

The Mech 5231

Chapter 5231 The Divorce

The Kingdom of Mechs was splitting apart.

There was nothing that the people of the Red Ocean could do to prevent this course of events from unfolding.

The distant Star Designers responsible for commanding the kingdom to inflict so much harm to itself were all grimly united in their purpose.

Seventy of them apparently commanded enough authority within the Kingdom of Mechs to push through this drastic change with or without the cooperation of their peers in the Red Ocean!

That simple fact galled Ves and a lot of other people who happened to be stuck in the new frontier.

The red humans had all been caught up in an accident that exposed them to a lot of new and indeterminate alien adversaries.

It was difficult for them to resist all of this opposition when they were badly outnumbered. One of the few reasons why they still managed to retain a sense of confidence was that they knew that they had their brothers and sisters in the Milky Way backing them up from a distance.

Even if the so-called 'original humans' were only able to help by figuring stuff out and transmitting a lot of data back to the red humans, that was already incredibly useful as both groups relied heavily on technological advances to stay ahead of the competition.

Although splitting up the Kingdom of Mechs did not necessarily cut off all of the existing communication channels between the two sides, the collective action taken by the Star Designers of the Milky Way conveyed an intent of finality.

The original humans had probably planned to cut off the other intact communication channels as well. Anything that directly tied the Red Ocean to the Milky Way had to be invalidated in order to remove as many chances for the mysterious and powerful alien threats from piggy-backing off the connections and ending up in the old galaxy somehow!

Of course, this did not stop a truly powerful and capable alien threat from figuring out where red humanity originally came from. The Milky Way Galaxy had radiated its light all the way to the Virgo Cluster 50 million years ago. Even accounting for all of the drift in the motion of stellar objects that had occurred throughout this time, it shouldn't be too difficult for an intelligent alien race to determine the location of humanity's home galaxy.

Getting there was another problem, though. The real purpose of all of the original Star Designers was to prevent any powerful energy-based life forms from using any existing ties to expand their influence to the Milky Way Galaxy in a completely unexpected manner that could not be defended against.

Whether their caution was justified or not, the 70 Star Designers essentially did not want to take on this gamble!

As Ves continued to remain stunned after he processed all of these implications, another change occurred in the visual image projected by the Polymath.

The silhouettes of comparably tiny mechs started to appear in the surroundings. Many of them looked strange and abnormal compared to the machines that Ves was accustomed to working with, but none of them were truly unfamiliar to the eyes of an experienced mech designer.

"The god mechs have appeared!"

The appearance of any god pilot and god mech was normally a cause for celebration for people.

No one in the assembly hall felt particularly jubilant at the time.

Different from the Star Designers who were in the process of affecting the Kingdom of Mechs, the god mechs clearly conveyed a sense of individual sovereignty.

Each god pilot was like a personal kingdom unto themselves. Ves understood a bit better why these powerful warriors could no longer truly coexist with the Kingdom of Mechs anymore.

They simply couldn't mix with each other!

Even so, just because the god pilots could no longer become a part of the Kingdom of Mechs did not mean that they could not assist it in other ways.

Right now, several dozen of the vague projections of different god mechs formed a loose sphere around the kingdom. It looked as if they positioned themselves in a protective formation that could defend against intrusions from any direction.

Not all of the god mechs assumed this protective formation.

They instead lingered outside of it as if they had been left out of the loop.

As Ves tried to cast his spiritual senses forward, he could vaguely identify the familiar mark of the Destroyer of Worlds.

Having met her in 'person', Ves had a clear recollection of her domain and power!

It took a bit more trouble to figure out the identities of the remaining god mechs left outside.

Each of them matched with the known god pilots who had become stuck in the Red ocean as well.

Whatever secret deployment they were undertaking did not prevent them from getting a closer look of what was taking place!

A few of the outside god mechs tried to move closer, but that triggered an aggressive response from the defenders.

The dynamic was clear to see here. No words were needed to describe what was going on with the two groups of god pilots.

The apex warriors of the Milky Way were in on the scheme. Not all of the god pilots of the Milky Way had showed up, but enough of them had agreed to participate in the plan that they could stop any other opposition from interfering with the ongoing separation process.

With just 8 god pilots on the side of red humanity, there was nothing the Destroyer of Worlds, the Light of Sol and the rest could do to stop the original humans from cutting off a lifeline!

"This... is a tragedy." Ves whispered in a tone that conveyed his utter helplessness towards this situation.

"I do not think there is much our leading defenders can do for us anyway." The neighboring Master Mech Designer shook his head. "The Star Designers are tasked with managing the affairs of the Kingdom of Mechs from within. The god pilots are solely assigned to defend it from exterior threats. The reason for this strict division is because the former are creators while the latter are destroyers. If the god pilots who fight on our behalf ever get close enough to the kingdom, they cannot do much but exacerbate the damage. They cannot undo the damage and reverse the separation process. The most they can do is threaten to inflict extensive damage to the other parts of the Kingdom of Mechs while they still remain within reach unless the original humans stop this scheme."

Understanding lit up in Ves' eyes. "I see now. The god pilots of the Milky Way don't want this to happen, so they have shown up to prevent any retaliations for this action. It... is depressing to see our fellow humans on the other side treat us like threats to be guarded against. Where is the solidarity between our people?"

The Master Mech Designer snorted. "The necessity of survival trumps any obligation of solidarity. This is exactly the sort of action that the Survivalists over in the Milky Way would orchestrate. The Polymath likely conspired with her closest peers in the other galaxy to make this happen. Both parties will gain what they want from completing the separation. The original Survivalists will be able to increase the security of their home galaxy while the Polymath will gain the opportunity to enact her ostensible plan to take control of the splinter kingdom."

Damn!

These Survivalists were a real piece of work!

Ves previously thought that they were among the more reasonable people of the Mech Trade Association, but it turned out that they truly had no limits as long as they believed that humanity, or at least the portion that was most relevant to them, had come under threat!

He found it rather ironic that the greatest enemy of the Survivalists in the Red Ocean turned out to be the Survivalists of the Milky Way.

The worst part of it all was that Ves could not fault any of them for the decisions they had made.

Just as Ves intended to strike off the Unity Plan to advance his personal interests, the Survivalists of both sides were merely looking out after their own people.

The key here was that the red Survivalists and the original Survivalists no longer stood up for the exact same group of people anymore.

From the moment red humanity turned into a distinct population group, the interests of the two branches of humanity no longer aligned with each other anymore.

Red humanity wanted to borrow the help of original humanity to survive the impending calamities.

Original humanity did not want to get sucked into red humanity's extinction-level problems!

Ves lowered his eyes in depressed realization.

As the diverging interests between the two branches of humanity grew stronger, a separation became increasingly more certain.

Even if the Polymath did not pull off this extreme stunt today, the Star Designers and god pilots of the Milky Way would have committed this action sooner or later.

This was because their ultimate responsibility was to protect the human race. Their human race.

The consequences of their decision became increasingly more grave.

The cracks in the large city wall started to show large rents and gaps that couldn't be plugged by tossing a couple new bricks into place.

Now that the separation had reached this stage, the damage started to pile up faster. It was as if the initial act of tearing apart the kingdom was the hardest, but once more and more weaknesses emerged, it became a lot easier to continue the tearing process!

All of this induced an increasingly greater sense of distress to any mech professional!

"So this is it, huh?" Ves shakily commented. "The original humans are kicking us all away in order to save their sorry hides. What a messy and abrupt divorce."

"Divorce is an apt word." The Master Mech Designer nodded with an expression that showed that he had already made peace with this new reality. "If I were you, I wouldn't linger too much on an event that is already set in stone. I would worry more about what happens afterwards. Once the splinter kingdom appears, the Polymath won't remain as a bystander anymore. This is the time when she will have to make a proactive move if she wants to complete her coup."

Damn, he was right!

While there was nothing that the red humans could do to stop the actions of the white humans, the story was different once they were all by themselves!

Even though the Polymath had secretly conspired with the white humans behind everyone else's backs, once the separation was complete, she would have no more backing from remote anymore!

Ves looked around all of the key figures in this assembly hall.

A constant stream of menacing looking guards had poured in from the side entrances that appeared from the walls.

Larger defensive constructs as well as genuine first-class demi-mechs quietly emerged from behind as well!

No real full-sized mechs had shown up so far, but Ves was sure that they were in the process of forming into ranks outside of the hull of the Khamatar Reign.

"Will all of this be enough?"

The mechers seated around Ves made contemptuous noises.

"Do you think the Polymath is the sort of person who has failed to take these measures into account? If she has decided to take this drastic course of action, then she most definitely took all of our possible reactions into account as well. No amount of firepower or technological solution can defeat one of our most powerful mech designers in a direct confrontation, especially when she has

made adequate preparations for this eventuality. The only possible individuals who can stop her are the Xenotechnician or the Fist of Defiance."

The Fist of Defiance may have shown his presence in the projected image of the Kingdom of Mechs and its immediate surroundings, but it did not look as if he could physically zip back to the Khamatar Reign in a timely manner!

That left the Xenotechnician. Ves did not forget about the impressive demonstration that the old and wily Star Designer displayed during their first meeting with each other.

Did this old geezer possess the means to stop the Polymath from completing her attempted takeover of red humanity?

Chapter 5232 A Game At The Highest Level

The crumbling of a portion of the city wall happened slow enough for plenty of people to process their unwillingness and eventually accept the truth of what was happening.

The Kingdom of Mechs was splitting into two separate pieces.

