

The Mech 5851

Chapter 5851 Under Heavy Strain

What Ves had just done was incredibly crude.

The conditions were incredibly scuffed and inadequate.

The Dominion of Man was not designed and built with the Carmine System in mind.

Yet Ves had managed to treat her as if she was a living starship solely due to the presence of the Brain Trust.

Without this ridiculous organic element that just happened to share a faint but passing resemblance to a Carmine System, he would have never concocted such a crazy scheme!

"The pact is formed."

Ves managed to complete the most important step. He worked hard to take advantage of the available conditions and combine all of the disparate elements into a crude Carmine warship.

Yet even as Ves could feel the enormously powerful storm clouds forming above the Dominion of Man, he quickly grew concerned about the state of the fragile bond.

His jubilation and laughter quickly faded, much to the relief of the fleeters. It was not exactly pleasant when they shared the same room with a mech designer who apparently experienced a bout of madness.

What they did not know was that the reason behind Ves' abrupt change of mood might not be a positive turn of events.

"What have you done, Ves?" Sigrund asked as he stood behind his work station. "The stress levels of all of the brain units have skyrocketed. The Alpha Plus Brains are particularly showing signs of concern. Their readings have not only spiked to the point where they are heating up at a rapid rate, but their data is also getting scrambled! Nothing about this matches the scenarios that we have planned in advance! If this pattern persists, the most sensitive nerve cells of the Alpha Plus Brains wear themselves out to the point where they are unrecoverable! The entire Brain Trust will collapse at that point! What did you do?!"

Ves grimaced. The tribulation storm hadn't even arrived yet, and it already looked like his extremely bold and daring attempt to transform the Dominion of Man into the first Carmine warship hit its first major hurdle!

In hindsight, it might not have been a good idea for Ves to skip decades of careful experimentation and work on a dreadnought right away.

The fact that he became confronted by a whole load of complications that never occurred when he experimented with his Carmine mechs showed that his theoretical framework on the Carmine System still had a lot of glaring holes!

The good news was that the Blood Pact hadn't collapsed in an instant.

The bad news was that the newly formed spiritual connection mimicked the behavior of a piece of string that was trying to hold up a weight that far exceeded its load capacity.

It did not take Blinky's precise senses to figure out that the Blood Pact would not be able to hold for long at this rate!

Ves offered a quick explanation to Sigrund and the fleeters.

"I have employed a classified experimental design application to tie the ancestral spirit to the Dominion of Man. While the first step has proceeded as intended, the result is much less stable than I have anticipated. There is a clear disparity in strength between the two variables!"

"Can you compensate for these complications? If not, I recommend we disconnect the Brain Trust from the rest of the dreadnought by force. The ship is already relying on her other AI core arrays to regulate her systems."

"It won't work." Ves shook his head. "The pact has already formed. If you interrupt this process now, then the Brain Trust will have to be scrapped in its entirety! The Dominion of Man might not come out unscathed either. Our only choice is to commit and hope that we can fix this mess! Do your best to keep the 5 Alpha Plus Brains as connected to each other as possible. It is vital for them to merge."

Sigrund and the other fletcher specialists clearly desired a lot more clarification from Ves, but they would never get their wish.

Not only was Ves not allowed to divulge any details about the Carmine System, he did not want the fleeters to know how extensively he put the safety and the combat effectiveness of their dreadnought at risk.

They would probably crucify him if they learned that his risky experiment had the potential to render the entire Dominion of Man inoperative or worse!

While Sigrund quickly activated a few emergency measures that would hopefully extend the longevity of the brain units under strain, Ves and Blinky desperately tried to diagnose the problem.

It soon became clear that Ves was dealing with multiple problems that all compounded in a Blood Pact that was far too weak and inadequate to cope with them at the same time.

On a fundamental level, a traditional Blood Pact was a permanent spiritual bond between a Carmine mech pilot and a Carmine mech.

In this particular case, Ves forcibly created an unconventional permanent spiritual bond with a newborn ancestral spirit and an improvised Carmine dreadnought.

There were many sketchy aspects about this model. The newborn spirit had only just come to life and was incredibly unstable.

If Ves waited for the new spiritual entity to come into its own, the entity would have been able to increase the strength and resilience of the Blood Pact.

Apparently, the strength of the current Blood Pact was mainly based on the 'pilot' due to the fact that the 'machine' did not possess a strong or cohesive spiritual counterpart.

This was bad, because the 'machine' was not a relatively small and manageable mech, but rather a dreadnought that was 18 kilometers long!

An ordinary Blood Pact was way too small and inadequate to form a stable connection with such a massive vessel!

It did not help that the Dominion of Man did not possess an adequate Carmine System either. The improvised blood channels only covered a small fraction of the immense capital ship, and the blood sacrifice of all of the crew members was not strong enough to serve as an adequate substitute.

The Brain Trust was not able to handle the load either. Despite all of the preparations, the Alpha Plus Brains were not merging properly, thereby making it difficult to form a theoretical 'Super Brain' that possessed an effective genetic aptitude score of S!

The situation grew direr by the second. Alarms rang across the entire dreadnought while tens of thousands of spacers tried in vain to repair the issues plaguing their proud vessels.

Their efforts were doomed to fail. At most, they might be able to delay the point where something important inevitably broke.

Ves realized that it was up to him to fix the problem he created due to his recklessness.

As the acute crisis weighed down on him, he refused to crumble under the pressure.

Lesser people who became aware that their actions may have doomed one of the 8 precious dreadnoughts of red humanity would have panicked by now, but Ves had lived through so many comparable incidents that it did not take any effort for him to maintain his cool.

In fact, he always worked best when he was put under pressure.

The consequences of failure this time were so great that Ves entered into a highly focused state!

His perception of the passage of time slowed down as he rapidly analyzed the huge trouble he was in. So many different variables had gotten messed up that it was difficult to sort them all out, but Ves did so anyway due to his unflinching belief that there were always solutions to every problem!

It only took a few seconds for Ves to line out all of the acute problems and puzzle out possible solutions.

The newborn ancestral spirit's lack of power relative to the Dominion of Man was the most fundamental problem. A weak 'pilot' simply did not have the qualifications to mind-meld with such a massive and unreasonably powerful machine!

Bringing up the entity's strength was a crucial priority. The easiest way to solve this problem was to use Alexa Streon's companion spirit to rapidly nurture his latest creation.

"I shouldn't have left her behind." Ves blamed himself.

To be fair, it was unlikely that his direct disciple would have been able to provide much help. There were clear limits to how much Maia was able to boost the growth of other spiritual entities.

According to his original plan, the new ancestral spirit should have grown into power by absorbing the huge amount of spiritual feedback of people who believed in human supremacy.

This was similar to how Gaia reached the threshold of True God in record time.

However, the process of gathering spiritual feedback still took a bit of time. It did not help that the new entity was put under enormous strain shortly after its creation, thereby causing it to incur constant damage that the entity was struggling to regenerate.

Ves actually found it rather admirable that the spiritual product was able to persist under the circumstances.

He quickly activated a communication link with Dread Captain Argile.

"Activate the 2nd Caramond Contingency Plan!"

The commander of the dreadnought frowned. "We will throw secrecy out of the window if we do that. Are you absolutely certain it is necessary?"

"It is! Time is short. People need to praise and revere the supreme marshal that has once led our race to victory. The more they think about him, the more our new ancestral spirit can embody the aspect of human supremacy!"

It only took a single second for Volkert Argile to make his decision.

"Done. I have transmitted the requests and instructions. Fleet Admiral Argile will ensure that there will be no hindrances. What else do you require?"

"Activate the 3rd Spark Reactor Contingency Plan."

That provoked a much stronger reaction from the dread captain!

"Maximizing the power output of the Spark Reactor is not a gentle process! Different energies will course throughout the entire hull. This may exacerbate our current problems."

"I know, but we don't have much choice! Just do what I say! I know what I am doing!"

Seeing that maintaining the status quo probably wouldn't lead to a good result, the dread captain nodded before implementing another dangerous plan.

"Anything else?"

"Nothing more for the time being. Be prepared for shocks and other disruptive phenomena. Since the gentle approach isn't working, I am switching over to a more forceful approach. Don't be too alarmed if your ship jolts a few times."

Ves cut off the communication channel before the captain could inquire any further.

It took time for both contingency plans to come into effect, but they should hopefully start to make a difference within the next two minutes.

"Caramond. Caramond. Caramond."

The 2nd Caramond Contingency Plan was already starting to come into effect.

The spacers serving aboard the Dominion of Man as well as all of her escort vessels had been instructed to think really hard about a heroic figure of humanity's past.

Supreme Marshal Caramond Perle was the defining hero who broke the hold of the Cosmopolitan Movement and led the human race to conquer half the galaxy!

Even though it had been many centuries since he died, the man was still famous enough to be in all of the history books.

Now, as the Red Fleet executed a mysterious order that compelled it to use all of its media and public relations channels to put this legendary hero in the forefront of human society, his name began to occupy more and more people's minds.

"Caramond. Caramond. Caramond."

The fleeters serving aboard the Dominion of Man were the most 'pious' of all. They continually repeated the hero's name as if they were reciting a mantra. This was not a surprise as Ves had already primed them to worship Caramond Perle for a lack of a better term.

It was working!

The newborn ancestral spirit that Ves deliberately modeled after the legendary supreme marshal of the human race was beginning to solidify!

Unfortunately, it was not enough.

Caramond wasn't growing fast enough to reverse the alarmingly rapid deterioration of the nascent Blood Pact.

The disparity between strength and load was still too great!

The ploy would have worked if Ves had chosen to bind Caramond to a Carmine mech or maybe a Carmine juggernaut, but a massive dreadnought was still too big!

This was where the Spark Reactor came in. It took a lot of time to raise its power output, but Ves could gradually feel that the Brain Trust along with many other systems began to expend a lot more energy than before!

Chapter 5852 Caramond

Two massive changes took place shortly after Ves formed a highly unstable Blood Pact.

One of them was the Red Fleet's inexplicable decision to glorify Supreme Marshal Caramond Perle.

This was an incredibly random and unexpected move from one of the powers that made up the Red Two.

The fleeters generally did not do anything without a specific purpose in mind. This was why many leaders across human-occupied space became surprised when all of the channels that the Second Main Fleet could leverage had dropped all of their priorities in favor of espousing the heroism of one of humanity's greatest heroes!

It would have been more understandable if all of the media and publicity departments scheduled these events in advance.

However, a lot of people became confronted by fletcher propaganda without any warning or explanation!

[...The human spirit shall endure! As Supreme Marshal Caramond Perle had once led a beleaguered human race to demolish the aliens of the Milky Way, his ideals shall guide us through our struggle once more!...]

[...Let us remember the man who saved human civilization from the treachery of alien lovers and single-handedly started the Age of Conquest! As a simple human, the hero known as Caramond Perle is the principal figure who contributed more than anyone else to ensuring human dominance in the Milky Way...]

[...Red humanity has lost its way! We have become lost and splintered after the Great Severing. Instead of bickering among ourselves, we should unite and fight the aliens together! There is no

better example to learn from than Caramond Perle, whose military and political acumen enabled him to forge many different groups of people into a single united empire...]

The Red Fleet's initiative went beyond flooding the galactic net with propaganda broadcasts.

Many fleters received instructions to read up on Caramond Perle or listen to impromptu history lessons about this historical figure!

Those stationed in highly populated cities and space stations even went out on the streets with instructions to mention the historical hero's name in any way possible!

"Have you heard of our lord and savior Caramond Perle?"

"The Red Fleet will save our race just as Supreme Marshal Caramond Perle has saved us in the past!"

"In light of the brave sons and daughters of red humanity who suffered defeat at the hands of the native aliens, our branch has decided to create the Caramond Perle Recovery Fund to subsidize starship acquisition and repair programs for qualified private mech forces."

As the Red Fleet pushed Caramond Perle's name to such an excessive degree, many people began to wonder whether the powerful organization had come under the control of a madman.

It was not just the mechers who were wondering whether their archrivals had become compromised, but also the fleters themselves!

Those who were not aligned with the Second Main Fleet criticized this initiative the most! The actions of Fleet Admiral Stanley Argile and his lackeys were embarrassing their noble institution!

