

Mech Touch 6901

Chapter 6901 Invitation Letter

Venerable Rosa Orfan did not exactly leave Gloriana's design lab in a good mood, but it couldn't be helped.

Ves and Gloriana had a duty to keep their client informed about the good news as well as bad news related to the upgrade project.

The Riot Mark III Project suffered numerous delays and suffered multiple disruptions originating from external sources.

The timeline for the project had become as chaotic as the vision that Ves wanted to realize with its design.

This made it more difficult for the mech designers to keep track of all of the changes. They also risked getting out of sync with each other. The messier the project became, the more everyone's thoughts on the Riot Mark III began to diverge.

This generated additional work for Ves as he had to act as the knot that tied everything together. The Riot Mark III was his brainchild, so he had to make sure that every mech designer conformed to his intentions.

That was not a simple task considering that his ideas for the Riot Mark III changed over time.

Ves identified that he was getting caught up in feature creep. He was allowing the onset of new technologies and inspired ideas to interfere with his original vision for the Riot Mark III Project.

If he wanted to complete the upgrade project in the most straightforward way possible, then he should ignore the promise of superdimensional technology and completely reject any major changes to the original concept of the expert spearman mech.

This was impossible.

Superdimensional tech was too strong. It would take a long time to design another major revision to the Riot that would allow her to convert into a full superdimensional mech.

It was better to accept the additional work and complications early than to let Venerable Orfan suffer for missing out on the superdimensional trend.

"Sir?"

Ves interrupted his musings as a mech designer sought to visit him in his personal design lab.

Not just anyone from the design department could knock on his door. Unless it was a handful of close people, the others had to gain approval from his bodyguards, personal assistant or his wife.

"Come in, Kalister." He said as he silently transmitted a signal to open the secure door.

Kalister Devos looked a little nervous as he entered the sanctum of the most important mech designer of the Larkinson Clan.

His gaze tried to remain as straight as possible, but his enhanced vision must have caught the sight of the projected images of living mechs in action and the masterwork mech figurines that Ves had casually placed wherever he liked.

"Meow~" Lucky yawned as he perched on an elevated cat bed.

The young mech designer gave the gem cat a short but respectful bow.

To the old timers, Lucky was family.

The newcomers, Lucky was a legend that had accompanied the Larkinson Clan from the beginning. Tales of his exploits painted him as a mythical guardian figure that had saved Ves and the Larkinsons during numerous critical moments.

Ves was not surprised by this sort of behavior. He could tell that Lucky cared little about the attitudes of the juniors of the clan. No matter whether people revered him or treated him as a pet, it didn't matter so long as he continued to be fed with yummy metals.

Unfortunately, his latest diet did not entirely agree with his stomach. Ves had already fed him another tiny slice of weapon-grade superdimensional matter, but his digestive system barely tolerated the highly exotic meal.

The good news was that Lucky was able to tolerate superdimensional matter a little better than before.

The bad news was that the rate of improvement was too slow. If Ves extrapolated the data, then it may take years before Lucky fully acclimated to superdimensional meals.

Ves looked forward to that moment. By then, the gem cat's transformation to an artificial superdimensional being would be complete.

A part of Ves wanted this to happen in order to make up for his regret for passing over the upgrade track for Superdimensional Transformation.

If Ves missed the opportunity to turn himself into a superdimensional existence, then his cat would take his place!

Perhaps Lucky would gain a massive body that was large enough to maul a mech into pieces.

"Take a seat, Kalister." Ves gestured to a nearby chair. "How are you doing? Does the Design Department live up to your expectations?"

The former Terran calmly took his seat while keeping his back straight.

"The Design Department is different from what I have imagined. It is... less organized and more informal than I expected. It is clear that its current structure is closely related to how you originally organized your design teams. After passing over leadership to Director Gloriana, your successor has attempted to formalize the department, but she has become accustomed to how you work that her changes are too mild."

"Do you think Gloriana must go further in her reforms?"

"Not necessarily." Kalister smiled. "The less formal structure of the Design Department is good for low-ranking mech designers such as ourselves. Our workloads are still considerable, but we have greater room to excel and develop our talents. We can earn additional Larkinson merits and exchange them for a rich variety of rewards. Not all mech companies are as generous to its lowest mech designers. We are much more accustomed to being driven by slaves, figuratively speaking."

"And they can get away with this treatment?"

"Why not, sir? Their mechs are designed by numerous notable Master Mech Designers. Their teachings and guidance hold great value to us. Although they may not necessarily care about the Novices and Apprentices under their noses, their professional obligations still compel them to lecture us from time to time. Most mech companies have also developed structured promotion trajectories that give anyone a chance to climb higher. The difficulty is far greater as the companies do not necessarily want to promote too many Journeymen and Seniors from the lower ranks."

Ves frowned. "I can see why that may be the case. The Masters merely want assistants who are good at completing their assignments but nothing more. If the hired help turn into Journeymen, then the mech company has to allocate more resources and manpower to support their continued development. Journeymen have also become too dignified to complete any further scut work. This may be detrimental if they have spent multiple years becoming good at designing specialized components."

Most mech companies actually did not need so many Journeymen, Seniors and Masters.

They would rather work with a fixed team of vetted, loyal and trustworthy Masters and shape entire departments around their needs.

The Design Department did not work like that because it lacked a team of highly productive Master Mech Designers.

At this stage, Ves and Gloriana still needed to raise a lot of talents in order to speed up the completion of all of their mech design projects.

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This could not go on forever. A new Journeyman, Senior and Master usually lasted for a long time. They permanently raised the productivity of the Design Department unless they manually quit, got fired or received a reassignment.

Once the Design Department received all of the help it needed, it may eventually adopt the same patterns as the older mech companies and limit the scope of upward mobility.

The Larkinson Clan merely needed enough promotions to cover normal attrition. Perhaps Ves might give ambitious mech designers other places for them to showcase their talents, but the Design Department still needed to provide the greatest possible assistance to Ves and Gloriana in order to maintain their value.

Ves almost forgot that Kalister Devos likely visited his office for a specific purpose.

"I did not expect you to drop by today. What is on your mind that is urgent enough for you to pay me a visit?"

Kalister's expression changed. He regained his formal demeanor and stood up with a ramrod straight back.

He carefully retrieved a black paper letter that looked old-fashioned and presented it to his superior with both of his palms.

Ves eyed the letter with an odd expression before plucking it from the younger mech designer's fingers.

The texture and thickness of the envelope felt particularly good. It was not smooth enough to feel artificial, but it was also not rough enough to feel crude.

The sender of the envelope had even sealed it with old-fashioned red wax. The gesture held no functional meaning, but it certainly added greater metaphorical weight to the letter.

Ves casually pulled at the wax seal and opened the envelope. He retrieved a thin card that formally conveyed an invitation to a banquet organized by the Devos Ancient Clan.

"I see." He said as he quickly interpreted the meaning behind the invitation. "After spending plenty of months on New Constantinople VIII, I am already set to resume my journey through the cosmos. Since it is unlikely that I will ever return to this star system, the Devosans want to formally send me off with a farewell party. This is definitely a new experience for me. Why the letter?"

"Tradition." Kalister simply answered. "The reason why we still uphold it is because it conveys how serious the sender desires the attendance of the recipient. This is a sign of great respect from one party to another. If your importance is not as high to the Devosans, then they would have sent you a much less ceremonial virtual notification."

Ves could see that. He might have to copy this little tradition if he wanted to organize his own gatherings in the future. He could even add a little extra spice to his invitation letters in order to make them special. The recipients would definitely appreciate the personal touch.

He directed a gracious smile towards Kalister. "I accept. I believe I can spare an evening to entertain one of my best friends and allies during these difficult times. The Devos Ancient Clan is a good host, and I have very few complaints about my stay on this planet. Do I need to send back a letter?"

"That is not necessary. I shall convey your response on your behalf. As a foreigner, Devos Ancient Clan will not expect you to follow Terran etiquette and traditions. Ignoring the rules is a sign of disrespect if you are a native of the Terran state, but an excusable oversight if you are not. The Terrans appreciate those who are willing to emulate their ways, but if you wish to do this, then you must do everything right, or

else you will insult their heritage by failing to make a good effort. Only trained diplomats should follow this route."

Ves was no diplomat, so he did not even think of trying to emulate the Terrans.

Besides, a man of his status and accomplishments no longer needed to rely on this pageantry in order to earn the respect of the Terrans.

It was much like how the Fist of Defiance made no pretense at formality and always poke his mind. His incredible might and force was so high that his mere involvement was enough to make even the most stiff-backed snobs fold in an instant!

"Since this farewell banquet is a big deal, will the Devosans spring any surprises for me?" Ves asked.

Kalister Devos spent a few seconds in thought. "I cannot say for certain, but it is in the best interest for the Devos Ancient Clan to maintain its intimacy with the Larkinson Clan. My former clan will likely offer you gifts or other proposals of great substance. You may decline if you wish, but the Devosans have analyzed your personality and past decision-making so well that they will definitely calibrate their offers to raise the success rate to the greatest possible extent."

"Should I feel concerned?"

"Not likely, sir. You hold the advantage, so the offer will be more favorable to you than the Devosans. Their goal is to continue to maintain friendly relations with you long after you have left their territories, so they must absolutely be generous."

Chapter 6902 Hymn of the Trees

The banquet hosted by the Devos Ancient Clan took place at its seat of power on New Constantinople VIII.

Sandan had never been the same after the institution of martial law. Although the restrictions were lighter in the capital city of New Constantinople VIII, few Terrans were in the mood for leisure after witnessing human civilization collapsing at the edges.

Even if New Constantinople is still safe enough from the ravages of the Red War, how long would it take for the fighting to reach their star system?

Many people who cherished their lives over their new homes had already been looking into relocating.

Unfortunately, not even the first-raters were able to move so easily anymore. The Terran Alliance and many ancient clans had not been shy about using the cudgel of martial law to keep vital workers in their places.

This was hardly the first existential crisis the Terran people had faced. The threat posed by the native aliens of the Red Ocean may be among the most existential to the people who found themselves cut off from Old Earth by 50 million light-years, but the citizens still showed a sense of duty and collective responsibility that kept them focused even if death was looming over the horizon.

Due to the partial withdrawal of leisure and civilian pursuits, Sandan lost much of its liveliness, especially at night.

Yet today, one of its most luxurious garden retreats had become uncommonly active.

The floating green resort floated above most of the structures of the city like a divine island.

Spotlights placed around the city shone their radiance upon the floating structure, causing it to look like a beacon of hope in an era of darkness.

Many other structures received directives to dim their own lights to a fraction of their usual levels.

The Devosans made sure to disable any form of gary advertisements and other discordant distractions. The entire city of Sandan had to present its best face to the guests that had been invited to the banquet.

It turned out that the Devos Ancient Clan invited more people than just the Larkinsons. Envoys from other ancient clans and organizations came as well.

As the armored shuttle from the Larkinson Clan arrived under heavy escort, many other vehicles had already delivered their distinguished passengers.

Ves was able to spot familiar symbols belonging to the Streon Ancient Clan, the Hunting Association, the Red Collective and more.

He was not able to spot any vehicles or mechs belonging to the Red Association and the Red Fleet, and he had a good feeling that they would not be showing up at any point.

Soft but pleasant hymnal music wafted in everyone's ears as they stepped outside of their vehicles after touching down on the landing zone.

There was not enough parking space to accommodate every shuttle, so traffic control directed them to disgorge their passengers before lifting off to head to a dedicated parking center.

The recently acquired first-class multipurpose mechs of the Larkinson Clan did not leave.