From what it looked like, the original kingdom did not stand to lose too much of itself. While the damage definitely set its growth back by a few decades, the active mech community in the Milky Way should easily be able to fix the gaps in the same amount of time.

Once the damage was repaired, the original humans should be able to move on with their lives as normal. They wouldn't even notice the absence of all of the displaced people after this time!

The situation for the red humans was much less certain. No one knew how much of its original functionality the splinter kingdom would retain. The proportion of damage was not only a lot more severe, but this rejected piece also looked a lot less strong and functional in every way!

Still, Ves might be wrong about this. The projected image was merely a partial visual representation of what was actually taking place.

He truly doubted that the Polymath would be okay with this entire venture if the splinter kingdom was woefully deficient and incomplete.

It was much likelier that this separated portion contained enough comprehensive features to function as an independent kingdom in itself. Perhaps it might become a lot weaker for a while, but persistent exposure to E energy radiation should quickly enable it to grow stronger and mend all of the damage from the separation.

Ves and everyone else could sense that the separation process was about to reach completion.

No one had many moves at this time, and it seemed unlikely that a savior would come and put a stop to this dramatic event.

When the separation finally happened, every single mech pilot and mech designer froze for a moment that seemed to stretch on to eternity.

The people of the Milky Way Galaxy did not experience anything too serious. The more sensitive among them briefly experienced a painful snap that caused them to wince and hold their heads in pain, but that was all. They easily shrugged off this occurrence and were able to return to their daily lives without any major repercussions.

The damage to their original kingdom was relatively minor all-considered. It helped a lot that the Mech Trade Association did everything in its power to downplay the situation and encourage everyone to stop asking any further questions.

Only the most knowledgeable insiders in the Milky Way understood the full significance of what had just occurred.

None of them expressed the intent or willingness to expose the true magnitude of what had happened. Everyone was willing to abide by the current covenant that had remained in force for a long time. The common folk needed to remain as docile and uninformed as possible.

The situation was much different in the Red Ocean.

A large number of mech pilots and mech designers experienced a tear in their inner selves that induced a greater spike of pain than anything they experienced before!

Everyone with the exception of the firmest ace pilots and so on couldn't help but cry out in pain while nursing their aching heads!

Ves had paid close attention to his flaming design seed at the critical time.

While he hadn't been able to perceive much, he briefly noticed that the flames had abruptly spluttered as if it was on the verge of running out of fuel!

It was only moments later that it had reached a slightly different equilibrium than before.

His design flame felt... weaker somehow, though he couldn't exactly explain what had changed.

As Ves and many other people in the assembly hall took a minute or so to recover from the unforgettable trauma generated by the separation event, their eyes gradually focused on the projected image of the Kingdom of Mechs.

It had changed.

Much of it had gone missing. The much larger portion that represented the original kingdom had been removed from the picture as it was no longer within reach anymore!

What was left was just the sad piece of city wall and a small portion of ground as well as ancient stone structures.

This was the splinter kingdom that the original humans had graciously bestowed to the red humans as a farewell gift.

Every single person connected to the splinter kingdom felt an incredible sense of loss when they beheld its state.

Few if any of them fully understood how much they had actually lost, but that did not stop the part of them that sincerely loved mechs from becoming intensely affected by this tragic event!

It took a great amount of will and effort for Ves to draw his attention away from the sorry-looking splinter kingdom and gaze at the three leaders floating above the podium.

The Mace of Retaliation looked visibly ashen, but the peak ace pilot showed no sign of calling in his ace mech to give the Polymath her well-deserved beatdown.

This was strange.

The Xenotechnician's lack of action appeared even stranger to Ves. There was no way this old and wiley Star Designer should be any weaker than the Polymath! He had several centuries worth of accumulation to fall back upon. Why hadn't he pulled out his superpowerful pinnacle work alien antimatter beam annihilator blaster or whatever?

Out of everyone in this massive hall, only the Polymath looked as if she was actually taking subsequent action.

A new Star appeared above the poor splinter kingdom.

Its signature matched precisely with the Polymath's domain.

"What... is she doing?"

"She is about to commence her takeover, If I have to take a guess."

Thirteen more Stars appeared in quick succession. Each of them possessed vastly different signatures as they embodied entirely different domains.

It was immediately clear that while the individual Stars might disagree with each other on many matters during ordinary times, they had set aside all of their disagreements in order to rally around a common purpose!

The eight god mechs of the Red Ocean acted in coordination as well. They menacingly sped forward towards the sole dissident Star that had played a major role in what had come to pass.

The Polymath appeared to be so badly outnumbered that there shouldn't be any way for her to hijack the vulnerable splinter kingdom!

However, nobody thought that she could be stopped so easily. The physical body of the Polymath still conveyed a sense of certainty and confidence that did not fit the image of someone who was about to suffer defeat.

"Stop it, Clair." The Xenotechnician abruptly spoke in the clear. "Our former brothers and sisters have done enough damage. What we need to do is to set aside our disagreements and do our best to recover from this event. Any further conflict will only exacerbate our disadvantage and set us back even further. Are you truly content to reign over red humanity when your new empire has crumbled into ruins?"

The Polymath slowly shook her head as she maintained a determined expression.

"I have only just begun to enact my plan. There is nothing you or anyone else can do to stop my ascension. I dare not claim that I have calculated for every possible variable, but I did not proceed with this action unless I was certain that I can account for your means of resistance."

"What gives you the confidence that you will prevail? We outnumber you! There is no one left by your side! I have already corresponded with the handful of Star Designers and god pilots who were initially sympathetic to your cause and successfully convinced them that it is unwise to elevate a tyrant into power."

It turned out that the Xenotechnician had managed to produce actual results during this time.

As the main backer of the Diplomacy Plan, it made sense that the man was good at interpersonal communications.

For him to successfully convert the Polymath's sympathizers into opponents was a major diplomatic achievement!

Unfortunately, all the Xenotechnician managed to do was to elicit a sneer from the Polymath. "They shall come crawling back to me soon enough once I have fulfilled my plan. I never truly counted on their cooperation to secure my objectives. There is nothing you can do to hinder my advance. Your acts of resistance are irrelevant."

"We shall see whether your confidence holds true this time."

It gradually dawned on them that this top-level conflict had taken on another dimension.

By arguing in the open, they were attempting to sway the people around them. The Star Designers were warring for everyone's hearts and minds.

It was clear what the Polymath wanted to do. She sought to reinforce the impression that her ascension was inevitable. Instead of trying to oppose her, people should start to think about how they could best serve her in her new administration.

The Xenotechnician on the other hand wanted to keep everyone's hopes of resistance alive. The last thing he wanted to see was for the Polymath to get away with usurping power and legitimize her reign!

A momentary stalemate emerged. The Star representing the Polymath did not attempt to overcome the blockade set by the other Star Designers as well as all of the god pilots.

Ves thought that these powerful figures could do more than to prevent the Polymath from claiming her kingdom. Why weren't they going on the offensive? Why hadn't the Xenotechnician and the guards around them not taken any concrete action to restrain the rogue Star Designer?

"If they haven't made a move, it is because doing so will set us back even further somehow." The neighboring Master Mech Designer helpfully provided his own analysis. "Look at the state of the kingdom that has been left to us. It is in a catastrophic state. It is so fragile that any damage that might result from heavy fighting may lead to an unstoppable cascade of collapses that can bring it all down. Once that happens, everyone will lose. This is the worst case scenario that everyone must prevent at all cost."

"Doesn't that mean that the Polymath is blackmailing everyone at the moment? She's using the fragility of our splinter kingdom against us! That should make her even less desirable as our ruler!"

Surprisingly enough, the Survivalists around him disagreed with that last statement.

"On the contrary, young man. You do not understand our faction enough to know what is truly taking place. This is not a civil war. This is an ideological dispute. No matter what the Polymath is doing, she has made it clear that she is doing what she thinks is best for red humanity. She fighting on our behalf in her own way. The fact that her actions are overbearing is difficult to stomach, but... it is not unacceptable in our eyes. She is not a traitor. As far as we are concerned, she is still a Star Designer, a leader of our faction and a leader of the Red Association."

Another nearby mecher added her own clarification. "One of the tenets of our faction is that the ends justify the means. Our overarching goal has always been to secure the survival of our people, no matter the cost. The Polymath may have broken the rules and acted in a less-than-acceptable manner, but if she can actually fulfill her claims and make red humanity stronger by assuming the role of a tyrant... then all is forgiven. We can work with her if she has demonstrated enough strength, calculation and cunning to lead red humanity to a better future."

"That... that's madness!" Ves reacted with shock for the umpteenth time! "Aren't you afraid of subjecting yourself to the rule of a Star Designer that has shown that she is all too willing to disregard our opinions? Perhaps it is better to accept the risks of greater damage if that is what it takes to stop her and punish her for her transgressions. We can't keep holding ourselves back like this! Doing nothing will play right into her hands!"

The Survivalists did not exhibit as much rejection towards this idea as they should.

"You still do not understand, Professor Larkinson. This... this is how the game is played at this level. It may very well be possible for the Xenotechnician and others on this ship to possess the means to stop the Polymath in a permanent manner. However... we do not want to kill her. That is why an ace mech has yet to appear. Barring the appearance of a god mech that can exercise the right amount of power and control to subjugate a Star Designer, our hands are tied."

Ves looked around in incomprehension. He had a feeling that he was hanging around with the completely wrong crowd. Why couldn't he be hanging out with the Transhumanists instead? He bet that they weren't nearly as extreme as the Survivalists!

