

The Mech 5941

Chapter 5941 Ominous Undercurrents.

Ves entered into a contemplative mood after his latest meeting with his mother.

Her advice offered a lot of clarity. Though he wished she could have told him more, he had to admit that her advice was apt and relevant.

However, her words also caused Ves to entertain doubts.

It was so easy for him to behave like a good boy and follow his mother's advice and recommendations to the letter.

Yet if he did so, he would behave more like his mother as opposed to himself.

He may have inherited a few traits from his mother, but he grew up in a modern human society.

Every time Ves encountered a vestige of humanity's ancient cultivation history, he frequently became confronted by a completely different human culture.

So many people at the time struggled to compete with each other in a brutal contest for survival. The desire to monopolize the best resources available led to constant power struggles.

Cooperation may be possible in certain cases. There was still plenty of room for honor, affection, duty and even altruism.

Yet when the most powerful gods of a society all turned out to be tyrants comparable to the Subjugation King, then it was difficult for the cultivators below them to hold themselves to a higher standard.

The individual struggle for power and eternity had become a central pillar of this tribal culture!

As a product of modern human civilization, Ves did not like it at all. The Five Scrolls Compact likely became responsible for its own downfall due to an inability to rein in all of the different personalities that abused their power and authority for their own gains.

His mother's apparent past painted her as a murderous opportunist who was willing to betray her superiors, break her oaths, slaughter innocents and sow terror in order to advance her own power.

Though Lieutenant-Commander Astrid Jameson did her best to paint the woman previously known as Cultmaster Original Sin in the worst possible light, Ves could not bring himself to deny that his mother was capable of committing these deeds.

Though the present version of Cynthia Larkinson didn't behave nearly as deplorably, Ves was able to pick up plenty of clues through Veronica's eyes.

His cyborg cat incarnation only possessed a limited understanding of the Oblivion Empire due to staying isolated on a single ship all of the time.

This caused Veronica to only catch a small glimpse of the Oblivion Empire forged by Cynthia.

This 'empire' was anything but simple. It attracted ambitious and desperate mech pilots like moths to a flame. Those who abandoned their previous lives and identities in human space became disturbingly loyal to the Lady of the Night at a remarkable speed. They fought and died against her enemies for a cause that did not really benefit them all that much!

There were too many disturbing clues about the Oblivion Empire that Ves could not deny the uncomfortable truth any longer.

His mother... had turned into a despotic cultivator. Ves suspected that she engaged in a particularly insidious form of deity cultivation that was way more exploitative than any of his spiritual networks!

In fact, Ves even suspected that she may have used his works as a template before twisting it to provide her with far greater advantages than what she deserved!

Though Ves no longer considered himself a part of original humanity, that did not mean he lost all empathy towards them. His distant human cousins were still humans. The principle that every human possessed fundamental rights was too ingrained in his psyche for him to deny his mother's callous disregard towards ordinary folk.

Ves wished he possessed the courage to confront his mother on this issue, but he never dared to do so. He already understood that the attempt was doomed to fail.

Was this what it was like to live under the reign of a True God?

He developed greater admiration towards god pilots. Their combat prowess was so enormous that they could easily topple the regime of a powerful state and rule it with an iron fist.

Yet the fact that they clung to their honor and duty as protectors of the common folk was a miracle in itself.

If Ves had a choice, he would much rather contribute to the rise of modern humanity than facilitate the rise of a despot.

However, when that very same despot happened to be his mother, Ves found it extraordinarily difficult to cling to his values.

Ves deeply cared about family. He had lost his mother once. He went through great lengths to bring her back to life. It would not be a mistake to claim that his mother was one of the most powerful 'products' that he managed to restore!

Unfortunately, taking credit for her return also burdened him with a sense of responsibility over his product. Cynthia had done far more than to take over the Nyxian Gap and build an empire that could help her defend against the enemies that rabidly sought to claim her life.

Even to this day, the minions and the cadre of the Five Scrolls Compact continued to invade the Nyxian Gap and wage a war of attrition against the Oblivion Empire.

Though the frequency and the intensity of these battles had dropped to an extent, far too many soldiers of the Oblivion Empire sacrificed their lives just to buy time for Cynthia to recover her strength and complete her hidden schemes.

Though Veronica was shielded from much of the affairs of the Oblivion Empire, she picked up enough clues on her mother's flagship to sense that a massive operation was in the works.

It seemed that the Oblivion Empire had enough of remaining passive. The Oblivion Empress was likely preparing to launch a major offensive, but that was all Veronica was able to glean.

She failed to gather any intelligence relating to Cynthia's goals, locations, assets and timeframe.

That unsettled her. Staying on the defensive was clearly not a long-term solution, but the bloodshed was bound to skyrocket once the Oblivion Empire launched a risky offensive!

Perhaps Veronica had grown too comfortable with the status quo. She loved it that she finally managed to reunite with her parents. She did not want to ruin the stability of the present.

"It's too bad those cultists refuse to leave my mother alone." Ves muttered as he passed through a gate and stepped outside the perimeter of Diandi Base.

His wife along with her guards had already reached the gathering spot in advance. She had plenty of reasons to arrive early.

[This lowly slave greets the male consort of the Glorious Queen.] The indoctrinated arche engineer dipped his four legs in the alien's version of a bow. [May your shell-less grace please Her Majesty.]

Ves rolled her eyes at the alien's translated speech. He still did not like what the arche was saying, but Gloriana did not turn Hekkel into a servile dummy.

Every young and low-ranking member of the arche race was trained to act in this fashion. Their archeshells were far too small and dull to elevate their status in their alien society. It was only through centuries of growth and selective feeding of high-grade materials that the more successful arche rose in status and gained the respect they deserved.

Arche society was quite fair and meritocratic when it came to social mobility.

Of course, that did not prevent the emergence of aristocratic lines. Successful members of the arche race became good at raising descendants who enjoyed many advantages during their childhood.

The main advantage of these alien aristocrats was that they invested many generations into developing exclusive recipes of valuable materials. Special combinations of different materials could lead to the growth of exceptionally beautiful and powerful archeshells.

Even if the size of an archeshell was not yet up to par, as long as it looked pretty enough, a young arche could still rise above the lowest-ranking members of his race!

This was one of the reasons why Gloriana managed to keep Hekkel docile.

His wife absolutely refused to transplant an archeshell on her back, yet she still needed to wear something in order to prevent Hekkel from going mad.

The exquisite Archglove was an acceptable compromise. Though Gloriana failed to turn it into a masterwork, it was well-designed and possessed beautiful aesthetics. The cost of this hard-plated accessory could probably give first-class mechs a run for their money due to the use of both phasewater and precious high-grade materials!

One of the more notable traits of the Archglove was that the hyper materials were aspected towards metal. This not only made it easier for her to harmonize with archetech, but also strengthened her connection to any arche, as every member of this alien species ingested and incorporated a lot of metallic substances in their archeshells.

Ves dismissed Hekkel's greeting and presence. He did not come here to explore the mysteries of the arche and their advanced alien technology.

There were more impressive and imposing pieces of tech that demanded his attention.

"So this is what you have decided to trade during the grand auction on Ector V. How... typically male." Gloriana said in a flat and unassuming tone. "I do not have too many problems with objects themselves. They are far more powerful than any other weapons in our possession. What I do take issue with is your judgment. Why did you commit thousands of kilograms of phasewater and valuable shares of the LMC for what amounts to toys for boys?"

Oh boy.

Ves already anticipated this response from his wife. He could already tell during the grand auction that she would not be pleased by some of his choices, but he committed to his decisions anyway because it made sense from his perspective.

He did not have any reason to apologize for the choices he made at the time.

"I managed to bring home plenty of strategic gains, honey. Both Starfarer Berth and the E-66 Experimental Yard have granted us genuine first-class shipbuilding capabilities that will generate greatest value for our clan over the long term. The Zeta-65 Warp Interdictor is based on exclusive tech that is expressly designed to counter transphasic technology and hunt down phase whales."

"Ves!" His wife turned around and barked in his direction! "I am not referring to those acquisitions! Obtaining shipyards was your original purpose, and the Zeta-65 comes with enough exclusive terms to retain its value over time. What I take issue with is these TOYS!"

She gestured her arm towards the objects that had just been delivered beyond the walls of Diandi Base.

One of them was the long and slender container that held the tier 3 Destroyer mech spear.

The other was the Alpha Lifeguard first-class masterwork support mech.

The final one was by far the biggest and most ostentatious of the bunch.

This was because the mechers had just delivered the Otalon Sprius, a 350-meter long juggernaut!

The size of this outdated metal monstrosity was enormous. Even though it did not contain any extraordinary traits, its age combined with its titanic size already made it impossible for anyone to ignore its presence!

Its imposing height and its humongous mass granted the juggernaut an overpowering physical presence that could easily diminish the stature of any other mech in the vicinity!

The Otalon Sprius was so big that Ves had no idea where to store it. There was no space on the surface of Diandi Base. None of the underground spaces were tall enough to accommodate a mechanical monstrosity whose length was comparable to sub-capital ships.

Though the raw power of this metal beast was unimaginably high, its practicality was so abysmally low that Ves understood why juggernauts fell out of favor.

"I can explain." Ves said as he raised his palms in a placating motion. "I did not buy this juggernaut because I wanted to play with a really awesome toy. There is immense strategic value in being able to field an actual juggernaut in battle."

Chapter 5942 Inopportune Time

Though Gloriana faulted Ves' judgment and complained about his choices, she ultimately did not have too many objections over most of his acquisitions.

The Alpha Lifeguard was a powerful first-class masterwork mech that could provide ultimate protection to both mechs and people.

It had only grown more relevant than ever since Ves amazed red humanity several times during his now-infamous business trip.

"We do not have a qualified mech pilot who can make full use of this powerful support mech." Gloriana commented. "We will have to borrow a mech pilot from the Bluejay Fleet in order to enjoy its protection."

Ves nodded in agreement. "I have already issued a request. In the meantime, I have charged our clan with training or recruiting suitable pilots. It will not be easy to find the right pilots because the Alpha Lifeguard requires special training in order to make full use of its remote shielding capabilities. All of the good first-class mech pilots are tightly bound to their employers. Even if our clan manages to poach them, their loyalty and commitment are always in doubt. The less qualified first-class mech pilots often possess slightly inferior genetic aptitudes, which makes it more challenging to maintain full control over a first-class mech that is very dependent on micromanagement in order to realize its full potential."

"Are you telling me that it will take years before our clan is fully able to master the Alpha Lifeguard?"

"Maybe longer than that." Ves admitted. "I also want to upgrade it and convert it into a living mech, but that is a huge undertaking. This is an advanced first-class masterwork mech. Any upgrades we come up with must surpass a high quality standard in order to retain the Alpha Lifeguard's special properties. Neither of us are ready for this. We need to promote to first-class mech designers and build up a sufficient amount of experience before we can tackle such a project."

Gloriana briefly grimaced. "That is too long of a duration. It is not ideal to depend on a mech that clearly has room for upgrades, yet will not receive any due to our own incompetence. However, I am confident enough that we will be able to give this powerful mech the attention it deserves from us in a handful of years. Until then, we can depend on the protection that it can already cover. Master Goldstein is an excellent mech designer by all accounts, and the work that he has adapted for private use still retains the essence of his design philosophy."

While Gloriana clearly appreciated the Alpha Lifeguard regardless of whether it could be upgraded, she harbored greater concerns over the tier 3 Destroyer mech spear.

