

The Mech 5791

Chapter 5791 Decisive Resolution

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The history of red humanity had changed forever!

Due to a confluence of accidents and botched conspiracies, Ves had impulsively called for the society he was a part of to found a worthy end addition to the Red Two.

Surprisingly enough, his idea gained so much traction that his improvised proposal got passed by plenty of stakeholders!

Not only was the public nearly universally behind the idea of gaining a much easier pathway to power in a collective that they could call their own, but a broad plurality of tier 1 galactic citizens decided to go onboard as well!

This was nothing but a miracle, one that could have never taken place if a lot of conditions had been slightly different.

Public attention had worked in his favor.

Ves found it ironic that the antics of Lieutenant-Commander Astrid Jameson had actually caused the initially boring public inquiry to turn into a civilization-wide spectacle!

If not for that, Ves would have never been able to throw a verbal bomb that detonated all of human society!

Ves realized that he had been put in the right place and time to chip away at the hegemony of the Red Two. So many people sought to weaken the mechers and the fleeters, yet none had managed to do so because these rival groups always banded together in order to resist any challenge to their power structure.

Even though the opponents to living mechs sought to leverage overwhelming public pressure to force Ves to limit the capabilities of his products, in the end he had brilliantly hijacked the weapon of his enemies and turned the will of the people into his strongest weapon!

He had no doubt that if public opinion hadn't been so overwhelmingly in favor of his ideals, a lot of god pilots and Star Designers probably felt they could get away with rejecting this obvious challenge to their authority.

Yet because Ves had aligned himself much more closely with the desires of the common folk, it became impossible for the mechers and the fleeters to pretend that they were working in the best interest of the masses.

What happened taught Ves a few good lessons about power and influence.

In any case, now that the Xenotechnician had completed his announcement, the show had finally come to a close.

Admiral Amelie Jameson departed first, but not before directing a mean scowl towards Ves. She did not hide her disgust at the outcome of the proceedings, nor hide her personal animosity towards the chief culprit behind this circus.

Ves remained cool. He knew that he had made or enflamed a number of powerful enemies today. However, there was no way for him to avoid this consequence without outright admitting defeat. So what if a bunch of tier 1 galactic citizens really did not like him at the moment?

He more than made up for that by earning the appreciation of even more powerful leaders!

While the Star Designers only took a single speculative glance towards Ves before shutting down their connections, the god pilots had no such restraint.

The First of Defiance grinned and raised his fist as if he wanted Ves to bump it back. "YOU'VE GOT GUTS, KID. WE TRULY NEED A YOUNGSTER LIKE YOU UP HERE. TOO MANY HOLDOVERS FROM THE AGE OF CONQUEST ARE LETTING THEIR IMPRESSIONS OF HUMANITY AT ITS WORST DICTATE THEIR DECISIONS. IT IS HIGH TIME FOR THEM TO GET OUT OF THE WAY AND LET THE LATER GENERATIONS TAKE CHARGE OF THEIR OWN DESTINY."

The god pilot definitely worsened his relationships with these so-called holdovers, but the Survivalist leader did not show any sign that he cared about that. He simply voiced his frustrations at the status quo before he signed off without waiting for any replies.

The physical projection of the Army of One moved closer and eyed Ves up like a cut of meat.

The god pilot's stare unnerved Ves, especially when there was actual force behind it. The famed powerhouse was fairly young, but that also caused him to be a lot more open-minded towards new ideas.

The man did not seem to spot what he was looking for, because he soon shook his head in disappointment.

"YOU ARE NOT READY YET. WORK HARD AND DO NOT DROWN YOURSELF WITH YOUR NEW RESPONSIBILITIES. WE DO NOT HAVE THE LUXURY OF TIME."

Ves kind of understood what the Army of One meant and sought from him. "I am very much aware of that, Your Holiness. Do not be concerned. I am not my mother. Designing mechs will always remain my primary vocation."

After the departure of the Army of One, a Star Designer approached him next.

Surprisingly enough, the Web Mistress saw fit to adopt a more reconciliatory tone!

"There are aspects of your work that greatly intrigue me." The junior Mech Supremacist leader stated. "Once the planning and deployment of your kinship networks have reached an advanced stage, I will be called upon to inspect, review and possibly augment your work."

What?

"Uh, you will?"

The Web Mistress smiled at Ves. "This is not my original area of expertise, but I admit that your work has greatly inspired me. E-technology may be beyond the reach of most mech designers, but you vastly underestimate Star Designers if you think that will stump us. There are only several quirks about your unique design application that we cannot replicate, but we are confident that we can develop substitutes if need be. The Red Fleet's ARCHIE comes to mind."

Ves remained silent for a few seconds.

This was not a simple message. Ves did not forget that the Web Mistress initially sided with the opposition in an attempt to restrict his third order living mechs.

Was she trying to reconcile with him? How would her involvement in his kinship networks affect their deployment? What did she seek from his work?

More importantly than that, had she managed to destroy his monopoly on kinship networks?

Ves wanted to deny this possibility, but he couldn't. Out of all of the Star Designers who could make this happen, he judged that the Polymath and the Web Mistress had the highest chance of succeeding!

If this was the case, then Ves needed to adjust his expectations accordingly. He was not as irreplaceable as he thought.

While he could still lean on the value of other contributions such as the transcendence glow, Carmine mechs and companion spirit fruits, it did not feel good for him to lose one of his trusty pillars.

Perhaps the only reason why he was not completely worried was that he doubted that anyone could fully replicate features of his kinship networks. They were based on living entities of his own creation, and they were purpose-built for this functionality.

"I would be... happy to collaborate with you on this matter." Ves politely responded. "I think that kinship networks can offer great value to human society. I would like it if we can employ them more extensively."

"I agree with you, but we cannot move too quickly on this issue. There is a great degree of suspicion towards them. It will take more effort and accommodations to make them more universally acceptable."

"I understand."

By the time the Web Mistress said her piece, most of the tier 1 galactic citizens had retreated from the Dragon King's Palace.

Ves flagged the Evolution Witch before she could complete her own disappearing act.

It took a lot of courage for him to draw the attention of a god pilot on his own initiative, but Ves wanted to strike while the iron was hot. There was no better circumstance for him to issue a request to the Transhumanist leader!

"PROFESSOR LARKINSON, THE AGENT OF CHANGE. WHAT IS IT YOU REQUIRE?"

"I have a big favor to ask of you." Ves decided to be direct in sharing his intentions. "It is not really suitable for me to explain it to you in public. Are you available to speak in a more private setting?"

"FOR YOU? I CAN INDULGE YOU. LET US SPEAK TWO HOURS LATER. BOTH OF US WILL NEED TO HANDLE PRESSING MATTERS FIRST. MY APPOINTMENT AS THE HEAD OF THE INTERIM LEADERSHIP COUNCIL IS AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY FOR ME TO INITIATE THE REFORMS THAT I HAVE ALWAYS ENVISIONED, BUT I WILL NEED TO TAKE ACTION RIGHT AWAY IN ORDER TO YIELD THE BEST RESULTS."

"Ah, do not delay your plans on my account. I still hope to speak with you later."

The Evolution Witch nodded once at Ves before her physical projection went away.

The final personality left was the god cat cradled in his arms.

Emma gently lifted up in the air and turned around to face him squarely in the eyes.

"Thank you, Your Holiness. Your support has been invaluable to me. I owe you another favor."

"MIEW."

By the time the various tier 1 and tier 2 galactic citizens had withdrawn their presence, the grand hall felt a lot emptier and more diminished.

This was a historic moment.

Everyone understood that the decisions made today would reverberate through human civilization for many years to come.

For the first time in several centuries, the mechers and the fleeters were on track to lose their duopoly on power.

Their previously unassailable authority had cracked now that most people recognized that the existing hegemony was no longer adequately equipped to handle the issues that plagued red humanity.

Ves... had done the unthinkable.

That caused him to attract a huge amount of attention. Ves could feel the hot stares trying to poke at his body!

Ves looked around for anyone who could take charge of this runaway session. It did not surprise him that Planetary Governor Rod Mergan-Castelaus had quietly managed to beat a retreat. The moderator of the public inquiry had completely lost face during the final session. It had been wise of him to retreat from the public eye.

Since that was the case, Ves might as well step up since nobody else did what was necessary.

Ves boldly lifted his body up in the air and addressed the public.

"I declare that this public inquiry has come to an end. Given the many irregularities that have occurred throughout these past few days, let us just agree to give the matter of living mechs a rest. Whatever the case, the Red Collective that is on track of being formed is a much more legitimate organization to regulate my living mechs. Until then, given that my helpful third-order living mechs have done nothing but prove their value to their users, I think it is reasonable to decide that we should preserve the current status quo. Does anyone object to my judgment?"

He was pretty sure that the rules of the public inquiry did not allow for the defender to cast judgment on himself, but Ves boldly did so anyway.

His momentum was so great at this time that no one dared to stand in his way anymore!

Those who had attempted to do so had received a lashing from his Devil Tongue!

Ves purposefully looked down at Lieutenant-Commander Astrid Jameson and the other speakers.

Though they most definitely took issue to his latest unreasonable stunt, they knew better than to voice their objections.

They understood extremely well that they had not only lost public support, but would also incur even more hatred if they continued their attempts to beat up their golden boy!

Ves did not let his adversaries get away with a silent assent, though.

"Answer me." He demanded in a commanding tone. "Do you accept my verdict or not? A simple yes or no answer is sufficient."

He hoped that Astrid Jameson would be the one to step forward, but it was Professor Kacuk Chabran who did what was necessary.

"Yes. We accept. You win, professor. You have played the game brilliantly if I may say so myself."

"Good. I hope that this matter comes to an end today. I do not tolerate any further challenges from you about my work."

"Oh, we shall not make this mistake again."

Chapter 5792 Blueprint of Ascendancy

5792 Blueprint of Ascendancy

As the broadcast of the momentous public inquiry finally ceased, the ripple effects of this historic turning point still reverberated across the new frontier!

Everyone's lives had been affected by the revelations and decisions made during the sessions!

The last day especially stood out as a moment where the entire public and much of the current leadership joined together to force a fundamental change to their society!

Nobody knew what the addition of the Red Collective would bring to their lives, but few people doubted that their lives would go on as usual.

This was because the Red Collective promised to be a lot more open and accessible to ordinary people!

The reactions to what Ves had managed to accomplish with his words alone were myriad and intense.

Much to his chagrin, it seemed that it would become harder to Ves to get rid of his notorious title because of his latest performance!

"So that is why he is called the Devil Tongue!"

"Like mother, like son. From what little I have heard about his ancient mother, her son has definitely inherited her cunning and her scheming. I definitely wouldn't want to become his enemy."

"His nickname might sound evil, but he is exactly what we need in our highly stratified society. So many leaders are so close-minded that they are not sensitive to criticism from below anymore. It takes a cheeky mech designer with a sharp tongue to tell them how out of touch with reality they have become!"

While all of human society reacted strongly to all of the changes wrought by Ves, none exhibited more fanaticism than the citizens of the Hex Federation!

Surprisingly enough, it was not the members of the Larkinson Clan who celebrated the hardest, but the Hexers who literally worshiped Ves as their Supreme Son!

Priestesses and other fanatical Hexers all attracted growing crowds across all cities within their second-rate state to extol the virtues of the Superior Mother!

"THE RED TWO HAS SPOKEN! OUR SUPERIOR MOTHER IS TRULY THE GREATEST OF THEM ALL! HER STRENGTH IS UNQUESTIONABLE, FOR SHE HAS MANAGED TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE DURING THE CLASH OF GODS!"

"The Superior Mother's journey is legendary! The fleeters have confirmed that she has completed the entire cycle of hexism! She has gone through the phases of life, death, godhood, damnation, dust before ultimately rising up as the most Supreme woman to ever exist!"

"We are the blessed people! We have worshiped the Superior Mother long before other unenlightened fools. Those brutes who previously scorned our beliefs are jealous of us for earning her favor first!"

The religious fervor in much of Hexer space had spiked!

Even the more secularist-minded Hexers couldn't help but get caught up in the excitement and begin to revere the Superior Mother for her strength and deeds.

Outsiders such as the Fridaymen became perplexed as they observed the exaggerated fervor of the Hexers.

"These witches have gone crazy! Don't they realize who they are worshiping? Cultmaster Original Sin is already dead and gone according to the records! Even if she managed to cheat death somehow, she is the last person to look up to. She has more human blood on her hands than entire mech armies!"

"It is exactly because of her notoriety and prowess that the Hexers adore the Superior Mother. They are not pacifists. As frightening as it may sound, the Hexers worship any strong woman who demonstrates excellence!"

Amidst all of this growing fervor, the Wodin Dynasty that maintained a strong connection to the Larkinson Clan benefited immensely from the latest events!

The Supreme Son and his powerful mother had become so prominent throughout human space that the two leading women of the Wodin Dynasty already started to plot on how to capitalize on this latest coup.

