

Chapter 346: Good News, All of It

A bit of unknown technology, a mass of a Blank blood embedded deep in a chip, a handful of loyal personalities—and you can create an existence walking right along the edge of the rules.

He knew exactly what he was doing. So, when creating this construct, he also imposed strict limitations upon it.

First was the inseparable flesh-and-blood of the Blank, which would limit the system's unchecked growth—after all, no matter how efficient data may be, it will always be constrained by its hardware.

Second, Hades set an *update* rule for this system. The Lord of the Underworld personally designed a data-collection box forged from blackstone and named it the Black Casket.

The blackstone material came from what lies buried beneath the Twenty-One Cathedral.

Salem would select the most outstanding Magos from various fields. After undergoing loyalty verification, each chosen Magos would have a Black Casket implanted into them.

But the selection did not end there.

Only when the Magos sacrificed themselves for humanity and was verified by multiple parties as having a stable and pure personality could they be considered truly chosen.

The Black Casket would then be placed inside the Twenty-One Cathedral for a whole year, followed by another assessment of personality stability.

Only after both stability and loyalty were confirmed would that personality be integrated into the Nirvana System.

For the sake of updates and adaptation to the times, newly integrated personalities would hold one-third of the system's dominance, ensuring continued stability.

Integration was not allowed at any time—it had to wait until the deadline set by him was reached. For that purpose, Hades designed two interwoven hourglasses; only when the sand fully ran out could the system be updated.

The unstable timing of these hourglasses depended on a complex computational equation—one Hades believed would not be deciphered anytime soon.

If the update was not performed on time, the Nirvana System would automatically self-destruct.

Updates ensured the Nirvana System would remain closely aligned with the faction it served, without suddenly becoming extreme.

At the same time, the Nirvana System was not directly connected to the armory. Hades provided the Magos with a table of iterative cipher codes; the Magos needed to manually build the corresponding signal converters for each era.

In simple terms, the Nirvana System was like a dual-pronged plug, but the weapons platform used a three-pronged socket. The Magos had to physically create a converter to bridge the two.

If the system ever went berserk... the Magos could simply unplug it—or wait for the docking cipher to iterate to a new generation, rendering the existing converter useless.

And if the Nirvana System ever attempted to calculate the docking cipher on its own, the destruction protocol left by Hades would activate immediately.

Hades considered that the current capacity of the Nirvana System was still too small; twenty-two personalities could not even bear the planning computations for a single planet. This was merely an initial experiment... People would have plenty of time to observe, test, or destroy it.

When the Emperor's solution arrived, Hades would reassess whether it was feasible.

But in truth, Hades built the Nirvana System also with a pessimistic future in mind—

If he truly became trapped in the Great Rift, lacking manpower and resources, a high-computational system would be essential. Although everything *seemed* to be improving, Hades could clearly see the psykers in their group dying—this was not good, for most of them were Navigators.

He had to find another path.

But the good news was... perhaps on the day Hades truly felt he was going to become a local tyrant ruling the Great Rift for life, the one he constantly thought about—Charon—finally returned.

Good news: Malcador wasn't with him. Even better news—

A massive shadow slowly enveloped the sky, and Hades stared upward, mouth agape in disbelief.

A vessel slightly slimmer than the Gloriana-class Battleship floated silently above the firmament, its massive adamantium ram glinting with a subdued, muted sheen, the whole ship swallowed in darkness.

Several tall, sharp blackstone spires arched upward from the ship. Aside from the steel pipes that had to remain exposed for structural reasons—gleaming in a cold silver-gray—everything else on the main hull was clad in black.

At the prow, jagged High Gothic letters flashed—shrill and flamboyant:

“My friend, death is not a bad thing.”

Beneath it was the ship's name: Cocytus.

Cocytus, the River of Lamentation—its waters freezing to the bone, where the tears of sinners fall and sink into the underworld, leaving only a river of sorrow to flow on.

Standing beside Hades, Angron burst out laughing and slapped his pauldron.

“Brother, this is way too dark—guess you like to keep things understated?”

But after they boarded the ship for a tour, Angron silently took back his comment.

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Expressionless, Hades contemplated welding himself into the floor and never coming out again.