"I know what this weapon can do." She said as she stared at the container that barely manage to keep the volatile weapon tame. "Out of all of the melee weapons that we can equip onto our mechs, I cannot think of anything more outrageous than this Destroyer weapon. What I find questionable is the timing of this acquisition. You paid a heavy price to secure a weapon that no one in our clan is qualified to wield at this time. Even if one of our heroes finally manage to break through to ace pilot, it is not certain whether they are suitable to wield a spear."

"I think you are giving ace pilots too little credit, dear." Ves gently retorted. "Ace pilots can easily master the use of any weapon due to their superhuman capabilities. While I would have preferred to obtain a Destroyer sword, the blade is far more expensive to fabricate than a spear that only needs a

powerful spear tip. Personally, I am willing to keep this Destroyer spear unused for a decade. Venerable Rosa Orfan is the most suitable candidate to wield this weapon. As soon as she completes her second apotheosis, I will not hesitate to give her the privilege to wield this weapon into battle. The native aliens won't know what they have in store. An ace mech armed with a tier 3 Destroyer spear should be able to overload any transphasic energy shield with much greater ease!"

Destroyer weapons were not optimized to neutralize energy shields, but that did not mean they were terrible at it. They still inflicted far greater damage on energy-based defenses mainly due to their raw destructive potential.

This was a strong reason for Ves to pay a lot to transfer it to his possession!

"The recent grand auction gave us a priceless opportunity to obtain a genuine tier 3 Destroyer weapon. It is unlikely the Terrans will give up any of the powerful Destroyer weapons since they appear to be having trouble with producing more of them. Don't forget that the Terran Alliance only has a fraction of the high-end infrastructure of the Greater Terran United Confederation."

Red humanity did not lose a lot of knowledge, but getting cut off from humongous resources and high-tech industries of the Milky Way was devastating.

There was a lot of tech in the Red Ocean that had become irreplaceable and in many cases unrepairable.

It was still fine for the time being as the Great Severing was still relatively fresh.

The technical problems related to getting cut off from the Milky Way were bound to become much greater in a decade or two! Red humanity had to speed up its technological conversion to ensure that all of the most critical machines and devices remained functional over the long term.

Speaking of outdated Milky Way-derived technology, the Otalon Sprius was by far the most representative relic of the old galaxy.

"The state of the juggernaut is better than I expected." Gloriana said as she continued to examine the immense physical construction that was standing in a field next to Diandi Base. "That does not mean it is in a usable condition. The Evolution Witch clearly did not appreciate this trophy well enough to arrange proper maintenance in the decades it remained in her hands. Juggernauts may be built to withstand extreme stresses, but they should not be able to prevent the decay of its more delicate electronic and mechanical systems."

"I did not acquire the Otalon Sprius to serve as an immediate boost to our defenses, Gloriana. Its present state is not good, but it doesn't really matter when we intend to redesign and rebuilt it from the ground up. In fact, I can even argue that the physical juggernaut is not as valuable as the permit that comes with it. Buying this big machine has granted us a license to field a single juggernaut."

So long as the dimensions of the Larkinson juggernaut did not diverge too much from the dimensions of the Otalon Sprius, it was very much possible to produce a brand-new juggernaut!

The Larkinsons just had to destroy the Otalon Sprius in order to comply with the terms set by the Red Association.

Gloriana became thoughtful when she heard that. "That presents us with much greater leeway than I initially thought. Do you prefer to invest additional effort into preserving a part of the Otalon Sprius, or do you prefer to design a completely new juggernaut?"

There were pros and cons to both possibilities, but Ves had already made his choice.

"It will be troublesome, but I think it is ultimately worth it to overhaul and upgrade the Otalon Sprius." Ves answered. "Its history may be rather ignoble, but it is still a decades-old machine. The juggernaut had not been alive for all of this time, but its age is a form of accumulation in itself. I can make use of that to give the new and improved version of the Otalon Sprius a powerful head-start."

He did not have any concrete ideas to share with Gloriana. Whatever experimental ideas he came up with so far were not solid enough.

Gloriana practically despaired when she thought about all of the time she needed to devote to redesigning such a powerful monster of a machine.

"There is not enough time in our schedules to work on this juggernaut. Our workload is already high. There are far too many expert mechs that urgently require upgrades. Meanwhile, I expect our clan to produce more expert pilots in the following years. I am obliged to design proper expert mechs for all of them. In the meantime, I have to devote enough time on my studies, research as well as raising our children."

Ves faced the same issue. The problem with the Otalon Sprius was that it required a massive time investment in order to convert into a powerful addition to the Larkinson Clan's war arsenal.

"Let's just leave it here for the time being." He decided. "It doesn't matter if we don't touch it for a decade or so. We can tackle this ambitious project when we have finally freed enough time in our schedules to upgrade it properly. By that time, we should have also mastered enough high technologies and new advancements to make it a lot stronger than if we embark on this project right away."

His wife had no objection to this decision. It helped that there was no acute need for the juggernaut for the time being.

Ves had also earned the right to colonize a valuable star system, but his clan was not even ready to do so. The preparations would likely take years even if the Larkinsons enjoyed additional subsidies and support.

Once the Larkinson Clan established a proper first-class colony settlement, there was finally a reason to put a juggernaut to good use. The Otalon Sprius was designed to excel in planetary combat. So long as Ves and his wife added a lot of anti-orbit weaponry to its massive frame, it should be able to repel starships in orbit as well!

Since there was no intention of upgrading the juggernaut, there was little point in sticking around any longer.

Both mech designers decided to turn around and head back inside Diandi Base.

While Gloriana went back to the design lab in order to apply her latest insights on archetech on the Dark Zephyr Mark III Project, Ves did not join her right away.

He had a more important priority to deal with. His blood became increasingly hotter as he counted down the seconds.

When Ves returned to his personal abode, he sat down on a chair and petted the gem cat that was dozing on a table.

"Meow..."

"Hey again, buddy. I need you to guard me and remain alert. I don't know what is going to happen, but be ready to respond to anything."

"Meow..."

Lucky's condition had not been fully restored, but he was looking better than a week before. His digestion system was still working hard to digest the super-class alloy that continued to remain obstinate.

Once Ves completed his preparations, he took a deep breath and settled in for an indeterminate wait.

Roughly an hour later, he finally received the notification that he was waiting for all of this time.

His entire consciousness shifted to a blank space.

A vast gulf of emptiness spanned before his disembodied existence.

[The Mech Designer System has successfully updated to Version 3.0. The submission of EE-343F-00334R served as a powerful catalyst that has resulted in a large improvement of the underlying foundation and structure of the Mech Designer System. It has become more complete and less flawed compared to its prior state.]

Ves was glad that his efforts weren't in vain.

[The Mech Designer System still has further room for immediate improvement. The user is given a choice to select a specialized upgrade direction to further specialize and define the role of the latest version of the Mech Designer System. You are allowed to choose from 1 of 7 Upgrade Tracks, each of which share a relation to EE-343F-00334R. They shall be presented to you one by one.]

If Ves was present in his physical body, he would have smiled by now.

He had been looking forward to this moment!

Chapter 5943 The Violet Refuge

The empty expanse around the consciousness of Ves began to change into a completely different setting.

The void of deep space came into existence. Stars dotted the skies, though not ones that looked familiar.

The illusion, for Ves recognized that he was not observing a location that existed in reality, presented a sea of stars that did not possess the red nebulas that defined the Red Ocean, nor the ubiquitous golden glow of Messier 87.

Instead, a spherical boundary that glowed in a subtle shade of violet caged in this expanse of space.

Ves had a powerful sense that the space beyond this violet boundary might look completely different from a vast expanse of space.

What mattered was the space inside this violet energy bubble. It was not empty. Instead, it was filled with several large space stations and starships.

The human-built space stations did not contain any familiar or unfamiliar markings. They looked rather generic if not for the fact that they were clearly built with the aim of providing long-term habitation in a fixed location in space.

The space ships also looked generic, making it look as if the System tried its best not to taint this illusion with biases or visions of a future timeline.

Whatever the case, the collection of space stations and starships effectively formed a society that could easily host tens of millions of people!

Shuttles and other space traffic showed that every ship and space station was very much active.

Ves identified many forms of fixed defenses, but it was rather clear that the inhabitants weren't particularly afraid of getting invaded.

The space within the violet energy bubble was protected somehow. It formed an oasis of safety in a cosmos that was filled with powerful enemies.

[Upgrade Track #1: The Violet Refuge. This upgrade direction will transform the System Space into a fully developed pocket space. This pocket space must be anchored in a fixed location relative to a cosmic satellite. The Violet Refuge falls under the control of the highest-ranking user of the Mech Designer System, who can choose the anchoring coordinates, the entry and exit conditions and more. The Violet Refuge will be limited in size at first, but many of its properties can be upgraded by spending Ascension Points.]

A pocket space. The first upgrade track amounted to a hidden refuge. Ves grew considerably less enthused when he heard that. He already had the Blinkyverse. Sure, it was a completely imaginary space for the time being, but there was always a way to transform it into a material universe.

Perhaps the biggest advantage of obtaining the Violet Refuge was that its physical laws and dimensions conformed to realspace. A mech built in this System-provided pocket space should work exactly the same in the rest of the cosmos.

This was not necessarily the case in the Blinkyverse. Some of its laws that governed its small reality diverged from the main universe. This granted Ves certain advantages as he could do stuff that was not possible in normal space.

Unfortunately, it could also lead to accidents and other compatibility problems if he shifted stuff from one universe to another.

Ves was sure he could figure out solutions to these problems. The chance of accidents also shouldn't be too big as the differences in laws of reality weren't all that big.

"How secure is this Violet Refuge? Can it block the tracking of my soul mark?" He asked the system without producing any actual sound.

[The Violet Refuge is well-hidden and shielded from many different forms of tracking and detection. It is highly isolated and can block many forms of signal transmission from the beginning. Many functions can be added or upgraded to the Violet Refuge. Its volume, stability, detection avoidance and defense against intrusion can all be improved to a high ceiling. The more Ascension Points the user is willing to spend, the more powerful it becomes.]

If there was one aspect about the System that Ves had confidence in, it was that it always attempted to deliver impressive results.

Ves deduced that this may be an expression of the creator of the Mech Designer System. Whoever made it probably shared a lot in common with Gloriana!

Therefore, the Violet Refuge should be far more than a simple pocket space. It should truly do its name justice and provide Ves with a genuine refuge to hide against threats towards himself and his clan.

Given all of the possible calamities foretold by the prophetic visions painted on the Zeal, Ves had plenty of reasons to believe that it was not redundant to prepare an extremely secure bolthole for himself.

No matter whether he needed safe harbor against humans or aliens, the Violet Refuge had the potential to shield him against many of his enemies!

It also helped that Ves could apparently bring in a lot of people and objects into this exclusive pocket space. He could even turn it into a permanent habitat space. Generations of Larkinsons might grow up and die without ever venturing into realspace!

He understood why the System presented it as the first solution. The Violet Refuge probably offered the most direct solution to one of his greatest threats. If it became powerful enough to prevent the Subjugation King from tracking his coordinates or block his intrusion attempts, then Ves would gain lots of time to solve the dangerous soul mark in a more permanent fashion!

That was already tempting enough for him to choose the first upgrade track right away. He refrained from doing so because he considered it to be a cowardly decision.

Ves did not want to turn himself into a squirrel who dashed into his secret hiding place at the first sign of trouble!

Sure, someone who possessed an affinity for darkness might consider this to be standard behavior, but Ves did not want to deal with his problem by avoiding confrontation all of the time!

Besides, choosing the Violet Refuge meant that he would pass over 6 other upgrade tracks, any of which could offer more compelling options.

"Next."

The illusion changed. The Violet Refuge disappeared. The environment changed to the System Space that he was already familiar with. The same mountain top came into view always.