Deep within the Crescent Palace on New Scimitar IV, Matriarch Xiaphna Wodin and Madame Constance Wodin both gathered together to outline their plan.

"My grandson-in-law has opened up a fantastic new pathway for the Hexer people." The old but vigorous matriarch stated as she held a saucer and a cup of tea. She elegantly lifted her cup and took a sip before she continued to share her vision. "Our greatest weakness has always been the fact that we have never been able to breach the second-class ceiling that limits our potential."

"My youngest and proudest daughter is in the process of earning the qualifications to become a first-class mech designer."

The matriarch gently shook her head. "I am aware, but she is but one of many Hexers. She may be able to drag a number of us up to her level, but we cannot rely on her charity forever. We must follow the example of the Superior Mother and rely on our own strength to become equals to the high and mighty first-raters!"

The Hexers always regarded it as a great injustice that they never managed to become as wealthy, powerful, respected and feared as the likes of the Terrans and the Rubarthans.

They fully believed that they deserved to be treated as the superior people, but the powers that be always conspired against them. The unenlightened fools rejected the Hexer ideals and treated the Superior Mother as superstition.

The final session of the public inquiry fully vindicated the faith that the Hexers held towards the Superior Mother!

Even though she lived another life at the time, the Superior Mother had unquestionably achieved great success by acting as the model of a Hexer in a hidden society that had ultimately failed her in the end.

However, what these ignorant fools did not know was that the Superior Mother had overcome every trial up to and including death itself to ascend into a transcendent being that was greater than a typical god!

Every Hexer became inspired by the Superior Mother's difficult journey, so much so that they prayed a lot more earnestly towards her than before!

After a brief pause, Matriarch Xiaphna Wodin transmitted a file to her daughter.

Prime Minister Constance Wodin raised her eyebrow as she rapidly read through the notes.

"This master plan of yours is... ambitious. Far be it from me to question your wisdom, but do you truly think that our dynasty and our people will be able to uplift ourselves by fully committing to the Red Collective? Did we not already decide to take advantage of the New Elites Program to nurture strong Hexer warlords?"

"So did everyone else." The Matriarch sighed. "Aside from our embrace of living mechs, we do not possess enough advantages to exceed our rivals. The new frontier is too small. It cannot accommodate too many first-raters. If we want to break past our opposition, we must excel in a different area. I cannot think of any better means than to master the power of cultivation that the Superior Mother excels at. We may not be familiar with it, but we shall assuredly turn it into our greatest weapons!"

"How?"

"By receiving the Superior Mother's guidance!" The matriarch excitedly revealed! "Have you listened to the many feats of power that she has demonstrated in her last lifetime? She has absorbed the teachings of the Wood Shrine and the Apex Predator Cult and defeated any other challenger with her techniques. Think about what we can do with the same methods. We can drain the life of our unworthy opponents. We can drown our enemy in a forest of flesh-eating trees. We may even be

able to raise our own mech designers who are capable of designing living mechs! The power of life itself shall become the instrument of our people's ascension!"

The old matriarch never thought that the Hexer people would have much chance to rise during the remainder of her lifetime!

Constance Wodin became convinced as well. Her excitement rose higher when she determined that her mother's ambitious master plan was plausible!

"Gaining strength for cultivation is not enough." The younger Wodin said as she began to analyze the possibilities. "I agree that we should make use of the Red Collective. Cultivation is not as dependent on resources and territory, at least for the time being. It is likely that this will change as more production-oriented cultivators will develop effective ways to convert resources into growth boosters. However, there is a moderate window of opportunity at the start where no single group has surpassed the others. If we can gain a head-start in the early years of the Red Collective, we can use our power to acquire more resources and snowball our way to the top!"

This layout was plausible, but it would not be easy for the Hexers to realize it. There were too many conditions that the Hexers had to meet in order to pull off this incredible feat.

Nonetheless, their chances of becoming just as powerful as other first-raters were significantly higher than before!

Matriarch Xiaphna leaned forward. "We must fully utilize our connections with both the Superior Mother and the Supreme Son. We must urge the remainder of the Hex Federation to go all-out in worshipping them and embracing cultivation wholeheartedly. There can be no more room for doubt or skepticism in our state anymore."

"Certain groups of Hexers will not like that, mother. The Vraken Matriarchal Dynasty has always been reluctant to embrace the truth. Do not forget that we have still failed to become a matriarchal dynasty ourselves."

"We must learn from the examples of the mother and her son and threaten the skeptical Hexers into compliance." The matriarch mercilessly said. "If the Vraken Matriarchal Dynasty does not sufficiently do its part to contribute to the faith of the Superior Mother, then the Wodin Dynasty can take its exalted place. With the backing of our Supreme and her son, we can fully realize this threat."

Constance raised her eyebrows. That was certainly a good way to prod the Vrakens and the other remaining secularists in the Hex Federation into embracing the truth!

"That will leave us without an opening to become a matriarchal dynasty. Only 6 of them can ever exist. This has always been the rule."

The matriarch actually laughed at that! "Hahahaha! There is no need for us to obsess over this status anymore! Don't you see, my daughter? Our dynasty has absorbed the lineage of gods and Supremes. We have already surpassed all 6 matriarchal dynasties! So long as we remain faithful and obedient towards the Superior Mother, we can peacefully take control of the Hex Federation and reign over it as the only Supreme Dynasty!"

A Supreme Dynasty!

The Hexers had never welcomed such an exalted group into their midst!

However, the Supreme Son had already demonstrated that it was okay to break traditions. The Wodin Dynasty had all the right cards to make a play for power!

The two women's eyes twinkled as they imagined the possibilities.

"I can see it now." Constance whispered. "Our Wodin Dynasty are still vassals to the Evern Matriarch Dynasty on paper, but this has ceased to be the reality for several years now. It is not enough for us to rely on our connections to the Superior Mother and the Supreme Son alone. We must embrace cultivation harder than any other Hexer and outperform the matriarchal dynasties in this regard."

"The Superior Mother will help us as long as we fully surrender ourselves to her." The matriarch said with certainty. "She will bless every faithful Hexer that seeks to master her power, but she will favor the Wodins more than most because we are her family. Once we have risen to power, we can fully direct the Hexer people to establish a power bloc within the Red Collective. We must do our utmost to elevate the Supreme Son to the highest seat. Even if we fail, we must continue to act as his strongest and most loyal base of support within this large umbrella organization. Unity and faith shall be our greatest contributions to my grandson's cause. In turn, he shall reward us with power, appointments and other benefits. This shall be the blueprint of our ascendancy!"

Chapter 5793 Family Support

5793 Family Support

While the Wodins were plotting their incredibly ambitious rise to power and their eventual takeover of the Red Collective, Ves remained oblivious to the designs of his family-in-law.

He had reduced the priority of the Hexers a long time ago. They were only important when he actively designed mechs for them. Outside of that, he did not hold any elevated expectations towards them. They often boasted about their prowess and their superiority, but time and time again reality taught them that they were no better than other people.

Ves had other concerns on his mind at the moment.

His comm exploded with countless messages as everyone and their mother wanted to get a hold of the man who transformed red humanity forever!

Though Ves wanted to block all of them, this indiscriminate approach would do him no favors, so he accepted the calls from the most important parties just to show that he still cared.

"How are the Larkinsons over at the expeditionary fleet doing?"

"They are happy for you, grandson." The projection of Venerable Benjamin Larkinson smiled and responded. "They were worried that the Red Two would abolish or limit our living mechs. The fact that you managed to turn our entire society upside down just so you can make those unsympathetic elites forget about their original goal is nothing short of astounding. We are all proud of you, Ves."

In order to emphasize that, Benjamin briefly expanded the 12:15

In order to emphasize that, Benjamin briefly expanded the scope of his projection, giving Ves a glimpse of all of the pilots who had gathered together to toast and celebrate the preservation of their powerful third order living mechs!

Though they only encompassed a small sample of clansmen, Ves still got a good impression of the jubilation that had swept throughout the expeditionary fleet.

"I am glad that I could be of service to our mech pilots." Ves smiled in genuine satisfaction. Serving mech pilots had always been his highest calling. "After this disaster of a public inquiry, I think it is safe to say that my living mechs are no longer under threat anymore. The only way they can be undermined is if they somehow underperform compared to other mechs."

That sounded way too unlikely to Ves. The only notable exception was true mechs, but they definitely came with their own fair share of limitations.

"We are also happy and proud of you for being able to give a harsh dose of reality to those powerful fleet admirals, god pilots and Star Designer." Venerable Benjamin continued. "You did your Larkinson name proud. Any other man your age would have quaked in his boots when he commanded the attention of so many powerful people, but you bravely stuck to your principles. You... you would have made for a good mech pilot."

Once upon a time, that remark would have caused Ves to lament his lack of genetic aptitude.

Nowadays, he wasn't even interested in piloting mechs anymore. He had fully embraced his identity as a mech designer and was determined to see it through.

"I know, grandpa, but this is not the time for us to look back. We need to stay sharp and carefully navigate our way forward. I really did not ask for this, you know. My strong involvement with the Red Collective has dragged us in the forefront of everyone's attention. On one hand, a lot of doors have opened for us. On the other hand, all of our actions become much more scrutinized than before. We cannot afford to falter or disgrace our reputation."

Benjamin understood this quite well. "You have become a hero to our society. The price of being put on a pedestal is that you must continue to live up to your image."

"I am concerned about more than that, to be honest." Ves briefly paused and took a deep breath. "I am scared. I don't easily admit this, but I have raised my profile far beyond what I can tolerate. I have made a lot of powerful enemies that I might not be able to fend off. Worse, they might attempt to target you and the rest of the expeditionary fleet in an attempt to undermine me. If I had my way, I would step away from anything related to the Red Collective, but the people above me won't accept that. The Red Collective is my brainchild, and I am expected to contribute to its formation."

The older Larkinson frowned with concern. It was easy for people to see Ves as a larger-than-life hero who accomplished impossible feats as if he was having another tuesday, but few people understood that he was still human underneath all of that bravado.

"The clan will always have your back, Ves. If all of these power plays are too much for you, don't hesitate to pull back and come back to us. It doesn't matter if our ascent to first-class gets delayed because of your actions. What is important is that we remain happy and content with our lot. You are not responsible for shouldering the entire future of red humanity. There are so many other powerful mech pilots and mech designers out there that can already do the job. As far as I am concerned, your only job is to design mechs. I don't understand why you are spending so much time and effort on activities outside of that. Perhaps it is best for you if you go back to the design lab and find yourself again."

Ves closed his eyes as his grandfather gave his sage advice.

"You're right, but... it is quite hard to shed my additional responsibilities. I still have a lot of items on my agenda that I need to address. I can promise you that once I am done with all of that, I will make sure to do my best to stick to designing mechs in the foreseeable future. I won't be able to avoid the council meetings on how to shape the Red Collective, but I will do my best to do the minimum work expected of me. The other leaders have a much better clue on how to organize an equal partner to the Red Two."

"It is good that you know your limits. You may have a penchant for doing the impossible, but let's not make it a habit, right?"

Ves truly did not have the qualifications to form an organization of this size and scope. He never studied any of the related courses and his experience serving as the patriarch of the Larkinson Clan did not translate well to an organization as unprecedented as the Red Collective.

After a bit more talking, Ves ended his call with his grandfather. The call had done wonders to restore his mood. It was nice to hear that he could still count on the unconditional support of his grandfather and the rest of the clan.

He soon accepted the next caller.

"The Colonial Federation of Davute has already changed its tune towards us." General Ark Larkinson reported to his nephew. "We have not only received a lot more priority in the structure of the armed forces of Davute, but we are also being offered territory and other properties. The Clive Administration actively seeks to bind our Davute Branch to the state."

Ves did not look too surprised at that. "You don't need to wait for my input to decide on this stuff. You're in charge over there. I will leave this stuff to your discretion. If you want to rule over your planet, be my guest. Just make sure that you uphold the honor of the Larkinson Clan and clean up your own mess."

"It may not be necessary. I am wary of accepting gifts without an immediate expectation of repayment. I would rather earn the right to rule over a planet by relying on our merits. We are already relying too much on your success as it is." General Ark responded with a rueful smile.

"I am glad to hear that you still recognize this reality. I won't lie to you, uncle. We are lifted higher than ever, but we are also teetering on collapse. Our foundation is not up to the task of supporting us anymore. We are too weak and underdeveloped. We are especially deficient in military force. As long as we do not have the power to protect ourselves, we will always be at the mercy of those who do. This concerns me a lot."

General Ark's expression grew serious. "We are all working harder than ever to break past our bottlenecks. Your grandfather and I are trying our best to become the first ace pilots of the Larkinson Clan, but overcoming the barrier between expert pilot and ace pilot is not that easy, even if I have third order living masterwork expert mech at my disposal. The closer I come to pushing against the barrier, the more I realize how I have to live up to in order to attain a new level of power."

That caused Ves to frown. From what he heard, the Red Kingdom should have been tweaked to lower the threshold to breaking through. Producing more high-ranking mech pilots was a much higher priority than ensuring that each of them were stable nowadays.

