

The Mech 5161

Chapter 5161 Sensitive Matters

Jovy Armalon had a lot to say about the upcoming conference. He first spent his time on explaining the rules and guidelines of this event.

"Our faction has held conferences on a semi-regular basis for centuries." He told Ves as his Eye of Providence floated by his side like a watchful guardian. "These gatherings are opportunities for the most accomplished mech designers among us to share their works, solicit more support, partner up with collaborators and gain the acknowledgement of their peers as well as superiors."

Ves nodded as he petted his own companion spirit. "That sounds like a professional conference. Is this conference heavily slanted towards mech designers?"

"No. A large number of mech pilots, mech officers, scientists, developers, industrialists, business magnates, sociologists, politicians and so on will be attending as well. It is undeniable that mech designers occupy much of the agenda for the conference, but the enormous changes that have taken place in the Red Ocean makes it important to accept input from other experts as well. Many important decisions are about to be made. We must make certain that they are as informed and comprehensive as possible."

That caused Ves to frown. "It sounds like your faction has held off on making any big moves all of this time."

Jovy nodded. "I have heard rumors that certain key leaders wish to introduce several major proposals that will lead to drastic changes in our society if they are implemented. Since they supposedly run against many of our existing rules and customs, matters such as this can only be decided in person. While our faction does not have a sole voice in how our civilization is run, we still have great influence over the other factions. As long as all Survivalists agree to unite around a single plan, we can exert our full effort into promoting it and gaining acceptance from the other factions and groups."

"That sounds really political." Ves remarked. "Do the galactic mech councilors have any say?"

"No. Most of them were left behind in the Milky Way Galaxy. Very few of them visited the Red Ocean when the Great Severing occurred. According to the regulations of the Mech Trade Association, a quorum cannot be established if too few councilors are available to form a representative governing body. We have also instituted a form of martial law where all decision-making authority is equally divided between every Star Designer and god pilot. It is not the most ideal approach to govern our Association, but when total extinction is only a few steps away, we cannot afford to get slowed down by senseless politicking and inefficient bureaucratic processes."

That was an understandable decision, though Ves was not sure whether he liked it. The galactic mech councilors played an important moderating role during the Age of Mechs. They represented the interests of the general public and always made sure to balance the interests between every stakeholder.

Now that the mechers got rid of this inherent restraint, the Star Designers and god pilots faced less obstacles in their desire to reshape human civilization according to their own ideals!

Perhaps that was the point. Ves suspected that those extremely powerful mechers not only regarded this crisis as a threat, but also an opportunity to grab power and implement all of their suppressed ambitions!

Ves glanced directly at Jovy and his unnerving Eye of Providence. "You probably know more about what is in store, right? Can you give me a preview? I have heard a few stories about how the Polymath is attempting to push through drastic changes to the rules of a certain kingdom."

That immediately caused Jovy to wave his palm in concern. "Shh. Be careful about what you say. You never know how many ears are embedded in the bulkheads of this frigate. It is not our turn to have a say on Her Excellency's plans. Only the Masters and other upper leaders of our factions are allowed to provide their input on this matter. The implications are too enormous to allow unqualified or tainted voices to distort this vital debate."

Ves raised his eyebrow. "Is my voice unqualified or tainted?"

"Both." Jovy bluntly declared. "Do not forget your identity when you arrive at the conference. You are merely a second-class Senior Mech Designer who has been designated as our associate. Our Masters won't be inclined to take you seriously at all, especially given your youth and relative lack of experience. Furthermore, your ties with the Transhumanists and more recently the Terrans puts your trustworthiness and partiality under question. Even I am not allowed to divulge many pieces of information due to your... mercenary inclinations."

That disappointed Ves, though he accepted that it was more than fair for the Survivalists to keep him at arm's length.

If he had been more active in trying to ingratiate himself with the Survivalist Faction over every other choice, then Jovy might have invited him to become a proud member of the Red Association right at the start of this reunion!

Ves did not regret his choices, though. Whether it was called the Mech Trade Association or the Red Association, both of them instituted a lot of rules that grated on a free spirit like himself.

He also did not like to completely commit to any single side in case it turned into a crashing starship at one point in the future.

"I get it, Jovy. I will make sure to avoid pushing any boundaries at the conference. I know this is a sensitive topic, but can you give me a general overview of the political environment of the Survivalist Faction? I don't want to come in completely blind and ignorant of what is actually taking place."

This caused Jovy to remain silent for a few seconds. The Reality Trickster idly took hold of his companion spirit and squeezed it like a stress toy.

"I suppose you are correct. It would not do for you to unknowingly offend a mecher due to your lack of awareness. I have told you earlier that the Red Association is effectively led by the god pilots and Star Designers present in the Red Ocean. There are currently 8 of the former and 14 of the latter. What comes to mind when you think about how they make decisions, Ves?"

"They're not of the same mind." Ves immediately replied. "Each of them are strong-willed individuals who believe in their own vision the most, some more than others. If they want to get anything done, they will have to gain support from like-minded leaders."

"Exactly. Many but not all of the existing factions of the Milky Way are represented by qualified leaders in the Red Ocean. A few factions have already become a non-entity for that reason. The Preserving Order Faction is a notable example of this. It has no Star Designers or god pilots who can stand up for them in this dwarf galaxy. The relatively small number of Masters and other notable members of this faction have already begun to defect to other factions such as ours."

"That's handy."

"Reducing the number of factions indeed helps with improving the governance of the Red Association." Jovy agreed. "There are more issues, though. None of us saw the Great Severing coming. Our Association has always operated with the assumption that the Milky Way and the Red Ocean will remain interconnected. Every faction decided for themselves how many of their standard bearers they wanted to send over. This has led to an uneven distribution of manpower, assets and top-level leaders throughout the factions. For example, our Survivalist Faction is helmed by 2 Star Designers and 1 god pilot."

Ves nodded. The list of Star Designers and god pilots present in the Red Ocean was not a secret.

"I know. Aside from the Polymath, you guys also have the Xenotechnician and the Fist of Defiance."

Both of them were pretty famous old geezers. They had been a part of the scene much longer than the Polymath, who only rose up like a rocket relatively recently.

The Xenotechnician was more than 450 years old and had been born before the Age of Mechs had begun!

As an old relic who essentially lived through three ages up to this point, the Xenotechnician had invested much of his research into studying, reverse engineering, assimilating and improving upon alien technology!

For centuries, this old Star Designer had made countless contributions by picking apart the most complicated alien technologies that he could get his hands on and converting it to a format that humanity could understand and make use of without any hidden dangers!

As a very old mech designer who constantly spends his time fooling around with alien tech, it was inevitable for critics to accuse the Xenotechnician for agreeing with cosmopolitan ideals.

These accusations never gained ground. The MTA must have investigated this guy so many times that he would have long been censured if these accusations held any measure of truth.

The Fist of Defiance was a much more straightforward hero by comparison. He was only a little less than four centuries old, and his god mech was one of the most relentless assault machines in existence. He might not be able to blow up a planet with a single cannon discharge, but was definitely a terror against all champions once he got close enough to utilize his fists!

The original Survivalist Faction had several more top-level leaders among its ranks, but the current trifecta was all the Survivalists could count upon in this displaced dwarf galaxy.

Ves figured that each of the goals, ideas, principles and ambitions of these eminent figures would probably have an outsized effect on the conference.

He suddenly made another realization.

"If the amount of top-level leaders translates into voting power, then the faction with the highest count will have the most say."

Jovy responded with a rueful smile. "That is also correct. Our faction is not the most dominant in this regard. That honor goes to the Expansionist Faction that had invested much more in the invasion of the Red Ocean than the others. The Expansionists currently boast 4 Star Designers and 2 god pilots."

That was a lot! With 22 seats in the new council, that meant that the Expansionists essentially controlled a quarter of the entire Red Association!

"So if anyone wants to push through a plan, they have to gain the approval of the Expansionists."

"That is so. We cannot get around them, especially if they form a united front." Jovy shrugged.

"This is not your concern. It is up to the leaders of our faction to negotiate with the Expansionists."

Jovy did not wish to say anything further about the division within the Red Association, so Ves tactfully changed the topic by asking another question.

"Where is the conference being held, anyway?"

"That is classified." Jovy spoke. "Not that it matters too much since the both of us will reach our destination soon enough. I still need to follow the rules, so you will have to be patient. I can tell you that the location is large and expansive enough to host a lot of invited guests. There are many different venues ranging from golf courses to mech arenas. Each of them provide opportunities for mechers and associates to come into contact with each other and establish new forms of cooperation. I highly suggest you visit these venues if you are unable to attend any of the closed conference sessions."

Ves received a few more pieces of advice on how he should make the best use of his time.

"Your degree of augmentation allows you to skip sleep for an extended amount of time, is that correct?" Jovy suddenly asked.

"That is correct. I don't normally skip my beauty sleep since there are many repercussions for doing it too frequently, but I can easily keep myself up for a whole week if necessary."

"If that is the case, then try to stay up throughout the entire conference. The gatherings do not end at night. Everyone who urgently seeks to advance their own interests will continue to find new opportunities to cooperate and advance their own work during this event. It will be years before we hold another conference, so all of the mechers will do their best to meet as many goals as possible in the starting years of the Age of Dawn."

That sounded exactly to Ves' liking. He did not want to attend a big conference only to sip martinis and complain about mundane affairs.

"I will take that into account. Thank you for reminding me of this. It sounds like there will be plenty for me to do during this conference."

Chapter 5162 Hidden Power Struggle

As Jovy continued to talk about the upcoming conference, Ves no longer felt as in the dark as before.

He had a much more complete understanding about the context, purpose and significance of this gathering.

Although the Survivalists did not hold the greatest amount of voting power in the Red Association, their influence reached further than was apparent on the surface.

For one, the Survivalists were by far the most prepared mechers to cope with the current circumstances. They had a lot of contingency plans that they could immediately implement by virtue of all of the stockpile of strategic materials and assets that they transferred over in advance.

Additionally, both the Polymath and the Xenotechnician were among the most useful technological leaders in the new reality.

The former was brilliant with rapidly inventing all manner of technologies that could quickly help red humanity increase its tech superiority against the aliens.

The latter had been busy with assimilating a lot of phasewater technology, making it so that people were able to steal more advantages that were previously exclusive to the aliens.

The two of them were already brilliant enough on their own, but they could accomplish great synergy if they pooled their efforts together!

Ves was not entirely certain about their political stances, though. The two Star Designers belonged to vastly different generations and likely disagreed on a lot of matters.

Then there was the Fist of Defiance. It was no secret that high-ranking mech pilots were muleheads, and enough publications had described this supremely powerful fighter as an uncompromising figure who desired to wipe out aliens preemptively before they ever posed a serious threat!

Before the Great Severing, the Big Two likely hadn't put all of their effort into wiping out the indigenous aliens of the Red Ocean.

That restraint came to bite the red humans in the rear as the disparity in numbers between the two sides had grown too lopsided!

From this perspective, the worst nightmare of the Fist of Defiance had essentially come true.

The humans in this corner of the cosmos were all at risk of getting wiped out en masse, and there was no way for the people of the Milky Way to bail them out anymore!

Given these circumstances, the Fist of Defiance must definitely feel pissed that nobody took him seriously enough before the Great Severing. He must have become even more uncompromising for that reason.

All of these political undercurrents painted the conference in a different light. Ves figured out why Jovy did not dare to say too much and cross too many boundaries.

This was because the three leaders of the Survivalist Faction had likely entered into a power struggle!

None of the Survivalists would admit to outsiders, but Ves could infer the truth easily enough now that he had collected enough clues.

