abrupt. Adding too many bells and whistles could potentially cause a subtle degree of alienation that was difficult to ascertain. If the ace pilot did not recognize these problems and requested the mech designers to address them in time, the operation union phase may very well seal his fate!

Fortunately, such a case did not apply to the Voice of Liberty, but not necessarily for the right reasons.

The senior ace pilot 'impulsively' chose to break through without going through the motions that real god pilot candidates went through.

One of them was to switch to a brand new god mech prototype, or upgrade their existing machines to the same standard.

The advantage of attempting a breakthrough with an 'older' machine was that the fit between mech and mech pilot was often high.

The disadvantage of doing so was that the relatively lackluster performance of a mech that had never truly been designed to accommodate a god may ultimately prove inadequate when it truly mattered!

Of course, the latter factor was a bit... nebulous.

The technology and standards of mechs had evolved by leaps and bounds since the start of the Age of Mechs.

At the start, the boundaries between junior ace mechs, senior ace mechs and god mech prototypes were a lot blurrier and less defined.

The nascent mech community still had to figure out the rules of the game.

There had been enough instances where powerful ace pilots had managed to break through with machines that performed much worse than contemporary ace mechs!

Strictly speaking, the Voice of Liberty was correct that it was not quite necessary for him to upgrade his ace mech to the very limit of what current technology could achieve in order to succeed.

After all, until recently, full superdimensional mechs did not exist, yet plenty of god pilots emerged in the previous age!

Still, just because Saint Morgenstern did not take this matter too seriously did not mean that Ves agreed with this approach.

He was of the opinion that any reasonable amount of preparation should be taken if the occasion allowed for it. For the ace pilot to disregard the supreme importance of his machine may end up biting him in the back at a later date!

In any case, the Voice of Liberty currently faced much more difficulty in trying to attain domain field union.

This was the sacred process of merging one's Saint Kingdom with the form of the mech.

That was not easy considering that a Saint Kingdom was a pure energy field while the mech was a purely material existence.

At least on the surface.

In truth, the boundaries between the two were not as absolute as most people thought.

As Ves knew extremely well, a mech possessed both a physical component and a spiritual component.

The latter was pretty much invisible for ordinary mass-produced mechs, but senior ace mechs and god mech prototypes happened to possess a much stronger and more obvious intangible footprint!

Whether mech designers specialized in spiritual engineering or not, those who were able to work on mechs at this level were never weak in this aspect.

Their ability to distort reality when it came to mechs was not as blatant as that of high-ranking mech pilots, but it was still impressive nonetheless!

Just like mechs, the domain field of a mech pilot was not as simple as it appeared on the surface.

The Saint Kingdom may be incorporeal in nature, but it possessed the power to alter and manipulate the material realm.

This was especially the case for particularly powerful high-ranking mech pilots!

The more a pilot approached godhood, the less the rules of nature could pose a constraint on their will.

Yet however much they could bend the physical laws as if they were their playthings, there was still a hard limit at the rank of ace pilot.

In order to force a Saint Kingdom to completely merge with a mech, the Voice of Liberty had to exert his willpower beyond its previous limit.

This did not come without a cost!

Though Ves was only able to observe the Voice of Liberty's efforts from the perspective of an outside observer, he could still get an impression of his agony!

It was as if he was trying to compress his soul in a box that was at least a hundred times too small for its size!

The extreme compression rate could not be attained through normal means. The only way to make it happen was for Saint Morgenstern to use his willpower to distort reality and forcibly squeeze his Saint Kingdom into his machine!

This only amplified his suffering!

Distorting reality was easy when his willpower was in normal condition.

It became a lot harder when he actively tried to reshape it to attain domain field union!

Ves and everyone else watched on with awe and concern as the ace pilot experienced more and more pain.

Yet the will and desire of the Voice of Liberty could not be defeated so easily.

"I WILL NOT ALLOW MYSELF TO GET DEFEATED IN THE SECOND PHASE! ROAR FOR ME, MY INSTRUMENT!"

Even as his ace mech increasingly lost definition, it was still able to play its guitar without any apparent problem!

The specially-designed metal fingers continued to strum the weaponized guitar.

The sounds generated from the mech-grade instrument gained a choppy and rhythmic character.

Everyone within the area of effect felt increasingly more excited and energetic. A few people who couldn't control themselves even started to bang their heads as if they were attending a concert!

Whatever the case, the music not only affected others, but also the musician himself!

The pain still existed, but the Voice of Liberty was able to power his way through and push past the increasingly more stiff resistance!

His Saint Kingdom steadily shrunk and compressed until it had almost reached the physical size of his machine!

Of course, the final steps were the most difficult one. Saint Morgenstern had already attained an incredible compression rate.

In many cases, god mech prototypes tended to be a little larger than their predecessors precisely to make this step a little easier!

While not every god pilot candidate opted for this choice, it had certainly provided crucial assistance in at least some cases.

The Voice of Liberty did not even get to make this choice. The Sound of Revolution was perfectly sized for an ace pilot, but that might not be the case for a god pilot.

Whether it is because of stubbornness or extreme confidence in oneself, Saint Morgenstern chose to push past the final barrier of resistance by tearing a piece of himself!

"MY WILL IS INDOMITABLE! MY CAUSEES ARE JUST! I AM THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE! SO LONG AS HUMANS CRY OUT FOR JUSTICE, I SHALL ALWAYS BE THEIR SWORD AND SHIELD!"

This was both a promise and a statement of fact!

Ves didn't exactly know why, but after the Voice of Liberty shouted those words, he successfully compressed his Saint Kingdom to the right proportions!

Completing this crucial step had profound implications!

For one, now that the Saint Kingdom had shrunk to match the physical proportions of the mech, the boundaries between the two had become a lot more nebulous.

It became difficult if not outright impossible to distinguish between the two. The mech was the Saint Kingdom, and the Saint Kingdom was the mech.

Though Ves had read plenty of theories about it, witnessing it happen in front of him still confounded him! What he just witnessed should have been impossible. There was absolutely no way that two entirely different phenomena would get mixed with each other to such an extreme.

The most immediate consequence of achieving domain field union was that the Sound of Revolution had firmly broken the limitation of a material object.

Due to the merger, the ace mech could not only reshape itself to a much more versatile degree, but also turn fully immaterial whenever it wanted!

Of course, the Voice of Liberty did not rashly attempt to make this happen.

The mech may have become capable of turning into a pure energy object, but that did not apply to the pilot.

This was why the Voice of Liberty needed to complete the third phase of the Mech Body Merger Process, which was corporeal union!

Ves happened to possess a bit more understanding and expertise in this specific type of fusion.

The tainted breakthrough of Saint Rosa Orfan had accidentally caused her to fuse her body with her own machine.

Though the accident permanently impaired the ace pilot's quality of life, Ves had a reasonable suspicion that it may actually help her complete the third phase if she ever gained the opportunity to make her own breakthrough attempt.

Saint Conrad Morgenstern did not undergo such extremes.

He started out like most pilots. He still possessed a functioning human body.

Trying to merge his corporeal form with his mech was therefore a much more difficult endeavor, especially when the saint had already exerted himself quite heavily in the preceding phases.

Yet now that he had come this far, the Voice of Liberty did not intend to fail so soon!

He mustered his increasingly more ragged willpower and forcibly pushed himself into action!

"MY WILL SHALL BECOME ETERNAL! THE SHACKLES OF MY BODY SHALL NO LONGER HOLD ME BACK! SO LONG AS A SINGLE VOICE CRIES OUT FOR JUSTICE, I MUST NEVER FADE, FOR MY MISSION HAS NOT COME TO AN END!"

The Voice of Liberty focused on his cause and used that to motivate him to push past the pain generated by his body!

Though Ves was not able to get a clear view inside the cockpit of the powerful mech, he could guess that the saint was steadily trying to merge his frail human form with his mech.

Although his machine had already become an energy-based existence in all the ways that counted, he still needed to induce the same sort of transformation on his own body!

Ves was not clear of the details. He did not know whether there was only a single correct route or whether multiple viable strategies existed.

Yet what he was able to sense from the incredibly bright and powerful amalgamation was a crescendo that steadily rose in power.

Even now, the Sound of Revolution still played its guitar, even though its Saint Kingdom had already retracted.

The reason why Ves and the others were still able to hear the instrument being played was because the secondary energy field had not faded away.

Ves guessed that it was generated with the help of a key resonating exotic, which made it an intrinsic feature of the ace mech.

In fact, the recent changes and transformations had strengthened this energy field, enabling it to reach further and manipulate the emotions of listeners more effectively!

As always, the Voice of Liberty drew strength from his own music.

Despite forcing an irreversible transformation on his body, the daring ace pilot managed to retain enough focus, will and lucidity to slowly advance the merger between flesh and machine!

"Is he actually going to do it?" Ves asked as if he could not believe what was happening in front of his senses.

"Never celebrate prematurely, Ves." His wife transmitted back. "Even if he manages to complete the corporeal union phase, there is still the last and most difficult phase of all. That is where most ace pilots falter despite their preparations."

Chapter 7386 The Final Opponent

Chapter 7386 The Final Opponent

Ves had to admit that he underestimated the Voice of Liberty.

He managed to complete the first 3 phases of the Mech Body Merger Process.

It turned out that Saint Conrad Morgenstern was not only a schemer, but also an opportunist.

When the ace pilot slowly merged his physical human form with the less definable existence of his mech, Ves could vaguely sense clear similarities between this case and that of the Riot Mark III!

It became obvious that the Voice of Liberty had taken notes during his encounter with the Riot Mark III.

Perhaps in his eyes, the superdimensional ace mech was less of an obstacle and more of a teaching example!

Though Ves considered Conrad's conduct to be a little shameful, all was fair in love and war.

Given such an 'excellent' example of a version of corporeal union between pilot and machine, how could the radical saint not resist the urge to attempt a similar transformation?

Of course, the two cases still diverged a lot from each other.

The Sound of Revolution was nothing like the Riot Mark III.

The former had never been turned into a D-mech, and did not possess a particularly strong and adversarial living spirit.

Though Ves could not deny that long and extensive use of the guitar-wielding mech by a particularly powerful ace pilot had caused it to develop a life of its own, the Sound of Revolution still lacked the qualities that stimulated Saint Orfan's successful breakthrough!

Ves grew concerned about that. He did not think it was a good idea for the Voice of Liberty to rashly copy a model that worked well enough for Saint Orfan but not necessarily for himself.

Oh well.

The man who aspired to become a god clearly did not let these doubts and considerations hold him back.

The fourth phase commenced.

At this time, the boundaries between Conrad Morgenstern and the Sound of Revolution had already blurred to non-existence.

The man was the mech and vice versa.

Due to withdrawal of the Saint Kingdom, the people in the vicinity did not get subjected to any excessive pressure.

The only influence that continued to affect their moods was the guitar music that had softened up and developed a more anticipatory chapter.

The Voice of Liberty knew that the most crucial phase had arrived.

After completing three arduous and costly phases, he had reached a highly unstable state of existence.

Though he had technically merged into his machine, his current state was not stable in the slightest.

Ves had the feeling that if the hopeful pilot made a single crucial misstep, he would lose complete control of himself and completely burst apart!

The loss of an absolute corporeal form apparently was a very big deal.

Not only had he sacrificed the human body that nurtured him and anchored his willpower for most of his life, but his mech had also turned into a type of energy object, causing it to become less suitable to anchoring his existence in the material realm.

Therefore, the most important step that remained was to ascend to a higher level of existence!

The only way the bloated and overloaded version of the Voice of Liberty could maintain his existence as an energy-based life form was to become a god that encapsulated both a being of extraordinary willpower as well as a powerful machine!

There was truly no way back for him. He did not even have any opportunity to rest and recover, as his current state was highly volatile.

The Voice of Liberty decisively commenced the fourth phase of the Mech Body Merger Process.

Total union.

The phrase suggested that the Voice of Liberty had not yet fully merged with his mech, which was technically true.

Despite merging his Saint Kingdom and his physical body with the Sound of Revolution, he still had not merged the totality of his willpower into his current state.

This step was rightfully considered the hardest of all because the pilot in question had to merge two different forms of energy into a single impossible amalgamation.

Willpower was highly exclusionary in nature.

Sure, Saint Morgenstern was able to use it to resonate with his ace mech and develop a bond with it in the process.

Yet that was more of a partnership than a total and complete union.

Although he had already completed an important step by merging his Saint Kingdom with his mech, that was just folding a byproduct more than anything.

The true criteria for attaining total union was to fuse his extraordinary willpower into his highly enriched mech to the point they became indistinguishable from each other!

Total union could be seen as a true miracle, as it was a concrete manifestation of an impossible phenomenon.

This was also another reason why it was considered the hardest step of all. The preceding steps could also be regarded as impossible phenomena, but the pilot only needed to bend reality to a moderate degree in order to make them happen.

What needed to happen next corresponded to a difficulty to a much higher order!

"I AM THE MASTER OF MY WILLPOWER, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND!"

The Voice of Liberty's self-declaration encapsulated his final struggle.

The willpower that he had cultivated for most of his career had ironically become the ultimate stumbling block of his ascension!

While it was true that he was the origin of his own power, the latter possessed intrinsic traits that he had long taken advantage of, but now had to overcome through his own efforts!

In other words, Saint Conrad Morgenstern's final opponent as a mortal existence was himself!

This was an incredibly confounding situation.

For a long time, high-ranking mech pilots relied on their willpower to defeat other opponents.

Yet when they had reached far enough to reach the final phase of their path to godhood, they were all confronted by the source of their own strength.

How could an ace pilot possibly fight against himself and win?

Logic stated that an ace pilot could only ever match the strength of himself. There was no obvious way that he could exceed his own limit.

What was worse was that the only entity that was capable of defeating a saint at his height was a god!

Only by gaining the supreme power to rewrite reality and turn the impossible into possible could a pilot vanquish his own self and ascend to godhood!

In other words, the Voice of Liberty needed to harness the power of a god pilot in order to become a god pilot!

The inherent paradox in this statement exemplified how difficult and exceptional it was to make this happen.

After all, if the Voice of Liberty was able to wield the power of a god pilot, then why would he still need to undergo the Mech Body Merger Process?

No other god could lend a hand. The god prospect in question needed to pass this test through his own efforts. Relying on another powerful deity's assistance contradicted the very foundation of his willpower!

Therefore, most peak ace pilots remained stumped on this problem for a long time.

Yet the fact that a hundred or so succeeded throughout human history showed that this was not a truly impossible test.

Many god pilots relied on a variety of means to achieve their ascension.

Some had prepared for their breakthroughs for decades, while others relied on a combination of coincidences and favorable environments to ascend in one fell swoop.

The most common method was to pull off a feat so great that it became a legendary deed.

It had the smell of a ritual, so it made sense of how it could provide peak ace pilots with a vital boost that could still be regarded as a reward for their own efforts.

Ves believed that the Voice of Liberty deliberately confronted the escort fleet and defeated the Riot Mark III just so that he could forge his own legend on the spot!

This was evident when the ambush ships that accompanied him and his machine had not hesitated to broadcast the entire spectacle onto the galactic net!

Ves did not know how many people had tuned into the broadcast at the moment.

Even if not everyone had developed an interest in the current affair, they most definitely tuned into the live feed en masse as soon as the Voice of Liberty had begun his breakthrough process!

Now that he had become the center of attention for all of red humanity, the Voice of Liberty reached out through them with both his music and his words!

His transformed ace mech played a sequence that gradually became grander and more bombastic.

It had already gained the power to pass through light-years of distance and reach directly into the hearts of those who wished for the rise of a new god pilot!

As their hopes and expectations cautiously rose, the Voice of Liberty addressed them directly!

"HEAR ME, CITIZENS OF RED HUMANITY! TODAY, I PLEDGE TO BECOME YOUR VOICE. I SHALL LISTEN TO THE MAJORITY AND GIVE CONSIDERATION TO THE MINORITY. I SHALL GIVE POWER TO THE VOICES OF THE UNDERSERVED. I SHALL NOT BE IMPARTIAL, BECAUSE INDIFFERENCE CUTS THE DEEPEST. I SHALL BE YOUR SHIELD AGAINST THE ENEMIES FROM WITHOUT, BUT I SHALL ALSO BE YOUR SWORD AGAINST THE ENEMIES FROM WITHIN. IF YOU WISH TO SUPPORT MY CAUSE, THEN PRAY FOR MY SUCCESS!"

Ves found the speech relatively normal until Saint Morgenstern spoke the last words.

That put his appeal in a substantially different light!

As the Voice of Liberty finally threw himself fully into completing the fourth phase of the Mech Body Merger Process, it became clear why he made such a deliberate move.

His condition was already poor! He had exhausted much of his energy during the previous three phases and had damaged himself in ways that should have ended his life if he was not in his current state.

So how could he possibly think he could achieve total union with his machine and shed the final remnants of his mortality?

By exercising one of the exclusive privileges that belonged to gods, which was harvesting and harnessing the power of faith!

Though Ves was unable to feel or sense the passing of faith power, he could observe its effects on Saint Morgenstern.

His guitar music immediately reflected his gargantuan struggle by playing choppy and heavy chords.

"RAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!"

He also screamed or roared continuously as he bore great pain while forcibly trying to channel the power of faith!

Only by using the magical power of faith could the Voice of Liberty ever hope to complete his impossible transformation!

Yet as he continued to scream, he showed increasing signs of struggle.

Only gods were allowed to wield the power of faith.

The senior ace pilot already broke a fundamental taboo by tapping into it while he had not yet ascended to godhood.

This was also why not every god pilot relied on the power of faith to complete their own breakthroughs!

Those that did utilize the power of faith all endured similar struggles.

To touch upon the forbidden was to court death.

The power of faith was a powerful tonic to True Gods, but it was far too lethal to the unworthy!

Perhaps the main reason why the Voice of Liberty did not collapse right away was because he was already close to reaching the third major cultivation rank!

Only a thin barrier prevented him from passing through the final barrier.