Nonetheless, the growing amount of internal and external pressure did not deter the Second Main Fleet from continuing their coordinated publicity campaign.

Back inside the Dominion of Man, Ves clearly sensed that all of these efforts were working.

"Caramond. Caramond. Caramond."

The crew serving aboard the dreadnought contributed most of all. Ves had not primed them in the preceding days for nothing. Many of the depictions of men in heroic situations had been altered to portray Caramond Perle.

Sure, the Supreme Marshal had never fought an infantry battle against phase whales or thousands of other alien species depicted in those exaggerated paintings. The many historical inaccuracies did not matter, though. Intent was far more important than the truth.

With the support of the crew most of all, the ancestral spirit was showing clear signs of recovery.

The spiritual feedback that the entity was somehow gathering from billions if not trillions of people across the Red Ocean had become so much that he was rapidly rising through the first and second major cultivation ranks!

Yet despite all of this amazing progress, the unstable Blood Pact still remained incredibly lopsided!

The Dominion of Man was too immense. Her size and mass far exceeded that of a mech, and her armaments alone were cataclysmically more powerful.

All of this imposed such an enormous load on her new partner that the Blood Pact continued to deteriorate regardless of how quickly Caramond was rising to the occasion!

"The Alpha Plus Brains are beginning to overheat!"

"One of the weapon departments has reported serious glitches."

"One of our data storage units has just been corrupted!"

The dreadnought continued to suffer. Sigrund and the other experts tried their best to keep the brain units as healthy as possible.

Ves continued to keep a close eye on the 5 Alpha Plus Brains. He originally thought that their close neural integration was sufficient to merge them together, but each of the brain units used to belong to strong personalities.

Whatever happened in the past few minutes had somehow sped up the revival of the remnant spiritualities associated with the brains!

"Blinky! Do your best to merge these remnant personalities with Caramond!"

"Mrow!"

The Star Cat reinforced the tethers that anchored Caramond to the Dominion of Man and tried to integrate the spirit more extensively to the 5 Alpha Brains.

It was already fairly troublesome to do so with a single brain, but trying to keep Caramond integrated with 5 separate organic AI cores at once was a different story!

Blinky had to leverage Ves' ingenuity to the fullest in order to figure out and implement inventive solutions.

The measures were working. The Alpha Plus Brains no longer fought against each other, but instead started to work together as had always been the case.

Though Ves did not possess extensive expertise in brains, the readings started to look a little more encouraging.

"How is the Brain Trust, Sigrund?"

The Alpha Plus Brains began to feel more special to Ves, but he knew far too little about what he was doing to determine whether his ambitious gambit would succeed.

"It is getting better, but only marginally! The strain on the Alpha Plus Brains is dropping, but it is still at an unusually high level. We cannot sustain this state for too long!"

Ves nodded in understanding. "Are the Alpha Plus Brains starting to show any signs of synchronization?"

"Yes, but the signs are not strong yet. The 5 brain units are still performing many calculations by themselves. It will likely take time for their synchronization rate to approach 100 percent, but there is no guarantee this will happen."

The Alpha Plus Brains began to feel more special to Ves, but he knew far too little about what he was doing to determine whether his ambitious gambit would succeed.

He needed more time!

Caramond was growing stronger at a faster rate. So much spiritual feedback was pouring into the newly created entity that he was rapidly starting to become smarter and more capable of leveraging his rising power!

Much of the spiritual programming that Ves had integrated into the ancestral spirit's template was beginning to produce results.

The powerful entity was made with the Blood Pact in mind. Caramond went into action as soon as he was able to do so and tried his best to strengthen the Blood Pact on his end.

Ves found it impressive that Caramond rose to the occasion without actually breaking all of this time.

This was one of the reasons why it was so critical to form a Blood Pact when he was still new.

Caramond therefore remained in a fairly malleable state which meant that he adapted a lot better to the demands imposed by this powerful spiritual connection.

This was counterintuitive to people as human babies were usually too weak and defenseless to do the same.

However, Ves had created too many spiritual entities for him to apply mortal rules to intangible existences.

"You have done a good job so far, Caramond, but the next challenge is about to come!"

It took a bit of time for the Dominion of Man to run at full power. The dreadnought not only had to increase the power generation of the Spark Reactor to the limit, but also had to activate a lot of azure shield generators and other ship systems that expended a huge amount of energy!

All of this was necessary to channel as much energies from the Spark Reactor throughout the hull as possible!

As the Spark Reactor started to become more and more active, an amazing series of changes occurred.

Ves and Blinky experienced a second source of pressure all around as the Spark Reactor supplied far more than huge quantities of electric energies.

The Spark Reactor also produced a lot of fire-attributed E energy!

The living spark stuffed inside the center of this massive construct possessed True God-level characteristics, so its material energies and metaphysical energies were never truly isolated from each other.

Normally, the Spark Reactor did its best to separate these energies but this time was different.

It took a lot of convincing and modifications, but Ves managed to convince the engineers responsible for maintaining the Spark Reactor to let a bit of fire-attributed E energy piggyback off electric energy.

What this essentially meant was that the Spark Reactor's fire energy rapidly began to proliferate throughout the entire hull!

Fire energy spread to everyone, even in sections where it was never meant to go! The potent and extraordinary energy reached places such as cafeterias, command centers, cabins, armies, Dread

Armor repair centers, shuttle bays, hydroponics, fire control systems, ammunition stores, life support systems and so much more!

Practically every single powered part and system of the Dominion of Man began to get exposed to the Spark Reactor's fire energy!

This was incredibly significant to Ves. He no longer regarded the Spark Reactor as a source of electric energy.

If the Dominion of Man was like a gigantic organic body, then the Spark Reactor functioned as the heart!

At this time, the Spark Reactor distributed its endless supply of fire-attributed E energy through the 'arteries' of the dreadnought as if it was pumping blood.

The entire interior of the dreadnought grew hotter. The temperature hadn't risen at all, but everyone felt as if they were being exposed to the rays of a star!

Once this effect had grown past a certain threshold, Ves quickly took action!

"The pact must change!"

Mere blood could no longer turn the Dominion of Man into a passable Carmine warship.

The starship was too damn big and strong relative to the circulation of human blood. To be more precise, the Brain Trust was far too pathetic while the blood sacrifice of the crew was even less effective.

Ves suspected that even if all of the crew serving on the Dominion of Man sacrificed their lives at once, they still wouldn't provide enough power to do the job.

Since that was the case, Ves made another bold and daring experiment.

He had made the risky decision to substitute blood with fire energy!

While blood still played an important role in keeping the two Carmine elements together, the introduction of potent fire energy could do a lot to compensate for the fact that the Dominion of Man was never designed to function as a conventional Carmine warship.

At least that was the theory.

Ves and Blinky worked quickly to alter the Blood Pact so that it became compatible with fire-attributed E energy.

It helped a lot that Ves had accounted for this possibility beforehand. The feature had already been baked into Caramond and the Brain Trust, so all he had to do was flip a lot of intangible switches in order to activate this hidden functionality.

"It's... it's working!"

The Blood Pact was no more.

By tapping into the output of the Spark Reactor, Ves had managed to create the first Bloodfire Pact!

Just as its name suggested, it was a pact formed by relying on the power of blood and fire-attributed E energy!

Suffice to say, a Bloodfire Pact was far more powerful than any mundane Blood Pact that Ves had established in the past!

Flame and heat exploded from all 5 Alpha Plus Brains!

Seconds later, all of the other organic AI cores burst into flames!

This was despite the fact that they were all floating in their own nutrient vats!

"Fire! Activating extinguishers now!"

"Wait!" Ves called out. "They're not actually on fire! Look at the temperature readings. The brains are only metaphysically on fire!"

"What is that supposed to mean?!"

Ves wanted to scratch his head. "I have no idea, but I don't feel that this is a detrimental process. Don't do anything that would interrupt this process!"

Chapter 5853 Ignited

The Blood Pact was formed and sustained through blood.

Although the Carmine Systems integrated into metallic mechs did not appear to serve any functional use, their symbolic and metaphysical functions were much more significant!

Blood was the medium that tied the Carmine mech pilot and Carmine mech together.

The choice of blood was deliberate. Due to swallowing a certain enlightenment fruit, Ves had become intimately familiar with the extraordinary properties of human blood.

Water and other liquid substances clearly weren't suitable. Ves might be able to circulate them through a Carmine System, but an active Carmine mech pilot would quickly get poisoned as a result!

Even if the mech pilot received heavy augmentation that enabled him to function with water flowing through his veins, it still wouldn't work as well.

Unlike blood, water possessed other inherent meanings. It did not hold the same attributes that paired up well with the Carmine System.

This was why Ves stuck to using blood as the primary connecting medium for such a long time.

The Bastion piloted by Venerable Jannzi Larkinson was the first time that Ves implemented the Carmine System.

His intent for this gimmick back then was a lot different at the time, but it turned out so well that Ves decided to make the Carmine System the centerpiece of his design philosophy.

What was important to note was that the Carmine System was originally a product of the Age of Mechs. It was designed to operate in a low-energy environment that was largely devoid of E energy and hyper materials.

Then came along the Age of Dawn.

With Messier 87 shining its oppressive light over the Red Ocean, the rules of the game had changed.

A lot of new possibilities opened up, so much so that the Red Association quickly introduced the Hyper Generation in order to add more structure to the rapidly developing field of hyper technology.

What Ves did not think about in the months and years after the Great Severing was that the Carmine System might not be restricted to blood anymore.

Logically, any non-solid medium that was compatible with life could do a similar job.

It did not even have to be a material substance. E energy might be able to do the job as well as long as it possessed a few necessary properties.

Yet Ves had never once thought about finding a replacement for blood.

For one, blood always served him well enough. Not a single Carmine mech he produced so far had exhibited any signs of instability.

The Blood Pacts between the Carmine mechs and Carmine mech pilots all functioned without any apparent issues.

Ves preferred to pay attention to the actual problems and limitations related to the Carmine System as opposed to finding solutions when none were needed.

Perhaps it had been a little shortsighted of him to neglect these possible alternatives. Blood had power, but there were other choices that either opened up new possibilities or produced even better results!

Yet because Ves always assumed that the Carmine System was intrinsically tied to blood, he stumbled through the first year of the Age of Dawn without ever deviating in this aspect.

This seemed incredibly stupid in hindsight!

It was as if Ves always had the option of producing transphasic mechs, yet never did so because he neglected to harvest a nearby deposit of phasewater that was hiding in plain sight!

It was strange how taking a break from designing a Carmine mech and working on a possible Carmine dreadnought of all things had led to several crucial discoveries and breakthroughs in this field.

The concept of the Bloodfire Pact was born out of a concern that the Dominion of Man would not be able to function as a proper Carmine warship, if such a thing could even exist.

Ves had good reasons to feel concerned.

Blood made up such a miniscule part of the hull and structure of the dreadnought that it would never be able to match the proportion of a Carmine mech.

Since the probability that blood would not be able to serve as an adequate medium for a pact, Ves had been thinking hard about a replacement.

It was only when Ves recalled his observation that the Spark Reactor was built around a living entity that he made the connection!

The living spark was not only alive, but functioned as the 'heart' of a massive 'living' dreadnought.

Once Ves began to fit these variables into the model of the Carmine System, everything seemed to fall into place.

Though Ves did not have proof that his latest theory had any merit, the evidence so far suggested that he was right to leverage the power of the Spark Reactor!

Of course, the results were a lot flashier than he expected!

As fire-attributed E energies continued to course throughout the entire hull, far more than just the Brain Trust burst into metaphysical flames!

"Ahh!"

The Dread Marines assigned to guard the Brain Trust also began to display the same phenomenon!

Each of their Dread Armors seemed to combust and release fiery orange flames, yet in actuality none of them were really burning.

"We are receiving reports that Dread Marines across the entire hull have caught on fire as well! The soldiers report that they are feeling uncomfortably hot, but none of the heat comes from a physical source."

"We need explanations, Ves! Dread Captain Argile needs answers in order to reassure his crew. Is the Dominion of Man at risk?!"

