Mech Touch 6231

Chapter 6231 A Strange Boot

As Ves and Ketis stood before the Wishing Fountain, the former explained a few details about the Wishing Fountain's strange lottery drawing process.

He also mentioned many of the strange and powerful prizes that he managed to win from the Wishing Fountain.

"...and that is how a man like myself unwillingly gained a feminine Flower Parasol. Don't get me wrong. It is definitely a powerful high-level artifact that has good growth and development potential. It is just not something that a man would want to get caught with. The artifact itself is also biased against men. It is only truly willing to unveil its full power in the hands of a woman."

"I see." Ketis said with a bemused expression.

The Wishing Fountain truly embodied the randomness of a lottery. While the more valuable lottery tickets always guaranteed a prize award, they did not promise to give their holders exactly what they wanted!

However, as long as the lottery ticket holder got lucky, they had the potential to obtain goods worth hundreds if not thousands of AP that was normally unattainable through other means!

Therefore, the Wishing Fountain was still one of the most valuable facilities of the Mech Designer System. It gave people like Ves hope of obtaining a boon that was powerful enough to change their lives.

Ves had benefited a lot from the prizes of the Wishing Fountain. Now, he hoped that Ketis would be able to get lucky and start to accumulate her own collection of valuables.

"Here." He said as he pulled out a golden lottery ticket from his pocket and dropped it onto the woman's palm. "This is my welcome gift to you. It only costs 5 AP to purchase this ticket, and there is a chance that you might end up winning nothing, but there is always the chance of obtaining a treasure of untold value. Did you know that I originally obtained Lucky from one of my very first lottery draws?"

That certainly caused Ketis to regard the Wishing Fountain with much greater respect.

"Truly?"

"Yes. How else did I manage to obtain a gem cat so advanced at the start of my career?"

Ketis' eyes grew red as she stared intensely at the simple looking golden lottery ticket.

Although it did not convey as much wealth and promise as the radiant lottery ticket that Ves had shown off earlier, the golden ticket still represented a huge array of possibilities.

Would she be able to get lucky as well and obtain a lifelong companion that could grow a lot more powerful over time?

She did not know the answer, but that was why she wanted to give this a try. She did not hesitate any longer and immediately tossed the ticket into the fountain as instructed.

The Wishing Fountain absorbed the ticket before the water began to glow gold.

Soon enough, the fountain spat out a black boot of an ancient style.

Ketis catched the piece of footwear and looked at it with puzzlement. "That's it? Where is the other boot?"

[Congratulations! You have won a replica of Tye-Kayense's Left Boot!]

"..."

Ves became speechless. Was Ketis' luck that terrible? Although the design of the boot was rather interesting, he did not sense it was made out of any powerful or exceptional materials at all. It was just a boot that any shoemaker could make in his own workshop in a matter of days!

Perhaps believing that there may be more to this prize than was apparent on the surface, Ketis did not hesitate to bend down, remove her left shoe and put on Tye-Kayense's left boot.

"It is a perfect fit." The swordmaster said. "It fits me better than my old shoe."

"Do you notice anything else? Does it provide you with a surge of strength or anything?"

"...No. It is just a boot. A Comfortable black boot, but still just a boot."

Well, that was a waste of a golden lottery ticket. It was a good thing that he still had 9 of them left.

Once Ketis came to terms with the reality that she was not able to win a prize as special as Lucky today, she shrugged her shoulders and was ready to resume her tour of the System Space.

"Er, Ketis?"

"What is it, Ves."

"Aren't you going to change back to your shoe? The boot looks a bit discordant on you. It has been a literal age since asymmetric footwear was last in fashion."

Ketis smirked back. "I don't care about fashion. This boot fits me so well that I don't want to switch back anymore. Besides, I want to keep wearing it if only to confirm that it doesn't come with anything special. I might even have someone craft a mirror copy of this boot so that it won't look out of place anymore."

That was a sensible idea, assuming that the mysterious boot granted by the Wishing Fountain did not secretly carry a curse or any other nefarious dangers.

Though Ves was pretty sure that there was absolutely nothing extraordinary about Tye-Kayense's Left Boot, who knew whether he could trust the System's description!

"Be careful, Ketis. From my own experiences with the System, it never lies about anything it says or describes, but it can still mislead you by withholding important information. It never told me where Lucky came from or who made it. Perhaps what makes this boot special is not its inherent power or the lack of it, but the significance of its appearance to others. Maybe a hidden Compact cultist that is hiding among the population of red humanity would instantly mistake you as a descendant of a great enemy and go after your life."

Although the theory sounded plausible, it was also a very far-fetched scenario. Ketis did not take it too seriously.

"Let us move onto the next facility. I am curious to see what else this place has to offer."

The pair left the Wishing Fountain and moved up to the Divine Bazaar.

Ves did not need to explain too much how Ketis could benefit from this place. As long as she earned enough AP, she could exchange for all kinds of amazing goods and materials that the Bazaar had on rotation at the time!

"The System used to give me access to a huge catalog of goods, but the problem was that most of it was unaffordable to me." Ves explained to the second user of the System. "After upgrading to Version 2.0, the System changed to the current model, which is to offer a selection of several hundred random high-quality goods. There isn't as much variety as before, but you can rest assured that each of this stuff is worth the AP. For example, I have found the Qi Restoration Potion to be extremely useful in emergencies. If I had more AP, I would have bought a few of them in order to stockpile them in the Vault."

Ketis could certainly understand the usefulness of a potion that could restore her extraordinary power in an instant, but that was not what caught her attention.

Instead, she moved over to the section of the Divine Bazaar that offered all kinds of strange and weird materials that she was pretty sure was not available on the open market.

[Radenka Metal]

Price: 55 Ascension Points

A rare exotic metal that originated from Randenka, a planet that was destroyed in a conflict that occurred in the distant past. Radenka Metal is a popular material to forge bladed weapons due to its excellent ability to hold an edge. It combines well with heavenly materials and can be further strengthened and sharpened by imbuing it with the power of metal.

[Trellband Steel]

Price 500 Ascension Points

Trellband Steel is a valuable alloy of multiple high-grade exotics as well as phasewater originally developed by the orven race. Trellband Steel is the favored material used by the high-caste members of the orven race to forge sacrificial daggers. The orven elders and leaders believe that using daggers made out of this Trellband Steel will increase their chances of evolving into phase lords. One of the reasons why they hold this belief is that a dagger made out of this alloy can cut through spatial barriers and energy shields enhanced by phasewater.

[Hiseen Sharpening Stone]

Price: 10 Ascension Points

A sharpening stone created and used by the Hiseen, an ancient brotherhood of swordsmen who sought to train themselves into breaking 10,000 laws with their swords. The Hiseen were convinced that the best way to break every enemy and obstacle in their path was to sharpen their swords to the point where they can cut the immaterial as easily as the material. The Hiseen Sharpening Stone is made out of a special combination of exotic and hyper materials that when used with a specific technique, is able to physically sharpen most swords to the point where they gain a monomolecular edge.

Although the Divine Bazaar did not provide too many offerings related to swordmasters, Ketis already found a small selection of goods that could easily allow her to progress her swordsmanship by leaps and bounds!

Anyone who thought that swordmasters did not need to invest much money in order to progress was wrong.

Just because swordmasters did not rely on huge and expensive mechs to channel their full power did not mean that capital was irrelevant.

Gear mattered just as much to a swordmaster like Ketis. If she was able to forge a powerful new sword or upgrade the Bloodsinger with superior materials like the ones offered in the Divine Bazaar, she was incredibly hopeful that she would be able to master new techniques and elevate her swordsmanship to a higher level.

"This Bazaar is amazing." Ketis said. "I will definitely return here on a frequent basis. No matter whether I come as a mech designer or a swordmaster, this Bazaar should definitely present me with relevant offers. The only issue is the price…"

She had 0 AP to her name. The System did not provide her with a welcome gift of AP, which meant that she needed to start earning it from scratch.

If not for the fact that Ves was awfully short on AP himself, he would have been willing to transfer a few dozen of it for her to get started with using the System.

In fact, Ves was not even sure whether the System had an option that allowed users to send AP to each other.

He could explore that later. He still needed to finish the tour.

"Come. There is something really exciting up ahead."

They left the Divine Bazaar and approached a large and mystical tree that dangled many weirdly shaped fruit from its long and noodly branches.

Ketis looked up at the willow-like tree and stared at the descriptions of all of the enlightenment fruits.

"So this is where you obtained the fruits that allowed people like Tusa and Isobel to master entirely new skills out of nowhere. The fruits you purchased here must be why they mastered shadow and explosion powers, correct?"

Ves was impressed that she was able to make this connection. "That is true. The fruits here all cost a lot of AP, but they are definitely worth the price. You only have to ingest them to master the knowledge contained within. You won't be able to master it perfectly, but you will gain

enough proficiency to be able to use what you have learned in your mech design projects right away. The Tree of Possibilities and its predecessor are the reasons why I have been able to progress so damn quickly. Without the frequent infusion of lots of advanced skills and knowledge packages, I would have still remained stuck as an Apprentice Mech Designer at my age!"

Ketis fully understood the significance of the Tree of Possibilities. She immediately thought back on her own problems and shortcomings and knew that she could solve most of them as long as she started to ingest a half-a-dozen enlightenment fruits related to mech design.

She began to see the Tree of Possibilities in the same way as Ves.

This was more than just a tree. It had the potential to become one of the chief contributors to her future success!

Chapter 6232 Attainable Possibilities

The Tree of Possibilities seductively dangled its fruits over the heads of Ves and Ketis.

For a long time, Ves enjoyed sole access to the Tree of Possibilities. He had exchanged over a dozen fruits over the years, and each of them had provided lots of direct and indirect benefits.

There was no better and more efficient way for Ves to quickly learn and gain proficiency in all sorts of useful Skills!

The best part was that the reach of the Tree of Possibilities was insanely vast. It was able to produce fruit containing knowledge from all sorts of sources, from the lost repositories of ancient cultivation societies to current native alien technological development.

Ves had no idea how the Tree was able to accumulate so much knowledge. He was pretty sure that a part of the Tree's vast database had yet to be mastered by modern humans.

"This tree…" Ketis gazed up at the fruits in wonderment. "There is so much variety. There is one fruit that claims I can learn how to construct puelmer homeships. There is another fruit that claims it can impart me with the knowledge to mutate into a three-headed beast. Then there is a fruit that can teach me how to design active scanning systems that are good at detecting stealth systems favored by the Red Fleet."

"This is just the tip of the iceberg, Ketis. There are much more outrageous enlightenment fruits available, though they also cost an exponentially greater amount of AP. It is a bit difficult to obtain the better ones. You need to work hard to earn a lot of AP to buy a specific fruit, but if too much time has passed, the Tree of Possibilities has already refreshed its selection with a different rotation. It may take a year or longer before the fruit you have in mind has made a return. This is frankly one of the most frustrating aspects about the Tree of Possibilities."

Just like the Divine Bazaar, the Tree of Possibilities only offered a rotation of a few hundred fruits at a time, but the ones available at the moment already made Ketis excited.

If the descriptions offered by the System were accurate, then she could completely imagine herself becoming much more powerful as a mech designer as well as a swordmaster as long as she ingested much of these fruits!

"No wonder you have improved so quickly despite not spending as much time on studying." Ketis said with clear awe in her tone. "Even a pig can turn into a genius with the help of these fruits. As far as I know, no other learning device or method can equal the effectiveness of eating one of these fruits. I am becoming more and more eager to start earning Ascension Points. Everything good in the Mech Designer System depends on it. My intuition tells me that there are numerous fruits above us that can definitely advance my progression as a mech designer or a swordmaster if I gain access to the knowledge contained within."