It was not advantageous for the Survivalist Faction to broadcast its internal divisions to the public. That would undermine its authority and weaken its voice during high-level discussions.

Ves speculated that the primary purpose of the conference had changed since the Survivalists initially planned this event.

They used to assume the conference would mainly center around sharing ideas, meeting with more like-minded people and form a new consensus on a couple of important but relatively mundane policy proposals.

Now, the conference gained a huge amount of significance due to transitioning to a new age.

Ves already knew that much of the conference would center around presenting possible solutions to combat the rising alien threat.

What was not as obvious was that it also served as a competition for the three faction leaders to present their own visions to their shared following!

As long as a majority of Survivalists threw their weight behind one of them, then the winner would be able to effectively be able to implement his or her own plans with the full backing of the faction!

This might not be the most ideal way to run a faction, but the Survivalists understood the importance of sacrificing their individual priorities in order to do whatever was necessary to preserve the human race!

Ves was able to piece all of this together by combining his existing knowledge of the Survivalist Faction with all of the vague and indirect hints that his friend was dropping.

All of this fascinated and frightened Ves. He had a feeling that the conference was destined to become a turning point in red humanity's history.

Once the Survivalist Faction began to put its full weight behind a single plan, it would begin to solicit support from other friendly factions.

If enough of them supported this initiative, then the Red Association would adopt it as their central policy!

After that, the mechers would try their best to win the support of the other major human groups such as the Red Fleet and the first-rate colonial superstates.

So long as enough of them played along, much of red humanity would move according to the plan and ideals of a single visionary leader!

Though Ves was not certain whether the Survivalists would succeed in this grand and ambitious endeavor, the possibility of it was enough to turn the conference into an epoch-changing event!

Ves needed no more instructions on how he needed to keep his head down and avoid any missteps.

He threw a speculative look towards Jovy. Which side did he lean towards? Ves decided to see whether he could squeeze an answer out of his buddy.

"Which of the three Survivalist leaders is your favorite? Who among them do you admire the most?"

"They are all excellent humans. They all have their strong points and have made many contributions to humanity. There is little point in picking favorites as I respect all of them in equal measure." Jovy diplomatically answered.

What a boring answer. It was probably the safest one he could give, though.

"I see."

The two took a break at that point. Jovy might not be an important figure in the upcoming conference, but he had an entire schedule of his own. He needed to gain access to more resources and support in order to speed up his advancement to Master.

Just like Ves, Jovy recognized that Seniors were too marginal to play a major role in the events that were unfolding in the coming years.

Over dinner, Jovy shared a bit about his own life within the Association.

"As you know, the Association gathers many of the best first-class mech designers of human society. There is an abundance of skilled and renowned Master Mech Designers and Star Designers who design the vast majority of mechs in use. This leaves lower-ranking mech designers with little room to push their own independently designed products to our mech pilots. It would not be fair to force inferior products on them when our Association can clearly afford better."

That caused Ves to grow confused. "Mech designers cannot advance if their mech designs remain theoretical. They need their products to be used by actual mech pilots if they want to make substantial progress. How can the Apprentices, Journeymen and Senior ever make any progress if no one takes their mechs seriously?"

Jovy chuckled at this question. "The Masters and Star Designers fully understand our struggles. They used to be like us as well in the past. The solution is virtual reality."

"Virtual reality?"

"Yes. You have never truly entered the Design World or the other virtual portals that our Association has set up for mech designers like myself."

"I think you mentioned the Design World to me before." Ves recalled.

"I did, and you rejected it without knowing how significant it is. What you may not realize is that I spend over half of my time in the Design World. Here, we can design as many virtual mechs as we want. The better our designs, the more MTA merits we can earn upon their completion. The amount of rewards that we can earn is based on their performance as well as their novelty. The latter demand is particularly challenging for us. We cannot design the same mechs over and over again. We need to exercise our creativity and step outside of established works to invent truly new machines."

That... sounded awfully similar to Ves. He was reminded to the Mech Designer System's own reward system for mech designs.

"The story does not end at that point." Jovy added.

"There's more?"

"Yes." Jovy nodded. "The true test of a mech design is how well they perform when put to use. While it is not practical to fabricate and test every virtual mech in reality, it is no problem to test them in a virtual setting. Our mech pilots can choose and buy the right to pilot any virtual mech that has been uploaded to a catalog. They can subsequently pilot the machine in virtual battles against each other. The more victories attained by a virtual mech model, the more follow-up rewards its designer can earn. The matching system has set up specific tiers based on the rank of the designer and other parameters to make this competition more fair. This is how I have earned most of my MTA merits."

That also sounded familiar to Ves!

He had started his eventful mech design career by designing virtual mechs a long time ago. Ves almost forgot about those distant days, but they had done much to shape his design philosophy and approach towards mech design.

The biggest difference between Ves and Jovy was that the latter remained stuck in the virtual mech phase for a much longer time!

Ves felt it was rather sad that a young and talented Senior like Jovy had any chances to see his mechs in reality.

Nonetheless, Ves found it rather impressive that MTA mech designers were potentially able to make breakthroughs while solely working on virtual mech designs!

It sounded as if the mechers had deliberately set up the Kingdom of Mechs to support their younger mech designers.

"Can you give me a look at your virtual designs?" Ves asked. "I have always been curious to see how your design philosophy empowers your mech designs. There haven't been many opportunities for me to observe your work despite how frequently we interact with each other. You know all about my own mech designs, but I have only observed one actual mech that you have designed, and that was the Fortune Devil that we played around with years ago. You should have made many improvements since that time."

Jovy thought for a moment before nodding. "That is fair. It is indeed absurd that you have never seen any of my virtual mech designs. You can only truly know a mech designer by studying their works. I will introduce them to you later on after I have taken care of a few matters."

The two continued to eat their meals. Ves found that the food was remarkably tailored to his own physical needs, so much so that he began to grow a little suspicious.

How much did the mechers know about his latest physical transformation?

"Is it possible for other mech designers to advance all the way to Master by sticking with virtual mechs?" Ves curiously asked.

"It's too difficult." Jovy shook his head. "Don't think about it. Our Association enjoys a great advantage on this front. I will not explain why, but outsiders cannot replicate what we can do. It is much better for outside mech designers to stick to what they are already doing."

"I see."

It was not as if Ves had any problems with selling his physical mechs en masse. The only hindrance was his own lack of priority. He hadn't designed too many original new commercial mechs as of late.

The Second Eye had recently gone on sale, but the rifleman mech model did not make a big splash on the market. It looked like it would take a lot of time before his customers discovered its true utility and learned to value its unique traits.

Chapter 5163 Buried Heritages

If a mech designer was able to advance by solely relying on the convenience of virtual mech designs, then Ves would be lying if he said that he was not interested!

There were not as many practical restraints in a virtual setting. Ves could design mechs by making use of all of the rare and expensive materials that were available in the catalog.

He could also experiment with unstable innovations and unfamiliar alien tech without worrying too much about wasting too much money or endangering the lives of mech pilots.

Still, Ves would have never been able to attain so much success by relying on virtual designs alone.

Design philosophies were much less effective in a virtual environment. Unless the mechers found a way to create an incredibly realistic virtual server that could compensate for this effect, Ves would find it a lot harder to sell his mechs.

This was especially the case when virtual mechs never really lasted long enough to undergo growth!

The fact that virtual mechs got spawned in a match before disappearing once the fight was done meant that none of them would have any chance to grow stronger!

Ves would have probably developed his design philosophy in a substantially different direction if he continued to keep most of his work virtual.

He much preferred to design and sell his mechs for real despite the innumerable challenges and limitations involved. All of the extra problems were worth it so long as he was able to capture enough market share.

What he liked even more was seeing his products exerting a lot of influence on people's lives. Every star sector or zone where his commercial mechs became popular had undergone a lot of changes due to their unique effects!

There was no greater validation for a mech designer than to see his work change an entire society!

"I do envy you at times." Jovy Armalon spoke as he finished his dessert. "The only physical mechs that I have contributed to are either competition mechs or projects led by much more competent mech designers. It is very difficult to appreciate my own design capabilities when my mechs are hardly used in reality. Do not get me wrong. I am happy that I have been able to win over a respectable amount of mech pilots in our virtual universe, but..."

"It is not tangible enough." Ves finished for his friend. "Your mechs have rarely if ever been used to kill other people. Your works have not taken part in any wars. The lack of a direct physical presence means that it is difficult for other people to remember and acknowledge you as a successful mech designer."

The other man looked melancholic for a moment. "I have no reason to complain about my own circumstances. I was born into the Association and I have received countless benefits from that. I know that my work is superior to almost every other peer at my rank or age range, yet all of this does not entirely allow me to rid myself of the idea that my work is... irrelevant."

This did not sound like a new problem. Jovy must have been plagued by this struggle for a long time. Other MTA and RA mech designers likely suffered from the same condition.

"I wouldn't worry too much if I was you." Ves tried to pull his friend out of his funk. "Your design philosophy is so tricky that you will probably be able to design plenty of interesting mechs once you have realized your design philosophy. You'll turn into a real bigshot once you become a Master, right?"

Jovy smiled again. "That is the expectation that everyone around me holds. My design philosophy indeed has a lot of potential if I can realize it, but that is also my greatest challenge. It will take an enormous amount of work and several research breakthroughs in order to overcome it. If that is not difficult enough, I have to complete all of this work by limiting myself to virtual mechs."

"I guess you have a point, but you also have access to a lot of augmentations and other advanced technological goodies. A lot of mech designers would kill to take your place. Besides, we're not living in the Age of Mechs anymore. Exotic radiation is changing the game by creating a lot of new possibilities. I think your Eye of Providence already has a taste of what is to come."

The RA mech designer nodded. "Exotic radiation and the changes it has brought to our entire society will dominate much of the conversations during the conference. I am aware that you have a surprising amount of useful insights on this subject. Perhaps you will be invited to speak in some of the closed sessions related to E energy radiation."

That caused Ves to instantly grow more vigilant. The mechers already knew a lot about him. Much of their information was wrong or incomplete, but that did not stop them from finding out that he had access to old cultivation traditions.

Fortunately, the Five Scrolls Compact did not have a significant presence in the Red Ocean.

Even if a small amount of moles had managed to get through the greater beyonder gate in the past few years, none of their True God-level sorcerers should have been able to sneak through the Big Two's intense security arrangements.

It didn't matter too much anymore if scattered groups of Terrans, Rubarthans and space peasants used to be related to the Five Scrolls Compact in one way or another.

The Sacred Scrolls were separated over 50 million light-years away from the current coordinates of the Red Ocean!

If the Compact cultists were somehow able to use their powerful Scrolls to form an actual transportation bridge between the two galaxies, then the mechers wouldn't feel threatened by the actions of their old enemies.

They would welcome this development!

The mechers as well as the fleeters would probably do everything in their power to invade the Ruined Temple and take over the bridge so that they could use it for themselves!

The chance that this would actually happen was too low, though. Ves shouldn't get his hopes up that either branches of humanity would find a way to restore the ability to move from one galaxy to another in the foreseeable future.

In any case, the absence of a threat from the dreaded Compact made it so that the Red Association probably adopted a much looser attitude towards its offshoots and remnants.

Ves did not have to worry about getting into trouble, especially if he went out of his way to utilize his unique knowledge to contribute to humanity.

What he didn't know was how extensively the Survivalists preserved their old heritage and how extensively they were planning to revive it now that it had become a lot more relevant.

Ves struggled to figure out how to bring this topic up with Jovy. How much did he know? How much was he permitted to say?

