

The Mech 4771

Chapter 4771 Phase Energy

As expected of cells meant to contain modest-sized phase lords, the walls of the cells were meters thick in every direction.

Both Ves, Ketis and Gloriana all had their companion spirits move further and further away from the cell, only to encounter the same monotonous transphasic stone material with no hint of interruption.

Ves had to send out Blinky a bit further than was usual in human-built facilities to finally enter a corridor.

The Star Cat blinked as the incarnation curiously looked around.

The corridor of the ancient alien facility looked as dull and plain as the cell where Ves and his clansmen were stuck in. Whether the alien builders did not bother with any ornamentation or whether all of the softer perishable materials had all decayed or worn out many ages in the past, Ves could not say for certain.

The barren corridor did not bode well to him. The lack of any systems or complications meant that there were no obvious switches or buttons that could open up a convenient exit to his cell.

He still commanded Blinky to explore a bit further. Though the cat was steadily approaching the limit of how far he was able to move away from Ves, the distance was still extensive enough to cross into the cell on the opposite side of the corridor if he wanted.

He did just that.

Ves had already confirmed that there weren't any clansmen in the opposite cell, so he made sure that Blinky slowed down and approached cautiously lest his sudden emergency caused him to be treated as a hostile entity.

As Blinky finally moved close enough to poke his eye through one of the corners of the cell, the cat was able to observe a group of familiar-looking people in dress uniforms.

The directors, top management and star doctors of Freewell Medical Services had responded as well as they could to this latest crisis.

None of them fell into panic or confusion. They forcibly kept themselves and each other calm while their best speakers sought to communicate with their captors.

Ves did not bother making contact with this group. They were just a bunch of civilians with not a single weapon or serious combatant among them. They also lacked the knowledge or skills to facilitate an escape attempt.

Ves instead sent Blinky onwards. The cat could pass through the solid walls and take a peek at other adjacent cells within his current range.

A few more cells contained random prisoners that he recognized from Block L, so they were clearly placed here based on proximity.

He even found a few more groups of Larkinsons, among whom were mech pilots who possessed combat training and could be useful in a fight.

That was important in any breakout attempt as his cell was sorely lacking in combat capable personnel at the moment.

With the exception of Ketis, Lucky, Clixie and General Verle, none of the others looked like they could put up a good fight, especially if they lacked the right gear.

While there were retired military officers such as Chief Minister Abigail Evren and Chief Minister Magdalena Larkinson among the crowd, these older clansmen had left their glory days behind a long time ago. They may be able to shoot a gun and such, but their combat effectiveness was not comparable to one of his infantry troopers.

"Hmmm. My honor guards are located a bit further away. That is inconvenient."

Goldie knew where everyone was located and informed him that his honor guards were stashed in a different part of this expansive pocket space facility.

Ves would first have to break out of this cell before making his way down several corridors before trying to breach another cell.

Though he definitely intended to do just that and strengthen his hand, he first had to complete the first step, which was getting out of this stupid cage!

After examining the surroundings for a few more minutes, Ves, Ketis and Gloriana each reported their respective findings.

"These air vents are not connected to any other cells." Gloriana reported first. "There does not appear to be any active ventilation systems either. The alien air mixture is passively sent through the channels through the use of gravity until it emerges directly into our cells. There are other air vents built into the corners of this floor that ensure that air continues to circulate."

Alexandria hadn't been able to find out more as the red companion spirit had reached the limit of her range before she could reach the end of the miniscule upper ventilation shafts.

"Ketis?" Ves asked as he turned to the Swordmaiden.

"The structural integrity of the floors are just as hard and solid as the walls. If there are any cells below our feet, I am not certain they are there as Sharpie hasn't been able to go any further."

"Sharp... Sharp... Sharp..." The tiny companion spirit in the shape of Ketis listlessly repeated.

"Is there any conceivable way you can think of breaking through this stone material with a good sword?"

Ketis frowned for a moment. "If I had my Bloodsinger or a comparable weapon, then I am confident I can cut through half a meter of this material if I go all out. I don't think I can do much more than that unless I have rested for at least a full day."

That was better than Ves expected, but it was still not sufficient.

"Do you think that my Amastendira can drill a hole through this stone material?"

A few of the old-timers did not look surprised when Ves mentioned the name of his most powerful personal weapon, but the ones who had joined the clan later on looked completely clueless.

Ketis had been with the clan long enough to know what he meant.

"Maybe you should ask Sara Voiken, but in my opinion transphasic weapons should already have a hard time damaging this tough material. A weapon that is not enhanced by phasewater should fare even worse. You will exhaust the energy reserves of your gun before you can produce more than a shallow groove into the wall."

He agreed with her assessment. This was also why he didn't bother materializing the weapon in the first place.

Gloriana looked concerned. "What do we do, then? We cannot remain stuck here. Either our captors will come and use us for their own ends, or we will remain isolated here for a long period of time. What if there is no food or water supply? How will we take care of our long-term hygiene needs?!"

"I am pretty sure that whoever bothered to kidnap us and the other VIPs at the founding ceremony has plans for us. They would have taken advantage of the lack of spatial inhibition to teleport bombs at our coordinates if killing us was their objective." Ves said. "We are not worth as much if we are all dead. Only by keeping us alive will our abductors be able to leverage us against Davute and our respective organizations."

"That is a logical argument, Ves, but not everyone acts rationally."

"I know that all too well, honey, but this scheme is so advanced that I am pretty sure that our captors did not decide to reveal the existence of this pocket space on a whim."

They had too little information about their captors to make too many guesses about their motives, but Ves already had a decent idea of what he was dealing with. He looked towards Chief Minister Novilon Purnesse and Minister Shederin Purnesse.

The father-and-son duo had been swapping their own ideas and theories for a while now. They too had been able to come up with a few plausible ideas on what sort of scheme they had been caught in. Whoever controlled this facility had a greater purpose in mind.

Ves could only hope that working towards this purpose distracted the abducting party long enough for him to launch a breakout attempt.

He turned his attention to this priority.

"Given the way this place is constructed, I highly doubt we are being actively monitored or tracked. At most, there are penetrating sensors in operation that solely track us based on our mass, heat, neural activity or whatever."

Ketis concurred with his opinion. "The lack of antigrav modules, security systems, riot suppression systems and most importantly a method to transport food signifies that this is not a prison in a human sense. If it is designed to hold phase lords, then the priority lies in containing their incredible power. Ves, do you remember the unclean whale we found at the center of the Palace of Shame?"

"I do." Ves spoke.

"Did you notice that the giant prisoner was not only shackled in place, but had also been put into a state of hibernation for several centuries. While the whale obviously did not regain his peak strength

shortly after breaking out of the asteroid base, he was clearly able to leverage enough strength to put up a fight against seven ace mechs!"

Ves widened his eyes. He understood the message that she was trying to convey.

Although the word 'phase lord' was a term that the Big Two had come up with to demystify the existence of native gods, their biologies had evolved so much that they couldn't be treated as ordinary organisms anymore!

This was due to the amazing properties of phasewater. The substance actually existed in more dimensions than normal. By gaining a foothold in energy-rich dimensions, phasewater was able to passively power its amazing spatial effects.

The actual explanation was a lot deeper and more complex than that as it involved advanced physics and convoluted math that hardly anyone bothered to study before. It was a large part why so many human scientists needed so much time just to get a grip on this liquid exotic and its many possibilities.

However, for now all Ves needed to know was that phasewater could largely meet the energy needs of powerful physical lifeforms.

This was why phase whales and more formidable phase lords whose bodies were actually a lot larger and more massive than they appeared on the surface did not need to eat just as much food.

Phasewater already supplied them with much of the energy needed to sustain their oversized bodies, therefore allowing them to get by with less conventional input!

Of course, if any phase lord happened to get trapped in a barren place like this cell for a long time, then such a powerful figure had no choice but to hibernate and minimize as much body activity as possible in order to avoid starvation.

"Generally speaking, the greater the concentration of phasewater in the blood, the longer a phase lord can survive." Ves spoke. "If this phase prison was built to contain the more formidable among them, then it truly isn't necessary to build all of those unnecessary elements. Each one introduces another weak point that a resourceful phase lord can exploit in order to break out of this prison!"

As mech designers and engineers, Ves and his colleagues were easily able to derive clues about their prison by putting themselves in the perspective of its builders or owners.

It was clear that both groups only cared about keeping its prisoners in place as much as possible!

"Seeing as there are no seams or any mechanisms that can open up any cavities, the only way that anything can go in and out is through teleportation." Gloriana concluded. "This sounds counterintuitive because this entire pocket space facility appears to be built to inhibit phase lords from utilizing their phasewater-derived abilities, and teleportation is definitely a known spatial ability that they can perform as long as they learn the right techniques. How is it possible for the operators of this prison to teleport us despite the heavy interference of all of these walls?"

That stumped the mech designers. Though most of them had already started to study phasewater theory, their understanding of this field was still relatively shallow. There was no way they could equal the knowledge of that of a native phasewater engineer!

Ves was a bit of an exception in this regard. As a human who recently stepped onto the path of a phase lord himself, his instinctive and theoretical understanding of phasewater had risen by leaps and bounds!

He looked around for a moment before presenting his answer.

"Teleportation is still possible as long as it takes place over the right frequency."

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The others looked as if he had spoken an alien language.

Chapter 4772 So Many Tricks

"Since when did you become an expert in teleportation technology?" Gloriana suspiciously asked. "Is it due to your recent changes?"

Ves shrugged off her question. "Maybe. That's not important, dear. The point is that there are ways for teleportation technology to work despite a blockade. In fact, whoever was responsible for teleporting us away may have been able to do so despite the presence of active spatial interdiction fields. It is just a lot more troublesome as you need to exert so much effort that you can't pull in as many people."

Both Ketis and Gloriana frowned. The two couldn't really follow him at this point anymore.

"What is your point, Ves?" Gloriana asked. "Are you claiming that you have mastered this frequency? What use is to us if you have figured this out? The only one of us who has a teleportation device is you, and I am highly doubtful that you can do anything if you have managed to make your way out of this cell."

"Hey, isn't it better for me to break out and find a way to free the rest? I am the Swordmaster in this gathering!"

Ves gazed at her for a brief moment of time. "You are a Swordmaster without a sword. I have the Amastendira. Not only that, you don't even have any combat armor on you. A single attack will probably fell you even if you have Sharpie by your side."

"Why don't you pass your gear to me, then?! I am a much better fighter than you will ever be. This is the truth!"

Ves shook his head. "I do not deny that, but out of the two of us, I am much more resourceful among the two of us. I have... some experience in sneaking around and breaking out of prisons."

"This is crazy! You cannot be considering this! You are not a commando, Ves! You are confusing your identity! You are a mech designer! You don't belong in the field!" Gloriana exclaimed.

The other clansmen in the cell soon got involved as well. Hardly anyone among them thought it was a good idea for Ves to be the one to teleport out of this cell and find a way to find a control room that could free them all. Not only would this put the most important member of the Larkinson Clan at great risk, but Ketis was clearly the more superior warrior among their gathering!

After the Larkinsons kept trying to convince Ves in vain, he finally couldn't take it any longer.

"SHUT UP!" He boomed as he amplified the voice transmitted by the speakers of this Unending Regalia. "I am not making an impulsive decision here! There are good reasons why I am the best candidate!"

