

The Mech 5781

Chapter 5781 The Third Way

5781 The Third Way

As Ves unfolded his true body to the public for the first time, thereby inadvertently giving much of the public their first actual glimpse of a human phase lord, he successfully grasped the rhythm of the public inquiry by force!

Whether it was to his benefit or not, Ves most definitely commanded the attention of pretty much every red human with his reckless stunt!

The sheer physical and non-physical power radiating on his unrestrained form captivated a lot of people.

No matter how bad their perception may be, there was something fundamental in the ability for life forms to recognize those who were vastly more powerful than themselves.

The people who were physically present in the grand chamber could feel the power contained in Ves' enormous body the most, but the spectators who watched from remote also managed to appreciate the enormous disparity depending on their projection systems.

While many ordinary folk were trying to process what Ves had turned himself into, the principal members of the opposition quickly gathered together after they had previously been pushed from the speaking pit.

Lieutenant-Commander Astrid Jameson looked concerned on the outside, but sounded a lot more jubilant on the secure communication channel about the outburst that she managed to incite from the infamously temperamental mech designer!

[Larkinson has taken the bait! We knew this would happen! He clearly takes after his mother, but clearly lacks her experience and cunning. Our mission is complete. The Devil Tongue will finally sink his cause, with his own speech no less!]

The other members of the opposition generally sounded pleased as well, but Professor Kacuk Chabran did not join in the celebration.

[The session is not over yet. Do not count your chickens before they hatch. Professor Larkinson may yet be able to recover from his disadvantageous position. He has done so in the past. He can do it again. The risk that we will lose all of our gains is small but not negligible. We should have never pursued this risky strategy. If we consolidated our gains from the second session, we would have been able to guarantee an outcome that would have been slightly in our favor.]

That caused the others to dismiss the Terran scholar's overly cautious posture.

[We know you were reluctant about enacting this radical plan, but we cannot afford to settle for a weak compromise.] Master Alice Cantor dismissively responded. [There is no reason to second-guess ourselves when our trap is clearly working as intended. The inexperienced mech designer believes he can demagogue his way out of his problem. He will only exacerbate it as his conduct only reinforces the negative traits associated with cultivators, his mother included.]

Even as Ves readied himself to issue a rebuke against all of the mud that had been flung in his direction, he could faintly feel the smugness radiating from his adversaries.

Ves did not disregard Sigrund's analysis.

He recognized that his impulsive action indeed played into the hands of his opponents.

However, Ves believed he had no choice.

The game was already stacked against him. If playing by the book did not give him a viable pathway towards victory, then he could only flip the board and hope that he could improvise his way to a favorable outcome!

Though Ves did not allocate much time and thought towards figuring out a winning strategy, he already had an overall idea in mind.

It came to him as soon as he metaphorically flipped the board.

Defense was a losing approach.

Ves always operated a lot better when he was on the offense.

He decided to settle on this direction and go all the way!

Forget about defending his mother!

Forget about trying to redeem cultivation!

Forget about portraying his living mechs as cuddly pets!

Ves was done with making excuses!

He wanted to do what he did best, which was to promote something new!

Though he recognized that this was an exceedingly risky plan that would definitely cause him to burn a lot of bridges, he did not want to give his adversaries the satisfaction of remaining smug!

"LISTEN TO ME." His gigantic form repeated as the water completely pressed around him. "YOU ARE ALL MAKING A HUGE MISTAKE."

Despite the fact that the energy shield that he previously wore no longer kept the water out, Ves made another show of power by projecting a spatial barrier around his body!

That elicited a lot of gasps. If people had not recognized what Ves was before, they certainly did now as he had displayed the two most iconic traits of a phase lord!

However, Ves' disruptive actions did not go unchallenged.

A bunch of humanoid mechs adapted for aquatic operation entered the enormous chamber.

They all carried shields and tridents, but most certainly possessed a lot more armaments.

At the same time, transphasic energy shields came to life around Ves. They kept him contained while at the same time protected everyone else from the threat he posed on others.

Ves looked distinctly unimpressed. He retrieved his Oceancaller and sized it up so that it was almost proportionate to his current dimensions.

He proceeded to lift up his powerful artifact and began to play a slow but mysteriously melodic tune.

Nothing happened at first. The security forces were reluctant to make a move due to the risk of harming others.

However, the water that filled the grand hall began to stir around Ves regardless of whether there were any energy shields in the way.

Soon enough, a dramatic occurrence took place.

The Oceancaller's exterior increasingly began to light up as its runes became more and more active!

At the same time, all of the water around Ves spontaneously moved away from him as if he exerted a water-repellant force field!

If that was not enough, his actions also generated a slight whirlpool that caused the remaining water in the chamber to rotate around the speaking pit.

Few people thought that Ves managed to accomplish this through technological means. There was nothing obviously techy about that strange metal flute, and his apparent status as a phase lord showed that he had definitely mastered strange abilities that were far beyond the range of a typical mech designer!

Though Ves did not attempt to break the transphasic energy shield, the threat of doing so held back the security forces from taking more drastic action.

He had already demonstrated his power. Who knew what else he could do with his strange cultivator abilities?

Though security discreetly urged the 100,000 spectators to leave the grand hall for their own safety, all but a few insisted on staying in place!

The privilege of watching the first genuine human phase lord with their own eyes was too compelling for them to cut short!

Ves lowered his Oceancaller and turned in their direction because they were among the individuals that he truly needed to win over.

"BEHOLD MY POWER." He boomed with a deep and powerful voice that came naturally with his empowered physique. "CULTIVATION IS NOT INHERENTLY EVIL. IT IS MERELY THE EXPRESSION AND THE PURSUIT OF POWER. EVEN THE PHASE WHALES AND THE PHASE LORDS OF THE RED OCEAN ARE ENGAGED IN THEIR OWN FORM OF BODY CULTIVATION. EACH RED HUMAN HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME STRONG AS I, ESPECIALLY NOW THAT WE HAVE ENTERED AN AGE WHERE WE HAVE ALL GAINED UNLIMITED ACCESS TO E ENERGY, THE RESOURCE THAT CAN MAKE ANY DREAM COME TRUE. YOU JUST NEED PROPER INSTRUCTION."

He lifted his Oceancaller and made sure that everyone could take a good look at the still-active runes.

"THERE ARE MANY FORMS OF CULTIVATION. IT CAN ALLOW PEOPLE SUCH AS MYSELF TO BECOME POWERFUL TO THE POINT WHERE I CAN FIGHT AGAINST A MECH WITH MY BARE HANDS. IT CAN ALSO ALLOW ALL KINDS OF CREATORS TO PRODUCE WONDERS THAT CAN PRODUCE POWERFUL EFFECTS BY LEVERAGING E

ENERGY. DO YOU THINK THIS IS SCARY? WOULD YOU PREFER THE FIFTH ENFORCEMENT FLEET TO SHIELD YOU FROM ALL OF THESE POSSIBILITIES?"

Hardly anyone was willing to do so. The pursuit of power was still strong in modern human society. They would be crazy to deny themselves the chance to grow as powerful as Ves!

That elicited the smirk from the exposed phase lord.

"DO NOT LISTEN TO THE FOOLS WHO ARE DOING THEIR BEST TO DENY YOU OF YOUR BASIC RIGHT. IF ADMIRAL JAMESON AND HER DESCENDANT HAD THEIR WAY, THEY WOULD HAVE DEPRIVED YOU FROM THIS POWER AND KEPT YOU WEAK AND DEPENDENT ON THEIR PROTECTION. THEY MAY FEAR CULTIVATION BECAUSE IT CAN AMPLIFY THE DAMAGE OF EVERY MALCONTENT, BUT THEIR TRUE MOTIVATION IS TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OVER SPACE PEASANTS."

A contemptuous look appeared on his face. "DO NOT DENY YOURSELF THIS POWER! IN THIS AGE OF WAR AND TRIBULATION, WE MUST EMPOWER AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE. STRENGTH IS THE ONLY GUARANTEE FOR SURVIVAL IN A HOSTILE DWARF GALAXY. CULTIVATION OFFERS AN ALTERNATE PATH TOWARDS POWER THAT IS NOT INHERENTLY GOOD OR EVIL. IT IS A WEAPON THAT CAN BE USED TO PROTECT OR DESTROY, JUST LIKE ANY OTHER WEAPON."

Perhaps his audience might not take his words so seriously if he addressed them as a normal human, but now that he openly displayed his full might, people could not help but take his words at heart!

"WE HAVE DEVELOPED MECHS THAT CAN CARRY ENOUGH ORDNANCE TO DESTROY AN ENTIRE CITY. WE OPERATE WARSHIPS WHOSE ARSENALS ARE SO RIDICULOUSLY POWERFUL THAT THEY CAN DESTROY ENTIRE PLANETS. YET DESPITE ALL OF THE DAMAGE THEY CAN INFLICT ON HUMANITY, WE ARE COMPLETELY FINE WITH THEIR USAGE. WHY IS THIS THE CASE? IT IS BECAUSE WE ASCRIBE GOOD AND EVIL TO THEIR HUMAN WIELDERS, NOT THE WAR WEAPONS THEMSELVES. WHY CAN'T WE ADOPT THE SAME APPROACH TOWARDS THE POSSIBILITIES OPENED UP BY CULTIVATION?"

His words made a lot of sense, and built up to one of his central arguments.

"MAKE NO MISTAKE. CULTIVATION CAN BE DANGEROUS. MAKING IT AVAILABLE TO THE GENERAL POPULATION IS BOUND TO PRODUCE A LOT OF ACCIDENTS AND DISASTERS. FOR EVERY HERO WHO BRAVELY UTILIZES HIS POWER TO DEFEND OUR HOMES AGAINST THE ALIEN INVADERS, A MURDEROUS MONSTER SUCH AS MY VERY OWN MOTHER MAY EMERGE AS WELL."

This surprising admission caused people to temper their hopes a little.

"SO WHAT? WHY BE SCARED WHEN THERE IS SO MUCH POWER WITHIN YOUR REACH? TAKE YOUR SAFETY INTO YOUR OWN HANDS! DO NOT ENTRUST YOUR ENTIRE SAFETY TO MECHS AND WARSHIPS! ABUSES ARE INEVITABLE, BUT CULTIVATORS ARE NOT FERAL. THEY CAN BE CONTROLLED. SO LONG AS ANY CULTIVATOR RECEIVES THE RIGHT INCENTIVE, THEY CAN BE PERSUADED TO FIGHT AGAINST OUR REAL ENEMIES, THE ALIENS WHO SEEK TO MAKE OUR RACE EXTINCT!"

Ves was approaching his second central argument.

"I AM SICK AND TIRED OF ALL OF THE DIVISION BETWEEN MECHS, WARSHIPS AND NOW CULTIVATION. WHY CAN'T WE ALL SIT DOWN AND RECOGNIZE THAT THEY ARE ALL VALID AND EFFECTIVE TOOLS TO EMPLOY AGAINST OUR REAL ENEMIES? EXCLUDING ANY OF THEM WILL SET BACK THE WAR EFFORT. CASUALTIES ARE CONTINUING TO MOUNT. IT IS QUESTIONABLE WHETHER WE WILL HAVE ENOUGH INTACT MECHS AND WARSHIPS LEFT TO RESIST THE ONSLAUGHT. IF WE CAN ADD HUMAN PHASE LORDS ALONG WITH OTHER KINDS OF PHASE LORDS TO OUR DEFENSIVE FORCES, WE CAN SAVE FAR MORE HUMAN LIVES THAN WILL BE LOST BY THE OCCASIONAL CULTIVATOR LOSING CONTROL!"

Ves truly envisioned a possible future where the artificial barriers between mechs, warships and cultivators collapsed.

Why did they have to fight against each other when they could clearly achieve comprehensively better results by combining forces?

The audience clearly looked swayed by this argument, prompting Ves to press on ahead.

"YOU HAVE HEARD THE FLEETER DESCRIBE MANY OF THE KILLINGS, MASSACRES AND OTHER VIOLENT DEEDS PERPETRATED BY MY MOTHER. WHILE I AM SINCERELY APOLOGETIC THAT MY MOTHER SAW CAUSE TO COMMIT THOSE AWFUL CRIMES, THE EXAMPLE SHE HAS SET ONLY STRENGTHENS THE NEED FOR A MORE PROACTIVE AND SENSIBLE APPROACH TOWARDS CULTIVATION. DO NOT EXPECT IT TO REMAIN OUT OF REACH. THERE ARE FAR TOO MANY REMNANT TRACES OF THE SECRET ORGANIZATION IN OUR SOCIETY TO STAMP THEM ALL OUT. RATHER THAN TRY TO SUPPRESS IT, WE SHOULD EMBRACE IT, JUST LIKE WE HAVE DONE IN THE DISTANT PAST!"

His eyes burned with passion and conviction as he was finally to present his ultimate proposal!