He just needed a single push, one that was strong enough to poke through this deceptively thin wall and evolve into a new state of existence!

Yet...

The screams grew increasingly less forceful.

Instead, they sounded... increasingly more desperate.

The power of faith was highly corrosive, and the ace pilot's prodigious willpower could not block its harmful effects very well.

With every second that passed, another piece of the Voice of Liberty crumbled apart!

While he was gradually making progress, the cost of defeating himself may be too great for him to bear!

Chapter 7387 Demanding Sacrifice

Chapter 7387 Demanding Sacrifice

The Voice of Liberty entered into such a special state that Ves and other outside observers could no longer figure out what was happening with precision.

They could only form vague conclusions on how he was holding up and how much closer he came to completing the fourth and final phase.

The rogue saint's bold decision to harness the power of faith was certainly a bold one.

He not only put so much of himself and his causes at stake, but also pledged a life of service before he had managed to attain supreme power.

Becoming a god pilot demanded sacrifice.

This sacrifice could come in many forms.

Since the Voice of Liberty was clearly lacking in resources and preparation, he had little choice but to compensate for his shortcomings by 'borrowing from the future' in a manner of speaking.

He made grand promises. He gave up the freedom to do anything with the power he hoped to gain in order to become a super-powered version of a public servant.

Though many god pilots had made similar vows during their own breakthrough events, in their cases their dedications paid off as they gained the crucial momentum they needed to make it to the end of the road of no return!

However, the current situation did not match those success stories.

Instead, the ongoing breakthrough event possessed more similarities with failed attempts!

"According to our analysis, the Voice of Liberty entered the fourth phase in a terrible state." Gloriana reported to Ves. "His decision to make so many promises to serve the people who he believed to be underserved by the prevailing power has sharpened his focus and allowed him to make substantial progress, but that is far from enough for him to complete the Mech Body Merger Process. Whatever else he is doing is taking a horrible toll on him. The resonance meters detect increasing volatility and instability. His willpower is becoming shaky and his focus is drifting. If he is not able to maintain a consistent resonance strength at 1545 laves, then..."

"I know, Gloriana." Ves grimly responded. "Order the closest mechs and ships to back off to safer distances. If this gets ugly, we can't allow collateral damage to occur."

"The various elements are just about to reposition, Ves. You should go as well. You are too close to the event at the moment."

The Dark Apostle silently backed away from the amalgamation between the Voice of Liberty and the Sound of Revolution.

Even the Ascended Giant felt nervous about staying so close to a potential energy bomb!

While backing off was the responsible decision to make, the mass withdrawal also signified the escort fleet's lack of confidence.

This dealt a not-so-insubstantial blow to the Voice of Liberty's confidence.

The pressure already broke him apart in piecemeal, but the dip in confidence was like the straw that broke the camel's back.

The resonance meters went crazy!

The ace pilot's willpower rapidly grew unstable! The shape of his evolving mech began to wobble and lose definition.

Even the guitar music became more and more distorted!

In an instant, the warped mech glowed brighter than ever before.

Then, a gigantic and extraordinarily punishing lighting bolt appeared out of nowhere and directly struck the faltering amalgamation!

This caused the latter to erupt in an explosion that briefly distorted space!

"Careful!"

"Raise your defenses!"

An invisible shockwave spread out that went through everyone and everything, causing them to feel a profound sense of sadness and regret!

The Voice of Liberty did not even have time to prepare his final words.

The combined pressure had pushed him past his limits!

The once-confident and hopeful ace pilot had made a bet himself and lost!

The consequences were dire. The failure to form a total union doomed the pilot as well as the mech to total annihilation!

The Voice of Liberty had already lost much of his attention and cognition right before his collapse.

If he was a little more stubborn or persistent, then he may have been able to maintain what little willpower he had left to linger for a short time.

However, the power of faith proved too strong for him to bear. It had torn apart Saint Morgenstern's willpower and everything else as if it exacted punishment for entering a forbidden domain!

Ves mentally shuddered at the brutal display.

He felt even more apprehensive about harnessing the power of faith than before.

It was not without reason why only True Gods possessed the qualifications to wield this high-level power source!

In any case, the failed breakthrough event not only caused a heroic if misguided ace pilot to disappear, but also his ace mech and all of the time, effort and resources put into its development.

As a mech designer, Ves couldn't help but feel a lot of regret for the passing of such a unique and iconic senior ace mech.

The Sound of Revolution had long made a name for itself in certain circles. It earned fame as one of the Resonance Smith's personal works.

Its existence served as a physical record that a Star Designer deigned to bestow a quirky guitar-wielding mech to a senior ace pilot.

The mech was an irreplaceable piece of mech history!

Now, it was gone forever!

It could only exist in the records of the past and the memories of those who witnessed it in one form or another.

Ves felt this loss a bit deeper than others due to his greater appreciation for the Sound of Revolution.

Even though the Resonance Smith never explicitly designed it as a living mech, it was still filled with life of a different sort.

It resonated beautifully with its pilot. The machine was able to perform a wide variety of feats that exceeded the capacities of most other senior ace mechs by relying on highly refined and advanced methods, some of which the Resonance Smith must have personally developed to take advantage of the Voice of Liberty's talents in particular!

Combined with years of intensive use and familiarization, the bond between ace pilot and ace mech had gained actual substance.

Now, everything was lost.

Before everyone's eyes, the glowing form that used to be a famous and iconic ace mech crumbled apart.

It had already lost much of the essence of what made it so powerful, and now its shell continued to fall into pieces of glittering but ultimately short-lived motes of light.

It could have been beautiful if not for the realization that they represented the parting form of a former legend.

The man who claimed to be the voice of the people had perished.

Just like many other hopeful saints, he had faltered at the fourth phase of the Mech Body Merger Process.

Faced with the requirement to shed his mortality and overcome his own willpower, he ultimately fell short despite his best efforts.

Once the final motes of light faded away, everything returned to tranquility.

The area of space that briefly hosted the ace mech had grown smooth and stable again.

Various high-powered sensor and scanner systems swept the surrounding region, but found no trace of the ace mech, nor any lingering traces of its existence.

its annihilation was truly absolute in this fashion.

This was the cruelty of a failed breakthrough. It was as if the university completely erased the god pilot candidate and his machine out of existence.

Though records and memories of the two had remained untouched, they provided very little value to red humanity.

Once the various sensor arrays detected no further anomalies after 5 minutes of intensive sweeps, Ves ordered the escort fleet to stand down.

"Be alert for any approaching stealth vessels or ambush forces, but lower the alert level. Oh, be sure to secure the ambush vessels that followed the Voice of Liberty on his mad quest to make difference. Their crews are clearly not the main actors, but they are still complicit in disrupting matters of great concern to our entire civilization."

"You should meet with the officer in charge of the ambush force." Alexa Streon advised. "When god pilot candidates have made up their minds, they often make preparations in the event of failure. They know that they will face complete annihilation if they fall short, so they make sure to leave their legacies behind."

"I see. Good reminder, Alexa. Please contact the commanding officer of the ambush vessels and determine whether the Voice of Liberty had indeed left behind a will or an inheritance of sorts."

"Will do, sir."

The affair was finally coming to a close.

As the Dark Apostle flew back to the Armitage, Ves entered into an introspective move.

The demise of a senior ace pilot of this stature inflicted a serious blow to red humanity.

Yet he did not die for nothing.

Saint Conrad Morgenstern had died while staking his life on his cause.

He died for the belief that mech pilots were sacred existences that should never be desecrated for the purpose of stuffing them into stolen resonance generators.

The fact that completely got erased from existence without being able to leave any remnants behind for Ves to salvage seemed like a final form of defiance.

If the Voice of Liberty was doomed to die, then he became utterly determined to not leave any remains behind that could be used to exploit him after his demise!

"What a pity."

If the process of annihilation was not so total, Ves could have taken advantage of the moment to harvest a spiritual remnant.

Just a tiny piece would have been enough to open up a lot of possibilities, from empowering a new artifact warship with an exceptionally strong stolen resonance generator to breathing life into a particularly combative design spirit!

Alas, none of that could happen when Ves had no way of collecting any relevant ingredients.

"Wait a second."

Was it truly the case that all direct traces of the ace pilot and ace mech had been erased?

When Ves curiously checked the retrieval teams to find out whether they successfully managed to gather pieces of debris that the Riot Mark III's final attack managed to dislodge, he found out that the pieces of debris hadn't disappeared!

Whether they still held any value remained to be seen.

Ves did not dare to set any expectations on the salvaged pieces of metal. They may have been part of a once-famous ace mech, but they did not encompass any of the core components of the powerful machine.

If these pieces possessed a stronger connection to the deceased pilot and machine, then they likely would have been erased as well.

Still, who knew if the universe or whatever had been a little careless.

As the current event came to an end, a large amount of discussion erupted among the public.

They had witnessed the daring attempt of an ace pilot trying to traverse the path to no return for the first time in a new age and in a different galaxy.

To witness the Voice of Liberty collapse and die in such a short interval of time did not exceed the expectations of many viewers.

They might not fully understand all of the variables that affected the process and outcome of a breakthrough event, but they all knew that most attempts ended in one spectacular failure or another!

To succeed in doing the impossible had always been the exception rather than the rule.

In this regard, the Voice of Liberty performed precisely according to expectations!

Even if many of those people had prayed for his success a bit earlier, that did not change their inherent pessimism on how unlikely it was for an ace pilot to rewrite reality and ascend to godhood beyond everyone's expectations.

In the end, many people would dismiss this case as another form of proof that becoming a god pilot had lured another hero into a tragic demise.

Too many heroes had already prematurely ended their lives to pursue this dream, and people had no doubt that many more would follow in the Voice of Liberty's footsteps!

Chapter 7388 Poor in Fortune

Chapter 7388 Poor in Fortune

The escort fleet regained control over the situation.

Its forces secured the surrounding area and took control over the stealth vessels that accompanied the Voice of Liberty.

Interrogations and analysis of the ship cores revealed that the rogue saint's followers had no clue that he hatched such a deep plot.

They only knew about his most superficial plan, which was to intercept the escort fleet and destroy the research specimen.

None of them had any clue that their vaunted ace pilot practically planned his own suicide!

The outcome that eventually came to pass before their eyes crushed their spirits.

Their idol which they admired to the point of supporting his treasonous behavior had died so abruptly and completely that they could not fathom why he abandoned them so utterly!

They had all become overtaken by grief, regret and other gloomy emotions.

That made them easier to interrogate than normal.

Though the vast majority of crew members knew nothing, there were a handful of trusted subordinates and insiders who knew a little more.

Ves, now returned to his human-scaled form, decided to board the leading vessel and check to see if the deceased ace pilot had left anything useful behind.

The man most commonly known as his secretary and assistant admitted what little he knew about his principal's deeper intentions.

"Conrad... has grown weary and tired of the status quo in the last two or so years." A rather elderly but stately man said. "He grew disappointed by the lack of courage and abundance of caution shown by peak ace pilots such as the Mace of Retaliation. He believes that they are too afraid of the unknown and harbor too much respect towards the risks. He has never explicitly stated his own intention to initiate a breakthrough attempt. It was unthinkable to us as he had yet to become a peak ace pilot. This is why his actions took all of us by surprise."

Even in sorrow, the black-suited man still demonstrated the grace of a man who once stood alongside a senior ace pilot.

He sounded genuine, and Ves had little reason to believe that the secretary said anything misleading.

The logic was too strong. Everyone knew that only ace pilots who had reached the upper limit of their resonance strength invested their time on their potential breakthroughs.

There was no point for senior ace pilots to make preparations in advance as it might take years before they became qualified.

It was too premature for them to make plans in advance, especially considering that their circumstances could change drastically in a moderate span of time.

Even if they formulated a plan, there was no reasonable way to execute it with their lacking resonance strengths.

However, the Voice of Liberty clearly did not play by the rules. He had so little respect for them that he directly contradicted common sense and relied on unnatural means to boost his resonance strength!

"Did he not tell you just before he deployed into the field for the last time?" Ves questioned.

The elderly man shook his head. "No, sir. We trust each other. I know him well. He is usually forthcoming with his confidantes, but he bears numerous secrets and burdens that he keeps to himself. This is just one of them. He may have believed that we would do something irrational and spoil his plan. He was right to fear that from us. We care too much about him. There are times where we have been forced to protect him from his own... hubris. We are not ignorant of his

shortcomings. Ace pilots are all confident by definition, but he... he thought that he could challenge the universe, especially after receiving a custom-designed mech from the Resonance Smith."

To be fair, anyone who received a mech of this caliber would experience a massive boost in confidence.

Though the Sound of Revolution hadn't been able to show off its full prowess today, it was definitely an extremely well-designed mech!

Yet despite getting paired with such a perfect complimentary machine, Saint Conrad Morgenstern ultimately failed to gather the strength to rewrite reality to a sufficient degree.

His unfilling death cast a huge amount of doubt on his judgment.

"It is already clear to everyone that the Voice of Liberty is an idealist." Ves mildly spoke as he crossed his arms and tapped feet against the deck. "However, I do not believe his delusion has become strong enough that he believes his breakthrough will unconditionally succeed. He had to have left a message or an inheritance of sorts behind. Where is it? What did he leave behind?"

The secretary's expression turned a little odd. "I am in charge of his personal effects, which are not that many considering a saint of his stature. The Voice of Liberty had never been a materialist. He has invested most of his assets into upgrading and repairing his ace mech. His personal chambers contain relatively few personal effects, most of which hold no value to you. There is nothing to be gained from confiscating his attires, his trophies or documents. He has left more possessions behind at his residences in Yernstall and other locations, but he has always held the sentiment that his true treasures are his memories."

Ves pressed his lips when he heard that. He already had a feeling that this was the case.

The Voice of Liberty had made little friends over the years.

While he was not known to be abrasive or insensitive, he was clearly a driven crusader who drew a clear line with anyone he perceived to be a part of a corrupt power structure.

Such a man usually did not get to amass a lot of wealth. Not that it mattered as such individuals rarely if ever indulged in any luxuries unrelated to their own mechs.

Ves held little expectations towards acquiring any treasures at this point.

He briefly turned around to see how Lucky was doing.

"Have you found anything interesting yet?"

He had brought his gem cat over in the hopes of sniffing out any hidden caches.

"Meow." Lucky yawned as he idly floated from corner to corner.

The mechanical feline clearly hadn't found anything suspicious.

"Keep searching." Ves urged. "Do not miss any detail. I want this vessel completely swept by the time we leave."

Time constraints prevented Ves from bringing Lucky over to the other ships. He could only hope that if the Voice of Liberty left anything valuable behind, it would be aboard the ship he resided upon prior to his last engagement.

Ves decided to take a closer look himself. He toured the interior of the vessels.

He not only visited the chambers where he rested when he was still shackled to his corporeal form, but also dropped by the mech hangar where the Sound of Revolution had been resting quietly before its fateful deployment.

Nothing.

Ves opened control panels, accessed the software of different ship systems and even dug into the sparse reserves of spare parts and materials for the senior ace mech.

Though he managed to make numerous interesting discoveries, none of them fit his criteria!

He grew frustrated! "I don't believe this! There is no way that the Voice of Liberty has left us with nothing useful!"

"Ahem." The secretary politely coughed. "According to my understanding and familiarity of him, that may be precisely what he intended."

Ves immediately spun on his heels. "Explain!"

"You should be familiar with his history and his controversies. Though he has made several friends throughout his lifetime, he has made even more enemies. He does not necessarily fear them while he remains alive and well, but once he has met his end, he knows that his supporting circle will collapse. His possessions will be claimed by greedy parties while his friends and comrades may face a certain degree of suppression from society. In order to prevent these sharks from tearing everything apart, he has deliberately lived a more frugal and ascetic life than necessary."

That... unfortunately made a lot of sense. It aligned with Ves' own impressions and ideas.

The Voice of Liberty clearly knew what he was doing. The man was exactly kind of person who would leave nothing behind in order to spite his enemies for the last time!

Ves asked a few more questions, but they only reinforced the notion that Saint Conrad Morgenstern had invested very little in his legacy.

He found that to be a rather selfish and shortsighted approach from an ace pilot.

Perhaps that may have been a contributing factor to his failed breakthrough.

After sniffing around for a while, Ves truly gave up at this point. He relied on scanning systems, Blinky's spiritual senses and his spatial senses to see if he could find any hidden treasures, yet the ship turned out to be utterly mundane.

The secretary did not think that there was anything special about it. He had repeatedly reminded Ves that his search was in vain.

"Conrad despised the current rulers of his people." The secretary plainly said. "He stepped into the field knowing that if he failed, he would leave nothing behind just so that he can spite treasure seekers such as yourself. The manner of his demise aligns with his purposes even better. The universe has erased his being, doing him a favor of preventing others from exploiting his brain and body for nefarious purposes."

What a bitter man.

The identity of a contrarian led to a difficult and miserable life. The Voice of Liberty could not place his full trust in anyone, fearing that even his closest of confidants might betray him one day.

Just when Ves thought he would get nothing out of this apparently wasted trip, he suddenly received an alert from his comm.

"A message from... the Voice of Liberty?!"

It turned out that he taken the time record a small message. Saint Morgenstern uploaded it onto the galactic net and added a condition to send it to its intended recipient if he had not come back and transmitted the deactivation command.

"Quite simple, but effective I guess. It seems that Saint Conrad was not entirely convinced that he would live past this day.

Ves read the description attached to the video file.

"It is best if I watch the recording of his last message in private." He said, not just to the secretary, but also to the members of the other groups.

While they were no doubt curious at what the Voice of Liberty's intended to say to the mech designer upon the event of a failed breakthrough, they knew better than to listen without authorization.

Ves entered a secure chamber a moment later.

Stealth vessels often dealt with secrets, so it became all the more important that they offered highly secure and shielded compartments where almost no signals could go in and out.

Lucky lazily made the rounds while Ves set up his jamming devices.

Only after he had set up the necessary precautions did he choose to play the message.

A projection of Saint Conrad Morgenstern came into view.

Different from the recordings that he watched before, this one felt lifeless.