He banged his fist against his chest plate.

"First, I am clearly the most well-equipped among us, and I know my gear the best. None of you can make good use out of my Unending Regalia because you didn't design and build it by hand."

He spread out an arm and channeled a few design spirits in quick succession.

The Golden Cat briefly showed up again and waved at everyone with her paw.

Nyaaaa.

Lufa appeared and clasped his hands in greeting.

Qilanxo briefly showed up and rear up to release a silent roar.

Helena appeared as well and hovered behind Ves and placed her intangible hands on his armor in a show of support.

"I've got your back, little brother."

The design spirits disappeared shortly afterwards, but the show of power had been enough to stun many of his clansmen into stunned silence.

"I am the only one among you who can do that. Even if the amount of help they can provide is limited, the ability to call them forward at least gives me more unconventional options."

That might not be entirely true. Ves peeked at Marvaine for a second. His son had already shown signs of taking after his father. That meant that the kid might be able to replicate this feat too one day!

In any case, he still had a show to finish.

For his final trick, he prepared to give everyone a glimpse of a recently acquired property that he had been doing his best to hide from everyone.

He slowly lifted the suppression of his own glow.

Soon, everyone in the cell became bathed by a glow.

This was nothing new to the Larkinsons as they frequently fell under the influence of a glow anytime they strayed close to a Larkinson mech.

When Ves had demonstrated his ability to call upon a hint of the design spirits under his sway, the clansmen also experienced familiar sensations.

They had grown familiar with pretty much every glow that Ves had employed in his work. Whether it was the Solemn Guardian or Kalo, every high-ranking member of the clan had to be familiar with what their mechs were capable of in order to lead it properly!

Yet what Ves exuded this time was completely different yet so familiar to all of the gathered clansmen.

This was because Ves exuded a glow that was completely new to them, yet also felt unmistakably familiar for an unknown reason.

Perhaps the only person among them who did not exhibit any sort of surprise was Ketis.

As a Swordmaster, her intuition and senses were much stronger than anyone else's. She merely nodded as if she made an observation that confirmed her theories.

"I always felt you had grown a lot stronger than before." She said in calm acceptance. "Since this is the case, it is truly reasonable for you to go out instead of me. I don't know what you can do with this glow of yours, but I have the feeling that I have only glimpsed the tip of the iceberg."

She was right. Ves indeed hid a lot more surprises that gave him a lot of confidence in his ability to find a way to resolve this crisis.

From his cybernetic leg that possessed a few unexpected surprises to all of the options that were waiting for him in the System Space, there should never be a circumstance where Ves was truly unarmed and unable to extricate himself from a sticky situation!

Before Ves could come close to putting his latest theory into action, his wife and the others forced him to draft a plan and prepare as best as possible.

It was unacceptable to just send Ves out in the middle of an alien complex and leave him without any further directions!

Though the other Larkinsons weren't able to provide him with a lot of substantial help, their varied backgrounds and expertise granted them insights in many areas that Ves might overlook.

"Hey, don't worry too much." He told them all. "We can still remain in contact with each other. We are all Larkinsons, so we are all connected to the Golden Cat. I never had any reason to reveal this capability to you all before, but now that we have ended up in this difficult situation, I might as well unveil this to you so that we can maximize our chances of making it out of here alive."

His closest people such as Gloriana, Ketis and a few other clansmen already possessed varying degrees of awareness of how the Larkinson Network connected them all, but there were many more members of the clan who never realized that they could directly transmit messages to each other!

"Does that mean that you can do more than sense other Larkinsons?!" Chief Minister Novilon looked shocked.

"Yup. We can turn it into a full communication network, though I don't think Goldie will like it if we use it to transmit messages to each other when an ordinary electronic network already suffices."

"Can you connect to the clansmen who are trapped in the other cells?! What about our people back in normal space?!"

"I can connect to both." Ves casually revealed. "In fact, Goldie should have already been feeding information about our circumstances to the people that we have left behind. They are quite worried to say the least."

Though there were many people who wanted to send out messages to the family they left behind, Ves raised his palm and forced everyone to quiet down.

"Stop. Let's not waste more time. We need to figure out a way to get ourselves out of this predicament before whoever kidnapped us is ready to take the next step. I think I am as ready as I can be. If I truly need your help, then we can still remain in touch with the help of the Larkinson Network."

He spent a bit more time to console his worried children before he attempted to teleport himself out of this cell.

"Go kill the bad guys, papa!" Andraste shouted in encouragement.

"Please bring back a present for me!" Marvaine begged. "I want to play with alien toys!"

"Hahaha. I can't promise you anything, but I will certainly try to bring back a souvenir."

Once Ves had mentally prepared himself for his bold and potentially dangerous venture, he turned around and approached the wall that was adjacent to the corridor.

As everyone else in the cell went silent in order to give their patriarch a chance to succeed, Ves closed his eyes and concentrated.

The Phase King descended into his mind once again. A rough map of the facility entered his awareness as the design spirit was able to detect a large quantity of transphasic stone construction in a large radius around his current location.

Ves did not need to know that much. He only wanted to get himself on the other side of this meters-thick wall.

He did not intend to utilize his emergency one-use personal teleporter to do this. He didn't understand how the device worked and how its technical properties interacted with the spatial inhibitions that dominated this entire facility.

Aside from that, the personal teleporter was designed to be operated by people who clearly didn't know how to configure its settings. Aside from setting a few parameters such as distance or a description such as a specific starship, Ves had no way to control its settings at all. There was no way he could apply his theories about matching a specific frequency when this damn automated device didn't give him the possibility to alter its parameters!

Fortunately, Ves did not believe he needed to waste his teleporter. If his theories were correct, then he might be able to pull this off without wasting this precious life-saving trump card!

"Alright, Phase King. We have corresponded about this before. I never dared to test this possibility in reality, but now that we are stuck here, we may as well try."

He did not speak any longer as his connection with the Phase King made that redundant. He exchanged a large amount of thoughts with the alien design spirit.

Prompted by Ves' instructions, the Phase king began to leverage his power and incredible affinity with phasewater to touch and resonate with all of the transphasic objects within reach!

The Unending Regalia began to vibrate and shake as its new transphasic armor plating seemed to come to life in a weird fashion!

Not only that, but the nearest wall began to vibrate in a similar fashion.

The objects in question weren't truly shaking. What was actually happening was that the phasewater integrated in these gears were rippling the immediate fabric of space, giving outsiders the illusion of vibrations.

What was actually happening was that the spaces themselves were fluctuating!

This looked extremely dangerous and could easily kill people if they had no grip on this process, but neither Ves nor the Phase King showed any fear!

The latter had lived alongside many pools of phasewater for over a million years. His knowledge and insight on this substance and some of its applications were extremely deep!

Though Ves did not come close to matching the Phase King's incredible understanding of phasewater, his advantage was that a tiny amount of this dangerous liquid substance was already coursing through his veins!

This massively increased his ability to withstand spatial effects like the one that was gripping his body and his suit of combat armor.

As the immediate surroundings around Ves started to shake more and more, the Phase King finally reached the critical point of the technique that it had performed through Ves!

A strange effect took place that caused the air to pop!

"He... he's gone!"

"How did he do it?! This is impossible!"

No one was standing in the place where Ves' armored form previously stood. Gloriana and the others were still in disbelief!

Chapter 4773 Ves The Biomech

When Ves decided to pull off a radical trick that he had only fantasized about in his mind, he did not know whether he could succeed.

The consequences of failure were extremely dire. His body could explode. His body could merge into a transphasic stone wall. Not all of his body might be able to make it to the other side!

Yet Ves had multiple reasons to go through with this measure.

First, the existence of Veronica meant that anything he did would not end his life right away. A mistake that could prove fatal to others was not a one-way ticket to death.

Second, being proactive was better than sitting around doing nothing. Ves did not want to leave the initiative to his abductors. Who knew what the other party would do if more time passed by. Since he had the power to leave, why not try and see if he could improve his own situation?

Third, the phasewater survey conducted by the Phase King revealed that this ancient alien complex that was apparently built inside a pocket space was not completely empty and barren. There might be relics or treasures that the original occupants had left behind.

This alone was enough to stimulate his greed!

When Ves learned from the Larkinsons on the other side that Davute had called in the MTA to crack open the pocket space that apparently no one knew about, his urgency grew greater.

Having suffered multiple incidents where the mechers arrived with a big capital ship before proceeding to steal his hard-earned loot, Ves was determined not to give the damned Association a chance to claim the treasures of this mysterious place once again!

Although it was impossible for him to take away anything big and cumbersome, he was no longer as helpless as before when it came to taking away smaller goods!

When he thought about what kind of relics or treasures he could find during an exploration of this facility, he no longer had many scruples left.

Ves had always been able to progress by leaps and bounds by taking chances and grasping unique opportunities!

As such, he did not hesitate to work together with the Phase King to see if he could teleport out of this cell.

The process was difficult and cumbersome. He not only had to channel the Phase King and have him descend into his mind a lot more than usual, but he also had to endure the strain of supporting the design spirit's actions as the fish-whale king attempted to pull off a teleportation technique!

Nobody in the cell noticed anything wrong, but Ves' body had come under a lot of strain as the phasewater in his bloodstream had begun to fluctuate!

This was an indicator that the Phase King had somehow activated the phasewater that had become a part of Ves' physical form!

Of course, it was not just his body that the ancient entity tapped with his formidable phasewater manipulation ability. The Phase King also activated the phasewater integrated in the Unending Regalia, thereby attempting to make sure that Ves would not end up naked and completely unprotected if he managed to reach the other side!

"Ngh... this is definitely one of my stupider idea..."

As Ves could feel the Phase King getting close to completing an unprecedented teleportation technique, it seemed as if his body was truly beginning to tear apart!

Despite all of the augmentations and despite its considerable strengthening, the power of phasewater was on a different level.

Even a 0.01 percent concentration of phasewater in his bloodstream was close to tearing his body apart if the volatile substance ever went out of control!

The reason why he experienced so much body-tearing pain was because a weak 'phase lord' like himself who barely took a single step onto this ascension path should never be able to pull off a teleportation technique at his current level of strength!

He needed to understand the deeper properties of phasewater, be able to exert a high degree of fine control over it, become proficient with tapping all of the spare power that could be drawn from the substance and shape all of that raw power into a refined and complicated technique by

calculating a huge amount of variables to ensure it would bring him to his intended destination in one piece!

Ves understood a bit better now why his emergency teleporter did not allow ordinary people to control its mechanisms at all. There were way too many variables that could go wrong!

Even though Ves himself couldn't even satisfy a fraction of those cumbersome requirements, the advantage that he possessed was that he did not have to do all of the hard work himself!

He just needed to make his body and energies available to the Phase King!

Right now, Ves had the strangest illusion that he had become a mech.

More specifically, his resemblance to the Everchanger was uncanny.

Both of them possessed the ability to load different design spirits into their being, though the expert mech was able to do this a lot easier as he was designed to operate like this from the start.

At most, Ves imitated the Everchanger's function because they were both attributed to life.

One of the distinctive properties of a life domain was that it got along remarkably well with other attributes and entities!

This meant that if the Everchanger could channel different design spirits and even use this connection to borrow their power in order to perform a few minor techniques, Ves should theoretically be able to do the same at a smaller scale!