She gestured at several different fruits of varying shapes and colors.

One of them was a familiar wood-based fruit that Ves thought about acquiring for himself. Now that he thought about it, Ketis could make much better use of it than himself.

[Evil-Breaking Peach Wood Sword Manual]

Price: 100 Ascension Points

Imparts a method to carve suitable wood into an Evil-Breaking Peach Wood Sword. This is a sword that does not possess a strong cutting edge, but is highly effective when used to fight against negative existences. The Evil-Breaking Peach Sword is also effective when used to fight energy-based lifeforms and other energy constructs.

Evil-Breaking Peach Swords that are excellently carved and made with high-quality materials can be enhanced by lightning. When empowered by any source of lightning energy, the Evil-

Breaking Peach Sword not only becomes much more deadly against immaterial enemies, but also receives physical tempering that strengthens its physical properties.

"This is certainly an interesting enlightenment fruit." Ves commented. "It is an especially nice complement to Venerable Lanie's Elegant Rage and other wood-based mechs that I intend to design in the future."

"I do not care too much about using wood to build my mechs, but this is such a completely different approach to sword making that absorbing this fruit will expose me to an entirely different facet to swords."

Another fruit promised to impart her with a completely different style of swordsmanship than she was familiar with. Just the novelty of it along with the use of entirely different cultivation principles was enough to make the swordmaster within herself yearn to master this new kind of fighting approach as soon as possible.

Its description contained familiar concepts and mechanisms that reminded Ves of the cultivation approach of both swordmasters and mech pilots. Ves even developed the suspicion that it may have served as the foundation of human willpower cultivation!

[Seven Emotions Sword Styles - Joy Chapter]

Price: 400 Ascension Points

Bestows the skills and related theory to execute one of the Seven Emotions Sword Styles with a sword or other handheld bladed weapon. The Seven Emotion Sword Styles is an extreme form of swordsmanship that teaches the practitioner how to weaponize one's own emotions and produce extraordinary results.

The Seven Emotions Sword Styles stand out in that they do not require the use of external resources to master. Instead, they impose high requirements on their practitioners, demanding that they seek out a high level of stimulation that can push their emotions to inhuman extremes. Great danger lies in pursuing extreme emotions. If the practitioners lose their self-control, they become slaves to their own swords and emotions, thereby posing a danger to everyone and everything around them. Only by conquering their own extreme emotions and impulses will sword practitioners be able to master their chosen sword styles.

The Joy Chapter of the Seven Emotions Sword Styles centers around using one's own happiness to produce positive outcomes that can generate greater happiness to the sword practitioner. By defeating the opponents that are correlated to happiness, the newly generated joy will feed back into the practitioner, thereby enabling further enemies to be defeated with greater ease.

Once the momentum of the practitioner has exceeded a high level, the sword wielder can generate an expanding field of joy that can impart a fraction of its power to friendly combatants. This will allow them to fight alongside the sword practitioner with greater power, thereby generating greater joy that will feed back into them all, allowing them to overcome any enemy, even those whose strengths exceed their own cultivation.

Requirements: Strength must be 1.7 or higher. Dexterity must be 1.8 or higher. Endurance must be 2.0 or higher. Intelligence must be 1.5 or higher. Concentration must be 3.0 or higher. Spirituality must be 5 or higher.

"These Seven Emotions Sword Styles must be a collection of top-tier sword styles from a time before the founding of the Heavensword Association." Ketis immediately concluded. "The description provided by the System is not too detailed, but there are already enough clues that make me convinced that it is based on different principles than the sword styles that I am familiar with. If I can learn and master this so-called Joy Chapter, I think I may be able to break through to the rank of sword saint!"

A single chapter was worth 400 Ascension Points! With that high of a price tag, the enlightenment fruit definitely contained extremely valuable knowledge!

Ves made another observation. "From what I can surmise, there are seven of these chapters in total. I bet that if you can gather all of the chapters that are based on different emotions and master each of them, you'll be able to combine them and find a way to advance to the mythical rank of sword god."

"I think so as well." Ketis' eyes glowed brighter as she stared hungrily at the 400 AP fruit. "I think I fully understand the value of the Tree of Possibilities now. It gives users like us access to all sorts of forbidden and extremely powerful knowledge. We need to pay a huge amount of Ascension Points for the most desirable fruits, but at least the System offers us a clear and transparent channel to obtain these powerful skills and techniques. That is much easier and more straightforward than trying to convince a Star Designer to give us access to her personal library or hunting down an obscure family that has collected a half-decayed tome in one of its vaults."

She was completely correct. The Tree of Possibilities cut out all of the middlemen and directly made the valuable knowledge accessible to the users of the Mech Designer System so long as they could cough up the required amount of Ascension Points.

"By the way, what are these requirements and what are the numbers based upon?" The female mech designer asked.

"It's just the System's way of quantifying our Attributes. I will take you to the top of the mountain where you can inspect your own Status later. It is not that difficult to raise your lowest Attributes with the help of the System. You can buy certain pills or other powerful reagents down at the Divine Bazaar that can help you meet the requirements of the more powerful enlightenment fruits."

"I will need an AP for that, which I do not have."

"Then you will need to work for it, Ketis. You can still take advantage of a few services offered by the System without spending any AP, but that would be a huge waste of its potential. The System doesn't want to be attached to a bunch of lazy freeloaders. It actively encourages its users to work hard and be as productive as possible. The many incentives offered by the System for becoming a high performer is a big reason why I am so successful and why I tried to impart this attitude towards the Larkinson Clan."

Ketis looked enlightened by this explanation. So much of Ves' actions and decisions suddenly made a lot of sense now that she gained access to a crucial piece of missing context.

The Mech Designer System literally shaped Ves into the mech designer he was today!

The pair spent a few more minutes admiring the many enlightenment fruits that promised to turn Ketis into a much better mech designer or swordmaster.

However, her lack of AP ultimately forced her to turn away from all of the temptation. There was little point in looking at the fruits without having any chance of acquiring them due to her incredible poverty.

Ves actually felt a little sorry for her. While Ketis turned to leave, he moved closer to the Tree of Possibilities.

He briefly studied one of the cheapest fruits before plucking it from its branch. He inwardly winced as he could just feel his stash of AP dwindling even further from its already alarmingly low sum.

"Ves?"

"For you." Ves extended the small black peach-like fruit. "I think it is best if you can experience the effect of ingesting an enlightenment fruit in advance. That way, you will know what you are saving your AP up for. Besides, I have studied your recent works, and I truly think you need to shore up your fundamentals. It takes years of dedicated study for most Journeyman to reach the standard of a Senior in just one of these fields, let alone a dozen. This is one of the reasons why third-class and to a lesser extent second-class Journeymen can take decades if not a century to advance to the next rank."

Ketis curiously took hold of the fruit and briefly read its description.

[Senior-level Mechanics]

Price: 5 Ascension Points

Imparts a comprehensive understanding of the broad field of Mechanics at a level of proficiency that corresponds to a Senior Mech Designer.

Requirements: Journeyman-level Mechanics.

Though she felt a little insulted that Ves thought so little of her mastery in the field of Mechanics, she was honest enough with herself to know that he was not wrong.

If she could solve this shortcoming instantly by ingesting a single fruit, then she was not conceited enough to reject this gift!

"How do I make use of this fruit?"

"Just eat it in a single go. Do not stop until you have finished the entire fruit."

"Good."

Ketis only needed two bites to ingest the entire enlightenment fruit. She then began to freeze as the fruit began to burn a huge amount of knowledge related to Mechanics directly into her mind!

Chapter 6233 The Morality of the System

The fruit that Ves bought was disgustingly cheap, but offered so much to Ketis.

The knowledge was overwhelming. Ketis had never received such a massive infusion of theory and insights before. Her brain came under a huge amount of strain as the fruit forcibly infused it with so much information that it felt as if her head was about to burst!

Fortunately, the enlightenment fruits never actually exceeded her limits. It appeared that it was specifically designed to accommodate its eventual beneficiary to the best possible extent.

Since Ketis was not only unaccustomed to enlightenment fruits, but also possessed a lower brain development, it took a lot of time for her to 'digest' its contents.

Senior-level Mechanics ceased to be a big deal to Ves a long time ago. Let alone this enlightenment fruit, he was easily able to digest a more expensive fruit that contained a lot more theory.

"Are you okay now, Ketis?"

"I am… fine, I think. This is a huge rush for me. Give me a moment to catch my breath. I am used to exhausting myself in physical training sessions, but I never exposed my brain to so much mental drain. I cannot imagine how much worse it will be if I try to absorb one of the more expensive fruits…"

"It is not as bad as you think. If you cannot digest all of the knowledge in a single go, then the fruit will hold most of it back and feed you bits and pieces over weeks or maybe even months. It may take a lot longer before you can grasp all of the contents of an enlightenment fruit, but at least it wont drive you crazy or anything."

Ketis grew relieved after she heard that. That meant that she did not have to refrain herself from targeting the more expensive and desirable fruits.

"If I can eat a dozen or two dozen more fruits like this, I am confident that I can become a Senior Mech Designer much faster than before. I don't have to work hard for two decades or so before I can find my breakthrough chance. As long as I absorb enough Senior-level knowledge in the most important fields of mech design, I am confident I can come up with a powerful design application that can take my work to the next level!"

Ves chuckled at her enthusiasm. "That is the spirit. The Tree of Possibilities can help you as a mech designer in two different ways. It can help you skip years of painstaking study by quickly absorbing the knowledge that mech designers of a higher rank are expected to know. It can also give you access to exotic new technological applications that you can use as inspiration to develop your own powerful design applications. However, you should be careful not to become too dependent on these fruits to fuel your progress."

"I know. I have not forgotten your warning, Ves."

"There's more to it than that. Ascension Points are scarce resources. It takes a huge amount of work to earn a lot of it, so it is not cost-effective for you to spend all of it on stuff that you can acquire yourself through other reasonable means. Your brain can also only absorb so much information at a time. There were times where I felt my brain was close to bursting. I think that the height of your Intelligence Attribute determines how much knowledge you can absorb from enlightenment fruits at a time. You will need to augment yourself further or find a way to trigger a mental evolution that raises your Intelligence limit. All of these limitations mean that you need to make a careful selection on what sort of fruits you intend to ingest. It is best to make a priority list and formulate a strategy in advance."

"I see. That is indeed a strict limitation."

Ketis understood that she was not able to make unlimited use of the Tree of Possibilities. Even if she earned a huge amount of AP, it was not wise to spend it all on a lot of enlightenment fruits.

The two mech designers eventually turned away from the Tree of Possibilities and moved to the next stop.

"Well, you have been wondering what other way you can rely on to earn a lot of Ascension Points. The Mission Hall is your answer. This is the place where you can choose to accept the Missions that the System has put on rotation from time to time. None of them are easy, and

many of them demand a serious time commitment from you, but the AP they award you is always considerable."

After witnessing what places like the Divine Bazaar and the Tree of Possibilities had to offer, Ketis possessed a strong interest in earning lots of AP right away.

She quickly browsed the Missions that the Mission Hall made available this time.

Many of the Missions were somewhat familiar to Ves. The details may have changed, but the nature of the requests were roughly similar to the Missions that showed up in the past.

Ves briefly looked surprised when the Mission Hall suddenly started to offer Missions that were definitely drafted with Ketis in mind!

[Teach Swordsmanship to 10 Disciples]

Mission: Teach Swordsmanship to 10 Disciples

Difficulty: B-Rank

Description

One of the duties of swordmasters is to pass on their legacies and keep their inheritances alive. In order to become a better student of the sword, a practitioner must also become a better teacher.

Accept at least 10 nominal or direct disciples and teach each of them one of your core sword styles and techniques. This Mission is deemed a success when 5 of your disciples have advanced to sword initiate as a direct result of your teaching.