"What is it, Ves? I can see you are troubled."

"E energy... how extensively does the Red Association plan to introduce or reintroduce methods to make effective use of it? I am not sure about what you mechers think about this. I would like to know this so that I won't violate any rules on this matter."

Ves had a feeling that Jovy knew exactly what he was trying to convey.

"To be honest, I am not too sure about this myself." The RA mech designer frankly admitted. "I am not important enough to receive access to the relevant information. I am certain that the conference will hold a session on this exact issue. The higher-ranking members of my faction will debate and hold a vote on how much the general public is permitted to work with E energy and its many manifestations. I have heard that this is a contentious issue. There are Survivalists who are strongly supportive of widespread adoption and there are others who fear that too many people will abuse this phenomenon or suffer accidents if they attempt to play with forces that they do not fully understand."

"Oh."

The Survivalist Faction wasn't able to make up their mind on this matter because both sides had a point. Their shared ideology did not give them an obvious answer that they should embrace.

Ultimately, the Survivalists had to make up their minds on whether they were willing to entrust the general public with dangerous knowledge on cultivation.

The faction would have definitely tried to prevent this from happening during normal times, but now that red humanity was literally pushed to a corner, the Survivalists might not have another choice.

Desperate times called for desperate measures!

Ves and Jovy exchanged a few more awkward words about cultivation and E energy radiation.

It was definitely clear that Jovy was at least superficially aware of cultivation, but it was not entirely clear whether he knew enough to call himself a proper cultivator.

Ves was inclined to reject this possibility. He already took a good look at the Eye of Providence. The companion spirit did not show any signs of cultivating a specific method.

"Can I ask you a question that I have been wondering about for a long time?"

"Sure, Ves. Ask away. Answering your questions is part of the reason why I have picked you up. The more I answer your doubts, the less likely you will make a fool of yourself in front of a crowd of Masters and potentially greater figures."

Wow. The Survivalists must be really worrying about the possibility that Ves would put his foot in the mouth in their most important gathering!

"What is R particle radiation, Jovy? The Red Two have given the public nothing after the initial announcement. The Association has released a lot of publications about E energy radiation, and I am grateful for that, but I still feel an itch whenever I think about how little I actually know about the other components of exotic radiation."

"That is deliberate on our part." Jovy freely replied. "You can stop wondering if I can offer you any clarity. Even I haven't heard any real information about this phenomenon. I am almost certain that our Masters do not know anything either. It is not a secret that god pilots are the only individuals who can perceive the new type of particles released by the supermassive black hole in the center of Messier 87. Only the most powerful among us have conducted various studies on R particle radiation. Whatever they have discovered, they have yet to see any reason to share their findings."

"That's a shame." Ves said with a hint of remorse.

"My guess is that we are not qualified to work with this type of exotic radiation. It is an entirely new type of particle produced by one of the most powerful black holes of our cosmos. Just think of what that means. R particles may contain traits that can produce an unimaginable amount of energy or strengthen one of the fundamental forces of the universe."

All of this sounded great, but that did not help Ves in the slightest. He needed actual information about R particles in order to have any hope of making use of it in his own way.

Ves eventually retired and took a brief rest.

The RA frigate continued on her journey to a secret location. Only two days passed by before she had finally reached the site where the conference was held.

It did not really surprise Ves that much that the Survivalists decided to hold their big event away from planets and space stations.

In order to make it as hard as possible for the native aliens to barge in unannounced and crash the party, the Survivalists had opted to hold the conference on an MTA research battlecarrier!

What was special about the conference site was that she wasn't parked somewhere in a star system.

She was actively coursing through the higher dimensions as she engaged in FTL travel!

Without the advanced technologies needed to locate and catch up to another starship in FTL travel, it was impossible for others to even reach this important ship!

"Damn. You guys are going all out." Ves commented as he admired the sight of the enormous capital ship and her many escorts.

Chapter 5164 Khamatar Reign

Ves had witnessed numerous impressive MTA warships in the past.

The one that stuck out the most to him was the Antazella de Osiris.

Ves took an admiring look at the augmented and corrected view of the starship where the conference was held.

The research battlecarrier de facto functioned as a seat of an MTA Master for good reasons. She possessed all of the amenities that a mech designer in the field required while also possessing formidable offensive and defensive capabilities.

Her expansive mech capacity along with her battleship-grade gun batteries enabled her to fight against a varied range of enemy craft and vessels all by herself!

The existence of such a comprehensive capital ship signified that Ves might not be the only daredevil of a mech designer in human society.

The mechers also yearned to explore the less well-known parts of space!

Of course, their excellent grasp of high technology and their abundant resources enabled them to gear up countless times better than Ves.

Whereas he was often at risk of falling over the edge and plunging into the abyss, the mechers had plenty of safeguards in place that would prevent them from losing their balance!

"What is she?" Ves asked as he waited for the MTA frigate he was riding on to move up the line, pass the security check and complete the transit.

"That is the Khamatar Reign, the flagship of the Blue Kindling Fleet and a ship under our direct control." Jovy Armalon explained. "She is one of the many warships that we have prepared in the event the worst case scenario has occurred."

"You mean..."

"Our faction have set up the Blue Kindling Fleet along with a number of other fleets to escape the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy in their entirety if there is no hope anymore. We previously thought that we were just being overly cautious out of habit, but it turns out that preparing for this contingency plan may end up worth it after all." He spoke in a subdued voice.

The Survivalists were the most paranoid and prepared factions out of the entire Association. They saw danger where there was none and always did their best to prepare for a rainy day.

Even if their efforts were wasted 99 out of 100 times, their foresight and emphasis on backup plans put them in a particularly strong position at the start of the Age of Dawn!

Ves observed the fleet surrounding impressive capital ships. Smaller but still formidable fleet carriers, battleships, cruisers and escort ships surrounded the vessel from all sides.

Not a lot of first-class multipurpose mechs were out and about, mainly because it was a lot harder for them to engage in independent FTL travel due to their limited sizes.

It still impressed a lot that the Survivalists had nonetheless deployed a couple of hundred of them even though it was not entirely necessary!

This was as much a safety precaution as well as a show of force. Perhaps the sight might not be much of a surprise to the mechers themselves, but associates such as Ves rarely encountered such an impressive sight!

No matter how safe they were while traveling the higher dimensions, the Survivalists did not leave anything to chance and maintained the highest security standards.

This was also why Ves and Jovy couldn't be teleported into the Khamatar Reign immediately even though the mechers definitely had the tech to make it possible.

In order to prevent crazy attacks from occurring such as a traitor suddenly teleporting hundreds of antimatter bombs within the flagship of the Blue Kindling Fleet, the mechers had set up an interdiction field that completely negated this capability!

Ves could already feel it in his veins. The invisible interference field was far more subtle and refined than expected, so much so that most people would never even feel the difference.

The only reason why Ves could perceive it was because he was a phase lord!

He had a feeling that he wouldn't be able to execute the same instinctive teleportation trick like the one he pulled off in the ancient alien prison facility built inside the Davute Pocket Space.

Interesting.

He was not surprised that the mechers were capable of building such powerful tech.

What he did take note of was how refined and effective it was. He did not believe that this effect was within the realm of possibility of an ordinary MTA researcher.

Had one of the two Star Designers of the Survivalist Faction personally developed the contraption that was responsible for inhibiting teleportation and warping?

That realization caused Ves to grow more nervous. He already knew on an intellectual level that he would be coming into close proximity to not just one Star Designer, but possibly another one as well.

He still recalled the moment where the Polymath deigned to visit him and meet with him in person.

Though the impressive True God in the form of a mech designer did not find what she was looking for, Ves was still sure that she was more eager than ever to get her hands on another piece of the legendary Metal Scroll.

Ves had inadvertently got away from that dangerous moment because the System went into dormancy in order to complete its comprehensive upgrade cycle at the time.

He could no longer count on this anymore. Unless the Mech Designer System Version 2.0 managed to improve its hiding capabilities, Ves needed to make sure he did not come into close proximity to the Polymath again!

It would be a mistake to assume the relatively young Star Designer had not changed all of that much since they last met in person.

This was the Age of Dawn. The reintroduction of the power of heaven to red humanity meant that every cultivator gained access to a whole new source of power.

The Polymath was a True God-level cultivator who just happened to be one of the leaders of the Red Association, an off-shoot of an off-shoot of the Five Scrolls Compact.

In addition to all of that, the Polymath was known to be extremely avid at absorbing all kinds of information and knowledge no matter the field or discipline.

Ves could already conclude beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Polymath had already begun to delve into cultivation science!

Perhaps the Star Designer might never be able to equal the sheer amount of knowledge and mystical capabilities as his mother, but she would definitely be able to engineer her own powerful solutions!

All of this caused Ves to view the Khamatar Reign with much greater dread. The ship was more than just an RA research battlecarrier.

She had become a nexus for all kinds of new and powerful innovations. Some of them might even be able to counter all of the methods and techniques he had long relied upon to gain an advantage over everyone!

"We are close." Jovy said, pulling Ves out of his darker thoughts.

A first-class multipurpose mech flew close and began to scan the MTA frigate from bow to stern without encountering any resistance.

Ves could feel strong energy waves coursing through his entire body. Despite all of the measures he had taken to hide his unusual traits and increase his privacy to the best of his ability, he had a feeling that the powerful scanning device pierced through everything.

This was exactly why he previously preferred to keep his distance from the MTA.

It was unfortunate that the mechers did not give him a choice.

This entire visit was a gamble to him. He needed to bet that he would be able to gain enough favor from the mechers to overlook certain troublesome matters.

Jovy clearly sensed Ves' growing distress. "You will not be left alone, Ves. I will be accompanying you for the majority of your time on the Khamatar Reign. I will make sure to look out for you and prevent others from developing a misunderstanding about you and your work."

That sounded reassuring, but it also caused Ves to grow more suspicious about Jovy's motives.

"Are you doing this on assignment or are you doing this on your own initiative?"

"Both." The RA mech designer admitted. "You are one of the few friends I have outside of the Association that I can let my guard down to an extent. I genuinely respect your work and already saw promise in them when you were much younger and less accomplished. At the same time, Master Vayro Goldstein has always kept an eye on you despite being preoccupied with his projects."

That sounded both good and bad to Ves.

On the one hand, maintaining the persistent interest of a powerful mecher who was high up in the hierarchy meant that he could count on a lot of protection.

On the other hand, he did not miss the fact that Master Goldstein was a trusted subordinate of the Polymath.

He was known as her spokesperson, which meant that his actions partially represented the Star Designer's actions as well!

All of that caused Ves to lose the reassurance that he briefly obtained. His experiences over the years told him that it was always a bad idea to get mixed up in a political power struggle, especially when he was a marginal figure instead of a major player!

Ves did not want to enter the conference while carrying the label as an associate that had firmly entered the camp of the Polymath.

Even without the whole issue concerning the search for the fragments of the Metal Scrolls, Ves just did not want to take the Polymath's side for no good reason.

He preferred to remain neutral, but if he had to pick a side, he at least wanted to know more about the alternative choices.

That reminded him of an important issue.

As he observed the projected feed, he could spot numerous ace mechs surrounding the Khamater Reign and patrolling the periphery of the fleet.

"Jovy, can you tell me whether the Fist of Defiance will attend this conference as well?"

"I can answer this for you. As far as I am aware, our god pilot won't be attending the conference in person. He is already committed to an important military operation. I do not know anything more than that. He has already appointed a trusted representative to go in his place and speak on his behalf. None of us will have to be subjected to a constantly active god kingdom that can monitor you at all times and eavesdrop on any conversations and transmissions that take place within the Khamatar Reign."

