

The Mech 5971

Chapter 5971 Hyper Material Advancements

It was not necessary to use bad materials to make a good mech.

The skill of the mech designer could compensate for many of the shortcomings of inferior materials.

Yet there were hard limits to how extensively a mech designer could turn trash into treasure.

Any professional mech designer should be able to cobble together a functional mech out of terrible materials if it was necessary.

The mech designer would hate it, but it did not matter so long as they delivered.

Even so, almost every mech designer preferred to work with superior materials if they had a choice.

More powerful materials gave a mech designer more options. The mech in question could become extremely powerful in a single aspect, or achieve a balanced performance profile with a very high baseline.

Cost and resource scarcity prevented many mech designers from using as much expensive materials as they wished.

This was not an issue that Ves had to worry about too much these days. The LMC was selling more products than ever. Partial ownership in Isthmus Manufacturing gave Ves and his clansmen an even greater source of income than before, so he no longer had to worry about restraining his budget for high-end mech design projects.

His growing relations with the Red Two and the first-rate colonial superstates granted him additional channels for rare materials. He could trade MTA merits and other concessions for materials that were normally reserved for in-house usage.

For now, Ves only ordered a batch of materials from the Red Association. The mechers were most invested in discovering and developing hyperts that were most suited to be used in their products.

After Ves, Andraste and Alexa examined the hyper alloy stored in the first container, they began to open a few other containers.

They became exposed to various different hyper materials with varying origins and properties.

Though Ves judged that most of them were useless for his current project, he soon encountered a material that seemed to deepen the shadows in its vicinity.

The sample came in the form of an unassuming matte gray alloy bar. Despite its dull appearance, the hyper alloy conveyed an impression that it was about to transform anything nearby into shadow.

"Maaaw!"

Yaika pulled back as she received a small backlash when she attempted to examine the strange alloy. The kitten did not actually receive much harm, but that did not stop Blinky from licking her back to health.

"Mrowww..."

"It hurts." Andraste whined as she experienced her companion spirit's pain. What is wrong with this hyper material?"

"Interesting." Ves grinned as Blinky examined the shadowy alloy without suffering a backlash like his daughter. The Star Cat had faced much more powerful threats than a small piece of metal. "For whatever reason, this alloy not only draws in a lot of shadow energy, but also tries to phase nearby matter into a different dimension that is strongly related to shadow, darkness and other related concepts."

"Different dimension? Does it contain phasewater?"

"It does. I can clearly sense that it contains a high concentration of phasewater. It is well-known that any transphasic material that contains a lot of phasewater constantly destabilizes the local space. What you are seeing is this exact same effect, but themed around shadows. This is one of the many reasons why we are keeping our distance from the samples. It wouldn't be your companion spirit alone that would get hurt from exposure to this dangerous material."

Ves did not care about the risk factors of this material. From his perspective, more volatile activity often translated in greater power.

There were two major reasons why this hyper alloy attracted so much interest.

The first reason was that the material happened to possess an effect that closely aligned with what he was looking for. He needed to find a powerful hyper material that could allow the Dark Zephyr to phase through solid matter. Shifting the mech into a parallel dimension that by borrowing the power of shadow sounded like a viable option as long as Venerable Tusa was able to resonate with the Ultimate Module.

The second reason why he wanted to work with the alloy was because it might actually allow him to locate the dimension connected to the power of shadows!

If he was able to gather enough information about this mysterious dimension, would he be able to confirm its dimension number with the help of the Dimension Telescope?

If so, it would save him a lot of AP and effort!

Perhaps this was the proper way for him to discover useful dimensions!

Instead of working hard to accumulate 1000 AP so that he could purchase the Observation Search upgrade, he could skip all of that by relying on more conventional measures to find and locate profitable dimensions.

Regardless of whether this shadowy alloy was suitable to be used as the key material of his experimental destructive phasing module, he was bound to study it for its transdimensional properties alone!

"So the mechers actually did it." Ves said with growing appreciation in his voice. "They actually made a transphasic hyper material that is strong enough to be useful and tough enough to withstand the rigors of high-end combat."

Naturally occurring hyper materials originally did not possess transphasic properties. That meant that everyone had to go out of their way to merge hyper materials and transphasic materials together.

The fact that an alloy like this existed meant that the mechers already managed to attain crucial breakthroughs in this area!

"Alexa, please explain the properties of this wonderful material."

"Gladly. Teraixe-063 is a very recently developed transphasic hyper material. It was originally developed as a way to transform matter into shadow energy. While the end result is not able to accomplish this, it is able to phase any nearby matter into a parallel dimension that is remarkably easy to enter compared to the alternatives. The stability and reliability of this shadow phasing property varies depending on the presence of light and shadow in the immediate environment. It still performs well enough in brightly lit areas, but its effects grow remarkably stronger when engulfed in shadow and darkness."

Trying to transform a mech into shadow energy was way too ambitious of a goal. Only god mechs possessed this ability as far as Ves knew, and that was because the line between energy and matter had already begun to blur at the third major cultivation rank.

Teraixe-063 was not a True God-level material, but its combination of properties happened to fit almost exactly what Ves needed!

He couldn't hold himself back any longer. He hopped over the ramp and approached the volatile hyper alloy without any fear.

Once he got close, he ignored the volatile spatial activity and directly took hold of the sample of Teraixe-063.

"Fascinating." Ves whispered as he utilized all of his senses to establish a more intuitive feel of this interesting material. "The phasewater concentration of Teraixe-063 is remarkably high. Under normal circumstances, this object should have turned itself apart a long time ago. How is it able to remain stable? Wait, the shadow energy... it exerts a dampening effect somehow. So long as the supply of shadow energy is not cut off, it will naturally maintain a suppressive effect. How convenient."

Andraste wanted to follow after her father, but Alexa kept a firm hold of the eager girl's arm.

"Remember your father's lesson. Do not approach strange and volatile materials without sufficient protection."

"Then why is papa allowed to get close?"

"He already enjoys sufficient protection. He is a phase lord after all. A being of his stature can withstand even greater dangers."

"Alexa is right." Ves said as he carefully placed the sample of Teraixe-63 back into its container.

"Potential threats and hazards are not universally dangerous. It all depends on strength. The stronger you become, the less you have to fear from the cosmos. I am not one to boast, but I have grown pretty strong myself."

"Stronger than Ketis?" Andraste innocently asked.

"Ehm, I am definitely stronger than your swordsmanship tutor!"

His daughter did not believe him. "Really?"

"I'm not as weak as I appear. I know that Ketis can do pretty cool stuff with her swords, but she is only human. I might not possess any sophisticated fighting skills, but I have a lot of mass and energy at my disposal. Once my body reaches the height of three mechs stacked on top of each other, do you think I can still be threatened by a sword that is as small as my fingernail?"

"Ketis can launch incredibly powerful sword energy attacks, you know! She can slay lots of giants!"

Ves inwardly sighed. His daughter had become such a Ketis fangirl that she completely dismissed her own father's combat prowess.

This was a travesty!

If not for the fact that any footage related to the transformation of the Dominion of Man was classified, he would have shown it to his girl already.

She would definitely root for her own father if he was able to see her fight and prevail against the clone of a God King!

Oh well.

Ves retreated from the long table and returned to the ramp.

He continued the examination of hyper materials. Most of them were very powerful and interesting in their own right, but that did not mean they were suited for his purpose.

He identified a number of hyper materials that were more suitable for the Phobos as opposed to the Dark Zephyr.

He also encountered hyper materials that possessed desirable traits, yet also interfered with the functioning of Teraixe-63.

This was one of the problems with combining multiple strong and volatile materials. They tended to lose a lot of stability when placed in close proximity with other hypers with overlapping functions.

Fortunately, Ves finally managed to encounter another high-grade hyper material that fit all of his requirements.

"What do you feel from this piece of rock, Andraste?"

"Maaaw."

"According to Yaika, the dark stone makes her feel weaker. It is dangerous, but not as obvious as some of the other materials. It is much more insidious."

"That is an apt description. Its threat can be just as big as a sword or a laser weapon. It just isn't as obvious. Please introduce us to this material, Alexa."

"This hyper material is artificially produced by placing rocks with similar material compositions in specially prepared enclosed space. The exact configuration and details of the production site are classified, but it is clear that it is strongly related to the darkness element. The result is a batch of high-grade hyper rocks that absorb darkness energy and can utilize it to weaken the molecular bonds between molecules. Strong exposure to this effect can cause objects up to and including organics such as human bodies to collapse into fine particles."

This was the second effect that Ves wanted to obtain!

"What is it called?"

"Omen Stone."

"That is a remarkably succinct and fitting name for this deadly hyper material. At least it wasn't named after its inventor."

Alexa coughed. "In fact, the Omen Stone is a product developed and sold by Professor Hirastus Omen, a relatively young but rising material scientist directly employed by the Red Association."

"..."

"Professor Omen does not have as many credentials as his older peers in his sector, but he is also not weighed down by a large body of work that has either become outdated or lost much of its relevance. He is a rising star in his field, much as you are in the field of mech design."

That was high praise coming from the likes of Alexa. She only respected a few brilliant people.

Ves adopted a speculative expression. "You are making me develop an interest in meeting Professor Omen. We may be able to establish a lucrative form of cooperation with each other."

That reminded him that he already befriended another materials-oriented mech designer.

Last he heard, Tristan Wesseling was doing better than ever as his specialization experienced a renaissance after the arrival of the Age of Dawn.

Perhaps Ves should get in touch with an old friend and see whether they could cooperate on a deeper level.

Chapter 5972 Attribute Bonus

The physical projection of Tristan Wesseling looked surprised.

He never imagined that Ves would contact him out of the blue one day.

The distance between the two had become a lot more magnified after the last year.

When Tristan learned that Ves had actually played a key role in transforming the Dominion of Man into a living dreadnought of all possibilities, he knew that there was no way he could catch up to his old friend anymore!

Even if Tristan managed to make a lot of progress in the following century, Ves would make 10 times as many gains.

This realization did not make the former Fridayman depressed.

Instead, he felt relieved. The burden of trying to keep up with an insanely successful prodigy was impossible to begin with. It was better for him to stop wasting his time on useless comparisons and focus on his own work.

That was exactly what he was doing before the infamous patriarch of the Larkinson Clan contacted him in person.

It quickly became clear that it was not a social call. Ves directly started the conversation by explaining his needs before extending a business offer.

His old friend presented so much information in so little time that Tristan had to delay his response so that he could go over all of the implications.

"I am not opposed to working with you on commission." Tristan spoke. "I am no stranger to them. The difference here is that you are not giving me enough information to work with. You want me to develop a hyper gem that can augment the performance of an experimental hyper module for an expert mech of yours, yet you refuse to share their technical data."

"That is because it isn't necessary. You should be able to work out a gem without needing to learn the specifics. There is plenty of public footage of the Dark Zephyr in action. The upgraded version of the expert mech will become a lot more powerful, but there are still plenty of similarities."

"That may be the case, but I cannot guarantee that the commissioned gem will perform up to your standards. You haven't even explained to me what this experimental hyper module is meant to do. I cannot work out anything too specific if you do not extend even the most basic level of trust."

Ves sighed. "I am sorry, Tristan. I am not treating you as fairly as I would like. Please understand that it is better for both of us if I do not share too many details. The experimental hyper module is part of a major technological development. I do not want the wrong people to learn about it too soon. If the cosmopolitans ever get wind of it, they will most definitely lead the information to the Red Cabal, who will subsequently be able to account for this additional factor if they ever plan an ambush against my forces. Real lives are at stake. I do not ask for a perfect result. I am just fine with a satisfactory one. Don't worry. I will not skimp on the payment. As long as the gem is at least somewhat useful to the Dark Zephyr, I will compensate you fully."