"The ship is fine as best I can tell." Ves quickly answered as he did his best to observe and analyze the dramatic changes taking place around him. "As best as I can tell, I have managed to tap into the greater potential of the Spark Reactor. What is happening right now is that the Spark Reactor is 'refining' the Dominion of Man for a lack of a better description. The brain units... as well as the Dread Armors are key components of the dreadnought. I bet that the Rubicon Spatial Transfer System must have 'lit on fire' as well."

"Why? What is the point of this process?!"

"The Spark Reactor is transforming all of these elements. This is not necessarily a bad thing. All of the components on fire are changing in a way that will make them more compatible with the Spark Reactor and their new conditions. It is rather great that this is happening because it is fixing many of the flaws that would have caused the process to fail."

Unless the flames actually burned anything for real, they were incredibly beneficial to the formation of the brand-new Bloodfire Pact.

The refinement process that took place across the entire hull directly improved the Dominion of Man's qualification as a Carmine warship of the bloodfire variety.

"Captain Reze, please take a look at the readings of the brain units. Have they grown more stable?"

"They... the stress levels are decreasing. There are many indications that the brain units... are beginning to acclimate to the heightened activity. The Alpha Plus Brains are improving even faster. They... they are beginning to synchronize with each other!"

That was good news!

Ves had evidently missed a few crucial steps, but this autonomous refinement process helped to make up the shortcomings.

The brain units remained physically separate, but they had started to come together in a spiritual sense.

Instead of functioning as separate brains, they began to behave more like collections of brain cells that happened to be a little more separated from each other than usual.

While Ves was glad that the Spark Reactor induced all of these spontaneous transformations, the problem was that these were directed actions!

There was an intelligence that purposefully engineered these changes!

Caramond was not responsible. He was too new and did not know how to properly exercise his power.

The brain units themselves also shouldn't be responsible because they did not possess any coherent sapience before he started the ritual.

The only explanation that made sense was that the living spark itself was responsible somehow.

Ves found it difficult to accept this conclusion because he was pretty sure that the living spark was devoid of any intelligence. It was supposed to be the spiritual equivalent of a clone. It had lots of power, but no real mind to do anything more sophisticated than leak it out of its intangible body.

This was also an important reason why Ves felt a bit more comfortable with forming a so-called Bloodfire Pact.

In the model for this specific pact, Caramond played the role of a Carmine mech pilot while the living spark functioned akin to the spirituality of a living mech.

So long as Caramond was the only properly sentient and active intelligence in this relationship, the ancestral spirit would remain in charge of the powerful dreadnought.

However, it turned out that this assumption was wrong!

The current indications suggested that the living spark was not as devoid of intelligence as Ves expected.

This was a scary thought.

If the living spark possessed a hostile attitude towards the Red Fleet and red humanity, then the Dominion of Man had the potential to turn into a demonic dreadnought!

Yet... as Ves and Blinky continued to observe the burning brain units and Dread Marines, there were no signs of any adverse changes.

The strange flames did not cause any physical or spiritual harm.

Nothing showed any signs that they were hijacked by another intelligence.

The Spark Reactor operated at full power without exhibiting any complications.

The conclusion that Ves drew from these observations was that if the living spark was not an enemy, at least for the time being.

Ves' actions may have inadvertently woken up the living spark!

That, or he had caused it to develop an actual semblance of intelligence!

Whatever the case, this scarily powerful True God-level entity did not try to break out of the Spark Reactor, but instead stayed put and continued to supply a huge amount of power to the Dominion of Man.

More importantly than that, the living spark either accepted the terms of the Bloodfire Pact or decided to tolerate the existing one.

This was a far better outcome than trying to resist the permanent spiritual bond!

As time went by, the crew of the Dominion of Man slowly became accustomed to mysterious phenomena.

They were all elites who could withstand a lot of shocks. So long as their superiors told them that the illusionary flames were harmless, they did their best to remain calm and in control. Panic would not help their situation in the slightest.

What mattered at this time was the transformation and stabilization of the Brain Trust.

It was the crucial element that tied Caramond together with the Dominion of Man, or more precisely the living spark.

"The flames are beginning to fade!"

"The heat is abating."

As the transformations started to subside, the Dominion of Man had become a lot more integrated with her Spark Reactor than before.

The refinement process had turned the idea of the Dominion of Man as a Carmine warship into a reality, at least in part.

As far as Ves was able to see, the Brain Trust, the Dread Armor and other critical systems had become intrinsically tied to the existence of the living spark.

It was as if these separate elements had formed their own individual Bloodfire Pacts with the living sparks!

The most important outcome was that the Brain Trust, the Rubicon Spatial Transfer System and all of the Dread Armors had become permanently bonded to the living spark!

Ves worried the most about the latter. He was unclear whether this change also included the soldiers who wore the Dread Armors during the refinement process.

This was not the time to investigate this matter, though.

The latest changes had been a boon to the Bloodfire Pact!

Unlike the shaky Blood Pact of before, the Bloodfire Pact that replaced it was much stronger and more stable than anything he had seen in the past!

Not only had Caramond grown a lot stronger due to the passage of time, but the Dominion of Man was finally pulling her weight due to leveraging the strength of her Spark Reactor!

It was an amazing result. Ves did not think that he would be able to replicate this result with a regular capital ship.

The immense power and crucial assistance provided by the living spark had turned out to be instrumental in forging a working pact!

What was even better was that the 5 Alpha Plus Brains no longer functioned as separate brain units at this point.

The refinement process had somehow completed the work that Ves attempted to make. According to the readings, the crucial collection of brain units had truly begun to function like a mythical S-grade Super Brain!

The consequences were enormous and far-reaching. The entire Brain Trust began to radiate a different sort of power.

"It's working... it's actually working for real this time..."

Though Ves still needed to conduct a lot of examinations to verify his results, he had a strong hunch that the living spark's intervention successfully finished what he started!

The consequences to all of this became very clear as the pressure from above was rapidly growing stronger.

Whether it was the Bloodfire Pact, the magical refinement process or the complete formation of a Super Brain, the heavens had grown jealous at what Ves had managed to cobble together!

Chapter 5854 A Hidden Pact

When the Red Fleet initiated a widespread publicity campaign that was solely meant to put Supreme Marshal Caramond Perle to the forefront of everyone's consciousness, many people took notice.

The fleeters had always been driven by calculation and rationality. Their principles were abundantly clear and their oldest traditions went back millenia.

While the Red Fleet most definitely kept a lot of secrets, they usually managed them pretty well.

Lieutenant-Commander Astrid Jameson's leaks had been the only time in recent memory that the fleeters acted against their own rules and regulations.

The current incident might not share any resemblance to the abrupt push to bring Supreme Marshal Caramond Perle to the forefront of public attention, but plenty of people figured out that there may be a common element that was responsible for provoking both incidents.

Deep inside a hidden biotech research facility where an entire research division conducted exhaustive studies on phase whale and phase lord tissue samples, an eminently powerful figure sat in the middle of an enormous hall.

The woman was instantly recognizable. Her tall form, her purple robe and above all else her overpowering God Kingdom identified her as one of the 8 iconic god pilots of red humanity!

The Evolution Witch had been assigned to guard and patrol the border regions around the Vivan Upper Zone this time.

The native aliens had relented in their latest pushes at the upper zones at this time. That did not mean that the Red Cabal had run out of steam.

No. It was the opposite in fact. The intelligence services of the Red Association had picked up many indications that the aliens had decided to stop sending warfleets into human space in bite-sized portions.

The Red Two's premier warfleets along with the active protection of god pilots such as the Evolution Witch ensured that none of these intrusions managed to get much done.

It would have been tolerable if the alien warfleets managed to inflict irreplaceable losses to their opponents before they inevitably got wiped out, but the results were too meager to sustain this effort.

The aliens were not stupid. They were not eager to throw themselves to their deaths.

It became increasingly evident that the Red Cabal had collected enough intelligence about their extragalactic foes to recalibrate their strategy.

Since there were so many moving parts involved, it took a lot of time for the natives of the Red Ocean to execute a strategic shift.

The Evolution Witch smelled a major offensive on the horizon. She knew that this lull would only be temporary. Once the aliens got ready to attack with much greater fervor than before, they would inevitably come up with a trump card or two that were designed to contain god pilots such as herself!

This made it more important than ever for the few god pilots who found themselves stuck in the Red Ocean to do whatever it took to increase their strength and capabilities.

The issue was that god pilots no longer had a solid direction to follow.

Every mech pilot up to the rank of god pilot merely had to fight, train and master their own selves. The Kingdom of Mechs or the Red Kingdom took care of everything else.

Unfortunately, the Progenitors of Mechs never got around to developing a blueprint on how god pilots should progress past their current rank.

This caused a lot of problems for the most powerful and exalted warriors of the modern age.

When the Evolution Witch managed to break through to god pilot at a fairly young age, she became filled with an overpowering sense of optimism.

That quickly disappeared once she started to communicate with the other god pilots of humanity.

Out of a hundred or so god pilots, none of them had a definitive clue about how they should progress towards the next rank!

They all knew there was another threshold in the distance. Yet none of them had managed to construct a standard cultivation method that would enable all of them to reach the hypothetical rank of god king pilot.

That was why everyone decided to diverge and pursue their own individual paths.

As True Gods, they had already turned into unique existences. They might share a lot in common, but their God Kingdoms had diverged so much from each other that a one-size-fits-all approach may no longer be adequate to promote their strength any further.

This was why different god pilots tended to do whatever they thought was necessary to advance their strength.

Whenever the Huntsman was stationed in the border regions, he rarely spent time on defending human star systems. He instead made the risky decision to go behind enemy lines and hunt down notable commanders and phase leaders.

His hunts regularly terrified alien leaders and caused significant delays in enemy operations.

Yet he also generated a lot of concern within the Red Association due to flying solo all of the time.

Though the Huntsman made sure to make his hunts as unpredictable as possible, it was still possible for the aliens to prepare an ambush for his possible intrusion.

Yet these hunts were always worth it for the god pilot. Each time he came back with a brand-new trophy, he came across as a little more threatening than before.

The Evolution Witch occasionally envied the Huntsman for developing such a straightforward path towards ascension. It made sense for him to derive strength from his hunts as it fully aligned with his God Kingdom.

The female god pilot was not as lucky, however. She had only broken through relatively recently.

The Huntsman was a century older than her. His knowledge, his techniques, his accumulation and his understanding of his domain and God Kingdom were so much better that he always gained the upper hand during their spars.

In fact, even if their overall combat power were even, the Huntsman would still win the overwhelming majority of friendly bouts!

The Huntsman countered her. The Evolution Witch's greatest advantage was her ability to absorb and mimic the strengths of every extraordinary creature she came into contact with. She was able to assimilate, optimize, evolve and even merge the best biological characteristics of the most powerful organisms of the Milky Way and the Red Ocean!

Her versatility was nearly unmatched. The most recent major operation had been incredibly rewarding to her as she managed to absorb an entire ancient phase whale!

Though it took a lot more time and effort to fully assimilate and master the extraordinary abilities of the once-powerful Singularity Lord, she could already pass herself off as a fairly powerful phase whale at this time!

Yet for all of these advantages, the Huntsman still regarded her as prey.

Her continuous defeats against him rankled her pride and affronted her sensibilities as a god pilot.

She did not necessarily mind the fact that she was losing. What truly upset her was the fact that she never managed to improve her performance after all of this time!

The gap between them was growing. No matter how many mutated beasts and calamity beasts her Geneforger absorbed, she only became more versatile as opposed to getting stronger.

A part of her recognized that she needed to absorb more foes on the same level as the Singularity Lord in order to make meaningful progress.

However, the ancient phase whales had all made themselves scarce. Not only were they hiding on the other side of the dwarf galaxy, they also hid their precise whereabouts by holing up in their pocket spaces.

Besides, Lucie Miyazaki had a strong feeling that assimilating another ancient phase whale would merely turn herself into an even bigger piece of prey in front of the infuriating god pilot.

A normal mech pilot would have recognized and accepted the fact that the Huntsman was her natural counter.

A god pilot would never give up. It was against their nature to do so. The Evolution Witch swore to herself that she would do whatever it took to defeat the Huntsman in single combat one day.

