

The Mech 5171

Chapter 5171 Coercive Means

In theory, the Polymath's proposal up to this point made a lot of sense.

The previous way in which the Big Two purposefully divided human space into many somewhat autonomous states before letting them compete against each other was an artifact of a past age.

At the time, the worst enemy of humanity was itself. The lack of strong and acute external threats caused people to turn their hostility towards each other, to devastating effects.

The best way the MTA and the CEA could cope with this situation was to control and regulate the conflict to prevent a repeat of the dark days of the Age of Conquest.

Now, the Polymath summed up the courage to tell everyone that they needed to pick up a sledgehammer and shatter the existing order in its entirety to implement her radical reforms!

Nothing less than total destruction would suffice.

This was because any lingering attachments to the old order would continue to divide the population.

For example, Ves personally knew that Davute still kept its guard up towards Karlach. Even if the Red Two forcibly prohibited any open conflicts, there were still plenty of ways for either side to trip each other up. The colonial states would continue to hold back a large proportion of manpower and assets that could be used to fight the aliens just so they could respond to any surprises from their regional rivals!

The same applied to the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact.

Alexa Striker talked a lot about how her people were constantly on guard against the mechers, the fleeters and the Rubarthans. The Terrans fundamentally distrusted the other three major groups because of historical disagreements and 'injustices'.

Due to all of the scars the Terrans had accrued throughout the ages, they had become a lot more insular and defensive about what little autonomy and cultural traditions they had left. They resisted attempts to break down their superstate so much that even the Big Two had to back off and compromise with these prickly people to an extent.

While it was true that the Great Severing cut off much of the backing that enabled the Terrans and Rubarthans to carve out their own semi-independent territories in the Red Ocean, that did not mean that these isolated people were easy to conquer.

The Terrans and the Rubarthans would resist the forced integration of all of red humanity with all of their might!

Sure, the aliens might be their common enemies, but that was not enough to persuade them to abandon their identities and become a part of this proposed new galactic order.

A lot of Survivalists were clever enough to realize this. They paid close attention to the Polymath. A woman as smart as her must definitely have a plan in mind to resolve this intractable problem!

"We have been brought to an age and a cosmic environment where we are surrounded by aliens near and far." The Polymath spoke as the projected map zoomed out again. "The native aliens of the Red

Ocean are not the only threats that we must contend against. In the coming decades or centuries, we will be confronted by an even greater wave of hostile aliens that originate from Messier 87 or one of its many surrounding dwarf galaxies."

Dozens of large red arrows originated from afar and pointed directly at the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy!

These arrows were so visually large and intimidating that they made the more local threats in the new frontier look like insects!

"We cannot allow ourselves to be held back by our historical flaws." The Polymath emphasized this point. "Our existing foundation is too flawed and decayed. We must tear it down in its entirety and replace it with a new foundation that is superior in every regard. This transition will not be painless. There will be many parties who will resist this change out of irrational and sentimental reasons. Even if they possess sufficient awareness to recognize that their illogical decisions will benefit our alien adversaries more, their resistance will magnify the cost and time needed to complete the bloody reforms to an unreasonable extent."

This would probably be the point of all of the resistance. The Terrans and Rubarthans did not actually want to fight the Red Two to the bitter end. The first-rate colonial superstates merely wanted to present enough deterrence so that no one would involve them in any radical reforms!

So what exactly did the Polymath had in mind that could render all of these measures ineffective?

She finally introduced the most crucial part of her plan.

"Not all of you are privy to this secret. What I am about to say is only understandable to a small group of high-ranking mech pilots and mech designers. I am of the opinion that there is no good reason to maintain the confidentiality of this subject, but the rules cannot change for the time being. My subordinates and I will hold more extensive briefings behind closed doors to explain this sensitive process in greater detail. For now, I can tell you that there is a secret source of power that mech designers and mech pilots depend upon to a great extent."

A lot of people seated in the inner rings looked confused or puzzled. A fair amount of individuals seated in the outer rings exhibited the same lack of comprehension.

They were mostly Journeymen or other professionals who were not initiated to the existence of the Kingdom of Mechs.

Technically, it was already a violation for the Polymath to allude to its existence to so many irrelevant people at once, but no one dared to mention this little fact.

The Polymath soon explained the driving reason why she brought up this sensitive subject.

"It is not possible to gain the cooperation of the individual states and alliances through persuasion. We must apply more coercive means to melt their resistance. We can do this by taking hostage of one of their lifelines. I have spoken to my fellow Star Designers who remain in the Milky Way. Many of them have given their initial agreement to vote for a radical change that will result in splitting off the 'source' into two. There are many consequences to doing so, but the most important one is that the only Star Designers that can govern the off-shoot source are the ones who reside in this dwarf galaxy."

So that was why the Polymath wanted to split up the Kingdom of Mechs!

The rumors he heard were true. The young and ambitious Star Designer wanted to make a power grab, and in order to do so, she wanted to sever one of the remaining bonds that kept both branches of humanity connected to each other!

The Star Designer quickly explained the reason why this was important. "Once this process has occurred, our Red Association will be able to take effective control over it. The Terrans and the Rubarthans only have 2 Star Designers each, which is not enough to form a majority. The greatest concern then is that the Star Designers of different factions may choose to oppose my plan."

This was a great possibility. The Terrans and the Rubarthans only needed to persuade 3 Star Designers from the Red Association to oppose the Polymath's radical initiative. This should not be too difficult!

The Polymath actually started to smile at this time. "Their actions are irrelevant. While I cannot divulge the precise reason why this is the case outside of a closed briefing, I have great confidence that I will be able to usurp control over the splinter source and gain absolute control over it. Both the Xenotechnician and the Fist of Defiance are enlightened to my plan and acknowledge that I have the qualifications to override the authority of every Star Designer and assume sole ownership of the source."

This revelation completely detonated the minds of those in the know!

A large number of Senior Mech Designers, Master Mech Designers as well as powerful mech pilots looked at the Polymath in a completely different light!

The significance of her latest confession was too great. For centuries, the Kingdom of Mechs had always been regarded as a collective gift to humanity as a whole.

It had been set up to function as an inclusive source of power that was governed by consensus.

This meant that the Star Designers who shared much of the authority over the kingdom could not push through their individual plans and ambitions without obtaining the support of the majority.

This remained valid whether the Kingdom of Mechs remained the same or got split off into smaller pieces!

For the Polymath to boast that she could essentially step over the 13 other Star Designer and sit on the throne of the kingdom was a complete change!

Though a lot of knowledgeable mechers wanted to scratch their head as they guessed at the reason why the relatively young Star Designer was able to make this claim, Ves had a feeling that he already knew the correct answer!

If his guess was right, then she may have figured out how to exploit the fragment of the Metal Scroll in her possession to open up a backdoor in the Kingdom of Mechs!

After all, both of them were strongly related to each other. The Metal Scroll heavily contributed to the formation of the Kingdom of Mechs. It was logical to assume that any trace of the former could still exert control of the latter.

Once the Polymath was able to ascend the throne of her own little splinter kingdom, she could legitimately become the Queen of Mechs!

Her own fragment of the Metal Scroll would function as the crown that bestowed her with the authority and legitimacy she needed to govern her new kingdom with an iron fist!

All of that might sound fine to the Survivalists, but where did that leave other fragment holders like Ves?

If his continued possession of the Mech Designer System interfered with the Polymath's ultimate ambition, then she would definitely intensify her search and hunt down anyone who could possibly stand in her way of becoming the supreme authority of mechs!

The Polymath gave her shocked audience enough time to take in her words.

"Rule by consensus is more appropriate for times of peace and prosperity. However, it is during times of adversity and setbacks that this governance model exposes its flaws. The constant division and large amounts of wasted time will reduce our society's potential and prevent us from combating the native aliens at our full potential. All of red humanity must unite under a single ruler. This ruler must be intelligent, competent and knowledgeable enough to make the wisest and most correct decisions for the good of our civilization. The sovereign must also possess enough personal capital to enshrine her rule and deter any challengers from questioning her right to command our entire society."

Wait a minute... was the Polymath about to go even further than what she had already said just earlier?!

Everyone was able to figure out what she was building up towards. More and more people couldn't hold in their shock any longer.

The Polymath slowly began to unveil her own domain to her audience. Just like the first speaker, the female Star Designer exposed a small part of the essence of her own existence!

A strong sense of truth radiated from the backdrop of endless books and repositories of knowledge that made up her true form!

Though her little show did not cause the people in the assembly hall to get flooded by new and amazing knowledge, they were still able to experience enough of the Polymath to know that everything she said was truthful!

There was not a single time throughout this speech where she falsified her claims or deliberately attempted to deceive her audience!

All of her projections, predictions and so on were completely accurate as far as she was concerned!

This meant that it was very much possible for the Polymath to use her absolute control over the Kingdom of Mechs to coerce all of the other factions and states into doing her bidding.

What could they do? Any resistance meant that the Polymath could easily rip away all of the support provided by the Kingdom of Mechs. None of the groups that have developed a heavy reliance on mechs could tolerate this deprivation!

With this powerful club in her hands, the Polymath could essentially manipulate all of red humanity into doing anything she wanted.

This included the act of recognizing her as the empress of a new red human empire!

Chapter 5172 Openness And Unity

What the Polymath attempted to do was to repeat human history, in part at least.

During the early days of the Age of Conquest, the Terran Empire rose up as a united human star nation that effectively mobilized every human under a single banner.

Just like what the Polymath wanted to do, the Terran Empire obeyed the rule of a single emperor who reigned with absolute power.

The reason why the humans back then supported this shift was because they were in an awful situation back then. Only by setting aside their historical regional and cultural differences would they be able to make the best out of their limited manpower, technology and resources and make real gains in the large and dangerous Milky Way Galaxy.

The Terran Empire was a success. It grew rapidly under the wise and competent leadership of the leading figures of the time. Each of them were heroes and visionaries who all made undeniable contributions in the rise of humanity!

Now, the Polymath clearly wanted to emulate this model and repeat the success of the past!

Though the Terran Empire eventually deteriorated over time to the point where the Rubarthans successfully rebelled against the increasingly more tyrannical ruling powers, it at least did the job it originally set out to accomplish.

The Rubarthans had the luxury to launch their rebellion and cause a lot of internal conflicts because the human race had grown far enough to no longer hold much fear that the aliens would be able to exploit the infighting.

For now, none of the gathered Survivalists believed that they have the luxury to worry about the long-term dangers of letting a single individual reign as the absolute empress of all of red humanity.

Anything was acceptable as long as the Polymath could lead them to victory in this war of extinction!

As the Polymath reigned in her impressive domain, few people questioned her qualifications to rule over their entire society.

She was indeed intelligent and enlightened enough to be able to make well-reasoned decisions without any apparent flaws or biases.

She also demonstrated a relatively pure and selfless attitude towards power.

She did not propose taking charge of their entire civilization because she was power hungry.

She did it because she believed that she was the most qualified to assume this heavy responsibility.

Whether all of this was actually as truthful as the Polymath portrayed, Ves did not dare to think any further.