The difference was that the white mists that obscured much of the surrounding terrain had receded by a huge extent.

Ves found out that the available territory had expanded to include the rest of the mountain as well as a large lake at the bottom!

The lake immediately attracted his attention. He could immediately tell it was not a normal body of water. Instead, his incorporeal senses detected that the lake was filled entirely with phasewater!

That was not even the best part.

The lake was not calm. A fountain of phasewater constantly sprayed in the center.

It turned out that the lake was more than a reserve. It was a phasewater wellspring!

[Upgrade Track #2: Phasewater Generation. The System Space can be expanded to accommodate one or more phasewater wellsprings. Each phasewater wellspring can autonomously generate phasewater. Different from other sources, the wellsprings inside the System Space do not need to be supplied with materials. The initial generation of phasewater is relatively small at the beginning, but can be expanded by spending Ascension Points. The wellsprings can potentially be upgraded to produce as much phasewater as the entire Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy.]

This was another powerful upgrade track! Being able to generate phasewater in a completely secure location immediately solved the constant shortage of phasewater.

So long as the production rate became high enough, the Larkinson Clan would never be short of phasewater ever again!

What was even more promising was that Phasewater Generation completely cut off his dependence on the Red Ocean.

In other words, if Ves and his people ever traveled to another galaxy like the Milky Way or Messier 87 one day, he did not have to worry about losing access to large sources of phasewater anymore. He could continue to reap the benefits of the Red Ocean's specialty product without actually remaining anchored to the dwarf galaxy anymore!

This was an extremely powerful long-term benefit that would definitely justify this upgrade track.

Having access to a source of phasewater also assisted his phase lord cultivation. If he was no longer able to improve his true body through lightning baptisms, then he needed to grow it the old-fashioned way.

The aliens did so through various means, but one of the most universal one was to steadily inject more phasewater into their bloodstreams. By doing this at a very gradual rate, the alien phase lords were able to increase their tolerance for higher concentrations of phasewater in a safe and stable manner.

Naturally, the greater his phasewater concentration, the greater the demand for phasewater!

Once his body proportions began to approach that of a small moon, he would need far more phasewater than he could ever plunder from an alien warfleet or stronghold!

Ves knew that so long as he chose this powerful upgrade track, there was no need for him to rely on external sources anymore.

Either the System would give him the option of procuring a PPS for a lot of Ascension Points, or he could just go without one and rely on infusing phasewater supplied by all of the phasewater wellsprings!

In any case, Ves would become absolutely assured that he would gain abundant access to one of the most valuable and strategic resources of the Red Ocean!

He even theorized that it may no longer be necessary for him to procure a phasewater production system!

Either the System would give him the option of procuring a PPS for a lot of Ascension Points, or he could just go without one and rely on infusing phasewater supplied by all of the phasewater wellsprings!

In any case, Ves would become absolutely assured that he would gain abundant access to one of the most valuable and strategic resources of the Red Ocean!

On many occasions, the difference between victory and defeat was decided by access to resources.

If Ves was willing to expose the fact that he could easily obtain far more phasewater than the rest of red humanity combined, then he could gain a massive amount of leverage over the other human powers!

He could potentially supply them with far more phasewater than the Red Cabal had access to. This would enable red humanity to put up a far greater fight against the native aliens as far more combat assets enjoyed the benefits of transphasic technology!

Upgrade Track #2 definitely satisfied his personal interests as well as the interests of human civilization.

Still, an upgradeable source of phasewater alone might not be enough to solve all of his problems.

It might turn him into a much more attractive target instead!

Another reason not to take this option was to consider whether its function largely became redundant so long as he was able to become a greater phase lord.

If he was able to steal the PPS of a phase whale and implant it inside his body, he should definitely gain the ability to generate phasewater by himself.

Sure, the production rate might not be as high, and his subsequent cultivation may proceed at a snail's pace, but he should at least be able to meet his own needs as well as that of his clan!

Phasewater Generation therefore wasn't as unique and irreplaceable as he originally thought.

Besides, so long as red humanity managed to win the Red War and take over the Red Ocean, the supply of phasewater across all of the conquered territories would become incomparable to current conditions!

Ves concluded that this was a convenient but not quite essential upgrade track. There were many viable substitutes available, though they required a lot more effort and struggle to realize.

Besides, Ves was not sure whether it was a good idea to build up an enormous dependency on phasewater. It had its strengths, but it might also limit the technological development of his clan in the long run.

Hyper technology had the potential to reproduce the powerful effects of phasewater in different ways. It just needed a lot of development before people figured out more sophisticated ways to manipulate space-attributed E energy.

In the end, Ves had to decide how much of his life should be dominated by phasewater.

It was an exotic material that possessed much greater promise than what the phase whales had managed to uncover, but it required a huge commitment to realize its endless potential!

Chapter 5944 Gate Bonanza

The System only presented two new upgrade tracks so far, and they were already powerful enough to be absolute game changers.

Both of them were strongly related to the space element, just as Ves expected. This implied that once he completed another Supply Mission by submitting Yondu Milk, the next round of System upgrades would probably be centered around biotechnology.

The expanse of space shifted yet again. The mists that obscured the environment around the mountaintop covered everything else up yet again.

The perspective shifted. Ves' consciousness appeared right in front of the Time Gate.

The difference was that the gate in question looked a lot different than before. It had received a massive overhaul that caused it to become a lot bigger and thicker. Additional modules of indeterminate function had been added as well.

The large gate activated.

The view shifted to show a much larger portal floating in space.

Ves instantly recognized it. How could he forget about the greater beyonder gate that was located in the Maryun Ultima System in the Milky Way?!

"No way..."

After a brief wait, the greater beyonder gate slowly activated.

A large procession of human starships hailing from the Red Ocean slowly passed through the activated gate!

[Upgrade Path #3: Universal Gate Network. Transforms the Time Gate into a Time and Space Gate that will serve as the nexus of an expandable gate network. Enable the construction of additional gates by investing Ascension Points or material resources. Continuous upgrades can lead to the creation of an intergalactic gate network that can span across the cosmos.]

This looked and sounded quite familiar to Ves!

"Isn't this a way to recreate the Milky Way Galactic Gate Network?"

Ves could understand the appeal of being able to support the creation of a new network of gates, especially if they fell under his control.

However, the Red Two should be fully capable of setting up a gate network themselves. Perhaps the only reason they hadn't already done so was because the Red Ocean was a lot smaller, so the demand for instant transportation was much smaller.

The lesser beyonder gates may be just a fraction as powerful as their greater counterparts, but they still required an immense amount of phasewater in order to function.

Red humanity had better uses for phasewater than to build a mostly redundant gate network!

Perhaps it made sense to set up a proper gate network if humans started to conquer a lot more territories, but for now human-occupied space was so small that modern superdrive-equipped starships could easily cross from one end to the other end of human space in a matter of weeks or months.

Ves did not actually possess much interest in creating his own gate network. The only promising part about the illusion presented by the System was the possibility of reconnecting to the greater beyonder gate located all the way in the Milky Way.

This told him that if he chose this upgrade path, he may be able to offer salvation to red humanity!

If he could arrange an evacuation route back to the Milky Way, then he could save every human stuck in the Red Ocean from getting wiped out by the native aliens or enslaved by the Subjugation King!

Sure, it may be a cowardly decision to run without putting up a fight to the very end, but no one would blame Ves and the others for running away from an incoming God King!

Ves couldn't help but associate this upgrade track to the prophetic vision called 'The Triumphant Return to the Milky Way'.

Had he been responsible for helping red humanity return to the Milky Way in this possible future timeline?

That may very well be the case!

The only point of uncertainty was that if he arranged for red humanity's evacuation back to the galaxy they originally came from, this reunion would be anything but 'triumphant'!

He mentally shrugged. "Who cares. If the alien God King can't be stopped, I can at least buy a lot of time for myself and my family."

Getting soul marked by this tyrannical bastard was his fault. It was only fair that he would suffer the consequences of his own recklessness.

What he couldn't accept was the possibility that he doomed the rest of his family!

His children did not deserve to suffer for his mistakes. Each of them was special, and he just knew that the Subjugation King would take a liking for them. Aurelia was especially attractive because her companion spirit just happened to possess a powerful affinity for the light element!

As a parent, he would do anything to save her from a predator. If he had to choose this upgrade track and figure out a way to reconnect to the greater beyonder gate in the Maryun Ultima System, then that was a worthwhile endeavor!

"Still... does running away solve the problem?"

Not necessarily. He would just be able to bring himself along with much of what was left of red humanity back to a low-energy environment.

Though it would be nice to reunite with his mother and father with his main body, he feared that all he would do was to delay the inevitable!

There was no way that the Subjugation King would settle for conquering the Red Ocean.

Once he gained access to all of the phasewater available in the dwarf galaxy, the entire cosmos opened up to him. With his immense power and vast amount of alien knowledge, he would definitely find a way to jump all the way to the Milky Way!

Once the God King arrived in the Milky Way, he would definitely seek to conquer the much larger galaxy, low-energy environment or not! Just the fact that Ves still bore the alien tyrant's soul mark would just make it a lot easier for him to dial in the right coordinates!

"Wait, is this the reason why I got chained up like a war criminal in one of the prophetic visions?"

He had no idea whether this was the case, but it sounded like a plausible scenario.

To be sure, Ves did not think the Subjugation King or other invaders from Messier 87 would let off the Milky Way. They would find out the origin of the human race soon enough by capturing and interrogating a lot of people and aliens once they arrived in the Red Ocean.

Ves did not even possess a lot of confidence that red humanity and original humanity combined could fend off a Subjugation King with access to lots of phasewater. The Milky Way was broken and devoid of energy that could give humans the edge they needed to defeat an actual God King.

"This is not that great of a choice. Those portals are all vulnerable to attacks, and they can't be built in locations where no human has reached before."

Another point of criticism was that humans had already mastered this technology. Their beyonder gates might not be as sophisticated, but they could do the job well enough.

The main attractions of selecting this upgrade track was to build and control his own gate network and to recreate a bridge between the Red Ocean and the Milky Way.

Ves was ready to move on and explore another possible choice.

"Next."

His perspective went back to the Time and Space Gate. This time, the device had been modified in other ways. It looked smaller but also more mystical.

The transformed gate activated. It generated a portal that led straight to the streets of the capital city of New Constantinople VIII!

The gate shut down then activated a portal that led to an entirely different location. Ves could see that it led to the Cat Nest on Davute.

The gate proceeded to repeat this routine. It opened up gates at other locations in the Red Ocean, both on land and in space.

The Time and Space Gate granted Ves the ability to relocate directly to the surface of different planets to the interior of mobile starships such as the Spirit of Bentheim!

Ves already deduced that the Time Gate gained a portal generation function!

This was not all. The best part about this was that the destination did not require an expensive and vulnerable portal. He could just program a destination and appear where he wanted! [Upgrade Path #4: Portal Exploration. Transforms the Time Gate into a Time and Space Gate. Allows for one-way transportation to locations and coordinates that you have previously visited in the past. The user must pay an increasing amount of Ascension Points to enable instant displacement across further distances and more difficult locations. Further upgrades can increase the maximum displacement distance, create one-way portals to destinations that the user has yet to visit and increase the size of the Time and Space Gate. The user can spend a large amount of Ascension Points to enable the creation of permanent portals and two-way portals.]

His enthusiasm for this upgrade track dropped a bit when he learned that he would have to pay Ascension Points for each passage to a destination without a portal.

The advantage was still great. So long as he earned enough of them, he could potentially reach destinations that were normally inaccessible!

He could already think of many possible uses for this.

He gained the ability to move between different planets and fleets belonging to the Larkinson Clan.