Reward: 100 Ascension Points

Time limit: 3 Years

Penalty for failure: Lower your Strength by 0.2.

"This Mission…" Ketis spoke in a daze. "100 Ascension Points is a lot for a Mission, correct?"

"It is, but don't underestimate the challenge of completing a B-Rank Mission. I am sure you can teach a bunch of swordsmen and swordswomen well enough that they can break through and become the equivalent of an expert candidate in their profession, but… you only have 3 years to complete it. If you end up failing it, you will suffer a major penalty that is difficult or costly to recover from. Are you sure you want to accept such a difficult Mission right out the gate?"

Ketis did not hesitate and accepted it right away.

"This Mission is tailor-made for me. I was meaning to become more serious about passing on my swordsmanship to other aspiring swordsmen. Andraste and my children are only the first who have truly received full attention and guidance. The issue is that they are still too young to become sword initiates, so I better get to work by seeking out older and more practiced swordsmen and swordswomen as my disciples."

She would have no difficulty in finding willing pupils. Despite her relative youth, she was a genuine swordmaster that was comparable to an expert pilot! Lots of people would sell everything they possessed just to obtain a chance to become her disciple!

Ves felt a little mixed about this Mission, though.

"Teaching is a serious obligation, Ketis. Do not be half-hearted about this. You must make sure to allocate enough time on teaching and guiding your disciples so that they can continue to make progress over time. The System can be pretty strict about its wordings and requirements. A disciple is more than just a student. You can't get away with completing the Mission by taking on hundreds of students and teaching them in one big classroom for a couple of years in the hope that 5 of them will get lucky somehow."

The swordmaster's expression turned serious. "I am aware. I have no intention of going against the spirit of this Mission. The Mech Designer System clearly wants me to develop as a proper swordmaster. I will not disappoint its expectations by resorting to cheating or by relying on exploits."

"It is good that you know."

Ketis continued to browse for more Missions which she had a good chance of completing. The Mission Hall offered a few more that were clearly related to swordsmanship, but the problem was that they were much less… tasteful… than the prior one she accepted.

[Cursed Sword Birth]

Mission: Cursed Sword Birth

Difficulty: C-Rank

Description

When a swordmaster desires to wield a more powerful weapon that cannot be acquired through normal means, then he or she can choose to conduct a bloody ritual that can artificially empower a sword with the power of a curse.

Collect 999 innocent intelligent beings and immobilize them in a ritual circle according to a design imparted by this Mission. Gather other special reagents and plant them in the ritual circle. The stronger and more valuable the sacrifices, the greater the effect of the ritual.

Once the preparations are complete, wait until total night has fallen on the planet and location of the ritual before using the sword to inflict pain and suffering on each unwilling sacrifice. The greater the outburst of extreme negative emotions, the stronger the outcome. Chop off the heads and stain the blade of the sword with blood after the sacrifice has reached the limit.

Once the last and final sacrifice has fallen to the sword, throw it into the middle of the ritual circle and allow it to absorb the strong and lingering resentment of all 999 deceased sacrifices. If the ritualist has performed all of the steps correctly enough and harbors a strong desire for greater power, then the curse will successfully be born inside the blood-stained blade.

The birth of the Cursed Sword is the first step to nurturing a supreme god-killing weapon that can shock the weak into utter terror while polluting the strong with distracting mental anguish.

Reward: 250 Ascension Points

Time limit: 6 Months

Penalty for failure: Lower your Endurance by 0.1.

"This Mission… is abominable." Ketis uttered as she tried her best to suppress her indignation. "How can the System possibly encourage me to become a mass murderer? This goes against everything a swordmaster should stand for! A criminal who has shed so much innocent blood would never be tolerated in the Heavensword Association or the Larkinson Clan for that matter!"

Ves did not look too surprised that the System would present such a nefarious Mission.

"Don't be angry. This is just the way the System is made. Have you forgotten my theory on who originally created it? One of the… inventors of modern mechs likely built this System as a desperate means to come back to life again. This fellow was definitely a high-ranking member of the Five Scrolls Compact. Even if he was one of the least objectionable cultivators among the cadre of this infamous secret organization, his morality is nowhere comparable to that of modern humans."

"But still!"

"The System is pretty neutral in my opinion." Ves patiently explained. "It doesn't judge you at all. No matter whether you are a devil or a saint, it is accommodating to everyone. While it offers plenty of options for you to become one or the other, the ultimate choice is up to you. Unless it imposes a Mission onto you for some reason, you have complete freedom to decide how you want to develop with the help of the System. 250 Ascension Points for a single Mission is a really great reward, and obtaining a Cursed Sword sounds like a fantastic way to become exposed to a new and exotic means of empowering swords."

In other words, completing this Mission was bound to provide massive gains to Ketis in her guise as a Journeyman as well as a swordmaster!

Ketis did not feel tempted at all. She felt sicker and sicker as she continued to stare at its horrible demands.

"No thanks. I am eager to become stronger, but I will never corrupt my soul in the pursuit of power."

"Don't be in a hurry to dismiss it. Read carefully. Have you found any mention of humans in it? There isn't any. The System won't make such an obvious oversight if the purpose is to work with human sacrifices. This means that it is completely acceptable for you to create a Cursed Blade by spilling alien blood instead. You only need to ask the expeditionary fleet to capture enough alien POWs to conduct your ritual. Doesn't that sound like a good plan? Think about all of the cool stuff you can exchange for 250 Ascension Points…"

Chapter 6234 Code of Honor

Ves felt like vomiting.

Since when had the System become so generous all of a sudden?!

The Cursed Sword Birth Mission was such a scam!

What B-Rank Mission? It may as well be D-Rank in his eyes!

The requirement to gather 999 intelligent beings so that they could be tortured and killed was of no particular difficulty!

Ves and Ketis could easily instruct the expeditionary fleet to capture any random alien warship and transfer the prisoners of war into their custody.

Since the Mission did not specify any particular demands for the sacrifices aside from the need for them to be alive, organic and capable of bleeding, practically any alien species fighting on the frontlines would do! Perhaps the only unsuitable species among the 13 major alien races were the phase whales and the zzamayels.

The phase whales were too big and scarce. It was a massive waste to gather 999 of them to conduct a grand ritual just to empowered a single sword.

The zzamayels were too strange. They were more like jellyfish than traditional animals, and they did not even bleed as far as Ves knew of their strange biology.

That still left plenty of other alien species that were perfectly suitable for this ritual. In fact, there was no need to wait for the Golden Skull Alliance to capture the aliens. Many other forces had managed to capture a huge amount of prisoners of war across the frontlines.

Most of them ended up getting tossed out of the airlock or thrown into the nutrient pack production facilities. There were far too many low-ranking alien soldiers who possessed very little valuable intelligence and took too much space and resources to contain.

Since prisoner swaps between the two hostile sides were not established, there was little incentive to keep so many alien prisoners.

Even the biotech institutions could only conduct experiments on so many aliens at a time. It was a real pain to keep them all healthy and stable enough as every species possessed special needs and requirements that were difficult for humans to satisfy.

In any case, with so many aliens getting captured all of the time, it should be easy enough for the Larkinson Clan to buy several thousand of them. In fact, now that Ves thought about it, there was no need to resort to any outside parties at all. The Larkinson Biotech Institute still kept tens of thousands of sapient aliens locked inside the biomes of the Dragon's Den. He could instruct the LBI to transfer them to Ketis right away.

So long as the captives were in place, Ketis could start the ritual right away. Whether she wanted to empower the Bloodsinger or a brand-new blade forged out of different materials, there should not be any major issue in completing this mysterious ritual!

Ves believed that creating a Cursed Sword was as good as done once all of the pieces fell into place. Not only would Ketis gain a powerful new weapon that possessed a huge amount of research value, she would also earn 250 whopping Ascension Points, which was enough to redeem for extremely valuable goodies such as the Evil-Breaking Peach Wood Sword Manual Enlightenment Fruit!!

If she worked hard to complete a few other Missions, then she might be able to exchange the Seven Emotions Sword Styles - Joy Chapter Enlightenment Fruit!

Despite all of these temptations, Ketis looked completely unmoved. Her disgust grew stronger. She clearly did not react positively to Ves' persuasion.

"I am not like you, Ves." She snarled at him. "You may not see any issue with conducting a bloody ritual that calls for the slaughter of 999 alien beings, but I see this differently. Even when I was still a pirate in the frontier of the old galaxy, my fellow Swordmaidens and I have always held onto our bottom lines. We follow a strict code of honor that was rare among the

scum of the frontier. We Swordmaidens have always believed that our core strength is based on discipline. Do you know what that word means, Ves?"

"I have an impression on what it means, but I guess you hold onto a different definition."

"Apparently. Discipline is a sword that stands for self-control. It is the ability to keep ourselves sober and rational in situations where our more primal parts of ourselves want to go wild. More than that, discipline is also the strength to stick to what we think is right even when we are tempted to do wrong. This is one such situation. I do not know what motivations the System has in mind for tempting me to break my code in exchange for a large payoff, but I will not allow it to tarnish my honor."

"It's just a bunch of aliens, you know. How can it be dishonorable for you to kill a few aliens? Sure, torturing them before you can finally chop off their heads is distasteful, but who cares when there is a war going on? The native aliens have never been merciful towards us humans. It is either kill or be killed. I really don't think that it matters how we treat them before they inevitably get offed. Every alien taken captive during this war gets killed anyway. You just have an opportunity to extract more value out of their short lives before you can finally release them from their mortal suffering."

"YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!" Ketis furiously shouted towards Ves! "This is not about the aliens! I don't care about them! I don't think they should have the same rights as humans! What I care about is myself! Do you truly think I can prevent my heart from becoming stained if I act despicably against aliens as opposed to humans?"

"Uhh…"

"It isn't possible! If I want to maintain a clean and pure heart towards swordsmanship, I must comport myself with honor, dignity and respect, especially now that I have become a swordmaster that everyone looks up to. Ugly behavior will only cause my soul to become ugly as well. It doesn't matter if other people think I am completely in the right for inflicting unnecessary pain and torture onto alien soldiers who tried to wipe out all of humanity. Just because they have awful intentions towards our race doesn't mean that we have to stoop to their level. I am a swordmaster. I am better than these mortal beings. To become a sword saint, I must uphold the ideals of a saint. If I fall for the trap set by the System, I do not think I can become the saint that I have envisioned for myself anymore. Even if my future path is not cut off, I do not think I will like the person who I will become a few decades later."

"..."

Ves grew speechless for a moment. He never thought that his casual advice would lead to such a strong and principled outburst.

He could see where Ketis was coming from. She was not as pragmatic as himself. She still clung to the ideals that Ves had long considered naive. She was much better fit for the ideals of the Larkinson Clan than himself.

That was fine.

Ves actually liked it more if Ketis still retained her bottom lines and was willing to stick to her noble principles.

"I am sorry." He eventually broke the silence. "I shouldn't have tried to push you to accept this Mission. I may have inducted you into the Mech Designer System, but you should have complete control over how you interact with it. You don't need to listen to my advice. You are more than capable enough to make your own decisions."

Ketis calmed down by this time. "Apology accepted. I know that you mean well. Let us just move on. I can take a look at the other Missions at another time."

The pair left the Mission Hall and moved to the next facility.

"The Workshop of Creation is a place that I have not really used all that much. On the surface, it allows you to pay AP to make use of the excellent workshop equipment. As far as I know, it can give you access to the best tools available to humanity. If you truly want to construct an incredibly valuable mech or piece of equipment, you can think about creating it here instead of in reality. You just have to make sure you can explain where you made it to other people."

"You sound as if there is more to this Workshop than is apparent on the surface."

