

Mech 2101

Chapter 2101 The Calling of Brutus

Close to the frontier, a ship cut through the higher dimensions like a hot knife through butter.

The Serendipity might not be the largest starship, but she was certainly fast for her size and class!

For several weeks, the light frigate traversed through the domain of the Sentinel Kingdom and many other states along the way.

It didn't take long for the Hexer vessel to cross over into the territories ravaged by the sandmen.

During the height of the Sand War, thousands of sandman fleets assaulted human-occupied star systems like an inexorable tide. Each day, numerous star systems succumbed.

Nothing survived the sand storms.

Everything that humans built in orbit and on the surface of a planet disappeared in a matter of hours as the relentless sandmen engulfed everything.

Centuries of heritage disappeared. Not a single single artificial structure escaped the fate of becoming consumed.

What was worse was the people living and working at the settlements. The sandmen wiped them all out as if they were nothing but vermin dirtying up their new real estate!

The Sand War already harvested trillions of lives spanning over thousands of star systems!

On a galactic scale, this loss of life was negligible. Not even the local branch of the MTA exhibited any alarm at such a calamity!

In any case, the frontier states and frontier star sectors existed to serve as a buffer zone for human space. What did it matter if a couple of trillion people died? Human civilization was so vast that those devastated regions would quickly grow back to normal after a century of reconstruction!

Yet while the leaders at the top looked on without compassion, the people at the bottom suffered immensely from all of the death and destruction.

Countless refugees poured into other states. Even if they had been lucky enough to survive the devastation, they had lost everything they worked and lived for. With their state and home planet dead, they no longer had anything to lean upon in these difficult times.

Along with the trauma of losing everything they were familiar with, the survivors also had to process the immense amount of deaths of their fellow people.

Too many of them had lost friends, family and other kin to the sandmen. The aliens didn't even commit mass murder because they liked it. The barely-emotional beings just wiped everyone out because they were in the way!

Against such a cruel, heartless enemy, the anger that people held towards this alien race was immense!

Right now, other than her anguish, anger was the only emotion that Davia Stark possessed.

As the Serendipity flitted into the territory of the former Vindmar Republic, the ship passed through numerous star systems that Davia had once visited over her long years as a soldier and a mercenary.

She remembered the bustling trade of the Miamar System, the beautiful space monuments of the Desklar Prime System and the astounding military fortifications of the Ratarin System.

Now, nothing was left but dust and sand. The sandmen didn't even spare the ruins. The aliens consumed almost every single piece of metal and valuable material and used it to create more of their kind.

Her fists clenched as she witnessed the sight of the latest devastated star system in the hexagon-shaped observation room. The dome-like space provided her with a fantastic augmented view of space. Brilliant colors lit up from every direction as the windows automatically magnified and prettied up the sight of the distant stars.

Various projections provided her with a magnified view of various planets and other special features.

Ordinarily, such a sight would have delighted her. Yet now that she was surrounded by one sand-scoured planet after another, the sight only fueled her growing fury.

A hatch suddenly slid open. The uniformed shape of a Hexer mech pilot stepped into the room.

Davia faintly felt as if a blanket of protection covered her form. She barely took notice of it, too caught up in her depression and rage to acknowledge any other emotion!

When Brutus reached the broken expert pilot, he looked at her carefully.

"Is it too much?"

She shook her head. "I.. I needed to see this. I needed to.. see the graves of my fellow Vindmarkers."

"You're in a talkative mood today. That's good."

The two looked out into the vast and mysterious expanse of space.

"When you became an expert pilot, you kept it hidden, correct?" Brutus asked, though he already knew the answer. "You were never recognized, so you never received the guidance that every expert pilot received from the state and from the MTA."

"What does it matter?" She murmured. "I lost my strength."

"According to the MTA, every expert pilot is exceptional. Each of us not only possessed the potential to break through mortal limits, but actually succeeded in doing so. The strength we have gained is the reward we received for exceeding our humanity."

She remained silent and continued to stare out into empty space.

"I don't believe you are not an expert pilot anymore." Brutus continued. He was already used to her silence. "Those who have reached our height but become unable to pilot an expert mech are usually those who suffered permanent brain damage. Even though much of their strength is lost or sealed, they are still exceptional. You are still exceptional."

He crossed his arms behind his back and stared at the projections of the devastated star systems. "Unlike these injured veterans, you are different. The damage you suffered is all in the mind. This is rather difficult to heal, as the mind still works in mysterious ways even after thousands of years of scientific research. However, unless there is proof that I am wrong, I think that you can still be healed!"

"Don't waste your time on me." She slowly grimaced. "I'm a failure. I failed my state. I failed my comrades."

Instead of answering her directly, Brutus recited one of the messages he received when he advanced to expert pilots.

"Expert pilots like us are capable of inflicting an enormous amount of destruction. The power we wield and the abilities we are able to perform puts us on a pedestal. In addition, as a Hexer, I have always abided by the principle that we must do our best to maintain order. Foreigners such as the Larkinsons don't understand me. They think that boys like me must be collared and constrained by the women of our state."

"Aren't they right?"

The male expert pilot smiled. "No. We don't need to be chains, because we already know what is best. I may possess more power than the typical female Hexer, but that does not grant me the right to abuse it. Far from it. Both my home state and the MTA agree that power conveys responsibility. The stronger we are, the more we must take on responsibility."

Though Davia looked like she was tuning out his words, Brutus knew that she was still paying attention.

"What many foreigners fail to distinguish is that Hexers don't believe that might makes right. This is not how humanity rose from its barbaric origins. If we keep adhering to such primitive notions, we will continue to wallow in misery and chaos. This is why women such as you should be the leaders of human society. Women are wise and far-sighted. Only when women rule the galaxy will we usher in true peace!"

Davia couldn't help but scoff a bit. What did this have to do with her condition?

"You are stronger than me." Brutus stated as he turned to her. "Your weakness is only temporary. It pains me to see you imprisoned by your own darkness. I know you are better than this. Don't run away from your power. Embrace it. Don't let this setback believe you are weak."

"It's too difficult.."

"I am here for you." He said and reached out to hold her hand. "You are a noble woman and expert pilot. The galaxy needs people like you. Tragedies like this happen more often than you think. The frontier is never peaceful and plenty of alien races still threaten our fellow humans. Each of us bears the responsibility of defending human space when the aliens mobilize for war yet again."

Brutus stretched his arm towards a projection and magnified it until it took up their entire view. "Look at this planet. Billions once lived on it. Now, those Vindmarkers are gone."

The mention of such an immense loss of life pushed her into a spiral. Brutus squeezed her hand in order to prevent her from getting engulfed entirely!

"I did not pick out this planet to rub in your failure. In fact, in your position, there was hardly anything you could do. You weren't piloting an expert pilot. You were just piloting a mech for a mercenary corps. What kind of difference could you have made under those circumstances?"

"I could have done more." Davia spoke with regret. "I could have told the military I was an expert pilot. I could have fought alongside other defenders."

"That may be true. However, the past is the past. Don't let it drag you down and forget who you truly are. The sandmen crushed your comrades and almost ended your life. Don't let them succeed. Humanity needs those who are able and willing to serve a common cause. Even a single expert pilot like you can make a difference! The sandmen may have come and gone, but there are many other alien races who need to be guarded against. If worse comes to worst, then having one more expert pilot can save an entire planet like this from annihilation!"

Davia remained silent as usual. It seemed her talkative mood had passed.

"Your wounds aren't permanent. What is broken can be remade. The hardest part is that you have to rely on yourself to climb back up. There is no reason to think that you can't overcome this hurdle. You have already achieved the incredibly difficult feat of surpassing your mortal limits when you were just an ordinary human being. As long as rekindle your reason to fight, I am certain that you will regain your former glory!"

It was easy for him to spread his optimism.

It was a lot harder for Davia to buy it all. Throughout his entire speech, she remained as impassive as ever.

Restoring an expert pilot could not be done in a single day.

"We are about to reach the Varantyr System very soon." He reminded her. "I'm not sure about its current state, but be prepared to face a lot of scavengers. Those vermin are already picking at the bones of every fallen state. Vindmar might be better off due to its remoteness, but the greedy vultures won't ignore the riches that the Varantyr System still contains!"

Even though the sandmen swept up a lot of precious material, they didn't consume everything. The aliens weren't always thorough and sometimes overlooked hidden bunkers, underground complexes and very remote locations.

The sandmen also left ignored a lot of random objects and materials they believed to be of little value. This could range from remarkable exoplants to priceless artwork. As long as scavengers managed to dig up these miscellaneous bits and pieces, they could probably earn a fortune from them by selling them to collectors!

The mere thought of those surviving relics falling in the hands of greedy collectors sparked some anger in Davia. None of those people involved respected Vindmar's heritage! They only saw them as rare collectibles that mainly derived their value due to the fact that there was no more supply!

A small ripple emanated from her mind. A few broken gears had moved. It was a pity the movement didn't last long enough. Her broken will quickly settled down as her permanent depression rose up again.

Brutus nonetheless perceived something. He smiled. Any change was good in his opinion. Whether he was able to help Davia regain her old strength or not, he believed that any woman deserved a chance.

Because that was who he was. Women may be superior, but they weren't invincible.

Sometimes, they needed protection.

To be their shield was the greatest calling of his life.

Chapter 2102 Bring Home The Glory

Joshua Larkinson felt as if he was living in a dream.

Not only did he pilot one of the most powerful mechs designed by Ves Larkinson, he also became a part of the clan!

As one of the few adopted members who didn't possess a compound name, he had become one of the famous individuals of his 'kind'. Many people, particularly the younger ones, looked up to him as if he was a hero.

While Joshua didn't feel comfortable with all of the respect he received, he reluctantly accepted it. Even though he was very young, he always made sure to retain his humility.

No matter how many compliments he received, that was no reason to sit back and relax.

He wasn't even the strongest mech pilot in the Larkinson Clan. That honor was reserved for Jannzi and Tusa.

He smiled at the woman he dated. Both of them sat in a lounge room for mech pilots on standby.

He still couldn't believe he managed to gain Jannzi's attention!

The only problem was that trying to form a relationship with an expert candidate was anything but simple.

"Would you like to go out on a date?" He asked.

Jannzi frowned. "We don't have time for such frivolities. According to what I have heard, the clan patriarch soon intends to head into the Nyxian Gap for some reason or another. We need to increase our strength as much as possible when we still can. While there is nothing wrong with our individual combat skills, our teamwork and coordination can still

use a lot of work. My Shieldbearers still have a lot to go before they are ready to form a unified shield wall."

The Shieldbearer Unit was a new addition to the Avatars of Myth. Commander Melkor had transferred Jannzi and Tusa out of their old mech companies and put them in charge of their units centered around their strengths.

The goal was to form a cadre of elite Avatars that could not only support the efforts of the expert candidates, but also learn from them. Even if the cadre had no hope of advancing to expert pilot, at the very least they came closer than any other regular mech pilot!

Of course, it took a very long time to train these elites up to this point. Jannzi's burden increased considerably ever since she was put in charge of a squad of eager Shieldbearer mech pilots.

Joshua knew that. He wanted to take Jannzi out for a date for a very long time. So far, he didn't have much luck!

"You need to learn how to relax, Jannzi." He said. "Too much work and no play is no good. Even your fellow truebloods know that. I know you are.. frustrated.. by the fact that you haven't made any progress towards expert pilot. Isn't that proof that your current approach isn't working?"

"You.. have a point."

"Look. Our Larkinson Clan is anything but weak. We drill every day. What's the harm of taking the evening off? Our free time shouldn't always be spent on additional training."

His words caused Jannzi to contemplate them carefully. After a moment of consideration, she uttered her reply.

"No. Everything can wait. I have heard too many stories about the Nyxian Gap to neglect its danger."

Joshua wanted to palm his face!

Some days, he questioned why he decided to pursue a relationship with Jannzi. Though she was just an expert candidate, she already acquired some of the majesty and bearing of an expert pilot!

This had caused Joshua a lot of difficulties. Many times, he felt as if Jannzi was high above the clouds while he was still trudging through a pool of mud.

Rather than let Jannzi float beyond his grasp, Joshua wanted to match her height!