If Ark still found it difficult to advance to ace pilot after he had received his Lionheart, then there may be more severe reasons why he failed to make any further progress.

The two Larkinsons talked a bit more with each other before they ended the call.

Uncle Ark gave a final word to Ves before he left.

"From what I have observed during the broadcast, most of those god pilots have come to respect you a lot. That is truly impressive, Ves. However, you need to be careful around them as well. It only takes a single misstep for them to think that you are the scum of the cosmos and decide that it is best for our civilization to erase you from existence. They are not family like we are. They all serve their own masters, and none of them include you or the Larkinson Clan as far as I am aware."

Ves seriously nodded. "I will be careful."

Once this call came to an end, Ves thought for a moment before he decided to call his wife. She deserved to hear from him, and she had been trying to call him nonstop all this time.

"Hello, honey. I am glad to—"

"—YOU ABSOLUTELY STUPID IMBECILE! WHY ARE YOU SO OPPOSED TO ASSUMING LEADERSHIP OVER THE RED COLLECTIVE!? DONT' YOU REALIZE THAT THIS IS YOUR GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO PROMOTE TO A TIER 1 GALACTIC CITIZEN RIGHT AWAY?! ANYONE ELSE IN YOUR SHOES WOULD HAVE SHOWN THEIR WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT THIS RESPONSIBILITY ALREADY! IT MAY BE ACCEPTABLE FOR YOU TO REFUSE THE FIRST TIME OUT OF MODESTY, BUT CONTINUING TO REJECT THE OBVIOUS HINTS WILL ONLY CAUSE YOU TO GET PASSED OVER!"

Ves blinked and leaned back from the tirade.

"Well, it is nice to hear from you too, Gloriana. While I understand your perspective, I respectfully disagree with your opinion. I am not equipped to lead the Red Collective. I don't have the backing or the foundation to hold such as an important position. It is at least a century too soon before I am even remotely qualified to hold a high leadership position within the Collective."

"NONE OF THAT IS INSURMOUNTABLE! WHEN YOU SPOKE TO EVERY RED HUMAN TODAY, I SAW WHAT YOU COULD BE AT YOUR BEST! WHY ARE YOU DENYING THAT YOU HAVE THE ABILITY TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ORGANIZATION THAT YOU HAVE CREATED OUT OF YOUR OWN IMAGINATION?! IT IS YOUR BIRTHRIGHT TO LEAD THE RED COLLECTIVE! WE CAN ALL BECOME SO RICH AND POWERFUL ONCE YOU ARE IN CONTROL OF ONE OF THE RED THREE! THINK OF HOW MUCH OUR CHILDREN WILL BENEFIT FROM YOUR POSITION OF POWER!"

Did Gloriana not realize his true goal for proposing the Red Collective?

The entire point of making it inclusive to the point of mixing mechers, fleeters, Terrans, Rubarthans and every other group of people into a single melting pot was to make it divided to the point where it became ungovernable!

Let alone Ves, not even the greatest statesmen among humans could turn the Red Collective into an effective organization!

Of course, Ves knew better than to share this reasoning to his wife over an unsecure channel.

"Our children will be fine regardless of what I do. Enough about this, dear. How have you been? Has anyone back in New Constantinople VIII approached you due to my latest actions? How is the security situation?"

"We are fine." Gloriana calmed down a bit now that they changed the topic. "The local branch of the Red Association has dispatched additional first-class multipurpose mechs to guard Diandi Base. The Devos Ancient Clan has also made multiple accommodations to increase the security of the star system."

Chapter 5794 The Beacon of Evolution

5794 The Beacon of Evolution

After ending an exhausting call with his wife, Ves quickly chatted with a few other important figures before he finally cleared his immediate schedule.

He only had minutes to go until his appointment with the Evolution Witch commenced.

It did not surprise him that there were protocols to contacting god pilots by remote.

Their dignity should never be affronted, and it was bad form to keep them waiting for whatever reason.

The choice of venue where Ves wanted to establish a connection was important. The Ector V Branch of the Red Association had offered its most stately secure communication center, though he could always fall back to the Tarrasque as well.

The planetary headquarters offered much better facilities, but Ves plainly did not trust the place.

He chose to get teleported back to the Tarrasque without hesitation as the flagship as well as the Bluejay Fleet had been under the effective control of the Survivalist Faction for the most part.

Even if a god pilot was capable of establishing total information security on the other end of a communication line, it was best not to tempt fate.

Ves freshened up a bit. He donned another uniform and made sure to go over the topics he wanted to discuss with the Evolution Witch.

An opportunity like this did not come every day. Not only had he managed to arrange a personal meeting with her, he also did so just after completing one of his greatest coups in his career!

The halo from his astonishing attempt to reform human society had not only lifted up his spirits, but also earned the appreciation of almost every god pilot in the new frontier!

Most of these ultimate soldiers and warriors appreciated bravery in others. Ves had always tried to be more proactive and take greater risks than other mech designers precisely because it would endear him more to mech pilots.

While the dangers were myriad, the payoff was worth it. He doubted that he would have been able to secure a meeting with a powerful god pilot so easily if he had not proven his mettle through other deeds!

While Ves expected the upcoming meeting to proceed cordially given that he already cooperated intimately with the Transhumanist Faction, he still grew concerned about what its leader might impose on him now that they met in person.

It was quite difficult for Ves to resist any direct instructions from the Evolution Witch. He might not be a direct subordinate of hers, but their power disparity was so high that it was not feasible for him to reject any orders as long as they were reasonable enough.

The only way he could counter such an event was to invoke the Destroyer of Worlds and hope that his most supportive ally among the god pilots would put an end to any tyrannical behavior.

Ves took a couple of deep breaths in order to calm himself down and reset his mind. God pilots possessed razor sharp intuition and were extremely good at reading the intentions of other people. It would not do for Ves to entertain any negative thoughts.

A signal sounded across the secure chamber deep inside the Tarrasque.

That prompted Ves to straighten his back and inspect his appearance one more time. He had defaulted to wearing his usual Larkinson uniform again. His Oceancaller, his Hammer of Brilliance and his Hammer of Melody all hung on his trusty toolbelt. He wore each of them proudly even if few people understood what they actually represented.

Actually, that was not true anymore. Ves had shown off the Oceancaller in such an astonishing manner that inquiries about it had already exploded on the galactic net!

He hoped that revealing and showcasing a high-level artifact might spur the growth of the traditional blacksmith community. Their crafts could produce feats that could not be replicated with modern technology, at least for the time being.

Once cultivators became more common in society, each of them needed the appropriate tools and weapons to enhance their individual capabilities.

Of course, there was nothing wrong with equipping them with modern equipment as well. Who said a cultivator couldn't wear a suit of combat armor?

The Tarrasque's secure communication systems soon began to establish an encrypted connection with the Evolution Witch.

A strong presence descended into the entire compartment.

Ves had already endured the presence of multiple powerful personalities before, but this was different.

Not only was this taking place in a much smaller setting, but the Evolution Witch clearly paid a lot more attention to Ves on an individual basis.

He could clearly feel that the god pilot took her time to explore the immediate surroundings. Just the barest hint of her God Kingdom extended through the communication channel, but that already granted the Evolution Witch plenty of power to inspect the entire chamber and muffle any hidden sensors and other unpleasant surprises.

Not that Ves expected her to find any. From the moment he booked this compartment, the crew of the heavy cruiser would make sure it was swept totally clean. No mecher wanted to bear the guilt of attempting to eavesdrop on a conversation involving a god pilot, no matter how futile it was for the attempt to even succeed!

The fact that the Evolution Witch took her time showed that she showed enough care towards this concern. It also signaled to Ves that she probably intended to address a number of sensitive topics herself.

Once she was done, the god pilot continued to maintain a light energy field that was sufficient to block and detect practically any remote listening attempts.

Unfortunately, it also had the effect of blocking or dampening Ves' existing connections with the Golden Cat and other entities, but he had already taken this possibility into account.

The physical projection of the god pilot floated imperiously before Ves. The woman who appeared in her human guise wore a purple robe with glowing green accents.

Despite her name, the Evolution Witch consciously maintained a relatively normal human appearance. She did not display any obvious inhuman mutations, though her body was certainly anything but normal.

The only personal touches she made to her human form was to turn her eyes yellow and her hair midnight blue.

Her human appearance was ultimately a trivial part of herself. Ves knew enough about god pilots that they had effectively transcended the barrier between the material and immaterial.

They were willpower made manifest, which was another way of saying that they were extremely powerful energy-based life forms.

It was her God Kingdom that truly gave Ves an understanding of her fundamental personality, conviction and psyche.

The descriptions that people made for the Evolution Witch were exactly on the mark. Anyone who had the luxury of getting in touch with her God Kingdom would feel their body, mind and spirit become more stimulated.

Ves almost couldn't resist the urge to close his eyes and bask in the woman's presence. He felt that every part of himself had become a little looser, priming himself for any form of evolution.

Blinky's constantly active cultivation also became a bit more effective than before. His efficiency increased a little further. The Blinkyverse filled up a little faster, speeding up the expansion of its internal space into a sizable star system.

This was the power commanded by god pilots. Their God Kingdoms formed the basis of their power and exposed their true selves without any obfuscation.

Right now, Ves gained a more thorough understanding of how much the Evolution Witch obsessed about improving her life essence.

This actually reassured him a bit. Not only did this make her more predictable, but he also happened to be quite compatible with her. His design philosophy was based around Mutual Growth, which meant that his principles and ideals were bound to be similar!

Both of them smiled at each other. They both understood without saying anything that they probably shared a few goals in common with each other.

The female god pilot finally broke the silence.

"YOU ARE AN INTERESTING PERSONALITY. I HAVE TAKEN THE TIME TO INVESTIGATE YOU. I STUDIED YOUR RECORDS, WATCHED YOUR PUBLIC FOOTAGE AND INTERVIEWED A NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE INTERACTED WITH YOU BEFORE. MY INTEREST IN YOU HAS ONLY GROWN AFTER THAT. YOU MAY NOT LOOK LIKE IT ON THE SURFACE, BUT YOU ARE FAR MORE THAN WHAT YOU APPEAR ON THE SURFACE."

Ves tried his best to remain calm. "I may have developed a few special talents and abilities, but I always consider myself a mech designer first and foremost. Everything that I do is for the purpose of empowering my mechs and serving my customers in better ways."

The Evolution Witch did not hide the fact that she was judging him at this time.

"I AM RELIEVED TO FIND THAT YOU ARE BEING SINCERE. IF YOUR MOTIVES AND METHODS WERE IMPURE, THEN WE WOULD BE HAVING A DIFFERENT CONVERSATION. THAT DOES NOT MEAN THAT YOU ARE OFF THE HOOK. THE KNOWLEDGE AND ABILITIES THAT YOU POSSESS CAN INFLICT UNTOLD DAMAGE TO OUR SOCIETY. DO YOU AGREE, HOLY SON OF THE METAL SCROLL?"

Ves resisted the urge to gulp. This was a pretty direct threat and warning.

"I am a mech designer. I won't be stupid enough to forget my fundamental purpose. I may get distracted from time to time, but my research always ties back to my primary vocation in a way. As for that Holy Son stuff... that is completely irrelevant to me. I am more than aware that the Five Scrolls Compact is a thing of the past. We aren't even in the same galaxy anymore. I have always considered myself to be a member of modern human society."

The Evolution Witch smiled and slightly let up on her pressure. "IT IS GOOD TO HEAR THAT YOU HAVE A PROPER PERSPECTIVE. I WAS BORN LONG AFTER THE TIME WHERE THE FIVE SCROLLS COMPACT TERRORIZED HUMAN CIVILIZATION. I DO NOT HARBOR ANY ILL WILL TOWARDS THE FACT THAT YOU CARRY A FRAGMENT OF THE MYTHICAL METAL SCROLL WITH YOU. I EVEN CONSIDER IT TO BE A BOON FOR RED HUMANITY. YOUR ECLECTIC INVENTIONS INDICATE THAT YOU HAVE A WILLINGNESS TO TRANSLATE YOUR GAINS FROM THIS ANCIENT RELIC INTO MEANINGFUL CONTRIBUTIONS TO HUMAN CIVILIZATION. IT IS ULTIMATELY THROUGH DEEDS, NOT WORDS THAT YOU HAVE DEMONSTRATED THE CAPACITY THAT YOU ARE A TRUE MECH DESIGNER."

Though Ves was most definitely frightened about the fact that the Evolution Witch openly addressed the Metal Scroll, he already knew that it was impossible to hide this secret from the likes of a god pilot at this point.

The Red Association knew too much. The mechers tracked everything. They spied on almost every move he made. They calculated and analyzed his progression to such a fine detail that it was obvious that he definitely benefited from extraordinary help in order to produce so many groundbreaking innovations!

"I... cannot deny that there is an element of self-enrichment in my usage of my... gifts, but no human works for free. I like to think that I have been a remarkably responsible user of my fragment of the Metal Scroll than most."