Of course, that was not the only reason for her to pursue greater strength. She also took it upon herself to defend red humanity, defeat the Red Cabal and fend off other threats.

The real reason why she was so fixated on defeating the Huntsman was because this rivalry exposed the limitations of her old approach.

If she wanted to overcome her own weaknesses and defeat her implacable peer, she needed to pursue a different evolution strategy.

This was why another True God was sitting in a lotus position in front of her mortal form.

It took a lot of effort to control her God Kingdom and prevent it from repelling the powerful guest. The Evolution Witch exerted just enough of her divine willpower to exert a light degree of pressure towards her fellow True God.

The manifestation of the Superior Mother continued to raise her arm and project her energies towards the Evolution Witch. While it was not her forte, the incarnation of Cynthia Larkinson did her best to project piercing energies that were reminiscent of the Huntsman's sharp domain.

It was clear that one of them had it much easier than the other.

It was so easy for Lucie to strengthen her God Kingdom and block the flow of E energy. She could even take it a step further and repel the Superior Mother's fragile domain.

However, that was counterproductive to her goals.

If the Evolution Witch wanted to become strong enough to defeat the likes of the Huntsman, she wouldn't be able to do it alone.

She needed help.

It was difficult for a god pilot to admit this fact, but Lucie was not as stubborn and arrogant as the likes of the First Flame.

She was younger and less experienced than any other god pilot. Everyone else was doing their best to grow stronger in their own ways, so it was extremely unlikely for the Evolution Witch to catch up to any of them if she relied on her own efforts.

This was why she actively sought out the help of one of the most dangerous cultivators of the Age of Conquest.

Though their initial introduction had been tense, the Evolution Witch and the woman formerly known as Cultmaster Original Sin both figured out fairly quickly that they had a lot of grounds for cooperation.

Neither of the two had any desire to revisit the sins of the pasts. The future weighed much heavier on them, so they quickly managed to form a pact that would compel them to assist each other's cultivation as best as possible.

Aside from exchanging knowledge and secrets that were helpful to their counterparts, they also started to experiment with conditioning each other.

For example, the Evolution Witch partially exerted her God Kingdom on the Superior Mother in order for the latter to increase her ability to cope with other god pilots.

The Superior Mother utilized her versatile mastery of the elements to acclimate the Evolution Witch to specific attacks.

The results were relatively meager so far, but both were hopeful that they could strengthen each other in more meaningful ways.

Both abruptly paused the current session.

The manifestation of the Superior Mother cut off the flow of energy and lowered her arm.

The matronly figure frowned.

"Have you noticed?"

"I have." Lucie faintly nodded. "The researchers in the base are discussing the latest actions of the flecters. Let me guess. Your son is involved."

The Superior Mother snorted and crossed her arms. "That brat of mine is incapable of sitting still. This is just the start. By the time the day has come to an end, he will become the talk of red humanity. Again."

The Evolution Witch did not know if she would be able to tolerate such a naughty offspring. She felt fortunate that she had dedicated herself so much to her life and career that she never got around to having kids.

"Do you require my assistance to contain the... fallout?" The god pilot offered.

"It shouldn't be necessary. Ves has plenty of contacts to lean on. Besides, you are located too many star systems away from him to render aid in time."

"That may not always be the case, my friend."

"Let us not get ahead of ourselves, Lucie. First we need to master an aspect of each other's powers."

Chapter 5855 A Talk Between Fleet Admirals

The Evolution Witch and Cynthia Larkinson were far from the only powerful figures to notice the Red Fleet's unusual movements.

Many of them had access to enough intelligence to deduce the ultimate culprits responsible for publicizing Supreme Marshal Caramond Perle en masse.

Enough tier 1 and tier 2 galactic citizens also possessed enough knowledge to guess what was taking place.

It went without saying that none of them were particularly pleased at what was happening.

Bang!

"Fleet Admiral Argile! This is completely unacceptable! Just because your son is the captain of the Dominion of Man does not mean you are free to alter it to this degree! There are rules! Any major upgrade and refit plan must first earn the approval of a designated panel of shipwrights and naval engineers! No such applications have been filed in the last two months!"

The head of the Second Main Fleet continued to remain cool as the physical projection of his counterpart from the Fifth Enforcement Fleet expressed her dissatisfaction.

"I admit that the Dominion of Man is undergoing changes that many of us have not been able to foresee. Technically, we have commissioned Professor Larkinson to repair a problem related to her control system that our own scientists have failed to correct. His proposed solution is evidently much more involved than we expected. Complications are to be expected when applying corrections on such a large scale."

"THE DOMINION OF MAN IS LITERALLY ON FIRE, STANLEY! Have you observed her hull at this time? Her entire exterior is surrounded by flames! It is as if she is trying to imitate a star!"

"The flames are merely illusions, Amelie. We are continuity to monitor the precise condition of the dreadnought. Her hull remains undamaged, and so is every other object that is affected by this unexplainable phenomenon. It may even be beneficial as the readings from the ship suggest that many of her parameters have spontaneously improved."

"It is too premature to come to this conclusion! Even if you are correct, these unplanned changes may ultimately damage or disable the Dominion of Man. You know as well as I do how much of a catastrophe it will be for us to lose a dreadnought, which is a very real possibility! Leaving aside that gigantic storm that is forming in the star system, the channeling of so many flames is most likely related to the Spark Reactor!"

"The Spark Reactor may be operating at full capacity, but it is not under an immediate risk of losing containment."

You know what is inside." Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson hissed.

Fleet Admiral Argile's expression grew a little more strained when he heard that sentence.

"Our experts are continuing to monitor the condition of the Spark Reactor. If there is any chance that it is at risk of getting compromised, we will forcibly disconnect it from the rest of the hull. Despite how she looks, the Dominion of Man is only being subjected to fire energy. This will remain harmless so long as the flow of energy remains unidirectional."

"You better hope that the direction of energy transmissions remains this way." Fleet Admiral Jameson warned. "If outside signals can penetrate or bypass the many layers of isolation barriers that keeps the power of the reactor contained, we will have a much greater problem on our hands. You are ultimately responsible for any fiasco that may occur, and I will do my utmost to inform our fleeters of your many oversights."

Though Fleet Admiral Stanley Argile clearly could not predict the outcome of this unfolding incident, he did not think of shirking responsibility.

"I will take the fall should the worst happen." Stanley Argile spoke to his fellow peer, rival and political opponent. "At the same time, I will share the credit if the Dominion of Man has successfully completed a transformational upgrade."

This was how he intended to play the game. Now that it had come to this point, Fleet Admiral Argile fully intended to commit to this gamble!

The physical projection of his female peer leaned over the desk.

"You have become irrational. I can understand the desire to extend a certain measure of trust to a mech designer who possesses unconventional expertise. I have no complaints if you chose to unleash him onto an outdated courier vessel or maybe a frigate. Yet instead of letting him test his solutions on an expendable hull, you invited him over to one of our 8 precious dreadnoughts and let him have free rein!"

"We did not give him free rein, Amelie. We have denied him access to plenty of information related to the Spark Reactor and so on. He knows more than he should, but this will increase his chances of success. The formation of this 'tribulation storm' appears to be set in stone. The fact that Professor Larkinson has been able to trigger this powerful manifestation once again indicates that the Dominion of Man has indeed improved by an impressive margin."

"That storm may be the death of our dreadnought!" The female fleet admiral practically roared! "Whatever monstrosity your pet mech designer has created this time is so boundary breaking that the backlash is equally as formidable! That has always been the rule!"

"Do you have so little faith in the combat worthiness of our dreadnought, Amelie?" Stanley Argile raised his eyebrow.

"I am not assuming that the Dominion of Man is guaranteed to shatter from the fury of this storm, but the probability that this will happen is unacceptably high. According to the preliminary calculations of one of my special research times, the size and energy signatures of this growing storm indicates that it will escalate to the point where the strikes can overwhelm the dreadnought's defenses and inflict serious material damage to her hull. It will be a catastrophe if that happens. None of our dreadnoughts have yet to suffer serious harm."

"That is because we are far too reluctant to dispatch our dreadnoughts to battlefields where they may face adequate resistance." Stanley Argile replied.

"It is because we are being prudent about preserving our strategic deterrent." The old woman insisted. "Our dreadnoughts are not even close to ready for the battles to come. Our R&D departments are doing all they can to improve our application of hyper technology, but they have made good progress in the past half year. The Dominion of Man was scheduled to undergo her next refit within two years. You could have waited for her to receive her next round of upgrades as opposed to acting prematurely!"

"You know why I had to do this. Your obstructionism would have delayed us for too long. Besides, I have read the same progress reports as you. Our recent technological gains may have been impressive, but they can only ever close the gap with god mechs. I have read nothing that gives me any reasonable expectation that our dreadnoughts can achieve parity with the most powerful god

mechs. Even if the performance gains are more optimistic than expected, the mech industry has not remained idle. The performance of every active god mech will continue to rise. I deem it justified to take a risk and allow Professor Larkinson to have his way with the Dominion of Man."

"The Dominion of Man is a poor choice to unleash this cretin of a mech designer." Amelie Jameson said with a clear tone of disapproval. "Her defenses are adequate, but not the best. The Indignation of Righteousness is able to withstand much more powerful attacks. Much of the offensive power of the Dominion of Man is tied to her Dread Marines. Her gun batteries are not as strong or numerous as the direct offensive arsenal of the Guns of Armageddon."

Stanley Argile inclined his head. "You have raised valid points, but the name of the Dominion of Man possessed much greater symbolic weight than the Indignation of Righteousness and the Guns of Armageddon. You may despise the occult, but you cannot deny that it exists."

"What has happened to you, Stanley?! You used to be much more reasonable when it came to cultivation! Has Professor Larkinson corrupted you with his Devil Tongue?"

"Nothing of the sort has happened." The male fleet admiral shook his head. "I merely came to the realization that we cannot cling to our existing policies when we have already entered a radically different age. We also do not have the luxury of time. We have decades at most. While I am reassured that the Red Association is doing its utmost to rise to the occasion, we cannot afford to fall behind. We are not living in the Age of Mechs anymore. We have entered a turbulent new age where we must accelerate our progress to regain our superiority in this dwarf galaxy."

Amelie gave Argile a pointed look. "Establishing our dominance in the Red Ocean is not our primary objective. The survival of our race and our organization supersedes the need to satisfy our egos. Our dreadnoughts are not required to match or exceed god mechs. They merely have to be strong enough to keep our current enemies at bay. They will not be able to fulfill their mission nearly as effectively if one of their hulls has befallen an accident, especially one that you have engineered through your own decision-making!"

A brief pause ensued as both leaders went over the hidden implications of the current situation.

Fleet Admiral Argile eventually offered a firm response.

"I respectfully disagree with your assertion that our dreadnoughts should only be used to buy time. This is the coward's way out. Have you forgotten what our uniforms stand for, Amelie? We are human. We are the successors of Supreme Marshal Caramond Perle and the generations of humans who followed his will. No enemy is insurmountable. No alien is undefeatable. Through technology and grit, we can accomplish the impossible and carve out a permanent human empire in the Red Ocean! Every decision that I have made since the Great Severing is aligned with this purpose!"

Amelie Jameson looked at her fellow fleet admiral as if he had gone mad. "Have you become brainwashed by your own propaganda? The Supreme Marshal is irrelevant in our day and age. His ideals and his willingness to defy the status quo are admirable, but only when the prevailing leaders have failed in their responsibilities. That is not the case here. Our Red Fleet is working on multiple measures to protect the red humanity and guarantee the continuation of our civilization regardless of what happens. Besides, Caramond Perle is hardly the paragon of righteousness as everyone thinks. He is not the role model that you of all people should be looking up to. Every hero has its dark side."

Fleet Admiral Argile chuckled. "Hero or villain, nobody can deny that Caramond Perle has been a pivotal figure in leading humanity to greatness. Red humanity needs a hero to rally around. I can think of no greater symbol to the masses than the supreme marshal. We can ensure the space peasants continue to look up at us so long as his misdeeds remain buried. The public does not necessarily desire for Caramond Perle to give them courage. People only need the idealized version of this historical figure. Professor Larkinson is more than capable of satisfying this demand."

"What if this idealized version of Caramond Perle grows out of control?"

