

The Mech 6041

Chapter 6041 Exchange Stability for Power

With the help of Jovy's input, the Riot Mark III was shaping up to become an increasingly more interesting Larkinson expert mech.

Ves couldn't help but develop a greater interest in the outcome of this upgrade project. The recent changes to the planning of the Riot Mark III Project vindicated his decision to invite Jovy to collaborate with him and his wife.

If they managed to succeed in meeting all of their goals for the Riot Mark III, there was a good chance that the resulting end product might actually be able to match the magnificence of the Amaranto Mark III!

"I like what we are doing with the Riot Mark III." Gloriana admitted to Ves after they concluded another in-person meeting with Jovy. "I never imagined that it would become so much easier to gain access to the resources and expertise of the Red Association. The scope of the project has increased by a large extent, but your friend is conscientious enough to offer solutions to the problems that he has raised. It is quite... comfortable to work alongside such a helpful and thoughtful mech designer."

"I know, Gloriana. Don't get used to it, though. It is okay to borrow from outside expertise every now and then, but if we want to become better mech designers, we constantly need to hone our problem solving abilities. No Master Mech Designer is able to reach such a high rank by relying on handouts all of the time."

"You do not need to remind me of this lesson. I will still undertake a large amount of work myself. Do you think it is easy to combine Destroyer resistant materials and unstable energetic materials? I also have to design an all-hyper material archemetal frame for the Amaranto Mark III, which is a completely different challenge altogether. I barely have any time left to design the low-tier expert mechs for the latest demigods of the clan."

It was a good thing that Gloriana had already decided to reduce the clan's commitment to designing low-tier expert mechs. The reduced requirements along with delegating a lot of work to a handful of the many Journeyman Mech Designers of the Design Department allowed her to cope with her workload.

Everyone immediately became a lot busier than before. Both the Amaranto Mark III and the Riot Mark III demanded a lot of time and effort in order to make substantial progress, but none of the mech designers involved had any reason to complain.

The work was fulfilling as they yearned to fulfill their dreams for the two high-end upgrade projects!

Ves found it fascinating to alternate between the two different projects.

While the Amaranto Mark III and the Riot Mark III shared a lot of similarities, their designs radically diverged in many areas.

What Ves loved about the Amaranto Mark III was that her design attempted to turn her into an absolute beast in terms of firepower.

Gloriana's attempt to design an archemetal frame that consisted almost entirely out of hyper materials would make the high-tier expert mech and potentially ace mech a lot more fragile than equivalent machines. This forced her to be careful about any design choice she made as the unusual material composition amplified the consequences for any faults and weak points in her work.

Yet when she thought about how much more power the new and improved Amaranto could channel in either of her soon-

to-be-upgraded weapons, she gained another burst of motivation and worked with greater gusto than before!

In contrast to the extreme performance profile of the Amaranto Mark III, the Riot Mark III demanded a completely different response.

The high-tier expert spearman mech needed to exemplify the role of an assault mech. This meant that aside from ranged attack capabilities, the Riot needed to perform well in both offense and defense.

Oh, his mobility needed to be decent as well, otherwise a lot of powerful opponents would simply be able to counter the Riot by maintaining their distance from a relatively powerful but sluggish mech!

Mech design was a process of making lots of compromises and tradeoffs. It was difficult to design a mech that scored well in multiple areas. The original Riot was patterned after a spearman mech, which was largely considered an offensive mech archetype.

However, in order to strengthen the living mech's ability to trade blows with threatening enemies, Ves had chosen to put a lot of emphasis on the Riot's armor system and other defensive measures.

This resulted in a package that sort of fulfilled his requirements, but did so in a clunky and imperfect fashion.

The Riot was able to inflict a considerable amount of damage up close, but he could never compete against the First Sword in terms of pure lethality.

There was no need to hold a contest because Venerable Orfan would probably be the first to admit that she was not able to keep up with Venerable Dise when it came to inflicting the most damage in the same amount of time!

The disparity was just that obvious!

Of course, Venerable Orfan would also be the first to crow about her machine's much better ability to withstand abuse.

Unlike the First Sword whose relatively lighter and less armored mech frame was designed for evasion and maneuverability, the Riot functioned like a defensive mech without looking like one.

Anyone who thought they could make quick work of the expert spearman mech would definitely become unpleasantly surprised by how long the hardy machine was able to last, all without relying on a physical tower shield like the Bastion!

Of course, no one was willing to bet that the Riot could absorb more damage than a heavy space knight like the Bastion. The former might possess a surprising amount of defensive strength, but the spearman mech was ultimately limited by his original archetype.

The Riot Mark III did not completely inherit this original pattern.

Instead, the myriad of suggestions painted a vision that exceeded many of the compromises of the earlier iterations of the expert mech!

By employing a Destroyer spear in a deliberately less stable manner, the Riot Mark III had the potential to catch up to the lethality of the First Sword when the latter also received an upgrade!

By incorporating a lot of unstable energetic materials in the archemech frame of the Riot, the expert mech's ability to cope with damage would definitely jump to another level!

In short, the compromises became less costly than before. The sweet spots improved to such an extent that the Riot possessed the least amount of shortcomings out of all of the Larkinson expert mechs!

However, Ves did not forget the fundamental truth that everything came at a price.

It was not true that Ves, Gloriana and Jovy would be able to design the Riot Mark III as an expert mech that broke the limitations of what was possible.

The not so secret tradeoffs to designing the Riot Mark III this way was a huge drop in stability.

This was normally antithetical to Ves' design approach. He always tried to put in greater effort to increase the reliability and fault tolerance of his mech designs. He wanted his customers to be able to partner up with his living mechs for the long haul. It was not conducive to his purpose to design living mechs that fell apart after years of moderate to heavy use.

Yet that was exactly what he and his collaborators set out to create. Under any other circumstances, designing a mech with so many unstable factors stacked on top of each other was a recipe for disaster!

Expert mech or not, such a machine was still at risk of blowing apart when much of the mech frame literally consisted of explosive materials!

The reason why Ves, Gloriana and Jovy went ahead with this anyway was because they were confident in Venerable Orfan's ability to control her expert mech and manage the risks.

Years of piloting the Riot and developing her abilities to better suit the characteristics of her battle partner had turned Rosa Orfan into a champion who became proficient at navigating chaos!

So long as the volatile elements did not actually reach a critical state and explode, their greater power would boost the Riot's performance to a much greater extent than normal!

While it was rather risky for Venerable Orfan to pilot the Riot Mark III at the expert pilot stage, Ves had much greater confidence in her ability to control the risk factors when she became an ace pilot!

By then, her resonance strength would grow so powerful that she could literally reshape her machine through willpower baptism.

Of course, once the Riot Mark III became qualified to wield the tier 3 Destroyer spear, the risk of losing control would shoot up again. Orfan would never be able to pilot her upgraded machine in

complete comfort. She constantly needed to exert a lot of willpower to maintain her control over all of the unstable elements.

This was why it was important for her to deepen her familiarity with chaos. Only by mastering its rules and mechanisms would she be able to wield its potent power without suffering too many backlashes.

"If we design the Riot Mark III according to this plan, then we cannot eliminate all of the risks to the mech and pilot." Gloriana warned Ves. "According to our preliminary calculations, the mech will occasionally suffer from self-harm. The probability that this happens increases when the Riot is engaged in active combat. The greater the stress, the greater the chance of losing control."

That was indeed a major problem. "Are you recommending that we should dial it back?"

"Not yet, Ves. I think that the Riot Mark III can still become a highly effective asset, but the premise is that the power of the mech vastly exceeds the damage produced by backlashes. Every time the expert spearman mech deploys into battle, Venerable Orfan will have to take a gamble on how often her mech suffers an accident and how severely the damage will impair the machine."

In other words, the Riot Mark III would always be a machine that would regularly incur damage. Ves pitied the poor maintenance team that would become responsible for servicing the dangerous living mech in the future.

Ves crossed his arms in thought. "Once we complete the Riot Mark III, we will have to monitor his performance closely. I suppose we are doing that for every expert mech we have recently worked upon, but we need to take this a lot more seriously for Rosa Orfan's expert mech. If it turns out that the costs exceed the benefits, we need to be prepared to rework the Riot Mark III into a more stable iteration at the cost of giving up a bit of power. The goal is to design a chaos machine. It is not our purpose to design a literal torture machine."

Hopefully, it would not come to that. As long as Venerable Orfan broke through early enough, Ves believed that her improved strength should be adequate enough to keep a handle on most danger factors.

As Ves and the others resumed their design work, a few major developments occurred that represented a break in routine.

First, Gavin Neumann was finally scheduled to return to New Constantinople VIII.

Second, the Interim Leadership Council held a second meeting.

The latter caused Ves to head down to the underground Hyper Chamber once again where he attended another virtual meeting in the same opulent circular meeting hall.

As Ves and many others who attended the meeting by remote took their seats around the enormous round table, they all waited for the Evolution Witch to arrive and open a discussion on the next topic in contention.

One curious change compared to the last meeting was that less people attended than before.

Some of the missing councilors sent substitutes to represent their voice, but others just kept their high-backed seats empty.

"Where are the rest?"

"They are subject to communication lockdowns." Master Vayro Goldstein helpfully explained to Ves. "There are signs that the native aliens are on the verge of launching a large offensive. Our soldiers must be ready to respond and fight at any moment."

"Oh..."

Chapter 6042 5 Defensive Bands

The air in the virtual conference chamber grew heavier at the mention of the coming alien offensive.

Nobody had any reason to look forward to this major turn of events. The native aliens had been steadily amassing more and more warfleets at their staging points just outside of human-occupied space.

An increasing amount of people knew about this impending threat. Even the Red Cabal had to know that their movements had long been seen by their enemies. The surprise factor was almost entirely gone.

The only point of uncertainty was when the aliens were finally willing to launch a mass invasion.

Ves glanced at the powerful figures that attended the meeting. The god pilots and other military officials were conspicuously absent. Most of the people who were free enough to arrive today were those who did not possess any immediate or important military positions.

Despite the lack of leaders who were most involved in the defense of human-occupied space, Ves believed that the remainder still possessed a good understanding of the latest developments of the Red War.

They possessed a lot of high-level information that was unattainable by anyone else!

Since that was the case, Ves might as well try to fish for more insider information. The more he knew, the lower the chance that he would get caught off-guard by future events.

"How big is this upcoming offensive?" Ves casually asked. "I mean, it is obviously a big deal, but does this offensive have the potential to push us back all the way to Bridgehead One, or is it more limited in scope?"

Most of the gathered leaders looked as if they already understood what was going on. The only people who exposed their ignorance were the councilors who hailed from second-rate and third-rate states.

Typical.

Master Goldstein adopted an amused expression. The older mech designer knew exactly what Ves was doing.

Fortunately, he was willing to humor the honorary member of the Red Association this time.

"Our intelligence services are in the process of collecting as much reliable and variable information as possible. We cannot claim to possess a good understanding of every alien movement. We have already confirmed that the Red Cabal has mobilized an unknown number of phase whales to create pocket dimensions for the sole purpose of hiding their most sensitive and strategic military assets.

This is why we can only approximate the total strength and number of the alien attack fleets. For now, there are strong indications that the Red Cabal has amassed enough strength to overrun 3 of 5 defensive bands."

That explanation provoked a ripple of surprise from some of the gathered councilors.

It turned out that even if they received a bit of insider information, their permissions were either too low, or their organizations did not manage to collect as much intelligence as the Red Association.

Regardless, the news that the aliens amassed enough strength to overrun 3 out of 5 defensive bands provoked a considerable negative reaction!

