

Mech Touch 6571

Chapter 6571 Short Term and Long Term Considerations

Now that Ves read through the descriptions of the three powerful upgrade options presented by the Mech Designer System, he immediately began to determine which one suited him best.

Ketis had a lot more time to mull over her choices. Her discussion with Ves did not change her calculus all that much. She still went through an orderly process of setting criteria before weighing the three options against them just to be sure she made a choice that had not been overly influenced by the Heavensword.

Ves on the other hand had to start from the beginning. He first tried to determine his greatest priorities.

Survival should rank at the top. He could do nothing if he ended up getting killed by his enemies.

The native aliens of red humanity posed the most acute threat. Given their many advantages during this sensitive period of time, it might be useful if Ves found a way to strengthen himself and the forces under his command in the short term.

However, Ves was not the only one who was fighting against the current enemies of red humanity. Many other people were pitching in as well. This meant that he did not bear the sole burden of saving his race and civilization.

Was it truly necessary for him to disregard other concerns and solely base his decision on immediate combat boosts?

Maybe, maybe not. The rest of red humanity still had the capital to compete against the native aliens. Humans were working on plenty of initiatives to overcome their lack of numbers.

However, what if their preparations fell short?

What if the surprises prepared by the Red Cabal turned out to be more powerful and overwhelming than expected?

Ves did not want to spend so much time and preparation on improving his long-term prospects when he was already at risk of getting killed or driven away in the short term!

He found it very difficult to decide how to weigh his short term and long term interests.

His expression darkened. He could not afford to neglect the latter.

The greater threat on the horizon was the future invasion of the natives of Messier 87. The Subjugation King and his alien armada were on their way to the Red Ocean! Once this foreign invasion force entered the dwarf galaxy, neither the humans nor the resident aliens stood a chance against the might of a God King!

Sure, the Evolution Witch and every other god pilot was hard at work trying to promote to the fourth major cultivation rank, but how much could they accomplish in the span of a few decades?

If Ves had a choice, he did not want to put his life in the hands of others, particularly strangers who did not have his best interests at heart.

Ves would much prefer it if he could take the initiative and solve the threat posed by the Subjugation King through his own efforts.

He did not dream about arming himself to the teeth and engaging in personal combat against the powerful krelion.

That was pure madness.

It was best if he could elevate one of his Larkinson mech pilots or power up a more reliable ally such as the Destroyer of Worlds with his works.

The time limit was far too short for his liking. Ves did not have the confidence that he could help a mech pilot reach the fourth major cultivation rank in just half a century. There was too little time!

Escape was not even an option for him. Ves learned that the Red Three had already built the Whale Ark, but he did not dare to board it while he still bore the soul mark of the alien god king.

At best, he could send off his wife, his children and his Larkinsons.

Ves was not resigned to death or capture at the hands of the terrible alien from the nearby supermassive galaxy,

The Mech Designer System gave him the best prospect to flip the table and overturn the rules!

All three upgrade tracks gave him the potential to gain a lot of power to overcome a hostile god king.

Five Element Mastery held the greatest promise as far as he was concerned. By mastering the five elements and learning how to fuse them all together might result in a supermech that might be powerful enough to allow a god pilot, or better yet multiple god pilots to leapfrog an entire major cultivation rank and defeat the Subjugation King in combat!

Ves couldn't help but think back on the Elemental Lord and recall the brutal response from the heavenly authority of Messier 87. He truly believed that developing a successful version of this incredible mech was the best way to solve this crisis.

However, he was not entirely certain whether he should put all of his eggs in the five elements basket.

The natives of Messier 87 excelled at manipulating E energy since that was what they

had in abundance

They were doubtlessly familiar with the 5 elements. Not only did they wield the power of fire and so on with great familiarity and sophistication, they also knew exactly how to effectively counter these manifestations!

The other two upgrade tracks promised to strengthen Ves and his works in less familiar and unconventional ways. This was crucial as the only way to defeat the Subjugation King from a position of weakness was to take the alien bastard by surprise!

The less familiar the methods, the greater the chances of killing or repelling the extragalactic invader!

In that sense, Ves had much greater confidence that the benefits brought by Demoncasting and Superdimensional Transformation would help him defeat the alien

god king.

Of the two, Demoncasting probably granted more immediate benefits in the short term while Superdimensional Transformation likely promised amazing value in the

long term.

"Damn, I am no closer to making up my mind."

Ves felt an attraction for all three options if he was being honest. This was why he needed to set hard criteria and stick to them. He needed to use his logic to decide. which choice benefited him the most.

He took another look at Five Element Mastery.

The short term benefits of this upgrade track were not too great.

It took time to earn enough AP to absorb his first elemental enlightenment fruits.

Ves needed to spend even more time to apply his newfound knowledge into future mech designers.

It also took months or years for his published works to proliferate throughout human society and make a meaningful difference in the Red War.

The long-term prospects of Five Element Mastery were a lot better.

This upgrade track would allow Ves to speed up his progression as a mech designer by

a considerable degree.

As an added bonus, Five Element Mastery also allowed his companion spirit to enrich the Blinkyverse and acquire all kinds of useful combat techniques.

The Star Cat would become a proper qi cultivator like his mother and possess the

ability to become a moderately powerful threat in his own right!

"This sounds rather good, but... can I really afford to wait that long?"

The poor short term prospects of this upgrade track ultimately caused Ves to lower its

overall evaluation.

Ves considered Demoncasting next. He felt a lot more excited for this option than the other choices, but he could not allow his emotions to affect his judgment. Objectively speaking, the benefits of Demoncasting were not quite clear due to the short description. The System withheld too many important details for Ves to gain a good overview of what he would be getting into if he chose this upgrade track.

If he was willing to make a lot of assumptions, then Demoncasting presumably allowed him to strengthen his gear and the gear of others right away.

The biggest constraint was the supply of 'demons. The System mentioned that there

were numerous ways to obtain demons to cast into his mechs and other gear, but

each of them imposed their own demands.

Spending AP to summon demons from another plane or whatever sounded incredibly

wasteful.

Sacrificing the lives of lots of humans and aliens sounded like a cheaper and more convenient way to acquire demons, but this sort of practice reeked of demonic

cultivation!

There had to be other ways to obtain more demons. Perhaps he might be able to make

use of the Dimension Observatory to find a dimension where they resided and dispatch forces to a dimensional tear to capture them en masse!

Whatever the case, as long as Ves solved the demon supply problem, Ves or rather

Vulcan would be able to cast a large amount of cursed arms, giving red humanity an

immediate edge against its enemies!

While demoncasting likely possessed good short term prospects, its long term prospects should not be too weak.

As long as the art of demoncasting remained forbidden and forgotten by others, Ves would maintain a definite advantage. All of his rivals and enemies could be kept at bay because their machines lacked demoncasted weapons.

Even if they became a little more common, Ves would make sure that his forces retained the most powerful and exclusive demon arms!

The only question was whether demoncasted weapons would eventually hit a ceiling

in the far future.

Unlike Five Elements Mastery which would continue to become more powerful over time, Demoncasting might have lower development potential.

What if its development hit a ceiling? What if he could only create stronger arms by converting the soul of a god king into a demon?

"Nothing comes for free! Ves sighed. "Five Elements Mastery will allow me to derive a

lot of power from elemental E energy, but I can't forget that all E energy radiation

originally belongs to Messier 87."

That was a potential vulnerability that the natives of that powerful galaxy could exploit against red humanity!

After all, the Subjugation King had once proved he was able to control a part of the

heavenly authority of Messier 87!

That was not enough for Ves to give up on his ambition to recreate the Elemental Lord, but he felt it was necessary to prepare a backup measure. Demoncasting was inherently a practice that went against the heavens, so Ves did not have to worry that Messier 87 would be able to sabotage it. At most, the heavenly

authority might suppress it instead.

Regardless, demoncasted weapons presumably worked in a similar manner to the Heavensword in that they possessed their own internal power sources.

That sounded much more reliable than an elemental mech that had to rely much more

extensively on the availability of E energy radiation to reach its full potential!

This caused him to lean more and more to this upgrade track.

What about Superdimensional transformation?

Its long-term prospects were equally promising. It might even be able to turn Ves and

Ketis into unfathomably powerful beings whose mastery over the dimensions would allow them to fight the Subjugation King!

In the short term, Ves was more than willing to spend as much AP as he could scrounge on transforming his brain into a more extensive superdimensional organ.

As a phase lord, Ves had already turned into a superdimensional organism, but not to a great extent.

Instead of relying on obscure and flawed alien methods to advance his phase lord cultivation, Ves would much rather make use of the System's more precise upgrade options to precisely control and optimize his superdimensional evolution! However, would all of this make enough of a difference to overcome his enemies?

He was much less certain about that. Superdimensional Transformation was largely centered around empowering himself rather than helping others become stronger. Ves had to remind himself that he was a mech designer first and foremost. If he disregarded everything else, then the only reason to pick this upgrade track was to increase his productivity and make it easier for him to acquire dimensional resources. None of these advantages were unique!

Ves could increase his productivity in other ways even if they were not as convenient.

He could also rely on the current facilities of the Dimension Observatory to harvest those resources.

If that was the case, then Superdimension Transformation ultimately didn't hold as much promise as the other upgrade tracks.

After he completed his evaluation, it became abundantly clear which option he should choose.

"Ketis? I am done."

"Which option do you favor the most?"

"Demoncasting"

The swordmaster's expression twitched. "As expected. I already had a hunch you would lean in this direction."

"What is your choice?"

"My choice hasn't really changed. I still favor Five Elements Mastery over the others."

"I see."

Chapter 6572 The Commonality of the Five Elements

Given the preferences of the two mech designers, neither of them valued Superdimensional Transformation over the other choices, so that was an easy elimination.

Ves and Ketis just needed to come to a consensus on which of the remaining two upgrade tracks they should commit to. Their decision would have far-reaching consequences on how they progressed in the future and how they affected the society they lived in. Neither of the two could take this matter lightly!

"It seems you are pretty optimistic about the five elements."

Ketis nodded. "You may have a point that the natives of Messier 87 have likely mastered the uses of the five elements to a much greater extent than us, but that is all the more reason why we need to catch up and eventually surpass them if possible. You can say all you want about the native aliens, but the way in which they rapidly closed the tech gap is admirable. Wars between two different civilizations have always resulted in mutual technology theft. It is how humans were able to rise so quickly during the Age of Conquest, after all. In my opinion, we should do everything in our power to help red humanity develop a strong foundation in the five elements. I think we will almost certainly fall short compared to the aliens from Messier 87, but at least we have closed the gap just enough that we can actually understand the methods of the extragalactic aliens... and copy them in a short amount of time!"

There was a certain degree of merit in her argument. As long as red humanity was able to survive its initial contact with the Subjugation King, people would soon get exposed to a lot of powerful methods from the extragalactic invaders!