Compared to the Faos and Salem Magos restrained style, the Magos of Rust were clearly far more... theatrical.

Because those Magos had actually built a *river* inside a ship named after one.

Hades' eyes were void of light. He stared at the quietly flowing stream at his feet, extremely certain that the liquid moving through it was absolutely not water, but... blood.

The river ran through the entire length of the ship. Following it, they passed a long corridor lined with adamantium keelwork, and then reached the main hall, where Charon and Sister Nera were already waiting for them.

Hades wanted to cover his face, but held himself back.

A wide set of steps, taking up a full third of the hall, rose tier upon tier. On both sides, riverwater flowed downward; in the center lay a scarlet velvet carpet. At the very top sat the throne belonging solely to the Lord of the Underworld.

The throne was carved from stark geometric shapes, symmetrical and austere. Deep green and blood-red gems were inlaid sparsely from the

base upward, growing fewer and fewer until pure black stone dominated the structure.

Behind the throne, a mosaic of countless gemstones formed a mural: a lone figure standing amid strange, chaotic waves, scythe held high. Calm, unbroken darkness opened at his feet, cutting the turbulent waters cleanly in two.

The waves were cast entirely from gemstones—dazzling, almost dizzying—while the darkness was filled wholly with ancient, unadorned blackstone.

Three statues of Cerberus flanked the throne, one standing, one lying down, one sitting. Each bore a different expression, their ruby eyes glinting with a chilling sharpness.

The rest of the hall was likewise etched with ornate and extravagant murals.

The entire design imitated the opulence of Martian sanctums and similar places—lush, grand, and excessive.

Hades felt like he might faint. He could sense Angron behind him, radiating a “I don’t even know what to say” look.

What made it worse was that Charon and Sister Nera were standing on either side of the steps... leaving a perfectly open path for Hades to ascend.

Their eyes clearly signaled that Hades should go up so they could discuss business.

Hades briefly pictured the scene. He could already feel the suffocating embarrassment.

No. Absolutely not. Hades would *never* sit on that thing.

He hated the feeling of looking down on people from above. It reminded him of certain emperors from feudal dynasties... or some arrogant, insufferable superior.

Hades swallowed hard.

“Charon, time is short. I want you to tell me the Emperor’s plan as soon as possible.”

After previous lessons, Charon no longer displayed unnecessary emotions. That was a good thing.

Hades watched as Charon approached him, hands slowly presenting a wooden box.

The box was carved with countless golden inscriptions, violent psychic energy rippling across its surface—it looked impossible to open. Hades extended his hand with practiced ease, releasing the Black Domain to devour the excess warp energy.

The lock clicked open.

Hades hesitated for a moment, briefly wondering whether the Emperor might try to *startle* him this time. In the end, he decided to open it.

Predictably, inside was a phalanx bone.

But... something was off. The finger bone was not placed in the center. Instead, it rested quietly near the upper middle of the box.

A strange sense of familiarity.

Silently, very silently, Hades lifted his hand as if trying to confirm which bone it was.

His hand hovered above the box, and he slowly made a *certain* familiar gesture—its position aligned perfectly. The moment he formed the gesture, golden light flared, tracing a simplified image of that very gesture across the box's bottom panel.

There's no doubt about it.

This time, the Emperor had mailed him the first phalanx of his right middle finger.

Behind Hades, Angron—who had witnessed the entire nouveau riche decorating style of the ship—finally couldn't hold back:

"Hades, what does that gesture mean? What is he trying to say?"

Hades didn't even turn around. He simply reached backward with precision, pressing down Angron's raised middle finger.

"It's a... gesture of approval and friendliness. But don't imitate it. No—don't do it, Angron. And don't ask me why. I'm begging you."

Thankfully, Angron was understanding enough. He neither did it nor asked again.

Which was infinitely better than the Emperor sending him a middle finger across interstellar distance.

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That day, perhaps the only thing that brought Hades any joy was what he found in the Magos' nouveau riche–styled bedroom they had decorated for him: a patch of familiar Macragge Blue.

A suggestion from Korklan—the Magos had risked much to secretly retrieve from the Death Guard's storage one of Hades' treasured possessions.

The Lord of Death had noticed the theft long ago, but Mortarion only did some mini celebration at the fact that The Endurance had lost that blue color.