If she could become an expert candidate, so could he! As a much-lauded mech pilot in the Avatars of Myth, he refused to believe he didn't have what it took to become a demigod!

Once he advanced to expert candidate, Joshua would fully be able to treat Jannzi like an equal. When that happened, they wouldn't be so distant to each other anymore!

Ever since he joined the Avatars of Myth, Joshua had fulfilled all of the ambitions set by younger self.

He became a member of the Avatars.

He piloted nearly every LMC mech that had been released.

He received the privilege of piloting a masterwork mech.

He distinguished himself in battle.

Joshua found that it was hard for him to get fired up after he made all of those accomplishments. What was there to aim for? He was already a Larkinson. He already piloted a very great mech.

Yet once he recognized that he wouldn't be able to maintain Jannzi's interest if he remained a mortal, his drive to improve ignited once again!

He wanted to achieve a breakthrough! He wanted to advance to expert candidate!

"You're right." He spoke with a determined voice. "Training is important. We can't neglect its performance. I'll make sure to train as diligently as possible tonight!"

Elsewhere, another pair exhibited a lot more jubilation.

"Yes! We did it, Raella! We finally received our charter!"

Vincent Ricklin-Larkinson embraced his girlfriend in a hug and boldly kissed her. "It took some time, but those old fogeys finally did the right thing!"

"Hahaha!" The female Larkinson looked ecstatic! "Though I always wanted to become a mech athlete, it's not that bad to run our own competitive circuit!"

Fighting a war and becoming just another cog in the machine wasn't to her liking at all. She already had a taste of what that kind of life was like when the Bloodclaws were compelled to defend the Bentheim System against the sandmen.

The constant slog of battle and the depressing amount of casualties had left her with a life-long distaste for war. While she was still willing to participate in a battle when asked, she would never do so with a smile, unlike many other Larkinsons.

That said, anyone who called her a coward deserved to get punched in the face!

As the pair slowly wound down, they studied the documents they received that outlined what they were permitted to do and don't. They also skimmed through their budget and the support they were entitled to receive from the other divisions of the Larkinson Clan.

It wasn't much.

"Balls!" Vincent cursed. "Those old fogeys sure are stingy! What can we do with such a pathetic budget? I wanted to throw some Bright Warriors in the duelling arena!"

Raella angrily whacked him in the head. "I told you to stop dreaming! The LMC may be making a lot bank lately, but that doesn't give us the luxury to ruin Bright Warriors for fun! Besides, a duel between those mechs will be as boring as hell. Their defense is impenetrable but their offensive power is weak."

"It's just that it's going to be so disappointing to play around with cheap third-class mechs. There's hardly any way we can build any hype around a match between two different trash cans."

"We have to start somewhere, Vincent. I think this is a test from the Larkinson Assembly. As long as we can turn our dueling circuit into a success, the assemblymen will definitely see the value we provide! Only a formal competition involving real mechs can entertain the bored mech pilots and other personnel in our clan!"

As they studied the document even further, they quickly recognized another problem.

"They aren't providing us with a fighting venue." Raella frowned.

"Is that important, babe?"

"It is if we want to hold landbound duels! We can't assume that we will always have access to the dueling arenas of a planet like Cinach VI. Since our clan is nomadic, it's important that we have continuous access to the appropriate facilities!"

"How do we do that?"

Raella grinned. "Why, buy an arena ship of course! While they aren't very common, they exist. They look like regular transport or cargo ships from the outside, but their interior is pretty much hollowed out in order to provide as much space for an arena as possible!"

"That sounds... amazing! However, our budget..."

"I'll think of something." She said. "If nothing works, I'll barge into Ves' design lab and squeeze his neck until he coughs up enough money!"

"Um, he's well-guarded, you know."

"Ah. Yeah. I forgot about that." She grimaced. "He's not the old Ves anymore. Well, we're still friends. If her Hexer girlfriend can wrap him around her fingers, then so can I! Hehe. I may not have spent much time with Ves, but I know how to push his buttons."

"Blegh!" Vincent pretended to vomit!

Smack!

"I didn't mean it that way!" Raella insisted while placing her hands on her hips. "Let's leave the arena ship aside for the moment. If there's no progress on that front, we can still go through with holding duels in space."

There was no need to pay for real estate in space. There was too much emptiness to go around!

The only issue was that they still needed to anchor some fixtures in space. Otherwise, it would be too easy to inflict collateral damage on a nearby ship or mech!

After going over all of the boring documents, they finally got to the fun part.

"We get to name our own competition circuit!" Vincent happily noted before scratching his head. "Uhm, did we figure that out yet? What should we call it, babe?"

"Hmm.." Raella took this issue very seriously. "We need to set a name that will stick. Ten or twenty years from now, our Larkinson Clan will probably be a lot bigger. The name must still be worthy enough for our successful circuit!"

"How about the Fight Club?"

"Too generic! That's the stupidest name I've ever heard!" Raella crossed her arms and furrowed her brows. "Let me think. It has to sound classy. If you look at the names of the other mech games circuits, they always reference some sort of cup, award or region."

"How about.. The Larkinson Master Series!" Vincent suggested.

"Hmmm... it's not quite there yet. It's getting there, but I need a bit more grandeur."

"Oh, I got it!" Vincent exulted. "Let's call it the Larkinson Championship Series!"

Raella weighed the name. Though it didn't sound as exciting as she hoped, it exuded plenty of class. That was important if she wanted it to be taken seriously several decades from now.

She did not go through all of this trouble to quit after a few years. She was in it for the long run!

Since she wanted to build an entirely new institution based around mech competitions, she had to make sure it possessed a solid foundation. After the brief amount of time she spent with Ves, she knew the importance of coming up with a memorable name and a solid brand!

"Alright." She nodded. "The Larkinson Championship Series doesn't sound as bad as your other suggestions."

"Mark my words, Raella! The LCS will become the most prestigious and impressive circuit in the Larkinson Clan!"

That remained to be seen.

After they settled the name, they began to consider the hierarchy.

"It says here that there can only be a single director in charge." Vincent patted his chest. "I happen to know a thing or two about leading an organization!"

Raella ignored his boast and quickly filled in her own name as director! "Sorry, but this job is mine! The LCS is my brainchild!"

"I thought it was our brainchild!"

"You can be the vice-director."

"Second place is just the first loser!"

"Perhaps it's a better idea if you don't manage our circuit at all, Vincent."

"What?! You're kicking me out already? I haven't even showed off my awesome management skills!"

"It's either that or forfeit your chance of competing. We can't allow any LCS personnel to take part in the very competition we organize! That's just stupid!"

"Oh. You're right."

"So if you want to show off your manly charm on the arena, you better butt out of my business and do your own thing. If I were you, I would get in early and organize my own team."

"That's.. That's a brilliant idea, Raella!" He crowed, already becoming enthralled by his fantasies! "I can become the champion of the LCS! I will lift up trophy after trophy! Witness me, Raella. I'll bring home the glory as soon as I win the first finals!"

"Uh huh." Raella scoffed. "What will your team name be? Ricklin's Rollers?"

"Nah. That's already done and over with. Let me think..." Vincent tapped his finger against his chiseled chin. "Oh, I got it! TSV!"

"And that stands for..."

"Team Solo Vincent!"

"Are you sure about that? I don't see how the word 'team' fits in that combination."

"It's perfect, haha! It doesn't matter how many teammates I have. I'll be the one who will be carrying them all to victory! I can already imagine the chants from the crowd. TSV! TSV! TSV!"

Chapter 2103 Short-Term Benefits

"So you haven't found anything useful yet?" Ves skeptically asked as he scratched Lucky's head.

"I'm still in the process of grouping all of the individual substances inside the sample." Dr. Ranya told him as she peered at a microscopic view of the sample of life-prolonging treatment serum. "Besides, many of the organic substances I've catalogued are complete unknowns. I can't even begin to guess where they came from, let alone reproducing them. It doesn't help that you are only giving me a few hours a week of access."

"You still have other responsibilities, and it's not like you'll gain much more with additional time. I'm well aware that you spend a lot more time on hitting the books in order to gain the knowledge to decipher more about the serum."

Dr. Ranya sighed. While Ves wasn't an exobiologist, he was still a scientist of some sorts. He was well acquainted with her research cycle.

"The serum is one of the most wondrous products of high technology in human hands." She spoke. "My foundation is far too shallow to even scratch the surface of its profound nature. It will likely take centuries for me to decipher its basic working. Nonetheless, I will never let go of this opportunity! Access to such a high-grade serum is an extremely

precious opportunity that many of my fellow colleagues would kill to spend a few hours with! I'm confident I can achieve something remarkable in three, no two decades!"

Ves glowered at that. With such a long time-span, he could have hired much more competent exobiologists!

Someone as smart as Ranya didn't miss his response.

"Before you try and find someone more senior to take over this research project, you should keep in mind that there is so much to learn that every biotech expert has to start from scratch. The theories that you need to learn to unlock the secrets of serum are very esoteric and obscure. Much of what is available is scattered and fragmented. I have to piece together a lot of rules by combining scattered theories with my experimental observations. This is a life-long labor. Sure, someone better than me might be able to decipher the serum faster, but how old will they be? 100 years? 200 years?"

The implication was obvious. Ranya might not possess the learning efficiency of those at the upper end of a field, but they were at least several decades old. By the time they mastered the serum to a thorough degree, they might have already reached the end of their lives!

However, her argument possessed some very glaring holes.

"There are two ways to mitigate this shortcoming." He said and raised a finger. "First, research on life-prolonging treatment serum will presumably yield research results that will aid people in prolonging their lives. Even if that isn't the case, the value of an expert who studied the serum extensively is worth it for me to pay for a life extension!"

He raised another finger. "Second, even if prolonging the life of an old geezer isn't viable, I can always tell him to teach some apprentices to take over his mantle! Human civilization has always revolved around the accumulation and inheritance of knowledge. We stand on the shoulders of giants."

What a lofty argument! Ves mentally patted himself on the back for making use of these lines.

"I won't say that you're wrong, but.. do you really want to expose the existence of your serum further? Even if you have managed to guarantee their silence, there is always a way to crack someone open. Do you truly want to take that risk?"

Ugh. Ranya succinctly appealed to one of his fears. She was right. Every single person who knew about the serum increased the chance that it might get exposed.

Even the Terrans and Rubarthans wouldn't hesitate to dispatch forces to rob the serum from his hands! Its value was simply too great for someone like him to retain possession of such a hot good!

Though Ves truly wanted to obtain benefits faster, he feared the risk of exposure even more. This was why he had been very careful about exposing its existence to as few individuals as possible!

So far, only he, Lucky, Nitaa and Ranya knew about it. No one else. With all of the security precautions he took, Calabast was probably in the dark as well.

Perhaps the only other person who might know a thing or two about it was James, but his methods were simply too confounding.

Though Ves was highly alarmed at how the Living Prophet peered through some of his secrets, he was relieved that the Ylvainan was apparently on his side.

Since James claimed to be able to see the future, the smug bastard should be very well aware of the consequences of betraying him! While Ves hadn't been able to exact vengeance on anyone who wronged him, he would definitely not spare any effort, starting with Ylvaine's spiritual fragment!

After all, if Ves was capable of breathing life into spiritual entities, he could take it back as well!

As long as he possessed this leverage, he was confident he could keep James in check.

"You have made your point." Ves eventually spoke. "That said, my patience isn't endless. Even if you can't figure out anything fancy, I want to see at least one practical gain within the next few years."

"That.. is a steep challenge. If I drop almost everything and focus completely on short-term gains, I might be able to derive a useful application of my research. It would be helpful to determine direction to work towards. What are you looking for, exactly?"

He thought about that. "Since the serum is mainly about extending one's life, then try and find a way to do that. Your result doesn't have to be as effective as a low-grade serum. Even I know that is out of reach. However, if you can develop some sort of elixir that can extend a baseline human's life by thirty years, that is already incredibly helpful. As long as it is economic enough, we can supply it to every clansman, thereby boosting the strength of our clan by a considerable margin!"