Right now, it felt as if Ves had voluntarily surrendered control of his body to the Phase King, just as how the Everchanger freely allowed Venerable Joshua to control his enormous mechanical frame.

Ves even gained a couple of subtle insights about what life was like for a living mech.

Each time they interfaced with a mech pilot, the living mech had to extend a lot of trust and control to a human. This was a delicate process and one that could do a lot of harm to mechs that did not earn a lot of respect from their users.

Ves also ended up in a similar position. By giving up control to the Phase King, the latter could do a lot of harm if he wanted. Just botching the current technique would definitely produce untold damage to his body!

There was no particular need for concern, though.

Ves embodied the Phase King on a deeper level, allowing him to understand the design spirit's thoughts and intentions on a more direct level. The same also applied in the other direction.

If either of the two held any malicious intentions towards each other, then there was no way that Ves or the Phase King could hide their thoughts against each other!

The bond they shared with each other was roughly comparable to the man-machine connection facilitated by a neural interface.

Of course, even if Ves was a paranoid bastard by nature, he did not show much concern towards the Phase King. Both of them had established an unwritten contract a long time ago. They both knew what they wanted from each other and had many reasons to cooperate.

There was no design spirit who understood phasewater and how to manipulate it better than the Phase King.

In turn, there was no mech designer who could provide the alien spirit with channels that could supply a lot of spiritual feedback. Ves was also the only human that could produce brand-new spiritual fish-whales out of raw energy that could populate the design spirit's spiritual kingdom.

By relying on the power of mutual benefit, Ves trusted the Phase King to perform a teleportation technique in a manner that no 'human' had ever done before.

Ves bet that if the transhumanists could see him now, they would probably go wild with envy and desire!

Only Ves knew that the mechers probably wouldn't feel as enthusiastic once they truly knew what was taking place.

"C'mon! Hurry up! I can't hold it much longer!"

His mental state as well as his energy reserves were depleting at a rapid rate.

What the Phase King did with his body was comparable to a mech pilot overloading his mech in order to pull off a move that was beyond the capacity of the machine!

It didn't help that the two were far apart in many different ways. The Phase King used to be a much more powerful alien entity when he was alive, and he had grown even stronger on a spiritual level after he had let loose of his mortal coil.

Perhaps the Phase King could never compare to an authentic phase whale due to the limitations of his original biology, but his extremely lengthy lifespan had probably caused his understanding and control over phasewater to exceed that of many younger whales!

Right now, Ves could feel how horrible this represented as the Phase King worked through thousands of different formulas at a time!

The amount of variables that the Phase King had to process ran in the millions, and Ves could feel that this was hardly the spiritual entity's limit!

If Ves had to describe this disparity in terms of mechs, then Ves was like a third-class biomech that was trying to perform as if his ordinary processors and software suite had been replaced by first-class equivalents!

The difference in processing power and sophistication was far too much for a fragile third-class biomech to bear. Just the energy requirements alone was enough to drain the 'mech' in seconds!

Just when Ves thought he couldn't bear it, his awareness completely blanked out for an instant!

At the time where his armored form disappeared from the cell, it instantly appeared tens of meters away!

The Phase King succeeded in pulling off the teleportation technique!

Even though the cost was not only great due to the 'low specs' of Ves' body, also because of the necessity of needing to find the right frequency of the phasewater integrated in the abnormally hard walls of the prison, the end result was an astonishing success!

"Ah!"

If not for the fact that the Unending Regalia could stiffen itself so that it could remain upright, Ves would have collapsed on the barren stone floor of the corridor at this time!

"Damnit... that was a bit more painful than I thought..."

Ves could barely think about how amazing it was for him to successfully teleport his body as well as his combat armor without relying on a fancy high technology gizmo.

This was because his body felt as if it was a mech that had just gone through a backbreaking battle! Even if the phasewater in his body did not shred his body apart completely, he was certain that it had gotten torn in a lot of places!

Fortunately, his Unending Regalia was a lot tougher than his body and essentially made it through intact. The diagnostics of his armor reported a few problems, but nothing critical had been damaged.

His suit's systems also detected the damaged state of his body and automatically injected a cocktail of drugs and medicine in different parts of his body.

This not only gave Ves a bit of relief, but also helped him accelerate the healing process of his own body.

As a transhuman phase lord, his control over his body was unparalleled. If he was able to control his hair follicles to the point where he could prevent himself from growing a beard, he could also control his body cells to mend the tears in his flesh and other organic parts!

It took over ten minutes for Ves to quickly patch himself back together.

He couldn't do much about the ache in his head or the energy that he had depleted in order to fuel the Phase King's technique, but he at least regained his ability to move and act in this new environment.

He stared out at the barren corridor which stretched on in opposite directions.

"Well, where do I go next?"

Chapter 4774 Barren Facility

When the Phase King mapped out the interior of the large and ancient prison structure, he did not manage to figure out what each compartment held.

Still, even a basic map was enough for Ves and the other Larkinsons to figure out a lot of clues.

For example, there were hundreds of cells of the same size as the one where Ves had just escaped from. These were large enough to accommodate several organisms that were several times taller than an average human being.

The Phase King's survey also revealed over a dozen larger cells within his range.

These cells were much greater and were presumably designed to hold phase lords who could only become as small as a light mech.

Then there was a massive chamber in the center that was exaggerated in several different ways.

It was large enough to hold a sub-capital ship or an equivalent large organism.

The walls in every direction were over a hundred meters thick! The floor and ceiling weren't exempted from this either!

If that wasn't enough, the concentration of phasewater in those walls was also at least five times higher than anywhere else!

Ves could draw an obvious conclusion from all of these measures.

"The central chamber was designed to hold a phase whale!"

Could it be that he had inadvertently stumbled into another version of the Palace of Shame. Were the phase whales so damn chaotic that they needed to build lots of prisons in lots of different star systems in order to contain all of their misbehaving descendants?

It would be quite devastating if it turned out if the center of this entire prison facility actually held a captive phase whale!

"The situation shouldn't be as bad, though."

As far as he knew, the Palace of Shame had been built a thousand years ago and was obviously still in use before Operation Lighthouse commenced.

This unknown prison facility was much older than that. Ves could only sense a lot of desolation in its walls as it seemed that absolutely no one had come and ever attempted to turn it into a functioning prison for many ages.

Aside from that, when the Phase King stretched out his awareness, the design spirit did not sense any living organism within his extensive range that possessed any concentration of phasewater.

Unless a phase whale was strong and capable enough to block this scan, it was highly unlikely that the central chamber still held an actual phase whale!

"It's probably empty."

Even if he was wrong, it didn't matter. Given how much effort and resources had been put into making it as impenetrable as possible, there was no way that a phase whale could get out so easily.

It was impossible for Ves to get in as he was far too incapable to teleport himself inside this chamber!

In order to avoid any accidents, Ves did not intend to approach the center of the facility if he could help it. It was obvious that the security levels were higher over there as bigger organisms tended to have more raw power at their disposal.

In comparison, the smallest and most numerous cells were clearly placed in the periphery of the prison facility. The security levels here were lower as it did not make sense to invest an unnecessary amount of resources to contain lower-level prisoners.

"Even aliens don't have unlimited resources at their disposal."

He already made a decision on where he should explore first based on the map that the Phase King had formed.

Most aliens designed their structures in a similar fashion to humans.

This was especially the case if they had to be economical due to the use of lots of phasewater.

The design of the prison had been reduced to an extremely simple level. Even if it contained more ornamental features in the past, the core construction of the cells and corridors suggested that the builders mainly had practicality in mind!

Just like humans, a lot of aliens tended to place the more functional systems such as power generators, storage vaults and the like at the bottom levels. Any control rooms and offices for high-ranking personnel were usually placed at the top.

However, Ves had to remind himself that the order was usually a bit different when it came to underground structures. A lot of alien races also adopted weird architectural rules that did not make sense to humans. The current location was also highly abnormal.

His goal right now was to free his clansmen and loot any treasures that could be found in this large but barren facility. He bet that he could get what he wanted if he visited the lower levels first.

"If the upper levels contain the master controls, then there is also a high chance that the people responsible for kidnapping so many people have dug in over there. It is too risky for me to confront them all by myself."

This was why he cautiously followed a route that should lead him to a number of ramps and shafts that slowly led downwards.

As his armored feet clanked against the barren stone floor of the corridors, Ves winced at how much noise he was making.

The complete absence of any activity amplified the noises even more!

He contemplated whether he should activate the antigrav modules built into his suit, but that would deplete its energy reserves faster.

He decided to keep walking and continued to move down the corridor.

As he journeyed to the lower level, he made sure to observe his surroundings and remain on the lookout for any other individuals.

He even sent out Blinky and have him explore the cells around him. He also made his companion spirit take a look past different corners whenever possible.

Ves found that it was incredibly useful to have a companion spirit as a scout. Although the distance limit was incredibly annoying, it was already helpful for Blinky to seamlessly pass through every wall and see whether the cells around him contained any prisoners.

It turned out that only some of the cells on both sides of the corridors contained any occupants.

The people that had been taken from the seating blocks were anything but normal. Each of them maintained control over themselves and did not go crazy or irrational for the most part.

Even if there were weak-willed individuals among them who began to boil over due to the pressure, there were others that could put a stop to any misbehavior.

Whether this would last, Ves didn't know. He had yet to see any signs of contact, and no one received any food and water as of yet. He had a hunch that whoever kidnapped these VIPs did not plan on keeping these valuable captives for an extended period of time.

Ves hurried his steps after he made this tentative conclusion. He needed to make his moves faster in order to preempt whatever schemes the controllers of this facility had in mind.

He only slowed down his steps when Blinky started peeking into the cells that contained all of the guards, both the private ones and the security guards working for the colonial government.

Just as he expected, the guards had tried their best to employ all of the weapons at their disposal to forcibly blow a hole into the walls, but how could they possibly succeed?

Cells that were built to contain powerful phase lords should definitely be able to withstand all of the massed firepower with ease!

At most, the more powerful transphasic armaments might be able to chip the surface, but the guns quickly exhausted their energy cells or magazines in the process.

Ves only stopped entirely when he knew he had come close to the cell that contained his honor guards.

He did not let Blinky act sneaky this time. The Star Cat openly appeared in the cell containing both his honor guards.

"Sir!" Nitaa along with the other guards on standby had straightened themselves and saluted to the intangible cat! "Did you...?"

Mrow.

The cat nodded.

"That is great! Are you by yourself or do you have a team with you, sir?"

Mrow mrow.

"That is exceedingly dangerous and irresponsible. Can you free us from captivity? Let us perform our mission!"

Mrow mrow mrow.

Ves continued to hold an odd conversation with his chief guard. Of course, he wasn't actually talking to his honor guards with cat sounds. He was actually tapping into the Larkinson Network and using it to convey his words directly to her mind and vice versa.

Once Nitaa discovered that Ves wasn't able to take his guards away from their cells, Nitaa felt glum due to becoming useless once again.

There was nothing Ves could do about that. He first had to find a way to get them out, and he had yet to encounter any control interface or mechanism through his journey.

"We will continue to wait here until you are able to free us. Our weapons are ready to eliminate any enemies that stand in your way and our armor can still resist a lot of attacks that dare to harm your life!"

Mrow!

Blinky disappeared again as there was not much point in lingering any longer. Ves just wanted to reassure his guards and put them on a higher state of alert in case he found a way to release them from their cell.