He could instantly escape a losing battle before his enemies could kill or capture him. He doubted that anyone could stop him from getting away the instant he entered the System Space.

He could sneakily move behind enemy lines and appear on a distant alien planet. From there, he could wreak havoc or steal a lot of valuable goods such as phasewater or archetech.

If he upgraded the Time and Space Gate extensively enough, then he may even be able to hop to a different dwarf galaxy, or arrive directly inside Messier 87!

So long as Ves ensured that he maintained his distance from the likes of the Subjugation King, he could make good use of his ability to appear in other galaxies to plunder specialty resources and absorb valuable alien knowledge.

Perhaps he might even be able to bring a small group of family to a galaxy that was so distant that it would take the Subjugation King centuries to arrive even if he managed to enrich himself with a lot of phasewater!

"The problem is that this option is clearly a lot smaller in scale."

He liked Universal Gate Network a lot more for providing powerful infrastructural support. It was a benefit that not only made life better for himself, but also red humanity as a whole.

Portal Exploration was a lot more limited in scale. He wondered whether it was only possible to pass through it from the System Space.

"Is there an upgrade that can allow me to generate this portal in realspace?"

[Yes, but it will require a great amount of Ascension Points to apply this upgrade.]

Ves grew relieved. He did not have to let others enter his System Space in order to pass through an active portal. That vastly reduced the risk of exposure.

Despite the smaller scope and the constant need to pay Ascension Points for every activation, he actually took a liking for this option.

He could get up to a lot of mischief with Portal Exploration. He could raid his enemies and disappear before he was ever in danger of getting caught. He could potentially leave the Red Ocean behind and hop to a neighboring dwarf galaxy that had never received human visitors in the past.

So long as he had enough Ascension Points, the entire cosmos was within reach!

"The scale is a lot smaller, though."

Would he be able to arrange an evacuation route for his entire clan? That sounded unlikely unless he was willing to invest a lot of Ascension Points in upgrading this parameter.

That was troublesome because AP was limited. Trying to upgrade capacity might cause Ves to have too few Ascension Points left to upgrade the maximum distance.

There was no way he could have it both ways with how much AP he was able to earn.

"Unless... I am not the only user anymore..."

Chapter 5945 A Growing Incentive to Share

Ves suddenly realized that many of the upgrade tracks promised a lot of powerful features, but only after investing a lot of Ascension Points.

Wouldn't he be able to upgrade these powerful System features if he started to empower trustworthy mech designers such as Gloriana and Alexa?

His eyes lit up! This idea had a lot of merit!

"It is becoming increasingly harder for me to shoulder this burden alone. I can do a lot more with additional help."

However, Ves quickly recalled the reason why he never went through with inviting another mech designer to become a user of the Mech Designer System.

Others might end up hijacking the System from him one day!

Though Ves did not value the System as much as everyone else, he could not deny that he possessed enough selfishness to keep it for himself.

He did not trust anyone else with its power. If they ended up similar to the Polymath and forgot the most basic principle of the mech designer profession, then the new users of the System posed an enormous threat to modern human civilization!

Yet... the allure of increasing AP generation had become a lot stronger now. The upgrade to the Mech Designer System this time was clearly based around collective benefits this time.

The four upgrade tracks provided so far increased the need for more AP. If the Missions offered by the System did not present more lucrative forms of income, then the only way to further strengthen the new additions was to invite more mech designers!

Ves grew unsettled.

When Ves decided to take a step back and examine the implications of the upgrade tracks that the Mech Designer System presented so far, he eventually managed to identify a concerning pattern.

"Each of these upgrade tracks require astronomical amounts of AP to unlock their full potential!"

The immediate implication of the existence of these AP sinks was that Ves could no longer rely on himself to feed this bottomless pit.

He would subsequently become incentivized to invite others to partake in the System. As long as they became users, they possessed the capacity to earn Ascension Points.

The greater the group of users, the greater the rate of AP income!

Ves might not even have to design mechs in person anymore. He could just sit back, relax and spend AP on increasingly costly upgrades!

No matter whether he opted for Phasewater Generation or Portal Exploration, as long as he brought in enough people, he would become assured that he would soon gain more power than ever before.

Ves had been looking for ways to accelerate his growth and gain enough hard power to resist his enemies.

The latest upgrade seemed tailored to solve his greatest concern!

Ves felt reassured that the System exhibited signs that it was aware of his growing predicament. It showed a willingness to lend a hand by tailoring its upgrade tracks that could solve his problems.

However... Ves found it difficult to put his complete trust in the System.

"What is your angle?"

From the moment he looked at this situation from a more critical angle, he suddenly made an important realization!

This scenario started to look awfully familiar!

The Five Scrolls Compact used to operate on a similar business model!

The members of this infamous cult toiled on the behalf of one of the Sacred Scrolls, and got rewarded for their efforts.

The Compact at its height had become extremely powerful. A huge amount of cultivators had fallen under the sway of the benefits provided by the Sacred Scroll. The Holy Sons and Daughters received the greatest favor of them all, and organized the remaining cultists to ensure they utilized their power and resources effectively to channel a large amount of contributions to the Sacred Scroll.

The business model adopted by the Five Scrolls Compact was not necessarily evil or nefarious.

The reason why it ended up so badly was because the Sacred Scrolls had been made with impure motives in mind!

Ves felt a lot more ambivalent towards the upgrade tracks presented by the System this time. If his suspicion was right, the following options were not going to be any cheaper.

The point of this elaborate scheme was to channel the greatest benefits to the Metal Scroll and so on. They needed to absorb a huge amount of resources in order to fuel the revival and return of their mysterious creators.

It was a huge conspiracy from beginning to end. The 'users' of the Sacred Scrolls had all been turned into glorified slaves. Neither the Scrolls nor their creators had any reason to care for the wellbeing of their exploited minions!

Ves felt a lot more ambivalent towards the upgrade tracks presented by the System this time. If his suspicion was right, the following options were not going to be any cheaper.

They were practically set up in a way that incentivized a large increase in the user base of the System!

Ves wondered how long he would be able to resist the urge to invite others to make use of the System.

He had a strong hunch that the time where he was the only user of the Mech Designer System was gradually coming to an end.

His needs grew bigger with each passing year. His responsibilities had skyrocketed as well due his rapid rise in human society. Ves urgently needed to speed up red humanity's growth as well as boost his personal power.

He could not do so by relying on his own efforts!

Though he was far from ready to invite other people to partake in the System, he was already beginning to think about possible candidates.

Only three names came to mind.

"There's my wife."

Though he frequently clashed with her on many matters, they also worked together extremely well. Ves had never doubted her competence and integrity as a mech designer. Ves expected her to do well once she gained access to all of the features of the Mech Designer System.

That meant that she could start earning lots of AP very soon!

On top of that, Gloriana also invested a lot of attention into her craftsmanship. Though she was not as good as him at the moment, she had learned a lot and was constantly making progress. She would have made a lot more strides in this area if she hadn't become sidetracked by archetech during the past few months.

Once she managed to elevate her craftsmanship to the next level, she would probably be able to earn radiant lottery tickets at a steady rate!

More radiant lottery tickets translated into more powerful goodies. Even if they weren't particularly useful to the Larkinsons, they could always sell them to others in exchange for other valuable concessions.

"Alexa Streon is my direct disciple. She has proven her trustworthiness already, and she is truly dedicated to the craft."

The young Journeyman was not only an extremely well-educated Terran mech designer, but she also agreed with Ves on many matters. Her design philosophy was derived from his own, and her passion for living mechs was genuine.

She never gave him a reason to doubt her loyalty or motivation. That did not mean that their relationship might grow more competitive and adversarial in the future, but for now she was firmly in his camp.

As an upstanding member of the Larkinson Clan, Ves trusted her to put the interests of the clan above the interests of other human powers. It did not seem reckless for him to induct her into the System one day.

"The third candidate is Marvaine."

He was far too young to work as a mech designer, let alone make use of the System.

It was not even certain whether Marvaine was willing to continue his studies. If he decided to commit to this profession and graduate from a mech design university, Ves was willing to induct him into the System.

Ves had started to make use of the System shortly after he graduated from the Rittersberg University of Technology. It would be a nice family tradition if his son followed his footsteps.

He feared that Marvaine might develop a dependence on the powerful functions of the System right away, but its incentive structure was still reliant on designing mechs.

Since Ves was able to escape this potential trap without receiving any special guidance, his son should be able to fend for himself.

He was already smart in his own right. He also had his father watching over him at all times!

The more he thought about it, the more he believed that this was the right course to go forward. He could no longer shoulder every burden by himself. It would be great if the people by his side improved faster once they gained access to the functions of the System.

Ves mentally shrugged and decided to check out the remaining options.

"Let's continue. Show me the next upgrade track, please."

The Time and Space Gate changed yet again. This time, it became a little smaller, but the entire clearing had also changed.

Tall black pillars had sprung up. Cages and holding facilities had appeared. Their presence all cast a more ominous light on the altered environment.

The gate went active. As an active portal formed at an unknown location, a random alien being suddenly appeared!

The alien did not look like any species that Ves was familiar with. The newcomer was equipped with transphasic technology, so it was obvious that he had been plucked from another location in the Red Ocean.

While the alien still looked confused at how he ended up in this completely new mountain environment, the black pillars instantly went active.

The alien screamed and dropped onto the ground!

At the same time, a cage dropped on top of him and deprived it of its freedom!

Once the alien lost the ability to resist, the cage floated up the ground and started to transport the new captive to the nearby holding facility.

The gate activated yet again. This time, it spat out an alien Ves never expected to see on this side of the cosmos again.

"Is that... an Ocicyth?!"

The large Ocicyth was an insectile alien that possessed a large body that was covered by a sharp, purple exoskeleton. The alien's formidable stature and thick natural armor made it clear that it was part of a soldier subspecies!

The reason why Ves managed to recognize the Ocicyth right away was because this was an infamously powerful race in the Milky Way.

The Ocicyth ranked fifth among the Seven Apex Races!

The insectile race had once ruled a large portion of the Milky Way!

Despite the formidable combat prowess of this soldier subspecies, the black pillars instantly sapped it of much of its strength.

Another cage formed around its large body and brought him to the holding family.

The pattern repeated several more times. Each time the gate activated, a different alien being appeared, likely without permission, hence the need to restrain the new arrivals!

At one time, the area around the gate expanded even further. After that, the gate spat out a phase whale!

The old and powerful alien immediately grew angry! It put up so much resistance that it almost broke the cage!

[Upgrade Track #5: Random Being Acquisition. The Time Gate can be upgraded into a Time and Space Gate. By spending a certain amount of Ascension Points, the gate can be used to acquire different living organisms up to a certain strength level within a large stellar range. The acquisition process is based on principles that rules out precise targeting. This process can be improved by spending Ascension Points on upgrading the maximum range, narrowing the acquisition zone to a more defined region, increasing the upper strength limit and adding options for more precise targeting of beings that possess specific traits. At its height, Random Being Acquisition allows the user to obtain living beings across the entire universe.]

"Damn!"

This was a powerful option! Ves could derive so many benefits if he was able to use Random Being Acquisition to come into contact and capture all manner of powerful alien beings!

Whether he wanted to steal their unique knowledge or harvest them for ingredients, there was huge potential in this option.

This was especially the case if he upgraded it to the point where it could capture alien beings native to Messier 87!

He could learn so much if he managed to get his hands on an alien engineer.

However, the randomness of the acquisition process reminded him of capricious lottery draws.

He was not entirely comfortable with the idea of turning the gate into another version of the Wishing Fountain!

Chapter 5946 Portal Fantasy

The fifth upgrade track was definitely the sketchiest option that the System presented so far.