"I AM INCLINED TO AGREE, BUT DO NOT EXPECT EVERYONE TO EXPRESS THE SAME DEGREE OF UNDERSTANDING. THE SURVIVORS OF THE AGE OF CONQUEST HAVE A MUCH WORSE IMPRESSION TOWARDS HOLY SONS THAN THE CHILDREN OF THE AGE OF MECHS. THE FIRST FLAME'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS YOU IS ESPECIALLY CONCERNING."

Damn! The First Flame was over 600 years old, which meant that he most certainly occupied a senior position when the Big Two rebelled against the Five Scrolls Compact!

The god pilot not only knew a lot more about the Compact and its Holy Sons than anyone else alive today, but he had likely lost a lot more friends, comrades and subordinates during this tragic war!

How could Ves possibly react to this reality?

"My mother may be culpable for any past crimes the Five Scrolls Compact has committed, but it has nothing to do with me. I hope the First Flame understands at least that much."

"HE DOES, WHICH IS THE MAIN REASON WHY HE HAS NOT EXTENDED HIS FLAME AND BURNED YOU UNTIL THERE IS NOTHING LEFT BUT ASHES. YOU ARE PLAYING A DANGEROUS GAME SO LONG AS YOU CONTINUE TO HOLD A REMNANT OF THE DREADED COMPACT. DO NOT GIVE MY OLDER PEER AN EXCUSE TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST YOU. NOTHING CAN SAVE YOU FROM HIS CLEANSING FLAMES."

This time, Ves could not stop himself from gulping.

Chapter 5795 A Little Housekeeping

5795 A Little Housekeeping

The Evolution Witch had given Ves an essential reminder.

He was walking on thin ice.

It had become painfully difficult for Ves to cling onto the secrets that he wanted to hide the most.

The fact that it was starting to become common knowledge among tier 1 galactic citizens that he was the Holy Son of the Metal Scroll annoyed Ves a lot!

While the reactions from the leaders of red humanity were much better than the worst case scenario, they were not exactly the best either.

"It has been centuries since the Five Scrolls Compact met its end." Ves said in a resentful tone. "I can understand that the people who have survived that conflict have constantly remained on guard against its revival, but the chances of that happening in the Red Ocean is too low. They should be worrying about present day conflicts a lot more."

I AGREE, BUT NOT EVERYONE SHARES MY OPINION. WE LIVE IN A SOCIETY THAT IS SHAPED BY THE LIKES OF THE FIRST FLAME, FLEET ADMIRAL JAMESON AND OTHER DEFENDERS OF MODERN HUMANITY. THEIR INFLUENCE MAY HAVE WANED OVER THE CENTURIES, BUT THEY WILL NEVER ABANDON THEIR MISSION. WE ARE ALL CHILDREN IN THEIR EYES. THEY REGARD OUR PERSISTENT DESIRE FOR IMPROVEMENT WITH SUSPICION. ANYTHING THAT CAUSES US TO REGRESS TO ANYTHING RESEMBLING THE OLD COMPACT WILL TRIGGER THEIR WORST FEARS."

Strangely enough, Ves felt a lot more sympathetic towards the Evolution Witch. He realized that the two of them were actually in the same boat. They had no direct involvement in the events that took place at the end of the Age of Conquest, but they suffered from its consequences anyway.

Both of them could do so much more with their knowledge and their abilities, yet they constantly had to check whether their initiatives might offend the old guard in any way.

Ves relaxed a bit in the Evolution Witch's presence. The god pilot clearly indicated that she considered him to be on the same side with regards to this issue. Both of them had to fight against the same constraints.

"I don't think it is a good idea to continue to limit ourselves." He said. "One of the reasons why I proposed the Red Collective in the first place is because the old-timers in the Red Two are so inflexible about this that there is a need for a more constructive platform to consider these matters. However, if these guys continue to push back against everything we do, then we still won't be able to make enough progress to overcome every challenge."

The Evolution Witch made a dismissive gesture. "OPPOSITION TO CULTIVATION WILL ALWAYS EXIST. AS MUCH AS I DISLIKE IT, SOME OF IT IS NECESSARY TO KEEP US IN CHECK. WE CAN ONLY COMPROMISE WITH THESE FORCES AND DO OUR BEST TO CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY IN A SAFE AND RESPONSIBLE MANNER. ONCE THE RED COLLECTIVE HAS DEMONSTRATED THAT IT CAN EFFECTIVELY RESTRAIN THE WORST EXCESSES OF CULTIVATORS, WE MAY BE ABLE TO PUSH OUR BOUNDARIES FURTHER, BUT DO NOT EXPECT TO MAKE ANY RAPID GAINS."

That was a letdown to Ves, but he supposed that it would be foolish to hope for anything better.

"Thank you for telling me that. The insights that you have given me are useful to know. I will be sure to pay more attention to this angle."

They soon moved on to more practical issues.

"AS BOTH THE LEADER OF THE TRANSHUMANIST FACTION AND THE NEWLY APPOINTED HEAD OF THE INTERIM LEADERSHIP COUNCIL, I HAVE CONDUCTED THE FIRST STEPS INTO DETERMINING ALL OF THE EXISTING INITIATIVES THAT SHOULD BE ABSORBED BY THE RED COLLECTIVE. MANY OF YOUR WORKS HAPPEN TO FALL INTO MY CONSIDERATION."

"Uh, what do you mean by that, Your Holiness?"

The god pilot formed a projection that displayed his most prominent contributions to the Red Association. The powerful woman plucked some of them out of their place and deposited them under the scope of the Red Collective.

"AFTER A SHORT CONSIDERATION, IT IS CLEAR THAT INVENTIONS SUCH AS KINSHIP NETWORKS, COMPANION SPIRITS, THE 'GLOW' THAT CAN PROMOTE BREAKTHROUGHS AND THE OVERLORD PROJECT ARE MUCH MORE AT HOME IN THE RED COLLECTIVE. THEY DO NOT HAVE ANY DIRECT RELATIONS WITH MECHS, THOUGH THEY DO HAVE OBVIOUS SYNERGIES WITH THEM. DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR OBJECTIONS ABOUT THIS PLANNED TRANSFER?"

He did not expect the Evolution Witch to plan this arrangement so soon after she became responsible for forming the foundation of the Red Collective. Ves was taken a bit aback and had to think quickly in order to formulate a coherent response.

"I... suppose that it makes sense." Ves eventually said. "I am worried about who is put in charge of managing and overseeing all of this stuff. It would do no good to promote their development and increase their usage when you end up putting one of the haters in charge."

The Evolution Witch had clearly thought about that as well.

"IT IS TOO EARLY TO DETERMINE HOW PROJECTS WILL BE MANAGED. IT IS POSSIBLE TO PUT YOU IN CHARGE OF THEM, BUT GIVEN THEIR EXTREME IMPORTANCE, THEY WILL LIKELY NEED TO BE SUPERVISED BY KNOWLEDGEABLE EXPERTS. YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE AFRAID THAT YOUR WORKS WILL BE UNREASONABLY SUPPRESSED. THEY ARE TOO USEFUL TO SET ASIDE. ANYONE WHO RESTRICTS ACCESS TO THEIR BENEFITS WILL HAVE TO ANSWER TO ME. I SHALL NOT TOLERATE SENSELESS OBSTRUCTION IN A TIME OF WAR."

That reassured Ves a lot. He could trust in the promise of a god pilot. Her willingness to put her own credibility on the line said much about how much she valued his various contributions.

"I am grateful for your care and attention, Your Holiness. I cannot help but notice that living mechs and Carmine mechs are not included in this shift."

"GOOD OBSERVATION, PROFESSOR LARKINSON." The Evolution Witch nodded. "THEY STRADDLE THE LINE BETWEEN MECHS AND CULTIVATION. FOR NOW, I PROPOSE TO SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR BOTH OF THEM. THE RED ASSOCIATION AND THE RED COLLECTIVE SHOULD HOLD JOINT RESPONSIBILITY FOR LIVING MECHS. THE ASSOCIATION WILL PERFORM ITS ORIGINAL TASK OF SUPERVISING THE MATERIAL DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF YOUR WORKS. THE COLLECTIVE SHALL OVERSEE THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR LIVING PERSONALITIES AFTER THEY HAVE BEEN MADE."

This was a messy and imperfect solution, but it made sense in a way. Ves was anything but happy about needing to answer to two separate authorities, but at least their responsibilities did not overlap with each other.

Ves could live with this solution. Ves already understood the Red Association well enough to believe that the mechers would not have a problem with the more mundane aspects of his mechs.

The Red Collective still possessed a lot of unknowns, though. Its structure, rules, strictness and more were still unclear. It would be unreasonable to appoint Ves as the supervisor of his own works. The conflict of interest alone made it unacceptable for him to become his own policeman!

Still, the Evolution Witch had already shown a willingness to accommodate Ves' needs. He had also become a member of the Interim Leadership Council, so he could still exert a bit of influence on how the Red Collective managed all of this stuff.

"I can live with that as long as the areas of responsibility are truly split as you have stated." Ves eventually said. "What about Carmine mechs? It will be a lot harder to separate all of the variables seeing as how they are more permanently bound to each other."

"CARMINE MECHS AND ANY APPLICATIONS BASED ON THE CARMINE SYSTEM SHALL CONTINUE TO REMAIN UNDER THE PURVIEW OF THE RED ASSOCIATION." The Evolution Witch declared. "AS NEW AND UNCONVENTIONAL YOUR CARMINE MECHS MAY BE, THE FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH IS THAT IT IS PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF MECHS AND MECH PILOTS MORE THAN CULTIVATORS. THE TRANSHUMANIST FACTION AND THE SURVIVALIST FACTION WILL CONTINUE THEIR JOINT RESEARCH AND SUPERVISION OVER THESE WORKS."

That made sense. Even though mech pilots were technically cultivators, modern humanity still treated the former as if they existed in a category of their own. The interest groups based on the mech community were so strong that it was impossible for them to give up a treasure as valuable as Carmine mechs.

Not only did the Carmine System allow ordinary people to experience the wonder of piloting mechs, they also enhanced the control of existing mech pilots over their cherished machines!

Ves nodded in acceptance. "I can agree to that. Keeping Carmine mechs under a single organization will make my life a lot easier. The Transhumanists will be glad that they won't lose another toy. The Red Collective will take away so much stuff that it would be painful to lose Carmine mechs as well."

"I AM PLEASED YOU UNDERSTAND. I SEE GREAT PROMISE IN CARMINE MECHS, BUT THEIR IMPLICATIONS CAN BE SEVERE. WE WILL NEED TO INTRODUCE THEM TO THE PUBLIC AT THE RIGHT TIME. I COMMEND YOU FOR YOUR PATIENCE AND YOUR RESTRAINT."

She knew that Ves must have felt tempted to defy his instructions and reveal the existence of the Carmine System. The fact that he ultimately did not resort to this solution proved that he could be trusted to keep his word.

This was an extremely important virtue to god pilots.

They talked a bit more about what exactly had to be transferred to the Red Collective once it got off the ground.

The importance of inventions that had already shown their value such as companion spirits and kinship networks was great, and many people knew it. That meant that a lot of players would compete against each other in order to gain even the slightest measure of responsibility or authority over them. That was not a good development.

"YOU WILL BE APPROACHED BY MANY PARTIES WHO ARE SEEKING TO BECOME YOUR ALLIES. DISCERN THEIR INTENTIONS AND DECIDE FOR YOURSELF IF IT IS BENEFICIAL TO COOPERATE WITH THEM. DO NOT MAKE PROMISES THAT YOU CANNOT FULFILL. THE RED COLLECTIVE IS GREATER THAN ANY OF US. IT WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR ANY SINGLE INDIVIDUAL TO DICTATE ITS OVERALL DIRECTION."

Ves twitched his lips. Knew that there was no way for him to hide his true thoughts on this subject in front of an astute god pilot who was definitely studying his reactions carefully.

He did not bother to hide his motivations this time. It was useless anyway.

"The Red Collective should not be an organization that is too proactive or decisive. As an inclusive organization by design, it should not implement policies that only serve a small minority of people. For better or worse, a lot of extreme and selfish proposals will have little chance of passing. No matter what people believe in, they all have to find a middle ground that enough groups can stomach."

"I LIKE YOUR CHARACTERIZATION. IT IS GOOD THAT AN ORGANIZATION IS PRONE TO MAKING COMPROMISES THAT AVOID ANY EXTREMES, BUT MANY DEADLOCKS WILL ENSUE IN THE EVENT A CONSENSUS CANNOT BE FORMED. I DO NOT ENTIRELY FAVOR THIS OUTCOME. MODERATION IS MAY BE THE IDEAL STATE WHEN HUMANITY WAS STILL IN THE AGE OF MECHS, BUT IN WARTIME MORE DECISIVE ACTION IS NEEDED. I SHALL ENDEAVOR TO EMPOWER THE HIGHEST POSITION OF THE RED COLLECTIVE JUST ENOUGH TO PREVENT ANY LOGJAMS."