"Er, what is a defensive band?" Ves asked as he felt like he was the only person in the meeting chamber who did not already know this information.

It was not as if he wined and dined with all of the members of high society where people circulated this kind of stuff.

Ves had been neglecting his social affairs in order to focus on his mech design work. He did not regret this decision as he managed to complete the Dark Zephyr Mark III in a beautiful fashion.

Helping Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson break through to the rank of ace pilot was much more important to Ves and the Larkinson Clan than schmoozing with a bunch of bigshots!

Besides, wasn't this virtual meeting a chance for him to catch up to the information he missed?

Master Goldstein projected a simplified map of human- occupied space.

The focus of this projected map rested on the zones that were situated closest to the border to alien space.

"Highlighted on this map are all of the upper, middle and lower zones that directly border alien space. This is our principal barrier and buffer zone against the native aliens of the Red Ocean. If we lose most if not all of these zones, many core zones will become exposed and turn into the latest border zones. This is a catastrophic outcome as the border zones are no longer suitable for heavy development. Many industries and trillions of colonists must be relocated further into human-controlled space in order to prevent future tragedies. The loss of resources, strategic depth, living space and etcetera will heavily reduce our chances of gaining the upper hand in the Red War."

In short, red humanity could not afford to lose all of their border zones during this critical time!

It may be okay for red humanity to lose one or two border zones during the upcoming enemy offensive, but the cost of trying to regain them grew exponentially higher if more got lost in the process!

The projection of the map shifted as the border zones were further divided into 5 very lengthy horizontal bands.

"We have subdivided our defensive lines into 5 broad bands." The Master Mech Designer of the Survivalist Faction explained. "Each band comprises a large string of fortified star systems. The most notable anchor locations are so heavily defended that we believe their defenses cannot be breached unless the Red Cabal is willing to dispatch their phase whales or phase lords."

It went without saying that numerous god pilots would be hovering around these key fortress systems in case a phase leader showed up. Any powerful alien leader that dared to show up would definitely be at risk of getting beaten up and captured by one of red humanity's strongest protectors!

Alas, there were too few of them. Human-occupied space might only comprise a small part of the entire Red Ocean, but the quantity of star systems and the amount of light-years that made up the entire length of the defensive bands was still way too much.

Perhaps that was the point of launching a major offensive. So long as the aliens deployed hundreds if not thousands of fleets at a time, there was no way a handful of god pilots could mop them all up in a short amount of time!

There may be another factor that gave the native aliens the confidence to succeed in their offensive.

"Wait." Ves spoke. "Since the native aliens are prepared to invade our space despite knowing that our god pilots can stomp all of their warfleets in sequence, have they managed to come up with a response against our top assets?"

"The Red Cabal bears a strong grudge against the RF's dreadnoughts and an even stronger hatred against our god pilots." The Web Mistress responded this time. "The phase whales have suffered irreplaceable losses that have heavily traumatized their race and community. Many humans believe in the stereotype that the phase whales are slow to respond and unable to respond to changing circumstances. This is not entirely accurate. The results of Operation Night Jazz has created many new hatreds, as the loss of every ancient phase whale has generated grief among many more phase whales and other important alien dignitaries. Alone, their ability to respond may be limited, but together, their collective efforts may allow them to gain a fighting chance against our god pilots."

Her voice carried a substantially different weight than Master Goldstein. As one of the 14 Star Designers in the neighborhood, she was a genuine True God as well as one of the best mech designers in the new frontier!

Ves briefly envied her high rank and status, but he quickly set these feelings aside. One day, he would become just as important as the likes of the Web Mistress.

What was important was that the Web Mistress believed that the Red Cabal had come up with possible counters against god mechs!

If the aliens gained the capability to kill or at least repel a god pilot, then red humanity was in deep trouble!

"Trust in our god pilots, Professor Larkinson." Master Goldstein spoke. "The phase whales are not weak, and we must be wary of their profound mastery in the manipulation of space. However, god pilots are the pinnacle of human excellence. They are forged to withstand extreme threats beyond anyone's imagination. The cosmopolitans may have attempted to explain the severity of attacking our god pilots, but the phase whales cannot fully shake off their arrogance."

It sounded as if red humanity was making the exact same mistake. Ves knew quite well how difficult it was to defeat a god pilot, but that did not mean there was no way to defeat one. Nothing was absolute.

At least the leaders took into account the possibility that red humanity would get pushed back despite the efforts of the god pilots to stem the tide.

"So how bad is it for us to lose 3 out of 5 defensive bands?"

"The Torald Middle Zone that you are familiar with and numerous other zones will turn into contested territories." Another councilor from a second-rate state replied. "It is not as awful as losing all 5 defensive bands during a single offensive, but if the aliens are able to make this much progress, then our remaining defenses will become much more strained. You can expect the aliens to dispatch more raiding fleets to the zones that were previously untouched. Important star systems such as the Davute System may suffer surprise attacks."

Human-occupied space would become a lot more strained if that happened! Much of the wealth and prosperity of Davute and other star systems situated close to the border zones relied upon maintaining a high degree of order.

If traders and other people felt less safe in these regions, they would definitely begin to liquidate their assets and relocate to the reare as fast as possible.

This was a catastrophe that was only a bit less severe than losing all 5 defensive bands!

As such, it became imperative that red humanity held the line as much as possible. Losing 1 or 2 defensive bands was a lot less severe as the aliens wouldn't be able to threaten the core zones as easily as in the previous scenario.

"Why don't we disrupt the alien offensive rhythm by launching counterattacks into alien space?" Ves suggested. "We don't have to embark on a deep strike expedition in order to hit the aliens where it hurts."

Several leaders smiled or chuckled.

"Why do you think most of our god pilots and other military personnel are absent at the moment? We have already considered every conceivable proposal. Just as how the Red Cabal is adjusting their strategies against our god pilots, we are also preparing countermeasures against the impending alien offensive."

Ves grew a little more reassured when he heard that. He might not like the Red Two, but he had to admit that their leaders were generally highly competent at their jobs. They would never let the aliens have their way.

"Do you know when the native aliens will finally launch their offensive? Do you have an approximate date?"

Master Goldstein shook his head. "Nobody knows the answers to your questions. We know that only a single highly revered ancient phase whale has the authority to decide on this matter. Since we do not have access to this top alien leader at all, we do not have enough clues to make a reliable prediction. It is possible that the alien offensive may commence tomorrow. Your forces should be prepared for a difficult campaign. Every linefighter must participate in the defense of human space in one fashion or another if they wish to retain their status."

The expeditionary fleet had already retreated to the Bortele System as far as Ves was aware of. The Battle of Torment had inflicted a lot of damage and losses, so it was not possible for the Golden Skull Alliance to maintain their presence right behind enemy lines.

That was good news. It meant that the expeditionary fleet would not get caught up in the first initial wave of attacks. The Golden Skull Alliance would be able to wait and see before deciding where to deploy and which star systems to defend.

Chapter 6043 Extraordinary Crime

After a bit more discussion where Ves collected a good amount of critical information, the chief councilor finally arrived.

Unlike before, the god pilot chose to present herself in a more militaristic uniform. Her entire aura swept across the virtual council chamber and affected everyone present no matter how far away they were located.

The Evolution Witch seemed to have entered a more martial mindset. Her entire aura and God Kingdom took on a harsher and more aggressive edge.

It was a good thing that none of her animosity was directed towards the councilors!

Clearly, the upcoming native alien offensive occupied much of her attention. She was keeping herself in a condition to unleash her full power at any time. This was fine, but it also affected the people who got into contact with her. True Gods were just that terrible!

Fortunately, the Evolution Witch did not forget to increase the noise and decrease the bandwidth of the virtual chamber's data transmissions. This caused her to look a little fuzzier and less distinguished than before, but it successfully tempered the impact of her aggressive aura.

Bad connection or not, no one present in the virtual meeting dared to display anything but their full respect and attention towards the only god pilot that had made an effort to be present today.

As the head of the Interim Leadership Council, she could not excuse her absence like the others.

Once she took her seat in the largest and most opulent seat next to Ves, Divine Lucie Miyazaki pointedly swept her gaze across the round table.

She did not take note of the empty seats. She knew better than most why so many councilors found themselves unable to attend this important occasion.

"<nullb>We have come together yet again on the eve of the third year of the Age of Dawn. The Red Collective is continuing to take shape. Much has been decided and arranged after the conclusion of the first session. If not for the impending escalation of the Red War, we would have been able to make considerably greater progress. With the survival of our species at stake, all of us have been forced to set aside many of our priorities, hence the notable absence of numerous councilors today. Let us hope that their seats will not remain empty on a more permanent basis."

The air in the virtual chamber grew heavier upon that remark. Although Ves did not think that the native aliens were capable of killing powerful god pilots and admirals, he could not rule out any possibility.

War was not fair. It was also foolish and naive to think that it would unfold exactly according to his estimations and predictions.

The Evolution Witch did not talk about the war for long. It was not time for the Interim Leadership Council to get involved in the affairs of the Red War.

"Several important decisions will have to be made today." The intimidating god pilot continued to speak. "The previous session largely revolved around the organization of cultivators. We formed a consensus around the sect policy, where we decided that the Red Collective should maintain its distance from ordinary cultivators but also strictly oversee the so-called sects that are responsible for educating and controlling those who yearn for greater power by practicing different methods. However, this is hardly a perfect plan to contain the excesses of cultivation. Pay attention to the following incidents."

A large projection appeared above the circular table. It depicted a gruesome sight that elicited sickening reactions from a few of the councilors.

It depicted a gruesome cellar where a lot of blood had been splattered across the walls, ceiling and floor.

The snapshot had clearly been censored to save the councilors from having their eyes seared with unpleasant imagery, but everyone could clearly guess what was beneath all of the blacked out areas!

Dozens of severed limbs, ground organs and shattered corpses caused the cellar to descend into a hellish ritual site!

Ves knew that the motivation for doing this was for ritualistic purposes because the perpetrator of the massacre of so many men, women and even children had specifically created a demented ritual circle and altar!

The craftsmanship of these features were very poor to say the least, but Ves knew enough about this kind of stuff to deduce that the mass murderer did not randomly put stuff together based on horror dramas or dark virtual reality games.

Ves could perceive a very faint but distinct harmony between all of the blood and corpses and the ritual circle!

The ritualistic elements themselves also clearly did not appear to be designed by amateurs who knew nothing. Having pulled off a few rituals himself, Ves was able to evaluate the work in the projection in a more professional manner.

Compared to his improvised and ad-hoc approach to conducting rituals, whoever designed this bloody arrangement was clearly a knowledgeable expert!

Ves shuddered at that thought. If the mass murderer actually got rewarded for his efforts, then this would definitely happen again!

"The 86th Street Massacre is one of the earliest murder incidents in the Age of Dawn that can be directly tied to cultivation. Many more incidents have occurred where different perpetrators across human space have engaged in varying degrees of slaughter in a misguided attempt to extend their lifespan and increase their power."

The projection turned into a slideshow that depicted different crime scenes. Some of them showed obvious ritualistic characteristics, while others hinted that the perpetrators had killed their victims to plunder their strength.

During the Age of Mechs, such acts would have been useless as the barren environment at the time would never have been able to fuel such acts.

It was different during the Age of Dawn. E energy radiation was just so damn responsive that it reacted to any action, especially more dramatic and emotional ones such as engaging in depravity!

The projection finally changed to show actual footage of a murderous cultivator in action!

The view came from a surveillance drone that monitored a small agricultural settlement.

These were places where people all knew each other. They worked for the same companies and lived fairly close together.

However, these settlements also lacked sufficient enforcement. Not a single mech was on guard, and the perpetrator deliberately targeted the police first!