Ves relaxed a bit. While he was aware that Jovy might not have the correct information, he did not believe the Survivalists would like it if they spent an entire week within the research battlecarrier where all of their talk about opposing the Fist of Defiance's vision became exposed to the god pilot himself!

He briefly felt he had entered a powerful field that was highly familiar to him. The Saint Kingdom of an unknown ace pilot investigated his body and confirmed that he was not a clone that tried to sneak inside the conference with malicious intentions in mind.

"How often will this happen?"

"Not too frequently." Jovy responded. "Our security personnel are known to be thorough at their jobs, but constant checks can grate on your mood. Our conferences are supposed to be venues where mech designers and other people can freely share and discuss their ideas with each other. So long as we know that you did not come to threaten anyone, you will be left alone for the most part."

"I hope you are right."

It took a few more minutes for Ves to finally step foot inside the Khamater Reign.

He already caught sight of dozens of mechers and associates who arrived not too long ago. They all wore distinctly different outfits and were in the process of adding an extra badge to their chests that conveniently denoted their status.

Ves received one as well. His finely crafted metal badge was colored in teal while Jovy received a green version of the same item.

"Pin it on the front of your body and make sure to keep it with you at all times. Security will not be happy if you ever lose it for whatever reason."

"Understood."

Chapter 5165 The Beginning Of The Conference

It was not entirely necessary to use badges to denote the identity of an invited guest.

Every mecher and everyone they considered worthy to become their associate all possessed cranial implants. This enabled them to call up additional information in real-time on anyone and anything that entered their view.

Nonetheless, it was a lot easier and less cumbersome if everyone wore a brightly colored hat or distinctly different uniforms.

The Survivalists did not force anyone to change their wardrobes to such an extent. They chose to go for the most practical solution, which entailed handing over shiny badges that were large enough to be easily visible from a distance.

Members of the Red Association received green badges while associates received teal badges.

There was nothing special about the badges. They were clearly mass-produced by materializers and did not contain any circuitry or more mystical components.

Ves privately thought that the organizers of the conference could have chosen more contrasting colors, but perhaps there were good reasons behind these choices.

The Survivalists did not bother to add any further differentiation aside from that, which Ves thought was just fine. He did not want other people to judge him thoroughly before entering into conversation.

Not that it mattered all that much. People could still use their cranial implants to look up his colorful record from the Khamater Reign's public network if they sought more information.

As Ves placed the self-adhering metal badge on the front of his most refined and gilded red uniform, he felt like he was truly part of the crowd.

"Come. Let us stow our luggage in our staterooms and check up on the state of your cargo." Jovy said as he started to move deeper into the interior of the massive vessel. "I can give you a small tour while we are on the way."

The Khamatar Reign possessed a fairly standard interior for the Red Association. The bulkheads were mostly gunmetal gray that occasionally bore functional markings.

The deck was made out of similar alloys but oddly did not make any noise when people stepped on them. Ves found this lack of sound to be disturbing at first, but he quickly got accustomed to it once he no longer thought about it too hard.

The relative lack of warmth did not last too long. Ves encountered more and more interior halls and compartments where the mechs had put more effort into making them look pleasant and livable.

The Survivalists still showed considerable restraint, but they went out of their way to place a variety of artworks as well as scale models of powerful mechs in large public spaces.

Touches of advanced technology were everywhere.

Sturdy bulkheads occasionally morphed into open entrances despite the fact that Ves was sure they were all made out of solid metal.

Overhead materialized reproduced entire meals in a large cafeteria. Each of the meals were originally cooked by the best chefs for the purpose of getting scanned down to the placement of the last atom.

A mech designer that wanted to call up an item that was stored in the cargo hold only had to make a single request. Seconds later, the deck opened up and delivered the good despite the fact that it was originally located all the way down in the lower decks of the enormous capital ship!

There was so much for Ves to take in. At times, he wanted to secretly send out Blinky or employ his spiritual senses to study anyone or anything that caught his interest.

He restrained himself. He was surrounded by so many powerful individuals that he did not believe he kept his action discreet. This was not the time for him to fool around.

"There are many facilities within the Khamater Reign that might be worthwhile for you to explore." Jovy said. "There is no time for that today. We need to check into our rooms and get ready to attend the opening speeches."

Ves already had a decent idea of what this was all about.

"That is the moment where your three leaders or their representatives explain the overall agenda of this conference and present their own proposals, right?"

"Yes. I highly suggest that you listen to them carefully. You don't have a direct say in these matters, but your individual projects might get affected by changes in policy."

"I see."

What else could he say about that? He clearly had no business with getting involved with the top-level power struggle. He just wanted to keep his head down and sell his modest contributions to the Survivalists.

After a lengthy journey across the hull of the enormous research battlecarrier, they eventually reached their staterooms.

The Survivalists did not skimp out on this. That was for certain. Even though Ves had resolved to make the best possible use out of his time and stay awake for an entire week, he could see himself going back to unwind in this expansive and luxurious suite.

Once he confirmed that everything was in order, Ves joined up with Jovy so that they could move to a massive assembly hall that was already half-filled.

Lots and lots of expensive-looking capsule seats were placed around an elevated stage at the center. People had already been assigned to the seats in advance.

Different from what Ves expected, the most powerful and influential mechers were not seated at the front.

Instead, they took their seats at the far rear.

The more junior and less important guests received the privilege of getting a closer view of the important dignitaries who would soon be addressing all of the attendees!

Ves was indirectly able to determine his overall ranking among the associates by studying the positioning of his seat.

He was situated further away from the front than he expected. He somehow gained more priority than thousands of eager young Journeymen, battle hungry mech pilots and an incredible variety of associates.

What Ves found notable was that he spotted a sizable quantity of Master Mech Designers, both mecher and associate, who had been assigned with lower priority seats!

This looked perplexing to Ves as well as many other invited guests. Ves received frequent glances from mech designers who were much older than himself.

"There is no need for you to feel nervous." Jovy reassured his friend. "Our faction did not make a mistake with the seat assignments. The mech designers who are seated in front of us are unlikely to make as many contributions to humanity as you. The allocation of seats is largely determined by your galactic citizenship tier. This approach is not entirely perfect, but it leads to the least amount of doubt and disagreements."

That made a lot of sense. Higher tiers of galactic citizenships were not easy to come by. If a Master Mech Designer did not introduce ground-breaking technologies that permanently strengthened mechs on a universal basis, their citizenship tiers would never move past tier 8.

Ves and Jovy were oddballs in that they were younger and less powerful than typical tier 6 galactic citizens.

It was as if they were a pair of children that had somehow managed to sneak into a gathering for grown-ups!

The conference attracted many talents, though. As Ves swept across the seats placed in front of his current 'ring', he could spot a lot of relatively young faces.

A fair number of them were mech designers who had demonstrated enough potential to attract the Survivalist Faction.

Each of them possessed special advantages that could help with turning the tide against the aliens so long as they advanced to the rank of Master Mech Designer!

Unfortunately, Ves did not think that many of them were likely to realize their design philosophies in the short or medium term. There simply wasn't enough time for them to mature and complete their life-changing research projects.

Even if this cohort of young talents received more time to develop their own craft, only a minority of them would be able to realize their ambitious design philosophies.

The Survivalists already recognized this reality. They chose to go for quantity and make sure to put enough talents under their wings in the hopes that at least a couple of them would succeed!

Ves had figured this out in the past, but he felt a lot less valued now that he was able to observe so many of his peers in a single place. The Survivalists already took failure into account and did not do anything further than was necessary to claim their territory.

This did not affect him for long. Relatively few of his kind were able to earn tier 6 galactic citizenship.

Not only that, but Ves was pretty sure that his various innovations would certainly attract much greater attention and appreciation from the faction!

Time passed by. Ves chatted with Jovy to a limited extent. He wasn't in a hurry to start a conversation with other people even though he was itching to make new friends.

It was not wise to talk with anyone without knowing what was actually going on. Ves at least needed to listen to the opening speeches before he could set out to pursue his own agenda.

"How many people are attending this conference?"

"There should be around 50,000 mechers and 27,000 associates." Jovy answered. "The majority of them are marginal figures. They are either tag-alongs or trusted individuals who have been brought over in order to widen their horizons. Only a couple of hundred high-ranked participants have a real voice during this conference."

The lights in the circular assembly hall slowly started to dim as the final guests arrived and took their seats.

A large central projection came to life. An impressive rendition of the Red Association symbol came into view.

Once this projection turned off again, Ves noted to his surprise that a new figure had appeared on the stage!

Everyone's backs straightened while people fell utterly silent.

No one dared to show any sign of disrespect. People did not even dare to transmit silent messages to each other anymore.

The reason for that was that a legendary Star Designer had finally appeared in front of everyone's sights!

Ves became reassured that the Polymath did not show up so soon.

The Star Designer who decided to kick off the conference turned out to be the Xenotechnician!

Though his moniker sounded a bit perplexing, his extensive work and his contributions over the centuries were undeniable.

The man played an indispensable role in strengthening and popularizing mechs throughout the generations. He converted a lot of exotic alien tech that were previously exclusive to the native aliens of the Milky Way and more recently the Red Ocean into more universal and usable human tech.

This extensive legacy of unlocking the secrets of alien tech caused many people to question how extensively the 456 year old fossil became affected by his own work.

While Ves did not see any obvious alien touches in the old man's surprisingly fit and upright body, he almost gasped when he took a closer look at the figure's outfit.

The Xenotechnician had a well-known habit of adorning himself with items and clothes with clear inhuman elements.

This time, he chose to wear a suit and voluminous robe that were made entirely out of silvery paneled archemetal!

Though Ves was not able to glean too many details from this distance, he knew enough about archetech that it shouldn't be possible to produce working pieces of archemetal that were so thin and light!

This showed that the Xenotechnician not only deciphered the working principles of archetech, but also improved upon it to the point where he was able to strengthen and widen its applications!

More than a few mech designers displayed a lot of appreciation of the Xenotechnician's silver-toned outfit.

Even Ves wanted to obtain a copy of it so that he could protect himself with a much thinner but more functional protective suit!

If the Xenotechnician already understood archetech well enough to create this simple product, what if he applied his latest gains to his mech designs?

Chapter 5166 By Any Means Necessary!

"Welcome... to the first conference organized by our faction in this new and exciting age. Many of you are apprehensive of what the Age of Dawn has brought to us all. You are correct to hold this attitude. Fear is a primal emotion that keeps us on our toes. Fear is what drives us to find solutions against problems that threaten our livelihoods. Fear has led us to take action and put an end to the madness in the closing years of the Age of Conquest."

The Xenotechnician spoke with a voice that was firm but not too overbearing. His voice also contained a deliberate touch of artificial distortion, which was odd as a man of his ability could easily fix.

The centuries-old Star Designer knew exactly what he was doing. He had grown so old that he no longer needed to put so much effort into conforming to societal norms.

When a mech designer like him transcended into a post-divinity life form, he had become so far removed from his humble human origins that he may as well be a separate species!

Of course, every mech designer voluntarily anchored themselves to their human identities. They dedicated so much of their lives to contributing to human civilization in one way or another that it was unthinkable for them to abandon their roots.

Though the Xenotechnician kept his power so restrained that he came across as an aging but surprisingly healthy geezer, he did not present himself as anything other than a human.

Whether this was an accurate representation of himself remained to be seen. Everyone was just happy that this extremely powerful and capable Star Designer remained on their side!