Making people live longer meant that Ves would also be able to squeeze more work out of them! It took a lot of effort to hire and train the next generation of replacements. If the old fogeys of his clan could live a few more decades, then that meant that Ves would

get a lot more worth out of them! Of course, the premise for all of this was whether the elixir cost less than the value he gained from extending the life of a productive clansman.

As for trying to reverse-engineer serum in its entirety, Ves would be a fool to think it could be accomplished within a century. Even if he had become aware of its remarkable spiritual properties, the degree of spiritual engineering involved was way beyond his level of competence!

He was in the same boat as Ranya in that regard.

Unlike her, Ves couldn't afford to waste too much time on deciphering the workings of the serum.

However, he didn't need to understand how it worked in order to make use of it. After a long time of contemplation, he eventually made up his mind.

It was a waste to hoard such a potent good. Waiting until he became 300 years old in order to extend his life by another century was far too long.

He was only a tenth as old right now! It would take forever to get to the point where he would need to use it to extend his life, and by then he would definitely be able to earn it by himself!

It was this confidence in himself that allowed him to do something that was unthinkable any anyone else in his position.

He decided to use up the serum in other applications!

Though it was very easy to waste the potential of the serum, as long as Ves gained enough immediate benefits, then that was worth it! A smaller boost in the early days of his career was far more valuable than a larger boost in the later stages.

The sooner he advanced to Senior, the sooner he could enter the big leagues!

The faster his mech designs improved, the more money he would earn!

It was all about obtaining an early lead and snowballing it to a greater lead in the years to come. Ves was keenly aware that he was constantly racing against time. He didn't need to rely on his intuition to know that humanity's golden age would never last.

Even if a great threat didn't arrive within his lifetime, it was still very crucial to strengthen himself as much as possible in the early stages. If he was too weak by the time he arrived at the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy, then he would never be able to stick his head out in this wild and dangerous expanse!

As Ves finally took back the sample from Ranya, he left the Scarlet Rose's newly-built biolab and headed over to the vault. After going through a lot of security checks, he entered the secure compartment and inspected the new shipment of P-stones.

Unlike the ones he obtained before, the new ones didn't store any of his excess spiritual energy. They were empty batteries waiting to be filled up. With so many new P-stones, Ves could store years worth of his excess spiritual energy!

"I never did find the maximum capacity of a P-stone." He remarked.

He didn't know whether the P-stones all stored the same amount of spiritual energy. He had no clue if it depended on their individual material composition or their shapes.

In fact, up until now, he still hadn't created a measuring stick for spiritual energy!

All of these were basic scientific questions that Ves had neglected to address due to his lack of time. It was only now that he was waiting for the data of the prototype testing of his remaining project that he obtained some free time.

When it came to researching anything related to this field, Ves preferred to go his own way. Of course, the lack of access to his mother's heritage or any source of systematic knowledge also played into that. If his deadbeat mother actually bothered to pass on her teachings, he wouldn't be forced to fumble in the dark all the time!

"It's better that she didn't." He muttered under his breath. "I don't need her help! I can figure out my own path!"

Just like in the field of mech design, Ves was confident he could innovate his own solutions! Though his results wouldn't be very impressive at first, as long as he continued to blaze his own trail, he would eventually be able to create something that truly belonged to himself!

Ves wasn't looking to replicate the Grand Dynamo nestled in his mind. Instead, he wanted to create something just as powerful!

He looked at the P-stones before glancing at the vial in his hands. His intuition had been buzzing like crazy whenever he looked at the serum.

One of the many hunches he received was there might be some way to make them interact with each other. To what purpose, he didn't know.

"Is it possible to separate and isolate the spiritual properties of a sample?"

Ves was very reluctant to mess around with the highly complex and highly concentrated life-attributed spiritual energy locked inside the serum.

In some ways, the serum was alive. Ves couldn't treat it as a simple medicine.

However, Ves was not deterred.

"Life is one of my domains!"

Ves began to draw out a tiny droplet from the vial and began to store it into another prepared container.

Though the drop was incredibly miniscule, Ves still felt as if he was holding something a miniature sun! The spiritual energy contained in the drop was still very potent!

"Let's see whether I can pass it onto a P-stone!"

Chapter 2104 The Right Command

Ves spent almost half a day inside the vault. Though it didn't offer any proper lab facilities, he didn't require any. Not a single piece of lab equipment could do anything meaningful to spiritual energy.

As Nitaa stoically remained on guard and Lucky dozed on the deck, Ves continued to fumble with the tiny sample.

He tried various ways to extract its spiritual energy and transfer it to a P-stone.

Suffice to say, this was easier said than done.

Due to the living properties of the serum, its spiritual energy was essentially tied to its existence.

Ves couldn't just scoop it out and drop it into an empty P-stone. He first needed some way to separate the bonds that held these two elements together.

In essence, it was no different from harvesting a life.

Though it all sounded macabre, Ves didn't have any trouble with it. He would hesitate if he was about to perform this procedure on a living person or one of his mechs.

However, the serum wasn't really a sentient lifeform as far as Ves was aware of. Despite its abundance of spiritual energy and the sophistication of its operation, Ves did not recognize anything that suggested that it was actually a lifeform who he could talk to. He had already tried to communicate it with his Spirituality, but received absolutely no response.

Even if this assumption was wrong, then that wasn't his fault. The serum should have opened its mouth if it objected to being treated as his latest test subject!

"I don't even really know what I'm doing." He muttered.

Ves was basically trying out something on a whim at the moment. Without any mech designs to work on, he grew bored. He could have spent his time on managing the Larkinson Clan, but he had already set an overall direction. There was no need for him to swoop in and micromanage everything.

He supposed he could have taken a break. He could have taken Gloriana out. He could have spent his time on researching imaginary mechs.

Instead, he felt compelled to play around with a sample of the serum.

Since he owned something so extraordinary, why should he let it warm his pocket?

Over the past week, Ves had carried it around everywhere in a pouch made of Synthra Umbra. He frequently took the time to extend his spiritual senses towards it in order to view the profound interactions of the life-attributed spiritual energy.

Time and time again, Ves sighed in admiration at the grand feat of spiritual engineering he witnessed in the serum. In fact, he wasn't even sure whether the serum had been created artificially.

There was just something about the interactions that felt as if they were in tune with the laws of nature.

This made his current actions a bit difficult to stomach. Ves wanted to rip the spiritual energy out of the droplet he extracted from the vial and stuff it into a P-stone.

That was tantamount to ruining the sample!

Not only would the droplet lose the life energies that made it so remarkable, the life-attributed spiritual energy he extracted would also lose its organic support.

Deconstructing something of high value into two elements of much less value was not worthwhile in most cases.

However, Ves believed it would be worthwhile in this case.

First, the serum was far too complex and potent as a whole. By deconstructing it, Ves would obtain two much more manageable elements that could be studied to a much greater degree.

Second, Ves wanted to make use of the life-attributed energy. However, he had no use for the organic components. If Ves made use of the entire sample in its original form, then the chance of its existence leaking was substantial!

"Ranya can study the droplet that remains after I have extracted the life out of it." He determined.

As Ves tried out various methods to separate the life-attributed spiritual energy from the droplet, he achieved no result. Hours went by as Ves failed to make it budge!

"Damn it! Do I really have to make use of an F-stone?"

Ves had a faint hunch that it might be possible to cut the life out of the sample if he utilized the offensive charge of his F-stone.

However, it wasn't worth it to waste its charge on this procedure. He needed to preserve the strength of the F-stone as much as possible in order to guard against a rampaging Nyxie!

"How can I separate it then if I can't employ a sharp enough implement?" He frowned.

He had already tried to shrink the sample. While that reduced its spiritual strength, Ves soon found out that it also decreased the complexity of spiritual interactions.

The smaller the sample, the less sophisticated its spiritual nature became. Ves didn't want that. For his next experiment, he wanted to retain as much complexity as possible!

"The higher the quality, the better!"

He turned to his dozing cat. "Do you have any ideas?"

"Meow."

"I doubt that will work."

"Meow?"

"Don't speak nonsense. How can that possibly work? Although it's alive, it isn't sentient!"

"Meow meow!"

"Huh. I didn't think about that."

"Meow!"

Lucky's expression turned smug. Even a cat was able to outsmart Ves!

The serum was alive, but not sentient as far as he knew. However, there were many forms of life that didn't possess any conscious minds yet still reacted to external stimuli.

Plants, bacteria, viruses and so on did not exist in isolation. They interacted with their environment. No matter their complexity, they were all 'alive' in at least some sense of the word.

As Ves turned his attention back to the tiny container that contained the sample, he began to look at its spiritual qualities from a different perspective.

"It's not a sentient spiritual entity. It's not a collection of spiritual building blocks either. The energy and its attributes are all intricately tied together like the circuits of a processor or the programming code of a piece of software."

Following this train of thought, what kind of stimuli could he employ to get a reaction out of it? Ves immediately thought of his own spiritual domain.

He concentrated his mind. He deliberately depressed the mech aspect of his spiritual expression.

Then he began to form a spiritual projection and extended it towards the sample.

He didn't dare to make contact directly. The closer his spiritual expression got, the more he felt as if he was approaching a sun.

Making direct contact would definitely burn him! That was what he guessed!

"It should be enough to maintain close proximity."

Subsequently, Ves tried to communicate it. He spent a lot of time throwing random commands at it, thinking that he might be able to trigger some inbuilt command.

"Separate."

"Partition."

"Extract."

"Divide."

None of these commands worked. Even as Ves dredged up a dictionary and some programming textbooks from his implants, not a single word triggered a response.

"Is my approach wrong?" Ves frowned.

Did he have to employ a different language?

"No. The language shouldn't matter. My method of communication is universal."

This was his superpower, of sorts. He was able to communicate with all sorts of living beings no matter if they were cats or exobeasts through his Spirituality.

Perhaps he needed to employ more complex commands. He shrugged. It was worth a try.

"Separate your spiritual energy from your material form."

"Let me extract your energy."

"Grant me administrator access."

"Open sesame!"

Nothing worked, but Ves wasn't deterred. The brute force method he employed was not only stupid, but also time consuming. Failure was normal. To expect quick success was folly, especially when Ves wasn't even sure if this method was viable to begin with! He might as well have been talking to a wall all the time!

Even Ves didn't know why he chose to employ this method. All of it rested on shaky assumptions. The only reason why he persisted at all was because of his intuition.

Though it had been acting wonky all this time, Ves nonetheless perceived some positive signs. His intuition had rarely failed him and it was one of his most useful strengths. It had always played a key role in many of his successes and played a starring role in the creation of his masterworks!

Of course, his intuition only dealt with certain issues. Ves couldn't help but remember the time where his intuition allowed him to unlock a very difficult puzzle, only to unleash Sigrund upon the galaxy!

Ves did not think he faced such a situation this time. As potent as the sample appeared, Ves doubted that it contained some spiritual monster.

Still, as much as he believed in his current approach, several hours went by without result. Even he began to run out of patience!

"I'll beat you up if you don't give up your energy!"

"Let me harvest your life!"

"Offer me your tribute!"

The sample suddenly shone in his spiritual senses! Before Ves could react, the spiritual energy that had been attached to the droplet suddenly separated on its own accord!

It happened in less than a second. The transition was so abrupt that Ves almost couldn't believe what took place.

"..It worked?"

Ves quickly shook off his befuddlement. He quickly swiped a P-stone he kept on hand.

As soon as the rock came near, it automatically sucked in the life-attributed spiritual energy. This stopped the separated energy from decaying now that it had lost its original material shelter.

Ves still couldn't believe it actually worked, and with such a unique phrase. There was something imperious about telling a sample of the serum to offer him tribute. It was as if he was a god demanding a sacrifice from his subjects!

Had the creators of the life-prolonging treatment serum programmed this specific phrase in the serum? Or had he simply said something that vaguely resembled the actual command?

"No matter. The point is that I succeeded!"

He spent way too many hours on this procedure! It turned out that his hunch was right!

Ves keenly studied the separated elements.

He first took a close look at the sample. He could already tell it started glowing less. Without its spiritual energy, the sample seemed to have lost all life.

When Ves studied the P-stone that contained his prize, it seemed to have become warm in his spiritual vision.

Something remarkable entered the rock!