"There is. If you look closely at the rules, you can essentially pay 1 AP to stay in the System Space for 24 hours. You might not understand the significance of this yet, but let me ask you a question. We have already been inside this mysterious System Space for many minutes. How much time do you think has passed in reality?"

"...Nothing?"

"Close enough. Only a fraction of a second has passed in reality. It is like we have entered into a spacetime bubble that works opposite to the one that has currently engulfed Bridgehead One. As long as you have the AP to spare, you can stay here for weeks, months or even years on end to work on stuff and complete Missions without worrying about wasting any time in reality."

It was only now that Ketis understood how valuable it was to be able to spend an entire day inside the System Space without any apparent time passing in reality!

Just like Ves, Ketis had also learned that mech designers were short on time. There was so much they could do, and so little time in a day to take care of all of their priorities.

"I see. Is this one of the reasons why you have been able to progress so quickly? How much time did you actually manage to save while making use of the services of this Workshop?"

"Not as much as you think, Ketis. There are certain cases where it is worthwhile to spend 1 AP to essentially get an extra day of time, but I much prefer to save my AP for other stuff."

That reminded him that he still had a bunch of Missions that he had yet to make any progress in. He really should begin to work on a few of them despite his busy schedule. Many Missions came with a time limit where Ves would have to pay a small but significant penalty if he failed to satisfy their conditions!

Besides, Ves was also sick and tired of having virtually no AP left in his pocket. His little gifts to Ketis may have made her happy, but it had also caused his pathetic AP reserve to shrink even further!

Ves quickly finished his explanation of the Workshop of Creation before he led Ketis to the next step.

"Is this a gate? Where does it lead to? Does it allow you to teleport to another place?"

"Not quite. This is the Time Gate. It is a little bit complicated to explain its full functions."

He began to give Ketis an exhaustive introduction of the Time Gate. The reason why he did this was because he believed that Ketis would definitely pounce on the opportunity to experience how other mech pilots controlled their swordsman mechs.

Since that was the case, he did not want her to blunder without knowing what she could or could not do. Each Mastery opportunity was precious, and it was important for Ketis to get the most out of her first jaunt through space and time.

Ketis initially looked unbelieving. Though the other facilities of the Mech Designer System already sounded fantastic enough, the Time Gate completely broke her boundaries on what it should be capable of! She never expected that this relic actually made time travel available to its users!

"Is this… real? Did you really manage to travel back in time and change human history?"

"It's real, believe me. Who do you think the Destroyer of Worlds got her companion spirit from?" Ves smirked.

Chapter 6235 The Real Reason

The Time Gate completely surpassed Ketis' imagination.

She simply couldn't process the craziness surrounding the ability to travel back in time and experience history from the perspective of an actual mech pilot.

The fact that she could potentially interfere with the life of the mech pilot in question and change the course of history blew her mind!

The potential abuses were enormous! What if she leaked a lot of future information to the humans in the past? What if she engineered the downfall of the heroes of the present? What if she produced a butterfly effect that ultimately caused her own birth to be unmade?!

"Don't worry too much about it." Ves reassured a shocked-looking Ketis. "The primary purpose of the Time Gate is to give us the most realistic front-row seat to how a mech pilot fights with an actual mech. Everything else is secondary. Just do what comes natural to you, and don't worry about accidentally unmaking our present timeline or anything. From what I have observed, the present time that we currently live in has already incorporated every jaunt that I, and now you, have made in the past. So don't hesitate and feel free to do whatever you want. Every change that causes enough ripple effects to change our society has already happened. We

just don't know it yet. If you don't want to engage in these shenanigans, then don't think about it and use these Mastery experiences for their intended purpose."

Ketis furrowed her brows as she tried to process all of the information provided by Ves. Time travel was a very mysterious subject. There were many people that believed that the Red Two may have mastered a rudimentary form of it, but the cost was probably so high that it was simply never done.

If the mercers and the fleeters truly mastered time travel, then they would have never let the Red Cabal pull off the Great Severing!

"Isn't this too reckless, Ves? I know many people who would kill to be able to travel back to the past so that they could alter their history and set themselves up for future success."

He chuckled. "I don't think the System can bear all of those consequences. There is always a price for everything. We just don't know exactly what is being paid because the System isn't being transparent about the mechanisms of the Time Gate. Personally, I believe that the System's selection of Mastery hosts is anything but random. Maybe they are specifically selected that no matter what you do, you will not be able to harm the timeline."

That sounded rather reasonable. Ultimately, Ketis had to undergo a Mastery experience herself in order to get a better idea of what she was dealing with. Descriptions and second-hand accounts alone did not do the Time Gate justice.

"If you want to make use of the Time Gate, do keep in mind that the time you spend in 'the past' will also go by in reality."

"That doesn't make any sense." Ketis frowned. "Isn't the progression of time in reality slowed down to almost zero right now? Why does it suddenly return to a normal pace as soon as we pass through the Time Gate? Why doesn't this time-manipulating device allow us to spend days on the other side while no time passes by on this side?"

"Beats me. I don't make the rules, Ketis. I may have been making use of the Mech Designer System for almost two decades, but I am still just a user, just like you. Only the creator or someone with heightened authority can give us more detailed explanations why everything is set up this way."

The only person he could think of was his mother, who oddly enough possessed the ability to influence or intimidate the System into acting in a certain fashion.

"Is there anything else I should know about the Time Gate before we move to the next stop?"

"Yeah. If my guess is right, you should be able to make use of the Time Gate for free once every year. Don't waste this opportunity. I do not think there is a better way for mech designers like us to understand what mech pilots are going through when they are struggling inside the cockpits of their machines. One of the reasons why my customers enjoy the experience of piloting my mechs so much is because I have incorporated so many lessons from so many Mastery experiences in my mech designs. It is also why I have been able to make so many masterwork mechs. One of the factors that determine the quality of a product is how well it serves the needs of its intended users. A machine that pilots like a well-fitted glove is most definitely superior to a clunky lump of metal that actively fights its pilot's intentions every step of the way."

The swordmaster looked thoughtful at that. She most definitely understood the implications as well as the value of the Time Gate.

"I will not waste it." She promised. "From what you have described, this is a far better way for mech designers to understand the challenges of mech pilots than the alternatives. Interviewing mech pilots is a poor means of information transfer, and trying to connect with their minds with the help of neural interface technology is risky and can only be done outside of the cockpit."

If Ketis disregarded the shenanigans related to time travel, then the service provided by the Time Gate was already invaluable enough to any mech designer. She would be more than happy if access to these so-called 'Mastery experiences' was the only gain she made today.

The pair eventually eventually left the clearing that held the gate and moved up to the second-to-last stop.

Before they reached the top of the mountain, Ves led Ketis to a clearing that was built to the side and looked a lot more technologically advanced than the other facilities.

"Is that an old-fashioned land-based observatory?" Ketis asked in puzzlement. "I assumed the sky above us was fake."

"You are not wrong, Ketis. This particular facility is looking at something different than the sky of the System Space. This is the primary reason why you are here. I had already been thinking about inducing you into the Mech Designer System for several years, but I never pulled the trigger until the appearance of this structure recently has encouraged me to pull the trigger."

The two stepped inside the large structure and became greeted by a lot of empty space and two very distinctive sights.

Though Ketis' attention was immediately drawn towards the smaller object, Ves held her hand and pulled her towards the large array in the middle.

"This is the Dimension Telescope. It is one of the two main components of the Dimension Observatory we are in. Simply put, it allows us to peek at one of them in any other dimensions that are normally inaccessible to us. It contains a range of useful features and upgrades that will allow us to look for specific resources and such, but all of it costs lots of AP to acquire. You can take a look yourself by accessing the console."

Ketis did so and soon began to look troubled. "These upgrades are… expensive. There are so many of them as well, and I bet that this device will continue to present expensive new upgrade choices later on. Why are you so eager to make use of this telescope? There is little point in observing different dimensions unless you want to conduct specialized research, but I do not think this is relevant to your research projects."

"To explain that, I will have to take you to the second component of the Dimension Observatory. Come over here. You have already been staring at it from the moment you stepped inside this place."

Compared to the large and impressive telescope, Ketis clearly possessed a much greater attraction towards a giant pillar surrounded by spatial energies!

The reason why she felt such a strong affinity towards it was because it was vaguely shaped like a sword!

Not only that, but she intuitively guessed that it was able to leverage the spatial energies to form an exceptionally sharp blade that could cut through more than solid matter!

As a swordmaster, Ketis already felt the urge to wield this giant pillar and swing the massive 'blade' at least once.

Unfortunately, she was not a phase lord. It was impossible for a mere human like herself to hold a pillar that was large and heavy enough to hold up the roof of a medium-sized structure!

"What… what is it called?"

"This… is the Dimension Blade. Perhaps you may have guessed it already, but this device exists to sever the walls between dimensions in a targeted fashion. This will generate a tear that will connect the material realm with one of the higher dimensions that we have targeted. Anything on the other side can cross into our own set of dimensions and vice versa so long as the dimensional tear continues to persist. For now, the tears we can make with this Dimension Blade are not that big. The tears won't last that long either."

"This… this is amazing." Ketis gasped. "Wielding the Dimension Blade is like wielding the power of a god, if only momentarily. Can only create minor gaps between the dimensions?."

"The System allows us to upgrade the performance of the Dimension Blade in several ways, so we can attain much better results as long as we invest enough AP. One of my ultimate goals is to save enough AP to secure one of the best and most expensive upgrades that allows us to make a permanent tear through the dimensional walls!"

A temporary tear and a permanent tear had completely different meanings. Ketis was smart enough to deduce the consequences of either option.

It was already amazing enough to be able to produce temporary tears for the purpose of quickly plundering valuable dimensional resources, but creating permanent tears had a much greater impact on society!

"This…!" Ketis widened her eyes in realization. "If we can create numerous permanent tears into resource-rich dimensions, then we can significantly expand the availability of resources in human-occupied space! If we can plant them in strategic star systems to the rear, we can give the Red Two and every other major power the ability to continuously mine the resources they need to construct powerful mechs and warships."

"Exactly! Do you see now why I am so keen on using the Dimension Observatory?"

"Why haven't you already made use of it if you think it is so important?"

"It's too expensive." Ves frankly admitted. "Not only that, but I don't want to draw any further attention to myself than I already have. Let me explain my concerns to you in greater detail so that you understand my perspective."

He spent the next ten minutes telling her how he was struggling to earn enough AP to fuel his own upgrades while also trying to improve the performance of the Dimension Observatory.

He also explained how he had become way too high profile and that he did not think he could afford to become a lot more valuable than he was today.

"...I don't have a good way to explain how I have magically gained the ability to cut a tear through dimensions. Not even phase whales can do stuff like this. People will suspect that I am hiding a much greater secret if I show off this ability one day. That is why I have spent months without ever touching the Dimension Observatory." Ves concluded his explanation.

Realization dawned on Ketis as she completely comprehended her former mentor's plan at this time.

"So the main reason you inducted me to the system is to wield this power in your stead?"

"It makes sense, doesn't it? You are a swordsmaster. You can do all kinds of cool stuff with a blade in your hand. The Red Two, the first-rate colonial superstates and every other major power won't look too deeply into you when you show off your crazy new ability to create dimensional tears one day. They will just assume that this is part of a hidden traditional swordsmanship method. This can serve as the apparent origin behind your powerful new ability! You can even invent a fake sword style around it and toss it to others as a diversion. It is not your fault that their sword practitioners are so incompetent that they can't pull off any of the techniques in the manual."

Chapter 6236 A Swordmaster's Responsibility

So this was the real reason why Ves invited Ketis to become a user of the Mech Designer System.