If red humanity's understanding of E energy manipulation was too shallow at that point, then there was no hope of imitating the enemy's best practices and technology in a short amount of time!

Selecting Five Elements Mastery would massively reduce this risk from happening. Either red humanity caught up quite a lot, or it actually managed to exceed the civilizations of Messier 87 in a few areas!

Ves did not completely buy into this argument, though.

"You may be right, but we don't necessarily need to rely on the Mech Designer System to explore how we can make better use of the five elements. The Red Three and every major power is already hard at work in trying to develop many new applications that make use of them. Our contributions can still be helpful, but it wouldn't be as game changing as you think. It is actually quite easy for any mech designer or researcher to study new ways to make use of the classical elements. There is not much about them that is exclusive or difficult to access."

The swordmaster nodded in acknowledgement of his arguments. His points were

plausible, but it was difficult to determine the truth.

Ketis brought up another argument that caused her to favor this option.

"Do not forget that we are mech designers. Of all of the upgrade tracks, the gains we make from Five Elements Mastery is the easiest to implement in mass production mechs. Every advancement we make in this area can be spread far and wide. We can also share much of the knowledge we obtain from the elemental enlightenment fruits so that we can uplift all of the military industries that are desperately looking for ways to strengthen their mechs, warships and other combat assets even further!"

That was a great argument to be honest. Ves also felt it was important to stimulate red humanity's overall technological development. Helping people gain a much better grasp of the five elements would positively impact the lives of many ordinary individuals.

"There are two issues about your argument that I have a problem with." Ves said. "First, knowledge related to the five elements can easily be stolen and shared. In the short term, the native aliens will most certainly get their hands on everything we have taught to red humanity. The gap in technology between us and our immediate enemies in the Red Ocean will not improve in any serious way. At most, the native aliens will be a few years behind, but certainly not any further."

"That is... true, but my argument relating to the aliens of Messier 87 still stands."

"That is what my second problem is about, Ketis. Five Element Mastery will help us close the gap and catch up to the Messier 87 aliens. What I do not see much hope for is a way to surpass our enemies. If we want to win in any conflict against these powerful foes, then we cannot do so by trying to compete against them in an area that they are more familiar with and understand the best. This is why I think Demoncasting is a lot better in this regard. No one else will be able to replicate this method. Not even the aliens from Messier 87 will be able to come up with anything similar or stronger. If we try to harness the five elements, we would be like my daughter Andraste trying to beat you with her swordsmanship. You are much more adept at wielding the sword."

Ketis frowned and crossed her arms. "You are putting a large amount of effort into casting Five Elements Mastery in a bad light. I distinctly remember that you sang its praises not too long ago. Doesn't this upgrade track allow you to design better elemental Carmine mechs and help you become a Star Designer much faster than normal? I thought you would readily embrace this option for this reason alone. Every mech designer dreams of becoming a Star Designer, and the System just gives you a possibility to practically guarantee your future promotion."

"Is that what you think, Ketis? You are not thinking deep enough. First, there is a risk that absorbing too many elemental Carmine fruits will cause my design philosophy to be based on lessons and advancements that don't belong to me. I may end up becoming the puppet of whoever originally generated all of that knowledge. Even if I use the elemental enlightenment fruits in moderation, this problem doesn't entirely go away."

The swordmaster was not impressed by this potential danger.

"Much of what we know is borrowed knowledge. I don't see you making a big deal about that. We don't have the time to conduct empirical experiments and derive new laws for every single phenomenon. The same goes for E energy theory. Most of the cultivation methods constructed by the Red Collective are based on ancient cultivation records. Is that a problem? Not necessarily as long as you know what you are doing. Their origin is not a concern. What truly matters is what we do with it. The earlier we build up a strong foundation in the five elements, the sooner we can develop our own frameworks and design applications. It is better to start now and do our best to expand our repertoire over the span of several decades. The alternative is that everyone muddles

along and suddenly get completely overwhelmed by the vastly superior elemental manipulation of the aliens from Messier 87."

Accumulation took time and effort. Red humanity was already in the process of building an entire R&D infrastructure that sought to leverage the inherent advantages

of working with the five elements.

However, without the extensive and complete knowledge that Ves and Ketis could obtain from the elemental enlightenment fruits, the R&D initiatives would probably progress so slowly that red humanity would look like cavemen in front of alien civilizations who had been harnessing the five elements for many ages!

This was why there was a strong argument in favor of selecting Five Elements

Mastery.

Ves shook his head in disapproval, though. "My point still stands, though. I don't think it is the wisest idea to try to outdo the aliens from Messier 87 in the areas that they are strong at. I think it is much better if we try to defeat them in an asymmetrical manner. We need to take them by surprise and attack them in a way that they cannot easily understand, imitate or counter. Demoncasting meets all of these requirements. This should be a good fit for you as well. What are your objections to this upgrade track? Are you so hung up over the fact that it has an evil air around it? You shouldn't pay too much attention to silly labels and the judgments of others." This was a point in which neither of the two could see eye to eye with each other. "I can't do that, Ves. I am a swordmaster. While I do not fight for high-minded ideals such as justice and the good of red humanity, I still have to abide by a bottom line. Stuffing 'demons' into mechs and tempting mech pilots to make use of the tainted products feels incredibly dirty to me. Are we so desperate for power that we must resort to such an awful method? Where do demons come from anyway? Do they all come from amalgamations of ordinary souls that have fused together in a terrible manner? What if the 'demons' we summon from other dimensions originated from lost human or alien souls?"

"So what if that is the case?" Ves calmly pushed back. "Don't be sanctimonious, Ketis. Good or evil are irrelevant in the face of possible extinction. There is only do or don't. Look, if it makes you feel better about it, we can put restrictions on ourselves that will strictly limit us to using demons derived from alien souls. So many of them are attacking our border regions that they are dying by the millions if not more. As long as you set up a mechanism where you can stably harvest the right souls, we should have no shortage of demons to perform our castings."

"That... sounds more reasonable, but it doesn't resolve my inherent dislike towards Demoncasting"

"Don't tell me you are unwilling to repurpose alien souls into a useful resource. Are you turning into a cosmopolitan or something? The native aliens deserve no sympathy for us as they have never extended it to us. They have made no secret that the main reason why they are waging this war is to wipe us all out. We cannot afford to be squeamish or soft-hearted towards them. Even if the act of converting 'innocent' souls into depraved demons is a universal taboo, I will willingly damn myself if that is what it takes to equip our best champions with the strongest demon arms!"

After all of this argumentation, Ves did not stray away from his decision to commit to

Demoncasting.

It had grown even stronger!

That was not to say that Five Elements Mastery was so much worse. Its benefits were undeniable, but Ves couldn't muster up as much enthusiasm towards it anymore.

It was too boring and generic in his opinion. It was too lacking in possibilities to develop a unique advantage that could help red humanity inflict a surprising defeat against the aliens from Messier 87!

"I am not extending any unwarranted sympathy towards the native aliens," Ketis defended herself. "I just think that maintaining honor is about abiding by a universal code of conduct. There are vile and less savory acts that we should refrain from engaging in even if there are reasons that encourage us to do so. If we lose control over ourselves and give in to temptation, we will degenerate into beasts. Demoncasting sounds as if it has far too many temptations that encourage us to fall into depravity. I am not too afraid that I will slip, especially if I am being accompanied with the Heavensword. It is you that I am worried about. You often get carried away."

Ves did not take this risk too seriously. "I can see why you have that impression, but you are unfairly maligning me. I am perfectly able to control myself. I occasionally choose not to just so that I can fire up my passion and achieve better results. Tell you what. If you are so worried that I will go astray, why not tackle Demoncasting together? We can apply both of our strengths in a single work. In the meantime, we can continually monitor each other and make sure we are not crossing any lines. Does that sound like a good suggestion?"

Chapter 6573 Maximum Resource Utilization

As the two mech designers expressed their opinions towards each other, it became clear that one of them was way more committed to an upgrade track than the other.

Ves sounded more and more determined to select Demoncasting as the next evolution of the Mech Designer System!

Ketis let out an exasperated breath. She saw less and less hope of being able to convince him to settle for Five Elements Mastery instead.

"While your arguments sound logical and rational, I feel as if they don't weigh as much as your emotional preference towards Demoncasting." The female mech designer expressed. "You have completely surrendered to your shiny toy syndrome"

"Is that even a thing?"

"It is. I specifically looked it up, you know. It describes your behavior surprisingly well. To put it simply, if you are given a choice to play with a superior toy that you are already familiar with, or an inferior toy that you have never encountered before, you will choose to play with the latter 10 out of 10 times because it is 'shinier' in your eyes!" ...That sounds about right." Ves admitted.

"That is not supposed to be a compliment, Ves! It is a description of a fault! It might sound trivial as long as we are talking about toys, but when it comes to a subject as important as preparing red humanity against the terrible enemies on the horizon, the consequences of making the wrong decision are much more severe! Why are you not taking this more seriously?!"

Ves raised his palm. "Calm down, Ketis! I am not taking this lightly. Look, I thought we already ascertained that none of the three upgrade tracks are obviously good or bad. The System wouldn't scam us that way. The stakes are high, but even if we choose Superdimensional Transformation, we won't be sabotaging ourselves. We can still make ourselves stronger and achieve better results. Since this is the case, I don't think it is a mistake if we go for Five Element Mastery or Demoncasting. They both have very different pros and cons, but their overall value is so close to each other that what advantages the former has is not decisive enough to commit to it right away. Once we have exhausted the avenues for logic, we can let our feelings and intuition lead the way. Right now, both of them are screaming for me to accept Demoncasting."

Ketis looked at Ves as if he was a stimulant addict who had gone too far.

He was completely hopeless.

"Let me ask you a question, Ketis. Do you truly object so much to Demoncasting?"

"Just as you are letting your judgment get swayed by your own feelings, I am also affected by my distaste for it. I know it doesn't entirely make sense when I explain it, but I do not think that we should cross certain lines no matter the circumstance. I know that the survival of red humanity is at stake, but if we allow these 'demon arms' to corrupt us to the point where we are no different from the evil beings we professed to control, then I would rather die like a human than live like a demon."

Ves looked completely unimpressed.

"You don't really mean that."

"Are you questioning my honor?" Ketis indignantly shot back.

"No. I merely don't believe that you or anyone but the most delusional people is truly willing to refrain from resorting to dirty methods if that is what they need to rely upon to save everyone's hives. Even if you don't care too much about your own life, think about your loved ones. Think about your husband Joshua. Does he deserve to suffer and die just because you refuse to cast him the best possible demon sword that you can cast?"

"Do not Devil Tongue me, Ves." Ketis hissed. "Using my family against me is a low blow." "I don't think what I am saying is wrong, and I wasn't finished yet. Joshua is hardly the only person affected by your reticence. Think about your children. Kirian appears determined to follow his parents and become a swordsman and mech pilot. Will you allow him to risk his life in battle with weaker equipment? What if he ends up getting killed because his arms did not give him the edge he needed to win a bout against the enemy? Then there is Mayra, who looks like she is shaping up to become a mech designer. While that will keep her far from the fighting, there is no way to run when the aliens have destroyed everything and are determined to hunt down the remnants of a defeated race."