"I see... I don't think a lot of stakeholders will like it, though. The point of the Collective is to give the dispossessed people of red humanity an actual voice. It would be a mistake to imitate the Red Association and the Red Fleet in becoming deaf to their pleas."

It was difficult if not impossible to find the right balance between top-down and bottom-up management.

Ves did not think that even a god pilot as powerful as the Evolution Witch could solve this dilemma!

The god pilot in question certainly was not amused with Ves' petty antics, but she saw little reason to delve into this topic further.

It was still too soon to determine how the Red Collective was run. There was still an entire year for everyone to figure out how this novel new organization should complement human society.

Chapter 5796 The Radical Witch

5796 The Radical Witch

Ves did not expect to talk about mundane administrative topics with the Evolution Witch.

She took her responsibilities seriously and made it clear that she was fully invested into turning the Red Collective into a functional and productive addition to human civilization.

Perhaps that may have been one of the reasons why the tier 1 galactic citizens came to a consensus about appointing her as an interim leader.

Ves had a feeling that the Red Collective would end up a bit differently from what he originally envisioned if the Evolution Witch continued to make her mark in the following year.

She was driven, committed and utterly serious about discharging her responsibilities. That was not entirely good news to Ves as a more effective version of the Red Collective did not fall in line with all of his goals!

Alas, there was little that Ves could do about it. He felt as if he had organized a calm expedition, only for General Ark Larkinson to swoop in and lead the fleet to an entirely different destination!

Ves did not like to lose control, but part of it was his fault. His wife was right that his continual attempts to deflect responsibility did not do him any favors in this regard.

He felt conflicted about his initial decisions, but he chose to stick to his guns. Designing mechs was more important than anything else. All of this political power was all illusory because it could easily be taken away from him so long as his actual competence continued to remain inadequate.

"THE VISION THAT YOU HAVE PRESENTED TO RED HUMANITY HAS SERVED AS A CATALYST FOR FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES TO OUR SOCIETY." The Evolution Witch began to share her more philosophical musings after a while. "THE PROSPECT EXCITES ME. FOR OVER ONE-

AND-A-HALF YEARS, WE HAVE TRIED TO RUN OUR SOCIETY AS IF WE WERE STILL OPERATING IN THE MILKY WAY. WHILE THE RED TWO HAVE MADE A NUMBER OF NECESSARY ADAPTATIONS, THEY ARE UNWILLING TO GO FAR ENOUGH TO HELP OUR RACE THRIVE IN THIS NEW LOCATION AND ERA."

"Survival of the fittest." Ves remarked. "The species that tend to survive in the long run are not necessarily those who are the strongest at any given place and time, but those that can adapt the best to changing circumstances. Even the biggest and strongest monsters can go extinct once an ecosystem can no longer support them anymore. If there were other races from the Milky Way who happened to invade the Red Ocean with us, then humans like us would feel a lot more urgent about embracing the benefits of E energy radiation."

He demonstrated enough understanding of biology to signal that he understood her desire for change.

However, it also created another uncomfortable association.

"DID YOU LEARN THAT FROM YOUR NOW-
INFAMOUS MOTHER, PROFESSOR LARKINSON?"

"Er, that is just standard biology, Your Holiness. I am not my mother. You do not have to fear that I will follow in her footsteps. I have grown up in a very different environment, and my ideals are my own. The fact that I am committed to mech design should serve as sufficient proof of my dedication."

"IT IS NOT MY INTENTION TO QUESTION YOUR MOTIVES, BUT YOU HAVE TO REALIZE THAT YOU CANNOT EVADE THIS CONTROVERSY FOREVER. YOU HAVE BRILLIANTLY MANAGED TO DEFLECT ANY INQUIRIES RELATING TO YOUR MOTHER, BUT THERE WILL COME A TIME WHEN PEOPLE WILL RECALL THAT YOU ARE DIRECTLY DESCENDED FROM A MASS MURDERER, A WAR CRIMINAL, A TRAITOR AND AN OATH BREAKER. WHAT IS MORE UNCOMFORTABLE IS THAT IT REMAINS UNCLEAR WHETHER SHE IS ALIVE OR DEAD. ACCORDING TO THE RECORDS, SHE DIED WHEN YOU WERE BUT A CHILD. YET ONE OF YOUR 'SPIRITS' IS LITERALLY REGARDED AS YOUR MOTHER BY A REGIONAL RELIGION."

Ves grew a lot more uncomfortable. He did not want to volunteer any further information related to his mother than necessary, but it seemed as if everyone had uncovered more information about her than himself!

The god pilot leaned forward. "WHO IS THE SUPERIOR MOTHER?"

"She is a creation of mine." Ves honestly admitted. "The Superior Mother is modeled after my actual mother. That is why they share many similarities. There are times where I truly treat the Superior Mother as the woman who raised me in my early years, but there are also times when I treat her as one of my living products. It depends on the context."

The expression on the Evolution Witch's face showed that she was not satisfied with his answer.

He may have responded with the technical truth, but there was no way for Ves to hide the fact that he was trying to be deceptive.

Unlike the Polymath who was solely attuned to truth or falsehood, the razor sharp intuition of a god pilot was much better at gleaning people's underlying intentions!

The Evolution Witch floated a little closer and amped up the pressure against Ves.

"DO NOT MISTAKE MY CORDIALITY FOR TOLERANCE. HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN WHO YOU ARE SPEAKING TO? I WILL ASK YOU ONE MORE TIME. WHO IS THE SUPERIOR MOTHER?"

Ves liked to have claimed that he put on a brave face and courageously stood his ground against the leader of the Transhumanist Faction.

What actually happened was that he crumbled in an instant!

"Okay! Fine! What I told you earlier was true, but what I did not mention right away is that the Superior Mother is an incarnation of Cynthia Larkinson!"

"YOU ARE COMPLYING, BUT NOT ENOUGH. WHAT ELSE ARE YOU WITHHOLDING FROM ME, PROFESSOR LARKINSON?"

Damn! The Evolution Witch truly did not intend to let Ves off until she obtained the full truth!

The god pilot did not hesitate to exert more crushing pressure on Ves. Despite the fact that she was stationed light-

years away from the Ector System, the Evolution Witch was still able to give him nightmarish illusions where his true body mutated into all kinds of different biological monstrosities!

Ves did not have the desire to test whether the Evolution Witch possessed the ability to induce physical mutations over a communication channel.

"Okay! I may have left out the tiny little detail that Cynthia Larkinson is still alive and well in the Milky Way, and that she has carved out her own empire in the Oblivion Empire while at the same time remaining connected to what is going on in the Red Ocean!"

The powerful god pilot finally smiled and relented. "THAT IS BETTER. YOUR CONFESSIONS MATCH MY ANALYSIS. YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN MORE FORTHCOMING FROM THE BEGINNING. I AM NOT YOUR ALLY, BUT YOU DO NOT WANT TO BE MY ENEMY. DO NOT FORGET THAT, PROFESSOR LARKINSON."

Ves tried to regain his composure. "I understand, Your Holiness."

"IT IS USEFUL TO KNOW THAT YOUR MOTHER IS POWERFUL ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT YOUR BIRTH MOTHER IS ABLE TO PROJECT HERSELF IN THIS DWARF GALAXY. MANY PEOPLE WILL EXPRESS CONCERN IF THEY LEARN THAT SHE, AND BY

EXTENSION YOU, STILL MAINTAINS AN ACTIVE COMMUNICATION LINK WITH HUMANITY IN THE OLD GALAXY. YOU NEED NOT FEAR THE POSSIBILITY THAT I WILL PASS ON WHAT I HAVE LEARNED. I WILL HOLD THIS SECRET FOR YOU. NEWS OF THIS WILL ONLY DISTRACT OTHERS."

That relieved Ves a lot. He might not like the Evolution Witch all that much at this time, but he could trust in her word.

"I don't control or even understand my mother, but you don't have to be afraid that she will turn into the second coming of Original Sin. She has left her slaughtering ways far behind her. The Superior Mother primarily functions as a conduit and a source of feedback."

The god pilot did not put much stock in his words. "YOU HAVE JUST CONFESSED THAT YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE TRUE FACE OF YOUR MOTHER. IT WAS CLEAR EARLIER TODAY THAT THE INFORMATION SHARED BY LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER ASTRID JAMESON WAS COMPLETELY NEW TO YOU. NO MATTER. IT IS OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE TO ME. NOW THAT I HAVE EXTRACTED ENOUGH CONTEXT FROM YOU, I AM SUFFICIENTLY PREPARED TO APPROACH HER DIRECTLY."

What?!

"You... you want to seek out my mother?!"

The female powerhouse grinned. "THE FIRST FLAME WILL TORCH ME IF HE DISCOVERS MY INTENTIONS, BUT I AM DETERMINED TO SPEAK WITH ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL SURVIVORS OF THE FIVE SCROLLS COMPACT."

Ves almost blanked out. He had difficulty understanding what could possibly drive the Evolution Witch to desire a meeting with his actual mother.

"Wh-Why?"

"AS I HAVE STATED EARLIER, I AM A CHILD OF THE AGE OF MECHS. I GREW UP IN A TIME PERIOD WHERE THE HORRORS UNLEASHED BY THE FIVE SCROLLS COMPACT HAVE ALREADY TURNED INTO HISTORICAL RECORDS. TO BE MORE DIRECT, I DO NOT BEAR ANY ANIMOSITY TOWARDS FORMER ADVERSARIES FROM A CONFLICT THAT HAS ALREADY CONCLUDED 4 CENTURIES PRIOR. TWO AGES HAS PASSED SINCE THEN. IT IS TIME TO LET GO OF THE PAST AND MEET THE FUTURE WITH A FRESH PERSPECTIVE. SHE CAN BE OF ENORMOUS USE TO THE RED COLLECTIVE."

"Wait a second... you want to employ her as a consultant?!"

"WHY NOT? IT IS AN OBVIOUS COURSE OF ACTION NOW THAT I AM AWARE OF HER EXISTENCE AND AVAILABILITY. YOUR MOTHER IS CERTAIN TO POSSESS AN ENORMOUS ACCUMULATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE ON ALL ASPECTS REGARDING CULTIVATION. I CAN THINK OF NO BETTER ADVISOR ON HOW THE RED COLLECTIVE SHOULD BE ORGANIZED."

"Uhm, far be it for me to question the wisdom of your plans, but aren't you afraid that her advice will inadvertently make the Red Collective resemble the Five Scrolls Compact a little too closely?"

The god pilot imperiously crossed her arms. "THAT IS WHY SHE IS ONLY ONE OF MANY EXPERTS THAT I WILL LISTEN TO. I WILL MAKE SURE TO SOLICIT THE ADVICE OF

NUMEROUS HARD-LINE OPPONENTS OF CULTIVATION. I MUST LISTEN TO A WIDE SPECTRUM OF OPINIONS BECAUSE THE RED COLLECTIVE HAS DUAL RESPONSIBILITIES. THE NEW ORGANIZATION MUST PROMOTE THE PRACTICE OF CULTIVATION, BUT IT MUST ALSO RESTRAIN IT WHEN ABUSES HAVE TAKEN PLACE. EMPHASIZING ONE AT THE COST OF NEGLECTING THE OTHER WILL NOT YIELD THE DESIRED OUTCOME."

He agreed with her logic. What threw him off-guard was that the Evolution Witch saw no issue with exchanging notes with a former mass murderer. She demonstrated a degree of ruthless pragmatism that was difficult to attribute to high-

ranking mech pilots.

"I will be sure to notify my mother beforehand about your intentions." Ves gently offered. "As far as I know, you pose a strong threat towards her, so she will likely be reluctant to communicate with you directly."

"GOD PILOTS HAVE THAT EFFECT ON OTHER CULTIVATORS, EVEN IF THEY ARE TRUE GODS." The Evolution Witch commented with a deceptively mild tone.

She was totally not bragging!

Ves coughed at that. "If you truly want to talk to her and nothing more, then I can help you arrange a more indirect means of communication with my mother. I do not have the ability to know what is on her mind, but I think she will be more than willing to help you set up the Red Collective as long as it will help me. She cares a lot about my wellbeing. She is just as invested in defeating the aliens that threaten to engulf our civilization as any human in the Red Ocean."

The god pilot radiated greater interest after hearing that. "THE MORE OUR GOALS ARE ALIGNED, THE GREATER THE ROOM FOR COOPERATION. PERHAPS IT MAY BE POSSIBLE TO EMPLOY 'SPIRITS' SUCH AS THE SUPERIOR MOTHER AS THE REPRESENTATIVES OF DIFFERENT POPULATIONS OF RED HUMANITY. IT IS AN UNPRECEDENTED IDEA, BUT IT CAN THEORETICALLY WORK."

Ves had only thrown out that suggestion to get people to stop hounding him for answers!

Even though he seriously entertained its merits, he did not truly mean to turn it into a reality!

The idea went a bit too far even for him! There was no way he wanted one of the most important institutions of red humanity to be run by pretender gods of all entities!

"Uhm, no offense, Your Holiness, but I think it is better to let red humanity run its own affairs."