That did not mean that the other reasons became invalid all of a sudden. Ketis fully believed Ves that he had the best intentions in mind for her. The System was not harmful to her unless she failed to resist her temptations.

However, Ketis was under no illusion that Ves was a good samaritan who wanted to spread the bounty. If not for the pressure that the Dimension Observatory exerted on his limited ability to earn AP, he would have continued to hide away the Mech Designer System in order to satisfy his paranoia about how much he could get in trouble if its existence ever got exposed!

Ketis understood Ves quite well and knew that he had taken a very courageous step by sharing the System with her. He rightfully felt concerned that revealing this enormous secret to just one person could compromise its secrecy. It should not be common for him to set these feelings aside and seek out cooperation.

Whether he did so because he wanted to borrow her AP, it didn't matter. He did not restrict her from making use of everything the System had to offer to its users.

Gaining access to facilities like the Divine Bazaar and the Tree of Possibilities already put her at an enormous debt to Ves!

As a woman of honor and integrity, Ketis fully intended to repay all of the boons she received today.

That did not mean she was eager to take on the role of a scapegoat.

Ketis looked at Ves with a look that showed she caught on to his scheme.

"The ability to create tears between dimensions that can allow humans to harvest rich resources in places that are normally inaccessible is a game-changing ability of the highest order. Not even god pilots can do this I think. So long as I show up and reveal this ability one day, a lot of powerful people will pay attention to me. Once they figure out that my 'ability' is the real deal, they may decide to stuff me into a gilded cage just like you. The bigshots may even do worse and stuff me in a literal cage somewhere in the rear. This is highly detrimental to me. As a swordmaster, I must actively seek out conflict and danger in order to hone my blade. I won't be able to elevate my swordsmanship when I am not actually in a fight."

Ves sighed. "I admit that there is a risk that the mechers will swoop in and restrict your freedom of movement like they have done with me, but… as long as you are creative with your wording, you can give them the impression that your ability to create more powerful dimensional tears is related to your cultivation as a swordmaster. The stronger you become, the larger and longer lasting the tears. If you can claim that you can create a permanent dimensional tear once you advance to the rank of sword saint, then I am sure that they are willing to escort you to enough battlefields where you can give your swordsmanship full play."

That sounded like a dubious plan to Ketis. Even if it worked out as he predicted, she still wouldn't be able to go where she wished. She would gain her own 'Bluejay Fleet' that stuck to her like a barnacle and acted like an overprotective mother whenever she attempted to travel anywhere that posed a slight threat to her life.

How would she be able to build up her courage and face true life-threatening challenges when the mechers refused to hold back from saving her? She hated the thought of getting coddled all of the time!

"You don't have to accept this request of mine." Ves earnestly said. "You are by far the best candidate to expose the ability to create dimensional tears, but you are not the only one. I just need to spend 10 AP in order to induct another mech designer to the System. Most people in our profession actually like it when they stay as far away from danger as possible, so it shouldn't be too difficult to find a trustworthy partner who is willing to bear this particular burden."

Ketis looked a bit guilty after hearing this. "I do not want you to feel as if you have invited me in vain. I would hate it if you think I am being ungrateful."

"There are more ways for you to contribute aside from creating dimensional tears. If you truly want to repay me for giving you access to the System, then make good use of it and earn lots of AP so that you can make the Dimension Observatory stronger and more useful to us all. The sooner we unlock the ability to create permanent dimensional tears, the better."

That made Ketis feel a bit better. Now that she had almost completed her tour through the System Space, she had a pretty good idea how difficult it was for a user to earn AP.

If the descriptions of the Dimension Observatory were accurate, then it clearly possessed a huge amount of potential. However, it cost a huge amount of AP to draw out its greater potential and elevate it to the point where it could relieve red humanity's persistent resource shortages in a more permanent and sustainable fashion.

At this moment, Ketis' mind began to sway.

This was because the call of duty beckoned to her. It was clear that Ves was too much of a coward to make use of the Dimension Observatory himself. He would try his best to shirk this duty and pass it off to someone else in order to prevent his heat from increasing any further.

How long would it take for him to find a willing and trustworthy candidate? It had already taken him a lot of guts to invite Ketis into the Mech Designer System.

If he chose Ketis over Gloriana, then Ves clearly had major trust problems!

Ketis recognized the incredible value of the Dimension Observatory. In a time where red humanity suffered one setback after another, any delay in making effective use of the Observatory's functions could lead to the defeat of human civilization.

The most direct way to solve this problem and minimize the negative consequences was to accept the duty that Ves had thrust upon her. So long as she accepted the consequences of bearing this important burden, she would not only be able to help red humanity gather more resources to fuel its hungry war machine, but also take personal control over a power that others might abuse for their own purposes.

Ketis closed her eyes for a moment.

As Ketis tried to come to terms with this responsibility, she felt as if Sharpie had grown a little sharper and stronger.

A swordmaster never shirked her duty.

A swordmaster did what was necessary in order to fight for her people.

A swordmaster should not let the consequences of her own actions keep her sword in its scabbard.

As the woman opened her eyes once again, her steel had subtly become stronger and more condensed. This may be just a simple mental test to others, but to a swordmaster like Ketis, it had served as an important reminder of how a true transcendent warrior should behave.

"I will do it, Ves."

"Wait, what?"

"You heard me. I did not misspeak. I will go further than spend a part of my AP income on upgrading the Dimension Observatory. I shall 'wield' the Dimension Blade and pretend it is my own sword as I use it to create openings to other dimensions. I do not entirely approve of the deception in your plan, but I understand that revealing the truth will do more harm than good. I shall keep your secret, Ves. In exchange, please allow me to take charge on how the Dimension Observatory's functions are used. If you want to shirk your responsibilities, then be consistent. So long as I am in control, I will ensure it will only be used for the good of red humanity."

Ves blinked. He did not expect his former student to make a counteroffer and add an extra demand of her own to the deal.

He did not entirely like it. He had wasted one of his precious System Upgrade opportunities on Dimension Breach Creation. Why should he relinquish control over it and allow Ketis to decide when and where she wanted to open new holes in the dimensional walls?

However, Ves only briefly held these thoughts. Ketis would never deliberately disadvantage him and the Larkinson Clan.

As far as he was concerned, Ketis just wanted him to delegate this matter properly. As long as he was willing to give her a chance to prove herself, the swordmaster would go on and hopefully live up to his expectations.

The most important part about this was that Ves needed to be able to let go. The Dimension Observatory was incredibly valuable to him, but it held a lot of value to others as well.

It was impossible for the Larkinson Clan to monopolize the ability to create dimensional breaches.

Letting Ketis take charge over this matter would make her responsible for maintaining a careful balancing act.

Hopefully, she would still be able to grant preferential treatment to the Larkinson Clan.

Ves did not expect to be able to take sole possession of every portal into another dimension, but as long as his clan gained control of one or two permanent dimensional tears, that already put the Larkinsons ahead of most of their rivals!

Besides, he already noticed how much good it would do for Ketis to take on this greater responsibility. His sharp senses could not possibly miss how her companion spirit grew a little stronger and more driven after she had made a decision in her mind.

Ves extended his arm.

Ketis reached out and shook hands with the man who brought her into the System.

"It's a deal, then."

Both of their lives had changed forever because of this, but it would take time before either of them understood how much their trajectories had shifted.

One thing was for sure. Ketis was definitely bound to become as famous and prominent as Ves after she revealed her latest miraculous 'ability'!

"I truly appreciate it, Ketis. You are the best person I can think of who can fulfill this particular role. I know it will cause you to attract a lot of unwanted attention, but you can leverage that to win a lot of concessions from the powerful groups that want you to create breaches from them. Try and ask for stuff that can advance your cultivation as a swordmaster. You are already on the right track as a mech designer, there hasn't been a natural sword saint among humanity for centuries if not longer. I think it may take more than training and combat to refine your willpower. Perhaps the mechers have a nifty material or elixir on hand that can help you get closer to the threshold of the next rank. I am not sure how strong a sword saint actually is, but as long as you become one, your ability to protect yourself and resist coercion will become a lot stronger. You will need this strength in order to hold your ground when you begin to interact with the leaders of red humanity on a more frequent basis."

Ves helpfully gave Ketis more tips on how to deal with the upper echelon of their civilization. He had learned a lot of lessons in the past few years. It was best if he could impart much of his accumulated wisdom to his former student so that she wouldn't repeat the same mistakes.

"Whatever you do, do not neglect the importance of diplomacy. You need to form alliances with other powerful groups. I am on really good terms with the Survivalist Faction and the Transhumanist Faction of the Red Association, and I am pretty chummy with a few Terran ancient clans and so on. It may be possible to shift that favor to you since we are part of the same clan, but it is best if you go out of your way to forge direct relations with different

powers. Only when you have a solid enough support network will you be able to avoid the worst outcome."

Chapter 6237 Empty Courtyard

As long as Ketis gained prominence due to her own merits as opposed to leaching from Ves, she would rise to become a new power centered around herself.

What this meant was that Ketis had the potential of becoming the second strong pillar that propped up the Larkinson Clan!

Even if Ves became utterly disgraced and ruined one day, so long as Ketis remained clean and proper, she could easily take over the burden of supporting and sustaining the Larkinson Clan by herself!

The ability to breach dimensions was just too valuable for her importance to be any less.

While this meant that Ves would not be able to command her as directly as before, it was worth it as he could shift more responsibilities over to her, thereby relieving himself of some of his undesirable burdens.

All in all, helping Ketis grow up and become a powerhouse in her own right was incredibly beneficial to his own interests.

She would at least be able to divert a lot of unwelcome attention away from him, allowing him to work in peace.

After the two mech designers explored almost every part of the System Space, they finally came to the summit of the mountain.

"This is the Sacred Temple." Ves said as they stepped foot on the clearing. "This is the place where you can find out stuff about yourself. It is a key place if you want to figure out how to develop yourself and improve your cultivation."

The swordmaster looked a bit puzzled at the sight of the temple. It possessed an obvious ancient religious atmosphere that seemed completely contradictory to the previous facilities.

"Why does the Mech Designer System host such a strange structure?"

"It is because I selected a specific upgrade track that is centered around spiritual development." Ves responded. "Everytime I complete a big Mission and feed a very valuable material to the System, it will grow stronger and gain powerful new capabilities. It used to be a lot more limited in the past. In fact, I am actually expecting to complete another big Mission in the near future. If the Red Tide Offensive hasn't caused any undue delays, a provider will deliver a very special material that will allow me to upgrade the System for the third time. We can discuss what upgrade track we should pick once we meet together inside this System Space."

"Wait." Ketis suddenly raised her palm. "I just realized this possibility. If we can both enter this System Space while we are located in two separate locations, we should be able to do more than talk to each other in total confidence. Since we can bring our stuff inside this place, can we transfer it to each other?"

Ves blinked. He hadn't realized this yet! How could he have overlooked such an amazing possibility?!

"We should try it out in order to be sure, but I see little reason why it isn't possible. So long as we transfer our goods to each other directly or deposit it into the Vault of Eternity first, I believe the System may very allow us to effectively transfer items from one star system to another without the need to physically ship the materials across this distance!"

Now that he thought about it, this was actually one of the original plans he had in mind when he sent Veronica to his parents in the old galaxy.

Since Veronica managed to deliver the coffin that held the bones of a primordial human, Ves speculated that he would be able to facilitate instant trans-galactic trade using the System as the effective transportation channel!

Although the Great Severing caused Ves to become so far removed from Veronica that the Mech Designer System was no longer able to facilitate this trade anymore, perhaps the story was different with Ketis!

At the very least, Ves had great confidence in the ability to swap goods between himself and Ketis so long as they remained in the same dwarf galaxy!