Instead, the Dracoloids and the Omega Threshers took up positions in and around the Hymn of the Trees.

The Larkinson Clan already made arrangements with the Devos Ancient Clan beforehand. It was unacceptable for Ves to visit a location with protection at hand.

A small handful of Apocalypse Wardens discretely followed Ves and his small party. Their heavy suits of combat armor contrasted sharply against the heavenly backdrop of the garden retreat, but most people who attended the banquet were accustomed to the presence of guards and servants.

"It smells so nice here." Little Marvaine called as he clung to his mother's hand.

"Miaow." Clixie echoed as she sniffed the air and made a weird expression.

"It smells so fake." Andraste offered her own words. "This garden looks nice and all, but the ground is too even and there is a lack of birds and other wildlife. The forests outside of our home are much more real than this place. This shows that the Terrans only pretend to love nature. As soon as a bird uses their shoes as their toilet, they will quickly change their tune."

"Young lady!" Gloriana hissed at her second daughter. "Be on your best behavior! We are among allies! Be polite and keep your sharp tongue in its sheath. We are not confronting enemies tonight."

The willful red-headed girl rolled her eyes and continued to hug Lucky in her arms, uncaring that the archemetal cat ruffled her multi-layered turquoise dress.

"Meow."

"Do not encourage her, Lucky!"

As the family proceeded towards the center of the garden resort, the Larkinsons already attracted a lot of attention from others.

How could they not? The Larkinsons were the guests of honor.

The family had made an effort to dress themselves up. To be more precise, their well-paid stylists had done all of the work. There was no need for them to be excessive in their choices, as the Larkinsons had already moved past the point where they needed to dress loudly in order to attract attention.

Ves liked how his children looked. This was one of the few formal occasions that they had been allowed to attend.

Aurelia wore a sky blue dress that looked like a variation of her mother's dress.

Marvaine wore a small cute tuxedo that added a lot of charm to his small form.

Clixie wore her magnificent golden collar as well as a bowtie on her tail.

Lucky wore a charming bowtie collar on his neck. Multiple red circlets adorned his metallic tail.

Aside from Ves and his immediate family, a few other Larkinsons walked alongside them as well.

Saint Commander Casella Ingvar had chosen to attend in a suit that resembled a dress uniform.

Her entire outfit conveyed a statement that made it clear that she attended the banquet as part of the military arm of the Larkinson Clan.

Alexa Streon on the other hand chose to wear a dress that vaguely matched the colors of the Streon Ancient Clan.

She had never denied her connections to her original clan, nor deliberately sought to cut ties.

The former Terran was principled enough to serve the Larkinsons wholeheartedly, but that did not mean she had to throw away all of her connections and attachments to her relatives.

Ves had also given Saint Dise to attend the banquet as a courtesy, but she had declined straight away. She was not a woman who cared about dressing herself up and participating in pageantry.

Saint Dise was always ready for a good fight, but she had no interest in playing the social game.

Just as well. She made herself useful by guarding Diandi Base and the valuable vaults filled with mid to high-grade superdimensional matter.

The possibility that groups would be greedy enough to attempt to rob the Larkinson Clan was not small!

Multiple intelligence services had already picked up clues here and there. So long as the superdimensional ace sword mech stayed on alert this whole time, no one should be stupid enough to test their defenses against a superdimensional greatsword.

Speaking of mechs, one machine in particular hovered conspicuously above the Hymn of the Trees.

The Black Lord that had managed to 'win' the practice bout against the First Mark III most likely deterred any opportunists from stirring up trouble.

It was not pleasant for guests to fall into the range of its Saint Kingdom. The Wind of Destruction possessed an extraordinary will that yearned to sweep up his enemies and any other obstacles with disintegrating gales.

Fortunately, the old and experienced senior ace pilot had a lot of practice with restraining his willpower. He was able to dial down the intensity of his Saint Kingdom far better than any of his Larkinson counterparts.

His remaining influence came across as a small buzz that was as annoying as a case of tinnitus. None of the attendees were average humans, so they easily tolerated this necessary burden.

Of course, they all restrained their words and kept their thoughts in check. They were keenly aware that the Wind of Destruction possessed a good grasp of everyone that had entered his Saint Kingdom. He would easily be able to detect any hints of malice and threat.

It was due to the capabilities of ace pilots that high society instituted a lot more rules and customs to organized gatherings like these. The ace pilots on guard were in a position to gather a lot of privileged information, which was why they had to make an oath to divulge no privileged information unless individuals in question had violated the rules in the first place.

Ves was not too sure whether such promises could be trusted. He could think of multiple different loopholes that the Devos Ancient Clan could exploit to gather secret information.

This was why it was a big deal when people accepted the invitations and attended the gatherings. By willingly subjecting themselves to the scrutiny of ace pilots, they proved with their actions that they had little to nothing to fear.

It was a great sign of trust on the part of people like Ves to openly enter the Hymn of the Trees with his family. He did not even insist that Saint Commander Casella pilot her Minerva Mark II, though the ace command mech was close at hand in case an incident occurred.

While the family continued to move further inward, Casella and Alexa had already split off to socialize with others.

Both of them understood that this was a rare opportunity to forge more ties with the Terrans. To be honest, they were much better trained and educated at this than Ves, so he left them be and trusted them to advance the interests of his clan.

"These plants are weird." Aurela remarked.

Ves took a look at the larger and more exotic-looking flowers. Their alien origins were clear, but each of them held intrinsic power that stirred his senses in a pleasant manner.

"These are not ordinary plants." He said. "I can feel... that they have been artificially mutated that somehow produces stable and controlled outcomes. This is remarkable. It takes more than mindless injection of E energy to produce this outcome. If my suspicions are correct, these plants have turned into reagents that you can use to concoct incredibly useful elixirs."

As Ves and his family passed through a vine-covered gate and entered an open courtyard and structure, their gazes immediately fell upon the glowing tree at the center.

A soft bronze glow radiated from the alien tree, yet none of the Devosans and guests showed any concern about being subjected to unfamiliar radiation.

A large part of this was because the tree radiated a subtle sense of vitality and encouragement.

The effect was not strong enough to accuse the tree of producing a brainwashing effect, but Ves could clearly see that a number of visitors preferred to linger in the periphery of the courtyard.

Ves became momentarily fascinated by the tree. It lacked the docility and lack of strong thoughts of the earlier plants. His best guess was that the Devosans had actually managed to pick up a mutated exoplant in the wild and somehow severed its aggression and constrained its continued growth.

"This is only a fraction of what we have built since the Age of Dawn. Come. There is more for you to see."

They had taken an extraordinary organism that had the potential to grow into an ecological disaster like the Emperor Tree... and turned it into a decorative garden plant that happened to exude a pleasant aura.

It took more than raw power to tame an exoplant like this. It took specialized knowledge and expertise to render a wild threat into a harmless natural edifice.

"Larkinsons. Welcome to the Hymn of the Trees."

Ves turned to face a familiar old woman. Master Laila Rebecca Devos approached while wearing a ceremonial dark purple toga-like dress. She looked a lot more stately and dignified than usual, which meant that she probably intended to conduct a lot of important business tonight.

"Thank you for having us. This place is lovely."

"This is only a fraction of what we have built since the Age of Dawn. Come. There is more for you to see."

Chapter 6903 Hijack Implant

The mutated tree was the centerpiece of the courtyard, but the Devosans had decorated the center of their garden with more minor wonders.

The kids ran off to play and talk with the other children. Gloriana sought out a group of Terran mech designers and began to exchange information about superdimensional technology.

Ves meanwhile chose to observe the exhibits together with Master Laila Rebecca Devos.

While the mutated tree was the centerpiece of the garden retreat, the Terrans had added plenty of other interesting works.

One of them was a sculpture of a brave soldier that was made of hyper materials that were attuned to different emotions.

When Ves approached, it sought to read his mood. The statue seemed to sense his amusement, which caused it to drop its intimidating warclub and pick up a glass of beer before toasting it in his direction.

"How remarkable."

He could tell that the sculpture did not incorporate any electronics in the slightest. It was just a solid mass of hyper materials chosen for their sensitivity to different emotions and their malleability under specific circumstances.

The sculptor had combined the different hyper materials together and somehow imbued them with spiritual programming that instructed them to behave in different ways depending on the input they received.

This was pure hyper technology and E-technology. It showcased the ingenuity of a Terran artist and also proved the viability of creating machines that completely got rid of any dependency on electrical circuits, whether conventional or archetech.

"There is a proposal to design a mech that relies on the same methods used to create this sculpture." Master Laila Devos commented. "You should be able to deduce the reasons why such a 'mech' can be useful. In a more optimistic era, our ancient clan would not have any qualms about issuing the funding needed to explore such an interesting idea. Even if a full hyper mech is so weak that it is thoroughly uncompetitive, we are always vigilant towards new technological paradigms that can help us break past the limits of current technology."

Ves observed the statue with increasing curiosity. It must have picked up his altered mood, as it had begun to pick up a nearby flower and examine it as if it was the most fascinating object in the cosmos.

Ves and Blinky paid even closer attention to the hyper sculpture than before. They confirmed that this was not the work of any electronics or an external device. The statue completely relied on the manipulation of E energy to interpret information and react to it, all without using anything relating to conventional technology.

He had a feeling he could replicate this statue without the use of modern production equipment.

He just needed the bare minimum to shape different metals and hammer them together.

The real secret rested in the spiritual programming of the hyper object.

Ves needed to imprint it with a thorough set of instructions and parameters and make sure it stuck.

Of course, Ves was a different artist from the one that produced this particular sculpture. He was much more inclined to simply turn his creation alive and allow it to make its own decisions based on a set of guidelines.

"Thank you for showing me this." He spoke. "This work, though relatively simple in construction, has opened my eyes to what E-technology is capable of. I never imagined putting it to use in this way."

"You are not the only individual who has taken to E-technology like a duck to water. Far outside of your little base, there are many innovators and visionaries who have embraced the new technologies and learned how to realize their ideas based on what we have access to. We may not have the ability to make our creations alive, but we can make them useful in our own ways."

The underlying message here was that the Terrans possessed the ability to innovate as well.

Ves may have been able to shock the public by introducing groundbreaking innovations such as Carmine mechs, but he was still a single mech designer.

Red humanity had many more brilliant minds in its midst.

The Terran Alliance claimed many of them in their ranks.

While the Red Association most definitely sought to poach these geniuses, prodigies and late bloomers within their own ranks, the Terrans were proud and did not surrender to the mechers often.

"I have never thought that I am the only person that can forcefully drag the mech industry forward." Ves explained himself. "I am very much cognizant that my unusual specialization allows me to spot and realize possibilities that were not available to us anymore. That does not mean that I am blind to others who have made contributions of their own. For example, the First Sword Mark III could never become a full superdimensional mech without the cooperation of the Mech Supremacist Faction. The powerful seed that we exchanged from your ancient clan is not a treasure that we could have grown in our own labs."

His humility was not false, as evidenced by the sculpture's reaction. It had carefully put down the flower and lowered its posture while adopting a servile expression.

The Terran Master looked satisfied with this response. "Good. I was afraid that your rapid successes may have overinflated your sense of self-importance. That is not to say that your confidence is misplaced. You have given all of us a much better chance of resisting the native aliens with your contributions to red humanity. Your kinship networks alone have rooted out the scourge of cosmopolitans in most of our important institutions. If not for the signs that the human traitors are already in the process of developing countermeasures against detection, we may be able to keep this pest outside of our ranks longer."

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developing countermeasures against detection, we may be able to keep this pest outside of our ranks longer."

Wait, what?

"Have the cosmopolitans already managed to find a way to defeat our kinship networks?" Ves asked with a frown.