"So you're just going to sit around and let her complete her plan without interruption?"

"That is exactly what we are going to do." The Master Mech Designer said in a clear tone of resignation. "We only have 14 Star Designers to begin with. The loss of our most comprehensive mech designer and researcher will set us back in ways that you cannot comprehend. Escalating this conflict is the worst possible outcome. It takes serious hardware to even begin to harm a woman as powerful as the Polymath, and that is far too much. The collateral damage alone will tear apart the Khamatar Reign and everyone within her hull."

It was at this time that the Polymath no longer stuck to talking anymore.

The Star Designer lifted her arm and began to manifest a crown out of nothing.

The gunmetal gray metal crown immediately attracted most people's attention. It possessed a clear and obvious transcendent quality that radiated its own power!

The Polymath proceeded to lift the relatively thin-looking crown and placed it over her head.

Nobody moved to stop her from crowning herself.

From the moment the metal headdress perfectly adorned her head between her elaborately braided hair, A pulse of power surged from the confident Star Designer!

The splinter kingdom seemed to respond to this pulse. It started to radiate more power as it somehow established a weak but escalating form resonance with the source of the trigger!

Ves couldn't help but grow stunned at this time!

As his eyes settled on the mysterious crown on the Polymath's face, he had a strong guess that this was probably the symbol of authority that was associated with an authentic Holy Son or Daughter!

How could she possibly get her hands on an actual crown?! Didn't she possess a mere fragment of the Metal Scroll?!

Ves had never attained anything close to a crown in all of the years he owned the Mech Designer System.

Either his fragment was a lot weaker, or the System had somehow scammed him by depriving him from his rightful possession!

Chapter 5233 The Shadow Over The Kingdom

The Polymath had donned her crown.

This singular gray crown pulsed with the power of metal that resonated with the hearts of every mech pilot and mech designer.

There was no way to fully describe the magnificence of this singular crown. It was not so much an object as it was a fixture filled with symbolism given life and substance.

While most people in the assembly hall automatically assumed that the Polymath had meticulously designed and built this crown as some sort of technological masterpiece, Ves knew better.

Though the design was completely different, it possessed a number of physical and contextual similarities to another crown that his mother had shown off back in the other galaxy.

Ves had a strong feeling that the Polymath had unveiled the Metal Scroll's version of the Golden Laurel Wreath Crown.

Whatever its functions, it not only appeared to give the Polymath a power boost that enabled her powerful aura and domain to fend off the Xenotechnician with greater efficiency, but also produced a more disastrous effect!

Ves and everyone else could see that whenever the crown pulsed in a soft gray corona, the splinter kingdom released a similar pulsing glow in return!

It was like a heartbeat that was slowly coming to life, one that every single member of the mech community could feel within the depths of their own sources of power.

"The Polymath... is resonating with her new kingdom." A nearby mecher gasped with awe.

Whether the statement was accurate or not, it sure looked as if the Polymath was attempting to interface with the splinter kingdom on a mystical level that Ves couldn't even begin to understand.

Whatever the case, the tyrant couldn't be allowed to complete this crucial step!

Once she had taken over the fraction of the kingdom bequeathed by the original humans as their final parting gift, the entire mech community would fall under her sway!

Everyone would be forced to dance to her tune aside from maybe the Red Fleet. True freedom would become a secondary concern as the Polymath's drive to pursue the most rational and optimal outcomes compelled her to control all of red humanity like chess pieces.

This was not the future that Ves wanted to live in. It was not the kind of society that he wanted his children to grow up in. The present version of humanity may be anything but perfect, but at least it gives enough opportunities for a lot of people to pursue their own dreams and make their own choices!

"Why aren't we taking action already?!"

"We are! It's harder than it looks! The Polymath has already taken all of our measures into account. It's as if she already has us in checkmate before she even made the first move!"

Although it looked as if nobody was putting up any resistance, the real struggle took place on multiple levels that were too abstract and complicated to understand for most people.

Ves gained an inkling of what it was like to fight a battle at this high level as he could feel the faint ripple effects of a clash between Star Designers taking place in dimensions that were far removed from the material realm.

The Xenotechnician employed tech and powers against the Polymath, only for the latter to fend them off with her own measures.

Perhaps the older Star Designer might have been able to gain ground over his opponent by virtue of his greater experience and accumulation, but the Polymath managed to put up a much better resistance than she should!

Her development as a Star Designer not only exceeded that of her peers, but she also benefited from an unknown but most definitely potent power boost from her gunmetal gray crown!

"The Polymath is holding her ground!"

Given that the Polymath still had to divert a significant amount of power to hold back her fellow faction leader, this should have been the perfect time for the Mace of Retaliation and all of the other ace pilots to make their moves.

Yet none of them made any attempts to summon their ace mechs, because the Polymath put them all in checkmate somehow as well!

"As soon as an ace mech appears, the conflict will escalate and spill out in our immediate surroundings. The Khamatar Reign and a large concentration of the most crucial leaders and professionals of red humanity will be wiped out from existence. That is a lose-lose situation that no one wants to come to pass."

Ves grew more and more disappointed at the Survivalists around him. Although he knew they were doing what they could to resist the Polymath's attempted takeover without putting a lot of people at risk, he grew frustrated at their utter inability to defeat a single renegade!

They literally outnumbered her! They had their own Star Designer on their side! Why couldn't they whip out a lot of guns and start firing right away?!

He understood the reason for their restraint soon after he thought about it. He could tell that the Polymath had subverted a lot of tech on the vessel.

Any sign of employing a weapon would provoke a furious retaliation from the ship's own defensive systems!

In fact, even if Ves managed to get off a shot from his Amastendira would cause hundreds of layers of transphasic energy shields to appear and block the attack.

Anything else would provoke an even greater response. Ves had recently managed to get his hands on an antimatter bomb.

A weapon of mass destruction was a fearsome threat to any group, but not the Survivalists in one of the centers of their power!

The antimatter bomb could be teleported hundreds of thousands of kilometers away just a split-second after it appeared.

Its triggering mechanism could be completely neutralized by precisely dematerializing its key component.

The titanic forces unleashed by the explosion could even be shielded and directed away from the Polymath!

In short, none of the weapons that Ves had at his disposal had any chance of working against a Star Designer who was essentially operating in the base of her own power!

Not even his more exotic abilities could avail him against an opponent this strong. Neither Blinky nor any other spiritual trick could ever hope to impact an entity as powerful as a crown-bearing Star Designer!

Wait. That was not right.

There was one potential asset that could overcome all forms of resistance.

Emma.

Or at least, the remote summoning of Divine Irine Mox's companion spirit.

Ves still retained half of Emma's original spiritual fragment.

He had a great amount of respect towards the power of a god pilot. With his knowledge of cultivation, he understood that these pinnacle warriors were expressly designed as the perfect counters against every other variety of True God!

The power of a god pilot at close proximity should be more than enough to stop the Polymath, but that was assuming that Emma was at full strength.

Ves tried to estimate the power that Emma could muster from the half-depleted fragment and tried to guess whether that was enough to overcome the Polymath's formidable defenses.

Although his calculations were dubious to say the least, he did not feel that Emma had a good chance of burning through all of the obstacles and successfully stop the Polymath from completing her plan.

There simply wasn't enough power. Everything had a price, and the weak fragment that Ves had stored in the Vault of Eternity could not sustain an expenditure of this magnitude!

Besides, pulling a remote version of Emma out of his sleeve would expose a lot of hidden capabilities and associations.

In the worst case scenario, the Polymath might deduce that Ves actually possessed his own fragment of the Metal Scroll all along!

Still, now that the situation had come to this point, Ves did not feel like holding back anymore.

So what if the Polymath recognized him as a competitor?

So what if people discovered that Ves secretly maintained ties with a Rubarthan god pilot?

So what if unleashing a god pilot in this space might cause the conflict to escalate to the point where the entire research battlecarrier would get torn apart?

In his opinion, anything was better than rolling over and allowing the Polymath to fulfill her own plan!

However, just as Ves was about to make a move that had a high likelihood of failing, a completely unexpected development occurred.

Just as the splinter kingdom started to pulse into a faster and more lively rhythm, a dark and inexplicable shadow rose up from its damaged grounds!

"What is happening!?"

"It doesn't appear to be the work of the Polymath."

The large shadow began to morph into a more defined shape in the projected image.

The invisible conflict between the Xenotechnician and the Polymath did not pause, but it was clear from their human expressions that neither of them anticipated this development.

As the shadow gained more definition, it began to convey a sense of weight and majesty that Ves could not explain.

As the head of the shadow began to take on the shape of an odd ancient helmet with a very defined human-like face mask, an undeniable aura of history and sacredness emanated from this odd and unexpected entity.

It wasn't until the translucent figure's helmet took on a distinctive shape that the Xenotechnician and several mechers sitting in the front reacted with shock!

They recognized the shadow's identity!

"Who is it?!" Someone asked! "Is it a god pilot?!"

"No." The Xenotechnician spoke with wonder and realization. "If my analysis is correct, each of you have the honor of witnessing a remnant of the Seleucid, one of the thirteen Progenitors of Mechs. He is one of the great heroes of the human race during the end of the Age of Conquest. Each of us owe an immense amount of gratitude towards him and his fellow Progenitors for creating the original Kingdom of Mechs."

Every single mech pilot and mech designer automatically bowed in respect, and maybe even worship.

This was an act of instinct to the ignorant, and an act of voluntary intent to those in the know.