"IT HAS BECOME CLEAR TO ME THAT NEITHER THE RED ASSOCIATION NOR THE RED FLEET ARE PROPERLY EQUIPPED TO ADMINISTER CULTIVATION IN OUR SOCIETY. THEY ARE FAR TOO ORIENTED TOWARDS MECHS AND WARSHIPS RESPECTIVELY TO TREAT CULTIVATION BY ITS OWN MERITS. RATHER THAN ALLOW THESE CLUMSY ORGANIZATIONS TO BUMBLE AROUND, I PROPOSE WE FOUND A THIRD REGULATORY INSTITUTION WHOSE MANDATE SOLELY EMPOWERS IT TO GOVERN THE WEAPON KNOWN AS CULTIVATION!"

What?!

Neither Jovy, nor Sigrund, nor anyone else had any inkling that Ves would be crazy enough to present such a crazy idea!

Ves managed to provoke more shock, surprise and outrage with his radical suggestion than he had done by unveiling his true body!

The mere notion of creating another competitor to the Red Two was such a heretical idea that no one else had the guts to voice this proposal in public!

Of all of the people in the Red Ocean, only Ves had the fame and the courage to make this exceedingly risky move!

"THE AGE OF CONQUEST WAS DOMINATED BY WARSHIPS. THE AGE OF MECHS WAS OBVIOUSLY SHAPED BY MECHS. THE AGE OF DAWN IS BOUND TO BE DEFINED BY CULTIVATION. THAT DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE LATTER WILL TAKE OVER EVERYTHING. IT CAN EXIST AS AN EQUAL HUMAN WEAPON ALONGSIDE MECHS AND WARSHIPS. THE LATTER TWO HAVE ALREADY COEXISTED UNDER AN ATTENTIVE REGIME. ADDING ANOTHER COMPONENT TO THIS STRUCTURE WILL NOT BREAK THIS MODEL."

People were much less confident about that. The Big Two and by extension the Red Two had reigned above their heads for so long that they could not imagine what would happen if a third major player joined their group!

Ves didn't seem to harbor any fears about what could go wrong.

"NOW THAT I HAVE MADE MY PROPOSAL, I AM ASKING YOU WHETHER YOU AGREE WITH ME OR NOT. THE NEW ASSOCIATION CENTERED AROUND CULTIVATION IS NOT MEANT TO REPLACE THE RED TWO, BUT IS MEANT TO COEXIST ALONGSIDE OUR EXISTING INSTITUTIONS. IT CAN EVEN BE LED AND MANAGED BY EXISTING MECHERS AND FLEETER FOR ALL I CARE! IF YOU WANT TO DENY THE FIFTH ENFORCEMENT FLEET AND GAIN ACCESS TO THE ABILITY TO WIELD RAW POWER LIKE MYSELF, THEN VOICE YOUR SUPPORT! WHO IS WITH ME, RED HUMANITY!?"

A few awkward seconds ensued as absolutely no one in human space succeeded in summoning the courage to back Ves' crazy proposal.

However, a small flame began to appear inside the air pocket surrounding his true body.

Those flames slowly formed into a familiar-looking god cat!

"<nullb>MIEW!"

Ves grinned at Emma's appearance.

His gamble paid off! He knew that he could count on her support!

"THE DESTROYER OF WORLDS HAS SECONDED MY PROPOSAL! WHO ELSE AGREES WITH THE NECESSITY OF FOUNDING A THIRD ASSOCIATION?"

Just moments later, another powerful presence emerged!

This time, it came in the form of a physical projection that nonetheless radiated far more power than Ves in his full physical form!

Every red human was able to recognize the human figure that emerged. Her appearance and her aura were so unique and distinctive that her identity became clear right away!

"<nullb>I SUPPORT YOUR INITIATIVE."

The Evolution Witch had spoken!

Chapter 5782 Breaking Point

5782 Breaking Point

It was as if all of red humanity collectively froze for a moment.

Then, every single person in the grand hall descended onto their knees as they greeted the arrival of the god pilots with utmost respect.

Many people who viewed the broadcast from afar did likewise even if they were many light-years away from the actual venue.

They rose up a short moment later, but meticulously remained silent in order to avoid disturbing the powerful new arrivals.

No one knew what else they were supposed to do at this time.

An unthinkable event took place!

The magnitude of what Ves had spontaneously unleashed onto human society was so disruptive that no one could dismiss his words anymore!

He had done the unthinkable. He did what many people always wanted to do but never had the power or the courage to voice their forbidden intentions in public.

He challenged the hegemony of the human race.

For the entire duration of the Age of Mechs, the Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance reigned supreme over humanity.

Though they refrained from outright taking over every territory of every single star nation that existed all of the time, their overwhelming military might easily enabled them to take charge of many of the institutions that actually mattered.

As much as they couched their mission and their public image in a benevolent slant, at the end of the day they had become the latest tyrants to rule over human civilization.

The Red Two at the start of the Age of Dawn sought to extend this pattern.

They were doing a decent job at that so far. The arrival of exotic radiation had forced them to adapt to the changing circumstances, but their existing foundations were so strong that their grip on red humanity remained strong.

Careful adaptations such as the Deep Strike Plan, the New Elites Program and the Auxiliary Fleet Program enabled the mechers and the fleters to retain much of their existing power base while placating the most immediate needs of space peasants.

Ves was sure that the Red Association and the Red Fleet already had plans in store for the latest phenomenon that was gradually permeating through people's lives.

Cultivation was too universal, too accessible and too dangerous to be left unchecked.

Given the secretive behavior of the mechers and the fleters, they likely drafted different plans on how to gradually manage the introduction and the takeover of cultivation in the following years.

Different factions had different goals and priorities, which complicated this entire process.

The Fifth Enforcement Fleet obviously wanted to ban it in its entirety, or at least lay the groundwork of imposing heavy regulations.

Their gambits during the public inquiry could be regarded as one of the centerpieces of their strategy.

Ves recognized now that Admiral Amelie Jameson and her ilk never targeted his living mechs specifically, but wanted to use him as a vehicle to advance their actual goal, which was the suppression of cultivation as a whole.

All of this was fine except for one fact.

Ves never asked to be used in this way.

To run roughshod of his rights and completely disregard his interests in order to achieve a greater goal rankled him to no end!

Ves truly hated the Fifth Enforcement Fleet.

He hated the Jamesons for being able to bend the rules whenever they wished.

He despised the old-fashioned fleeters who were so paranoid of an old threat that they resorted to dirty measures in order to cripple its resurgence.

Though Ves was not willing to kill them if he met them on the street one day, these obstinate fleeters had pushed him so much that he wanted to ruin their day in any way he could!

It was through that explosion of rage and fury that he suddenly came up with the most crazy but brilliant plan he conceived during a crisis.

Why not add a competitor to the Red Two?

The Red Association and the Red Fleet may behave like enemies to each other, but when it came to their power duopoly, they were united on this issue.

The mechers and fleeters hated it when they had to share power with others!

Ves knew for certain that he could royally piss off Admiral Amelie Jameson and her Fifth Enforcement Fleet if he proposed to add a major competitor to the Red Fleet. He would permanently burn his bridges with a powerful fleet that hated weirdos with a passion and had plenty of practice squashing them down.

He would make enemies with a lot of other people as well. Ves had no idea whether the more moderate and open-minded fleeters who were previously supportive of living mechs would still have his back after he threatened their fundamental power base.

The Red Association was another big concern. The mechers stood to lose just as much as the fleeters if they had to share power with a third human super-organization!

If he did not handle this situation well enough, he would paint such a giant target on his back that he wouldn't be surprised if an RF dreadnought appeared in orbit of Ector V and launched a weapon of mass destruction on Charvey in the hopes of killing Ves on the spot!

Ves would have never dared to take this risk if he was in a calmer and more rational mood.

The clever way to go about it was to float this proposal through proxies or anonymously. There were plenty of ways for Ves to circulate the idea of founding a new cultivation association.

Announcing it directly was a lot more dangerous, but also had a much greater chance of eliciting support from the major leaders and factions of red humanity!

His famous identity and the huge amount of attention drawn by the public inquiry made it impossible for his proposal to get dismissed out of hand!

Still, it was one thing to listen to his proposal.

It was another thing to actually respond to it! Anyone who backed Ves up would directly challenge the legitimacy and the interests of the Red Two!

However, he did not choose to flip the board to such an astonishing degree because he wanted to screw the Fifth Enforcement Fleet over before committing suicide.

He recognized a fleeting opportunity to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

Ves keenly recognized numerous vulnerabilities that he could exploit as long as everything went in his way.

The first vulnerability was that the Red Two were not universally popular.

They had made plenty of enemies, and there were bound to be a lot of people who were more than willing to take them down a notch.

They just did not dare to do so by themselves because they would turn themselves into targets to the most powerful humans in the Red Ocean.

The second vulnerability was that the mechers and the fleters were not that homogenous and united.

Both the Red Association and the Red Fleet were divided into different factions. The Fifth Enforcement Fleet sat on one end while the Transhumanist Faction sat on the opposite end of the spectrum.

The former hated his guts, but the latter was a lot more sympathetic to his ideas!

The third vulnerability was that god pilots were not logical beings.

They were willpower made manifest. They used to be humans who pushed their willpower to an insane height by being more stubborn, mule-headed and committed to their personal convictions and ideologies than anyone else!

While they were old, wise and intelligent enough to understand the greater picture, they were more than willing to throw aside carefully laid plans as long as their ambitions and principles were at stake!

Even though Ves had made an exceedingly dangerous gamble by proposing the formation of a third major organization, he knew that he would have a slim but realistic chance of getting away with it as long as he managed to elicit the support of a single god pilot!

Even though they were intimidating as hell, god pilots were not all that different from other high-ranking mech pilots.

If there was one group of people that Ves knew how to appeal towards, it was mech pilots.

He knew how they thought.

He knew what made them tick.

He knew how to earn their respect.

He knew how much value they placed in their conviction.

This was why he specifically targeted two god pilots with his seemingly suicidal speech!

The Destroyer of Worlds was the most likely god pilot to come to his aid. She genuinely recognized that she had only managed to become as powerful as she was today with his help. As far as she was concerned, he made her. The gratitude she owed him was immense.

Given this enormous personal debt, a god pilot would be more than willing to violate any prohibition, order or political consideration to help a genuine friend and benefactor in need!

Ves would have already been able to save his hide with Emma's highly welcome appearance, but that did not necessarily mean his proposal could get off the ground.

If he truly wanted his proposal to get taken seriously, then he needed the support of more than just a Rubarthan god pilot.

He needed the backing of at least one powerful leader from the Red Association.

This was why he had set his sights on the Evolution Witch.

Though he had never met her in person, he had collected plenty of information about her. He watched her battle footage and he listened to the personal insights shared by Vector Loban.

From what Ves could surmise, the Evolution Witch was not so much a mech pilot, but more of a woman who was addicted to self-improvement.

In other words, she was a consummate cultivator!

Though she had ostensibly reached the height of her power by taking charge of one of the most important factions of the Red Association, her goals weren't necessarily aligned with the Red Association as a whole.

Ves even knew that as long as he said the right words, he could effectively persuade her into betraying her own organization!

He couldn't help but smirk when her physical projection intruded into the grand hall.

The moment the Evolution Witch took the bait that he had especially laid out for her, Ves knew that he had truly turned the tide!

Planetary Governor Rod Mergan-Castelaus had been rendered completely irrelevant at this time.

No one paid the disgraced moderator any further notice. Not only had he been discredited, there was no way he could bring the proceedings back to order because there was no way a mortal like him dared to instruct an actual god in human form!

The dual appearances of the Destroyer of Worlds and the Evolution Witch had radically shifted the scope of the evolving debate!

The only individuals that could make a decision on this highly consequential were tier 1 galactic citizens.

Everyone else had been relegated to the background.

In order to emphasize this shift, Ves deliberately chose to fold his true body again.

His gigantic form slowly began to return to normal proportions.

Fortunately for his dignity, his nanosuit ensured that he maintained his dignity throughout this transformation.

"<nullb>Miew~"

The remote manifestation of Emma casually approached and dropped into his arms.

The Destroyer of Worlds clearly did not intend to be an active participant of this historic debate.

She deliberately manifested her companion spirit who could only communicate with miewes in order to offer her passive support for Ves. Her actions clearly showed that she would take it as a personal affront if anyone sought to threaten his life!

That was enough. Ves did not ask for anything more. He fully understood that Irene did not want to overstep her boundaries and make an impulsive and emotional decision that would have enormous repercussions for the Rubarthan Pact.

Ves' giant head slowly shifted towards the small human projection that nonetheless radiated entire orders of magnitude more power than himself!

"Your Holiness, I am honored to be graced by your exalted presence. I have heard much about you, and I genuinely admire your journey, your accomplishments and your vision for red humanity. I am pleased that you find common ground with my proposal."

Divine Lucie Miyazaki was an incredibly intimidating god pilot. She was among the younger ones to reach her exalted rank, but she was famed for her aggression and her willingness to resort to drastic measures.

She also did not appear to be that personable up close, unlike Divine Irene Mox.

Even if her power was largely restrained by the huge distance between her actual location and Ector V, being stared at by her physical projection actually exerted a lot of pressure onto Ves!

This was a woman who did not tolerate nonsense!