The recorded ace pilot was unable to convey any hint of will. This was one of the definite signs that he was no longer alive and present in this universe.

[Hello, Ves.] The saint greeted in a remarkably casual voice. [If you are hearing this, then I must have fallen. This is not how I want the future to be shaped, but in the event it unfolds, I cannot allow my passing to harm my friends and subordinates. Let me propose a deal with you. I would like to request you to extend your protection to my followers who have nowhere else to go. Take them into your clan. I can vouch their honor and integrity. They are all good men and women that possess their own skills and talents which you may find useful. I am not asking you to do this for nothing. In exchange for giving them refuge, I am willing to pass on a reward to you in return.]

Ves grew a lot more interested in what the ace pilot had to say!

Chapter 7389 Posthumous Bargain

Chapter 7389 Posthumous Bargain

It made sense for the Voice of Liberty to make a request to protect his underlings.

However, despite his controversial stances, the late rogue saint had attracted a large variety of supporters.

The Larkinson Clan wouldn't mind it if it had to accommodate the more sensible and ordinary individuals, but the same could not be said for the more outspoken and radical ones.

[I know what you are concerned about.] The recorded version of the deceased ace pilot spoke. [Not everyone within my orbit belongs in your clan. I do not insist you bring them in. The matter of becoming your clansman must be a completely voluntary process. I will not force you to shelter my men, and I will not force my former subordinates to join your cause. I only ask that you give them a fair chance.]

That sounded a lot more acceptable to Ves, but he wondered how much leeway he had with this condition.

What prevented his clan from rejecting 90 percent of the applicants?

The Voice of Liberty couldn't have overlooked such an obvious loophole. He already found a means to ensure that the Larkinsons made an earnest effort.

His projected face smiled.

[In exchange for protecting my lads, I can transfer the minor favor that the Resonance Smith has bequeathed to me. I am sure a man of your stature understands the value and importance of favors. I have refrained from using up my sole remaining favor to my benefactor precisely because of its irresistibility. I have not informed the Star Designer of this deal, but he will understand what I have done as long as you come forward to him with this recording. His Excellency shall decide

whether you have sufficiently complied with my demand. If you have passed his scrutiny, he will not defy my last wish and allow you to make use of the minor favor. That is all. Take care of them for me. Treat them as your own brothers and sisters, and they shall do the same to you. Goodbye.]

Silence ensued after the brief recording had reached its end.

The Voice of Liberty made a completely different impression in this pre-recorded message. He had shed all forms of posturing and did not try to affect his mood with his music.

During the time he recorded this message, he was not a man who had almost touched upon the divine, nor a crusader who fought to uphold the dignity of mech pilots.

He was just a man who worried about his friends and acquaintances.

This was a very human request. It showed that underneath his imposing aura, he still retained a large amount of humanity.

Ves actually suspected that this may be one of the most pivotal factors behind his failure.

While his lack of preparation and accumulation served as the biggest reasons behind his downfall, his strong concerns of what would happen to his followers in the event of failure may have created another crack in his confidence during the moments where he needed it the most.

A truly confident god pilot candidate would not fuss so much about contingencies.

Ves ultimately felt a bit confused about the Voice of Liberty. The late saint exhibited both reckless and cautious traits. He swung from one direction to another, making his true character unclear.

Who was he, really?

"Well, it doesn't matter anymore, does it, Lucky?"

"Meow."

The gem cat did not care for a dead man.

After he made sure that the Voice of Liberty did not hide any other secret messages inside the data file, Ves exited the secure chamber and quickly concluded his visit to the stealth vessel.

He only briefly felt tempted to claim the Voice of Liberty's sparse personal belongings that he stored in his private chambers.

One item that stood out was a guitar. The instrument was clearly just a spare, but because a senior ace pilot had channeled his heart and soul into it for at least several weeks, it had become more than just a tool.

Unfortunately, any lingering remnant of Conrad Morgenstern had disappeared upon his elimination.

This caused the guitar to feel a bit hollow. It had clearly turned into a pseudo-artifact, but it had become almost stillborn.

Perhaps Ves might be able to recover it or convert it into a more useful form, but what was the point?

He was already short on time. He had no time to waste on frivolous projects.

Besides, he had no passion for music, and he did not know anyone who loved to play the guitar.

"Maybe Andraste will like it." He briefly wondered.

He quickly discarded the notion.

Perhaps it might be useful for his second daughter to partake in another hobby, but she already lived a busy and active lifestyle.

He chose to leave the guitar and other belongings behind.

The Red Association and the Red Fleet had already laid claim to the ambush vessels.

Troops and specialists had already boarded them and taken them over. They would all be sent to the nearest RA or RF strongholds so that they could undergo deeper inspections in case anything got overlooked.

The escort fleet finally resumed its journey to Yernstall.

Despite the delay and everything that ensued, no one believed that the fleet would encounter anymore ambushes.

The star systems situated closer to Yernstall were all highly populated and highly monitored.

Their defenses might not always be up to standard, but it would be difficult for human or alien stealth vessels to sneak past without tripping up an alarm.

Just before the escort fleet was finally due to arrive in the Yernstall Central Star Node, Ves briefly discussed the Voice of Liberty's final request with the other leaders of the clan.

"I have spoken with a bunch of the Voice of Liberty's followers." Ves said inside a conference room. "Most of them are alright, I think. They may be a bit more prone to supporting radical actions, but their hearts are in the right place. I see no problem with allowing them to join our clan so long as they are truly sincere about becoming Larkinsons. However, if they cannot meet this demand, we should not make any exceptions to our recruitment policies. Letting go of their old ties and relationships is an essential expectation that we put on our members. We cannot and should not tolerate double-dealing."

The projection of Saint Commander Casella Ingvar nodded in agreement. "I concur. The Voice of Liberty must have done his research on his clan. Our recruitment policies are all public. He has not requested an exception to our rules, so he must have implicitly agreed with our clan rules."

"If Saint Conrad Morgenstern had any problems with the way the Larkinson Clan liked to recruit its members, then he should have decided to approach another group." The projection of Swordmaster Ketis stated. "Our clan may be generous in some ways, but we are not a charity. We are getting flooded with too many applications already. Being selective is necessary if we want to preserve internal harmony."

Gloriana wanted to voice a concern. "I do not think we should be too casual with giving this group of people a chance to join. There is at least one major issue that needs to be brought to your attention. According to my investigation, the Voice of Liberty has recently formed the Pilot Humanist Society along with other radicals. His sudden demise did not cause the PHS to fall. In fact, it is the opposite. He is already being regarded as a martyr. Due to his very public stunt, Saint Morgenstern has not only exposed many more individuals to the PHS, but also galvanized the more actionable among them to join this movement!"

Ves briefly looked up the organization on the galactic net. He skimmed through the database entries as well as the news articles.

They all supported Gloriana's assertions. The Pilot Humanist Society had rapidly risen to become one of the lead voices in opposing the proliferation of stolen resonance technology!

"Ugh." Ves inwardly groaned.

He had feared that this might happen. The Voice of Liberty had made such a dramatic stance and died so tragically that he had moved a lot of people.

While not all of them were willing to become a hardcore supporter of the late saint's cause, if just 0.1 percent of them joined the Pilot Humanist Society, then that was enough to give the nascent organization a lot of momentum!

In other words, even if the Voice of Liberty died, his sacrifice ensured that his cause would live on in other ways!

There was no easy way to stall this movement. Saint Morgenstern's fall was too tragic. People who already felt inclined to support his viewpoints had only become even more committed to his ideals.

"What is the Larkinson Clan's official stance on this matter?" Ves asked an important question.

Everyone in this remote gathering turned their attention to the matriarch of the Larkinson Clan.

The Saint Commander frowned, indicating that even she could not formulate a clear answer on this subject.

Chapter 7390 Favor Ideas

Chapter 7390 Favor Ideas

After thirty seconds of contemplation, the Saint Commander finally conveyed her policy on the matter at hand.

"The Larkinson Clan is not in the business of political advocacy." She said. "Our primary concern is to ensure the safety and welfare of our members. We are only a small group of humans who are trying to survive and navigate the dangerous waters of the Red Ocean. That said..."

Her gaze swept across the people in the virtual conference room. Everyone who met her eyes could feel a subtle but unmistakable sense of will and focus.

"Just because our clan does not like to take sides does not mean that I forbid our clansmen from pursuing their personal causes. I know for a fact that there is a significant proportion of clansmen who support the views espoused by the Voice of Liberty. They may not like that he has inflicted grievous harm onto Saint Orfan and the Riot, but they respect his conviction and his advocacy. Do not forget that our clan consists of many mech pilots, many of whom have received orthodox training and accrued at least several years of experience in various private or military organizations. They all bear the pride of their profession. Their opinions towards stolen resonance technology are all mixed, to say the least."

Ves and several other Larkinsons furrowed their brows.

She raised an important point. The Larkinson Clan was defined by both its mech designers and mech pilots.

While Ves was its original founder, he had long relied on the strength of the mech pilots under his banner to secure victory on the battlefield and safeguard his interests.

The rise of heroes such as Saint Tusa and Saint Dise had caused mech pilots to become just as prominent as mech designers such as Ves and Ketis.

If the clan had to decide whether to embrace or suppress stolen resonance technology, then Ves could not be assured that every clansman would vote in favor of his own choice.

There were a lot of mech pilots who found the very notion of getting converted into a willpower source to be reprehensible!

Even if only a minority of mech pilots would ever get the opportunity to get started into willpower cultivation, the entire body still considered its champions as their aspirational goals.

Many mech pilots idolized their high-ranking equivalents!

This hero worship vastly complicated the debate on the matter and prevented the Larkinson Clan from putting its full support behind stolen resonance technology.

Ves grimaced as he realized that he could not fully engage in stolen resonance technology.

As long as he remained a member of the Larkinson Clan, he would remain bound by most of its rules.

While he had become powerful enough to bend or break the rules on occasion, that was very difficult to do when the spotlight had firmly shone on the latest tech that had entered the scene.

There was no way he could casually install a stolen resonance generator into a starship without explaining where he obtained the source of its willpower!

He risked the loss of much of the prestige and goodwill that he built up if he recklessly violated the dignity of the mech piloting profession!

"So what does that mean for the clan?" Ves took a deep breath and asked the Saint Commander.

"In practice, I will not stop my own members from associating with the Pilot Humanist Society, the same as I am not stopping them from befriending other organizations such as the Transhumanist Faction, the Mech Supremacy Faction or the Red Fleet. Our clan has never demanded full exclusivity in terms of loyalty or association. Our only hard requirement is that every Larkinson must put their loyalty to our clan and their fellow kin above any external entanglements. So long as that remains the case, there is no need to meddle too much in such relations."

That was practically the only rule to adopt given Ves' deep personal ties with several of those aforementioned groups.

Ketis and Gloriana looked thoughtful while nodding in agreement.

They had their own entanglements as well.

Though it would be a lie to state that there were no conflicts of interests, they rarely if ever allowed them to rise to a level where it could seriously pose a threat to the core interests of the Larkinson Clan.

They were not that stupid or selfish.

Still, the latest organization to gain prominence in the current age clearly couldn't escape controversy.

The very fact that it was opposed to the use and proliferation of stolen resonance technology definitely put it in opposition of other groups that were very much in favor of its adoption such as the Red Fleet and the Rubarthan Pact!

"I guess it is... reasonable to allow our clansmen to associate with the Pilot Humanist Society." Ves eventually said. "However, our clan has much to gain from this tech. We cannot afford to abandon it given the dire circumstances of our civilization. I do not want our clansmen to develop absolute opposition towards a solution that can make our warships and other assets a lot more effective against high-powered enemies."

"Many of us understand your perspective." The Saint Commander responded. "The main point of contention is where you gain your source of willpower. As long as you or anyone else is able to find adequate substitutes, much of the opposition will disappear. There will still be purists who believe that resonance is the exclusive preserve of high-ranking mech pilots, but they will be much easier to deflect when they are alone."

"Agree."

The discussion regarding the Larkinson Clan's stances on stolen resonance technology and the new protest movement became clear.

Though Ves did not feel entirely satisfied, he knew that the Saint Commander made the most sensible decisions.

"So are we in agreement when it comes to complying with the Voice of Liberty's dying request?" Ves asked once again.

The projection of Casella Ingvar stood up. "The Larkinson Clan shall take in all willing members of Saint Conrad Morgenstern's network. This includes the members of the Pilot Humanist Society. So long as they are willing to abide by our rules and rein in any extreme impulses that may harm the reputation of our clan, they are welcome to don the mantle of a Larkinson. We shall strive to be as earnest as possible in order to secure the minor favor to the Resonance Smith."

The mention of the controversial but undeniably productive Star Designer caused many people's eyes to shine.

They already tasted the benefits of cashing in a minor favor from such an august personality in the past!

The Resonance Smith's specializations happened to be a lot more relevant these days.

Not only had he managed to develop a lot of wondrous solutions related to the fields of phasewater technology and more recently E-technology, he had also made a lot of strides in increasing the practicality of superdimensional technology!

Gloriana was practically salivating at the thought of enlisting the Star Designer's aid in solving her own material science problems!

"We should ask the Resonance Smith to solve our most immediate problem!" She exclaimed. "Ves, haven't you felt frustrated that we still cannot create any devices that can dynamically change in size? Superdimensional matter should have given the possibility to create such works, but we have made no progress in unlocking this capability. If we enlist the aid of this Star Designer, we can skip much of the research and obtain an answer right away!"

Ves indeed desired to master such a solution, but he did not know whether this was a worthwhile trade.

"I am not sure about that, Gloriana. You are not wrong that mastering this capability is incredibly useful to us. It will not only make things a lot more convenient for our clan, but also offer a lot of practicality to our Ascended Giants. That said, I am not sure that it is the right decision to rely on outside help to solve this problem. I feel that this is much more of a spiritual engineering problem than a material science-related issue. The key is to master the runes that certain ancient artifacts rely upon to change in size. As far as I know, objects such as the Oceancaller do not possess any inherent superdimensional matter, yet they still exhibit superdimensional capabilities. I think this is the true holy grail."

He had other ideas on how to use up a minor favor from the Resonance Smith.

The group exchanged a few more suggestions, but none of them sounded urgent or compelling enough.

"Despite gaining privileged access to research related to stolen resonance technology, we all know that we will never obtain the most cutting-edge research results." Gloriana said. "Out of all of the parties involved in this trending field, it is the Star Designers who are expected to develop the most advanced applications. If we want to make extensive use of stolen resonance technology, we must reduce our dependence on Mentalist Crystals as much as possible. We should request the Resonance Smith to give us alloy formulas of the best substitutes that he has been able to research so far. Even if they are still inferior to Mentalist Crystals, they should at least be good enough for our own use."

Her proposal had a lot of merit. Ves certainly did not mind it if they used up this favor in this way.

However, this was not the only way to strengthen the Larkinson Clan.

"Stolen resonance technology may be on the rise, but the foundation of our clan has always centered around mechs." Ves gently said. "My elemental Carmine mech design projects are all highly dependent on the application of special materials that are strongly biased towards specific elements. If I ever hit a wall that I cannot easily overcome, then relying on the expertise of a Star Designer may save us months or years of delays. This is very important for all of us. The sooner I complete all of the designs, the sooner I am qualified to break through to the rank of Master Mech Designer."

The Larkinson Clan sorely needed a proper Master Mech Designer amongst its ranks.

While it became a lot easier than ever for the clan to recruit an external Master Mech Designer, trust remained a defining obstacle.

Neither Ves nor anyone else wanted to hand a lot of power over to a Master Mech Designer who did not bleed or contribute to the clan while it was still struggling to find its place in the universe.

A Master Mech Designer would definitely seek to gain power. How could Ves and Gloriana allow a newcomer to supplant them so brazenly in their own domains?

This was why the leadership of the clan was so eager for Ves or another Larkinson Mech Designer to advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer!

Compared to many other Senior Mech Designers, Ves was in a better position, because he possessed a pretty solid roadmap to realizing his design philosophy.

If using the favor to help Ves complete his critical design projects sooner than normal, then that might very well be a worthwhile exchange!

"Ahem." The projection of Ketis interrupted. "I have my own request. Forgive me for being shameless, but swordmasters such as myself have long dreamed about asking for his help. We... believe we can become a lot more useful on the battlefield if we upgrade our swords and combat gear. Expert pilots can resist a lot of damage by resonating with their expert mechs. Swordmasters cannot. Our attack power has always been stronger than our ability to take incoming blows. I want to change that by asking the Resonance Smith for help in developing 'expert armor' or whatever

that we can resonance with. I can think of no one else in the Red Ocean who is more suitable to help us complete this goal."

This was a bold request!

Currently, the only way for swordmasters to make a substantial difference in the ongoing conflicts was to pilot Carmine mechs.

That not only required a lot of training, but also detracted from the essence of their profession, which was wielding swords.

If they could obtain much greater resilience by resonating with specially-developed suits of combat armor, then swordmasters would no longer be marginalized as combat assets!

They would finally become a force to be reckoned with, especially when used in clandestine operations where their relatively small sizes made them ideal for infiltration, sabotage and assassination

Chapter 7391 Return to Yernstall

Chapter 7391 Return to Yernstall

The Larkinsons came up with multiple proposals on how to exchange the minor favor with the Resonance Smith, but nothing could be done unless they fulfilled their end of the deal.

"These are all good ideas, but let us not be too hasty." The Saint Commander eventually declared. "We should work to integrate the subordinates and followers of the Voice of Liberty first before we can even think of scheduling an audience with His Excellency. During this time, you can continue to work on your projects and determine whether you truly need to enlist the help of a living god to overcome a bottleneck in your research. Ketis."

"Yes, Casella?" The swordmaster responded with a mild frown.

"Ves and Gloriana are our foremost mech designers in the clan. They have been responsible for developing many groundbreaking mech designs as well as innovative technologies. Their requests will likely take priority over yours for at least two reasons. First, their requests are more directly tied to the mechs that we rely so heavily upon. Second, their projects more likely involve higher-level problems, which are more difficult to solve by relying on the means we have at hand. Unless your proposal can offer greater value to the clan, we have little choice but to prioritize our more immediate needs."