Perhaps the reason why Ketis accused Ves of pulling off a low blow was because this line of attack was difficult to resolve.

"If we go for Five Elements Mastery, then we won't have to grapple with this problem." Ketis finally retorted. "Besides, Five Elements Mastery is much easier to spread to the masses. This is what we should care about as mech designers."

"I don't think so." Ves shook his head. "You are not wrong about how many people we can affect, but I can turn this argument around. Do you think that everything related to the five elements is fine and dandy? Each of them can be used to create horrendous travesties. From concentrating lots of fire energy to reproduce the explosion of a nuclear bomb, to using earth energy to generate an earthquake that can collapse an entire city, there are many ways to misuse this knowledge. The potential for abuse is great. The Red Collective cannot completely prevent such incidents from happening.

While the ripple effects of Demoncasting are also rather serious, what is different is that we can control the scale as long as we are the only providers of demon arms." "Doesn't the limitation on replicability restrict the usefulness of Demoncasting? There is also the source of demons to consider. We cannot possibly save an entire civilization if we are only able to create a few dozen demon arms."

Ves grinned. "Wrong again. We can go for quality instead of quantity. Five Elements Mastery is much more beneficial to the masses, but even if we can make standard mechs three or four times stronger than today, will that make a difference against an alien enemy that is more powerful than a god pilot? They will still be ants in front of such an unimaginably powerful opponent. We need to focus on strengthening our strongest champions instead. If Demoncasting is effective for god mechs, we can elevate their attack power so that they can inflict actual harm onto an enemy that they cannot possibly defeat on their own. As long as there are enough god pilots with weapons that break the boundary, we may be able to drive away the invaders from

Messier 87."

"That... sounds somewhat plausible, but I believe that can only be accomplish if we obtain the strongest possible demons. After all, the System itself has stated that the product of Demoncasting is far more dependent on the nature of the demon than the material properties of the vessel. Do you think it is easy to gather so many powerful demons?"

"It is possible. We either have to earn a huge amount of AP, which gets easier if we invite a lot more mech designers to join the System, or kill a lot of aliens and harvest.

their souls. Wait."

"What is it, Ves?"

"Give me a minute. I just realized that this isn't as big of a problem as I thought."

"Huh?"

While Ketis looked flabbergasted, Ves suddenly started to grin when he thought about a location that contained a lot of life!

How did he not realize this before?! Well, he did register this piece of information on a factual level, but it was only now that he recognized its potential as a huge deposit of

raw materials!

The Milky Way was filled with life!

The entire galaxy was teeming with human and alien individuals!

Although wars were rather frequent in the old galaxy, their scale were so much smaller that four centuries of relative calm and stability had caused a lot of species to multiply

their numbers.

Humanity had completely recovered from the ravages of the Age of Conquest and had become more prosperous than ever.

As for the aliens living on the other side of the Milky Way, they had suffered devastating losses in the earlier periods of the Age of Conquest, but enough time had passed for them to rebuild their empires and replenish their population in most cases.

All of this meant that the galaxy was teeming with souls, each of which represented a valuable resource!

The problem was that it took a bit of effort to harvest these souls.

Yet hadn't Veronica and Master Willix worked day and night to rush the Rule Breaker Project to completion?

At this stage, the first Carmine mech to be introduced to the completely unprepared masses of original humanity was only a few weeks away from mass proliferation.

The Rule Breaker Project was originally meant to serve as a catalyst for mass wars and growing instability, so it neatly fell in line with his new intentions!

What was also great about this upcoming Carmine mass production mech design that he could use it as a vehicle to harvest a lot of souls!

He just had to add Helena as a secondary design spirit to the mech design! She would only have one job as the second design spirit of the Rule Breaker Project. She just needed to harvest the souls of anyone who died in the vicinity of the machine, up to and including the Carmine mech pilot himself if he ever croaked!

In fact, Helena shouldn't let the spiritual foundation of the Carmine mech go either!

In any case, if the pilot had died, the Carmine mech would become useless, so Helena might as well put the living mech out of its misery and reap its life!

This was maximum resource utilization on a scale that was unthinkable in the new frontier!

The Milky Way was around 64 times bigger than the Red Ocean, so Ves could loosely estimate that it was 64 times more populous!

Ves didn't even have to bother to harvest souls in the Red Ocean because so many more would soon be ripe for the taking in the Milky Way!

It was only now that his goals almost became completely aligned with the Oblivion

Gate Consortium.

His mother and the other conspirators wanted to engulf the Milky Way into war and

strife in order to topple the Big Two and erect a new order, preferably with them in charge.

Ves just wanted to cause war for war's sake!

The greater the killing, the greater the profit!

No matter whether they were human, alien or machine, Ves wanted to claim them all! mech or arms!

Though Ves felt sorry for the people of the old galaxy, his sympathy for them was not as great as his sympathy for the people of red humanity.

He could only save one group of people. If he was forced to make a choice, then he would always choose the group that encompassed most of his friends and family! Ves did not hesitate any longer.

He suddenly burst out into laughter! "Hahahahaha, I get it now! This option is tailor-made for my circumstances! I can get much more out of it than the other ones! There's no need to think about it any further! System, I choose Upgrade Track #2:

Demoncasting!"

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING, VES?!"

Ketis reacted with great alarm as Ves locked in his favored choice without explaining himself any further!

Even if his mind had already been set on this choice, Ketis still believed she could

make him reconsider if she was persuasive enough.

She even thought about betraying his trust and selecting Five Element Mastery before

Ves could lock in the final decision. Unfortunately, Ves had moved too quickly for her to succeed!

"The salvation of red humanity is in my grasp! Now that I can tap into a nearly endless

supply of souls, I can Demoncast all of the mechs and equipment that I want! The Age of Demons shall record the rise of red humanity! Hahahahahaha! Hahahahahaha!

HAHAHAHAHA!"

Chapter 6574 Stacking Lottery Tickets

The System Space rumbled shortly after Ves locked in his choice.

The deed was done.

Ves had chosen the second upgrade track, which permanently altered the functioning of the Mech Designer System.

Due to the decisions that Ves made in the past, it had slowly evolved and morphed into a direction that suited his needs the most, more or less.

Ves liked it. He felt as if he had patiently raised the System as a child. By completing one Supply Mission after another, he fed the System with essential nutrients and allowed it to reach another growth milestone.

As for steering the direction of its growth, Ves likened it to augmenting a growing child. There were many different ways that human children could grow and improve based on the genetic treatments and cybernetic implants they received.

The Mech Designer System had undergone three major transformations thus far. Each transformation altered its identity and purpose little by little.

While it still centered around helping mech designers get better at their jobs, it had gained numerous powerful functions that also helped its users to become more.

Spiritual Ascension enabled users to explore the rich possibilities of cultivation.

Dimension Breach Creation allowed users to enter and mine resources from different dimensions.

Now, Demoncasting granted users the ability to directly empower objects by infusing them with 'demons'!

When Ves charted the course of all of these upgrades, he could recognize a clear pattern to the seemingly unrelated upgrade tracks.

The pattern would have been a lot clearer if he chose Superdimensional Transformation. Perhaps that was the course he was already heading towards prior to the introduction of Version 4.0. If he stuck to it, then he would have turned the System into an evolution aid that would help him become an increasingly more powerful superdimensional entity.

Now that he had changed its direction, the System became much more centered around the creation and use of powerful mechs and artifacts.

While Ves could probably make use of the Demoncasting to upgrade his own combat gear and turn him into a well-equipped powerhouse, this was not the primary purpose of this upgrade track.

It was clearly meant to give users a way to empower their own products, and possibly the products of others as well.

The upgrade track therefore aligned quite a lot with the profession of a mech designer. Ves liked that because he would rather strengthen his ability to function as a service provider rather than turn himself into a champion.

He felt a little sorry for Ketis for locking in his decision without finishing his debate with her, but he still felt that he was the real owner of the Mech Designer System. The fact that both of them

happened to possess equal decision-making authority over it was a flaw that he needed to remedy sooner or later.

There had to be a way to upgrade his authority. He intended to find out how, but first he wanted to go over the upgraded facilities and see whether he could take advantage of their improved functions.

"Now that the System has completed its upgrade, we should slowly make our way up the mountaintop. Are you coming?"

The swordmaster did not exactly look happy at Ves, but now that he had done the deed, there was no way to go back. The woman let out an exasperated sigh and followed suit.

"Let me make one thing clear, Ves. I have made my views about Demoncasting clear. If you are so greedy to acquire demons that you are harvesting the souls of innocent people, then I will stop you no matter what it takes. We are humans, so we should hold onto our bottom lines. As soon as you violate them, you have become closer to a beast. I cannot respect a person who has degenerated so far. While I admittedly don't have a clear idea what souls even are, I do not want to live in a future where they are treated as mere commodities. Just let them go to the next destination and hope they can find peace."

Ves could tell that Ketis was being utterly serious about this. He would never dismiss her concerns.

"Who do you think I am? While I do not entirely think it is unacceptable to convert human souls into demons in an emergency, your demand is reasonable. I promise to you that I will never intentionally use the souls of fellow red humans to create demons. It isn't really necessary anyway. The native aliens heavily outnumber our population. It is much easier to harvest large quantities of souls derived from alien beings. Don't worry about it. I will not disrespect or mistreat the souls of brave defenders and hard-working civilians who are doing their best to contribute to the survival of our race and civilization. I will not turn myself into an enemy of red humanity." Ketis turned her head towards Ves. Her eyes gazed suspiciously at him, as if she could not believe that he could readily make such a concession.

However, she had moved close enough to encompass him into her sword aura. While it was not really effective at reading a phase lord and a spiritually powerful entity, Ves did not deliberately hide his feelings and emotions on this issue.

She could feel he was being sincere.

"I suppose that will do." She eventually said. "Don't worry. If you engage in Demoncasting with the help of alien souls, I will not object to your actions. As you have said, any sympathy towards the aliens is self-defeating. If they don't want their souls to get corrupted, then they shouldn't wage war against our race." "It is good that you understand. Are you willing to make use of Demoncasting

yourself?"

"I am not sure yet. I need to see the Demoncasting Forge in person and make my own judgment."

Before they visited the latest expansion to the Workshop of Creation, they first stopped by the Vault of Eternity.

The latest System upgrade had caused the site to become a little fancier and more impressive. The stone gate that led into the Vault had become more decorative and also gained a few golden accents.

Ves and Ketis only spent a little time here to confirm that the option to rent storage space had been turned into outright buying it. The prices remained the same, so the Vault had become much more practical and economical than before. It was already possible to spend a hundred or so AP to store a vehicle the size of a small shuttle. They visited the Wishing Fountain next to understand the rules concerning stacking lottery tickets to increase the probability to win a better prize.

