

The Mech 5641

Chapter 5641 Dangerous Neural Interface

The Transcendent series of mechs designed by Ves gained a lot of fame and puzzlement for their extraordinary ability to provide mystical targeting guidance to its mech pilots.

This was the greatest feature that allowed them to stand out from the competition!

From the Transcendent Punisher to the Transcendent Charger, both of these powerful mechs enabled the Ylvainans to occupy a solid position in the Larkinson Clan!

Yet as the Eye of Ylvaine continued to take advantage of prescient abilities of Ylvaine, the shortcomings of borrowing the design spirit's foresight became increasingly more clear.

"Reaction time." Ves said as he faced his wife. "Everything moves quickly in the thick of battle. Whenever Ylvaine makes a prediction and passes his message on to a mech pilot, that person will have to take the time to adjust his aim and pull the trigger. Do you know how much of a delay that entails? By the time the attack has reached the supposed target coordinate, the enemy that should have gotten hit might have already moved away."

"Is Ylvaine not capable of predicting the delay and taking that into account when passing on the target coordinates?" Gloriana asked with a frown.

"He is, but small changes in a short amount of time can produce huge divergences. The longer the delay, the smaller the chance of success. It becomes a lot harder for Ylvaine to manage all of the variables when they become exponentially greater. There are a lot of benefits to shrinking the delay time between informing the mech pilot and pulling the trigger. Ylvaine has to do less work, so he will not be as burdened as before. The Transcendent Punisher can attain a higher hit rate as there aren't as many scenarios where the mech will miss its shot."

Gloriana frowned as she stared at the Divine Foresight Mark I Neural Interface designed by the only lead designer who was able to independently develop these dangerous modules.

"I cannot argue against the effectiveness of reducing the lag time, but mechs are meant to serve their mech pilots. This custom neural interface arguably does the opposite. The brains of mech pilots are quite sensitive and they are prone to accelerated wear and tear as they continue to interface with mechs. The greater the intensity of data transmissions, the greater the damage. This is an important factor why older mech pilots tend to lose their effectiveness at a more advanced age. The only way they can forestall this unstoppable decline is if they manage to break through or receive expensive brain augmentations."

The negative effects of neural interfaces on the brains of mech pilots was one of the open secrets of the mech community. Every veteran soldier noticed how they slowly lost their ability to exchange as much data or maintain a high degree of sensitivity and reactivity as before.

Younger mech pilots may be lacking in experience and wisdom, but they were most often capable of accomplishing extravagant feats due to their excellent conditions!

It was therefore crucially important for these lively talents to retain their peak combat effectiveness as long as possible. The mechers imposed many restrictions on neural interfaces in order to prevent mech pilots from losing their peak conditions much faster than they should.

The newly developed Divine Foresight Mark I Neural Interface threatened to break this safety net.

"The Divine Foresight behaves no different from a normal neural interface under normal conditions." Ves told his wife. "The mech pilot is only supposed to trigger the function that puts the brain in a hyperactive state for a brief moment of time when it truly matters. This is especially relevant when the mech needs to make use of its enormous Devora Cannon to nail a critical shot with a precious transphasic hyper gauss round. These ship-killing projectiles can contain up to several hundred grams of phasewater and are intended to break through enemy defenses and sunder apart entire enemy warships!"

In other words, Ves wanted to ensure that a troupe of Transcendent Punishers assigned to launch their most crucial salvo did not throw away kilograms of phasewater in vain!

Every super-heavy gauss round that missed its target and flew off in the void of space was pure waste as far as Ves was concerned!

The negative impact of a missed shot was far too great, especially in a crucial moment where the Transcendent Punishers only had a short time to do their jobs.

In order to reduce the probability of misses, Ves insisted on adding the Divine Foresight Mark I to the Mark III. Only then would he have the confidence to allow mech pilots to launch super-expensive gauss rounds from the Devora Cannon.

Gloriana most definitely understood this rationale, but she seriously questioned whether a more sure hit was worth the tradeoff of speeding up the 'aging' of the mech pilot's brain.

"How much faster will the brains of the Ylvainan mech pilots wear down if they start to overload their own brains with the help of this custom neural interface?"

"It is not as bad as you think, honey. As I have said before, the Divine Foresight should only be run at full power in brief intervals of time. It is not as if the mech pilot must experience the entire engagement in a hyperactive state. The amount of data being exchanged through the neural interface is still massive in those few seconds, but it is unlikely to cause the mech pilot's mind to explode. As long as the affected individual is subsequently able to retire from battle and avoid any strenuous activity for at least a month, his brain will largely be able to recover much of the damage over time. However, if the pilot induces a hyperactive state multiple times in quick succession, then the damage will rapidly compound and exceed certain limits."

"That means that permanent brain damage becomes a certainty if a mech pilot utilizes this function multiple times in the same battle." Gloriana frowned in disapproval. "Why hasn't the Red Association stepped in to prohibit this dangerous neural interface of yours?"

Ves smirked. "I'm a tier 3 galactic citizen certified by the very same Red Association. I'm practically a mecher already. I'll be fine as long as I don't do anything that besmirches the reputation of the Association."

The truth was actually a lot more nuanced than that. Ves was well aware of the dark side of the mechers.

They craved novel data the most.

Anything that could give them new and interesting pieces of data enriched their overall knowledge base and made it easier for them to come up with useful new inventions.

Crossing the line was not a sin to the Red Association. What truly concerned the powerful organization was if a violation became too damaging to human society and the standing of the mechers.

As long as the Larkinsons kept the more controversial aspects about the Divine Foresight Mark I to themselves, the mechers would probably continue to maintain a blind eye towards its problematic nature.

Gloriana may not be aware of all of these considerations, but if the mechers hadn't stepped in at this point, they probably wouldn't take action in the future.

"For the sake of those mech pilots, I hope they will be able to show enough restraint."

"They might not be able to hold themselves back." Ves shook his head. "When a battle has taken a turn for the worse, the Ylvainan mech pilots may decide to employ this function multiple times over the course of a single battle. I know these kinds of people pretty well. They're fanatics. They are fighting for a greater cause than themselves. Their health and the condition of their brains are not as important as the lives of thousands of Larkinsons or the survival of the expeditionary fleet itself. When it comes down to it, the Eye of Ylvaine should definitely be willing to sacrifice the careers of its mech pilots in exchange for a better result."

Gloriana could think of plenty of scenarios where this could ultimately produce more gains than losses. From that perspective, it was better to make the option available in case a mech pilot needed to exceed his usual level of performance in order to attain a much more favorable result.

However, she couldn't help but feel that the Divine Foresight Mark I set a dangerous precedent for the Larkinson Clan. How long would it take before another Larkinson mech design contained a similar neural interface?

Piloting mechs was an inherently dangerous profession. It was the job of mech designers to accommodate pilots as much as possible. It was doubtful whether the addition of this self-destructive feature would ultimately benefit the pilots who became even more exposed to harm than before.

Despite her misgivings, Gloriana did not push back any further. Ves had obviously considered this matter extensively. He would be the one to bear the fault if anything related to the Divine Foresight went terribly wrong in the future.

"Alright." She eventually said. "I have a much better understanding of your heavy artillery mech than before. I am confident that I can help you with upgrading Commander Melin's old mech to the Mark III. The changes between the two versions are all-encompassing, but as long as we do this in an orderly fashion, we should still be able to preserve the original character of the Zeal."

This was not the first time they did this kind of job. The only difference was that the mech they were working on was much bigger and heavier than usual. The quantity of components they needed to replace was also much higher.

However, neither Ves nor Gloriana were rookies. Once they completed their preparations and went to work, they completely fell in sync with each other.

"Mrow!"

Blinky came out and utilized the Living Workshop ability to flood all of the parts, materials and production equipment with copious amounts of life energy.

"Maaow."

Meanwhile, Alexandria worked together with Gloriana to form a considerably more optimized design network.

The minds of husband and wife came together, allowing them to swap a lot of information as well as emotions to each other.

Their teamwork, which was already good under normal circumstances, immediately reached a much higher level with the help of Alexandria's design network!

From outward appearances, the two worked as if they had become two sides of the same coin.

Both of them had recently become a lot more capable than before. Ves completed his second sublimation fairly recently while Gloriana just came home with a brand-new first-class implant set.

By connecting their minds to each other, the two mech designers benefited a lot more from the answers and second opinions supplied by their partners!

The two also worked much faster than before. There was no way to speed up the first-class production machines themselves, but they were already fairly fast and productive when working on relatively simpler second-class and quasi-first-class components.

Ves and Gloriana utilized their copious processing power to apply on-the-spot adaptations faster and prevent too many mistakes from occurring. Neither of the two had many complaints about their output for the time being.

As Ves began to disassemble large parts of the Zeal and begin the process of replacing its core components one by one, he acted with both passion and precision as he treated this entire upgrade process similar to a full-body organ replacement operation.

Gloriana meanwhile basked in the Living Workshop as she injected a lot more love and care into her most delicate and demanding work processes. She was able to soften her perfectionist tendencies with a greater tolerance for individual quirks and differences.

It was times like these that reminded Ves and Gloriana that they were made for each other.

Both of them smiled as they steadily rebuilt the Zeal until he became increasingly more powerful and imposing as a heavy artillery mech.

After just three days of extremely intensive work, the upgraded machine was almost done!

The two mech designers just had to apply the finishing touches to make the third order living mech as good as new!

Chapter 5642 A Sacred Ritual

The Zeal was a unique mech.

Its name was not.

Over the course of rebuilding the old Transcendent Punisher mech into a powerful Mark III, Ves finally couldn't hold his curiosity back anymore.

He decided to ask the living mech a direct question while he was in the process of remaking its entire frame.

"Why did your battle partner name you the Zeal? As far as I know, I already designed a third-class hero mech called the Transcendent Punisher a long time ago. The one assigned to Taon Melin was supposed to embody one of the virtues of the Ylvaine Protectorate, so the old hero mech was the first Ylvainan living mech to bear this symbolic name. I'm not too sure what happened with it, but do you feel comfortable with retaining your current name knowing that it already belongs to another machine?"

It might be highly unusual for surgeons to ask questions to the patients in the process of performing life-changing operations of the latter, but mechs did not work like humans.

The Zeal remained fully cognizant and aware of what was taking place around him. Due to the excellent care shown by the two mech designers, his spiritual foundation remained strong and largely undamaged throughout the entire upgrade process.

Ves asked this significant question for more reasons than satisfying his curiosity. He wanted to know the Zeal on a deeper level and therefore increase his chances of turning him into a masterwork mech that he could be proud of. There should be no ambiguity about his current identity.

[I AM THE ZEAL. THE OLD HERO MECH YOU HAVE SPOKEN ABOUT IS ALSO CALLED THE ZEAL. THERE IS NO CONFLICT BETWEEN US AS FAR AS I AM CONCERNED. YOU HUMANS ALSO HAVE A HABIT OF USING THE SAME NAMES FOR YOURSELVES. SHOULD THERE ONLY BE ONE UNIQUE BEING CALLED 'ALICE' OR 'ROBERT' AMONG TRILLIONS OF YOUR KIND? THERE ARE EVEN CASES WHERE FATHERS NAME THEIR SONS AFTER THEMSELVES. THEY LIKE TO DO THIS ACROSS EVERY GENERATION SO THAT DESCENDANTS WILL END UP WITH NAMES SUCH AS SAMUEL III OR LEWIS CCXXII.]

Ves chuckled after he heard that. "You're right. We humans can be pretty sloppy with our names as well. Since you do not mind it if Taon has named you after one of his earlier mechs, then I guess it's fine. Shouldn't you be called the Zeal II, if only to distinguish you from your predecessor."