Though Ketis did not look happy to hear this, she appreciated that the Saint Commander provided an explanation. This allowed her to go back and improve her proposal.

After they finished their discussion on this particular matter, they began to talk about other subjects.

The big gathering loomed tall over everyone's shoulders. The Larkinson Clan had gradually fractured and dispersed its assets over the past few years. While this allowed everyone to fight on more suitable battlefield alongside other allies, it threw away a massive advantage, which was concentration of power.

Switching strategies so suddenly disrupted a lot of plans and arrangements. Casella and the administration of the clan had their hands full with planning the logistics of their upcoming convergence.

The Saint Commander emphasized that they might not be able to gather all of the necessary supplies.

"Red humanity's economy has become much more volatile than before. While we enjoy priority rights among the Terrans, the reality is that they cannot divert too much high-quality materials and other supplies to their own combat units. If the supply situation remains as bad as it is today, we will not be able to punch deeply into alien space without emptying certain important stockpiles such as phasewater."

Ves did not look too concerned about that. "That is... indeed a problem, but we can solve it easily enough. If we can't buy all of our necessary supplies in friendly space, then we will just have to plunder them in hostile space. Please conduct an indepth analysis on the supply depots and repair yards that the native aliens have set up on their side of the border. As long as we orchestrate our raids well enough, we should be able to secure the supplies we need without giving the enemy an opportunity to blow it all up. If we can maintain this streak across multiple raids, then we can turn into a self-sustaining raiding fleet."

"That is far too dangerous, Ves." Gloriana objected to this plan. "Unless we leave non-combatants such as myself and our children behind in a safe location such as Yernstall, I will never condone such a risky operation. One catastrophe will not only spell the demise of most of our first-class combat assets, but we will also lose our future!"

She raised a valid concern.

13:34

The risks were a lot more reasonable so long as their fleet only traveled to the border regions and no further.

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The risks were a lot more reasonable so long as their fleet only traveled to the border regions and no further.

However, conducting a deeper strike into alien-occupied territory clearly subjected their non-combatants to much greater danger!

Ves and Gloriana continued to argue over this issue. It was not so simple to dump most of the mech designers and the children in Yernstall.

While Ves no longer harbored as much apprehension towards the Red Two as before, he still felt uncomfortable with the prospect of putting 'hostages' in their care.

Another reason why he felt reluctant to separate with the Design Department was that they worked a lot more effectively if they did so in a single physical location.

Working by remote not only risked the possibility of leaking their trade secrets, but also introduced a lot of friction, thereby causing them to slow their pace.

This was not acceptable as far as he was concerned. They were already lagging when it came to completing their current design schedule.

In the end, the Miracle Couple failed to come to a consensus on this matter. Neither side wanted to budge.

So they resorted to their usual means, which was to stop their unproductive argument and pick it up at a later date.

They still had a bit of time before they had to make a definite decision on this matter.

Perhaps other possibilities might appear that presented better options than their current choices.

"Is there anything else that we need to discuss before we conclude this virtual meeting?" The projection of the Saint Commander asked.

She already looked impatient to go back to her desk so that she could finish her daily paperwork.

The burden of leading the Larkinson Clan had only grown since she had taken over as its matriarch.

Though she did not hate the responsibilities, she could not deny that it left her with less time on piloting the Minerva Mark II.

"I would like to mention something." Ketis broke the silence after a few seconds. "The Voice of Liberty may have failed to become a god, but he has successfully galvanized many mech pilots. They have become more motivated to advance their ranks after they became inspired by the late ace pilot's defiance against his own conditions. This applies to both the senior expert pilots in our expeditionary fleet as well as dozens of god pilot candidates who have stood on the precipice for a long time."

Everyone's expression grew a little more serious after hearing this. Ves had heard a bit about these developments as well.

The Voice of Liberty may have failed to achieve his primary objective, but that did not mean that he had lost completely.

Invigorating the confidence of mech pilots and encouraging them to take a leap of faith could be considered his most impactful contribution to society!

This was good news on the whole. Many would doubtlessly die or perish in the process, but as long as a handful of them succeeded, then that would definitely compensate for all of the losses!

"I am looking forward to receiving uplifting news."

The meeting ended shortly after.

The escort fleet continued to traverse through more and more populated star systems.

The powers-that-be had already made a greater effort to secure the locations. Not a single accident occurred before the fleet finally arrived in Yernstall proper.

"Finally! We have reached our destination!"

"The sooner we hand over the research specimen, the better. It is far too hot for my liking."

"Damnit! I wanted to spend more time studying the samples!"

Amidst all of the complaints and cries of relief, a large force formally received the research specimen.

The escort fleet had successfully completed its mission, much to Ves' relief. He immediately disbanded the combined fleet so that everyone could go their own way again.

The Bluejay Fleet flew to the inner system and split up in order for numerous vessels to get serviced at different berths.

Ves chose to transfer to the Armitage and stay aboard until the large vessel reached the outskirts of the Yernstall Central Star Node.

A couple of dozen Ascended Giants wearily returned to the headquarters of the Phase Lord Department.

They no longer possessed the enthusiasm and confidence they possessed before. The recent battles had given them all a brutal reality check.

When the Dark Apostle took over Ves' true body, he found it difficult to figure out a way to restore everyone's confidence in a short amount of time.

"Victory and defeat are two sides of the same coin, sir." The Divine Harpoon told his leader. "A true soldier or warrior will not be able to win all of the time. Defeat will come sooner or later. What matters is not that they have faltered, but whether they can stand upright again. I advise you to leave the discouraged giants behind at our headquarters for the time being. I am confident that most of our boys will eventually regain their fighting spirit. If not, we can always provide a small amount of guidance."

"What if there are still giants that are still wallowing in their depression?"

"Then we have taken the measure of their resilience, Dark Apostle. They have proven themselves unsuitable to undertake frontline duties. We can only assign leisurely guard or garrison duties to them. Let the cowards stay in the rear."

That may be the only way to get any value out of the broken giants.

"We need to load a fresh batch of giants into the Armitage." The Dark Apostle stated. "We still need to find suitable battles for them, and there are no better opponents than their alien mirrors. Please take charge of the selection. We need soldiers who have not given up on themselves already."

"Understood. I have already drafted a preliminary list of names. I will need to meet with every giant in person before I make the final decision."

Neither Ves nor the Dark Apostle wanted the Ascended Giants to go to waste. Even if they had to coddle them, they were determined to drag the boys to the battlefield and allow them to make their own achievements!

One of the most important factors that determined success and failure was gear.

Though the Bluejay Fleet was still able to outfit a decent amount of giants with superdimensional gear, questions had arisen on whether they had adopted the right configurations.

"Scale is the greatest advantage of our kind." The Divine Harpoon stated. "However, we have been unable to leverage this advantage to the fullest due to the limited scale of our equipment. The Ur-Titans have proven themselves to be much more effective than my Faceless Giants due to the disparity in size."

"What are you suggesting?" The Dark Apostle asked.

"I would like to ask you to think about overhauling our distribution of superdimensional equipment. Rather than spreading out smaller amounts of superdimensional matter over a larger group, it may be better to concentrate greater amounts among our elites. There are a number of talented Ur-Titans that have already grown to a scale of 4x or greater. Although it will take much more superdimensional alloys to clad them in proper sets of arms and armor, their combat effectiveness will likely be much greater than a squad of smaller giants."

The older man raised a good point. Concentrating the best resources to the true elites would definitely make it easier for them to dominate the battlefield.

However, the quantity of Ur-Titans who have reached this scale was too small for his liking.

Losing a decisive numbers advantage would definitely make it more difficult to mop up sprawling battlefields.

"I am not in favor of this change of strategy." The Dark Apostle eventually responded. "The operations that we have in mind will likely force us to split up our assets into many detachments. We need to be able to attack multiple planets, moons, starbases and fleets at the same time. It will be more difficult for us to do so if we only have a handful of large giants at our disposal."

There were always easy targets in every enemy stronghold. Sending multiple squads of weaker but still formidable Ascended Giants to clean them up was an easy way for them to gain easy victories and build up their confidence over time.

The Divine Harpoon understood his superior's considerations.

"Very well. If you do not find the tradeoffs acceptable, then we will adhere to our established methods."

Chapter 7392 Naval Developments

Chapter 7392 Naval Developments

As the center of human-occupied space in the Red Ocean, Yernstall was an incredibly busy place.

The ongoing wars had not caused traffic and commerce to decline in the slightest. Pretty much every major group or faction established a stronghold in the central star node.

This included the Larkinson Clan.

Starfarer Berth continued to pump out first-class combat carriers and other sub-capital vessels.

Though its limited scale prevented it from constructing any larger hulls, Saint Commander Casella Ingvær recently authorized large-scale upgrades and modernization, allowing the orbital shipyard to produce more effective starships in smaller timeframes.

Though the clan could have upgraded and expanded its operations even further, it did not make sense to do so at this time. The deteriorating economy and the unstable supply situation meant that it became more and more difficult to ship sufficient quantities of raw materials.

Phasewater became increasingly more scarce. Bulk metals also became a lot more troublesome to procure, as more and more groups preferred to keep their resources in-house rather than trade them away.

Fortunately, the Larkinson Clan forged enough business ties to overcome these difficulties.

The so-called Open Consortiums helped a lot with bringing different trade partners together. Though many of the members were only small players, they wouldn't have been able to exchange their goods with each other with so much ease if they did not have access to such a convenient trading platform.

Interestingly enough, even though most Open Consortiums had originally been founded by the Larkinson Clan, much of the leadership and management responsibilities gradually shifted to other groups.

The Larkinsons maintained a lot of branches in different locations, but most of them were rather small. There was no way for them to maintain a large presence in most zones, so it did not make sense for them to possess such outsized influence in consortiums that they barely used.

This was why the Larkinsons deliberately relinquished much of their power and control over the Open Consortiums.

The working model was robust enough that even if others took over the regional consortiums, everything should still work well enough, especially if the participants continued to sign the Open Books that compelled them to conduct honest transactions.

The only Open Consortium that the Larkinson Clan continued to exert a significant amount of control was the one based in the Krakatoa Middle Zone.

It couldn't be helped. It was home to the Davute Branch, which happened to be the largest branch of the Larkinson Clan.

While the regional Open Consortiums were technically independent from each other, their identical origins and many similarities made it easy for them to trust each other.

In a period where trade networks continued to experience greater pressure, the clan still had to rely on these Open Consortiums as well as other trade deals to guarantee the supply of goods and materials.

Not just Starfarer Berth, but all of the mech manufacturing plants demanded constant input of materials.

If not for the fact that the Yellow Jacket was not that picky in terms of materials, it would have been a lot more difficult to keep its costs at a reasonable level.

As Ves toured his advanced shipyard, Eric Poderin continued to report on the latest happenings.

"We are grateful for the latest upgrades. Combined with access to newer and better ship designs, we have recently been able to produce combat carriers that are roughly 15 percent more effective on average. We even have the option to mount small guns on them, though we have yet to do so as the Red Two have yet to greenlight them for privately-held first-class ships."

Ves briefly frowned as he heard that. He still found it rather annoying that the Red Association and the Red Fleet continued to suppress the proliferation of first-class warships.

This was in stark contrast to second-class and third-class warships, which had begun to show up increasingly more in the Middle and Lower Zones.

Though most of them consisted of civilian hulls that had hastily been converted into military ones, their firepower offered vital support in a way that was difficult for mechs to match.

The benefits would definitely be greater if private organizations such as the Larkinson Clan could field its own first-class warships, but their power was exponentially greater.

It was understandable that the mechers and fleeters grew nervous about the prospect of random people gaining control over warships that possessed enough firepower to raze entire cities and planets from orbit!

However, Terrans and the Rubarthans clearly did not take this restriction.

Shortly after they regained their sovereignty, they had already begun to field their own warships.

Therefore, the enforcement of rules became increasingly more farcical. The main reason why the Red Two still prohibited the use of first-class warships must have been out of pride more than anything.

"I do not expect the mechers and the fleeters to greenlight the private use of first-class warships anytime soon." Ves analyzed. "Most of us will have to make do with mechs. You should continue to focus on building the best possible combat carriers for the Premier Fleet. We can never have too many combat carriers in my opinion."

Aside from a few points, Ves was generally satisfied with how Starfarer Berth conducted its operations.

The Larkinson Clan was still lacking in terms of shipyards, but the ones it had in its possession operated long enough to produce plenty of hulls by this time.

Ves was not too worried that anything would happen to Starfarer Berth. It was based in one of the only star systems that merited the protection of a god pilot.

The only downside of operating in Yernstall was that the taxes and fees were extremely high.

"The actual cost of producing our hulls has multiplied by at least 3 times." The CEO of Starfarer Berth admitted. "The Saint Commander is aware of this, but she has not issued any orders to trim our expenses."

Ves nodded in understanding. He would have made the same decision. "I am not that well-versed in our clan's revenue and expenses as before, but I think that we should still have money to spare for quality starships. In a time of war and uncertainty, money by itself is useless. Only by converting it into solid goods will you be able to get anything useful. The work that you and your men are doing is extremely important to everyone. We will continue to rely on your efforts."

Shortly after they completed their tour, Eric Poderin mentioned an important development.

"The Red Collective has approached us recently. The Artifact Warship Department has made certain attainments that it wishes to test by contracting numerous shipyards owned by different parties. We figure that the only reason why this department contacted us is because of the connection with you. The collies want us to construct a so-called artifact warship according to their methods and instructions. What is your opinion?"

Ves possessed a bit more insider knowledge on what was going on with the Artifact Warship Department.

Leaving aside stolen resonance technology that was still too new to form any conclusions, Ves was generally impressed by how thorough the engineers and cultivation scientists managed to fuse different 'tech bases' together.

That said, there were good reasons why they were still stuck in the experimental phases.

"Artifact warships are the future of this industry." Ves stated his own opinion. "Getting an early start is beneficial for you all. While the methods are not yet mature, they still form the blueprint of how artifact warships will be constructed in the future. I recommend that you accept the deal, but make sure to demand that the ship in question will be owned by the Larkinson Clan. We do not work for free. I think that the department will not mind this too much as it is mainly interested in the data. In fact, we can make this deal even more compelling if we use our own methods wherever we can."

The Larkinson Clan had its own tricks, and Starfarer Berth already employed a few of them to give their ships a little extra potential.

Though the starships in question could not be regarded as fully-fledged artifact warships, they at least possessed a little more life than usual.

Perhaps the combination between different methods might produce surprising results. Ves certainly looked forward to the outcome.

Later that day, Ves reunited with the rest of his family in order to welcome his oldest daughter.

She arrived via shuttle. She appeared alongside a similarly-aged woman wearing a exotic black dress decorated with feline patterns.

"Aurelia!"

"Miaow!"

Before anyone could exchange any greetings, Andraste and Clixie immediately broke the line and scurried forward in order to glomp the young woman wearing a cadet uniform!

Both Ves and Gloriana smiled warmly as Marvaine belatedly ran over to join the group hug.

A minute later, Aurelia presented herself before her parents, though with a Rubarthan Sentinel Cat in her arms.

"Welcome back, dear." Gloriana softly greeted. "How are you doing at the Erwin Klobucar Naval Academy?"

"I am doing very well over there, as I have already told you during our previous online exchanges." The girl almost rolled her eyes. "I have learned more about operating starships than I could have ever imagined. My learning ability is higher than almost any other student at the academy. The higher-ups have personally devised an expanded curriculum to take advantage of that. If my plans do not change in the coming years, I will probably minor in both E-technology and FTL engineering."

Both were advanced subjects to say the least. Aurelia had a great advantage in studying E-technology as her companion spirit and her notable spirituality allowed her to observe and manipulate intangible variables without requiring cumbersome workarounds.

FTL engineering was highly complex, especially if one wanted to study its deeper principles and nuances.

Current FTL drive technology was already quite mature, the relatively recent development of superdrives clearly proved that there was a lot of untapped potential in this field of technology.

Since combining FTL drives with phasewater-based warp drives could achieve such astonishing results, many people speculated that they could develop even more ridiculous means of superluminal travel with the help of superdimensional matter!

Ves fully approved of her chosen fields of study. She may very well contribute to the development of a powerful new drive in the future.

Of course, that was assuming other people such as Star Designers did not invent it first, which may very well happen.

"We can talk about the details of your studies later." Ves said. "Have you made any new friends?"

Aurelia nodded. "Yes, though many of them come from the spaceborn clans. They are normally unwilling to socialize with outsiders, but I have not received much rejection from them. It has taken time for me to identify cadets who seek more from me than forming a strategic connection with you, papa."

"Such people exist everywhere." Gloriana said as she reached out to caress her daughter's head. "You should be intelligent enough to know how to handle relations with a wide variety of individuals. As far as I am concerned, do not hesitate to use your background as a princess of the Larkinson Clan to your advantage. We can always use more friends among the Red Fleet."

"Even if they harbor ulterior motives?"

"We can handle such people." Ves confidently said. "Do whatever you want. Your time at the academy belongs to you. You can learn as much or as little as you want. If you want to create a wide friend circle, then that is also okay. Just make sure you do not regret the time you have spent in your teenage years."

"Ahem." Gloriana coughed in an annoying fashion. "While I generally agree with your father, you should not forget that you are representing our clan. You should ensure that your study results are up to standard before you decide to divert your time on other... pursuits."

"I have no problem with that, mama."

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Chapter 7393 The Red Fleet's Pivoting

Chapter 7393 The Red Fleet's Pivoting

Aurelia looked adorable once she changed out of her cadet uniform and became surrounded by the cats and her younger siblings.

Andraste and Marvaine could never have enough of their eldest sister.

Even though they hadn't been separated for too long, remote communications could never substitute for real personal contact.

It was not just their human forms that were nuzzling up against each other.

Their companion spirits were doing the same in a different realm!