"There has to be several control interfaces somewhere."

A place as secure as this might only have one control room, but Ves did not think that was the case as it sounded a bit impractical and prone to failure.

Having seen more the actual state of this barren and long-abandoned prison facility, he gained more insight into the design choices of its alien designers.

"Whoever commissioned or built this place really doesn't want any incidents to happen. If an unauthorized party truly managed to access a control center, then there has to be a backup one that can prevent a single person from freeing all of the prisoners."

Ves became more certain that there had to be another control room in this large and expansive facility.

Logically speaking these crucial rooms should be placed as far apart from each other as possible.

Normally, the center should be the most secure place to build a control room, but since it was occupied by a large cell that was built to imprison the most dangerous inmate imaginable, then it would be incredibly foolish to install the controls of the cells in close proximity!

"The odds are much greater that the primary or secondary control rooms are placed at the bottom!"

Even if he couldn't find one at the lowest levels, he would just have to explore the periphery of the facility until he managed to strike gold.

As he started to descend several levels on huge ramps that were large enough to accommodate beings the size of mechs, Ves gained a better feel of the desolation of the entire facility.

He was pretty sure that no one had walked this path in tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of years.

Not even the unknown party that managed to take control of this place had disturbed the hallways in such a long period of time.

This caused Ves to develop more ideas about whoever managed to take control over it. A number of possibilities became more plausible than others, but he had too little information to form a definite conclusion.

Perhaps he might be able to gain more clues if he asked Ylvaine, but the design spirit had yet to recover all that much from predicting all kinds of possible future events.

Although Ves could still rely on Ylvaine to make a couple of crucial predictions, it was best to save this up until it was truly necessary.

For example, if he finally found a control room but lacked the ability to enter it because there was a solid wall in the way, he might need guidance in order to figure out a way to get inside!

"I really hope something will break the monotony of this place." He muttered. "This is really starting to get creepy."

As Ves continued to make his way to the lower floors, he began to notice more architectural features that he previously overlooked.

The cells and the hallways were all decently lit. The light levels were on the lower side, but not to the point where people risked bumping into each other because it was too dark in their cells.

Ves curiously moved closer to a wall and noticed that it was the source of the lighting. Somehow, the wall was constructed in a way that caused the phasewater integrated in the outer surface to release constant energy in the form of soft light.

"Interesting."

As a mech designer and a phase lord who had become versed in phasewater theory, he knew it was not that simple to engineer such a uniform light source at such an enormous scale.

If not for the fact that the facility was made out of inorganic stone, he would have thought that this place was constructed by the phase whales.

However, even if the phase whales had done nothing aside from creating this pocket space, Ves guessed that the builders of the prison most certainly had ties to the powerful native alien race.

That caused him to become a little more vigilant. The phase whales were inscrutable and behaved much differently from other aliens.

As they were aquatic in nature, they experienced vastly different lives than humans or other aliens. They were much more indifferent towards matters such as wars and death, and did not really possess empathy in a normal sense.

Although the subject was taboo among the native alien races of the Red Ocean, there were plenty of humans who wondered whether the phase whales evolved naturally to begin with. Their affinity and compatibility with phasewater were simply too high.

There were even people who speculated that the phase whales used to be a lot less different than other intelligent aquatic races. The reason why they had become so powerful was because they had advanced their technology to such an extent that they managed to upgrade their entire collective genome so that even the most plain and normal whales among their kind could integrate more phasewater into their bloodstream with relative ease!

That would have been an unimaginably grand project if this outlandish theory happened to be true!

Lots of humans dreamt about doing this to the human race as well. It had long been in the realm of possibility to collectively upgrade humanity's genes so that they would all become more powerful.

It did not entirely work out in practice.

22:37

One of the reasons why dwarves became so numerous in human civilization was because their Heavy gravity variant humans were actually the most 'successful' and ubiquitous results of these efforts!

The majority of dwarves possessed genetic codes that were natural and stable enough that it could be used to procreate more dwarves without worrying about genetic decay. They could easily expand their entire population at a rate that was just as quickly as baseline humans!

Many families and other groups also practiced this kind of generational gene propagation. The diversity was enormous and the results were mixed.

Instead of developing custom designer baby formulas that were customized for each individual child, they instead tried to create a high-quality variant of humanity that performed better in any way, thereby ensuring that many generations would be able to enjoy the same advantages.

It did not entirely work out in practice.

One of the reasons why dwarves became so numerous in human civilization was because their variant was cheap and easy to produce.

The same could not be said for high-end specs. The amount of resources required to grow a single designer baby was already great. Trying to grow millions, billions or trillions of them quickly became prohibitive even for first-rate states!

The resources required to grow better brains or stronger muscles often consisted of exotics that could only be supplied up to a point.

The only way to prevent these expensive posthumans from bankrupting a state or organization was to control their growth rate, especially when times were tougher than in the past.

If a group's circumstances became dire enough, then its people might become extinct due to the painful fact that no one was able to afford the cost of raising their expensive children anymore!

"Maybe this is why the phase whales have such a low fertility rate." Ves idly guessed. "With their mastery of biotechnology, they should easily be able to find a way to increase their birth rate. The reason why they haven't is not necessarily because they are uninterested, but because they know it would put too much strain on their environment to raise so many of their kind."

This was unimaginable to humans as their fecundity was one of the key reasons why they had managed to rise up and become a powerful race during the Age of Conquest.

Ves knew that factions such as the Transhumanists did not care too much about this, but there were also many traditionalists who felt that unrestricted genetic modification would lead to massive societal problems and repeat the mistakes of the past.

As Ves continued to think about a subject that was no longer related to the situation at hand, he abruptly stopped when Blinky made a massive discovery at the turn of a corner!

He had reached one of the lower levels of the facility at this time. There were no more cells around him as he had apparently reached a floor where a number of large halls were situated.

He did not know what purpose they served, but he guessed that they may have been used for storage or other purposes.

What he did not expect to find was a pile of bones.

"What the...?"

After Blinky flew around a bit to make sure there was nothing else in the large, stadium-sized hall, Ves cautiously stepped forward and studied the bones from a distance.

He could immediately see that the bones were undoubtedly ancient. Even if they did not have a speck of dust and hardly degraded over the ages, Ves could feel the sense of age exuding from their dry and clean surfaces.

He cautiously stepped closer and tried to analyze and scan the heap of bones with the help of the advanced sensors integrated in his Unending Regalia.

The data quickly allowed him to make a number of preliminary conclusions.

The first one was that the bones came from many different races. Their shapes, their material composition, their sizes, their densities, their growth marks and other indicators were all different.

As Ves stopped at a modest distance from the edge of the pile, he could clearly see that the bones had not been stacked in a careful manner. It looked as if a large alien attempted to place them in a way that kept them together but did not care about showing any respect to the alien individuals who grew these bones.

What concerned him a bit was that the vast majority of bones looked as if they belonged to races that could tower over humans.

"Do these... come from the former prisoners of this facility?"

Why pile them up here? Why not dispose of them so that they wouldn't litter this chamber?

Ves couldn't help but imagine several different explanations for what he was seeing.

One of them was that the prison had been operating for a long time, but that it had suddenly been cut off from normal space without explanation.

Once the prison guards had become trapped and isolated from their homes, they eventually grew mad and fought against each other as they degenerated into savage beasts!

Eventually, the surviving guard managed to slay his or her colleagues and ate the flesh of their bodies until there was nothing left but bones.

In order to commemorate the fallen, the final survivor built this tombstone out of bones to remember the dead.

"This is a ridiculous theory!"

Ves found it difficult to believe in this colorful story. It was much more likely that the bones belonged to unruly prisoners who managed to launch an escape attempt by using a similar method as Ves, only to get caught by the guards before getting executed. The bones served as a reminder to every other inmate of the fate that awaited them if they attempted to do the same!

Ves' body shuddered a bit as he realized that he might be the same as the poor aliens whose bones had been turned into a macabre monument!

This also ignited his curiosity.

He wanted to learn more about this prison!

He wanted to learn more about the ancient beings who left no trace of their existence behind besides from these alien bones!

He wanted to learn what this pile of bones truly represented!

After hesitating for a dozen or so seconds, he decided to bite the bullet and reach out to touch one of the bones.

Although he wasn't able to touch the surface with his bare skin, his limb had moved close enough for him to sense whether there were any spiritual traces left behind.

He struggled to sense any spiritual traces. These bones had existed for so long that whatever resentment or regrets their owners held had already dissipated due to the passage of time!

"What about phasewater, then?"

He didn't find any traces of phasewater either, but he could tell the bones used to be infused with it. This was a strong indicator that the bones used to belong to captive phase lords who were too powerful to be contained in ordinary prisons!

"Where did all of the phasewater go?" Ves complained.

It would have been marvelous if the bones held significant concentrations of phasewater. He could have created all kinds of interesting products by using them as raw materials, from totems to biomech parts!

He honestly couldn't tell whether the phasewater decayed naturally over time or whether someone extracted it from the bones. He felt that the former was more likely as the bones did not exhibit any traces of rough handling.

As Ves became frustrated at how little these bones could tell him, he suddenly remembered that he might know a certain eldest sister who could derive more clues from this obvious monument of death!

Since Ves did not intend to channel Helena's power, it was a lot more straightforward to call forth her manifestation. He carried small totems of every design spirit on his person.

A gray-robed lady with a dark lotus flower in her hair appeared in front of Ves.

"Hello, brother. I learned from Goldie that you have fallen into another predicament again."

"That's an understatement. I'd love to chat, but I don't have all day. Can you give me your impression of these bones?"

"Hm? Oh sure."

Helena's intangible form curiously stared at the bones and even began to float in the air in order to study it from multiple angles. She remained quiet throughout her examination and withheld her conclusions until she became satisfied.

"Well?"

His sister adopted an intrigued expression. "Just like you, I cannot really read too much in this. I can tell you that this is an alien version of a funeral pyre. The aliens who these bones belonged to did not die at the same time, but their bodies and their flesh still remained relatively intact before they were apparently stacked together. Whoever burned the bodies did so with the intent of honoring the dead, more specifically one being in particular."

So his theory that this was a tombstone of sorts was close to the mark.

"Let me guess." Ves spoke up. "The body of the alien who this funeral pyre was dedicated to is located deep inside, right?"

"That is correct, but I can't read much from them as I only have access to a fraction of my power in this state. They are almost indistinguishable from the other bones as they are so pressed together against each other that it becomes hard to tell them apart. I am afraid you have to separate them in order for me to gain a good look."

Ves wondered if it would be a good use of his time to dismantle this funeral pyre and retrieve those particular set of bones.

Logically speaking, it didn't make sense for him to waste his time and effort into doing so, but he was too damn curious to leave this mystery unsolved.

Chapter 4776 Rest In Peace

Moving a bunch of bones piled on top of each other was quite exhausting. Ves could feel his calories burn and his recently-healed muscles beginning to strain again.

Each time he moved another big bone that belonged to a species that probably massed at least five times as much as an average human being, Ves questioned the wisdom of his current activity.

He contemplated whether he should continue to make his way to the lowest floor instead of busying himself with trying to explore a funeral pyre that had no direct relations to his current predicament.

However, everytime he wanted to turn back, he could not actually do so. It was against his nature as a mech designer, an explorer and an innovator to leave a stone unturned, especially if it was a particularly interesting and fascinating one!