[IT IS NOT NECESSARY. BOTH TAON AND I KNOW WHICH LIVING MECH HE IS REFERRING TO WHEN HE USES THIS NAME. IT IS AN HONOR AND A SACRED DUTY TO BEAR MY CURRENT LABEL. TAON MELIN HOPES TO EMBODY THIS VIRTUE AND INSPIRE OTHER YLVAINANS TO SHOW THE SAME DEDICATION OF HIS FAITH AND BELIEFS IN BATTLE. I AM MORE THAN A LIVING MECH. I AM A SYMBOL OF MY FAITH.]

Even living mechs were capable of holding beliefs and superstitions. Since they had become just as sentient and intelligent as humans, there was no reason why these artificial beings could not be as stupid and ignorant as their organic partners either.

Ves already knew that this kind of development was inevitable. Every living mech interfaced so much with their mech pilots that they became strongly influenced by the principles, values as well as the beliefs of the latter.

In that sense, Ves understood a bit better why the Zeal proudly wore his current name. The heavy artillery mech had taken over a sacred mission, and felt it was his duty to carry the mantle of the old Transcendent Messenger that first held this duty.

"Do you know what happened to your predecessor?"

[THE EYE OF YLVAINES HAS ENTRUSTED THE ORIGINAL ZEAL TO THE ASCENSION GALLERY IN THE CAT NEST. THE HERO MECH CURRENTLY SERVES AS A MUSEUM EXHIBIT FOR VISITING LARKINSONS AND OTHER GUESTS.]

"That is interesting."

All of this talk about the old and new Zeal caused Ves to consider the idea of revisiting the old Transcendent Messenger design.

Perhaps he could update it into a much more powerful first-class iteration, turning it into a simple but profound combat machine that shared a lot of similarities with the original Ouroboros.

However, Ves quickly discarded this idea. The design considerations he made back then made sense back when he was limited to designing third-class mechs, but first-class mechs played in a completely different arena.

More than that, Ves was not able to come up with a good rationale on why he should design such a mech in the first place. Hero mechs held special meaning to him, and he did not want to design one casually for fear of disgracing the mech archetype.

He set this idea aside and put his full focus back on his work. His wife had already started to grow annoyed at his distracting thoughts.

When it was finally time for both mech designers to put their finishing touches on the powerful new mech after nearly three full days of non-stop work, the newly rebuilt form of the Zeal slightly began to deviate from the standard template of the Mark III.

The newly updated Zeal not only had to become a masterwork mech, but also become more attuned with Commander Taon Melin.

Gloriana had begun to apply a lot of software and hardware tweaks that should allow the machine to run smoother under the hands of the Zeal's designated pilot.

Ves on the other hand began to show a bit of artistic flair as he took a big paint brush and began to paint sacred images and symbols onto the fresh white coating of the heavy artillery mech.

Before the start of this upgrade run, he had a small argument with his wife about this action.

"Why do you possibly want to mar the relatively clean and tidy design of your Transcendent Punisher Mark III by hand painting messy illustrations across the exterior? There is no functional purpose behind this action!"

"I don't agree with that, Gloriana. I've learned a lot about stuff during my recent trip. Back when I was vacationing on Ocanon VI, I learned that there is real significance behind rituals,, especially now that we are living in a medium-energy environment. Actions that previously appear to be

purely symbolic in nature have now gained the power to bend reality, if only slightly. Just let me give this a try. If the results do not end up meeting my expectations, then we can always wipe off the paint."

Though Gloriana still objected to this proposal, Ves was in charge this time, so he managed to get his way on this issue.

When the time came for him to start his unusual art process, he had already psyched himself up for this experimental attempt.

Despite working for three days straight, Ves had already accrued a measure of mental fatigue. The workload was extremely high and the E-computers of his Blinkyverse had been running at full capacity this entire time.

Even though Ves' mental condition was not as sharp as before, he did not mind his current state.

He actually felt it was an advantage to start his improvised art project when he was already starting to get tired.

This was because he wanted to paint the surface of the Zeal with his heart, rather than his mind!

Ves hadn't even come up with a single coherent plan or vision on the artwork that he wanted to apply on the living mech.

He was certainly creative enough to come up with a concept and a draft, but he refused to do so because it would go against the spirit of his goal.

Naturally, there was no way he wanted to stick to his tiny human form for this step. That was way too inefficient. Since he possessed the capacity to make himself larger, he might as well make use of it so that he could proficiently hold a much larger paint brush!

"I need to make sure I don't rip apart any of my clothes."

He took a few deep breaths as he shed his lab coat, his uniform and most of his clothes.

He had dressed himself down until he wore an expensive first-class vacsuit that his wife had bought during her recent visit to Vulit.

Though Ves complained about her extravagant purchases many times in his mind, he had to admit that this vacsuit came in very handy at this time.

This was because it was actually stretchable to a ridiculous degree!

There was virtually no way the original developers of this product ever imagined that the vacsuit would be used for this particular purpose. It was only made this way in order to justify the enormous price premium on this fashion article.

Whatever the case, it should be fully capable of accommodating Ves' true body!

The only caveat was that its endurance was much lower than ordinary first-

class garments. It was never designed to function as a battle outfit and would easily fall apart if Ves tried to wear this in a serious battle.

Both Gloriana and the Zeal watched on with varying degrees of awe as Ves literally grew in size.

His glow and his presence became a lot more pronounced as his true form started to become visible again.

Ves stopped just before he had reached the height of a typical light mech!

If he went too far, then he would lose a lot of fine control, which was detrimental to his purpose.

Ves moved a bit to make sure that his stretched vacsuit remained intact. Once he became satisfied with his new condition, he picked up the giant-sized painting tools and began to perform his meticulous craft.

What was special about his approach was that he did not paint by himself.

Instead, he opened up his mind to Ylvaine and enabled the design spirit to descend onto his mind.

An air of sacredness started to get mixed into Ves' glow. His eyes grew deeper as they seemed to see the future as well as the present.

Ves purposefully put himself into a less cognizant mindset. He deliberately lowered his awareness so that his conscious thinking process did not dominate his mind anymore.

Instead, he gave plenty of room for Ylvaine to take root and exert his own purpose!

The two had entered into a magical state of cooperation. The design network started to convey a lot of confusing and illogical thoughts to Gloriana.

The stuff that was taking place in Ves' mind in his current state was so disorienting that it was already driving her mad!

"Maow!"

Alexandria forcibly shut down the design network in order to save Gloriana from her husband's latest bout of insanity.

Ves did not really care about the cessation of the design network. It wasn't necessary anymore as he was much more intent on joining hands with Ylvaine at the moment.

In his self-imposed fugue, Ves deliberately tried to turn himself into a vessel of Ylvaine's intent and vision.

As his giant limbs started to move the paint brush with slow and delicate motions, the surface of the nearly completed heavy artillery mech started to gain a bit of color.

It soon became clear that his plan was working.

Ves retained just enough cognizance to retain his excellent skills and personal art style.

Ylvaine meanwhile gained the capability to direct Ves to paint certain symbols and images based on his current foresight.

The design spirit had opened himself up to the currents of time, allowing him to gain random images of different events that may or may not take place in the future!

Ylvaine subsequently tried to induce Ves into transforming these ephemeral visions into a concrete illustration that would 'solidify' these future glimpses.

Ves and Ylvaine literally turned the Zeal into a canvas that immortalized these random visions in the form of art!

The significance of their cooperative actions was deep and profound. Even Gloriana managed to feel that the two were conducting a sacred and unknowable ritual due to the resonance they evoked from the environment.

The longer they worked, the more E energy radiation began to pump into the freshly painted symbols and vistas.

It was as if the universe itself had chosen to bless these prophetic visions!

Chapter 5643 Another Virtue

The Zeal in its current state was not a particularly crucial or important mech.

Ves could have decided to update the Zeal to Mark III specifications with only minor cosmetic changes in order to distinguish the living mech from his standard counterparts.

However, it was not in his nature to slack off and take it easy. The moment a work assignment turned into a routine was the moment that Ves would begin to lose his touch as a mech designer!

Every serious attempt at fabricating or upgrading a mech compelled him to do better. There were many ways in which he could improve his work and increase the quality of the final result.

This time, Ves decided to take advantage of this occasion to conduct a radical experiment and see whether he could gain proof of one of his recent theories!

When Ves came up with the unusual idea of letting his consciousness take a backseat and allowing Ylvaine to 'direct' his body to produce art, he did not think about the outcome of this crazy move.

He did not dare to set any hopes or expectations on how the exterior of the Zeal might look after he had ended the cooperative art session.

Ves wanted the output to fully reflect Ylvaine's vision instead of his own. The only influence he wanted to exert over the end results was to make it look professional and aesthetically pleasing enough to pass muster.

After all, there was a huge difference between seeing a potential future timeline and conveying it to people in the present!

The very act of divining the future might not even be a visual process to begin with. A lot of stuff went lost in translation, so no prophecy could possibly describe a possible future event with total accuracy.

Ves did not mind that, and neither did Ylvaine. When both of them had joined forces to perform a single united purpose, they did not attempt to recreate any photorealistic images.

Not only was the chance of including inaccuracies in the painted images a lot greater, but it would also take an excessive amount of time to add so much detail.

Ves and Ylvaine instead began to generate more abstract and symbolic works of art across the surface of the Zeal.

The Transcendent Punisher Mark III design was huge. Its surface area was enormous, even if much of it was broken up into a lot of different angles.

However, that did not stop the two extraordinary individuals from making good use of their complicated canvas.

At certain times, Ves slowed down and made a lot of precise strokes with a thinner brush in order to add detail when necessary, but also sped up and made a lot of faster strokes whenever it was expedient.

As their cooperative progressed, Gloriana had been reduced to a bystander. She watched with an increasing degree of confusion as all kinds of strange images and indecipherable ideograms started to cover the previously clean surface of the mech.

Much to her relief, the increasingly more dense and all-encompassing artwork did not cause the Zeal to look too messy and cluttered.

Though the abundance of artwork across the surface of its mech frame definitely caused the machine to lose its freshness, the Ylvainan mech gained more and more majesty in the process.

With each completed illustration, the Zeal took another step away from his origin as a standard Transcendent Punisher Mark III and fleshed out his own unique identity.

There was no going back from this! Out of all of the Transcendent Punishers to exist to this date, only the Zeal had been blessed with the art and vision of both the Great Prophet and the Bright Martyr!

The living mech became ecstatic at what was happening. The machine possessed enough intelligence and awareness to know that Ylvaine and his progenitor had teamed up to turn his very surface into a metal tapestry of all sorts of mysterious prophecies.

The incredibly faithful mech did not even want to enter into battle anymore after this! The Zeal simply could not bear the thought of aliens desecrating the sacred images through their foul attacks.

The Zeal needed to take the place of the older mech that bore the same name!

More people deserved to see and interpret the sacred prophecies that Ylvaine had generously made available to the people living in the present!

As Ves and Ylvaine finally started to wind down as they had managed to cover much of the surface of the Zeal with their exceptional artwork, their fused state slowly started to wind down.

Ylvaine had expended a considerable amount of energy to cast his vision further and wider this time. The design spirit did not set any limits or parameters to where his future sight might take him, allowing him to grasp a lot of glimpses of important turning points in a timeline that had not yet come to pass.

This caused the subjects and the meaning of his prophecies to become incredibly diverse!

The subject matter, the approximate time period and the overall message were all different.

As Ves gradually regained his awareness, he did not stop to admire 'his' artistry but immediately moved to put the final touch on his latest upgrade project.

He shrank his body down to its normal human proportions and quickly donned his usual outfit again. He then proceeded to enter the cockpit and retrieve a gem that he had already picked out beforehand.

It had been difficult for him to narrow down his choice. There were several gems produced by Lucky that seemed apt for the Zeal.