All he knew was that the female Star Designer wanted to convince everyone that she was qualified to become the savior of red humanity!

In order to do that, she proceeded to detail a portion of the changes that she wished to make to fully maximize the potential of their society.

"I have already explained how I intend to dissolve all existing human states in order to form a single united empire. This is a necessary step that will open up our new star nation to further policy changes. For example, one of the shortcomings that will become increasingly more evident is the lack of manpower."

The Polymath called up the map of the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy and applied a different overlay to it. The new data markers showed the estimated population of every race.

"As you can see, humanity did not have enough time to transfer enough individuals to the new frontier to give us an abundant pool of manpower. While the average qualifications of every immigrant is considerably higher than the average standards of the Milky Way, our modeling has projected that we will suffer a progressively greater shortage within the next ten to twenty years. The plain truth is that no matter what war strategy we adopt, we will suffer more loss of human life than we can replenish through natural childbirth and lengthy education."

The projection showed a timelapse of a possible scenario. It showed that the relentless alien invasions would steadily nibble at human colonies while also causing a lot of human forces to suffer serious attrition.

All of this was very bad news. Without enough manpower, how could red humanity muster up enough soldiers and workers to keep up the fight?

This was why the Polymath proposed a radical and previously unthinkable solution to this problem.

"My proposed solution aims to address this latent danger." She spoke with apparent confidence in her plan. "We must set up new facilities across human space where we can produce a large amount of batch humans. We possess the technology and the knowledge to cultivate trillions of artificially born and raised humans based on special human gene templates. We only need to possess the willingness to resort to this solution."

Yes and a lot of people couldn't help but feel repulsed towards this idea. The entire notion of producing humans en masse as if they were nothing but factory commodities was profoundly disturbing. Only a small number of groups engaged in the practice, and the results were always less than stellar.

The Polymath did not seem to care about the feelings of others.

"At our current technology level, we can rapidly grow a test tube human and have this newborn organism undergo accelerated growth so that he can reach his adult form in as little as five years. During this rapid organic growth process, we can rapidly prepare this batch human for service on the battlefield or in the factory floor by relying on a combination of advanced technologies, such as connecting the subject's mind to a virtual reality teaching environment, to injecting packages of standardized knowledge."

While all of this sounded like it could actually work, what would be the result?

What would happen if billions if not trillions of freshly 'graduated' batch humans started to enter human society and lived among regular humans?

There was no way that the two groups of humans would be able to get along!

However, as long as most people were willing to endure the new complications, it may lead to a lot of relief over time.

Batch humans could relieve much of the burden of keeping humanity's war machine running while attrition continued to harvest so many lives.

"Increasing our manpower is only one component to my comprehensive reform plan." The Polymath stated. "We must also alter people's relationship with technology. At this moment, we are withholding too much technology from the general public, mainly out of fear that they will abuse it to the detriment of our society. We can no longer afford to let this hinder us from resisting the aliens as effectively as possible. The Warship Quota Program is too conservative. We must permit the use of warships to every vetted and trustworthy force. If they continue to rely solely on mechs to fight against alien forces, then they will continue to suffer excessive losses due to an inability to deploy the most optimal force composition in their battles."

Ves happened to agree with the Star Designer on this point. The prohibition against warships was outdated as far as he was concerned. The Golden Skull Alliance and many other pioneering forces would have been able to stave off losses and win their battles a lot more easily if they had warships at their disposal.

Nonetheless, a lot of Survivalists still looked uncomfortable with this proposed change. The fear that stupid people would inevitably abuse their power and use the might of warships to indiscriminately kill a lot of fellow humans remained ingrained in their minds!

This was why the Polymath found it so important to take charge of red humanity. Only she could disregard all of the misplaced sentiments of the past and ram through the necessary changes!

"The same applies to weapons of mass destruction." She continued as if she was not done with breaking taboos. "We should be ready to extend limited permission to any forces that are assigned to defend humanity against the native aliens. For now, neither side has resorted to them too much for fear of escalating this war to apocalyptic proportions, but we must be ready to escalate if we stand to gain more from it than our adversaries."

The Polymath proceeded to announce additional tech-related reforms. From taking over the entire supply of phasewater so that so many people would stop wasting this strategic resource to granting greater permission to use dangerous alien technology as long as it was powerful, the Star Designer wanted to strengthen the fighting power of humans to the utmost!

Of course, in order to realize this goal, there was no way she could avoid the latest variable that had entered the game.

The powerful woman finally addressed the topic that Ves and a few other knowledgeable people were waiting for. The Polymath could not possibly leave this powerful component out of her pitch.

"As I have mentioned earlier, the last prong to my plan is to bring back the secrets of our hidden past. I cannot disclose too much information outside of a closed briefing session, but I can tell you that ancient humans were far more powerful than you assume. They have already studied and taken advantage of the phenomenon known as E energy radiation many millennia ago. The reason why this is not apparent is because it was buried for good reasons. Now that our circumstances have changed, we cannot afford to deprive the public from the legacies that we have kept secret."

The Polymath did not actually describe what these legacies were supposed to be, but anyone familiar with cultivation or the Five Scrolls Compact showed a mix of reactions.

Some looked eager. Others looked concerned. Most actually looked resigned.

This was because the secrets of cultivation were already in the hands of far too many people.

"Compared to the hostile alien races, we possess many advantages in this area. We must not squander our head start by letting our fears stifle our innovation. One of the principal reasons why we have announced the Age of Dawn is because we recognize the endless potential of E energy radiation to comprehensively transform our entire society. We must create a new discipline that is specialized in the study and exploitation of E energy radiation and the changes it exerts on our reality."

Although this suggestion did not evoke as much of a reaction from the crowd because it wasn't as drastic, Ves still found it to be a radical shift from current policies!

For the Red Association to go from suppressing any mention of cultivation to making much of it available to the public was an enormous reversal from the past!

"Just as humans have founded mech universities and mech academies in order to better educate people in the design and use of mechs, we must do the same for E energy radiation." The Polymath declared. "We must not keep our ancient legacies hidden, but put them into libraries and teach their contents to a large number of students. We must promote the sharing of knowledge and encourage any research that enables us to combine our existing technologies with the possibilities presented by E energy radiation."

This was actually a good idea, though Ves was not quite sure how wise it was to expose so many people to a dangerous source of power that could easily be abused by individual cultivators.

This decision may lead to a lot of social instability over time, but the Polymath probably considered this to be an acceptable sacrifice.

The Star Designer eventually wrapped up her explosive pitch.

"There is more that I wish to divulge, but cannot do so due to confidentiality reasons. No matter what, we must do everything in our power to unite our scattered race and increase our efficiency in every facet of our society. As long as we are able to repair and improve our foundation, we can properly confront every challenger that seeks to extinguish our people. Red humanity must rise, and it can do so by relying on the latent power that is buried within ourselves. Make the right choice. Instead of letting hundreds of mixed and irrational leaders pull our divided civilization in every direction, it is better to appoint a single sovereign that can direct us as a united entity."

Chapter 5173 Political Conference

"That was... something."

"I can understand the sentiment." Jovy said.

When the opening speeches came to an end, both Ves and Jovy decided to pull back and retire to a nearby restaurant.

Neither of them were particularly hungry, so they just ordered a pot of afternoon tea along with a few snacks.

As their order silently materialized on the delicate crystal table, Ves sank back into the unnaturally soft embrace of his recliner and tried to sort out his rampaging thoughts.

He was not the only person to do so. The restaurant was gradually filling up with groups of Survivalists and associates. They sat around their own tables and started to order a range of drinks ranging from alien fruit juice to heavy spirits.

"I just received a message from Master Goldstein." Jovy spoke after a minute. "He wants us to stop by his office and discuss your agenda."

"Okay. Anything else?"

"There are a few other topics that he wishes to discuss with you, but you will find out soon enough once you meet with him in person."

Ves threw a speculative look at Jovy. He recalled much of what the earlier three speakers had said. Each of their proposals shocked him to the core. The last one was particularly concerning due to how it might cause him to unwittingly get on the wrong side of one of the most powerful mech designers of red humanity!

This entire conference turned into an enormous mine field in his eyes. Ves felt as if a single wrong step might cause him to step onto an explosive and get blown to shreds. He did not know how he could put his mind on presenting his innovations and listening to the bright ideas of other mech designers.

The only piece of good news was that he did not have a say in the decision-making process. The cadre who formed much of the upper hierarchy of the faction received this precious honor.

Given how much power and influence a completely united Survivalist Faction could exert, the collective opinions of a few hundred people may very well decide the future course of all of red humanity!

"How is it going so far?" Ves curiously asked. "You've got connections. I'm sure you have been able to gauge where the wind is blowing."

The RA Senior's expression turned sour. "You overestimate my intelligence gathering capabilities. I do have an extensive network of friends and acquaintances. I can introduce you to a handful of them while we are aboard this ship. Not many of them have a good overview of what is taking place. The few that do are under strict orders not to leak out what they know. I can only make a few inferences based on what little information that I have managed to collect."

"So what are your findings?"

"It is still too early to make any solid judgments, Ves. Opinions can change and many of the voters will not easily reveal their leanings unless they are already in an existing camp. For now, I can only say that the Xenotechnician's Diplomacy Plan and the Fist of Defiance's Deep Strike Plan have each managed to gather a small pool of strong supporters. The former is mostly preferred by the older generations. The Survivalists who are as old as the Xenotechnician prefer to take the plan that is projected to have the highest chance of producing a positive outcome. As far as they are concerned, we need to completely remove the threat of extinction before we have the luxury of taking further action."

That was a sound approach, if also a cowardly one. It made complete sense for the old geezers who survived for several centuries and ideally wished to live longer in order to experience the glory of the Age of Dawn.

To them, red humanity might have to make a lot of concessions in order to cozy up to a few potentially friendly alien races, but as long as that helped to take off the heat, there would always be enough room to make a comeback!

"What about the Deep Strike Plan?"

Jovy smirked. "A lot of mech pilots, mech officers and other Survivalists with a penchant for war prefer to go on the offensive. Many of them have principles and values that make them highly unwilling to make any sort of concessions to the aliens. Even if the odds of winning are not great, they would rather put their all in the fight just so they can produce a miracle that might enable them to reverse the course of the war. However, they are not completely unreasonable. Each of them will obey instructions from above. The greater good of red humanity's survival cannot be imperiled by the reckless actions from a handful of stubborn fools."

Even the Fist of Defiance was willing to abide by the Survivalist Faction's consensus rules. If he could accept this arrangement, then so could his son and all of the other powerful fighters!

"Where does that leave the last plan, Jovy?"

"From what I am hearing, the Unity Plan has attracted the most supporters so far. The Survivalists who find the Diplomacy Plan and the Deep Strike Plan to be equally appalling have started to lean towards the Polymath's proposal for safe harbor, though I am not certain if they strongly believe in her either. It is bold of her to claim that she can single-handedly take control of our society. I am inclined to give her the benefit of the doubt seeing that she is so clever and knowledgeable, but the backlash we will incur from so many corners of our civilization will not be light."