It was not as if there was anything more interesting for him to study. Ves had walked through a lot of hallways so far. He also sent Blinky out to peek inside the cells along the way to see whether he could find anything else aside from kidnapped and confused humans.

Nothing.

Ves had the strong sense that this ancient prison used to be a lot cozier and more furnished than in the present day. The spaces were a bit too big and there were obvious functional chambers that clearly should have hosted areas such as a mess hall, an exercise room and even an indoor farm.

All of them had either decayed until even the dust had blown away or the previous operators of the facility had emptied it out after a decision had been made to wind it down.

Ves previously thought that the facility had been abandoned in an orderly fashion, but he couldn't figure out how the current display fit in that picture. Why go through so much effort to empty out all of the hallways and chambers, only to leave such an obvious mess behind?

It didn't help that he had no idea about the alien race that previously built and operated this prison. The nunsers, orvens and puelmers possessed radically different cultures. Each of them treated their captives in different ways.

Then there were the phase whales, who seemed to have a preference for locking up their misbehaving kind for whatever reason.

As Ves continued to remove more bones from the central heap, the transphasic stone floor became more and more littered with old but still fairly solid alien bones.

The materials fascinated him quite a bit. Some of them looked as if they had grown completely naturally while others possessed clear signs of augmentation and reinforcements. The bones of one particular species happened to be completely made out of fabricated metal!

Just handling them gave him different ideas on how he could utilize them in various different projects. From creating artifacts that could house new alien design spirits to using them as the structural components of a new form of combat armor that explicitly complemented his identity as a phase lord, but the lack of phasewater significantly dampened his enthusiasm.

He could already guess that he could turn them as hard as first-class armor plating as long as he infused them with a lot of phasewater, but was it worthwhile for him to go through so much trouble to enhance a bunch of old bones?

"Keep going, brother." Helena said as she put more energy into sustaining her manifestation near the miniature totem that he stored in one of the cavities of his Unending Regalia. "You've almost uncovered the bottom. I can sense it. We are getting closer to unveiling the remains of the one who this funeral pyre is dedicated to. This is so exciting! I finally get to experience the feeling of digging up a precious alien relic like you for once! You should call me out for more excavations like these in the future, okay?!"

Ves breathed a little deeper in his armor as he had just put aside the latest heavy bone. Despite the modest volume of the bone, the use of heavy metals including transuranium elements caused them to become a lot heavier than they looked.

Once he managed to move a large waist bone out of the way, he could finally discover whether he had wasted his time or vindicated his decision to dig deeper.

"That... is not what I expected." Ves spoke as he grew stunned at what he found.

Even his sister became speechless for a moment as she hovered by his side.

A few seconds of total silence passed by before Helena decided she wanted to take a closer look. She leaned over and brought her 'eyes' closer to the distinctive looking skeleton.

"Am I looking at what I think it is...?" Ves asked in a befuddled tone.

"I may not be a biologist, but I still know enough about bones to see that your initial guess is not off the mark. There are differences that can be explained by different growth circumstances, but I can state with confidence that we are most definitely graced by the sight of a human skeleton!

A human skeleton!

Resting in the center with its arm bones clasped on its chest lay a human skeleton!

Although Ves did not have a habit of playing around with bones, this was not the first time he encountered a human skeleton.

Aside from that, Ves also possessed a good understanding of the human physique including the makeup and proportions of every bone due to his mech design and especially biomech design studies.

Mechs often imitated the human form, so mech designers had to understand the former in order to understand the latter!

This was why he agreed with Helena's assessment and knew for certain that this was undoubtedly a human skeleton!

"How the hell did a human skeleton end up in this ancient alien prison facility?" Ves questioned. "Did I misjudge the age of these bones? Maybe an unlucky pioneer or colonist accidentally stumbled into this pocket space and prison and somehow ended up in a fight against the descendants of ancient prisoners."

Helena shook her head. "That cannot be true. The passing of time is too obvious in all of these bones. The aura of death that they had once been saturated with has almost entirely dissipated, leaving little else but dust behind. The human skeleton has lingered here just as long as the larger alien bones that you have handled. They come from the same period of history."

"This... this is too ludicrous! How can this happen?! Is it possible that we are looking at an altered orven skeleton instead?"

Of all of the varied native alien races of the Red Ocean, the orvens resembled humans the most.

Yet even then, no one would be able to mistake an orven for a human!

"Don't be silly, Ves. This skeleton most clearly has one pair of eyes instead of two. Orvens are also taller than average. There are also other differences in the growth of their bone structure that are obviously different. This is a genuine human skeleton."

"How...?"

Ves could not explain how a human skeleton ended up so far away from the Milky Way and Old Earth where their race supposedly originated from. Shouldn't ancient humans still be living in caves and hunting mammoths at the time the owner of this skeleton ended up in this pocket space prison facility?

As Ves continued to puzzle over how he could reconcile this find with what he knew of established history, his sister paid attention to an entirely different matter!

"We are looking at a genuine historical record that can definitely change humanity's perception of its own ancient past if we reveal its existence!" Helena exclaimed! "Do you think I can earn credit for this discovery even if I don't have an actual identity in human civilization?"

"That will never happen!" Ves insisted!

There were far too many things that could go wrong with such a revelation. Humanity had always believed that it was a young race that rose up from Old Earth in relatively recent history and rose to dominance like a rocket.

This short but proud history had given the human race a lot of confidence. Whereas many other races had risen to the stars much earlier but barely managed to occupy a few star sectors in the Milky Way, humans had already conquered half of the galaxy in a fraction of the time!

If anyone came out with strong proof that humans had not only treaded the stars much earlier than that, but also insinuated that Old Earth might not be the planet where they originally came from, then all hell would break loose!

"The Terrans will kill us if we try to spread this discovery!"

The smug but powerful Terrans always took an inordinate amount of pride for maintaining control of humanity's ancestral home planet. Not even the Big Two could take it away from them as any attempt at doing so would cause the Greater Terran United Confederation to launch a doomsday war against the rest of human space!

In fact, even the Big Two would do their utmost to suppress the news and silence Ves, perhaps permanently. The myth of humanity's prodigal rise was far too valuable. Damaging it would damage the confidence of every single human, causing them to become more timid to the point where they no longer dared to conquer alien territories anymore.

"Interesting." His spiritual sister spoke as she poked her intangible finger through the skeleton.

"Interesting."

"What is interesting?"

"You should take a closer look. No, just touch it. I think you will be pleasantly surprised by what you will find."

Ves reluctantly did what she suggested and leaned over to touch one of the leg bones of the skeleton.

"What the..?!"

"Do you feel it?" Helena grinned like a sister who just introduced her younger sibling to an awesome new toy! "You can feel it, right? These bones are anything but ordinary. They may look like they come from a random human body, but they are much, much more than that. You just need to infuse a little life into them to activate their dormant potential!"

Even though Ves did not touch the bones directly, he could feel as if a hungry void attracted his Spirituality!

It was as if Ves had just come across a battery that had remained empty for many ages.

What would happen if Ves decided to 'charge' this battery for a bit? Would he be able to activate the functions associated with the bones?

His curiosity overruled all concerns. He wanted to know what would happen if he fed this dormant beast.

Against his better judgment, he cautiously transferred a trickle of spiritual energy.

The leg bone eagerly slurped up his life-attributed energy and seemed to come to life in an incredibly noticeable manner

"What?!"

The bones actually began to light up for no apparent reason!

Ves examined the leg bone a lot closer but couldn't see or sense the presence of any circuitry, electronics, spiritual constructs or anything. The spiritual energy he donated was simply settling into the leg bone as if it had entered a pool that had literally been dry for ages.

A small part of his spiritual energy even spilled over to the adjacent bones. Their hunger and eagerness to fill up their empty pools were even greater!

"I think one fact is clear." He spoke as he slowly let go of the bone to see whether it would do anything with the infusion of energy.

"What is that, Ves?" Helena asked.

"These bones aren't left behind by a regular human being." He responded. "In fact, I am seriously starting to doubt we are dealing with the remains of a member of the 'human' race in the first place. This fellow might have looked indistinguishable from ordinary people back when he was alive, but you can argue that he actually belongs to another race entirely! This is especially the case when it seems that his bones are completely natural, which appears to be the case!"

When Ves briefly came into 'contact' with the leg bone and infused it with a little life, he gained the sense that it had never been altered or augmented in any way.

It had grown into a spiritually reactive material in a completely organic fashion!

Chapter 4777 Traces of a Forgotten Age

"The skeleton deserves a name." Helena said as she continued to stare at the slightly glowing leg bone that still looked as if it was a cool glow toy. "I think that we will be working with it a lot now that we have discovered it. I know you well enough that you will never let go of this discovery, no matter what the Big Two might think about its existence."

"That's right."

Ves practically drooled at the sight of the human skeleton that lay neatly between a pile of recently displaced alien bones.

He had always been on the lookout for spiritually reactive materials. Despite issuing instructions to his clan as well as certain external organizations for materials that possessed the properties he needed, he had failed to get his hands on anything like Unending alloy despite offering rich rewards.

Aside from internal skull bones from galenta whales, a non-intelligent aquatic species, Ves had no clue where he could get his hands on known spiritually reactive materials in the new frontier.

These apparently human bones presented him with a pleasant surprise!

Ves grew bolder and began to touch another leg bone.

This time, he infused it with more spiritual energy. This not only caused the ancient organic object to light up a bit brighter, but also gave him a better sense on how much energy it could absorb before its pool became filled.

"These bones can hold a lot of energy!" He gasped. "Their capacity exceeds that of Unending alloy and P-stones!"

He loosely estimated that he could pump tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of Ves worth of spiritual energy inside all of the bones before they became saturated.

By that time, the entire skeleton would probably light up as if it was a god that had descended onto the mortal plane!

"Wait." Ves abruptly said. "This fellow isn't coming back alive by injecting my energy into these remains, right?"

"Don't worry, brother. As I said, too much time has passed. That is the point where the traces of death have long faded away. Even the most stubborn humans cannot escape the claws of death. These ancient bones are nothing but the dust that the previous owner has left behind in his passing."

"Alright."

He trusted his sister's judgment on this matter. She was the Daughter of Death, after all. Her expertise on this subject vastly exceeded his own. He just wanted to be sure in case he accidentally revived an ancient monster. Again.

Since it became clear that this skeleton couldn't have belonged to an ordinary baseline human, Ves and Helena began to guess at the ancient human's identity and life experience.

"The shapes and structure of these bones definitely correspond to that of a human male." Ves surmised. "Even if it is clear that these bones are exceptional and consist of an exceptional mixture of exotic materials, the pelvis and hips of this skeleton are not as wide and flared as that of a female human."

His intangible sister concurred with his assessment. "I cannot detect any traces of the human's past life, but it looks unmistakably male in my vast experience of looking at dead human corpses."

"Uh huh."

"You should give it a name." Helena suggested again. "How about calling it Adam?"

"The first human? Let's not go overboard. The identity and the power of this ancient human was most definitely awesome, but that is no reason to deify these remains. Maybe David is better."

His sister looked impressed. "After the giant slayer? That is an apt name. Since this ancient human was buried under so many bones from larger alien species that he may have a hand in slaying them. This is a warrior's grave."

Ves shrugged. "Actually, I just want to call him David because we found him in a pocket space in Davute."

"..."

They quickly moved on to decipher other information from this skeleton.