For example, the Doom of Remis seemed like a good option to Ves. Its description explicitly mentioned a 'failed prophet', which immediately caused Ves to associate this older gem with Ylvaine.

However, its effect was only effective at close range, which meant that it was only suitable for melee mechs.

Ves finally settled on a heavenly gem that he had recently obtained.

[Final Sacrifice]

The sacrificial intent of a true ideologue is contained within this gem. When fully charged, it allows a mech to generate a large weapon construct that can fire a single full-powered energy attack that can bypass all energy barriers and disintegrate all matter.

Ves almost did not choose it because Sacrifice was a distinctly different Ylvainan virtue from Zeal.

However, the effect and theme fit the living mech far too well for Ves to dismiss this powerful heavenly gem as a choice!

There was no rule that stated that Ylvainans were only allowed to exemplify a single virtue. It should be natural for the more devoted and earnest among them to exhibit all 6 virtues.

This prompted Ves to go through with his decision without engaging in too many doubts and second thoughts.

He carefully brought out a black gem that sparked with random flashes of light.

Ves greatly suspected that this heavenly gem encapsulated some of the remnant power and energy of the Dustweaver's sacrificial attack.

The power of this gem had to be exceptional, but that made it even more important to put it in the right mech.

Ves initially planned to reserve it for a melee mech or a more versatile machine that did not wield any heavy ranged weapons. After all, the Final Sacrifice purportedly enabled a mech to gain a single-use molecular disintegrator for free!

However, his plans could not keep up with the changes. When faced with a powerful heavy artillery mech that could mount the enormous Devora Cannon and could borrow the power of Emma, he just had to pair the living mech up with the Final Sacrifice!

As Ves allowed the Zeal to absorb the exceptionally powerful gem, he already began to feel the immediate changes induced by the machine.

All the prophetic artwork applied to the exterior of the Zeal had caused the living mech to become more sacred and holy in ways that Ves could not describe.

The blessed artworks that mysteriously generated a subtle form of resonance with the universe, causing them to draw in E energies that reminded Ves of divination and other related concepts.

The point was that the appearance and the feel of the Zeal had definitely caused the living machine to gain an undeniably sacred and even holy demeanor!

Yet from the moment that Ves inserted his heavenly gem, the Zeal's aura quickly started to change in ways that caused it to gain a more ominous accent.

The previously positive and upright demeanor of the Zeal steadily began to shift into a more negative and gloomy impression.

Though the exceptional heavy artillery mech still retained his sacred character, the machine no longer felt as inspiring as before.

Instead, the Zeal had turned into an existence that was made to warn others of the grim tidings ahead.

Ves grew relieved when he confirmed that the drastic change in demeanor did not upset the Zeal or change his nature in an unacceptable manner.

He actually appreciated the shift. It not only added a lot of flavor to his work, but also complemented the living mech's role as an overpowering offensive mech even more!

The Zeal actually began to show a slightly greater resemblance towards the legendary Ragnarok!

Just like the famous god mech, the Zeal was able to mount a super-heavy cannon that could fire a hugely destructive projectile blessed with the power of destruction.

While the damage potential of these two artillery-oriented mechs diverged enormously from each other, the Zeal still had a lot of room for growth!

It was not impossible for the Zeal to grow step-by-step until he became a god mech that was just as powerful as the current iteration of the Ragnarok!

Ves even had a hunch that he would definitely be responsible for turning the Zeal into an impressive god mech, but he did not dare to entertain this notion for too long.

Arrogance was the step towards disappointing his expectations for the future!

He needed to retain his sense of awe and humility in order to earnestly work towards a better future.

As Ves floated outside of the cockpit of his latest completed work, the Zeal had already begun a process that Ylvaine had already prophesied in advance.

"We have made another masterwork mech." Gloriana said in a distracted tone.

Strangely enough, neither Ves nor his wife showed that much interest towards the masterwork transformation that mysteriously elevated the quality of the Zeal well beyond the threshold!

Even if Ves did not add the Final Sacrifice to the Zeal, the heavy artillery mech still would have become a masterwork!

What he did was just a cherry on top. The heavenly gem added a powerful accent to the Ylvainan mech and caused him to develop an even more unique identity than before.

As the enormous heavy artillery mech rose to a new level of craftsmanship, Ves became slightly concerned whether his odd actions and the heavenly gem might cause the Zeal to attract another spontaneous lightning storm.

Fortunately, the radical upgrade attempt did not cross any significant taboos this time. The weather outside of Diandi Base remained completely clear and normal.

Once the lengthy masterwork transformation had finally run its course, the Zeal had finally completed his extensive rebirth.

[I... AM... THE LIGHT OF FAITH... AND THE MESSENGER OF DOOM.]

An inner fire seemed to burn inside the spiritual foundation of the Zeal. The living mech experienced a profound moment that caused him to grow a lot more powerful all of a sudden!

That definitely attracted Ves' attention. He originally thought that all of the work done to the Zeal would cause him to incur damage to his spiritual foundation, but instead the opposite took place!

The most concrete manifestation of this improved strength was that the third order living mech suddenly gained a whole bunch of Ascension Runes!

The powerful boost was incredibly significant, because Ves had never witnessed a moment where an existing mech could obtain so many Ascension Runes in the workshop as opposed to the battlefield!

Chapter 5644 Forbidden Glimpses

As the masterwork transformation slowly came to an end, a familiar voice sounded from behind.

"Each time we make a plan, you always find a way to break it. You have outdone yourself, Ves. The Association recently decided to reduce the MTA merits awarded to you for each successfully completed masterwork mech. After all, we have already obtained enough observations of their common properties, so your subsequent masterworks are unlikely to hold much empirical value. This... this is different."

Ves and Gloriana turned around to face Jovy, who had quietly teleported inside the private mech workshop from the Tarrasque up in orbit.

Neither of the two Larkinson mech designers showed any surprise at his arrival. He was bound to come after the successful formation of any masterwork mech, let alone a machine that looked as unusual as the upgraded Zeal!

While the living mech basked in his powerful upgrade and his newest mission, the three mech designers struggled to figure out what had happened.

As Ves, Gloriana and Jovy took a deeper look at the Zeal, they clearly expressed more interest towards the prophetic visions on the surface than the technical merits of the mechs!

It couldn't be helped! Even though the Transcendent Punisher Mark III was absolutely a potent transphasic hyper mech, the many vague and bizarre illustrations that Ves had spontaneously painted by obeying Ylvaine's instructions might hold even greater meaning!

Gloriana frowned a bit as she tried to make sense of the prophetic visions that clearly overshadowed her latest masterwork mech.

She understood why Ves and Jovy developed a fascination towards the illustrations. Through the mysterious ritual conducted by Ves and his design spirit, the prophetic visions seemed to gain extraordinary weight. The E energies gradually pouring into them seemed to validate the events depicted by the images and protected them to an extent.

It conveyed the impression that the prophecies foretold by all of the spontaneous artworks somehow managed to resonate with a far greater power than the likes of Ylvaine!

Perhaps a normal mechers might dismiss all of these manifestations as tricks or superstitious stagecraft, but Jovy was different.

He knew Ves well and was open-minded enough to consider the theory that much if not all of these strange visions may come to pass one day!

The biggest reason why Jovy was willing to take this possibility into account was because he happened to possess a certain degree of comprehension towards future probabilities.

His companion spirit dove out of head and stared at the freshly upgraded masterwork mech with a mixture of awe and dread.

The Eye of Providence sensed that the mech had touched upon so many different destinies that the translucent floating eyeball shuddered in fear the more it looked at the painted illustrations!

"Zssss!"

The ability to see more than ordinary people was both a blessing and a curse. Right now, Jovy's companion spirit apparently started to see stuff that it could not bear at its current level of strength.

The large eyeball flew back as if it had suffered a nasty physical blow! The Eye of Providence quickly turned around and dove back into the sanctity of Jovy's mind!

"Ves..." The RA Senior Mech Designer spoke up with wide eyes. "This heavy artillery mech... contains images that depict beings of immense power. I do not know everything about divination, but even I can deduce that such an act cannot be done without suffering the consequences. Frankly speaking, I do not know why you and your design spirit managed to get away with this all without suffering an enormous backlash along the way."

What 'dynamic duo' had done had been extraordinarily dangerous in hindsight!

The Great Prophet freely cast his sight in the future without any direction or constraints!

The Bright Martyr dared to record all of these dangerous visions in a permanent form across his metal canvas!

In short, both of them had violate so many taboos that they should have already gotten struck down by at least several of the powerful beings that they had unknowingly offended!

Yet... nothing happened.

Ves received constant updates from the control center of Diandi Base.

No alien invaders had magically teleported on site in order to flatten the entire place.

No lightning storm had spontaneously formed in the skies in order to annihilate everything with the power of ultimate destruction.

No majestic True God afflicted Ves and Ylvaine with an unstoppable curse that caused them to suffer an agonizing death.

Nothing.

It was as if Ves and Ylvaine had just teamed up to produce a lot of childish scribbles that shouldn't be tied to anything of significance.

Yet the sense of ritual and the subtle resonance evoked by the end results were no illusions.

They were very real, so everyone in the workshop had to account for the possibility that the prophetic visions had a basis in reality!

Of course, Ves still remained skeptical. Even if he was one of the chief culprits behind these images, he did not believe that they could all become true.

This was too absurd of a possibility!

"Before we take a closer look at what Ylvaine and I have actually made, I would like to caution you all to not read too much into them." He warned. "According to my own theories, Ylvaine does not foresee a single future timeline that will definitely come to pass. Instead, I think he is able to glimpse a range of many different possibilities. At most, he may be able to divine a couple of the more probable future outcomes based on present developments. That does not rule out that lower probability events may occur that can completely derail a future outcome."

Jovy concurred with Ves. "I do not have access to any proof that can back up or dismiss your theories, but Prophecies may also be subject to the observer's paradox."

Gloriana furrowed her brows. "You may be correct on that, but that does not invalidate the reference value of prophecies. For example, one of them can foretell a possible ambush of a god pilot that will lead to his or her death. Even if it is implausible for a god pilot to be fooled into a trap, we can still make a lot of useful observations from the assets brought out by the aliens. Maybe they have developed a devastating new weapon to serve as their trump card, or maybe they have secretly cooperated with the cosmopolitans to augment ancient phase whales with human technology."

She made a good point. The actual outcomes may or may not be reliable, but every painted image could convey a lot of useful clues that did not seem valuable at first!

Of course, the premise to this was that the prophetic visions were reasonably accurate. If there was a large possibility that Ves had misinterpreted the guidance from Ylvaine, then that would make the illustrations a lot less reliable!

With these thoughts in mind, the three mech designers hovered into the air and faced the rear of the heavy artillery mech.

As a six-legged machine that was designed to bear weapons as large as the Devora Cannon, the surface area of a Transcendent Punisher Mark III was enormous.

Even if much of the surface was broken up by a lot of curves and sharp angles, the large mech still featured more than enough space for Ves to paint a lot of coherent images on reasonably flat or gently curved surfaces.

All three mech designers immediately froze when they beheld the first prophetic vision.

It depicted a grand ceremonial hall that was clearly of alien make. Two groups of beings dressed in their most formal and resplendent wear stood on opposite sides of each other.

Numerous representatives of each side had moved forward and were on the cusp of shaking their hands.

The sight reminded Ves of his most recent treaty signing. Though the occasion was a lot smaller and not as formal, the air of ceremony and the joining of two distinctly different groups were remarkably familiar!

"This is a formal treaty signing of the highest specifications of our civilization." Jovy sharply said. "This painting is too broad and wide for me to determine the identities of human leaders, but I can roughly guess who they may be based on various clues. At the very least, all four major human groups are represented. The Red Association, the Red Fleet, the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact have all sent their respective figureheads to sign the treaty in person on behalf of our collective civilization."