The Terrans, the Rubarthans and many other groups would probably be pissed if the Polymath took away their autonomy, their pride, their heritage and their culture!

While a lot of people would undoubtedly acknowledge that the Polymath might have a good point about the need for people to cooperate more efficiently with each other, that would not take away the fact that the Survivalist Faction would probably become the most hated group in human space!

In the past, the Mech Trade Association had always tried its best to present itself in a benevolent and fairly unobtrusive light. This was a deliberate strategy meant to prevent people from regarding the powerful organization as a tyrannical authority.

What the Polymath was trying to push would completely upend this strategy!

From the moment she crowned herself as the empress of a new red human empire, she would undoubtedly be branded a tyrant!

While Ves did not really care about how people thought about this Star Designer, it was a different story if his status as an associate of her faction branded him as an accomplice to the new regime!

Of course, there were also upsides to this development. If his good relationship with the Survivalist Faction translated into greater access and privileges, he might not feel it was all that to be on the side of the reigning authority.

Ultimately, every plan had its upsides and downsides. Ves was confident that he and his clan would be able to benefit from all of them so long as he carefully navigated the unfolding situation.

He still couldn't make up his mind which one he preferred to be honest.

It would be good to have a few powerful alien races on humanity's side.

Ves was greedy for all of the rich spoils he could obtain by raiding the underprotected star systems of his adversaries.

Living in a society ruled by a technocrat that no longer tolerated any stupidity sounded pretty nice.

It might be better that he did not have any say in which plan the Survivalist Faction eventually embraced. Ves truly did not want to bear this crushingly heavy responsibility.

"The remainder of the conference will take place under the shadow of this vote." Jovy felt the need to inform Ves. "Every other invention or proposal will be judged by how much they can contribute to any of the three plans. One of the ways in which the camps can build up more support for their causes is to find more support among the solutions introduced over the course of this week."

"What does that mean for us, exactly?"

"You should expect subordinates and envoys from the Xenotechnician, the Fist of Defiance and the Polymath to pay attention to attend every presentation or briefing in the hopes of finding anything that can strengthen the case of their patron."

That caused Ves' expression to sour. "That means that everything will turn political, whether we want it or not. I take it that my own presentations can't escape this development."

"I am afraid so, Ves. I am sorry for that. I can tell you are not overly enthused to get caught up in this competition. You should expect greater scrutiny."

"What about you, Jovy? You are on the side of the Polymath, right? Will you begin to advocate that red humanity needs stronger direction?"

The RA Senior laughed. "That is not exactly true. I do cooperate with her people from time to time, but I am not really qualified enough to truly run with them. I will have to realize my design philosophy before I can truly take part in their circle. You don't have to be afraid that I will be ordered to steer you to any side. It would also be inappropriate for me to do so given that I have a responsibility to guide you throughout this week."

Ves was not quite sure whether he should believe everything that Jovy said, but he was willing to put his trust in his friend.

"Hey, that little pet of yours should be able to see what most people cannot see. What does providence have to say about this situation?"

The other mech designer shook his head. "Providence is quite apprehensive to say the least. The Khamatar Reign has become the site of a great debate that will have enormous implications to every single life in the Red Ocean. Not only that, but the two Star Designers are still in close proximity. I do not think it is a good idea to encroach upon their boundaries."

"Hm, you're right. It is better not to tempt fate. Is your eye able to see other stuff, then?"

"I have caught bits and pieces of information." Jovy replied in a more relaxed tone. "You will attract a notable amount of attention once you begin to present your work to different audiences. Don't think that you will be able to blend among the other associates for long. You can't avoid it by downplaying your work. We Survivalists are nothing but intelligent and resourceful."

"I see. Thank you for telling me that. I will make sure not to conflate my words."

Once they finished their tea, they stood up and left the restaurant compartment.

Both of them navigated the halls and corridors of the enormous research battlecarrier and finally entered an upscale section that had been converted into office spaces for the guests that had need of working spaces.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Larkinson, or should I say Professor Larkinson." The bald Master greeted him in a business-like tone.

"Hello, Master Goldstein. I'm still not used to getting called by my title."

"You should acclimate to it as soon as possible, then. Our professional circle normally does not acknowledge mundane titles such as patriarch, lord or king because they have little to no bearing on your work as a mech designer. Becoming a university professor is different. Every teacher is respected among our kind. For you to be able to take this step is an indication that you are starting to get ready to bear greater responsibilities."

"I quite like it, actually." Ves smiled as he sat down. "Teaching a bunch of eager young mech designers partially reminds me of my own days as a student. My situation was a lot different at the time, but there is a lot about mech design that remains constant no matter the class."

Chapter 5174 Light Schedule

Ves and Master Goldstein actually had a pleasant chat about teaching.

Just like any other high-ranking mech designer, Vayro Goldstein spent a lot of time on teaching students as opposed to designing mechs.

He did not see this responsibility as a diversion, but saw it as an addition to his life and progression.

"You have reached a stage in your career where you will encounter more and more obstacles to work." Goldstein sincerely advised the relatively young associate. "You may be of the opinion that your relatively fast progress and frequent successes does not require you to depend on others at all, but that is not correct. As brilliant as you may be, you are only one mech designer. Have you faced situations where you wish to pursue an interesting new research project or develop the urge to design a new mech design, but ultimately choose not to do so because of your existing obligations?"

"Yes."

"I am not surprised. You are being confronted by a problem that plagues almost every mech designer at your stage. Mech design is a discipline that offers endless possibilities. We are plagued by choice, and this problem becomes more and more severe as you go deeper. You can only choose to pursue two or four directions of research as most. You do not have the time to take on any further projects. This is where carefully selected apprentices and proteges can relieve your growing burden."

Ves nodded in agreement. "I already understand the benefits of spreading my craft. I am not opposed to taking on apprentices, but it will take a lot of time for my teaching efforts to bear results. I haven't actually experienced too many years as a mech designer. I find it difficult to wait for years or even decades for a younger mech designer to become a Journeyman with a related design philosophy."

Goldstein smirked. "Ah. This is the downside of rapid progress. Your vision is still directed towards the present. Your perspective on time is still skewed towards the short term. That is not necessarily a fault, but it can indeed cause you to grow impatient when other factors are not progressing as fast as you. Be patient, Professor Larkinson. The further you go, the longer you have to wait to see your efforts bear fruit."

When Ves thought about how Maikel and Zanthar were taking their sweet time figuring out their design philosophies, he couldn't help but grow frustrated and impatient.

It was not fair to fault his two former students for making as much progress as other Apprentice Mech Designers, but there were times when he wanted to smack their heads and tell them to stop dilly-dallying around.

"Not every young mech designer can advance up the ranks as fast as you." Goldstein said as if he knew exactly what Ves was thinking. "It is not uncommon to wait for three or five decades for a young student who has benefited from your teachings to finally reach the stage where he or she becomes useful to you. At least your former pupil managed to succeed in making progress. There will be cases where they will continue to disappoint your expectations without any indication that they will change. That is when you need to learn to let go and invest in other hopefuls."

The older mech designer's advice ultimately helped Ves a lot. Mech designers already had a lot of experience with the selection, teaching, supervision and management of apprentices. It was a good idea to take a closer look at their best practices and copy their methods.

Once Master Goldstein was done with providing friendly advice, he soon turned to more relevant matters.

"I will first need to update your badges."

The green badge attached to Jovy's chest and the teal badge affixed to Ves' own chest began to gain a few more additions. They looked like differently colored dots that clearly contrasted strongly against the dominant colors.

"What is this all about?" Ves asked as he tried to decipher the meaning of these extra symbols.

"They are visual shorthands that can quickly communicate your expertise and whether you are permitted to discuss or attend closed sessions on certain topics. The red dot is the most important one. It signifies that you possess useful expertise on E energy radiation and that you are qualified to exchange with others who possess the same recognition."

That was actually a clever system. Ves would know whether another mech designer was worthwhile to talk to about a specific topic by glancing at the dots on their badges.

"What about the purple dot?"

"That identifies you as an expert on 'traditional psionic power manipulation'. Some of my colleagues along with a small number of associates will hold many closed sessions related to this topic that may or may not have massive implications to our society. I highly advise you to attend as many of them as possible since it is strongly related to one of your core competences."

Ves had to admit that he was incredibly interested in what other people had to say about cultivation science.

He was also a bit disturbed by how well the Survivalists knew about his past entanglement with cultivators and their practices.

"I will keep that in mind. Do you have any recommendations?"

"Not per se." Goldstein said as he tapped his own badge. He had a lot more dots than Ves and Jovy, but none of them were in purple. "My expertise lies in different areas. You can decide on your own. Pay close attention to the rules and attitudes of the lead speakers. There should be enough open-minded researchers who are more than willing to enter into a debate or discussion, but there are also less impatient professionals who will not have the patience to do the same."

"Understood. I will pay close attention to that. What about my own presentations?"

"You do not have any obligations for the remainder of this day. You will be expected to hold a closed session on your 'companion spirit fruit trees'. Few people are aware of what that even means, so you may find it challenging to attract much interest at first. You should be able to remedy this as long as you can produce immediate results that can support your claims."

Ves smirked. "That should not be a problem. I have made sure to strengthen the effect of the companion spirit fruits to ensure that they will produce a more noticeable effect than normal."

"Good. I know from Jovy that your product can augment humans so that they can work with E energy radiation with much greater clarity and awareness than before. This can become a vital boon in our society's transition to a new order."

It sounded as if Master Goldstein was a strong supporter of the Unity Plan. Ves expected nothing less from an important subordinate of the Polymath.

The older man soon moved on to the next obligation that Ves had to meet.

"There is nothing scheduled for you on the third day, but you must ensure that you are in your best possible condition to present your work on your Carmine System. You will not be doing so in an ordinary closed session, but rather a secret session where a carefully selected panel of mech designers and relevant experts will evaluate and discuss the merits of your invention."

This was the big presentation, and one that Ves cared about the most. The Carmine System was directly relevant to his design philosophy, so he wanted to make sure that the mech community saw it as a beneficial addition to the mech community as opposed to a threat to its existing order!

"I will be ready. I will make sure of that." Ves promised.

There was no need to question the competence of a Senior Mech Designer. If Ves wasn't able to hold an adequate presentation on a subject that he prioritized so much, then he would have never been able to reach his current rank!

"The composition of the panel is not entirely clear at this time." Master Goldstein informed Ves. "This is because many important figures are too preoccupied during this week. I think you can understand that they have greater concerns than to spend a few hours of their time on judging a peculiar invention of a relatively young associate."

Ves shrugged. "I get it. I'm not asking for much. The only result that I need is to receive permission to continue my research in this area. I don't want to inadvertently break a rule or affect the interests of others without any cover. My innovation has the potential to change the definition of mech pilot forever."

"I will make sure to help you advance your research without hindrances, Professor Larkinson. I am not afraid of what you may unleash with your work, and I will try to find like-minded mech designers who possess similar outlooks."

This was the benefit of having friendly mechs by his side. Ves felt quite fortunate that a powerful Master Mech Designer within the faction was willing to cover his back.

"What about my third presentation?"