His grin widened as he carefully inspected the state of the separated spiritual energy. As expected, it had lost a considerable amount of life as well. Yet it hadn't died entirely!

The best way to describe its current state was that it had entered hibernation. Most of its interactions slowed down or froze entirely as it tried to conserve as much energy as possible.

"Good. Good." He muttered with a grin. "This is exactly what I need!"

The thought had been brewing in his mind for a while. What if he could extract a bit of life from the serum and transferred it to a P-stone? What if he subsequently made use of it in something else?

"This seed of life is key to my next creation!"

Ves caressed the rocky surface of the valuable P-stone, feeling the weakened but still lively spiritual energy locked within.

"Meow!"

Lucky immediately floated next to the stone and attempted to take a bite!

"Oh no you don't!"

Ves grabbed onto Lucky's neck with both his hand and a spiritual projection!

"Meow meow meow!"

"No! Absolutely not!"

"Meeeeeeooooow!"

It took a long time to push away his cat! Even though he managed to stop Lucky from eating the seed of life, Ves did not feel reassured.

Even if Ves locked it in the vault, Lucky would just phase through every obstacle in order to take a bite out of the spiritually-empowered rock!

He glanced suspiciously at Lucky. His downcast pet continued to look longingly at the P-stone.

"This isn't for you!"

"Meow?"

"Then watch! I'll show you what I'm going to do right away!"

Chapter 2105 The Crazy Ceremony

To Ves, the P-stone in his hands truly deserved to be called the seed of life.

It contained a large amount of life-attributed spiritual energy. Even though it had been separated from its source, most of its sophisticated structure and interactions remained intact. More than a hundred different varieties of life melded together in a symphonic whole.

Even if that symphony had fallen silent, it hadn't been disbanded.

"That's good enough." Ves nodded in satisfaction. "A seed exists to be planted. Or eaten."

He carefully put the seed of life in a prepared container and kept it close. With Lucky constantly drooling at it, who knew whether the naughty cat would swoop in and take a bite!

Ves did not wish to lose any of its potency. Even now, the life-attributed spiritual energy continued to decay!

While he didn't have to worry about anything for a couple of days, from the rate of decay he estimated it would take just a week for it to degrade its quality!

"I'm on a time limit!"

Fortunately, the ceremony he planned would take place in a couple of days. This was plenty of time to process the seed of life.

"I can't wait!"

He inspected the vault one more time before exiting it. He moved straight to the mech workshop compartment and made sure that it was secure.

His comm suddenly rang. Ves accepted the call.

"Ves." A projection of his girlfriend popped up. "You're late. What are you doing on your ship? What have you been up to? We were supposed to eat dinner right now!"

"Don't wait on my accord. I won't be going back today. I'm occupied with a very important personal project right now."

She frowned. "Can I help?"

"Not at the moment. However, make sure to show up on time the day after tomorrow. I have something very big in store."

"Okay..."

After a bit more chit-chat, Ves eventually ended the call and turned his attention back to the container that held the seed of life.

"Well, let's see what I can make out of you. With so much life inside of you, I don't believe you can give birth to something weak!"

He inspected the materials he had already prepared beforehand. He not only brought in enough Breyer alloy to fabricate a light mech, he also ordered some additional exotics.

Not all of them were relevant to fabricating mechs. In truth, they mainly played a decorative role.

Ves made a thorough effort in his inspection. He threw out every piece of material that wasn't pure or contained other defects.

In the end, he was left with a smaller pile of high-quality materials.

"Let's begin!"

Ves began to activate some production machines and began to process the materials.

The question on how to utilize his seed of life hung over his head.

He had two choices. Either he could keep it as a whole, or he could break it up into dust and blend it into the materials.

"The latter sounds way too risky. What if the spiritual energy leaks out? I can't afford this outcome!"

He reluctantly decided to keep the seed of life intact. When he finished the material processing stage and moved on to the fabrication stage, he modified the design in order to accommodate the seed in the interior of his next creation.

"While I'm at it, I should also make some other modifications."

Ves turned his head and looked suspiciously at Lucky.

"Meow."

"No means no! You can forget about it. When I'm done with this fabrication run, let's see whether you still have the guts to covet my seed of life!"

He turned back to his work and tried his best to fabricate every part.

When it came time to assemble his work, he began to piece together the parts as if he was assembling a mech. While this was not a traditional way to create such a work of art, Ves was not a sculptor. He was a mech designer.

"It doesn't matter. As long as it looks good, that is all that matters!"

During this process, he carefully pulled out another object he brought out of the vault.

The remnant of the Idol of the Superior Mother. Ves had already cleaned it up so that its burn marks no longer blackened its original marble-like surface.

"This piece originally belongs to the chest. In fact, it's quite close to the area corresponding to the heart."

When he designed his current work, he left enough room to slot in this piece! He carefully shifted it in place before surrounding it with other parts.

Eventually, a statue came into being. It was a statue of a proud woman that bore a very strong resemblance to the original Idol of the Superior Mother!

In fact, Ves originally intended to recreate the destroyed statue to its exact dimensions!

It was just that Lucky's greed for the seed of life caused Ves to alter the design and put his own touch on it. Now that he did so, he had to admit that his hastily-revised design possessed a bit more charm than before.

Though its appearance deviated from the classic form of superiority of the original statue, it took a completely different meaning in his eyes!

Aside from slotting in the remnant of the original idol, Ves also added some other objects to his statue.

After a bit of thought, Ves decided to place the seed of life in the location of the womb.

He then retrieved the wooden statuette that his mother had carved and placed it in the middle of the statue's brain.

After he finished slotting these objects, he completed the assembly and took a step back.

The outer surface of the statue made it seem as if it had been carved out of a large piece of marble.

In truth, Ves merely covered it with a layer of modified Breyer alloy. He had altered its composition and added several other materials that weakened it but also made it more aesthetically pleasing.

To Ves, it was worth it. He had managed to reconstruct some of the charm of the Idol of the Superior Mother while employing the methods of a mech designer.

"Hahaha! It looks better than I thought! What do you think, Lucky?"

"Meow..."

Lucky looked at the statue with a reluctant expression. The cat no longer dared to swoop in and eat the delectable seed of life.

This was because Ves had shaped it in the form of his mother!

"Hahaha, even if you don't respect me, you still respect my mother!"

The shape of the Idol of the Superior Mother didn't differ drastically from the shape of his mother! After examining his memories and studying the old archival recordings of his mother when she lived on Cloudy Curtain, he managed to reconstruct her appearance to a very accurate degree!

Most of his alterations concentrated on the face of the statue. Aside from that, he didn't have to put much effort into altering the proportions of the other limbs. Perhaps the only challenge he encountered was to reduce the height of the statue.

His mother wasn't as tall as the original Idol!

As Ves finished evaluating his work of art with his eyes, he switched over to his spiritual vision.

The statue exuded a considerable amount of spiritual activity. However, it was all a bit disjointed and inconsistent.

The head exhibited no activity. The heart section barely registered in his senses. Only the womb exuded significant activity.

Even from a distance, Ves could easily sense the energy contained within the seed of life!

"It's enough!"

This was not the complete form of the statue as far as he was concerned! Ves still needed to perform another step.

Unfortunately, now was not the time!

"Let's go, Lucky. Don't think about doing anything to this statue."

"Meow.."

Two days later, Ves along with numerous transports, shuttles and other vehicles arrived at an empty plain on Cinach VI.

A large number of Avatar and Sentinel Mech had been called to guard the premises. No uninvited guests were allowed to get close!

The Avatars and Sentinels didn't just patrol the premises. They also installed some prefabricated structures and fixtures.

If people looked down from orbit, they would find out that the Larkinson Clan was constructing a giant hexagon!

Soon enough, anyone peering at the site would suddenly find out that their views turned fuzzy!

In order to block any snooping, the Black Cats erected numerous pillars around the Hexagon that formed a giant interference field in the air!

As the enormous hexagon took shape, some of the construction crew erected a tall pedestal in the center. Then, a couple of heavy-duty lifter bots brought forth the second edition of the Idol of the Superior Mother and carefully installed it in place.

While all of this construction work proceeded, a lot of people emerged from their vehicles.

"What's this all about, Ves?" Gloriana asked with concern. "Is this part of the ceremony you have been hinting about?"

He nodded. "Yup! Are you surprised?"

"I'm aghast! You don't know anything about hexism, Ves! I don't know what kind of ritual you plan to conduct, but this is completely crazy! If the Temple of Hexism knows about this..."

"I'm not conducting a religious ritual!" Ves shouted at her! "I'm merely channeling some symbolism! I'm doing all of this in order to create the best possible design spirit for our upcoming Hexer mech! You wanted me to create a design spirit that would impress your fellow Hexers, right? I'm doing exactly that!"

"You should have consulted me! Compared to a layman like you, I know tons more about hexism!"

"This is my ceremony, not yours. If I just follow your lead, I can't guarantee the best result."

While the two argued, a large amount of people started to enter the giant hexagon. Ves had issued a lot of orders, contacted a lot of local officials and made some many other arrangements in order to bring in so many people!

The interior of the hexagon had been split up into six different zones.

Each zone corresponded to a phase of existence.

66,666 men stepped into the zone representing the phase of life.

The men largely consisted of locals drawn from the population of Cinach VI. The curious commoners had no idea what they had signed up for. All they knew was that they stood to earn a lot of money if they cooperated.

The men took up a lot of space. In fact, it almost looked as if the zone was about to overflow!

6,666 coffins holding the bodies of the recent deceased were placed in the zone representing the phase of death.

It had taken a lot of effort to secure those coffins. Ves not only needed to convince the local authorities to play along, he also had to gain the cooperation of a lot of families of the deceased!

Fortunately, as long as Ves threw enough money at them, the families easily agreed to delay their planned funerals.

6 small containers were placed in the zone representing the phase of godhood.

Ves winced at the small number of containers. He didn't dare to bring in any more. Each of them contained P-stones containing various spiritual entities or spiritual fragments of some of his design spirits.

It had been a bit troublesome to obtain the fragments, but Ves didn't care about the damage.

666 glowering women stepped into the zone of damnation.

Each of them were Penitent Sisters. Commander Chancy, Head Designer Stameros and Commodore Evern all looked profoundly unhappy to take part in this blasphemous-looking ritual!

When Ves initially ordered the women to cooperate with this ceremony, it almost seemed as if the Penitent Sisters would rebel against him right on the spot!

However, in the end, they refrained from breaking their oaths. If they wanted to keep their chances of redemption alive, they needed to play along with any reasonable orders!

Even then, Ves had to offer the Penitent Sisters numerous concessions in order to provide enough Sisters to represent the most heinous phase of existence!

666,666 small, thumb-sized containers were moved in the zone representing the phase of dust.

All of them contained a single sandman corpse, each resembling a single grain of sand. Ever since the Sand War broke out, a lot of dead sandmen floated in space. Each of them used to be part of a sandman vessel but had lost whatever animated them when the human defenders blasted them to pieces.

Even though Ves brought in a lot of grains of sand, they didn't take up any space!

66 women were supposed to enter the zone of phase of women. After a lot of thought, Ves decided to reserve this honor to the Swordmaidens.

Commander Dise and 65 of her strongest Swordmaidens proudly strode forward and occupied the large zone.

With all of the pieces moving into place, the people or objects representing six phases of existence all surrounded the statue placed in the center of the hexagon from six different directions!

Chapter 2106 Six Zones

The giant hexagon spanned a large area. Small dividers split it up in six different zones akin to six pieces of a pie.

A tall but fairly narrow hexagon-shaped platform rested in the very center of the zones. Decorative iconography representing the six phases of existence faced every zone.

At the phase of life, a large number of men of varying ages stood at their assigned locations.

Though it was an immense challenge to stuff 66,666 men in a single zone, as long as they followed the instructions projected to them on an individual basis, no one experienced any problems.

Just to be sure there wouldn't be any interruptions, everyone had already been ushered into bathrooms a few hours before.

No one was allowed to interrupt the ritual because they urgently needed to do their business!

The majority of men consisted of locals. With all of the wealth and clout that Ves wielded these days, it was a simple matter of gaining House Evenson's permission to recruit a lot of random people.