Even the Xenotechnician the Polymath couldn't help but tone down their invisible struggle for a moment in order to pay their respects!

Once the shadow roused from its hibernation and stock of the immediate surroundings, its solid masked expression turned towards the Polymath.

Not the Star representing the Polymath in another realm, but the physical body of the Star Designer that currently bore a resonating metal crown!

The shadow studied the crowned woman for a moment.

Everyone held their breaths in anticipation of what the remnant of an ancient historical figure had to say towards this messy situation!

A solemn and inexplicably sacred air descended onto the assembly hall as the shadow finally issued its judgment.

The shadow did not produce any sounds, but managed to convey its meaning through a spiritual broadcast that was especially familiar to Ves.

[Unworthy.]

This was what the remnant of the Seleucid managed to impart in a manner that transcended ordinary words and language.

The mystical entity managed to pack a lot of additional meaning in this word. It not only signified that the Seleucid would have judged the Polymath to be a disappointment, but that she had no right to lay claim to the off-shoot of a kingdom that he and twelve of his peers had sacrificed their very lives to create!

The shadow did not confine its response to words alone. The splinter kingdom that was tied to its existence seemed to resist the influence exerted by the Polymath!

The pulse weakened as the crown seemed to lose connection with the kingdom. It was as if the Seleucid was actively closing the door to any attempt to usurp its control!

A long and heavy moment of tension ensued after the shadow cast its judgment.

Though nobody really wanted to shift their attention away from what might very well be the last legacy imparted by one of the legendary Progenitors of Mechs, everyone knew that the Polymath's response had become extremely critical at the moment!

Chapter 5234 The Audition

The ball was in the Polymath's court.

After the shadow of the Seleucid had seemingly been roused from the splinter kingdom, the entire dynamic of the ongoing struggle had changed.

The situation no longer appeared to be as one-sided as before. Not even the Polymath could have predicted that the Kingdom of Mechs was not as empty as it appeared.

Who could have known that one of the ghosts of the Progenitors of Mechs would appear and judge the Polymath like a criminal on trial?

Certainly, Ves did not think that the Star Designer could have foreseen just this outcome despite how logical its appearance may have been in hindsight!

Ves did not know anything about the 13 Progenitors of Mechs. He did not know how old they were, how powerful they had become, how deeply they used to be embedded in the Five Scrolls Compact and what led them to rebel against their own organization.

In fact, he didn't even know how they were individually called! This was the first time that he and a lot of other people learned of the title of one of the legendary figures that had established the supremacy of mechs in human society that had persisted to this day!

Given that the representation of a literal ancestor of the mech community declared the Polymath to be completely unsuited to take over the splinter kingdom, Ves developed the slight hope that she might see reason and accept this rebuke with grace.

That... did not appear to happen.

As the seconds dragged on, the atmosphere grew increasingly more ominous.

Throughout this moment, the Polymath's expression had defaulted to an impassive state.

This was not an expression of a woman who was ready to acknowledge defeat.

She looked as if she received her judgment... and simply set it aside.

"Your time has passed." The Polymath audaciously spoke.

Few people expected that the Polymath had the guts to talk back against one of the founders who created the prosperous mech community that served humanity well all of this time!

Just this act alone caused everyone's opinion of the woman to sink even further. It appeared as if there was no limit to how many taboos that she was willing to violate in order to fulfill her ambitious goals!

"You had your time." The defiant Star Designer continued. "We live in a different era now. The Age of Dawn demands a new set of rules and paradigms. A new form of humanity must rise. Only I have the vision and the determination to repair the flaws that have become exacerbated as a result of your increasingly more detrimental policies."

No one expected the Polymath to defy the shadow of the Seleucid so openly!

The response from the remnant of the Progenitor was a repeat of his earlier message.

[Unworthy.]

"I reject your judgment." The Polymath responded as her momentum steadily grew. "I see the Truth of your existence. Your authority is hollow and your power is only a fraction of what it used to be. I admire how the Progenitors of Mechs have retained an echo of their own id in their greatest and only pinnacle work, but even they could have never foreseen that their creation would be split in two uneven pieces. Your base of power is no longer as large and extensive as before. You are alone, cut off and incomplete. You are a remnant that is only one step away from nihility. BEGONE."

The crown that rested on top of the Polymath's head exploded with power!

Ves and many others sitting in front couldn't help but experience an invisible force that pressed them backwards!

Although Ves found it difficult to track everyone's moves as most of it was happening out of sight, he could feel and sense that the Polymath not only managed to fend off the Xenotechnician, but also started to make gains in assuming control over the splinter kingdom!

The Polymath never ceased her projection of the splinter kingdom. This allowed everyone to see that she was slowly causing it to pulse again despite the best efforts of its final protector to deny her access!

Throughout it all, the representations of the other Star Designers and god pilots tried to help in various ways, only for their ripple effects to threaten to cause greater harm to the already fragile splinter kingdom!

Ves and many other people started to lose the optimism that they had just gained as the current situation continued to unfold.

Though the Polymath had to direct more of her power to wrestle for control of the splinter kingdom, it was clear to see from the increasingly faster pulses that she was making actual progress!

This had a profound effect on those who witnessed her in action on a surface level.

The youngest Star Designer looked like she was fully in her element. Despite the accidents and unforeseen development that had occurred, she still retained enough reserves to handle all of the issues with poise and determination!

It made her look even more all-powerful than before. The Polymath had chosen her dress strategically. Not only did she look like an empress that had already gained control over everything, but the addition of her crown wonderfully cemented the increasingly inevitable truth that she was about to become the first ruler who united all of red humanity.

The aura of victory and invincibility radiating from the Polymath had a profound effect on the Survivalists.

Ves hadn't remained unaffected either. It took conscious effort for him to break away from the spell generated by the Polymath's impressive performance and turn to the others to see if they intended to make their own moves.

Nothing happened.

Though the Xenotechnician was still putting up a fight, the rest looked at the odd struggle between the Polymath and the shadow of the Seleucid with strange and complex expressions.

Ves narrowed his eyes.

There were people who still gazed at the remnant of one of the Progenitors with literal eyes of worship.

There were also people who looked at the Polymath with concerns about what she might do if she ever succeeded in her coup.

Unfortunately, there were way more of the latter than the former!

Ves grew increasingly more dismayed when he saw that the Survivalists did not seem to care as much about the judgment issued by the remnant of one of the ancestors responsible for creating their entire industry.

Apparently, their deep respect for the thirteen ancient heroes quickly started to make way for a growing sense of awe and belief in the power of the Polymath!

Ves slowly realized what was taking place.

The Survivalists... were indoctrinated to support whoever came up with the best plans and solutions that could save humanity from extinction-level threats.

Though the actions taken by the Polymath were anything but proper, it was undeniable that she had been remarkably effective!

Not only did she demonstrate enough cunning and intelligence to checkmate a large amount of powerful players, she also displayed the raw strength needed to resist the Xenotechnician and the shadow of the Seleucid at the same time!

As the Polymath exerted more pressure, the splinter kingdom slowly began to resonate with her again.

In the meantime, the remnant of the thirteen Progenitors visibly began to exhaust whatever reservoir of energy it retained after the traumatic split of the original Kingdom of Mechs.

The Polymath had been right about the severe weakness of this mystical echo!

The impact of all of these sights was profound. People started to drop their open displays of hostility.

Instead, the attitude of the Survivalists towards the renegade Star Designer became increasingly more.... accepting.

Ves wasn't stupid. He figured out what was going on. This entire attempt to take over the splinter kingdom and subsequently the rest of red humanity was basically an audition.

There was no other way to put it. The odd set of rules, customs and traditions that made up the Survivalist Faction produced a circumstance where the Polymath could win everyone over so long as she succeeded in completing her outlandish coup!

The underlying logic wasn't all that hard to decipher.

One of the most uncertain claims about the Unity Plan was whether the Polymath possessed the competences needed to resist the overwhelming amount of alien opponents from both the Red Ocean and Messier 87.

If the Polymath was able to prevail against every red human True God as well as the final contingency measure of one of the Progenitors himself, then would definitely prove her qualifications to lead red humanity to a better future!

This explained why Ves couldn't get rid of the suspicion that the Survivalists continually held back when they could have employed more measures to hinder the Polymath.

He even began to suspect that this entire setup actually turned out to be an elaborate conspiracy from the start!

Most of the Survivalists had never been serious about presenting a choice from the start. The Unity Plan had been the predetermined choice all along, but it would be too outrageous for the faction to push it onto the rest of Red Humanity straight away.

Hence the need for a voting session. If the Survivalists showed that they gave serious consideration to a bunch of alternatives but ultimately voted for the Unity Plan, then that might help to make everyone accept this result.

That was probably Plan A.

When Ves and a bunch of cowardly Survivalists threw a wrench in the original plan, the Polymath immediately switched to Plan B.

If she could not convince the red humans to adopt her Unity Plan by granting her a mandate, then she would do so by force!

By demonstrating all of the qualities that people could reasonably expect from a self-crowned empress of an entire civilization, the Survivalists would be able to guarantee the ascension of one of their own kind!

The Survivalist Faction stood to gain immensely once the Polymath assumed total control. Her strong connections and familiarity with many other Survivalists meant that all of the people in the assembly hall were bound to rise up and assume greater positions of power!

Though Ves had no hard proof that the Survivalists had explicitly hatched this conspiracy from the start, he at least felt that it was likely that it had become an implicit idea that gained increasingly more support.