"We have discussed this subject matter with the Transhumanist Faction in advance. Master Termeneo Dervidian has approved of your request to present your work on your transcendence glow during a closed session. The only condition is that we must make it clear that this application falls under the supervision of his faction. The Survivalists cannot make any decisions by themselves. They will have to pass on their quests to the Transhumanists."

"I see. I have no problem with that. The Transhumanists are supposed to be the ones who will manage this stuff on their end. I just want to make more people aware of the transcendence glow so that they know that this option exists. I think it has become more relevant than before due to the urgency of these times."

"I share your opinion in this regard, Professor Larkinson."

This should be it. Ves did not have too many obligations in his schedule. His presentations were also spread out over different days so he should have plenty of time to adjust and prepare for each of them. Outside of that, he should be able to spend plenty of time on other people's sessions. There were so many brilliant people aboard the Khamatar Reign that he was eager to expand his horizons over the course of this exciting week!

"There is more." The Master Mech Designer unexpectedly mentioned. "You have received an invitation to attend a secret session held on the sixth day. It is organized by a research group that has spent years researching an augmentation method to produce human phase lords. As a subject of interest, your presence is expected at this session."

Ves blanked out for a second. "Uhm... I do not recall participating in this kind of research. I am not a geneticist or an exobiologist. I have a pretty good grasp of phasewater theory, but I think that any high-ranking mech designer of the Red Association can blow me out of the water in this aspect."

Goldstein directed a stern stare at the younger mech designer. "You do not need to show any false modesty to us. You have made unique and unprecedented accomplishments in your short career. Associate or not, my colleagues and I are not close-minded enough to disregard your input solely due to your identity. Results speak louder than words. The fact that you have succeeded while our

research group has not is clear to all. There is no need for concern. This is not an interrogation. It is a research exchange. There will be rewards based on how much you can aid our research efforts."

"Oh... that sounds... nice..."

The Master did not mention this openly, but it was pretty clear that the Survivalists figured out that he had become a phase lord at one point!

Even though his phasewater concentration was still miniscule, that was already a ground-breaking result!

There was no way the mechers would miss the opportunity to study and 'question' an individual who actually managed to turn their unattainable dream into a reality!

Chapter 5175 The First Open Session

It was too much to hope that the Survivalists never figured out that Ves had technically become a phase lord.

He didn't even know how he was supposed to explain how he ended up this way.

Should he tell them that he stole and adapted an orven ritual to transform himself?

How would he be able to avoid mentioning the System's role in vastly increasing the success rate of this sketchy procedure?

Then there was the tribulation lightning that rained down upon him for an awfully long time. It undoubtedly contributed to his successful transformation, but he did not have the faintest clue why that was the case.

Unfortunately for Ves, Master Goldstein's tone made it clear that there was no way he could reject this 'invitation'.

"Oh well. At least it is scheduled on the sixth day. I don't have to worry about it for a while." He shrugged.

Ves was confident that the Survivalists valued him enough to prevent him from getting arbitrarily detained.

The possibility that the avid researchers of the Red Association would capture him before stuffing him inside a lab so that they could dissect him was low.

However, just because the chance was low did not mean it was zero!

If Ves wanted to make sure that he would be able to leave this conference without issue and return to his expeditionary fleet without any incidents, he needed to do his best to increase his value in the short term!

"I need to do a good job at making people appreciate all of my work." He concluded.

He gained extra motivation to do well in his upcoming presentations!

Aside from that, he also needed to give this research group enough data and information to keep them busy. If they were able to gain nothing that could help them make actual progress, then they would probably keep pestering him for more assistance!

As Ves stood outside the closed hatch of Master Goldstein's office, he wondered what he should do next.

"I am free, right?"

Jovy nodded. "You don't have any obligations on the first day. You can choose whether to spend time on your upcoming presentations if you want, but I think you would rather like to hear what other people have to say."

Ves grinned. "That's right. Let's take a look at the list."

They connected to the internal network and called up a long list of ongoing and future sessions.

The list was adjusted according to his identity, so Ves was only able to learn about presentations and debates on topics that he was permitted to get in touch with. This meant that there were a lot more sessions going on that he did not know about.

Ves did not particularly mind. There were already so many possible events that he did not have the time to attend all of the ones that held his interest.

He happened to catch an open session led by Master Teresa Norville. His eyes widened when he saw its title.

"This one! Let's attend this one!"

"I can see why you are interested in this session. Master Norville is one of the Xenotechnician's more talented and successful apprentices. She is only 180 years old and is considered a prospect to become a Star Designer in a century or two. You can trust that she had conducted thorough research on a subject if she is ready to present her findings to an audience."

"That sounds good. I recently managed to get my hands on an archeship, so it is incredibly helpful to know how archetech works."

The session that Ves was interested in was titled 'Introduction to Archetech and its Applicability to Meehs'.

He figured that a lot of mechers and associates might want to attend this session because they admired the Xenotechnician's cool new outfit.

"It is actually clever on their part." Jovy said. "The Xenotechnician attracts attention towards his new and interesting archemetal clothing. His former disciple holds a session on this exotic tech shortly after the opening speeches. This is a good opportunity to sway more people into supporting the Diplomacy Plan."

Ves could see that as well, but he did not care about it. He just wanted to learn how archetech worked and how he could produce his own archemetal components.

After navigating through the Khamatar Reign's interior, the two Seniors finally entered a middle-sized lecture hall.

The layout and seating had been precisely arranged according to Master Teresa Norville's instructions.

Just as Ves and Jovy expected, the session attracted a notable amount of people. Most of them were mech designers or engineers who possessed a keen interest on mastering archetech so that they could apply it to their own work.

Both young and old professionals took their seats without disturbing Master Norville.

It was rather interesting to see that everyone automatically chose their seats based on the rules of the main assembly hall. The younger and less experienced individuals got to sit at the front while the older people sat in the back.

Ves figured out that this made it easier for the former group to ask questions and engage in a dialogue with the lecturer.

As Ves and Jovy took their seats in the middle, they waited for the hall to fill up further before the Master was ready to begin her presentation.

Over 700 people chose to attend this open session. Even though it looked unlikely that most of them would ever seriously work with archetech in their lives, they still wanted to broaden their horizons and learn what was possible.

"Very well." The middle-aged looking woman wearing several prominent pieces of alien jewelry spoke up. "Each of you has chosen to learn about the fundamentals of the signature technologies of the arche race. It is not possible to go into exhaustive detail on this alien tech. There is only enough time to mention the key characteristics of this advanced tech base. I have condensed the contents and the technical information as best as possible, but it is hardly exhaustive enough to enable you to reproduce this tech by yourselves."

With that out of the way, Master Norville immediately began her lesson by projecting a turtle-like alien.

"The root of archetech lies in the organic structure of the arche. As you can see, the arche are quadrupeds that originally relied on their special archeshells to protect them from predation. What distinguishes them from most testudo species is that their shells can not only absorb and integrate a large variety of exotic materials, but are also capable of generating electronic resonance, which provides the species with a large variety of abilities."

The Master quickly summarized a lot of basic information to get everyone up to speed.

She soon began to mention an interesting finding.

"As far as our research has shown, the arche are completely naturally evolved. We have not discovered any clues in their genomes, their historical records or their constructs that signify that they are artificially conceived. Their archeshells naturally evolved to their current form based on the complex and special conditions of their former home planet. The implication is that it is unlikely that any other race in the entire cosmos is able to form anything similar. This is because archeshells and by extension archetech derives much of their power from a specific group of exotics."

A second projection came to life that displayed over a dozen different exotic materials. Their individual compositions were different and so were their properties, but they still shared a few traits in common.

"This is a new classification of exotics that we have designated as electrosensitive. A number of them used to be prevalent in the home planet of the arche. Once the aliens took to the stars, they have later discovered a number of other exotics that can meet their needs for this type of materials."

Ves didn't even know that! Learning this was already worth the decision to attend this open session!

"Electrosensitive exotics have many beneficial effects to arche." The Master continued. "The main benefit is that it is a powerful amplifier of electronic resonance. All high-powered versions of archeshells and archetech are dependent on these materials. Without them, the arche are unable to produce the power that is necessary to cement their place as a major alien race in the Red Ocean. The arche are known to set aside many lesser priorities in order to obtain a notable quantity of this group of exotics. Much like other exotic-dependent races, the growth and expansion of their civilization is directly correlated by the availability of these materials."

That had many implications for both the arche and the humans who desired to reverse engineer archetech. Ves actually became disappointed by this discovery.

If archetech was not as universal as he initially thought, then it meant that he would not be able to produce as many mechs made out of archemetal as he desired.

"Electrosensitive materials are not rare in the Red Ocean, but they are not too abundant either. Much of the reason why the arche have become nomadic is because there are few star systems that can offer them an adequate supply of these exotics. One of the common goals of all hidden archeships is to constantly survey star systems for deposits of these key materials. They may even be equipped with modest mining facilities so that they can quickly and covertly extract them from an asteroid or a planet."

That actually made the arche sound like roaming beggars who would trawl many different trash piles for food. It completely ruined their previous mystique.

However, Master Teresa Norville was not done with her presentation.

"As you can foresee, the material dependencies of archetech heavily limits any further applications by our race. We would have to compete against the arche for the limited supply of electrosensitive exotics. The aliens are already struggling to obtain enough of them. We will struggle even more to accumulate these resources."

Archetech sounded similar to phasewater technology then. The latter had become the playground of the rich and powerful due to the persistent shortage of phasewater. It wasn't even sold on the market anymore!

It was then that Master Norville presented a new research result.

"We do not think that the usage of archetech should be restricted by this condition. We have dedicated a team of material scientists to study all known samples of electrosensitive materials. Their objectives are to discover a method to synthesize them with the help of industrial methods, or to develop an artificial exotic alloy that can be used to produce effective archemetal in their stead. We have succeeded."

The projection displayed a handful of new lab-produced alloys that indeed possessed similar properties to electrosensitive exotics!

Master Teresa Norville smiled with satisfaction. "These are only preliminary results. The performance, toughness and cost-effectiveness of the early versions of these alloys are not up to standard. We expect to make rapid gains in these parameters in the ensuing months and weeks. We anticipate it will take half a year to a year to complete a range of artificial electrosensitive alloys that can be utilized to produce archemetal without being limited by the lack of availability of key raw materials. The cost will likely be substantial, so they are not too suitable for mass production. Our material scientists will have to make further breakthroughs in order to realize this condition."

Damn! While Ves had not yet made any progress in researching archetech, the mechers under the lead of the Xenotechnician had already made so much progress!

If Ves could get his hands on what the Survivalists knew about archetech, his clan did not even need to send the archeship to a research partner anymore.

The Golden Skull Alliance would be able to convert the alien ship for its own use a lot sooner!

Ves looked at Master Teresa Norville with a hungry expression. He urgently wanted to pry the secrets of archetech from her. The problem was that his identity and lack of bargaining chips hindered his ability to do so. How could he possibly persuade this eminent mech designer to share all of the valuable research that she and her research team obtained with great effort?