"I am completely uncertain how old David used to be." Ves frowned. "The skeletal structure suggests that he was an adult at the time of his death, but that is all. His bone composition is so far removed from the baseline human standard that his aging pattern may be completely different. For all I know, he may have lived through several millennia, but still look like a middle-aged guy."

"I truly wish that the passage of time hasn't been so harsh on David's skeletal remains." Helena lamented. "We could have learned so much about his identity and his place in history if even a trace of him remained."

"Is there truly nothing left?" Ves frowned.

"What are you doing, brother?"

"I am taking a closer look at the skull. If there is any trace of life left of the man who we currently call David, then it should definitely reside in the temple of his mind."

Ves bent down and carefully grasped the skull on both sides before trying to wrench it from its spine.

It remained stubbornly attached. He had to apply a bit more force than he liked to pop out the skull from the rest of the skeleton.

Oddly enough, the jawbone also remained attached to the rest of the skull, but Ves felt that he could pull it out if he liked.

From the moment his armored hands grasped the sides of the skull, he could already feel a significantly stronger attraction towards spiritual energy!

Ves cautiously fed it with a bit more spiritual energy.

"Wow."

As soon as it took in his spiritual energy, the skull glowed considerably brighter than the leg bones!

Not only that, but two pale green points of lights had lit up in the middle of the empty and hollow eye sockets!

It gave him the illusion as if a revenant spirit had just awakened!

Of course, Ves knew better. He hadn't actually revived any ancient undead human entity. The light show was merely produced by an unknown natural mechanism that fed off spiritual energy.

Since Ves' domain was predominantly attributed towards life and metal, the glowing eye orbs reflected this by taking on a silvery green hue.

"Interesting."

He tried to figure out whether anything new showed up. So far his life-attributed energy did not feed any spiritual remnants or anything. There was absolutely nothing inside the giant void inside the skull.

Ves grew disappointed. He would have loved to revive an ancient guide that could provide him with valuable information about the layout and the secrets of this ancient prison facility.

He also wanted to ask 'David' how the hell a human like him ended up hundreds of thousands of light-years away from humanity's supposed homeworld long before the first starships ascended from its surface!

"You know, I get the feeling that the Milky Way and the Red Ocean used to be more interconnected than everyone assumes." He speculated. "I have witnessed sights back in the old galaxy that suggest that the native aliens of the Red Ocean may have ended up in my home galaxy. If I assume that is true, then it is not a stretch to believe that natives of the Milky Way made their way here as well."

The strongest proof of 'cross-contamination' was the Unending One.

He didn't know it at the time, but now that he looked back on his encounters with this cruel but powerful dark god, the tentacled whale's spiritual appearance closely matched that of an unclean whale!

Helena crossed her arms. "The story is probably not that simple. It is best not to draw any premature conclusions."

"Mmhmm."

Ves turned his attention back on trying to derive anything useful from this find. Pumping the skull with spiritual energy caused it to glow a little brighter, but it still lacked an essential spark of life, which was a shame.

Nothing else happened as Ves tried to manipulate it in various ways. He studied the skull and the rest of the skeleton to see if he could see any remains of clothes, weapons, equipment or access passes, but the ancient human truly didn't leave any of that behind.

That was another disappointment. Although Ves had become incredibly interested in David's story and the properties of his remains, none of this provided him with any immediate help. He hadn't forgotten about his original purpose.

Before Ves was ready to wrap up this examination, Helena raised her palm. "Wait. Let me give this a try. Can you take back the energy you put into the skull?"

"Sure."

Once he did so, Helena's intangible form slowly approached and placed a palm against the side of the human skull.

Soon, a trickle of death energy entered the skull's giant pool, causing it to glow in a darker and more ominous tint!

"I knew it! This skull can not only absorb different elements, it can do so without exhibiting any obvious bias!"

The two energies began to cycle around each other like a typical yin-yang symbol. The interplay between life combined with metal on one side and death on the other side seemed to form an Ves looked at David's skull with astonishment. The eye sockets which previously held two silvery green points of light now held a pair of dark gray orbs.

The skull had taken a much more ominous vibe. Ves subjectively felt as if he was holding a colder object in his arms, but that was just an illusion created by negative energy.

"Can you do anything else with it now that you have pumped it with your energy?" Ves asked his sister. "If this is the extent of what you can do, then this doesn't really change anything."

A skull that could hold different spiritual energy attributes was not functionally different from P-stones and Unending alloy. It was hardly worth getting excited over alone.

"Hmmm... why not try injecting your own energy into it again? Don't drain my energy away this time. I am curious to see what will happen."

He shrugged. "Okay, sister, but I don't think anything special will happen. I have tried that before with P-stones. The only thing that happens is that they will get jumbled together and turn into a compound mush."

As Ves cautiously injected his own spiritual energy into the skull again, it did not do what he expected it to do. Instead of blending with the death energy that Helena had provided earlier, the two energies remained separated from each other!

Ves became a lot more alert all of a sudden. "That isn't supposed to happen."

The injection of spiritual energy from two different entities seemed to trigger an unknown mechanism that caused the skull to exhibit more activity.

The two energies began to cycle around each other like a typical yin-yang symbol. The interplay between life combined with metal on one side and death on the other side seemed to form an engine inside the skull!

The eye sockets began to change as well. One of them glowed in silvery green while the other in ominous dark gray.

"I knew it, hahaha!" Helena suddenly cackled. "Our mother would definitely be interested in what we have discovered today!"

Ves remained confused.

"What's the big deal?"

"I know who David used to be. Our mother told me stories about them. If I am not mistaken, you are looking at a primordial form of the human race."

"Wait, what? Primordial form? This skeleton is nowhere close to that of a baseline human!"

His sister glanced at him as if he was an idiot. "The variation of humans you call 'baseline' are anything but normal, you silly brother. They are not the default form of the human species. They are... well, they are the low-end version of what humans could be. David is an older and less downgraded version of humanity. He used to be so powerful back when he was alive, and he didn't even have to work as hard as normal humans in this day and age! Do you understand now, Ves? David is a relic of the most glorious period of human history! You might think that the Age of Conquest is already impressive enough, but you know nothing of the age where human gods such as myself used to be a lot more common than in the past!"

"And that makes you so excited because...?"

"Don't you see, Ves? With a lot of creative processing, David's skeleton can easily be used to reconstruct a human body for our mother! Not the Superior Mother, but your original mother who gave birth to you at Cloudy Curtain!"

"REALLY!?"

Chapter 4778 Primordial

What Helena said at the end shocked Ves beyond his wits.

If there was one big regret in his life, it was his sorrow that his mother hadn't lived long enough for him to grow up under her care.

Though he had reached the age where he no longer particularly yearned for his mother's care, he still possessed a lot of affection for the woman who gave him birth and provided him with his happiest early memories.

Even though the current version of his mother diverged considerably from the gentle and pleasant woman that he remembered from his past, that did not change the fact that he loved her like any child would feel towards a parent.

If there was a way for him to bring Cynthia Larkinson back to life in the flesh, he would definitely pounce on the opportunity.

No matter how difficult it was or how many resources he had to expend in order to make it happen, he would find a way to get it done so that his father could finally spend the rest of his life with his loved one in a more ideal fashion!

Ves stared at this skull which seamlessly contained spiritual energy from two different sources without mixing them up. He did not know why this was important or how it was related to bringing his mother back to life, but he needed an explanation from his spiritual sister!

He turned towards her. Right now, the woman glowed with so much joy that she looked as if she had literally risen from the grave!

"You need to tell me more, Helena. Start with explaining the differences between baseline humans and these so-called primordial humans."

"They are both humans, just like how dwarves are humans that just happened to be built differently." Helena replied. "The differences between modern baseline humans and ancient primordial humans cover other areas, though. In your world, it is similar to the differences between a budget mech and a premium mech, no, expert mech!"

"Are you calling modern humans like myself the cheap and inferior version of the human race?" Ves frowned.

"Baseline humans are not inferior, Ves. It is not my intention to insult this group. They are a product of their times, and the same applies to primordial humans. Many eons ago, human society as you can call it used to be a lot grander. The humans that lived at that time were all powerful beyond what you can imagine. These were glorious times, and one that can not be equaled anymore because the galaxy is no longer able to sustain primordial humans anymore."

Although Ves had already speculated that this might be the case, he still couldn't remain skeptical of this outlandish story.

"Weren't humans supposed to be cave dwellers on Earth at the time?"

"Oh, Ves."

"Hey! It is a legitimate question!"

"This is not an easy question to answer." Helena answered in a more reluctant tone than before.

"Our mother has given me a history lesson, but she merely brushed over the major events. I suspect that she does not know much about those periods either. What I can tell you was that a cataclysm occurred that fundamentally broke the Milky Way and possibly regions. The galaxy never became the same again and much of what made primordial humans great... could not be repeated anymore. Do not ask me what happened next. I can only say that after all of the dust has settled, primordial humans have left the stage and the group that you call 'baseline humans' have become the dominant strain."

"..."

This was a heavy history lesson even if it was woefully light on the details. Ves had so many questions that he didn't know where to begin.

"Let me guess." Ves eventually spoke. "The reason why David's skeleton is a suitable raw material to bring our real mother back to life is because... she is also a primordial human, right?"

Helena gave him a brilliant smile. "That is so. Do you know why she is so powerful in life as well as in her unlife? Her race plays a large role in her rise. Primordial humans are powerful, Ves. They are naturally gifted and can easily master powers that are out of reach to baseline humans."

"Are you sure our mother is descended from this group? You just told me that primordial humans went extinct."

"Since when did I say that, brother? I merely mentioned that they have left the stage. That does not mean they have all died out. It is true that the vast majority of primordial humans have died out, but there are still ways for a small population of remnants to maintain small, isolated populations. These enclaves have survived for many ages and some of them still exist up to this day."

Ves became less surprised than before. It was easy enough for him to make this guess after learning that his mother was a descendant of this small but extremely special group of ancient humans.

It explained so much, to be honest.

major strains of humanity working together, their civilization wouldn't have been able to survive the most difficult period and expand so quickly once they gained their stride. It is only later on that "Does the Five Scrolls Compact consist of primordial humans as well?"

Helena nodded. "Not entirely, but their upper ranks may as well be completely comprised of them. The leaders of the Compact take great pride in their bloodlines and heritage. As you can imagine, they consider themselves to be racially superior to all of the other variants of humans that are part of modern human society. They have always believed that it is their birthright to reign over lesser humans. They do not even consider baseline humans to be of the same kind as theirs."

That sounded awfully familiar to how the orvens structured their society. The gulf between the upper castes and the lower castes were so enormous that the orvens could not fathom they could get along with each other as equals.

"The Age of Conquest. That was driven by the Five Scrolls Compact, right?" He asked.

"You can say that about the Age of Stars as well, but you can also argue that baseline humans were already doing well for themselves. Mother describes it more as a collective effort. Without the two major strains of humanity working together, their civilization wouldn't have been able to survive the most difficult period and expand so quickly once they gained their stride. It is only later on that differences arose that became increasingly more difficult to resolve."

It was interesting how Helena framed the rebellion of the MTA and CFA as a political affair. The greater truth was probably a lot more profound, and he bet that the Sacred Scrolls played a large role in the disputes.