That mollified Tristan a bit. "Those terms are acceptable. As a service provider, I do not want to deliver a disappointing product to my clients, but in the interest of full disclosure, I cannot promise to fulfill all of the requirements that you have set. If you agree to present me with a commission after this, then I will make the attempt to create the hyper gem you need. Given your demanding expectations, you will need to send me an advance in funding or materials so that I can begin the development of the hyper gem that you wish to add to one of your expert mechs."

"Funding and materials are no problem." Ves dismissively waved his hand. "I will put you in contact with Miss Alexa Streon, who acts as my secretary and assistant in mech-related affairs. I will send her a message that she should procure all of the high-grade exotics and hyperts that you need to develop your gem."

"More powerful materials are not always beneficial to my work, Ves. It is exponentially harder to form a stable and functional gem when you try to compress too many volatile and energetic materials together. I have found that it is always better to establish a stable equilibrium, even if that means forgoing more powerful materials."

That made Ves appreciate Lucky's gems even more. They were much more powerful than Tristan's gems, but managed to isolate their energies so well that Ves was not able to perceive anything from the outside.

Tristan's specialization had not yet approached that level, but that was not a big problem. He still had plenty of time to grow and develop his specialization.

"If you truly need more direction, then I can give you a single hint. The gem should enhance the Dark Zephyr's connection with the shadow element. That is all I can say."

"That is... helpful. It is better than nothing. I have not worked with this element before, so please do not expect anything too refined."

"I understand. Even a minor difference can help. If it turns out that your gem doesn't really provide anything helpful to the Dark Zephyr, then I can always leave it out. I won't blame you if that happens."

It was not in Ves' best interests to reduce his expectations for this commission.

However, he did so anyway because he trusted Tristan to do his best regardless. They were more than client and producer. They were friends who went all the way back to the Komodo Star Sector. Even if their trajectories had diverged from each other, their mutual respect still remained strong.

There was no need for Ves or Tristan to actively reaffirm their friendships. Their speech, body language and other indicators already made it clear that they were still in tune with each other.

A part of Ves even wanted to deepen his friendship with Tristan, but he decided against it. He was far too busy to spend his time on an activity that would not yield immediate gains. He already had too much work on his plate.

After hashing out a few more details, Ves quickly bid goodbye to Tristan.

"Please produce results as quickly as possible. It will not take too long before we are ready to upgrade one of our oldest expert mechs. We will find out at that point whether your gem can serve as the capstone to our reimagined machine."

Once the communication channel closed, Ves closed his eyes and pushed aside most of his thoughts concerning the hyper gem commission.

The typical effects of gems did not require Ves to design a mech around them. He could freely design his mech first before slotting in the gem to selectively augment a few capabilities.

Lucky's gems were especially compatible with a lot of mechs. Tristan's gems did not possess as much adaptability, but as long as the effects were not too disruptive, he could still slot them into his mechs after making a few adjustments.

Gems were convenient like that.

"Wait, the Dark Zephyr already has a gem."

It had been such a long time ago since he imbued his expert mech with a gem that it had slipped his mind. This was despite the fact that its actual performance clearly exceeded its technical parameters!

[Bastet's Regard]

The blessing of a feline patron is stored in this gem. Improves the agility of a mech by 20 percent.

The effect was a bit weak compared to Lucky's newer gems, but it was still an excellent fit for an expert light skirmisher.

Ves wondered whether the effects of Tristan's gems would overlap with the gems produced by Lucky.

"That... shouldn't be the case."

They might look identical to each other, but they worked according to different principles. Besides, their effects should be radically different, so there was little chance of any overlap. Ves soon returned to his work.

He split his time between mech design, research, teaching, raising children and handling administrative duties.

He deliberately declined to engage in any diplomacy and delegated this responsibility to his subordinates.

Far too many people wanted to establish a relationship with Ves, but he could not afford to get distracted.

He was way too invested in the Dark Zephyr Mark III Project to get pulled away again.

His wife made excellent progress as well. Though it was a bit weird for her to drag Hekkel along every time she worked on the Dark Zephyr Mark III Project, Ves became accustomed to the arche engineer's presence after a while.

It helped that his wife had done an excellent job at taming the alien. The arche was so damn servile and obedient that people started to treat it like a giant pet turtle.

"Meow..."

"Miaow..."

Both Lucky and Clixie yawned as they perched on top of the shiny archeshell and took a nap.

Hekkel's archeshell had become one of their favorite napping spots!

"Hihihi! Let's ride!"

Andraste and Marvaine loved to climb on top of the archehell so that they could pretend to ride Hekkel as if he was an exotic mount.

While his shell was not a particularly comfortable saddle, the children did not mind all that much.

The only issue was that Hekkel's movement speed was much slower than that of an arche soldier. He was unable to actually ride in battle, not that anyone cared about this detail.

As Ves tried to incorporate Omen Stone and Teraixe-063 in his very first Ultimate Module design, he conducted lots of small experiments to study the interaction between the two hyper materials.

Only a few of these experiments yielded helpful insights, but a negative result was still a useful data point.

The more experiments he completed, the more he became adept with the usage of these two interesting materials.

Ves discovered that his newfound affinity for darkness provided him with a large advantage in understanding the two hypers and understanding their greater potential.

It was as if Omen Stone and Teraixe-063 hid their secrets behind encrypted texts.

The greater his comprehension of darkness, the easier it was for him to decrypt these invisible texts and gain more crucial insights.

"Am I deciphering their runes?"

Ves had not observed any solid trace of runes in the two hyper materials.

That did not mean they were absent. They might just be hidden from his sight.

Though Ves had no evidence to prove that the hyper materials were marked with runes, he had reasons to believe that this may be the case.

They did not have to be there by design. Nature itself carved the runes as the hyper materials started to react to specific elements and harmonized with a fundamental aspect of reality.

Whatever the case, Ves had a powerful feeling that he would be able to draw out the potential of the two hyper materials to a considerably greater extent than other people!

The Ultimate Module would become even more powerful if that was the case!

"Should I insert a darkness-oriented Ultimate Module in all of my expert mechs?"

Ves shook his head. This was too excessive!

Darkness just happened to be compatible with the Dark Zephyr and Venerable Tusa in a way, but that clearly did not apply to other combinations.

Ves should prioritize fit over raw power. Even if he possessed a clear advantage in working with the darkness element, he should stick to the ones that were already associated with his other mechs.

"It's a pity, though."

He needed to pay more attention to the nascent domains of other mech designers. A lot more Journeymen worked for the Design Department than before. That gave Ves access to many different specializations, each of which corresponded to many different attributes.

"I should pay more attention to them." Ves thought. "I haven't really interacted with them all that much. It is usually Gloriana and Alexa who direct their work."

Many of the new recruits had already acclimated to their new clan and responsibilities by now. Ves should check up on them and see whether any notable talents had bloomed.

Chapter 5973 Change in Positions

In the days since he returned from his infamous business trip, Ves spent most of his time in the design lab by himself.

Sure, he regularly collaborated with Gloriana. He also offered regular tutoring sessions to both Alexa Streon and the guest mech designers from the Vulcan Empire.

Each of them enabled Ves to remain somewhat connected to the happenings within the Design Department.

Nonetheless, ever since he recruited a whopping 25 Journeyman Mech Designers at once, Ves felt out of touch with the rest of the institution.

He missed the presence of many of the old-timers such as Juliet Stameross and Sara Voiken.

They had all opted to undergo EdNet training for a maximum duration of 4 years, which meant they would be missing out on this crucial development period.

Yet they all felt the need to undergo training in an accelerated virtual learning environment because they knew they would fail to keep up with the development of the clan.

Ves looked forward to reuniting with the new and improved Larkinsons, but there were still a few more years to go before they rejoined the clan.

This should have been an opportune moment for him to forge new friendships with the second-class mech designers that were beginning to assist with updating a lot of old and outdated Larkinson mech designs.

Ves did not need to do a thing. Despite being the man in charge of the Design Department, he rarely involved himself with the management of all of the design teams these days. His time was more valuable than that. The less time he spent on getting bogged down on trivial affairs, the more time he had left for more essential design work.

No one blamed him for this transformation. He was the most successful mech designer by far. He commanded respect far beyond that of a normal Senior Mech Designer. The cute little low-ranking mech designers all stared at him with outright hero worship whenever he walked past their workstations.

Ves had become a living myth to all of the old and new mech designers.

In order to fill up the leadership gap, Gloriana had jumped at the opportunity. By now, she had firmly established herself as the de facto leader in charge of the Design Department.

Whenever mech designers wanted to obtain approval to start a new design project or request additional funding, they turned to Gloriana rather than Ves.

She was the one that allocated resources, approved design projects, set the overall schedule and mandated additional training.

Gloriana did not mind the additional work and responsibilities. She enjoyed the power she held over her subordinates.

The self-worth she gained for becoming the queen of the Design Department subsequently boosted her mood whenever she spent time on her own design projects.

Ves had nothing to complain about her leadership style. She was stern but fair. She always held herself to a higher standard than the others, which made it easier for the mech designers to meet her demands.

Of course, not even Gloriana could handle everything herself. She had learned how to delegate a few responsibilities to more notable mech designers such as Alexa Streon and Kelsey Ampatoch.

It did not take a lot of thinking to understand why Gloriana leaned so much from the two notable Journeymen.

Both Alexa and Kelsey were genuine first-class mech designers. The first was a former Terran scion. The latter was a remarkably talented and ambitious former Rubarthan employee of Isthmus Manufacturing.

Since the pair had studied first-class mech design at renowned and demanding Terran and Rubarthan mech design universities, Ves expected to rely heavily on them when they were finally ready to design the first batch of first-class Larkinson mechs.

In the meantime, what made Alexa and Kelsey so helpful to Gloriana was because their illustrious backgrounds granted them a lot of unique advantages. Alexa could easily manage relationships between the Premier Branch of the Larkinson Clan and the Terran ancient clans that ran the Terran Alliance. She was able to negotiate favorable deals and utilize her extensive connections to get a lot of useful stuff done on New Constantinople VIII.

Kelsey lacked local connections, but what he brought to the Design Department was a higher standard of professionalism.

He had worked for Isthmus Manufacturing for multiple years. During that time, he participated in many design projects and worked alongside a lot of different mech designers. Even if he was just a cog in the machine, he spent enough time within this well-run institution to understand how it worked!

Gloriana soon learned to appreciate the former Rubarthan's experience. The management of the Design Department began to undergo a noticeable shift.

Everything became a little more structured, formalized and efficient.

Though Gloriana was careful to preserve the customs that made the Design Department a great place to work at, she did not shy away from importing the best practices that Kelsey had learned from his previous employer.

The differences were obvious to Ves. Gloriana ran the Design Department a lot better than Ves had ever done when he was in charge!

When Ves spent a few days observing the leadership dynamic of the Design Department, he decided that his wife had done such a good job that it was time for him to acknowledge the inevitable.

This was why Ves summoned Gloriana, Alexa and Kelsey to his office in the morning of the next workday.

"Why have you called us here?" Gloriana asked as she left Hekkel outside the office door. "And why did you not discuss your intentions with me beforehand?"

Ves waved his hand before him. Three metal plates hovered down from the ceiling and unfolded into a set of chairs.

"Please sit down."

They all did.

Ves folded his hands on his desk. "I won't waste too much of your time. I called you here because I think the Design Department has grown and matured so much over the past years that the time has come to reorganize its leadership structure."