Chapter 5797 A Not So Minor Request

5797 A Not So Minor Request

Ves had a feeling that while the Evolution Witch certainly appreciated him and his work, she valued his ties to a former high-ranking Compact member even more!

The god pilot certainly did not hide her obvious interest in seeking cooperation with a True God who should have been her archenemy if they lived in the previous ages.

However, the charm of the Age of Dawn was that it had not only severed the Red Ocean's physical connection to the Milky Way, but also shed a lot of old and useless baggage in the process.

Ves liked it that the leader of the Transhumanist Faction was a lot less old-fashioned and willing to implement drastic changes that she deemed necessary.

What he did not like was how much she was willing to make effective use of her superior bargaining position to push through her demands!

When the lengthy but impactful conversation between him and the energetic god pilot finally reached the stage where he could bring up his desired topic, he began to doubt whether it was a good idea to go through with his initial plan.

He had talked long enough with the Evolution Witch to understand her measure. This was a driven god pilot who was not above taking advantage of a situation to advance her own interests.

She definitely had a set of principles that she abided by, but they were apparently a lot looser and less restrictive than the ones borne by more rigid god pilots.

It was no wonder that her reputation painted her as dangerous. She was a transcendent figure who wielded great martial might, but could not be restrained by rules and morals and easily as other god pilots.

As much as Ves feared the ire of the First Flame, the oldest god pilot could at least be trusted to abide by a strong code of honor.

It was exactly because high-ranking mech pilots built up their strength by maintaining their honor and following their convictions that they did not attract fear and suspicion.

The opposite was the case. Under the deliberate machinations of the Mech Trade Association, high-ranking mech pilots and especially god pilots were all treated as exemplary heroes who could do no wrong.

The public had long developed a strong impression of these powerful beings as honorable soldiers or warriors who fought for their ideals and for the betterment of mankind.

The fact that they were so strongly associated with mechs and not anything monstrous helped to increase their ties to modern humanity.

This strong climate ensured that every mech pilot that broke through and reached a greater stage of power continued to remain trapped in a society that imposed strong expectations on their behavior.

Assisted by the selective criteria of the Kingdom of Mechs, the mech community successfully produced the most combat effective cultivators of humanity, yet amazingly turned them into the brightest and most honorable paragons at the same time!

Anyone who understood how power could corrupt anyone would be amazed at how human civilization had managed to do the impossible!

Ves had grown up in a society where people universally admired and trusted high-ranking mech pilots.

It was therefore a little jarring for him to meet and interact with a god pilot who did not precisely fit this stereotypical mold.

Of course, Ves was not naive to assume that all demigods and higher were universally trustworthy and dependable.

He had met enough expert pilots and ace pilots who possessed obvious personality flaws that made them dangerous and unpredictable.

It seemed that he would have to add the Evolution Witch to that list.

Ves felt more and more apprehensive when he thought about issuing his request, but he might as well get it over with now that he was here. Who knew when he would be able to hold another private chat with the Evolution Witch. At least she was in a good enough mood.

"Your Holiness?"

"YES, PROFESSOR LARKINSON?"

Knowing that the Evolution Witch's time was valuable, Ves pressed onwards. "I have a small request... at least I think it is small. I have an urgent need to acquire an extremely rare and valuable material that is not available in the Red Ocean. I have tried to use other channels to inquire where I can acquire this exotic substance. I eventually managed to acquire a detailed analysis report of this material from the Xenotechnician, but..."

The Evolution Witch peered at him with a gnawing glance. "YOU REQUIRE MY ASSISTANCE. I SEE. GIVEN THAT YOU HAVE APPROACHED ME WITH THIS REQUEST, I PRESUME THIS MATERIAL IS ORGANIC IN NATURE. THAT IS NOT A SURPRISE. I HAVE RECEIVED SIMILAR REQUESTS SINCE THE START OF THE AGE OF DAWN. YOU WOULD BE SURPRISED AT HOW MANY DIFFERENT EXOBEASTS THERE ARE IN THE MILKY WAY THAT CAN PRODUCE EXTRAORDINARILY HELPFUL ORGANIC SUBSTANCES. PASS ME THE REPORT."

Ves did so. The god pilot immediately frowned as she rapidly read through all of the descriptions and numbers.

"Are you able to synthesize Yondu Milk?" He cautiously asked. "I don't need much of it. Just 12.556 milligrams will do. I would be happy if you could give me more, but it is not strictly necessary."

He did not dare to request 0.001 milligrams more for fear that the Evolution Witch might call him out on his dishonesty again.

The silence stretched on, causing Ves to grow more nervous. Was the Evolution Witch capable of reproducing this unique material? Would she be willing to go through the trouble of meeting his request?

This was an important issue to him. The Supply Missions had been hanging over his head for many years now. With so many expectations placed on his shoulders, Ves urgently needed to speed up his development more than ever!

It actually helped that it had become an open secret that his mother had gifted him a fragment of the Metal Scroll.

The mechers and the fleeters had a logical explanation why he progressed so quickly and came up with the craziest inventions at times.

His status as the Holy Son of the Metal Scroll also covered any other unusual actions and results, even if they had no direct connection to the Mech Designer System!

In other words, Ves did not have to be as subtle and circumspect about his use of the System as before. This was one of the reasons why he mustered up the courage to ask for Yondu Milk from one of the leaders of the Red Association.

There was hardly any other logical explanation why he would randomly have a need of an extremely powerful organic substance.

The Evolution Witch ultimately broke the silence after three full minutes of contemplation.

"I HAVE GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS FOR YOU, PROFESSOR. THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT I CAN RELUCTANTLY SYNTHESIZE IT. MY GOD KINGDOM IS INDEED SUITABLE FOR THIS PURPOSE, AND THE XENOTECHNICIAN HAS WORKED THOROUGHLY ENOUGH TO COLLECT ALL OF THE ESSENTIAL DATA."

"What... what is the bad news, then?"

"YOU SHOULD ALREADY HAVE AN EXPECTATION OF THE COST. 12.556 MILLIGRAMS OF YONDU MILK IS NOT A TRIVIAL AMOUNT. THERE IS A REAL PRICE TO SYNTHESIZING JUST A FRACTION OF IT. LET ME PUT IT THIS WAY. IF I SET ASIDE EVERY OTHER PRIORITY, I WILL NEED TO SPEND MORE THAN A WEEK ON CHANNELING ALL OF MY WILLPOWER PURELY ON PRODUCING DROP AFTER DROP OF THIS ALIEN MILK. I WILL NOT BE ABLE TO SPARE ANY ENERGY ON DEFENDING HUMAN STRONGHOLDS, FIGHTING HOSTILE SPACE WHALES OR ENGAGE IN ANY OTHER ESSENTIAL ACTIVITY."

A week might not sound like much, but the time and energy of a god pilot was extremely precious!

There were only 8 god pilots, each of whom fulfilled essential duties.

Ves knew that at least one of them was stationed in Bridgehead One in order to guard the greater beyonder gate.

Maybe one or two more god pilots were stationed in other essential star systems, while the rest continually patrolled the border regions in order to deter or repel large alien incursions.

There were so few god pilots that the absence of one of them would definitely worsen the strategic outlook of red humanity!

If the Red Cabal somehow got wind of it, the native aliens might decide to launch a massive offensive, taking advantage of the fact that a god pilot was temporarily unavailable.

Suffice to say, it would be the height of selfishness for Ves to insist the Evolution Witch meet his request after knowing how much it cost to reproduce this damned Yondu Milk!

"What... what makes this Yondu Milk so special and difficult to synthesize? The report contains a lot of descriptions about its properties, but it doesn't really state what it can do. The only piece of relevant information that I have obtained is that it is used in one of the most effective life-prolonging treatment serum formulas."

The Evolution Witch smiled again. "YONDU MILK IS A SUBSTANCE THAT DEFIES REALITY. THIS IS NOT A SURPRISE BECAUSE IT IS PRODUCED BY AN IMPOSSIBLE EXOBEAST."

LET ME GIVE YOU ANOTHER DESCRIPTION. YONDU MILK IS A PRODUCT OF A GOD, AN ALIEN ONE, BUT A GOD NONETHELESS. IT IS NOT TOO DIFFICULT FOR ME TO REPRODUCE ITS MATERIAL PROPERTIES, BUT WHAT IS TRULY CHALLENGING IS TO IMITATE THE NONMATERIAL PROPERTIES THAT THE ANCIENT EXOBEAST ATTACHES TO THE MILK. HAVE YOU EVER ATTEMPTED TO IMITATE THE WORK OF ANOTHER GOD?"

"Uhh..."

"THE MECHERS THAT YOU HAVE PREVIOUSLY CONSULTED WERE CORRECT TO POINT YOU IN MY DIRECTION. I AM THE ONLY BEING IN THE RED OCEAN THAT CAN FULLY REPRODUCE YONDU MILK. MY ABILITY TO IMITATE OTHER ORGANISMS IS UNSURPASSED. MY DOMINION OVER BIOLOGY IS ABSOLUTE. I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT NO ONE ELSE CAN MEET YOUR DIFFICULT REQUEST. WHILE IT TAKES AN IMMENSE AMOUNT OF EFFORT TO PRODUCE THE DESIRED QUANTITY OF YONDU MILK, I CAN STILL DO IT WITHOUT COMPROMISING MY OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES BY TAKING MY TIME."

Uh oh. The Evolution Witch did not emphasize her uniqueness for nothing. Ves recognized that he was being subjected to another negotiation.

"I understand." He said and bowed his head. "You don't need to boast any further. What do you want in exchange for 12.556 milligrams of Yondu Milk?"

The Evolution Witch grinned and leaned forward in a slightly intimidating fashion. "I ALREADY HAVE WHAT I WANT FROM YOU. THERE IS NOTHING URGENT THAT I REQUIRE FROM YOU AT THIS TIME."

She was probably right. The Red Association had already forced Ves to make a lot of major contributions.

While he received decent compensation for his actions, it also left him with a meager reserve of stuff he could trade with the likes of a god pilot.

"I'll... owe you a favor?"

The Evolution Witch did not look impressed.

"THERE IS A SOLUTION TO YOUR PROBLEM. I WILL DELIVER THE REQUESTED QUANTITY OF YONDU MILK IN HALF A YEAR. IN EXCHANGE FOR THIS SERVICE, YOUR MOTHER WILL INCUR A DEBT ON YOUR BEHALF. SHE WILL HAVE TO COOPERATE WITH ME ON AN UNCONDITIONAL BASIS UNTIL SHE HAS FULLY COMPENSATED FOR THE COST OF SATISFYING YOUR DEMAND. IS THIS ACCEPTABLE TO YOU, PROFESSOR LARKINSON?"

Damn!

The Evolution Witch sure drove a hard bargain!

Though Ves felt reassured that the god pilot did not expect him to do anything crazy or time-consuming in exchange for 12.556 milligrams of Yondu Milk, the same could not be said for his mother!

Ves already had a few ideas of what the Evolution Witch sought by cooperating with his mother.

However, there was a huge difference between approaching his mother as a business partner than as a loan shark!

"I... can't make this decision on her behalf." He responded. "I need to contact my mother and find out whether she is willing to play along. It would help if you can provide details on what you would have her do. I don't think she is unreasonable enough to reject cooperation out of hand."

Chapter 5798 Blocked

5798 Blocked

Ves exited the secure communication chamber half an hour later.

The powerful God Kingdom that had reached across the communication channel and imposed an isolation field around the compartment had finally disappeared, much to the crew's relief.

Every mecher stationed on the Tarrasque tried to fulfill their routine duties as diligently as possible. None of them dared to relax, joke around or act less than impeccably.

Jovy Armalon and Vector Loban waited outside the corridor for the entire duration. Both of them kept their backs ramrod straight even though it was clear that the Evolution Witch never paid them any mind from beginning to end.

Ves did not look like he had experienced a dream come true by speaking at length with an actual god pilot.

Countless people would have given up everything just to receive a little bit validation from one of the most powerful humans to exist, yet Ves looked as if he had lived through an arduous battle!

"Has your meeting with the leader of my faction concluded to your satisfaction?" Professor Vector Loban inquired.

Ves tiredly rubbed his face. "I suppose so, but... she didn't make it easy for me. It's been a long day. So much has happened that I need to take a lengthy break."

"Your quarters are always available to you. For security reasons, it is best if you and your entourage remain on this flagship. The Red Association has already confirmed that reinforcements are on the way to bolster the Bluejay Fleet. We will soon be joined by 3 light cruisers and 2 combat carriers."

"Combat carriers?"

"Yes. They are urgently needed. The ship class selected for the Bluejay Fleet can only hold 20 first-class multipurpose mechs each, but they possess robust repair suites and can carry an abundant amount of supplies. Additionally, the carriers also hold 1 elite infantry battalion each. The availability of additional mechs and infantry will substantially improve your security whenever you are indoors or on the surface of a planet."

"Well, I guess anything helps." Ves shrugged.