Though Ves was unable to recall many of the messy and jumbled thoughts and emotions transmitted by Ylvaine at the time, he still retained vague echoes of what he tried to make.

He intuitively felt that Jovy was right.

Gloriana on the other hand focused on the other side of this treaty signing ceremony!

"Are those... aliens?"

"Yup." Ves confirmed. "Even if they only look like painted sticks or blobs from this perspective, it is still easy enough to infer their races. One of them is clearly a nunser. The other is an orven. The one to the side is an arche, and that final blob makes me feel that it is a zzamayel."

"A zzamayel? We have yet to encounter a single member of their race as far as I recall." Gloriana frowned.

"We'll probably encounter them soon enough. Their core territories are located a bit further away from this corner of the dwarf galaxy, so they are a bit late in coming. Once they show up, a lot of human forces will get introduced to this slime race."

The zzamayel race basically consisted of sentient slimes. Red humanity might not have encountered this bizarre race themselves, but the other alien races possessed detailed records about their kind.

Apparently, the zzamayels employed both conventional technology and biotechnology. They were not known for being innovators, and their technological development was not as strong as that of the puelmers.

However, the zzamayels had become particularly good at making the most out of the tech and resources they had. They were efficient and were known to defeat more powerful forces with less resources at their disposal. This indicated that the slime race possessed a level of cunning and thoughtfulness that the humans did not want to face.

What mattered now was that the first prophetic image painted by Ves and Ylvaine somehow depicted a possible future where red humanity and a bunch of native aliens got together!

Gloriana began to puzzle over another question.

"Are humans signing a peace treaty or an alliance treaty?"

There was an important distinction between the two!

One simply mandated both sides to stop fighting.

The other compelled the two sides to join forces!

"I don't know." Ves shrugged. "I have a vague sense of the title of this artwork. I have a feeling that it should be called the 'The Meeting of Races', but that doesn't say what the different races plan to do once they meet. I guess that either possibility may happen."

"I am leaning towards an alliance treaty." Jovy thoughtfully said. "In an event as important as this, you would expect that the aliens would send one representative of every race. Yet now that both sides are on the cusp of signing the treaty, the majority of the thirteen major alien races are absent. Of course, you can't expect the voribugs to be present, but where are the puelmers? Where are the phase whales? You would at least expect them to be present if the treaty is meant to bring an end to the Red War, but since they are absent, it is highly likely that they object to the agreement."

That did not completely discount the possibility that this event was centered around the signing of a peace treaty, but Jovy still made a good point!

"Have the cosmopolitans succeeded?" Gloriana wondered.

That was a distressing thought. The Meeting of Races was a prophetic vision that would probably make any cosmopolitan pleased to the point of ecstasy!

Chapter 5645 Precrime

Ves did not know what to make of the Meeting of Races.

On the one hand, it foretold a possible and maybe even likely future where the Red War did not lead to the annihilation of red humanity.

That was already a cause for celebration, but how much did red humanity have to sacrifice in order to negotiate an end to a conflict or the start of a new multi-racial cooperation agreement?

Ves actually felt a bit skeptical about this future possibility.

He knew that General Axelar Streon and Gaia were cooking up a grand plan to heist the home planet of a major alien race.

There was a distinct possibility that their ultimate goal may be the ancestral home planet of the orven race!

After all, the orvens resembled humans the most, so their home planet should be a lot more compatible as well.

If the Terran Alliance managed to pull off this explosive grand heist, then the orvens would develop such an irreconcilable hatred towards humanity that they would never agree to end the war!

However, if that scenario was not entirely guaranteed to come to pass.

Ves ultimately shook his head and did not dare to think too much in this direction. He needed to follow his own advice and stop himself from trying to read too much into dubious and unreliable clues.

"As grand as this occasion may appear, do you have the impression that the two sides are happy to sign this treaty?" Jovy asked.

"I thought that the sense of gloom and discomfort came from the Zeal as opposed to this artwork." Gloriana skeptically responded.

"That is partially true, but now that I think about it, I don't think I tried to depict a happy occasion." Ves mentioned as he tried to recall his mind state at the time of making this work. "I get the feeling that both sides are under pressure. The likely explanation for that is that they may be forced to come together in order to confront a common threat that either of the two sides cannot defeat by themselves."

That sounded like a much more plausible reason to form an alliance between red humanity and at least a few of the major alien races.

The group of mech designers moved on to a simpler but considerably more darker image painted on a smaller surface.

Ves had utilized a lot of black and gray paints to make all of the ragged brush strokes. The resulting painting roughly depicted a grim older man holding a pistol against the head of a younger man that was kneeling on the floor in utter defeat.

Gloriana immediately became on edge. The prophetic image offended her in a way that prompted her to take it a lot more seriously!

"Is that your Amastendira?"

"It kind of looks like it." Ves admitted. The white and golden colors stood out too much from the rest of the image. "Even though the detail level is not too high, I am pretty sure the gun that I have painted has a different design. I may have broken down and rebuilt the Amastendira from the ground up. It's a horribly outdated laser pistol by this time, but it still contains a few pieces of good tech that I can build upon. I always intended to upgrade it, but only after I became a first-class mech designer."

"That means that the figure holding the gun is likely you." His wife concluded. "The question is who you are executing. Your art style in this image leaves much to be desired. How little time did you spend on it? I cannot discern any facial details at all! Even the clothes are engulfed in shadow!"

This was clearly a dark scene. Ves actually felt he had done a great job at conveying the overall dark and depressing atmosphere of this prophetic vision!

Yet when Ves thought about who the person holding the gun might be trying to execute, his expression suddenly dropped.

For whatever reason, Gloriana immediately picked up on his change of mood.

"You know."

"I... think I do. The title that I have associated with this artwork is pretty unambiguous in this regard. Don't read too much into it. This is only a possible future."

"I will not like the answer." Gloriana guessed in a flat tone.

"Yes, but this is anything but a guaranteed outcome. The observer's paradox alone means that the future can still be changed. Now that we have received forewarning, we can purposefully take action to lower the probability of this event from ever occurring."

"Tell me the truth, Ves. Do not lie. I can tell if you do. What is the title of this work?"

"...Filicide."

That was an unusual word to say the least. Pretty much no one in their orbit used this word in normal parlance.

Jovy instantly looked up this word in his internal dictionary.

"Filicide. Noun. The act of killing one's son or daughter. I believe this is a case of killing a son, as the human figure kneeling on the ground in defeat clearly looks masculine."

That predictably caused the only woman to explode!

"WHAT?! I KNEW IT! I KNEW THIS PAINTING WOULD BREAK MY HEART! HOW COULD YOU, VES?! HOW COULD YOU KILL OUR OWN CHILD? WHY ARE YOU SO CRUEL AND HEARTLESS TO SHOOT ONE OF OUR PRECIOUS BABIES IN THE HEAD? ARE YOU SO FULL OF YOURSELVES THAT YOU ARE UNABLE TO FORGIVE THE SON THAT YOU HAVE RAISED IN YOUR OWN ARMS?!"

"Calm down, honey!" Ves innocently raised his arms. "You know I would never do such a thing! Don't talk to me as if I have already done it! I don't know how far in the future this event takes place, but a lot has clearly happened for such an execution to become remotely plausible. Precrime is a fantasy, not a real phenomenon!"

"MY BABY! MARVAINE! WHAT HAS MARVAINE POSSIBLY DONE TO DESERVE THIS PUNISHMENT?! HE IS JUST A MECH DESIGNER IN THIS FUTURE!"

"The man holding the gun is not necessarily me, you know! Even if he is, there is no certainty that the kneeling figure is Marvaine!" Ves retorted. "We can still have other children, you know. There may be other sons that have misbehaved for one reason or another. In fact, the victim may not even be one of our children. He may be one of our grandsons or distant descendants."

Not even Jovy believed in the latter. "The emotions poured into this artwork suggests a strong emotional bond between 'father' and 'son'. This is an act of extreme desperation and necessity. It is unlikely that the two family members have a passing familiarity with each other. You have depicted these emotions in a beautiful manner despite the brief amount of time you spent on making it. Your work deserves to be put in a museum."

Ves got betrayed by his own art!

"Childkiller! I should take Marvaine away from you right away! Even my daughters may be in danger from you one day. If you are depraved enough to kill your son in the future, then my precious baby girls are no less safe in your presence!"

It took a lot of effort and a bit of time for Ves and Jovy to calm down the hysterical mother.

It was more than understandable for Gloriana to go nuts at the very possibility that her husband might kill one of their own children one day, but this was such a spurious scenario in the far future that it was excessive to believe that it was already set in stone!

Treating Ves as a child killer at this time was as absurd as spending trillions of MTA credits worth of handbags and other extravagant luxuries based on his probable income 100 years later.

Though Gloriana's distressed emotions had gained primacy for a time, her rationality eventually resurfaced just enough to calm her down.

She agreed with Ves not because she agreed with her arguments, but she had to believe that determinism did not exist in order to make room for a possibility where her cute little boy would be saved from getting killed by his own cruel and merciless father!

"I will keep a much closer eye on you and Marvaine. Do not test my patience." Gloriana warned with narrowed eyes.

Ves looked helpless as he could not shake off his wife's intense suspicion and paranoia.

"I love Marvaine as much as Aurelia and Andraste. Family is the most important thing to me. You know I would never harm my own flesh and blood. Either this is a case of a mistaken identity, or a lot of stuff happened that caused us to deviate too far from our current selves. At the very least, the remote possibility that this future may come to pass is a wakeup call for all of us. We need to work even harder to restrain ourselves and prevent us from ever losing sight of what is important."

They took one last look at this tragic artwork before they moved away.

Ves had one more thought as he bid goodbye to this awful prophetic vision.

Though Gloriana assumed that the 'son' was Marvaine, Ves was not so certain about this identification.

There was still a possibility that he and his wife might decide to complete their set and have 2 more sons in the next couple of years.

Ves couldn't help but think back on Ylvaine's recent prophecy about his possible second son. This caused him to feel more upset, because the design spirit's annoying prophecies had started to distort his perception of his children when nobody was at fault.

Nothing happened yet, but Ylvaine already made a number of predictions that did not foretell anything good about a child that had yet to be born!

Anyway, all three mech designers were eager to wash away the bad associations generated by Filicide and eagerly observed the third major image.

Jovy looked intrigued. "If the previous image was zoomed in to a personal level, then this one has zoomed out to the point where we are looking at a galaxy from top-down."

"This is the Red Ocean." Gloriana stated. "The red nebulas and the approximate size and shape of the dwarf galaxy are unmistakable. The density and the positioning of the stars also match up to the current star map. At the very least, this snapshot is taken within a couple of centuries at most if we account for stellar drift and other factors that change over time."

"There's a big difference between the current map of the dwarf galaxy and... this." Ves pointed out the obvious. "Half of the stars are engulfed in a cloud of darkness. They're not even glowing

anymore. I can't tell whether those stars have literally been snuffed or if the obscured side of the Red Ocean have fallen under the control of a dark power."

Either possibility sounded frightening to Ves!

"What is the name of this piece?" His wife asked.

"The Black Tide."

"That certainly sounds ominous."

"There are strong indications that the remaining prophetic visions will not be much better." Jovy shared one of his thoughts. "I can perceive a definite pattern in these works."

Ves had been having this feeling as well. It did not help that the Zeal had become extra gloomy and fatalistic after absorbing the powerful Final Sacrifice gem.

However, he only added the gem after he and Ylvaine produced all of these illustrations, not before.

The order was wrong... or was it? Had Ylvaine somehow known that the Zeal would be a mech steeped in negativity, and therefore orient his predictions towards visions of doom and disaster?