Just like the previous facility, the Wishing Fountain experienced a modest visual makeover. It looked considerably more sacred than before.

"There is no limit to how many tickets you can stack." Ves observed an important rule.

"Do you want to try it out?"

"Why not? I saved up 19 golden lottery tickets. I think that it would be incredibly useful if I can use the Wishing Fountain to obtain knowledge or items that are related to

demons."

"There is no guarantee that you will gain what you want."

"I know, but if I use 10 tickets at a time, my chances of obtaining a desirable prize will surely increase by a large margin."

Ves did not hesitate any longer and immediately drew out 10 golden lottery tickets before throwing them all into the fountain.

The water began to glow gold at a much greater intensity than before! Soon, a very familiar-looking golden prize wheel extended from the bottom. Many pie-shaped segments were marked by different symbols at the edge.

Ves and Ketis curiously studied them all and noted that stacking 10 golden lottery tickets at once probably had a considerably powerful effect!

"There is a symbol of a sword beheading a demon over here." Ketis said. "I have the feeling that this will either give out a weapon that can easily kill demons, or give out knowledge on how to do it ourselves. It occupies a large cone on this wheel, so it is not too difficult to aim for it if you spin the wheel with the right amount of force."

Compared to the symbol of a sword beheading a demon, Ves was much more interested in the symbol that showed a robed and shadowy entity slamming a hammer down a collection of wailing souls!

This must be a prize related to the production of a demon!

There was another symbol that attracted his attention. It depicted a generic human figure extending his hand and causing an obviously evil-looking demonic entity to fall

on his butt and beg for mercy.

This was probably a prize related to subduing demons.

There were many other symbols that conveyed different meanings, but Ves felt that these two were the ones he needed the most.

Fortunately for Ves, the 'pic slices' associated with these two prizes were not as great as the one pointed out by Ketis, but they were not too small either!

The only regret was that they were placed on opposite ends of the prize wheel, so Ves could only target one of these tempting symbols.

"I'll go for the one that looks like it will help me suppress demons." Ves eventually decided. "I have a strong suspicion that working with demons is inherently dangerous. As long as you walk along the river enough times, your shoes will eventually get wet. It

would be best if I have a way to guard against accidents, because they will definitely happen sooner or later."

He had taken enough risky decisions for the day. He decided to rein in his adventurism and go for the more prudent option.

Besides, he did not think that Ketis would appreciate it if he went for the one related to converting souls into demons. It was best not to draw more suspicion,

Ves looked at the wheel and estimated how much force he needed to apply to spin the

wheel just enough to obtain his desired prize. He estimated the resistance generated

by friction and other other factors.

He then proceeded to pull the wheel.

Just as expected, Ves managed to win the prize associated with the desired symbol.

It happened to be a very practical enlightenment fruit. [Soul Whip Technique Fruit]

Grants the ability to perform a technique that condenses darkness energy into a

barely perceptible whip. This Soul Whip does not inflict any material damage, but it can inflict a disproportionate amount of pain and suffering onto souls and similar intangible beings that are susceptible to the energies that comprise the whip structure. The power and properties of the whip is affected by the execution of the technique, the intent of the practitioner and the energies being used. Requirements: Spirituality must be 3.0 or higher, Concentration must be 1.5 or higher. Though Ketis clearly frowned when she read the description, Ves decisively swallowed the fruit and stood still as he rapidly assimilated the foreign knowledge. The absorption process proceeded very smoothly this time. Ves was much more capable of integrating knowledge than before, and the Soul Whip Technique happened to be a lot more concise. It only contained the most essential information about how

to form the Soul Whip and nothing else.

This was a much nicer enlightenment fruit than the ones that were originally derived from old or forgotten religious cults!

Much of their contents were padded by religious claptrap and nonsensical pseudo

science. The knowledge granted by the latest fruit was much more like a modern instruction manual!

Ves immediately tried to test his latest technique. He channeled and condensed his darkness energy as instructed and formed a rather small and short Soul Whip. "Great! Spending 10 golden lottery tickets was worth it! It's not only effective against demons, but any other spiritual entities. It is such a versatile technique!" Meanwhile, Ketis shuddered for a bit. She did not think that Ves would become a

better person now that he had gained the power to whip any soul-like entity, including the souls of ordinary people!

Chapter 6575 Fertilizing a Tree

Ves experimented with the Soul Whip Technique as if it was the latest toy in his possession.

He unskillfully waved his arm about and watched as the Soul Whip noodled around like a floppy snake.

The enlightenment fruit taught him how to create a Soul Whip, but did not pass on the skills on how to handle this weapon.

It didn't matter to Ves. As long as he could make it hit what he wanted, there was no need to perfect his whipping skills.

One of the downsides of the technique imparted by the latest fruit was that it only taught him the most essential and basic instructions of creating a Soul Whip.

It did not appear to be too powerful or possess a lot of depth. The lack of strange descriptions and abstruse meanings meant it was simple for Ves to master the technique, but it also meant that he would have to work out how to improve and adjust the parameters of the Soul Whip by himself.

As Ves and his former student left the Wishing Fountain and moved to their next step, he already began to experiment with the new technique.

Instead of channeling pure darkness energy into the intangible whip, he also began to channel each of the five elements in succession.

The results were... mixed.

The Soul Whip mixed with fire energy literally flamed out. It was as if the darkness energy and fire energy mutually destroyed each other.

Infusing water energy seemed to make the whip heavier and move like an eel, but it also lost much of its threat. It became useless!

Earth energy simply caused the whip to become solid and rigid, thereby turning into a rod that lacked the fluidity of a whip.

Blending the whip with wood energy did... something, but Ves could not determine what. He likely had to use it on a target in order to know for sure.

When he finally tried it out with metal energy, he seemed to have turned the whip into a... needle.

"Hm. Funny!"

It was clear that simple blending of other E energy attributes did not yield any useful improvements. He would have to employ more sophisticated methods in order to successfully evolve the Soul Whip.

Ves was not quite sure whether it was worth it to invest his time in this endeavor,

He shrugged and set this matter aside. He would revisit it when it became clear that it would be helpful for him to form a stronger whip.

He visited the Divine Bazaar next. Most of the stalls and shops remained the same, but a new clearing had formed in the center that became occupied by a large and ostentatious wooden pavilion.

When the pair of mech designers entered the pavilion, they saw no signs of life, but numerous display cases showing many different items.

Just as expected, these display cases offered a large variety of low-level items for sale on a fixed basis. Attribute Candies, potions, medical supplies and other goods could be bought for dozens of AP each.

"This is a good place." Ketis said. "We don't have to wait for the right rotation to obtain the stuff we need anymore."

"That's true. It's too bad we don't have the AP to spare for these goods at the moment." The two memorized the items for sale and soon left the Divine Bazaar. They climbed up the mountaintop and soon reached the Tree of Possibilites. Compared to before, it had grown taller and formed more branches. The amount of enlightenment fruits available for exchange still remained the same, unfortunately. What was new was that Ketis previously dumped the corpse of a high-caste orven naval captain at the base of the tree.

The corpse had disappeared. The roots of the tree had sucked out all of the nutrients until there was nothing left.

As a consequence, one of the branches had grown a conspicuously glowing golden enlightenment fruit.

It beckoned to Ves and Ketis as if it was a piece of forbidden fruit.

Though Ves had a suspicion that he could pluck the fruit with no issue, he did not make any moves to do so as it belonged to Ketis.

[Orven Large Homeship Operations Golden Fruit]

Grants comprehensive understanding on how to operate most fundamental operations on large homeships built by the orven race. Also grants sufficient understanding of orven language in order to facilitate the operation of orven homeships. The beneficiary of this fruit will be able to operate basic engineering, gunnery, navigation, helm, life support, damage control, hydroponics, energy shielding and more.

Requirements: Intelligence must be 1.7 or higher.

Ketis grew a little disappointed when she studied the description of the fruit. Learning how to operate an orven warship did not exactly rank high on her wishlist.

"At least you will be able to understand what is going on whenever you board an orven warship in the future." Ves commented.

A frown appeared on her face. "I do not see the point in absorbing this fruit. I should pass it on to whoever you appoint to become the captain of the Torturous Scream." "That's not necessary. We won't keep much of the convoluted alien computing systems and other systems that run the flagship that we have captured from the Torment Fleet. By the time the conversion process has run its course, the Torturous Scream will largely look the same from the outside, but much of her internal systems should be based on human tech. Just take it. You will know what is going on when you next invade an orven ship, and you will also be able to negotiate with the orvens if necessary. I think it would also be good for you to widen your horizons and stuff your head with knowledge that is not

directly related to swordsman mechs. You need to diversify your knowledge base if you want to keep innovating"

Though Ketis still had her doubts about the usefulness of this knowledge, this was her first golden enlightenment fruit. She eventually decided to follow his advice and bit

into the golden fruit.

She paused and closed her eyes for a minute.

"That was... a lot. My head hurts a little. I do not think I should absorb another enlightenment fruit for at least a few days. Orven language is so alien that I need to put myself in an entirely different mindset to speak it. There are so many guttural

sounds."

"Do you regret absorbing this fruit, Ketis?"

"I am not sure. Nothing about it is directly relevant to me and my work. It doesn't contain too much technical knowledge. I just know how to operate most of the systems of an orven homeship. Maybe I will be able to gain inspiration from how the orvens approach their tech. Some stuff is universal, but the orvens do have their

unique points."

"That sounds good. Just let it settle in your mind. Perhaps you will think about it next time you are in a creative mood. Anyway, I think I understand how the improved Tree of Possibilities operates. It just gives us a chance to absorb a part of the knowledge of the sacrifice. That piece of knowledge can comprise the most important or the most advanced that can be extracted from the brain, but the selection can also be completely random. Whatever the case, it is unlikely that the golden enlightenment fruit will contain knowledge that doesn't belong to the deceased"

Ketis nodded in agreement. "We won't be able to obtain golden enlightenment fruits related to mech design. We would have to kill and allow the tree to fertilize the corpse. That is unacceptable to me unless the mech designer is a scumbag" "Then forget about it. The most valuable bodies that you should strive to obtain are those belonging to senior alien scientists and engineers. They contain a wealth of knowledge in phasewater theory and all manner of alien technologies. They should have

also learned human technological principles as well. Puelmer carcasses should be especially valuable to us. Since you are currently stationed in the frontlines, it should be easy for you to purchase a handful of bodies from high-ranking puelmers. Try and see whether you can fertilize the Tree of Possibilities with them. If that doesn't work, try and obtain a prisoner of war and kill the ugly alien with your sword. If the Tree of Possibilities still doesn't want to absorb the corpse, then it is clear that the rules for growing a golden enlightenment fruit are quite strict."

The only known success case so far was when Ketis personally killed the orven captain and sacrificed his corpse on the spot. If valid combat was a requirement, then they wouldn't be able to grow hundreds of golden enlightenment fruits by buying

high-value alien bodies in bulk.