Mana, Yaika and Denny had all cuddled up together in a pile of intangible fur.

They looked so cute together!

Ves and Gloriana gave their eldest daughter time to catch up with her siblings.

Meanwhile, the pair quietly interrogated Aurelia's companion.

Though 'Marigold Larkinson' looked like a girl of the same age as her principal, she was actually a high-level artifact.

Ves had upgraded the Flower Parasol himself, yet he had little idea how it was able to transform into a humanoid form.

He knew it probably gained this capability after absorbing a special ingredient, but that did not grant him any insights on the actual theory behind the transformation.

It was a complete black box as far as he was concerned.

This was a shame, because if he could figure out the mechanisms behind this miraculous transformation, he could apply to other artifacts!

Oh well.

At least Aurelia would never feel lonely.

"Has Aurelia become friendly with any boys at the academy?" Gloriana keenly asked.

"Aurelia is one of the most popular girls in her class." Marigold dutifully reported. "She tries to maintain cordial relations with everyone. She has certainly been approached by boys, but she has deftly converted them into friends. They have just begun their study programs. There is not much time for leisure activities. All cadets have been told that they must work hard as their results in their first years determine the ceiling of their later years."

Gloriana looked somewhat satisfied after hearing this. "Boys are indeed a distraction at her age. It would be better if she could wrap them around her finger, but I am glad to hear that she is prioritizing her studies. Knowledge is the root of power."

They inquired about the subjects that she was studying, but nothing stood out, which was to be expected as Aurelia was still in her first year.

The Red Fleet mastered a lot of high-end knowledge, especially in the fields of materials science, energy technology, FTL drive technology and more.

However, Aurelia probably wouldn't be able to touch any of these subjects in-depth until much later.

She first needed to build up her fundamentals before she could go deeper in a specialized field.

"Have you noticed anything interesting or unusual while you resided in the naval academy?" Ves curiously asked.

Marigold hummed for a moment. "Perhaps. I have detected the presence of an increasing amount of artifacts. I cannot give you any solid descriptions of them as I have never caught sight of them. I can only feel that they are quite different from myself."

"Different in what way?"

"I can tell that they are sapient and intelligent." The living artifact said with certainty. "However, there is... a much greater degree of artificiality to them. It feels as if they are logic turned to life."

Both Ves and Gloriana briefly exchanged glances.

"Those are probably the smart AIs that the Red Fleet have been experimenting on in the past few years." Gloriana stated. "We have obtained a batch of them as well. They are still installed on the Tortuous Scream. I have heard that the Saint Commander is becoming increasingly more proficient in utilizing their smart processing capabilities, especially when she is interfacing with them with her Command Field."

"I am not unfamiliar with regular smart AIs." Marigold said. "This feels different. The best way I can describe it is that the fleeters may have possibly grafted their smart AIs onto traditional artifacts."

That sounded interesting. And disturbing.

"You are the expert on this subject, Ves. What do you think?"

"Marigold may have detected the Red Fleet's experimentation on artifact warships." Ves speculated. "The naval academies are not just centers of learning. They gather a notable amount of academics together. Teaching and research often go hand-in-hand. I can definitely believe that the fleeters are conducting at least some of their research over there. This also makes it convenient for our daughter to gain access later on. Artifact warships will continue to grow in importance."

Through Marigold's descriptions, Ves gained a better understanding of how far the fleeters had progressed their development of artifact warships.

It was already impressive enough for the fleeters to create artifacts in the form of warships.

To be able to convert their smart AIs into 'artifact spirits' was another important advancement!

"I do not think the unknown artifacts are enormous in size." Marigold said as she analyzed her impressions further. "Certainly not as large as capital ships. If they are artifact warships, then they should be fairly small."

"As small as a destroyer?"

"Smaller."

"A frigate?"

"...Maybe a large corvette."

That... did not sound large at all! Sure, a corvette was larger and bulkier than a mech, but that was not that big of a deal!

Gloriana did not look too surprised. "It makes sense. These are probably prototypes that are not expected to be deployed into active service. It is much more difficult and costly to build larger artifact warships. As long as you are only interested in gathering empirical data, then smaller hulls will suffice for the most part."

The notion of creating artifacts controlled by smart AIs certainly sounded interesting. It could solve many problems, especially if the fleeters programmed them well enough in advance.

However, Ves also suspected that there were disadvantages to this approach.

From his understanding, traditional craftsmanship entailed the creation of an artifact before imbuing it with the soul of a powerful life form.

The greater the power of the latter, the greater the enhancement to the former!

Nothing encapsulated this formula better than the Riot Mark III!

A mech that already started off as a powerful machine became even stronger after undergoing Demoncasting!

Smart AIs may be a lot more intelligent and programmed to perfection, but they were probably not too powerful in a spiritual sense.

Therefore, they probably did not provide a significant raw power boost to any artifact warship they got attached to. That sounded like a waste of potential.

His wife did not necessarily agree with his stance. "Power without control is useless. Not everything has to reach record-breaking numbers. Warships are highly complex collections of different systems. They need to be controlled with great precision and coordination in order to correctly utilize their formidable capabilities."

She made a good point.

The power of warships primarily came from their impressive scale.

The simplest way to create more powerful warships was to build bigger ones, but that was a wasteful approach.

The Red Fleet could not afford to construct battleships en masse anymore.

The Red Ocean Union was too small and poor in resources to be able to supply all of the bulk materials necessary to construct fully-fledged capital ships in great numbers.

For better or worse, the RF had to spend its limited amount of resources a lot more efficiently than its parent organization!

This was why the fleeters increasingly sought to cram more power into smaller hulls.

"Early versions of artifact warships feature rough performance, but they already perform significantly better than modern hyper warships." Gloriana commented. "If the Red Fleet is able to perfect this technology further by integrating the intelligent processing capabilities of smart AIs, the mature versions will no longer be a joke. What they may lack in raw power, they make up for it with control and precision."

There was a clear hint of bias and approval in her tone. She clearly preferred this development route over that of stuffing extremely powerful but highly unstable demons into artifacts!

"The Red Fleet prioritizes consistency, uniformity and reproducibility." Ves voiced his own thoughts. "There is room for individual growth and evolution, but the fleeters clearly prefer to place tight guard rails along the trajectory. There is nothing inherently wrong with this approach. They are not mech pilots who have an obsessive need to develop their eccentricities and strengthen their unique flavors. A warship is a warship."

It sounded like the Red Fleet was on the right track to regain its confidence, if not its dominance.

The humanoid artifact continued to share more observations when she stayed by Aurelia's side. She could tell much about fletcher culture and developments based on what she witnessed at one of the RF's premier naval academies.

"The curriculum for most study programs are undergoing rapid changes." Marigold Larkinson said. "Certain subjects deemed redundant have either been shifted out of the list of compulsory subjects or removed from the catalog entirely. In their place, the fleeters have added dozens of subjects related to E-technology, superdimensional technology as well as astrogeology, colony engineering, resource processing and so on. According to the discussions from the older cadets, it is unusual for the Red Fleet to place a greater emphasis on resource extraction."

Ves couldn't help but smirk at that. "The Red Fleet can no longer sit back and rely on levying taxes on the states that it is still able to keep under its thumb. The withdrawal of the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact has hurt the RF's bottom line a lot. The fleeters have to get off their lazy butts and put more effort into harvesting the resources necessary to build all of their precious warships."

There were probably not a lot of high-grade resources left unexploited in the existing territories of the Red Ocean Union.

If the Red Fleet wanted to grow its pool of strategic materials, then the only choices available were to salvage a large amount of battlefield debris or conquer and exploit enemy territory.

Ves had a feeling that the fleeters planned ahead for the latter scenario. They must be really optimistic of the future.

The alternative was that the fleeters formulated a contingency plan that revolved around operating multiple self-sustaining vulture fleets.

If the dual alien threats truly managed to break the frontlines and overrun human-occupied space, then going nomadic was the only way for a semblance of their civilization to survive in a hostile dwarf galaxy.

The thought was depressing, so Ves quickly shifted his attention.

"Have you made any other unusual discoveries and observations?" Gloriana asked.

Marigold hummed for a few seconds. "Aurelia has only just begun her studies at Erwin Klobucar, but she has already demonstrated enough talent and capabilities to attract the interest of multiple potential mentors. These teachers are highly respected and possess their own specializations."

"Has our daughter voiced any inclination for a mentor?"

"Not yet." The living artifact said with a reasonable degree of certainty. "She has only just begun her studies as a naval cadet. The choice of mentor is almost just as important in the naval community as it is in the mech community. Aurelia probably wants to build up a basic foundation and explore what she needs the most before she settles on her choice. For example, if she wishes to learn fleet command, then she can approach a mentor who used to command squadrons or larger units. If she wishes to expand her engineering competences, then she can seek a mentor who used to work at one of the Red Fleet's many R&D institutions."

If Ves had a choice, he preferred it if Aurelia chose a command track.

This would not only allow her career to enter a fast-track, but also make her more useful in commanding the Larkinson Clan's own expanding naval assets.

While Ves valued the Red Fleet's unique technological contributions, they were not indispensable.

As a mech designer, Ves had many ways to acquire or develop the technologies he needed.

Naval command was not a skill that you could learn from a textbook alone.

Chapter 7394 Neglected Product Lines

Chapter 7394 Neglected Product Lines

All in all, Ves felt quite satisfied with the Red Fleet's adaptations.

He became more assured that his daughter would spend a fruitful time at the Erwin Klobucar Naval Academy.

Ves continued to spend the rest of his day catching up with his daughter and taking care of other miscellaneous affairs.

While the Bluejay Fleet's vessels continued to get serviced and resupplied, Ves became inundated with dozens of affairs.

For example, he had to divert a bit of time to manage the delicate repairs and restoration of the Riot Mark III.

The D-mech incurred serious damage as well as permanent mutations during the last battle. Repairing the machine was troublesome as its internal structure had warped too much to make it easy to return to its original condition.

Ves and Gloriana had contemplated numerous options, but eventually concluded that they had little choice but to roll with the changes. They just had to try their best to ensure the Riot Mark III could still put up a good fight in its sharper and edgier incarnation.

Other affairs related to the mechs sold by the Living Mech Corporation.

"Outside of the Yellow Jacket and the related Jacket Commander models, sales of other models are relatively flat or in slight decline." Gavin Nuemann reported. "This is not because our product lines are deficient. The relatively newer models such as the Ferocious Piranha Mark IV, Valkyrie Redeemer Mark IV and the Stormblade Samurai Mark II consistently remain popular. The Fey Fianna is the LMC's bestselling product after our Carmine mech. However, the face of warfare in the Red Ocean is changing faster than we can adapt. Many materials have become more expensive and troublesome to ship across territories. This is disproportionately affecting our premium product offerings. Furthermore, the Voribug War has brutally shown that many mechs, including ours, cannot handle so much attrition."

These were all important points. Ves had heard them before, but they had become much more serious as time went by. It was times like these that truly tested the survival capabilities of mech companies!

"Is the LMC in any acute trouble?"

"No." The partially mechanised assistant responded. "We are in a much better position than many other companies at a comparable scale. Your fame and eminent status continues to bestow a halo onto our brand. The demand of the Yellow Jacket will remain rock-solid as it is the only Carmine mech line available. Rising costs have slimmed our profit margin, but our direct sales volume

remains high. Besides, we have earned far more money from the mech designs by licensing them out to third parties. These are some of the reasons why we have not been forced to downsize our operations or shut our doors."

The mech industry had become a lot more turbulent as of late. So many changes occurred in a relatively short span of time that many companies that previously relied on the old status quo had completely failed to adapt.

Of course, there were also many other mech designers and mech companies that had proven to be clever, fast and open-minded enough to adapt to the new changes.

The LMC did not even rank among the top of this list!

Ves did not have too many high expectations for his mech company, especially when he had lately occupied himself with greater affairs.

Fortunately, the LMC could survive without his direct attention.

The Design Department under the leadership of Gloriana might not have too many high-ranking mech designers, but it was still capable of taking care of many routine design tasks.

Of course, if Ves continued to shift his priority away from his commercial offerings, the LMC would probably continue to experience a gradual decline in market share and relevance.

The mech market's demand was not static, especially in more turbulent times.

Consumers demanded more than straightforward upgrades to existing and outdated mech concepts.

Applying the same set of formulaic hyper technology and E-technology to his older commercially available works would only keep the existing userbase of LMC mechs happy for a few years at most.

As new technologies continued to emerge and enemies swiftly adapted to existing solutions, a time would come where the only way to keep the LMC's iconic mechs relevant was to properly reimagine them for the Age of Dawn.

"This is not the time for me to reorient my focus back to the commercial market." Ves quietly told his assistant. "I would like to do so, but my current priority is to complete the development of the Arboreal Project. The development of elemental Carmine mechs is vital to my progression as a mech designer. It is also the best way for me to make a unique and highly impactful contribution to the mech market."

"I am aware of that, Ves, but it is hard to commercialize those ambitious projects of yours when you have already surrendered the right of distribution to your partners."

"The LMC will be fine. Even if my products fall out of favor in the next few years, there are still plenty of Journeyman Mech Designers within the clan that supplement our mech roster. Ketis is particularly good at this due to her unique advantages."

It was a good thing that the Larkinson Clan had made a lot of strides to diversify its income sources.

Although not all of them were stable and reliable, the clan had no fear of getting ruined if something went wrong with its mech business.

Even if other income streams collapsed, Ves could still find a way out by virtue of his galactic citizenship.

That said, everything had a price. He had done his best to stay away from overly shady practices so far because he knew it would taint his reputation to an extent.

After the pair finished their talk about finances, their conversation soon shifted to more strategic affairs.

"You've been following the debate that ensued after the Voice of Liberty's stunt, right?"

Gavin nodded with a cool and impassive expression. "Yes. I am not impressed so far. The subject has polarized the mech community and provoked far too many heated arguments. Die-hard believers in stolen resonance technology are shouting at members and sympathizers of the Pilot Humanist Society all of the time. Do not underestimate the latter. The PHS has only come into prominence for a short amount of time, but has already earned a great amount of respect, especially among mech pilots with a superiority complex."

That sounded predictable.

The Pilot Humanist Society fought for a dream that originated in the past and managed to define an entire age!

This ideal still captivated many people even if they were not mech pilots.

In fact, the availability of Carmine mechs meant that even norms saw hope of becoming respected and all-powerful mech pilots one day.

Ves had accidentally made this problem worse!

"The Pilot Humanist Society has steadily proven itself to be a legitimate interest group whose voices gained an increasingly more receptive audience." Gavin explained. "It is still mostly a grassroots movement in that it has not gained the open backing of high-ranked officials in any organization."

"Interesting. It sounds like the PHS will continue to become an increasingly more powerful thorn at someone's side."

"One outspoken member of the PHS may be relevant to us. Venerable Ariel Szenka used to be a protege of the Voice of Liberty. Though they eventually went their separate ways, the former has inherited at least part of the latter's outspokenness."

"And she is relevant because...?"

"Venerable Szenka is one of the individuals who may fall under the category of people that the Voice of Liberty entrusted to our clan." Gavin answered. "It is our obligation to offer her shelter to protect her against her former mentor's many enemies. If she chose to ignore our repeated transmission, then that is her prerogative."

Ves wondered whether it was a good idea for the Larkinson Clan to absorb such a polarizing figure. It might make the public think that the clan had taken a side.

That was not supposed to happen.

"Will we actually bring Venerable Szenka into our clan?"

Gavin paused and exerted his powerful cranial processors. He completed a rapid series of calculations, much of which he intuitively understood.

"I cannot be sure of the answer. Our matriarch will decide. Venerable Ariel Szenka is already a senior ace pilot that is within breakthrough territory. Recruiting her and outfitting her with an impeccable living expert may be the impetus they need to transcend to sainthood."

That would be a relatively 'easy' way for the Larkinson Clan to acquire another ace pilot.

Of course, there were no guarantees.

"The downside is that her existing advocacy and her stubbornness may prevent her from fully integrating into our clan."

There were good reasons why the Larkinson Clan did not recruit existing expert pilots even if it had started to receive a growing number of applications.

Expert pilots had already solidified much of their values, ideals and loyalties. Trying to instill genuine loyalty into the Larkinson Clan at this stage was too difficult!

The Saint Commander would ultimately decide.

Ves trusted that she would make the right decision. It was not worth it for the clan to absorb an unstable element in the hope of acquiring another ace pilot-level asset.

"What about the rest of the PHS? Are they prone to violence?"

"Most of the supporters of the PHS are enthusiasts." Gavin replied. "They are easy to rile up and are willing to protest outside of their working hours. Yet it is because this group is so big and eclectic that many potential threats can blend into the crowds. Time will tell whether there are elements of the PHS that will continue to radicalize until they feel driven to commit acts of terror."

"Like the Cosmopolitan Movement." Ves sardonically said.

Somehow, many outspoken political organizations seemed to slide along a similar trajectory. It was as if as long as these radicals did not get their way, they would continue to sink deeper and deeper into their delusions!

Ves genuinely feared that the more extreme and conspiracy-driven members of the PHS may turn their hostility against their fellow humans!

He hoped that the higher-ups possessed enough awareness and foresight to properly manage this contentious organization.

The Cosmopolitan Movement already caused enough trouble for human civilization!

Their discussion continued. Just as they were about to talk about their preparations for departure, Gavin suddenly paused as he received a priority notification.

"What is the matter?"

"The... office of the Resonance Smith has just sent a summons to you, Ves. It states in no uncertain terms that you are expected to visit him at one of his facilities tomorrow."

"What?!" Ves widened his eyes in surprise! A meeting with a Star Designer did not come out of nowhere! "I distinctly remember that I did not request an audience with His Excellency! We have yet to fulfill the requirement set by the Voice of Liberty to a satisfactory level. It takes more time to approach all of the members of his network. Even then, my wife and I are not sure whether it is a wise move to cash in this favor immediately. This is far too soon!"

"You can issue your complaints to the Resonance Smith, though his response may disappoint you. He and the Voice of Liberty are cut from similar cloths in my humble perspective. They are not the sort of people who let themselves obey orders without question."