The previous ones were all benign in nature. They allowed Ves to either build useful stuff or grant him capabilities that he could use for good or ill.

Random Being Acquisition was different because it directly targeted random beings living throughout the universe.

Nobody wanted to get kidnapped, brought back to a mysterious space before subsequently getting stuffed into a cage!

This option was tailor-made for Ves if he wanted to grow his power by plundering the strength of other alien beings.

He was sure he could gain access to plenty of solutions that would ease the process of extracting valuable knowledge and secrets from the minds of intelligent organisms.

He might also be able to improve his ability to harvest unique or valuable resources from powerful captives.

If Ves was able to use this upgrade track to capture phase whales and phase lords on a consistent basis, then it would be more than worthwhile for him to spend lots of Ascension Points!

It would be even better if he was able to make the Time and Space Gate powerful enough to kidnap aliens from Messier 87!

"This is not an easy option." Ves mentally frowned.

The value of this upgrade track was directly proportional to his ability to extract value from his captives.

If he wanted to make the most out of the Ascension Points invested in this upgrade track, he not only needed to get good at plundering everything of value from a captured alien.

He also had to find ways to convert the acquired beings into loyal minions and subordinates!

Ves suddenly recalled the old cartoon dramas that he used to watch when he was young. There was a period of time when the age-old portal fantasy genre enjoyed a resurgence for the umpteenth time.

Ordinary people who lived in a normal society suddenly got transported into a completely different fantastical setting!

After their arrival, they quickly utilized their modern ingenuity or their 'special powers' to gain an advantage and rampage across their new environments!

Although fantasy could never match reality, Ves had the impression that Random Being Acquisition shared a close resemblance to all of those old stories!

"Is this a way for me to kidnap individuals with special abilities and hoodwink them into serving my cause?"

The universe was unimaginably big. The amount of galaxies spread across the cosmos easily surpassed 2 trillion!

There was a huge variety of living beings out there. The vast majority of them comprised of little more than bacteria and other weak organisms, but the more powerful among them likely developed a lot of weird and unique advantages.

The Alshyr race became powerful by exploiting the power of Worclaw Crystals.

The phase whales were able to make use of phasewater to grow their bodies to moon-sized proportions.

The extinct luminar crystal race invented an amazing form of high technology based on creating special crystals.

The arche had developed a powerful new tech base that worked on radically different principles from conventional technology.

In short, there were lots of powerful alien beings out there that could contribute completely new insights and capabilities to Ves.

From increasing the direct combat power of his personal retinue to providing groundbreaking technological advancements to red humanity, there was huge potential in this upgrade track!

However, there were two dubious aspects about Random Being Acquisition that made Ves hesitate about picking this option.

The first one was that there was a strong element of randomness to the selection process. Who knew whether spending his Ascension Points would yield a profitable result? This was no different from gambling!

The second dubious aspect was that Random Being Acquisition was not entirely unique.

Portal Exploration allowed Ves or a hand-picked capture team to teleport to a completely foreign location and snatch valuable alien targets by themselves!

Of course, the upgrade track needed a lot of AP investment in order to make this capture operation viable. Ves had to be able to generate a two-way portal to prevent himself and his people from getting stranded in the middle of hostile territory.

Since this was a possibility, why should he favor the fifth upgrade track?

"Random Being Acquisition is a lot narrower in scope, but it does its job a lot better. There is no need to risk myself by venturing into dangerous places. So long as any alien being enters the System Space, it should be easy enough to subdue the new arrival. The holding facility is a completely secure prison that can probably block all forms of tracking and detection. It should also offer solutions that allow me to extract much greater value from my captives than if I rely on ordinary means."

That last part was extremely important to Ves. It was always difficult to interrogate different alien beings as their differences made it difficult to figure out how to apply sufficient pressure on these unfamiliar species.

The more extreme and divergent the aliens, the harder it became to understand them, let alone get them to spill their secrets.

"There's too much randomness in this option." Ves mentally sighed. "The benefits may be unimaginably high if I can kidnap an alien inventor... but it can also cause me to waste a lot of AP in vain."

Though Ves possessed a higher than average risk tolerance, that did not mean he lost his appreciation for stabler alternatives.

He decided to set aside further considerations for later. He still had two more upgrade tracks to explore.

"Next."

This time, the setting changed to show a random untamed planet. The lush green environment showed that the globe supported a life-bearing ecosystem.

The biodiversity of this planet was quite impressive. Exobeasts of many different varieties tried to eke out a living. Exotic radiation occasionally caused a few exceptional specimens to mutate and gain extraordinary power.

The calamity beasts that rose up among the fiercest native organisms ruled over their respective territories like kings.

Each of them sought to defend their lands, rule over their dependent tribes and find ways to evolve into god beasts.

It was quite an idyllic sight.

Yet one day, all of that changed when a dimensional tear appeared above a certain region!

The gap in the fabric of space released a flood of energies that originated from a completely different dimension from the material one!

The energies spilling out from this gap had an immediate and catastrophic effect on the ecosystem.

Many exobeasts and exoplants died out as they became exposed to energies that their bodies couldn't bear!

Mass extinction soon engulfed the entire continent, and subsequently the entire planet.

The effect was the greatest on the side of the planet where the tear originated. The opposite side of the planet managed to escape the worst effects, but continuous exposure slowly caused the more powerful and resilient organisms to fall and die.

Doomsday had come to the untamed planet.

However, not everything was destined to end.

"Life always finds a way."

Though more than 99.9999 percent of all species died out after getting exposed to foreign energies, a small proportion of exobeasts and exoplants somehow managed to adapt to the extreme circumstances.

Many of them had mutated before and self-evolved fast enough to tolerate the foreign energies, especially when they resided on the opposite side of the planet.

The more successful among them even managed to draw strength from the foreign energies, allowing them to grow stronger and gain fantastic new abilities!

After an unknown amount of years, the untamed planet eventually managed to recover. The dimensional tear still spilled out energies that were absolutely lethal to ordinary life forms, but the ones that had managed to repopulate the globe had all developed an amazing tolerance for them. Many couldn't even live without the powerful energies anymore!

Ves recognized the incredible value of these new species. Just like E energy radiation, the energies supplied by the dimensional tear produced different kinds of mutations that could provide valuable reagents or exceptionally powerful exobeasts.

"Isn't this a replication of what happened to Aeon Corona VII?"

How could Ves forget his unforgettable adventure at the planet where the Starlight Megalodon had crashed?

He had come into contact with so many wonderful and terrible phenomena while he stayed on the planet.

From befriending Qilanxo to almost getting killed by Sigrund, the mission related to Aeon Corona VII had forged his old self into the mech designer he was today.

Though a part of him still resented all of the trauma and suffering he endured while he endeavored to retrieve a vial of life-prolonging serum, another part of him appreciated how much stronger he had grown after he came back with his life intact.

The thought of being able to create more planets like Aeon Corona VII definitely held a lot of allure to Ves!

The surroundings changed to show a completely different planet. This one was already colonized by humans. Billions of people lived across thousands of settlements spread across the surface.

Another dimensional tear opened up above a random city.

Unlike last time, the tear did not spill out any dangerous and lethal energies.

Instead, the tear took the form of a portal that led into a very strange and alien space.

The local humans quickly took charge of the area and cautiously explored the dimensional tear.

Seeing that it did not introduce any direct harm to the planet and ecosystem, the humans first sent out probes, bots and ultimately human field teams!

After a lot of cautious explorations, the bots and field teams eventually exited the dimensional tear while holding all kinds of bizarre loot.

The haul consisted of unstable crystals, strange metal ores and living creatures that were neither carbon-based nor silicon-based!

Soon, the humans confirmed that the dimensional tear led to a parallel but radically different dimension that was filled with all manner of strange resources!

The local rulers quickly chose to construct a set of defensive fortifications and research institutions around the dimensional tear. Each haul brought back valuable goods that could not be sourced anywhere else in the Red Ocean.

The researchers eagerly studied the strange items and eventually managed to achieve a few breakthroughs.

Mechs that incorporated these bizarre materials started to show up. Each of them exhibited much better performance than comparable machines!

The energy weapons of these strange mechs bypassed transphasic energy shields entirely.

The mechs gained the ability to phase right through deadly attack salvos when activated at the right time.

The strange machines were also able to launch missiles that spontaneously transformed everything around the impact site into shiny and reflective metal!

All in all, the forces who fielded these abnormal mechs clearly gained a lot of power by exploiting the resources taken from the other side of the dimensional tear.

[Upgrade Track #6: Dimension Breach Creation. Allows for the generation of dimensional tears at designated locations at the cost of Ascension Points. These tears will breach the walls of reality and open an entrance to random or specified dimensions. The different dimensions can contain all manner of energy, resources or hazards. This upgrade track can be upgraded to increase the maximum size of the tear, prevent the passage of undesirable matter and energy, breach into more less accessible dimensions and create tears at greater distances. At its height and with heavy investment of high-quality resources, this upgrade track may gain the potential to breach into a completely separate universe.]

"What?!"

Much of the explanation provided by the System did not exceed his expectations, but that final part completely caught Ves off-guard!

"Is this for real?!"

The System essentially promised that he would gain the ability to travel the multiverse!

Ves would no longer remain confined to the current universe anymore!

Even though the amount of AP and resources needed to strengthen Dimension Breach Creation would definitely be astronomical, it gave Ves hope that he would be able to escape the reach of the Subjugation King and any other enemies that he could not defeat in the foreseeable future.

As powerful as God Kings may be, Ves doubted that they possessed the power to travel to a separate and fully formed universe!

This was definitely another upgrade track with an extremely high ceiling!

Chapter 5947 Fractalization

As Ves climbed his way to the upper ranks of human society, he gained access to increasingly more powerful tech.

From linking technology to the EdNet, he earned the qualifications to make use of the best and most advanced technologies produced by human civilization.

He even won the privilege to build and make use of his own battlecruiser recently!

The benefits were immense. Ves became more motivated to contribute to the Red Association and the Red Fleet. As long as he furthered their goals, the mechers and the fleeters would not be too stingy with their rewards.

Yet... there was only so much advanced tech and goodies that the Red Two could provide. They were all limited by the scarcity of resources and the shortage of brilliant minds in the new frontier.

It was difficult to develop amazing new tech when working under heavy resource constraints.

Dimension Breach Creation promised to solve one of red humanity's fundamental problems.

The solution?

Open a tear to an exotic dimension and figure out ways to farm the powerful matter and energy that resided on the other side!

Sure, the danger factor of working with all of this dangerous stuff was extremely high, but the potential rewards were equally as lucrative!

Though opening breaches to random dimensions could easily doom a planet or a star system, it could also grant the controllers a huge amount of wealth and other benefits!

Ves saw great promise in this option. It not only had the potential to solve red humanity's critical lack of resource availability, but it could even produce a more profound change on human-occupied space.

"If my suspicions are correct... then I might be able to turn all of human space in the Red Ocean into an artificial high-energy environment!

It would be ideal if he was able to find and breach a hole that led into a dimension that was rich with E energy, but Ves was not sure whether that was possible.

No matter. There were many other higher dimensions available that contained all manner of other useful energies.

As long as Ves managed to create enough breaches that led into energy-rich dimensions, the constant transfer of energy into the material realm would cause radical transformations to the environment!

Ves believed that if he went far enough with this, he could potentially increase the energy density of human space to the point where it started to match the energy density of Messier 87!

However, the risks were extremely high!

Who knew whether the dimensions were devoid of bizarre alien predators and other existential threats?

If he happened to open a breach that led into the wrong dimension, he may unwittingly unleash an ancient alien monster that could snuff out all life in the Red Ocean with just a single expression of its cosmic power!