"Let us get back on track." Ves said. "How does taking David's skeleton back to mother help with bringing her back to life? If she is one of these so-called primordial humans, isn't it easier to just dig up her grave and clone new flesh to wrap around her extremely valuable bones?"

Helena started to circle around Ves, paying constant attention to the glowing skeleton while she did so. "Ah, the situation is not as simple as it sounds. As you know, our mother isn't actually 'dead' in the traditional sense of the word. Yet it is undeniable that she has died. She was already cursed and dying from the moment she fled to the Komodo Star Sector in order to escape pursuit. Her affliction sapped her of all of her strength while she was trying to prolong her life. Bringing you to term and such drained her more than you could ever know. By the time she passed, her bones had already been drained to a much worse state than these bones."

That sounded like a cruel and awful curse. Ves could not imagine what could have laid his powerful mother low. He felt he had been more than correct in his decision to evade the cultists of the Five Scrolls Compact by fleeing to the Red Ocean.

Though it was improbable that he could avoid the tentacles of the Compact forever, he could still delay a confrontation by continuing to go on far-off expeditions that were far removed from planets such as Davute.

"Okay, I get it. Her old body is used up until it has been wrung dry. How does using David's skeleton help? It used to belong to a completely different primordial human. The skeleton doesn't even belong to a female and I am pretty sure that hundreds of thousands of years of resting inside this funeral pyre has caused it to lose a lot of value."

"You know nothing, Ves. From my perspective, these bones are almost perfect. The fact that they belong to a man is not an issue as I am sure they can be reshaped. The fact that they have been so well-preserved in an environment as static and sterile as this abandoned prison facility means that it has remained untainted by any filth. Only time has worn it down, and that is good news because any lingering resentment or other strong attachments have faded away. It has been cleansed down to its deepest parts. Our mother will not experience any backlash by appropriating it. Do you understand?"

"I think so..."

"The complete skeleton of a primordial human is not the material we need to make our mother whole again." Helena seriously said. "We need to gather many other materials, but you do not need to worry about that. Our mother and father can collect the supplementary goods on their own. The primordial skeleton is the core that brings it all together. The ritual absolutely cannot proceed if it is absent."

Ves found it quite coincidental that he got kidnapped to this pocket space before subsequently stumbling upon exactly the right skeleton during a breakout attempt.

Helena's presence was also crucial. If she hadn't been around to encourage him to dig through this pile of alien bones and identify the extraordinary origins of the skeleton, then he may have missed this crucial find entirely!

Although Ves was still interested in trying to get to the bottom of David's story, that was not as important as securing these bones for himself!

"We can't leave this behind to the MTA." He spoke. "Will the mechers be able to recognize the remains of a primordial human?"

"Yes." Helena simply replied.

"Okay. Then we will need to take it away before the Association arrives."

"How will you do that, Ves?"

He grinned behind his helmet. "I have just the trick. I have been waiting to pull this off. I think that the bones are just small enough that I can get away with pulling off this move."

He carefully put down the glowing skull and carefully pulled a few hand bones from David's remains.

Ves studied them for a moment before he opened up a storage compartment in his Unending Regalia that offered enough room for him to stuff the hand bones inside.

"Let's see whether this works." He spoke.

His body shifted in an abrupt fashion. Helena noticed the oddity but did not spot any differences.

"Of course it wouldn't be that easy." He frowned.

He activated another function that caused the bones stuffed in the small compartment to be sprayed with a glue-like substance. It quickly hardened and cased the small bones to be physically attached to the Unending Regalia.

"Let's try this!"

When Ves' body shifted again, Helena became surprised and shocked when she noticed that the storage compartment held nothing anymore!

"Hahahaha! It worked!"

"Did you lose the bones?!"

"No." Ves grinned at her sister. "I just put it in a much safer storage vault. Let me bring in the rest. I can assure you that nothing will go missing."

Though Helena had her doubts about this assertion, Ves quickly proceeded to pull off the same trick.

He started to apply the glue trick to the smallest bones and slowly worked his way up. It became a lot more difficult for him to physically attach the more sizable bones such as the waist bone to his armor, but he managed to solve that by attaching them to the back and pretending that they were backpack modules.

Ves continued to exploit this interaction with Inventorization and the System Space until he had safely brought away all of David's bones aside from the skull.

He originally intended to stow it away as well, but he stopped when he stared at its glowing shape.

"What are you up to now, Ves?"

"Now that you have told me about how awesome primordial humans are, I wonder if I can leverage their exceptional traits."

"How?"

"You'll see."

Chapter 4779 Decayed

"...What are you doing, Ves?"

"Isn't it obvious, sister? I'm charging the skull!"

"I am not blind, brother, but what is the purpose of doing this?! You are expending your energy and wearing down your mind by doing this. Shouldn't you be conserving your strength for what may come?!"

"I am not losing any of the energies I am putting inside this skill." Ves stated as he waved the glowing skull that he held in between his armored hands. "If you look carefully, this container is doing an excellent job at isolating its contents. Besides, I am extremely curious how this skull is automatically separating spiritual energy provided by different sources and how I can best leverage this property."

To be honest, Helena was right to be concerned.

This was because Ves kept connecting with different design spirits so that they could deposit their unique energies into his latest toy.

Since David's skull could continue to store these energies without causing them to contaminate each other, Ves wanted to find out if there were any limits!

If his suspicions about not possessing a limit was true, then Ves could think about a lot of possible uses for the skull!

Of course, he needed to make sure he did not inadvertently damage it or alter its fundamental qualities in the process. He wanted to see if he could find a practical application for this object that would provide him with a bit of additional assistance in this time of need.

It certainly seemed powerful enough to hide a lot of potential uses.

He had a feeling that Master Benedict Cortez would probably go crazy if the man found this magical skull.

Although Ves did not have a good understanding of what primordial humans and their bones were capable of, he could already conclude that David's skull was absolutely more remarkable than Object 335 which was meant to become the heart of the Geist System that he developed for his upcoming expert stealth mech!

Ves interrupted his current activity of channeling different spiritual energies into David's skull and directed a perplexed expression towards his sister.

After moving on from the disassembled pile of bones, the two had resumed their journey to the bottom of the ancient prison complex.

His sister looked a lot happier than before. Finding the well-preserved skeleton of a powerful primordial human that somehow got stranded in the Red Ocean over 100,000 years ago had been an unexpected gift to her. The Oblivion Empire that their mother had built in the Nyxian Gap secretly spent a lot of effort searching for one, but the chances of finding one was practically nil.

Too much time had passed in the Milky Way for such remains to be lying on the streets. Helena knew that the influence of the Five Scrolls Compact was too pervasive. Whether it was the Age of Conquest or the Age of Mechs, the Compact maintained a lot of reach.

The secretive cult's tentacles had stretched to every star sector and it had raised countless subordinate organizations that could search for anything of interest. It was obvious that the Compact would have an extremely high interest in retrieving any primordial human skeletons that hadn't already been destroyed by aliens or the ravages of the galaxy.

After all, if Cynthia Larkinson could bring her corporeal self back to life and mend the wounds to her most inner core, then so could the highest practitioners of the Compact!

Aside from that, the Big Two would definitely not let go of the remains of primordial humans either. Helena's eyes narrowed for a time when she went over the horror stories that her mother passed on to her. The Mech Trade Association especially rankled her due to how far it was willing to go to chase after ultimate power.

Even if the Oblivion Empire managed to secure a whole and complete skeleton of a strong enough primordial human back in the old galaxy, her mother's problems still wouldn't be over.

Depending on how much it became exposed to the environment, it could have become contaminated with all kinds of messy elements.

If the skeleton also came from an individual who had only died fairly recently, then the strong imprint and attachment to the bones made it virtually impossible for others to make use of it. The remains would have to be refined over a long period of time with resources that were pretty much unattainable to the Oblivion Empire.

David's skeleton therefore came as an enormous relief!

The only difficulty that bothered Helena was transporting it all the way back to the Milky Way before subsequently sending it to the Nyxian Gap.

It was impossible to employ a normal courier service for this crucial task. The Big Two inspected every piece of cargo that passed through the greater beyonder gates and the lesser beyonder gates. There was no way a primordial skeleton could ever get through without triggering a lot of alarms!

The only other way to bring David all the way to the Nyxian Gap was to have Ves use his strange and surprisingly effective dimensional storage capability to his advantage to smuggle the precious primordial skeleton over in person.

She didn't know how her brother would respond to such a request. Ves had invested so much into the Red Ocean that even a temporary departure would mess up all of his plans and arrangements in the new frontier.

It was due to this heavy demand that she was reluctant to raise the request to her brother.

On the one hand, she wanted her mother to get healed from her affliction that constantly caused her to leak out her power as if she was a starship that suffered a hull breach that couldn't be repaired.

On the other hand, she wanted Ves to remain happy and keep thriving in a dwarf galaxy where the hand of the Five Scrolls Compact still remained weak. Sending him back to the old galaxy would bring him far too close to the agents of the dreaded cult.

Though she said nothing during these minutes, Ves was sharp enough to pick up on her unease. He could easily guess the reason why she felt so troubled.

"Let us discuss what we will do with David after I have survived this ordeal. There is little point in worrying about it now when I am still in unfriendly territory. We need to focus on the matters at hand."

Helena nodded. "You are right. By the way, I think we are approaching a site of greater importance."

Ves turned his attention back to the path ahead. They had passed through a few halls and moved down to the lowest level of the facility.

He slowed down so that Blinky could proceed and scout the massive chamber located immediately ahead.

"Oh." Ves spoke.

"What is that supposed to mean?" His sister furrowed her brows. "I cannot sense anything up ahead. What did you find? Is it empty?"

"It isn't empty. I just need to wrap my head around what I have stumbled upon. I did not expect that there would still be intact storage containers in this empty facility."

Once Blinky tentatively confirmed that there should be any immediate threats up ahead, Ves and Helena proceeded forward.

Ves had been right in his hunch. Over a hundred cylindrical containers were neatly placed in different round clusters. They were significantly taller than mechs but were only half as thick. He found it odd that they had remained untouched all of this time. It was as if the former owners of this facility never bothered to take them away and just left them here to rest for thousands of years.

"Why do you think the previous occupants left them behind?" Helena curiously asked.

"The logical answer is that the containers don't hold anything worth transporting back to normal space." Ves replied. "The next most probable answer is that the previous occupants had to flee in relative haste and could not run away quickly enough."

As Ves moved closer to the nearest cluster of cylindrical containers, his armor suddenly bumped into an energy shield that just came to life!

"Ah! Damnit! That wasn't supposed to be there! How come there are still functioning energy shields in this place?!"

It turned out that the prison facility wasn't as powerless as he thought!

This was the first time that he came across a genuine powered effect in this prison. Everything else had been so simple that they did not require any energy to sustain their operations.

Both Ves and Helena grew a lot sharper. A storage facility that contained reserves of food or ordinary supplies did not necessarily merit such protection. There had to be a reason for the alien builders to add an additional layer of protection in this facility to prevent any escaping prisoners or intruders from exploiting the goods stored inside the containers.

Ves did not immediately proceed forward but instead moved to a bunch of other container clusters.

Each time, he bumped into the same energy shields, but he already expected that to be the case.

What he was actually paying attention to was whether the energy shields still remained consistent.

"Aha! I see!" Ves grinned behind his helmet as he studied the performance of the latest energy shield he purposely bumped into. "They're not the same!"