It was useless to complain. Star Designers did not fall sway such feeble pleas.

"I guess I should make ample preparations." Ves signed in resignation. "Do I need to watch out for anything? Has the Resonance Smith mentioned anything that he wanted to talk about in particular?"

"I am afraid not. The notification is very sparse on details. It only contained the necessary amount of information and no more."

"Ugh. If that is the case, then I will have to hope for the best." Ves rubbed his palm against his face.

Chapter 7395 Role Fulfilled

Chapter 7395 Role Fulfilled

Many people would feel honored and exhilarated if they received an invitation to meet a Star Designer.

That was not necessarily the case for Ves.

He generally received much more pleasant outcomes if he was the one who initiated these rare meetings.

Getting summoned by an esteemed tier 1 galactic citizen usually meant that the august figure wanted to entrust him with greater responsibilities or take care of a troublesome matter.

Ves came up with a lot of different ideas on what the Resonance Smith wanted from him this time.

He quickly took care of his remaining affairs in Yernstall. There was so much he wanted to do, but he had little choice but to delegate meetings and other chores to Alexa Streon, Gavin Neumann, Eliza Mo Ragadan, the Divine Harpoon and other subordinates.

Alexa badly wanted to have an in-depth discussion with Ves, but he had little choice but to postpone it. He could not afford to be unprepared when meeting one of the brightest and shrewdest minds in the Red Ocean!

His wife had clear concerns as well. She approached him as she held a napping Marvaine in her arms.

"The Resonance Smith might not give us time to decide how to cash in the minor favor that we are in the middle of earning. We need to make a set of priorities right away. The Resonance Smith has mastered many high technologies related to true resonance. He is the foremost authority on this subject. Since our clan relies so heavily on our champions, I suggest that you ask for advanced knowledge and techniques related to amplifying or narrowing the application of true resonance."

Ves frowned. This was a new request.

"Of all of the things we can exchange a minor favor for, I am not sure whether it is worthwhile enough for us to ask that kind of stuff." He said. "If stolen resonance technology becomes critical in the coming years, then we should think about gaining the secret to produce materials that can be used to make much more compact stolen resonance generators. Outside of this, I am also thinking about asking for various high-level alloy formulas that can help me bridge the gap between theory and practice in my not-yet-realized elemental Carmine mech design projects."

He did not need to rely on any further external aid to complete the development of his Woodsap mechs.

He also made ample preparations to develop his Polymetal mechs properly.

It was the remaining 3 elemental Carmine mech design projects that still presented a lot of unknown hurdles.

Bloodfire mechs demanded extreme heat-resistant modifications to their human Carmine mech pilots, which could get very costly. It was not realistic to demand all of them undergo top-tier full-body cybernetic conversion like Saint Isobel Kotin.

Mergewater mechs relied heavily on biomaterials that could assimilate other organic traits without impairing their most essential core functions. The greater their transformations, the greater the risk of losing the traits that made them mechs.

As for the earth-based Carmine mechs, Ves still had little clue how to design such beasts!

While Ves should have been responsible for solving the key design problems for all of his advanced projects, he felt no shame at turning to a Star Designer for a shortcut.

He was not a materials scientist. It was fairly normal for him to turn to outside help when it came to problems of this nature.

His projects mattered too much and their impact far exceeded that of a regular Senior or Master's work.

If he could save years worth of tedious experimentation, then that would only benefit red humanity further!

So long as he continued to lead the development of the elemental Carmine Systems, it didn't even matter to him that other mech designers took control of almost every other aspect of his elemental Carmine mechs!

This was why he was more than happy to let the Terrans shape the overall form and functions of the Arboreal Project.

Both he and the Terrans knew very well that the Woodsap System was the true core of the new mech design.

Without Ves contributing this unique and innovative variation of the Carmine System, the Terrans had no way of granting norms the gift of piloting super-powered mechs!

"What about asking for his help with exploiting the properties of superdimensional matter?" Gloriana suggested an alternative. "You have always wanted to obtain the secret to creating dimensional containers. I have heard that it is much easier to create with superdimensional matter as opposed to phasewater."

Ves shook his head. "It is precisely because it is so much easier that this secret isn't so valuable. The general knowledge will become available to me sooner or later. If need be, we can even assign one of our R&D institutions to figure it out. No, we need to ask for boons that are practically impossible for us to obtain in the short and medium term."

The more time he spent as a high-tier galactic citizen, the more he realized the preciousness of minor favors. He could not squander them at will, as each of them represented the right to call upon the services of a True God-level individual!

His talk with his wife had been enlightening, but Ves ultimately had his own ideas.

He ended the discussion by kissing her on the cheek before planting a kiss on his only son's cute forehead.

"Sweet dreams, buddy."

Little Marvaine continued to nap in bliss.

Due to the tight schedule, Ves did not have to wait too long before he answered the summons.

He put on one of his best dress uniforms, which his assistant and staff had recently replaced and upgraded, and boarded a high-security shuttle dispatched by the Red Association.

Flanked by menacing-looking escort mechs, the shuttle proceeded to bring Ves to an undisclosed location somewhere inside the vast Yernstall Central Star Node.

Though Ves possessed far better spatial senses than any normal human, he did not try to track the trajectory of the shuttle in a sign of respect.

Not that it would have worked. The shuttle activated many interference systems, and a handful of them were surprisingly effective at scrambling his spatial mapping.

The vehicle also passed through half-a-dozen heavy security gates that contained high-powered energy fields that produced much stronger interference!

If that was not enough, Ves and his shuttle got teleported around 3 times in rapid succession!

The security protocols so far seemed a bit excessive this time. The risk of infiltration, sabotage and assassination had clearly risen by a lot. Ves wondered whether the mechers were trying to guard against alien or human threats.

In any case, the shuttle finally touched down in a hangar bay and slowly opened its hatch.

When Ves stepped onto the solid metal deck, he could not tell whether he was in an underground facility or a starbase hidden deep inside space.

A handful of heavily armored guards received him and forced Ves to undergo a thorough search.

Ves had dutifully brought nothing that could ever pose a threat against a Star Designer, let alone another human.

Well, that was not entirely true. He could still retrieve the Oceancaller along with a whole bunch of other armaments from the Vault of Eternity.

He could also unfold his true body and let the Dark Apostle loose!

The conduct from the guards suggested to Ves that they were well aware that he remained deadly even if he had no weapons on hand.

However, there was only so much they could do to restrict his lethality without crossing a number of uncomfortable lines.

The Resonance Smith's security measures shouldn't be so weak that Ves could pose a credible threat to such an august figure.

Therefore, once all of the theater had concluded, the guards finally led him down a series of lifts and corridors before approaching one of the most centrally-located labs.

Curiously enough, Ves had not encountered any other humans in the vast but somewhat hollow facility.

Had they been given a day off? Were they ordered to remain inside their closed chambers? Or did they not exist in the first place?

Whatever the case, it didn't matter as the Star Designer alone could do the work of thousands of researchers if not millions at the same time!

Ves could already feel the powerful man's presence before he was able to observe the True God with his own eyes.

The Resonance Smith was the personification of the concept of Resonance.

Everything resonated with the Star Designer, and the Star Designer resonated with everything.

This created a whole host of effects, many of which were too deep and profound for Ves to understand.

Right now, the Resonance Smith stood in the middle of a lab while a tsunami of different materials surrounded him. Thousands of alloy bars and small components streamed in from a side gate and briefly circled around his human form before departing through another gate.

The closer the materials came to the Star Designer, the brighter they glowed and the more they resonated.

All of this produced both light and sound.

Ves was already familiar with the visual phenomena, but the sound was new. Each material possessed its own unique note that sounded increasingly more real as their resonance grew stronger.

They all sounded... magical.

He grew fascinated. Though he was still unable to understand the essence of what was going on, he was still able to obtain a handful of vague insights.

Suddenly, the symphony stopped.

The silencing was so sudden that Ves immediately regained his awareness.

The absence of sound and resonance was deafening.

It felt highly uncomfortable after Ves had immersed himself in such a comfortable environment.

Jose Ukele slowly raised his head and stared straight at the visitor.

He transmitted a silent command that caused all of the materials to exit out of a gate.

The lab had become almost completely empty. Every instrument and machine was hidden behind soft white paneling.

"Come closer." He said in a voice that sounded a lot different than before.

If Ves had to describe it, the Star Designer spoke not by pushing air out of his lungs, but by directly vibrating the surrounding air with the slightest touch of resonance!

It was not only a refined display of power, but also a demonstration of sorts.

Ves had the feeling that he was supposed to analyze this phenomenon and draw a lesson from this freebie.

If that was the case, he was obviously failing at it. Ves had not put any time on analyzing how the Voice of Liberty was able to manipulate so many people with his music.

If he did, then he might have been able to glean a valuable insight.

The Resonance Smith clearly picked up on this. His expression remained neutral, betraying no hint of expectation or the lack of it. He simply gained a bunch of data points.

When Ves came close enough, he stopped and made a slight but respectful bow.

"I have answered your summons as soon as it is expedient, Your Excellency. Before we continue, I... wish to offer my condolences to you. It is well-known that you have formed an acquaintance with the Voice of Liberty. His passing is a tragic loss to red humanity, but he did so on his own accord as far as I know. It is regrettable that he has chosen to do so in the wrong place at the wrong time."

He wanted to get those words out first in order to absolve himself and his forces from any blame for the Voice of Liberty's demise.

The Resonance Smith finally turned into a poisonous smile.

"You are... not entirely correct, Professor Larkinson. His death is the greatest contribution that he could have made to the human race. The likelihood that he would amount to anything more than a peak ace pilot was minimal. By dying in such a public manner, he has spurred on a wave of breakthroughs as others have taken inspiration from his courage. Through his music and his example, he has liberated other high-ranking mech pilots from their doubts and hesitancy, just as I envisioned. He has fulfilled his role... magnificently."

"Wait..."

Exlor

Chapter 7396 Questioning the Mech Designer's Creed

Chapter 7396 Questioning the Mech Designer's Creed

Ves froze inside the advanced but chillingly empty lab.

The fall of the Voice of Liberty was a tragedy.

During the event, Ves had always assumed that he had taken the initiative to go rogue and risk his very life to realize an unattainable ideal.

Though his life was filled with impossibilities, he did not allow his adverse circumstances to hold himself back.

He bravely confronted his weaknesses, and though he ultimately failed to conquer each of them, his struggle nonetheless inspired many viewers to conquer their own demons.

This should have been the truth.

Yet the Resonance Smith's words and attitude suggested that Saint Conrad Morgenstern's heroic sacrifice might not be as selfless and idealistic as everyone thought!

A lot of dark thoughts flitted through Ves' mind. His imagination couldn't help but spun alternative narratives where the incident concerning the Voice of Liberty was not as innocent as it seemed!

It sounded too outrageous to be true, but nothing was impossible when it came to the machinations of Star Designers.

Ves did not want to believe that the Resonance Smith had cruelly discarded the life of the Voice of Liberty just so that he could squeeze a bit of guaranteed value out of the senior ace pilot!

"Your Excellency..." Ves hesitantly spoke up again. "What... exactly... was your plan?"

The atmosphere in the chamber grew chillier.

The lightning remained bright, but it happened to cast the humanoid form of the dark-skinned Star Designer in a more ominous manner.

"That... requires an explanation, Professor Larkinson. I did not misspeak, and you did not misinterpret my words. In my calculations, the Voice of Liberty had never fully realized his potential as an active combatant. He may be a senior ace pilot who excels at winning large battles, but his value always remained limited to the tactical level. In order for him to become strong enough to shake the wars at the strategic level, he must succeed in his breakthrough, which was normally several decades away."

If the facts had been reduced to this level, then that made perfect sense.

"We don't have decades at our disposal." Ves stated the obvious.

"Exactly. You understand the preciousness of time more than many of your peers. That is good. Time is indeed in short supply. The lack of time makes it unbearable to wait for the Voice of

Liberty to make a proper attempt at becoming a god pilot. Rather than hope that Conrad can become a dispensable savior in a distant future, it is much more beneficial for all of us if he can become a catalyst to a more courageous humanity in the immediate present. In that, he has fulfilled his original goal magnificently."

"His... original goal?" Ves almost quivered when he deduced the dark intentions behind this specific phrase.

The Resonance Smith smiled deviously at Ves. "Yes, his original goal. You may have come to believe like many other individuals that I approached Conrad Morgenstern and granted him a new ace mech due to shared values and ideologies. That is at least partially true, but that is not the principal reason why I spared my valuable time and effort. My true intention of establishing a relationship with him is because I recognize his value as my loudspeaker. His talent and passion for music synergizes extremely well with several of my design solutions. At the time, I concluded that the Voice of Liberty would make for a fantastic vessel to broadcast a strong message to all of humanity. As a performer that has approached divinity, he is only second to god pilots in his ability to captivate an audience."

Nothing in those words contained any appreciation for the Voice of Liberty as a warrior or a freedom fighter.

The Resonance Smith obviously did not value those aspects out of the late ace pilot.

Though the Star Designer's words all sounded truthful and logical, they contained a distressing sense of coldness that Ves normally expected to come from the mouth of the Polymath.

At least the latter deliberately shut down her emotions when she plotted to save red humanity!

What about the Resonance Smith?

Ves did not sense that the Resonance Smith ascribed to the rational mech design approach.

In fact, resonance was a phenomenon that strongly corresponded to feeling.

The Star Designer could not cut himself off his own emotions if he wanted to master every aspect of resonance!

This led Ves to conclude that the Resonance Smith still possessed the capacity to care... yet chose to disregard it entirely when he decided the fate of the Voice of Liberty.

That was scary.

"Is... it truly the case that you solely decided to lend the Voice of Liberty a hand at the time because you saw a potential loudspeaker for yourself?" Ves hesitantly asked.

The Resonance Smith frowned in disapproval. "We are both clever mech designers, professor. I should not repeat the obvious. Yet it is apparent that you still do not fully understand the scope of my plans. That is forgivable. First, it is true that I primarily envisioned a potential use for Conrad Morgenstern as a particularly loud and effective bullhorn to impart a strong message to the public. Yet that does not mean that I have entirely disregarded his potential to become a god pilot. If I

never needed to use his more immediate services and if our enemies were willing to give him all the time he needed to grow organically, then I would have been happy to let him fulfill his original destiny."

"Yet from the moment you chose to use him to galvanize red humanity during this tense period, you derailed him from his path of godhood." Ves almost accused the Star Designer.

The Star Designer smiled and made a single clap.

"The logic of your statement is deficient. I did not make it impossible for him to become a god pilot. I manipulated the circumstances around him so that he eventually recognized a riskier and more expedient alternative for him to become a god. Poor Conrad. He thought it was all his idea, that he willfully turned his back to me in order to prevent his taint from spilling in my direction. What he did not and could not know was that the news he became exposed to, the people he met along his journey and even the subliminal resonance generated by his own Sound of Revolution all served to nudge him towards a single conclusion. That the time to act was now, and that he was the only pilot who possessed the means and the courage to do what was necessary."

The Resonance Smith sounded outright diabolical!

Despite the fact that the Star Designer evoked a serene ability to resonate with his environment, his words conveyed anything but peace and harmony!

Ves never expected the Resonance Smith to start off this conversation in this way.

The outrageous Star Designer did not hesitate to confess his 'evil' intentions as if he had no shame!

If the public knew that the Resonance Smith conspired to kill an honorable ace pilot, then it would become a lot more difficult for him to maintain his present level of popularity!

"What you just said... what you just confessed to... completely violates the mech designer's creed."

The Resonance Smith's smile turned sardonic. "The mech designer's creed is indeed the core principle that has guided the mech designer profession. It has prevented many of your colleagues from going astray. Yet for all of the good it has done... I see no reason to abide by this pedantic rule."

"What?!"

"Why do you sound so surprised, Professor Larkinson? I am an Unbounder, a member of the Red Association who believes that most of the rules that we apply to ourselves only exist to shackle our potential and prolong the reign of the unworthy. When you approach my level of power, the rules are no longer unquestionable. In fact, I dare to say that you are obligated to question them. You will find that many of them which we have inherited from the old galaxy do more harm than good. To ignore them is justice. To repeal them is righteousness."

"And that applies as well to the mech designer's creed?!"

The Resonance Smith laughed in amusement. "Not precisely. Do note that I mentioned that it has kept many mech designers honest and on the right path. It still plays a useful role to the mech

industry. I have no intention of removing it. Mech designers must still serve mech pilots. I am merely asking them to be more skeptical and question whether the mech pilot in question deserves your service. Not all of them have proven to be worthy of your full consideration."

As much as Ves wanted to deny this taboo statement, he couldn't help but agree with the general message.

It was impossible for Ves to care for every mech pilot as thoroughly as he did with the Larkinsons.

His time was short and his output was finite.

Yet that did not mean that he should belittle his lesser customers and clients!

They might not receive his full attention, but he still felt an obligation to give them the means to realize their potential!

So long as his intentions remained pure, even a slight amount of effort could make a positive difference!

That was why Ves felt so offended by the notion that mech designers should no longer follow their creed.

"I don't understand your stance." Ves said with a frown. "You first state that we should ignore the creed. You then state that it is still useful and that we should follow it. What am I supposed to think?"

"The rules do not apply equally to every individual. Status, experience and capability all influence the applicability of every rule. To a Senior Mech Designer such as yourself, the mech designer's creed is still a necessary training wheel. To a Star Designer who has transcended the mundane boundaries of the mech designer profession, the creed is no longer relevant."

"Are you... claiming that becoming a Star Designer gives you an excuse to disregard the traditions of our profession."

"Your profession, not ours." The Resonance Smith 'corrected' Ves. "There are those who believe that Star Designers are high-level successors of mech designers. That is a misconception. That is as naive as believing that a so-called Ascended Giant should still be treated as a human. Despite their obvious relations, they are fundamentally different in power and identity. Although there are a number of colleagues of mine who still insist that they are mech designers despite how extensively they have transcended their old limitations, they are still stuck in their past glories. They do not realize the full implications of what they have become. Gods are not bound by mortal rules. What is the point of transcending our mortality when we are still willing to subject ourselves to the whims of sheep? At least the Polymath understands the Truth much better than those idiots."