Ves relaxed a bit when he reminded himself that the System would probably implement enough safety precautions to prevent such accidents from occurring.

He may have to pay a lot of AP in order to reduce the risks, but it was an acceptable price to pay.

Dimension Breach Creation had already become one of his favorite options.

Although Ves and other people needed to conduct a lot of research and exploration to figure out the best ways to exploit the dimensional tears, the potential profitability was insanely high!

The capacity to access other dimensions on a much wider and more consistent scale had the potential to supercharge the growth of red humanity.

The Larkinson Clan could also monopolize dimensional tears of their own. Ves would definitely try to open up access to dimensions that contained the most lucrative resources.

There was no need for the Larkinsons to claim large amounts of territory that was difficult to defend. They could just fortify a couple of planets and continuously mine resources in different dimensions without worrying about running dry!

Unfortunately, Ves did not think that opening up dimensional tears would allow him to evade the pursuit of the Subjugation King.

At most, it only gave him the ability to harvest powerful resources. It was up to him and the rest of red humanity to figure out how to convert them into powerful products.

In any case, Ves had one more upgrade track to consider.

"Next."

The environment changed to show a copy of his own true body floating in deep space.

Ves had grown really big as of late. His phasewater concentration measured at 3.8 percent last he checked.

Even though that was still far from reaching 100 percent, he had made a lot of progress compared to his previous state!

Replacing just 3.8 percent of his blood circulation could cause his body to exceed the height of a typical mech by as much as 3 times!

If this rate of physical growth remained constant at greater concentrations of phasewater, then a day might come where his body might become big enough to allow people to live on the surface!

"How absurd!"

Ves already guessed that the last upgrade track was related to promoting his phase lord cultivation.

The illusion of his true body began to show unusual phenomena.

He initially expected his true body to grow in size or display exotic new spatial abilities. It would make sense for the System to facilitate his body cultivation.

It could do this by giving him the option to spend Ascension Points to increase his phasewater concentration.

It could also increase his utilization of phasewater by implanting new phasewater organs and upgrading his existing ones.

Perhaps it would even allow Ves, and potentially every other user of the Mech Designer System, the option to purchase a phasewater production system without needing to hunt down a phase whale or greater phase lord!

Instead of doing that, strange lines formed on his body. These lines grew increasingly thicker and more numerous.

At a certain point, the space occupied by his true body suddenly started to fracture and break into cubes!

"What the hell is going on?!" Ves mentally wondered.

His true body broke apart, but it did not actually come to any harm. Instead, the unusual transformation changed his body in such an odd fashion that it became a lot stronger than before!

Powerful attacks slammed into the odd body, yet the attacks either reflected, broke apart or simply hit nothing as the space blocks moved out of the way.

Once the fractalized body went on the attack, it was able to break apart a powerful first-class multipurpose mech by pointing a finger at its target.

The illusion produced shadowy mechs that began to attack the fractalized version of Ves.

Powerful attacks slammed into the odd body, yet the attacks either reflected, broke apart or simply hit nothing as the space blocks moved out of the way.

Once the fractalized body went on the attack, it was able to break apart a powerful first-class multipurpose mech by pointing a finger at its target.

A second later, the mech broke apart into tens of thousands of cubes of space and matter!

Unlike Ves, the mech clearly wasn't able to remain functional after all of its parts got diced before being physically separated from each other!

The other hostile mech quickly retreated and tried to take Ves down by relying on long-ranged attacks.

The strategy was sound, but the fractalized version of Ves performed an even weirder move.

A few blocks moved away from the rest and started to grow in size.

Once these aberrant blocks grew big enough, they began to disgorge shadowy mechs that had been stored inside a part of his body!

These were clearly living mechs of his own design, though Ves was not able to study their exact designs.

What mattered was that the living mechs quickly went into action and employed their own powerful weapons to fight against the distant threat!

Since the friendly mechs outnumbered the enemy one, the ones 'deployed' by Ves quickly won the fight.

Now that they had done their jobs, the friendly mechs flew back and reentered the strange space blocks, which subsequently rejoined its cube-shaped brethren.

Ves' true body eventually reemerged whole after all of the space blocks rejoined each other again.

"What. The. Hell."

[Upgrade Track #7: Fractalization. Grants the ability to comprehend the power of space in a more profound manner, beginning with fractalization. This upgrade track can assist in promoting more advanced cultivation based on deeper as well as alternate forms of spatial manipulation at the cost of spending Ascension Points. The available services are not specific to phase lord cultivation, but can provide indirect assistance that can unlock more powerful or alternate forms of power expression. When a user has achieved great success in fractalization, it is possible for him or her to reproduce many of the actions enabled by prior upgrade tracks.]

"Huh?!"

Ves initially thought that the seventh and last upgrade track was just a really weird form of phase lord cultivation.

It was more than that. If he interpreted this correctly, it promoted a powerful form of qi cultivation based on the space element. If Ves ever managed to become powerful enough, he no longer needed to rely on the System to teleport to other galaxies or open dimensional tears.

This was because Ves effectively gained the power and expertise to accomplish these feats by himself!

"That is true power!"

Ves would be lying if he claimed that he was uninterested in grasping this power.

However, he was realistic enough to understand that the amount of resources and effort required to reach this ultimate state was probably much greater than all of the other options!

Cultivation was difficult! Ves needed to invest so much effort into qi cultivation that he would not be able to devote as much time in mech design or other productive activities!

"Fractalization is much more suitable for me if I chose to integrate the space element as a major component of my domain." Ves mentally frowned.

He had ultimately settled on a different course. That made this upgrade track much less attractive as he did not possess an innate advantage in this cultivation approach.

If he chose Fractalization anyway, then the System might transform Ves to the point where space became the fourth major element of his domain.

Alternatively, Ves needed to do the hard work himself. This would not only take a lot of years, but also slow down his progression as a mech designer.

"This is too big of a downside!"

The allure of being able to master the power of space in such a versatile manner was incredibly attractive to Ves. He was keenly aware that if he chose the other upgrade tracks, he would lose access to many of their benefits once he lost control of the System.

That would not happen if he managed to make high attainments in Fractalization!

His cultivation belonged to himself, so he would still retain much of his strength even if he bid farewell to the System.

This was a compelling reason for him to keep this final upgrade track into consideration.

"Besides, fractalization might not be the most suitable option for me, but what about other users?"

Ves could induct his children and other Larkinsons into the System. If they developed a powerful interest or affinity in the space element, he could encourage them to spend their AP on Fractalization!

Ever since he broke a psychological barrier that discouraged him from pulling other people into the Mech Designer System, he began to think a lot more on how to maximize their participation.

"Anyway, now that I know what I can choose from, I need to figure out what I need the most before narrowing down my selection..."

It was rather amazing how just 2.353 kilograms of EE-343F-00334R could open up so many wild possibilities.

He was pretty sure that the Rubicon Spatial Transfer System utilized a much greater quantity of this super-class alloy, yet it was only able to make teleportation a lot more viable in combat situations.

This meant that human technology was still too far behind! It was not as advanced as everyone thought!

It became even more important for Ves to make the correct decision. An opportunity like this only came once. Choosing one upgrade track meant forgoing the benefits of the other ones.

"Let's see..."

Chapter 5948 The Power of Gates

Before Ves could make a selection, he first needed to define his goal. Only then would he be able to create a list of priorities that would help him rank the available options.

What was his goal?

Right now, his greatest shortcoming was lack of time. He could accomplish a lot more if he had more time to study cutting-edge science, design more mechs, raise his children, lead his clan and engage in diplomacy.

Alas, the System upgrade this time centered around space rather than time, so he could forget about any easy solutions.

What else did he require?

"I'm already doing pretty well." He concluded. "If I set aside my lack of time, I am not short on anything. My clan is growing, my subordinates are growing stronger, my mech company is selling more products than ever and I have become one of the most influential leaders of the younger generation. I'm also making good progress on advancing my design philosophy with the help of all of the insights I have harvested as of late."

There were still a few issues that bothered him a lot. The shortcomings of human civilization in the Red Ocean constrained him increasingly further.

Original humanity was extremely powerful due to having access to all of the population and resources of a large galaxy.

As much as humans liked to regard themselves as superior and better than all of the other sapient races, the cold hard truth was that if the Seven Apex Races hadn't been so complacent and afflicted by inertia, they could have easily crushed human civilization in its inception!

Red humanity was in a much worse position because the native aliens of the Red Ocean fully understood the threat posed by the extragalactic invaders.

The fact that the Red Cabal quickly triggered their most dire emergency plan and transport their entire dwarf galaxy over 50 million light-years away was an overwhelming indication that they were frightened by the threat posed by humans!

It made a lot of sense for the native aliens to unite their forces and go all-out in destroying every human trace in their own home galaxy.

Ves mentally scowled.

"I'm doing pretty well on a personal basis, but the human society that shelters me is in dire need of help."

In the short to medium term, the native aliens were about to launch major offensives.

By transferring and concentrating many of the existing warships that were previously dispersed throughout the Red Ocean, the Red Cabal was in an excellent position to win a grueling war of attrition!

In the long term, the arrival of the Subjugation King and his powerful armada threatened to topple everyone, regardless of whether they were human or alien!

Ves felt burdened by all of these expectations. He needed to tailor his choice to satisfy both short term and long term needs.

Neglecting any of these priorities might cause red humanity to suffer devastating losses that it could not recover from! Without the protection of a powerful enough civilization, Ves would lose the shelter that it offered!

"That is unless I go for the Violet Refuge."

Out of all of the upgrade tracks, the first one clearly required the least amount of investment. So long as the shielded pocket space was large enough to accommodate all of the members of the Larkinson Clan along with a lot of friends and allies, it should be safe enough to serve as one of the few effective boltholes for the human race in the Red Ocean.

However, Ves did not like this solution at all. It was way too cowardly and reactive for his liking.

It also became impossible to gain access to resources needed to sustain and progress a remnant society.

Unless he gained the ability to open portals to distant destinations, there was practically no way for humans to leave the Violet Refuge and regain their old splendor!

Ves couldn't help but compare the Violet Refuge to the pocket space that was previously hidden on Davute.

The pescans that previously lived and thrived on Davute VII got wiped out by the humans who came and swept away the weak and underdeveloped alien residents.

Yet what the human colonizers failed to discover for years was that a small group of pescan refugees successfully managed to enter the secret phase whale enclave and escape the attention of the human invaders!

The pescans could have lived in the abandoned prison for a long time.

However, their preparations were far too poor, and the evacuation proceeded with too much haste. The former rulers of Davute VII were not equipped to live in the pocket space over many generations.

Perhaps that was why they eventually went crazy and chose to launch a brazen attack on the leading figures of Davutan society!

Ves wondered what it would be like if he and his clan evacuated to the Violet Refuge. Would he and his fellow Larkinsons become so frustrated by the prospect of living in a violet cage that they would irrationally leave their protected habitat and launch poorly conceived revenge attacks?

There was a very large chance that this might happen!

Even if the most logical solution was to settle in the Violet Refuge for hundreds if not thousands of years, Ves had no faith that people would be willing to live and die in this isolated space.

Humans yearned to be free!

Therefore, Ves already ruled out the Violet Refuge as a choice. He wanted to be more proactive even if that meant putting himself at greater risk.

In terms of short term value, Ves believed that Phasewater Generation provided the most straightforward benefits. Phasewater was a scarce resource that humans coveted a lot. Ves could never spare enough of it himself. Since phasewater technology had already reached a stage of maturity, there was no need to put in any extra effort to convert phasewater into useful applications.