"It is good that we never thought about imposing hard control in the first place." Argile grinned. "It is better to properly nurture whatever life that Professor Larkinson has brought into existence."

"You are mad." The woman hissed. "The same applies to the mech designer who you apparently trust more than our R&D departments. Your actions are weakening the foundation of the Red Fleet!"

"Good. The Red Fleet as we know it has become too rigid, inflexible and old-fashioned to face the challenges of tomorrow. We must embrace more radical improvements, but in order to generate widespread support, we must break the tethers that hold us back!"

Chapter 5856 I Am On Fire

"Why is the Dominion of Man on fire?! It doesn't make any sense! There is no oxygen or other propellant in space that can sustain an exothermic reaction of this magnitude! The hull of the dreadnought has not sustained any apparent burn damage as far as we can observe."

"The fleeters are refusing to give us any answers. Professor Larkinson remains out of contact. The escort vessels surrounding the Dominion of Man have adjusted their formations. They are maintaining their distance while simultaneously remaining vigilant towards outside interference."

"From what I last heard of him, my prevailing theory is... that Larkinson couldn't resist the urge to apply his Carmine System to the Dominion of Man. I know it sounds unrealistic, but it is the only explanation that fits his eclectic capabilities! The dreadnought must possess special properties that coincidentally match the requirements of his Carmine System somehow. I think that the dreadnought's famous Spark Reactor has played a decisive role in this attempted transformation. That is the most reasonable explanation why the enormous hull appears to have caught fire."

Jovy Armalon answered a lot of calls ever since the Red Fleet began acting strangely.

What happened to the Dominion of Man only confirmed that Ves was ultimately responsible!

Master Goldstein and many other powerful leaders demanded a lot more answers than he could give at the moment. If not for the fact that mechers such as himself had not been invited over the Dominion of Man, he would have been able to supply much more exhaustive answers!

As Jovy continued to endure requests for more information, he pressed his fingers against his forehead.

Ves' latest actions had ignited yet another controversy!

"At least you are still here, Lucky."

"Meow." Lucky casually lounged on Jovy's lap as if he belonged on this spot.

"Your owner could truly do me a favor by being much more clear about what he intended to do today. He will be the death of me one day."

As interesting as it was to accompany Ves as he continued to come up with the most inventive and revolutionary initiatives a Senior Mech Designer could come up with, Jovy was starting to get tired of getting jerked around all of the time.

The more time and energy he spent on cleaning up after Ves, the less he could allocate his resources to his own personal mech design activities.

Still, it wasn't all that bad. Jovy had learned a lot of useful lessons from Ves that accelerated his progress.

As far as he was concerned, it would do RA mech designers a lot of good if they shadowed talented but unconventional mech designers for a few years. The changes in perspective and exposure to completely different approaches to mech design never failed to broaden people's horizons.

Alas, Jovy did not think that many of his fellow peers would be able to tolerate the sheer craziness that Ves regularly introduced to the cosmos!

"Why did he do this?!" Vector Loban looked ready to tear his hair out! "If our theory about applying the Carmine System to the Dominion of Man is correct, then Professor Larkinson has just committed a massive breach of confidentiality! No matter how many precautions he has taken, the fleeters may have gained crucial intelligence about the Carmine System and its many implications!"

Jovy directed a sympathetic glance towards the Transhumanist. "I do not know what Ves was thinking when he broke the rules. I can say that he is usually more diligent and attentive when it comes to abiding by his agreements. He must have his reasons to act on his own initiative and cooperate with the fleeters of all people. Regardless, it is not our place to judge him. We should leave that to the likes of the Xenotechnician and the Evolution Witch."

Vector Loban furrowed his brows. "The two leaders are too invested in him to withdraw their support. This has never been in question. It is the disapproval of other tier 1 galactic citizens that we must be concerned about. Known critics such as Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson and the Energy Warder will capitalize on his overreach."

Jovy did not feel as much concern. He continued to stroke Lucky's back in an effort to ease his nerves.

"I think that Ves will remain just fine. The premise is that his gamble has paid off. If he truly manages to create the very first Carmine warship in existence... the Red Fleet will become ecstatic. Our Association won't necessarily be happy, but I think that there will be enough who understand that anything that increases the survival of red humanity is an act that should be pursued."

"Spoken like a true Survivalist." Vector grumbled. "You are the sort of mechers who would not hesitate to engineer the downfall of our Association if it is for the benefit of our race."

"Ves may have already done so by proposing to found the Red Collective." Jovy calmly responded. "Not that this is a probable outcome. Our faction keeps the rest of our Association in line. Enough of you are cognizant that we will do what is necessary to fulfill our mission. Our last conference has already proven that in spades. It is best to never test our bottom lines."

"There are times where I think that your Survivalist Faction is more extreme than the Unbound Humanity Faction. Only the Dissolution Faction and the Cosmopolitan Movement are more extreme. It is no surprise that you Survivalists are able to develop such a good relationship with Ves Larkinson."

Jovy took that as a compliment. "Thank you. I advise you to be more supportive for change if you truly want to earn his trust. He took the effort to call me shortly before he initiated his latest stunt, but he did not think to give you the same courtesy. I may have known him for years, but it is not as challenging to become his friend as you think. Alexa Streon has managed to work her way into his inner circle remarkably quickly."

The two mechers soon stopped their exchange of words as they went back to answering calls.

The mood among the people who were only able to observe what was happening from a distance was a lot different from the mood of the people who experienced the changes up close!

An enormous amount of personnel was stationed on the Dominion of Man. The dreadnought practically functioned like a moving colony settlement all by herself in terms of population!

Many of the spacers and officers who suited themselves up in high-quality hazard suits and combat armor that befitted their ranks initially experienced a series of strange sensations as they participated in the massive ritual.

They already found it odd that they had been ordered to make a lot of structural modifications to the power lines and substations and so on. They found it even more incomprehensible that they were instructed to manually alter the faces of many artworks featuring male figures.

"Why do we have to paint the supreme Mmarshal's face in every hallway and compartment?"

"Shut up and do your work. It is not our place to question our orders."

"A bot can repaint all of this in seconds and do a much better job than any of us." The man continued to complain. "Why must we do this ourselves? We are not even the original artists of these bulkhead murals."

"There is weirdness in the works. It has to be when the Argiles invited the developer of living mechs to our ship."

"Wait... are you suspecting that this is part of an effort to turn our dreadnought into the warship version of a living mech?"

"There is no other reasonable explanation. The sequence of events is obvious."

"This... this is impossible! Design philosophies are the principal reason why mechs are able to bend or break the laws of physics! It has never worked on warships unless the people responsible are Star Designers!"

"I do not know what gives Professor Larkinson the confidence that he can upgrade the Dominion of Man, but I would not count him out. The Argiles know what they are doing."

The sense of ritual grew heavier when the crucial moment arrived.

From the moment they received the order to shed their blood, each of them felt as if they had developed a closer relationship with the vessel somehow!

The seemingly nonsensical dances and other rituals initially caused them to question whether there was any functional benefit to engaging in these embarrassing acts, but they soon withheld their complaints as they developed an even closer relationship to the Dominion of Man.

"We are the guardians of mankind."

"Caramond Perle has led us once. He shall lead us again."

"I dedicate my heart and soul to the ideals of the supreme marshal!"

While the fleeters were not familiar with this phenomenon, their rituals and dedications all caused them to resonate with the Dominion of Man as well as the ancestral spirit that had just formed a connection with the dreadnought!

Though the resonance remained subtle enough to escape everyone's notice, this changed as soon as fire began to spread throughout the hull!

The Spark Reactor generated a vast amount of fire E energy!

Much of it remained isolated until it could safely be disposed, but the difference this time was that a portion of it deliberately bled into the conventional power lines that connected to every section of the dreadnought.

This produced many consequences.

At first, the spacers merely felt as if they were standing next to a blazing bonfire.

It was only later that the spread of fire-attributed E energy began to light several crucial ship systems on fire!

Not only did the Brain Trust and the Rubicon Spatial Transfer System inexplicably burst into flames, the same also happened to every single fletcher equipped with Dread Armor!

Initially, the soldiers wearing these heavy armors assumed they were under attack!

If not for their excellent training and discipline, a few of the more trigger-happy soldiers would have discharged their weapons by this time!

Fortunately, their protective suits did not indicate any obvious battle damage, so the troops quickly figured out that the flames did not pose any threat.

That did not mean that they could be ignored!

Not only did every person locked inside a Dread Armor feel awfully hot, but their powerful equipment actually felt as if the flames fueled their growth somehow!

Not a single piece of Dread Armor aboard the Dominion of Man was exempt from this phenomenon.

The fire phenomenon did not spread to the Dread Armor stored in the cargo hulls of supply ships or other storage sites.

One of the most notable Dread Armors that got 'refined' by the flames was the high-quality officer-grade unit worn by Volkert Argile himself!

It was precisely because the commander of the Dominion of Man experienced this phenomenon first-hand that he allowed this to proceed without making any attempt to interrupt the process!

"Are you in distress, skipper?!"

"I am not in pain." Argile waved his arm to fend off one of his adjutants. "I have sustained no injuries so far. Please continue to monitor my condition, but do not employ any safety measures unless you have actual proof of harm."

Though the Dread Armor became directly affected by the fiery refinement process, Dread Captain Argile did not remain completely unaffected!

A minute portion of the fire energy spilled into his body, causing subtle changes that he was barely able to notice.

Whether deliberate or not, Dread Captain Argile inexplicably felt more closely connected to the Dominion of Man.

It was a wonderful sensation. Volkert Argile had always wanted to master a ship as fine as the Dominion of Man to a greater degree, but there were limits to how much he learned about the dreadnought.

The fire energy coursing through his body enabled him to develop a closer bond with the Dominion of Man through other means.

Yet as the fires began to subside from his Dread Armor, the feeling grew weaker.

"No!"

A part of him wanted to take back this addictive sensation! Despite his strong discipline, the temptation to become one with his massive starship was too great for him to ignore!

"Come back and light me on fire!"

Chapter 5857 Servitude

From the moment Ves gave birth to the ancestral spirit known as Caramond Perle, he had set off a chain of events that changed the fate of the Dominion of Man forever.

His decision to tie the newly created spiritual product to the Dominion of Man was already bad enough.

What truly caused the powerful dreadnought to irrevocably abandon her prior fate and embark on a completely different future was the decision to tie the Spark Reactor into the process!

No amount of words could describe how reckless and ill-thought Ves had acted when he attempted to replace his tried-and-true Blood Pact with the highly speculative Bloodfire Pact.

The good news was that the basic theory of this much more powerful variation of a regular Blood Pact held up in reality.

Substituting lifeblood for fire energy worked out far better than Ves expected. Pretty much every section of the enormous hull of the Dominion of Man coursed with fire by the time the Spark Reactor generated energies at full capacity!

Yet the side effects were far greater as well. Ves had become so fixated on the state of Caramond and the conditions of the so-called Super Brain that he scarcely wondered what had happened to the Dread Marines assigned to guard the Brain Trust.

Just because the illusionary flames had faded from their tall and imposing Dread Armors did not mean that the refinement process had ended.

During the initial transformation of the Dominion of Man, the entire vessel had been symbolically lit aflame.

Many new and unfamiliar aspects emerged.

Some acted like seeds that still needed a lot of nurturing before they could bloom into flowers.

Others only occurred briefly and faded when the flames had subsided.

More had begun to stick around.

One of the more consequential aspects to the crew was that each of them somehow resonated with the Dominion of Man, especially when the vessel was being refined by the Spark Reactor!

Each of the fleeters who became affected by this mysterious phenomenon had been given a choice by the ship they served for a number of months or years.

The fleeters who resonated particularly well with the Dominion of Man were plentiful.

They generally fell into several categories.

First were the troopers who donned Dread Armors. The famed armors were far greater than mere suits of combat armor. Through a mysterious production process that enabled them to contain a miniscule portion of the living spark's power, each of these empowered pieces of gear had transcended their physical limitations.

The marines who worked hard and earned the qualifications to equip themselves with the most powerful infantry gear in the Red Ocean developed a huge attachment to them without fail.

Despite the absence of neural interfaces that enabled them to develop a mental connection with their powerful equipment, the troopers always developed a close relationship with their individual Dread Armors.