"<nullb>ELABORATE." The Evolution Witch imperiously commanded to Ves. "<nullb>TELL US YOUR VISION FOR THIS PROPOSED NEW REGULATORY ORGANIZATION."

"I would be happy to do so, Your Holiness."

Chapter 5783 You're A Cultivator

5783 You're A Cultivator

The Evolution Witch did not have to give Ves any more speaking time.

She was more than capable of picking up his proposal and flesh it out according to her own ideas.

The fact that she allowed Ves to expound upon his idea showed that she recognized him and valued his voice on this matter.

She did not just do so because she liked him or trusted his judgment.

It was because he was a convenient vessel to formally present this subversive proposal to the public.

If the Evolution Witch unilaterally took charge of this initiative, then the political dynamic around it would change. It would effectively make it look as if she personally attempted to rebel against the Red Association that she had pledged an oath to protect and defend!

Even if she managed to find a loophole that would allow her to squirm her way out of her responsibilities and support an initiative that directly damaged the interests of the Red Association, the dishonor she brought with her actions would be immense.

However, if the idea continued to belong to Ves, the Evolution Witch would present herself as a powerful individual who was willing to lend her aid to a worthy cause. This would allow her to retain her honor and reduce the amount of objections she incurred.

The key phrase here was 'worthy cause'.

If Ves wanted to drag the Evolution Witch on his metaphorical pirate ship, then he had to frame his radical initiative in a way that genuinely benefited red humanity!

If this was not the case, then recklessly attempting to break the duopoly of the Red Two would only lead to further conflict, chaos and division!

The stakes were high. Ves had jumped onto the back of a very dangerous tiger and had no choice but to ride it all the way. There was no disembarking from the pirate ship that he had personally launched!

His thoughts never stilled from the moment he decided to go all out.

Even though he had shrunk his true body at this time, it didn't really matter because the only way he could win this struggle was through rhetoric and ideas.

Proceeding down this perilous path led to a lot of unknowns. He was bound to make a number of allies among the powerful, yet he would also make a lot more enemies in the process.

Ves found it incredibly difficult to muster up the courage to expand on a plan that was bound to offend numerous tier 1 galactic citizens!

After all, the Red Two was their power base. Harming the Red Association and the Red Fleet directly threatened their own personal interests as well!

"<nullb>MIEW~"

With the attention of all of red humanity on him, Ves took a deep breath and took comfort in the reassuring presence of Emma.

The lovely god cat was so powerful, yet so divinely cute!

Her obvious support and affection gave Ves the injection of courage he needed to resist the overwhelming pressure and follow through with his ambitious plan.

"Red humanity has entered a crossroads since the Great Severing changed our society forever." He addressed the public in a steady voice that did not betray a hint of nervousness. "A distantly familiar phenomenon has returned, one that our race already knows how to harness with devastating effects. As I have stated before, our past legacies that are still preserved in the hands of many old families with long memories can quickly teach us how to harness E energy for good... or evil."

People already had an idea of what that entailed.

Good examples of cultivation were mech pilots and mech designers.

Bad examples were lawless criminals such as his own mother!

The three sessions had already given the public a basic understanding of both, so Ves did not have to explain them all over again.

What mattered was how the organization was supposed to handle them. There were many different organizational models and management strategies that Ves could choose from. Each of them would have enormous implications on the rights, obligations, freedoms and restrictions of cultivators.

Ves decided to go for an approach that he could personally stomach. There was no reason for him to kneecap himself, after all. Since he had been invested with the power to dictate the initial framework of an organization that had the potential to rival the Red Two, he would be stupid if he did not take advantage of this golden opportunity!

"The new as-of-yet-unnamed organization that I am envisioning should roughly be modeled after the Mech Trade Association." Ves explained. "It must be a singular human-wide authority that is invested with the mandate to govern anything that is related to cultivation. However, it must strike a balance between tolerance and enforcement."

Everyone listened carefully to his words. No matter how much or little they thought about the Senior Mech Designer who commanded the attention of all of red humanity, his words would definitely carry a lot of influence towards the true decision makers!

"According to my own understanding of cultivation, I believe that every human will eventually be able to engage with it. Many are already doing so. Mech pilots and mech designers are the most famous examples of cultivators. However, exposure to E energy radiation has made many other forms of cultivation viable. Throughout my journey through the new frontier, I have observed definite signs of cultivation from other groups. Examples include the members of the Hunting Association and even the members of the Red Fleet or the participants of their Auxiliary Fleet Program!"

That last statement finally elicited a shocked reaction from a number of people!

Captain Zonrad Reze looked almost betrayed as Ves casually spilled the secret that he had originally shared.

Lieutenant-Commander Astrid Jameson clearly looked as if she did not believe a word about this outrageous claim!

If not for the fact that two god pilots were present at the moment, she would have tried to challenge him already!

Ves smirked in her direction.

"You can deny it all you want, lieutenant-commander, but the fact of the matter is that you, a member of the most cultivation-averse wing of the Red Fleet, are already a cultivator. Your ancestor is a cultivator along with every other serving member of the Jameson Spaceborn Clan."

The direct accusation was finally too much for the poor RF officer. Her outrage had grown so strong that it exceeded her fear towards the god pilots!

"You are slandering us! We are not cultivators! We are true humans who are tasked with protecting our race from your ilk!"

"Hahahaha!" Ves openly laughed! "That's funny! I am not here to argue with you about the truth. All I can say to you and every other fletcher is to take another look at ARCHIE, your AI evaluation and personnel management system. Do you know how gods are made in the world of cultivation? Do you know that the act of worship doesn't have to be dressed in religious rituals? Do you understand the consequence of having billions of people collectively looking up to a single existence?"

The young officer's eyes widened. She was smart enough to understand his logic, but her dogmatic ideology and animosity towards him prevented her from accepting his claim!

"You are conflating facts! You are making associations that do not exist!"

Ves shook his head in disappointment. "People keep forgetting this fact, but the fact of the matter is that E energy is both psychoactive and psychoreactive. In short, as long as you think about something hard enough, E energy will try to make it true, no matter whether you consciously intended for it to happen or not. The will of the collective is a powerful force, Miss Jameson. The way you fletchers interact with ARCHIE is feeding it to the point where he is evolving from a comprehensive AI into a deity-like cultivator. To reward you for contributing to its growth, ARCHIE subsequently rewards you fletchers by feeding back a measure of its power, thereby making you a little smarter, stronger and better in other ways. This is undeniably a form of cultivation. Don't believe me? Then compare the statistics. I am sure that any proper empirical study will prove my claims."

Astrid had no words anymore. She looked as if her operating system had encountered two conflicting directives and decided to crash.

"This is why a specialized cultivation organization is essential to red humanity." Ves stated as he faced the general audience again. "As you can see, even the Red Fleet with all of its power and knowledge is not equipped to regulate all of the phenomena related to cultivation! Its inherent biases and ignorance towards this power either makes it blind to its dangers, or prevents it from handling it in a constructive manner!"

There was no need for Ves to prove these claims, because the Fifth Enforcement Fleet's conduct throughout this entire public inquiry already proved their validity!

Through a simple twist of words, Ves managed to frame a situation where Admiral Amelie Jameson and her descendant had turned into their own worst enemies!

Their domineering behavior, their clear biases and their unwillingness to consider any reasonable compromises clearly proved to the public that they were not trustworthy and competent enough to regulate cultivation for the benefit of red humanity!

This strengthened the argument that it was better to set up a third major organization.

"You may wonder whether the Red Association may be more qualified to take on this important mandate." Ves said as he addressed the other alternative. "After all, they already have an abundant amount of experience in promoting and regulating two specialized cultivation professions. There are already mechers that are actively engaged in other forms of cultivation. Why not expand their responsibilities?"

That was a good question.

"It is not the best way forward in my opinion." Ves said a few seconds later. "The Red Association is geared towards mechs. It will lose its focus and more if it takes on too many varied responsibilities. Cultivation outside of mechs is so enormous and varied in scope that it is better to handle it separately, despite how they might be related to each other."

There was another reason why Ves felt it was best to keep the two worlds separated.

"More importantly than that, the new cultivation organization needs to be kept in check. Red humanity must not forget what our predecessors have wrought during the twilight years of the Age of Conquest. Cultivators had become mad with power. Their behavior became more rampant because there was nothing else that could keep them in check anymore. We must not repeat that mistake. Checks and balances must be established to keep cultivators in line, and I can think of no better way to do so than to allow the mechers and their true mechs to act as an additional source of deterrence. The Fifth Enforcement Fleet can also serve a similar role if they wish."

As much as Ves wanted to disgrace Admiral Amelie Jameson and demolish her precious Fifth Enforcement Fleet, it was unrealistic for him to fulfill this selfish desire.

The obstinate fleeters needed to be part of the solution in order for this ambitious scheme to work.

Ves presented another concern. "Integrating cultivation in our society will not be easy. It is far more accessible than mechs and warships, since even the mechers and the fleeters can engage in it! Therefore, I do not think it practical to make this cultivation organization exclusive. I propose to do the opposite instead. Everyone must feel welcome under its broad umbrella. The organization must actively welcome the participation of both mechers and fleeters. This will prevent them from conflicting with each other on how to regulate cultivation without allowing it to threaten the existing value of mechs and warships. Inclusivity is paramount. Only by working together can we tame this ubiquitous power and consistently implement fair and safe policies throughout human-occupied space."

This was a heavy compromise. Ves could have insisted on making the new cultivation association more exclusive, but that would have been politically unacceptable to a lot of leaders from the Red Two.

The existence of a third major human organization already shook the foundation of the Red Association and the Red Fleet.

By inviting their members to become a part of the new organization, their objections wouldn't be as fierce anymore.

After all, if they ended up in charge of the new cultivation association, then they might not end up losing any power in the long run!

Ves did not expect it to work that way. The Cultivation Association would become so large and messy that it would never be completely aligned with the existing Red Two.

Mixing mechers, fleters and other adversaries into a single melting pot was a recipe for conflict and disagreements!

If this circumstance came about, then there was no way for either of the Red Two to effectively enact their policies through this new vehicle.

The constant pushback from internal competitors would effectively ensure that the third organization would effectively maintain a considerable degree of separation from the older powerful institutions!

Chapter 5784 Collective Vision

5784 Collective Vision

A lot of people looked confused when Ves insisted on making the third organization inclusive.

They did not understand what it meant or how it would play out over time.

To be fair, not even Ves was able to predict what would happen if a bunch of powerful stakeholders from multiple competing groups all joined the same organization!

This was a problem, because bad governance could easily doom the best of intentions.

"I am sure you are wondering who will get to be in charge of this new cultivation organization," Ves said. "I cannot understate the importance of selecting its initial leaders. These are the visionaries who must define the new association's mission, establish its enormous organizational structure, bestow a lot of subordinates with important responsibilities and formulate impactful policies."

He turned towards the physical projection of the Evolution Witch. The god pilot had crossed her arms and seemed content to listen to his pitch.

"While I envision that the new cultivation organization be led by multiple tier 1 galactic citizens at first, I recognize the need for a single guiding voice. This powerful individual must be responsible for keeping everyone on topic and ensure that a permanent gridlock will not cause the association to become impotent. He or she is not supposed to be the sole decision maker, but must carry enough respect to push an agenda forward. Red humanity cannot afford to remain stagnant on cultivation. If we want to win the Red War, then we must leverage the power of cultivation as productively as possible in the following few years."

He gestured towards the physical projection of the Evolution Witch.

"I can think of no better candidate to become the chairwoman, president or whatever of this new cultivation association than you, Your Holiness! You are one of the eight principal protectors of red humanity, which already speaks to your character and your sense of responsibility. You are powerful enough that no one can disregard your voice. You are young enough to be open-minded towards new possibilities while evading any of the destructive biases that clouds the judgment of elders who lived through the end of the Age of Conquest. More importantly than that, your well-

known interest and expertise on genetics and human evolution makes you more qualified to set the agenda than any other human leader!"

Ves may be overdoing it a bit, but he was genuinely sincere about putting her in charge, at least at the start!

Despite how favorable this recommendation may be, the Evolution Witch did not accept it right away.

"<nullb>THIS IS YOUR VISION, YOUR GRAND DESIGN. WHY NOT PRESIDE OVER THIS NEW ORGANIZATION YOURSELF?"

Ves almost coughed. "I do not believe I am qualified to lead this organization! I am just a mech designer, Your Holiness. As invested as I am in many other aspects of cultivation, my initial and most important vocation is designing mechs. I will still need to rely a lot on the Red Association to further my personal career. As tempting as it may be to lead this new cultivation association, it will only slow down my personal ambitions. I can make far greater contributions to our society if I continue to design living mechs. Besides, I doubt that enough decision makers are in favor of elevating an abnormally young tier 3 galactic citizen such as myself. You are a far better candidate, though there may be other qualified candidates that I am not aware of at this time."

A short pause ensued as the Evolution Witch seemed to ponder over this crucial issue.

Her physical projection eventually issued a succinct reply.

"<nullb>LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE CAN BE DETERMINED LATER. THE MAIN SUBJECT FOR CONSIDERATION IS WHETHER TO ESTABLISH THIS NEW CULTIVATION ASSOCIATION. DO YOU INTEND FOR THIS TO BE ITS NAME?"