In terms of long term value, pretty much all of the upgrade paths offered a lot of promise in a few decades and centuries.

If he managed to live long enough, then the upgrade tracks would be able to deliver benefits that easily exceeded that of the original Metal Scroll!

It was rather ridiculous that a fragment of the Metal Scroll had the potential to surpass the power of its original source!

"The System shouldn't be lying." Ves judged.

He had a lot of confidence in the System's credibility. If it claimed that Ves would be able to move to the other side of the cosmos or breach the wall between different universes, then he did not have much reason to doubt these boastful claims.

The key was recognizing that it took an astronomical amount of energy and resources to reach this end state.

As much as Ves yearned to gain access to these high-end perks, he knew that it would take so long for him to unlock them that they were practically irrelevant to his current problems.

"I shouldn't let the promise of distant benefits sway my decision." He concluded. "My long-term window only extends up to a century at most. I need to worry about surviving the coming of the Subjugation King first before I have the luxury of dreaming about obtaining supreme power. In any case, as long as I grow strong enough, I don't need the help of the System to travel to other galaxies."

Everything would become a lot easier for him once he became a Star Designer or the rank that came after that. The difficulty was getting to this point. That was the period where he needed the help of the System to tide him over.

"The Universe Gate Network is not really a suitable choice compared to the other ones." He frowned. "The need to build actual portals in different locations is too resource intensive. Each gate

is at constant risk of getting sabotaged or destroyed, and it is highly doubtful that my clan will be able to retain possession over them. The only reason to choose it over the others is the promise of being able to reopen passage back to the Milky Way."

That was not a sufficient reason for him to select the Universal Gate Network over the other fantastic choices.

Running back to the old galaxy was barely better than hiding in the Violet Refuge in his opinion. Both of these options were far too cowardly and reactive for his liking.

"The other ones are much better in this regard."

Options such as Phasewater Generation and Random Being Acquisition were useful all of the time. Both provided strong benefits at the beginning, but could steadily be upgraded so that they not only remained relevant as Ves grew stronger, but might also turn into his ultimate trump cards!

Ves found it difficult to settle on a single choice among the ones that remained eligible. Each of them offered different pros and cons that caused them all to gain roughly equal weight in his eyes.

"I need to use other criteria to rank them further."

Aside from ranking the upgrade tracks by their short term and long term value, he could also distinguish them by how much they benefited him personally as opposed to providing help to human civilization as a whole.

The most selfish option was Fractalization. It was just a means for the System to assist its users in practicing weird but incredibly deep cultivation centered around the space element.

While Ves could think of plenty of ways that this could boost his power, it was very hard for this upgrade track to provide social benefits.

He could only do so indirectly by using his stronger comprehension of space to develop more refined applications of phasewater technology.

"That sounds nice and all, but there are more straightforward ways to uplift human civilization."

Ves deeply understood that he could not save red humanity alone. He needed the help of other humans just as they needed his revolutionary innovations.

There were numerous clever Star Designers and powerful god pilots out there that could exploit the benefits obtained by Ves far better than himself!

He was not opposed to sharing his bounty so long as he received fair remuneration for his assistance.

The Universal Gate Network provided a huge benefit to society, though the associated risks and dangers were too high for his liking. The gates were just too obvious to everyone. Anyone could launch an attack on them, and the loss would be great if any of them got destroyed.

However, the Universal Gate Network also promised the most direct and straightforward way to reopen the only transportation channel between the Red Ocean and the Milky Way.

"Wait a minute."

A very powerful idea came to mind!

"What if... the two branches of humanity united once again?"

Ves believed that mankind's full potential would be unleashed once red humanity and original humanity reunited once again!

The Great Severing had led to earthshaking changes to human civilization in the Red Ocean, but only little over 2 full years had passed since the separation!

That meant that there was still a chance for the two groups of humans to reconcile and make up with each other again!

There was no need for red humanity to flee from the new frontier anymore.

Instead, Ves believed that original humanity would never be able to resist the immense benefits brought by exotic radiation in the new galactic neighborhood.

Every god pilot and Star Designer had been looking for ways to achieve their breakthroughs and reach the fourth major cultivation rank.

The Milky Way may be big, but it was incredibly barren in terms of energy level.

Only the Red Ocean and possibly Messier 87 granted them hope of reaching the next rank!

There were so many powerful True Gods and brilliant talents that remained stuck in the Milky Way. Each of them could easily bloom and tap their remaining potential so long as they transferred to the Red Ocean and reinforced the outnumbered and beleaguered humans who were already holding the line!

The Common Fleet Alliance also had plenty of reasons to increase their investment in the Red Ocean. The benefits of hyper technology and phasewater technology were too great for them to ignore.

The first god ship in the form of the Dominion of Man was an irresistible allure to every warship supremacist who had long grown tired of the same old technologies in the Milky Way!

Ves grinned. So long as humanity was able to fight the Red War and repel the extragalactic invaders from Messier 87 as a united race, the odds of winning were much greater than before!

Humans would stop cowering like rats and fully recover the pride and confidence they held before!

The best part about this was that not even the Subjugation King could steamroll his way through the Red Ocean anymore!

If 8 god pilots weren't enough to defeat the alien God King, then what about 20 god pilots?

If 20 god pilots weren't enough to defeat the Subjugation King, then what about 100 god pilots?

Even if the strength gap was too great for quantity to defeat this alien tyrant, then surely there must be a few very old and powerful god pilots who might be able to use the resources in the Red Ocean to advance to the mythical rank of god king pilot!

"This is probably the best way to beat that slaving bastard and prevent him from hunting me down!"

Chapter 5949 AP Sinks

Ves grew a lot more enthused about the Universal Gate Network than before.

Although there were many reasons to malign it, Ves valued this upgrade path for offering the most direct and straightforward possibility to reopen the greater beyonder gate.

Of course, it wouldn't be easy. Ves believed that he not only had to persuade red humanity to construct an entirely new gate, but also convince original humanity to change the settings of its old greater beyonder gate and open it up for business again.

This would probably require Veronica and Cynthia to make contact with the Big Two. There was no guarantee that the mechers and the fleeters from the old galaxy would be willing to play along, especially if they found out about the huge threat posed by the powerful alien civilizations of Messier 87.

A more serious issue that Ves was worried about was the bad blood that built up between the two branches of humanity.

Red humanity felt abandoned by original humanity. Many surviving communication channels went dark as original humanity recognized that their isolated and displaced cousins became targeted by enemies that they could not withstand.

Not only that, but the leaders of the Red Association had witnessed how the Polymath conspired with their counterparts of the Mech Trade Association to sever the Kingdom of Mechs from the new frontier!

These were all serious issues that did not bode well for any possible reunion.

"Even if there is the possibility of reenabling two-way intergalactic travel, the two sides might not be able to bring themselves to reconcile with each other."

That would result in a lot of tension and awkward situations. The political struggles would intensify, leading to a lot of infighting that ultimately distracted the humans from fending off the collective alien threats.

"Universal Gate Network can give me the power to reconnect the two galaxies, but it can't help me unite the two branches of humanity."

That was one of the greater faults of this upgrade track. It relied too heavily on external help, and did not provide a lot of direct benefits to Ves himself. He could not use this option to directly improve his personal power. The most he could do was to negotiate concessions in exchange for his gate-related services.

"In fact, this option may actually slow down my progress!"

At the beginning, this upgrade path probably wouldn't allow him to build gates that were impressive enough to be valued by the Red Two. Ves would have to invest a lot of AP into this upgrade track to make it useful enough.

Besides, Ves doubted he would be able to open up gates to other galaxies without building a portal at the other destination.

This was a huge logistical shortcoming. It meant that it was far too difficult for him to create a passage leading to Messier 87 or one of the many dwarf galaxies that orbited around the golden galaxy.

Ves ultimately shook his head. "I don't mind it if I have to make sacrifices to strengthen everyone else, but this is too cumbersome."

There was a limit to his altruism. From his perspective, repeatedly sacrificing his interests was not noble. It was foolish behavior. He would have nothing left if he kept up with this behavior. By then, the people around him would not hesitate to betray him and abandon him due to expending all of his value.

He was realistic enough to understand that if he wanted to make enough changes to society, he needed to expand his personal power. This was why he could not ignore this priority when he chose his next upgrade track.

"As far as personal power goes, Phasewater Generation, Portal Exploration and Random Being Acquisition are good choices."

That was not to say they were only relevant to himself. He had the ability to choose whether to share his bounty to others. The important part was that he possessed most of the initiative.

Of the three options, Phasewater Generation is the least versatile. It did not actually introduce anything new. It just solved a resource shortage in the most direct fashion possible.

Phasewater held a lot of value. It was unlikely to become useless or irrelevant over time. Being able to obtain more of it was always advantageous.

"Yet... it is too simple."

Ves disliked the lack of versatility and expanded options. Phasewater was powerful, especially if he was able to accumulate ever-increasing quantities of it, but its usefulness was eventually constrained by human technology and other limitations.

The development of phasewater technology was still in the early-to-mid stage!

Human researchers managed to copy a lot of simple and readily available phasewater tech from the native aliens, but it would take centuries before they managed to develop truly amazing applications in this field!

That was far too great of a timeframe for Ves. If the best uses of phasewater only became available several centuries later, he probably wouldn't need to depend on this upgrade track anymore!

If Ves wanted to convert his spoils into more immediate benefits, then Portal Exploration and Random Being Acquisition sounded like promising options.

Both of them shared a lot in common. Ves would still need to conduct a lot of research or delegate this work to others to convert his gains into useful benefits.

However, the sheer variety of spoils meant that it would be possible to obtain benefits that Ves could use to boost his power in a shorter time frame than usual.

"There's still a risk of failure, though."

Portal Exploration only had the power to create one-way portals at the beginning. This was a serious constraint. Ves would either need to prepare an alternate evacuation channel, or invest enough AP to unlock the ability to pass through the portal he originally came from. It was unacceptable for him to become stranded behind enemy lines!

Random Being Acquisition offered a more specialized service and allowed Ves to capture a lot of useful aliens. It could probably become really good at its only function as long as he sunk enough AP into this upgrade track.

Yet it was precisely because of its narrow functionality that he disliked it. The upgrade track did not introduce any means for him to move to another destination. It was not able to capture non-living subjects as far as he could tell. It also became difficult to guarantee that the AP spent on activating the Time and Space Gate produced a profitable result.

"It would be rather painful to invest a hundred AP, only to kidnap a useless low-caste orven laborer."

Then again, the randomness of this option also made it possible for Ves to hit the jackpot. A slight investment might allow him to capture a phase lord or phase whale if he was lucky!

Words mattered. If the System used the phrase 'Random Being Acquisition', then the random factor was a core part of this upgrade track. Ves doubted that he could negate it entirely. Each use of the Time and Space Gate was another time he pulled the lever of a slot machine.

Ves did not find this to be undesirable in itself. What truly bothered him was that it became difficult to obtain exactly what he needed in a relatively short time frame.

He could pull the lever a hundred times, yet fail to obtain a single alien captive that possessed the properties he needed!

However, if Ves was not in a hurry, then the sheer variety of alien beings that got kidnapped by the System would allow him to amass a collection of useful prisoners over time.

So long as Ves was able to keep them under control, he would eventually be able to amass a large and diverse collection of useful captives!

Due to his affinity for life, he was confident he could find ways to extract a lot of value from them. He could obtain all kinds of wonderful biological organs that he could implant into his mechs.

He could indoctrinate the more pliable prisoners and have them fight on his behalf.

Ves could even harvest the spiritualities of the more extraordinary beings to use as ingredients for his other projects.

"This is an excellent option if I want to design more biomechs."

However, that was not in his consideration at the moment. That made this option a lot less attractive.