"What did you discover, Ves?" His sister curiously hovered closer. "It is just an energy shield, so what?"

"Hahaha, that may be true, but there are a lot of details that you are overlooking. First, these energy shields don't activate unless something approaches the area under their protection. They are normally turned off because keeping them on not only consumes a constant amount of power, but also wears out the shield generators."

"Okay? I could have made that observation as well, Ves."

"There is more. Did you notice that these energy shields are flickering a bit. They are still strong, no doubt, but they are hardly performing at their prime anymore. Unlike the solid transphasic stone material that we are surrounded by, any electric device is much more complex and much more prone to malfunctioning over time. I highly doubt the alien shield generators were designed to exist for so long."

"That sounds plausible."

Tz!

"Look at this energy shield!" Ves said as he slapped his armed hand against the protection barrier.

"Did you notice another crucial detail? The alien builders have clearly demonstrated their mastery of phasewater technology. Their shield generators are bound to be transphasic, but there is virtually no noticeable transphasic effect acting on the barriers. The energy shields were meant to be transphasic, but the incredible passage of time has either evaporated all of the phasewater or caused it to decay in another manner. Whatever the case, the shields are incomparably weak compared to what they were at their peak!"

Helena finally perked up. "I see! You think it is possible to breach through these energy shields! If you can do that, you will gain access to a cluster of alien storage containers!"

"Exactly! Before I expend a lot of effort to break one of these decrepit energy shields, I will need to scout ahead and see whether it is worthwhile to gain access to these containers."

He sent Blinky forth as always and did not look surprised as the alien systems responsible for watching out for intruders completely overlooked the companion spirit's passage.

In fact, even if an energy shield activated anyway, Ves still doubted whether they could block a spiritual entity's passage. The tech clearly hadn't been developed to account for spiritual intrusions.

As Blinky dove into a cylindrical storage container and explored what they container, Ves suddenly paused.

"What did you find, Ves?! Tell me, please!"

"I've discovered a stash of phasewater..."

"That's great news, Ves! How much did you find? Are the entire containers filled with phasewater?"

"Not exactly. Many containers are empty. The others show signs that they used to hold various quantities of phasewater, but I believe that the contents have long decayed over time. So far, I have only found three containers where there is only a bit of phasewater pooling at the bottom. There used to be a lot more phasewater stored in them, but even if much of it has disappeared, there are still many kilograms left after all of this time!"

"It is a start..."

He nodded in agreement. "It's a start."

Chapter 4780 Faded to Dust

Ves scouted the containers even more. He explored numerous clusters and made sure to take a peek in each of them with the help of Blinky. The companion spirit only needed a single glimpse in order to confirm whether any remaining phasewater was left inside.

He could not use the Phase King to sense the overall quantities of phasewater in all of the surrounding containers because the containers were made out of an alloy that was extremely effective at isolating phasewater.

Since each giant 'barrel' could potentially hold thousands of kilograms of pure phasewater, they had to be made out of excellently stabilized alloys that could withstand the constant spatial activity generated by pure phasewater.

Even then, Ves found it rather ludicrous to believe that all of the containers in this storage chamber collectively held hundreds of thousands of kilograms of phasewater!

He did not know common phasewater used to be in the past, it should not be common to the point where alien groups could gather phasewater as easily with the same level of ease as stockpiling food rations!

"The aliens probably stored phasewater in a diluted form." Ves guessed. "It is easy enough to mix phasewater with either a stabilizing substance or just plain water. By neutralizing the effects of phasewater or reducing its effective concentration, you can effectively make it a lot less dangerous to handle. It is also less risky to store blended phasewater over the long term this way. The only troublesome part is getting it back out again."

Blinky possessed no phasewater affinity or phasewater senses on his own, so the cat found it difficult to judge whether the containers held pure or diluted phasewater.

Whatever the case, both forms could be useful to Ves!

"Do you want to breach an energy shield and gather whatever phasewater you can find inside this cluster?"

Ves shook his head. "Not yet. It will take a significant amount of time and effort for me to do so. I do not think it is wise for me to get distracted by this when I haven't fully explored the lower levels of this prison yet. I need to take a peek at the other chambers and halls to see whether I can find anything worthwhile over there. My main priority is to find a control room where I can access the systems that still run this facility."

He would have loved to spend days in this storage chamber if he wasn't in the middle of a crisis. He loved to make lucrative discoveries like this! There was never a time where he had too much phasewater in his possession!

Still, he had greater priorities at this time, so he reluctantly turned away from the cylinders that still contained a fraction of the phasewater they still held and continued to explore the lowest level of the facility.

He failed to find anything interesting. Vast chambers and different rooms that clearly held a lot of furniture and other items in the past had now become completely hollow and barren.

Ves continually wondered why the previous occupants brought away all of the hardware but conspicuously left the containers that held varying quantities of phasewater behind. It was impossible for the natives of the Red Ocean to forgo the opportunity to take away a lot of free phasewater!

"Maybe the people who emptied this facility of all of its goods failed to break through the energy shields." Helena speculated.

"That is the theory that I am thinking about as well. It implies that the group that controlled this prison last did not manage to overcome the security barriers that isolated all of the precious phasewater."

"This indicates that there are issues relating to authorization and control. A prison breakout may have occurred that either succeeded or did enough damage that the current controllers of this facility lost a great degree of access rights. Either way, the survivors chose to abandon this facility with what little control they had left."

"That is the most plausible theory that I have heard, but we need to find a control room."

They continued to sweep the lowest floor, and when that did not yield anything, they moved to the next floor and repeated their search.

It was not until they entered the third floor from the bottom that the pair of 'siblings' finally encountered another break in the pattern.

This discovery was just as significant as the containers of phasewater down below, if not greater!

"I am not entirely certain yet, but if there is any place that holds a control room of sorts, it has to be behind that broken wall."

There was a broken wall!

This was the first sign of genuine damage to the facility that Ves had seen up to this point!

The walls in the other areas were completely whole at best and lightly scratched at worst. Their resilience was immense and most phasewater-based abilities simply failed to take effect.

Ves could not imagine what sort of attack had managed to breach through tens of meters of solid stone in order to create a tunnel that led to a smaller chamber that was situated at an odd location!

"Careful, brother. There may be danger up ahead."

"You don't need to remind me of that. I will just get close enough so that Blinky is able to scout ahead."

As Blinky moved into the tunnel and took a closer look at the breach, Ves soon figured out how an unknown group managed to break into the place.

"Look at the sides of this wall. You can see artificial signs that it has been smoothed out, but whoever did it mostly focused on making the floor as flat as possible while removing the rougher edges on the other sides and the ceiling. From the patterns I can see from them, I can deduce that the tunnel has been bored by an overwhelming application of thermal energy."

"Like a mining laser, right?"

"The big brother version of a mining laser." Ves replied. "It has to be a transphasic laser weapon at the scale of a mech-grade laser cannon or more probably a warship-grade cannon. What complicates it even further is that it cannot fire a single beam for a couple of seconds. Unless its power is overwhelming, the laser weapon most certainly took its time to drill all the way to the other side of the wall. In fact, the weapon stopped firing shortly before it managed to break through on the other end. Do you see how much more jagged and fractured the transphasic stone becomes in the distance? That tells me that whoever wanted to get inside simply hammered the last bits of stone into pieces."

"Huh." Helena already started to come up with a story in her mind about an epic prison break. "If these are the marks of an escape attempt, how have the prisoners gotten their hands on a warship-grade laser cannon?"

Ves grinned at her. "Who said anything about using armaments? All beings that claim that they are gods are all the same. They eschew external tools and always rely on their own intrinsic strengths to do the job. I can only imagine that a phase lord has figured out a way to output a powerful laser beam from his body and leverage his own phasewater to make sure the attack is strong enough to drill through all of this transphasic stone."

That sounded like a plausible theory. Ves knew he could have actually gone in this direction as well, though at a much smaller scale. He ultimately went in another direction. During his last marathon in the System Space, he settled for integrating a miniature kinetic gun in his cyborg leg and focused the remainder of his evolution on obscuring his true nature.

"So how does figuring this out help us at this junction?" Helena patiently asked.

"It tells me that if I absolutely have to breach through a lot of transphasic stone walls, I would be better off using an energy weapon rather than a kinetic weapon. More specifically, I should stick to relying on pure heat to melt or vaporize the stone and whatever phasewater is integrated into them. It makes sense as it is quite rare for phase lords to develop energy attack methods. It is much easier to develop in a similar direction as the Trampler of Stars and rely on growing a strong body first and come up with a few spatial manipulation tricks that can serve as your signature moves."

Obviously Ves had a low opinion of these delusional 'gods' who obsessed way too much about growing the biggest and densest bodies.

Sure, more meat helped with increasing the absolute amount of phasewater that a body could hold, but what was the point of that? An organism with several tons of phasewater in his body was merely a deadlier monster to Ves. At least the Compact cultists in the old galaxy made more sense by trying to transcend the limitations of the corporeal form entirely.

After conducting several more rounds of explorations, Ves tentatively concluded that no one had bothered to set up a trap in the tunnel.

"Let's head inside."

As Ves and Helena proceeded to move through the tunnel that was large enough to fit an elephant with plenty of room to spare, Blinky along with a small and simple observer bot flew forward.

Ves sent out the purple Star Cat to act as his eyes and ears while the bot merely served as a decoy that might trigger any hidden proximity traps.

Fortunately, nothing serious happened once they reached the other end. As Blinky entered the chamber on the other end first, the cat could immediately tell that he had entered an entirely different space.

The stones no longer looked bare and perfunctory anymore. Instead, faded alien frescos and other impressive images marked the walls. The ceiling and floor were both made out of a different transphasic stone variety with a brighter blue tint.

All in all, the chamber that Ves guessed was a control room was obviously set up to accommodate high-ranking personnel!

"Now we are talking." Ves smiled as he approached the left side first. "The fact that these markings haven't entirely faded yet is a testament to their higher quality craftsmanship."

It was a pity that all he could see were blotches of faded colors at this point. The alien artwork that previously made this room look more resplendent hadn't been able to withstand the test of time that well.

"Everything returns to dust in the end." Helena spoke as she studied the other faded painted walls. "It is easy for someone to rise to fame and be remembered for years. It is more challenging to have the monuments made after you endure for decades or centuries. Only the greatest figures can ensure that their names are kept in the history books, but even history can fade as a civilization rises and falls throughout the eons. The march of entropy proceeds ever onwards. All will fade into dust, and in time even dust shall crumble."

Ves directed a flat stare towards his sister. "Uhm, okay. Cool story. Anyway, we're here to see if we can access the controls of the prison facility. This has to be the right place."

He no longer bothered to study the artwork since they had all faded to the point of losing value. He turned around and moved directly to the other side of the chamber.

The metal clanking of his armor hitting the stone floor slowed down as he reached the end to behold the damage done to what appeared to be a large crystalline control interface.

Once upon a time, a brilliant command console must have covered this wall. The quartz-like crystals came in shades of purple to green.

Unfortunately, someone had come and ripped at least two-thirds of the crystals away.

If that was not enough, someone had come in and hammered at the remaining crystals, causing them to break. The broken ends of those crystals laid forgotten and abandoned on the floor.

His sister eventually floated closer as well. "So these are the controls that you hoped to access."

"Yes..."

"How will you proceed?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Ves started to grin behind his helmet. "I am going to fix this control interface!"