Chapter 5176 The Practicalities Of Archemechs

Master Teresa Norville managed to captivate most of the crowd with her brief but incredibly useful explanation of what her research group managed to uncover about archetech.

The Red Association still retained much of the strengths of the Mech Trade Association that it had separated from. It employed many of the best human researchers and benefited from amply funding and resources to conduct their studies.

Not even a new and original tech base such as archetech could withhold its secrets from the hungry researchers of the Red Association.

Perhaps the native aliens of the Red Ocean always struggled a lot in their attempts to reverse engineer archetech, but that was because their starting points were just lower.

Humanity possessed a much more robust and developed scientific community. It also mastered a lot of high technology and other advanced knowledge. It could use its existing base to easily implement a lot of easy solutions on archetech that the aliens had never managed to conceive.

As Master Norville continued to detail the many advancements that the Red Association's researchers had successfully applied, it became clear that the mechers were closer to adapting archetech into mechs than expected.

She even unveiled a relatively simple first-class multipurpose mech design that was completely made out of archetech in front of her audience!

A lot of people immediately tried to decipher the design as much as their own expertise allowed. It became clear that the vast majority of them couldn't understand it at all. This was because all of the design schematics portrayed large amounts of metal blocks that were somehow pushed together into the vague form of a humanoid machine!

Even the joints and other moving parts looked almost completely alien due to their complete lack of circuitry, power lines, communication lines and traditional structural sub-components.

The only parts that vaguely looked familiar and understandable were the ones that archetech could not fully replicate. The neural interface as well as an extremely potent power reactor were mostly conventional, though they utilized relatively inert archemetal as structural reinforcement.

"This is the experimental design of a working prototype 'archemach', to use the colloquial term for a mech that is not only predominantly integrated with archemetal, but also functions almost entirely through archetech. In order to fit this definition, the entire frame, barring a number of unavoidable exceptions, is completely controlled and powered by electronic resonance."

What an amazing design. Even though it was clearly designed to be as barebones as possible due to the relative lack of modules and weapon systems, it already looked more advanced than the typical mech utilized by first-rate states!

A mech designed with a completely different tech base truly tested the analytical capabilities of mech designers. Many of the professionals in the crowd tried their best to decipher and understand the projected machine.

It was easy enough to figure out what the more obvious blocks of metal were supposed to do. Engines were engines, limbs were limbs and sensors were sensors. Just because they were made out of other materials such as crystal or archemetal did not mean that they suddenly had to look or behave completely differently.

However, the fact that archemetal could perform the role of a lot of conventional components meant that the design offered far less details than Ves would have liked.

Sure, archemetal also boasted intricate internal structures that substituted the role of circuitry, but the charm of this material was that it contained many functions that were solely generated by combining different combinations of exotics together in specific ways.

What was so brilliant about archemetal was that programming its functions did not necessarily require the exact same type of materials to make it do anything specific. It could take a large range of exotics, dynamically combine them together and still produce the same effects, such as releasing a bolt of electricity or making a part glow at a precise luminosity.

All of this meant was that archetech became fiendishly hard to decipher and figure out if one was not already an expert in their workings.

No matter whether it was a young 30-year old Journeyman or a 300-year old Master, none of them could fully understand how the archemach worked just by studying its design for a long time!

The only way to realistically analyze its workings was to fabricate the archemach and test its individual capabilities, either as a whole, or by isolating its specific parts.

All of these boring data gathering activities took a lot of time as well as a lot of expertise. The Larkinson Clan did not possess a research institute that could tackle this kind of experimental study, which was a major shortcoming now that he thought about it. The clan had never really put too much effort into deciphering most alien technologies it came across.

"Compared to an equivalent first-class mech designed with conventional technological principles, this experimental archemech possesses clear advantages and disadvantages. The archemech is considerably denser as its internal volume is being utilized at a considerably higher proportion. It can withstand much more damage to its internals as much of it is as resilient as the external plating. The mobility of the mech has suffered, but that can partially be mitigated by integrating the archemetal with phasewater."

Essentially, an archemech was much more of a solid construct of metal than a more conventional mech. It made a lot of sense for it to become a lot heavier and sluggish compared to a machine of the same size.

"According to our preliminary investigations, an archemech can maintain its combat effectiveness 3 times longer on average. Its chance of surviving a typical battle where it would otherwise lose functionality is 65 percent higher, although this percentage is significantly lower when the opposing force consists of warships. What is especially important is that the chances that the mech pilot can survive an encounter increases by 187 percent, even when accounting for cockpit ejections and attempted interceptions."

Now that truly caused all of the gathered attendees to take note of this experimental archemech concept!

While the numbers mentioned by Master Norville should be taken with a huge grain of salt due to the impossibility of using a handful of numbers to calculate the parameters of an endless variety of combat scenarios, they could still be used as rough measures.

If the subordinate of the Xenotechnician hadn't been exaggerating too much, then an archemech could not only withstand a lot more damage and keep fighting, but its mech pilot also had a much higher chance of surviving!

Both of these factors were important to any serious mech force!

The increased resilience of an archemech made it a lot easier to win a battle. After all, if an enemy had to invest several times more firepower to take down a machine, then that meant that the archemechs had a lot more time to fulfill their objectives!

It also reduced the costs of maintaining a force of mechs over time as less machines needed to be replaced or restored at heavy cost.

However, what a lot of mechers truly cared about was the drastically higher survival rate of mech pilots.

The use of archemetal made a lot of previously necessary components obsolete and there was a lot more room to accommodate a stronger and sturdier cockpit.

Not only was it able to accommodate larger and stronger energy shield generators, but it could also integrate a lot more armor plating without reducing the performance of the archemech too much!

A lot of weapons of modest power and caliber simply wouldn't be able to threaten the life of a mech pilot as easily anymore. It took a lot of effort or a lot of numbers in order to quickly down the pilot as well as the archemech itself.

Even then, once the cockpit ejected and flew to the rear, it would become a lot harder to destroy or knock down on account of its resilient archemetal shell.

So long as archemechs could be rolled out on a wider scale, this trend could completely revolutionize the mech community!

Archemechs would gain a lot of resilience, allowing them to close the gap with warships to an extent.

However, the solution was not all that perfect. As much as archemetal could make a mech more resilient, they also became noticeably slower and less maneuverable due to their substantial increase in density.

Not only that, but the large primary gun batteries of typical alien warships could easily wipe out several archemechs with a single shot due to their immense power!

Master Teresa Norville was quite frank when it came to the shortcomings of this design.

"Archemechs remain experimental as they are not yet suitable to replace the use of conventional metallic mechs. Their lower mobility is a major weakness. Archemetal is currently difficult to produce with the use of materializers. It is better to utilize the hybrid production method employed by the arche. This is an approach that simulated the organic archeshell growth method of their own biologies. While this may be a tried and true method to the aliens, it is also slow and inefficient. We are currently working to develop a more industrialized production method, but it may take years to complete this project. The repair and maintenance of archemetal is also a great issue. Only mech technicians and engineers with a moderate degree of understanding of archemetal can effectively repair damaged archemechs."

All of that dampened the enthusiasm of some of the gathered mech designers, but not all. They were all clever enough that archemechs were not economical for low-tier mechs, but that they were still viable enough to shake up the market for high-end mechs!

Master Norville continued to mention a few other points where the RA's researchers and mech designers encountered more problems and shortcomings of archemechs.

It surprised Ves that she was being so frank about exposing the failures and the inability to make progress in all of these areas.

Then he realized what the Master was truly doing. She was trying to fish for specific solutions from her audience. She listed out all of the problems encountered by the research group and hoped that at least one of the attending guests just happened to possess a specialty that could play a role in solving a difficult technical problem!

Perhaps this was one of the correct ways to take advantage of a conference. An event like this sucked in a lot of smart and clever professionals that never met with each other under normal circumstances.

Compared to trying to solicit for help through a network or other channels, it was a lot easier to ask for help in person!

Ves even thought about adopting this approach himself. Master Norville's example taught him a lot on how he could potentially milk more benefits out of the people who chose to attend a session.

The underlying theme of this conference was mutual exchange. Norville clearly withheld a lot of useful knowledge about archetech and archemech. What she revealed was only the tip of the iceberg.

If Ves or any other attendee wanted to gain access to the good stuff, they had to offer valuable knowledge or assistance in return.

Ves inwardly sighed. Compared to all of the older and more established Masters in the crowd, he was not quite certain that his bargaining chips would suffice.

He thought that Master Norville might appreciate his full insights on luminar crystal technology, but then he remembered that he was already a senior contributor of restricted technology.

He had already traded away his knowledge on luminar crystal technology to the The Red Association in essence!

Ves would have to come up with new tech that the Association had yet to master for whatever reason. He looked down at his badge and spotted the two dots that visually identified his permissions.

"Why do I only have two dots?"

He had seen mech designers wearing badges that were adorned by 5, 6 or even 8 differently colored dots!

While Ves was not conceited enough to think he was just as knowledgeable as a centuries-old Master, he should at least be able to obtain permissions to take part in more varied sessions!

Chapter 5177 Unattainable

Once Master Teresa Norville ended her highly interesting presentation on archetech and its potential applications in mechs, everyone who attended the session saw a lot of promise in this unconventional alien tech base.

Although it sounded like it would take around five years for the Red Association to make it practical for internal use, that was still fast enough to make it a worthwhile medium-term investment.

This was what most mechers cared about.

The associates on the other hand deeply wanted to figure out how much longer they needed to wait before they could play with archemechs as well!

Unfortunately, Ves and the others would probably have to wait a few years longer. In order to make a new form of high technology viable enough for use to the 'general public', it had to become a lot more economical and practical.

Otherwise, most mech designers and mech companies would simply skip over it because it cost too much.

They would rather spend the same amount of money for an alternate solution that provided a much greater return of investment.

That said, it was still possible for individual parties such as Ves to get ahead of the curve.

There were rumors that the Red Association planned to end the current mech generation early just so that it could publish a wide range of early tech that could help the mech industry get started on empowering mechs with E energy radiation.

Even if the Phasewater Generation made way for an Exotic Radiation Generation or whatever, it was unlikely that the mechers would add any form of archetech to their public releases.

That would only happen a mech generation later at the earliest. Who knew how long people had to wait in order to get their hands on mature and tested applications of archetech.

Ves couldn't wait that long. He possessed a strong interest in archetech. It was perfect for him as far as he was concerned. The Larkinson Army had always taken the high-end route, so the excessive costs and troublesome maintenance

He also recognized the fantastic synergy between archetech and the Carmine System.

One of the greatest downsides of the Carmine System was that it permanently locked a mech pilot to a specific mech for the rest of his or her life.

Although Ves had yet to actually test this, he knew it was an actual restriction. Venerable Jannzi outright refused to consider the idea of piloting any other mech even though she physically possessed the ability to do so without problem.

The Blood Pact was a literal pact. It was a contract and binding that went beyond the physical and acted on the spiritualities of the involved parties.

In any case, the existence of this restriction meant that it became a lot more important as well as worthwhile to prevent the demise of a Carmine mech.

If Ves could choose between a conventional metallic mech and an archemech, Ves would pick the latter over the former anytime.