His wife predictably lit up when she heard that. She was not stupid. She instantly deduced what Ves had in store for this meeting. He glanced at her enthusiastic eyes for a moment before he took a deep breath.

"After contemplating the state of the Design Department and my place in it, I have decided that it is high time for me to implement necessary organizational reforms. In truth, I don't see this as a change in policy. I am merely formalizing a circumstance that has already come into being."

The three Journeyman Mech Designers all looked up to him with expectation. Alexa and Kelsey had also figured out what this meeting was all about.

"My first decision is to step down from the position of head designer after the conclusion of this meeting. I won't leave the Design Department, but I will no longer involve myself in its management. It is an unnecessary distraction to me at this point. I will instead assume the position of elder designer that I have created for myself."

That was a more radical step than the three had predicted!

They already guessed that Ves wanted to hand over leadership responsibilities, but to do so in a decisive fashion was a bit extreme!

"Can you explain the position of elder designer to us?" Gloriana asked. "It is not a standard industry term."

"That's because I came up with it a few hours earlier. My goal is to create a position for myself that allows me to enjoy a great amount of seniority but without the obligations that typically come with a high position. Aside from that, I think that I will not be the only one who has need of this position in the Design Department. When we bring in future mech designers who are much more capable than others, yet do not want to distract themselves with leading a large amount of subordinates, they can assume the position of elder designer and channel all of their productivity in what they do best."

Everyone looked thoughtful at that. The explanation made sense.

"You are planning for the possibility that we may hire other Senior Mech Designers and possibly even Master Mech Designers." Gloriana said.

Ves nodded. "Yes. I am not telling you to go hire a Master right away, but if you ever decide to do so in your new capacity one day, then the Design Department should already be prepared for such an eventuality."

"And what is my new capacity, exactly?"

"While I am still in charge of the Design Department, I will not transfer the title of head designer to you. It is far too understated of a title given your actual importance and responsibilities. I have decided to appoint you as the director instead. This will bring you on par with the directors of other strategically important institutions and make it easier for outsiders to take you seriously."

Gloriana swelled with pride and happiness. Becoming a director of the most critical department of the LMC and the Larkinson Clan was a huge boost in validation!

She could finally brag about it whenever she attended the occasional high-society gathering on New Constantinople VIII!

Ves directed his attention to the other two Journeymen.

"Alexa. Kelsey. The two of you are relatively new to the Larkinson Clan, but you have already made many contributions. One of the key principles of my clan is that merit should be acknowledged. There are many mech designers who have worked with me for a longer time, and while I occasionally favor them at times, that does not stop me from elevating you to greater positions of responsibility. Doing so is best for our clan. I can think of no one else in the Design Department that can do better at your new jobs. Starting from today, each of you will receive the

appointment of vice-director of the Design Department. In reality, your work and responsibilities will not change all that much. You have already been fulfilling this role. I am merely making it official."

The former Terran and the former Rubarthan both looked pleased and humbled by his praise.

"Thank you for your trust and confidence in us." Alexa placed her hand on her heart and made a short bow.

"I will endeavor to prove to the entire clan that you have made the right decision to appoint me to the position of vice director." Kelsey Ampatoch eagerly said.

The latter was a lot more enthused about this promotion than the former!

Ves recalled that Kelsey used to work as a low-to-mid level grunt in the much larger Isthmus Manufacturing.

The winner of the Fey Shaper Contest expressly resigned from his old company and caught Ves' attention for a reason. Kelsey wanted nothing more than to break through the societal barrier that stalled his promotions and ascend into a bigshot!

Ves gave the two new vice directors a moment to celebrate their promotions before turning to his wife again.

"Once you become the director, you will be in charge of the Design Department. You don't need to ask for permission to change stuff to your liking. I implicitly trust you that you will not do anything that will lead to severe dysfunctions. Do not forget that I still have effective control over the LMC, so do not think I am unable to override your orders anymore. If there is sufficient cause for alarm, I can use my ownership of the company to force a change in policy. Please do not give me a reason to resort to this measure."

His wife turned serious. "I have not overlooked the fact who is truly in charge. I will not give you any reason to intervene in this fashion. The Design Department shall prosper under my directorship. I will do my best to turn it into the most desirable work environment of our clan!"

A new era had begun for the Design Department.

Ves gracefully resigned from his leadership position while Gloriana officially gained her first fief as its queen!

Chapter 5974 Larkinson R&D Expansion

Just as Ves predicted, the Design Department did not undergo a lot of upheaval when the organizational changes took place.

Nothing really changed as far as most people were concerned. They had already taken their orders from Gloriana and her two first-class deputies. They continued to do so going forward.

The only difference now was that the instructions had become a lot more legitimate as they were backed by concrete authority rather than nebulous influence.

Gloriana previously managed to get everyone to listen to her because Ves implicitly backed her actions.

Now, he essentially made it all official, so there was no excuse for the mech designers to reject her anymore, not that this ever happened.

As the shifts continued to take place, one of the more awkward circumstances was the position of Ketis.

The swordmaster was a member of the old guard and had proven herself more than the other Journeymen of the Larkinson Clan.

She already had a few bestselling mech models under her name and only got beaten by Ves in terms of earning revenue for the Larkinson Clan.

This granted her the rare but coveted position of Exemplar. Though she did not get to own any shares in the LMC, she still received a hefty monetary reward equivalent to the dividends issued to a 1 percent ownership stake.

That had made Ketis very rich, especially in recent years. She did not have the habit of hoarding money or saving up for useless luxuries, so she had made herself a lot more popular in the clan by spending much of her personal income on upgrades for the Swordmaidens and the Heavensworders.

Even though Gloriana firmly placed herself on top of Ketis within the hierarchy of the clan, the actual balance of power between the two had a lot more nuances.

Gloriana never dared to issue orders to Ketis. The most the former could do was to issue politely worded requests.

It hadn't been a problem so far. Ketis never made any excessive demands and preferred to spend most of her work time on her personal swordsman mech design projects.

Still, that did not change the fact that Ketis had become an existence in herself. She was the most successful student of Ves so far and had recently completed the very powerful Storm Sword design.

It only took a few days for Gloriana to come to Ves with a proposal.

"Ketis has exceeded the status of a lead designer." She explained to her husband. "Her design skills may be rougher than mine, but she possesses a remarkable ability to innovate, just like you. I think it is better if she assumed the position of elder designer alongside yourself."

Ves raised his eyebrow when he heard that. "You are in charge now. It is within your right to make this decision without consulting me. That is the entire point of me stepping down from my former leadership position."

Gloriana let out a frustrated grunt. "I am not ignorant of that, but this goes beyond the usual concerns. I do not want to alienate Ketis, nor all of the other mech designers, many of whom think they can do far better now that they enjoy the same opportunities as her. The issue right now is that Ketis has only earned part of the qualifications to become an elder designer. I cannot fully justify an immediate promotion, but delaying it is not fair. It is difficult for me to form a decision."

He chuckled. "I see that you are beginning to understand the true burden of leadership. I get where you are coming from, but in my opinion you are worrying too much over an issue that is ultimately not a big deal. Ketis has been doing fine as a lead designer. Sure, her status has grown along with her reputation and accomplishments, but that does not demand an immediate adjustment. Give it time. Allow her to prove herself further. You have already mentioned that there are a lot of

Journeyman who are not convinced by her. They need to be taught a lesson that Ketis can sell more mechs than multiple of them put together. She will not back away from this contest."

His wife looked thoughtful at that. "So your recommendation is to maintain the status quo for the time being?"

"Yes. I think the best you can do in this situation is to avoid making any mistakes. You do not want to alienate Ketis and the others. Doing nothing is the best course of action because you have not taken direct responsibility so far. If anything, I am the one that is culpable, as it was my original leadership that has resulted in this situation."

"Hmmm... you make a good point." Gloriana said as she tried to game this scenario. "I will do as you advised. Once Ketis has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that she can contribute much more to the Larkinson Clan than almost all of the other mech designers, no one will have any reason to fault my decision to elevate her to the position of elder designer. It should not take too many years I believe."

Both of them had watched Ketis grow up and become more established as a mech designer.

They believed in her potential, and they believed that the Larkinson Clan would give the Swordmaiden mech designer enough of a stage to showcase her talents.

Aside from this little incident, Gloriana did not come to Ves to discuss any further problems. The Design Department was well-behaved as a whole, and the recently appointed director had amply proved her ability to run this important institution.

Weeks went by as everyone continued to remain productive.

Ves had made a lot of strikes in the development of his first Ultimate Module. He did not hesitate to conduct a lot of experiments related to both Omen Stone, Teraixe-063 and other compatible hyper materials to determine how they worked and how they could be combined.

The empirical data combined with his increasingly more detailed theoretical framework gave Ves the backing he needed to develop a viable destructive phasing module.

In the meantime, Gloriana did not let her directorship go over her head. She understood the importance of prioritizing her progression as a mech designer. To that end, she not only delegated more work to the vice directors, but also implemented a huge expansion in staff.

The Design Department gained a new Staff Office that comprised of a lot of staff personnel.

From secretaries to occupational therapists, every mech designer gained access to much more extensive support and conveniences than before.

Aside from that, the ambitious new director also began to lay the groundwork of setting up new technological development companies under the Larkinson Clan.

This was a goal that went beyond the scope of the Design Department. She presented her plan to the chief ministers, who saw merit in the idea.

The current Larkinson Clan depended far too much on external research institutes and development companies to gain access to superior component designs.

Ves previously rejected the notion of setting up more development companies because the barrier of entry was way too high. It cost a lot of money to create a decent development company, and it might not even end up creating anything useful due to the lack of star developers.

Neither money nor talent became an issue anymore.

The income of the Larkinson Clan had grown so much that it could easily fund a major expansion in R&D activities.

So many people wanted to join the clan that Ves presided over that qualified manpower never became an issue.

The rise of the Larkinson Advanced Research and Development Institute showed that it was the right time to expand on this front.

Ves originally founded the LARDI a few years ago in order to figure out how to make better use with all of the phasewater that the Larkinson Army earned as spoils, its pace of development had never caught up to Ves' insanely fast progression.

That was not the fault of the researchers working at the LARDI. They had not received as much funding, infrastructure and top researchers until fairly recently. Ves expected them to produce better results now that they could embark on more ambitious R&D projects under the leadership of proven and successful lead developers.

Though Ves occasionally paid attention to the planning on this subject, he remained hands off and trusted that the existing leadership structure of the Larkinson Clan would be able to handle this matter from beginning to end.

The initiative sparked a lot of debates. Plenty of people had a lot of opinions. Many mech designers possessed their own wish lists, and they all thought it was best if the new development companies conducted R&D in their respective specializations.

Ultimately, the Larkinson Assembly voted on a bill that reorganized the clan's existing R&D institutes and mandated the creation of 4 additional ones.

The Larkinson Biotech Institute, the T Institute and the Larkinson Advanced Research and Development Institute mostly remained the same. What changed was that they needed to coordinate their R&D activities better and provide a better accounting for their spending.

The Larkinson Mech Component Development Institute was a very necessary addition to the Larkinson Clan. Its purpose was to conduct independent research and development on many ordinary mech parts and components that did not fall under the responsibility of other institutes.

The LMCDI became responsible for developing in-house models of power reactors, mech engines, flight systems, boosters, armor systems and more.

The Larkinson Industrial Development Institute was meant to support the Larkinson Clan's rapidly growing resource harvesting and industrial activities. They were meant to develop better ways to harvest gasses and mining ores. They were also tasked with developing superior production machines to facilitate both light and heavy industry.

Any mech designer working for the Design Department was allowed to collaborate with or request support from the relevant R&D teams of any institute. They no longer had to conduct a lot of specialized work themselves anymore.