The Survivalists did not even need to communicate with each other to adopt this mentality. It was just a product of their values and traditions!

The more these elite mechers started to show open acceptance towards the Polymath, the more Ves grew disgusted by their lack of principles.

Something broke inside Ves.

The time he spent alongside the Survivalists during the conference had steadily increased his respect in the Survivalist Faction.

All of that progress disappeared.

In fact, whatever respect and belief that Ves possessed in any greater authority had crumbled forever!

It turned out that all powerful states and organizations were the same. The Survivalist Faction and the Red Association turned out to be no different in the end.

They were all as flawed, corrupt and unreliable as the other powers that stabbed him in the back.

Ves could no longer muster any admiration towards any greater institution no matter how noble they might seem.

To think that he started to appreciate the fact that he had become an honorary member of the Red Association.

He no longer appreciated the brand-new tier 3 galactic citizenship badge pinned on his chest.

It had become a tainted symbol of a hypocritical organization.

Ves closed his eyes for a moment.

"If you guys aren't willing to take action, then I will."

Determination flowed from his body as he became more resistant towards the Polymath's aura and everything the Survivalist Faction stood for.

His rejection of everything that had happened today urged him to do anything in his power to spoil this secret audition!

Whether it was enough to make a difference, Ves had no idea. All he knew was that he needed to make his move now before it was too late!

With but a single thought, a certain spiritual fragment appeared in front of him out of the blue.

"EMMA! Heed my call!"

"Miew."

Chapter 5237 Conclusion of the Voting Session

Ves' speech had detonated a metaphorical bomb in the crowd!

Neither the Xenotechnician, the Mace of Retaliation or anyone else expected Ves to come out and support the Deep Strike Plan as a specific counter-reaction to the Polymath's attempted coup!

The implications were enormous. Adopting the Deep Strike Plan in a normal voting session would have definitely resulted in large changes across human society, but its context had changed considerably after what just happened.

A lot of people outside of this conference were pissed. They had become incredibly angry and upset at the Survivalists for attempting to pull off a coup without any warning or means to argue their own case.

The Terrans and the Rubarthans would definitely become livid once they learned even a tiny part of what had happened during this voting session!

Red humanity couldn't afford to suffer any further breakdowns in relationships. Growing mistrust towards each other could potentially make their society so dysfunctional that they might actually destroy themselves before the aliens manage to finish the job!

As such, a radical turn towards the Deep Strike Plan might actually be an acceptable way to mend any cracks and partially restore the reputation of the Survivalist Faction.

The biggest problems were that it not only entailed a lot of risk, but would also upend the existing structure of human society!

Was red humanity truly ready to transition to an age where warlords and tunnel-visioned mech pilots held greater sway?

Nobody knew for certain whether Ves was right about putting their trust in the brave rather than the intellectuals.

However, it was hard to argue for the opposite now that the Polymath had single-handedly destroyed a lot of trust towards great thinkers.

As Ves gave his recommendation, he did not add anything extra to his speech. He had shared his personal stance and nothing more.

He knew that if he wanted to, he could have presented a plan of his own. The Survivalists would have likely interpreted his alternative proposal had the implicit backing of the Destroyer of Worlds and potentially other notable third-party figures.

Ves saw no need to muck up this awful voting session even further. He was already happy enough with the Deep Strike Plan and had enough confidence in the Fist of Defiance that he would execute it properly.

"Let us commence the vote once again." The Xenotechnician smoothly spoke.

Procedurally speaking, the current voting session had moved on to the second round. That meant that the 89 proxy votes had become invalid as a new round of voting had commenced.

Unless the delegates granted Ves their proxy votes to him again, he could not single-handedly decide the plan adopted by the Survivalist Faction anymore.

Fortunately, the delegates had better sense than that. The circumstances were different now that they became confronted with a much simpler binary choice.

Much to Ves' relief, the delegates had all made up their minds on how to cast their own votes. They all stood up when the Xenotechnician called them to show their support for their preferred proposal.

It helped a lot that giving Ves their proxy vote would default to another vote in favor of the Deep Strike Plan.

Since that was the case, these delegates might as well go on record and look decisive in the process.

The Xenotechnician formally announced the results of the second round.

"Today, 273 delegates have spoken once again. 121 of them have cast their vote on my Diplomacy Plan. The remaining 152 delegates have cast their vote on the Fist of Defiance's Deep Strike Plan. The outcome is clear. The Deep Strike Plan will be embraced by our faction!"

No sounds of celebration broke out. No one cheered or erupted in jubilation. The Polymath's deeds had cast an undeniable shadow over the proceedings.

The vote seemed like an act of penance. Many of the former supporters of the Unity Plan had opted to throw their weight behind the Deep Strike Plan.

The margin was closer than Ves would have liked. The fact that there was only a 30-vote difference between the two options told him that there were still a lot of delegates who preferred to consort with traitors and aliens rather than put their faith in human heroes!

This was yet another mark against the Survivalist Faction. Even after his speech, these schemers and cowards still preferred to put more emphasis on people's worst traits as opposed to their best!

Nobody knew for certain whether Ves' impromptu speech had actually made the difference. He had the feeling that it might have helped, but no one knew for certain. The delegates certainly wouldn't accept any interviews where they provided a detailed accounting of their leanings throughout the voting session.

In any case, the Fist of Defiance had become the ultimate winner of this high-level dispute. Ves found this to be ironic as he was the only powerhouse who was physically absent from this rocky event.

Hopefully, the Fist of Defiance would know how much of a favor Ves had done for him. With a highly principled and trustworthy god pilot at the helm, red humanity was set to fight against the aliens without any awful compromises. That should make a considerable difference in aligning people towards a singular cause!

The Mace of Retaliation tried his best to step up and fill the void left by the Polymath.

"I would like to thank you all on behalf of my grandfather. I wholeheartedly agree with the arguments espoused by Professor Larkinson. The fact that it took the youngest and most grounded among the delegates to wake you all up to our degeneration shows that we have strayed too far away from the original intentions of the Progenitors of Mechs. We must take action right away to reverse course and pursue the true meaning of strength once again. Mech pilots such as myself will do our best to become the guiding force that people expect us to be, but we cannot undertake all of our duties without everyone else's help. Please work together with us so that we can win the fight of our lives."

The Mace of Retaliation spoke a bit more. Ordinarily, he and his clique would have been happy to roll out specific actions on another day, but the crisis surrounding the Polymath's failed coup had produced massive cracks in trust between the Survivalists and many other important human groups.

The Survivalists had no choice but to implement a few critical directives right away and reach out to all of the other major interests to prevent any disastrous responses!

All of this kept everyone including the Xenotechnician busy. Ves had pretty much been pushed to the side as too many people had become way too busy to deal with him during this critical time.

Ves took this as a blessing. It was nice not to be at the center of attention anymore. With everyone important running around to handle a lot of time-sensitive affairs, he returned to his stateroom and enjoyed his moment out of the public eye.

While it looked as if he was taking a break, in reality he had shifted much of his focus to an entirely different galaxy.

Veronica had jumped into her mother's arms a while ago. There was no better person to provide her with an explanation about the Kingdom of Mechs and the Polymath's crown than the Oblivion Empress herself!

A glowing white hand softly stroked Veronica's silvery plated back. The female cyborg cat squinted her eyes and luxuriated in the transcendently pleasant caress. Cynthia knew exactly how to stimulate the living divine artifact's pleasure senses!

"I am pleased to hear that you have managed to navigate this latest crisis of yours." Cynthia Larkinson spoke with a measure of pride and mirth. "It sounds as if I am not the only member of our family who happened to come into the possession of a stolen crown. You know what they say. Like mother, like daughter."

The cat awkwardly coughed. "Yes, well, I didn't know what to do with the crown. I never really ask for it in the first place, but it literally fell into my lap, you know? It seemed criminal for me to surrender it to the Xenotechnician or any of the other Survivalists. I had the System store it into its special storage space before anyone else could take it away. I am sure that I will suffer the consequences for this impulsive decision, so I want to know what I have gained out of it. What is this crown, exactly? Is it the same as the one that sparked the infamous Crown Uprising?"

"It is the same sort of crown." Cynthia spoke with absolute certainty. "I am surprised that this Star Designer managed to gain possession of it. Did you ever notice that her crown disapproved of her in any way?"

The feline shook her metallic head. "Nope. It did not show any apparent signs of life. The Polymath was able to handle it with ease and it remained on top of her head without any fuss."

"I see. That says much about her and her relationship with her fragment of the Metal Scroll."

Veronica grew suspicious about this circumstance. "Does that mean that the Polymath is... was... the legitimate Holy Daughter of the Metal Scroll?"

"I suppose you are correct."

"But how? The Metal Scroll doesn't really exist anymore. Pieces of it have spread across the galaxies. From the Polymath's interactions with the Kingdom of Mechs, I think it is pretty safe to say that the Progenitors of Mechs have infused a significant amount of fragments in their ultimate creation. Under all of these circumstances, the crown that is associated with the Scroll should have lost most of its functionality."

Cynthia chuckled in response. "Your theory sounds plausible, but it is based on a faulty understanding of the true nature of the Scrolls as well as the crowns. I cannot and will not divulge the whole story to you. I do not even want to share what I know about the crowns. I am forced to reconsider this stance because you have inadvertently obtained one yourself."

"Get on with it, please."

The True God playfully swatted Veronica's head!