"This feature still has promise." Ketis smiled. "I have an actual reason to enter the battlefield and challenge the native aliens in direct combat. Previously, I only did so in order to grow my courage and refine my swordsmanship. Now I know I can acquire useful knowledge that can help me understand alien tech better."

The upgrade to the Tree of Possibilities was much more practical for Ketis than for Ves. The former just had to keep fighting against the native aliens to get the corpses she needed to grow more golden enlightenment fruits.

As for Ves, he would have to move closer to the frontlines and secure a dedicated

supply channel.

Even then, the Tree of Possibilities may still reject the corpse because Ves was not directly involved with killing the alien in question.

He had a suspicion that the corpse would still remain valid if it was killed by one of his products, but death by mech tended to obliterate fragile organic bodies.

The only enemies that could be killed by powerful mechs but still remain mostly physically intact were phase leaders!

Unless Saint Tusa was able to replicate his feat of killing a phase lord faster and cleaner than before, Ves could forget about obtaining such an extravagant prize!

Even if Tusa managed to slay another phase lord, the corpse was way too valuable to be handed over to Ves.

The Red Three had been snapping up phase lord carcasses left and right whenever they became available. Even if the groups were reluctant to hand it over, they would still be forced to do so even if they earned a large amount of war merits and other

rewards in return.

Ves sighed.

"Would you do me a favor, Ketis? If you ever obtain a golden enlightenment fruit that you don't already need, please show it to me first. If I do not need it, you can give it to

others." The swordmaster nodded. "I will, but only if Joshua and my children do not already need the knowledge that the golden enlightenment fruit contains. They will probably need it much more than you, no offense."

"It's okay. I would have made the same decision if I was in your shoes."

The latest feature of the Tree of Possibilities could still play a useful role, but it

required the users to put active effort into hunting down high-value enemies. After leaving the Tree of Possibilities, the pair of mech designer entered the Mission

Hall next.

It had grown larger and featured a much more sizable Mission Board.

Both mech designers studied the Missions made available this time and indeed

confirmed that there were three times more than unusual.

The additional quantity also led to another improvement that hadn't been mentioned in the changelog.

The variety of Missions had increased!

There was greater room for the Mission Hall to issue Missions that were much different from the usual ones.

Ves paid particularly close attention to the much more numerous D-rank Mission.

[Forge 5 Bastard Swords]

[Pray to Su-thaneexi's once every 37.4 hours for a total of 7 times]

[Demoncast a Pain Blade]

[Design a Cannoncer Mech] [Repair 5 Heavily Damaged Mechs]

None of these Missions imposed any heavy demands. Ves could complete several of them in the span of a few days.

The rewards for these low-rank Missions did not amount to much. He would only gain

around 5 to 10 AP if he satisfied the requirements without overperforming. That was still a good deal, though! The amount of time that Ves had to invest to

complete these Missions was not that big of a deal!

He could easily complete half a dozen of them and earn several dozen AP. As long as he

did this enough times, he would soon be able to afford an expensive enlightenment fruit or pay for a substantial upgrade! "Earning AP has become much easier!"

Chapter 6576 Demoncasting Forge

Ves and Ketis both divided the easy D-rank Missions between themselves. They would just have to spend a bit of time in order to complete them and harvest a modest amount of AP.

After they were done, they left the Mission Hall and ascended up the Workshop of Creation.

Ves admittedly did not really make use of it that often. In the past, he only valued it for the ability to rent workshop space for 1 AP per 24 hours, which could potentially allow him to prolong his stay in the System Space by weeks or months so long as he continually completed enough Missions to cover for his 'daily rent'!

Now that the Mission Hall offered three times as many Missions as before, Ves and Ketis could potentially start a Mission-clearing marathon that could last for several years inside the System Space!

Hardly any time would pass in reality while the two users harvested a lot of experience, mastered a lot of useful knowledge and improved their design and fabrication capabilities to another level.

As long as Ves and Ketis spent their time on completing the right Missions, it should also be easy for the two to maintain a positive balance, thereby ending their marathons with way more AP than when they had at the start!

Of course, the premise for all of this was that they accepted enough Missions that they could complete while remaining inside the System Space.

When Ves described how he used the Workshop of Creation in the past, Ketis looked awfully thoughtful.

"That explains a few times where you inexplicably changed. This actually sounds like a great way for you to earn more AP. Why haven't you done it more often?"

"Each marathon takes a lot out of you. I am still human, you know. Spending months inside this isolated space for so long is exhausting. If I stay here for too long, I become increasingly more

disconnected to reality. I won't feel the urgency of the Red War, and my love for my wife and children will turn into an abstract concept. In short, you will lose your humanity if you keep slaving away like this. You should only do a marathon once every few years. Well, maybe you can do it a little more often considering that your willpower is much stronger."

Ketis certainly looked interested. "I think I will try it out soon."

That caused Ves to smile. "It's been awhile since I last did it. Now that we have a lot more Missions to complete, this is a good time for me to start a new marathon as well. Why don't we do this together? I think we can mitigate the sense of disconnect and the loss of social interaction if we work together."

"I suppose we can do that, but we don't earn credit if we complete each other's Missions, right?"

"That's probably true, but we don't have to work together. We only need to work quietly alongside each other and take breaks at the same time."

Now that red humanity's defensive lines were close to reaching their limit, it became more important than ever for everyone to contribute to the war effort.

With more AP, Ves and Ketis could gain a lot more out of the System and provide

critical aid to the defenders who most needed the additional boost.

The two were not prepared to start their marathon right away, but they quickly agreed to settle a few affairs in reality before starting to earn as much AP as possible in four or so days.

As they entered the Workshop of Creation, they immediately saw that much of it had remained the same.

The only change was that a brand-new forge area had formed against the mountainside.

The Demoncasting Forge occupied its own exclusive alcove. While much of the rocks that make up the mountain were gray in color, the rocks that surrounded the new forge were black like basalt.

Compared to the ultra-modern instruments and production equipment of the main Workshop of Creation, the tools and equipment of the Demoncasting Forge appeared to be a lot more primitive!

There was enough open space to the side to fit mechs and larger objects if necessary. The most prominent feature of the Demoncasting Forge was the constantly burning flame. It looked positively demonic as it not only burned in an unnaturally dark red shade, but also exuded a clear sense of threat that Ves could already sense from this distance!

As Ves and Ketis moved closer, they both put up their guards as they sensed the flow of malevolent E energies in the entire forge.

The distinctly edgy demonic theme on all of the tools and equipment did not help matters either!

Ves did not take the threats seriously. He smirked as he wondered how delighted he would feel if he used the tools to Demoncast for the first time.

He wandered over to a rough-edged stone work table and picked up a ball-peen hammer that looked as if it had attitude.

Just holding it already caused Ves to confirm one of his suspicions.

"This is a Demoncasted product. All of the stuff here that gives out dangerous vibes

are infused with demons!"

"No wonder!"

Ketis already felt as if she had approached a den of evil and sin.

The Mech Designer System's use of the term 'demons' appeared completely justified! Whatever twisted souls had been stuffed inside the forging tools, they clearly posed a threat to anyone without the means to defend themselves!

Fortunately, the demons stuck inside the tools were locked in pretty tight. They also did not appear to be too powerful, though Ves had to exert greater force in order to keep the hammer under his control.

"I can already tell that handling these tools will be a pain." He said. "This hammer is constantly trying to fight against me. That is fine when I am just holding it, but if I am using it in my work, then it can jerk around and mess up a critical step. We need to be on guard against that possibility. Perhaps..."

Ves formed a small Soul Whip with his free hand and lightly 'caressed' the small blacksmith hammer.

It let out a faint screech of agony before it suddenly turned a lot more docile!

"That's handy!"

Although Ves could tell that the hammer had grown a little weaker and less potent, the lack of resistance more than made up for that shortcoming!

Even Ketis began to appreciate the Soul Whip Technique.

However, she believed she could handle the tools just fine by herself. She walked over and picked up a pair of tongs. It began to resist her hold, but Sharpie quickly dove into the tool and actually began to provoke a fight against the trapped demon!

The tongs vibrated a lot harder for a few seconds before Sharpie apparently won the fight!

Ves raised his eyebrows at this demonstration of strength.

"Is it that easy for you to subdue a Demoncasted tool?"

"The demon inside this tool is not that weak. It was already suppressed. It hardly has

any room to fight back." Ketis explained.

"I see. That is helpful to know."

They put down the tools and continued to explore the Demoncasting Forge. They soon found a series of steles that roughly served as an instruction manual. Even if much of the actual instructions consisted of wordless images instead of clear text, the two mech designers were smart enough to decipher the meanings.

"I see" Ves said. "Most of the tools here aren't actually necessary unless we want to forge a more advanced form of D-mechs or D-arms. The most basic version of

'cast' a demon into it through a few ritualistic processes."

"D-mechs? D-arms?"

"That is how I decided to call the products of Demoncasting. After all, I can't just call them outright demon mechs and demon arms. That is awful marketing. Even if people think that there is something wrong with them, they will be less likely to associate my products with literal evil demons if I use more neutral labels."

Ketis would argue that Ves was engaging in a form of deceptive marketing by masking the true nature of these horrible works, but whatever.

The steles not only granted them basic instructions on how to use the Demoncasting Forge, but also presented a separate black stone pillar that apparently served as the interface to upgrade the facilities.

This one thankfully offered greater clarity. They could upgrade the quality of the provided tools, increase the heat of the demonic flame, increase the security measures to contain the rioting of unruly demons and upgrade various parameters of

a so-called 'Demon Summoning Circle!

Ves' eyes lit up as soon as he realized that this was the place where he could exchange

AP for demons!

"It's not here. Wait. It looks like it is placed within a cave. We need to look for an entrance"

They easily found it now that they knew what to look for. They entered a dark cave tunnel and soon arrived at an underground clearing that already hosted an underwhelming ritual circle.

Though Ves could not understand it at all, he had a feeling that it was barely sufficient for the job.

He quickly moved to another stele where he could command the circle to summon a demon of varying strengths.

[Minor Demon: 5 Ascension Points

--Middle Demon: UNAVAILABLE FOR SUMMONING

--Greater Demon: UNAVAILABLE FOR SUMMONING

--Demon King: UNAVAILABLE FOR SUMMONING]

"I see." Ves said.

"What did you figure out, Ves?"

"I think I understand the strength division of demons. Did you notice that the demons

locked in the smaller tools are clearly weaker than the ones locked in the anvil and other stuff that is a bit larger? The former are probably stuffed with Minor Demons

while the latter are infused with Middle Demons. Given their overall strength levels,

Minor Demons correspond to the first major cultivation rank while the latter correspond to the second major cultivation rank."

"That... makes sense. I thought these demons would be stronger."

"That is because we are already strong. A minor demon can still pose a threat to an untrained civilian."