The Larkinson Industrial Development Institute was meant to support the Larkinson Clan's rapidly growing resource harvesting and industrial activities. They were meant to develop better ways to harvest gasses and mining ores. They were also tasked with developing superior production machines to facilitate both light and heavy industry.

The Larkinson Naval Design Institute previously consisted of the old Naval Design Department that used to be part of the Larkinson Army.

By turning it into a fully fledged R&D institute, the LNDI not only expanded by a large extent, but also gained a lot of status and priority. This came at a good time because the acquisition of both Starfarer Berth and the E-66 Experimental Yard had turned the Larkinson Clan into a legitimate starship producer!

The LNDI not only designed new starship designs, but also updated the designs of existing Larkinson vessels. The new naval-oriented institute also became responsible for providing support and coordinating with the two Larkinson-owned shipyards.

Ves appreciated this expansion because the additional support would massively speed up the design of the first true Larkinson battlecruiser.

The C Institute was the most controversial and least understood of the bunch. This was the only part of the new bill that he saw fit to intervene.

The reason why he insisted on the creation of the C Institute was because Ves wanted to found an organization that was centered around individual and more traditional forms of cultivation.

Although it would take a long time to hire the right personnel and get the institute up and running, it would eventually conduct structured research on qi cultivation, traditional craftsmanship as well as traditional swordsmanship.

A part of its functions overlapped with the T Institute, but Ves made sure to divide their responsibilities.

The T Institute shifted its focus on hyper technology, E-technology as well as mech pilot support.

If this arrangement proved unworkable, then Ves could always come back and implement further changes.

For now, the new and reformed institutes deepened the foundation of the Larkinson Clan and reduced its dependence on external service providers.

Ves felt a little sorry for the Cross Clan for reducing his dependence on its own development company, but the Larkinson Clan had outgrown all of its allies.

Chapter 5975 First Interim Session

The large-scale expansion of R&D activities was a big move.

However, the Larkinson Clan had grown large and wealthy enough to support such an ambitious endeavor.

Though Ves had to allocate a bit of time to guide the process, he became relieved when he confirmed that the other leaders of the clan were able to handle most of the work themselves.

It helped a lot that the Larkinson Clan not only hired a lot of bright and talented second-raters, but also started to hire first-raters at an increasing rate.

First-raters were generally superior in everything. They were also a lot more capable of supporting the future activities of the Premier Branch. There was no way the Larkinson Clan could continue to rely on second-raters alone anymore.

However, the recruitment of tens of thousands of first-raters also reduced the cohesion of the clan.

The first-raters still maintained an inherent class superiority towards their 'lesser' brothers and sisters.

The second-raters on the other hand disliked the elitism of the snooty first-raters.

While the Larkinsons mostly managed to reduce the tension between the two groups by keeping them apart for the most part, this could not persist forever.

Ves wished that the two groups got along better, but the firm sense of separation between the two had become so ingrained in modern human society that it was impossible to erase the barriers entirely.

The most he could do was to ensure that the Larkinson Clan continued to offer EdNet slots to the second-raters. So long as a clansman earned enough Larkinson merits, they could redeem a quota and hopefully earn the qualifications to become a first-rater by the time they completed their accelerated virtual reality learning programs.

Many second-raters were satisfied with this arrangement. The clan did not possess a lot of EdNet slots, so competition for them was fierce.

What mattered was that the criteria for securing them was open, transparent and fair. Ambitious clansmen just had to figure out a way to contribute more to the clan than their rivals.

As the clan's R&D organizations quickly started to establish or expand their operations, there was an even greater sense of optimism among the Larkinsons.

They were growing more powerful by the day. It was not just Ves that was making progress. Plenty of Larkinsons, both old and new, benefited from the rising tide of the Larkinson Clan.

As the Dark Zephyr Mark III gradually came closer to completion during all of this growth and expansion, Ves occasionally had to step away from his work in order to meet his other obligations.

After several months of preparation work and behind-the-scenes negotiations, the Evolution Witch finally saw fit to organize the first session of the Interim Leadership Council.

Ves expected for the recently appointed chief councilor of the ILC to organize a session sooner, but she was apparently a lot more thorough than he expected.

He knew enough about high-level politics that stuff like this always involved a lot of horse trading outside of public view. He had no doubt that the Evolution Witch approached every member of the council in advance in order to figure everyone's goals and bottom lines.

The god pilot may have even forged a few agreements in advance.

Red humanity could not wait too long. The Red Collective needed to get up and running in less than a year, so the Evolution Witch had to put a lot of effort into realizing Ves' original proposal.

Strangely enough, Divine Lucie Miyazaki never approached Ves about the Red Collective before the first session. Her plans evidently did not require her to establish any preliminary agreements with him. He felt a little insulted by her decision to skip him over.

Then again, Ves had repeatedly made it clear that he did not wish to get bogged down by the affairs of the Red Collective. The best thing he could do was to leave all of this politicking to others and focus most of his attention on his mech design projects.

When Ves entered the Hyper Chamber built inside Diandi Base, his entire surroundings changed into one of the grandest and most solemn meeting chambers he had ever seen.

Huge stone walls formed a huge cylindrical room that was topped by a transparent dome.

The light that descended from above began to take on rainbow shades. Once the light fell onto the floor, they began to illuminate a large variety of sparkling gemstones.

The way the light shone on the floor produced dynamic images that resembled mechs and mythical beasts in action.

In the center of the exaggeratingly large meeting chamber was a circular table that could easily accommodate over a thousand people.

Instead, only 100 high-backed seats were spaced relatively far apart from each other.

The wooden chairs were made out of exotic wood. What was interesting was that the chairs were also embedded with flowers, leafy branches and other active plant structures.

Bouquets of sparkling and lovely smelling flowers extended from the edge of the circular table.

Together with the colorful light shining from above, the flowers added a strong touch of warmth and life to the meeting chamber.

Ves already noticed that he was not the first to arrive. Plenty of councilors had arrived as well. Each of them had already found their designated seats.

A small line that was only visible to himself guided Ves to his own chair. He immediately noticed that it was positioned next to a larger and more ostentatious seat.

His lips pressed into a line. Great. The Evolution Witch most definitely forced him to sit adjacent to her own position.

He shrugged and began to sit down on the remarkably soft and comfortable seat. The wood looked hard, but it was actually soft and malleable enough to adjust to the contours of his compressed body.

Nobody spoke out loud. If they communicated with each other at all, they did so over private channels.

Ves did not really recognize the councilors who came early. The projected nameplates set in front of them helped to clarify their origins.

He smiled. It seemed the Evolution Witch took his advice seriously. In a council as important as this, the god pilot had gone out of her way to invite representatives of the middle and lower zones to add their voices to the sessions.

None of these councilors were under the illusion that their voice carried as much weight as the genuine bigshots of red humanity.

However, their role was not to decide, but to inform. All they needed to do was to voice the concerns and opinions of the humans that always got ignored whenever the leaders of human civilization made big decisions.

More people steadily entered the impressive meeting chamber by remote. They all came from different parts of human-occupied space, but they all took this initial session extremely seriously.

This became obvious from the way they dressed. Each of them had opted to wear extravagant outfits that could easily allow them to maintain dignified appearances within the Star Emperor's court.

Colorful fabric, exquisite embroidery, embedded jewels and geometric patterns caused the men and women to look as if they were ready to have their appearances recorded in the history books of red humanity.

Ves looked down at his own outfit. He had not been complacent enough to attend this virtual council setting with just his regular patriarch uniform.

His wife made sure to choose a custom smart dress uniform for himself that was predominantly red and white. Subtle gray embroidery and dashes of golden filigree added much-needed sophistication to the ensemble.

Though the outfit would not win him any contests, he believed it looked good enough to pass muster.

Once over half of the seats became filled, the more important councilors arrived.

A trickle of tier 1 and tier 2 galactic citizens arrived and took their seats.

Almost everyone paid little attention to the tier 2 galactic citizens. No one directed a glance at notable leaders such as Master Vayro Goldstein and the Mace of Retaliation because more impressive figures arrived at the same time!

Ves started to see a lot of familiar faces at this point. Not every tier 1 galactic citizen had been invited to the Interim Leadership Council, but that made the identities of the ones that did attend the first session all the more important!

Fleet Admiral Stanley Argile briefly nodded towards Ves in greeting before he went back to exchanging a few words with Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson.

The Light of Sol was the first god pilot to arrive, but the Spacelock came right afterwards. Neither of the two interacted with each other. They instead chose to take their places at the opposite sides of the circular table.

While the measure was effective to an extent, it was impossible for most people to disregard the God Kingdoms of multiple powerful god pilots!

This was why it was for the best if only a handful of god pilots attended this session.

As several more Star Designers, god pilots and admirals entered the meeting chamber by remote, Ves grew a little disappointed that a few friendly god pilots had been left out of the council.

Neither the Fist of Defiance nor the Destroyer of Worlds joined the Interim Leadership Council.

Perhaps it was for the better. The Star Designers but especially the god pilots had done their best to suppress their powerful domains. The projection technology that formed their illusionary bodies deliberately made everything fuzzier in order to weaken the transmission of extraordinary power.

While the measure was effective to an extent, it was impossible for most people to disregard the God Kingdoms of multiple powerful god pilots!

This was why it was for the best if only a handful of god pilots attended this session.

As time passed by, only one seat remained empty.

It soon became occupied when the Evolution Witch directly teleported herself into the meeting chamber.

Unlike every other councilor, the leader of the Transhumanist Faction was the only person who was physically present in this space.

Her presence was stronger than any other god pilot, but she had done a good job at suppressing and diminishing her overpowering domain.

It at least ensured that all of the second-class and third-class representatives could face her without feeling compelled to lower themselves to their knees in supplication.

The god pilot, who chose to dress herself in a heroic suit that looked just as refined and sophisticated as the others, started the session after only a short delay.

"Councilors of red humanity. Each of you have received an invitation to join the Interim Leadership Council to begin the vital process of reforming our society. Professor Larkinson has lifted a mirror in front of us, and has exposed the flaws that continue to exacerbate our problems. He proposed the establishment of a Red Collective in order to meet the needs of the public and adapt the people to the latest age. I find myself in agreement with this goal, but doing so is not straightforward. The premise of the Red Collective sounds simple enough, but everyone has a different idea on how it should be run. Many challenging policy questions have emerged that we must resolve in order to secure enough public support."

The Evolution Witch continued to explain what she sought from the Interim Leadership Council.

There was no need for her to grandstand as the people gathered here were beyond this level of manipulation.

Even the weakest second-raters and third-raters were all reputable and renowned statesmen of their respective states. They were hardly representative of ordinary space peasants.

"There is a great matter of uncertainty and ambiguity in the role that the Red Collective must play in our society." The Evolution Witch continued. "We can only discuss a part of the policy issues that we must decide upon sooner rather than later. They can entail questions such as how extensively cultivation needs to be centralized. We will also discuss whether we should make cultivation available to any human, or whether we should limit cultivation to a small selection of vetted and approved individuals to engage in cultivation."

All of this sounded important alright. Ves began to take this session more seriously. He did not want the Red Collective to grow too powerful and nosy. He needed to make sure that it did not try to amass too much power during these council sessions!

Chapter 5976 Deep Political Maneuver

A sense of history overtook the well-dressed councilors. A diverse collection of 100 individuals spanning the top and middle layers of red humanity had gathered together in order to decide upon the formation of a third hegemon.

It went without saying that the political and economic interests surrounding the Red Collective were immense. The fortunes and livelihoods of a huge amount of human beings were at stake. Entire states might rise or fall depending on the decisions made during the remainder of the year!