Ves shook his head. "Not per se. I do not have a recommendation for it. I suppose that if you want to join the existing Red Two, its name should start with the word 'Red'. I think it is a great idea if we can call it the Red Cabal, but... the aliens have already taken that moniker, if in their own native languages. Maybe we can call it... the Red Collective."

The Evolution Witch along with everyone else considered this name.

"<nullb>EXPLAIN YOUR REASONING."

"The word 'collective' emphasizes inclusivity." Ves elaborated on his choice. "I envision the Red Collective to welcome all human cultivators whether they are mech designers, mech pilots, swordmasters or simply ordinary people who happen to dabble in cultivation. I do not believe it is a good idea to turn it into an exclusive organization like the original Red Two. Cultivators can do a lot of damage to themselves and other people if they are isolated and left to their own devices. It is better to be tolerant towards deviants and provide them with a welcome and mostly nonjudgmental platform to allow them to engage in cultivation in a constructive manner."

That... was an entirely different sort of organization than the Red Association and the Red Fleet!

Opening its doors to anyone meant that there would be no distinction between members and non-members.

The lack of division would make it harder for a small but incredibly elite group of members to lord it over the space peasants.

On the other hand, the overly generous entry conditions meant that a lot of trash and freeloaders would become a part of the Collective, making it more difficult for this new organization to develop a strong and cohesive image.

That was actually what Ves really wanted. The messier and more divided the Collective, the greater the chance that it would leave him and his works alone!

The last thing he wanted was a strong and cohesive authority that frequently imposed all kinds of restrictions on his living mechs!

Ves made a brief bow towards the Evolution Witch. "Of course, this is just my personal vision. It is not up to me to set the name and the membership criteria of the Red Collective. You and anyone invested with the responsibility for setting up this new organization can make these decisions yourselves. I can only add that the ubiquitous availability of E energy makes cultivation so accessible to every red human that you cannot regulate it as strictly as you do with mechs and warships. I think it is much better to extend a welcoming hand to everybody than to deny its benefits to everyone but a select few."

Those were good suggestions, but they still left a lot of open questions.

Ves did not want to overstep his boundaries. He had to be careful about giving enough direction to inspire the public, but also reserve enough room for the actual leaders such as the Evolution Witch to put their own stamp on the idea.

The god pilot in question slowly nodded in approval.

"<nullb>I APPROVE OF YOUR VISION. I AGREE WITH YOU. CULTIVATION SHOULD BE A UNIVERSAL RIGHT FOR RED HUMANITY. EVERYONE DESERVES A CHANCE TO OVERCOME THEIR WEAKNESS."

This was to be expected from the Evolution Witch. Her difficult life journey where she constantly had to break through in order to outpace her congenital ailments had fundamentally shaped views towards human evolution.

Even if other forms of cultivation were not identical to her own, they still possessed enough similarities for the Evolution Witch to support them on principle!

The other god pilot who had shown up voiced her opinion in a much more direct manner.

"<nullb>MIEW."

That was clarifying.

The time for elaboration had come to an end. Ves had already sketched a basic layout on a canvas. It was up to the real movers and shakers of human civilization to decide whether to agree to the formation of the Red Collective.

Passing this proposal would lead to drastic changes throughout society.

The implications were massive.

Red humanity would diverge even further from original humanity that resided back in the old galaxy.

The Red Two would eventually morph into the Red Three as the newest entry was bound to become an intimate part of people's lives!

A huge sense of weight descended onto the Dragon King's Palace. The destiny of the human race in the Red Ocean was at stake. Every tier 1 galactic citizen in the dwarf galaxy had directed their attention to this highly consequential event!

Ves decided to give this matter another push.

"Earlier, I asked the members of the public whether they are in favor of my proposal. While I do not have the ability to poll every single human in the new frontier, I would like to ask you to stand up and voice your support if you agree with my proposal. So I ask of you again, ARE YOU WITH ME, RED HUMANITY?!"

The vast majority of the 100,000 people who were fortunate enough to witness this historic event inside the grand hall all rose from their seats and issued their reply!

"WE ARE WITH YOU!"

Their thunderous reply rippled through the water as well as the still-existing pocket of air centered around Ves!

Their voices transmitted over the broadcast and into many other homes and workplaces!

What was remarkable was that a lot of people on the other end issued the same response!

No matter whether the Red Association or the Red Fleet was able to precisely track the exact responses from every single individual, it was more than clear that there was a comfortable majority of people who were in favor of the establishment of the Red Collective!

How could they not? It not only promised to teach people how to harness the power of cultivation, but did so while presenting far fewer barriers of entry compared to the existing Red Two!

The proposal clearly provided a lot of benefits but very few downsides to ordinary people.

Neither the Red Association nor the Red Fleet could possibly be as generous towards them. Ordinary space peasants had a long history of getting screwed by the mechers and fleters.

The masses clearly relished the chance to stick it to the Red Two and gain power in a way that fell outside of their direct jurisdiction!

Ves smiled. He felt a lot of relief that the public was willing to play along with his charade.

Unfortunately, public support alone was not enough to force such a radical change on human society.

The existing powers needed to assent as well in order to turn this whimsical idea into a concrete reality.

He turned back to the Evolution Witch while gently stroking Emma's delectably soft and furry back.

"The public has spoken. Now, I would like to invite the leaders of the Red Two and the first-rate colonial super-states to share their stance on this proposal."

"<nullb>MIEW!"

Naturally, the Destroyer of Worlds supported this initiative, and not just because she wanted to do Ves a favor.

Given her ambitious plan to speed up her cultivation to the unprecedented rank of god king pilot, Divine Irene Mox could surely leverage the support of a friendly institution!

"<nullb>AS I HAVE STATED BEFORE, EVOLUTION SHOULD BE A UNIVERSAL RIGHT TO ALL RED HUMANS. I APPROVE."

The support of two god pilots was already enough to form the Red Collective. It was not as if anyone was willing to stand in their way if they really insisted.

The greater issue at stake was acceptance and legitimacy.

Ves did not want the Red Collective to turn into a niche organization with huge limitations to its scope like the Hunting Association.

It had to be a large and strong enough group to rival the existing Red Two in power one day!

In order to make that happen, it was crucial for the proposal to gain a lot more backing in high places!

This was the most important moment for Ves. Had his pitch won over enough influential leaders to build a broad base of support for the Red Collective!

"I approve!" A relatively weak voice broke the silence from below! The fleet captain wearing his dress uniform boldly attracted everyone's attention. "My standing in the Red Fleet may not be impressive, but I have seen its rot and stagnation. Far too many colleagues of mine are trapped in the web of outdated traditions and willful ignorance. We cannot ignore cultivation forever! If we do not embrace it, we will get overtaken by it! Technology does not have to resist cultivation. It can coexist alongside this new force!"

Though Sigrund was definitely not a bigshot, it was still a highly symbolic move for an actual captain of the Red Fleet to publicly support this radical initiative!

"Thank you, Captain Reze. Who else agrees with my motion?!"

Chapter 5785 Red Admiralty

5785 Red Admiralty

This was perhaps the most crucial part of Ves' incredibly bold attempt to reform the power structure of red humanity.

Ves had already changed history in a way by opening the gates to the formation of a Red Collective.

Public support for this broad new organization with a mandate related to cultivation was clearly high.

There would not be many issues trying to convince the masses to accept this potential new addition to their lives.

Yet it did not matter if a couple of trillion more people supported the initiative. The ugly truth about red humanity was that the vast majority of them were powerless.

As much as Ves hated the term space peasant, there were good reasons why the mechers and fleters used it on a frequent basis. That was because the second-raters and third-raters lacked the power to make their voices heard.

Therefore, the only opinions that truly mattered were the people at the top.

The galactic citizenship system was the formalization of human civilization's highly lopsided hierarchy.

By establishing clearly defined tiers, it became very obvious to anyone whether a person was qualified to share their opinions or decide on an issue.

A matter as consequential as establishing the Red Collective could only be decided by the highest leaders in the Red Ocean.

The approval of a god pilot like the Destroyer of Worlds alone was functionally worth more than the total sum of space peasants in the new frontier!

It sounded incredibly unfair and unjust, but this was the reality of today's society.

The mechers and the fleters had never been interested in sharing power. Since they came into power during the Age of Mechs, they made huge power grabs in the name of 'protecting civilians from the irresponsible decisions of their former leaders'.

While the Big Two's heavy-handed reforms successfully neutered the former star nations to the point where they could no longer threaten the survival of the human race, one of the lamentable consequences was that ordinary folk became even more divorced from power.

This was why there was such a strong universal drive towards promotion and wealth generation.

Many people born under ordinary conditions were dissatisfied with their lot. They envied the first-raters for actually having enough say in how their lives and their society should be run.

There was no hope for people at the bottom or middle layers of society to push through meaningful changes. Their opinions simply didn't matter enough.

Only by working hard, making the right connections and showing enough brilliance would these people be able to rise high enough to join the privileged class!

If there was one benefit to the galactic citizenship system, it enabled people to clearly understand their inferiority and tell them how far they needed to climb in order to actually matter.

Under the current circumstances, only tier 1 and maybe tier 2 galactic citizens were qualified to vote on this matter.

While Sigrund had made a nice gesture, his rank was so low in the greater scheme of things that his support was mostly symbolic more than anything.

If one of his superiors did not show up to affirm his statement, then his words became as worthless as that of a space peasant!

Several long seconds passed as people waited for a follow-up. It should definitely be possible for the movers and shakers of red humanity to establish a remote connection to the Dragon King's Palace and form a projection inside the grand hall.

However, the situation gradually grew more awkward as the expected support did not arrive in a prompt manner.

Just as Ves thought that he needed to step into the void and fill up the silence in order to sustain his momentum, a new projection finally appeared next to Captain Zonrad Reze.

The woman that appeared wore a fancier and more decorated version of Sigrund's dress uniform.

The virtual medals and the perfectly arranged aiguillettes did much more to enhance the woman's stature. Her brunette hair had been braided in a ponytail that elegantly draped in the front of her other shoulder.

Ves knew enough about the RF's rank insignia to know that the latest arrival was a full admiral!

The latest arrival soon confirmed that with her own words.

"I am Admiral Chelsea Mieli, formerly of the Second Main Fleet. I lead the recently formed Seventh Light Fleet, which is predominantly tasked with reconnaissance and the deployment of fast patrols. I am also a part of the Red Admiralty, the highest decision-making organ of the Red Fleet."

The Great Severing had initially messed up the ranks of the portion of the CFA that got cut off from the Milky Way.

The huge gaps and shortcomings that resulted from this abrupt cut-off forced the Red Fleet to implement a thorough reorganization.

Not only did the Red Fleet form five new fleets that specialized in fulfilling different missions and responsibilities, it also raised a bunch of new admirals to fill up the widening leadership gaps.

The Red Admiralty was a lesser version of a similar decision-making organ of the Common Fleet Alliance.

The latter was a lot larger in scope, given that it was principally dominated by grand admirals that ranked above fleet admirals!

In any case, Admiral Chelsea Mieli was completely different from her subordinate. Her voice held actual weight.

She smiled as she addressed the entire public for the first time since her promotion.

"I approve everything said by Captain Reze. Let me explain my reasoning. He along with many other fleeters have studied the disposition of alien forces beyond our borders. What they have uncovered with their own sensor sweeps is disconcerting. The quantity of alien warships is overwhelming. Even if many of them have yet to arrive in the war zones due to internal tension and slow alien superluminal traversal methods, this will not hold them back forever. Our mechs and warships will be subjected to so many hostiles that they may be pushed past their breaking points. This is not the fault of our technology or our soldiers. Both are more than adequate. The fundamental issue is quantity."

Many people already had a shallow understanding of how humanity was fighting an uphill battle.

The territories occupied by humans were so small relative to the size of the entire dwarf galaxy that it was impossible to gain parity in numbers!

Yet to hear that this disadvantage would lead to concrete setbacks and difficulties from an admiral of the Red Fleet made it a lot harder to believe that red humanity would muddle through somehow!

Admiral Mieli knew exactly what she was doing.

"Do not cling to your illusions that human superiority alone will allow us to prevail in the Red War. The actual facts and numbers do not support this conclusion. We cannot expect to win our struggle of survival by adhering to the status quo. Everyone needs to adapt, including the Red Fleet. The formation of the Red Collective will not weaken us. It will strengthen us by addressing the new blindspots that have emerged and increase the militarization of our population without imposing an excessive drain on our limited resources."

Though the woman did not frame her argument in an uplifting manner, she nonetheless delivered a heavy dose of reality to the public.

Far too many people were not sufficiently informed about the harsh realities of war.

This was mostly deliberate as many leaders wanted to raise morale and prevent any internal unrest from occurring.

While this was certainly nice, the downside to this approach was that far too many people lacked the urgency to resort to harsher measures in order to produce greater results!

Admiral Mieli clearly wanted to change the mentality of the general population with her message.

"Thank you for your vote of support." Ves said a moment later. "Who else among the Red Fleet is willing to back this initiative?"

Another physical projection came to life.