Ketis extended her finger and tapped at the words 'Greater Demon' and 'Demon King!

"The previous stele mentioned an option to upgrade the circle so that we can summon

a Middle Demon for 100 AP. Do you think we would eventually be able to unlock the option to summon a Greater Demon and... a Demon King?"

"That... is an outrageous possibility. I don't believe the System is strong enough to make that happen, but... if we earn enough AP... who knows."

It sounded absolutely crazy that the System could become strong enough to summon

random Demon Kings and put them at the mercy of its users!

Of course, it probably wouldn't be as simple to make use of them. For one, just keeping

them in captivity was probably an incredibly difficult ordeal!

This was why the upgrade stele also offered upgrades to expand and strengthen the facilities related to keeping the demons in captivity!

The two mech designers briefly entered another cave clearing that hosted an underground facility called the Demon Prison,

So far, it could only contain up to 5 Minor Demons and Middle Demons. Supposedly, any demon directly summoned by the circle could seamlessly be

transferred to an available cell.

That luxury did not exist for demons derived from other sources, such as ones created by fusing souls together.

"Let's get back to the forge." Ves said.

"Why?"

"Because I am itching to try it out. I want to create my first D-arms!"

"You will need to obtain a demon first, Ves. It costs 5 AP to summon a Minor Demon."

"I will try it out later. Now that I have come into contact with actual D-arms, I have a better idea of what they are. I think I already have a demon or two in my possession!

Come!"

Chapter 6577 Demoncasting vs Demonforging

The Demoncasting Forge largely met Ves' expectations.

The tech and principles ran counter to more general cultivation practices. Everything about the forge looked as if it was turned into a stereotypical evil villain setup. There was no way that normal people would feel comfortably working in this kind of

danger-filled place! Just the tools storing one demon after another was enough to give them a heart attack!

Only those who possessed the strength to bear all of the pressure could make effective use of the Demoncasting Forge. This was not an art for the weak. Demoncasters willingly exposed themselves to corruption and damnation because the results justified the means!

As Ves excitedly trotted back to the main forge, Ketis followed suit while harboring serious misgivings about the entire setup.

She harbored increasing misgivings about Demoncasting and the Mech Designer System that practically led Ves by the nose.

She was not fooled by the computer-like facade of the Mech Designer System. It had to be controlled by a highly autonomous AI or possess outright sentience.

If that was the case, then it knew exactly what it was doing by presenting false choices to Ves.

It knew him so well that it should have been able to perfectly predict the upgrade track he would choose.

In hindsight, there was only one valid choice for a crazy mech designer like Ves.

He always wanted to stray off the beaten track!

Just the description of Demoncasting being a 'lost' and 'forbidden' craft was enough to reel Ves in like a fish!

Since that was the case, why did the System go out of its way to present this option to Ves?

How did the embrace of Demoncasting advance its goals?

What was its endgame?

Ketis couldn't help but feel concerned about what Demoncasting would do to Ves and the people around him. It was only a matter of time before his recklessness would cause this entire business to blow up in his face.

She found it regretful that Ves did not take these risk factors seriously. He shouldn't be stupid enough to deny they existed, but his overwhelming enthusiasm towards Demoncasting caused him to look at this dangerous practice with rose-tinted glasses.

Fine.

If Ves refused to heed the danger of weaponizing demons against their will, then Ketis would have to take up the watch. She would have to keep an eye on his activities and make sure to intervene if anything went wrong.

This was the first time that Ketis felt good about possessing the Heavensword. As upset as she felt at its insistence on becoming her sword and threatening to replace her swordsmanship, its power was undeniable.

The days that passed since the two spent time together had caused her concerns to ease a little bit. She no longer suspected that the Heavensword held any ill intent.

The greatest risk posed by this mysterious relic weapon was that its alien and archaic thinking may lead it to taking well-meaning but ultimately misguided actions.

Ketis found that whenever the Heavensword made any concerning noises in reaction to a development that it did not like, she had to press her hand on the hilt and force the weapon to stay put.

She had done this so many times in the past few weeks that she had practically trained it to become docile.

She was half-surprised the Heavensword was willing to acquiesce to her training. Hopefully, that would be enough for the powerful artifact to stay mum while Ves engaged in his first act of Demoncasting.

"Let's see..."

The two mech designers had returned to the main forge. Ves swept his gaze throughout the extensive workplace and tried to figure out where to begin. He approached the instruction steles yet again and paused for a moment.

"Did you figure out anything new, Ves?"

"I think I do." He said. "Have you noticed that these basic instructions actually leave out most of the tools and equipment in the Demoncasting Forge?"

"Hmm? Oh, you are right."

"According to this primitive tutorial, the basic method of Demoncasting is to prepare a target object, select and place the desired Demoncasting Mold over the target object, take out a demon and roast it over a demonic flame, insert the processed demon into the Demoncasting Mold, wait for a while before removing the Demoncasting Mold. Following these steps should hopefully produce a brand new D-arms."

Ketis listened to his summary and nodded. "That sounds similar to conventional casting. There is no need to make use of the forging tools."

"Then why does the Demoncasting Forge include them to begin with?" Ves asked.

makes

"My biggest guess is that is a more advanced method of creating D-arms. sense if you think about it, Ves. Conventional casting is more consistent, cheaper and much less demanding on technical skills. The downsides are that the results are usually inferior and an inability to deviate from the template set by the mold. Manual forging with tools like these is less consistent, costlier and demands much greater skill from the blacksmith. The advantages of forging is that as long as the craftsman is skilled and knowledgeable enough, he or she can better combine the input materials

together and shape a product with much greater variation and choice. The end product is usually much harder and less likely to possess weak points."

That was an oversimplified summary of differences between casting and forging, but it was enough to give the two a better understanding of the methods to infuse demons into objects.

"Demoncasting is probably the cheaper, faster and more idiot-proof way to create a D-arms, especially in a place where the System has already set everything up. It is the best place to start with this, but there is eventually a limit to what we can do with these Demoncasting Molds. If we want to exert greater control over the output and raise its quality, we have to switch over to a more manual and artisanal process." Ves surmised.

Ketis looked thoughtful. "That does sound like a natural progression."

"Once we have gotten the hang of transforming demons into metaphysical power sources, we can probably attempt to create D-arms through Demonforging or whatever it is called. Instead of thoroughly burning the demon until it 'melts' into a 'liquid' form, we probably have to burn the demon to a lower degree so that it remains 'solid. We'll have to use these hammers to beat the demon into the right shape while it is still hot enough to remain malleable. As long as we know what we are doing, we can probably increase the utilization of resources and achieve a more perfect fit! I am truly excited to learn this more advanced form of producing D-arms, but we can't be too hasty. We need to learn how to walk before we can run."

"I agree. Traditional blacksmithing has always been a craft that is taught from master to apprentice. There are no 'Master Demonforgers' who can systematically teach us what we need to know and supervise our work processes. It is reckless to attempt to use all of these forging tools without proper instruction."

It was unlikely that the System would supply them a Demonforging Master, so Ves and Ketis would have to learn this advanced craft through other means.

Hopefully, the Tree of Possibilities would eventually spawn an enlightenment fruit related to this promising art in the future.

Otherwise, Ves would have to puzzle everything out by relying on trial and error. That sounded like a dangerous prospect since so much about the Demoncasting Forge was filled with danger!

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meaning to replace it since it isn't up to my standards anymore."

Ves took the knife and noted that it held the spark of life. It wasn't as alive as his

mechs, though.

"This will do I suppose. Size is certainly an important factor in Demoncasting, but I am not sure how. We will have to discover the rules by ourselves."

Ves actually liked that because he enjoyed the process of exploration and discovery.

Instead of learning what he needed to know from a boring textbook or a direct infusion from an enlightenment fruit, he would get to act like a pioneer and earn every scrap of knowledge through his own efforts!

He soon turned back to the forge and made sure to place the knife and the Demoncasting Mold into the right places.

The next step required him to pull out a demon. Ketis watched on with growing

curiosity.

Why did he think he could skip the process of summoning a Minor Demon?

Ves simply pulled out a familiar-looking pouch from one of his uniform pockets and emptied its contents into his palm.

A sizable collection of gems of different shapes and colors glinted in the light of the demonic flame.

"Wait, aren't those the gems produced by Lucky?"

"They are. You should take a look at their descriptions. I used to dismiss them as

fantasy or irrelevant information, but now that I am introduced to the art of Demoncasting, I have begun to wonder whether there is a connection between the two. I have enough clues to seriously consider this possibility."

Even if he was wrong, he would only waste a single gem at most. He could always go

back to the Demon Summoning Circle and pay the 5 AP fee to obtain a proper Minor

Demon.

He carefully sifted through the beautiful and mysterious gems to pick one that he

could afford to waste on an experiment.

[Maiden's Affection]

The desire of an ancient maiden is locked within this gem. Increases the attraction of

a mech by 40 percent to females.

"It's gotta be you." He said as he picked up the lustrous, pink and heart-shaped gem without further hesitation.

"Wait. Are you sure you want to discard this gem?"

"Definitely. There's no combat benefit to using this gem at all! Since it is so useless, I might as well get my money's worth out of it by using it as experimental material."

Ves decisively tossed the gem into the ominous-looking demonic flame. Immediately, the flame surged as if it took offense at the intrusion! The gem meanwhile mysteriously floated in the middle of the dark red flames. Its exterior actually resisted the extraordinary heat for a while, but its physical structure eventually began to melt and evaporate.

Soon enough, a faint and mysterious soul-like entity emerged out of her cage and screamed in pain as the flames refined her fragile existence!

Ves and Ketis winced and took a step backwards as the robed maiden's scream scratched their spirits!

Yet the ancient maiden's cry of agony did not last as the demonic flames hungrily devoured her, causing more and more aspects of herself to get broken down until she began to lose her form!

"Is this what you call a demon?!"

"Hey, it is working so far, right?! If this works out, I will be able to confirm I have an existing supply of demons! I will finally be able to make better use of these gems!"

Chapter 6578 The Maiden Knife

When the System presented the second upgrade track to Ves, it did not take long for him to speculate on whether there was a possible connection between Demoncasting and Lucky's gems.

He did not have enough conclusive proof that this connection existed, but the possibility of it made the upgrade track a little more tantalizing!

So far, the initial demon refining process unfolded in accordance with the tutorial on the instruction steles!

The demonic flames painfully burned the defiant demon to the point the latter started to lose definition.

This was a crucial process. Ves had to make the refinement process last long enough to burn away enough impurities and make the demon pliable enough to squeeze inside the Demoncasting Mold and obediently adopt the right configuration.

Pull the demon out of the demonic flames too soon, and it would not only put up a greater fight, but also fail to properly fill up the mold.

Pull the demon out too late, and too much of its potential would have burned away, resulting in a more obedient but also substantially weaker end result.

If Ves wanted to play it safe, then he should have waited a little longer until the ancient maiden burned to the brink of nihility.