Ves absolutely did not want to guess who the Resonance Smith referred to when he called them idiots.

This was way above his paygrade!

Though Ves couldn't help but agree with certain parts of the dangerous Star Designer's speech, he could not bring himself to accept the full message!

It was only now that Ves fully realized why the Resonance Smith had always been marginalized by the greater mech community.

The Resonance Smith practiced what he preached!

He not only advocated for the removal of many of the rules that maintained the stability of human civilization, but he also violated them despite the fact that they were still in force!

The Unbounder was a true rule breaker!

The taboos did not exist for him as far as he was concerned!

Disturbingly, Ves did not find this kind of attitude to be completely alien to his sensibilities.

That was because he too had the habit of ignoring the rules when they got in the way!

Ves distressingly recognized that he had more in common with the Resonance Smith than he initially thought!

Chapter 7397 Rethinking the Relationship

Chapter 7397 Rethinking the Relationship

Every Star Designer was not right in the head.

Just like god pilots, Star Designers always seemed to lose at least some of the restraints they still held when they lived as mortals.

Yet compared to his peers, the Resonance Smith took this a lot further!

Ves had never imagined that a Star Designer would not only question the mech designer's creed, but consciously choose to set it aside!

It sounded as ludicrous as a god pilot stating a lie.

Such a fundamental contradiction in responsibility exceeded anything that Ves could have imagined from such a noble and selfless profession.

Since the Age of Mechs, all mech designers had been taught to serve mech pilots in a devoted manner.

Though their classes taught them that mech designers should never denigrate themselves or let them be ordered around as minions, the mech community definitely prioritized the needs of mech pilots over others.

This pattern had been the established truth for over 4 centuries and counting. Nobody sought to question this hierarchy because it seemed as natural as anything.

Mech pilots earned greater privileges because they were scarce and limited in number.

Mech pilots bore the brunt of the danger whenever war erupted.

Mech pilots had the potential to become the most powerful gods in human form.

All of these reasons and more caused all of human society to put them up a pedestal.

Mech designers, who possessed incredible capabilities of their own, could only take a backseat and adopt a more subservient position.

This was why the Resonance Smith's statement broke Ves' cognition.

The extreme contrast between the eccentric Star Designer's stance and human society's established norms was too great!

It took a few moments for Ves to regain his composure and speak again.

"How... how could you assume such a crazy stance? Why... would you express so much contempt towards the mech designer's creed? Even if you have become a Star Designer, shouldn't you continue to serve god pilots with the same devotion as before?"

The Resonance Smith scowled at those words. It was as if the very notion offended his sensibilities!

"That is why I despise the old regime so much. You have become so accustomed to rules such as the mech designer's creed that you have never properly questioned whether they are still appropriate for the current conditions. Let me give you a lesson, Professor Larkinson. The relationships between god pilots and Star Designers are not even close to their mortal counterparts. We are all gods. One god cannot command another god. We negotiate with each other. We exert pressure on each other. We trade individual favors with each other. We never serve freely, because our services have grown too valuable to be obtained without cost."

That sort of made sense. Star Designers existed in a different league compared to Master Mech Designers.

Combined with the scarcity of the former, it was well within their rights to ask for more remuneration.

However, that did not automatically mean that Star Designers had a right to screw over mech pilots!

"What you say makes a certain amount of sense, but what gives you the right to toy around with the lives of mortal mech pilots?"

"It is true that I do not dare to 'play games' with god pilots, but that is because they are strong and sharp enough to detect impropriety." The Resonance Smith readily admitted. "Yet I feel no guilt by

using mech pilots for my own ends. They feel honored to receive the attention of a Star Designer such as myself. I have never withheld any benefits from them. It is merely their biases and inattention that prevents them from acknowledging the greater price they must pay in order to use my works. I never forced Saint Conrad Morgenstern to make use of the ace mech that I have devised for him. I have explained its settings and features in exhausting detail."

"Yet you deliberately misled him by downplaying its more manipulative traits, am I correct?" Ves looked up at the Star Designer in suspicion. "As long as you flood your audience's ears with enough technobabble, you can get away with practically anything."

The Resonance Smith's smile became a lot more obvious. "Caveat emptor. Buyer beware. Not every seller has the customer's best intentions at heart. It is unfortunate that mech pilots throughout the generations have lost their vigilance towards the mech designers that they have relied upon for centuries due to the existence of the mech designer's creed. Its existence has distorted the relationships between mech pilots and mech designers and caused artificial stupidity to become ubiquitous. Mech pilots are becoming more stupid by the generation while mech designers have lost so much of their egos that they have become slaves in all but name!"

It was very clear that the Unbounder felt very strongly about the negative consequences of institutionalizing the mech designer's creed!

While Ves could sort of understand the Star Designer's perspective, he felt that the Resonance Smith mainly obsessed over the negative effects and hardly appreciated the positive effects.

That was not a fair evaluation.

Ves doubted it would do him any good if he pointed out this hypocrisy. There was no way a little Senior like himself could argue against a Star Designer on equal grounds.

He sighed. "So what am I supposed to draw from your 'lesson'? Should mech designers gain the freedom to scam mech pilots."

"Yes." The Resonance Smith directly responded. "Normal market dynamics must be restored. The Mech Trade Association and the Red Association have stunted the mech market for too long. They are treating everyone as children when they are actually full-grown adults. Let mech pilots be scammed! Let them be more vigilant of what they are buying and using! Force them to question whether a mech designer or mech company cares too much about profits to do their jobs properly. There will be wrongdoing. There will be victims. There will be dissatisfaction. However, once mech pilots develop the necessary degree of skepticism and vigilance, the mech market will automatically grow healthy and stable again. A more natural equilibrium will emerge that doesn't rely on the iron fist of the mechers."

His stance actually sounded quite reasonable.

The mechers would never agree, though.

They had guarded the reputation and integrity of mechs for centuries with success.

Even if their many taboos and restrictions had led to huge distortions in the mech market, they ensured that people throughout human society possessed absolute trust in mechs.

More importantly, people also trusted the individuals who designed the very same mechs.

Ves benefited a lot from the institutional trust in the mech designer profession. It would have been a lot more difficult for him to run a successful business and expand his sales if he constantly had to prove the reliability of his own products!

That was why Ves felt very mixed about the Resonance Smith's stance. His belief that most of the rules had to be torn down might led to a great wave of liberalization, but it would also ignite a lot of chaos!

There was already a lot of chaos in society at the moment. Ves hardly believed that red humanity could endure more disruptions during this dangerous period of time.

"I am sorry, Your Excellency, but I cannot bring myself to agree with your viewpoint." Ves calmly responded as he placed his confidence in the rules that he relied upon for much of his life. "Rules give structure. They are necessary to maintain stability. Perhaps a decade ago would have been the right time to enact reforms, but now... it will only make things worse. Much worse."

Ves only had to shift his perspective to Veronica and witness the absolute breakdown of order to witness what would happen if a great authority like the Mech Trade Association lost power!

Fortunately, the Resonance Smith did not press further. "That is your prerogative. Keep my words in mind. Once you have become my peer, you shall see for yourself that I am correct. This is because some truths always remain in force. Mech pilots are destroyers. Even if they possess the power to create, their ability to spread death and ruination far surpasses anything else. They are a disrupting existence to society. Sometimes a little destruction is necessary to create room for more useful alternatives, but too much destruction will only lead to our end."

The Star Designer consistently expressed a contemptuous opinion towards the mech piloting profession.

This was very arrogant behavior on his part. Ves seriously doubted the wisdom of treating mech pilots with contempt!

Sure, Ves had met plenty of mech pilots with questionable judgment and intelligence, but that did not mean they should be treated as idiots!

For the most part, mech pilots were honorable soldiers who freely stepped up and fought the good fight.

Many of them resigned themselves to fighting and dying to protect masses of people that they never personally met in their lives.

That alone deserved respect.

"If you think that way about mech pilots, what about mech designers like myself?" Ves curiously asked.

The Resonance Smith smiled a little brighter in response. "We are the brains that truly keep our society together. If mech pilots are sources of disruption, then mech designers are sources of

mending. We are problem solvers. We are service providers. We are engines of innovation. You of all mech designers should understand who we are. We study mundane phenomena and extrapolate them into the extraordinary. That is true power. Do you think the might to destroy a planet is impressive? Nonsense! You have redefined the definition of life and broke the rules that have kept the mech piloting profession atrophied since they first utilized the neural interface! You have engineered the collapse of an entire pillar of the mech community! This is true destruction!"

Ves did not feel honored by this accomplishment, especially when put in this way. It was never his intention to damage the prestige of mech pilots!

"Please do not twist my work into the Carmine System. I did not set out to damage the interests of mech pilots. I simply wanted to serve our society, and what better way to do so than to allow any norm to pilot a machine that was previously closed to them? While I may have damaged the exclusivity enjoyed by mech pilots in the process, none of it was deliberate. Besides, they still enjoy an inherent advantage because they can use two different control systems at the same time. I think that my invention has made everyone happy in the end."

"How naive." The Star Designer smiled and shook his head. "You put too much faith in the cooperative relationship between mech pilots and mech designers. The former are not worth so much of your respect. You only need to study my plan for Conrad Morgenstern to understand why this is the case. Only a short amount of time has passed since his planned sacrifice, and already the numbers have changed for the better. Compared to previous time intervals, the short period after his demise has led to significantly increased breakthrough rates."

"Really?" Ves looked surprised.

"The statistics do not lie. 105 percent more expert candidates have emerged. 62 percent more expert pilots have come into power. 23 percent more saints have announced themselves. These are all excess quantities that measurably exceed the previous pattern. This has already vindicated the death of a single senior ace pilot. If even one new god pilot comes into being due to this catalyst, then the yield of my plan is near infinite!"

Ves almost felt sick after hearing that. The Resonance Smith was essentially justifying his deliberate decision to drive a senior ace pilot to his death by emphasizing all of the 'profit' that ensued!

This attitude of treating lives as numbers on a balance sheet seemed very anti-humanist.

It was no wonder that the Pilot Humanist Society felt it was necessary to advocate for the rights of mech pilots!

It was because of leaders like the Resonance Smith that the PHS had become a necessary existence!

"By the way, less than 30 minutes ago, a familiar friend and relative of yours is also included among those statistics."

"What?!"

The Resonance Smith activated a projection that showed a busy and fairly destructive battlefield.

Amidst all of the damaged ships and destroyed strike craft, a single heavy mech holding a radiant shield glowed with the power of a singularity!

"THE VOICE OF LIBERTY IS RIGHT! SINCE HIS FALL, THE WEAK AND THE UNDERSERVED LACK PROTECTION. SINCE THAT IS THE CASE, I SHALL PICK UP HIS MANTLE AND ASSUME HIS MISSION. I SHALL BECOME THEIR SHIELD AGAINST THE ENEMIES FROM WITHOUT! I SHALL ALSO BECOME THEIR SWORD AGAINST THE ENEMIES FROM WITHIN! LET MY VOICE RING TRUE AND LET THE UNIVERSE BEAR WITNESS TO MY PROMISE!"

Much of the surrounding debris circled around the machine as if it had turned into a new star!

Ves immediately recognized his old work!

"The Bastion! That's Jannzi!"

Venerable Jannzi actually managed to break past her stubborn bottleneck and broke through, thereby becoming the latest ace pilot to grace the Larkinson Clan!

Chapter 7398 Vague Attribution

Chapter 7398 Vague Attribution

Jannzi Larkinson broke through.

After spending many months settling down after her rapid ascent to the limit of what an expert pilot could achieve, she 'unexpectedly' broke through shortly after the end of the most recent affair.

It was very easy to tie the two events together, particularly given that Jannzi herself had openly admitted that she became inspired by the late ace pilot's example!

Now, Jannzi had become a saint herself, thereby taking a major step forward in the path to godhood.

She had joined the ranks of Tusa, Casella and Ark and became one of the strongest and most exemplary members of the Larkinson Clan.

Though the addition of 'another' saint did not change the status quo too much at this stage, the addition of another powerful ace pilot further deepened the foundation of the Larkinson Clan.

What mattered the most was that she was a rare defensive expert.

The clan had plenty of offensive powerhouses among its saints, but those who focused on defense were much less ubiquitous.

Saint Jannzi's breakthrough addressed one of the clan's major shortcomings. Once her Bastion got upgraded into a proper ace heavy knight mech, the improved machine would not only benefit from

all of the latest technological advancements of the Age of Mechs, but would also be fully clad in high-grade superdimensional alloy!

Although Ves did not know on the top of his head whether the Larkinson Clan had stockpiled enough armor-grade superdimensional matter to fully upgrade a big and heavy machine like the Bastion, even partial coverage was enough to qualitatively increase her survivability!

Ves immediately knew that Gloriana would have to rearrange her design schedule once again.

They had made good progress on the Promethea Mark II Project and the Lionheart Mark II Project. Their increased productivity and other assisting factors enabled them to progress both projects at the same speed as they did when they focused on one high-end project at the time.

While it would still take up to two months or so to finalize both projects to their satisfaction, they could tackle the Bastion Mark II Project right afterwards.

In fact, if any other Larkinson expert pilot also relied on the same catalyst to break through, he or she may receive the same kind of treatment!

Before he could fantasize more about what it would be like to have an ace mech version of the Bastion at his disposal, he suddenly shook his head.

This was bad!

He almost became completely trapped in his conversation partner's rhythm!

"I know what you are doing." Ves almost growled. "You are trying to make me feel grateful to you for sparking Saint Jannzi's breakthrough. That is nonsense. She was already an ace pilot candidate for a while now. If she didn't advance to the next rank today, then she would have done so eventually. Perhaps it would have taken a few more years for her to overcome her bottleneck, but I had no doubt that she would be able to do so within a decade. At most, the sequence of events that you have engineered has brought the timeline forward by a couple of years."

The Resonance Smith smiled indulgently at Ves. "If that is what you want to believe. It is admittedly difficult to attribute one or another outcome directly to a specific event. It may very well be the case that your clan's defensive expert was already on the cusp of achieving a breakthrough. However, it is undeniable that my plan has indeed allowed her to achieve greatness sooner than normal. She is not the only one. There will be many other expert pilots and ace pilots who owe their accelerated progress to the sacrificial actions of the Voice of Liberty. When taken as a whole, the new trend will have a significantly positive effect on the war effort. This is the goal that I have been striving for. I have induced a shock that was strong enough to jolt them into action."

Ves had heard it all before. He was growing tired of this argument.

"If I am being honest, Your Excellency, I am not interested in arguing philosophy with you. This kind of stuff is too big for me. I am still a Senior Mech Designer. My greatest concern is working towards my own breakthrough. My preferred way to contribute to red humanity is to design mechs. I think it is best if I stick to that instead of trying to learn from your example."

"Fair enough." The Resonance Smith said and nodded. "I am imparting information to you because you are more than just an ordinary Senior Mech Designer. It will take shorter than you think before you are able to pull the same sort of levers. If there is one lesson you must learn from my example, it is that your clients can also be subject to engineering. A good mech designer must never waste any opportunity to make improvements. There will be occasions in the future where you can nudge individuals in the right directions. So long as your judgment is correct, you can achieve more change with a single psychological hint than selling thousands of powerful mechs."

He could believe that. The Resonance Smith was a clear example of how much change could be accomplished through social engineering rather than pure mechanical engineering.

The outcast Star Designer spoke as if the both of them were made from the same cloth. Ves did not like this implication, but he couldn't deny that they indeed shared a number of traits in common.

Yet that did not mean that they had to become buddies all of a sudden. Ves remained suspicious by nature. He had long overcome his instinctual and irrational hero worship of anyone who bore the title of Star Designer.

So far, he loathed the Polymath, and he possessed a dim view on the Xenotechnician.

While he used to regard the Resonance Smith in a positive light, the latest circumstances forced him to reconsider this evaluation.

Ves felt disappointed that the Resonance Smith did not meet his expectations.

His biggest mistake was not realizing what it meant for His Excellency to be a leader of the Unbound Humanity Faction.

The Resonance Smith was almost like an anarchist at heart! He truly believed in breaking the rules!

That alone prevented Ves from taking the Unbounder's side.

No matter how sympathetic his arguments may sound, the Resonance Smith was ultimately a source of danger.

His formidable design capabilities may have turned him into a fantastic productive asset, but as long as he continued to adhere to his ideals, he could easily destroy far more than he created!

Both Ves and the Resonance Smith knew that the divide between the two had only grown deeper instead of shallower.

The former felt more alienated by the Star Designer.

The latter felt disappointed that Ves continued to bury his head in the sand.

Oh well.

Life still had to go on.

The projections disappeared. The Resonance Smith no longer tried to insist that he had been partially responsible for helping Saint Jannzi realize her potential today.

They moved on and began to talk about more serious and relevant subjects.

"Progress has been made in the secret discussions concerning stolen resonance technology."

"Oh. Can... you share the details?"

"I am afraid not, Professor Larkinson. Despite your personal involvement in this ongoing affair, you have explicitly not been invited to this clandestine gathering. I cannot even tell you who has sat on the panel, but I am sure your imagination can fill in the gaps. What matters is that we have formed an initial consensus on how to manage stolen resonance technology."

"So what have you guys decided?" Ves asked. "Have you permitted everyone to make use of stolen resonance tech? What are the rules concerning sources?"

"All of that will be explained as soon as the Red Association has published an official document on the matter. This will not take long. We will not permit humans to slaughter our high-ranking mech pilots for the purpose of harvesting their extraordinary willpower. In fact, the use of any human source of willpower will face heavy prohibitions by our institutions."

Ves couldn't help but smirk. "I bet that you objected heavily to the imposition of these rules."