"I can already obtain all manner of powerful mutated beasts by acquiring them from hunting teams. I can also obtain plenty of alien prisoners from the expeditionary fleet. Random Being Acquisition doesn't actually present me with new possibilities. The only way to change that is to upgrade its acquisition range so that it can steal beings from other galaxies."

How much AP would that take? Probably a lot!

Even when the Time and Space Gate became powerful enough, Ves would still end up paying lots of AP just to activate its acquisition function a single time!

He mentally frowned. "This is the greatest problem with Portal Exploration and Random Being Acquisition. They constantly demand AP in order to show their value."

The neverending demand for AP was not a big deal if Ves opened up the Mech Designer System and inducted other people.

If he continued to monopolize it, then that was a different story. Earning AP was difficult and took time. He already had trouble with accumulating enough Ascension Points to purchase expensive but powerful enlightenment fruits. He could not bear an additional burden.

"If I want to earn the most profit for the least amount of AP investment, which one should I choose?"

Phasewater Generation was an obvious choice, but aside from that, Dimension Breach Creation sounded really promising.

It was not quite clear how safe it would be if he started to open dimensional tears in random places. Who knew if there were monsters lurking on the other side.

However, his expedition to Aeon Corona VII a long time ago had personally exposed him to the possibilities of deriving strength from strange dimensions.

He became more enthused about the possibilities of this upgrade track. It had the potential to transform red humanity's critical lack of resources on a wider scale!

"System, are the dimensional tears generated by Dimension Breach Creation temporary or permanent?"

[Dimensional walls will attempt to repair any breaches as they appear. You must restore an existing dimensional tear or create a new one if you wish to maintain a status quo. It is possible to create fixed dimensional tears after investing enough Ascension Points. They can still be removed through external intervention, but they will not close by themselves. If you invest a large amount of Ascension Points, the dimensional tears can become impervious to damage, but they cannot be closed after they have been opened.]

That was both good and bad news. Dimensional tears possessed the same vulnerabilities as gates if that was the case. They needed to be protected at all times to prevent others from destroying a lucrative source of power.

The ultimate dimensional tears should be permanent ones. Ves had no idea how it was possible, but the prospect of creating a permanent breach to a dimension rich with powerful energies could be an enormous game changer for humanity!

However, Ves was unsure how much AP he needed to throw into this giant hole in order to get to this point.

A part of him was also afraid of unintended consequences. There were good reasons why the different dimensions remained separate from each other.

If Ves started to undermine the fundamental structure of the universe, the damage might become so great one day that reality itself would unravel!

"Maybe I need to rein in my ambitions and settle for temporary breaches for the foreseeable future."

Dimension Breach Creation would operate a lot similar to Portal Exploration if that was the case.

The biggest difference was that the former allowed him to mine for resources in a different dimension, while the latter allowed him to harvest resources in a different material location.

"Either one is good."

Chapter 5950 Swayed By Emotions

After an indeterminate time, Ves believed he spent enough time on analyzing his available options.

He had studied their pros and cons and had a good idea of how they would affect his life in the coming years.

He roughly estimated how much they could benefit him on a personal basis and how much they could contribute to the advancement of human society as a whole.

Ves also figured out how much AP he needed to invest in order to harvest modest gains, and how much more he needed to spend in order to get to the really good stuff.

Ves even kept his mother's advice in mind and carefully studied how extensively certain decisions promoted the interests of the Mech Designer System.

It was difficult to make any definite judgments due to lack of information. If the goal was to revive the mysterious creator of the Mech Designer System, then he believed that it urgently needed a greater supply of high-level energy as well as super-class materials.

Energy was the basis of all power. Ves never really noticed it, but the System had to be running on an absolutely monstrous power source.

However, he doubted that this was enough for it to fulfill its greater purpose.

Being able to open a permanent dimensional tear to a hidden dimension filled with extremely powerful energies would definitely help the System solve its energy deficit!

"There are also materials to consider."

The System had demonstrated many times that it was capable of converting energy to matter.

Yet not all objects and materials were as easy to materialize. Super-class materials existed in a league of their own. They were miracles in material form that were not only exceedingly rare, but also much more powerful than every other exotic or hyper!

Ves guessed that there were certain upgrade tracks that were much more effective at solving this shortcoming than others.

Dimension Breach Creation, Random Being Acquisition and Portal Exploration all seemed like choices that benefited the System the most.

Of course, that did not stop Ves from profiting as well. The important part was whether he got ripped off in the process.

"The amount of AP the System charges for its services will determine how much I am being taken advantage of." He surmised.

The problem was that without picking an upgrade track, there was no way for him to evaluate these costs in advance.

Ves mentally shook his head.

Since that was the case, he should pay more attention to other criteria.

All 7 choices scored differently in the aforementioned aspects. There was no obviously superior upgrade track that Ves could choose without feeling like he suffered a loss.

However, there were a few choices that Ves ruled out right away.

The Violet Refuge was too passive for Ves. Even if he gained the ability to create remote portals that could allow people inside to exit in another star system, he was not willing to bet whether this special space could keep a powerful God King at bay.

Phasewater Generation was too simple. It did not introduce any truly new variables that could lead to game-changing innovations. Ves already had access to other sources of phasewater. Even if the quantity was not as good, there was no need to be greedy.

Universal Gate Network promised to reconnect the two branches of humanity, but it would take a lot of AP and cooperation from multiple parties to make this happen. Outside of that, building ordinary gates was largely dispensable.

Fractalization was too weird and mostly redundant during the early stages. While it promised to give Ves the power to replicate the advantages of all of the other upgrade tracks, it would probably take thousands if not millions of years of cultivation to reach such an impossible height.

This left him with 3 remaining options.

"Portal Exploration. Random Being Acquisition. Dimension Breach Creation. It has to be one of these choices."

Each of them had their strong points, and they all scored at least decently well in most criteria.

Since Ves was not able to make up his mind by using his existing list of criteria, he needed to include additional considerations to make a fitting choice.

"Let's think about relevance. Which of these upgrade tracks complements my mech design activities the most?"

His ability to design and build fantastic mechs depended on many factors. Availability of special and unique resources was one of them. If Ves wanted to design powerful mechs that possessed advantages that could not be matched by other works, then he needed to accrue a large amount of special materials.

All three upgrade tracks in consideration could do this, but Random Being Acquisition scored the worst in this aspect.

It was inconsistent due to its random nature. This meant that there was no way to mass produce a mech that relied on a unique resource such as Worclaw Crystals.

It was also limited to beings that were available within a certain range from his location. That meant that Ves would only be able to kidnap aliens who resided in the Red Ocean for the time being. This was not unique as he could easily commission the expeditionary fleet or a more powerful force to kidnap specific alien species on his behalf.

"The biggest upside to this is that it is a lot faster, more direct and more convenient."

Portal Exploration demanded a lot more manual effort compared to Random Being Acquisition, but it was also a lot more consistent.

Since it did not include the word 'random', Ves assumed that it was possible to repeatedly form portals to a single remote location.

This meant that it became possible for him or his organization to consistently mine the unique resources of a resource-rich planet.

Of course, he first needed to become aware of such a valuable site, and that was not always possible.

It also shared the same disadvantage of Random Being Acquisition that it only gave Ves a chance to extract resources from relatively common sources in the universe.

Portal Exploration only really came into power if Ves was able to upgrade it to the point where he was able to open two-way portals across intergalactic distances.

That was when Ves could harvest the specialty resources of other galaxies!

"Why bother to wait that long and spend a huge amount of AP on upgrades when I can start with mining specialty resources right away with Dimension Breach Creation?"

The prospect of starting with harvesting completely foreign energy and matter exerted a strong attraction to a mech designer like Ves!

However, he quickly calmed himself down when he reminded himself that just because he gained access to a lot of weird new stuff, it didn't necessarily mean he could make good use of it all right away!

He needed to conduct a lot of research in order to figure out the properties of strange materials.

He also had to put a lot of thought on how to convert the resources into powerful new design applications.

That took way too much work! Ves did not have the time to waste on figuring out the properties of so many oddities.

"I don't have to do all of this work alone, though."

This was where the advantage of organization became prominent. He not only had access to a clan that could easily set up a bunch of new research institutions, but he also forged very close relations with the four major powers of red humanity.

The mechers, fleeters, Terrans and Rubarthans had so many scientists and engineers at their disposal that they could easily bear this burden!

They might even pay him for the privilege of gaining access to the strange but potentially powerful energy and matter of other dimensions!

The Larkinsons could not digest the benefits of dimensional tears alone. Ves needed to persuade all of the other human powers to cooperate with him to ensure that they did not waste this powerful opportunity.

"All of this sounds nice, but how easy is it to open up a tear to an energy-rich or resource-rich dimension?"

Ves did not study dimensional theory deeply, but most dimensions were completely empty and devoid of value.

This was one of the reasons why starships that engaged in FTL travel did not crash into other-dimensional space rocks while they traversed the higher dimensions.

Finding a valuable dimension was a challenge in itself. Ves believed that he needed to pay a considerable price to discover a profitable dimension!

"This is a serious complication."

It meant that Ves would not be able to make substantial gains in the short term. If the process worked as he anticipated, then he would have to breach random dimensions many times in a row before he finally hit the jackpot.

How much time would this take? How much AP did he have to spend until he found the right dimension?

All of this was obscured behind a fog of uncertainty.

"System, can you tell me whether Dimension Breach Creation will help me find dimensions that are filled with desirable energy and resources?"

[...]

Ves mentally grimaced. Of course the System wouldn't make it easy for him. Its refusal to provide additional context was practically criminal!

He needed to work with what he got. Ves at least had enough confidence in the System to assume that Dimension Breach Creation would not leave him with duds all of the time.

Perhaps it would offer him a service to find a suitable dimension to breach.

In summary, Dimension Breach Creation took more time to prove its value than the other options.

Whether it was finding a profitable dimension to breach or waiting for researchers to figure out useful applications, it may take multiple years to earn a serious return on investment.

However, the profit potential of this option had a very high ceiling!

This was especially the case if he was able to open a permanent tear to an energy rich dimension!

The example of Aeon Corona VII continually captured his imagination. It was impossible for Ves to disassociate the sights he had seen on that abnormal planet with this upgrade track.

This alone made Dimension Breach Creation more attractive than the other options. He had witnessed the benefits in the past. A part of him yearned to recreate the splendor of that unforgettable planet.

"This is not good! I am letting my emotions sway my decisions. I can't make such a crucial decision by listening to my biases!"

Unfortunately, Ves was not a completely rational being. He was a mech designer who often surrendered control to his overflowing passion.

Ves definitely felt a greater attraction towards Dimension Breach Creation. It was a more extreme form of gambling than Random Being Acquisition. This was because it took a lot of time and effort to find a dimension of actual value!

When Ves compared Dimension Breach Creation from the other two options in consideration, he tried to determine whether there was any compelling reason to favor the latter.

"Portal Exploration and Random Being Acquisition are much easier to work with, but the potential profits are not as good. It is much more difficult to obtain unique resources that can provide completely different advantages than normal."

Ultimately, his choice came down to whether he valued the unique resources originating from strange dimensions over more familiar benefits that could already be found in the material realm.

If he favored the former, then he would have to settle for a future where his best works became increasingly weirder and more bizarre.

If he favored the latter, then he needed to apply even more criteria to decide whether to go for Portal Exploration or Random Being Acquisition.

This was a difficult junction to be at. Ves was afraid of making the wrong choice. The lack of clarification meant that he had to make a crucial decision based on a lot of missing information.

"What should I choose?"

Each upgrade track had its own charm. It was truly too difficult for Ves to make up his mind!