Ves could already feel the tension in the air of the massive meeting chamber. Even though he and almost every councilor only attended this meeting by remote, the gathering of so many strong and powerful personalities inevitably caused a few invisible clashes.

The suppressed domains of powerful god pilots subtly collided against each other.

The powerful design philosophies of eminent Star Designers anchored their own presence in the meeting chamber.

It was quite impressive how the relatively 'ordinary' second-raters and third-raters managed to maintain their composure during all of this invisible posturing.

Each of them understood that they served a vital function. If they botched their jobs, then the Red Collective could easily turn into an organization that trampled over the rights of space peasants.

This was unacceptable!

Faced with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reduce the rampant inequality of human society, many second-rate and third-rate states had temporarily set aside their persistent rivalries.

United by a common cause, these lesser states invested a lot of support into the statesmen that had been lucky enough to join the Interim Leadership Council.

The councilors who represented the interests of the less fortunate states had the most to gain from these all-important sessions as far as they were aware of. Each of them eyed the other councilors and estimated whether they could obtain additional support during the discussions.

Many of these councilors couldn't help but sweep their gaze towards Ves.

The seating arrangement around the large circular table was incredibly significant and filled with meaning.

The councilors of the Red Association and the Red Fleet sat on opposite sides of each other.

The councilors of the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact also faced each other across a large distance.

Various neutral and 'lesser' councilors sat between the aforementioned power blocs, serving as buffers that ensured that tempers remained cool.

It was not a surprise that Ves was seated among the mechers. He was an honorary member and a well-established mech designer to boot.

His overtures to the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact had not pulled him away from his current camp.

His most recent collaboration with the Red Fleet did not sufficiently damage his relationship with the Red Association either.

What was peculiar about his seating position was that he did not sit at the periphery as befitting of his status as a tier 3 galactic citizen.

There were multiple god pilots and Star Designers who wielded a lot more power and influence over red humanity.

An argument could be made that Ves deserved to occupy an honorary position next to the chief councilor due to being the 'father' of the Red Collective.

Without his impassioned speech during the end of the public inquiry, red humanity would have never rallied around this broad and widely supported initiative so quickly!

However, everyone heard his repeated attempts to absolve himself of any further responsibilities and obligations.

If this was the case, he should have been seated a lot further away from the most powerful councilor in this grand and opulent chamber.

Had Ves changed his mind and decided to exercise his newfound political clout?

Or did the Evolution Witch simply granted him a position of honor without attaching any further meaning to this move?

A lot of councilors tried to guess the truth, yet failed to come up with a concrete answer.

None of them were crass enough to outright ask Ves or the Evolution Witch of their intentions.

That was not how the game was played.

The councilors instead tried to form their own guesses.

The Evolution Witch never engaged in meaningless actions. Her difficult upbringing molded her into a legendary woman who never wasted her time and always tried to fulfill as many objectives as possible in the least amount of time.

Therefore, a lot of councilors made the tentative conclusion that Ves became a serious player in this grand game.

Whether this was good or bad was a very important question. Ves had already earned a lot of notoriety for being a 'change agent'.

His very words and deeds created massive amounts of change, no matter whether people asked for it or not. If that was not bad enough, the changes he introduced were so unpredictable that not even a Star Designer as smart as the Polymath could plan around his moves!

For the Evolution Witch to pull the Devil Tongue so close to her position indicated that she may have made a secret agreement with him to muddy up the waters on her behalf!

As everyone formed their own conclusions about this deep and profound political maneuver, the Evolution Witch calmly introduced the agenda for the first session.

"The formation of the Red Collective begins with deciding on its mission. We cannot decide on its structure, hierarchy, principles, customs and taboos if we do not form a consensus on what it should accomplish. This is why we must debate on what the overall purpose of our organization should be. For now, we should be in agreement that the Red Collective should be tasked with regulating and promoting the phenomenon known as cultivation. The question now is how much power the Red Collective should hold over this sphere."

This was a big topic alright! Yes and many other councilors braced themselves for an intense dispute.

The Evolution Witch continued to speak

"The first topic on the agenda is centralization. How extensively our new organization should centralize the institutions related to cultivation? Should the Red Collective become the sole sanctioned group that is permitted to allow its members to practice cultivation, or should we pursue the opposite and permit many different organizations to engage in cultivation within the boundaries set by our rules?"

"Cultivation is a corrupting force." Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson took the word as soon as the Evolution Witch finished her speech. "I do not have to present any further evidence or documentation on this, as many councilors should already be aware of how our people suffered in the past. Humans cannot be trusted with the power to 'arm' themselves with destructive power obtained from absorbing reckless amounts of E energy. Just the psychological aspects of gaining personal power without the necessary training and discipline herald a future of great danger and instability. If we want to preserve our safe and stable order as much as possible, we must completely centralize cultivation under the Red Collective and nowhere else."

As the head of the Fifth Enforcement Speech, Fleet Admiral Jameson naturally wished to pursue the greatest degree of control and enforcement as possible.

Although she took an extreme position, there were multiple councilors that showed obvious signs of support.

The members of her camp within the RF automatically backed her stance.

The councilors hailing from states that tended to harbor greater fear towards crime and anarchy also had reasons to support greater centralization.

What was interesting was that a number of the lesser councilors seemed swayed by Fleet Admiral Jameson.

"A central authority that governs all areas related to cultivation can be a boon to the middle and lesser zones." An elderly man slowly spoke. "Second-rate and especially third-rate states lack access to sufficient resources and other forms of support. If we are asked to fend for ourselves, we will not be able to develop our own cultivation methods, accelerate the collective evolution of our populations and remain connected with first-class cultivators."

Another lesser councilor added further support to this stance. "Do not forget that there are talented and gifted people in every population group. There are many third-raters and second-raters who are ordinary on the surface, but may actually possess remarkable talent in cultivation. They are the equivalent of A-grade mech pilots. If our goal is to cultivate the strongest heroes possible to increase our fighting power against our alien enemies, then it is not wise to let many of our talents

languish due to the division between the classes. A strong Red Collective that offers sufficient resources and opportunities to hidden talents will yield greater dividends in the future."

This was a strong argument towards shaping the Red Collective into a powerful and more centralized organization.

Many forms of cultivation were dependent on talent. A lot of ordinary folk would not be able to make much gains unless they had access to a lot of elixirs and other cultivation resources.

However, most space peasants had no chance of obtaining such luxuries. Spending a lot of resources on strengthening so many weaklings was not a good investment, but the equation was different if a lot of talents could be found!

Just like mech pilots with high genetic aptitudes, these freaks of nature were able to comprehend specific elements a lot faster than others.

Depending on the cultivation method, the most talented humans found to date were able to race their way through the first major cultivation rank as if it was a wide and smooth road.

Although they still needed to spend at least a few more years before they could reach the second major cultivation rank, that was already the equivalent of becoming an ace pilot or a Master Mech Designer!

It was so incredibly unreasonable that a handful of blessed humans could form their domains in less than a decade after they got started in cultivation!

Although no one who understood cultivation well enough dared to ignore the potential of ordinary people who were willing to overcome their lack of talent with hard work, the priority right now was to raise a batch of human True Gods as quickly as possible.

Only when their civilization started to produce more cultivators of the third major cultivation rank would red humanity be able to tilt the balance of the Red War in their favor!

This was why those concerned with the state of war saw merit in this direction.

"As far as we know, it is not necessary for humans to undergo extensive genetic modification or install many artificial implants in their bodies to excel in cultivation." Master Vayro Goldstein of the Survivalist Faction spoke up. "If we can promote simple and foolproof cultivation methods among every large population of humans, we can discover many talents that can help us hold back the ancient phase whales and defend against other major threats. If we want to identify them as extensively as possible, we must control or monitor the potential talents. By constantly tracking their behavior and their growth speed, we can discover their value early and invite them to a training camp where we can realize their potential as effectively as possible."

The Survivalist Faction evidently saw great need for True Gods in the future, so Master Goldstein did not hesitate to present an incredibly intrusive plan!

Naturally, not everyone was willing to turn the Red Collective into an intrusive and controlling entity.

"Power corrupts." The famous Terran Star Designer known as the Armsforger spoke. "This ancient adage applies to organizations as well as individuals. We cannot put all of our eggs in a single basket. Letting the Red Collective control everything related to cultivation will stifle the potential of

many people and make the organization more inefficient and unwieldy. It is better to allow individual people, organizations and states to form their own cultivation groups. This will allow each of them to explore their own cultivation directions. More importantly, they will also be able to keep each other in check."

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"With all due respect, Your Excellency, your proposal will lead to much greater infighting than we have witnessed during the Age of Mechs." Master Goldstein calmly retorted. "Dividing our cultivators into many different groups will scatter their collective strength and make it easier for them to get defeated in detail. We are at war. We cannot afford to extend too much freedom to our future soldiers and champions. If we are to survive as a race, we must pool our resources and manpower together in order to cultivate as many saviors as possible. We have no other choice!"

Chapter 5977 Accusations of Tyranny

The first fault line had already appeared.

Two opposing camps had emerged. The Fifth Enforcement Fleet, the Survivalists along with a substantial group of representatives of lesser states strongly advocated for greater centralization.

However, the Armsforger hailing from the Terran Alliance immediately expressed his opposition towards this stance.

Ves took a closer look at the famous Terran Star Designer. Lucas Nayald was a 260 year old Star Designer who maintained a remarkably young and muscular appearance. If not for the fact that his domain radiated a strong sense of metal from inside out, people would have mistaken him for a particularly athletic Journeyman or a Senior!

The biographies written about his life painted the picture of a talented and motivated descendant of the Nayald Ancient Clan.

Having been raised in one of the most privileged positions possible, Lucas Nayald did not waste this fantastic opportunity and worked hard to become an excellent mech designer.

One of the factors that helped him make so much progress was that he had decided upon his specialization very early.

Though the man did not set out to become a soldier, he had fallen in love with melee weapons after he picked up fencing as a 'mandatory' hobby.

He soon began to expand his fighting repertoire by learning and mastering all sorts of other weapons.

Lucas became obsessed with learning how to wield spears, halberds, other kinds of swords and more exotic melee weapons.

Though Lucas Nayald spent way more time on practicing his weapon skills than he should, his studies did not suffer too much from his activities, so he was allowed to pursue his new passion.

Once he graduated from mech design, he quickly went on to develop a design philosophy that enabled him to forge or fabricate the best melee weapons for his clients.

His overall design philosophy towards his famous melee weapons had started out simple, but changed very little over time.

Sure, the Armsforger had become a lot more skilled at forging his weapons, but he respected the old traditions of ancient human weapons so much that he never wanted to add any unnecessary gimmicks or frills to their design.

Though his solid metal weapons initially seemed unassuming, they gradually started to show their value as the Armsforger continued to improve his craftsmanship.

Of course, as a mech designer, the Armsforger already knew how to design mechs that made excellent use of the properties of his iconic weapons.

Over the course of two centuries, the Armsforger steadily worked his way up the mech industry as his mechs and mech weapons both earned greater renown within Terran space.

Nowadays, his weapons had become so coveted and desirable that even god pilots were willing to make large concessions in order to obtain one of his famous arms!

Every client that was fortunate enough to own his weapons already treated their possessions as treasured heirlooms.

The reason why so many people desired to own one of his personally forged weapons was due to several reasons.

The most basic one was that his weapons were much more solid and reliable than others. The Armsforger had initially made a name for himself by forging mech weapons that could endure far more abuse than was typical.

This was especially important in first-class mech combat as there were plenty of powerful machines that possessed high attack power.