Ves inwardly shook his head. This was too complicated. He shouldn't let all of the implications of these prophecies overwhelm his cognition.

No matter what may or may not come to pass, he firmly believed that only he was the master of his own destiny!

No one else was allowed to dictate his future!

Chapter 5646 Visions of Doom

The Black Tide foretold a grim future for the Red Ocean.

Fully half of the dwarf galaxy had fallen under a tide of darkness!

Whether this tide was a literal or a metaphorical depiction, no one could tell. Not even Ves was all too clear about the exact meaning of this artwork.

"The side that has fallen under darkness also encompasses all of the territories that are currently claimed by red humanity." Jovy remarked. "It is not too difficult to guess that we may be the biggest losers in this future outcome."

Ves started to look doubtful. "It doesn't have to be. Since human-occupied space is so deep in this tide of darkness, it may depict the explosive expansion of human civilization across the Red Ocean. Don't you think this state looks awfully similar to the current state of the Milky Way Galaxy? The Black Tide may in fact show a possible future outcome where red humanity has come to dominate half of the new frontier!"

Somehow, neither Gloriana nor Jovy believed in this alternative interpretation.

"It sounds... possible, but implausible." Jovy judged. "The current pattern set by these illustrations convey negative outcomes. I do not think that the Black Tide is meant to reassure human viewers."

"Maybe you're right. Prophecies can be regarded as early warnings of sorts, so getting a glimpse of a future calamity is not necessarily a bad thing for us. The only problem I have with this work is that it is a redundant warning."

Anyone clever enough could determine without too much effort that red humanity was already in a bad place.

If people did not fight against the aliens hard enough, they would almost certainly get wiped out along with the rest of red humanity!

No matter whether it was the indigenous aliens from the Red Ocean or the extragalactic visitors from Messier 87, the dangers were very real.

Perhaps the only value of the Black Tide was showing the portions of space that might be spared from this vague calamity.

Ves most definitely recorded the image in his cranial implant so that he knew where he should run to if there was any possibility that this event might happen in reality!

Since an image like this did not really convey a lot of useful details, the group of mech designers did not stay for long and looked at the fourth prophetic vision that Ves happened to paint on one of the largest flat surfaces of the Zeal.

Gloriana looked a lot more appreciative at this time. "This is your best image yet. The level of detail is much higher, and I can see you have invested a considerable amount of time to accurately depict the dimensions of the subjects."

"They deserve it. As a mech designer, it would be an actual crime for me to do less than my best in depicting the majesty of these god mechs."

The fourth image actually depicted not one, but several god mechs in combat!

There was no way that the three mech designers could mistake the iconic god mechs. They all happen to look familiar to them, so the prophetic vision clearly did not take place too far in the future.

Ves had painted each and every god mech at such good angles and in such great detail that viewers could even distinguish individual modules and other surface features!

Though the god mechs did not look the same as they did during Operation Night Jazz, the differences could be chalked up to technological upgrades that improved the performance of the powerful machines but preserved their essence.

"This is interesting." Gloriana said. "For whatever reason, the Geneforger, the Heartpiercer and the Ultimate Controller have joined forces to fight against a singular powerful foe. I would have thought that this should be an issue that only concerns the Red Association, but the Spacelock has chosen to contribute despite the fact that he hails from the Rubarthan Pact."

"That is because the threat they are fighting against likely poses a threat to all of red humanity, not just the mechers." Ves guessed.

Jovy meanwhile fell silent as soon as he glimpsed the powerful opponent that the god mechs struggled to contain.

"Ves... I know this question is redundant, but I have to ask in order to be absolutely certain. When you painted this illustration, did you or Ylvaine ever purposefully alter or deviate the depiction of the opponent of these god mechs?"

"No way! I have far more integrity than that! When I had joined forces with Ylvaine, we both sought to translate the future glimpses into a fixed form without injecting our biases or preferences. I can't claim that this depiction is totally objective, but I can personally promise you that I did not attempt to lie or push a particular agenda."

Jovy let out a tired sigh. "I know, but thank you for answering. The... esteemed individuals that I am in contact with are not as familiar with you, so the reassurances that you have given are not redundant."

Even though Jovy never said anything about this until now, Ves already had a strong feeling that his impromptu art session had attracted attention from very high places.

He bet that at least two of the distant onlookers consisted of a Star Designer and a god pilot!

Though Ves felt it was a bit absurd for them to take the results of his improvised art session so seriously, this was not the first time he pulled off an extraordinary feat.

There was a high likelihood that a bunch of tier 1 galactic citizens were frantically trying to interpret his prophetic visions as if they might actually come true!

Ves tried his best not to let that pressure him too much. Whatever the case, Ves had already done the deed. It was up to other people to determine what they thought about his work.

The reason why Jovy and the people behind him had become so concerned about this image was because the adversary that occupied a central position in this piece happened to be another 'god mech'!

However, the subject in question looked like it had gone through a lot of changes since last time.

"Did you run out of bright paint over the course of making this artwork?" Jovy asked.

"Of course not! Our workshop is so well-stocked that it is impossible to run out of colors to paint."

The reason why Jovy asked such a stupid question was because he rejected the most obvious interpretation.

The enemy that the Evolution Witch, the Huntsman and the Spacelock fought against was... the First Flame.

Or at least a corrupted version of the oldest and most powerful god pilot in the Red Ocean.

During Operation Night Jazz, the First Flame demonstrated absolute dominance by transforming his god mech into a massive flaming bird-like creature!

This time, the Phoenix had made a return, but the mythical creature manifestation looked a lot more evil than before!

Its previously bright flames became a lot darker and more ominous. Pure malice radiated from the brilliantly detailed flames that made up the angry manifestation.

"What is the name of this piece?"

"The Suppression of the Dark Phoenix."

"..."

Jovy did not respond to this. His mouth remained shut and his expression remained impassive. The subject of this prophetic vision alarmed people at the highest level. If there was any truth to this depiction, then those leaders had to take as much action as necessary to prevent a scenario where the First Flame might actually turn against his fellow human brothers!

Ves had a strong hunch about what was going on in this image, but he did not dare to voice his thoughts for fear of offending one or multiple god pilots.

It would be stupid for Ves to get on the bad side of the First Flame!

He just had to trust that the mechers were smart and decisive enough to take this warning seriously and take real action to prevent this possible doom scenario from ever occurring.

No one spoke any further. This was strange as the remarkable detail of the depictions of the god mechs and the Dark Phoenix could evoke a lot of discussion among the three mech designers.

Unfortunately, the image triggered so many taboos that no one was in the mood to talk any further!

The three mech designers quickly moved to the next image.

Fortunately, the subject matter was not as controversial this time.

"This is an ancient phase whale." Gloriana described. "It is clearly in warp travel. The brush trails clearly convey this impression. However..."

"It is not a living creature." Ves added. "Can you spot all of the technological modules built across the surface? While they are all too small for us to discern any precise details, their overall aesthetics conform to a human style. Since this work is called the Whale Ark, this is probably an enormous planet-sized ancient phase whale carcass that has been converted into an enormous ark ship!"

The amount of work required to convert such an immense alien body into a half-biological, half-mechanical starship of enormous proportions was insane!

Who was rich and extravagant enough to complete this resource-intensive conversion, and what purpose did the Whale Ark serve?

Jovy spoke up this time.

"There are... rumors among higher circles that the Red Fleet is investing resources in a possible contingency plan. If... red humanity's position in the new frontier has become untenable, then we need a way out. It is possible that the fleeters are planning to convert at least one of the relatively intact ancient phase whale carcasses obtained from the recent operation into an ark ship that can preserve much of the essence of our race and civilization."

This definitely looked like a superproject that the fleeters would invest in! They loved big ships the most, and this was probably the most feasible way for them to obtain a vessel of unsurpassed proportions without ruining themselves in the process!

Nonetheless, the sheer amount of work and resources required to complete such a titanic conversion process was so much that it would probably take decades to complete at the very least!

"If the Black Tide ever comes to pass, perhaps we will all be grateful that a massive ark ship like this exists." Ves observed. "We just have to make sure we secure enough tickets for ourselves. I bet a ship as exceptional as this is not built to roam the shallow waters of the Red Ocean. This... may be the first vessel built by red humanity that can realistically traverse intergalactic distances."

In other words, the Whale Ark may very well be constructed for the purpose of reaching Messier 87 or one of its many orbiting dwarf galaxies!

This would truly free red humanity from the limited confines of their current environment and escape one of the many possible dooms that might befall the Red Ocean!

Gloriana frowned. "The Whale Ark does not have to depict a scenario where the final survivors of red humanity must hastily scramble away from the Red Ocean and seek refuge in another galaxy. It may just be a more innocent pioneering ship that is meant to build our civilization's first bridgehead in the periphery of Messier 87."

Her guess did sound plausible, but the stylistic choices that Ves had made caused the depiction of the Whale Ark to gain a desperate quality to it. This did not seem like a painting that was meant to inspire pride and awe in this grand feat of human naval engineering.

Jovy made another observation. "There are no markings or symbols on the visible surface of the 'hull' that can identify the name of the ark ship. It is also unclear who exactly is in control of the vessel. It could be the fleeters, or a coalition of human powers. It may just be a single fleet or faction among the fleeters that have occupied the ark ship."

"Perhaps... the Whale Ark was built in haste." Gloriana threw out a guess. "Her construction had to be rushed in order to give these people enough time to escape from a calamity that would soon befall the Red Ocean."

"Or... the fleeters gave up on our resistance against the enemies that stand against red humanity." Ves made a more ominous guess. "Do you think it is plausible that the fleeters would just give up at the first sign that red humanity will lose the Red War?"

That was a profoundly dishonorable act, and represented a betrayal of the highest order!

Yet... no one could rule out this possibility either!

Those cowardly bastards!

Chapter 5647 Manipulative Guidance

The Zeal had taken on a whole other meaning.

It was no longer just a masterwork version of the Transcendent Punisher Mark III.

The so-called 'finishing touches' that Ves had applied to the mech at the end completely transformed the living mech's value and instantly caused the machine to transcend his own existence!

The mech was still a fantastic fighting machine. Ves had no doubt about that. The addition of the Final Sacrifice alone guaranteed that it had the power to breach all defenses in a desperate situation.

Yet... how could Ves had known that his whimsical idea to paint all kinds of prophetic visions onto the surface of an actual combat mech could make predictions that possessed so much significance that they could actually shape the future policies of red humanity?!

Ves briefly glanced at Jovy.

His friend as well as his permanent minder did not act in his current identity at the moment.

At this moment, Jovy had become a vessel for the higher-ups of the Red Association. Ves could just feel the gazes of multiple powerful but distant figures paying attention to him, the workshop and most importantly the exterior of the Zeal.

On the one hand, it gratified Ves that his work produced an immediate impact that would hopefully give the big shots at the top a little more forewarning of possible disasters on the horizon.

On the other hand, he became frightened by how frequently he attracted the attention of all of those big figures without meaning to! He never actually desired to continually attract their attention to him as if he was an electromagnet!

This unplanned art exhibition was bound to produce consequences that Ves could not foresee or anticipate. The entire future of red humanity might take a drastically different turn because he couldn't resist the urge to add a bit of additional flair to one of his latest masterwork mechs.

Was it for the better, or for the worse?

Ves could not quite tell. As he could feel the attention directed towards the visual depictions of different snapshots of possible futures, he began to feel more wary and apprehensive at what sort of interpretations and conclusions drew from his artwork.

"What is the matter, Ves?" Jovy asked as he turned away from the Whale Ark. "As the artist and one of the chief individuals responsible for producing these insightful images, you possess a unique insight into their nature and meaning. Your input is of great value. If you have any doubts or concerns, just speak."