"Hahahaha!" A maddened young man cackled as he used a smuggled or stolen assault rifle to tear through the armor of a pair of law enforcement officers! "Your souls are mine! You will receive the honor of becoming a part of a new god!"

After killing the officers, the murderer moved closer and performed a weird technique that actually drew out a bit of energy from the bloodied corpses!

The ecstatic cultivator opened his mouth and actually swallowed what appeared to be his victim's souls!

The crazed cultivator did not leave it at that. Now that all of the effective threats had been dealt with, the murderer proceeded to barge into different homes and kill anyone he encountered!

Despite practicing an unknown cultivation method, the man sensibly made use of modern equipment to enhance his killing efficiency.

Not every settler allowed themselves to be killed without putting up a fight.

Unfortunately, these were ordinary colonists and civilians. They did not own any combat armor, and whatever pistols or other small arms they possessed completely failed to overcome the cultivator's personal shield generator.

Even if it was an outdated gadget that did not contain any phasewater, the protection offered by the shield generator was still too powerful to overcome by a collection of small arms!

Once the cultivator managed to kill 40 or so civilians, the man suddenly stopped and dropped to his knees.

"Aaaaahhh!"

The cultivator screamed as the souls of multiple victims seemed to jump out of his head!

"YOU ARE MINE! BE STILL AND LET ME DEVOUR YOU! I AM A GOD! SUBMIT TO ME AND BECOME MY NOURISHMENT!"

Every councilor watched on with varying degrees of expressions.

Most councilors maintained stoic faces, but the ones that showed a little emotions were either disgusted, concerned or intrigued.

Ves felt a mixture of concern and interest himself. He was concerned by this display of violence because crazy people like this soul eater would definitely give cultivators a bad name. The more such depravities occurred, the more the leaders of human civilization wanted to shackle the phenomenon of cultivation!

He also grew interested in these kinds of incidents because it opened himself up to a form of empowerment through predation. Although the means were despicable, the process was still fascinating!

Ves did not forget that his mother practiced similar methods. Predation may often be associated with evil deeds, but it did not have to be so. There was still value in absorbing the strength of real enemies.

It was a pity that the screaming cultivator did not sign up for frontline service, but instead chose to visit an isolated farming village on a typical rural planet!

The criminal cultivator continued to scream for one more minute until he finally couldn't withstand the backlash of absorbing so many unwilling souls in a short amount of time.

His head exploded!

"Good riddance." A councilor muttered.

"<nullb>The Renare Village Affair is one of the first incidents where we have managed to obtain fairly complete and detailed footage of a murderous cultivator in action." The Evolution Witch stated. "<nullb>The Red Association has immediately chosen to suppress any news of it to the greatest extent. We feared that if more people hear what is taking place, they will develop the desire to pursue greater strength gth by imitating these acts. We believe that our efforts have been somewhat successful, as similar affairs have remained fairly sparse for the time being."

That would not last forever. So long as the temptation of greater strength and longevity existed, there would always be weak-willed people who yearned to become more powerful without putting in the hard work to practice a more orthodox cultivation method!

Although the dangers of predatory cultivation methods were much greater, they imposed fewer requirements and usually yielded faster results.

The projection began to show other pieces of footage. Many cultivators with ill intentions weren't stupid enough to prey on other humans in full view of surveillance, but it was very difficult to evade every possible recording device.

Monitoring had become far too ubiquitous in the modern era!

This was why much of the slaughter occurred far away from large and technologically advanced settlements.

"<nullb>As you can see, many of these recorded incidents are taking place in small and isolated third-class settlements. More and more cultivators who apparently managed to gain access to ancient demonic cultivation methods are deliberately preying on the weakest of humans. The benefits of harvesting the energy or materials of first-class humans is not that much greater than the benefits of doing the same to third-class humans. It is much less riskier and more cost-effective to target the latter for that reason."

More and more incidents occurred. It became harder for the Red Association and other authorities to cover up the massacres.

It turned out that a lot of alleged raids conducted by native aliens were actually false! The real perpetrators of a lot of massacres turned out to be human demonic cultivators!

The Evolution Witch clearly harbored a lot of animosity towards these gutless cultivators who maliciously targeted fellow humans as opposed to taking the fight to the native aliens.

Her God Kingdom grew a little more intense as everyone couldn't help but develop an even worse impression towards these short-sighted killers!

"Crime will always exist as long as there is temptation. It is futile to eliminate these massacres entirely, but that does not mean we should allow them to happen. We must decide upon the laws that cultivators must abide by and a means of enforcement to constrain criminals with extraordinary means. If we do not impose a firm regime, our society will degenerate due to the wholesale breakdown of law and order. This session will not end until we have decided upon a complete framework of laws and enforcement."

Chapter 6044 The Limitless Provider

Despite the absence of many councilors, the ones that attended the second session were perfectly capable of holding thorough discussions on what should or should not be permissible.

Nobody disagreed on the necessity to outlaw demonic cultivation methods that derived their power from plundering the strength and vitality of other people.

"It is not enough to rely on existing laws to prohibit these vile acts of murder." An angry-looking female councilor spoke. "I propose that we deem murder for the express purpose of advancing one's cultivation as taboo!"

"Hear hear!"

"I agree!"

"We cannot give cultivators any leeway over this matter!"

It did not surprise Ves that the councilor who made this proposal came from a third-rate state. All of the other councilors from third and second-rate states supported her proposal.

Their states and citizens were the most vulnerable to these sorts of crimes. They did not possess the tech and strength to prevent or stop such acts from occurring on a wider scale.

The footage of the first recorded incident showed how easy it was for a demonic cultivator to attack the weak. Just because the criminal apparently based his strength on ancient methods did not mean he was prohibited from making use of modern weapons and tools.

What if the demonic cultivator brought a mech instead of infantry gear?

What if he employed a warship to perpetrate a slaughter on an unimaginable scale?

Ves knew as long as the incentive was high enough, cultivators would be willing to do anything!

Much of the notoriety of his mother's past incarnation came from her penchant of draining the power of her enemies and other victims.

The Mistress of the Oceans, who owned the original Oceancaller, advanced her True God cultivation by maliciously flooding all of the settlements on entire occupied planets!

Then there were the creators of the Sacred Scrolls. Each of them had attempted to commit one of the gravest of taboos by stealing the strength from the heavenly authority of the Milky Way Galaxy!

The consequences were dire. Demonic cultivation, especially when targeted towards humans on a massive scale, led to a severe drop of population, stability and cohesion. There was not much good that people could say about predatory cultivation approaches.

However, there were still those that did not agree to wholesale prohibitions of this vicious style of cultivation.

A female Star Designer chose to provide a counterweight.

"We are not herbivores, councilors." The Limitless Provider responded. "What is a demonic cultivation method? Should all forms of cultivation that are based on harming others be declared forbidden? If that is the case, we should stop mech pilots from performing their duties, as they directly or indirectly grow in power the more they fight against others. Aggression is not necessarily a sin. What matters is who you direct it towards. Many of you understand the dire state of red humanity. We cannot and should not impose too many taboos on ourselves. The more we constrain our actions with self-imposed rules, the weaker we become. If there is a fast and convenient method to grow more powerful by plundering the strength of native aliens, then we should support it, not prohibit it out of a misguided motivation to coddle our population."

A third-class councilor gritted his teeth. "How can you possibly control the cultivators who are allowed to practice such methods?! It is possible that most of the cultivators who learn this method will abide by the rules that you have set, but it only takes a small proportion of bad apples to inflict a disproportionate amount of damage to our society. Compared to plundering the strength of hostile native aliens, it is much easier to plot against other humans. How many millions of billions of people will die because of prioritizing the development of powerful cultivators over protecting human decency?!"

A furious debate broke out. Tiffany MacArthur-Marmedion, a notable 300 year old Star Designer of the Expansionist Faction, did not want the Interim Leadership Council to completely eliminate what may very well be a fast and effective way of raising the strength of a lot of human cultivators.

This was not that much a surprise to the people who read her biography. The Limitless Provider had dedicated much of her work towards the development of seemingly endless energy sources. She was obsessed with breaking the limits that constrained her work. She gained great satisfaction from liberating people of all kinds of rules that constrained their potential.

While that made her sound like a natural fit for the Unbound Humanity Faction, she actually joined the Expansionist Faction. She even married the Dimension Architect who led the Expansionists!

From what Ves had heard, the Limitless Provider was friends with the Resonance Smith, but she did not join his faction in the end.

This indicated that the female Star Designer possessed a lot of personal ambitions. The importance of expanding human space and gaining access to more alien tech and new materials surpassed her desire to reduce the weight of the mechers and the fleeters!

In any case, the Limitless Provider did not only have a philosophical reason to prevent the Red Collective from taking a universally hostile stance towards 'demonic cultivation'.

"Let me give you a real and current example of how cultivation based on absorbing the strength of your defeated opponents can become a productive force in our society." The Expansionist spoke. "The Hunting Association founded by the Huntsman has already begun to convert exobeast hunters into cultivators. By practicing the tenets of the Hunter's Code, these hunters are able to improve their cultivation by devouring the flesh of their kills or devoting their prey to the Huntsman. In the years since the Hunting Association has been in operation, many hunters have grown quickly, vastly exceeding the progress they can attain if they practice more conventional cultivation methods."

The Hunting Association had become more and more ubiquitous. The rapidly growing organization placed branches on any planet that was being threatened by mutating exobeasts.

Although the hunters who practiced the Hunter's Code initially did not seem special, now that the more successful ones had hunted down dozens of large and intimidating exobeasts, their extraordinary power and abilities became increasingly more obvious!

Having witnessed the hunters and examined the Hunter's Code himself, Ves knew that the Limitless Provider made an excellent point.

If the hunters preyed on other humans, then they would have been slapped with the label of demonic cultivators without any doubt!

Yet because they maintained their own sense of honor and strictly engaged in ritualistic hunts against exobeasts that were universally hostile towards civilized life, the hunters were not only doing a great service to red humanity, but got rewarded in the process!

It was quite natural for the Limitless Provider to stand up for the Huntsman, who also led the Expansionist Faction.

The fact that the Expansionists still boasted 4 Star Designers and 2 god pilots made it difficult for other groups to ignore their outsized influence!

In fact, the original cause of the Expansionist Faction had pretty much become irrelevant at this time. Nobody was in a mood to think about expanding human space when the native aliens were doing their best to erase human civilization in its entirety!

Many people hoped that the various Star Designers and god pilots of the Expansionist Faction would have a falling out and join the other factions of the Red Association.

That had not happened. It was a testament to the Energy Warder's leadership that the large faction continued to remain relatively united from top to bottom. The 500 year old Star Designer did not manage to live so long and climb his way up by being incompetent!

"I... admit that the Hunting Association has been a force of good in many states." A second-class councilor conceded. "I suppose it has served as a model of a sect before sects have gained official status. That does not mean that hunters can be trusted to maintain control over themselves. It can take only one bad day for any of them to snap and treat other humans as their prey!"

It was brave of him to argue against a Star Designer, but the Limitless Provider always had an answer to every accusation.

"The Huntsman has implemented enough safeguards and incentives in the Hunter's Code to prevent this scenario from taking place. Hunters can only effectively derive their strength from powerful enough prey. Attacking the weak will not yield them any benefits. It will actually degrade them, as they have violated the tenets of the Hunter's Code."

"That may be true, but this only applies to hunters who have registered at the Hunting Association. What of other demonic cultivators? There are old books and records in circulation that claim to give people a means to transform into gods as long as they sacrifice enough human lives. These old and destructive texts are filled with temptations, but contain none of the protections of the Hunter's Code."