The old man that appeared did not look that much different from Admiral Mieli.

However, his rank and demeanor were so much greater that people immediately straightened their backs and became more attentive when they noticed his arrival!

Though most people did not act as deferentially as they did upon the arrival of the two female god pilots, the latest arrival was arguably the most senior and most authoritative leader of the Red Fleet!

Fleet Admiral Stanley Argile needed no introduction!

"On behalf of the Second Main Fleet, I declare my support for this initiative. I agree with the arguments shared by these officers. Not only does the Red Fleet have to be realistic about our chances and accept the necessity of fighting alongside cultivators, we must also be more open-minded about realizing the latent potential of our spacers who are serving within our ranks. It is well-known that the construction of warships impose the greatest drain on our resources. Any means of increasing our combat power without worsening this problem must be pursued at all cost."

The backing of the Second Main Fleet was a big deal!

The Second Main Fleet and the Fifth Enforcement Fleet were the original major fighting groups that the Common Fleet Alliance transferred to the Red Ocean.

The Second Main Fleet's unambiguous support perfectly counterbalanced the strong opposition from the Fifth Enforcement Fleet.

Fleet Admiral Stanley Argile possessed even greater sway than Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson.

This was because the Second Main Fleet originally served as the spearhead of the CFA's conquest of the new frontier. It contained the strongest warships, the most premier combat crews and the finest naval traditions among all of the other fleets.

There was no way the Red Fleet would be able to pull their weight in the Red War without the vital efforts and contributions of the Second Main Fleet!

However, after Fleet Admiral Stanley Argile had put his reputation and credibility on the line by backing this incredibly controversial initiative, no more admirals showed up to affirm their support.

Instead, a minute passed by before the projection of an older woman appeared besides Lieutenant-Commander Astrid Jameson.

A lot of people gasped as the infamous fleeter's ancestor had finally decided to descend upon the stage herself!

Ves immediately narrowed his eyes as he beheld the mastermind behind his attempted character assassination.

If it wasn't for this meddlesome woman, Ves wouldn't have been forced to resort to this extreme course of action to save his own hide!

Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson did not look repentant or remorseful. She did not even bother to look in his direction.

"My descendant here has already explained that cultivation is a scourge that will lead to the corruption of the human race. As deplorable as you think the native aliens may be, the cultivators spawned by this Red Collective will definitely be worse! In the interest of safeguarding the lives of the weak and defenseless, the Fifth Enforcement Fleet respectfully rejects this proposal."

Two more physical projections showed up to back the fleet admiral's stance!

"The Third Barrier Fleet rejects the motion!"

"The Sixth Special Fleet rejects the motion!"

Just like the Seventh Fleet, the Third and Sixth Fleets had only been recently formed out of a combination of scattered units and donations from the Second and Fifth Fleets.

They were only led by full admirals who were still new to their ranks and positions. Their weight and prestige was not high, but they provided crucial numerical backing to the fleet admiral that they were aligned towards.

The appearance of the latest three fleeters made it clear that the Red Fleet was still divided on this issue!

The only admirals that had yet to show up were the ones that led the recently formed First Garrison Fleet and the Fourth Engineering Fleet.

Given their roles and responsibilities, it was relatively expected that they refrained from picking sides.

It still left the Red Fleet torn between two opposing stances.

Ves felt disappointed that his pitch failed to convince enough fleeters of the necessity to engage cultivation in a more constructive manner.

Their power to deny reality was too damned strong. Even when he pointed out that the fleeters had already become cultivators due to their interactions with ARCHIE, far too many of them still preferred to bury their heads in the sand and pretend that they were still ordinary humans!

Chapter 5786 Unified Voices

5786 Unified Voices

To be fair, the current outcome was the best that Ves could hope for. It was too much to expect fleeters to be more open-minded about the need to deviate from their existing rules and traditions.

The courage displayed by Fleet Admiral Stanley Argile and Admiral Chelsea Mieli was impressive. They openly defied a taboo and made a complete reversal on the subject of cultivation!

Ves understood why they were more willing to embrace change than others.

The Second Main Fleet fought the hardest battles and suffered the greatest attrition as a result.

If this pattern persisted, then it would inevitably get hollowed out as it became harder to replenish the losses of irreplaceable warships!

The Seventh Light Fleet not only understood the immediate enemies of red humanity a lot better, but completely lacked the heavy tonnage and firepower to resist any offensives.

The large collection of sub-capital ships under the command of Admiral Mieli could only slow down the enemy advance by raiding shipping lines and intercepting scouting vessels.

However, they could forget about defending crucial human-occupied star systems against a determined enemy invasion!

That was not to say that the other fleets would be put in a worse position if the native aliens managed to make a lot of gains.

The issue was that the Fifth Enforcement Fleet and so on were not experiencing the full consequences of inaction at this time.

Perhaps they might change their tune once the aliens launched a proper offensive, but until then they had the luxury of maintaining the status quo.

"The Red Fleet has spoken." Ves said while he continued to pet Emma's back. "Who else among the leaders of red humanity wishes to declare their stance on my proposal?"

Two projected individuals appeared. They showed up away from any of the existing groups.

People showed a bit more reaction when they saw that the latest arrival turned out to be Terrans!

General Axelar Streon and Master Laila Rebecca Devos both shared a good relationship with Ves. They also held enough status within their respective ancient clans to speak on their behalf.

"The Streon Ancient Clan wholeheartedly approves this proposal!" The famous peak ace pilot announced! "As Terrans, we have preserved far more records on cultivation than others. We understand its potential and its perils. We have conducted research on how we humans can best combine it with our existing technologies to produce far greater results that were previously possible. Rather than see it as a replacement of our existing methods, we see it as a welcome

addition to our arsenal. As far as we are concerned, the Terran Alliance cannot fall behind in this new arms race!"

General Axelar Streon possessed a lot of influence among the Terrans. Even if it seemed unlikely that he would ever be able to initiate the Mech Body Merger Process and reach his ultimate destination, his Ouroboros was already quite powerful in a superstate that only enjoyed the protection of a single god pilot.

The biggest issue was that he was one of the more forward-thinking and reform-minded leaders of the Terran people.

The Terrans really valued their traditions and often resisted change for fear of losing their heritage.

It remained uncertain whether General Axelar represented a comfortable majority or remained an outlier.

The Master Mech Designer spoke next.

"The Devos Ancient Clan approves Professor Larkinson's proposal as well. Many people here may be afraid that cultivation may come to replace mechs, but nothing could be further from the truth. Mechs enable humans to exceed their physical limitations and pose a greater threat against our enemies. They possess distinct advantages that cultivation cannot easily surpass. The rise of an active cultivation community can actually empower mechs by introducing new technological possibilities that were not feasible before. Just as the innovative E-technologies developed by Professor Larkinson has led to the creation of living mechs, other exotic solutions may emerge that can further enable mech pilots to attain more victories and return from the battlefield alive."

It was rather interesting that Master Devos primarily spoke as a mech designer as opposed to a Terran, but her input was welcome nonetheless. She could definitely help to reduce the apprehension that the mech community held towards cultivation.

After all, the Age of Mechs had been their golden age. Mech pilots were the protagonists of that era and mech designers enjoyed an exalted status in the industrial sector. Every other profession failed to match their level of fame, prestige and desirability.

It would be hard for them to welcome new competitors who promised to become legitimate substitutes for mechs.

This was why Ves did not expect for every mech pilot and mech designer to support the establishment of the Red Collective.

Ves interrupted his thoughts when a bunch of projections of other Terran leaders appeared.

Leaders of both familiar and unfamiliar Terran lineages such as the Shuku Ancient Clan, the Sullie Ancient Clan and the Nayald Ancient Clan had chosen to stand up and issue a remarkably unified declaration!

"The Shuku Ancient Clan approves this proposal!"

"The Sullie Ancient Clan approves this proposal."

"The Nayald Ancient Clan approves this proposal."

"The Dermond Ancient Clan approves..."

A large majority of ancient clans publicly supported Ves and his initiative despite the fact that they originally never had anything to do with this stuff!

They were the first supporters from people and groups that had no special relationship with Ves.

It was clear that they did not make a public stand solely because they liked Ves.

He did not need to be a consummate politician to know that the Terran ancient clans were mainly invested in the Red Collective because it presented them with an opportunity to break the hegemony of the Red Two!

The Terran people had bowed their heads to the mechers and the fleeters far too long. With the addition of the Red Collective, the power previously held by the current overlords would definitely become diluted.

Even if it was not possible to kick the mechers and the fleeters out of the overly inclusive Red Collective, it was enough for the rest of humanity to gain another pathway towards power!

Almost all of the ancient clans active in the Terran Alliance had declared their support for the founding of the Red Collective.

That still left a handful of incredibly stubborn and traditional holdouts.

The Chabran Ancient Clan for example remained conspicuously absent.

Professor Kacuk Chabran could have declared its stance outright since he was already present on site, but his status within the clan was not impressive enough to serve as an adequate representative.

In any case, it did not matter if the remaining ancient clans implicitly rejected this radical change.

The Terran ancient clans had shown that they had formed a near-universal consensus on this issue!

This could only lead to one effective outcome.

"He's coming!"

Everyone knelt to their knees yet again as a third god pilot decided to show up at this time!

Floating in front and above the group of ancient clan leaders, the Light of Sol clearly conveyed that he was not speaking for himself, but on behalf of the entire Terran Alliance!

"<nullb>THE TERRAN PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN. THE TERRAN ALLIANCE IS FULLY BEHIND THIS PROPOSAL. THE RED COLLECTIVE SHALL BECOME THE INSTRUMENT THAT WILL LEAD OUR PEOPLE TO A NEW EARTH."

That evoked a loud reaction from the public!

Even though many people were smart enough to figure that the Terrans were only doing this to weaken the Red Association and the Red Fleet, it was still highly consequential that the famously politically neutral Terran god pilot had chosen to take a solid stance!

The fact that the Light of Sol rarely took a stance on any issue that his decision to do so at this time hit so hard. The god pilot's move effectively sealed the official stance of the Terran Alliance and eliminated any possible opposition among the Terran people!

Naturally, the Rubarthans couldn't fall behind.

Emerging from the opposite side of the Terrans, all of the Rubarthan princes who happened to be stuck in the Red Ocean emerged in unison.

Each of them dressed in their best princely outfits and lined themselves up in a row that placed none of them ahead of each other.

The Smokestack Prince spoke first.

"The Rubarthan Pact does not see eye-to-eye with the Terran Alliance on most issues, but the fate of humanity is too important to allow historical rivalries to threaten our collective survival. Our Rubarthan people have always embraced change as a productive force. We recognize that we can never become complacent, as there will always be competitors who will try harder to overtake us. Do not forget that the native aliens have access to many of the same opportunities as us. Our enemies have access to just as much E energy radiation as us. If we do not form the Red Collective and systematically organize humanity's introduction to cultivation, the native aliens shall overtake our strength."

That was an excellent argument. Though the Smokestack Prince's delivery was not that passionate, he still presented a good logical argument that made it less acceptable to reject cultivation.

The Inferno Spear Prince spoke next. As a peak ace pilot, his aura and his voice carried a lot more voice!

"I miss the New Rubarth Empire. I miss the Milky Way Galaxy that we have forever left behind. I miss the relatives and the acquaintances that we shall never see again. The Red Ocean has become our new home and the Age of Dawn has become our new reality. Instead of clinging to a past that is no longer attainable, we should grasp the opportunities of this new era and conquer a galaxy all over again! The odds may not be in our favor, but we have been in this position before! The Rubarthan people shall be part of the vanguard that will fully leverage the power of cultivation to push back the native aliens and sweep aside their warships!"

The Rubarthan ace pilot sounded eager to step onto the battlefield right away in order to set a good example for his Rubarthan subjects!

A few minutes passed as the other Rubarthan princes including the Impresario Prince voiced their support for Ves' proposal.

In the end, it became clear that all of the Rubarthan princes in the Red Ocean had chosen to support the initiative!

The fact that the Rubarthan leaders all showed up and made an unanimous decision gave them the excuse to feel superior towards their Terran counterparts.

Of course, now that the Imperial Principalities were fully behind the Red Collective, there was little excuse for the god pilots to go against this decision.

The manifestation of Emma jumped out of Ves' arms and proudly floated before the line of Rubarthan princes.

"<nullb>MIEW!"

Naturally, everyone already knew where the Destroyer of Worlds stood on this issue. Her latest action was merely a formality, but its symbolic value was still high!

A fourth powerful projection emerged next to the god cat!

Even though a lot of people were growing tired of the repeated bowing, they did not dare to show any disrespect towards the ultimate protectors of red humanity and lowered themselves to their knees.

The Spacelock's human form possessed a much stiffer and more formal aristocratic bearing than his female peer.

Though it was not a secret that the Spacelock and the Destroyer of Worlds did not see eye-to-eye on many issues, this was not one of those situations.

The Spacelock imperiously floated before the Rubarthan princes and affirmed the unanimous stance of his superstate.

"<nullb>I DECLARE THAT THE RUBARTHAN PACT FULLY APPROVES THE CREATION OF THE RED COLLECTIVE."

There was no need for the Rubarthan god pilot to say anything more.