"Not yet, but we know they are working on it. Their solution is not perfect and heavily limits their infiltration attempts. As far as we know, they have attempted to kidnap loyal workers before temparing with their cranial implants. In one case, we found a cranial implant that has secretly turned into a hijacking module. When the unsuspecting individual receives an encrypted data feed, a controller can knock the compromised individual unconscious, take over the body and pilot it by remote. The cosmopolitans can also make this measure more secure by removing the reliance on signal transmissions by installing an AI that is programmed to perform different missions, as we have discovered in three other victims. Since their minds and souls are technically untouched, the kinship network is not immediately able to discover that anything is amiss."

That was an incredibly devious but apparently effective means of compromising loyal people!

"Did it work?"

"Partially." Master Laila Devos honestly replied. "The kinship network did not detect the moment the compromised individuals began to act suspiciously, but our conventional monitoring system immediately flagged the abnormalities and alerted security. Due to their sensitive identities and locations, the programming of our monitoring system is highly sensitive to abnormal behavior. The officers on site ascertained relatively quickly that the original individuals have been hijacked and that they are not acting on their own accord."

Although the incidents ended well, that was because other security systems had covered for the failure of the kinship network.

Ves grew incredibly concerned. He had always put a lot of faith in the infallibility of his kinship networks. To hear that the Cosmopolitan Movement had made so much strides in exploiting a vulnerability damaged his confidence in his work.

Every kinship became vulnerable, including his own Larkinson Network.

Even if the Golden Cat was able to multitask remarkably well, it was impossible for her to keep an eye on millions of different Larkinsons at the same time. They also deserved to enjoy their measure of privacy.

All of this meant that the cosmopolitans had a possibility of infiltrating the Larkinson Clan.

Even if the compromised individuals only had a short window of opportunity to steal confidential data or commit hasty acts of sabotage before other security systems detected any impropriety, it still represented a lot of danger!

His fears grew so much that the hyper sculpture quickly reflected his mindstate. It openly hunched its body while adopting an expression of absolute terror.

Ves was starting to get annoying at how it reflected his emotions so well.

He wordlessly turned around and moved away from the stupid statue. He stopped when he reached a vivid orange plant that not only gave off a pleasant scent, but also happened to float in mid-air.

Its roots branched out into nothing, yet the plant was able to survive and thrive anyway.

Was it sustaining itself by absorbing E energy and air alone?

That shouldn't have been possible unless... it had turned into a mutated plant.

It was so small, though. Ves found it difficult to believe that such a small and modest plant had crossed the extraordinary threshold, yet maintained its current stable form.

Was this the work of the mysterious gardeners?

Ves began to develop a greater desire to learn about them and find out what they were capable of. Nurturing plants was important, especially since many of them could be used to produce special elixirs that could advance an individual's cultivation.

"This plant is a small natural wonder." Master Laila spoke with a tone of appreciation. "Our scientists have derived useful insights and data from it. Whether they can convert that into anything useful remains to be seen, but as long as they study enough mutated exoflora, they will slowly be able to introduce derivative products that can benefit a large number of people. This mutated plant is one of the reasons why we must fight to retain our possession of as many planets as possible."

"Oh?"

"Most of our attempts to induce mutations into exofauna and exoflora on space stations and starships have failed. For whatever reasons, organisms can only undergo semi-controlled but extremely powerful mutations when they reside on planets. They possess unidentified qualities that can nurture and bless the individuals who are made from their minerals and have grown up on their surfaces. This is the strongest proof that we have gathered to date that a planet directly influences the growth and evolution of organisms that reside within its atmosphere."

There was only one reason why a Terran would speak so passionately about the relationship between planets and organisms.

"Old Earth is located in a different galactic neighborhood." Ves pointed out. "Besides, even if we still resided in the old galaxy, you Terrans are notorious for heavily limiting the amount of visitors and temporary residents that are allowed to land on the planet that has birthed our race. The overwhelming majority of humans have grown up on different planets."

"That is true, Professor Larkinson, and we do not begrudge those who have never had the pleasure of setting foot on Old Earth. It is still a gift that can help any human. I cherish my memory of doing so for the rest of my life. When I finally had to leave the original Sol System, I came back with renewed energy and determination. This is the effect that a planet can have on humans in the Age of Mechs. Although we have not yet gathered any conclusive proof, I believe that the effects are even greater now that we have entered the Age of Dawn. Exobeasts and exoplants are able to grow stronger and develop their sapience. Intelligent species such as our own human race cannot remain unaffected."

Ves was not sure whether that was true. He held little interest in the topic. Even if living on a planet provided certain benefits, he heavily disliked the downside of being pinned down in a single static location!

He would rather stay safe on a starship that could travel anywhere. What he just heard from Master Laila Devos did not change his stance in the slightest.

Chapter 6904 Superdimensional Globe

As Ves continued to chat with Master Laila Rebecca Devos about the artworks that her ancient clan had put up for display, she continued to diverge into unexpectedly weighty subjects.

It put Ves on edge. He gradually realized that there may be more to this farewell banquet than sending him off with a wave.

Ves felt snookered by the Devos Ancient Clan. He thought he had built a relationship based on mutual trust and goodwill.

Right now, that trust and goodwill had begun to erode when he started to pick up more and more clues that the Devosans or rather the Terrans were up to no good.

A mech designer as clever as Master Laila could not possibly miss his growing suspicion and unease.

However, for whatever reason, the old woman did not bring up the subject directly, but continued to show him different plants and artworks that added a lot of class to the Hymn of the Trees.

Ves suspected that the Devosans sought to test him. They probed his reactions and evaluated his opinions. They likely planned to tailor their plan based on all of the gathered data.

A part of Ves wanted to spark a bit of mischief and deliberately give off false responses.

That was not a good idea.

Not only would the Wind of Destruction be able to detect Ves' lack of sincerity, but it would also invalidate the test and risk eliciting an inappropriate reaction from the Devosans.

As much as Ves disliked it, he would be better off if he simply played along and allowed the Terrans to take his measure.

Master Laila Devos brought him to a more secluded corner of the garden retreat. They even had to pass through a privacy screen that obscured the artwork.

As soon as Ves glimpsed at the piece in question, he understood why the Devosans wanted to keep it out of sight.

"What the..."

The Devosans had taken a cow-sized piece of hull-grade superdimensional matter and shaped it into an intricate sculpture.

The floating superdimensional orb had clearly been shaped to resemble a planet. A single artist had meticulously carved and shaped the dark metal exterior to follow the contours of islands and continents.

The landmasses themselves possessed a lot of depth and texture.

The artist had playfully carved out rivers and mountains.

The proportions looked a little exaggerated, as if the sculptor had made a passing attempt at realism, only to prefer to make everything look more dramatic than normal.

What was interesting was that the deeper valleys that represented the lakes, seas and oceans were not empty.

Instead, the artist had filled them with pure phasewater. The exotic liquid had not been processed in any way, therefore causing it to lap across the deeper surfaces of the globe as if it was being perpetually disturbed.

Due to its strong and untamed superdimensional properties, the globe continually generated spatial activity.

It made the metal orb look far more than just a metal mass that was partially covered by a liquid.

The interaction between the dynamic phasewater and static superdimensional matter produced continuous ripples that gave Ves the illusion that the planet was constantly transforming before his eyes.

The globe even appeared to spin around its axis due to its own spatial forces.

It took a lot of calculations and careful manipulation in order to make the superdimensional artwork spin at a constant and consistent rate.

Ves grew a little concerned about whether it was safe to stand so close to the superdimensional globe.

When he looked around, he could not spot any obvious devices. He knew that the Devosans had carefully placed space suppressors and maybe other precautions that carefully prevented the artwork from damaging the surroundings.

That said, they were not quite effective, as he could still feel small ripples running through his body, making him feel a little weird, but no more.

He possessed plenty of defenses and also possessed a natural resistance against spatial disturbances due to his phase lord cultivation.

"Fascinating, is it not?" Master Laila Devos finally broke the silence. "When one of our Master Mech Designers requested a sample of hull-grade superdimensional matter, he claimed he would use it to conduct an experiment on developing a superior shield generator by replacing phasewater. Instead, he squandered his resources earmarked for research and development on this... curiosity."

"Did you punish the guy for misappropriating strategic resources and wasting your time?"

"We did, but we also rewarded him for creating a novel meant to experience the splendor of Old Earth through this depiction."

It figured. The Terrans were obsessed with Old Earth. Even now after they were separated by a much larger distance from the Milky Way than before, they could not stop themselves from pining after their lost home planet.

Any subject related to Old Earth instantly caused the Terrans to lose their rationality. Not even the most intelligent Master Mech Designers were immune to this effect.

"So why did you bring me here?" He asked. "Not that I appreciate a good artwork, but this superdimensional representation of Old Earth is not particularly good in my eyes. It doesn't make much use of the remarkable properties of superdimensional matter to produce a more interesting effect."

Master Laila smiled in response. "You have noticed. That is good. You are correct. We did not bring you here to admire this sculpture. We instead brought you here as an extra precautionary measure. The Wind of Destruction keeping watch from above is capable of preventing nearly every instance of data leakage, but not all. This superdimensional artwork and the devices we installed to contain it is generating enough turbulence to disrupt even the most hidden signal transmissions."

"I see. You want to speak to me in absolute confidence."

"I do. These precautions are not absolutely necessary. Our plans have already reached a stage where we can proceed regardless of whether they are leaked to the wrong parties. Nonetheless, we can continue to accrue advantages the longer we are able to maintain secrecy."

Ves started closely at the old woman. From his frequent interactions with her, he felt she had strayed too far away from mech design.

She had become a consummate politician and spent way too much time and mental energy on scheming, management and other tedious affairs.

While a mech designer of her stature naturally assumed leadership duties, there came a point where they became too consumed by their power and authority.

If they did not leverage their power and access to further their own mech designs, then they had already deviated from the purity of their profession.

Was it possible for Master Laila Devos to become a Star Designer? Perhaps. She was not doing herself any favors by continuing to place other affairs above her own mech designs.

Of course, Ves did not intend to voice his true feelings about the old Master. She was smart and experienced enough to understand her own situation. Maybe all of her actions made sense from her perspective.

"What is the matter? Please tell me clearly."

"Since we are in a secure enough location, I am finally permitted to divulge the truth to you. We wanted to give you advance warning of what may come. The delay may only last a number of weeks, but the changes we are preparing are enormous. The truth is that we are preparing to sever the Terran Alliance from the reign of the Red Three and declare our independence from greater human civilization. While we acknowledge our blood ties with the rest of red humanity, no longer will we tolerate the rule of non-Terrans. The mechers and fleeters will be asked to evacuate all of their direct members, employees and other close dependents. Soon enough, the Terran Alliance shall exist as an independent star nation. I can tell you that the Rubarthans are preparing much the same."

"..."

Ves fell silent for a time. Did he hear that right?

He already knew that many parties had already sought to fight against the yoke of the Big Two back in the old galaxy, but the Red Ocean was supposed to be different!

Even if the Terrans and the Rubarthans in the dwarf galaxy hated the mechers and the fleeters, that did not mean that Ves supported an extensive dissolution of the current order!

"Are you truly going through with this, Master? Can't it wait until our civilization has beaten back the alien invasion and bought a lot of respite for the troops? It makes no sense to split red humanity up when we need unity the most!"

Ves had known from the events unfolding in the Milky Way that the Terrans and the Rubarthans really hated the mechers and fleeters. It was not a surprise that the former would try to shake off the rule of the latter if they saw a good opportunity.

However, the situation was completely different in the Red Ocean!