Since the Dread Armors could be regarded as extensions of the Dominion of Man, the marines who played such a crucial role in projecting the strength of the enormous warship all received the offer to become a part of the ship they served with pride.

The ship... recognized them. The Dread Marines felt more valued than ever. Each of them became beset by illusions of possible futures if they chose to make the fateful decision to form a pact with the living vessel.

They imagined themselves growing stronger by getting refined by the temperate but potentially deadly flames of the Spark Reactor.

They envisioned growing strong enough to punch through bulkheads and release fire from their mouths.

They conjured up glimpses of more distant futures where they had become so in tune with the Dominion of Man that they outlived anyone else due to the fire coursing through their veins.

Over 90 percent of the Dread Marines accepted this offer within seconds after they realized what it entailed.

The remainder took a bit longer, but they accepted anyway as they could not imagine going back to their mundane and forgettable lives after they missed this opportunity.

Only 1 percent of the Combat Marines possessed enough discipline, external attachments and stubbornness to cling to their original oaths.

The fact that so few Dread Marines surrendered to the Dominion of Man was a testament to the latter's ability to convince people to forsake everything in favor of unending service.

Unfortunately for the fire-blessed capital ship, she was not able to reach out to the other ratings and officers that served on the same vessel.

The hazard suits and more conventional combat armor worn by the crew lacked the tiny sparks of fire that tied them to the Spark Reactor.

This was why only a part of the crew outside of the Dread Marines managed to resonate with the living warship.

The ones who resonated with the Dominion of Man to a sufficient degree tended to be those who put serious effort into their rituals, those who served the longest aboard the dreadnought and those who possessed the greatest affection towards the magnificent vessel.

Each of them were able to get in tune with the living dreadnought a lot easier than others.

Though the heat radiating from every direction around them did not convey any concrete words, each of these people instinctively understood the meaning of the silent request.

The Dominion of Man needed them. The dreadnought desired their service. The ship somehow came alive, and possessed enough intelligence to understand the necessity of requiring mortal servants.

The living dreadnought did not attempt to deceive the spacers within her reach. The vessel plainly made it clear that she expected her minions to serve her until death, and maybe even beyond if that was possible.

Accepting this deal, this pact would have life-changing consequences to those that received this fire-blessed offer.

Though the Dominion of Man had to struggle a lot more in order to present her contract to all of these crew members, many of them ultimately agreed to form a pact that would change their lives forever.

In the span of a few minutes, the Dominion of Man turned into a nexus of many new but promising connections. The living spark hidden inside the Spark Reactor turned into the center of an immense web of pacts with loyal and dedicated crew members.

It did not matter whether they had families that they needed to get back to when they ended their tours.

It did not matter whether they had greater ambitions or wanted to serve elsewhere after they had padded their resumes with a tour aboard one of the most powerful warships of the Red Fleet.

It did not matter whether they surrendered their autonomy and became beholden to a living warship as opposed to their regular chain of command.

Modeled after the initial Bloodfire Pact, fire energy was the medium that tied all of these 'Bloodfire servants' together.

Even now, their bodies continue to experience greater heat than usual!

The difference was that none of them experienced any discomfort anymore. A few of the servants were sensitive enough to understand that their bodies were slowly being refined, but it was not quite clear what they were turning into. Naturally, none of them felt bothered that they had lost control over the evolution of their bodies.

Once the Red Fleet understood the full magnitude of all of these permanent changes, it did not take much imagination to figure out that most people would not react well to these disturbing actions!

However, nobody who cared about these issues was aware of what had happened at the time.

The newly emerged Bloodfire servants did not express any overt signs that they had become beholden to the Dominion of Man.

Each of them were able to sense their fellow kin from the moment they formed their pacts. They silently nodded to each other before resuming their duties with utmost attention.

This was because each of them had become aware of the growing distress of their new master.

The Dominion of Man had come under threat.

The foe was not an ancient phase whale or a treacherous force comprised of human mechs and warships.

The adversary was a lot more powerful and abstract this time!

Once the fire energy released by the Spark Reactor no longer demanded everyone's attention, more and more people started to feel an enormous buildup of danger above their heads.

Storm clouds had begun to gather at an accelerated rate, especially when the dreadnought initially burst into flames!

It was as if a mysterious switch had been flipped that somehow activated a turbo mode that amplified the storm clouds!

The sight was completely illogical. How could storm clouds made out of liquid water drops remain cohesive in the void of space?

The water drops should have frozen into ice a long time ago, yet they behaved as if they were part of a heavy storm cloud on a terrestrial planet.

The fact that the gathering storm clouds disturbed the ambient E energies and possessed an oppressive psychic component clued many people into the fact that it was far from an ordinary phenomenon!

Previously, the storm clouds already looked ominous enough to look as if they could pose a real threat against one of the most powerful warships in the Red Ocean.

The activation of the Spark Reactor had somehow agitated the tribulation storm to the point where it grew a lot stronger than before!

The storm clouds occupied so much at this time that they stretched on for thousands of kilometers!

A few of the escort vessels that happened to be patrolling fairly close quickly increased their distance from the Dominion of Man as a precaution.

None of them wanted to tempt fate by attracting the ire from the heavens!

Inside the transformed Brain Trust, Ves tried his best to determine whether the 5 Alpha Plus Brains had truly merged to replicate the capabilities of a mythical Super Brain with an effective genetic aptitude of S.

Ves belatedly realized that he never fully explored what exactly made the Chosen Human special during his early career.

His biography never mentioned anything specific about the initial piloting experiences of the man who advanced to the rank of god pilot at record speed.

Was he able to process ten times as much data as conventional talents?

Did he gain a sense of intuition that was so scarily effective that it bordered on precognition?

Did he break through as easily as breathing air?

Ves did not know any details, and that hindered him from confirming without a shadow of a doubt that he had succeeded in breaking past a limit that had only been done by a single god pilot once before.

"WHAT?!"

Ves retreated from his tunnel vision and turned around to observe the projected feed of one of the exterior visual sensors of the Dominion of Man.

His inability to empirically verify the results of his experiment was frustrating beyond belief!

"Ves! You need to see this! The storm clouds forming about the Dominion of Man... they've changed. A shape has formed that looks like the face of an intelligent alien species!"

"WHAT?!"

Ves retreated from his tunnel vision and turned around to observe the projected feed of one of the exterior visual sensors of the Dominion of Man.

His heart froze as soon as he saw the contours of an alien face.

"This... this is impossible."

Pure power radiated from this face. What was remarkable was that it felt distinctly different from the rest of the tribulation storm!

There was only one possible explanation for this unexpected turn of events.

Somehow, a mysterious but extremely powerful alien entity managed to hijack the tribulation storm from an immense distance!

Given that the shape of this new and completely unfamiliar alien species did not match any of the known alien species from the Red Ocean suggested that the origin of this alien powerhouse was extragalactic!

That begged the question how the powerful figure managed to hijack something as powerful and domineering as a tribulation storm in the first place.

From the moment Ves locked eyes with the projected face's eyes, he instantly felt as if invisible laser beams pinned onto his Spirituality!

He somehow knew what had happened.

He went too far this time. He violated a taboo that he shouldn't have. His act had been so egregious that it somehow created an opening that enabled a powerful alien deity to invite himself over to this tribulation storm!

"We're... we're in big trouble this time."

Chapter 5858 Subjugation Comes

Normal storm clouds did not make faces.

In fact, even tribulation storm clouds did not make faces.

Ves had experienced enough of them to know that aside from raining down much more powerful and exotic lightning strikes than usual, the storm clouds did not look all that differently.

What happened on this fateful day utterly defied his expectations and put him on a collision course with an alien being of unimaginable power.

Ves could not imagine the immense amount of power and mastery required to reach across a huge amount of light-years and directly insert a part of one's consciousness into a distant tribulation storm!

He was pretty sure that no True God was capable of this astonishing feat.

No matter whether they were god pilots, Star Designers, sword gods, qi cultivators and so on, Ves seriously doubted whether any of them had the ability to impose their strength onto a tribulation storm of all things!

An extremely strange phenomenon was taking place above the Dominion of Man!

The effects of this intelligent alien being inserting himself right inside the tribulation storm had far-reaching effects.

The E energy radiation flowing in the entire region of space grew more powerful but also became a lot more turbulent than before.

The distant light radiating from Messier 87 became abnormally more luminous and noticeable in space.

A semblance of the powerful alien being's domain started to blend into the tribulation storm, thereby causing its very character to become infected by foreign concepts.

This was the most ostentatious display of power that Ves had ever witnessed so far. Not even the amazing performance of the god pilots during Operation Night Jazz could compare to this astonishing display of power.

The tribulation storm continued to exude more and more oppression in the surroundings.

It became so bad that even the crew members of the escort vessels that were stationed tens of thousands of kilometers away started to experience random bouts of fright!

Suffice to say, this was a threat that the Red Fleet had never expected to confront at this time!

As the storm clouds continued to roil, the crackling of lightning had begun to form. A multitude of small but numerous bolts coursed through the immense cloud cover.

Instead of the usual bright blue of empyrean purple bolts, they started to glow into a sickly shade of green.

From the moment Ves caught sight of them, his Jutland organ began to constrict.

There was a powerful sense of constriction to these bolts. Their power was definitely potent enough to kill a baseline human outright, but Ves suspected that they were supposed to do more than inflict a lot of damage.

The constricting force possessed a strong and distinctly alien imprint as well. It did not take much thinking to determine that it was an intrinsic element of the alien deity's domain.

Ves already learned a lot from the three-eyed insectile-looking alien. The noseless being's enormous face peered down with a mouth filled with razor sharp teeth.

While there was a possibility that the entity showed off the equivalent of a smile for his species, the sheer malevolence radiating from the tribulation storm did not give Ves the idea of a friendly greeting!

What upset Ves most of all was that he could feel the alien paying particular attention to him. No one else aboard the Dominion of Man received as much attention.

It did not matter whether there were many layers of hull plating and deck plating in the way.

It did not matter that Ves had suited himself up in his Unending Regalia.

It did not matter that Ves was just one human among many aboard the Dominion of Man.

The alien deity somehow managed to identify Ves in an instant and never ceased to break its malevolent gaze!

"Ugh... can't you look elsewhere for once?"

The thought that this alien entity paid special attention to Ves because of his latest actions was scary beyond belief!

"Ah!"

"My head!"

Just when Ves thought that this incredibly intimidating staring contest would go on for several more minutes, the gigantic alien face opened its mouth and projected a sound.

"%#\$*@(*#."

"Ah!"

"My head!"

"Did you hear that?!"

"No human can make those noises!"

"How come... how come I am able to understand what he is saying?"

"What is it saying?!"

The storm hijacker... communicated with the humans aboard the Dominion of Man.

He did so in his own native language... which somehow possessed such abnormal properties that it was able to project sound directly into people's skulls!

The sheer weight of the alien deity's words was powerful enough to exert painful pressure to those who were more sensitive towards spiritual phenomena.

To Ves, it felt as if... the heavens spoke to him directly.

The scary part about all of this... was that Ves' domain gave him advantage over other people.

Whereas the confused and disoriented crew of the Dominion of Man simply heard a bunch of alien noises that were completely indecipherable, Ves somehow managed to interpret the meaning of the alien creature.

A part of him really wished that he was unable to parse the actual meaning of those alien noises.

Still, it was better for him to obtain a bit of information about the alien being that was about to make his life hell.

According to his own domain, the alien being, who came across as masculine in his species, conveyed this particular meaning in his opening statement.

"BLASPHEMERS."

That was certainly a pleasant introduction.

Ves silently groaned in his mind. He always had trouble with religious nuts. The native aliens were already bad enough, but at least they tempered their worship of phase whales with the knowledge that they could evolve into similar beings.

This new alien not only made it clear in his first statement that he was an authentic believer, but that he also hated humans like Ves for the crime of not sharing his beliefs!

After a short pause, the alien ponderously spoke his next words.

"@&\$@&#@&%@#."

As multiple people including Sigrund winced as they held their pounding heads, Ves tried his best to parse the meaning of this more complex statement.