A harder and more solid weapon would not break under a lot of abuse. The wielder could boldly use an Armsforger weapon to block or deflect an incoming projectile!

The most powerful Armsforger weapons were rumored to be so damn hard and tough that they could even remain intact when they were tossed into a black hole!

Few people took this rumor seriously, but Ves actually believed that this may be true, as crazy as it sounded!

Aside from being able to forge unbreakable weapons, the Armsforger also stood out for another reason.

He was one of the few Star Designers who was known to produce tier 1 Destroyer weapons.

Many powerful Terran god mechs wielded custom and extremely powerful tier 1 Destroyer weapons thanks to the indispensable work of the Armsforger!

The fact that so many Terran god mechs wielded such supremely powerful arms caused them to form a strong deterrent.

The Greater Terran United Confederation gained increased confidence over the course of the Age of Mechs for this reason.

Fighting against any Terran god mech up close was a nightmare to others!

Although precise information about tier 1 Destroyer weapons were scarce, Ves had heard plenty of rumors of how these unreasonably powerful arms were able to cut right through enemy God Kingdoms as if they were made out of butter!

Ves recalled that the Light of Sol did not unveil his impressive tier 1 Destroyer sword during Operation Night Jazz.

This was understandable as the god pilot was already able to complete his objections without revealing such a powerful trump card to the aliens.

It was a pity, though. Ves really wanted to see how easily a tier 1 Destroyer sword could carve up an ancient phase whale.

In any case, if there was one Star Designer in the Red Ocean who still retained the ability to produce new high-tier Destroyer weapons, it had to be the Armsforger!

This alone turned him into an indispensable Star Designer to red humanity!

When Ves thought about how the people of the Red Ocean could possibly resist the invasion of the Subjugation King and his armada, he believed that the unmatched lethality of tier 1 Destroyer weapons could give god pilots a realistic chance.

The more tier 1 Destroyer weapons the Armsforger was able to supply to every god pilot, the greater the probability of defeating the alien God King!

However, Ves did not think it was that easy for the Armsforger to fabricate his most powerful arms.

He did not believe that any high-grade exotic or hyper could possibly withstand the extreme concentrations of Destroyer particles.

Perhaps only the rarest and most coveted super-class materials could be used to make a stable tier 1 Destroyer sword!

Unless red humanity managed to import a lot of strategically valuable materials from the old galaxy, the chances that the Armsforger would be able to make another tier 1 Destroyer weapon was low.

Mech weapons were very large as a rule. Their weight could often be measured in tons.

In order to produce a tier 1 Destroyer weapon that was fit to be wielded by a mech, the Armsforger needed to obtain a large quantity of super-class materials!

In any case, the Armsforger had become an extremely critical Star Designer in the Age of Dawn.

Ves personally had another reason to keep a closer eye on Lucas Nayald.

Perhaps not every part of the Destroyer weapon had to be made out of the most powerful materials, but its core at least had to include them in order to prevent them from tearing themselves apart.

In any case, the Armsforger had become an extremely critical Star Designer in the Age of Dawn.

Ves personally had another reason to keep a closer eye on Lucas Nayald.

He suspected that the reason why the Armsforger became so good at making melee weapons was because he had access to the complete legacy of a Divine Blacksmith!

It would explain why his simple-looking arms became so unreasonably powerful. It also explained why he respected a lot of old traditions so much.

For now, the Star Designer's clear importance meant that no one was able to dismiss his words. His opinion had to be respected, especially when people wanted to commission powerful arms from him one day.

Despite the pushback from his opponents, the Armsmaster continued to argue in favor of his stance.

"Our Terran people have learned the hard way that forced unification and centralization is not attainable. Turning the Red Collective into a centralized organization with a strong mandate to regulate and control cultivation in our shared society will do nothing more than to restore the tyranny that we have rebelled against in our past. Do not squander the current level of public support towards this initiative. If the Red Collective is seen as a tool to enforce an iron grip on the masses, then the response from the public will be brutal and overwhelming."

Those were strong claims, but many councilors found them to be plausible.

Ves agreed with this sentiment as well. He not only agreed with the Armsforger's logic, but also benefited a lot more if the Red Collective became weak and divided.

The Evolution Witch likely held her own opinion on this matter, but it was not appropriate for her to share her own opinion when she presided over this meeting.

A short pause ensued as people waited for the next councilor to oppose the movement to centralize the Red Collective.

The Spacelock eventually spoke up on behalf of the Rubarthan Pact.

"I find myself in agreement with the respected Terran Star Designer. Human civilization has remained divided throughout most of its history. The Red Collective must adapt its organizational structure to accommodate our current reality. It is not appropriate to impose radical changes to our current society by using the Red Collective as a cudgel on every state."

The god pilot had spoken!

Both the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact had made their stances quite clear now.

While they did not like each other, that did not stop them from implicitly banding together to ensure that the Red Collective did not become a threat to their respective first-rate colonial superstates!

Ves already predicted as much. He too did not want the Red Collective to obtain too much power and boss everyone around.

It was at this point that a third speaker took the word.

The Mace of Retaliation stood up and maintained a stiff posture as he loudly voiced his stance.

"My father and I are of the opinion that the cure must never be worse than the disease. We have already flirted with absolute tyranny in our recent past. We must not allow ourselves to let our fears make our decisions because you are afraid of empowering people who previously did not carry

enough weight in our society. Accidents will happen and people shall die on a larger scale than before. However, we are convinced that this is the best way for us to raise strong warriors that are willing to fight for their people!"

A lot of people looked intrigued.

The Survivalist Faction had become divided.

On the one hand, the Survivalists represented by Master Vayro Goldstein believed in the original stance of the Polymath. They were convinced that the only way to keep cultivation under control was to exert strong control at the top!

On the other hand, the Survivalists represented by the Fist of Defiance firmly believed that giving people the freedom to do what they wanted in terms of cultivation would step up and fight a lot harder than the cogs of a huge machine.

Though it sounded as if the Fist of Defiance and his son were not completely aligned with the Terrans and the Rubarthans, they at least shared a common cause on this subject.

The debate continued to rage on as two power blocs continued to argue whether the Red Collective should be heavy-handed in its treatment of cultivators or not. The implications were far too great for anyone to maintain a neutral stance on this highly consequential matter!

Ves conscientiously kept his mouth shut during the debate. He did not feel the need to insert himself in this contentious argument and attract unnecessary attention to himself.

However, just because he wanted to remain out of the spotlight did not mean that other people were willing to let him fade into the background!

"Professor Larkinson!" The Mace of Retaliation loudly boomed from his position on the circular table! "You have yet to offer your recommendation. Why not speak up and tell us what you think? The Red Collective is your invention, after all. You have earned the right to have your voice heard! Come on. Tell us how stupid and self-destructive these people are by trying to hoard too much power!"

Ves inwardly groaned as the other 99 councilors immediately turned their gaze in his direction.

He wouldn't be able to get away with remaining silent anymore!

Chapter 5978 Not This Again

The Fist of Defiance and the Mace of Retaliation developed a lot of infamy since they became prominent.

The father was the worst of all. He was clearly smart enough to understand the delicate political nuances that caused a lot of division among people.

Yet he often voiced his opinions and openly confronted whatever he considered stupid or wrong with hardly any restraint!

This was part of his personality and identity. The Fist of Defiance literally derived his power from opposing what he considered to be a detriment to society. His frequent impolitic remarks had made others a lot more guarded against his presence.

No one wanted to ruin relationships and cause hard feelings when a confrontation could be avoided!

The Mace of Retaliation had inherited many of his father's bad habits, but he at least distinguished himself by being a little more reasonable.

Of course, the difference was not that great. The Mace of Retaliation mainly held himself back because he was not as powerful as his father. He lacked the power to enforce his own will onto other people.

Given that a bunch of councilors tried to follow in the footsteps of the Polymath, the peak ace pilot grew alarmed with this development.

Even though the Terrans, Rubarthans and other groups were opposed to strengthening the control of the Red Collective, the Mace of Retaliation did not want to leave anything to chance.

He needed to find a way to strengthen the case against further centralization even further.

This was why he called out the father of the Red Collective.

Anyone smart enough would have been able to figure out that Ves valued his autonomy. He hated it when other people were in a position to demand his obedience.

Since that was the case, the probability that Ves would back the stance of some of his old enemies such as Admiral Amelie Jameson was extremely low!

The Mace of Retaliation grinned as he looked at the Devil Tongue in anticipation.

Anyone who assumed that the Fist of Defiance and the Mace of Retaliation lacked political sensitivity were making a big mistake.

They understood politics well enough. They simply refused to play by the rules if they became an inconvenience.

To mech pilots like themselves, they would rather confront their enemies openly than to engage in underhanded scheming.

Yet there were also times when the Fist of Defiance and the Mace of Retaliation needed to accomplish their goals through slightly more indirect means.

While the Mace of Retaliation saw no problem with drawing Ves into the current debate, there were many other councilors that thought otherwise!

There had been far too many cases where the Devil Tongue completely upended the status quo and somehow swayed the majority into taking new and unprecedented stances.

Will the infamous Professor Larkinson detonate another verbal bomb during this session?

Nobody knew for certain, and that was exactly why so many people felt bothered by inviting him to speak!

Couldn't the first session of the Interim Leadership Council proceed in a more orderly fashion?

Everyone already possessed at least a rough understanding of each other's stances. The Evolution Witch had already drafted much of the framework of the Red Collective out of the public eye. The sessions should mainly center around filling up the gaps and forcing decisions in situations where multiple sides refused to concede defeat.

Since the important players already knew about this in advance, they could plan out their debating strategies and anticipate the moves by the opposition.

All of that threatened to become irrelevant if Ves randomly caused the discussion to go off-track!

Ves smiled at the other councilors as he steadily rose to his feet. He became more thankful that his wife had been thoughtful enough to dress him up in an expensive and custom-tailored suit. Its refined appearance helped to steel his nerves and make him feel more confident than he appeared.

In truth, his mind was racing on how he should respond to this invitation to speak.

Clearly, many councilors expected him to take the Mace of Retaliation's side and fiercely shoot back at the centralists who wanted to turn the Red Collective into a brutal fist.

Perhaps he might be more rude about it than others, but it was inconceivable that he would take the side of Admiral Amelie Jameson!

Ves could feel the old woman's stare boring down on him. She was likely waiting to launch a counterattack immediately after he finished speaking.

That was not a desirable outcome for him. He was tired of getting into disputas all of the time. There was no benefit to further antagonizing the tier 1 galactic citizens that he disagreed with. Why couldn't these people leave him alone so that he could concentrate on his mech design projects?

Alas, since the Mace of Retaliation put him on the spot, Ves had to improvise a response that should hopefully sound so harmless and meaningless that people no longer asked for his opinions.

"Ahem." Ves cleared his throat. "I find myself in agreement with the opponents of centralization. Humans long to be free and in control of themselves. They do not take kindly to being forced to obey the directives of an oppressive and pervasive central authority. With respect, I sincerely cannot foresee any future where trying to bring so many people to heel will result in a good outcome. If the storylines of so many action dramas have any basis in reality, then the inevitable consequence of heavy repression is a full blown outbreak of repressed cultivators!"

Not every councilor was willing to remain silent. The proponents of centralization had to stand up and defend their stance.

Much to Ves' surprise, Fleet Admiral Jameson displayed a remarkable degree of self-control and remained silent.

Instead, it was Master Goldstein who responded to an associate of his own faction!