However, Ves was a Senior Mech Designer. He believed he could improvise his way through his first Demoncasting attempt while trying to create more than just a basic beginner's product.

This was why he fished the 'ancient maiden' out of the demonic flames when she still retained a considerable amount of definition.

The tutorial clearly described how to do that. Ves used a pair of tongs that were somehow empowered to hold and suppress a demon.

While the tongs did a good job of preventing the moderately refined demon from getting loose, he had to exert a considerable amount of force to counteract the ancient maiden's resistance!

He ignored her soul-shaking screams as best as possible and quickly stuffed her into a mechanism that sucked her in before pressing her into the prepared Demoncasting Mold.

There was not much Ves could do to influence the process from here. Demoncasters were mostly expected to stand back and stay vigilant until the demon thoroughly filled the mold.

They then needed to press the mold against the target object at the right time in order for the processed demon to adhere to a new physical home.

Ves did not have a good understanding of the right timing, so he relied entirely on his intuition and guesswork to carefully lower the Demoncasting Mold until it gently made contact with the combat knife.

A mysterious process ensued. Somehow, the Demoncasting Mold automatically 'poured' the transformed demon into the knife donated by Ketis.

It became clear to both mech designers that this was not a casual step, but a process that was carefully controlled by the mold and maybe another apparatus.

This process enabled the processed demon to integrate into the knife in a different manner than Ves had witnessed in the past.

He felt that the integration sequence went further and applied more force, as if the mold was trying to stuff the transformed ancient maiden so deeply into the weapon that she could not break out by relying on her own force!

"Look!" Ketis gasped and pointed at the knife! "The changes go beyond spiritual alterations. The knife is beginning to undergo a physical transformation!"

Ves expected this to happen. He recalled the inexplicable transformations of Elegant. Rage and the Zeal during their ill-fated mission against the Emperor Tree. While Ves did not know what happened to them at the time, he now understood that the living mechs became corrupted by the Emperor Tree, which was apparently so similar in nature to a demon that they went through a process that Ves decided to call 'demonization.

The current Demoncasting process produced a reaction that shared so many similarities with what Ves had managed to observe in certain pieces of archival footage that they had to be same in essence.

Just as Ves surmised, the process of demonization did not always have to be an accidental case of uncontrolled transformation.

Perhaps the first Demoncasters had witnessed wild demonization before and thought to themselves that they could tame and control this dangerous reaction.

It was quite worthwhile for them to do so as demonized products tended to become a lot more powerful at the cost of losing control!

From the perspective of a producer, Demoncasting should therefore be a planned and controlled process to harness the power of demonization.

The goal was to produce the highest possible increase in strength while limiting the negative side effects as much as possible.

Demoncasting and especially Demonforging constantly tested the craftsman's ability to balance between power and control.

Ves couldn't help but smirk.

Interesting!

He enjoyed this challenge!

He already looked forward to mastering these difficult production processes step by step!

Nothing would interest him more than to master the art of Demoncasting and Demonforging to the point where he could surpass the methods of his predecessors and elevate these methods to the next level!

Ves believed that there should definitely be a correlation between living mechs and Demoncasting.

Perhaps they may even be part of the same underlying phenomenon, only expressed in vastly different ways!

He did not think that was a likely possibility, though. A more plausible theory was that they were still different enough that they could coexist with each other. That gave Ves the opportunity to create brand-new synergies between living mechs and D-mechs! In any case, enough time had passed for the Demoncast Mold to complete its job. It automatically raised in height before settling into a rest position. "Mhmm. This entire step is automated. That is convenient. Let's go and see the result." The combat knife that Ketis presented to Ves earlier had changed beyond recognition. If anyone saw the original knife alongside the one that presented its new form to the mech designers, nobody would think they had any relations with each other! The mass, volume, color, design language and material properties were all different! They didn't even appear to have been designed and built in the same plane of

existence!

The combat knife was a product of solid skill and practical efficiency. Ketis had forged the knife to serve as a reliable backup weapon, nothing more, nothing less.

As for the... pink monstrosity that signified Ves' first attempt at Demoncasting, it looked as if it had been designed by a demented woman who had an unnatural obsession for spikes, needless inefficiency and above all else the color pink. Ves could recognize a vague but ultimately futile attempt at turning the weapon into an elegant and beautiful D-arm.

What went wrong was that the source of transformation retained too much of herself that she actively resisted her captivity and deviated from the shape she was forced to adopt by the Demoncasting mold.

The result was a partial failure where the demonization process ultimately went out of

control.

While the outcome wasn't as bad as complete demonization, Ves had clearly botched

the timing and other parameters and produced a D-arm that was ultimately unqualified to serve as an effective weapon.

Ketis sneered at the monstrosity of what her weapon had become. "This is a torture instrument, both to the wielder and to the enemy. Look at these spikes. Some of them actually curve towards the wielder. If you wield it as if you do a regular knife, the chances are great that you will accidentally puncture yourself. The hilt has grown needlessly short, and the blade has gained unnecessary curvature.

However..."

"Does the weapon have any good points in your opinion?"

The swordmaster pulled out a small multiscanner from one of her pockets and began to use it to take measurements of the weapon.

The multiscanner beeped in alarm, signifying that it failed to properly measure some of the physical traits of the D-arm.

"While much of the energy from the... demon... probably went to waste, at least some

of her energy ended up doing a bit of good. The alloy of the blade has changed beyond recognition. Preliminary scans show it has become at least 40 percent tougher. The edge has also become sharper. These spikes look weak and thin, but they are actually much stronger. They can probably be used to puncture through light armor. I think there is also more to this weapon than the purely physical transformations. I can feel it. The ancient maiden... is beckoning me to pick up the knife. My instincts are warning me that she has ill intentions."

"What are you waiting for, then? Try it out. You're the swordmaster here. You should be able to glean much more information out of it than I." Ves said.

Ketis did not hesitate for long. She picked the weapon up by the short hilt and soon began to close her eyes.

She deliberately withdrew her willpower and allowed the pink knife to influence her to

a certain extent.

An inexplicable change swept across her body. Ketis had never been the most attractive woman amidst designer babies and faces that had been carefully sculpted to

perfection, but somehow the odd pink knife injected her with energy that caused her to look more attractive than usual.

He recalled the description of the gem he used to source the demon and understood that the D-arm faithfully reproduced the original effect.

It was too bad that the knife was a poor fit with Ketis. She looked more charming, but she did not have much of it to begin with. The weapon would probably produce a much stronger effect if held by a more classically beautiful woman such as Gloriana. This beauty effect was not the only change induced by the D-arm.

It seemed to have come alive in Kotic's hand. It orbited around as if it wanted Kotic to

stab herself. It also produced spiritual activity that suggested to Ves that it was mindlessly screaming its pain and fury towards its wielder!

Ketis stoically withstood the attacks with the help of her firm willpower. She only gave enough ground to get an impression of how the pink knife affected its wielder.

"So what did you find out, Ketis?"

"The 'demon' is not rational." She said. "A small part of her is forced to empower the

knife and force its blade to become a better cutting implement than it should. Another part of her has gone completely crazy and out of control. The rest has turned into a

ball of rage, pain and trauma. Think about it, Ves. What if I toss your body into a fire that is so powerful that it burns your very soul? Stuck you into a supernatural mold and forcibly transform

you from a free human being into a manufactured product that has lost its name, its pride, its dignity and its freedom? How would you feel if your body is forcibly squeezed, amputated and contorted into the shape of a weapon? The only things left in your world are pain, fury and purpose. You have become the worst

kind of slave that can exist, one that does not have the option to resist her new painful new fate."

Ves frowned when he heard that. He did not care too much about the pain and stuff. What irritated him was the mention of wasted energy.

Even though this was his very first attempt at Demoncasting, he still felt this outcome

was a blow to his pride as a creator.

"Why are the results so poor?"

"There are many reasons. The fit between the demon, the mold and the object is too

low. Trying to turn the ancient maiden into a source of attack enhancement is like trying to use a cotton shirt as armor. The demon also has a poor connection with a modern combat knife. The botched timing and other imperfect steps don't help matters either. If you have gained more practice and made choices that better fit with

each other, I have a feeling you could have been able to obtain a weapon that is twice or thrice as deadly as this pink knife."

"I see. All of your points make sense. I really screwed up by selecting the wrong mold and object to be demonized. Well, at least I learned my lesson."

Chapter 6579 The Initial Power of Demoncasting

Although Ves felt he had made a disappointing first D-arm, the experience had taught him a lot of lessons.

He felt confident he would be able to do a much better job next time.

Ves and Ketis did not immediately throw away the D-arm. They still wanted to gather more data, so they methodically tested out its hardness, its cutting power and any other weird stuff it might have.

The Workshop of Creation offered plenty of testing facilities that allowed them to thoroughly understand the properties of the weapon. They gained more precise numbers than the ones collected by Ketis' handheld multiscanner and also managed to record the properties that it couldn't gather.

All in all, despite the fact that Ves apparently wasted most of the power of the 'demon' locked inside Lucky's gem, the pink and awfully spiky knife was still a qualified D-arms. Even if its newfound impracticality made it difficult to handle the knife like a standard blade, Ketis was actually beginning to warm up to it after she had become accustomed to its many quirks.

"I think this weapon is representative of every D-arms." Ketis said as she performed a modified kata with the D-arm. "Merging my original combat knife with a demon has caused the former to acquire some of the strengths of the latter. The knife has completely exceeded its physical limitations and has become tougher, sharper and deadlier. It has also gained all of the baggage of the demon, which is the source of many complications. As long as the wielder is strong enough to cope with the dangers, he or she may actually be better off than wielding an ordinary weapon."

"That sounds good. I feel kind of regretful that this knife did not come close to living up to its potential, but there is always next time. Is there a way to undo the Demoncasting and separate the demon from the knife again."

Ketis thought for moment before shaking her head. "If such a method exists, then I do not have the faintest clue how it can be done. The only way to separate the two is to forcibly break the weapon but not too much. The demon will have enough openings to mount an escape attempt. That will probably be a painful and traumatic process where the demon is able to wrench free while leaving parts of itself behind."

That sounded anything but a clean separation process.

All Ves needed to know for now was that it was too difficult to undo the Demoncasting process and start over with the same resources as before.

"That's a pity. We can't reuse the ancient maiden over and over again in order to gain more practice. Each demon is a precious resource because we can't easily reuse it on

other objects."

"By the way, I think I can roughly gauge the strength of the ancient maiden." Ketis said. "According to my senses, what was originally locked in the gem was only a small and worn-out fraction of the greater whole. She may very well have been a god at her prime, but what little was left that got stuffed in the gem was only a shadow of her former glory. Even so, after this remnant got burned by the demonic flame before being horribly mutilated by getting squeezed into the Demoncasting Mold, she still possesses a degree of strength and cohesion that is on the weaker side of the second major cultivation rank."