"Then the Red Collective shall aspire to remove them as much as possible." The Limitless Provider said in a reasonable tone. "I am not opposed to prohibiting all forms of aggressive cultivation. We can make a rule that any cultivation method that breaks our existing laws should still be outlawed. This clearly means that cultivation that in some way harms other humans in any fashion should be restricted or eliminated."

"With respect, that is not enough to prevent abuse, Your Excellency. There will be far too many cultivators who will try to exploit loopholes in order to accelerate their progress. The risks are too great. As far as I am concerned, we must strictly limit this approach and impose greater limitations on the Hunter's Code while we are at it. Have you conducted any safety studies on the consequences of devouring defeated prey? Many hunters are known to develop increasingly greater personality problems as they grow stronger. What if they are gradually turning more and more into the beasts they are hunting? You cannot dismiss their deviating behavior as mere eccentricities!"

The Limitless Provider elegantly folded her arms. "The phenomenon you speak of is known to us. This is the natural consequence of experiencing rapid growth in strength without spending enough time to acclimate to their transformations. This is a human problem, not a cultivation problem. The Hunting Association is in the process of enhancing its policies to regulate the growth of hunters."

"Therapy is far from enough to restrain these beasts in the making! We need to impose stronger control over these mentally ill hunters!"

The argument between the two sides continued. Ves made sure to keep himself out of this ugly fight. His body sagged into his large seat as he tried his best to maintain an expressionless face. The less he showed he had an opinion, the lower the chance that people would notice he was present!

Of course, the less he wanted to get called out, the greater the likelihood it occurred!

"Professor Larkinson." The Limitless Provider suddenly turned to the previously inconspicuous Senior Mech Designer. "Please share your input with us. As third-rater by birth, you understand the plight of common humans on a more personal level. You are also descended from a powerful cultivator and war criminal who used to earn a great amount of notoriety by perpetrating the crimes that the Red Collective seeks to prevent. You should therefore possess a broader perspective on this subject."

Ves couldn't help but frown. The Star Designer may be right, but that did not mean he liked it when people brought this information back into the forefront of everyone's minds!

He was not eager to give his answer either. He had a strong feeling that there was more at stake than the legitimacy of the Hunting Association and so on. Power was incredibly seductive, so there were bound to be a lot of other interests that saw value in practicing one form of demonic cultivation or another!

Should Ves take the initiative to foil their plans, or he get out of the way and remain as uninvolved as possible?

Chapter 6045 Sanctity of Life

Ves hated how he attracted the attention of each and every councilor.

They clearly showed an elevated level of interest when he was expected to speak. It was as if his opinions carried significantly greater weight than others!

This was an absurd notion. His hard power was not great, and he did not believe his wisdom matched up against all of the other leaders of red humanity.

The main reason why he attracted so much attention was because he managed to shoot into fame by inventing a bunch of extremely useful stuff and sharing a few crazy ideas.

While Ves took pride in many of his accomplishments, that did not mean he believed could throw his weight around.

His foundation was unstable. His power base was heavily reliant on the backing of third parties. People tolerated his opinions so long as he remained useful, which was not forever.

This was why Ves never took the initiative to take advantage of his increased clout. A huge amount of interests were at stake during every session of the Interim Leadership Council.

The Expansionist Faction represented by the Limitless Provider clearly wanted to give more leeway to aggressive cultivation methods.

The Hunting Association served as an excellent positive example, but its orientation towards hunting threatening beasts constrained its appeal.

Relatively few humans were willing to become full-time hunters. They did feel an attraction towards nature and disliked the act of venturing into the wild just so they could risk their lives to hunt down dirty beasts.

There were other ways to engage in predatory cultivation that could achieve faster results, and it did not involve going on repeated legitimate hunts.

Ves had a few ideas of what that might entail. This was because he was thinking about the possibilities of predatory cultivation as well.

He did not think it was wise to share too much of his actual thoughts on this occasion.

How should he respond?

The council wouldn't give him the time to think about all of the political implications of leaning in one direction or another, so he could only form an answer that partially reflected his true opinions.

"I think both sides of the argument have raised good points." Ves slowly spoke from his high-backed seat. "In my opinion, this debate should be framed by how far we are willing to sacrifice our humanity in exchange for greater power."

"What do you mean by that, professor?"

"It is easier to plunder than to build." Ves stated. "That is a universal rule that applies to many stuff. Cultivation is no different. That said, there is always a price for everything. Trying to grow stronger by plundering the strength of others is an inherently more dangerous and risky means of developing your power. It takes a large amount of discipline and forethought to maintain control over yourself. Not everyone can be as exemplary and strong-willed as the Huntsman. The temptation of greater power has seduced many people over the ages, to the detriment of many human victims. Yet it is undeniable that the unending pursuit of power has also propelled the human race far beyond its heights. Can any of you ever imagine that the Age of Conquest would make our civilization so large and powerful if people weren't as motivated by plundering the tech and resources of rival alien empires?"

Although the Age of Conquest definitely possessed a hidden cultivation angle that added a darker context to this period of human history, that still did not ruin the splendor of this glorious age.

"Humans are weak." Ves continued to address the councilors. "Unlike the Seven Apex Races or the phase whales, we cannot rely on the inherent abilities that we are born with. The only way for us to exceed our limits is to be smarter and more proactive than the other races. Plunder has always been a part of our success story. I think it would be a grave mistake for us to limit the use of certain methods because you find them distasteful. I think an argument can be made where it is permissible to utilize certain controversial methods so long as they are strictly regulated."

"That is too reckless, professor! As you have stated yourself, temptation will always lead people to lower their bottom line. We cannot rely on honor and laws alone to protect our population from incidents such as the ones presented by the Evolution Witch."

Ves grimaced. "We are at war. We cannot constantly hold the moral high ground when doing so will just cause us to lose a lot of other ground to the aliens. One day, our enemies will surround the meaningless ground that we are left with and finish the job. I think that if we want to survive the difficult years and decades ahead, it is not enough for us to pursue high-minded ideals. We need to be more ruthless and willing to lower ourselves to the level of our enemies, who have no intention of being merciful towards us. Why should we protect them from our worst tendencies? They are not humans like ourselves. They are not protected by human rights by definition."

The implication was that trying to be too soft on this issue might make it seem as if the councilors were siding with the dreaded Cosmopolitan Movement.

This was an absolute taboo!

Almost no one could afford to bear the infamy of supporting the cause of the treacherous cosmopolitans.

"It is not about protecting our alien opponents, Professor Larkinson." A third-class statesman spoke with a steady voice. "It is protecting our own dignity. From our understanding, any form of cultivation that expressly encourages the killing of other beings is inherently dangerous and corrupting. If you gaze into the abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you. Pursuing strength through

harming others is not sustainable. If these demonic cultivators are unable to prey on hostile aliens, it may take one snap for them to prey on fellow humans instead."

The Web Mistress also decided to add her voice to this argument.

"Humans are constrained by both laws and cultural norms. How we act towards our enemies is an important indicator of how civilized we are as a race. I would have thought that you of all mech designers would value the sanctity of life. There is no need to stand up for the rights of hostile aliens, but we should not debase ourselves and throw away our own humanity by treating our current enemies as literal prey. We are already strong enough to defeat them with our mechs. Cultivators may be able to assist in the war effort, but their ability to inflict damage and resist attacks can never keep up with modern war machines."

These were all valid arguments, but Ves possessed a different opinion from the Web Mistress.

He became reminded of the Destroyer of Worlds. Her sense of urgency caused her to reluctantly embrace the potential of darker forms of cultivation.

If even a god pilot believed it was necessary to rely on predation in order to prepare her for the most powerful alien enemy that was on his way to subjugate the Red Ocean, then any attempt to restrain such efforts was counterproductive!

"We would all like to live in a utopia, but it can never happen." Ves retorted. "That said, I do not entirely disagree with your argument, Your Excellency. We must continue to respect the sanctity of life. The only compromise that we should make is to limit this treatment to fellow humans. We cannot compromise our respect towards other human life. However, our empathy should end there. When it comes to the native aliens, they are similar to exobeasts. They are all filled with valuable resources that can provide great value as long as you know how to exploit them. Everyone here understands how short we are of resources. How can we possibly have the luxury to refuse to make use of them when we live in a poor corner of the Red Ocean?"

That argument seemed to sway a fair amount of councilors. At least it made it harder for those who supported greater restraint to push forth their arguments.

"I agree with Professor Larkinson." The Limitless Provider grinned. "His insights into life should be respected. Humans are neither good nor evil. We simply are. We try to encourage humans to be kind to our fellow brothers and sisters, but we cannot maintain a strong and healthy society by being generous and charitable to everyone. We recognize that we must occasionally be cruel to each other and ourselves in order to advance our power and wealth. The aliens deserve even less than that. They are locked in eternal competition against our race. Both humans and aliens are fighting to obtain greater territory and resources because we all know that if we fall behind, our extinction will not be long in coming."

The Expansionist Faction was much more cognizant about the cruelty of the competition against other aliens.

The Expansionists were obsessed with enabling humanity to thrive across the stars.

In many cases, that meant trampling on the territory and lives of a lot of alien civilizations!

Plenty of alien species had gone extinct due to humanity's relentless drive for territory and resources!

In this context, what difference did it make to allow cultivators to plunder the souls or other mystical energy from the corpses of alien bodies?

An eager expression appeared on the Limitless Provider's face. "We cannot fight the Red War by fielding duty-bound soldiers alone. Our race is too selfish for that. We can only encourage soldiers to fight against the overwhelming number of aliens that are preparing to invade our space by luring them with incentives. If that is the case, why not tempt them by permitting them to practice a cultivation method that allows them to directly grow stronger by killing our alien opponents? As long as we organize this correctly, we can mobilize a large number of volunteer soldiers to fight against the forces of the Red Cabal. The pursuit of strength will bring out the best of us no matter whether they are mech pilots or not. Even foot soldiers can become heroes as long as they spill enough alien blood!"

That was a powerful argument! Ves was a bit taken aback by the Expansionist leader's aggression!

He had to admit that there was a lot of logic behind her argument. It was true that so long as soldiers gained a means to break through their mortal limitations quickly by fighting against the aliens, they would definitely volunteer in droves! There would be no concerns about trying to maintain people's enthusiasm towards participating in a difficult war!

The Evolution Witch finally chose to weigh in herself.

"We must respect the life of other humans, but harbor contempt towards the life of aliens. We can be merciful towards our fellow brothers and sisters, but we must be ruthless in extracting the greatest value out of hostile aliens. There is a place for more predatory forms of cultivation, but they should only be practiced by a select group of humans who have earned the right to benefit from them. Even then, they must subject themselves to strict control and inspection to prevent any abuse."

"You sound as if you have already made a choice of who should be allowed to practice demonic cultivation methods." Master Goldstein commented.

"The answer is obvious. Only the New Elites are suitable to practice such methods, if they choose to do so. Linefighters, warfighters and warlords are the only humans who are in frequent contact with the native aliens. They are also the humans who most need the rapid growth in power. They are already under varying degrees of monitoring due to their special status. Furthermore, their training, discipline and combat tempering has allowed them to forge the inner strength and willpower to resist temptation."

That... was a brilliant idea. By combining demonic cultivation with an older and more established framework, it became easier and less risky to implement this new policy change.

However, the proposal did not receive universal approval.

"Is it a good idea to give humans who are most immersed in violence the ability to grow stronger by killing more enemies?"

Chapter 6046 Future Compensation

Numerous councilors looked pleased.

The Evolution Witch's declaration essentially ended the debate on whether red humanity should allow for more predatory means of cultivation.