"Anarchy has become a greater threat to our civilization than excessive control. War has come. It has become increasingly unsustainable for our society to be as free and peaceful as before. We must hasten our transition to a wartime footing, and that includes implementing martial law. If we do not militarize our society as much as possible, we will never be able to fight against our enemies to the best of our ability. Cultivation is an extension of our combat methods. Rather than allowing so many talented cultivators to squander their time and harbor weak commitment towards contributing to the war effort, we must identify them and treat them as strategic combat assets from the very beginning. This may not be fair to our people, but when the survival of our race is at stake, we cannot afford to hold back anymore."

A lot of councilors felt uneasy as they confronted the cold hard facts shared by Master Goldstein.

The man was a true Survivalist at his core. The survival of the human race was paramount. If that meant depriving people of some of their rights, then so be it. People such as Master Goldstein had no qualms about taking extreme positions so long as it was correct!

The Survivalist definitely made a persuasive argument this time. He repeated his earlier point, but added much greater emphasis on the consequences of refusing to mobilize for war.

Ves was actually sympathetic towards Master Goldstein's argument. It was true that a lot of states and planets hardly made any moves to prepare for war.

Many people continued to work at their normal civilian jobs instead of volunteering for military service.

A lot of industrial capacity was being used to produce typical consumer products as opposed to much more essential war materiel.

States cared more about maintaining a stable economy and keeping their citizens happy than preparing for an alien invasion that may possibly arrive one day.

The more Ves thought of how planets such as New Constantinople VIII had not gone far enough to prepare for war, the more he felt inclined to support Master Goldstein's stance.

"A perfect solution does not exist." The Web Mistress chose to speak up at this time. "Nobody who has decided to attend these sessions will reject the possibility of maintaining enough control while giving enough room for cultivators to act by themselves. It is precisely because we are unable to satisfy everyone that we must choose a winner and a loser."

Yet greater control was not necessarily the right answer. Ves still preferred to take the side of the Mace of Retaliation.

Ves frowned as he tried to think how he should respond to Master Goldstein.

"Personally speaking, I think that both sides have made good points. Centralization will allow us to organize cultivators a lot more efficiently. Decentralization will keep people happier and create greater diversity within the cultivation community. I think that we can settle on a middle ground that should just be enough to satisfy the majority of the council."

"Interesting." The Evolution Witch spoke for the first time since the debate commenced. Ves almost flinched when the god pilot decided to share her opinion! "I look forward to hearing what you have devised as an acceptable compromise solution."

"Ehm, my proposal to this dilemma is to ensure strict enough control while also giving individual cultivators a lot of leeway.

"A perfect solution does not exist." The Web Mistress chose to speak up at this time. "Nobody who has decided to attend these sessions will reject the possibility of maintaining enough control while giving enough room for cultivators to act by themselves. It is precisely because we are unable to satisfy everyone that we must choose a winner and a loser."

"I disagree, Master." Ves retorted. "I think there may be a way to address the concerns of both sides at once. Hear me out first. I am well aware that cultivators can do a lot of damage if left unchecked. A certain degree of supervision is essential to safeguard our society. However, why must the Red Collective be the organization that monitors and controls all of these potential dangers?"

That caused the councilors to realize that Ves was about to go off-track.

Ves smirked as became more confident in the argument he just came up with. "In my opinion, people respond poorly to direct control from an organization that is too powerful and distant from them. There is very little chance that a majority of cultivators will develop strong affection towards an overbearing Red Collective. Rather than letting this happen, I think it is better if private individuals and groups are allowed to create their own special cultivation organizations. This will make it so that most of the responsibility for supervising cultivators will fall onto these special organizations."

"What is the role of the Red Collective in this proposal of yours?" Master Goldstein asked.

"I am glad you asked, Master. It clearly should not be doing nothing. I think it is best if the Red Collective supervises the special cultivation organizations as a whole. This way, the former will still do what is necessary to safeguard our society. The Collective will just do so with at least one intermediary organization in between."

"Why bother with adding another layer between the Red Collective and individual cultivators? This will make it less likely that wrongdoing will be detected in advance."

"That is because every special cultivation organization is different." Ves responded in a more assured tone. "Each of them have their own goals, ideologies, cultivation methods, geographic interests and more. Similar to mercenary outfits, these cultivation organizations will appeal to different people, ensuring that the recruits will align with the predominant values of their chosen group."

"That sounds dangerously similar to cults or churches." Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson retorted.

"Your proposal will lead to widespread degeneration if that is the case. I will not allow you to replace a lesser evil with a greater evil. Cultivators must not be fooled into worshipping the gods of your own making or of other origins!"

Ves quickly shook his head. "This is not about religion! The special cultivation organizations that I have in mind are purely secularist in nature! Instead of identifying them as cults, you should instead see them as... sects. Each sect is bound by a common set of ideals and philosophies that help their cultivators practice methods that align with certain elements. The more organized the sect, the greater the consistency and the lower the incidents of cultivation deviation. Compared to the alternatives, I think this is the best way to safely spread cultivation to the general population!"

His proposal certainly raised a lot of eyebrows. Councilors seriously began to think about his compromise solution.

Chapter 5979 The First Consensus

Once Ves presented his idea, the councilors began to debate the merits of his proposal.

Surprisingly enough, there were plenty of councilors who immediately embraced this compromise solution. They were all clever enough to understand the implications and figure out even more consequences that Ves had not foreseen.

"Professor Larkinson has made a fitting suggestion." The Armsforger said. "On the one hand, as the Mace of Retaliation has said, humans respond poorly when they are forced to abide by the rules of a single overbearing authority. On the other hand, I do not disagree with the councilors who claim

that letting people to their own devices in this matter will lead to a massive drop in stability. Shifting the focus from the individual to a group organization in the form of a sect is a viable means to solve this dilemma. This way, the individual will have the ability to choose between many different sects, but still accept the necessity of accepting strict supervision."

A certain Rubarthan god pilot also expressed his support for this idea.

"I support this proposal. It is a superior alternative to complete centralization. The Red Collective cannot and should not control people's lives in a direct fashion. Delegating this responsibility to private organizations will not only reduce its administrative burden, but also foster enough diversity in thought and methods that success and innovation will be rewarded. Controlled competition is the engine of growth. By imposing a controlled competitive struggle, the more successful sects will rise above the inferior ones, thereby elevating our society as a whole."

More people began to get swayed by this compromise solution.

The key phrase here was controlled competition!

To the councilors who earned the qualifications to attend this high-level session, each of them were well aware of the model that humans used to stimulate their growth and prevent themselves from backsliding.

The Societal Vitality Theory first espoused by the New Rubarth Empire before subsequently getting adopted by humanity at large was the prevailing ideology that underpinned human society!

In an environment that was characterized by a finite amount of resources and space, only the best should get to enjoy the bulk of these benefits.

States, companies, mercenary outfits and even individual professionals all had to compete against each other in different competitive environments in order to earn the right to tap into a pool of finite resources.

Many mercenary organizations and private military groups flocked to the frontlines of the Red War not because they were altruistic, but because they wanted to gain greater power and rewards.

Earning the status of linefighters allowed them to gain access to rewards derived from resources that were previously exclusive to the Big Two.

As long as they won their battles, the brave linefighters also enriched themselves by plundering phasewater and other expensive materials from their defeated alien foes.

Plenty of cases had emerged where linefighters started out with heavy debts but quickly became rich enough to afford a home in a dream location such as the Vulit Central Star Node!

The Larkinsons were no exceptions to this rule. The participants of the highly successful expeditionary fleet of the Golden Skull Alliance all converted their wealth and war merits into powerful augmentations, customized mechs, high-end training programs and more.

The most worthy groups got rewarded for their efforts and steadily rose to the top.

Yet not every mech force was successful.

The fact that a lot of mech forces end up getting mauled or outright annihilated was a tragedy, but ultimately necessary.

If these weaker forces continued to persist, they would only continue to claim an unreasonable share of resources, only to expend them in wasteful and unproductive ways.

The Societal Vitality Theory favored their removal so that more effective and productive rivals could occupy their places.

The intended outcome was to create a society where only the strongest and most worthy individuals and groups were left!

Continued competitive pressure prevented stagnation and ensured that no one became complacent.

This was why a lot of councilors did not object to his proposal. They were already familiar with this model, and could easily adapt their institutions to accommodate this change.

Master Goldstein of the Survivalist Faction was the first councilor to change his stance!

This model applied to so many other groupings in society. What Ves had done was present a proposal that already conformed to the prevailing ideology of human civilization.

This was why a lot of councilors did not object to his proposal. They were already familiar with this model, and could easily adapt their institutions to accommodate this change.

Master Goldstein of the Survivalist Faction was the first councilor to change his stance!

"Professor Larkinson's proposal has great merit." He thoughtfully said. "A high degree of control and supervision is necessary, but there are multiple strategies that we can choose from. Letting intermediary organizations handle the bulk of these responsibilities is a good alternative. The only issue with the proposal that I do not agree with is the use of the term 'sect'. It possesses a negative connotation that is only moderately better than using the word 'cult'. It would be more appropriate to our society if we utilize terms that are more familiar to the understanding of contemporary citizens. For example, we can encourage the formation of specialized cultivation schools. Fostering an academic environment is more conducive towards learning and restraint."

That was a good suggestion. Multiple councilors agreed with Master Goldstein that it was better to use a less loaded term to name the organizations in question.

"School is too generic of a term and already possesses an existing meaning. Similar terms such as academy and college suffer from the same problem. It will lead to too much confusion in our society. We must make certain that we do not confuse a cultivation organization from a traditional school."

"We can use the word 'association' instead. It fits the circumstances better than the other terms." Another councilor proposed.

"No." Master Goldstein firmly. "We will not accept any measure that will degrade the meaning of an association. I would rather settle for sects if this is the alternative."

"You mechers do not have a monopoly on the word association! As far as we are concerned, your 'Red Association' is the biggest and strongest cultivation organization of them all! After all, what are mech pilots and mech designers if not cultivators in a modern coat?"

That seemed to rile up Master Goldstein and several mechers!

"Do not compare us to more traditional cultivators! We have properly integrated ourselves into modern society. We do not need to be controlled like other cultivators. There is no need for the Red

Collective to supervise us. It should be the other way around. Our high-ranking mech pilots and true mechs are well-placed to enforce the rules and suppress any misbehaving cultivators and sects!"

Clap.

The entire meeting chamber fell silent when the Evolution Witch produced an unnaturally loud clap with her hands.

Every projected figure that previously got caught up in the argument quickly regained their composure and settled down in their high-backed wooden seats.

"Let us keep this discussion on-topic." The Evolution Witch reassured order in the chamber. "The subject of enforcement is not on the agenda for today. That is reserved for a future session. Please return to debating the relationship between the Red Collective and individual cultivators."

A brief moment of silence ensued before the councilors began to speak again.

Though there were still advocates for either complete centralization or granting cultivators a high degree of autonomy, only the most radical councilors stuck to their original viewpoints.

More and more councilors became attracted to the balance promised by the compromise solution.

The Terrans, Rubarthans and other representatives of first-rate states freely abandoned their previous stances and fully placed their support behind the sect proposal.

This was because it benefited them just as much as their original stance!

The first-raters had access to a lot of wealth, resources and heritage. They were in an excellent position to create excellent sects, schools or whatever that possessed the capacity to train lots of cultivators from their respective states!

The strong culture and sense of identity from the Terrans, Rubarthans and so on ensured that the sects would start off with a high degree of cohesion. The councilors did not fear that there would be a lot of cultivators among the sects that would end up becoming mass murderers and taint the reputation of their people.

Even if the sects weren't forced to monitor their members closely, the first-raters would definitely do so anyway just to ensure that the future powerhouses of their respective states remained loyal and productive!

While the first-raters embraced the sect proposal without any hesitation, there were other councilors who recognized that their states and organizations would lose out if it got adopted.