While slower, an archemech was simply more durable, not only in single instances, but also over many years of service.

They were admittedly a lot more difficult and troublesome to perform deep repairs on their complicated frames, but their performance remained relatively solid when they only incurred light damage.

The fact that an archemech was also a lot more effective at protecting the life of a mech pilot was a nice bonus, even if it was not as valued in this specific case. It removed a potential weak point and gave Ves a lot more use out of a soldier that already took a lot of time and funding to bring up to standard.

To be honest, Ves still wanted to learn the secret on how to design an archemech no matter whether he intended to incorporate the Carmine System or not. Just its applicability to expert mechs and ace mechs was enough for him to drool at the possibilities.

Ves still had to wait for half an hour before he could have a chance of speaking with Master Norville in person.

It was not unusual for conference speakers to answer a lot of questions from the professionals who listened to her presentation. Master Norville might gain inspiration to tackle a problem from a new angle or meet with a specialist that could offer a lot of additional assistance.

Strangely enough, Master Norville was willing to answer relatively basic questions from the people sitting in front as well as the more advanced questions from the people sitting in the rear.

Ves got the feeling that her replies were not as useful as they sounded, though.

The questions asked by young and curious Journeymen were too shallow to be of use to a mech designer that wanted to make serious use of archetech.

The ones voiced by other Master Mech Designers were much more relevant and technical in nature, but Teresa Norville kept her replies extremely curt.

The social dynamic of these interactions caused Ves to suspect that they were secretly agreeing to meet in private at a later time in order to negotiate a serious exchange.

Jovy clearly picked up on this as well.

Unlike before where everyone had to remain absolutely silent and attentive in order to hear out the proposals from the three faction leaders, it was acceptable for people to communicate with each other.

"Are you thinking about meeting with her in private to explore the possibility of holding an exchange?" Jovy transmitted to Ves over a private communication channel.

Ves nodded. "I am, but I am not sure what I can trade for it. Archetech has become a high priority to me. It is especially relevant because my expeditionary fleet has an actual archeship in its possession. That puts me ahead of almost everyone else in this hall. It would be a waste not to take advantage of this rare and precious opportunity to learn how to combine archetech with mechs a few years sooner than normal."

The RA Senior actually shook his head at that. "I do not recommend you approach Master Norville at this time. She will not take you seriously, and that will greatly hinder any negotiations. You need to prove your usefulness first. I advise you to do well in your upcoming presentations. The more people respect and acknowledge your work, the more she will be interested in what you can offer."

That made a lot of sense. It was very difficult for the mechers to distinguish Ves from the tens of thousands of other associates who attended this conference.

Sure, Ves had his strengths, but many of the other associates who had managed to obtain the appreciation of the Survivalists were also geniuses in their own right!

Ves needed to make a splash and make sure that the Survivalists fell in love with his companion spirit fruits and other works.

He sighed. "Okay. I won't pester Master Norville right away. I will try to seek her or one of the people who can speak about this at a later date."

"Try not to wait until the seventh and final day." Jovy advised. "That is when the great vote will be held. The debate around the three proposals will reach its most intense stage on that day. None of the serious decision makers will have any attention to spare on less important matters such as an ordinary technological exchange."

That was good to know.

Once Ves and Jovy exited the hall along with the rest of the crowd, they called up the list of sessions in order to choose which one they should attend next.

Ves developed an interest in attending sessions related to phasewater, phasewater technology and transphasic products. He tried to search anything related to this new sphere, but did not find anything with enough substance.

The list only mentioned a few sessions related to phasewater technology, and many of them sounded as if they were oriented towards clueless newcomers.

"Wait a second. Jovy, are there any sessions related to phasewater that are not on the list?"

"Yes." The other mech designer confirmed. "Phasewater and tech derived from it is still a major research interest of the Association. Several sessions related to phasewater technology are starting in the next block. The reason why you cannot see them is because your badge lacks the dark blue dot."

Ves had seen dozens of figures, mostly older ones, who happened to have this dot on their badges. He was not pleased that the Survivalists did not see fit to give him this permit.

"Don't you think it is odd that my badge lacks this dot, Jovy? Given my past experiences as well as my current schedule, I think I have more than proven my ability to work with several applications of phasewater."

"It is not that simple, Ves. The threshold to take part in these closed sessions on phasewater is high. Look at my own badge. I do not have the dark blue dot either despite the fact that I have spent years of self-study on doing my best to get up to speed on phasewater technology. You are a professor at a first-class university, correct? You should have a good understanding of what first-raters must learn in order to earn the academic credits of an advanced course on this subject."

The Survivalist Faction did not allow any random mech designer to attend its closed sessions. These were much more sensitive and strategic gatherings that often strayed into restricted and confidential subject matter.

Ves did not feel resigned by this, though. He was a bit upset that he was only getting a glimpse of all of the wonderful sessions taking place within the Khamatar Reign.

"There ought to be a way for me to earn additional dots. Is there a testing center where I can update my badge?"

"There is. I can take you there if you are confident in your ability."

The Survivalists initially assigned these dots based on the information in their possession. It was conceivable that their expansive intelligence-gathering efforts missed a few details from people's lives.

As such, they had to give people an opportunity to correct any oversights, or else a lot of people would grow angry about being left out of the truly useful sessions!

It took fifteen minutes before Jovy led Ves to a rather busy department on the ship. Several halls became filled with mech designers and other professionals who appeared to be doing nothing.

They were all preoccupied with completing difficult exams in a virtual setting.

The application to earn an additional dot was simple. Ves had to approach a projected menu and made his selection out of a surprisingly extensive list.

A dark green dot represented that its bearer possessed a notable amount of expertise in biotechnology.

Ves really wanted to earn this qualification, but he was afraid that his rather basic grasp of biotechnology would cause him to waste his time in vain!

"Let's start with phasewater technology, then. People don't know a lot about it in the first place, so it shouldn't be too hard... right?"

Less than 10 minutes later, Ves left the exam hall with a dejected expression.

Jovy did not look surprised at all as he stood a short distance away from the entrance. The RA Senior had not even bothered to move from his spot. He expected this result!

"I told you. Whatever sporadic or ad-hoc learning you have received on this subject is not as rigorous as we demand. The fact that you were disqualified so soon means that you have been unable to resolve the more basic exam problems. You need to be able to speak with true authority if you want to earn a dot."

Ves let out a sigh. "I get it, I get it. I guess there is no way to add more dots to my badge."

He at least learned what many of the colors represented. An orange dot was related to sociology and psychology while a pink dot was related to intelligence and covert operations.

The only dot that was not on the list was a black one. He had only caught this particular variation a handful of times. Only the most distinguished and high-ranking mech designers boasted this unassuming color.

Ves already formed a couple of guesses about what this was all about, but he did not bother to think about it any further. The probability that he could earn this super-exclusive dot was pretty much zero.

Jovy softly patted Ves on the back. "Don't think about it too much. Focus on what you can do. There are already plenty of other sessions that enrich your understanding."

Chapter 5178 Completely Alien Environments

Ves attended a few more sessions after his humiliating visit at the testing center.

He came to respect the dots on people's badges a lot more this time. Everyone who possessed any dot had genuinely earned it. No one with a dot was a fool when it came to the field in question.

Perhaps the only reason why Ves was able to carry a red and purple in the first place was because studies on E energy radiation and cultivation science were not as mature.

Since most people were still relatively new at figuring them out, people like Ves who seemed to know a clue or two about these new fields managed to gain the recognition of an expert rather easily!

This would never happen in a few years from now. The fact that this conference was held only a few months after the Great Severing meant that far too many people were starting from scratch.

Geniuses or not, it was unlikely that they would be able to gain any sort of advantage over Ves.

The enlightenment fruits he exchanged a lot of Ascension Points for condensed years if not decades worth of study and practice in cultivation science!

Given that Ves possessed so much expertise in this special field, he tried to look for sessions where he could leverage his understanding to greater effect.

Ves did not actually find any closed sessions that interested him. They were a bit too basic and entry-level to provide him with useful insights.

"This is only the first day." Jovy said. "The closed sessions scheduled for the next hours are mostly meant to fill up any gaps in basic understanding. Once the Survivalists are satisfied that most people have strengthened their foundations, the more elaborate sessions will start. This includes yours as well."

"I see. I guess that makes sense."

Ves eventually chose to attend a closed session on hyper materials. This was a really popular session that was actually repeated at different time slots just so that more and more mechers and associates could get up to speed on this new type of materials.

Although the lecture and explanations on hypers did not go into too much depth, the presenters actually explained a lot of interesting new discoveries that the Red Association had yet to release to the public.

"Our analysis of signals and emissions that have radiated from Messier 87 reveals that there is a high prevalence of hyper materials in this supergalaxy." A male material scientist explained. "We have attempted to model the local environment at different galactic coordinates to predict how the presence of so many hypers would affect planets and star systems. The results range from minor, localized disruptions to extreme deviations in the laws of physics. We do not possess enough reliable data to narrow this range. The conditions also undergo massive shifts depending on whether we are studying a star system at the outer edge or close to the center of the dwarf galaxy."

A female scientist projected a vague galactic map of Messier 87 and began to overlay it with different colors that represented the estimated occurrence of hyper materials.

"The prevalence of hypers in the outer rim of this supergalaxy is relatively low, but already far more abundant than we can ever expect to find in the Red Ocean. The impact on the local environment should not be high, but it is likely that it is engulfed by a noticeable degree of interference in all bands. The effect grows progressively worse when moving towards the core. At one point, the presence of hypers is so high that their effects on the local regions will essentially turn them into large-scale hazardous regions where the laws of physics are bent and broken at a much greater frequency."

An exobiologist spoke up at this point. "It is impossible for humans in our current forms to survive in any of these new hazardous regions. We lack the adaptations to maintain our functions in an extreme high energy environment. It is highly probable that these regions contain novel ecosystems

that are completely centered around the prevalence of specific hypers as well as specific variations of E energy radiation. The alien species that have evolved out of these special regions may possess unimaginably powerful personal strengths, but are likely unable to leave their native environments without suffering severe consequences. They would be like fish out of water."

That sounded somewhat reassuring. The power of these superaliens sounded incredibly scary, but they should have little interest reaching out to areas outside of the core regions of their massive galaxy. This made it a bit less likely for the more powerful and established alien species to reach out to the new dwarf galaxy that appeared all of a sudden.

Even the weaker alien species who resided in the galactic rim of Messier 87 might not find it worthwhile to travel all the way to the Red Ocean. The difference in exposure to E energy radiation was too great.

However, Ves knew that he could not completely assume that the natives of this big galaxy would stay away entirely. There were always a few exceptions. Who knew what kind of oddball threats might seek to plunder the Red Ocean before anyone else arrived.

There was also R particle radiation that might attract unwanted attention. The Dark Source spurted two jets of matter at relativistic speeds in directions that were almost impossible to capture at close range.

It was only when the jet began to lose power and dissipated into expanding particles that it became a lot safer to harvest them. The Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy might not be positioned at an ideal location to capture a lot of R particles flying into space, but it still received a light share of them at all times!