Ves pressed his lips as he surveyed his gloomy heavy artillery mech once more.

"I have been mulling over several concerns that we really shouldn't ignore. I have questions that I cannot find the answer to. For whatever reason, I am wondering whether this is not a coincidence as I have initially thought. What if there is an intelligent force out there that has deliberately driven me to produce all of these strange future glimpses at this moment in time?"

That caused both Gloriana and Jovy to take Ves' concerns a lot more seriously.

"We do not have any way of proving or disproving this theory." Gloriana said. "Let me ask you this. Do you think it is a force from the present or the future that has induced you to paint all of these prophetic visions?"

Ves shrugged. "I truly do not know, and neither does Ylvaine. It could be either or both. What I do know is that trying to divine the futures of god pilots and the fates of trillions of lives is so costly that Ylvaine should have suffered a massive backlash before I even made my first brush stroke. Nothing comes for free in this cosmos. Why hasn't anything happened? The only logical answer I can come up with is that another power has paid the cost in our stead."

That was a plausible answer, and one that produced a lot of unsettling implications.

"You are correct to be wary about the sequence of events that has led to this result." Jovy said in a steady voice. "However, you are not the only person with a head on their shoulders. Rest assured that there are many analysts within the Association that are capable of following up on these concerns. Do you have any indication of who may be the party who paid this price?"

Ves shook his head. "Not really, but I have a number of possible candidates in mind. For example, the god pilots may have felt my Ylvaine's gaze and somehow chose to give him a break."

A brief pause ensued before Jovy issued a response.

"That has not happened as far as I can say."

"Then... maybe they did so in the future timeline where the First Flame went rogue?"

"I do not think that time works in such a fashion." Gloriana frowned.

Ves shrugged. "Hey, I am just throwing out possibilities. Who knows whether it might be true?"

"What other guesses do you have, Ves?"

"Well, another obvious candidate is the source of E energy radiation." Ves responded. "Ever since the Red Ocean got displayed to this neighborhood, we have been living under Messier 87's golden light ever since. There are so many ways this supermassive galaxy has affected that I cannot even begin to explain. There may be a possibility that a powerful authority hailing from Messier 87 has nudged Ylvaine's predictions along. This is actually the most frightening possibility because there is no way to tell whether that alien power is benign or malicious towards red humanity."

That was indeed one of the more frightening possibilities. Red humanity had already received more than enough indications that Messier 87 and its many powerful aliens likely did not intend to reach out with a hand of friendship to the humans.

They were just too weak to be worth befriending. What was worse was that humanity occupied a dwarf galaxy that was particularly rich in phasewater, which was a strategic exotic that could truly unlock intergalactic travel on a wider scale for any powerful civilization!

There was no way that the overpowering aliens of Messier 87 would bother to give any concessions to the 'weak' natives of the Red Oceans.

If the heavenly authority of Messier 87 actively colluded with its own native alien civilizations, then directing Ves to paint all of these distressing and concerning visions of doom may be part of a convoluted psychological warfare operation.

"It is... possible that your concerns may be valued." Jovy slowly said. "That does not mean we should discard your painted works entirely. We are fully aware that the source of these visions may not have any good intentions towards us. It would not be the first time that information has been used to twist people's minds and induce them into taking action that is ultimately detrimental towards themselves. The Whale Ark for example breeds the association that the Red Fleet has already given up on defending our holdings in the Red Ocean."

As the only major organization that was highly mobile and nomadic in nature, it was much easier for the fleeters to uproot their lives and abandon the rest of red humanity. They kept to themselves so much that people already started to treat them as distant cousins rather than fellow brothers.

Yet was it truly justified to accuse them of the future crime of cutting and running from all of the calamities unfolding in the Red Ocean?

Just the fact that the sight of the Whale Ark could sow further divisions between different groups of red humanity may ultimately benefit the invaders from Messier 87 the most in the end!

"This scenario has yet to come to pass." Gloriana said with a remarkably sober tone. "Ves has yet to kill my baby boy. Knowing that this might happen is not cause for me to divorce my husband and take my children far away from him. It is... wrong to let a single warning completely consume my attention and dictate my behavior. It is more reasonable to live our lives as before, but take a number of targeted precautions in order to prepare for the worst."

Jovy clapped in approval. "Well said, Gloriana! This is our general attitude as well. We cannot let paranoia and excessive fears plunge us in a spiral of self-

defeating actions. We must stick to our principles and retain our humanity as much as possible. Let us do our best to foil the intentions of any malicious actor that is seeking to manipulate us into defeating ourselves."

Anyone could have induced Ylvaine to make so many prophecies of so many powerful beings. Yet with few clues in hand, there was no way to gain any solid answers about their identities and their intentions.

Ves therefore shoved his concerns to the back of his mind and tried to view the remaining prophetic visions with a more humble attitude.

The sixth major artwork that the group of three paid attention to was a piece of work that evoked a lot more optimism than the other ones.

It depicted an active greater beyonder gate that was disgorging a fleet of different vessels, each of which possessed distinct red human characteristics such as phasewater technology and hyper technology that looked more advanced than anything used in the present!.

What was surprising about this image was that the greater beyonder gate was also surrounded by mechs and warships that lacked these distinct features.

Combined with several other clues such as the light of the local star and the heavy defensive works surrounding the gate, Ves and the others quickly identified the location where this future event was supposed to take place.

"That is Maryun Ultima!" Gloriana gasped. "This is the original primary gate system where so many human immigrants have traveled to in order to enter the Red Ocean. Now that our future fleets have returned to Maryun Ultima, does that mean that we have successfully regained a channel that can take us to our home galaxy?"

Though that sounded like good news, neither Ves nor Jovy looked as optimistic about this possible development.

"I thought that red humanity has already severed all ties with original humanity." Ves spoke.

Jovy nodded. "That should be the case. We cannot control for more hidden channels, but we still stand by our official stance. The greater beyonder gate in Bridgehead One shouldn't even be able to

connect to its counterpart in Maryun Ultima before. Even if we disregard the enormous distance, we have already begun the transformation of our own gate. This is an irreversible process."

Yet somehow, there was a future timeline where red humanity managed to get back home anyway.

Did the Red Two secretly build up another greater beyonder gate and hid it somewhere really quiet?

This was a realistic possibility!

Ves did not ask whether this was the case. He knew better than that. What matters was that returning to the Milky Way Galaxy was not as impossible as he thought. That was good news in itself. It at least informed him of another possible escape route. It also generated hope that the two different branches of humanity might be able to resolve their differences and join as one again.

However, as Ves continually perceived the sense of doom and gloom from the Zeal, he had to take into account that this scenario was not as optimistic as it appeared on the surface!

"Has red humanity fled from the new frontier in defeat?" Ves wondered. "Maybe these are the only surviving red humans left."

"It is unlikely for the greater beyonder gate on the other side to remain intact if that was the case." Gloriana said.

"The differences between our two peoples will diverge more and more over time." Jovy carefully stated. "Once enough time has passed where our civilizations have developed in near-complete isolation, we may no longer have the capacity to see each other as a single people and race. Those differences are bound to produce conflicts. What is the name of this painting?"

"The Triumphant Return to the Milky Way."

"I see."

Returning to the Milky Way may not be the triumphant return as the artwork suggested, but there were no clear indications why this was the case.

It was not until they viewed the next image that they saw what the red humans might wreak once they returned 'home'!

Gloriana immediately looked concerned. "Is that... Old Earth?"

"It looks like it. The continents and other planetary features match up." Ves said.

"Then why does it look as if it is in the middle of getting blown up from an explosion that originates from its core?"

"Uhhh..."

Chapter 5648 The First Glimpse

Everyone who was familiar with the Destroyer of Worlds knew about her penchant of blowing up planets.

This was the feat that she was famous for. Though she utilized this capacity only sparingly as resource-bearing planets were too valuable to blow up casually.

Nonetheless, the Rubarthans demonstrated little restraint as they eagerly utilized the planet-busting capacity of the Destroyer of Worlds in all kinds of propaganda!

Every admirer of the god pilots knew what it looked like when one of the overpowering shells punched through the surface of a terrestrial planet and buried itself deep into the core.

Once the supremely empowered shell had taken root in the center of the planet, the resulting blast was so cataclysmically powerful that entire continents and planetary layers sundered apart as the pieces launched out into different directions!

The global ruptures and the release of so much magma caused the dying planets to look like a cracked eggshell for a brief moment of time before they no longer resembled any cohesive planetary masses anymore!

That was what made the current image so striking. It purportedly showed the instant destruction of the ancestral home planet of the human race. The significance of such a supreme act of interstellar vandalism couldn't be overstated.

This was nothing less than a desecration of the human race's most precious heritage!

It was a crime that was worse than killing one's own mother.

While the vast majority of humans alive today had never set foot on Old Earth, let alone come anywhere close to the Sol System, the home planet was still seen as the ultimate mother of their entire race!

This made this depiction a lot more unbearable to its current viewers. Ves and the others would not feel so emotional about this prophetic vision if the central subject was any other planet.

Ves would not shed too many tears if Davute VII, Bortele III or New Constantinople VIII ended up dying after getting struck by the enormous might of the Ragnarok.

Yet because the planet just happened to be a planet that occupied a central place in human culture and civilization, he could not dismiss this prophetic vision as easily as he would have liked!

"The Destroyer of Worlds surely has a good reason to destroy Old Earth... correct?" Gloriana doubtfully asked.

"Destroying Old Earth should be the absolute last resort for any genuine human." Jovy said in a firm tone. "Even if hundreds or thousands of years have passed since the start of the Age of Dawn, red humanity should not have diverged to the point where we have developed strong contempt towards the planet that has spawned and nurtured our race. Be careful. Do not let this provocative vision steer your thinking in the wrong direction."

Seeing Old Earth get blown up like this caused Ves to develop stronger concern towards the secret cooperation between his mother and Divine Irine Mox.

In his first real talk with the Destroyer of Worlds, he learned that she and many others had become desperate for power.

Just as how the First Flame sought to speed up his cultivation no matter the cost to himself, the Destroyer of Worlds also became desperate enough to contemplate extreme measures to reach the fourth major cultivation rank as soon as possible.

There were good reasons why many cultivation methods emphasized stability and steady progress.

Trying to take shortcuts that weakened one's foundations and introduced more and more flaws may ultimately produce a backlash that would have devastating consequences for the cultivator!

The Suppression of the Dark Phoenix showed a possible scenario where the First Flame had pushed himself too far beyond his limits.

Was this a cause where the Destroyer of Worlds suffered a backlash in her demonic cultivation and went rogue?

This was a possibility that Ves could not dismiss!

"The planet may appear to be Old Earth... but may not be the planet we are all thinking about." Jovy said. "There are dozens of highly accurate replicates of our ancestral home planet in the Greater Terran United Confederation alone. No one has yet to create a replica of our home planet in the Red Ocean as far as I am aware of, but that may change in the future."

He was right. There was nothing about this image that could definitely prove that the destroyed planet was humanity's home planet in the Milky Way.

What if the planet in this prophetic vision was actually the replica of Old Earth that General Axelar Streon and Gaia sought to create to further their own ambitions?

Though it was still bad for the Destroyer of Worlds to destroy all of their hard work for inexplicable reasons, Divine Irene Mox at least did not have to bear the ultimate crime of breaking humanity's true home planet.

There was not enough detail or other distinctive features that could enable viewers to pin down the exact version of Earth that had attracted the ire of the Destroyer of Worlds.

"The title of this piece isn't particularly helpful either. It is merely called Forced Destruction."

That did not really add much context to the image.

There was no reason for Ves to linger any longer in front of this piece. He felt distinctly uncomfortable by the subject matter and wanted to get away from this sight sooner rather than later.

They moved to the eight major artwork that happened to depict a frozen scene in the middle of a desperate battle.