"Be patient, my child! Listen to me carefully, Ves. The crowns are not ordinary metal products. They are alive, but not in the same way as your mechs and trinkets. They are composed of the blood of an immortal god. I should not have to explain to you how much power that represents?"

"I can guess as much, mother. I'm not stupid. I have no desire to wear a crown that I haven't earned."

"Good. Very good. Do not change your mind even if the crown appears to accept you as an alternative to the Polymath. You should not trust the crown under any circumstance. Leaving aside your problematic ties to me, the crowns have a will and purpose of their own. Just because the Metal Scroll has shattered does not mean its crown is any less functional."

"I know that already. Can you move on to the part where you explain what a crown actually represents? I need more context."

"Very well." Cynthia let out a small sigh. "Let me frame it this way. The Sacred Scrolls are... tools that are designed to be used by a specific group of cultivators. They are meant to provide guidance and teachings. This is why they are made in this specific shape. Form follows function. Do you follow?"

As a mech designer, Ves could understand this approach quite well. "Okay."

"The crowns on the other hand are shaped in the form of a traditional and universal symbol of authority. Any human who lays eyes on one will know that whoever wears a crown has been bestowed the authority to rule over others. This is intentional. The Scrolls are made to produce an army. The crowns are made to direct this army. In other words, the true Holy Sons and Daughters are the designated surrogates of the immortal gods who shed their own blood to make these relics. No good can come to anyone who bears these cursed artifacts!"

Chapter 5238 The Conspiracy Underneath the Surface

To be honest, Cynthia's description did not surprise Veronica all that much.

It was enough for her to deduce this layout after absorbing so much information about cultivators, ancient human history and the history of the Five Scrolls Compact.

Ves had learned that cultivators in ancient human history turned out to be a lot more selfish and tyrannical than modern humans.

People rightfully expected the worst from others, particularly if the latter gained a lot more power!

While Ves did not have a full understanding of what these 'immortal gods' were supposed to represent, but if they were similar to other ancient cultivators, then they had to be power-hungry bastards without doubt!

A product reflected the personality of its creator. This was a general truth that rang true in many industries and most particularly the mech industry.

There was no way that the Sacred Scrolls and their associated crowns were benevolent given that they had been created by absolute bastards a long time ago!

Just examining how the Five Scrolls Compact developed as an organization should be enough proof that these objects were not made by angels!

As Veronica continued to listen to her mother, she noticed that Cynthia clearly did not want to divulge information that was unfortunately tightly related to the current subject matter.

"The symbols of authority... all have their own names as well as personalities. At the same time, they also reflect the desire of the Holy Sons and Daughters who bear them. They traditionally come in the form of a crown as that is the most effective shape to convey authority." The True God solemnly revealed. "The Golden Laurel Wreath Crown that is in my possession is a close representation of its creator as well as its last bearer. It generally seeks out a disciple of the Water Scroll that is cruel, bloodthirsty and willing to make great sacrifices for power. Anyone chosen by this particular crown can borrow progressively more power from it. The immortal gods have taken

great lengths to ensure that the Holy Sons and Daughters that have earned their approval can dominate other cultivators."

This was true news to Veronica! She had been waiting to learn insider information like this for a long time! She was finally able to gain a lot of useful context on the Five Scrolls Compact that constantly found a way to intersect with her life.

The cyborg cat took in the implications of Cynthia's words.

"The symbols of authority... don't bestow their power for free, do they?"

"That is a crucial observation, and one that you will need to stay alive going forward. This is one of the many insidious elements about these crowns. They seduce their chosen bearers with greater power by making specific decisions and behaving in a certain way. By setting up this constant feedback loop, the goals and personality traits of the Holy Sons and Daughters will gradually become more attuned with the immortal gods who made it all possible. This is the curse that plagues all bearers!"

Veronica's back stiffened as realization dawned on her feline face!

"Myaow! If that is the case, then the Polymath..."

Cynthia looked down on Veronica as if the cyborg cat was a dummy. "It took you long enough to connect the dots. You should have recognized the true implications as soon as the Polymath initially unveiled that crown of hers. The Metal Scroll may have shattered, but it is very much possible for its symbol of authority to remain intact all of this time, with all of the good and ill that comes with it. I cannot say how many years the young Star Designer has possessed and retained the approval of the crown. The greater this time interval, the more severe she has fallen into the grip of an immortal god!"

"What?!"

That... could potentially explain so much about the Polymath. The crown may have corrupted the famed Star Designer over time. The tyrannical side that she exposed when the voting session did not go in her way must have been a consequence of bearing the cursed crown for an indeterminate period of time!

It added an extra motivation for the Polymath's insistence in following the Unity Plan. She secretly held selfish intentions all of this time. By taking over the splinter kingdom, she could effectively regain control over a few more bits and pieces of the shattered Metal Scroll, thereby advancing the interests of the mysterious immortal god!

Taking over red humanity was another objective that fell in line with a supreme cultivator that desired greater power and a total control on all accessible resources.

Perhaps the compromised Polymath secretly plotted to retread the Age of Conquest and establish her own version of the Five Scrolls Compact in the Red Ocean!

Only this time the Polymath would have done a better job at it by taking the splinter kingdom hostage, thereby preventing any god pilot from taking action against her by threatening the core foundation of the mech community!

It was a brilliant plan that wonderfully enabled a Holy Daughter to effectively coopt her greatest enemies, thereby preemptively snuffing any attempted repeat of the Great Betrayal that led to the downfall of the original Compact!

What a deep and profound conspiracy!

Veronica felt even more glad that she had played her part in preventing the Polymath from taking control!

To think that she had always assumed that the Polymath always had the best intentions of red humanity in mind.

Everyone had fallen for her benevolent and rational act for such a long time that they couldn't imagine that this honest and truthful Star Designer had much more in common with the archenemies of the Mech Trade Association!

Veronica shuddered in Cynthia's arms.

Red humanity had come so close to dooming itself, and practically nobody realized the truth!

Ves had strong suspicions that the Xenotechnician and perhaps the other human True Gods might have figured out this truth as well, but declined to divulge it to the others.

It did not serve them well to expose the truth to everyone no matter the outcome of this multi-layered power struggle.

If the Polymath succeeded in her coup, then she still had to depend on mechs to secure her new empire against humanity's external enemies.

She was still a Star Designer after all, so it was unlikely she would do away with mechs.

This granted the Xenotechnician and all of the other existing human True God enough space for survival under the reign of the secret Holy Daughter.

Of course, it was better for most people that this outcome did not happen. Since the crown bearer failed to take over red humanity, there was no need to burden other people with these heavy secrets.

Veronica soon began to frown. "Do you think the Polymath only recently gained the approval of the crown? Her reputation is really good and she made remarkably few enemies as far as I know. She has always been known for her calm and rational decision-making. I find it incredibly difficult to equate her to one of those crazy Compact sorcerers."

Her mother snorted. "Not every cultivator shares the same mold, my child. The same applies to Holy Sons and Daughters. I have already described the associated personality traits of the Golden Laurel Wreath Crown. The symbol of authority of the Metal Scroll is imbued with a different set of traits. Think. What do the elements represent? How do they tie into the Scrolls?"

Veronica had to spend half a minute before she could come up with a possible response to her prompts.

"From what I recall, the Water Scroll teaches people how to 'elevate their flesh and blood to be closer to the gods'. It makes sense that a cultivator obsessed with this kind of activity has developed a penchant for bloody sacrifices and rapid empowerment. The Metal Scroll on the other hand

teaches people how to 'shape the blessed minerals into the armaments of the gods'. From my own experiences in the mech industry, designers and developers of weapons tend to be more patient and hard-working. A lack of self-control and reckless decision-making will always lead to higher failure rates, not to mention all of the wasted time and resources."

"Do you see now how the Polymath may simultaneously be a Holy Daughter as well as an ideal Star Designer?"

"...I see."

Although Cynthia did not outright say it, she heavily implied that the Polymath may have been corrupted by her fancy crown for many years if not decades!

The female True God shifted her posture. "The ancient creation cultivators who worked with metal do indeed share a lot in common with engineers. The differences between those ancient makers and modern mech designers are smaller than you think. That said, the former are still products of their environment. The ancient blacksmiths and so on are just as capable of hatching schemes and plotting the downfall of their enemies as other cultivators. They are just better at biding their time and masking their true ambitions. The Holy Sons and Daughters of the Metal Scroll have always been known to maintain a low profile so that they can spend ample time on preparation. Once the time is right, they can launch an overwhelming strike that gives the opposition no room for counterattacks!"

Creation cultivators are usually weaker in direct combat, so they couldn't afford to take many blows in return. This was why they developed the habits of an ambush predator.

Veronica looked stunned as she processed her mother's words.

"That description... fit the Polymath disturbingly well. Do you think... she bore the crown as soon as she gained possession of her fragment?"

"It is possible." Cynthia simply said without offering any further clarification. "What is important is that much of it is moot. From what you have regaled to me, she not only lost possession of her symbol of authority, but likely lost her fragment as well."

"Are you sure about that, mother?! I mean, that has been my guess as well, but I cannot say for sure. I don't really know for certain what the shadow of the Seleucid has done to the Polymath. Has she retained her power as a Star Designer, or did the splinter kingdom take that away as well?"

The Lady of the Night had to think carefully about her answer.