Limiting this privilege to the New Elites was a clever touch. It would not only increase the attraction of participating in the Red War as a frontline combatant, but also increase the probability that the victims of the so-called demonic cultivators remained confined to the many aliens that lived beyond alien space.

If people wanted to overcome the limitations of their talent and gain power quickly, then the solution became simple.

Just join one of the many troops engaged in fighting against the native aliens and earn enough war merits to redeem the opportunity to practice such methods!

The Evolution Witch grinned as she allowed her verdict to sink into everyone's minds.

Although the will of the chief councilor did not necessarily override the will of the majority of the Interim Leadership Council, no one dared to oppose her on this issue.

God pilots held a special status in human civilization. Their unimaginable martial might not only attracted a huge amount of awe and worship, but also surrounded them with a strong air of oppression.

Even if they did not deliberately set out to intimidate the people around them, they couldn't help it. Their life levels were way too high, and the willpower that they had forged through countless difficult battles had sharpened their mentalities in the sharpest of blades.

In addition, the absence of other god pilots in the Interim Leadership Council pretty much made the Evolution Witch their spokesperson.

Even though the 8 god pilots all belonged to different factions, they were not as divided as most people thought.

Under certain circumstances, they were readily able to set aside their differences and unite to protect their own rights and interests.

God pilots were the quintessential warlords of the human race.

Now that red humanity was cut off from original humanity, the 8 god pilots were no longer constrained by the old and very powerful legacy institutions rooted in the Milky Way Galaxy.

This meant that if they wanted to, all 8 god pilots could instantly overthrow every other authority and establish a new one where their will reigned supreme!

None of the other human leaders wanted this to happen. They would rather bend and stretch in the hopes that the god pilots stuck to their roles as protectors as opposed to rulers.

The current situation gave off the impression that the Evolution Witch spoke with the voice of every god pilot, not just her own. Since that was the case, it was better to let her have her way than risk a rebuke from the powerful Divines.

What a wonderful display of authority. Ves quietly envied the Evolution Witch's courage in setting the tone and ability to get away with it. This was the benefit of possessing a huge amount of hard power.

"We are at war." The Evolution Witch repeated to everyone even though it was not strictly necessary. "For as long as red humanity is under an existential threat, we must prioritize the strengthening and the development of essential soldiers. Under no circumstances should we neglect

the necessity of supplying important resources and other benefits to the soldiers who possess the courage and spirit to risk their lives to defend our civilization. Our highest priorities should always be to find better ways to arm our New Elites with stronger weapons. Only by it being clear that red humanity as a whole is unambiguously providing them with the support they need to fight our battles will we be able to defend our right to exist in this wartorn galaxy."

Every councilor took those words to heart. The Evolution Witch gave everyone an important reminder. At the same time, she also gave them an acceptable guideline to base their decisions around.

"We cannot blindly inherit the old ways of cultivation. We also cannot blindly inherit the prejudices of the past. We live in a different age now. Our society, our technology and our culture has evolved. If we want to become stronger, then we must evolve rather than regress. In a galaxy where the survival of the fittest has become more relevant than ever, we must prove ourselves to be fitter than the native aliens by embracing any valid means of becoming stronger. According to multiple studies, more predatory forms of cultivation can yield more results in the short term. They have less demand for talent or qualifications. Only the stronger, more decisive and more courageous people can attain the greatest results. This is what we urgently need to hold onto our defensive bands and protect our heartland territories."

The upcoming enemy offensive clearly concerned a lot of leaders. The aliens might not be too ingenious compared to humans, but they had numbers on their side. The quantity of enemies that were about to attack the border zones was bound to be massive!

In the face of all of these coming difficulties, the problems related to demonic cultivation no longer sounded as important as before.

As the Evolution Witch continued to lecture the council, Ves wondered how much of her opinions originally reflected her own will.

He did not forget that his mother and the Evolution Witch had formed an active cooperation agreement for a while now. The two had definitely held a lot of discussions.

Given Cynthia's infamous background, she had definitely taught a lot about the benefits of predatory cultivation approaches to the powerful leader of the Transhumanist Faction.

Perhaps the god pilot already decided the policy decisions for the current session in advance. She merely allowed the various councilors to voice their opinions to give them the illusion of participation.

At most, the Evolution Witch was open to suggestions.

"We possess enough records about so-called demonic cultivation to formulate modernized methods tailored to our present needs and circumstances. Our experts on these subjects should come together and form a common set of solutions to ensure that they maximize their benefits while decreasing the impact on the psyche of our New Elites to the greatest possible extent. There are many depraved and superstitious elements in these ancient manuals, so they should never be practiced in their original states. The Red Collective must strongly prohibit any instance of practicing these unsafe methods regardless of whether the cultivators are New Elites or not. Only by imposing tough measures will we be able to limit the possible excesses."

The councilors who advocated for greater restraint and prohibitions looked a little less upset now. The Evolution Witch did not reassure them entirely, but by taking a tough stance on misuse of demonic cultivation methods, she at least placated a few of their concerns.

A third-class councilor still felt that this was not enough.

"Your Holiness, it is impossible to keep demonic cultivation methods out of the hands of those who do not respect the sanctity of life. Information cannot be completely controlled. People will always find a way to leak or spread it out. No matter whether people pass what they have learned over the galactic net or through circulating secure data chips, once we have unleashed the beast, we cannot contain it anymore."

That was not entirely true. One of the ways to effectively control information across red humanity was to transform the Red Collective into a powerful centralized authority.

However, the first session already ruled out this development path. The sect policy meant that the Red Collective would take a backseat and allow the so-called sects take the lead in managing individual cultivators.

This was not a perfect arrangement as the treatment of cultivators and the enforcement of rules was much more dependent on the conditions of the sects.

The third-raters and second-raters feared that they would be unable to adequately cope against this threat. Their ability to defend against the negative consequences of these policies were not strong!

In other words, the weakest states would probably bear much of the price of letting red humanity engage in demonic cultivation!

The Evolution Witch narrowed her eyes, but she did not refute the legitimate concerns of the third-raters.

That did not mean she was willing to take a step back.

"Public security is an important means of guaranteeing the prosperity of our society, but winning the Red War should be our greatest concern. We are all cognizant that many of our less well-defended states and regions will experience greater pressure than before, but you are not without the means to defend against criminal cultivators. Population has always been an advantage of your states. Leverage your strength and focus on training as many upright and loyal cultivators as possible. Our civilization will come to rely on the power of your cultivation armies in time."

In other words, the threat of criminal cultivators was not necessarily a bad condition. It would make many third-raters more eager to attain greater power due to lacking enough security in their lives.

The implicit message behind the Evolution Witch's counterargument was that too much peace and stability was not beneficial to the current state of red humanity.

People needed to get subjected to real pressure in order to put them into a wartime mindset.

"What if... that is not enough, Your Holiness?" The third-class councilor persisted even if he had to fight back against the god pilot's oppressive aura. "A single first-rater with ill intentions can completely overrun an isolated colony planet by relying on superior tech and equipment. With the backing of a first-class multipurpose mech, none of the defense forces of our weaker settlements can last more than a few seconds."

"Third-rate and second-rate states will not remain as defenseless as before against hostile human cultivators or native alien raiders." The Evolution Witch promised to the relevant cultivators. "It is true that your states does not enjoy the wealth to strengthen the defenses of all of your colonies. However, this age has opened up many new possibilities for your citizens to attain power through more diverse means. We are not yet ready to announce the plans that we have tailored to your specific conditions, but I can promise you that you will enjoy rights that first-raters do not necessarily possess."

That sounded rather hopeful, but the Evolution Witch frustratingly declined to share any specifics.

That said, the third-class and second-class councilors looked mollified. The credibility of a god pilot was ironclad. If the Evolution Witch claimed that the upcoming plans would make the lesser states satisfied, then it was undoubtedly true!

Ves jerked in his seat. He had an inkling that his future Carmine mechs may be a part of this package.

It was because of his expected future contributions that he understood the underlying strategy.

The life of third-raters was too cheap. Most of them were baseline humans and required no expensive resources or manpower to raise. They were excellent test subjects that the Red Two could use to study the impact of radical new advancements such as the Carmine System on human society.

Although this approach was devoid of respect, the third-raters still benefited from these arrangements. They were weak and vulnerable to begin with, so they were more than willing to embrace anything that could help them become stronger!

The promise of future forms of compensation successfully neutralized the objections of the lesser states.

A broad consensus had formed around the practice of demonic cultivation. Despite the use of a loaded word, the desire to attain greater power in a hurry was too tempting for the councilors to resist.

In the end, the Interim Leadership Council settled on a policy that signaled everyone's willingness to sacrifice a part of their humanity in order to attain greater power!

Even if the interior of human space became a lot more messed up as a consequence, the councilors were willing to tolerate a lot of instability so long as red humanity managed to stay alive in the end!

Chapter 6047 Religious Contributions

The second session lasted a bit longer after the main decision had been made.

The councilors addressed other related topics such as determining the punishment for breaking the new taboos and who should be responsible for enforcement.

"The Red Association can undertake part of the responsibility of protecting the lesser states against criminal cultivators." Master Vayro Goldstein of the Survivalist Faction mentioned. "Our true mechs are especially resistant towards the more mysterious methods that they can employ. Many ancient demonic cultivation methods are notorious due to how much they enable practitioners to manipulate the minds of their victims. Our true mech pilots are especially trained to resist these

mental attacks, and the neural interfaces of their true mechs can offer much greater protection than is currently the norm."

Ves had never encountered true mechs after their initial revelation to the public, but that did not mean that they did not exist.

True mechs were mostly confined to the various bases of the Red Association. They did not serve a useful purpose in the fight against the native aliens, so they had no chance to appear in a prominent event up to this point.

That might change in the future, but for now, they mostly preserved their mystique.

Other topics came up as well. The Evolution Witch even brought up restrictions on another form of cultivation.

"The final issue that I wish to address during this session is the practice of cultivation that explicitly relies on the worship of others as gods." She spoke. "Religion and worship has always remained a part of humanity. We are a species that not only long for material answers, but also spiritual answers. Worship in the Age of Dawn holds a different meaning from before. As exotic radiation continues to empower every human in the Red Ocean, their devotion and piety can produce greater outcomes than before. This is both a boon and a bane."

Many councilors did not expect for the god pilot to raise such a contentious subject all of a sudden!

Although many of the councilors came from groups with secularist inclinations, none of them dared to underestimate the influence and persistence of religious organizations.

This was especially the case now that the Age of Dawn granted them an opportunity to rise!

"People have come to worship both old and new gods during these troubled times. Neither can be underestimated. The old gods have become a part of our civilization's mythos for millenia, and have amassed a strong core of traditional worshipers who are highly organized and enduring in their beliefs. The new gods are more mixed and can consist of anything from special existences such as Caramond to charlatans that seek to exploit gullible victims to their own advantage. Then there are god pilots such as myself."

None of the councilors looked eager to debate on this topic. There were a lot of people who held strong beliefs and would not accept anyone trying to interfere with their worship!

The Big Two and many other human authorities had long tried many different ways to stamp out what they regarded as superstition, but they never really succeeded.

It was too difficult to stamp out what appeared to be a core aspect of human nature. Trying to prevent people's need for spiritual sustenance was like forcing them to stop drinking alcohol. Only a portion of humans were susceptible to these measures.

This was why the councilors were concerned about the Evolution Witch's decision to bring up this subject. What if she insisted on taking a harder line against this phenomenon? That would undoubtedly upset a lot of people and produce a lot of unrest in a time where red humanity could not afford to split itself apart!

Fortunately, the Evolution Witch made an effort to reassure everyone's concerns.