"BY THE LIGHT OF THE COSMOS, I JUDGE YOU, THE LOST CHILDREN WHO HAVE COME FROM THE DARK BEYOND."

Oh boy.

There was so much meaning and context behind these translated words that Ves did not even know where to begin.

There was special emphasis on the phrase 'The Light of the Cosmos'.

The alien also used the expression 'judge' as if it was his absolute right to determine the life and death of humans he had never met in the past.

The meaning of 'the lost children who have come from the dark beyond' made it abundantly clear that the alien knew that the Red Ocean was originally located a lot further away.

The combination of meanings led Ves to make an incredibly frightening solution.

The alien deity originated from Messier 87.

The powerful being was somehow able to cast a portion of his power and awareness hundreds of thousands of light-years away and establish a direct connection to a tribulation storm!

Given that the storm had yet to cast down its first lightning strike, it appeared that the powerhouse had gained enough control to impose his will on this heavenly manifestation!

Such a being surpassed the power of ordinary True God to such an extent that there was no contest!

The ultimate conclusion that Ves drew from all of the clues was that the three-eyed noseless alien was a God King from Messier 87.

He gulped.

It was already bad enough that his antics had somehow been responsible for calling over one of the distant enemies who wielded far greater power than anyone else in the Red Ocean.

What truly made this experience awful was that the alien God King directed special attention towards Ves!

If Ves looked upwards, he would probably be able to lock 'eyes' with the giant alien apparition if not for the fact that there were a lot of decks and structural elements in the way.

The gigantic alien face spoke again.

"#\$&#*\$@."

"REJOICE, WORMS OF THIS RED FILTH. THE LIGHT OF THE COSMOS HAS BEGUN TO GRACE YOUR SEA OF STARS. WITH THE BLESSING OF THE GREAT LIGHTHOUSE THAT RADIATES THE STARS AND BESTOWS US WITH THE GIFT OF IMMORTALITY, THE EMPIRE THAT ILLUMINATES THE COSMOS EXERCISES ITS CLAIM ON YOUR STARS. I SHALL SUBJUGATE YOUR SOULS AND YOUR PETTY NATIONS AND TURN YOU INTO THE SLAVES OF THE KRELION RACE."

How the hell was this alien able to pack so much meaning with so little noises!?

Ves began to experience a stronger headache as he desperately tried to unpack the meaning of this God King's speech.

There was too much for him to analyze. The Light of the Cosmos. The Great Lighthouse That Radiates the Stars. The Empire That Illuminates the Cosmos. The Krelion Race.

Krelion.

That was the name of the species, at least when Ves' overstrained Spirituality tried to parse it into human speech.

The meanings conveyed by the all-powerful God King encompassed far more than words alone.

The awful noises also conveyed emotions and even hints of visual impressions.

The overarching concept that colored all of the alien deity's speech was subjugation.

The mere thought of the word 'subjugation' conjured images of chains, of enslaving weak and unworthy races, of imposing one's will onto others and of humiliating powerful rivals.

The God King was a tyrant, one who delighted in oppressing and conquering willful alien opposition.

Any foe that dared to sully 'The Light of the Cosmos' or stood against 'The Empire That Illuminates the Cosmos' deserved to be put into chains, both physical and spiritual ones!

"&*#\$**\$###."

"I AM THE SUBJUGATION KING. I SHALL BRING YOU INTO THE LIGHT. AWAIT MY ARRIVAL. THOSE WHO SURRENDER NOW SHALL BE DEEMED REDEEMABLE ENOUGH TO EARN A CHANCE TO CAST AWAY YOUR CHAINS. THOSE WHO RESIST WILL BECOME MY ETERNAL SLAVES."

This pretty much confirmed it. This was the mysterious God King that had set off from Messier 87 in order to conquer the Red Ocean.

The native from Messier 87 had developed in a much more energy-rich environment, so the God King was not only a lot more powerful, but likely mastered a lot of techniques as well!

Ves did not like the notion of being turned into an 'eternal slave'. The phrase held special meaning to the God King. There was a strong suggestion that not even death could liberate a slave from his chains!

The fact that this so-called Subjugation King fixated so much on capturing and enslaving his adversaries suggested that he preferred not to kill his opponents.

That should normally provide relief to his enemies, but it was very much opposite in this case!

The tyrannical alien God King could do far worse to his captives than those who managed to get away easily by dying right away!

There were ephemeral glimpses of battlefields where indistinct alien figures turned their weapons against themselves just so that they did not end up in the hands of the much-hated Subjugated King!

"#\$\$\$#*."

"YOU."

The gigantic face exerted a lot more oppression towards Ves all of a sudden!

The pressure was so great that Ves almost felt he was being flattened by a press!

"Me...?"

"#\$*#@#@%."

"YOU HAVE BLASPHEMED AGAINST THE LIGHT. YOUR CRIMES ARE FAR TOO MANY. YOUR SOUL IS BLACKENED BY THE SINS COMMITTED AGAINST THE LIGHT OF THE COSMOS. THERE WILL BE NO ESCAPE FOR YOU. YOUR SOUL IS MINE."

Just as Ves finished parsing those alien noises, he suddenly felt a huge shock to his Spirituality!

"Ahhh!"

Ves felt violated in a way he never experienced before!

Somehow, the alien face managed to project his power through the tribulation storm and instantly strike his Spirituality without any chance of resistance!

As Blinky quickly inspected what had happened, the companion spirit instantly noticed that Ves gained a foreign element!

His Spirituality had become contaminated by a brand-new mark!

Chapter 5859 Marked

"The storm has weakened!"

"Its diameter has shrunk by 17 percent!"

"Maybe... it takes an enormous amount of energy for the giant alien face to communicate with us. As long as it keeps talking, it will keep draining the energy level of the storm."

"Do you think that the clearly egotistical alien will keep talking until the storm gets exhausted?"

"That is unlikely, but it would be nice if that was the case."

The fleeters did not realize what just happened.

They failed to pick up the fact that the God King that went by the moniker of Subjugation King targeted Ves directly.

The exertion must have cost the powerful alien a lot. The fact that he was able to subvert control over the tribulation storm to such a ridiculous extent that he was able to convert a large portion of its power into a 'soul mark' of some kind was mind blowing and not in a good way!

As Blinky continued to look at Ves' Spirituality, the presence of the mark stood out as obvious as a fly in the ointment.

It was like an ugly and foreign parasite that somehow burrowed into Ves.

He wanted to get rid of it. He wanted to get rid of it right away. The soul mark or whatever did not belong to him. It was an extension of the power of the Subjugation King, one that might possess far more functions than act like a spiritual tracker for the God King!

What if the soul mark continued to contaminate his Spirituality and corrupted his personality?

What if the soul mark drained his life essence and reduced his lifespan?

What if Though Ves did not sense much of an active threat from this blackened mark, it conveyed a strong sense of implacability. It came across as a chain that the Subjugation King had latched onto his ankle.

When Blinky cautiously approached the soul mark and tried to break it down, the soul mark released a small explosion!

"MROW!"

The mark was too powerful!

Its energy quantity was not high, but its quality exceeded everything that Ves had ever come into contact with. Ves already surmised that not even god pilots could erase this mark.

They were too weak!

This was bad news. Ves already regretted his decision to enact his most ambitious plan to create a new ancestral spirit and tie it to a living Carmine warship.

He especially regretted the decision to involve the Spark Reactor!

Ves did not exactly know which action created an opening for the Subjugation King to hijack the tribulation storm, but it became clear that he had taken a step too far this time!

As much as Ves wanted to blame himself for tempting fate in such an arrogant fashion, there was no point in blaming himself.

He had to accept the fact that an alien GOD KING of all entities developed a personal interest in him and would be coming to him as soon as he crossed across the intergalactic void.

That 50 year or so deadline loomed a lot more ominously over his head than before.

There was no way he could escape the grasp of this super-powerful alien by hiding in the Red Ocean!

He would have to check up on his mother to be sure, but Ves already assumed it was a lost cause that he could ever get rid of it without the Subjugation King's permission.

There were only three acceptable ways for him to handle this massive new problem.

First, he could negotiate with the Subjugation King and come to an agreement that would convince the God King to remove his mark.

Second, he could engineer the Subjugation King's defeat by helping the Destroyer of Worlds and the other god pilots grow powerful enough to overpower him directly on the battlefield.

Third, he could look into ways to escape the reach of the Subjugation King. Whatever means he utilized to travel from Messier 87 to the Red Ocean, it was doubtful that his travel method was able to exceed the speed of utilizing a greater beyonder gate or other phasewater-based solution.

Of the three options that Ves was able to come up with, the first one sounded like a complete fantasy. There was no way that a God King that came to power by subjugating his enemies all of the time would be reasonable enough to negotiate with an inferior party!

The second option was his most preferred option. It was mildly more realistic than the previous one, but it was still nearly impossible to pull off. The gap between the ranks of god pilot and god king pilot was so immense that it would probably take the Destroyer of Worlds hundreds of more years to reach the fourth major cultivation rank.

The third option was the most viable one of them all. Ves hated the thought of running away, but he had done it before. It was the most logical decision to make. The only complication was how the hell he would be able to flee the Red Ocean. The greater beyonder gate in the Red Ocean was currently being transformed into an entirely different device. Perhaps the only other means of escape was to board the 'Whale Ark' revealed in one of the Zeal's prophetic visions.

Ves calmed down a bit when he determined that hope was not lost. He still had a shot of keeping himself out of the grasp of an incredibly powerful and malicious God King.

His best bet was to invest in both the second and third option.

He would continue to do his work and do his best to empower both new and existing god pilots.

Perhaps they did not have to reach the fourth major cultivation rank in order to defeat a single God King. As long as there were enough god pilots, they could use their numbers advantage to mob the powerful Krelion entity.

The cost would be horrendous. There was no way to determine the gap between the Subjugation King and everyone else, but it was probably large enough that not even the likes of the First Flame would be able to last more than a dozen seconds in a serious fight.

Though Ves refused to give up his hope, it was not wise for him to bet everything on the protection of others.

This was why he needed to make sure he prepared an escape route for himself!

As soon as it became clear that nothing in red humanity's arsenal could withstand the power of the Subjugation King, Ves needed to be gone from this dwarf galaxy!

Whether he would be able to return to the Milky Way or slink away to another galaxy was not important. Ves just needed to physically distance himself from the God King who marked his soul if he wanted to retain any hope of securing his freedom!

"#\$%&@."

"YOUR INITIAL PUNISHMENT BEGINS NOW."

"What is this alien saying?!"

"The energy readings of the storm are beginning to spike. There is a high chance that an attack is imminent!"

Ves did not need to spend much effort interpreting the alien speech to know that the Subjugation King still retained a measure of control over the tribulation storm!

A powerful green lightning bolt descended from the molded clouds and struck the azure energy shield of the Dominion of Man!

After that... nothing.

The Dominion of Man was equipped with some of the most powerful transphasic hyper energy shields developed by the Red Ocean.

Her azure energy shields were meant to withstand focused attacks from entire alien warfleets.

In fact, they were also designed to resist attacks from both god mechs and ancient phase whales!

Compared to the incredible threat posed by these top-level adversaries, the opening strike from a tribulation storm did not really present a serious enough threat.

"Our azure energy shield has held!"

It was rather funny to see that the Dominion of Man had managed to withstand the first strike without seeming to endure any strain.

The tribulation storm struck again, yet nothing obvious changed.

Multiple strikes rained down on the dreadnought. Each of them grew progressively stronger, yet still failed to overcome the combined effects that made azure energy shields so strong!

Ves was able to sense that the power of these lightning strikes were way higher than the ones that struck his Elemental Lord.

It seemed that the power of these tribulations scaled according to the power of the subject.

Whether the subject of the storm was Caramond, the Super Brain, the living spark or the Dominion of Man as a whole, it became clear that the tribulation storm had not reached an overpowering state right away.

Of course, Ves did not assume that the Dominion of Man would be able to keep this up forever.

Depending on how many strikes were left, sooner or later the storm would breach the dreadnought's defenses.

"The Dominion of Man's defenses are holding!"

"Her primary azure energy shields are constantly being reinforced."

"Her hull is beginning to rotate to give the most strained azure energy shield generators a reprieve."