Against overwhelming external enemies, red humanity needed to do its utmost to defend its lines. Any miscoordination or mutual suspicion could doom their race to near-extinction!

However, Master Laila Devos appeared completely unmoved.

"We disagree with your statement. Humans have never truly united. We are too numerous and different from each other. Unity is an empty promise. It sounds noble, but it is devoid of any real substance. When the linefighters are resisting the aliens, are they doing this for goals such as unity? Absolutely not. It is too abstract for most humans. They fight for reasons that are closer to their heart. They fight for their families. They fight for their 'states'. They fight their culture and way of life. None are more dedicated to their nation and people than Terrans such as ourselves. If we declare our independence and tell our soldiers that they can contribute to the refounding of a sovereign Terran empire, then they will fight against our enemies twice as hard."

The Terrans held many grievances towards the mechers and the fleeters. The extensive deprivation of sovereignty rankled them the most!

Even in the new frontier, the relations between these old powers continued to remain poor. There was too much bad blood between them for this dispute to end.

"Why now?"

"Because we can afford to take the risk." Master Laila said with a confident grin. "If we start sooner, we risk bringing the wrath of the Red Two down on us. If we start too late, then our civilization may have suffered too much damage in the process. We predicted that the current time is right. The mechers and the fleeters are too tied up in defending the frontlines or protecting their key star systems from alien incursions. They cannot effectively respond if we try our best to break away from their institutions."

"What about cooperation? The Terran Alliance is only guarded by a single god pilot. You need the help of several dreadnoughts to hold the line. Are you going to kick them out as well?"

"We will fight to preserve our own territory and beginnings of our reborn empire without relying on fickle assistance. We have made the strategic decision to drive away any mobile assets and personnel from the Red Alliance and the Red Fleet. Before you ask, we have not excluded the Red Collective."

Many thoughts went through Ves' minds. He absolutely understood how valuable it was to learn that the Terrans had been performing a lot of investigations.

"Is this it, then? Are you seriously going to sever the Terran Alliance from the rest of human civilization? Won't we grow weaker as a response?"

"No." Master Laila Devos grinned. "That is because without the taboos imposed by our former rulers, we can make use of tech that was previously hidden from us all. We have already revised our mech designs to incorporate shield link or energy link nodes."

She raised her arm and activated a fuzzy projection that displayed a slideshow of mech designs that all possessed common additions.

That was when Ves realized without a doubt that the Terrans were serious about this. They had very clearly slapped on shield link or energy link transceivers thinking that they would offer better protection and greater endurance!

By blatantly violating the taboo that kept these high technologies exclusive to the Red Association and the Red Fleet, the Terrans clearly showed their determination to build

up forces that would grant them the power to defend themselves against the mechers and the fleters!

Ves made another scary guess. "Since you are going as far as violating the prohibition on support link technology, are you going to field warships as well?"

Master Laila Devos grimly smiled. "Yes. No longer will we keep our starships unarmed because of old paranoia about destroying ourselves. The Age of Conquest is well behind us now. We are old and wise enough to make responsible use of warships. As soon as we publish our declaration of independence, many of our shipyards and other facilities are assigned to hastily mount whatever weapon systems that can be installed on the vessels on short notice. It will cut into the production of new starships, but this is a necessary step."

Chapter 6905 The Terran Gambit

Ves almost couldn't believe what he heard.

The Terrans and the Rubarthans actually plotted to declare independence!

The unified civilization of red humanity was hardly perfect, but Ves did not think it was bad either.

The mechers and fleters in the Red Ocean had mellowed out a lot more. The founding of the Red Collective should have eased the contradictions between the different human groups and provided a stronger bridge for cooperation.

The creation of Human High Command served as another bridge for cooperation. The brightest military strategists and planners put down all of their factional squabbles and came together in order to formulate a single orderly strategy to defend their race against the threat of alien aggression.

Many people assumed that the first-rate colonial superstates would interpret the latest moves as a form of reconciliation. Even if the measures were mostly temporary, the goodwill extended by the Red Two should have buried any ambition to secede from unified red humanity.

It turned out that Ves was too naive.

His blind spot prevented him from recognizing the shady undercurrents.

He spent way too much with the Survivalists, who tended to think in absolute rational terms. They tended to take logic to an extreme, to the point of disregarding almost any form of love and sentimentality.

The Terrans at the very least did not think that way. Ves had spent enough time in Terran space to understand that these folk clung to their heritage and traditions like invisible suits of armor.

If this turned out to be the case, then a possibility existed where the proud Terrans made a decision that fulfilled their long-held dreams of gaining independence!

Even if they lost the protection of the mechers and the fleeters during a period where their colonial superstate was more vulnerable to alien incursions than ever, these stubborn fools insisted on fighting and dying as Terrans as opposed to red humans!

It was a form of tribalism that may have gone too far!

If the Terrans were the only people who suffered from their idiocy, then that was fine for Ves.

Ves could foresee the emergence of numerous barriers between the Terran Alliance, the Rubarthan Pact and the Red Ocean Union. All of this would hinder the flow of trade and military assistance between the colonial alliances.

Friction was bad!

Once all three colonial alliances withdrew into themselves, they would find it much more difficult to trade the resources they possessed in excess with the resources that they lacked.

More egregiously, many people and organizations would be asked to pick sides. Very few could remain neutral in an era of increased polarization and mutual suspicion.

Those that pledged for one side could no longer easily engage in trade and travel with the other sides.

All of these consequences and more would ultimately affect red humanity's ability to repel the real enemy.

No matter how much Ves tried to think of the positives of this radical move, he couldn't see any obvious upsides to this extremely dangerous gambit.

Was pride that important to the Terrans?

"You still do not support our goal." Master Laila Rebecca Devos said as she stared deeply into Ves' eyes.

"Of course not." Ves scowled. "You should know quite well what the consequences of sowing further division will be! We are barely holding on as a single unified race and civilization. The moment you guys begin to split apart from each other, we will be facing the native aliens as three or more completely separate groups! Dont' you think this sounds stupid? Even the native aliens have chosen to set aside their grudges and band together under the umbrella of the Red Cabal. What you are proposing is the complete opposite!"

Though his words made sense, Master Laila shook her head in rejection. She completely denied his arguments.

"Our situation is different from that of the native aliens. They are inherently weak, thus they have no choice but to group together in order to pool their resources together. We are different. We are the direct descendants of the Terran Empire. The old galaxy used to be in the palm of our hands, and we have the potential to grasp the new frontier in the future. One of the reasons why we cannot realize our destiny is because the mechers and the fleeters continue to shackle us. They deprive us of our sovereignty and impose greater restrictions on the use of force than they apply to themselves. Why are they the only ones allowed to field warships? Why do they have sole permission to employ weapons of mass destruction? What gives them the right to tell us how to live?!"

Ves could never imagine that a woman as old and wise as Master Devos could turn into such a fanatical Terran!

He could sense that she was not putting on an act. She completely voiced her true feelings in an unreserved manner. In this place of safety and privacy, she had no qualms about exposing her true thoughts to Ves.

"The reason why the mechers and the fleeters get to be in charge is because they became the victors after the dust had settled at the end of the Age of Conquest. They ended up becoming more powerful than all of the other ruined powers at the time." Ves explained.

Master Laila crossed her arms and scoffed. "That is over 400 years ago and in another galaxy besides. The Red Ocean represents a new start for all of us. I will readily acknowledge that the Red Association and the Red Fleet have greater forces than us, but they are all being tied down by the native aliens. This is why we are planning to declare our independence in the short term. It is inconceivable that the mechers and the fleeters will turn away from the frontlines in order to wage a civil war against us. Even with their god pilots, they simply cannot afford to violate their own principles and slaughter fellow humans out of a selfish desire to remain in charge."

That... sounded logical enough. Ves had to admit that the timing they chose was indeed devious enough. Regardless of whether the RA and the RF wanted to retain their reputation as the 'good guys', there was no excuse for them to use military force to beat back the secessionists and subjugate the 'rebellious' territories.

Ves knew quite well how the Survivalists thought. They would consider the breakaway event to be a *fait accompli* and accept the new status quo.

So long as the price of intervention was far greater than the price of doing nothing, then the incredibly rational Survivalists would definitely prefer to choose the latter!

The other factions would follow suit. No matter how prideful and greedy they may be, none of them would be eager to turn away from a righteous war for survival in order to engage in brutal human infighting.

However, just because the mechers and the fleeters could not do anything to bring the Terrans and the Rubarthans back into the fold did not mean they had no way to retaliate.

Ves could foresee that relations between the Red Two and the secessionists would deteriorate by a huge extent.

Even if they did not turn into outright enemies, the mechers and the fleeters had plenty of ways to make the secessionists miserable!

From withholding valuable technological and material support to trying to funnel alien invaders into the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact, the revenge of the RA and the RF would definitely make the 'traitors' suffer!

All of this was bad news for people that just wanted to survive the Red War.

The greater the internal division of human civilization in the new frontier, the lower their chances of making it out alive!

"Don't you care at all about whether your stunt will torpedo our chances of survival?" Ves asked in a frustrated voice.

Master Laila smirked in response. "Our assessment differs from yours, but for argument's sake, let us assume that your words ring true. Our reaction to this is this: it is better to die free than to live as slaves. For over four centuries, the Terran people, culture and institutions have come under constant assault by our supposed rulers. Have you ever put one moment of thought in how ridiculous it is for all of us to fall under the yoke of a trade organization based on mechs and a coalition of fleets that had betrayed the nations they used to serve? We refuse to recognize them as legitimate or even competent rulers. The best credit we can give them is that they have restored stability to our civilization during the Age of Mechs, but that is all. Their usefulness has come to an end, so they must be removed."

"..."

Ves could feel her determination. She truly meant what she said when she preferred to die free.

These were the words of a fanatic who believed that her cause ranked higher than her survival!

Ves had a very bad impression of fanaticism in any form.

He used to think that it was only the religious types that fell victim to extremism.

It turned out that nationalists were just as prone to going crazy!

The old Terran Master's expression softened. "Look at it from our perspective, Ves. If red humanity is already doomed to go extinct, then there is little harm in regaining our sovereignty. If we are about to perish, then let us regain our dignity as a star empire that has once led the entire human race. We may die, but we shall do so as the proud descendants of the Terran Empire as opposed to the slaves of the RA and the RF. This is our version of the Final Glory line that you have recently released."

That was completely different! Ves did not think the two solutions were comparable to each other!

"What if there is a chance that we can survive as long as we fight hard enough?"

"Then we fight hard." Master Laila grimly smiled. "I believe with all of my heart that if every Terran soldier learns that we have taken back our sovereignty from the mechers and the fleeters, they shall swell with pride and fight our enemies harder than ever! Our peak ace pilots such as the Renewer of Terra, the Messenger of Silence, the Golden and the Everlasting shall rejoice and fight with the future of the Terran Alliance at stake! Along with superdimensional technology, this may just be the catalyst they need to ascend to godhood and become the newly appointed protectors of our dream to forge a new galactic empire!"

Crazy!

These Terrans were crazy!

Yet... the argument espoused by the Master Mech Designer did not sound entirely unrealistic.

If this insane stunt truly sparked a new wave of nationalism and elevated the moods of all of the peak ace pilots, then perhaps they might have a better chance of surviving the road to no return.

This was because high-ranking pilots never operated according to objective truths and logic!

They operated according to subjective feelings and opinions!

If they thought that founding a new Terran nation state in the Red Ocean was the best thing ever, then they just feel so good that their chances of advancing successfully may increase by as much as 30 percent or whatever!

Truth did not matter in the Age of Dawn!

Belief held more power in this brand new era!