He should have been more pleased that the mechers had seen fit to ramp up his security, but he was too mentally fatigued to show a stronger reaction. Trying to keep his wits and maintain his composure in front of the Evolution Witch had drained him a lot more than he expected.

Jovy made an awkward remark.

"The additional reinforcements are welcome, but they fall short of the standards of a full escort fleet for a tier 2 galactic citizen or higher. Given everything that you have accomplished today, there should be enough justification to raise your galactic citizenship tier. However, I have found no such change in the records."

Ves grimaced when Jovy mentioned this painful point.

There was a time where he would have rejected such a high-profile move, but that had passed now that he had painted an even bigger target on his back!

"I politely requested the Evolution Witch about this subject, but... I did not receive a favorable response."

"For what reason?"

Both mechers looked genuinely puzzled. Ves was already being called the Father of the Red Collective despite the fact that the organization had not yet formed at this time!

Since the Red Collective was meant to become an equal partner to the Red Association and the Red Fleet, it would be a travesty if Ves still did not receive the promotion he deserved.

His current level of fame and influence over red humanity was much greater than before the start of the public inquiry!

There were many tier 2 galactic citizens that had not come even close to changing the course of human history as much as Ves!

However, the lack of satisfaction on his face made it clear that he did not gain the official recognition that he sought.

"To be fair, it is not the Evolution Witch's fault. She actually expressed a willingness to file an application, but when she did so, she received an instant rejection. It turns out that a certain powerful figure has implemented a block on any further promotions. My citizenship tier can only be raised when I have advanced to the rank of Master Mech Designer. Nothing else can remove this block. Her Holiness... came around and agreed with this measure."

"I see. That is... inconvenient."

All three knew what was going on more or less. Whoever originally implemented this block wanted Ves to stay on track and prioritize his mech design activities first. This was not only for his own good, but also helped to limit the amount of time he could spend on other priorities, such as trying to run the Red Collective or such nonsense.

Ves was not a politician. He was a mech designer.

There was nothing more that Jovy could say to that. This was indeed a clever way to encourage Ves to stick to mechs.

If not for this measure, Ves might have felt tempted to put his original vocation aside and spend a lot of time and energy on becoming a more traditional cultivator!

This was not a good outcome to many people. They preferred it if Ves remained preoccupied with designing mechs as opposed to concocting forbidden horrors!

Though Ves resented the obvious manipulation, he did not have the power to push back against it. He could only accept the current reality and play by the rules.

"I'm heading back to my stateroom. Is there anything else?"

"We are curious what sort of agreement you have made with the Evolution Witch. Is there anything you are willing to share?"

Ves thought for a moment. "Nothing immediate comes to mind. One of the most important changes is that a lot of initiatives related to my contributions are slated to be transferred to the Red Collective at the appropriate time. Before you ask, the Carmine System and its derivative products will remain under the Red Association."

This was a logical division. Vector Loban mainly cared whether he could still conduct research on Carmine mechs. Hearing that the upcoming reforms would not deprive him of this opportunity relieved his most immediate concern.

Ves answered a few more questions until they arrived in front of his stateroom.

"By the way, is the grand auction still on track to begin in two days?" He asked.

"It is, but it has received much more interest among high society than before." Jovy reported. "Estaban Leeds has capitalized on your surge of popularity and the vast amount of increased attention on Ector V. There is not enough time for wealthy groups across the new frontier to dispatch their representatives to this port system in time to attend the auction in person, but there are still plenty of local magnates who have decided to attend this event. Are you still committed to auctioning 25 percent of the LMC's outstanding stock? Its estimated value has increased by a large margin, and that is not just because your living mechs have escaped sanction."

Ves needed to think more deeply about this matter. "I can probably attain the same results as before if I only auction 10 percent of the LMC's shares, but... I don't want to go back on my word. It is not necessarily a bad idea to stick to the original plan. I can gain much more out of this than I initially estimated. Whoever is willing to invest in my mech company will also be a lot stronger as well. That is going to be important for me and my clan as we could use more friends in high places."

His latest talk with the Evolution Witch reminded him of the importance of power.

While it would be best if he became a Star Designer and could single-handedly earn the allegiance of many willing groups, Ves was way too far from reaching this point.

The only way he could quickly increase his power base was to expand his network of allies.

It had already demonstrated its value once before, so Ves had high hopes of strengthening it further.

Having a lot of powerful friends did not necessarily secure his position, but it made it a lot harder for enemies to dislodge him. Ves just needed to make sure that he continued to remain a valuable ally.

"The auction can go on as planned, but I would like to add one more rule." Ves said after a brief moment of thought. "I have made a lot of new enemies today. I don't want these guys to outbid others and take partial control of my company just to hinder my work. I should retain the right to reject a winning bid if I don't like the highest bidder for whatever reason."

"That is understandable. I will inform Estaban Leeds on your behalf. I am sure the company will not object to this change. Anything else?"

"Captain Zonrad Reze most definitely wants to meet with me. Tell him that I will be ready to talk to him in private. Make sure to arrange a secure meeting location."

"Very well..."

Ves finally retired for the day.

There was a lot of stuff that he needed to catch up to, but he needed rest more than anything else.

A turbulent night passed in Charvey as the ripple effects of the infamous public inquiry still reverberated across human space.

When Ves woke up again, he no longer worried too much about what his words and actions had wrought upon human civilization.

Even if he had initially set off the formation of the Red Collective, the Evolution Witch and many other leaders had gotten their hooks on it. This relieved Ves of the burden and the responsibility to baby over this initiative as if it was his child.

With that out of the way, Ves tried to narrow his scope and focus on his more immediate concerns.

He was more than eager to get back to New Constantinople VIII and do his best to help his wife complete the challenging Dark Zephyr Mark III Project, but he still needed to complete a few chores.

"Let's see what I have on my plate." Ves murmured to himself as he shoved his breakfast into his mouth.

"Meow." Lucky echoed as he buried his metallic head inside his food bowl.

Aside from preparing for the grand auction, Ves looked forward to finally making actual progress in completing his Supply Missions.

He could afford to wait half a year before he could obtain his precious Yondu Milk. He just had to make sure that his mother continued to cooperate with the Evolution Witch.

Ves still needed to do more in order to secure a batch of EE-343F-00334R. He was not sure whether he could satisfy the Red Fleet's demands at his current level of competence, so he was eager to make the attempt.

In order to do that, he would have to make a detour and journey to one of the Red Fleet's powerful dreadnoughts so that he could gain access to the powerful vessel's AI core.

Ves had no idea how the Red Fleet took the revelation that ARCHIE had inadvertently turned into a living deity cultivator.

Revealing this uncomfortable truth had been a reckless move, but Ves did not regret it. He used it to gain more momentum and forestall any attempt for Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson to make a comeback.

Still, Ves worried whether the fleeters could live with their current reality. What if they violently lashed out against ARCHIE? What if ARCHIE went mad in an attempt to defend its right to live?

Ves needed to make contact with Sigrund again in order to gain a better understanding of the current affairs of the Red Fleet.

Now that the latest events had made parts of the Red Fleet more open towards unconventional solutions, Ves was eager to explore additional forms of cooperation.

He might not like everything about the fleeters, but they were just as wealthy as the mechers, if not more!

There were bound to be a lot of opportunities for Ves to sell his services to the Red Fleet!

Chapter 5799 Internal Rifts

5799 Internal Rifts

Jovy arranged a secure meeting place as promised.

Located deep underground a private resort, the luxuriously furnished meeting room had been a place where the movers and shakers of Ector V negotiated and concluded many business deals.

Ves would have preferred to meet with Sigrund in a location that was more secure, but that was not possible.

They needed to meet in a location that was not under the direct control of the Red Association or the Red Fleet.

There were factions and powerful personalities within both organizations that really did not like Ves at the moment! It was best not to give them easy opportunities to gain an advantage over him. Once more he lamented that he had outpaced the growth of the Larkinson Clan.

Fortunately, that would change in a few years. The Red Ocean would look a lot differently once the clansmen who had undergone EdNet training finally returned en masse, but their newly gained competence would instantly elevate his power base!

At the very least, he no longer wanted to depend entirely on the Bluejay Fleet for his security needs.

The hatch slid open shortly after Ves entered. A familiar fletcher captain stepped inside.

Both Ves and Captain Reze deployed their respective jammers and security devices.

Lucky flew around and phased through the reinforced walls to sniff out any buried listening devices.

Though the routine was time-consuming, Ves and Sigrund did not mind the delay. The peace of mind they gained was much more important.

Once the place was reasonably secure, Ves immediately started to ask questions.

"How is the Red Fleet doing?"

"It is not doing particularly well at the moment." Captain Reze responded. "If not for the fact that I am currently your designated contact person, I would have gotten dragged into the debate about the continued existence of ARCHIE. There are many fleeters who are not pleased that the improved evaluation and monitoring system that has been responsible for increasing their productivity has actually mutated into a sentient AI with god-like powers. Fears that everyone will get taken over by this inhuman monstrosity has provoked a lot of knee jerk reactions."

Ves furrowed his brows. "I can understand how that can be creepy for people. Surely there are fleeters among you that see enough reason to recognize the value in keeping ARCHIE."

The captain briefly smiled. "There are. Many fleeters, particularly the lower and middle ranks, adore ARCHIE. Ever since it took the place of the more limited IES, many spacers and officers have received the promotions that they have always deserved. The gratitude they owe to the fair and impartial system that is devoid of any bias and nepotism is massive."

"What about the other side? I am sure the fleeters who are in charge don't share this sentiment. I am surprised they allowed ARCHIE to come online in the first place."

"You would be surprised how many fleeters are in favor of employing more effective AIs, though only within reason. In any case, the higher-ranking fleeters have not benefited nearly as much from ARCHIE, so they regard it in a much more negative light. Those high-ranking officers also tend to be much more preoccupied with philosophical and societal problems. Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson is a good example of that. She is only 254 years old, but she has inherited so much responsibility that she is just as paranoid about AIs as the survivors of the Age of Conquest."

Ves immediately frowned. "What is she up to now that her massive gambit yesterday failed?"

"She is still fighting," Sigrund replied. "She may have lost the battle against you, but there are plenty of other battles that she can fight. She and her compatriots regard the massive encroachment of cultivation and everything related to it as a war. They are not too concerned about losing individual battles. What matters to them is that they make meaningful progress. As long as they can stop or delay the onset of cultivation within the Red Fleet and beyond, they have fulfilled their mission. They are not going to stop being a thorn on our sides."

"Ugh. I guess I shouldn't have expected our opponents to have a change of heart. Given that these spoilsports are so adamantly opposed to ARCHIE, is there a possibility that the Red Fleet will experience a schism and split in half?"

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" The fletcher smiled without emotion.

"I do get a sense of vindictive satisfaction at the thought of the fleeters causing their own downfall."

"Then I am afraid I have to disappoint you, Ves. We are not as stupid and short-sighted as you think. A furious debate is raging within our organization, but we are well-aware that the Terrans and the Rubarthans would like nothing more for us to disintegrate. I think that even the mechers do not want us to fracture. One way or another, Fleet Admiral Argile and Fleet Admiral Jameson will find a resolution that will end the ongoing ideological struggle."

This sounded similar to the prior division within the Survivalist Faction. There was plenty of room for different opinions, but once the Survivalists had voted on a plan, they expected everyone to fall in line and unite behind the winning proposal.

It was an effective way to resolve differences between opposing factions, but it required enough maturity from the losers to achieve the desired results.

Ves was not sure whether the Fifth Fleet was willing to play along if too many fleeters ended up favoring ARCHIE.

"Does this ongoing fight affect our earlier deal, captain?" He questioned. "I hope you haven't forgotten about exchanging EE-343F-00334R for my services."

"We have not forgotten, Ves. The strife is problematic, but it will not cause any undue delays. We are still eager to discover whether you can improve the performance of our cherished warships. We will just have to bring you to a dreadnought where your contribution is more welcome than others. It would be ideal if we can take you to the Dominion of Man. The dreadnought already carries enough stock of this precious material to meet your needs."

Ves grew a little disappointed when he learned the Red Fleet's current distraction had made it unclear whether he could conduct his experiment on the Dominion of Man.

However, it ultimately made little difference if he worked on one of the other dreadnoughts. The fleeters would simply have to spend a bit of extra time to deliver several kilograms of EE-343F-00334R to his location.

What Ves prized the most was that he was finally making real progress. Completing the Supply Missions strengthened the Mech Designer System by a large extent, thereby unlocking powerful new capabilities that would bring it closer to the level of the complete Metal Scroll.

Ves briefly wondered whether it was possible to turn his fragment into a full Sacred Scroll again, but he quickly dismissed the possibilities. He did not think it could fix all of the missing parts just by mixing a few top-quality materials together.

"What will happen after the experiment is successful?" Ves asked.

"If you have succeeded in bestowing life to one of our dreadnoughts, then we will have to conduct thorough tests to determine the differences. This will take months if not years. Once we have verified that your method is useful to us, you can expect us to conclude a more comprehensive deal with you. It is likely that we will wait until the Red Collective has entered into operation. It will be much less problematic to embrace aspects of cultivation if a part of us has already joined the new cultivation-oriented organization."