It was official now. The two first-rate colonial superstates both voiced their strong support for the formation of the Red Collective!

Even if the Terrans and the Rubarthans were not as powerful as the present-day mechers and fleeters, their strong unified support meant that the Red Collective was bound to become a legitimate competitor of the existing Red Two!

The only question now was whether the holdouts from the Red Association were willing to back this initiative.

A lot of tier 1 galactic citizens had yet to declare their stances.

Chapter 5787 Strong Voices

5787 Strong Voices

Of the four major groups of red humanity, two of them had already formed a remarkably strong unified front on this issue.

The Terrans and Rubarthans already had the power to form the Red Collective by themselves. They did not strictly need the support of the existing Red Two.

It was just that any strong opposition from the mechers and the fleeters would definitely hinder any efforts to turn the Red Collective into an equal partner to the Red Association and Red Fleet!

In order to reduce delays, pushbacks and other hindrances, it was vital for the Red Two to be as supportive as possible!

At the very least, the more divided they were over this issue, the lower their ability to sabotage the development of the Red Collective!

Ves and many others waited impatiently for the leaders of the Red Association to show up and share their own verdicts.

The proposal had already gained an abundant amount of support and momentum, but the god pilots and Star Designers of the Red Association frequently disregarded popular trends in the past.

They drew their authority and legitimacy from their overpowering strength or their astonishing productivity.

While it was nice for them to be popular among the space peasants, they did not strictly need it as they were not politicians.

The galactic mech councilors used to act as the representatives of regular folk, but the Red Association quietly reduced their importance.

All of this meant that the Red Association could very well form a major obstacle to the Red Collective.

It did not take long after the declaration of the Spacelock for the projection of a completely different leader to appear.

The latest arrival conspicuously chose to emerge at a position that was separated from the other groups.

This time, the people did not kneel, but still chose to bow in respect.

Ves meanwhile became more tense as he caught sight of a probable opponent.

The first Star Designer had arrived!

The Lord of Thermodynamics did not pay attention to anyone aside from the Evolution Witch.

Both of them were mechers, but that was all they had in common.

Hendrick Polt was old enough to live through the end of the Age of Conquest.

Divine Lucie Miyazaki was among the youngest god pilots and grew up during the heyday of the Age of Mechs.

Strong personalities were usually shaped by their most formative years during their childhood and adolescence.

No matter how many centuries they lived after that, they were still extensions of their younger selves!

As such, it was inconceivable for the two to fully understand and agree with each other given the enormous generational gap that existed between them. They were effectively products of entirely different eras!

After the Lord of Thermodynamics completed his brief and silent exchange with the Evolution Witch, he stared directly at Ves.

It was fortunate that a projection was unable to convey the expansive domain and true self of a Star Designer, because Ves might have become fascinated if this was the case!

"I do not approve." The old Star Designer declared without any shame or ambiguity. "Our existing institutions are already adequate enough to regulate cultivation. The Red Association as well as the Red Fleet already have extensive familiarity with what it can unleash. We have defeated its evils once, and we can do it again by relying on our existing deterrence. Forming a Red Collective during a time of war will unnecessarily generate instability, empower leaders who do not deserve what they gain and divide red humanity even further. The risks are far too disproportionate relative to the possible gains that we can make. Far too many of you have no inkling of the destructive

consequences of this initiative. I do. I have seen maddened humans tear itself apart once before. I do not want to see it happen again."

Damn.

The Lord of Thermodynamics had definitely put a damper on the effort to found the Red Collective.

Even though he was an old geezer, his advanced age only added to his reputation and renown.

The man had made far too many contributions over the centuries. His intellect and his output improved with each passing year. His voice carried a lot of weight for that reason.

Shortly afterwards, the projection of a second Star Designer appeared.

This was the first time that Ves locked eyes with the Web Mistress, if only by remote.

Ves personally held a huge amount of respect towards the Mother of Support Link Technology for revolutionizing the way that the best mechs as well as warships fought their battles.

By enabling them to share their energy, shielding and other resources among each other, the longevity and survivability of all assets that integrated support link technology had skyrocketed!

The technologies she improved and popularized was probably the chief reason why the armed forces of the Red Two managed to minimize their losses in the ongoing war.

Yet... just because Ves respected the professional contributions of the Web Mistress did not mean he had to agree with her political stances!

"I agree with my fellow Star Designer. The Red Collective is not a necessary or appropriate instrument. It will be too easy for dangerous radicals to capture this institution and put red humanity on a path of self-destruction."

That made it official. The Mech Supremacist Faction rejected the proposal.

Though Ves already expected this outcome, he still hoped that the two smart and powerful Star Designers would see reason and become more willing to embrace change.

Unfortunately, the Lord of Thermodynamics and the Web Mistress were still paranoid about bringing back the abuses of the Age of Conquest.

Another powerful presence emerged shortly afterwards.

This one happened to be a lot hotter as well!

The First Flame had emerged!

As the oldest god pilot in the Red Ocean, the man was a true living fossil. He was already old when the Mech Trade Association first came into power.

Due to his age, his mentality had shifted so much that he never really saw the need to engage in politics.

While he was longtime friends with the Lord of Thermodynamics, the First Flame always considered himself to be so far above other people that it was beneath him to join any faction.

He only represented himself today, though it could be argued that his weight within the Red Association was so high that he was practically a faction in itself!

"<nullb>I AGREE WITH THE STAR DESIGNERS. CULTIVATION IS A DANGEROUS POWER THAT SHOULD NOT BE MADE AVAILABLE EN MASSE. ONLY A SELECT GROUP OF WELL-

TRAINED ELITES CAN BE TRUSTED TO MAKE RESPONSIBLE USE OF THEIR POWER."

Well, that was a clear answer. Yet again, another member of the old guard showed that he was still stuck in the past.

Ves actually found it quite hypocritical for the First Flame to deny cultivation to the masses for fear of producing monsters when he himself was actually trying to transition away from a god pilot and attempt to become a more traditional qi and body cultivator!

The most ironic aspect about his unprecedented attempt to evolve into a powerful phoenix was that a prophetic vision indicated that there was a high chance that the First Flame would suffer cultivation deviation and turn into a mindless monster!

In short, the First Flame had no right to pass judgment on the perils of cultivation when he was most prone to become the evil that he hated the most!

It was not convenient for Ves to mention this particular point, so he dismissed the First Flame's hot projection and waited for other arrivals.

The Fist of Defiance showed up next!

This was a much more welcome arrival as the god pilot held a lot more goodwill towards Ves and vice versa.

Just like his name suggested, the Fist of Defiance possessed the most ideal pugilistic physique.

He did not even bother to wear a proper outfit and instead looked as if he was ready to brawl a phase whale bare-handed!

<nullb>"HAH! I LIKE YOU, KID! YOU ARE ONE OF THE FEW MECH DESIGNERS IN THE RED OCEAN WHO POSSESSED AN ACTUAL SPINE AROUND HERE. TOO MANY PEOPLE NOWADAYS LACK THE COURAGE TO TAKE RISKS AND PURSUE GREATER REWARDS. INSTEAD OF RUNNING AWAY FROM YOUR FEARS, IT IS BETTER TO CONFRONT IT HEAD-

ON AND CONQUER IT WITH YOUR FISTS! I AM WITH YOU ON THIS, LARKINSON! YOU SHOULD BE IN CHARGE OF THE RED COLLECTIVE AS FAR AS I AM CONCERNED!"

Ves smiled and bowed in gratitude. "You honor me with your praise, Your Holiness."

The Xenotechnician appeared next. The old man belonged to the same venerable generation as the Lord of Thermodynamics, but he adopted a much more tolerant attitude.

"In my lifetime of designing mechs and researching strange technologies, I have learned that humanity is all-too-often held back by its many fears. We fear alien inventions. We fear new knowledge. We fear societal change. There are times when it is wise to err on the side of caution, but this is not that time. Our side is disadvantaged in the Red War. Unless we can produce radical technological breakthroughs, our ability to win the war is slim. Embracing cultivation is an acceptable risk for us to take because its promises of power are exactly what we need to guarantee our race's survival."

Whereas the Fist of Defiance made a powerful emotional appeal, the Xenotechnician offered an exquisite logical argument.

Both leaders of the Survivalist Faction made it clear that they were fully behind this initiative!

Ves smiled in satisfaction and gratitude. The Survivalists might not have been able to do enough to protect him from the attacks of the Fifth Enforcement Fleet, but they were still willing to support him during this important time.

Combined with the existing support of the Evolution Witch, the Survivalist Faction and the Transhumanist Faction were definitely on his side!

Another Star Designer showed up. This one was a surprise to Ves.

Even though the general public was unaware that the Polymath had fallen from grace, many people in high places did not expect that she would be allowed to voice her opinion during this occasion!

The Polymath looked as emotionless but determined as ever. Her current posture betrayed no hint of her prior disgrace.

It was clear that the Red Association wanted to create the impression that the Polymath was still an active participant in leading red humanity to a better future.

She directed an unreadable glance towards Ves. Whether she was appreciative or upset with him was unclear.

The Polymath did not show up in order to reminisce about old times.

"Red humanity has fallen into a crisis." She spoke in a plain and factual tone. "In my personal opinion, the best way for us to maximize our potential is to unite our fractured population. Sadly, that is not a feasible possibility in our current climate. I do not favor the act of further dividing our people, but in the absence of the most ideal outside, I see the logic and the necessity of founding a specialized organization that can manage cultivation in a responsible manner. I approve of Professor Larkinson's initiative. Despite his relative youth and lack of experience, I too am in favor of appointing him as the leader of this Red Collective."

Gee. Thanks.

Despite his mixed feelings towards the Polymath, Ves welcomed her voice of support. She still carried a certain amount of weight given that she was still a Star Designer that was able to imitate difficult specializations that were no longer accessible in the Red Ocean.

However, Ves did not really like the fact that she insisted on putting him in charge of this messy new organization.

He already explained that he was too busy with designing mechs to waste his time on this difficult endeavor!

Ves could forgive the Fist of Defiance for making this suggestion because the god pilot merely thought it was best for human civilization.

The Polymath on the other hand might have wanted to take revenge on Ves by foisting him with a massive responsibility that he did not want!

Chapter 5788 The Resonance Smith

5788 The Resonance Smith

The Survivalist Faction wielded a lot of influence in the Red Association and beyond.

A lot of different parties looked up to the Survivalists for guidance in this time of crisis and uncertainty.

Few insiders overlooked the fact that the outcome of the latest conference organized by this faction had been responsible for pushing the Deep Strike Plan onto red humanity.

Even though the Fist of Defiance was not the outright leader of human civilization in the new frontier, the fact that society had begun to follow his vision had elevated his renown above other god pilots!

Therefore, people were considerably more inclined to accept his recommendations or instructions than in the past.

His personality flaws were well-known, but his unwavering optimism and his unflinching belief in red humanity was exactly what everyone needed the most in this dark and difficult period!

Though the god pilot had not turned into the outright ruler of red humanity, people found that despite his crass language, he was actually pretty suitable to serve as the guiding conscience of their troubled civilization.

There had to be good reasons why the Fist of Defiance recommended Ves to become the inaugural leader of the proposed organization.

However, it was not until the famous or infamous Polymath issued a similar recommendation that people truly started to take the idea more seriously!

Ves grew nervous as the expressions of many people started to show they were weighing this additional proposal on its merits.

If the Red Collective truly lifted off, then who better to lead it in its formative years than the man who came up with it in the first place?!

Even though he was awfully young for the job, he had demonstrated many admirable traits during the times he presented himself to the public.

In addition to that, his mysterious heritage and his excellent grasp on E-technology demonstrated that he possessed the functional knowledge needed to oversee the development of cultivation in human society.

Ves could clearly sense that the seed had been planted in people's minds. That was not good for him because he really did not want this job!

This was not the time to discuss this issue. The vote still needed to go on. There were still a number of important factions that had yet to declare their stances.

"The Polymath has spoken." He said as he continued to cradle Emma in his arms. "Who else from the Red Association is ready to announce their decision?"

Another projection came forth. The power radiating from this individual made it clear that yet another Star Designer made an appearance.

It soon became clear that the latest arrival did not have the most spotless reputation. Many of the god pilots and Star Designers who had already shown up all put up their guards as the only leader of the Unbound Humanity Faction finally saw fit to participate!

As one of the more obscure Star Designers of the MTA and now the RA, many people only knew about Jose Ukeke when his name appeared in the list of Star Designers.

The mechers did not seem keen to promote his name among the public. The Star Designer himself played along and mostly kept his work confined within the Association.

That did not mean he was a non-entity. Far from it. His unusual decision to embrace the ideals of the infamous Unbounders had immediately turned him into a troubled existence among the mechers!

After all, he was one of the few crazy people among their kind who actively advocated for the weakening of the Mech Trade Association and the elimination of nearly all taboos!

The man did not look very trustworthy either. Unlike the other Star Designers who made sure to wear their most refined and sophisticated outfits, the ebony-skinned Unbounder deliberately wore a frumpy coat while not even bothering to groom his unkempt gray hair.

Was this guy even a Star Designer?