Although Ves wanted to argue against it, he could not come up with any good counterarguments.

Perhaps the Terrans had a good point.

But only if their extremely risky gambit succeeded.

So long as their belief in a sovereign Terran nation state surpassed the very real material disadvantages of breaking relations with the Red Association and the Red Fleet, then the Terrans would win the greatest bet of their lives!

Chapter 6906 Fence Sitters

Ves frowned while pressing his fingers against his temple.

He was not suffering from a headache, but he certainly did not feel good after contemplating the possible ripple effects from the coming act of secession.

Was there anything Ves could do to stop the Terrans and the Rubarthans from going through with their insanely risky plan?

No.

As much as these people respected him, he had no voice when it came to their geopolitical ambitions. He was a provider of technology, not a leader of men or a visionary that could unite red humanity under a common flag.

What he managed to do with the Larkinson Clan was trivial compared to the much more difficult endeavor of keeping the Terrans and the Rubarthans aligned with the Red Association and the Red Fleet.

There was too much bad blood between them. Their grievances only began a little over 4 centuries ago. Since the start of the Age of Mechs, the mechers and the fleeters had only generated further resentment among the subjugated.

Even though Ves believed that it was absolutely stupid for the Terrans and the Rubarthans to settle their scores with their current overlords, voicing his opinion wouldn't change anything.

In fact, Ves suspected that not even god pilots or Star Designers could convince them to abort their plans!

This was far from a solitary initiative. This was the collective will of the first-rate colonial superstates.

Over the course of the Age of Mechs, the Big Two tried so hard to beat the pride out of the Terrans and the Rubarthans.

They failed.

The latter had managed to defend their heritage and remaining rights too well.

For whatever reason, the mechers and the fleeters failed to press too hard to dismantle the strong culture and traditions of the superstates.

Ves suspected that the MTA and the CFA originally intended to play the long game. Since enacting too many changes in a short amount of time was liable to provoke a

backlash, the mechers and the fleters likely intended to erode the Greater Terran United Confederation and the New Rubarth Empire over the course of many more centuries.

People had long memories, but when all of the people who lived through the days where the Terrans and the Rubarthans reigned supreme had died, their descendants might not hold as much fire towards the restoration of their star empires anymore.

After all, they grew up in a time where sovereign human empires had already turned into relics of a distant past.

Perhaps it might take a millenia or so to wear out the Terran or Rubarthan identity, but the Big Two were willing to wait this long.

After all, they possessed absolute military supremacy. Even if the first-rate superstates hid a few secret trump cards, they could never match the might of the two hegemon that had access to much of the resources of the Milky Way Galaxy.

It was unfortunate that the sudden release of the Auto Heretic line, the acts of sabotage committed by the Big Two's many enemies and the catastrophic outbreak of the Carmine Revolution completely disrupted the layout of the Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance!

The Big Two faced their first true crisis that threatened their continued hegemony in the old galaxy. Their enemies had been plotting their downfall for a long time, and now that they had an opening, they pounced upon it with great enthusiasm!

Ves thought that the MTA and the CFA had it coming because they were too arrogant and because original humanity had no real enemies aside from themselves.

It was human nature to resort to internal squabbles and infighting when they did not face too much external pressure.

People had grown too complacent in the Milky Way. The aliens that lived in the other half of the galaxy presented no real threat, so far too many humans directed their animosity and hatred towards each other.

This was one of the main reasons why the Big Two failed to stop the Carmine Revolution from completely upending the current order in the old galaxy!

Ves naturally assumed that it would be different in the Red Ocean.

In the face of full-blown hostility from all of the native alien races, the heavily outnumbered red humans should have recognized that it was detrimental to turn their weapons against each other.

During the last decade of the Age of Mechs, many human forces fought as many battles against each other as they fought the aliens whose territories they desired!

This was typical human behavior. The Big Two was too lazy to reign in the pioneers and opportunists that sought to carve out their territories in the new frontier.

Yet when the Age of Dawn commenced, pretty much all overt battles between different human groups quickly dwindled to nothing.

No one dared to waste their soldiers and mechs in petty territorial disputes when the native aliens threatened to roll over all humans regardless of allegiances!

Ves saw this as a good sign. It showed that red humans could rise above their greed and old resentments and focus on the bigger picture.

He was so wrong.

Human nature could be suppressed, but it could never be erased entirely.

People were unable to get rid of their bad habits.

Ves felt a chill running through his spine as he thought about how many plans would come to ruin if the Terrans and the Rubarthans truly succeeded in dividing human-occupied space into at least three separate pieces.

He looked at Master Laila Devos again.

Now that she had unveiled the enormous truth to him, he could never look at her the same way again.

She had become more than just a respectable elder, an accomplished Master Mech Designer and a wise leader figure.

In his eyes, she had turned into a fanatic. She had openly conveyed her willingness to throw all caution to the wind just to fulfill an irrational goal.

How could Ves possibly feel comfortable with Master Laila and the rest of the Terrans after that?

Who knew what other harebrained schemes they had secretly cooked up in their backyards.

Perhaps Ves was leaving New Constantinople at a good time. He definitely did not want to remain close to any Terran center of power when the secessionists finally made their move!

He took a deep breath.

"When?" He asked.

Ves urgently needed to collect more information. The more he knew about this gambit, the more he could protect himself from the aftermath.

"We are still waiting for a trigger event." Master Laila replied. "I am sworn to secrecy on this matter, so I cannot divulge any further details about the timing. I can only tell you that it will devastate the Red Association and the Red Fleet. The confluence of events will batter them so badly that they will not even think of bringing us back into the fold."

That sounded ominous.

Ves wisely did not probe any further, knowing that this was a secret that she intended to keep.

"Why tell me?" He said. "You could have easily said nothing and unveil the big surprise when you guys are finally ready to secede."

"There are multiple reasons why I am informing you in advance. First, our plans have developed to a point where the Secret Department of the Red Collective is likely to collect enough conclusive proof of our plans. A secret keeper will likely approach you in the coming weeks to inform you about our measures. You would have resented us for not telling you even though we have remained in contact with each other for years. By telling you upfront, we are conveying our sincerity to you and your clan."

That caused Ves to narrow his eyes in suspicion. "Are you trying to drag the Larkinson Clan into this grand scheme of yours?"

"No." Master Laila Devos shook her head. "We do not hold any expectations towards you and your clan. The Terran Alliance plans to secede on its own initiative. We do not insist that any of its allies and business partners must follow suit. It is not our place to make decisions on your behalf. We have thoroughly analyzed you and your clan and have come to understand that you prefer to be fence sitters."

That caused Ves to frown.

"I like to see it as remaining neutral. I am already burdened with enough problems. It is detrimental for me to attract more trouble."

"We can respect that, professor. You do not have to massage the truth to us. You wish to avoid commitments and maintain cordial relations with all of us. You and your clan are too heavily involved with the Red Three to break up relations with them. At the same time, you have developed beneficial ties with the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact. That is not necessarily detrimental in our opinion. Even when our superstate is prepared to break many relations to the Red Association and the Red Fleet, we still have a need for bridges such as your clan to maintain indirect channels with the two superorganizations."

That sounded a lot more magnanimous and far-sighted than Ves expected. That showed that the Terrans weren't being completely irrational.

Their goals may be crazy, but they were still smart enough to formulate the right processes.

"I don't know how much use we can be, but I do not object to serving as an intermediary between you and the Red Two." Ves carefully said. "By the way, I have noticed that you have never directed any animosity towards the newest superorganization. It will still be pretty awkward for the first-rate colonial superstates to sever most of their ties with the Red Two while leaving out the Red Collective. What are your intentions?"

"We do not harbor any contempt towards the Red Collective because it is unrelated to the many crimes committed by the mechers and the fleeters. It is too new to be stained with the sins of the past, and we also happen to hold considerable power and influence within its ranks. Even without that, we are confident that the RC will naturally be inclined towards neutrality. The repercussions of taking any side are too great. I believe that the collies will bury their heads in the sand and outright ignore the hostility that is brewing between us and our would-be masters."

The Master Mech Designer was probably right about this. Ves knew that the RC was too new and lacking in confidence. It had yet to build up a strong reputation. It also lacked a cadre that was powerful and accomplished enough to drive strong policies.

Neither side had to worry about the Red Collective mucking up the balance of power. This was already the best outcome to the ambitious Terrans and Rubarthans.

Ves lowered his posture, not out of defeat, but out of resignation.

There was no one powerful enough to stop this insanity from proceeding. Even if the news somehow got leaked to the Red Association and the Red Fleet, what could they do? The starship had already left the port. The vessel would soon engage in FTL travel.

"I... appreciate it that you thought to inform me of this development beforehand." He eventually said. "I recognize your gesture of goodwill. What you have told me is enough for me to make a few preparations and make sure that I won't accidentally get in the way. I hope you can understand that it is not in my best interests to voice my support for your attempts at secession. I won't do anything to stop you from fulfilling your long-held dream, but do not interpret that as a signal of approval."

"Your approval is inconsequential to us." Master Laila Devos began to grin. "This is because our rebellion is in your clan's best interest. Our goals are more aligned than you think. Only when you are able to remove the shackles that the mechers and to a lesser extent the fleters have placed on you will you recognize that the reign of the mechers and fleters is already doomed from the start of the Age of Dawn."

Chapter 6907 Initially Unpopular

As the secret conversation between Ves and Master Laila Devos neared its end, tension still existed between the two mech designers.

They were too different from each other. They belonged to completely different generations and grew up under radically different environments. Their life trajectories were far apart from each other.

Given all of these differences, was it any surprise that they failed to establish a close connection to each other?

"The fundamental reason why you are unable to understand our desire for independence and nationhood is because you have never become a part of a strong state." The old woman remarked. "Think back on the first two or three decades of your life. How did you feel about the Bright Republic? How loyal were you to your home state? Do you think that you would have been willing to sacrifice your life to defend your state and its people?"

Though Ves rarely thought about his past, he couldn't help but look back and recall what it was like.

He used to be a lot more naive, ill-informed and muddle-headed at the time. Yet Ves admired his old self for possessing a noble heart and mind.

Although he was not exemplary in any way, there was still a part of him that sincerely wanted to dedicate his life to protecting the state and more importantly the civilians that could use his protection.

Unfortunately, this noble sentiment did not last.

Ves let out another sigh in regret. "Ever since the Bright Republic sold me out, my faith in states and the powers that hold the reins of power over there have plummeted. Subsequent events have only reinforced my initial impression. Perhaps I have been extraordinarily unlucky during my journeys, but many states that had a chance to impress me ultimately did the opposite. By this time, I dare not trust any government or comparable institution. This is why I am more than willing to become a 'fence sitter' once you enact your secession plan. I don't dare to put my future in the hands of any powerful nation state."

"And that is why you prefer to build your own nation state instead." Master Laila smirked as if the two were the same kind of conspirators. "Our plans do not necessarily conflict with yours. In fact, your clan stands to gain considerable rights and operating space once we have beaten back the oppressive control of the mechers and the fleeters. Your clan's neutral position puts you in a favorable position. We bear all of the risks, but you do not. If we succeed in our aims, then you stand to receive all of the benefits despite your lack of active participation."

In other words, she accused the Larkinsons of freeloading, yet her tone clearly conveyed her lack of care towards this opportunistic behavior.

The Terrans did not need the help of the Larkinson Clan, but they were more than willing to welcome the Larkinsons into the fold once their gambit delivered results.

Ves could see that even if the Larkinson Clan continued to maintain its innocence, far too many people would naturally think that it was part of the same clique. Publishing denials would not work as the masses would rather believe in what they thought was the case. It would be an uphill battle to prove that the Larkinsons emphatically did not pick any side.