It was even simpler to hire these men to stand around in the middle of nowhere. Each participant received 1,000 sentinel crowns for a single afternoon of their time!

That was easily twice or thrice the monthly wage of an average laborer!

A lot of men who encountered this offer instantly accepted it without a pause. This was easy money to them, especially when there weren't any skill, age or experience requirements!

Even though none of the men knew what Ves and the Larkinson Clan had in store, it shouldn't be too bad in their opinion.

Though a lot of them tried to guess why this powerful foreigner needed them all, they didn't linger on it for too long. After all, who could guess the mind of a famously eccentric mech designer?

With the local authorities cooperating fully with the Larkinson Clan, almost every man became reassured that this wasn't some sort of scheme to enslave them or anything.

It wasn't until they were actually brought to the giant hexagon that they understood what they signed up for! Some of the men even started to have second thoughts when they looked at the large, mech-sized statue of a woman.

Something about this statue made them shudder!

"I don't know about this, man. What's with all of this Hexer stuff?"

"Who cares. Just enjoy your 1000 sents!"

Though almost every man in the zone consisted of locals, there were a few exceptions.

For one reason or another, Ves had given a direct order to Vincent Ricklin to take part. In fact, Vincent had been assigned the front-most spot!

"Haha, whatever is going on, I'm already in first place!" He boasted while he looked up at the tall, lifelike statue. "Damn, what a babe. If I didn't already have Raella, I would put the moves on this chick."

While Vincent entertained himself with the nearby eye candy, at the zone representing the phase of death, a quiet solitude had spread.

The men standing at the edge of this zone weren't as boisterous as the others. Each of them couldn't help to recognize the iconic shape of a coffin.

Each of them were wooden and tightly sealed. Light decorative carvings added a bit of sophistication to their exterior while the banners draped on them each displayed a short record of the deceased.

Each of the dead had died within a span of a week. Ves opted to reserve the coffins of the recent dead because he didn't think it was worth the outrage if he dug up a lot of buried graves.

It was easy enough to bribe the families of the deceased to lend him the coffins. As far as they were concerned, Ves was paying for the funerals!

At the phase of godhood, only 6 mysterious containers rested on the ground.

Each of them contained a P-stone filled with the essence of a design spirit.

Ves chose the design spirits with care. He selected Bravo for his boyishness, Zeigra for his honorable death, the Golden Cat for her spiritual network, Nyxie for his damned existence, the Crystal Leader for his forgotten existence and finally Qilanxo for her motherly strength.

The selection itself vaguely corresponded to the six phases of existence, which Ves believed would be a nice touch.

Next to this almost empty zone was the zone that represented the most controversial phase of existence.

666 angry or sullen-faced Penitent Sisters stood at their assigned spots. None of them dared to disobey orders and take any further steps.

Just to be sure, a couple of mechs along with a lot of guards on foot kept an eye on this unstable element. As soon as the Hexers stirred any trouble, security wouldn't hesitate to pacify them! It wasn't difficult at all to keep 666 unarmed women in check.

"This is blasphemy of the highest order!" Commodore Abigail Evern hissed. "If the Evern Matriarchal Dynasty hears about this, Mr. Larkinson's life is forfeit! My former relatives will never let a boy desecrate our beliefs with this farcical display!"

Even though the Penitent Sisters used to be cultists, they still respected many parts of hexism orthodoxy. What they witnessed right now seemed like a parody! A heretical parody!

Juliet Stameross spat on the ground. "I warned you all that the boy was in trouble. He's the most dangerous mech designer I've ever met. He's unlike any of the other male mech designers from the Hegemony. I don't know what that Wodin leech is thinking for letting her boy go unleashed for so long."

"We should do something, Val. Why did you tell us to play nice?"

Commander Valerie Chancy sighed and shook her head. "While I understand your concerns, you are picking the wrong hill to die for. Even if this entire arrangement seems proper, what can he do? Mr. Larkinson is just an ignorant boy, and it's very clear he hasn't consulted his girlfriend or any other Hexer. With his superficial understanding of hexism, he dares to invoke the Superior Mother? Hah, he should keep dreaming!"

The other two Penitent Sister leaders subsided a little. Their commander had a point. The sheer ignorance on display meant that whatever Ves Larkinson was up to, there was no chance in hell he would be able to invoke anything meaningful!

"Don't forget that this is all part of a test for us." The Penitent Sister Commander reminded everyone. She pointed at her cheek, which had been tattooed with a prominent ♂ symbol. "The other Hexers wish to humiliate us and bring us down with these petty insults. Lashing out will accomplish nothing except for leading us to deaths, thereby cutting off our legacy! This is exactly what our enemies want. Don't let them win. Instead, treat our punishment as a gauntlet. If we wish to be reborn stronger than before, we must prove ourselves worthy and maintain our forbearance as best as possible!"

The Penitent Sisters weren't afraid of death. What they truly feared was to die a meaningless death! If they disappeared from existence, who would remember them? Who would inherit their legacy? Who would remind the Hexers of the true threat of boys?

In their eyes, it would only be a matter of time before the boys who ruled the galaxy to squash the upstart Hexadric Hegemony!

For now, the Hegemony was too small and remote to attract the attention of the cabal of boys who secretly plotted to keep women down, but that wouldn't last! With the inevitable victory the Hegemony would achieve over the Coalition, the Hexers would soon come to dominate the entire Komodo Star Sector.

At that time, many Penitent Sisters believed that the reckoning would come!

In order to save the Hexers from their own doom, the Penitent Sisters had to overcome this humiliating punishment duty, regain their honor and convince the Hegemony of the fatal threat of boys!

While the zone representing the phase of damnation calmed down, the zone next to it never fluctuated from the beginning.

Ves didn't really understand the phase of dust. Why was it different from the phase of death? Weren't they the same thing?

Even skimming through dense, illogical hexism scripture didn't tell him much. He only learned that the two phases differed on whether people remembered the dead or not. When no one remembered your existence, you were no different than dust!

At least that was what Ves assumed. It didn't matter if he misinterpreted it. He just decided to interpret this phase a bit more literally and procured a modest batch of dead sandman corpses.

They used to live before they were killed trying to invade human space. Practically no one was able to distinguish the identities of low-caste sandmen. This was pretty much analogous to what the phase of dust stood for in his opinion!

After the phase of dust came the ultimate phase of existence.

For the phase of woman, Ves truly struggled to choose who to represent this zone.

The ideal candidates would be Hexer women. The Glory Battalion boasted plenty of female mech pilots and support personnel. All of them would be a good fit for this phase of existence.

Ves didn't have the guts to invite them to take part in this ceremony.

Gloriana's reaction already proved how much backlash he would incur if he tried to gain the cooperation of Hexers!

None of them would be pleased to take part in a mockery of their culture or beliefs!

For this reason, Ves had to draw upon another group of strong and confident that weren't Hexers!

Ves considered bringing in his own clansmen, but none of them were suitable. The Brighters in the clan were all ardent secularists while the Ylvainans thought that hexism was misguided.

In the end, he made an offer to the Swordmaidens and they accepted.

While the former pirates probably didn't fit the mold of a classic superior Hexer, Ves didn't care about these details. He personally admired the Swordmaidens and if any group of women deserved the highest honor, it would be Commander Dise and her fearless sisterhood!

It also helped that the Swordmaidens were highly practical and not very fussy. They had gone through weirder ordeals and they weren't entirely unfamiliar with dealing with cults.

As all of the elements fell into place, nothing happened. According to the schedule, the ceremony should have started five minutes ago, but so far the Larkinsons on guard just told everyone that an unavoidable delay had occurred.

"Please be patient, everyone! The ceremony will start soon!"

The reason for this delay was because Ves was still stuck backstage.

He truly wanted to step forward and begin the ceremony he plotted for a long time. However, his girlfriend still had a problem with this entire arrangement!

"—aside from all of the travesties you mentioned before, the distribution isn't even right! How stupid are you to employ just 6 proto-gods for the phase of godhood and 66 Swordmaidens for the phase of woman? It should have been the other way around! Women are superior to gods unless those gods are female as well. If I was in your shoes, I would have utilized 66 male proto-gods to represent the phase of godhood and just 6 proper, upstanding Hexer women to represent the ultimate phase of existence! Even a six-year old Hexer would be able to come up with this! You're so ignorant that I can't believe you thought this was a good idea."

Ves palmed his face. "This isn't important, Gloriana. Who cares about these trivial details? It's the thought that counts! All of this is just for symbolism. Remember the time when I created the Golden Cat? Back then, I learned how beneficial it was to hold a grand occasion. With all of the people and props I put in place, I think I have a good chance of breathing life into my most powerful design spirit to date!"

"I don't disagree with that, Ves, but the problem is that you are committing outright blasphemy. That is something that I can't accept!"

Gloriana still refused to take part in this charade!

Chapter 2107 Nagging Woman

Ves knew he could have gained Gloriana's approval if he put her in charge.

However, he knew he would never be able to get his grand ritual off the ground if he did so. Gloriana was too damn perfectionist to settle for less!

For example, her suggestion to employ 66 proto-gods instead of 6 proto-gods to represent the phase of godhood was too impractical!

Ves had to scrape deep into his collection of design spirits to even come up with this much. There was no way he could muster enough spiritual energy and other essential ingredients to create at least fifty new design spirits in a short amount of time.

In fact, Ves didn't even possess enough P-stones to house all of their essence!

And this was just one of her absurd demands.

"In fact, if you truly want to represent the phase of women, you should have invited six female Hexer expert pilots!" Gloriana lectured to him. "While it is arguably better if they are ace pilots instead, I understand that can be a little difficult, so I can accept it if we settle for less."

A little difficult?

Ves would probably get slapped to death if he approached the Hegemony with such a ludicrous proposal! Ace pilots were the most supreme and honorable champions of a second-rate state. Such exalted existences already enjoyed a status comparable to Master Mech Designers!

"What possessed you to use the remains of dead sandmen to represent the phase of dust? They're not even human! If you truly wanted to make a sincere attempt at embodying the phase of dust, you should have harvested the soil from a cemetery on one of our settled planets! When we die, our mortal coils eventually break down. All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."

Ves coughed. "I would rather keep my head intact, thank you very much."

All of these complaints and more continued to vindicate his choice of going his own way. Even if he made a million of perceived errors in her perspective, it didn't matter to him! All he wanted was the grandeur of a ritual.

After he empowered the Larkinson Mandate and created the Golden Cat, Ves had analyzed what had taken place.

Ves came up with two important conclusions why he was able to create a remarkable spiritual product on the day of the founding of the clan.

First, as the creator, his mood played a very great role in the creation of his works. Whether he intended to create mechs, design spirits or anything else, his mood was paramount when it came to establishing their spiritual properties.

The grander the occasion, the more Ves became focused. The more he tailored the environment around his act of creation, the more he was able to channel all of the right attributes into his design spirit!

It was similar to the difference between working at home and working at an office. Even though virtual technology allowed lots of people to work at home without lacking any of the facilities they depended upon, in most cases their productivity wasn't as good.

Eschewing a suit and tie for a t-shirt and boxers was not a good way to stay focused. Even if someone worked from home, it still made a huge difference to dress up as if you were about to head to the office.

Therefore, all of the pomp and circumstance today served a very important purpose. It didn't matter if Hexers like Gloriana thought that Ves was making tons of errors. As long as his choices steered his mood in the right direction, then everything was fine!

Ves never intended to hold a legitimate religious ritual. Every religion was superstition as far as he was concerned, so why should he adhere to orthodoxy? In hexism, boys

like him probably weren't allowed to preside over rituals in the first place! The fact that he even thought about it was a big taboo!

All of that sounded silly in his opinion. Ves did not care about taboos, especially ones based around superstition.

The second reason why the creation of the Golden Cat was so successful was the involvement of other people.

Previously, Ves created his spiritual product on his own or with Gloriana. The involvement of so few people didn't impart the created spiritual entities with any external influences.

This was a missed opportunity.

The difference between the Golden Cat and his other design spirits were very clear. Ves theorized that holding a show and aligning the moods of the audience would channel the properties of new creation to an even greater degree!