"We should definitely test this out." Ves strongly urged. "Once we confirm that it is possible, we can use this to smuggle goods to each other in total secrecy. It is best if we don't use it to exchange stuff that we can already ship to each other using regular transportation channels."

Ketis nodded in agreement. "We're partners."

"We're partners."

The two proceeded to venture deeper into the Sacred Temple. Ketis admired the various sights as they crossed a mostly empty courtyard.

"What is this place?"

"It's the Courtyard of Envoys. Supposedly, it is a place where we can place our Chosen Envoys."

"What is a Chosen Envoy?"

"It is an individual that has completely pledged his or her life to me… or you. I'm sorry. The description is rather vague, and I don't have any first-hand experience to share with you. I have never made use of this function."

"Why not?"

"The System told me that Chosen Envoys are completely incorporeal." Ves responded. "That implies that they are either dead or born this way. Whatever the case, the only people I can invite to become my Chosen Envoy are powerhouses who have just perished or are on the verge of dying. They need to be willing to completely surrender their lives to me, which basically means that they will become my undying slave. For as long as I live, they must dedicate their new form of unlife as my totally devoted servant. They literally cannot disobey my orders as they serve as my ghostly champions of sorts."

Ketis' expression grew ugly when she heard that. "That… is too much to ask of most people. The only worthwhile individuals to turn into your Chosen Envoys are high-ranking mech pilots. However, they are all strong-willed without exception. They would rather suffer an honorable death than to live on as a cowardly servant. The only reason for them to choose

undying service over the alternative is if their trust and loyalty in you is great enough for them to disregard their own desires."

"I think so as well. Do you see my problem now? I can't recruit any random expert pilot or ace pilot. I have to wait until one of our own is on the verge of death. I really don't want this to happen. I will not order the expeditionary fleet to take greater risks in the hopes that one of our champions will fall on the battlefield. They are family. I admit that I will not hold back if I see an opportunity, but given how methodically our troops fight, this may take a while."

"That is the right attitude to take. I completely approve of your approach, Ves. I can see how the option to turn a dying comrade into a Chosen Envoy can be good for both us and them. I am already thinking about whether it is possible to turn my fellow Swordmaidens into Envoys…"

"They will need to be strong enough in spirit." Ves reminded her. "Having companion spirits should help a lot with that, but given that Chosen Envoy is clearly a status reserved for the powerful, the candidates should at least reach the rank of a swordmaster or expert pilot."

That was a massive constraint. It ended Ketis' hopes of saving every Swordmaiden who fell on the battlefield.

"I think it is completely okay for you to make no use of the Chosen Courtyard. You already enjoy many forms of protection, and you can even turn into a phase lord if you are locked in a hard fight. I… don't have so many luxuries. I am a swordmaster. Even if I have the option to become a phase lord, I will not take it because it conflicts with my path. I have a much greater need for Chosen Envoys, especially if I am still allowed to fight the aliens from time to time. You never know what you may encounter on the battlefield."

She made a good argument. The life of an active swordmaster was indeed perilous. She could use a trump card like this to guard herself against unreasonable opponents such as mechs or giant beasts.

"Anway, let's continue. This over here is the Pantheon. This is probably a place which you will visit frequently after this, because it is the place where you can find out your Attributes and many other useful information."

He led her to a set of statues inside the Pantheon. A few of them looked familiar, but one of them had been added very recently.

Ketis recognized Ves and Blinky easily enough, but she grew puzzled when she caught sight of the statue of a completely different individual.

"This dwarf looks familiar…"

"It's one of my external incarnations." Ves coughed.

"Pardon?"

"It's not important. I brought you here because you can summon your Status which gives you a detailed quantitative breakdown of yourself. Here is mine."

Specializations: Mutual Growth

[Status]

Name: Ves Larkinson

Profession: Senior Mech Designer

Specializations: Mutual Growth

Ascension Points: 40 AP

Attributes

Strength: 22

Dexterity: 4.3

Endurance: 27

Intelligence: 6.4

Creativity: 9.1

Concentration: 18.2

Spirituality: 35

Genetic Aptitude: F+

Skills

[Superpublish]: Available.

[Inventorize]: Available. Can be activated a single time.

[Time Gate]: Unavailable.

Evaluation: A renowned Senior Mech Designer who has begun to master the mysteries of life, mechs, synergy and the occult.

Ketis momentarily looked overwhelmed, especially when she saw the giant list of Skills and Sub-Skills.

"Don't read too much into Skills and stuff." Ves advised. "The most important pieces of information you can gain from this Status are your Attribute scores. You will need to know how you stand on them in order to safely ingest certain enlightenment fruits that impose additional requirements."

"These numbers… what are they based on? Who determined the scale?"

"I don't know." Ves shrugged. "I can make a few guesses, though. I suspect that an Attribute score of 1.0 conforms to average humans. An Attribute score of 2.0 represents the normal limit of ordinary humans. This applies to every Attribute aside from Spirituality."

"Why the exception?"

"Because modern humans are spiritually deficient." Ves answered. "It's a long story, and it is not that useful to explain it to you. For now, you should keep in mind that normal humans can only improve their scores to 2.0 at most. It may be possible for baseline humans or lightly augmented humans to score a little bit above that, but that is the exception rather than the rule. Implants, genetic modification and breakthroughs in cultivation are all ways to raise your Attributes far beyond those limits. As you can see, I have grown a lot stronger in every way."

Ketis did not really understand the significance of his Attributes because she lacked context.

"Let's go take a look at your own Status page instead. You will understand a lot better what these numbers mean."

[Status]

Name: Ketis Larkinson

Profession: Journeyman Mech Designer, Swordmaster

Specializations: Sharpness, Unyielding

Ascension Points: 0 AP

Attributes

Strength: 2.6

Dexterity: 2.1

Endurance: 2.9

Intelligence: 2.2

Creativity: 1.3

Concentration: 3.0

Spirituality: 13.2

Genetic Aptitude: F

Skills

…

Abilities

Abilities

[Superpublish]: Available. Can be activated once a year.

[Time Gate]: Available. Can be activated once a year.

Evaluation: A promising young Journeyman Mech Designer and a Swordmaster who is only beginning to combine her two professions to develop unprecedented advantages in the field of mech design.

The Status belonging to Ketis was inferior in every way. Her Attributes were a lot lower. Her set of Skills and Sub-Skills were a lot less numerous and developed. Perhaps the only consolation was that she gained access to the same System-granted abilities as Ves.

Ketis immediately glowered when she compared her Attributes to that of Ves.

Even though Ketis was the only professionally trained combatant among the two, if she assumed these Attribute scores were accurate, it was impossible for her to defeat Ves in a straightforward battle!

Ketis was definitely a lot more skilled in combat than Ves, but the latter's crushing physical Attributes alone could easily stomp her flat!

She truly felt for the first time that swordmasters were weak!

Chapter 6238 The Information Provided By Divine Cores

Swordmasters were weak!

This was the central idea that haunted Ketis ever since she saw the Status of both Ves and herself.

Even as Ves casually dismissed the numerical differences between their Attributes and led her to the innermost section of the Sacred Temple, Ketis momentarily went through another internal struggle due to this harsh reality.

"...And this is the Sacred Hearth. It is here where we can directly observe and possibly manipulate our most central parts of ourselves. The theory on Divine Cores is a bit esoteric and mystical, but according to my own understanding, these Cores are the most direct and honest reflections of ourselves. They are the core that defines our Spirituality and in turn our personality, behavior, principles, and so on. At the beginning, your Divine Corelooks like a featureless ball. It is only when you grow stronger and begin to develop yourself that it slowly begins to form into a more distinguished shape."

Ves stopped in front of his Divine Core. "This is my most central Divine Core. I call it the Hand of Creation. I suppose it has taken on this shape because I truly love to create. I not only create mechs, but also other objects and even entirely new life forms. The broad range of my works has shaped my Divine Core into a form that is more universal than that of a typical mech designer. I quite like it. I suspect that it is one of the reasons why I am able to extend parts of my design philosophy to works that are not related to mechs."

The Hand of Creation looked beautiful to Ketis. The Sacred Hearth had a way of presenting the Divine Cores of its users in a way that conveyed their inner brilliance.

Ves' Divine Core was more than just a fancy-looking hand. It glittered with endless possibilities. It was as if the Hand of Creation was literally capable of bringing anything into existence.

The more Ketis stared at it, the more she felt as if she was getting to know the true Ves underneath all of his masks and other social constructs.

She understood more clearly now that deep down in his heart, Ves was just a really avid creator. He loved the act of making new stuff, simple as that. She did not spot anything in his Divine Core that was inherently good or evil.

Perhaps the only concerning sign on the Hand of Creation was the subtle streak of darkness that had blended into the Divine Core, but even that did not take away the obsession for creation.

Morality evidently did not rank high enough in Ves' list of concerns.

What she did manage to pick up was a need for recognition and a deep yearning for his works to change people's lives for the better. The former was a universal desire to every maker. The latter was a common goal of every earnest inventor.

All of this meant that Ves had always been what he claimed to be. He was a mech designer.

Although Ketis recognized that he was a lot more than 'just a mech designer', in his heart, he always remained true to his roots at all times.

All of his actions and decisions led back to his desire to become a better mech designer and creator. As long as Ketis held this truth in mind, she was basically able to figure out the real Ves. This was the value of being able to take a good look at his so-called Divine Core.

"Your Divine Core is not as bad as I thought." She honestly commented. "If something like this truly existed, then I expected that it would look… uglier."

"One's Divine Core is based on your true self. What people think of me is not necessarily reflective of who I truly am. Let the people have their misunderstandings. I know that so long as I stay true to my principles and ambitions, I will never be at risk of going astray."

They moved over to the next Divine Core. It looked a lot more concerning than the Hand of Creation. All Ketis saw was a giant maw that possessed endless hunger and a desire to devour everything in a futile attempt to become sated.

Compared to the relatively pure and honest Hand of Creation, the Whale Devouring Maw possessed a considerably more nefarious air to it. If it was not restrained, it could easily go on an uncontrollable eating spree, inflicting untold damage to property as well as human lives!

"What… what is this?"

"Mrow~"

A fluffy purple cat that reflected a growing galaxy on his fur emerged from Ves' head. The companion spirit leisurely flew through the air and even rubbed his head against Ketis before heading back to where he belonged.

"This is the Whale Devouring Maw. " Ves straightforwardly answered. "It is the Divine Core that corresponds to Blinky. I know it looks rather scary, but Blinky is not that bad. I mean, just look at him! Doesn't he look cute?"

"Mrow~"

A fluffy purple cat that reflected a growing galaxy on his fur emerged from Ves' head. The companion spirit leisurely flew through the air and even rubbed his head against Ketis before heading back to where he belonged.

Ketis did not know what she should believe in. "As far as I am aware, companion spirits are split personalities that have gained a little more independence. If this is the other side of yourself, then what will happen if you lose your self-control?"

"It won't happen." Ves insisted. "I might not be a Swordmaiden like you, but I am perfectly capable of remaining rational when it matters. I wouldn't have made it this far if I make stupid decisions all of the time. Blinky's Divine Core only looks this way because his core ability is based on a powerful ingredient taken from the Unending One. The supposed dark god was not exactly a pleasant fellow back then, but you can rest assured that Blinky is a completely new life form that has nothing to do with that big old whale."

Though Ketis had more than a few reasons to cast doubt on that explanation, she did not bother to continue this argument further. Her own impressions of Blinky had always been positive. So long as the companion spirit remained subordinate to Ves, then there was nothing to be concerned about.

They moved on to the third and weirded Divine Core.

She recognized the Hammer of Brilliance easily enough. Ves usually carried this strange self-made artifact on his handy tool belt.