Everyone's expression grew grim and tense as they saw a single god mech trying to fight its way out while being surrounded by over a dozen ancient phase whales!

The angle and timing of this shot was almost perfect.

It showed the ferocity of the enormous ancient phase whales surrounding the beleaguered god mech.

It showed the fury and overwhelming power channeled into the gigantic energy manifestation generated by the Fist of Defiance!

It also showed the energy manifestation as well as the underlying god mech suffering heavy blows by alien attacks that were both transphasic and hyper in nature!

"It is not a secret that the Fist of Defiance becomes stronger whenever he faces greater resistance." Gloriana said. "However, it would be absurd for His Divinity to grow more powerful without any restraining factors. There has to be a limit to his ability to amplify his combat power. He would

have long been sent out to the depths of the Red Ocean so that he could single-handedly defeat the leaders of the Red Cabal."

Ves nodded in agreement. "I think you're right. I think... the Fist of Defiance might not be able to outfight his way out of this scenario. This peace is called the Final Act of Defiance. This is a last stand. I don't know how strong the Invictus can be when it no longer holds back, but the god mech is not fighting against the phase whales of the past anymore. These future alien powerhouses clearly demonstrate spatial abilities that are further empowered by hyper technology."

This was grim but not particularly surprising news. E energy radiation affected everyone in the Red Ocean. There was no way the phase whales and the other indigenous aliens would be unable to figure out a way to make use of E energy in their own way.

No matter how far behind the native aliens may be in this particular field, the treacherous actions of the cosmopolitans would ensure that the Red Cabal would benefit from a lot of human wisdom in its attempts to leverage E energy.

Therefore, it was very realistic to imagine that a pod of hyper phase whales might succeed in defeating the Fist of Defiance, especially if he was by himself!

Ves grew a bit concerned about this prophetic vision. It showed that the god pilots were not invincible and could still be torn down by overwhelming numbers.

Once the Fist of Defiance fell in battle, red humanity would instantly lose one of its longtime stalwarts and protectors!

The ripple effects would be enormous. Not only would red humanity's defensive line expose a huge gap that could not easily be compensated for, but the loss of morale among the humans would be even more devastating!

Naturally, there was no need for Ves to ask whether the mechers grew concerned about this scene.

The Fist of Defiance was one of the staunchest and most important guardians of the Red Association!

His fall would hurt the mechers the most as the sheer difficulty of trying to defeat a god pilot who grew stronger when the odds were stacked against him was a nightmare.

The value of the Final Act of Defiance was not quite clear. Since this battle depicted a fight between more than a dozen moon or planet-sized combatants, the detail level was too low to show any distinctive clues that could narrow down the time range of this possible event.

Ves simply shrugged as he gave up on trying to derive more clues out of this image. He was sure that the astute and clever mecher analysts could do a much better job in this regard.

"There are several more prophetic visions to go until we have seen them all." Gloriana mentioned. "Let us go through them quickly. I do not know whether I can handle this much longer. The future of our civilization is in peril. Too much can go wrong. If even a couple of these events come true, then that already spells disaster for all of us. Knowing that all of this might actually happen is different form of torture."

Ves wordlessly nodded. They were all being cursed by knowledge once again.

"Now this is different."

What they saw was a magnificent army of powerful alien beings that appeared to be insectile in nature.

These insects were clearly sapient, as they positioned themselves in neat rows and formations that spoke of deliberate and conscious direction.

The insects showed many individual variations. Their exoskeletons were especially diverse as different exotics and methods of integration caused them to look like characters in a popular virtual reality game that had all dressed themselves up with wildly different cosmetic items.

Regardless of their individual expression, there was still a clear order to the formation of this alien army. Their overall sizes and positioning indicated that there was a clear division based on age, caste, subspecies or more.

The most central figure looked the most impressive. A bright light exuded from the leading insect organism. The apparent leader figure conveyed so much power and authority that the painting succeeded in conveying a minute portion of her immense powerful but undeniably alien aura!

"This... this is similar to glow!" Gloriana gasped!

"There is no insectile alien species that remotely resembles these aliens in the Red Ocean." Jovy said. "The strong and proficient control over E energy demonstrated by the larger and more imposing alien organisms implies that they are native to a different galaxy entirely."

That caused both Ves and Gloriana to widen their eyes!

"You mean... these may actually be enemies originating from Messier 87?!" Gloriana almost shrieked.

"Yes. Congratulations. This should be the first time that you have come across a possible depiction of the natives of the regional supermassive galaxy. What is this artwork called, Ves?"

"Insects of Light." Ves replied. "I have nothing more to say, other than that I think this race is extremely strong."

"There is no clear sign of conventional technology in this image."

"I know, Gloriana. If they are truly natives of an extremely high-energy environment, then they may not have any need for technology like ours. They can already do a lot on their own just by leveraging the huge concentration of E energy in the environment!"

Jovy started to look more critically at the image.

"As much as the extragalactic aliens seem interesting, I am more interested in the context of this scenario. In my eyes, the powerful insectile aliens may have formed an impressive greeting party in order to receive a visitor that demands their respects. Do you see the shadowy figure on the other side of the alien procession? That is clearly a humanoid figure, but the scale of this image is so grand that there are too few details that can allow us to determine his or her identity. All we can see is that the non-insectile visitor is garbed in black."

That certainly did not evoke any positive associations.

Chapter 5649 Shattered Expectations

It was undeniable that the insectile aliens were powerful. They did not appear to possess great physical might, but as natives to a galaxy that was saturated with E energy, their species had emerged and evolved alongside this powerful force for an innumerable amount of generations!

Ves felt that the alien insects may share a greater resemblance to the Alshyr race than a tool-based race like humanity.

These were amazingly powerful creatures that probably relied on their natural gifts to achieve supremacy as opposed to relying on highly sophisticated external tools.

It was difficult to determine the exact power of the individual aliens in the image. Most of them did not appear to be too strong as they primarily served as decoration in this instance.

It was the leading alien that generated the greatest amount of concern. Ves was somehow able to integrate a small part of her extraordinary charm in the Insects of Light. This heavily implied that she was at least as powerful as a True God!

However, the prophetic vision ultimately generated far more questions than answers. A single snapshot of the future could only convey a limited amount of information.

Though Ves found it incredibly interesting that he was able to get a glimpse of a powerful alien race native to Messier 87 far in advance, it did not actually change his life all that much.

So what if there was a powerful race of intelligent insects in the supermassive galaxy? Ves was not able to interact with them in any way so long as he was separated from them by an enormous distance!

The image showed far too little about the nature and the properties of these alien insects. Ves had no idea how powerful they were and what abilities they might possess. There was no way for him to develop any specific counters towards their species as their fighting methods were unknown.

"Let's move on." Ves suggested.

"Sure."

The tenth image was one of the least clarifying images that they had seen so far. Ves had made a lot of hasty brush strokes that vaguely looked like a hundred or so upright swords.

Each of these swords were in the process of getting cut in half by an extraordinarily powerful sword strike!

While the sight looked vaguely impressive, there were no humans or aliens in the scene that could provide any additional context.

Gloriana crossed her arms. "This is clearly a prophecy centered around Ketis. Can you offer any further clarification, Ves?"

"Not much, honey. All I know is that it is supposed to be called the Culling of the Sword Forest. It is a significant act, but why that is the case, I can't say. I do think that the individual who is doing the culling is likely Ketis, but it may just be a high-ranking swordsman mech."

This image was one of the worst as it failed to convey any coherent early warning or message.

There was not much for the group of mech designers to say as the prophetic vision simply did not go out of its way to explain itself to its viewers.

Jovy offered his own insight at this time.

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Perhaps we are not the target audience of this prophecy. If Ketis is able to see this illustration in person, there is a reasonable probability that she will be able to derive much greater meaning from this simplistic image."

That was a plausible theory. Ves intended to wait until the Zeal finally got shipped back to the expeditionary fleet. Once the living masterwork mech returned to his battle partner, Ketis could easily stop by and take a look before sharing her findings.

There were only 3 images left after this one.

The next prophetic vision at least had the courtesy of depicting a clear scene.

It showed another greater beyonder gate. This one was different from the one in Maryun Ultima.

The enormous metallic ring had gone through an extensive reconstruction process that significantly altered its functionality and turned it into a tool that was meant to serve red humanity alone!

This should have been an inspiring sight if not for the fact that it was very clearly broken!

"This artwork is called Shattered Expectations. I can see why it has earned this title."

"The gate... has shattered into pieces." Gloriana stated the obvious. "And not gently either. Look at all of the scarring. Look at all of the traces of battle damage. A great battle has ensued that finally breached through all of the defensive layers that kept it protected."

"The enemies who targeted the gate had to defeat a lot of mechs and warships along the way. Look at all of the debris that is floating in the background. Those are very clearly wrecked mechs and fleet assets" Ves pointed out. "I've experienced my fair share of battles. I've learned how to derive a lot of clues by examining the patterns of a debris field. Right now, the sheer quantity of wreckage suggests the enemy targeted the greater beyonder gate in a frontal attack. It is a pity that I can't identify any debris belonging to the attacking force. There are no obvious remains from alien phasefighters and warships."

Jovy had remained quiet at this time as the subject matter of this prophetic vision was highly disturbing.

The Deep Strike Plan originally advocated by the Fist of Defiance hinged on the capacity for red humanity to strike at their alien foes where they were weak!

Only by wreaking havoc behind enemy lines and forcing the numerically superior major alien races to redeploy much of their warfleets back to defending their hinterland would red humanity be able to gain a lot more breathing room!

The shattering of the greater beyonder gate might not put it out of commission on a permanent basis. Perhaps enough of it remained intact for the Red Two to put the pieces back together and replace all of the broken parts with fresh ones.

However, the delay would be devastating for red humanity as it would probably take years if not decades before it could function again!

"You have done us a great service, Ves." Jovy eventually spoke up again. "This is the most useful and actionable early warning message that we have received. Look at the designs of the warships and mechs. They are too far away from this perspective for us to make out any details, but their

color schemes look completely identical to the units currently garrisoned in Bridgehead One. Look at the intact surface modules of the broken greater beyonder gate. The one in this image is at a much more advanced stage of transformation than the one that exists in the present. However, I have received word from a reliable source that the gate that you have painted has not yet completed its final phase of reconstruction. It has only reached as far as the penultimate phase."

Ves and Gloriana both widened their eyes as they instantly figured out the implications of this piece of information.

"You mean that you can accurately estimate when this attack is supposed to take place based on the schedule and planning of this enormous makeover project?!"

"Yes." Jovy responded with a genuine smile. "However, this is only the case if your prophetic vision is accurate and if the reconstruction process has not encountered any unexpected setbacks and delays. It is not 100 percent certain that anything will happen during the calculated time interval of this surprise attack. Any measures we take to bolster our defenses and transfer additional troops to Bridgehead One may produce a butterfly effect where the original attacking force has chosen not to go through with this assault."

"In that case, we will not be able to gain any definitive proof that this prophetic vision has any basis in reality." Gloriana glumly said.

Ves was not as upset about this. "No news is good news in this case. No matter whether the reinforcement of Bridgehead One turns out to be a wasted action or not, at least the gate will remain intact no matter the outcome. That is what matters the most."

"Well said. We will speak about this later. Let us view the remaining two images."

The twelfth prophetic vision resonated with Ves a lot more. This was because he saw the interior of a church.

This was not an ordinary church, however. The tall structure was replete with golden statues and other gilded icons.

A huge mass of worshipers attended service at this time. Most of the figures did not attract any attention, but it was the priests and other church personnel that disturbed Ves.

Each of them had dressed themselves up in white and golden robes that were topped off with golden cat heads or cat ears!