"That makes sense. I hope I don't have to wait that long to get my hands on EE-343F-00334R, though."

"I do not believe you have to worry about that. The alloy is certainly valuable enough for the Dominion of Man to keep in stock, but the value of cooperation ultimately exceeds the value of this material."

That was reassuring to hear.

Now that Ves learned what he wanted from Sigrund, he relaxed and began to chat about less urgent matters.

"Will the fleeters participate in the upcoming grand auction?"

Captain Reze chuckled. "In fact, we will. None of us really cared about it previously, but it is different now. The auction house has rapidly expanded capacity. Not only is it accepting many more items to be auctioned the next day, but it is also expecting the arrival of many more guests. Many of them are primarily coming because of you. The grand auction is bound to become a lively event."

Ves had already received word that Estaban Leeds was capitalizing on his popularity, but this sounded like a much bigger deal than before.

"Will the fleeters put up anything good on auction?"

"Let's just say that we have put items up for bidding that even you will take interest in. That is all I can say. I am bound by confidentiality to not divulge any further information. I hope you bring enough capital."

"Don't worry about that. My latest arrangement with Isthmus Manufacturing has vastly increased my net worth. I can also spend the expected proceeds from auctioning LMC shares in advance."

Money was no longer an insurmountable problem to Ves at this point. Just as his wife and several advisors suggested, he could always go deep into debt in order to finance a massive investment. His earning ability was more than enough to pay it all back in time.

Ves asked another question after a while. "Since the Red Fleet is geared to become a participant in the Red Collective, which fleets are set to embrace cultivation?"

"None of that is clear at the moment." Sigrund shook his head. "Not enough time has passed to make this determination. I think that the Seventh Light Fleet that I am a part of may be a likely candidate. We are new and more open to change. We do not field any large warfleets, so any adverse consequences will not result in a rapid collapse of our defensive lines. Admiral Chelsea Mieli is also closely aligned to Fleet Admiral Stanley Argile, so the Seventh Light Fleet can be trusted to make an honest effort to integrate cultivation."

"So the Seventh Light Fleet will serve as a guinea pig for the Second Main Fleet?"

"Essentially, yes." Sigrund answered. "The Second Main Fleet is much older and more steeped in old traditions. It is crewed by veteran officers and spacers who have always known one way to fight. They are much more resistant towards radical changes than usual. They need convincing proof that cultivation can produce real performance gains before they are willing to adapt. As long as the Second Main Fleet has clearly become more powerful due to these changes, many of the other fleets will follow suit."

"I can't imagine the Fifth Enforcement Fleet doing this. It would be too embarrassing of a retreat."

"This is why Fleet Admiral Jameson is most certainly urging her R&D personnel to come up with viable alternatives that do not bear any direct relation to cultivation. There are still many die-hard fleeters out there that think that pure technology can still save them all. I do not necessarily disagree with this stance, but the opponents are fighting an uphill battle with this attitude."

"Speaking about the female fleet admiral, how is her descendant doing? Has Lieutenant-Commander Astrid Jameson already tucked her tail between her legs and left the port system?"

"I am afraid I have to disappoint you, Ves. She is still lingering, though neither of us have ever spoken to each other. From what I can surmise, she will most definitely participate in the upcoming grand auction on behalf of her ancestor. You can expect her to have access to deep pockets."

"Great."

"On the other hand, the Fifth Enforcement Fleet may have put items of their own up for auction. I do not know what they have entrusted to Estaban Leeds, but the Jamesons are eager to win back their lost prestige."

"Interesting."

Chapter 5800 The Flooded Theater

5800 The Flooded Theater

The grand auction organized by Estaban Leeds on Ector V received much more attention than anyone originally thought!

Due to the participation of the mech designer who had detonated human civilization in the Red Ocean only a few days ago, countless players wanted to get into contact with him through any means!

Unfortunately, many of their attempts became stymied due to the restrictive entry requirements imposed by Estaban Leeds for its highest class of auctions.

The company endured an enormous amount of pressure to ease up on the most stringent condition for participation.

For as long as the prestigious company organized its most prestigious grand auctions, it had always insisted on live participation.

Combined with the fact that only tier 6 galactic citizens and higher could get in, this had turned its grand auctions into highly exclusive gatherings where only the most powerful regional players got together in order to exchange their goods and services with each other!

The grand auctions did not only serve as a place for these wealthy magnates and powerful politicians to earn big scores or acquire valuable treasures.

It gave regional players an excuse to converge in a single physical location and expand their networks. Friends and allies deepened their ties with each other while relative strangers explored new business opportunities.

In short, the exclusive venue provided an intimate stage for different groups to forge deals with each other that was far superior to any remote communication method.

The high entry requirements did not seem to deter participation. It instead became a powerful draw as every regular participant knew that those bothered to come were both worthwhile to talk to and anchored to the regional economy.

Estaban Leeds therefore functioned far more than a mere auction house. It served as one of the economic lubricants that performed a vital role in accelerating the development of the prosperous Zelmar Upper Zone.

However, recent events had completely changed the character of the grand auction. Many of the regional players who used to receive the highest treatment had been relegated side characters!

In the past two days, over 360 participants signed up for the grand auction on short notice!

What was remarkable was that the vast majority of them were way more important than mere tier 6 galactic citizens.

Many tier 4, tier 3 and even tier 2 galactic citizens had signed up right away. After that, they hopped onto their fastest superdrive-equipped starships and urged their blazingly fast vessel to travel to the Ector System as quickly as possible!

It helped a lot that the Ector System was a port system, but even then a lot of Terrans and Rubarthans lamented the distance from their own territories.

If Estaban Leeds wanted to give all of these other high-tiered galactic citizens a chance to attend the auction of their lifetimes, the company could have delayed the big event by a week.

The number of attendees could easily become an order of magnitude greater than the current prognosis!

Ultimately, the company resisted the temptation to do so. The company had operated since the Age of Conquest, so its management was anything but short-sighted. People trusted the auction house because it had built up an unflinching reputation for being fair, honest, transparent and reliable.

Its determination to hold the grand auction on the scheduled date was admirable, but it certainly hadn't been easy given that it had made a lot of powerful groups angry.

When Ves got ready to attend the much-hyped grand auction, he became somewhat amazed at how extensively his involvement had warped the entire event.

"I have enough stuff on my plate at the moment." He said as a bot neatly adjusted his bow tie. "I know that a lot of power players have come to talk to me, but I am not in the mood to wine and dine with them at the moment."

"You will disappoint many potential business partners, sir." Kelsey Ampatoch said as he filled in for the role as his personal assistant at this time. "Back in Rubarthan space, there are many mech designers who would kill to be in your position. Whether it is your ability to design unique living mechs, or your outsized voice in the Interim Leadership Council, there is great demand for your attention. You do not need to meet with too many people. You can allow us to select a handful of VIPs and meet with them in private to hear their offers. This may be a good opportunity for you to acquire territories, first-class planets, rare resources and sizable ownership stakes in major companies."

The mention of all of these potential gains briefly aroused Ves' greed, but he quickly controlled himself.

While he and his clan could definitely use the help, Ves was still cognizant that his overall strength and means were still too limited.

So much had happened already that changed his reality. Ves felt the need to restrain himself before he lost all perspective.

"I am fine with our current trajectory." He said as he continued to admire the mirror projection's custom tuxedo-

clad form. "If people truly want to cooperate with me, then they can bid on the shares that I am putting up for auction. I think that making myself scarce will increase the demand for my company's shares. After all, I can't ignore the demands of shareholders."

"That may work. It will limit the amount of partners you cooperate with, but the relationships will become more enduring." Kelsey concluded.

"Besides, I can always hold my services in reserve in case I want to bid on something really special. I have heard that all kinds of remarkable stuff show up in these grand auctions."

Ves looked forward to that. One of the benefits of all of the increased attention was that many of the participants consigned a lot of valuables to Estaban Leeds.

Naturally, the auction house maintained strict standards on what kind of goods they added to the list. None of the high-

tier galactic citizens wanted to waste their time on ordinary commodities.

"Meow meow!"

A dark archemetal cat floated up to Ves and made his demands clear. The gem cat looked especially cute after a bot had tied a miniature bow tie to his collar.

"I know, Lucky. I will keep an eye for interesting exotics for you. Just make sure you don't use up all of it to strengthen your body. Leave some for your primary function."

"Meow."

After Ves became satisfied with his appearance, Ves and the rest of his immediate circle got teleported to one of the VIP teleportation chambers of the auction house.

Just like all of the other structures in the aquatic-themed city of Charvey, the auction venue had been decorated in an interesting manner.

Estaban Leeds had turned the entire auction house into an ancient theater that had been flooded with water. Everything was submerged with water, causing the environment to look more enchanting.

Plenty of alien aquatic life forms filled up the halls and corridors. Glowing purple weeds, strange six-eyed fish and transparent invertebrates leisurely floated in the water or rooted themselves into tastefully looking cracks.

Everyone who entered the Flooded Theater wore the same special energy shields that kept the water at bay, allowing their bodies and their clothes to remain dry.

Even Lucky wore a miniature version of the same device. Ves was pretty sure that his gem cat could swim through water without any problems, but it was best not to test his patience.

"Meow..."

Lucky certainly did not look comfortable in this environment. He flew closer to Ves and perched on his shoulder as if he was afraid his miniature water repelling shield could fail at any second.

"Okay, so what now?"

"There is still plenty of time before the grand auction begins." Kelsey Ampatoch said. "It is advisable for you to speak with the manager of the auction house. If you do not want to speak with anyone else, I can lead you straight to the upper hall where the big event is scheduled to take place. It is divided into a common seating space and private boxes."

"I take it that we have already reserved one of those private boxes, right?"

"Yes, but it usually isn't necessary. You see, the exclusive clientele that attends these grand auctions usually like it when they can sit in the same space. Many attendees actually prefer to sit in the large common space where they can easily approach and chat with other peers."

That actually sounded nice, but Ves had become so high-

profile that he would definitely become the center of attention if he appeared in a crowd.

"Can I gain a preview of the listings if I speak to the manager?"

"No. That is expressly forbidden by the rules set by Estaban Leeds. Either everyone or no one gets access to this information. Since surprise is part of what makes these exclusive auctions more dynamic and exciting, the auction house does not have a habit of sharing this information in advance."

"I see. That's fair. I guess I will just have to wait for the grand auction to get going. Let's move."

Ves, Lucky and Kelsey moved straight to their private box and settled in for a comfortable wait.

In the meantime, more and more distinguished guests arrived and met each other in the reception hall and other spaces.

The absence of Ves in these public gatherings did not dampen the excitement among the participants.

Not only did they talk about routine business affairs, they also showed a lot of enthusiasm as they exchanged their opinions on explosive subjects such as cultivation, the Red Collective and what it all meant to their respective states or organizations.

Nobody remained unaffected by the changes sparked by the historic public inquiry!

Many people stood to suffer a lot of losses, but there were others who saw brand new opportunities advance their interests.

None of these powerful people wanted to remain stagnant and fall behind the latest development. Regardless of whether they supported or opposed the recent changes, they all sought to capitalize on the latest trend if only to ensure they kept up with their rivals.

This was why even the likes of Lieutenant-Commander Astrid Jameson attended in order to represent the interests of the Fifth Enforcement Fleet.

Of course, her galactic citizen tier was not high, but she came in the company of a more senior RF officer.

The same applied to Jovy Armalon and Vector Loban. They arrived with their respective buddies from the same faction and eagerly helped to identify new opportunities for cooperation.

The eagerness to forge new partnerships was a clear indication that the latest turning point had shook a lot of parties.

It became impossible to maintain the old status quo because Ves single-handedly shook the very foundation of human society and the Red Two!

Cultivation should have been an open secret for at least a few more years. That would have given all of the major players a comfortable head-start.

Since Ves had spoiled their plans, they all scrambled to adapt in order to strengthen their positions in more immediate ways!

Ves smirked when he thought about what he had done. Those elites sought to deprive the common folk of essential benefits in order to satisfy their selfish interests. They had what was coming to them as far as he was concerned.

Only by serving the common folk would humanity be able to realize its greater potential.

Many powerful folk rightfully feared that giving ordinary people access to cultivation would lead to a lot of instability, but that was precisely why the Red Collective became necessary.

Time slowly passed by. Ves spent much of his time petting Lucky while allocating much of his attention to catching up on his advanced studies in his mind.

Soon, hundreds of high-tier galactic citizens and many more followers steadily began to fill up the upper hall.

The lighting of the cozy venue gradually began to dim. The only sources of light came from the fluorescent fish and aquatic plants that occupied the submerged space. Their inconsistency added a lot of novelty and created a special atmosphere in the upper hall.

Jovy and Vector both entered Ves' private booth after a while. Their energetic expressions showed that they had likely participated in a few successful ventures.

Before the two mechers could share their experiences, the highly anticipated event commenced.