This was very valuable. Whenever he performed his spiritual restoration technique, he exerted very little control over the final state of the end product.

Ves learned how to narrow down the variability by preparing specific ingredients. However, even then, there were countless ways to combine the ingredients. Whether the final product combined the ingredients in the manner he wanted was still a mystery!

This was why a crowd was important. As long as the thoughts of a collective became aligned, they could exert a notable amount of influence to the birth of a new spiritual product!

This was one of the reasons why the Golden Cat aligned so well with the Larkinsons. She had literally been birthed from their common desire to be a part of a strong clan that retained their original heritage!

In short, Ves pretty much treated this occasion similar to one of his product reveal events. The large crowd of men occupying the zone representing the phase of life was his true audience! As long as he manipulated their impressionable minds, he could do anything!

Unfortunately, Gloriana stood in his way. If possible, Ves just wanted to step around his girlfriend and proceed with the ritual, but unfortunately he needed her assistance. Her role was indispensable in the creation of his next design spirit!

"—and why did you pick up random locals from the street to make up the phase of life? If you wanted to create a Hexer proto-god, then you should have brought in actual Hexer citizens!

"ENOUGH!" Ves abruptly grabbed onto her shoulders and used his strength to shock her into silence! "I have listened to you long enough but I am not going to change a single detail! It's too late for that! I told you over and over again that the form of the ceremony doesn't matter! I'm not a priest and I am not conducting a divine ritual!"

"If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck..."

"This is different! Look, I know you have a million objections, but this is MY show, not yours. Just let me do what I want and you can complain afterwards AFTER you have seen my results, not before. Even if you think that my chances of success are miniscule, at least give me the benefit of the doubt!"

"There is no room for doubt here!" Gloriana hissed back. "In my eyes, you are walking straight into a bottomless pit. What I am trying to do is to pull you back before it's too late. I don't want to lose you, Ves!"

"None of your fears will come true! Look, if you think that I am doing everything wrong, then your Hexer gods or whatever won't do a thing to me. After all, I'm not a qualified priest and my knowledge of hexism is too shallow. There shouldn't be any danger!"

"It's still wrong, Ves."

"Just give me a chance. Burn me afterwards. Say 'I told you so' if it turns out that you are right. I will accept any admonishment you give me then, but please wait until you see my end product. Can you at least do that, Gloriana?"

He reached out and poured out his heart to her. "I love you, Gloriana. I know I have some rather odd ideas every now and then, but they are all fueled by my passion. You wouldn't want to block me from pursuing my dreams, right? As my girlfriend, you should support me instead of condemning me. Even if the entire Hegemony turns against us, our love will always matter more!"

Gloriana began to look uncertain. "... I don't know..."

"Our remaining mech design project is just the first of what is to come. If everything goes well, we can continue to design the powerful mechs the Hex Army needs to vanquish the Friday Coalition. You already know how powerful my glows can be. Just think of what will happen if every Hexer mech pilot benefits from them! If we wish to fulfill this ambition, then we need to impress the snobby matriarchs who hold all of the power with a design spirit that uniquely appeals to their sensibilities!"

"I want that too, Ves, but I'm afraid that your new proto-god will turn into a travesty! Your ceremony is all wrong!"

"Let. Me. Do. What. I. Want." He gritted his teeth.

The argument stretched on for half an hour before she reluctantly acquitted.

It took this much time to convince her that it was best for Ves to make his attempt and fail. In her opinion, this ceremony was doomed from the start. Ves just had to go through with it in order to realize how wrong he was to mock hexism.

After a considerable delay, Ves could finally proceed with the ceremony!

The crowd of waiting people all fell silent after a loud tone interrupted their conversations.

The boys from the phase of life, the Penitent Sisters from the phase of damnation and the Swordmaidens from the phase of woman all turned to the pair of mech designers floating over their heads.

Ves and Gloriana no longer displayed any conflict towards each other. They both put on their game faces now that they showed up in public. Both of them held their cats as they flew towards the tall statue.

"This face... isn't that your mother?!" Gloriana gasped.

Ves coughed. "That isn't important."

"I can't believe you, Ves." She hissed. "Not only is it enough for you to trample on the beliefs of Hexers. You can't even hold yourself back from trampling over the grave of your own mother!"

He ignored her. It was showtime now.

"Ladies and gentlemen." He spoke as he floated at head-height of the statue. "Welcome to this solemn occasion. Today, I will be conducting a ritual. Each of you will feel strange, but you have nothing to fear. My girlfriend and I are just about to form a new glow for one of my famed mechs."

A silence fell over the entire hexagon. None of the men felt inclined to talk or cause a disturbance. They had already been warned that they could kiss their 1000 sents goodbye if they interrupted anything!

Ves smiled at the well-behaved crowd of boys. He was already confident that the 666 Penitent Sisters and the 66 Swordmaidens would remain in line. Not because they were women, but because they were disciplined warriors.

The same didn't apply to the 66,666 men he faced, but that was what he sought! The weaker their minds, the easier it was to get them in tune!

He slowly began to concentrate his mind. He put on a spiritual mask he specifically designed for this occasion!

A sense of fervor and fanaticism spread from his body. Gloriana instantly sensed the changes and looked surprised!

As he spread out his influence, the entire crowd slowly became affected by his air. Each of them experienced a growing sense of worship and majesty towards the giant statue.

Some began to feel as if the statue depicted a goddess.

Others started to develop the illusion that the statue stood for their mothers.

More people began to see the statue as the most supreme Hexer in existence!

A spotlight from the air suddenly landed on the statue. Due to its white, marble-like texture, it began to take on a mysterious quality in everyone's eyes.

Chapter 2108 Mother's Love

The centerpiece of this ceremony was the statue. Not Ves. Though his role was essential in shaping the opinions of his audience, he was not of the star of the show today.

In order to achieve his desired results, Ves needed to get everyone to worship the statue of the Superior Mother.

In order to do that, Ves took a page from the likes of Prophet Ylvaine and other successful charlatans. He had already constructed a spiritual image of himself as a fanatical proselytizer!

Once he donned this mask, he gained an intensity in his mind that suddenly made him very eager to spread the gospel of motherhood!

"Mothers." Ves began. "Are the most honored people in existence. They are the carriers of life. Each of us emerged from their wombs. Each of us owe our lives from the sacrifices they make."

The statue began to sparkle under the light. That was mostly due to the special formula that Ves applied to its surface layer.

It made it seem as if the statue was made up out of stars. The glinting lights made it harder for people to study its details, but that only added to its mystery!

"It is a shame that not everyone has the privilege to grow up under the care of a loving mother. Do you remember the times when your mother kissed your cheek? Do you

recall the times when she hugged you and soothed you when you cried? Back when you were young, your mother seemed like the most important woman of your life. Do you still think that there can never be a better woman in your life than your mother?"

His words possessed an unnatural power. Everyone who listened to him, the guards included, couldn't help but think back on their own childhoods!

A lot of nostalgia started to appear on the faces of the men. Ves grinned at the sight. He had already succeeded in hypnotizing them with his Devil Tongue.

Unfortunately, not everyone was as easy to crack. He glimpsed down at Vincent Ricklin, who had grown up under difficult circumstances.

As Ves floated around the statue in circles, he peered at the faces of the Penitent Sisters and the Swordmaidens.

Both groups of strong-willed women held out for different reasons.

Just like Gloriana, the Penitent Sisters felt offended by this ritual.

As for the Swordmaidens, they all grew up under very tough circumstances in the frontier.

Ves knew he had to change tack.

"Mothers serve an indispensable role." He spoke. "They are the bearers of children. My children. Your children. Everyone's children. The continuation of life rests on their shoulders. It is in their belly that mech pilots and presidents are born! No matter how great or humble you currently are, everyone of us started from the same origin."

Technically, that wasn't entirely true. Some people were born from artificial wombs. This was usually the case when the woman who was supposed to carry a child suffered from severe health problems or couldn't afford to carry a child due to work reasons.

Though resorting to an artificial womb was a hassle-free way to bring a baby to term, most women didn't choose to do so unless it was absolutely necessary.

Therefore, Ves didn't have to worry about offending too many people who were born from technology rather than flesh.

He smiled and spread his arms. "The statue you see before you represents the woman known as the Superior Mother. When you think of this word, what do you imagine?"

What did the audience imagine? Many of them who looked at the ethereal-looking statue began to imagine their own mothers. Others began to conjure up other people's mothers. Some even thought about fictional mothers!

No matter what, no human was unfamiliar with mothers. They played such a ubiquitous role in society that humanity could not do without their existence!

"Each of you are probably thinking about different mothers." He said. "I am no different. When I think about the word mother, I think of my youth where I was just a little boy. I was an energetic child back then. I was happy and my mother always made sure to keep me that way. She fed me when I was hungry, clothed me when I was cold, tucked me in bed when I was afraid of the dark and kissed me when I wanted affection. All of my needs were met. Those were some of the happiest days of my life."

He truly spoke from his heart. His spiritual mask didn't distort his meaning all that much. It was just that his happy memories of Cynthia Larkinson were only confined to his early childhood!

As for the Cynthia that showed up when he was an adult, Ves conveniently pushed those memories to the back of his mind.

He began to look around again and saw that he managed to grip the hearts of the women.

Hexers placed supreme importance on motherhood. Even boy-haters like the Penitent Sisters revered mothers to an immense degree!

As for the Swordmaidens, while their childhoods weren't all that ideal, most of them still grew up with the support of a mother. No matter how awful the circumstances in the frontier degenerated, mothers were still the same, mostly.

Ves acknowledged this fact in his speech. "Every mother is different. Some mothers kiss their children more often than others. Some mothers prefer to spoil their children than to discipline them. Some are poor, some are rich, some are strong, some are frail. Yet no matter their differences, they all share something in common. Love."

A wave of warmth spread from his body as he shared his childhood affection. That innocent love and trust he held for his mother was something he cherished for his entire life. Now, he bared it to his audience, allowing every to experience the wondrous sensation of enjoying the unconditional love of a mother!

Some people began to tear up. Others began to look nostalgic as the sensation triggered their own memories of their mother's affection.

"The reason why this statue is called the Superior Mother is not because it stands for the ideal model. To me, the Superior Mother is an embodiment of every mother that attempts to do right by their children. No matter what difficulties and challenges they face, a good mother always strives to devote their whole lives to the betterment of their children!"

A lot of Hexers among the Penitent Sisters reacted with shock! This was not the correct interpretation of the Superior Mother! Yet.. why did it seem as if Ves Larkinson's definition sounded more compelling?

He smiled at the puzzlement of some of his audience. "The Superior Mother stands for mothers. She is not an unattainable ideal. All it takes to match her standard is for a mother to discharge their parental responsibilities and strive for their children. That is enough for them to earn a medal."

Gloriana, who floated alongside Ves, looked rather emotional at his words. Though she highly objected to this farcical ceremony at the start, she began to fall under his spell.

Now, it didn't seem so important anymore that Ves got all of the details wrong!

Ves turned his head to his girlfriend and looked in her eyes with a loving expression. He reached out and held her hand. "Every woman has the potential to become the Superior Mother. Men like me are lucky to be in the presence of such fantastic women. The Superior Mother is not an unattainable ideal. She is all around us! We are blessed to have such women in our lives!"

"Oh, Ves..." Gloriana lovingly said as she got caught up in his passionate eyes.

Ves impulsively leaned in and kissed her in the mouth.

"Love.. comes from the heart!" He stated. "And out of all of the humans in existence, it is mothers who possess the greatest hearts! The Superior Mother's love and affection for her children is boundless and limitless."

His words conjured up an extremely high opinion of mothers! Hardly anyone in the crowd, whether they were men or women, thought he was wrong!

Ves floated closer to the statue and patted its cheek. "Unfortunately, too many people in the galaxy have grown up without the affection of a mother. This is a sad state of affairs. My goal for bringing you all here today is to rectify this great wrong."

He puffed his chest and began to unleash his burning passion. "Today, I want to create a new glow! Please, lend me your strength! Help me bring the personification of the Superior Mother to life so that I can share her warmth to everyone who is deprived of a mother!"