"You have guessed correctly, professor. The last thing we need is to impose more rules onto us. High-ranking mech pilots can already protect themselves by staying prudent and lending their services to the right organizations. If they cannot behave according to this standard, then they deserve to be tricked. We should not coddle this class of people. Their intuition already gives them a significant advantage in detecting and countering trickery. They are mostly accustomed to employing their judgment on the battlefield, but it is time they develop the habit of using it off the battlefield as well."

The additional rules would probably make a lot of people unhappy, particularly industry insiders who were already burdened with excessive rules.

However, Ves did not object too much. He might personally agree that many rules had lost their relevance in the new age, but he did not think that pursuing the opposite to the extreme was any better.

"There is a problem with the resolution that you have just described." Ves said as he suddenly thought about a concerning situation. "You claim that the RA will soon publish a prohibition on the use of human-derived willpower sources. That is all well and good, but that is pretty much the only source of extraordinary willpower that is available in both the old galaxy and the new frontier. Even if we can use the Oblivion Gates to trade this resource back and forth, that still doesn't change anything!"

The Resonance Smith did not even deign to make a verbal reply this time. He simply stared directly at Ves with his false human eyes.

"..."

A highly disconcerting idea began to take hold in Ves' mind.

The only logical conclusion that he could draw upon the most recent decision was that the major powers readily prohibited the use of human willpower sources because they prepared an alternative solution.

That alternative solution could only be an alien source of extraordinary willpower!

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Chapter 7399 High Hypocrisy

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The Resonance Smith dropped a critically important announcement.

According to the deliberations of the tier 1 galactic citizens, red humanity intended to prohibit the use of human-derived willpower vessels.

The god pilots and Star Designers intended to institute this rule as soon as possible in order to cut off any brazen attempt at converting a high-ranking mech pilot's willpower into a stolen resonance generator.

Even though the Resonance Smith openly expressed his contempt at adopting yet another restriction upon human society, he had always been a marginal voice in galactic politics.

Most tier 1 galactic citizens fortunately possessed a lot more sense than the leader of the Unbound Humanity Faction.

They still recognized the value of rules and had no intention of undermining them anytime soon.

Red humanity needed to cling to order harder than ever if it wanted to remain somewhat united in the face of common external enemies.

This was why the higher-ups took the Pilot Humanist Society seriously.

The PHS only existed for a short amount of time, and its membership rolls were not too great.

Yet its actual influence far outweighed its official size!

Many mech pilots as well as people adjacent to them had a strong and passionate belief in the sanctity of the piloting profession.

To push through the widespread adoption of stolen resonance generators without setting a firm stance on this contentious issue would likely provoke a lot of outrage.

This was exactly what red humanity could not afford at the moment!

In the interest of maintaining stability, the tier 1 galactic citizens had little choice but to placate the most urgent demands of the PHS and its many sympathisers.

Though Ves personally felt annoyed that he could not legally make use of the human-derived willpower sources that he already had in storage, another part of him felt relieved that red humanity would not have to sink so low.

The only problem was that the demand for stolen resonance technology would still remain unmet.

There was no way that bigshots had truly decided to abandon this powerful new tech.

Ves could only draw one powerful conclusion from the latest decision.

"If red humanity is not allowed to use its own people as willpower batteries... then it can only come from other sources."

The Resonance Smith nodded as if this was the most obvious fact in the universe.

"Indeed. I do not mind revealing to you that I shall play an integral part in realizing these 'alternate' sources. What do you think, professor?"

Ves really did not want to voice his suspicions. Even though both of them definitely knew the answer, there was a difference between keeping it in mind and mentioning it out loud!

Yet it seemed that the Resonance Smith was not content with keeping everything implicit. He seemed determined to force Ves to confront taboos head-on this time!

"The most palatable way to acquire a willpower source is to generate it artificially." Ves mentioned his preferred solution. "However, the nature of extraordinary willpower makes that virtually impossible. At the very least, I can think of no way on how to generate it on a completely artificial basis. The very notion that smart AIs can develop willpower in the same way as humans is too outlandish. Perhaps the Red Fleet may be able to pull it off in the distant future, but I don't expect any progress in the short term. This leaves only one viable alternative..."

The Star Designer smiled expectantly at Ves. "Go on. Say it, young man. There is no need for you to fear the consequences of mentioning your theory."

Since that was the case, Ves did not hesitate any further.

"You guys... intend to impart willpower cultivation to the native aliens." He said with a heavy voice. "I don't know how you intend to do it, but it probably won't take long before we learn that

one or several alien races have 'coincidentally' learned how to produce their own version of expert pilots or swordmasters. Perhaps the Cosmopolitan Movement just happened to translate our methods into working alien versions. Perhaps the native alien researchers themselves managed to achieve a breakthrough in their research. Perhaps the most radical members of the Pilot Humanist Society had completely turned traitor. Whatever the case, the end result is that red humanity will have to fight against newly empowered aliens, but gain richer rewards if they manage to win."

A heavy silence ensued after Ves plainly voiced his suspicions.

Many people already suspected that the big shots had hatched this kind of plan, yet that did not mean it was politically acceptable to talk about it in the open.

Ves himself preferred to know as little about these potentially treasonous actions as possible.

It was a pity that the Resonance Smith did not agree with this particular stance!

The Star Designer actually chuckled!

"Hahaha! Do you not find it amusing that the vast majority of my fellow gods and leaders are eager to set aside their rules and principles just so that they can secure alien sources of willpower? For all of their supposed veneration of order and stability, the attraction of stolen resonance technology has proven to be too great for them to keep abiding by their principles. They have readily agreed to teach the native aliens how to produce their own version of willpower cultivators! Even if it can be argued that this will benefit our civilization in the long run, it is still a clear form of hypocrisy! Since the rules do not matter in this instance, it is better to get rid of them entirely!"

So that was what the Resonance Smith tried to convey.

He wanted to inform Ves that the other tier 1 galactic citizens were not so different from His Excellency after all. Greed could turn every rule-abiding citizen into a lawless bandit!

"I... appreciate your opinion, but I do not think that it is wise for me to share my opinion on this matter." Ves carefully responded.

The Star Designer looked down at Ves with contempt. "I would not speak of this to any random mech designer. You are a tier 2 galactic citizen. You are fully qualified to participate in this discussion. It is cowardice to run away from the responsibilities that you have acquired since we have acknowledged you as a leader of red humanity. You will only become more involved in these discussions, not less."

Ves had no choice but to believe this to be true.

By becoming the leader of the Phase Lord Department, he had implicitly thrust himself onto a greater stage.

So long as the Ascended Giants remained numerous and powerful enough to affect the course of human civilization in the Red Ocean, he would continue to remain important.

In fact, even without several hundred giants at his beck and call, his work as a mech designer also approached this level of influence!

Therefore, it was not premature for a Star Designer like the Resonance Smith to drag him into these kinds of high-level talks.

If Ves wanted to get out of it, then he had to relinquish his power and fade into the background.

It would not be difficult for him to do so, yet he refused to consider this course of action.

He would be a fool to give up so much power and influence when he worked so hard to attain it in the first place!

Ves never wanted to go back to the days where he was too small and inconsequential for him to fight for his interests.

In the past, he had little choice but to roll with the punches and suffer at the hand of other people's decisions.

Now that he managed to get a seat at the table, he could at least obtain a forewarning of upcoming events.

If he was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time, he could even nudge the direction of new developments!

In short, Ves should have nothing to complain about.

It was much better to have a bit of agency even if he had to bear greater burdens as a consequence.

"Do you expect me to do anything in order to promote the proliferation of willpower cultivation among the native aliens?"

"Your participation is redundant. We have already formed our own plans and measures." The Resonance Smith simply replied. "If everything goes according to plan, it should take no longer than half a year before the most human-like aliens such as the orvens begin to present their own willpower cultivators. Due to the vastly greater populations of the major alien races, we expect thousands if not tens of thousands of willpower cultivators to emerge. There is a great amount of latent talent buried among the aliens. Once they have been taught the right methods, their talent will bloom in a short amount of time. These are prime willpower vessels. Give them more time to grow, and they may rival our ace pilots in a handful of years, especially if the native aliens are able to provide them with effective resources."

A handful of years!

That was way too fast!

Ves did not find this to be entirely unrealistic, though.

Perhaps there were indeed a few dozen 'talents' among the native aliens who possessed talent that was almost as great as that of the Chosen Human!

This also made Ves hesitant to put his full support behind this plan.

Teaching willpower cultivation to the native aliens could easily backfire on red humanity.

What if the enemy managed to become a lot stronger in the process?

What if the new alien powerhouses ended up winning a lot more battles and killing a lot more people in the coming years?

The Red War would become a much bloodier affair!

However, it was clear that the tier 1 galactic citizens had weighed all of the risks yet decided to proceed anyway.

Chapter 7400 Uncommon Generosity

Chapter 7400 Uncommon Generosity

Ves had grown tired of talking with the Resonance Smith.

He could not bear so many heavy truths and secrets.

Though it could be argued that a tier 2 galactic citizen should not complain about being entrusted with exclusive information, Ves did not feel he was up to the task of bearing so many burdens.

In the end, he was still too young. He felt he needed at least a century's worth of experience before he could properly engage in this kind of political machinations.

Fortunately, the Star Designer did not keep on hammering him with ugly truths and inconvenient facts.

After betraying how readily the tier 1 galactic citizens disregarded their principles in order to advance their respective goals, the Resonance Smith soon moved on to addressing more pleasant subjects.

Such as the rewards that he had prepared for Ves and the clan.

The Resonance Smith became a lot more generous all of a sudden.

"I am aware of how much your clan is struggling to merge the advantages of superdimensional technology with archetech. Both branches of technology have great potential for resonance. I will leave it up to you and your fellow mech designers to discover this potential yourselves. What I can offer you are adapted superdimensional alloy formulas that offer superior compatibility. This should make it easier for you and your spouse to design archemechs that can not only withstand

more damage, but incorporate greater features than normal. Just be warned that the requirements to design, fabricate and repair any machines with these technologies are exceedingly high."

Ves received a bunch of electronic documents that contained the relevant knowledge. He briefly skimmed through them with his cranial implant and found that it contained exactly what he expected.

Though Ves did not feel particularly excited about the new alloy formulas and accompanying theory, he knew that he would be ecstatic!

This was exactly one of the problems that had been bothering her for a while. The Riot Mark III would have been able to perform better and withstand more damage if it was able to fuse the advantages of superdimensional technology and archetech a lot more perfectly.

With the new alloy formulas, Gloriana could at least ensure that the upcoming Promethea Mark II Project and Lionheart Mark II Project properly made use of the synergies between both cutting-edge technologies!

In that sense, Ves was quite happy that the Resonance Smith turned out to be well-informed and astute enough to address one of the Larkinson Clan's greater needs.

Even though Ves believed that it was partially a waste, it might have taken several years for the Larkinson Clan to independently develop alloy formulas that offered comparable performance.

Of course, Ves also recognized that this did not instantly solve all of the Larkinson Clan's problems.

Getting the right alloy formulas was just the first step. He and Gloriana still needed to incorporate it properly into archetech in a way that fully utilized the potential of both. There should still be a lot of room for improvement and optimization in this regard.

"This is a gracious gift." Ves politely responded. "We have experienced plenty of difficulties in our attempts to merge superdimensional technology with archetech. These solutions will save us a lot of time and allow us to release more powerful mechs sooner rather than later."

The Resonance Smith's expression remained fairly neutral. "Do not forget that archetech possesses alien origins. As long as there are aliens who have mastered this tech base more extensively than you, you will never be its true master."

"We have always been vigilant about this fact. You do not need to remind us of the dangers. My wife has already set her mind on developing a humanized adaptation of archetech, though she has warned that it will be a long-term effort."

Doubling down on archetech might make the Larkinson Clan's high-ranking mechs strong against a wide variety of threats, but it also increased their vulnerability against the original developers of this tech base.

The Larkinsons were lucky that they had yet to confront the truly powerful enemies of the arche, but a confrontation would only be a matter of time.

What would happen if the true master engineers of the mysterious arche race encountered the technological abominations created by the Larkinsons?

Would these aliens who understood the structure of archeshells and archemetal inside-out be able to punish the crude theft of their own inventions?

This had always been one of Gloriana's latent fears. She could not afford to underestimate the control and ingenuity of the crafty turtle-like aliens.

Fortunately, the awkward positioning of the arche race in the Red Ocean meant that the probability of encountering a large force was fairly small.

The nomadic aliens had never fully fit in with the other major alien races.

Their nomadic and plundering habits made them poor guests wherever they traveled.

It was only due to the Red War that the arche reluctantly cooperated alongside other aliens.

"Another gift which I will bestow upon you is a boon to the Ascended Giants that you have taken under your wing." The Star Designer continued to speak. "It is clear that your new and unruly subordinates are not able to cope with opponents that cannot be defeated with a certain amount of brute force. While you and your men are already working to remedy this shortcoming, I have decided to assist your effort by granting you a scalable weapon system of my own design."

A projection came to life. It displayed a series of hammers of different scales.

The smallest could be wielded a mech while the larger ones were massive monsters that could only be wielded by greater phase lords!

What impressed Ves the most was that these were not simple solid hammers.

They incorporated varying degrees of electronics that mostly appeared to empower the faces.

A few of the hammer models also appeared to be made out of superdimensional alloys, making them a lot more dangerous than normal!

"What are they?" Ves asked as he tried to guess at their functions and features.

"They are but a handful of sample designs of my Resonant Breaking Hammers." The Star Designer sounded mildly proud of his work. "They are blunt force weapons that can easily be scaled up to be wielded by increasingly more powerful giants. The larger the hammers, the more effective their damage. This is because they are designed to vibrate at a high frequency just moments before impact. Once they make contact with a target, both of them will resonate with each other over a brief interval. This can drastically weaken material defenses, making every subsequent impact more damaging than the ones that came before. This effect is much more pronounced if the hammers are made out of superdimensional alloys. Do take note that this does not apply to energy-based defenses."

"I see. These hammers... sound quite useful."

Although the existence of these Resonant Breaking Hammers did not solve every shortcoming of the Ascended Giants, they could at least increase their lethality against larger and more formidable opponents!

So long as the difference in mobility was not too great, a squad of giants armed with these special hammers should be able to break the defenses of a more powerful phase lord clad in Saint Armor!

Even if the high-frequency vibrations did not do anything special to azure energy shields and spatial barriers, it didn't matter too much as normal superdimensional weapons already penetrated such defenses with ease.

The more Ves thought about it, the more he felt that the Resonant Breaking Hammers could serve as a perfect stopgap solution for the coming years.

While the superdimensional halberds possessed greater reach and sharpness, they were not that sophisticated.

They could easily be used to bully the weak, but lacked the lethality to threaten anything stronger.

The Resonant Breaking Hammers may look a bit clumsier, but as long as the hammerheads remained fairly small in proportion to the shaft, the new weapons would not be much slower to swing.

The Star Designer had been very thoughtful when he presented this weapons package to Ves. The Resonance Smith would not offer a gift that would end up making the Ascended Giants weaker.

This also made it hard for Ves to refuse.

Even if these high-tech weapons possessed any hidden traps, Ves still had little choice but to adopt them for his men.

The demoralized giants truly needed a new source of encouragement, and these Resonant Breaking Hammers perfectly hit the nail on the head!

"Thank you for these weapon designs and specifications." Ves eventually said. "I will make sure that my subordinates from the Phase Lord Department will adopt them as soon as possible. I look forward to seeing them in action against worthy enemy targets."

"Your Ascended Giants have great potential, but only if they are properly led and equipped. At this moment, your new supersoldiers do not justify the phasewater and resources invested into them. That has disappointed many of us, but there are those who understand that they still need more development before they come into their power. Given how much you have committed to them, I am willing to add my own investment into your program. Do not squander my gift. I have especially taken the time to increase its synergy with superdimensional technology. The superdimensional version of Resonant Breaking Hammers can shatter entire fortresses if they are massive enough."

As Ves skimmed through the design schematics, he could readily believe this statement.

The tech responsible for generating high-frequency vibrations was way more complex than he thought!

They could not only vibrate at surprisingly high amplitudes, but also vary their frequency depending on the matter and shape of their targets.

The key to their ability to inflict high degrees of internal damage was not to shake as quickly as possible, but their ability to find the 'right' frequency that just so happened to generate a brief instance of destructive resonance that could drastically amplify the damage inflicted by kinetic impacts!

All of this not only demanded a lot of processing power, but also insanely well-designed analytical software.

Ves could never design such a complicated weapon system by himself. He would have to rely on a large multi-disciplinary R&D team to develop a comparable weapon system, especially one that synergizes so well with superdimensional technology.

This made this gift even heavier than normal.

Once Ves got over the euphoria of being able to equip all of his giants with these powerful new hammers, he began to grow skeptical.

The Resonance Smith's generosity exceeded Ves' imagination.

Why was the shifty Star Designer being so nice all of a sudden?

Whatever minor favor Ves had managed to inherit from the Voice of Liberty did not warrant so many gifts!

What was even more perplexing was that the Resonance Smith was not yet done!

"My third gift to you is a primer on anti-resonance technology. This is a niche branch of resonance technology that has become much more relevant for obvious reasons. Not everyone has access to this unusual tech. That is unlikely to change in the short term. Its strategic value will only grow higher due to future developments. The few parties who have mastered anti-resonance technology have a strong interest in limiting its circulation. I advise you to be careful about controlling the spread of anti-resonance solutions."

That was a serious warning. Ves actually felt that he might not be up to the task of protecting this exclusive tech against seizure.

Nonetheless, he had no intention of rejecting the virtual document.

Anti-resonance technology was exactly what the Larkinson Clan and the Ascended Giants needed to counter any hostile application of true resonance or stolen resonance!

If the giants had already mastered this tech before the recent battles, they wouldn't have suffered so many casualties!

"Why give me this primer?" Ves asked as he felt curious why he deserved this particular gift.

"I am confident that you can put your own spin on this tech. If you study the theory of anti-resonance technology, you will understand that it is particularly compatible with a familiar attribute. I have high expectations for that reason."

"I see."

No gift was ever truly free.