This caused the entire scene to look a lot more absurd. If this was not a clue that a certain ancestral spirit was involved, then the huge statues that clearly depicted the Golden Cat in a stately manner was definite proof that the Larkinsons were involved one way or another!

However, that was not the disturbing part of this image.

What truly set Ves off was the fact that there were actual aliens among the crowd!

"Is that... a nunser?" Gloriana asked in disbelief.

"Yeah. You can't mistake that large quadruped body shape. That really tall guy over there is probably an orven, though I am not entirely sure."

"Look at that ball shape at the front! If I am not mistaken, that should be a puelmer. This is impossible. The puelmer race is perpetually angry and far too arrogant to believe in any gods. They do not even respect the phase whales!"

Ves had no idea how to make sense of this prophetic vision. It was just too absurd for him to take seriously. Humans not only lived in harmony alongside the members of the major alien races of the Red Ocean, but they also shared the same faith!

"The title of this piece is called In the Service of the Golden Cat. It looks pretty normal, but how the hell are aliens mixed inside the crowd? I can't explain it. I really can't. How many years have passed for this to become a normal sight?"

"There is no way for us to discern how far in the future this scene takes place." Jovy commented in a neutral tone. "It may be hundreds or thousands of years in the future. We can be more open-minded in those cases. Our society will look completely different from today. It is not... unacceptable for us to imagine that at least a few alien groups have successfully integrated into human society."

"This is probably another dream come true for the cosmopolitans." Ves grumbled.

He hated the cosmopolitans with a passion. He could not imagine what happened in the years to come that eventually led to this possible result. How could Ves support any outcome that was favorable to an enemy that attempted to take his own life?

This was a lie!

Ves refused to spend any more attention to this artwork and quickly moved on to the final piece.

The style of this image was familiar to him. He had painted a dark and depressing scene once again.

Whether it was a coincidence or not, it showed a single male figure that was literally wrapped up in remarkably powerful chains in the center of a dark chamber. The abundant shadows and the absence of strong light sources made it difficult to get a clear view of the imprisoned individual, but Ves did not need to look at the few identifying markers to infer his identity.

He could instinctively feel that the subject of this prophetic vision... was himself.

With a beard.

"That's me." Ves admitted. "For whatever reason, people have shackled me and wrapped me up in chains to the point where I have become powerless and immobile. They then placed me in a secure chamber that seems as if it is expressly designed to contain me. These guys must be really afraid of what I will do if I am able to break free."

Gloriana developed a strong interest in Ves' visible face. "This is clearly taking place in the far future. You look much older and more majestic in every way. It is a pity that I cannot feel a trace of power from your depiction. I have to say that you look much more mature with this beard of yours. What is this work called?"

"The Sentencing of a War Criminal."

Gloriana actually chuckled at this time. "Why am I not surprised? Your pattern of behavior is... anything but exemplary. Perhaps one day, you have finally violated a taboo that you should not have tested."

Ves could not help but take this warning seriously.

No matter what, he did not want to lose his freedom and get locked away in a dark and lonely cage for who knew how many years!

"I guess... I will pay more attention to my actions. I am NOT going to let this happen."

Ves probably did not have to worry about getting caught and put into chains anytime soon, but there might come a time in the far future where he may actually be treated as a war criminal.

Though he had no idea how he could warrant such a label, Ves vowed to himself that he would never let himself end up in this sorry position!

Chapter 5650 Why Am I Absent?

"We need a moment of time to discuss what must be done." Jovy announced at the end of the impromptu viewing session. "I suggest you settle down for the time being. In the meantime, we should cover up your latest mech. We do not want images of what you have painted on the surface to spread. You should be psychologically prepared that this may be the last time that anyone can view the artistry applied to your machine."

There was no other choice for Ves but to agree. "I understand. Certain pieces of information are too dangerous to spread. I am already happy that my work has contributed to society, although in a much different fashion than I anticipated."

Ves and Gloriana quietly moved to the site and sat down on floating seats. They called in a few snacks to fill up their stomachs.

As both of them tried to make sense of all of the strange and vivid glances of the future, each of them derived different conclusions from what they had seen.

Ves had a lot of material to go through, but the one that struck him the most at the moment was the dark and tragic illustration where a much older version of him received judgment from a tribunal presided by shadowy human figures.

He had so many questions about this event that he did not even know where to begin. How far in the future did this take place? A few decades? A few centuries? Maybe... longer?

If Ves was just a baseline human, then he would have guessed up to 20 years at most. He clearly looked a lot more mature and weathered in every way, but his physical aging had not advanced all that much.

Ves could grow a neatly trimmed beard right now and look up to 80 to 90 percent similar to how he appeared in the image!

However, it was difficult for him to make up for the remaining elements. There were many subtle details on how he acted, how he carried himself and how he still managed to look so damn badass despite being put in a state of helplessness!

Yet no matter how awesome his older self looked, Ves derived no enjoyment from it due to the simple fact that one of his worst nightmares had come true!

What he hated the most was other people having control over his own life. Ves had no idea how powerful he became during the time when this possible event took place, but he clearly had not attained enough power to create enough deterrence.

His future self screwed up big time!

The final prophetic vision spooked Ves so much that he became determined to never let this possible future come to pass.

He had started his first step right away.

Since the Sentencing of the War Criminal happened to a version of Ves that had grown out a beard, one of the ways to defy this exact prophecy from coming true was to keep his chin hairless forever.

Problem solved!

As Ves continued to stroke his hairless chin that was as smooth as a baby's bottom, his wife felt the need to voice her thoughts.

"Why am I not in any of those images, Ves?"

"Huh?"

Gloriana narrowed her eyes at him as she took another sip of her tea. "Do not play stupid, Ves. Filicide and The Sentencing of a War Criminal are most definitely centered around you. In the Service of the Golden Cat is tangibly related to you as I doubt you would allow aliens to worship your creation alongside humans. I suspect that you have played a hand in the scenarios depicted by a number of other prophetic visions as well. Why must your paintings only showcase your deeds and not mine or anyone else's? I would at least expect to see one of our wonderful and excellent children attain prominence. Instead, the only clear trace of them is seeing my son on the verge of getting shot by his own father!"

Though her complaints sounded a bit self-centered, she did raise a number of troubling questions.

Ves thought deeply.

"When Ylvaine cast his sight far and wide, he did not exert any conscious control over the process. Neither did I for that matter. The selection is largely random as far as I can tell. It is only our subconscious desires and other uncontrollable factors that has ultimately led to the selection of thirteen different possible scenes in the future. While I have no proof to back up my theories, I think there is one or multiple forces in the background that have secretly directed Ylvaine's foresight. Aside from that, I think he was only able to capture major turning points in human history. Have you noticed how most of the images describe events that are so massive that they can be recorded in the history books?"

From the return of red humanity to the Milky Way to the breaking of the greater beyonder gate, these were undeniable turning points that could change the futures of entire races and civilizations!

It made a certain amount of sense that when Ylvaine cast his vision far and wide, his sight would be more easily attracted to major events as opposed to minor ones.

That made Ves question whether the second and thirteenth prophetic visions abided by this rule as well.

If he assumed that the execution of his son and the sentencing of himself as a war criminal carried roughly the same weight as a black tide sweeping across half of the Red Ocean, then that said a lot about his future self!

Just as he dreamed, he had definitely become a big shot in the future!

Though he had not grown powerful enough to the point where he became omnipotent and incapable of making errors, he at least gained so much influence that he could not help but star in not one, but several prophecies!

His ego couldn't help but swell when he thought that he had succeeded in climbing higher. He should have become a Master Mech Designer at the very least. Was it possible that his bearded self in the final image had already become a Star Designer?

Of course, it could also be that the prophecies already leaned towards Ves because he was involved.

All in all, the prophetic visions showed so much, but left out even more information. It was extremely dangerous to try to fill up the gaps in the absence of further proof.

"I have decided." Gloriana said as her eyes grew firmer.

"Decided what, honey?"

"I have decided to be more proactive." She told Ves. "The future according to Ylvaine's foresight is not a future in which I would like to live in. Leaving aside cataclysmic events such as the deaths and the loss of control of several god pilots, I do not want to be weak, powerless and absent during periods where you are left to shoulder all of the burdens. Why am I not present in a moment where you were on the verge of pulling the trigger of your Amastendira?"

"There are many possible explanations. You may be working on a really important secret project. You may have evacuated from a dangerous war zone. It could also be that we have fallen out with each other at that time."

There was one other possibility that Ves did not mention. Gloriana... may have already died in those potential future timelines.

If there was one point of reassurance that Ves derived from these prophetic visions, it was that Ves had not done anything terribly stupid to the point where he lost his life!

The Cosmopolitans and his other enemies failed to assassinate him. That granted Ves a lot of relief. It at least showed him that his enemies did not send out a True God or employed a ridiculous superweapon to wipe him out by relying on overwhelming force.

His wife let out a deep breath. "Regardless of what happened that caused me to be left out of the picture, the future is still mutable as long as it has not yet occurred. That gives me a chance to change the variables and attain a better outcome for myself. Perhaps... I should take a page out of your book."

"Hm? What are you talking about, Gloriana?"

"The fact that you have risen so high while I have failed to catch up to you shows that your approach and your penchant for risk-taking may ultimately yield better results than the alternatives."

"Not everyone is cut out for taking risks, honey. It has worked out for me because I have built up my power and always have a backup solution at hand. Don't think that all you need to succeed is to make thoughtless gambles. You not only need to be ready to profit from your wins, but also scramble to limit the damage in case you have lost."

His wife was different from him. She may have traveled alongside Ves over the course of several expeditions, but she had never taken up any responsibility over them. She lacked the practice and the experience to navigate dangerous waters and temper her greed at the right moments.

"Our clan doesn't necessarily need two daredevils at the top." Ves cautiously said. "If you really want to make a greater impact on society, then you should focus on what you are good at. You are different from me. You have your own way of attaining greater success. My generous advice is to stick to your heart and follow your desires if you must."

These were sage words. Gloriana's enthusiasm tempered a bit as she acknowledged his logic. Ves was right that she could not blindly follow another person's path.

That brought a difficult question to the forefront. What was she good at, exactly?

She could design excellent custom mechs. She could fabricate high-quality mechs. She could keep her husband in check. She could cooperate with him to develop fantastic collaboration works. She tried to do her best to be an attentive and loving mother.

While Gloriana had long taken pride in all of these accomplishments, their magnitude and their impact on greater human society was... limited.

Unlike her much more flamboyant husband, she was incapable of earning greater fame by producing shocking feats on a frequent basis.

While Ves pulled out one gamechanger after another, Gloriana continued to quietly work on her mech designs and design philosophy in a predictable fashion.

She finally realized that being stable and predictable was not conducive to innovation and critical success.

If she wanted to reach the height that her husband had reached in those possible future timelines, then she needed to step up and be more proactive.

This was the only way she could think of that would enable her to keep up with him and possibly prevent him from killing her son one day!

As long as Gloriana continued to weigh heavily in his heart, he would never dare to hurt any of her precious children!

Her inner fire began to burn hotter as she assumed a greater mission. The life of her son was at stake! The more successful she became, the more she was able to restrain her husband and reel him in when he went too far!

Her thoughts strayed towards the Dark Zephyr. She already intended to implement a new design solution in the updated version of the expert light skirmisher, but she decided to be even more daring than before!

Now that she had gained her new Arachne 01 Implant Set and allowed her cognitive abilities to fully catch up to the likes of Alexa Streon, there was no reason for her to fall behind anymore!

Her eyes twinkled as she already began to reimagine the Dark Zephyr on a fundamental basis. In order for the living mech to attain a greater level of perfection, she needed to strengthen the mech frame to a degree that was unprecedented among the mechs of the Larkinson Clan!