None of his words seem to have anything to do with mechs, but that didn't matter. His appeal sounded so earnest and noble that every single member of the audience couldn't help but agree to his demand! Their hearts were practically bursting to help!

"If you share my aspiration, if you wish to help, simply kneel before the Superior Mother. Look at her. Admire her. Worship her. The more you think about the Superior Mother,

the more she will become real to all of us! We are all her children, and we are all the reasons why she exists. Without children, the Superior Mother won't feel joy in her life! Therefore, please help her out and remind her why she bears her burden."

Everyone enthusiastically knelt on the ground and began to worship the statue in earnest. The words they heard all put them into a special mindset where they all began to imagine the statue of the Superior Mother coming to life!

Ves joyfully grinned at the sight. Yes! This was exactly what he set out to achieve! He could practically feel the energy from the crowd resonating with his mood. He possessed absolute confidence that he would succeed his strongest design spirit to date now that he got caught up in the energy of his own show!

"Let us begin." Ves privately communicated to Gloriana.

Both of them turned around to face the statue. As Ves began to concentrate his mind, he proceeded to go to work.

The first step was to bring out all of the ingredients and smash them apart.

Ves proceeded to do so in a brutal fashion. Empowered by the grandiose circumstances, he eagerly formed a spiritual projection before proceeding to use it as a hammer with gusto!

He first pulled out the spiritual fragment derived from the remnant of the original idol located in the heart of the statue. Though he hated to shatter it, it was a necessary process to create a new life.

Next, he mentally reached out towards the containers resting in the zone that represented the phase of godhood.

He pulled out the spiritual fragments of Qilanxo and Lucky and began to smash both of them apart.

Neither of them resisted. If they did, Ves would have a much harder time!

After that, he pulled out the spiritual fragment derived from the residue of the wooden statuette carved by his mother. Ves looked at the head of the statue with a brief look of uncertainty.

Fortunately, his hesitancy only lasted for a split second. Once he was ready to process this ingredient, he ruthlessly smashed it as if it was a scary monster!

He briefly turned towards the womb of the statue. He exhibited a bit of fear this time. Even though the seed of life didn't exhibit a lot of activity, it was still considerably strong!

The question he faced was whether it would resist his attempts to break it apart. For some reason, his intuition started to warn him that this might be a bad idea.

He still went through, though. The life-attributed spiritual energy derived from the sample of the serum was so potent that it would definitely be able to supercharge his new spiritual product!

As his concentration grew unprecedentedly sharp, his momentum started to grow. As soon as he accumulated enough energy in his spiritual projection, he hammered it towards the seed of life!

The life-attributed spiritual energy locked within the P-stone held on for a time, but it didn't possess the power to resist now that it had been torn from its root!

A brilliant explosion of life and energy emanated from the center of the statue. Suddenly, every prostrating member of the crowd felt as if the statue had truly come to life!

Ves frantically tried to sweep up every single shard of life-attributed spiritual energy as possible. Though he missed a couple, he at least managed to prevent the rest of it from drifting away.

As soon as he stuffed it in the loose amalgamation of shards, the new addition immediately started to react with the other shards.

Like a mother giving birth to their children, the product of the seed of life started to infuse life into spiritual shards.

This was completely unprecedented to Ves!

Chapter 2109 Universal Compatibility

Within the giant hexagon, thousands of people knelt down and worshipped the statue of the Superior Mother.

Its excellent construction and pleasing aesthetics evoked a lot of appreciation. The special effects that Ves had employed such as shining a spotlight onto it and releasing some mysterious mist added to the illusion that they had pulled into a magical moment.

After listening to Ves' speech, everyone aligned their thoughts towards mothers.

Mothers were the carrier of life.

Mothers were the greatest sources of love.

Every woman had the potential to become a Superior Mother.

No matter if it was the 66,666 men, the 666 Penitent Sisters, the 66 Swordmaidens or even the guards stationed just outside the hexagon, every single person was of one mind!

All of this unity produced an atmosphere that Ves found very conducive to his work. As his thoughts aligned with the masses, he felt as if he opened a mysterious part of mind that resonated the excitement in the air.

Yet even as he started to merge together the spiritual shards of his broken ingredients, the life-attributed spiritual energy acted on its accord!

Having lain dormant all this time, now that the scattered energy came into contact with the other shards, it began to do something that Ves did not anticipate.

The life-attributed energy began to nurture the broken shards!

Whether the shards originated from Cynthia Larkinson, Qilanxo, the Golden Cat, or the original Idol of the Superior Mother, they all fed on the sustenance freely given by the life-attributed energy!

Ves temporarily halted his work in order to observe this completely new interaction.

As someone who was very interested in life, he had never witnessed such a marvelous process! Even in a lesser form, the energy derived from the life-prolonging treatment serum possessed the remarkable ability to rejuvenate spiritual shards!

"Maybe this is not the limit!"

Ves suspected that this interaction also worked on spiritual fragments or even complete spiritual entities. There was no reason to suspect that it wouldn't. The gentle energy appeared to be exceptionally compatible with several different recipients!

Even his own spiritual energy had become livier. Ves felt as if it had grown several times stronger even though he had just made surface contact with the life-attributed energy!

This caused Ves to make a very profound conclusion.

The life-attributed spiritual energy derived from the serum was able to nurture anything spiritual!

While Ves still wasn't able to say for sure whether it was compatible with anything, so far he felt confident in making this assumption!

Not a single spiritual shard exhibited any sign of rejection. This was something unthinkable to Ves. In nearly every case, an encounter between different attributes and origins always led to incompatibility.

If one tried to force itself upon the other, it would always be regarded as a hostile invasion! No castle would open its gates to let in foreign invaders. That would only threaten its existence!

This was what made this interaction all the more exceptional. It didn't matter what kind of castle he focused upon. Each and every single one of them opened their gates wide to let in the life-attributed energy.

And each of those castles were rewarded for their hospitality. Once the life-attributed energy got inside, it began to sacrifice itself in order to upgrade and empower the friendly hosts!

"Is this one the essential secrets to life-prolonging treatments?"

Ves suspected that the spiritual energy component of the serum may have been added in order to revitalize an old person's spirituality.

However.. he wasn't confident about this guess. The quantity of energy he extracted from a sample of the serum was relatively modest. Though the quality and potency of the energy was still exceptional, it only originated from a tiny droplet!

The serum that he still carried in his hidden pocket began to take on an even greater weight. It already held a lot of value due to its known use. Now that Ves learned that it was actually a reservoir of nurturing energy, its value in his perspective had skyrocketed even further!

Unlike its conventional use of prolonging old people's lives, its new use of strengthening and revitalizing other spiritual entities was even more important!

In fact, to someone whose specialty revolved around life and the manipulation of spiritual energy, the serum had become something priceless!

Ves didn't have to wait until he became 300 years old to make full use of the serum. He could start incorporating in his works right away!

As Ves gradually started to merge the shards back together again, he noted that his efficiency had substantially improved. With the strengthening from the life-attributed energy, it became a lot easier to merge the shards.

It didn't take long before he thought that it was time to pull in his partner.

"Gloriana." He said as he briefly split up his concentration. "Help me perfect the newborn entity."

"Oh. Okay."

"Get ready. Open your mind. Don't resist."

"I know what to expect."

This wasn't their first rodeo. Gloriana relaxed and opened her mind as best as possible. Eventually, she opened herself just enough for Ves to reach into her mental space and steal a portion of her spiritual energy!

This caused her design seed to boil! Her mind automatically formed a spiritual projection on its own accord in an attempt to take back what it lost.

Ves merrily dragged the stolen spiritual energy into the pool of merging shards.

Just as in previous instances, once Gloriana's projection entered the pool, it no longer chased after the thief. With all of the glaring imperfections on display, it couldn't stand the sight!

The out-of-control projection approached the flawed mergers and began to smooth them out, causing the integration of different shards to become more seamless.

All of this proceeded according to expectation. The fact that every spiritual element received a substantial boost from the life-attributed spiritual energy did not alter this process. Even Gloriana's spiritual projection had become supercharged!

Ves wasn't sure what all of this empowerment led towards. Would the newborn spiritual product start off at a greater power level? Would it develop a more sophisticated personality? Perhaps it might even acquire a powerful ability!

Whatever the case, he looked forward to seeing how much this investment paid off. Had he used too much serum? What if he added even more life-attributed energy during a creation process?

However, just as Ves expected to complete the process without any issue, another unexpected complication arose.

Ves had already noticed that while every spiritual shards integrated the life-attributed energy, some of them absorbed it faster than others.

The differences weren't important. The weaker shards such as those that originated from the Golden Cat and the original Idol of the Superior Mother weren't as efficient as the stronger ones such as those originating from Qilanxo.

However, there was a very noticeable exception.

The small amount of spiritual shards that Ves had derived from his mother's statuette started off slowly. It absorbed the life-attributed energy at a very sedate pace, as if the weak and fragile shards couldn't go any faster without breaking.

Ves didn't concentrate too much on their behavior. This caused him to miss something very important.

As his mother's spiritual shards started to absorb more energy, they became more alive. They expanded in size and began to absorb the life-attributed energy even faster!

Once they had reached a certain size, the shards then began to move on their own accord!

Like gravity, the scattered shard spontaneously started to attract each other across small distances. Once a shard bumped into another one, they spontaneously merged, and in a perfect fashion as well!

The larger shards became even more powerful. They not only exerted a greater attraction on shards that came from the same source, but also became capable of absorbing life-attributed energy even faster.

It didn't take long before this process escalated to the point where Ves finally became aware of what was taking place.

By then, it was too late! Ves barely integrated some of his mother's shards into the growing amalgamation of spirituality before an entirely new spiritual fragment had formed!

"What the hell?"

The spiritual fragment was not only many times stronger than the original, but its growth proceeded without any signs of stopping!

It had quickly reached the point where the majority of remaining free-floating life-attributed spiritual energy got sucked up by his greedy mother!

"Goddammit! Even in the form of fragments, you just can't help yourself! Spit it out!" Ves mentally yelled at the fragment.

Just like his real mother, the fragment ignored his complaints and gleefully monopolized every remaining available energy!

The surprisingly rapid absorption almost caused Ves to break his concentration. He never expected that the addition of a tiny spiritual remnant from his mother would lead to such a drastic result.

At this moment, his mother's spiritual fragment absorbed so much life-attributed energy that it had grown as strong as the Golden Cat, if not more! As the fragment rapidly digested its gains, it began to reach a strength where Ves wasn't sure whether he could keep it in control!

"It's too strong!"

As his mother's lively spiritual fragment rejuvenated itself, it suddenly started to approach the spiritual amalgamation that was supposed to become his new spiritual product.

Ves had very high hopes for his latest creation. The Superior Mother was supposed to become the ultimate design spirit for his line of Hexer mech designs!

It was supposed to be the killer feature of his mechs that would enable the Hex Army to attain a decisive advantage on the battlefield!

Yet even as Ves and Gloriana was about to complete their latest act of creation, the self-revived spiritual fragment barged in and started to attack the incomplete design spirit!

Ves became shocked yet again! If he wasn't trying to maintain as much concentration as possible, he would have vomited at this sight.

"Mother! Go away! You're ruining everything!"

Like a voracious predator, his mother's spiritual fragment assaulted the unborn Superior Mother like a wolf jumping on a sheep.

While Ves believed the Superior Mother was strong enough to defend herself, at this time she was still 'under construction'!

Ves and Gloriana required at least several more minutes to complete the restoration process and allow the Superior Mother to come alive.

Until that happened, the Superior Mother was completely unable to defend itself!

As his mother's spiritual fragment cannibalized the spiritual body of the Superior Mother, its growth ballooned once again. Once the fragment grew stronger, it began to consume the Superior Mother at an even faster pace!

This was the most frightening sight that Ves had ever seen! Belatedly, Ves attempted to push his mother's spiritual fragment away, yet as soon as he did so, the voracious fragment ate his own spiritual energy!

"What the hell?! You're not even sparing your own son?!"

Ves had become so alarmed that he forcefully pulled back some of his concentration in order to physically push Gloriana away.

"Ah, what gives, Ves?!" She suddenly asked as she held her head in pain!

"A massive complication occurred. Stay away and close your mind as best as possible!"