"Letting every state and private organization found their own sects will lead to widespread segregation." A lesser councilor from a third-rate state complained. "There is already a strict separation between the classes in the mech community and elsewhere. Professor Larkinson promised that the Red Collective would serve as a vehicle that would weaken the barriers that keep the classes separate. We should not treat sects as the only way to organize cultivators. We should still allow the Red Collective to train and supervise cultivators directly. We can make it optional if that is a concern. If a cultivator does not want to join any of the available sects, he or she can always enlist in the Collective."

That was a clever idea. The lesser councilor already recognized that the sect proposal was on track of getting passed, so the statesman merely offered a supplement that would reduce the negative impact on lesser states.

Not many councilors supported this additional initiative, but not many people objected to it either. The idea needed to be fleshed out further in order to form a definite conclusion.

Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson frowned for a moment. She also recognized that the winds had shifted in the favor of the sect proposal.

If her complete centralization proposal no longer had any chance of becoming the prevailing consensus, then she would settle for the next-best solution. She stood up and attracted the attention of the other councilors.

"If these sects or schools will become the predominant interface between humans and cultivation, then they must not be governed with a light hand. Each cultivator is a weapon of mass destruction in the making. It is of utmost importance to ensure that sects are strictly monitored and that every rule is swiftly and decisively enforced. We must form a quota that limits the amount of sects that can be founded in a territory. Only the most upright, diligent and honorable sects will be allowed to earn and keep their quotas. The organizations that have failed in their duties and allowed their cultivators to degenerate will be subject to heavy punishment. If the sanctioned sects have failed severely enough, the Red Collective must strip them of their quotas and reallocate them to more honest cultivation organizations."

A lot of councilors had little objection to the fleet admiral's addition to the sect proposal.

It was truly a good idea, and roughly fell in line with Ves' original argument.

By limiting the amount of sects, the Red Collective could raise the competitive environment while simultaneously making it easier to supervise all of the cultivation organizations.

Setting high standards on the sects and dangling the threat of depriving them of their quotas would give them a powerful incentive to play by the rules!

The Red Collective could also create other mechanisms to foster greater controlled competition between the sects. By managing their relations and forcing them to compete for limited resources, the sects would mostly be focused on overcoming their rivals as opposed to harming ordinary people!

This was a familiar model to the Red Two. The mechers and the fleters had long used the method of dividing humans into different states in order to give them a proper channel to vent their competitive desires.

Since even a hardliner like Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson threw her support behind the sect proposal, the outcome of the first session was no longer in doubt.

The only topics left to discuss was hammering out a number of key details.

Chapter 5980 Evolutionary Vision

By the time the first session of the Interim Leadership Council came to an end, most councilors ended up satisfied.

The council ran with the sect proposal initially presented by Ves and expanded upon it. Many different interest groups tried to pass their own amendments in order to favor their own circumstances.

Though not every amendment got passed, the councilors did not unnecessarily obstruct ideas just because they came from their political opponents.

After all, the powerful figures gathered here all possessed a common responsibility for ensuring the survival of red humanity.

Even if they possessed selfish thoughts, they did not dare to go too far when they were sitting in the presence of multiple god pilots.

As the most honorable and individually powerful protectors of human civilization, god pilots generally had little tolerance towards obstructionism!

People such as Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson used to have no qualms about targeting Ves because he lacked the hard power to deter such maneuvers.

This did not apply to the god pilots!

Appointing a more ruthless and proactive god pilot like the Evolution Witch to the position of chief councilor was a very savvy move in this regard.

Under her supervision, no councilor dared to play any despicable games. Behavior that might be tolerated in their own states and organizations would never fly in a council under her charge!

The Evolution Witch did not even have to issue any warnings or step in. Just her presence and authority alone was enough to keep the councilors honest.

Under this atmosphere, the councilors who originally stood on opposite sides of the spectrum all managed to come to an acceptable middle ground.

What was rather impressive this time was that most councilors ultimately became satisfied with what they got. They managed to get enough amendments passed that they managed to satisfy at least some of their interests.

The Terrans and the Rubarthans were all happy by the fact that they avoided direct centralization. Their cultivators would not be in a position to lose their original loyalties and become indoctrinated by the Red Collective.

Instead, their cultivators would be able to join one of the multiple sects that were mainly controlled by first-rate states, either directly or indirectly.

The proponents of greater control such as the Fifth Enforcement Fleet and parts of the Survivalist Faction also became satisfied by the fact that the Red Collective still obtained strong supervision and control authority.

A lot of councilors took issue with the notion of letting the Red Collective exert strong control over individual cultivators.

However, not many of them were sympathetic towards the plight of sects. It made sense to constrain their behavior by imposing a lot of rules. So long as the Red Collective policies towards sects were not too unreasonable, it was acceptable to hold them to a higher standard.

In short, councilors such as Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson and Master Vayro Goldstein became more assured that the current setup would preserve human society's existing stability and order.

Anarchy, chaos and a wholesale deterioration of public safety threatened the interests of the Red Two. The mechers and the fleeters always derived their legitimacy from being able to run human space better than all of the alternatives. Their argument would no longer hold any weight if they failed in this aspect!

At least the sect proposal made it easier to guard the current order as the Red Collective merely had to keep a close eye on a limited number of sects.

Details such as how much the quota should be and other parameters could be determined at a later date. It was not necessary to involve so many tier 1 galactic citizens and other eminent leaders in trivial affairs.

Now that the Interim Leadership Council was done with shaping a single unified policy towards the purpose of the Red Collective and its relationship with human cultivators, the Evolution Witch finally brought the first session to a satisfying end.

The woman stood up from her larger and more regal seat and radiated a fraction of her God Kingdom across the entire meeting chamber.

Aside from the other tier 1 galactic citizens, every other councilor momentarily became affected by phantom illusions.

Each of them experienced visions ranging from advancing to the rank of True Gods or living long enough to see red humanity conquer the entire Red Ocean and multiple other dwarf galaxies!

Even Ves could not resist the effects of the Evolution Witch's God Kingdom!

It was just that his momentary illusion was a little special compared to that of the others.

He maintained enough awareness to know that his mind was responsible for creating a possible vision of the future. This caused him to develop a particularly exaggerated impression of what he became once he reached the level of a True God.

Not only did he become a Star Designer that could create an endless amount of living marvels, but his various incarnations also became transcendently powerful!

Blinky commanded an entire parallel universe. The Blinkyverse had not only turned into a material space, but grew to such a size that it was able to support the rise of many native alien civilizations!

The prosperity of the primordial galaxy of the Blinkyverse exceeded that of the Milky Way!

After all, the old galaxy might be populated by a lot of humans and aliens, but it was no longer blessed with the power of heaven.

The story was different for the Blinkyverse! The Star Cat had not only assumed the role of the heavenly authority over the primordial galaxy, but also possessed the ability to summon a sizable fraction of that power into the main universe!

Though Ves did not yet know how much Blinky needed to cultivate and sublimate his powers in order to reach this insanely powerful state, he was glad to learn that all of the painstaking accumulation eventually paid off at the end!

As for Vulcan, his situation also became outrageous. He had become a literal deity to every dwarf and craftsman who believed in him. The incarnation also became an exceptionally capable traditional craftsman who was able to produce extremely powerful masterwork and occasionally grand work-level artifacts.

This meant that Vulcan gained the capacity to produce artifacts that approached the level of the Heavensword!

If he had access to enough super-class materials and gained the faith of enough worshipers, then it was not impossible for Vulcan to craft an artifact that matched the power of that mythical weapon!

As for Veronica, her cultivation was a bit of a mystery. Ves only obtained fuzzy impressions of the cyborg cat after completing her transcendence.

One detail that became clear was that she became a cybernetic phase lord. She might look as small as a housecat under normal circumstances, but as long as she became involved in any battle, her feline shape quickly reached the size of a moon large enough to produce tides if it orbited a planet!

Veronica under the active imagination was not weak at all. This was because she was not a simple phase lord. She also benefited from a huge amount of cybernetic enhancements that augmented her combat capabilities in a targeted manner!

With the expertise of both Ves and Vulcan, Veronica gained the traits of a god mech while simultaneously preserving all of the advantages of a True God-level phase lord!

Despite the fact that Veronica lacked the transcendent willpower that made god pilots so strong, her deep technological integration at least enabled her to hold her ground in a fight!

Combined with a formidable command over the power of darkness, Veronica had a much better chance of evading any direct confrontation against the hostile god pilots!

Ves took a deep breath.

In reality, less than a second passed by. The Evolution Witch only exerted a minute extent of her God Kingdom for an instant.

That had already been enough for everyone aside from god pilots and Star Designers to lose their minds to illusions that stretched on for a much longer periods of time!

Some councilors looked as if they had become immersed in a false setting for weeks.

Others looked as if they had just peeked at the future for a couple of minutes.

None of the councilors looked as if they could resist such power!

None of the councilors who had become affected by the Evolution Witch's power remained unaffected by this move. Many of them became more introspective as they couldn't take their minds away from that tempting illusion.

Was this what it was like to achieve greater success in cultivation?

None of the councilors looked as if they could resist such power!

Not even the fleters who harbored the greatest misgivings towards cultivation could remain unmoved in the face of all of that temptation!

What a brazen act of manipulation. Even if many of the councilors appreciated the momentary taste of power, they were still cognizant enough to realize that the Evolution Witch actively tried to sway them to her mindset.

Of course, none of the councilors possessed the courage or the motivation to accuse the Evolution Witch.

This was the privilege of power!

The Evolution Witch shamelessly smiled at the other 99 councilors. "This concludes the first session. The date of the subsequent session will be announced at a later date. It will take time to expand on the amended sect proposal and incorporate it into our planning. Before you depart, do not forget the importance of our mission. Red humanity in its current state is too weak. If we do not adapt to our rich new environment, we will die. There is no ambiguity about this. Our alien adversaries will not be merciful towards us, so we cannot be soft towards them either. Only the fittest race shall survive in the end. If we cannot win this struggle, then we deserve to go extinct."

With those ominous words, the first session came to an end.

Many councilors deactivated the remote connection, causing their physical projections to disappear from the meeting chamber.

Few people stuck around to exchange words with each other. If they wanted to discuss more serious topics, they could always switch to more private communication channels.

Ves did not leave right away. It would be stupid of him to miss out on the opportunity to deepen his relationships with the movers and shakers of red humanity..

He first turned towards the Evolution Witch. A coy smile graced her lips as she studied Ves with fascination.

"Interesting. You truly are your mother's son. You possess great courage for splitting off your soul so many times. The risks are great, but the ability to command the power of multiple True Gods is a benefit that very few humans enjoy."

Ves widened his eyes. "Wait... you saw that?"

"Oh, you naive child. You understand so little of what god pilots are capable of. What makes you think I am unable to see your future forms? Self-evolution is under my purview. Out of the councilors present today, you shine like a beacon in a lighthouse. You are by far the most hard-working cultivator among them. I expect great results from you in the future. That is no excuse for you to rest on your laurels, however. The evolution potential that I have glimpsed from you and every other councilor is not a prophecy. It is merely an extrapolation based on your current conditions. It is not impossible for others to exceed you at a later date. Work hard and do not slack off. Our society needs your many gifts."

Ves awkwardly smiled. He felt awfully exposed in her presence. Who knew how many secrets she gleaned from him! If not for the fact that she had made a pact with his mother, he would have become apprehensive about what the god pilot intended to do with all of the sensitive information!

"I appreciate the... visions... but can you please not do it again?"

"You do not have power over me. I will inspect your potential whenever I am motivated to do so.
Your strategic value has just increased from my perspective."

"..."