"Perhaps you are right." He said with a frown that grew deeper. "My faith in government institutions has sunk so much that I can only extend my trust to my clan, and even that may not be as reliable as before. There is something... broken in me. What is unmade cannot become whole again. I really can't bring myself to put my trust in any government entity. Perhaps that sounds blasphemy to you, but I am merely the product of my own experiences. What I have witnessed throughout the years... has given me precious little reason to place much value in states, sovereign or otherwise."

Master Laila expressed pity to Ves. "You poor boy. It is your misfortune that you were born far outside Terran space. If you had been born in our midst, you would have grown up in a 'state' that is fully deserving of your loyalty and faith. The dark days of

the Age of Conquest may have forced us to bend the knee, but we have never been broken. We still uphold many of the values and principles that we revere for millenia. If you were a Terran like us, then any reasoning is redundant. You would have thrown your full support behind our initiative regardless of the risks."

"I don't necessarily agree with you. It is exactly because I began my life in a weak third-rate state that I fought so hard to rise up the ranks and uplift myself. Only when you are at the bottom will you have the greatest motivation to rise to the top. It is unlikely that I would have been as successful as I am today if I was born in a prosperous first-rate superstate."

They could never know for sure. Ves was born in the Bright Republic rather than other places. He was unique in many different ways. It was impossible to predict how his life would have unfolded if he grew up in a completely different place. Not even prophets could make such predictions.

The air between the two mech designers eased for a bit. Although Ves still did not entirely agree with the secessionists, "Before we return to the banquet, I can answer one last question for you for friendship's sake. Please remember that I cannot divulge any sensitive information. Think carefully on what you wish to ask."

This sounded like a precious opportunity to obtain slightly privileged but not completely confidential insider information.

Ves needed to think carefully on what he should ask. Information was power. He had learned this lesson the hard way in the past. The more he knew, the lower his chances of suffering a disadvantage in the future.

He did not rush to voice the first question that entered his mind, but thought carefully on what he should ask. He delegated most of his thinking power to it. Even his incarnations temporarily paused their duties and put their own minds to the task.

When Ves thought about all of the implications of the upcoming secession attempt, he suddenly thought of a... concerning but not entirely unrealistic possibility.

"Master Laila." He spoke up again. "My question for you is rather difficult and sensitive. I completely understand if you do not want to answer it. If you do not wish to divulge any information on the subject, then just tell me so instead of responding with a lie. Is that alright?"

"Ask your question, professor."

"When the Terran Alliance declares its sovereignty, it will gain the power to engage in diplomacy. Does your nation state intend to uphold human supremacy as before, or drop it in favor of pursuing the possibility of forming an alliance with a native alien race?"

This was a very weighty matter. Master Laila Devos recognized it as such, but she did not hold her mouth shut.

"During the Age of Stars, we have given cosmopolitanism a chance. It failed. We embraced human supremacy despite many of the elites decrying this decision because of how absurdly the surrounding alien empires outnumbered us and surpassed us in technological development. You might not understand the history at the time, but back then, Supreme Marshal Caramond Perle had almost failed to spark off his revolution. The Cosmopolitan Movement used to be much more popular. In fact, it was still the dominant ideology even though its cracks had already started to show. Many institutions remained stuck in inertia."

That was an interesting tidbit of history that Ves was not entirely clear of. He never really imagined that the cosmopolitans still managed to remain popular enough at the time. It showed that the transition from cosmopolitans to human supremacy did not happen overnight.

It took a lot of time and bloody struggle for the Supreme Marshal and his growing following to prevail over the human traitors!

As Ves took in the impromptu history lesson, he did not think that Master Laila Devos shared this particular story to him in order to voice her support for human supremacy.

Instead, her true lesson was a little more subtle than that. As Ves continued to mull over her words, he realized that the past was a mirror of the present.

"The situation is reversed for the current day." Ves said with growing insight. "The start of the Age of Conquest has cemented human supremacy as the dominant ideology of the human race going forward. It has upheld its dominance for many years, all the way up to current day. Even when certain individuals have begun to

doubt the wisdom of excluding the possibility of cooperation with any alien race, they will instantly suffer retribution for showing any alleged sympathy for the alien race of the Red Ocean. They are our mortal enemies. How can we possibly think about prying a few of them from the Red Cabal and turning them into our allies?"

This sounded completely crazy! Ves could hardly understand the logic behind such a demented plot.

Yet... Master Laila Devos brought up this story in order to tell that the best decisions may not necessarily be the popular decisions.

She also hinted that the Supreme Marshal that every human revered for truly bringing the human race to the stars started off incredibly unpopular, Caramond Perle had fought so much that he eventually managed to sway the masses with his example.

"Cosmopolitans are hated everywhere." Ves spoke with a frown. "They will always get beat up and killed when exposed because their intentions are fundamentally misaligned with the prevailing ideology of our civilization. Anyone who even hints at supporting a future where they can ally and coexist with alien races would end up ruining their lives. Yet... if their solution happens to increase the chances that red humanity will survive... does it truly make sense to suppress it in the current day and age?"

Ves would have gotten in trouble if he voiced this opinion. It was a good thing that this location should be secure.

In any case, he recognized that the positions of ardent human supremacists in the past and supporters of peaceful coexistence with the native aliens in the present happened to be the same!

Although Ves did not include actual cosmopolitans in his considerations, there had to be a lot of people who secretly thought that there had to be a better way to engage with aliens than to resort to genocide!

Once the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact declared their independence, they could indeed seek to end hostilities and maybe even ally with more reasonable alien races!

Of course, it would not be popular for the first-rate colonial superstates to push these controversial policies, but as long as it worked, they may be able to sway the opinion of the masses.

Human supremacy had never become so fragile since the start of the Age of Conquest!

Ves realized that nothing would piss off the mechers and the fleeters further than other humans forming their own treaties with different alien civilizations!

Even if he still found it difficult to imagine a future where any human was able to tolerate living and working alongside native aliens, he could not completely rule out this possibility either.

"Thank you for your clarification." Ves eventually said. "Your answer is very... insightful."

"You are welcome, Ves. Remember that even if we consider... alternative strategies, we will never stoop so low as to cooperate with the Cosmopolitan Movement. These traitors have committed crimes against the Terran people since the dawn of our star empire. We have never forgotten what they have done, both in the distant past and in the most recent war. At least the native aliens are killing us for legitimate reasons. The cosmopolitans are responsible for killing untold amounts of human lives due to extremism for extremism's sake. We will never forgive them. Some principles must never be broken."

While Ves grew a little more reassured after hearing that, in his opinion, the Terran Alliance actually had a lot in common with the Cosmopolitan Movement.

Both of them were driven by fanatics who believed their cause was worth dying for! Both groups were mad. They just came in different brands of crazy as far as he was concerned!

Chapter 6908 A Radiant Gift

When the actual banquet commenced, Ves tried his best to put up a polite facade and clap whenever it was appropriate.

The exotic dishes tasted like air to him, and that was not just because his phase lord physique had lowered the sensitivity of his taste buds to an enormous degree.

He simply was not in the mood to celebrate the friendship between the Larkinsons and the Devosans anymore.

The secrets that he learned from Master Laila Rebecca Devos continued to weigh on his mind and heart.

His wife probably noticed his unbalanced mood. She thoughtfully did not probe him for answers, but spoke up more frequently and covered for his social obligations. While she was not always reliable, he knew he could count on her this time.

One of the elder figures of the Devos Ancient Clan stood up. The man wore a similar formal toga outfit as Master Laila, though his garments were embellished with fluttering symbols of leaves.

He raised a glass above his head.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Terrans and guests. Tonight, we have gathered here to commemorate our friendship and cooperation with the Larkinson Clan. Although it is new and lacks the long and storied traditions of our own, we are a people who are not averse towards change. As our people and state enter a new age, so do the rules that we have abided by for centuries. We have found ourselves in a particularly dangerous period of history. In the past, our people have managed to overcome many existential challenges by following our traditions, but not entirely."

The man whose name escaped Ves' notice took a moment to sweep his gaze across the people sitting at their dining tables. The moody yellow lighting and the garden ambience created a sense of intimacy among the formally dressed individuals.

"The Age of Dawn has shattered the peace that has reigned throughout the Age of Mechs. We are cut off and beset by threats near and far away. It is easy for us to return to the passivity that has been thrust upon us during the previous age. Yet that is a mistake. To avoid change is to be enslaved by our own traditions. If we want to prove ourselves to be as strong as the Terrans during the most glorious periods of the Age of Conquest, then we must regain the courage and values that we have forgotten in the past centuries! We must remember our past as a people who spit death in the face and possessed the courage to defeat the strong while we were still weak!"

"Hear hear!"

"For Terra and humanity!"

Many Terrans raised their own glasses in agreement!

If Ves remained ignorant of the true undercurrents, then he would have interpreted these words as a generic attempt to boost morale.

Yet now that Master Laila Devos shared a crucial secret to him, those same words held a deeper meaning.

Those in the know understood that the Devosan leader voiced a much more concrete call to action.

If the Terrans wanted to regain the courage that had served them well during a more successful era, then they needed to possess the will and daring to defy the Red Association and the Red Fleet!

If the Terrans had become so cowed by the reputation and the coercion of the mechers and fleeters that they had become too risk averse, then they were no longer suited to enact the secret secession plan.

This was indeed a legitimate concern among the leaders of the Terran Alliance. The Terrans were already fairly resistant towards change by nature. This was both their greatest strength and their greatest weakness.

In order to execute their gambit with the best possible footing, the Terrans needed to shake off several of their bad habits and become more proactive than they had in centuries.

Were the Terrans truly capable of doing more than reacting to events as they happened?

That remained to be seen. The leaders could only express confidence that their people would do the right thing.

The man continued to smile as he gestured his glass towards the guests of honor.

"During these dark times, few people have managed to shine like beacons. Though few in number, each illuminator is able to help us navigate the new age. They are the vanguards that have explored the paths forward and charted out the best routes for us to follow. An emerging hero such as Professor Ves Larkinson may not be impressive in terms of age, but he is a leader among the younger generation. Elders such as ourselves have already led our ancient clan during the Age of Mechs. Now that we have entered the Age of Dawn, a new generation of leaders must rise up and lead us in a different direction. Only the young and the bold possess the combination of qualities that can lead us to a better future."

That sounded rather extreme in Terran terms. Ves could already sense that not everyone agreed with this message. It showed that the leadership of the Terran ancient clans were still divided on important issues.

He doubted that every Terran leader was aware of the secession plan. He also doubted that those in the know universally supported the dangerous initiative.

Yet even with all of this division, it did not stop a majority of the movers and shakers of the Terran Alliance from betting it all on the secession plan.

The Terrans were tired of remaining stuck with the label of losers!

Many ordinary people considered the Age of Mechs to be a golden age for mankind.

That was because human civilization no longer feared external threats and made a lot of efforts to reduce the scope of infighting.

The relative peace and prosperity that lasted for dozens of generations had been good for most space peasants.

They may have surrendered their sovereignty and pride, but what they got in return was relative peace and stability that lasted for a remarkable amount of time.

This was arguably the best period of time for second-raters and third-raters. The Big Two protected them and shielded them from more complicated and higher-level concerns.

Yet the first-raters resented such control. They lost too much agency. The Terrans and the Rubarthans suffered continuous humiliations due to all of the rights they had ceded to the MTA and the CFA.

Enough!

Here in the Red Ocean, the Red Two had done their best to perpetuate the previous status quo.

Even if unforeseen incidents such as the remarkably fast founding of the Red Collective occurred, that still did not shake the foundation of the RA and the RF too much.