"Fear is a vital reason to act, but we cannot allow ourselves to lose our rationality and make decisions that are in error. We must master our own fears and muster up the determination to do what it takes to fight for our survival. Our faction is formed by the common belief that no taboo is sacred and that we must do everything in our power to safeguard the survival of our race and civilization."

A heavy atmosphere fell over the assembly hall. Ves and many other attendees became swayed by the Xenotechnician's message.

Even though the Star Designer did not show any deliberate signs of manipulation, his identity along with his powerful extraordinary traits still put a lot of weight in his words.

It was a manner of speaking that caused everyone who listened to the speaker to see reality from his viewpoint!

As a survivor of the twilight of the Age of Conquest, the Xenotechnician clearly maintained an attitude that if humanity already managed to save itself once, it could do so again!

The only question in Ves's mind was what sort of strategy the Star Designer intended to propose. The man clearly had a strong idea on what the Survivalist Faction and the Red Association ought to do in order to save red humanity from extinction!

The living fossil did not keep his audience waiting for too long.

"Let me be honest with you all. Our isolated society is under grave danger. Our technology remains superior despite the best efforts of the aliens to close the gap. Our mech pilots stand to gain strength beyond measure once they have begun to unlock the potential of exotic radiation. Given enough time, the disparity in numbers will no longer be relevant as our mechs and mech pilots are able to use exotic radiation as their strongest weapons against our adversaries."

Humanity had always relied on ingenuity to solve problems that seem insurmountable. A lot of mechs placed a lot of expectations towards the Star Designers of the Red Association.

Were the Star Designers up to the task? Would their innovations be enough to strengthen red humanity fast enough to resist the escalating alien assaults?

"IT IS NOT ENOUGH!" The Xenotech loudly boomed, causing everyone to be taken aback by his abrupt shift in attitude! "We sustain ourselves with hope, but empty whims cannot solve the shortcomings that limit our ability to resist! Look at me. Look at this alien tech that I have deciphered. It seems powerful to your eyes. You are not wrong to respect its capabilities. Yet how many products can our society produce? How many raw materials can we extract from the limited amount of star systems under our control?"

The old man made a simple sobering argument. Relying on the advanced technologies that everyone wanted to rely upon to reverse the tide against the aliens had a fatal flaw.

The most powerful technologies often demanded the rarest resources!

Even if people settled for more practical solutions, they still couldn't get around the limitation of a persistent shortage of raw materials!

Many people actually hoped that the bigshots would find a way to overcome this problem, but how easy was it for them to create miracles out of nothing?

While Ves faintly hoped that the ubiquitous supply of exotic radiation may be able to plug this enormous gap, the Xenotechnician clearly had a different proposal in mind.

The Star Designer gradually began to unveil a hint of his enormous might as a True God.

Ves had witnessed a show like this once before. Back then, the Polymath lifted the veil that maintained her human facade and revealed that she had become the embodiment of the fundamental concept of Truth!

The Xenotechnician possessed a different domain. A manifestation slowly formed behind his back that looked like a small glimpse of a chaotic and disorganized clockwork machine of immense proportions!

Ves and Jovy weren't the only people who lost control and gasped at the transcendently powerful sight.

What made this incomprehensibly large and complex clockwork machine so weird and unnerving was that it was made out of many different kinds of tech!

Both human and alien technological elements blended together in a seemingly haphazard fusion that looked like it should never be able to work, yet somehow functioned properly!

This was the purest representation of the concept of Assimilation!

This was the essence of the Xenotechnician in his transcendent form!

It might even be his true body!

The old and fragile human shell that he presented as his body was nothing but an unimportant meatsuit to the Star Designer.

As a True God, he had largely transitioned into an energy-based life form that had taken the form of this titanic clockwork machine!

As the Xenotechnician spoke, the entire audience could feel the utter belief, conviction and sincerity of the immensely powerful Star Designer.

"No one will come to save us. Our compatriots that we have left behind in the Milky Way are unable to reinforce us, thereby denying us the advantages granted by the manpower, resources and assets of all of human space. If we wish to make up for this fatal shortcoming, then we must find a substitute. We must obtain more territory, harvest more resources and bring more forces to bear against the indigenous aliens that seek our extinction."

A new projection came to life. It showed an impressive representation of the Milky Way Galaxy.

Every attendee was familiar with the sight of their home galaxy. Their eyes showed longing and regret in various measures as they observed the lost cradle of human civilization.

A much smaller galaxy appeared next to this giant representation. The Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy was only a little over 1.5 percent as big as the Milky Way Galaxy.

In practice, this meant that the Red Ocean was only as large as an extensive collection of old galaxy star clusters!

Of this dwarf galaxy, only a part of the bottom was lit up in red. The rest was dyed in white.

"On this date, red humanity has laid claim to roughly 8 percent of the territories of the Red Ocean." The Xenotechnician factually explained as he silently withdrew his impressive domain. "Do not be fooled by this percentage. Only a fraction of our claims consist of upper zones. The native aliens are in full control over the most resource abundant territories of their home ground. It is not possible to make an accurate comparison of the amount of relevant resources that red humanity have access to compared to our direct adversaries, but our most credible estimates suggest that we only have access to 1 percent of the total amount of phasewater and other strategic resources."

I! II

This was a harsh and depressing truth. Humanity essentially started its invasion of the Red Ocean by entering the periphery of the dwarf galaxy.

It was the equivalent of extragalactic aliens trying to invade the Milky Way by setting up a bridgehead in the Komodo Star Sector!

While this ensured that humanity would not be faced with overwhelming resistance right from the start, red humanity was now beginning to suffer from the consequences of this fateful choice!

"Our society is about to enter its darkest hour. As the Red Cabal is preparing to flood our limited territories with alien fleet after alien fleet, we will not be in a position to undergo any further expansion. Instead, the opposite will occur. The balance of power will continue to grow more lopsided until we have reached a tipping point where we cannot possibly win this war anymore. No matter how many battleships and god mechs we can throw at our adversaries, we cannot stem the tide for long."

The Xenotechnician did not continue to pummel everyone's confidence by hammering home how far red humanity had fallen behind compared to their enemies.

"Desperate times call for desperate measures." He spoke in a slightly more uplifting tone. "If we cannot guarantee our survival by staying true to our current selves, then we are not doing enough to save red humanity. We must rethink the fundamental tenets of our civilization. If we release one of our boundaries, how can we use that to increase our advantages and impact the strength of our enemies?"

No one had a clear answer to this question. The taboos were far too strongly ingrained in everyone's minds.

As an ancient fossil who spent his youth in an age where the modern taboos had never taken shape, the Xenotechnician possessed a different attitude to the rules that had long been considered sacred by the children of the Age of Mechs.

The old Star Designer took an audible breath before he finally unveiled his explosive solution.

"We must revoke the taboo that prohibits us from cooperating with aliens." He announced, much to the shock of almost everyone in the assembly hall! "We must be frank about our position of weakness and resort to diplomacy to find allies among the indigenous alien races of the Red Ocean. As long as we employ the right intermediaries that can act as a reliable bridge between red humanity and a receptive alien race, we can form new treaties and convert deadly enemies into helpful allies!"

The map of the Red Ocean began to change. Roughly 20 percent of the territories lit in white suddenly began to glow in red!

All of a sudden, humanity and its new allies had access to much more resources, assets and manpower!

Combined with humanity's undeniable tech advantage, this might be enough to reverse the balance of power!

"Realizing this plan will be difficult, but not impossible." The Xenotechnician stated. "The major alien races are not as friendly with each other as you think. The fault lines that have generated many tensions between them have not faded with the arrival of our race. If we carefully study every alien group, we should be able to find these fault lines and use them to create more divisions among our foes. If red humanity can form a brand-new coalition with a major race such as the orvens or the puelmers, we can fight our remaining enemies to a standstill! I cannot promise you that we will be able to win the war, but it should at least be within the realm of possibility to create a stalemate!"

Everyone was still too shocked to exhibit any other reactions. What the Xenotechnician proposed was too radical and unthinkable to everyone!

Even though the Star Designer's logic was simple and clear, the leaps he made were just too shocking!

The powerful old man did not care for all of the criticism that he would doubtlessly generate in the coming days. He had a strong belief that his plan was the most viable of them all. Only compromise and diplomacy would save red humanity from total extinction.

"I must disclose one more piece of information to you. Our plan has little chance of success if we attempt to engage in diplomacy with the aliens ourselves. As much as we dislike it, we must make do with the choices at hand. There is only one existing group that can act as an intermediary. In fact, this group of outcasts have already taken the initiative to approach me and offer their services. Our relation with this forbidden organization is poor to say the least, but as long as their goals are compatible with ours, we must not let the taboo against cooperating with these generational criminals stop us from saving our race."

Wait a second. Ves was starting to have a very bad feeling about the identity of this forbidden organization!

The Xenotechnician made an admission to all of the gathered Survivalists and associates.

"It is the cosmopolitans who have clandestinely approached my people and proposed this plan in the first place. An irrational response to their valid and sound proposal is to reject it outright in the mistaken belief that red humanity must stand alone. The reality is that we do not have the qualifications to do so. We are not the humans of the past. We are not operating in the galaxy of our origin. We are our own people, so we must make our own rules! If our only way out is to swallow our pride and abandon our old principles so that we can engage in realpolitik, then so be it! Survival comes above all! Red humanity must be saved, by any means necessary!"

Chapter 5167 Forced Consensus

The entire assembly hall was frozen in shock.

The opening speech of the long-awaited conference of the Survivalist Faction completely detonated everyone's minds!

The hall still remained silent even after the Xenotechnician unveiled his radical plan.

No one dared to say or transmit anything. Neither praise nor scorn escaped from their lips.

It was not wise for them to catch the Xenotechnician's attention and receive a black mark in his eyes.

Even though the old Star Designer was generally known to be kind and tolerant towards people, what if a single mistake could cause them to miss out on a promotion or get passed over for an important mission?

It was better for everyone to keep their mouths shut and let the bigshots make all of the decisions behind closed doors.

Small and insignificant figures like Ves and Jovy had no say in the matter. It was the couple of hundred Master Mech Designers and other high-ranked dignitaries that all held enough power and influence that had the qualifications to pass judgment on this matter.

That was not to say that the rank-and-file members and associates played no role at all. The Xenotechnician, the Fist of Defiance and the Polymath still needed to win over a sufficient degree of popular support in order to ensure they could roll out their ambitious plans without hindrance.

As the Xenotechnician deliberately gave the tens of thousands of gathered attendees enough time to process his explosive words, he steadily finished his pitch.

"Remember who we are. We are beings of rationality. I hope that you will not allow your unreasonable biases and hatreds to cloud your judgment. We cannot afford to endanger our race and cause the deaths of trillions by acting on our emotions and stubborn attitudes about past grievances. It is all well and good to despise the aliens and reject any notion of collaborating with them, but if that attitude does not result in an improvement in the balance of power, it is an atrocious strategy that will only hasten our collective suicide."

The old Star Designer who apparently possessed no scruples pointed at the projected map of the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy.

Compared to the previous situation where only a tiny part of it was friendly towards red humanity, the new scenario looked a lot more optimistic than before!

"Our race did not always possess the hubris that we are known for today. Back in the Age of Space, we were at a heavy disadvantage. We kept a lower profile. We did not make enemies out of the surrounding alien empires. We compromised and made concessions in order to bide for time. The cosmopolitans served a necessary purpose for us all. Without their noble sacrifices, humanity would have never been able to survive long enough to enter the Age of Conquest. Learn from the past. Recognize that there are times where we must bend and stretch. If we have done it before, we can do it again. The taboos have served their purpose during the Age of Mechs. Do not allow these outdated and ill-fitting rules to prevent us from doing what is necessary. We can violate any principle as long as our cause is just."