"Do not misunderstand my intentions. I do not object to the practice of religion. Under normal circumstances, it is not our responsibility to tell humans what they should believe in. However, we cannot assume a hands-off approach towards religion due to much greater effects of worship in the current age. The mandate of the Red Collective is to protect and strengthen red humanity in matters related to cultivation. In order to do that, we must formulate and enforce a set of rules and guidelines to ensure that the worship of other beings as gods will not lead to a devolution of our proud and enlightened civilization."

That caused a lot of councilors to relax and nod in agreement.

This was a sensible approach towards this controversial subject matter.

It was not wise to allow all kinds of crackpots to found their own cults and reenact the Five Scrolls Compact. There was no way the Red Two would permit any iteration of that infamous cult to make a comeback!

On the other hand, the councilors also understood that humans never submitted to tyranny. If the Red Collective adopted overly harsh policies against expressions of faith, a lot of different rebellious groups would emerge and skulk in the shadows!

The clear answer to this issue was to find an acceptable middle ground that placated both sides.

"The answer is simple. The Red Collective will permit the practice of religion, but it must abide by the existing laws of our society. As a general rule, the process of worship must be transparent to the people who have decided to dedicate their beliefs. It is not permitted to mislead, deceive or harm worshipers in any way. Religious groups that refuse to abide by the laws and taboos of our Collective will be labeled as cults. Each cult is a forbidden organization that must be eradicated without exception. The harm they can cause to our society may be no less than the Cosmopolitan Movement!"

Many knowledgeable people already regarded the Cosmopolitan Movement as one of the oldest and most persistent cults of the human race.

Perhaps the cosmopolitans used to adhere to a sensible ideology, but over the millenia, the crazed diplomats and their descendants had radicalized to such an extreme degree that their ideals had become the center of their own faith!

In that sense, the Red Collective already had a legitimate reason to attack the Cosmopolitan Movement!

The Evolution Witch continued to express her views.

"Let me explain to you what should be permissible. Any form of organized religion must register with our Collective so that we can supervise them appropriately. I am actually in favor of embedding them within the existing framework of sects. This will substantially reduce the number of churches that are allowed to operate within human space, but it will make it much easier to monitor and supervise their activities. The proliferation of religions without limit is not safe in the current age. As much as this decision may harm the interests of the adherents of smaller faiths, the harm they can cause by believing in the wrong gods is too great."

Uh oh. That was anything but a harmless decision!

Ves knew that there was a seemingly endless amount of churches and cults in the old galaxy. Humanity existed for so long and expanded its population so much that nobody was about to count how many religions operated to this day.

Red humanity was much smaller, so the amount of church organizations operating in human-occupied space was a lot more manageable.

However, there were still trillions of believers, a fraction of whom became a part of all kinds of messy churches and cults!

Nobody really cared about that in the past, but times had changed!

A small and cautious debate ensued. There were councilors who feared the outbreak of religious strife, but there were also councilors who understood it was necessary to curtail this potential source of instability.

Ves found it rather interesting that the Evolution Witch dared to hold this discussion at this time.

He had a feeling that Cynthia's influence over the god pilot may be a lot greater than he initially expected.

Ves and Cynthia both had a very strong interest in permitting the worship of certain gods.

At the very least, people needed to be allowed to believe in the Superior Mother and Helena.

Ves also needed the Red Collective to grant legitimacy to the Solemn Guardian, Qilanxo, the Illustrious One, the Phase King and all of his other design spirits!

If that did not happen, then he would be in huge trouble! There was no way that Ves would be allowed to empower his living mechs with design spirits anymore if an arrangement couldn't be made.

This would massively weaken all of his living mechs as their design spirits often granted them an extra edge!

Though Ves felt very concerned about this subject, he conscientiously kept his mouth shut and trusted that the Evolution Witch wouldn't screw him over.

"The Red Collective must strictly inspect and verify that sanctioned religious organizations are worshipping gods that are either benign or neutral towards our race and current order. We cannot permit people to unscrupulously believe in phase whales, demons or individuals who do not possess the moral qualities to assume godhood. The specific rules and standards can be determined later, but as a general rule, any existence that unambiguously harms or holds red humanity back must be denied. In a time of war, we cannot be as lenient or tolerant as we would like, especially when actions related to faith have real consequences."

"What of... the worship of god pilots, Your Excellency? Will people be allowed to found churches in your name?"

The powerful god pilot's expression remained impassive. "Many people have always regarded us as gods, some more literal than others. Different god pilots hold different stances towards worship directed towards themselves. They have earned the right to dictate whether humans are allowed to worship them. If they are open to this practice, they can dictate their own rules on this activity. The

Hunting Association founded by the Huntsman is an excellent example that should serve as a model to my remaining peers."

There was a bit more discussion about specific rules and circumstances.

The Evolution Witch had clearly formulated an elaborate plan, because she had answers for every point raised by the councilors.

Ves grew more and more reassured as he concluded that his design spirits should still have enough room to operate as they have always done.

Perhaps he might still have to request a few exemptions from the Red Collective in order to avoid any annoying restrictions.

When he finally had an opportunity to speak, he pounced on it. "Given the importance of the Red War, I think that the Red Collective should reward sanctioned religious organizations that materially contribute to the war effort. There are churches that don't do much to encourage people to fight and defend the human race. They are little different from parasites in that regard. If we want to discourage them from refusing to contribute to our collective defense, more helpful churches that have helped our soldiers fight against our alien enemies should be able to earn enough rewards to take away the rights and privileges of religious organizations that have done nothing useful."

If that was the case, then he needed to get more involved in the Red Collective and hold real power in this future organization. This was the only way he could protect all of his interests!

Ves did not exactly look forward to that, but this matter was too important for him to allow others to decide on his behalf!

When he finally had an opportunity to speak, he pounced on it. "Given the importance of the Red War, I think that the Red Collective should reward sanctioned religious organizations that materially contribute to the war effort. There are churches that don't do much to encourage people to fight and defend the human race. They are little different from parasites in that regard. If we want to discourage them from refusing to contribute to our collective defense, more helpful churches that have helped our soldiers fight against our alien enemies should be able to earn enough rewards to take away the rights and privileges of religious organizations that have done nothing useful."

The Evolution Witch responded positively to this suggestion.

"You have made a good suggestion, Professor Larkinson. Your policy proposal may be excessively utilitarian, but our society cannot tolerate any leniency on this matter. Every sect or sanctioned religious organization must serve as a productive force of human civilization. If they do not contribute enough to justify their existence, then let them be removed by upstarts who are much more earnest about contributing to red humanity."

This was a harsh but probably necessary rule. At the very least, it would motivate many churches into helping red humanity fend off the native aliens.

Ves couldn't help but smile. If this rule truly came into effect, then he expected that his 'churches' may be able to earn much more contributions than most other organizations of the same kind!

After all, every living mech employed in battles against the native aliens represented another contribution by the design spirit that supported the machine!

Chapter 6048 Hidden Policy Change

The second session ended with success.

Many councilors eventually came away somewhat satisfied with the decisions made by the Interim Leadership Council.

Of course, no one truly got everything they wanted, but few councilors had much cause for complaint.

Ves learned a bit more how high-level politics was supposed to operate.

That said, he did not delude himself into thinking that everything could be decided in the debate chamber alone.

He was still missing a huge amount of backroom politics. The fact that Ves had not really participated in it meant that he still hadn't properly integrated himself into upper society.

That was fine. Ves knew his limits and understood that he still had a lot to go. He needed to strengthen his power base and forge closer relationships before it was safe for him to exert more influence on human society.

As the councilors began to bid goodbye to each other and cut off the remote connections, a few of them lingered and exchanged a few extra words with each other as usual.

Much to Ves' surprise, the Limitless Provider took the initiative to seek out Ves. Her projected form glided above the floor and approached like an ethereal lady.

"Professor Larkinson. On the behalf of the Expansionist Faction, we would like to thank you for your many contributions. Your companion spirit fruits and your kinship networks has increased the enthusiasm of the New Elites and helped them gain the strength they need to defend our borders."

The Star Designer sounded sincere enough. She presented herself with a gentle countenance, appearing in the form of a brunette middle-aged woman that could easily look like someone's mother.

However, when Ves stared a little closer, he was able to glimpse the real Limitless Provider behind her human shell.

Every Star Designer had practically evolved into an energy-based life form, and the Limitless Provider seemed to embrace this transformation more than others!

The woman held an immense amount of energy, more than Ves could possibly estimate. Not only that, but she was probably capable of absorbing a huge amount of energy from the environment, which definitely included E energy!

Though Ves did not know how exactly the Limitless Provider benefited from all of this, she was most certainly putting on an act!

Of course, every Star Designer did so to varying degrees. They had evolved so much that they needed to put conscious effort into retaining their humanity.

Ves made a short bow in front of the old and powerful woman. "I am glad you appreciate my innovations. I am a part of red humanity as well, so I am always happy to make our race stronger. We all need to work together in order to fend off the native aliens."

"With enough contributions, we can do more than repel the alien incursions." The Limitless Provider spoke with a firmer voice. "As long as we develop fast enough, we can take the fight to our enemies and inflict defeats that will force them to give up their territories! Once the Deep Strike Plan truly begins, we will control the rhythm of the Red War, enabling us to erode the grip that the Red Cabal holds onto the new frontier. Step by step, we shall reduce our weaknesses and expand our warmaking potential with the spoils delivered by our victory!"

The Star Designer sounded unreasonably confident about red humanity's ability to regain the upper hand!

Ves did not exactly know why. Was this because the Limitless Provider possessed inside knowledge that made her a lot more optimistic about red humanity's chances, or was it because she was just as overconfident as every other Expansionist?

"Forgive me for asking, but for what purpose have you approached me? As much as I wish to make more contributions, I do not have any inventions that I can pull from my hat."

The Limitless Provider smiled at Ves in a manner that hinted at her disbelief.

"There is an opportunity for further cooperation in the future. It is better if we make our acquaintance with each other in advance." The Star Designer mysteriously said. "The impending native alien offensive along with several other future developments may alter the conditions of our plan. We must allow it to unfold before we can discuss specifics. When the right time comes, the rise of red humanity in the new frontier shall truly commence."

That certainly sounded vague. Ves had very little idea what the Limitless Provider had in mind. The lack of information made it useless to speculate about the intentions of the Expansionist Faction.

All that mattered was that the most powerful faction of the Red Association took the initiative to express goodwill towards Ves. The fact that they thought he was worth cooperating with was a positive sign that he was steadily moving up in society.

He needed this. The more powerful groups he cooperated with, the less isolated he became.

"I look forward to hearing your proposal, Your Excellency."

Ves had met enough Star Designers to get rid of the instinctive awe that any lesser mech designer held towards the apex members of their profession.

So long as the Star Designers did not talk about their works, they sounded remarkably human to Ves.

After a minute of polite chatting, the Limitless Provider said goodbye and disappeared, but not before making a meaningful nod towards the Evolution Witch.

Just like in the previous session, the very real form of the Evolution Witch lingered in the meeting chamber so that she could speak with Ves in private.

Once no one else showed any intention of approaching Ves, the god pilot strengthened her God Kingdom and formed an almost completely isolated zone around herself.

It became more difficult for the Hyper Chamber underneath Diandi Base to maintain a stable connection with the distant site.

"Professor Larkinson. As the offspring of my collaborator and a man who possesses greater insights into cultivation than most people in the Red Ocean, you have earned the right to receive additional information. Let me remind you that what I am about to share must not be divulged to anyone. This includes your design spirits, including that Golden Cat that is trying in vain to keep an eye on your person."