The dreadnought did not stupidly stay in place but began to spin her hull and alter her orientation.

Since the lightning strikes only came from one direction, it was rather easy for the Dominion of Man to space out the incoming damage and prevent any of the strikes from concentrating their combined power.

While everything seemed fine so far, the tribulation storm still conveyed plenty of oppression, which meant that it still held back a lot of power.

Throughout this initial sequence, the so-called Subjugation King did not speak or make any obvious moves.

His three sickly green glowing eyes continued to look down at the Dominion of Man as if he was evaluating the humans who crewed the unusually resilient vessel.

"Damn, I almost forgot!"

One of the reasons why he chose to remain on this ship was because he wanted to promote his cultivation by bathing himself in tribulation lightning again.

This was only possible if the power of the lightning strikes actually managed to get past the initial layers of defense. The attacks at least needed to touch the hull in order to give Ves a chance.

For now, it looked like Ves needed to wait a long time before he could enjoy a lighting baptism.

Two rounds of 9 lightning strikes went by without issue.

By this time, the Dominion of Man's azure energy shields showed a few signs of destabilization, but her systems were so powerful that they were already recharging at a fairly rapid rate.

The Spark Reactor provided a huge amount of help!

Not only was it pumping out a lot of energy, it also generated a lot of E energy, though mostly of the fire element.

Normally, this fire energy did not play well with azure energy shields, but the dreadnought was somehow able to convert it into lots of water energy.

This was incredibly interesting and would have captivated Ves if not for the present circumstances!

For the time being, Ves grew a little more reassured that the Dominion of Man's ample energy defenses would keep the vessel safe for a while longer.

It was then that the Subjugation King spoke again.

"@%\$#\$#."

"AMUSING, BUT IRRITATING. LET ME GIVE YOU A TRUE TEST."

Uh oh. Ves did not like the sound of that.

When the tribulation storm was about to start the third round of lightning strikes, the gigantic face made up of storm clouds abruptly opened his sharp-toothed mouth and began to exhale lightning monsters of all things!

These sickly green lighting monsters traveled a lot slower than simple lightning strikes, but acted in a much more coordinated fashion.

They adopted arrow-shaped formations before driving themselves straight towards a single point!

Thousands of lightning monsters crashed onto the same segmented energy shield.

No matter how much the dreadnought attempted to spin this side away, the intelligent monsters kept circling around so that they could take advantage of this weakness.

The Subjugation King's intervention just made this lightning tribulation a lot more challenging!

Chapter 5860 Retaliating Storm

The Dominion of Man was under attack!

The dreadnought entered into a confrontation against a foe unlike anything the fleeters had ever fought against!

Aside from a tiny proportion of cultivation experts who mostly hung around next to the Spark Reactor, the rest of the spacers had no idea what they were up against.

Ves did.

At the very least, he lived through a similar situation in the past.

If there was any gain he made from his failed attempt to transform the Elemental Lord into a five-elemental hyper mech, it was that he had gained a decent understanding of the mechanics of tribulation storms.

As Ves continued to look at the projected feed of a hidden sensor drone stationed a dozen or so kilometers away, he could see the Dominion of Man struggling to withstand the onslaught of lightning monsters.

Sickly green lightning bolts coalesced and formed bodies that vaguely resembled bipedal reptiles with oversized mouths.

The creatures already looked voracious enough to be able to devour anything, but they did not appear to be particularly smart. There was little chance such creatures developed any sophisticated intelligence, which meant that they shouldn't be so difficult to handle.

Unfortunately, whatever control the Subjugation King had over these lightning creatures made them a lot more coordinated!

They did not attack the Dominion of Man in swarms, nor tried to follow the most direct and predictable route to their targets.

Instead, the lightning monsters began to behave as if they were part of an organized force.

They formed into arrow-shaped formations. They circled around to overload the same segmented azure energy shields. They timed their attacks to deliver the maximum amount of impact in the least amount of time.

This was the way an intelligent operator fought a battle. An army led by a God King of all possibilities was an extremely intimidating prospect. The lightning creatures already displayed far more unity and coordination than the creatures that the Elemental Lord faced in the past.

Wait a minute.

Ves recalled that the Elemental Lord actively fought back against those annoying lightning monsters. Whatever they became after the tribulation lightning condensed into semi-physical existences also made them vulnerable to conventional attacks.

He took a closer look at the multitude of gun batteries and other offensive systems buried into the hull of the dreadnought.

The Dominion of Man was a metropolis-sized starship. While the Guns of Armageddon and the Doom of Xenos definitely exceeded their sister ship in terms of firepower, that did not mean that the current hull was lacking in firepower!

Even if much of the capacity of the Dominion of Man was taken up by defensive systems, support systems and troop carrying modules, there was still a huge amount of space left over for dreadnought-grade main cannons and other awesome weapon modules!

The fact that none of these weapons had yet to open fire was a huge mistake!

"Sigrund! Open a communication line to the dread captain! I need to pass on a critical piece of information!"

"Opening a priority channel now!"

"Say your piece." Dread Captain Volkert Argile spoke in a voice that contained a lot of fire.

"First, I want to tell you that I understood what that big alien face said to us. I have a talent for interpreting alien speech. I am willing to pass on what he said after this crisis has passed."

"That is... helpful to know. Our superiors will definitely want to hear your testimony."

"Second, you should know that we do not necessarily have to remain passive when attacked by these tribulation storms. It is... permissible to strike back. You should make use of the Dominion of

Man's impressive weapon arsenal. So long as the tribulation storm doesn't send out lightning bolts that strike in an instant, there is always an opportunity to eliminate these lightning apparitions before they have an opportunity to wear down our defenses."

Ves could practically taste the realization on the other side of the communication channel.

"...You have taught us an essential lesson. We should have thought about it. I should have thought about it. We will correct our strategy as soon as possible. Do you have any other advice you wish to share with us, professor?"

"Yeah. You need to contact headquarters for advice and instructions. You can't do this alone. The tribulation storm is continuing to grow in power. If we do not outsmart its attacks, it will eventually overpower the Dominion of Man's defenses. Don't limit yourself to asking for help from other fleters. No offense, but you guys have the worst understanding of cultivation than any other major organization. Don't you think that you need to be asking for help from actual experts after that giant alien face showed up? The Red Fleet may not like it, but we can definitely use the help of any god pilot or Star Designer!"

"We cannot do that, professor! We are operating on an active battlefield! We have locked down most of our external communication methods in accordance with our most up to date information security protocols. Any communication channel, no matter how much we encrypt it, is a potential opening for third parties to intrude into our dreadnought."

"THIS IS BIGGER THAN PRESERVING THE SECRETS OF YOUR PRECIOUS FLAGSHIP!" Ves exploded in frustration! "With everything that has already happened, maintaining information security should be one of your least concerns! If you cannot make this decision by yourself, then pass on my warning to your father. He should definitely have the authority to do what is necessary."

"...Very well." The dread captain responded after a brief pause. "It is already a break from protocol to reach out to Fleet Admiral Argile, but I will allow it due to unprecedented circumstances."

Volkert Argile at least did not need to call his father to instruct his subordinates to bring the immensely powerful armaments of the Dominion of Man to bear against the lightning monster armies.

The biggest guns that could fit whole mechs inside their barrels took an awful long time to orient in the right direction.

Fortunately, the immensely long hull of the Dominion of Man offered plenty of space for smaller and nimber gun batteries.

Thousands of tertiary gun batteries that were primarily designed to intercept mechs, starfighters missile ordnance tracked the closest lightning monster formations and let loose a barrage of fire!

It was as if a dozen first-class fortifications worth of interceptor fire erupted from the Dominion of Man.

Every rapid-fire gun that was able to orient towards the lightning monsters precisely tracked their designated targets and shot with nearly perfect aim!

A torrent of thin but incredibly concentrated transphasic hyper laser beams blasted the lightning monsters with utmost precision!

Controlled by the recently upgraded Brain Trust, every single turret tracked a single specific lightning monster.

A torrent of thin but incredibly concentrated transphasic hyper laser beams blasted the lightning monsters with utmost precision!

It happened in a blink of an eye. The laser beam cannons only went active for an instant, but channeled ample amounts of electromagnetic radiation as well as small doses of raw and potent fire-attributed E energy.

The transphasic effect enabled the laser beam to attack targets that occupied other dimensions, which happened to work particularly well on these strange tribulation manifestations.

The combination of multiple factors amplified the damage potential of the transphasic hyper laser beams to such an extent that the lightning monsters did not stand a chance!

What was impressive was that the tertiary laser cannon batteries did not need a lot of time to recharge their next shots. They opened fire barely a second later, though the dreadnought could clearly cycle their fire at a faster rate at the risk of overheating the weapon systems.

Every battery mounted at least 3 barrels, with some boasting 6 or 9 barrels on a single hardpoint!

By alternating their fire, the Dominion of Man maintained a continuous barrage of laser beams that never seemed to end!

Hundreds of lightning monsters got struck and released their destructive potential in empty space, thereby preventing them from inflicting any damage to their target's defenses.

The energy shield generators took full advantage of this reprieve by restoring the integrity of their strained azure energy shields. The time bought by the voluminous point defenses of the Dominion of Man was incredibly precious as the more fragile defensive components did not need to resort to emergency measures to keep the hull protected.

"It's working!"

"Our ship doesn't even need to employ any of her primary and secondary gun batteries. Our tertiary guns are eliminating the lightning monsters faster than they can emerge from the storm!"

Ves practically looked gobsmacked at how easily the dreadnought took care of this threat.

The lightning monster waves had turned from a threat that was powerful enough to whittle down the defenses of human warships to literal cannon fodder!

There was nothing the tribulation apparitions could do to circumvent the relentlessly accurate fire from the Dominion of Man!

The monsters split up from each other and tried to envelop the Dominion of Man from as many directions as possible.

That simply allowed the dreadnought to open fire with the tertiary gun batteries that had yet to open fire due to being placed on the other side of the hull.

The monsters began to display more individual initiative by engaging in individual evasion patterns. They varied their speed, they changed directions at random times and cross-crossed their routes in an attempt to confuse the tracking systems of their massive opponent.

It didn't work.

The behavior of the lightning monsters had become more inventive, but so long as their mobility was not as outrageously high as instant lightning bolts, they were no faster than any random first-class multipurpose mech!

If there was one enemy type that the warships of the CFA and RA were designed to fight, it was mechs!

The fleeters had invested centuries worth of time, resources and effort into improving and perfecting their anti-mech combat solutions.

There were good reasons why the exterior of every dreadnought was covered with tertiary gun batteries. They were the most effective way to shoot down lots of mechs!

Right now, the Dominion of Man demonstrated with her actions why it was a bad idea to dispatch any mech force against the dreadnought on an open battlefield.

The merciless hyper laser cannon batteries were shredding the lightning monsters with perfect tracking!

The Brain Trust did not even appear to be particularly strained by the effort of tracking and predicting the trajectories of thousands of lightning monsters at a time.

Not a single move or intention avoided the accurate modeling and predictive solutions of the Super Brain and its assisting brain units.

Ves understood a bit better why the fleeters went through all of this trouble of adopting the Brain Trust as the primary control system of the Dominion of Man.

It was rather ironic that the brains taken from fleeters who could have been the best mech pilots offered the most effective tracking performance against nimble small craft!

Though the Dominion of Man had most definitely regained the upper hand for the time being, Ves did not dare to relax at this time.

The reprieve was only temporary.

Even if it took a lot of time for the tribulation attacks to ramp up to the point where they couldn't easily be shot down anymore, the Subjugation King was observing the performance of the dreadnought all of this time.

Ves widened his eyes as he made a scary realization.

"Uh oh."

Just as Ves managed to learn crucial details about the God King who was on his way to subjugate the Red Ocean, the very same alien powerhouse was doing the same to his would-be slaves!

The Subjugation King might come across as arrogant, but anyone who was powerful and cunning enough to reach the fourth major cultivation rank in a cutthroat environment should definitely not be stupid!

Even if Messier 87 was not conducive to the emergence of technological civilizations, Ves doubted that the God King would remain ignorant of the technological solutions that the Dominion of Man proudly displayed in the open.

The enemy was gathering crucial intelligence!