The Xenotechnician's message was clear. He wanted the Survivalists, the Red Association and all of red humanity to completely abandon any tenet and principle that made up their foundation for many generations as long as it got in the way of his radical plan!

A lot of people silently held mixed thoughts towards the old and respected Star Designer. A lot of them developed a genuine disgust towards the faction leader's plan and attitudes.

If he was any other person, he would have long been jeered off the central podium!

In fact, the outcast would have suffered worse consequences. A few of his words sounded so subversive and treasonous that enforcers would have probably taken him into custody and be made to confess all of his illegal plans and rat out all of his fellow conspirators!

This would not happen. The Xenotechnician was simply too great of a figure to apply this treatment. He had become a Star Designer a long time ago and made far more contributions to humanity than the Polymath. So long as he remained in his current position, he could continue to speed up red humanity's technological development, thereby saving an innumerable amount of lives in the years to come!

The living fossil was untouchable and he knew it. He boldly mentioned a proposal that entailed making up with the cosmopolitans and cooperating with them as if their many crimes in the past was all water under the bridge.

Ves admired the Xenotechnician in a way. The Star Designer had become one of the ultimate authorities of the human race. His power and influence had reached a height where he could boldly defy conventions and break the rules that restricted other people without suffering immediate consequences!

It would be a long time before Ves could reach this promising stage.

Still, as much as he admired the old Star Designer for presenting his proposal without fear, Ves felt a lot more ambivalent towards the actual idea.

Rationally, the Xenotechnician was right. War did not care about feelings. It cared about results. The plain truth of the matter was that red humanity was too outnumbered and too lacking in resources to fully exploit its few advantages.

None of the people gathered in the assembly hall were stupid. Each of them had been carefully selected for their competence and their ability to contribute to the Survivalist Faction. They

represented some of the best mech designers and other professionals of their society. Few of them denied that the Xenotechnician's plan had actual merit.

So long as his blueprint could prolong the survival of red humanity, who cared if they had to break a taboo or three?

Yet... humans were more complex than that. They were not Als who were willing to disregard everything in the name of logic.

Emotionally, Ves felt the urge to punch the Xenotechnician in the face. Did the man not recognize how foolish it was to cooperate with a group of human traitors who materially aided the aliens for many years?! The cosmopolitans personally handed over a lot of human high technologies to the aliens, thereby exacerbating the conflict and contributing to the defeats of many more human fleets and colonies!

The Cosmopolitan Movement set fire to red humanity in the first place. Now, it allegedly offered to come around to help the Survivalists put out the very same conflagration that they were originally responsible for! It was pretty clear to most people that these bastards were playing both sides in order to pursue their own interests!

Still... did red humanity have any other choice?

That was the question that every attendee had on their minds right now. They only heard out one proposal so far. The other two faction leaders were ready to present their own plans.

The Xenotechnician closed his speech by appealing to everyone's sense of duty.

"Centuries ago, we formed the Survivalist Faction to prepare for an indeterminate apocalypse that few people thought would be coming. We formed a brotherhood to stand vigil over our civilization and undertake any necessary actions to save us from threats from within and without. Now, the time has come for us to fulfill our essential purpose. Do not betray the hopes and intentions of your predecessors by betraying our founding mission. Let everyone else call us sinners if they wish. At least they will still be alive for them to voice their complaints."

With that, the old Star Designer ended his address and disappeared within a blink of an eye.

Everyone remained silent even though their emotions were anything but calm!

Though Ves tried his best not to extend his spiritual senses and poke around when he was surrounded by lots of powerful individuals, he could still pick up the anger, disgust, confusion and unwillingness in people's hearts.

No matter whether they were simple young mech officers or Master Mech Designers who belonged to the same generation as the Xenotechnician, none of them could remain impassive in the face of this extreme proposal!

A brief intermission ensued where the seated individuals were finally given a chance to recover and listen to the next speech with clearer heads.

Though people started to chat with each other, they were all clever enough not to voice any direct opinions about the Xenotechnician's outrageous plan.

"So this is going to happen two more times?" Ves softly asked Jovy.

The other young Senior Mech Designer nodded. "That is correct. This is part of how we operate. Our faction is founded on the premise that we must cooperate and do anything that is necessary to ensure the continuation of the human race. If a situation ever arises where our members are strongly divided between several alternate proposals, we agreed to gather together so that we can properly hear out every side before discussing the merits of each choice. Once we have cast our vote, our entire faction must implement a winning plan without any further interference or opposition. The worst thing we can do is to allow lingering disagreements to sabotage a course of action that may be the only way to save our entire race."

That... made a lot of sense. This was a good way to solve a contentious issue, though it clearly had its faults.

For example, what if the Survivalists voted to embrace the Xenotechnician's proposal, only for it to suffer all kinds of setbacks and accidents in the ensuing years?

According to the rules, the faction had to double down and continue to push their current plan to the end regardless of whether the actual reality deviated from reality!

Jovy understood Ves' doubts. "We cannot afford to get bogged down by doubts and second thoughts. In many cases, there is no time to change our minds and do everything over. Our enemies will not accommodate us. We can only make a single bet and ride it all the way. That is why it is crucial for our upper management to be as thorough and inquisitive as possible before they cast their votes. They only have one week to essentially decide on how red humanity intends to resist the hostile alien races."

Ves frowned as he still felt there were a lot of loopholes to this approach.

"I can see that you and your fellow Survivalists are all pragmatic and reasonable enough to support a plan once it has been decided. What about the other groups? I think you will find it much harder to persuade the other factions as well as the fleeters, Terrans, Rubarthans to play along with your crazy ideas!"

Jovy's expression grew stern. "We will do what we can to make that happen. At the very least, we will be taking the initiative. Doing nothing is not a solution. That will only lead to our inevitable deaths as the aliens steadily grind away at our forces and territories. If we want to win, we must be proactive. The leaders of all of those other groups are all intelligent and responsible enough to know that as well. So long as we can gather enough support from friendly stakeholders, we can exert enough pressure to convince the remaining holdouts to cooperate with our plan. Compared to us, the other groups and factions are too divided and not decisive enough to present a viable alternative."

His description of the other groups was probably not too far off the mark. Ves did not possess a clear understanding of how the other factions of the Association were doing, but he was quite aware that the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact were still mired by lots of differences in opinion.

The abrupt isolation from the Milky Way Galaxy had caused the displaced people to have no clear plan in place on how to govern their colonies without any further direct support from their home states.

They couldn't even make up their minds on how to run themselves. How could they possibly form a consensus and unite around their own plan?

The Survivalists possessed a strong advantage in this regard!

Chapter 5168 Humanity Does Not Bend!

"To be honest, this wouldn't be necessary if our faction leaders formed a consensus by themselves." Jovy quietly admitted to Ves.

"You mean if two out of three of them agreed on the same plan, the last holdout would have no choice but to play along?"

"That is correct. If the Xenotechnician and the Polymath both united around a single plan, then it is not beneficial for the Fist of Defiance to express any further opposition. His resistance at that point will no longer serve a productive use, but will instead lead to costly delays and a drastic reduction in our chances of success. Even a god pilot who is famed for his stubbornness and defiance as him understands that he must prioritize the greater interests of red humanity over his own feelings."

Ves finally understood the true significance of this conference. To think that he originally thought it was just a professional gathering where mech designers could meet with their peers and present their ideas to each other.

"Since you guys have resorted to these appeals, I take it that each faction leader insists on implementing their own specific plans."

"A three-way split has occurred that is paralyzing our faction." Jovy confirmed. "Each of the leaders have spent weeks trying to resolve it, to no avail. None of us wants this impasse to persist any further, so our Master Mech Designers and other high officials have been invested with the power to solve this problem."

This was an unlikely turn of events. Effective power passed from the most eminent leaders to the cadre who ranked lower in the hierarchy.

A situation like this not only tested the appeal of every faction leader's unique plan, but also tested the strength of their network within the cadre.

He was sure that the Survivalists who were not committed to any particular side would become the focus of a lot of appeals in the coming days.

In addition to that, the faction leaders also had to ensure that their existing supporters did not change their minds and side with another camp.

All of this sounded more and more contentious to Ves. He felt glad that he was a non-entity in this all-important power struggle. He was more than happy to remain a bystander and become a witness to a vital turning point of red humanity's early history.

The intermission slowly passed. Everyone tactfully ended their conversations and refrain from speaking any further.

The next speaker appeared on the central podium. Though Ves and a lot of people were disappointed that the Fist of Defiance was too indisposed to present his plan in person, the man he chose to speak in his place was a pretty good substitute.

The Mace of Retaliation had shown up in order to present the god pilot's vision!

Just as his name suggested, the Mace was a direct descendant of the Fist. The former was the most successful protege of the latter and made it all the way up to senior ace pilot!

There were rumors that the Mace of Retaliation had reached his current limit a long time ago and could undergo the Mech Body Merger Process anytime he wanted.

However, many years went by without any further developments. A lot of bold and reckless ace pilots would have taken the plunge a long time ago even if they intuitively knew that their chances of success were too slim.

The Mace of Retaliation was not one of them. He chose to stand in front of the same juncture and settle for inaction.

This was the most prudent choice, but not the most courageous one.

Perhaps the Mace had waited too long and lost much of the momentum that originally propelled him to his current height.

The conditions to become a god pilot were too brutal. Any flaw would drastically be magnified and used to ruin a hopeful ace pilot's chances of surviving the profound transformation process!

The Mace of Retaliation's personal history was not a subject of debate at this time.

Right now, he spoke on behalf of the only god pilot of the Survivalist Faction present in the Red Ocean.

No matter what, the Fist of Defiance's right to speak remained strong. Even the Star Designers had to respect their only top combatant's opinion.

"Ladies and gentlemen." The Mace began to address the gathered Survivalists. "My grandfather understands the dire situation that red humanity just as well as anyone. He cannot bring himself to agree with the Xenotechnician's approach. How can our race possibly throw away all of our pride and much of the reasons that have made our people strong in the face of adversity? To consort with the duplicitous and traitorous cosmopolitans is nothing less than drinking poison to quench your thirst. Our enemies remain enemies no matter how much we meet their demands!"

Clearly, the Fist of Defiance had a lot to say about the Xenotechnician's proposal to resort to diplomacy to solve the current crisis.

Unlike the old geezer that came before, the 250-year old ace pilot boldly raised his voice and channeled all of his aggressive emotions into a domain field that everyone could perceive!

"Do you think that the aliens will truly forgive us for attempting to commit genocide on all of them? No! Our enemies have no credibility at all! They will only seek to take advantage of us. Kneeling and begging for their protection will only cause us to give up all of our initiative. Do you feel comfortable with handing over so much power to our oh so reliable 'allies'? I certainly do not think so! This does not sound like a compromise to me. This is nothing less than a complete surrender as far as we are concerned! No longer will we be able to make our own choices and decide our own future. The traitors and aliens will effectively control our fragile society at that time. IS THIS WHAT YOU WANT?!"

Ves did not believe that anyone in the audience actually wanted to say yes to this question. Cooperating with the aliens did not solve the fundamental inadequacies between humanity and the other races. The allies of today could easily turn into the enemies of tomorrow.

"We are human! We are the conquerors of the Milky Way! We are the warriors who have beaten every single alien civilization that has sought to topple us in the past!" The Mace of Retaliation roared to the gathered people! "Should we cast away our illustrious legacy and throw away our dignity in the hopes that enough aliens will be merciful towards us? I SAY NO! MY FATHER SAYS NO! We will rather die than allow our fellow humans to disgrace themselves! If our defeat is inevitable, then it is better to keep our back upright and fight to the bitter end!"