"I... am unsure about her current state. You will have to obtain the answer from the Survivalists. What I can say with reasonable certainty is that this 'splinter kingdom' has likely deprived the Polymath of the remnant of the Metal Scroll that was attached to her. Unmaking this bond is... painful and traumatic, but she can gradually recover the wounds of her soul if she is allowed to live. The more relevant development is the accelerated recovery of the kingdom. This is good news to you and all mech designers. The Kingdom of Mechs is made using the pieces of the shattered Metal Scroll as the main ingredients. It is fitting that another piece has been utilized for a similar purpose."

Veronica began to relax again. Everything had gone well, all considered. She had unknowingly saved red humanity from a much darker future.

While it was annoying to learn the most important truths after the fact, at least she was able to shake off all of his lingering doubts and fears about whether the Unity Plan was truly the best way forward for red humanity!

"So... what I do with the Polymath's crown?"

"Don't even think about taking advantage of it!" Cynthia immediately warned. "You are far from qualified to work with forces beyond your comprehension. I think it is best if you take your time to verify whether it is under control. Your fragment might not be fully capable of containing it due to its incompleteness and lack of power. If the crown is the original one from over four-hundred years ago, then... you may have exposed yourself to a powerful curse."

That... was really bad news.

Chapter 5239 Crown Containment

Ves gained a lot of clarification on the nature of the Polymath's crown as well as the Metal Scroll.

The revelations were massive.

His mother provided him with a huge amount of new insights in the context of the Five Scrolls Compact and the supposed immortal gods who masterminded their emergence.

All told, the Sacred Scrolls themselves did not appear to be harmful on their own. There were deliberate reasons why the so-called immortal gods had created two incredibly powerful artifacts instead of mashing them together in a single superdevice.

From what Ves was able to figure out from his mother's narration, the Five Scrolls were designed by their creators to be the best and most comprehensive teaching tools.

Each Scroll was based on a primary element that was mastered by their respective makers. It contained much if not all of the comprehensive knowledge and accumulation of the supposed immortal gods.

The symbols of authority that were associated with the Sacred Scrolls functioned similar to a control system and an enforcement system. It had been created to keep the users of the Scrolls in line. It did so by designating and empowering a single leading figure that could represent the immortal god's interests.

All of it sounded rather convoluted, especially since much of it only made sense in an ancient time period that was unimaginable to Ves. He lacked too much context to properly understand the motivations and methods of these supposed immortal gods.

He couldn't even figure out whether these ancient entities were alive or dead!

While their titles suggested that they still managed to persist to this day, his mother had already disabused him of the notion that immortals were unkillable.

Anything could be killed. Even immortals could be felled. It just took a lot more effort to wipe them out completely.

Unfortunately for Ves, Cynthia Larkinson ceased to share any further details just as her story started to become truly interesting.

"I have already told you enough to develop a healthy dose of caution towards the crown that has come into your possession." The True God spoke with a measure of her authority as she petted the cyborg cat's back. "It is not wrong to say that it is one of the most powerful objects in the Red Ocean. It is a creation that rivals the Metal Scroll that it is paired with. There are many secrets to it that defy convention. Perhaps you will discover these traits later on when you become much more capable of keeping it in check. Maybe one day you will be able to take advantage of its incredible power, just as I have done with the Golden Laurel Wreath Crown."

His mother had been crazy enough to break off a piece of her stolen crown and utilize it in her resurrection ritual!

This alone indicated that the symbols of authority were exceptionally powerful ingredients that could be used in the construction of grand designs at the level of a True God!

Ves deeply understood that he was not ready to mess around with his own crown in this manner. It sounded like a much better idea to save it up and wait until he became a Master Mech Designer before utilizing the crown in the creation of a god mech or whatever.

"Is there a way to keep it contained and prevent it from doing any harm, mother? From what you have described, this crown contains a lot of power. A damaged fragment of the Metal Scroll might not be able to keep it in check. Can the crown hijack my Mech Designer System by relying on the authority bestowed by their shared creator?"

The transcendent woman frowned. "I am unsure about this. You should make your investigation. If there are any indications that the crown is in the process of subverting your fragment and encroaching upon your soul, you should attempt to get rid of it right away. You may not be able to accomplish this on your own. I advise you to seek the assistance of the Xenotechnician. There is no harm in admitting defeat and passing on an unsolvable problem to a more qualified problem solver."

That sounded great at first, but then Ves thought about how the crown may have corrupted the Polymath herself.

Who could tell whether the Xenotechnician would do any better? Just because he was a lot older and more experienced did not necessarily mean he could resist the seduction of a remnant of an immortal god!

Ves could easily imagine the Xenotechnician growing more and more despaired about red humanity's rapidly deteriorating situation in the coming years.

If the Deep Strike Plan that had just been adopted by the Survivalist Faction took too long to get off the ground, then a desperate Star Designer might as well decide that it was better to sell his soul to an ancient devil than to let red humanity go extinct!

The fact that the Polymath probably relied on the same excuse to rationalize her radical takeover attempt was profoundly ironic!

"You're not leaving me with any good options."

Cynthia snorted. "It could be worse. The Golden Laurel Wreath Crown has been trying to escape my grasp non-stop. The Five Scrolls Compact has mobilized much of its forces to the Nyxian Gap in order to take it back. Your crown is much less dangerous. It is essentially an unowned object in

more ways than one. While it has shown signs that it can still think for itself, the shattering of the Metal Scroll has likely impeded its strength and purpose. That does not mean that you should take it lightly. It will behave in a manner consistent with its maker. It is adept at maintaining a low profile and seeking growth through cooperation. Its threat is insidious. Once you realize that you have fallen into its trap, it is already too late."

That sounded swell.

Back within the Khamatar Reign, Ves ostensibly spent his time on reading a lot of documentation. There was little for him to spend his time on while the Survivalist Faction dealt with higher priority concerns.

Even though he knew that he was being monitored in every direction by the most powerful sensors and scanning systems that the mechers could muster, Ves simply couldn't hold himself back any longer.

He activated the silent command that supposedly launched a part of himself inside the System Space.

Once he had arrived, he immediately moved to the Vault of Eternity and checked on the condition of the infamous crown.

He relaxed and let loose a bit of tension when he saw that the crown obediently remained in stasis.

Though Ves did not have much confidence that the Vault would be able to keep it in place, for now the crown actually looked as if it had gone inert.

Ves wasn't fooled. His mother had given him plenty of pointed warnings about that. The crown was dangerous. It was just a matter of time before it began to exert its nefarious influence.

To be honest, it was a huge risk to keep the crown within the System Space. No matter how much the Mech Designer System deviated from its origins, it still possessed an undeniable relationship with this old and insidious item!

Ves could already imagine how the crown might slowly contaminate the System and work to subvert its mechanisms.

It did not even have to work that hard to make the System its new home. Ever since the latest upgrade, the System Space gained a lot of cultivation-related functions. These additions align pretty closely to the crown!

Though Ves felt tempted to err on the side of caution and toss it to the Xenotechnician, he ultimately did not follow through with this impulse.

The prospect of unleashing another crown-corrupted Star Designer to the Red Ocean was too frightening!

Although Ves did not consider himself more qualified to hold the crown, he at least had more confidence in his ability to handle it. He could always count on the help of his mother to build a better containment method and watch out whether he was being corrupted by this ancient relic.

With that thought in mind, Ves retreated from the System Space and tried to put his mind on other matters.

It took another hour before the Survivalists finally had time to deal with Ves.

Jovy briefly stopped by and gave Ves an update as well as a choice.

"You are scheduled to meet with the Xenotechnician and the Mace of Retaliation in turn. Both of them have a lot to say to you. It is important that you come to an accord with them on future plans and matters of import. However, before that happens, the Polymath has specifically requested to meet with you in total privacy. You... do not have to oblige her, but it would be great for everyone if you do. She is treating this as a bargaining term. As long as she is satisfied, she is willing to make more concessions in return."

The thought of meeting the Polymath in person no longer caused Ves to feel a mixture between wariness and great respect.

He had managed to pierce through her rational facade and uncovered the monster underneath.

It was not a pretty sight.

Knowing that she had lived under the thrall of an insidious throne and conspired to elevate her own version of the Five Scrolls Compact to power did not leave him with a good impression of the Polymath to say the least!

"What's going on with her, anyway?" Ves directly asked his friend. "Is she a traitor, or is she a faction leader who had only made a light misstep? Will you keep her in power or will you force her to account for her actions? It would be great if you can clarify these questions for me. I get the feeling that she isn't about to get executed."

Jovy did not even deny this. "You should have spent enough time around us to know how we think and act. The Polymath... played the game and lost. Sure, she may have stretched the boundaries and broken a few rules here and there, but what is important is that her plot is foiled. She surrendered promptly to spare us from any further damage and even made a major concession by sacrificing a large component of herself to rapidly restore and expand the Red Kingdom. All of these actions are clear signals that she is willing to compromise and start over again."

"..."

It sounded like the Survivalist Faction had no intention of exacting true punishment on her. In other jurisdictions, her plans and actions would have made her guilty of high treason, which automatically condemned her to death!

However, the Survivalists were way too practical and unprincipled for their own good. They were so obsessed with doing whatever it took to help red humanity survive that they were even willing to pardon the worst criminals so long as they offered enough compensation!

Ves couldn't even fault the Survivalists for this stance. Keeping the Polymath around and useful was far more beneficial to red humanity than the opposite. Killing her might placate the other human groups and strengthen the rule of law, but it was not worth the permanent removal of a powerful True God!

For better or worse, red humanity still needed the Polymath!

"At least tell me that there are real consequences to her actions."