The mechers and the fleeters not only hoarded a huge amount of advanced technologies, but also possessed much greater military force than the other forces!

Power ultimately determined their right to rule over other humans.

For a long time, the Terrans saw no hope of being able to regain their independence due to absolute power suppression.

Yet now that the Red War had tied up much of those military forces, the Terrans and other subjugated people finally had a rare opportunity to slip the leash that had been hanging on their necks for over 4 centuries!

The Terrans who recognized this opportunity and wanted to make use of it did not want to procrastinate.

As soon as the destined time had come, they would not hesitate to pull the trigger!

Perhaps not that many members of the older generation were willing to take the decisive steps, but this was where the younger generation could show their value.

The Devos Ancient Clan and so on had already prepped many talents that possessed greater flexibility and open-mindedness than those who had already lived for several centuries.

This was why the Devosan leader toasted the Larkinsons or more precisely Ves. If the Terrans needed inspiration on how to act during this critical time period, they only needed to learn from his example!

Ves twitched his mouth. Though this banquet was ostensibly about honoring the relationship between the Terrans and the Larkinsons, it ended up morphing into a subtle wake-up call to the Terrans who would soon be expected to fight for their collective independence!

The Devosan leader babbled on for another minute before he finally addressed a topic of greater relevance to the Larkinson Clan.

"In the spirit of our continued friendship and cooperation with the Larkinsons, we would like to issue a grand gift to them. They are not Terrans, but they have given us numerous crucial tools and solutions that can help us navigate the new age with greater confidence and strength. His kinship networks have united us under the loving gaze of the Mother of Earth. His companion spirits have bestowed greater power and choice to our most promising talents. The Red Collective that he has spoken into existence has given us a greater seat at the galactic table."

Ves' expression tightened a bit.

The man's words made it sound as if Ves actively conspired with the Terrans to help them pull off their upcoming secession plan!

That was not the case! The contributions made by Ves benefited other parties as well. This included the Red Association and the Red Fleet, or else his Bluejay Fleet would have been a lot smaller.

"Our ancient clan also bears the honor of hosting the Father of Carmine Mechs and his fellow Larkinsons on our very own planet. He has taught in person and by remote at

our local Eden Institute of Business & Technology, thereby enabling it to quickly rise up to become one of the foremost schools of higher education in the new frontier. During this entire period, the Larkinsons have never issued any excessive demands to us. They have behaved as impeccable guests and always respected our culture and traditions. To that end, it is only right that we reciprocate by granting them a gift of substance."

The man waved the hand holding his wine glass, which caused a container to rise up from a gap that emerged from the centermost table.

This container was an extremely high-end product in itself. While it was not made of superdimensional matter, Ves could already see from the design and the materials that it was made to contain an object of great value!

With another gesture, the man transmitted a silent command that caused the cylindrical container to slide open a viewport.

A small but remarkably radiant point of light floated inside. This point of light lazily floated inside the confines of the cylinder as if it was a speck of dust that was floating in the wind.

This was no speck of dust, though.

Ves frowned as he sensed considerable power and threat from this glowing particle.

"The Devos Ancient Clan hereby gifts the Larkinson Clan a container that contains a single Radiant particle. This is similar to a Destroyer particle, but it is willed into existence by the Light of Sol himself. A Radiant particle is the realization of the light attribute. A single particle may not be particularly powerful, but it is completely different when imbued by the willpower of its creator. This particle happens to possess that blessing. It is a divine treasure that we are honored to pass on to the Larkinson Clan."

12:14

A few Terrans reacted with considerable shock at this sight!

The reason why they reacted so strongly quickly became clear.

"The Devos Ancient Clan hereby gifts the Larkinson Clan a container that contains a single Radiant particle. This is similar to a Destroyer particle, but it is willed into existence by the Light of Sol himself. A Radiant particle is the realization of the light attribute. A single particle may not be particularly powerful, but it is completely different when imbued by the willpower of its creator. This particle happens to possess that blessing. It is a divine treasure that we are honored to pass on to the Larkinson Clan."

Ves and his wife were shocked!

They were not entirely clear how valuable this Radiant particle may be, but since it was much less famous than Destroyer particles, it should definitely be more scarce!

"Radiant particles may not be as straightforward as Destroyer particles, but they can produce strong effects when used correctly. They can increase the firepower of energy weapons, amplify the acceleration of flight systems and reduce the mass of a mech or other object. In short, by imbuing the Radiant particle in any part or object, you can effectively bestow it with a spark of the Light of Sol's immense power!"

What a gift!

Chapter 6909 Strange Urg

What a brilliant gift!

Though Ves was unclear how useful a single Radiant particle may be, anything that had been imbued by the willpower of a god pilot should not be too weak or useless!

Ves instantly figured out the cleverness behind this choice.

The Devos Ancient Clan clearly wanted to show off its wealth and power.

It could not give the Larkinson Clan a low-value trinket.

That would not only disrespect the Larkinsons, but also paint the Terrans as misers who suffered so greatly from the ongoing war that they could no longer bestow any generous gifts.

Therefore, the gift had to be an item of real substance. It most definitely needed to be universally recognized as valuable.

The problem was that most choices of gifts were of great value to the Terrans themselves.

There were likely those who thought about gifting the Larkinson Clan with a World Tree Seed or a capital ship.

Unfortunately, both were strategic assets that the Terrans urgently needed for their own war efforts. Giving one of them away as a gift would do more harm than good.

A will-infused Radiant particle therefore served as a much more clever gift.

On the one hand, it was a rare high-end material that possessed a lot of remarkable and mysterious properties.

Even though the container only contained a single particle, the fact that the Light of Sol saw fit to impart a fraction of his divine will into it immediately raised its value by at least a million times!

Whole Destroyer weapons were not worth as much as this single Radiant particle!

12:18

Ves had never even heard of Radiant particles before. He did not even know that the god pilot who made them could also extend a measure of his incredible power to one of the particles.

The Devos Ancient Clan not only gifted him with what could only be a microscopic super-class material, but also granted him the knowledge and awareness that this wonder existed in the first place!

The Terrans had unveiled a small part of the curtain.

Ves grew a lot less upset about the heavy revelation from Master Laila Rebecca Devos and became fascinated by the rare and precious particle presented by the hosts of the banquet.

Even though it was abundantly obvious to him that the Devosans sought to smooth over any hard feelings by bribing him with a literal shiny, they understood him too well!

Their plan worked!

As a mech designer, how could he remain unmoved when he stood to receive a magnanimous gift that could give a rare and powerful boost to one of his mechs?

Ves felt a little frustrated by how well the container isolated the fluctuations of the Radiant particle. He could not sense anything but the barest hint of light in its purest form.

Despite the miniscule amount of matter contained within the cylinder, Ves had the inexplicable sense that if he let it out and placed it on his hand, it might actually be able to destroy his true body!

Whether this was a real possibility or a silly illusion, Ves was not sure. He needed to get his hands on it and head straight back to his lab in order to research the hell out of the mysterious particle!

Only by understanding its properties would he be able to formulate plans on how to convert it into a useful application!

As the transparent window of the container continued to shine the particle's remarkably bright radiance among the gathered people, the Devosan leader briefly shared a bit more information on the remarkable particle.

"Unlike our rivals, we are graced by only a single god pilot. We are fortunate that the Light of Sol happens to be one of our more qualified god pilots to respond to the crises that the Terran Alliance is struggling with. Not only is he able to move from star system to star system faster than any other god pilot, he is also able to generate Radiant particles that can be used to upgrade the performance of our senior ace mechs."

That actually sounded like a great way to leverage the power of a god pilot.

One of the biggest constraints to god pilots was that they could only directly project their power in a single star system.

This was why certain god pilot tried to expand their capabilities and use their God Kingdoms as a means of producing rare and precious resources.

Certain god pilots were much more compatible with this approach than others.

For example, no one expected the Fist of Defiance to produce anything particularly rare and precious.

He was a meathead that happened to be stubborn enough to defy death when traversing the road to no return.

His relatively direct and uncompromising personality reflected his strong focus and dedication towards fisticuffs. He cared little for anything else and did not have the patience and the affinities to produce special particles or super-class materials.

The Evolution Witch was the opposite in this regard. Her direct combat capabilities was not as domineering as that of the Fist of Defiance, but she made up for it in many other ways.

Due to the characteristics of her God Kingdom, the Evolution Witch was in a much better position to will all kinds of organic materials into existence. This turned her into one of the most important sources of high-quality biomatter.

The Light of Sol probably sat somewhere in between. He was clearly a more combat-focused god pilot, but his strong affinity with the light element enabled him to generate the so-called Radiant particles in his God Kingdom.

Now, one of them had entered his possession. After the Devosan leader completed his brief introduction, the container floated towards the Larkinson delegation until it finally stopped in front of Ves.

He stood up and bowed his head in gratitude.

"I thank the Devos Ancient Clan and the Light of Sol for bestowing me this divinely touched gift. I am not familiar with the details concerning Radiant particles, but I am eager to study this sample and incorporate it into one of my mechs. I will definitely do this precious material justice."

Numerous Terrans smiled.

"That is good to hear, Professor Larkinson. We will transfer additional documentation to you so that you understand how the Radiant particle can be applied to different parts and systems. Since you are already familiar with Destroyer technology, you should be able to find many parallels between Destroyer particles and Radiant particles. They may not behave the same, but they are of the same root, so some properties are universal to their kind."

The remainder of the banquet went by without any other notable events. No Terran casually spoke of the secession plan. Many of them were so engrossed in their own power plays and political maneuvering that they were not worth his time to engage.

His wife did not hold the same opinion. She avidly spoke with the female Terrans of high bearing about inconsequential topics.

Master Laila Rebecca Devos had not shown up again. She had already completed her mission and had no compelling reason to stick around.

Ves actually felt restless the longer the evening dragged on. He frequently looked down on the precious cylindrical container that he had placed on his lap.

12:21

Although he had closed the transparent window in order to avoid flashing the Hymn of the Trees with a bright light show, he still felt tempted to tear the container apart and hold the Radiant particle in his hands.

He did not know why he possessed this urge. Given his recently obtained affinity for the darkness element, he should have felt repulsed towards the strong source of light.

Perhaps a part of him harbored a strong desire to taint and corrupt the Radiant particle.

The moment he entertained this guess, the more he wanted to transform the mysterious particle from a pure and radiant resource into a tainted and desecrated material!

Ves inwardly shook his head.

These were irrational thoughts!

He did not understand where those urges came from, but now that his logic reasserted itself, he firmly locked away those crazy and extreme plans.

It was best to focus his thinking on healthier subjects.

As the banquet finally came to an end, Ves impatiently waited until he and his group boarded the armored shuttle and made the journey back to Diandi Base.

Ves still held the protective cylinder.

"Can I see? Can I see?" Andraste eagerly asked.

"No. It is not safe, pumpkin. Destroyer particles are highly threatening, and I am sure that Radiant particles may possess similar dangers and risks. It is better to keep this gift in containment until we have thoroughly understood the potential hazards with working on such an amazing material."

"It contains the will of the Light of Sol, right?!"

"Probably." Ves replied. "I cannot verify this claim at the moment as the container is so good at isolation. Now that a god pilot has become involved, it is better to maintain our caution and ignore anything of concern."

12:37

"Probably." Ves replied. "I cannot verify this claim at the moment as the container is so good at isolation. Now that a god pilot has become involved, it is better to maintain our caution and ignore anything of concern."

All three kids looked completely obsessed with the container. God pilots possessed an amazing reputation in human space.