The Mace of Retaliation made a good case against the Xenotechnician's plan. No one was really willing to engage in diplomacy. The senior ace pilot was just the person who gave voice to all of their true feelings on this matter.

The only problem was that the Survivalists needed a better plan than engaging in mindless resistance against the overwhelming amount of hostile aliens in the Red Ocean.

It was at this point that the ace pilot presented his grandfather's alternative.

A familiar projection came to life again. It showed the exact same galactic map of the Red Ocean. The current overlay showed the depressingly small amount of territories that red humanity controlled up to this day.

"My grandfather and his extensive staff of military strategists and other experts have devised a new strategy to do the impossible and defeat our adversaries while we remain heavily outnumbered." The Mace spoke in an excited tone. "The Xenotechnician is correct that we do not have the numbers and resources to win a head-on collision against the native alien forces, so we will not put our hopes on the frontlines. We should instead seek to strike our foes where they are weak. Our enemies are not invincible. They all have their weaknesses, and it is up to us to exploit them in the best possible manner."

The map changed as numerous arrows shot out from human space and started to penetrate the interior of alien space.

"Now, you must all be wondering how we can strike at their vulnerable territories. The longer the war goes on, the more warships the aliens have sent to the frontlines, thereby reducing their garrisons in their core star systems which they assume are beyond our reach. Now, we can attempt to make detours and evade enemy interception in order to attack their underprotected rear. This is not good enough. It takes too long and the likelihood that the deep strike forces will be intercepted along the way is too great."

That was what Ves thought as well. The native aliens weren't completely helpless against this sort of measure, especially after they had gained a lot of technological solutions from the cosmopolitans!

The loss rate would be horrendous. Anyone who agreed to take part in this suicidal venture had to make peace with the fact that this might be a one-way trip!

However, the Fist of Defiance's plan was not that simple. His grandson's expression turned vicious as he unveiled a key component of the alternative proposal.

A projection of the greater beyonder gate appeared in place. It looked almost identical to the one hovering uselessly at Bridgehead One, but it gained a few technological additions.

"The Fist of Defiance has met with many mech designers, scientists and engineers. He has learned that it is possible to modify the greater beyonder gate so that it can open a gate to any portal generated by our starships. If the calculations are correct, the effective range of this long-ranged portal generation capability can encompass the entirety of the Red Ocean! Think about what that means for us! We can dispatch dozens of specially configured stealth frigates to the hinterland of alien space and use them to open a portal between Bridgehead One and any resource-rich alien region of our choosing!"

What?!

Ves, Jovy and many other people reacted with shock at this revelation!

They never imagined that the greater beyonder gate could be repurposed to this degree!

Although this technological undertaking was definitely not simple, as long as the mechers pulled it off, the previously useless gate would suddenly turn into a strategic weapon that opened countless new opportunities to strike back against the aliens!

Ves had witnessed the Big Two employ their high-end portal jump technology numerous times over the years.

It was a convenient way to quickly transport distant vessels to a star system without spending any time in transit. The journey was practically instant as long as there was already a cooperating ship at the end location.

The projected map showed what would happen if the Fist of Defiance had his way.

It showed symbols that represented a large number of enemy warfleets leaving their respective territories and converging towards the border to human space.

Meanwhile, the red humans began to form many deep strike raiding fleets and pushed them all through the modified greater beyonder gate!

Those deep strike forces instantly emerged deep into the interior of alien space. They subsequently spread out and began to launch incredibly violent and destructive raids against all of the highly developed and resource-rich star systems that had lost many of their previous protectors!

Once the human raiding fleets had left trails of devastation in their wakes, they would gather up again and somehow generate a portal that enabled them to directly make it back to Bridgehead One!

The Mace of Retaliation grinned. "Lack of resources? Hah! Instead of borrowing what we need from the indigenous aliens, we should take it directly from their hands! Not only will raiding their hinterland solve our most acute shortcomings, but it will also cause much doubt, confusion and hesitation among our foes! What will all of their warships do when their crew hear that their friends and families back home are under threat? I bet that more than a few of them will no longer spend any thought on the greater good! As long as we can divert enough of the enemy forces away from the frontlines, we will be able to prolong our survival by at least several decades, giving us much more time to overcome our disadvantages!"

The projected map played out the scenario envisioned by the Fist of Defiance and his clique.

It displayed a scenario where red humanity launched a consistent amount of deep strike raids on specific territories that targeted specific major alien races.

When the aliens who were on their way to the frontlines started to hear more and more stories about how their old stomping grounds were getting absolutely wrecked, many of their fleets would probably reverse course and go back in order to stop the devastating raids!

Ves was utterly impressed by this bold and daring approach. Even though there were a lot of questionable and risky points to this plan, at least the Fist of Defiance gave red humanity a way to maintain its dignity throughout this conflict!

Chapter 5169 The Viability Of A Plan

Different from the dour and depressing proposal presented by the Xenotechnician, the alternative presented by the Mace of Retaliation made many of the attendees excited!

The thought of modifying the greater beyonder gate to launch daring deep strike raids to the hinterland of alien space caused everyone to become hot-blooded!

Why should red humans bow down to reality and seek to compromise with their enemies?

Wouldn't it be better to maintain their principles and retaliate against the aliens in the most effective way possible?

This was exactly the kind of plan that a fearless and domineering god pilot would come up with! It was a way for red humanity to fight against the aliens on its terms.

Ves could already see that much of the younger people in the crowd had become swayed by the bold and unrelenting vision of the Fist of Defiance. Their blood ran so hot that they could not wait to contribute to this enormous undertaking!

However, when Ves briefly turned his head to the rear, he could see that many of the older and more level-headed figures did not get caught up in the excitement.

They showed a considerable amount of restraint. This was not the first time in their lives that they heard an exciting pitch from another person.

All too often, wide-eyed hopefuls made a lot of claims, only to discover that they were unable to back up their promises.

Scams were still far too prevalent in modern times.

The Mace of Retaliation most definitely captured everyone's interest with his pitch. Now was the time for him to back up his words so that he could convince enough mechers that his grandfather's plan was viable.

The ace pilot pointed towards the greater beyonder gate. "It will not be easy to implement this strategy. The most essential condition is to successfully modify our greater beyonder gate to connect to portals that are generated thousands of light-years away from Bridgehead One. We are told that even if every Star Designer and other relevant experts unite to work on this project, it will likely take years before we can commence our first deep strike operations."

That... sounded a lot less pleasant to everyone. The hot-headed individuals began to cool a bit now that they became confronted by practical problems.

"It is not a problem for us to wait for several years." The Mace of Retaliation assured everyone.

"The native alien warships are slow to move, so our frontlines will not break so soon. It is actually

better to give them time to journey in our direction. That will empty the enemy hinterland even further, which means that they are considerably easier for us to plunder and raze."

That was right, but there were still plenty more questions related to the act of tampering with the greater beyonder gate.

The ace pilot schooled his expression. "I can see that enough of you have concerns of what all of this work will do to our greater beyonder gate. I will not lie to you all about this. It is an exceedingly intricate marvel of human technology. The modifications needed to connect to portals across many zones will disable its original purpose. It can no longer connect to its original counterpart that is located in the Maryun Ultimate System of the Milky Way Galaxy. This change may or may not be permanent, but it is better to assume the worst."

That caused an even heavier cloud to form over everyone's heads.

On paper, nothing would actually change for anyone in the foreseeable future if the greater beyonder gate broke. It was not as if it was working in the first place ever since the Great Severing occurred.

However, its continued existence gave everyone a safety blanket of sorts. So long as it remained available in its current form, there was always a chance for either branches of humanity to develop a breakthrough that could enable them to successfully bridge a distance of 50 million light-years!

Transforming one of these crucial gates did not make it impossible for red humanity to make their way back to the Milky Way somehow.

It made it a lot harder, though. Perhaps doing this would rule out any possibility for the people alive today to ever return to their galaxy of origin within their lifetimes!

The Mace of Retaliation did not appear to care about this. He crossed his arms and sent challenging stares into the crowd.

"What? Are you afraid of breaking this useless metal ring? Rather than letting this broken piece of tech rot in space, it is better for us to repurpose it so that we can actually get at least some use out of it again! Forgot about returning to the Milky Way. All we need is a device that can quickly send our strike forces to the deepest and most undefended regions of alien space! This is much more attainable in our current situation, and it also happens to be useful. If we want to give every human additional motivation to fight to the end, then let us cut off this illusionary escape route so that no one will vainly hope that our cousins in the Milky Way will come to our rescue!"

Wow. That was a brutal message. Ves could see the logic in it, but he still felt reluctant to think about any irreversible changes to the greater beyonder gate.

"Once we complete the transformation of the gate, we must protect it to the best of our abilities." The Mace of Retaliation added. "Once the damage produced by our deep strike operations begin to disturb the aliens, they will do whatever it takes to take it down. We must not let them have their way. We must strengthen the defenses at Bridgehead One and prevent any conceivable enemy from destroying the only device that can save our race."

He was right. The phase whales would probably do anything in their power to somehow bridge the enormous distance and strike directly at the gate if possible!

Red humanity needed to fortify the star system and garrison a lot of warships and mechs that could have otherwise been used to defend the frontlines.

In fact, one of the most serious downsides to the plan proposed by the Fist of Defiance was that humanity needed to spread out its forces!

A strong defense force needed to protect the greater beyonder gate at all cost. Many different deep strike fleets had to be sent on distant missions in order to quickly gather enough resources.

All of this meant that red humanity would not be able to protect its own lines as well as before.

So long as the aliens chose to ignore the frequent raids and push through their invasion, the Fist of Defiance's plan would fail!

The ace pilot continued to speak in order to address people's doubts. He clarified other aspects of his grandfather's aggressive plan in order to convince everyone that it was viable.

"There are many risks involved in any deep strike operation. It is not advisable for red humanity to allocate this responsibility to its strongest and most elite first line troops. It is overkill and it would deprive our front lines of their most capable defenders. It is better to hand over this responsibility to pioneers and volunteers among the colonial states. Their forces are much weaker and less consistent, but we can exploit their greed to make them do what is necessary. We all want them to succeed, but if any of them have suffered a calamity in the deep, then it is not a painful setback to us. We can find other volunteers so long as we offer the right incentives."

Jovy turned his head and threw a knowing glance at Ves.

The Mace of Retaliation was not wrong. There were a lot of people who were willing to accept insane and unreasonable risks so long as there was promise of an even greater payout!

"In order to send our deep strike fleets to the correct locations, our stealth frigates must arrive at the target destinations in advance." The 250-year old Survivalist explained as he pointed to a projected animation that depicted this process. "The ship must generate a portal at her location under extreme conditions. This will cause her portal generator to consume a large amount of phasewater that grows progressively larger at greater distances. Each frigate can only generate so many portals before she runs through her reserves. In the most extreme cases, a single portal may already cause her to drain everything. What this means is that unless the arriving raiding fleets are able to plunder enough phasewater to make up for the shortfall, the ship cannot open a return portal."

This was a serious limitation!

Although it was only applicable if the greater beyonder gate attempted to transfer a raiding fleet to the opposite side of the Red Ocean, this was still a serious risk!

No one wanted to attract a lot of hostile attention, only to discover that they couldn't pay for the fare that could quickly take them out of enemy territory!