Ves tried his best to maintain a neutral expression. He already felt that the Evolution Witch's God Kingdom had crossed boundaries and made sure to temporarily block his permanent connection with Goldie.

Curiously enough, the god pilot was not able to cut him off from Vulcan and Veronica. That made sense as the latter two were intrinsically extensions of himself.

"I promise that I will not share any secrets you have decided to pass on to me." He said with as much sincerity as he could muster.

That seemed to satisfy Lucie.

"As you have most certainly deduced, I have held extensive discussions on the merits of demonic cultivation with your mother. She has proven to be quite persuasive, and I have come to agree with her stance that most forms of power are neither inherently good or bad. It is what we do with power and who we affect with our actions that determines whether we are doing what is right."

"Uhm, that sounds interesting and all, but can you get to the point, Your Holiness?"

"You brat." The Evolution Witch playfully scoffed. "Very well. I shall be direct. There is a debate between Star Designers on whether aspects of demonic cultivation should be incorporated into the Red Kingdom. Your mother has been helpful enough to formulate several cultivation models that I have relayed to the Star Designers to support this argument. If a majority of Star Designers agree, then mech pilots of almost every rank will experience faster growth than before as long as they are engaged in lethal combat against alien foes."

"What?!"

Ves never expected that such a development had occurred!

This was too fast and radical!

The Kingdom of Mechs and the Red Kingdom formed the foundation of the mech community in two different galaxies.

They were extremely important, which meant that the Star Designers who held authority over them could never afford to make any mistakes.

Even if it was a good idea to apply a change to an invisible kingdom, Ves thought it should have taken a lot longer to test and verify whether the proposal was capable of producing the desired results!

The Evolution Witch recognized his confusion and offered an explanation.

"The Kingdom of Mechs of original humanity has rarely changed over the generations due to several reasons. Humanity in the Milky Way occupies a dominant position, so there is no urgent

need for change. There are also many more Star Designers present in the old galaxy, which makes it much harder to gain the support of a broad majority. Neither of these factors apply to the Red Kingdom. We are urgently in need of change, and there are not as many Star Designers that we must convince in order to enact a promising proposal."

That made sense. Ves needed to stop thinking that all of the rules from the old galaxy automatically applied to the new frontier.

Ves grew more apprehensive as a result. Demonic cultivation had a very bad reputation. The antics of the Five Scrolls Compact alone provided abundant examples of cultivators growing mad with power and wantonly slaughtering lots of innocent civilians!

Turning this dangerous force into a core part of the mech piloting profession was incredibly reckless!

"Trust in us, boy. The Star Designers will not allow mech pilots to become corrupted. Even if they agree to implement this proposal, it will only be phased in on a gradual basis. The effects will not be strong from the beginning. Perhaps certain mech pilots will experience greater gains from killing enemies than others for the purpose of observation. As long as the mech pilots in question do not lose control, the Red Kingdom will gradually increase the effect of demonic cultivation on every mech pilot. Those who risk their lives to defend our civilization will receive much more direct feedback than in the past.

"Why is it necessary to resort to this measure?" Ves questioned. "One of the most admirable aspects of mech pilots is that most of them are honorable and upright. Implementing this change may compromise them. Even high-ranking mech pilots may become seduced by the power granted through unbridled slaughter. As strong-willed as they may be, I am not willing to bet that each of them will be able to maintain their cool."

The Evolution Witch smirked. "That is not necessarily a problem as long as the mech pilots remember that they must harvest alien lives in order to obtain greater strength. The Star Designers will try to deactivate this reward mechanism whenever mech pilots kill other humans. This will make the differences more obvious and incentivize more soldiers to participate in the New Elites Program."

"I see. It sounds like you guys already know what to do. Why tell me? Is there a way I can help?"

"You can. You are correct in your concerns that rapid growth through predation will generate negative side effects among mech pilots. This is an unavoidable consequence, and one we intend to monitor carefully. It does not hinder us from changing the Red Kingdom. Only by helping it adapt to our current circumstances will we be able to gain the strength we need to fight against our true enemies. We can no longer wait for multiple generations for expert pilots and ace pilots to gradually raise their resonance strengths and reach their breakthrough thresholds."

It sounded as if even the mechers had become dissatisfied at the relatively slow growth rates of high-ranking mech pilots.

This sounded like a repeat of an earlier policy decision. The mech community became willing to sacrifice stability in exchange for power. So long as ace pilots and potentially god pilots began to pop up like mushrooms in the coming 5 decades, who cared if a handful of them were not quite right in the head?

Sanity was overrated!

Chapter 6049 Her Golden Age

Ves was shocked by how quickly and decisively the Evolution Witch proposed to change the Red Kingdom.

Even though she made it sound as if the god pilots and Star Designers still needed to debate on this subject, the fact that the Evolution Witch felt confident enough to present this idea signaled that it was likely to pass!

The logic behind it was sound and the need was great. There was no time for red humanity to enact gradual changes that unfolded over multiple generations.

Now that the Red Two obtained sufficient proof that an alien God King was on his way to subjugate the Red Kingdom, the pace of technological and sociological changes had to be accelerated.

This was no time for reluctance! The only way for red humanity to obtain a glimmer of hope to survive by the end of the first century of the Age of Dawn was to act decisively and boldly pursue greater power!

When Ves looked at the projected form of the Evolution Witch, he could feel that her God Kingdom became more and more active.

The start of the Age of Dawn was her golden age!

Now that red humanity had fallen into a similar struggle for survival that had beset the Evolution Witch in prior life as a mortal, the god pilot relished the opportunity to stimulate the evolution of her entire race!

The Evolution Witch never gave up a struggle for survival. She amazingly managed to defeat her congenital ailments by relentlessly pushing herself to improve and break past her limits.

Now, she had an opportunity to do the same for many other humans, thereby replicating her miracle on a much wider scale than before!

As an ostensible goddess that oversaw the power of evolution, facilitating the growth of red humanity was definitely beneficial to her own progression!

Ves suddenly figured out the god pilot's game. The Evolution Witch not only sought to advance her progression by assimilating other powerful organisms.

The Evolution Witch also aimed to take charge of the evolution of the human race. This was why she actively took over the Transhumanist Faction in the Red Ocean.

If this was the case, then the Evolution Witch definitely had the potential to become the most successful god pilot in this era.

By becoming involved in efforts to strengthen humans year after year, she stood to earn a lot of feedback, allowing her to grow stronger through conceptual means!

This was a very sophisticated form of deity cultivation. People did not even have to believe in the Evolution Witch to boost her growth. They merely had to put effort into promoting their own evolution in order to match her domain!

If this was the case, then the Evolution Witch definitely had the potential to become the most successful god pilot in this era.

It made a lot more sense why she had a vested interest in changing the Red Kingdom.

Speeding up the growth and breakthrough of mech pilots benefited her so much that she was more than willing to disregard the negative impact of her decisions!

What did it matter if mech pilots became distorted or corrupted by the hidden forces that automatically sped up their growth?

So long as the Evolution Witch was able to advance to a god king pilot before the Subjugation King arrived in the Red Ocean, almost everything was permissible!

"I have a question, Your Holiness."

"Ask."

"Earlier, you stated that it was important to make cultivation and its consequences transparent, and to avoid any instances of causing deliberate harm to people. Won't the changes to the Red Kingdom violate these principles? How can you reconcile the act of experimenting on mech pilots with the rules set by your own council?"

The Evolution Witch did not show any sign of guilt despite receiving a direct accusation.

"The strategic value of the Red Kingdom is immeasurable. It is not a subject that should be divulged to the general public at all. Every god pilot and Star Designer agrees that its safety and secrecy supersedes all other priorities. As much as we value transparency, that does not mean that every secret is detrimental to society. We would also like to protect people from unreasonable sources of harm, but if protecting them too much leads to a deterioration of humanity's collective strength, then we will ultimately cause more harm in the long run."

Ves wanted to snort. "That sounds like a bunch of copouts. I used to think that god pilots like you are the most principled humans in existence. It turns out that even you guys have to resort to flimsy excuses and cheap rationalizations.

Despite his provocative words, the female god pilot did not grow angry at Ves. She was far too strong-willed to lose control over herself. She also felt it was not worthwhile to allow him to rile her up. This was hardly the first time she heard this accusation.

"Every rule must be tempered by the flawed reality we live in. Each of us wish that we can dispense with compromises, but we are not yet powerful enough to mold reality to our will. That is a sign that we must still pursue greater power before we can fulfill all of our ideals. When I evolve into a god king pilot, I may be able to reform our society so that we no longer have to be as secretive as before, but that will have to wait."

Seeing that the Evolution Witch and likely many other tier 1 galactic citizens had few qualms about conducting secret experiments on mech pilots on an unprecedented scale, Ves dropped this line of argument.

There was no way he could sway the mind of a god pilot, especially when it was related to her domain.

Besides, Ves did not actually disagree with her proposal. It was actually a brilliant idea to empower mech pilots by allowing them to absorb a bit of strength from each alien life they harvested.

The Red Kingdom directly benefited the Larkinson Army. Many of his clansmen would be able to grow faster merely by continuing to fight against the aliens. His expert pilots and ace pilots would be able to grow their resonance strength a lot faster.

It would be as if everyone of them ingested free vials of general purpose cultivation elixirs every one in a while!

Red humanity as a whole also stood to make huge gains. Expert pilots would reach the threshold of ace pilot candidate a lot faster than before, allowing them to waste less time so long as they actively took part in the Red War.

The benefits to ace pilots were even greater as they could reduce the time it took to reach their peak by multiple decades!

One of the overarching goals of the Evolution Witch's secret policy change was to massively increase the pool of peak ace pilots.

The more ace pilots arrived at the junction where they had to complete one more transformation in order to become a god pilot, the greater the rate of ultimate breakthroughs in the coming years!

Ves and many humans were more than happy to welcome the breakthrough of all god pilots no matter their origin!

It did not matter to Ves whether they were mechers, Terrans, Rubarthans or possessed a more obscure origin!

So long as they weren't hostile towards red humanity, the arrival of any god pilot boosted the survival chances of red humanity.

"The upcoming offensive shall serve as an excellent crucible for our linefighters. If there is any time to test whether the demonic cultivation methods proposed by your mother can benefit our race." The Evolution Witch crowed. "In order to prevent too many accidents from occurring, the Red Kingdom should not make any drastic changes at first. However, as long as many alien fleets continue to invade human space at a fast pace, the linefighters will be able to harvest more alien lives than they have done in the previous months and years. The quantity of deaths on every battlefield will enable the deadliest and most effective mech pilots to benefit massively."

Ves almost felt horrified by how giddy the Evolution Witch sounded about the upcoming offensive.

Instead of treating it as a major threat to red humanity, the god pilot instead regarded it was a catalyst for human evolution!

Only when the Red War's intensity increased would human soldiers truly experience the pressure of needing to overcome their inherent weaknesses and limitations.

If the Evolution Witch's proposal actually started to take effect, then the Red War provided even greater benefits than before!

"You... you sound as if you are treating the lives of all of those alien soldiers as resources. The more aliens invade human space, the more human mech pilots are able to absorb power from their defeated foes."

The Evolution Witch did not deny this calculus. "This is war. We can either devour the enemy, or allow the enemy to devour us. There is no middle ground. As the side that is most lacking in resources, we cannot afford to be picky. Your mother told me that absorbing the souls of defeating enemies is one of the natural tonics for growth, and there are other energies that can enhance one's strength. Granted, the tonics are inconsistent and polluted, but mech pilots can rely on their willpower to resist the negative impact of these processes."

If that was true, then mech pilots may be a lot more suitable for demonic cultivation than other people.

Ves did not completely buy into this story, though. It all sounded a bit too perfect and logical.