Since Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine all attended school on New Constantinople VIII, they definitely absorbed a bit of hero worship towards the Light of Sol. Every other kid at their age range possessed a universal admiration towards the only Terran god pilot in the dwarf galaxy.

Ves still harbored the necessary respect towards the most powerful mech pilots that he knew of, but he had long gotten rid of his hero worship of these entities.

He was much more interested in what the Radiant particle could do for him when he attempted to integrate it with a mech. He had no interest in chatting with the Light of Sol with the particle as a medium.

It was not always a good idea for people to meet their heroes... or gods.

Ves hated the thought of getting coerced by the god pilots into doing their bidding. They had the power to get away with it, and that made him angry like nothing else.

Until he gained enough power to hold his ground against these lawless brutes, it was best if he avoided contact with them as much as possible.

Hopefully the Light of Sol would be far too busy with defending the Terran Alliance's borders to pay attention to what Ves wanted to do with the Radiant particle.

His wife couldn't hold herself back any longer. After she spent a bit of time to settle the children, she finally voiced her thoughts.

"Have you thought about how we should use the Radiant particle?"

"I have. There are three high-ranking mechs that I think are suitable for integrating this Radiant particle. The most obvious choice is the Amaranto Mark III. We can attempt to integrate it into the Instrument of Vengeance or use it to remake the Instrument of Doom. The firepower of this luminar crystal weapon will be like nothing else we have witnessed from our own creations."

Gloriana tentatively nodded. "That is my first choice as well, although you can argue that the Amaranto Mark III already possesses ample enough firepower."

"This is why my second choice is the Dark Zephyr Mark III. Even if the attributes do not quite match with each other, I think that Tusa will welcome any chance to make his ace mech move faster."

His wife frowned. "The idea is... feasible, but the success rate should not be too high. Attributes matter greatly in this new era. Unless you can devise a form of duality where light and shadow are interconnected with each other, Saint Tusa will likely fight against his own machine."

"My third is the Lionheart. This is another machine that depends on light as a source of power. The compatibility between this Radiant particle and the Lionheart may be high. We can make the Lionheart faster, or integrate it in a melee weapon to add powerful striking capabilities to the future ace mech."

"The Lionheart is a valid choice."

Chapter 6910 Material Producers

The day after Ves returned from the city of Sandan with a powerful gift in his possession, he and his wife quickly handled their morning obligations before they finally directed their attention to the cylindrical container.

Alexa Streon and Jovy Armalon also joined the design lab.

Each of them possessed a degree of fascination towards the so-called Radiant particle and eagerly operated the lab instruments in an attempt to learn more about its properties.

Of course, they first read through the documentation in order to gain a small introduction to this mysterious substance.

The Terrans did not send as much information as Ves preferred. They only gave him the barebones data about the properties of Radiant particles along with a large amount of cautionary warnings.

While the latter provided a lot of clues, Ves still felt a little frustrated about how little the documentation explained the underlying reasons behind the Radiant particle's existence.

"From my interpretation, a Radiant particle is a materialized seed of the power wielded by the Light of Sol." Jovy Armalon voiced. "It is not a conventional exotic material, but a form of energy that is mostly turned into matter. Under specific circumstances, we can reverse this transformation and turn it into a potent form of persistent energy that we can use to amplify the performance of different parts."

Gloriana paid attention to another important factor. "What is interesting is that the Radiant particle ostensibly behaves as a highly specialized energy cell of sorts. Using up the energy locked inside the particle will cause it to grow exhausted, but it can restore its reserves by absorbing light E energy as well as high amounts of electrical energy. As long as we are cautious enough to never completely expend the reserves of the Radiant particle at once, it will always persist. The greatest shortcoming is that it cannot multiply independently. No matter how much energy it devours, it will eventually reach a limit, but doesn't split in half."

That was indeed a major restriction to Radiant particles. They were extremely special and had to be produced in a special way.

It was also one of the reasons that protected Radiant particles from theft.

As a former Terran, Alexa Streon possessed greater insights into the Light of Sol and his famous 'products'.

"I have heard of Radiant particles, but I have never had the pleasure of encountering it in person, either in raw form or in a processed form. I must warn you to treat it with great respect and remain on your best behavior. What Jovy has said is correct. A Radiant particle is a shard of energy that the Light of Sol has materialized in the form of a solid particle. When he has attached a small measure of his willpower to it, then its original connection with its maker is still active. This means that the Radiant particle can also function as a communication channel that directly connects to the Terran god pilot."

"..."

It was not every day that Ves received a miraculous communication medium that possessed so many other useful functions.

Ves felt a bit apprehensive at handling a precious material that could directly put him into contact with the Light of Sol at any time!

Yet... the power promised by the Radiant particle made it worth all of those difficulties.

The four mech designers conducted a series of lab tests. They kept the Radiant particle inside its container, but occasionally brought it out and used special implements in order to harvest direct measurements.

"Amazing! The temperature immediately around the Radiant particle is rising."

"I did not feel anything that I can identify as the gaze of a god pilot. Have the Devosans sent us the correct Radiant particle?"

"It may take more for the Light of Sol to take a personal interest in our research and development. We have not even talked about how to utilize this gift."

Ves and his fellow mech designers continued to spend the entire morning and parts of the afternoon on collecting a large amount of basic data.

Not all of the information was accurate and relevant, but it provided them with a more thorough baseline.

"Okay, the data that we have gathered largely support our expectations. We still have many more studies to conduct on the Radiant particle, but we can already plan ahead based on what we have gathered. How do you think we should use the Radiant particle?" Ves asked.

A short pause ensued as people looked at each other.

Alexa Streon eventually decided to break the silence. "You can integrate it into the Rainbow Shield of the Bastion, or the next iteration of this high-ranking mech. Integrating a Radiant particle into a weapon is the most straightforward choice, but your clan is not lacking in killing power. What you need more is a strong and reliable protector. As long as Venerable Jannzi is able to become a saint, it is well worth it to grant her protection that is far beyond the norm. A superdimensional tower shield is already strong, but it is still vulnerable against superdimensional arms. Empowering it with the Radiant particle may just grant it the advantage to withstand such threats."

That actually sounded like a good suggestion. It was a possibility that Ves had not entertained, as it was not an obvious choice.

"We can respond to threats more confidently if we can kill them faster as opposed to letting them pound our defenses." Alexa said in mild disapproval. "Remaining passive has rarely worked well. Enemies will keep pressing your defenses if our counterattack power is not sufficient. Since that is the case, using the Radiant particle to empower a sword or rifle will result in far better defenses, as we can mop up the threats much faster than without such a gift."

Alexa's argument made sense, but Ves knew that combat was not that simple. Accidents could always happen. It was due to these 'low-probability' events that Ves had to be on guard at all times.

Empowering the Bastion by bestowing her a Radiant tower shield sounded like a decent investment for the future. The living mech could offer far superior protection, especially if her battle partner managed to advance.

No one was entirely certain when that would happen. Venerable Jannzi had yet to break through, but that may be because she was slowly polishing her foundation.

"If Jannzi doesn't break through, then we are failing to make proper use of the might of this Radiant particle." He said. "This is not a period of time where we must mindlessly hoard our wealth and resources. It is always better to exchange them with stuff that can help us win a fight and kill the aliens faster."

Alexa looked slightly disappointed. "Does that mean you will reject my proposal?"

"I am afraid so. Don't take this too hard. Mech designers regularly come up with new ideas, but few ever get realized. I think I will put your plan in reserve. Who knows whether one of our enemies comes up with a superweapon that can bypass all of our existing defenses. Perhaps in those circumstances, a physical tower shield that is indirectly blessed by a god pilot can make a critical move. If we have a second or third Radiant particle, it should be a worthwhile investment."

That mollified the younger woman. Her proposal truly had merit, but the needs of the clan demanded a weapon as opposed to a shield.

Ves nodded in acknowledgement. "You are right. If there are no better options, then we will design an upgrade to the Instrument of Vengeance that will turn it into an even more lethal weapon than before. It will make the Amaranto Mark III even more skewed towards extreme firepower. It will pose such a great threat to the native aliens that they may throw away everything they have in order to ambush and destroy our ace marksman mech."

His wife made another proposal. "What about embedding the Radiant particle into the armor system instead? This will strengthen the defenses of the Amaranto Mark III, thereby increasing her chances of surviving an ambush. Due to the exceptionally high proportion of hyper materials used to construct the archemech frame, this empowerment will indirectly feed back to the Instrument of Vengeance, thereby making it somewhat more powerful, though not as much as a direct boost."

"The Amaranto Mark III." Gloriana said. "There is no need to say anything more. The combination speaks for itself."

Ves nodded in acknowledgement. "You are right. If there are no better options, then we will design an upgrade to the Instrument of Vengeance that will turn it into an even

more lethal weapon than before. It will make the Amaranto Mark III even more skewed towards extreme firepower. It will pose such a great threat to the native aliens that they may throw away everything they have in order to ambush and destroy our ace marksman mech."

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"Your alternative proposal goes against the vision of the Amaranto." Ves shook his head. "That alone is not a reason to reject it, but if I have to make a choice, I would rather turn the Amaranto into an even more extreme glass cannon than a more rounded machine. At worst, we will just assign other ace mechs to guard the Amaranto Mark III from threats. Again, this is a more realistic proposal if we have more Radiant particles in our possession. Alexa, how easy is it for the Light of Sol to produce more?"

"What little information I have about this case is that the act of making these particles puts him under strain. That is a vague description, but that is the best I can do." Alexa slowly answered.

That was indeed a useless response. Alexa at least made it clear that the Light of Sol likely could not produce millions of Radiant particles.

"Have you found out how common these Radiant particles are? It would be helpful for us to know how rare they are compared to Destroyer weapons."

Alexa thought for a few seconds before giving a cautious answer. "I do not have extensive information about this, but the secrets that I have come into touch with suggest that the Light of Sol has not previously explored this ability. He has a relatively lower drive towards uplifting humanity. He is not as keen as the likes of the Evolution Witch when it comes to leveraging his God Kingdom as a resource generator. Many god pilots believe that fixating on material production is a form of debasement."

God pilots much preferred to enter into combat and beat up powerful aliens with their cutting-edge technologies and their transcendent willpower.

Their opinions had merit. They were True Gods. They had crossed one of the most difficult thresholds imaginable and ascended to godhood. Of all of the obligations they must fulfill as the ultimate protectors of the human race, expending their willpower to produce resources was among the most banal and unimpressive one they could imagine.

There was no glory in becoming a True God-level material provider.

God pilots much preferred to enter into combat and beat up powerful aliens with their cutting-edge technologies and their transcendent willpower.

During the Age of Mechs, there were not that many reasons for god pilots to go into action in person during those peaceful days.

Many god pilots only engaged in the production of rare materials because their power would otherwise go to waste.

Such an excuse no longer existed in the Age of Dawn. Red humanity had become embroiled in total war. God pilots could kill all of the native aliens they wanted and still not do enough to deplete the incoming enemy soldiers!

Under those circumstances, the fact that the Light of Sol saw merit in diverting a measure of his power to produce a will-infused Radiant particle for the Larkinson Clan held greater significance.

Ves frowned for a moment.

He did not believe for a second that this gift was free. It sounded more as if the god pilot shrewdly wanted to invest in Ves.

By giving him such a powerful gift, he would have to reciprocate in the future!

While Ves felt good for proving himself worthy enough to attract the favor of another god pilot, he soon remembered the reasons why he tried to avoid contact with these unreasonable soldiers.

Ves really did not want the Light of Sol to use the Radiant particle as a medium to establish direct contact.

Once that happened, the Terran god pilot might choose to issue orders to him with the expectation that he should never betray his obligations!