"You don't need to be concerned about that, Ves. I don't have the details, but the Polymath has agreed to offer a huge amount of compensation to every injured party. This also includes you. Just meet with her, okay? It's just talk. Perhaps you can convince her to pay greater compensation to you. It is not every day that you get to blackmail or guilt trip a Star Designer. Ugh. I can't believe I just said that. The Polymath isn't as powerful as before, but the influence and resources at her command are still titanic. This is your chance to earn extra profit."

The mention of profit eventually won Ves over.

"Fine." He said with evident reluctance in his tone. "I am not sure if anything good will come out of this talk, but I suppose it is best if I talk to her one last time before I go back."

Chapter 5240 The Defeated

Ves rightfully feared what a Star Designer could do to him. It did not matter that the Survivalists claimed that they had her under control. It did not matter that the Polymath had sincerely conveyed her surrender and intention to stop any hostile actions.

Star Designers were True Gods. They were transcendent energy-based life forms that had completely shed their mortal roots. It was all too easy for these powerful beings to disregard the interests and sanctity of lesser organisms.

Though Ves considered himself to be a lot more special compared to an ordinary mortal, he was acutely aware that he was far from being able to negotiate with the Polymath as an equal.

Perhaps his mother could do so, but she was an entire galaxy away.

While Ves was most definitely wary of a Star Designer who had demonstrated the capacity to plan out exceptionally ambitious schemes, he did not allow his fears to dictate his behavior.

Ves was not completely helpless. He possessed several powerful backers, and though each of them were either restrained or conditional, the Polymath would still pay a heavy price if she acted out against him in any fashion!

Besides, the Survivalist Faction agreed to give her a way out so long as she played with everyone. It was in her best interest to show that she was willing to follow instructions as opposed to issuing them in the first place.

This created an unusual dynamic as soon as Ves entered a secure meeting chamber.

Although the Survivalists had been remarkably tolerant towards the Polymath, they weren't stupid.

It was best to keep the Polymath contained and out of contact with any lackeys and henchmen she might have. Who knew if she could still trigger Plan K, I or J in her current state.

At least the Survivalists were being serious about keeping the Polymath in isolation. Ves could clearly feel the presence of four overlapping Saint Kingdoms taking effect inside the chamber.

Four powerful ace mechs were stationed right outside this secure compartment. They might not be able to stop a secret transmission from getting through, but they could at least detect what was happening within their own domain fields.

The Polymath sat poised on her side of the plain metal table. She had mercifully replaced her regal empress outfit for a much simpler and more subdued professional-looking dress.

She still looked the part of a Star Designer. That quality remained undeniable. She just looked down on her luck compared to her previous appearances.

"It is a pleasure to meet you again, Professor Larkinson. Come and take a seat. We have much to discuss."

Despite speaking like she was still in command of the situation, Ves still obliged without thinking too hard about it. He just wanted to talk.

"You requested my presence?"

"I did." The Polymath's expression remained as cool and impassive as usual. "Let me begin by congratulating you on your victory. Both of us stood at opposite sides at one time. You have brilliantly concealed your true details during our prior encounters. This has enabled you to elude my calculations. If not for that, we may have been meeting each other under entirely different circumstances."

Ves narrowed his eyes in suspicion. There were layers in her words that held much greater meaning than was apparent on the surface.

He was too tired and fed up to play with allusions.

"Your crown." He said. "Back when Emma knocked the crown from your head, you and the Xenotechnician competed for it. After that, a blast of force erupted that just so happened to toss it onto my lap without any hindrance. This isn't a coincidence. I get the feeling that you are responsible for this. More than that, you managed to get your immediate opponent to play along."

The Polymath responded with a clear look of appreciation. "Sharp. I will not deny it. When it became clear that I am unable to regain possession of the crown during that critical interval of time, I produced a circumstance where it passed onto you. I believe it is better to leave it in your possession rather than allow the Xenotechnician to make contact with it. The Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown is a remarkably powerful relic, but one that is also associated with great risks and danger. It appears that you are already aware of this truth. You are quite well-informed. Perhaps that should not be a surprise given your background and relations."

The woman was too darned perceptive. It was awfully difficult to keep too many secrets from her. Since this was the case, he might as well be more open about his circumstances.

"I have my sources. Let me ask you a few questions. How long did you possess the crown, and how much did you pay to benefit from its power?"

A complex expression appeared on her face. The Polymath clearly possessed a lot of tangled feelings about the crown that she did not mind exposing to Ves.

"I owned it for over a century." She plainly admitted. "My relationship with it is not as straightforward as you think. I have always been cognizant of its origin and the threat it poses. I have constantly tried to maintain a balance between benefiting from its considerable power while also maintaining a sufficient amount of distance from its detrimental side effects."

"That sounds like a losing battle." Ves spoke.

The Polymath pointedly shook her head. "I disagree. I understand your skepticism. It is not difficult for you to conclude that I have been compromised by the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown, but the reality is more nuanced. One of the main reasons why I have maintained a rational approach is to reduce my vulnerability to its effects. This has allowed me to selectively conduct calculated trades where I can obtain the greatest amount of power with the least amount of cost."

Ves looked speechless at her. Did she actually believe she was capable enough to use the crown without getting corrupted by its influence?

"If that is the case... then what was that display of yours about? I do not think you demonstrated a lot of rationality when you tried to make a common enemy out of everyone during the voting session."

The Polymath crossed her arms. "I devised the Unity Plan as a logical and grounded response to the problems at hand. While there are elements to it that explicitly take advantage of the properties of the crown, that is the extent of its involvement. Crown or not, I believe to this day that it is best if red humanity comes together under my rule. I still regret that our faction has ultimately selected the worst out of three proposals in consideration. It appears that you deserve much of the credit for securing this outcome."

It sounded as if the Polymath did not even acknowledge that she had been brainwashed by the crown!

He found it disturbing that despite getting rid of the influence of the crown, the Polymath still talked about it as if she had no remorse for her decisions and actions!

Ves shook his head in disappointment. "I really do not think it is up to mech designers like us to tell other people what to do. We are service providers. From the moment we treat people as subjects instead of our customers, we have already gone astray. I am well aware that putting proven mech pilots and warlords in charge has its own fair share of problems, but at least they have to earn their way to power."

There were many possible ideological disagreements between the two. This was not the time and place to debate all of those differences.

The discussion quickly shifted back to a more relevant topic.

"What did the splinter kingdom take from you back then?" Ves pressed the Star Designer.

The Polymath knew exactly why he was so concerned about this matter. She smiled as she offered her response.

"It is being referred to as the Red Kingdom now. As to your question, under the direction of the shade's final safeguard, the kingdom stripped me of my section of an artifact that I am certain you are familiar with. The separation has not been painless, but it could have been worse."

This was one of the answers he was looking for. Ves felt a lot of relief now that he learned that the Polymath was no longer a direct competitor anymore.

"Are you still a Star Designer, or did its punishment take that away from you as well?"

"I am still a Star Designer. Little has changed in that regard." The Polymath graciously explained. "The removal of the artifacts has deprived me of their considerable power and benefits. I have become diminished now that I must rely on my own efforts to remain productive."

"You don't sound particularly upset about growing weaker."

"One interpretation of today's events is that you have liberated me from a burden that has weighed me down increasingly more. I derived the majority of the benefits from possessing the ancient artifacts in the earlier phases of my career. I am more than satisfied with my rapid advancement to my current rank, and I can continue to benefit from it. As a Star Designer, I am still capable of researching a vast amount of technologies and designing exceptional machines. Diminished I may, I am still far more productive than a Master Mech Designer. This is my intrinsic ability."

Ves did not know how to feel about this. It sounded like the Polymath would be able to bounce right back without suffering any truly negative repercussions.

"I... congratulate you on your speedy recovery. I do hope that you will continue to make up for what you have done."

"I will be doing that and more." The Polymath stated. "You do not need to be concerned about that. I have come to a new arrangement with the Xenotechnician and other parties. I will go back to researching new tech and designing revolutionary new products. I will be freed from all other non-essential responsibilities. The Xenotechnician and the Fist of Defiance shall take over most of my former leadership duties within our faction and Association. Going forward, I shall continue to contribute to our civilization as a Star Designer, not as a leader."

A lot of people in the know would doubtlessly grow relieved when they heard about this. It was frightening to leave the Polymath in any position of authority after what she had done.

"What about Master Vayro Goldstein and your other confidantes?"

"They are not involved or culpable for my deeds. They shall face no consequences and are free to seek other patrons. Their decisions are no concern to me anymore. I have left this game."

That was good for everyone. Ves found it rather nice that the Survivalist Faction acted so reasonably when dealing with the aftermath.

"So... I heard that you are willing to compensate me for all of the damage that you have done."

The female Star Designer looked amused. "You are certainly direct. It may behoove you to take additional classes on how to comport yourself in settings such as this. A less tolerant Star Designer might not react well to your tone."

"I'm too tired to bother with all of that stuff." Ves irreverently responded. "Let's just get this over with. I am still upset at you for letting that blasted crown encourage you to ram through your Unity Plan by force. Don't think that giving me the source of your madness is enough to make me happy. You have added a lot of trouble to me instead, especially given that a lot of people correctly deduced that I currently have it in my possession."

"You shouldn't worry too much about that, Professor Larkinson. Those who are unaware of our true statuses will not be aware of our commonalities. They will predominantly assume that the Khamatar Reign or the Xenotechnician himself has teleported it away for safekeeping."

"I'm not sure whether everyone will buy that story."

"That is why I suggest you leave this summit with a sizable escort force."

".."