"It is also important to preserve every ship equipped with portal generators at a given location. We believe that once the Red Cabal learn what we are doing, the aliens will invest much greater effort into sweeping their territories to hunt down these key ships. The difficulty of conducting these deep

strike operations will increase over time, but by then we will have hopefully made enough progress to thoroughly split up the aliens and ruin their own offensives."

One of the most crucial parts about this plan was to hit the right targets to draw the enemy fleets away from human space.

Red humanity could do so by heavily targeting the territories of only a limited selection of alien races.

There were many possible choices, but the Mace of Retaliation mentioned one of them in particular.

"We can exploit the racial and cultural traits of the nunsers race. These quadruped aliens are evolved herd animals. Even if they have become sentient and intelligent, they still possess many vestiges of their ancient origins. They may seem aggressive to outsiders, but they are intensely protective and caring towards their fellow nunsers. How do you think they will react when they receive news of dozens alien fleets ravaging their star systems and killing trillions of vulnerable nunsers crying out for help?"

If the nunsers were rational, then they would certainly be able to figure out that this was a ploy to divert their warfleets back to their own territories.

The most logical decision they could make was to endure all of the damage and work hard to push through the invasion so that the scourge of humanity would finally come to an end!

However, the nunsers weren't known for their sober and level-headed heads. It was quite probable that they would ignore the direct orders from the phase whales themselves and immediately turn their warships around!

That would definitely deprive the Red Cabal of a significant amount of attack units!

The plan actually did not sound half-bad to Ves as he continued to listen.

It was not as cowardly as the plan proposed by the Xenotechnician, but it was not as realistic either.

Cowards tended to attract a lot of scom, but they also happen to live longer on average.

The Xenotechnician failed to generate any excitement when he made his pitch, but he did not need to. There was no point for him to outdo the Fist of Defiance on this front.

What the wise and flexible Star Designer banked on instead was the assurance that his 'cowardly' plan was the most realistic way to save red humanity from extinction. Its logic was simply too strong and the plan did not involve risky or sketchy operations that had a good chance of doing nothing to alter the adverse strategic situation.

Reality was not an action drama. Committing to all-out attacks might not be enough to shake the resolve of the native aliens.

Was it better for humans to re-learn the art of diplomacy so that they could pull off the most important divide and conquer strategy of their lifetimes?

Or was it better for humans to stay true to their current selves and unabashedly commit to extremely risky diversionary assaults in the hope of resisting the aliens all by themselves?

Chapter 5170 Unlocking The Potential Of Red Humanity

When the Mace of Retaliation completed his fiery presentation, the gathered mechers and associates remained active and excited for a long time!

Even if most of them realized that betting all of their chips on committing to this questionable strategy might not cause as much disruption and division among the aliens as everyone hoped, it was still a plan that aligned with all of their principles and ideals!

As the children of the Age of Conquest and the Age of Mechs, the red humans had long grown up in an environment where their race firmly ruled at the top of their old galactic hierarchy.

They rose up from nothing and came to dominate half of the Milky Way Galaxy by themselves.

How could they possibly fail to repeat the same feat against major alien races of the Red Ocean that were objectively weaker and less technologically advanced than the Seven Apex Races that previously dominated the old galaxy?

Unfortunately, the comparison was not that simple.

Back during the early days of the Age of Conquest, humans still retained the sly and cunning mindsets that enabled them to draw attention away from themselves.

The Seven Apex Races never fully recognized the threat of these individually weak upstarts until it was too late!

Now that red humanity had entered the Age of Dawn, it could not count on the ignorance of the native aliens to stall for time and play the aliens against each other.

Humanity was just too scary! The Red Cabal obtained all of the information it needed from the cosmopolitans and other sources to know that these extragalactic invaders had to be stopped before they built up too much momentum!

Therefore, the Fist of Defiance's predictions on how the aliens would behave to the deep strikes might not pan out. So long as the aliens were all rational and determined enough to strangle the threat of red humanity in its cradle, no amount of deep strike raids would be able to shake their resolve!

As the attendees in the large assembly hall waited for the final main speaker to show up, Ves found it difficult to make up his mind.

"I can't make up my mind on which one I prefer." Ves softly murmured. "Both plans have their merits. I think the Xenotechnician's diplomatic approach likely has the highest chance of success, but we have to give up so much in the process. The Fist of Defiance's aggressive approach is much more to my liking, but it's a lot riskier."

Jovy nodded in agreement. "We can only choose one or the other. The two plans are not completely opposed to each other, but the controversial nature of the Xenotechnician's plan means that many people will prefer to avoid it entirely if there is a viable alternative."

Everyone began to build up more and more anticipation for the final presentation.

The crowd did not have to wait too long. The light in the enormous assembly hall dimmed as the final speaker appeared above the central podium.

Everyone fell utterly silent and straightened their backs as they became graced by the presence of one of the youngest and most impressive Star Designers to emerge from humanity!

Every Star Designer was a living legend, but the Polymath somehow managed to upstage her eminent colleagues by the sheer amount of brilliance she possessed!

Her amazing advancement speed and her comprehensive grasp of practically every field of technology enabled her to form new connections and pump out amazing innovations at breakneck pace.

Ever since she advanced to her current rank around half a century ago, she had rapidly established herself at the top due to her impressive productivity.

The Survivalist Faction was incredibly fortunate to have her within its ranks. Red humanity was also lucky that she had ended up stuck in the Red Ocean by the time the Great Severing occurred.

Ves carefully schooled his own expression. He also tried his best not to let his overactive mind come up with wild and strange ideas.

He could not afford to let his guard down around this Star Designer. They remained competitors so long as both of them held fragments of the Metal Scroll.

Given the incredible disparity of power between the two, it would take only a moment for the Polymath to order his execution!

Fortunately for Ves, the Star Designer paid no attention to a young and small associate. Her true audience were the Masters and other high-ranked dignitaries seated at the rear. The plan she was about to present was so all-encompassing in scope that she could not afford to get distracted by lesser concerns!

Compared to the Xenotechnician, the Polymath presented herself in a more vibrant and youthful manner. She looked like she was at the prime of her life. She also came across as a woman who intended to stand up and fight for humanity in an intelligent way!

"Survivalists." Her voice spread across the crowd like raindrops falling onto a desert. "The earlier two speakers have both sought to present their solutions to the existential threats of our new and isolated society. I admire both of their visions. Both the Xenotechnician and the Fist of Defiance possess the courage to propose changes that are necessary to alter our unforgettable circumstances."

A familiar map showed up again. It displayed the same galactic map of the Red Ocean. The projection did not linger here, but zoomed in on the bottom edge where red humanity claimed its own territories.

"Both of their plans have merit, but they are attempts to overcome the inherent weaknesses of our society that we have inherited from the Milky Way. The truth is that we are not confronted by one set of enemies, but two. Red humanity is beset by aliens from the outside and plagued by internal division from within our very borders. It is the latter that has become increasingly more unacceptable. The proof lies in the inefficient and arbitrary division of territories in human space."

The projected map highlighted the Red Ocean Union, the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact. It then proceeded to highlight the individual states and autonomous regions controlled by an incredible variety of groups and rulers.

"Humanity has always suffered from flawed and inefficient governance." The Polymath stated even though everyone already knew that. It was like saying that water was wet or that stars were hot.

"The current division of red humanity's territories is a direct consequence of the compromises and limitations imposed by the flaws of human civilization of the Milky Way. When the latter remained connected to the former, there were enough justifications to divide the star regions in this fashion. Now that this condition is no longer in place, why must we continue to tolerate this division?"

The Polymath brought up a matter that has disturbed plenty of people in the past. However, nobody proposed to do anything else because the price of trying to change anything was too great.

In particular, the first-rate superstates would block any radical changes in the way that human space in the Red Ocean was being governed!

Yet what if those dominant first-rate superstates were no longer around to enforce their interests in the new frontier?

The Polymath's words began to open people's eyes to the incongruity of the current situation.

The Polymath continued to make her case with facts and logic. It was as if she was holding a lecture in front of a university class!

"Inertia and outdated attitudes are holding us back from realizing that we have remained unchanged in a completely new and different age and environment. I agree with the Xenotechnician's sentiment that the old vestiges that we have internalized for centuries are holding us back. We must rationally rethink every rule and custom and evaluate whether there is any merit to maintaining them in our altered reality."

All of this made sense so far. Ves did not think that anyone could refute this argument.

The issue was where she was heading for with this pitch. It sounded like a setup to a much more expansive intervention.

The Polymath's expression remained stern as the projected map that displaced all of the individual colonies and states started to get flooded by many different arrows.

"What you are looking at is a summary of all of the open conflicts as well as hostile relations between different colonial states. Each of these overt or hidden wars continue to consume large amounts of manpower, assets and resources for marginal reasons. While there are many valid justifications to enable the space peasants to vent their urges on their fellow peers in the Milky Way, it is pure waste to allow this to proceed when our entire collective is being targeted by the sum total of sentient alien races of this hostile dwarf galaxy. We may be able to suppress infighting to a certain extent, but without implementing more permanent changes to our society, there is a high likelihood that the population at large will invest too much resources in unproductive activities."

This was one of the persistent flaws of the human race. Pride and traditions gave them strength, but they also gave people reasons to fight against each other.

Internal competition had been a fact of life for humanity for as long as it existed. Even when the Terrans were at the height of their power, their empire did not last long because they ultimately failed to suppress the rising discontent and animosity from within their expansive territories!

After the Age of Mechs commenced, the Big Two did nothing to resolve this flaw. Instead, the mechers and the fleeters did the opposite and promoted internal division for many reasons that made sense at the time.

The Polymath essentially acknowledged this prior truth, but also pointed out how inefficient it was to continue to maintain the current order when they were all beset by so many hostile aliens!

"Given all of this waste and lack of productivity, we must quickly address this problem while the population at large is still malleable enough to accept radical changes. What I wish to propose to you all today is a multi-faceted plan to completely reform our society as we know it. It consists of multiple prongs. One is focused on reforming the governance of our territories. Another is focused on unshackling the technological boundaries that hold us back. The last is to revive our ancient legacies and maximize our usage of a new source of power. This is all we need to secure our objective. Red humanity already possesses all of the capital it needs to defeat our adversaries. We merely have to draw out all of the potential that is currently put to waste."

"Let me present Our near-total separation from the existing order of the Milky Way presents us with an opportunity to institute our own order, one that has been carefully designed without any historical baggage and is completely tailored to our current circumstances."

In order to emphasize her words, the map showed a complete change in the organization of red humanity's space.

The Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact existed no more. Both of them had been subsumed by the Red Ocean Union!

Upon this merger, the Polymath proposed a complete redivision and reorganization of all existing colonial polities. The various zones were each divided into a handful of evenly-sized provinces, all of which were interconnected and dependent on each other to promote greater cooperation!

"We must remove all existing divisions and integrate our society as much as possible. In this possible new human empire, its citizens will no longer identify themselves as mechers, fleeters, Terrans, Rubarthans or by any other irrelevant label. They will all become citizens united under a single banner of a new galactic order. Our order."

What?!

Ves along with many other Survivalists were completely shocked by the Polymath's proposal!

It was not every day that a leader would boldly propose to erase millenia's worth of cultural traditions and historical grievances.

Although all of this made a huge amount of sense in theory, Ves did not think it was possible for the Polymath to overcome the sheer amount of opposition to her proposed new galactic order.

Since he had begun to teach at the Eden Institute of Business & Technology, he had interacted with the Terrans often enough to know that they would absolutely resist this insane plan with all of their might! There was no way they would roll over and allow the mechers to erase their proudest heritage!

How could the Polymath possibly push through her reforms in the face of overwhelming opposition?