"Didn't someone mention earlier about how if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes into you? Even if many mech pilots are able to resist the erosion of absorbing energies from alien corpses by leveraging their willpower, their psychologies are bound to change for the worse, especially if they are smart enough to guess what has changed. What if these changes ultimately produce a lot of distorted and power hungry mech pilots?"

"The Red Association will not tolerate rogue mech pilots regardless of their rank. You can trust us on that. We will not tolerate any mech pilot from besmirching the reputation of this protected profession. We shall especially crack down on expert pilots and ace pilots that have "

Why would the mechers be so proactive in hunting down rogue high-ranking mech pilots? Shouldn't they—

Oh.

"Everyone is a potential resource." Ves slowly spoke. "If you are willing to treat hostile aliens as potential resource packages, then it is not that big of a jump to treat hostile humans in a similar manner."

The Evolution Witch's God Kingdom churned for a moment. She directed a much more piercing gaze at Ves for a few seconds.

It felt as if the god pilot figuratively stabbed his head with a sharp blade!

"You know much."

Ves dared to snort. "I guess I do. I find it rather funny that you talk a big game about respecting the sanctity of human life, but as soon as there is an opportunity to harvest life-prolonging treatment serum juice from the brains of expert pilots and ace pilots, you guys pounce on it like ravenous beasts."

The Evolution Witch did not like to hear that at all, but her God Kingdom only became a little bit more oppressive.

"We are at war. Every human is either with us or against us. Our race cannot unlock its greater potential if we are excessively consumed by internal conflict and distractions. We can be lenient and tolerant to individuals who are earnest and sincere about defending our civilization. We cannot extend the same treatment to parasites and traitors. If they are to be eliminated, then we must take back all of their wealth, power and other sources of strength. To allow all of that to go to waste is an unaffordable mistake during these trying times. There are many elder Master Mech Designers and other leaders in their own scientific fields that are nearing the limits of their lifespan. They can

make many more high-level contributions to society if their lifespans are extended by a century or more."

As far as Divine Lucie Miyazaki was concerned, the worth of every human life was variable.

There were those who refused to contribute as much as others. From her perspective, it made sense to sacrifice those whose value was not as great to further the growth and longevity of those who contributed much more to society!

It was a profoundly cruel and heartless philosophy that had the potential to spur a lot of progress, but at a harsh cost!

The Evolution Witch would have never gotten away with such an inhuman stance during the Age of Mechs, but the story was different nowadays.

The Age of Dawn was the Evolution Witch's golden age.

Chapter 6050 We All Have Our Roles To Play

The value of a geezer who was 300, 400 or 500 years old was always greater than a person who was just 100 years old or less!

If the former was a mech designer or scientist, then he must have mastered an immense amount of advanced knowledge. Each year they lived, they could produce all kinds of amazingly useful contributions to society, from researching new applications of hyper materials to increasing the effectiveness of many applications of phasewater technology by 5 percent!

The productivity of these old fellows who had managed to earn a lot of merits to prolong their lives by several centuries was insane. They were living treasures of red humanity and an important part of the core foundation of their race.

From a purely utilitarian perspective, it made a lot of sense to kill a bunch of disobedient expert pilots and ace pilots to prolong their lives!

Ves widened his eyes as he suddenly understood the greater calculus behind the Evolution Witch's scheme.

If the supply of high-grade life-prolonging treatment serum in the Red Ocean got cut off due to the Great Severing, then the mechers urgently needed to produce their own supply somehow.

By promoting demonic cultivation so that even mech pilots benefited from the rapid growth they provided, a lot more expert pilots and ace pilots were expected to emerge in the future!

Due to the sequelae of these dangerous methods, many of these new heroes were bound to turn into bad apples. They would eventually be hunted down by the Red Association's Compliance Department and get processed into a bunch of high-level resources.

The end result was a net positive benefit to human civilization as a lot more high-grade life-prolonging treatment serum became available again!

While Ves rapidly pieced the conspiracy together, the human visage of the Evolution Witch kept smiling in a manner that made her appear as a man-eating monster.

When Ves cautiously directed his attention at the god pilot, he couldn't help but wonder...

Had she ever fueled her growth by preying on fellow humans?

Even though the notion was highly inappropriate, Ves couldn't help but think about the worst outcomes.

He couldn't help it! His paranoid mind was working against him! This was one of the worst times for him to indulge in conspiracy theories, especially in front of a god pilot who had unambiguously demonstrated her ability to read his thoughts in the past!

The Evolution Witch only looked more and more amused at Ves' increasing distress. This entire farce seemed like an amusing game to the powerful god pilot.

It was no wonder Lucie got along so well with Cynthia!

They both liked to tease and torment him as if he was a naive little boy!

Ves scowled. He was still too weak to earn the respect of these powerful True Gods. Only when became one himself would he finally be able to interact with them on more equal grounds!

"You know far too much for a Senior Mech Designer, but considering your galactic citizenship and your honorary membership of the Red Association, I can issue the necessary permissions for you so that others cannot use this as an angle of attack."

"Thank you." Ves responded with relief in his tone. "I'm not sure if I need it, but it is better to have it just in case."

"It goes without saying that you must continue to maintain your discretion on these matters. Our society is not as pure and clean as we wish it to be, but there is no better alternative available to us. We must hide certain truths from the general public because disclosing them will make us weaker. This is intolerable for us. Every major power that is aware of the related secrets agrees with this stance. We represent the collective will of our civilization."

There was no way Ves could hide the fact that he was skeptical towards this claim. All of this sounded like the same kind of elitism that afflicted the Big Two and the first-rate superstates for multiple centuries.

Why did they get to decide what was acceptable and what was taboo?

Ves felt an urge to be more proactive in making sure that the Red Collective followed a different trajectory from the Red Association and the Red Fleet. He couldn't stand this kind of hypocrisy!

The Evolution Witch silently shook his head as she clearly read Ves' thoughts.

There was no need for them to argue any further on this contentious issue.

Before Ves exited the meeting, the god pilot raised one more subject.

"Once the aliens launch their long-awaited offensive, pay attention to second-raters and third-raters. We certainly will. Their performance is important to the defense of our territories. If they begin to falter against the might of the invading aliens, then it will become harder for us to preserve our defensive bands. We cannot allow the middle and lower zones to become the weak points that enable the aliens to overrun all 5 defensive bands."

Ves frowned. "There is only so much they can do. It helps that you guys have built fortifications in their strategic star systems, but the RA and RF are ultimately outsiders in those places. They have much less emotional attachment to the locations they are ordered to protect. Only local citizens who have a vested interest in defending their territories will be more inclined to fight as if their lives and

freedom depend on it. As for the soldiers hailing from the Red Two, I bet they will withdraw as soon as they begin to incur more serious losses. Their greatest priority is not to hold the aliens back, but to preserve their strength so that they can fight another day."

It would be detrimental for the mechers and the fleeters to lose too many combat assets during this stage of the Red War.

The Red Two maintained a firm grip on red humanity due to their overwhelming might. Their god pilots and dreadnoughts exerted a lot of suppression, but their real foundation of power was their abundant amount of mechs, warships and defensive installations.

Only by retaining a large amount of combat capable units were they able to exert firm control over human-occupied space!

The Evolution Witch did not bother to deny this calculus.

"We all have a role to play. For now, one of our priorities is to comprehensively increase the combat power of the lesser states. I expect you to make a contribution by developing Carmine mechs in the near future. Once they are announced, much attention will be drawn towards their ability to allow norms to interface with mechs. However, the more immediate effect is to effectively raise the control of mech pilots with their Carmine mechs. This is much more important, so you should prioritize the needs of existing pilots first."

"Understood. I haven't started yet, but I will do so in the near future. I guess you want me to focus on empowering the mech pilots at the bottom by supplying them with cheap but fairly effective machines, correct?"

"Our liaison will convey our specific needs to you when the time is right. Unlocking the potential of third-raters is one of the necessary conditions to win the war in the long-term. You have gained a good understanding of the first-class mech community. What do you think is our greatest fault?"

"There is too much of an obsession with pursuing quality over quantity." Ves immediately shared his opinion on this matter. "You first-raters invest an unreasonably high amount of money and resources to design and produce mechs that can only be piloted by a miniscule proportion of your manpower pools. There are so many more first-class mechs and first-class mech pilots that can contribute almost just as well to the war effort, but none of you ever gives them the respect and recognition they deserve."

The Evolution Witch was well aware of these flaws.

"I personally agree with you that the primacy of first-class multipurpose mechs is flawed and needs to be addressed. It is the product of a past era when the wars in the old galaxy have turned into limited show matches and brief raids into enemy territories. They still have a role to play in the current age."

"I can understand the appeal of first-class multipurpose mechs, but why must you force every first-class mech pilot to fit into the same mold? What is wrong with fielding a bit more specialized mechs? They are cheaper and impose less demands on the pilot. Sure, they are more limited as well, but it is more important to increase your numbers since attrition is a major concern in the Red War."

"If a change is necessary, it will be considered sooner or later. The upcoming enemy offensive shall serve as an important test of our war readiness. Are we truly equipped to fight a long and brutal war

against the races that holds most of the Red Ocean? Can the quality of our soldiers and war machines compensate for the vastly greater quantity of enemies that are about to assail our border zones? All will be revealed in the coming years. There are many stubborn old fools who cling to old theories and assumptions despite the radical change in circumstances. Only hard proof of their failures can reduce their credibility and make room for new initiatives and paradigms."

That sounded important to Ves as well, as he was one of the many mech designers who enabled some of these new initiatives and paradigms.

This was also an important reason why the Evolution Witch spared a small part of her incredible valuable time to speak with Ves.

Their cooperation was bound to increase in the future. Both of them needed to depend on each other in order to advance their respective interests. It made sense to deepen their friendships.

Ves should have felt grateful for this. He already managed to befriend the Destroyer of Worlds. Having the backing of the Evolution Witch added a second powerful protector to his camp, thereby deterring his enemies even further.

However, Ves did not entirely feel comfortable to associate himself with the leader of the Transhumanist Faction.

The more time he spent with her, the more he became jaded by how far she was willing to go to promote her evolution and the evolution of red humanity.

Divine Lucie Miyazaki undoubtedly became convinced that her purpose was utterly correct. She possessed such strong conviction that every obstacle in her way had to be removed, with violence if need be. Every god pilot was a natural tyrant. It was no wonder that people were reluctant to put them in charge.

Alas, the current circumstances left people with little choice. Red humanity was too divided for its own good. Everyone pursued their own agendas. God pilots were not much different in this regard, but at least they could be trusted to fulfill their original responsibilities, which made them the best out of a collection of suboptimal choices.

"There will be a lot of successes and failures in the coming years." Ves concluded. "I just hope that the failures won't be great enough to put us too far behind. The native aliens are able to mobilize so many fleets that they won't hesitate to expand any breach. Any single collapse at the frontlines can lead to a domino effect that will make our downfall inevitable."

The Evolution Witch did not look concerned at all. She chuckled as she maintained an optimistic perspective towards the future.

"That is not necessarily the case. The Red Cabal has been holding back, and so have we. You do not know the depth of measures that we can take in order to tip the balance of the war. Our race did not rise up to become the overlord of the Milky Way Galaxy by playing according to the rules. You have yet to truly witness the superweapons developed by Star Designers. If the Common Fleet Alliance is able to design and construct dreadnoughts by relying on mortal scientists and engineers, what do you think the top of your profession can produce if all they have in mind is creating the most powerful killing machines?"

Well, if god mechs were an accurate indication of their capabilities, then they could definitely produce a lot of unimaginably powerful superweapons!