As his girlfriend looked at Ves with confusion, he regained his concentration and tried to observe what was taking place.

His mother's spiritual fragment was making rapid progress, though Ves finally spotted some signs of indigestion.

It turned out that her fragment's absorption ability wasn't omnipotent after all. While his mother was able to absorb his own spiritual energy and life-attributed spiritual energy without any problem, it was a different matter when it came to other sources and attributes!

Ves clearly recognized that his mother's spiritual fragment was growing more polluted. It started to accommodate a large variety of spiritual attributes, many of which only partially aligned with his mother.

Nonetheless, the power the fragment exuded no longer limited it to just a fragment. It had become an entirely new spiritual energy that was growing more alive and more complex by the second.

A storm of energy started to crackle within the strange new entity. Ves began to feel a strong form of pressure that rapidly expanded to the environment!

The thousands of men and hundreds of women kneeling in the hexagon all began to experience a very powerful pressure that vaguely resembled a glow, but stronger!

The air grew heavy and some people started to show signs of short breath.

As Ves completely lost control over what was taking place, the skies itself began to roil! Storm clouds spontaneously formed over the giant hexagon. Soon enough, lightning and thunder started to form in the cloud.

Crack!

Suddenly, an immense lightning bolt struck the statue of the Superior Mother!

Owing to its high-quality materials, the statue incurred no damage at all. Nonetheless, Ves and Gloriana hovered so close to it that they yelled and rapidly distanced themselves!

While all of this took place, the entire crowd became awed at what was taking place. None of them questioned why lightning randomly formed and struck the statue. As far as the audience was concerned, this was all part of the show!

Chapter 2110 Split Perspective

The Nyxian Gap. Known as a tumor that intruded upon multiple star sectors, this anomalous region of space was the home to many pirates and malcontents.

The same properties that made it so difficult to navigate through it also provided every wanted criminal a safe haven from persecution!

Filled with asteroids in every direction, the space inside was both chaotic and perilous. Though the amount of asteroid impacts was surprisingly rare, there were plenty of other hazards that made it dangerous to traverse.

Aside from the space warping that spanned the entire Gap, there were many localized hazards that regularly swallowed up unknown passerbys.

Some originated from the combination of strange and powerful exotics interacting with each other.

Others came about due to calamities that happened in the past.

Regardless, the deeper someone traversed the Gap, the greater the risk of entering a localized hazard. These hazards also grew in strength and lethality, making it increasingly more perilous to travel to the core regions of the Gap.

Right now, not even the Oblivion Hand escaped this fate!

Its enormous fleet, which consisted of over forty carriers and other starships, had been traversing deeper into the Gap. Though it had appropriately scattered its elements, the fleet abruptly lost contact with a pair of light carriers along with a number of mechs on patrol!

The entire fleet halted. The remaining members of the dark mercenary corps took up battle stations and guarded against every possibility.

Perhaps the Oblivion Hand might have stumbled upon an ambush!

Yet as hostile attackers never showed up, the dark mercenaries started to dispatch some scouting parties.

When a number of short-ranged drones began to investigate the site where the two carriers disappeared, they suddenly vanished as well!

"It's a hazard zone!"

The entire Oblivion Hand, which had razed and plundered over a dozen well-fortified bases, suddenly became as timid as a mouse. The fleet quickly turned around and distanced itself from the presumed hazard zone.

There was a good reason to do so. When faced with the unknown, the denizens of the Gap had all learned the hard way that curiosity often killed the cat!

Pirates had little reason to investigate the localized hazard zones. None of the pirate leaders were scientists, and even if they employed a bunch of intellectuals, it was not for the purpose of scientific exploration.

Nonetheless, the Oblivion Hand didn't intend to give up on its missing assets and personnel. The Dark Cleaver may have acquired an aggressive reputation, but he was also loved by his men!

The care and attention he put towards the wellbeing of his followers was one of the many reasons why the new expert pilot attracted such a large following.

A strange mech emerged from the flagship of the Oblivion Hand. Every other member of the Oblivion Hand reacted with awe and worship at the machine that flew towards the site of disaster.

"The Devil Tiger!"

The landbound tiger had become the iconic mech of the Dark Cleaver. After every battle, it grew stronger and more magnificent. Many people guessed that the Dark Cleaver managed to enter into a partnership with a rogue Senior Mech Designer or something.

The mercenary commander never confirmed anything, but the fact that the Devil Tiger was slowly morphing into an expert mech lent a lot of credence to this rumor!

Right now, the bestial mech propelled itself effortlessly through space despite the fact that it was a landbound mech.

Those observing the machine would easily be able to spot the wings mounted on the back of the mech.

The wings were part of an improvised flight system that had been built to allow the Devil Tiger to maneuver in space. The best part of it was that it had been built like a backpack module and a harness, allowing the Devil Tiger to mount its wings only when needed.

Just like the mech itself, the detachable flight system had been upgraded continuously. After incorporating stronger, more resilient and more potent exotics, all of its attributes had slowly increased in order to catch up with the performance of the Devil Tiger.

In the past, it had been fairly easy for enemies to damage and cripple the large wings.

Now, it was as tough as the chest plating of a defensive mech! Anyone who thought that the wings of the expert mech could be plucked so easily would be making a crucial error!

Inside the cockpit of the mech, a dark helmeted figure sat confidently in the piloting seat. An aura of restrained aggression coiled around the mech pilot.

This was the Dark Cleaver distinctive force of will!

What was odd about his force of will was that it did not remain still. Instead, it began to spread to the Devil Tiger, integrating in its frame and empowering it through mysterious means.

The compatibility between the mech pilot and the expert mech was exceptionally high! Only capable expert mech development teams could achieve this degree of integration between expert mech and expert pilot!

It was incredibly odd to encounter such a high degree of compatibility in a poor and chaotic environment like the Nyxian Gap.

Only a couple of individuals knew there was a price for this high compatibility.

A small, hand-sized crystal figure of a woman floated alongside the helmet of the expert pilot.

"Does it hurt?" She asked, her voice ringing in the cockpit with an ethereal echo.

"That hasn't been a problem anymore for a long time, Cynthia." The helmeted man replied. "It's just.. I can't get rid of the restlessness and irritation inside of me. It's been weeks since we last raided someone. The hunger.. it's growing again."

The face of the miniature crystalline figure grew concerned. "You are capable of handling this. I know it. I'm very impressed with how you have overcome your hurdles and grew into an expert pilot so quickly."

"You never warned me of the side effects!" Ryncol Larkinson complained. "In fact, you didn't even bother asking for my permission before you stuffed something weird in my head! Now, half my dreams consist of living as a giant cat preying on mechs!"

Cynthia's crystal body gently patted the side of her husband's helmet. "It will fade over time. Your willpower still requires a lot of time to erase all of the remnants in your mind."

Her husband had already overcome the most lethal hurdles. Now that he successfully advanced to expert pilot, he was no longer at risk of losing his personality and identity. Whatever lingering effects that remained would slowly turn into a non-issue.

Just as the Devil Tiger was just about to reach the edge of the presumed hazard zone, the crystalline form of Cynthia suddenly jerked.

"Huh?"

Her small head turned into a direction that led directly away from the center of the Gap.

"What's going on, Cynthia."

"I don't know.." She narrowed her eyes. "I sense.. that something is brewing. It's unsettling me. Each time I feel this way, something drastic happens."

The Devil Tiger slowed down its forward traversal. Its flight system started to propel in the opposite direction, causing the mech to slowly come to a stop relative to the fleet.

"Is it the hazard zone?"

"No. The threat is not in front. It's in the rear."

"What?!" Ryncol stiffened his back. "Are there any enemies approaching from the rear?!"

"Nothing of the sort. Instead.. I feel that something is happening light-years away. Possibly outside of the Nyxian Gap."

"Is it our son?" Ryncol suddenly asked in concern.

"Maybe.. I can't judge.."

Several tense minutes passed by as the Devil Tiger froze in space. A few officers of the Oblivion Hand contacted the Dark Cleaver in concern, but Ryncol quickly ordered his subordinates to stay put and remain on guard.

Just as Cynthia was about to dismiss her ominous feeling, a sharp crack suddenly struck her mentality!

"AHHHH!"

Her intangible form suddenly separated from her avatar! The crystal body suddenly dropped onto the floor as a transparent form suddenly emerged and expanded to full size!

"What's going on?!"

"It hurts!"

No matter what Ryncol tried to do, he could do nothing to relieve his wife's pain!

His hands went straight through her body as if she consisted of air.

At this moment, Cynthia Larkinson suffered a sudden ache in her mentality! Strange visions assaulted her as she felt as if she was being invaded by something far away.

The most frustrating part of this ordeal was that she wasn't able to defend herself against this attack! Whatever external influence managed to reach her had slipped right past her formidable defenses and acted straight onto the core of her existence!

"How can this be?! This is impossible!"

As the pain began to reach an unbearable level, a loud explosion suddenly shattered her perspective in half!

On one side, her consciousness was still alive and present inside the cockpit of the Devil Tiger.

On another side, she suddenly began to gain a view of an entirely different location.

The pain that struck straight to the core of her being had subsided a bit, allowing her to observe this strange new location.

Her perspective wasn't limited to a narrow field of vision. Through some indescribable senses, she slowly gained a sense of the second environment.

"Land. Clouds. A.. hexagon? People. Lots of people. What is this..?!"

Had her enemies performed some sort of ritual to draw her out?!

"Wait! This isn't their style!"

As Cynthia bewilderingly looked around, he immediately spotted some familiar forms floating in the air. Her eyes grew red as she realized who was responsible for her odd state.

"VES!" She angrily boomed!

No one heard her spiritual voice. The thousands of people who knelt in front of the statue as it attracted lightning bolt after lightning bolt continued to look at the statue with awe even as their minds all experienced some form of pressure.

Surprisingly, Ves, who was floating in the air at a healthy distance from the lightning-struck statue, cringed as soon as she conveyed her displeasure!

"I KNOW YOU CAN HEAR ME, VES!"

"..Mother?" Ves communicated back with a reluctant spiritual response. "I thought you were in the Nyxian Gap!"

"OBVIOUSLY THAT IS NOT ENTIRELY TRUE ANYMORE, AND YOU ARE AT FAULT!"

"I-I-I didn't mean to! You aren't supposed to be here!"

"REALLY?"

"I was just performing an experiment, that's all!"

Cynthia cast her senses around her yet again. She contemptuously noted the giant ritualistic hexagon, the thousands of kneeling worshippers and the statue her second perspective inhabited!

Her fury built up even as her mental strain began to grow more unbearable.

"I THOUGHT YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE A MECH DESIGNER, VES. I EXPECTED YOU TO GO ABOUT YOUR LIFE SURROUNDED BY MACHINES AND MECHS. HOW COME I FIND YOU IN THE MIDDLE OF A RITUAL CENTERED AROUND A STATUE BUILT IN MY LIKENESS?!"

Her son's jaw shook as he struggled to offer a reply! The little weasel was too afraid to explain himself!

A different voice suddenly butted into their private conversation.

"Who.. who are you?"

Both mother and son reacted with surprise!

Ves turned to the woman floating by his side. "Gloriana? You can hear all of that?"

"Yeah. Who is she, Ves?" Gloriana asked with wide eyes. "Is she.. truly your mother?"

"She is."

"I thought she was dead!"

"She is."

"What does that even mean!?"

"It's complicated, okay! How can you even talk to me this way?!"

Cynthia studied the woman carefully. She quickly understood the truth of the matter.

"You put a piece of yourself inside of her, Ves. Do you know how dangerous that is?! I'm surprised she is still fine!"

"Ah."

"I'm surprised her mind isn't fighting back. She must think very highly of you."

"She's my girlfriend." Ves lamely replied.

"I see."

Cynthia peered at the woman. Her anger subsided a bit. "You chose well. At least you did one thing right, Ves. I approve."

"You do?"

"The love you share for each other is very real!"

Gloriana smiled with pleasure at the compliment! Her boyfriend's dead mother approved of their relationship! This was the happiest day of her life!

As for Ves, he wanted to scratch his head. How come this weird turn of events turn into a meeting between his girlfriend and his mother?