"We have employed several experimental procedures to artificially increase the concentration of E energy radiation in limited areas to tentatively simulate these high energy environments. Our methods are still rudimentary and not yet up to our standards. We are reluctantly able to simulate the environment at the furthest edge of Messier 87's galactic rim, but our exposure to exotic radiation is so low that it is impossible to replicate an environment at the galactic center. We are still developing new solutions that will allow us to increase the concentration of E energy radiation even further, but we are uncertain how many years it will take to achieve a breakthrough."

Ves looked intrigued when he heard that. He had already managed to increase the concentration of E energy radiation. It was extremely unlikely that his method resembled the one utilized by the Red Association. There was no way the mechers utilized anything as esoteric as totems!

This was also why he did not think about approaching these researchers so that he could offer his assistance. The mechers would probably balk at relying on 'tech' they could not understand or control.

As long as Ves was the only one that could actually create new design spirits based around particular domains and attributes, the mechers would become dependent on his continued input. This was simply too much of a bother to them, so they would likely continue to work out their own solutions.

That did not mean that there was no possibility for cooperation at all. Ves perked up when a speaker mentioned how their research groups had difficulty obtaining samples of hyper materials with special properties.

"A large variety of hyper materials are sensitive to select variations of E energy radiation. Hypers that are responsive to a single variety often possess common or related properties that are interesting for many reasons. However, we have found it difficult to form large quantities of hypers that are paired to rarer forms of E energy radiation. Their natural occurrence in background radiation is low to non-existent, which considerably hinders our studies. If we are unable to solve this supply issue in the coming months, we intend to open a new exchange where different parties can deliver any hypers with the properties that we desire in exchange for MTA merits." Now that sounded really lucrative to Ves. He understood that there were spiritual attributes that were so rare or nonexistent in Messier 87's exotic radiation that even the mechers found it difficult to produce the associated sympathetic materials.

This could become a huge hindrance in many applications. One of them was designing a new kind of high-ranking mech that incorporated hypers that matched the domains of their powerful pilots.

The Red Association should be willing to pay a large price for rare sympathetic materials, especially in the short term when everyone was just getting started in this field!

Ves smelled a potential deal here. He felt that he would not have to wait a few months before this rumored exchange came online.

He looked at Jovy and quickly communicated his desire to meet with one of the speakers in private.

"Are you sure about that?" Jovy transmitted back over their private communication channel. "The mechers detest anyone who approaches them and waste their time in vain."

"I do not believe my offer will be a waste of time. I have only just begun in my own efforts to produce hyper materials, but I should have already amassed a decent variety at this time. I can also broaden my efforts and produce hypers of other attributes that I have developed a familiarity with. A few of them are definitely not a component of E energy radiation."

Jovy sent one deep look towards Ves before he nodded. "I will quietly arrange a meeting after this session is over. You shouldn't have to wait too long before you will get your turn."

It took over an hour for the session to come to an end. The attendees asked a lot of questions, and the answers actually helped Ves to enrich his understanding of this new classification of materials.

Once Ves managed to get his turn, he entered a small office compartment.

"Professor Armalon." An older woman acknowledged her fellow mecher. "Since you are willing to vouch for this gentleman, I shall grant him 3 minutes of my time. Begin."

It took a moment for Ves to realize that he had to make his pitch.

"I think it is best to give you a small demonstration of what I can do on the spot." He spoke. "Would you agree to this? I can promise you that it is harmless, though the effect might surprise you, Master."

He noticed that her green badge boasted purple dot among other ones, so he felt it was okay to display this particular capability.

The Master looked intrigued, but showed no fear. "If you are of the opinion that it will aid in your case, then you may proceed. I shall lower the responsiveness of the security systems in this

compartment. It would not have you do to make the monitoring system regard you as an acute threat."

That disturbed Ves a bit, but not enough to deter him from his next actions.

Blinky was still recovering from his earlier ordeal at the moment, so Ves would have to do this more directly.

He called up a bunch of design spirits and began to channel their glows.

The Master showed a faint reaction as she was being subjected to the glows of Helena, Lufa and the Solemn Guardian!

This was a careful selection on his part. E energy radiation already possessed a death attribute component, but it did not contain the purity and duty attributes as far as Ves knew.

This meant that it would be a lot harder for the Red Association to produce hypers that were related to these attributes, at least for a time!

Ves did not believe that the clever and inventive mechers would remain stifled for long, but the timing was important.

So long as he could meet their demand of rare sympathetic materials faster than the alternatives, he might be able to secure a modest business deal by relying on other party's lack of patience!

Chapter 5179 Elite Bazaar

Negotiations did not progress smoothly.

The Master that Ves tried to extract benefits from had little patience and wanted to obtain immediate benefits.

The problem was that Ves did not have any readily available samples to trade with. The T Institute was mainly preoccupied with producing death sympathetic materials at the moment, but that was not particularly troublesome for the Red Association to obtain by relying on their own proprietary methods.

Jovy helped a lot. Having him vouch for Ves and his claims did not entirely persuade the older woman to accept a deal that was based on shaky grounds, but it at least prevented him from getting kicked out right away.

"There is no need to conduct a trade straight away." Jovy interceded on Ves's behalf. "He will need to return to his fleet and work to produce the hyper materials that you seek. He has the ability to provide you what you need, though he is probably limited by his stock of materials. It would benefit you if you keep your communication lines open and wait until he has successfully produced what you need to expand upon your collection."

The female Master paused for a moment. She glanced at Ves' badge. Although it only boasted two dots, they happened to be of the right colors.

"Very well. It does not hurt to wait if your associate here can supply the desired materials. I am willing to exchange other materials, MTA merits and certain favors in return. The value of my remuneration is dependent on the speed in which your friend can supply a rare hyper material that we have yet to discover anywhere. Mind you that I am already in contact with many different

suppliers. If any of them are able to supply an unregistered material first, I will only provide a tenth of the original reward."

"A tenth is not enough." Ves shook his head. "It takes a lot of trouble and effort to artificially produce these hypers by leveraging rare E energy variations."

The Master crossed her arms and tilted her chin. "I care not how you supply the goods that we require. I can only promise you that our remuneration should satisfy you if our demands are met in a timely manner. Our research and development projects must progress as quickly as possible. Our time is limited. The sooner we are able to deepen our understanding of hypers, the sooner our society can make use of them on a wider scale. We must endeavor to strengthen humanity's collective strength as quickly as possible."

"I understand. I share the same sentiment. I will do what I can to contribute to our cause." Ves seriously spoke.

Of course, it wouldn't help to obtain a lot of benefits in the process.

The two hashed out a more detailed agreement in the next few minutes. Since everything was so vague, the two did not hold onto too many solid definitions. The numbers might become outdated after a few months.

Ves did not fear that he was getting ripped off with Jovy by his side.

Although the RA Senior Mech Designer was supposed to be on the side of the Association, his current capacity allowed him to look after Ves' best interests for the duration of his assignment.

The only setback that Ves faced was that he could not use this exchange to obtain exclusive knowledge on archetech.

"I work in a different department and research group from that of Master Teresa Norville." The woman explained. "I cannot arbitrarily take their research and transfer it to others. You must approach her or a member of her department if you wish to gain access to this type of knowledge."

"I see."

In the end, the female Master promised to reward Ves with hundreds of millions of MTA merits or a selection of rare materials that was useful in all kinds of different projects.

As Ves and Jovy exited the office, they took a brief break.

As Jovy walked up to a railing and looked down at a hall where hundreds of mechers and associates were walking to their next sessions, he glanced at Ves who was studying the list of events that were starting in the next block.

"How do you like the conference so far, Ves?"

"It's... great."

"You don't sound very certain."

Ves shrugged. "It is definitely a great place to be for a mech designer like myself. All of these presenters are offering free lectures on a lot of advanced and cutting-edge subjects for free. It's a bit annoying that my badge has to possess the right dots, but I can live with that. It is just..."

"You are not satisfied with what you can obtain for free?"

"Nothing comes for free. I feel like that no matter what these people are giving to us, it is only an advertisement for greater services that you need to pay for. It's quite hard to gain enough satisfaction when I don't have what the other party needs."

Jovy did not look surprised at that. "This happens more often than you think. Even in an organization as rich as the Association, we must still fight to obtain the resources we need to further our own projects. No one can make much progress if they attempt to rely on their own individual efforts. We are encouraged to specialize in our own narrow fields and use our strengths to trade what we need from each other. The more productive and successful mechers who are able to establish enough working relationships will climb the hierarchy faster. This is how the system works."

The Mech Trade Association had always worked like this, and the Red Association was no different in this regard.

Ves kind of appreciated this as it gave him an opportunity to make trades with the mechers who were already accustomed with making these kinds of deals.

"I think that I should dial back my expectations a bit for this day." He eventually concluded. "I did not expect this conference to work like a bazaar for elites. I don't have many bargaining chips at the moment, at least ones that others will value. I think I can change that for tomorrow. So long as I can convince people that my companion spirits are valuable, I can use that to obtain greater benefits."

"That may be possible to a degree, but do not forget that you are pushing to make your companion spirit fruits available to the masses. How our Association intends to roll them out is still up for debate, but you cannot charge a fortune for goods that are intended to be sold at more accessible prices."

Ves knew that. "That is true, but I can offer more customized services to the people who want to obtain a little more than a blank slate. Those fruits aren't all that impressive as they can only get people started with a basic companion spirit. That is already an unimaginable benefit to most individuals, but it is hardly the best of what I can offer."

"Are you planning to provide a boutique service?"

"Yep. I can offer better if I can spend a bit of time with individual recipients. I can't do this too much as it takes a bit of effort. I am also limited to providing this service to relatively weaker individuals. I have already tried and failed to impart one to an ace pilot. I think it is also beyond my ability to give one to a Master Mech Designer. They are simply too strong. Their inner qualities have transcended so much that it is difficult to create the openings I need to mold a new companion spirit."

"Do these restrictions apply to your companion spirit fruits as well?"

"I have never tested that, but theoretically that should be the case. The way they work is a little different, but their mechanisms are too fragile and will break under pressure."

"That will limit your options." Jovy frowned. "You won't be able to form a direct exchange with Masters and ace pilots, but you can appeal to their subordinates and proteges instead. There are also

plenty of other people who are willing to offer substantial benefits for a companion spirit that not only promises greater benefits in the future, but also grants an immediate advantage right from the start. Let us go over the possibilities. If you target the right people with the right needs, you can gain the most benefits out of your efforts."

He was right. Companion spirits were useful to everyone, but some people benefited a lot more from them than others. Irene Mox's Emma was a prime example of that. Ketis also gained a unique opportunity by taking advantage of the fact that Sharpie was a second version of herself.

The two refined the planning of tomorrow's conference. Now that Ves knew what these sessions were truly all about, he revised parts of his upcoming presentation to put less emphasis on wavy explanations and more emphasis on examples of existing companion spirits.

He felt a little reluctant to explain the companion spirits of other people as it represented a violation of privacy.