What was odd was the very real metal crown that had strangely planted itself on top of the Divine Artifact. Her sense of danger immediately triggered, causing her to become a lot more alert and vigilant.

The crown posed a threat!

"What is this, Ves?!"

"This… is the Hammer of Brilliance. This is Vulcan's Divine Core. As you can see, he is very devoted to traditional craftsmanship. The crown… is a long story, and also involves confidential information that I am not sure that I am allowed to share with you. I admit that the crown is dangerous, but my mother developed a solution that allows me to contain its power and prevent it from causing any further trouble… mostly."

"Mostly?"

"Well, the crown has been with me for over a year, and it hasn't stirred up any major problems so far. I'm sort of using it as a power source at the moment. It is no different from trying to generate power from an active volcano. It is dangerous, but the risks can be mitigated as long as you take the right precautions."

This was none of Ketis' business. She was willing to give Ves the benefit of the doubt and assume that he had a sufficient grasp on this crown.

After admiring Ves' Divine Cores, they moved on to the next set of Cores that clearly belonged to Ketis.

They stood in front of a greatsword that looked as if it was still in the process of getting forged.

"This is the Divine Core that corresponds to you." Ves remarked. "It doesn't look as defined as mine because you are still a Journeyman who only vaguely determined her development trajectory. The fact that it has not yet taken on a more solid and permanent shape means that you are still undecided where you want to take your design philosophy."

"Is that bad?"

"No. It is not. This is normal among Journeymen. You are still at an exploratory stage. You just need to travel more and experience new sights. Once you have found an idea that you are passionate about to use as the centerpiece of your design philosophy, that is the point where your Divine Core will shift to reflect your heartfelt choice. As long as you are able to satisfy the other requirements, it shouldn't take long before you advance to the rank of Senior Mech Designer."

Ketis was already vaguely aware of what she needed to do in order to take the next step, but she never imagined that she could gain access to such a clear visual indicator of her progress.

Being able to see her progress in a more concrete form was incredibly helpful to her progression!

Even though it was just the equivalent of being able to see a progress bar that represented her own progress as a mech designer, it was already helpful to know how close she was to reaching the next rank.

From what she could observe from her Divine Core, its progress did not stray too far from her own estimates of herself. She was still a long way from becoming a Senior. She was still engrossed in too many interesting research subjects, ranging from sharpness to stormblade technology. If she wanted to become a Senior, then she needed to limit herself to a more singular cohesive design application and put her other interests to the side.

"I know where I stand. I will be sure to check up on my Divine Core on a regular basis. Do you have any advice for me now that you have seen my Core?"

Ves thought for a moment. "Well, if you are satisfied with how your Divine Core reflects your current aspirations, then be careful about absorbing the more expensive and powerful enlightenment fruits. Knowledge is power, but power can be a corrupting force. If you absorb too much high-level knowledge, then your goals and ideals may change to reflect what you have learned. I am not telling you to avoid those expensive and powerful enlightenment fruits entirely. You just need to be more prepared to digest what you have gained."

"That is a good suggestion. I will make sure to be more careful about this." Ketis said.

It was unlikely that this would become a major problem to Ketis because of two reasons.

First, she was a Swordmaster. Her strong willpower would allow her to stick to her original convictions a lot easier.

Second, the more powerful and overwhelming enlightenment fruits were too expensive! It was impossible for her to exchange too many of these exotic knowledge packages.

There was no particular reason for Ves to worry about Ketis.

The two moved in front of the last Divine Core. It clearly reflected Sharpie because it looked exactly like the companion spirit!

"This is pretty interesting." Ves said as he stared at a Core that looked like a miniature Ketis wearing a robe and wielding a greatsword. "You are the first willpower cultivator that I have brought into the System. I think it is not an exception that Sharpie's Divine Core is an exact match of her current form. The outcome should be similar to every expert pilot we can bring into the System. They are some of the most honest people in existence, and this is a reflection of that trait. Their Divine Cores should always match how they look as the entire reason why they are able to grow so powerful is that they essentially worship themselves."

Every high-ranking mech pilot was self-centered by definition! It was natural to assume that their Divine Cores closely matched who they were in reality!

Ves even suspected that high-ranking mech pilots who had managed to form Blood Pacts with their mechs or completed parts of the Mech Body Merger Process started to look different from their human selves.

Their Divine Cores may have begun to resemble their own mechs!

Chapter 6239 Flawed Swordsmanship

The comparisons between the Attributes mentioned in their Statuses already gave Ketis a powerful indication that she was a lot weaker than Ves.

Studying their respective Divine Cores only worsened her evaluation of herself.

The three Divine Cores belonging to Ves were all strong and clearly defined without exception.

While a part of that could be explained by the fact that he was older and had more time to figure out his goals and motivations, he was being a lot more productive than Ketis.

What Ketis found ridiculous was that Ves 'accidentally' managed to become a phase lord somehow and become a lot stronger than herself!

Even though the two had never sparred against each other for real, Ketis could already tell without a shadow of a doubt that she could swing her blade against Ves' massive true body all day and still fail to kill him entirely.

His body was too big!

His skin and hide were too tough!

His bones were practically unbreakable!

No matter what species they originally belonged to, once an individual became a phase lord, their physiques already exceeded their normal boundaries and began to evolve into a more perfect and combat capable body.

This led to the ridiculous result that Ves had become powerful enough to fight against mechs barehanded in spite of the fact that his Divine Core showed that he had no intention of using his massive power in this way!

Although none of this was his fault, Ketis couldn't help but resent Ves a bit for gaining so much strength, only to make it all go to waste.

Perhaps the only benefit to becoming a phase lord for Ves was that he became a lot harder to assassinate.

If Ketis wielded this kind of power, she could do much more with it. At the very least, she could easily deploy into space and fight against other phase lords!

Alas, she was not a phase lord. She was a swordmaster.

A swordmaster was supposed to be strong… once.

Back in a time when human technology was nowhere near as developed and when mechs and large warships did not exist yet, a swordmaster should have been a force to be reckoned with in those primitive days.

Their blades could cut through any armor and they could outfight ten if not a hundred footsoldiers!

However, too much time had passed since then. Human technology progressed rapidly, and frequent conflicts fueled the demand for ever more powerful war weapons.

Swords had long made way for larger, deadlier and more powerful arms. The days when battles between individual troopers could decide the outcome of entire wars had passed a long time ago. Humanity's leap into the stars had definitely shifted the focus to warships and eventually mechs.

How could a sword possibly cut through a mech, let alone a warship?

While Ketis had always known that swordmasters had already become obsolete since the Age of Stars, she still remained upbeat about traditional swordsmanship as it helped her to design better mechs.

However, she never wanted to be 'just a mech designer' like Ves.

She was greedy. She wanted more.

If Ketis was being honest about herself, then she wanted to become a powerful sword wielder as well. Sharpie wouldn't have taken on her own guise if she did not harbor such a personal ambition.

Sharpie's Divine Core exposed the truth that Ketis wanted to become a powerful swordswoman as well.

She thought that no matter how many reminders she received that traditional swordsmanship was out of date and unable to keep up with modern war weapons, she would still be able to make a difference so long as she became a sword god.

It was hard.

It was hard for her to maintain an unflinching belief in the strength of traditional swordsmanship.

The brutal indications she received from the Sacred Temple had inflicted a powerful blow to her confidence.

For all of the blood, sweat and tears she invested into her swordsmanship, her 'Attributes' only slightly exceeded the human norm!

Even if she was able to execute dazzling extraordinary sword techniques, so what?

Her body remained so small and weak that there was a limit to how much damage she could inflict!

At her current level of strength, it might be possible for her to defeat a third-class mech… if it was a landbound machine that was only equipped with melee weapons.

Any mech could easily crush her as long as it was armed with a simple ranged weapon.

Swordmasters had no way of quickly closing the distance to a mech that was located kilometers away.

The mech could leisurely take potshots at a swordmaster that was exposed on open terrain and overwhelm whatever personal energy shields or sword auras that was capable of blocking a couple of shots from a mech at most.

Without the ridiculous amount of amplification and protection from a mech, swordmasters were simply too worthless to be of any value in the battles being waged today.

This was a huge source of discouragement to Ketis!

She couldn't help but question traditional swordsmanship herself.

Was it useful for her to devote so much time and effort to her combat profession?

Was there any value to practicing it if her only gain was to obtain a better understanding on how to design swordsman mechs?

Would the continuous progression of technology cause her swordsmanship to become even less relevant over time?

She didn't like the answers to those questions. Her passion dimmed and her confidence sank to a low point.

Ketis was no longer able to delude herself due to the vagueness and lack of quantifiable data.

The Mech Designer System clearly erected the Sacred Temple to allow for its users to obtain a clear and accurate understanding of their own states. It had no reason to lie or massage the data. At most, the data it presented may be a tad bit inaccurate due to measurement errors, but she did not think that she could take comfort in this excuse.

She knew it in her heart that the Sacred Temple presented an accurate impression of her current state.

Perhaps she wouldn't have felt so bad about herself if she was not able to compare herself to an inhuman freak like Ves, but she still would have felt miserable if his Attributes were closer to the human norm.

This was because her own Attributes remained far too weak!

Ketis did not think that her Strength, Endurance and so on would look that much better if she ever managed to advance to the rank of sword saint.

She had met the Heavensword Saint in person years ago. Even if old Abraham Egenroth only reached this rank due to receiving a forceful boost from the mythical sword that gave him his current title, that did not change the fact that he still became susceptible to many human vulnerabilities!

The Heavensword Saint was actually a special case in more ways. There were many people that believed that he could actually fight an expert mech or even an ace mech to a draw.

However, no one would attribute this miraculous outcome to the sword wielder. Instead, everyone would assume that it was the ridiculously powerful Heavensword that did all of the heavy lifting!

"Wait a minute."

Her eyes suddenly blazed with hope!

She realized that traditional swordsmanship was not completely hopeless!

Ketis should have thought about it before. The Heavensword had already given her a roadmap or blueprint to a newer and better future.

The Heavensword was forged at a time when the Milky Way Galaxy was still filled with the power of heaven.

Now, the only source of heaven that remained was locked inside the Heavensword's dimensional space and maybe other stubborn remnants of the ancient past.

It was due to preserving this tiny slice of 'heaven' that the sword managed to become so ridiculously strong, to the point of being able to teleport across intergalactic distances and back again!

"Traditional swordsmanship is… not as good as I thought it was. It is weak. It has no future. It has fallen behind the times. No one takes swordmasters seriously anymore because any mech or warship could flatten us. I don't blame these people because it is the truth."

It was also because of this that Ketis received the temporary privilege of wielding the Heavensword in battle.

It felt so good to hold so much power. Even though she was too weak and unqualified to use the Heavensword to the fullest extent, what she felt during that exhilarating moment had given her a first-hand glimpse of the awesome power that was available to those that wielded the power of heaven in battle!

The introduction of exotic radiation to the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy had effectively granted humans access to the 'power of heaven' once again, if only on a reduced scale.

Even so, the blooming applications of hyper technology and to a lesser extent E-technology had already shown everyone how much more powerful they could become by wielding the power of E energy!

The most recent lightning tribulation even featured an alien that was most likely native to Messier 87 that mastered a completely different style of swordsmanship!

Instead of trying to polish his willpower, the dual-wielding swordsman evidently dedicated his training to learning how to communicate and leverage the power of ice and fire!

Though Ketis was too busy at the time to think how it was relevant to her own swordsmanship, now this alien example further cemented her new resolve.

"You've been quiet for these past few minutes. What is the matter, Ketis?"

The swordmaster faced Ves with renewed fire and determination. "I was wrong."

"Wrong about what?"

"Traditional swordsmanship is… not as good as I thought it was. It is weak. It has no future. It has fallen behind the times. No one takes swordmasters seriously anymore because any mech or warship could flatten us. I don't blame these people because it is the truth."