The latest arrival grinned in amusement as he swept his gaze across the grand hall. He seemed to relish in all of the confusion and discomfort.

"I am Jose Ukeke. You may know me as the Resonance Smith. To be honest, I am... torn between two stances. I am known as an advocate for human rights. More specifically, I am convinced that humans such as yourself deserve to be treated as adults rather than irresponsible children. On one hand, the founding of the Red Collective will help to limit the jurisdiction of the Red Association and the Red Fleet. On the one hand, the Red Collective may end up imposing far more rules and restrictions than the previous two organizations ever could have done on their own. Professor Larkinson, which scenario do you deem more plausible?"

Ves blinked. He did not expect for the Unbounder to address him directly.

After everything that happened, Ves actually found himself straying closer to the principles and the ideals of the Unbounders.

Perhaps Master Benedict Cortez had actually been right about aligning himself with this seemingly crazy faction.

Even though the vast majority of mechers hated these deviants for trying to advocate for reining in their power, the Unbounders were truly sincere in their belief that humans were responsible enough to handle their own affairs.

However, the persistent opposition from everyone else had turned the Unbound Humanity Faction into a marginalized group. Only the much more radical Dissolution Faction was less popular!

Ves felt a bit troubled when the Resonance Smith sought his input.

Was the Star Designer truly undecided on this matter, or did the notorious Star Designer merely wanted to poke into Ves' head by asking a probing question?

Whatever the case, Ves could not afford to take this lightly.

"I am not sure what sort of answer you are looking for. In my opinion, the Red Collective is very different from the Red Association that you are familiar with. For one, nearly any cultivator who isn't an outright criminal or traitor may join the Collective. This strong inclusivity means that the new organization will never completely exclude ordinary people from power. One of the most persistent complaints about the mechers and the fleeters is that they make a lot of decisions that directly affect the lives of other people. That should not happen in my new organization."

"That is an admirable goal, but implementing it is far more difficult in practice." The Resonance Smith spoke with evident interest in his voice. "How would you propose to grant the general population a voice in the decision-making process? Will you allow them to vote directly on proposals? Will you give them the right to elect representatives that will be tasked with creating and voting on legislation?"

Ves shook his head. "The Red Collective is not a government and should not be structured as such. People will have the wrong ideas if we run it as a state. I really do not think it should be up to me to decide on how the Collective should be run."

The Resonance Smith shook his head. "Do not shirk my question. This is your vision. You must have an idea on how it will impose itself on human society."

The Star Designer made it sound that if Ves did not supply a satisfactory answer, the Resonance Smith would reject the proposal!

Even if the support of a single Star Designer was not that crucial, Ves did not want to lose the support and goodwill of a powerful player.

From what little Ves had heard about the Resonance Smith, this Star Designer was responsible for many of the advancements of high-end resonating materials!

A lot of ace mechs but especially god mechs derived a lot of power from the extremely powerful resonating alloys developed by Jose Ukewe.

The vast majority of resonating materials found in the cosmos were fairly weak. They were powerful up to a point. When high-ranking mech pilots outgrew these natural materials, their ability to leverage more power from their machines became constrained by hard ceilings.

The only way to further unlock the power of ace pilots and god pilots with vastly superior resonance strengths was to resort to artificially synthesized resonating materials!

If not for the groundbreaking work by the Resonance Smith, the domain fields and combat power of many ace mechs and god mechs would have been substantially weaker than in the present!

The extreme importance of the Resonance Smith's works had made him unassailable within the Association.

The mechers depended far too much on the Resonance Smith's work to ostracize him for his controversial ideals.

That meant that Jose Ukewe could keep on advocating for the lifting of many taboos as long as he kept making vitally important contributions!

He was clearly a shrewd and cunning Star Designer. It would not be good for Ves to get on the Resonance Smith's bad side!

The powerful mecher clearly wanted to force a real answer out of Ves.

"I... think that none of the existing governance models are suitable for the Red Collective." Ves eventually explained. "The way the mechers and fleeters run their own organizations may work well for them, but too many decisions are made by high and mighty elites who are locked in their ivory towers. Ah, no offense to you, but ordinary folk find it impossible to connect to you guys."

"I am aware." The Resonance Smith responded with a more severe expression. "The Big Two and the Red Two deliberately set themselves apart from the rest of the population. They believe that maintaining a degree of separation will allow them to manage our society in a more fair and impartial manner. I personally do not agree with this policy, but it is the prevailing consensus."

The leader of the Unbounders attracted a few ugly looks from the other leading figures. The Resonance Smith was making the Red Two look bad in front of the public.

Ves continued to explain his views. "As I have stated before, I don't think that appointing representatives to enact policies or letting people vote on measures directly is the answer either. Not only will it warp the Red Collective into something else, it will also lead to a lot of distracting and unproductive popularity contests. I am not opposed to giving ordinary people a way to exercise their power within the new organization, but these mundane measures will only decrease the efficiency of the Collective in a time where we can least afford it. We are locked in a total war against the native aliens of the Red Ocean. We need to be more decisive in our decision-making."

"Ah, but there is the dilemma." The Unbounder smirked in amusement. "More effective decision-making can only be accomplished by centralizing power at the top. A technocracy can accomplish that at the cost of disenfranchising the bottom. A more democratic governance system can give the general population more influence over far-reaching policy decisions, yet there are many concerns about respecting the voice of large quantities of people with little understanding of cultivation."

Neither of these governance systems sounded ideal to Ves. He did not want to determine which one was the lesser of two evils.

This was why he came up with a third idea that was so crazy and radical that he did not really want to voice it in the first place!

Unfortunately for him, the Resonance Smith demanded a real answer out of Ves!

After a few seconds of hesitation, Ves finally decided to throw his suggestion into the opening.

"I have been putting a little thought on an alternative solution that sidesteps the problems of the prior models." He slowly said. "It takes a bit of explanation to understand it in full, but if I have to summarize it, I think it is best for me to employ my kinship networks to bind large groups of people to powerful entities. These 'spirits' or gods if you will are theoretically the embodiment of the collective will and desires of a distinct population. That means that they are qualified to represent that group in the main decision-making organ of the Red Collective. Are you following me so far?"

"..."

Everyone had been stunned into silence.

Chapter 5789 The Marmedion Family

5789 The Marmedion Family

It looked like Ves still had plenty of capacity to stun the entire public with his crazy ideas.

The more people solicited his opinions, the more groundbreaking answers they received in return!

Ves had no doubt that the Resonance Smith had a greater scheme in mind by pressing him for answers.

When will these folks learn that it might be better to leave Ves alone?

One of the reasons why he deliberately threw out radical proposals was to discourage others from pulling him into their schemes!

Given the reactions produced by his latest idea, Ves had once again demonstrated his capacity to defy expectations and jump out of the traps set by others!

There was no way the Resonance Smith could have possibly predicted that Ves would appoint his own spirits as the policy makers of the Red Collective!

It was such an outlandish and crazy idea that could never be realized by anyone else! Only Ves was capable of forming this proposal and putting it into action!

The vast majority of people did not have a sufficient understanding of what Ves was talking about. They lacked the knowledge and the context surrounding spirits and kinship networks.

Most of the gathered leaders had a better idea of what Ves was talking about. Kinship networks were already on track to become an integral part of the New Elites Program as well as the two first-rate superstates.

That was what caused these powerful figures to feel mixed about this proposal.

It was not a secret that Ves' so-called spirits were not human in origin. Perhaps a few of them might have been based on real humans, but they had become so separated from their original roots that they could no longer be treated as individuals of the same race.

Therefore, letting these spirits or 'gods' exercise actual power within the Red Collective was no different from letting aliens or sentient AIs impose rules onto humans!

The only reason why this idea was not outright disqualified was the theory that spirits were not completely independent entities. By turning them into personifications of the collective will of large groups of people, they should technically be able to represent the interests of their constitutions far better than any other alternative!

All of this remained a theoretical exercise, though. It had never been tested in actual reality, so nobody could say for certain that this innovative but incredibly controversial governance model would work out well!

Not even the Resonance Smith wanted to voice his support behind this wacky idea.

"You have an interesting imagination, Professor Larkinson. Your creative solution to this problem deserves further consideration. You at least proved to my satisfaction that your vision of the Red Collective is different enough from our existing institutions to avoid the same mistakes. You have my support for your original proposal."

Ves inwardly sighed in relief once it became clear that he managed to overcome this hurdle. If he voiced any other answer, it would have been likely that he would have displeased a lot of important stakeholders.

If he favored a more technocratic governance model, then he would essentially hollow out the ideas of the Red Collective as it ended up little different from the Red Association and the Red Fleet.

If he tried to give the masses more direct control over how the Red Collective should be run, then a lot of delays and dysfunction would arise as people continually bumbled around during wartime.

That was not to say that letting spirits decide on policies was a superior alternative. It was just so new and unheard of that people could not decide whether it served their needs!

Many people remained confused about Ves and the Resonance Smith had just talked about, so a brief lull ensued after this exchange.

That ended as soon as another Star Designer appeared.

Ves perked up a bit after he recognized Kevan Arendstein, otherwise known as the Missile Messiah.

Even though missiles had fallen outside of the mainstream due to its lack of cost-effectiveness, that did not mean they were ineffective.

It was the opposite. Missiles could often produce devastating damage, so much so that they used to be a lot more prevalent in past mech generations!

Unfortunately, those years had passed. The Missile Messiah mostly serviced the needs of the most powerful clients for that reason. Only they possessed the money and resources to arm their machines with the most destructive warheads!

"<nullb>MIEW." Emma greeted the newly arrived Star Designer.

"Oh, you know him?" Ves softly asked.

The god cat nodded her powerful head.

That was a good sign!

Now that he thought about it, it was fairly logical for the Missile Messiah to service the needs of the Destroyer of Worlds.

The former may be a mecher, but he was still a Star Designer who specialized in developing the most powerful and useful ordnance!

From what Ves had learned about the Missile Messiah, the Star Designer was a leader of the Guidance Faction.

That meant that he belonged to the opposite camp of the Resonance Smith!

Ves was not certain where Kevan Arendstein would fall. He was a strong believer in letting the mechers intervene more actively in the governing of human states!

Would the Guidance Faction support the mandate of the Red Collective in spite of the fact that it would weaken the Red Association in the process?

The Star Designer did not leave Ves in suspense for long.

"I reject." The Missile Messiah said.

Everyone waited for the Star Designer to elaborate on his decision, but the man made it clear that none was forthcoming.

"...Okay. Thank you for your input."

Ves was disappointed at the Missile Messiah's rejection, but he did not feel upset about it. The Guidance Faction was notoriously power-hungry, so it saw any measure that reduced its power as a threat to its fundamental interests.

Even if the Missile Messiah would be able to make up for that by taking a prominent position in the Red Collective, his voice would certainly be smaller due to the addition of many other stakeholders. It was not much of a surprise that Kevar Arendstein recognized this obvious trap and expressed his dissatisfaction.

Whether deliberately or not, only a single major faction was left.

It happened to be the most powerful one after the Survivalist Faction.

Part of the reason why the red humanity got stuck in the Red Ocean in the first place was due to the strong encouragement of the Expansionist Faction!

Since the Expansionists were most enthused about expanding human space in an entirely new dwarf galaxy, they had committed the most god pilots and Star Designers to the new frontier.

This had inadvertently turned their faction into a heavyweight in a post-Great Severing society!

While there were people who had doubts whether the Expansionist Faction would remain united now that there was no more possibility of expanding human territories under the current climate, the Expansionists still enjoyed the advantages of being the big boys.

It was typical for them to appear last.

Perhaps wishing to counter the narrative that their unity was on the verge of breaking apart, the physical projections of all of them appeared at the same time!

Ves and many others were taken aback when multiple powerful presences radiated a measure of their power onto anyone nearby.

The Army of One!

The Huntsman!

The two god pilots did not have much in common, but they were both in favor of adopting a more aggressive approach in conquering alien territories!

Four Star Designers appeared besides them, each of whom possessed powerful specializations that encouraged them to relocate to the Red Ocean.

Three of them were even more notable for being part of the same family!

Charles Marmedion, otherwise known as the Energy Warder, was a Star Designer who excelled in developing energy shield systems. He had lived for over 5 centuries and was the most senior and authoritative voice within the Expansionist Faction. He was also the patriarch of the powerful Marmedion Family.

Chester Marmedion was the 320-year old descendant of the Energy Warder. The rise of the Dimensional Architect proved to the entire mech community that it was not impossible for multiple members of the same family to rise to the highest rank in the mech designer profession!

Tiffany MacArthur-Marmedion was an odd case. The Limitless Provider became famous for developing extremely powerful zero-point energy reactors that went on to satisfy the most demanding requirements of peak ace mechs and god mechs.

She was also the wife of Chester Marmedion.

The two did not start out as a pair of star-crossed lovers who grew up at the same time and advanced their careers in lockstep.

Instead, both of them worked separately and advanced to the rank of Star Designer first before randomly deciding to marry each other when they were both far beyond the typical age range to consider such matters!