However, the benefits were more than worth it. Ves felt it was a worthwhile tradeoff to expose the strengths of a number of his people in order to persuade the mechers to take his work more seriously.

The potential gains were just too great!

Once Ves completed his revision for the upcoming presentation, he pushed this matter aside and continued to attend various sessions throughout the night.

He learned a lot from each of them. The open session on the nunser race and their strong herd instincts taught Ves and others how they could potentially take advantage of this trait.

The session also helped to persuade people to gain more confidence in the Deep Strike Plan.

So long as humanity struck the nunser territories in the rear with thunderous force, the quadruped aliens would become so concerned about their kind that it was quite likely for them to turn around to prevent any further massacres!

However, this was not a long-term solution. The nunsers were known to launch devastating counterattacks after suffering heavy blows!

This was why people did not automatically assume that the Deep Strike Plan would work out. It relied on too many assumptions of alien behavior that might not necessarily be accurate in reality.

Ves decided to attend a closed session next. This one was more of a debate rather than a presentation. The speakers wanted to open a dialogue on whether it was appropriate to grant pioneers and other authorized individuals the right to utilize weapons of mass destruction against alien adversaries.

Suffice to say, Ves was a strong proponent in this debate. He did not hide his real opinions on this matter, but he did not speak too much either.

It was enough for him to provide his input as a pioneer who fought against multiple alien forces.

What he truly paid attention to was the opinions of other mechers. He wanted to gauge the overall sentiment within the Survivalist Faction and determine how likely it was for the Association to ease this taboo.

From what he heard from the various mechers, there was not too much support for permitting the use of superweapons. They distrusted space peasants so much that they were afraid that these impulsive humans would cause its own extinction shortly after getting their hands on extremely destructive toys!

"Mechs have enough potential to satisfy the masses. The Age of Dawn has introduced new factors that can radically alter their properties and their uses on the battlefield. It is better to rely on superior technology rather than crude and indiscriminate weapons."

The mechers all shared the same fault more or less. Their entire lives revolved around mechs, so they had so much confidence in these machines that they were prone to discounting the benefits of warships and superweapons.

While it was possible for first-class multipurpose mechs to put up a good fight against most adversaries, the problem was that a lot of people didn't have access to all of these fancy and ridiculously expensive products!

Third-raters and second-raters were unable to fight against serious alien forces. They were the ones who benefited the most from constructing lots of large but crude warships that could deploy an array of formidable superweapons.

To deny them these options out of fear of repeating past mistakes was knee-jerk behavior as far as Ves was concerned.

Chapter 5180 Introduction to Companion Spirits

Ves began to question whether it was a good idea to stay awake for an entire week.

He had learned so much on the first day that he needed time to think and internalize his gains.

"I'll keep going for now." He decided after a moment of thought. "If I get too tired to properly hold a presentation, then that might be a good idea for me to take a quick nap."

He would regret it if he missed a few sessions because he was too lazy to make better use of his time.

Ves had the illusion that valuable information had become a lot more accessible now that there were so many people handing it out for free. It would only be once he departed from this conference that he would go back to a reality where exclusive knowledge became a lot less accessible!

"Knowledge is power. The more I learn from all of these impressive speakers, the lower the chance I will be flying blind."

He needed to make sure he was at the top of the game, especially considering that it was almost time for him to lead his first session.

Now that the second day had arrived, Ves and Jovy moved over to a medium-sized compartment that had defaulted to a blank and empty state.

"Here is where you will hold your first closed session." Jovy stated as he called up an interface that could dynamically control the layout of the entire compartment. "Word about your companion spirits have already gotten around among the Survivalists, so hundreds of people have already signed up. I have already taken the initiative to invite a handful of my friends. I will introduce them to you later on if there is enough time."

Ves called up the same interface and began to specify changes that would turn the empty compartment into a modern lecture hall. He made a few adjustments in order to offer enough room for the companion spirit trees he brought to this conference.

By subtly changing the lighting so that a warmer light shone on the plants, he hoped to increase their mystique and attractiveness.

Once the ship's systems quietly delivered the trees from one of the Khamater Reign's storage compartments, Ves carefully checked each of their conditions to confirm that they were still in good condition.

He paid especially close attention to the state of every fruit dangling from the branches of the surprisingly fleshy tree.

"The appearance of your trees will unnerve your audience." Jovy remarked as he looked at the fleshy white trunks with distaste. "It is clear to see that their structures consist of repurposed alien organic tissue. It may be too much to ask for people to eat their fruits."

"It will be their loss, then. They can always obtain a customized companion spirit directly from me as long as they are willing to offer greater concessions."

The compartment soon completed its transformation. Since there was a bit of time left, Ves took the initiative to paint a few stylized and exaggerated images of different companion spirits on the bulkheads.

There was not enough time for him to depict spirits such as Blinky, Alexandria, Sharpie and Kiroshi in greater detail, but he personally thought that he did a good job at making them look impressive despite their stylized appearances.

He did not just sketch their appearances, but also added a few touches to the background to hint at their abilities and domains.

Ves even felt tempted to paint an image of Emma, but he thought better of it after a while.

"That does not look too bad." Jovy said as he studied the images of the different spirits. "You can definitely make a more memorable impression to your audience with the help of your art. However, I am afraid it will look as if you are trying too hard."

"I know, but I am fine with that. I need to stand out one way or another. My identity is not good enough, so I have to strengthen my case by relying on gimmicks. Whether I look like an amateur is not that important. As long as I can win over enough people who are receptive to my message, I should do okay."

People started to pass through the entrance after a short period of time.

The mechers and associates who wanted to attend this peculiar closed session all passed the requirements to attend it. Their badges either boasted a red dot, a purple dot or both.

Ves actually wanted to make it an open session in order to reach the widest possible audience, but he did not get to make up the rules.

By limiting attendance to people who were already initiated into certain secrets, Ves could speak more freely about the mechanics behind companion spirits. He could make a stronger case as his audience should be able to understand their benefits a lot better.

The seating order remained the same as ever. The younger and more ignorant guests sat at the front while the more senior and knowledgeable mechs sat at the rear.

People had already begun to talk with each other. The curious trees placed in the front and the strange images painted on the sides served as excellent conversation starters.

A lot of the attendees were quite clever. They could already infer from various clues that the fruits on these odd trees were supposed to give magical animals to people. The images painted by Ves were examples of what companion spirits could become.

More than a few of the arrivals looked and gestured at Jovy. He had already showcased his Eye of Providence numerous times. His peers wanted to find out if they could receive anything similar at an acceptable price.

A bit more people came than Ves initially expected. Almost 700 people came.

It was easy for Ves to tell that a decent chunk of them consisted of relatively young Journeymen and occasionally Seniors who sought to gain an advantage over their peers and rivals.

The Masters probably expressed little personal interest in these peculiar companion spirits because they had already built their own systems to further their progression.

Ves also took notice of a modest group of mech pilots. They probably heard the stories about how companion spirits could directly improve their fighting capabilities and did not want to miss out on this strange new augmentation.

Only two expert pilots chose to attend this closed session, though.

Ves chalked that up to the fact that general cultivation was useless to mech pilots. They were already locked in their own paths and did not need to bother with anything else. There was no need to confuse them by telling them about other ways to grow stronger before the Red Association was ready to make a public announcement.

"Do you know who they are?" Ves quietly asked his friend.

"I can read a part of their records, but I cannot do anything more than that. I do not know them in person. The Association is too big for me to know everyone in person. It is interesting that their badges both have purple dots. They may be participants of a secret research project."

"Interesting."

Just before Ves began his presentation, the hall became a lot more silent when three figures successively passed through the entrance and took their seats at the very rear.

"Those are..."

Jovy schooled his expression. "Congratulations, Ves. You have managed to attract enough interest from the three sub-factions to attract their envoys. It is a good sign that each of them sent one over."

Ves was not familiar with any of the three Master Mech Designers who came on behalf of their respective patrons. They did not preside over any sessions themselves, but attended the ones that they thought would benefit the plans they supported.

He soon learned from Jovy that Master Xena Wintress was tied to the Xenotechnician, Master Henry Urbeck was tied to the Fist of Defiance while Master Tolarian Cerny was tied to the Polymath.

Ves had already met so many Master Mech Designers on the first day. He became a little overwhelmed by how many more powerful personalities he needed to deal with in this conference.

He recalled a few pieces of advice that he received before and quickly regained his composure. There was no need for him to care too much as he was not involved in any of the high-level politicking.

He was just a simple associate who wanted to make a few exchanges.

The entrance soon closed shut, signifying that it was not possible for others to catch up to the closed session anymore.

If they wanted to attend, then they should have gotten here in time. The mechers expected at least that much from their ranks and their hand-picked associates.

"Welcome everyone." Ves began with a smile. "In the following two hours, I shall be giving you all an introduction on companion spirits and what I have done to make them more accessible to the masses. While I have quietly worked on companion spirits for numerous years, a number of advancements are relatively recent. Some of my work has not undergone rigorous testing and can produce unpredictable and possibly even dangerous results."

That unnerved a few people, but not as much as Ves expected. Many people in the crowd had been in his shoes in the past. Research was not easy and scientists sometimes had to cut corners in order to meet deadlines.

Once he mentioned this obligatory warning, Ves could finally begin with his true presentation.

"Let me start from the beginning. What are companion spirits? I think it is best if I show you an example of one to begin with. Feel free to scan or analyze him with any means you have on hand so long as it is not too excessive."

"Mrow!"

Although Blinky was still in a recovering stage, he had enjoyed enough rest to at least appear healthy when he manifested in the open.

The purple Star Cat initially did not elicit a major reaction from the 700 or so people, but that soon changed once they confirmed that it was not a projection.

"One of my new sensors indicates that a vortex of E energy radiation has formed around this purple feline. There is power in this subject. I would love to bring him to my lab and conduct a battery of tests."

"I can feel this cat is alive and real. That's... impossible."

"Looking at this cat reminds me of the cosmos for whatever reason. There is more to him than is apparent on the surface."

Sure enough, the people who attended this session were not completely clueless and incompetent. Enough people with a purple dot were able to glean parts of what made Blinky and by extension other companion spirits special.

"Mrow-"

"This is not a projection." Ves stated as his incarnation crawled over his body like a frisky animal. "Blinky here is a construct that comes from myself. He is not produced by any technology, though he can interact with tech in various ways. What is important is that companion spirits like him are essentially second personalities of their principals. I am Blinky and Blinky is me. The reason why this is the case is because he has spawned from my mind as an extension of myself."

That did not provide much clarity to the audience, but they soon became distracted as Blinky flew forward and allowed the attendees at the front rows to interact with the cat more directly.

They all looked as curious as children as their arms passed straight through Blinky's intangible body.

The relatively junior mech designers and other people were able to gain a better impression of what companion spirits were like through these attempts.

"Amazing."

"It is as if my fingers have brushed the surface of his soul."

As Blinky steadily moved up the rear, he began to receive more focused attention from the higher-ranked dignitaries.

Even the Masters began to understand that this companion spirit was special, especially given as many of them were sensitive enough to feel that this deceptively cute pet actually practiced a strange but unusually powerful cultivation method!