"Are you… questioning your path?"

She knew him too well.

"Perhaps you are right. What are you going to do about it, then?"

"I am." Ketis admitted. "And as far as I was concerned, this moment was long overdue. It is only by taking a step back and admitting that what I have been pursuing for many years is flawed that I am ready to take corrective actions. The harsh truth that I have been trying to avoid all of the time is that traditional swordsmanship in its current form sucks! Don't lie to me and say that it is not that bad. You know it is true."

She knew him too well.

"Perhaps you are right. What are you going to do about it, then?"

"Isn't the answer obvious? I am going to improve it and bring it up to modern standards! I will reform whatever is necessary to build a vastly stronger foundation that fully takes advantage of the conditions of the current era. We live in the Age of Dawn. Mechs no longer have an absolute claim of dominance anymore. If mechs can leverage the power of hyper technology to make themselves stronger, then so can swordmasters!"

"All of that sounds plausible, but there are huge differences between a human-sized sword and a multi-ton mech. The latter is always able to provide a much stronger degree of amplification. You can't make up for this enormous gap."

Ketis shook her head. "I think you are wrong! Anything is possible! Have you forgotten about the Heavensword? It possesses an entire pocket space that is filled with miraculous energies! This is at least one concrete example on how swordmasters can circumvent the limitations of

their limited human physiques. As long as they are equipped with swords that possess their own pockets of heavens in them, they can wield power far in excess of ordinary swordmasters!"

Her claim sounded so outrageous that Ves didn't know what to say. He then thought about it further and realized that his former student may actually have a point.

The Heavensword was a unique relic that could have only been made by a True God-level craftsman. There was no way a Journeyman like Ketis could forge such a transcendent artifact with her current capabilities.

However, if she utilized the advantages of the Mech Designer System to acquire relevant Skills and production equipment, it may be possible for her to one day forge a blade that possessed 0.1 percent of the power of the Heavensword!

The enormous difference in power made the weaker sword sound pathetic, but it already represented a huge breakthrough if Ketis managed to forge such a weapon!

As long as a decent swordmaster was able to wield such a weapon, it was not impossible for such a figure to fend off an expert mech under limited circumstances!

If Ketis kept improving her craft, she would eventually be able to forge much more powerful blades!

If she was able to systemize her sword forging methods and teach her craft to other traditional blacksmiths, then they may actually be able to spark the revival of swordmasters throughout human society!

Chapter 6240 The Evolution of Swordsmanship

Ves looked surprised as he stared at Ketis.

Deep inside the Sacred Temple, the swordmaster somehow gained an epiphany that caused her to drive away much of her confusion and gain a much clearer goal to strive towards!

The changes going through her mind were so profound that it even affected her spirituality!

Ves could clearly observe these changes. Not only was Sharpie's aura changing in character, but her Divine Core also started to change shape!

The miniature version of Ketis seemed to become a little more sacred and holy. The Divine Core gained a more distinct heavenly flavor as it became surrounded by mystical clouds. Even the robes began to brighten into white.

He could even see the faint silhouettes of a halo and a pair of wings sprouting behind her back!

In the end, Sharpie did not outright transform into a heavenly angel. Ketis' epiphany only progressed her willpower to a certain extent, and she still had a lot to go before she could imitate the power of an angelic being.

However, Ves was already impressed by her transformation!

Though a part of him felt concerned that Ketis was still being affected by the Heavensword's contamination, he believed she was strong and sober enough to make her own decisions on the matter.

If she truly thought that taking inspiration from the Heavensword was the best way for her to advance her swordmaster cultivation, then that was her decision to make.

He just felt it was a bit of a pity that her recent turn towards embracing heaven had caused her original obsession to diminish. Ketis still possessed a sharp edge, but it was clearly not her sole focus anymore.

As Ketis continued to shift internal gears, she eventually opened her eyes. She grabbed hold of her sheathed Greatsword and placed the tip against the floor of the Sacred Hearth chamber.

"Thank you, Ves."

"Uh, what did I do this time?"

"If you had not inducted me into the Mech Designer System and brought me to this temple of contemplation and self-reflection, I would have continued to muddle through for at least several more years. I would have wasted all of that time while trying in vain to figure out how

to become a stronger swordmaster, not knowing that my path was fundamentally flawed from the beginning."

"I take it that you intend to do something about those fundamental flaws."

"Correct." Ketis spoke with renewed purpose. "The Heavensword along with other clues has pointed a new way forward for me. I am frankly embarrassed that it has taken me this long to connect all of the dots, but at least it is not too late. The traditions of the Heavensword Association are strong… but they are also out of date. The thing about swordsmanship is that it is never supposed to be static. Just like technology, the methods and principles that underpin the art of the sword are also capable of changing and evolving. Pretty much all of the sword styles that we have inherited from the Heavensword Association were all shaped by the limitations to the past ages."

"The Age of Dawn is completely different. Many new possibilities have opened to us that were previously denied to us due to living in a low-energy environment."

"Exactly, Ves. Now that every swordsman is able to wield the power of E energy radiation, I see no reason why I along with other sword practitioners must insist on relying on our own willpower alone to fight. As much as I hate to admit it, willpower alone is far from enough to allow us to defeat the likes of god mechs, dreadnoughts and ancient phase whales. Only by admitting our weakness and becoming more proactive in doing better do we stand a chance of attaining parity with those powerhouses one day."

Ketis truly believed that she may be able to put up a good fight against those titans one day!

That was too much for Ves. He couldn't help but cast doubt on her new ambition.

"That is a bold claim. God mechs are the strongest combatants at their exalted levels. No other cultivator can match them in a direct confrontation. The most you can do is close the gap, but the difference in equipment is far too great for you to gain the upper hand against even the weakest of god mechs."

The reinvigorated swordmaster shook her head. "That is where you are wrong. First, a sword god that can fight by relying on supreme willpower can also rely on E energy radiation to wield far greater power. Second, your definition of a sword is too simple. As long as we focus on improving it and expanding it many different ways, we may eventually be able to design and forge very complex swords that are able to draw lots of power from the power sources that we

have installed inside their own pocket spaces. As long as this heavenly sword is as complex and powerful as a god mech, then the disparity in equipment can be negated!"

That sounded extremely arrogant of Ketis. Ves did not really believe it was possible to accomplish this, but it was good that she regained her confidence.

It didn't matter if her goal was realistic or not. As long as she worked hard to reach an impossibly high summit, she was bound to end up at a much higher position than she was today!

"I think I get what you are saying." Ves spoke. "The swordsmanship inheritance of the Heavensword Association is too deficient according to you. It was mainly centered around willpower cultivation. You think you can update it by combining willpower cultivation with both qi cultivation and artifact cultivation."

"That is it… I think."

Ketis was clearly not entirely familiar with the terminology used by Ves.

"Qi cultivation is the most traditional approach to cultivation, which is to promote your self-evolution by absorbing E energy. It used to be reserved to the Five Scrolls Compact in the past due to the difficulty of gaining access to E energy. Now that we are all surrounded by E energy radiation, this limitation doesn't exist any longer. You can easily imitate the swordsmanship approach demonstrated by that alien swordsman that showed up during the last lightning tribulation. The difference between you and that alien swordsman is that the latter apparently never felt the need to engage in willpower cultivation. You and every other swordsman that has adopted the traditions of the Heavensword Association are different. While it is a lot harder to engage in two forms of cultivation at the same time, the results will undoubtedly be greater if you succeed in both!"

The swordmaster appreciated this explanation. It sounded much more systematic and sound in theory than her previous argument.

"What about artifact cultivation?"

"That is a form of cultivation where the practitioner derives his strength from the powerful artifact that he possesses. A normal sword won't strengthen you much, but a weapon as powerful as the Bloodsinger that you have been nurturing all of the time is different. As long as

you make your sword a lot stronger, then whenever it is wielded by weaker individuals, those lucky folks will be able to quickly grow stronger by drawing from the power of their blades."

That was indeed what Ketis wanted to accomplish as well, but now that she heard this, she quickly recognized a very big problem with this approach.

"A sword that is too powerful has the potential to overwhelm its wielder." Ketis mentioned. "I certainly found it difficult to maintain my thoughts when I wielded the Heavensword in the past. I mostly managed to hold on because I was a swordmaster, but anyone weaker than that would have succumbed to the sword within a second."

"That is why artifact cultivation alone cannot produce strong swordsmen. You will only produce sword slaves in that case." Ves theorized. "The strength of the sword must always remain in proportion to the strength of its wielder. You can make the weapon a bit stronger than that, but the wielder needs to compensate by developing his willpower. One cannot go without the other."

"Each of the three forms of cultivation that you have mentioned is essential. Leaving one of them out will never result in swordsmanship that is strong enough to rival mech piloting."

"I think we have the makings of a superior approach to swordsmanship here, Ketis. Willpower cultivation, qi cultivation and artifact cultivation can all go hand-in-hand to produce a much more powerful version of swordsmaster than the ones that have shown up in the past. I think… it may be useful to distinguish it with another name. What would you like to call this evolution?"

A name instantly came to mind. Ketis could not think of any other names that could fit her new approach a lot better.

"Heavenly swordsmanship." She announced. "Let us call it like this in order to make it clear that it draws on power that is far greater than one can find within ourselves. This is my calling. No other swordmaster in the Red Ocean can create this more powerful form of swordsmanship that is perfectly adapted to the Age of Dawn. I know what I must do now. I must work to become the ancestor of heavenly swordsmanship. I must develop completely new sword styles that are much more comprehensive and advanced than before. The learning curve will be steeper, but the results will also be far greater."

Heavenly swordsmanship.

The name held so much meaning to Ketis. Ves could feel the rich associations that she had placed on it. Her basic aspiration was to invent and master a sword style that was so powerful that it could actually reproduce the raw might as well as the infinite mutability of the heavens!

If Ketis actually managed to pull off this insanely ambitious goal, then Ves predicted that she had a good chance of becoming the most powerful sword practitioner to ever exist!

As Ketis actively looked forward to mastering such might, she looked ten times more driven than before!

It was as if she had finally grown up now. Her pride, confidence, ambition and willpower had all grown a lot stronger.

Once she truly started to make progress in her ambitious new plan, her willpower cultivation was bound to grow by leaps and bounds.

It was not impossible for her to advance to sword saint as long as she was able to complete a prototype version of heavenly swordsmanship that actually worked!

"I am truly happy for you that you have clarified your goals, Ketis. You remind me of Tusa just before he managed to break through to the rank of ace pilot. Having a more specific goal in mind can do wonders to your progression. I think you have a real shot at attaining sainthood so long as you do not waver in your new goal."

"I won't change my mind." Ketis spoke with utter conviction. "I may have my own wants and needs, but I am willingly subordinating them to my new goal, because this is too important. Swordsmanship as I currently know it has become a dead end. It is too flawed and incomplete to give humans the strength they need to fend off the native aliens and other threats. Traditions are important, but we should never turn them into shackles that inhibit true progress."

"Well said!" Ves grinned and clapped. "I approve of your proactive mindset! This is exactly the kind of attitude that produces successful mech designers and so on. You should make good use of the System. You don't need to learn how to practice qi cultivation from scratch. There are many enlightenment fruits that can teach you how to manipulate E energy radiation for your own benefit. You can do that to 'upgrade' your existing sword styles. As for artifact cultivation, that is a little more complicated. If you truly want to do everything yourself, then you will need to become good at traditional blacksmithing."

"Traditional blacksmithing?"

"It's the ancient counterpart to the non-degenerated version of traditional swordsmanship. You don't need to spend too much AP to learn this craft. I can have Vulcan teach you how to forge low-level and eventually high-level artifacts."