Many people speculated that the Limitless Provider married into the Marmedion Family in order to form a sizable power bloc within the Association. It was difficult to imagine that the pair of old Star Designers genuinely harbored any passion towards each other.

Whatever the case, the Energy Warder effectively wielded the power of three Star Designers as a result!

Most people regarded Charles Marmedion as the de-facto leader of the Expansionist Faction, but few outsiders knew how much he got along with the two god pilots.

Even if god pilots started to gain greater weight in red humanity, it would still be difficult to pass any proposal without the assent of the Energy Warder!

The only Star Designer left inside the Expansionist Faction was Raya Zhao.

The Leyline Seer developed a rather unorthodox Class IX design philosophy that was centered around harnessing the huge power of the active core of a planet.

While that sounded rather convoluted and cumbersome, the advantage was that a mech or other machine could tap into the power of a planet in a fairly economical manner.

This allowed the Leyline Seer to develop design applications that empowered a wide variety of landbound mechs as well as enormous planetary facilities!

Her importance in defensive warfare could not be overstated, especially in an age where the extremely extravagant resources that the Limitless Provider needed to construct the most powerful versions of zero-point energy reactors had become extremely scarce!

Raya Zhao may have appeared at the same time as the other Expansionist leaders, but she distinctly set herself apart from the Marmedions and the two god pilots.

It became clear that the Expansionist Faction was split up into multiple sub-factions.

The three Marmedion Star Designers constituted a single group.

The two god pilots were so chummy with each other that they formed their own group.

The Leyline Seer aligned herself with neither of the two and formed her own little power base.

All of this was quite interesting to Ves. He wondered how that would affect the result.

"Everything that needed to be said has already been voiced, so I shall spare you with my reasoning." The Energy Warder spoke with his rich and authoritative voice. "On behalf of myself, the Dimensional Architect and the Limitless Provider, we reject the proposal."

...Damn.

Losing the support of the Marmedions was a serious blow to his interests, but Ves could still afford this setback as long as the remaining Expansionists diverged from this power bloc.

Ves looked almost hopeful when the two god pilots directly voiced their decisions!

"<nullb>I APPROVE. THE RED COLLECTIVE WILL DO A BETTER JOB AT ORGANIZING CULTIVATORS THAN THE EXISTING RED TWO." The Army of One spoke.

"<nullb>I APPROVE AS WELL. NEITHER THE RED ASSOCIATION NOR THE RED FLEET ARE ABLE TO SHOW DUE CONSIDERATION TO A PHENOMENON THAT FALLS OUTSIDE OF THEIR DIRECT MANDATES." The Huntsman explained.

Ves grinned and nodded in gratitude. "Thank you for your support."

The Leyline Seer spoke last.

"I approve as well. So long as the Red Collective remains inclusive enough to accommodate mech designers as well as other professionals, it can "

The end result was that the powerful Expansionist Faction was split down the middle!

No more voices were forthcoming. Though a couple of RF admirals and a handful of Star Designers of the first-rate colonial superstates had not shown up, their absence was either meaningless or signaled their desire to abstain from this decision.

The results were therefore quite clear to Ves and others.

"Let me summarize the votes." He said. "The Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact are nearly unanimously in favor of founding the Red Collective. The Red Association and the Red Fleet are somewhat evenly divided on this issue. As far as I am concerned, there is a broad majority of leaders who are in favor of expanding the Red Two. Combined with strong public support, I believe that means that there is sufficient reason to implement my proposal! Is there anyone who objects to this outcome?"

Though Ves had made it sound as if this was the only acceptable outcome, this was not strictly true.

He acted as if the first-rate colonial superstates were almost just as powerful as the Red Two.

He acted as if all that needed to pass this radical and far-reaching proposal was to attain a straight majority or a two-thirds majority.

The question now was whether any of the opposers saw fit to object to this arrangement.

Chapter 5790 Major Appointments

5790 Major Appointments

Everyone's attention turned towards the leaders who rejected the proposal.

The pressure on them was immense.

They all had their own reasons to object to the creation of the Red Collective. None of them came to their decisions lightly.

These powerful and far-sighted leaders mainly objected to the proposal for two legitimate reasons.

There were a lot of old-timers who were so scarred by the damage wrought by the Five Scrolls Compact that they objected to giving cultivation a platform.

There were also mechers and fleters who objected to turning the Red Two into the Red Three or because it would weaken their respective organizations.

Suffice to say, the fact that there is enough momentum behind the proposal that its passing seemed likely did not reassure the naysayers!

It was difficult to imagine that these strong personalities would just roll over and allow red humanity embrace change that significantly damaged their interests.

A long silence ensued after Ves summarized the vote count.

Even though it looked as if everyone froze in time, it did not take a genius to figure out that the tier 1 galactic citizens had entered into a furious private discussion.

It was not suitable for them to air their deliberations in public, so they made sure to communicate with each other without needing to worry about revealing any sensitive or confidential information.

This left Ves and the rest of the public in suspense.

Since nothing demanded his input for the time being, Ves defaulted to remaining silent while scratching Emma's lovely cheek.

Fortunately for him, he still had access to an insider.

"How is it going?" He softly whispered.

Emma squinted her eyes and began to purr.

That was enough of a signal that the secret deliberations were proceeding fairly well.

This was a fairly logical result. Even if the recalcitrant leaders had good reasons to reject the proposal, they not only had to resist the pushback from a larger group of supportive leaders, but also lost a lot of trust from the public!

Either of these downsides was enough to make these opposers more reluctant to continue to stand in the way of the Red Collective.

The prospect of incurring both was enough to turn continued opposition into political suicide!

The main reasons why the opposers still managed to drag on the deliberations for so long was because they wanted to secure a few concessions in exchange for their 'reluctant' support.

Given that the founding of the Red Collective had turned into an unstoppable trend, it was logical for the remaining holdouts to cease their futile resistance and try to extract a few consolation prizes from the victors.

Ves twitched his mouth when he figured this out. Typical. Even the staunchest ideologues were willing to be flexible with their principles in order to further their interests.

It helped a lot that an overwhelming majority of god pilots backed him up on this issue!

Aside from the hypocrite known as the First Flame, 7 out of 8 existing god pilots had made it clear that it was a good idea to form the Red Collective!

Even if most Star Designers ended up on the opposite side, it would be extremely troublesome for them to oppose the collective will of so many strong-willed god pilots.

In that sense, the fact that most god pilots approved the proposal averted a potential conflict that could have torn the Red Association apart.

Ves briefly glanced in the direction of the First Flame. The physical projection burned even hotter than before, signaling that the oldest god pilot was not in a good mood at the moment!

God pilots generally did not bother to hide their emotions, so it was clear that Divine Harald Genoa formed the greatest remaining stumbling block!

Several minutes as everyone continued to anticipate a conclusion to the public inquiry that had gone completely off the rails!

In the end, the First Flame visibly expressed his frustration, but closed his eyes to signal his acquiescence.

The old fossil couldn't resist the urge to put in a final word.

"I BELIEVE WITH ALL MY HEART THAT YOU ARE ALL LEADING RED HUMANITY INTO ITS DOOM BY OPENING THE FLOODGATES OF CULTIVATION. FEW IF ANY OF YOU UNDERSTAND THE TRUE HORRORS THAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO UNLEASH. YET... IF YOU ARE CONVINCED THAT THE ONLY FEASIBLE MEANS TO DEFEAT OUR ALIEN ADVERSARIES IS TO TURN OURSELVES INTO MONSTERS, THEN SO BE IT. I SHALL STAND ASIDE AND CONTINUE TO FULFILL MY ORIGINAL MISSION. I WILL TAKE IT UPON MYSELF TO PRESERVE THE LAST FLAMES OF THE HUMAN CIVILIZATION IN THE RED OCEAN WHEN THIS IRRESPONSIBLE EXPERIMENT OF YOURS INEVITABLY FALTERS."

The First Flame did not even bother to stick around. He withdrew his projection right after he had spat his last words.

What a sanctimonious bastard.

Ves almost sneered at the First Flame.

While it would have been more ideal if the oldest god pilots saw the light and backed the Red Collective, it was not a bad outcome for this ancient geezer to get out of the way and play with his flames in a corner.

The other god pilots certainly expressed a lot more satisfaction towards this resolution. Each of them may possess vastly different goals and convictions, but they found common cause in their desire to speed up the transformation of human society.

Before Ves could take the word again, the physical projection of the Xenotechnician rose up and attracted everyone's attention.

"We have come to a consensus. The Red Collective initially outlined by Professor Ves Larkinson will be formed. All of us here have promised to complete this enormous undertaking within one standard year. It should actually take more time to form an organization of this size and scope, but the longer people are able to engage with cultivation without proper instruction and supervision, the more difficult it becomes to bring everything to order."

That made sense. A year sounded like a lot, but it was actually really fast given how many rules, how many personnel and how much construction was needed to form a worthy rival to the existing Red Two!

A year was far too little to turn the Red Collective into an equal partner to the Red Association and the Red Fleet.

At most, the nascent organization started off with a strong foundation that would naturally grow into a mature member of the Red Three over the next few decades.

There were still limits to how much the Red Collective could accomplish in a few months or years. Ves did not dare to hold too many expectations in this regard.

The Xenotechnician continued to explain the consensus with his his friendly and reassuring voice.

"We have approved the formation of an Interim Leadership Council to formulate the initial rules, structure, hierarchy and objectives of the Red Collective. In order to meet the goal of inclusivity, we expressly invite a selection of notable leaders from the Red Two, the first-rate colonial superstates as well as a random selection of first-class, second-class and third- class statesmen to represent their citizens across human- occupied space. Aside from that, we will form a new hub on the galactic net where you can freely submit your ideas and discuss them with other interested individuals. We cannot assure you that we will accept all of your suggestions, but we can promise you that we will listen to you and seriously consider your input."

That... was actually a really comprehensive plan. It was a reasonable way to go about it, though a lot of people felt concerned whether the Red Two or the first-raters would end up dominating the discussion anyway. There were many ways for schemers to manipulate this Interim Leadership Council so that it effectively disregarded the demands of space peasants.

Still, the Xenotechnician sounded earnest enough. The god pilots definitely would not allow this process to become corrupted by special interests, especially after they promised to make it as fair as possible!

"In order to increase the efficiency of the Interim Leadership Council, we have decided to appoint the Evolution Witch as its chief councilor. She shall be invested with greater authority in order to ensure that the council makes consistent progress in fulfilling its extensive agenda. Do you agree with her appointment, Professor Larkinson?"

Why was the Star Designer asking Ves?! He was just a tier 3 galactic citizen!

"I am willing to extend my trust to the Evolution Witch. I have no objections to her appointment."

"Good. You have earned a place on this council as well. As the initiator and the original advocate of the Red Collective, we continue to value your input. Given your remarkable record, we also believe you can serve as an effective bridge between first-raters and those who live more humble lives."

At least the Xenotechnician did not refer to second-raters and third-raters as space peasants.

Though Ves still considered this responsibility to be a considerable distraction to his mech design work, it at least lasted for a year at most.

He did not bother to object to this appointment for this reason, especially when it would allow him exert a little influence to shape the Red Collective in his favor.

At least the bigshots shoved the most difficult and cumbersome duties to the Evolution Witch. She could continue to retain her high position when the Red Collective finally got going as far as Ves was concerned.

"Once the Interim Leadership Council has completed its mission and formed a complete blueprint of the Red Collective, it will officially start its operations a year later from today at most." Xenotechnician said. "We also intend to start a formal mechanism to decide on the inaugural head of this ambitious new institution. We will have to flesh it out before we can share more details, but we will endeavor to ensure that every common human citizen will be able to have a say in this decision."

Uh oh.

Ves glanced up at the audience. He could not help but notice that a lot of people immediately thought of him as their preferred candidate!

That was bad!

As much as Ves liked to be in charge rather than allow himself to be bossed around, he knew that he did not have the qualifications to lead the Red Collective.

It was way too premature for him to assume such an enormous responsibility!

"With all due respect, I am just a Senior Mech Designer." Ves couldn't help but voice his objections. "I have no clue how to lead an organization as big and as complex as this. Just because I came up with this notion does not mean I should make it work. You and every other tier 1 galactic citizen can do countless times better."

The Xenotechnician directed a generous smile towards Ves. "Do not sell yourself short, professor. This... charade of a public inquiry has exposed severe problems in how the present leaders of our society have become misaligned with the general population. We have been moving closer towards a gerontocracy where a selection of old and out-of-touch leaders dictate the lives of a large population of younger citizens. If we want to correct this obvious imbalance, then we must be more proactive in empowering members of the younger generations. Many god pilots, Star Designers and other elder statesmen have already shaped human civilization during the Age of Mechs. The Age of Dawn belongs to youngsters such as yourself, Professor Larkinson."

"...I partially agree. I think you are aiming too young, though. I am barely more than 40 years old! You should at least set your sights on a more competent leader who is over a century old. I am so young and inexperienced that I come up with the most outlandish ideas from time to time. I do not think it is wise for the rest of you to become subjected to the products of my overactive imagination."

Ves' words seemed to spread a subtle ripple of fear. As much as he had contributed to a worthy endeavor, everyone had more than enough of his creative ideas for one day!