That caused Ves to look pleasantly surprised. Maiden's Affection was one of the more recent gems produced by Lucky, so the remnant spirit locked inside should have been stronger than the ones locked in the earliest gems, but it was nice to hear confirmation.

"Does that mean that a typical gem produced by Lucky contains the equivalent of a Middle Demon that costs 100 AP to summon with the ritual circle?"

Ketis shook her head. "It is difficult to make direct comparisons. The remnant is heavily damaged and not as... complete as the demons that are locked inside the tools of this forge. Here. Feel the difference."

The swordmaster handed over the pink knife and also picked up a random casting tool.

When Ves held both D-arms at once, he could clearly sense the differences.

The casting tool was merely infused with a Minor Demon. Yet the integration between the two was so excellent that the equipment utilized the power of the demon to a high degree, leading to less waste and volatility. It was a well-engineered tool that did what it was supposed to without too much excess.

The pink knife on the other hand possessed far more excess than actual relevant functionality!

It contained the equivalent of a Middle Demon, yet the D-arm was so poorly designed and constructed that it squandered much of the potential of the living power source. The sheer degree of waste was so much that the pink knife ended up being weaker on an overall basis!

"It is hard to say which one is better, though." Ves said. "Sure, the casting tool has a definite advantage at this time, but... its growth prospects are limited. A Minor Demon is the weakest of its

kind. Unless it can get a lucky break and trigger a breakthrough while it is permanently bonded to an object, it will always remain weak for many years to come. As for this pink knife, it already starts out with a Middle Demon. Sure, the way the ancient maiden is integrated into the weapon is terrible, but she should still have room to grow and evolve."

"Even if that is the case, it is unlikely that additional growth will solve all of those

flaws and problems. A demon that can grow is a demon that will try to accumulate as much strength as possible before breaking out in a spectacular fashion. What this means is that the pink knife may be fairly manageable for now, but can slowly turn into a greater threat towards its wielder."

"I don't think it is as simple as that." Ves furrowed his brows. "In any case, a D-arm that can grow is not necessarily bad. It will steadily become more powerful over time, which is helpful so long as the wielder remains powerful enough to maintain control

over the weapon."

"I am wondering..."

"What are you wondering about?"

"What would happen if you turn a Carmine mech like the Yellow Jacket into a D-mech before having a person form a Blood Pact with it? Will the prospective pilot form a permanent bond with the living mech, the demon or both?"

"...That is a good question. I honestly don't know, Ketis. If there is any possibility that the Carmine mech pilot will be able to form a Blood Pact with the demon, then... that person will not be having a good time."

Ves actually grew a lot more interested in seeing how much a Carmine mech pilot may benefit by forming a Blood Pact with a demon, but he did not think it was a good idea to show much enthusiasm at this moment!

Even if it sounded like an incredibly fast and powerful approach towards artifact cultivation, it also sounded like a surefire way to corrupt the Carmine mech pilot in

question!

"We shouldn't overcomplicate D-mechs by mixing them up with the Carmine System for the time being" Ves said. "Why would we want to waste a precious demon on empowering a weak and inexperienced Carmine mech pilot? Demons are scarce, so we need to ration them to the ace mechs that need them most in the current war. The gems in my possession should largely be occupied by remnant entities that are equivalent to Middle Demons. While I need to get a lot more practice in Demoncasting before I am willing to make use of them, I need to convert them into useful and practical enhancements before the native aliens have started their final push." Ketis shook her head. "That will be difficult. There is not much time left before the aliens launch their attempted killer blow. You will have to spend valuable time during the marathon we have planned on learning the ins and outs of Demoncasting." "Then so be it. Gaining proficiency in Demoncasting is more important than earning more AP. The gems in my pocket aren't doing anything to help defend our border regions in their current state. I have always been looking for opportunities to make them useful at the ace mech-level."

Ves still had a bunch of gems, but Lucky's production rate had grown increasingly

slower over the years.

The gems did become more impressive and powerful though, which was what Ves needed even more.

He had been meaning to find a new purpose for Lucky's gems. At this point, their inexplicable boosts made them far too valuable to be used on ordinary machines, but they were only of limited use in high-ranking mechs.

The biggest problem that Ves had with the gems up to this point was that they lost their effect by the time the pilot of a boosted mech became a saint.

The Saint Kingdom pretty much replaced whatever the gem had done to strengthen

the machine.

Perhaps in the future, Lucky's gems would grow powerful enough to capture the

remnant of stronger entities.

However, Ves believed it was much better to integrate the power of these demons into

an ace mech in a more proper manner. As long as the ace pilot's Saint Kingdom was able to recognize and find a way to work with the demon, then the combination between the two would definitely lead to better results!

In order for that to happen, the high-ranking mech pilot needed to be okay with operating D-mechs and D-arms.

As much as Ves wanted to explore Demoncasting further, he needed to make additional preparations outside of the System Space. He also wanted to test his new D-arm in reality against live targets, which the Workshop of Creation couldn't

simulate.

"Let's go, Ketis. We are done here for the time being."

Ves and Ketis eventually decided to end their visit to the new Demoncasting Forge and resume their tour of the evolving System Space.

"So what do you think so far, Ketis? Are you willing to take up the practice of

Demoncasting or Demonforging?"

The swordmaster had not given a solid answer to this question so far. She did not look as if she had come closer to a satisfactory resolution.

"I don't think I can do Demoncasting in its current form. Ketis eventually said. "The source of these demons worries me. I think there is an inherently corrupting aspect about working with such dark and evil beings. If you can replace the demons with more neutral beings, then I may try this variation instead. Do you think that it is possible to do Beastcasting instead?"

Ves looked thoughtful. "That actually sounds like a good idea. I have managed to harvest the spiritualities of numerous powerful exobeasts, but... they are not exactly the same as demons. Even if you can fuse them into objects with the Demoncasting

Foreo I think that the roculte will ho underwhelming. The princinal wou that a demon

strengthens an object is through demonization. The spiritualities of powerful beasts may be able to induce a similar effect, but it wouldn't be the same unless you transform them into demons first somehow."

"That is okay, Ves. If Beastcasting can't produce superior quality, then I can always go

for quantity instead. There are so many powerful mutated beasts and calamity beasts on the untamed planets spread throughout the Red Ocean that it shouldn't be difficult to harvest their spiritualities in greater quantities. That should at least give me plenty of experimental material to attempt to create B-mechs and B-arms."

"Well, good luck, then. I hope you succeed, but I do not think you will be able to achieve quick success. Perhaps it will be better if you master the process of proper Demoncasting first before you try to innovate your own variation." "You're right that this is a better approach, but I want to do this my way,"

Chapter 6580 Heavenly Scapegoat

As much as Demoncasting had consumed Ves' attention, he still needed to complete his tour of the improved System.

After leaving the Demoncasting Forge, he and Ketis stopped by the Time Gate for a moment.

The Time Gate looked more impressive than last time. The circular metal structure still bore the marks of age, but it had gained a lot more runes. It also glowed in green, making it seem as if it was charged with radioactive energy.

Ves quickly accessed the interface and verified that the new options conformed to the description in the changelog.

"So it is true now. We can dive into the minds of other mech designers who worked in the past." He said. "By the way, have you tried out the Time Gate already?"

"I did." The swordmaster said. "I can only use it once a year, so it is more efficient to use it right away."

"So how did your first Mastery experience unfold?" Ves curiously asked.

"It was... interesting. I did not go on any wild adventures like the ones you went through in the past. I deliberately chose to inhabit a swordsman mech pilot, so the System stuffed me inside the mind of a rather peculiar second-class swordsman mech pilot. I only occupied his mind for a few days before my session automatically came to an end."

"What kind of battles did he fight?"

"He wasn't a soldier. He was a mech athlete who competed over 150 years ago. The swordsman mechs back then weren't as developed as the ones in the market today, but the principles are largely the same. It was interesting to witness the contrast in performance and see how much incremental advancements in technology has caused swordsman mechs to perform so much more fluently. In any case, pilot. I inhabited had just entered the playoffs and had to duel against a variety of tricky opponents to make it to the finals."

Ketis smiled as she imagined the hearty duels that she got to witness while riding the mind of the mech pilot.

While there were plenty of boring periods in between where the pilot was resting or studying his next tournament adversary, Ketis used the time to think about what she witnessed firsthand.

The tournament did not impose harsh restrictions on mech type and so on, so the swordsman mech pilot had to overcome a variety of opponents.

From running down a rifleman mech to avoiding the deadly pounces of a tiger mech, the experienced mech athlete used a combination of skill and strategy to win one match after another.

"Did he make it to the finals in the end?"

"Alas, no." Ketis sighed. "He finally met his match in the semifinals. He got matched up against an axeman mech. The enemy mech was slower, but was able to exert great strength with its axe

swings. The swordsman mech tried to use his superior mobility to circle around and avoid the crushing chops of the deadly axe, but he largely failed. The axeman mech was specially designed to defend against flanking attacks as it was able to twist its torso from its waist section by 170 degrees in either direction with surprising speed and force. This effectively allows the axeman mech to rapidly attack or counterattack from any angle. The swordsman mech managed to evade the sweeping attacks multiple times, but it only took one mistake for it to suffer crippling damage."

"That's a shame. Would you have been able to win the match for the swordsman mech pilot if you intervened more directly by taking over control of his body?"

Ketis looked thoughtful. "Maybe. I am not sure how that works and whether I can proficiently operate a mech through the neural interface. I am not trained in mech piloting, after all. If I could control the swordsman mech like it was my own body, I am confident that I can rely on my superior swordsmanship to whittle down the axeman mech while remaining undamaged. I don't have a reason to do so, though. This tournament was a test and challenge for the mech pilot. He must earn his victories through his own merit. While I felt tempted to give him tips on how to quickly polish his overly flamboyant swordsmanship, it would taint the sanctity of the tournament. It would be unfair for my intervention to deprive other finalists from the victories that they have earned over the course of normal history."

"You don't have to be afraid that you will wreck the current timeline if you change a bit of history during a Mastery experience. The current timeline we are living in already reflects the changes that we have made in the past. We just don't know it all as of yet. Perhaps you would have been able to propel the swordsman mech pilot to the finals and witness a mech duel at the highest level."

"I stand by my choice. I believe it is best to remain an observer and to refrain from affecting the timeline. I am already content with the original purpose of these Mastery experiences, which is to give us a first-hand look and feel of what our potential customers are going through when they are interfacing with a mech. This first experience is already enough to make many small improvements to the overall piloting experience."

"Suit yourself, then. By the way, you can also explore the mind of a mech designer now that the Time Gate has been upgraded. I think I will give it a try when it is available. There has to be a purpose to making this option available to us. Perhaps it will give us better insights on how proper and more orthodox mech designers work."

Neither of us are exactly normal among our kind. We should be able to harvest a lot of gains if we glimpse at the minds of professionals who possess a vastly different perspective and design philosophy."

Ves had already occupied the minds of plenty of mech pilots by this time. He could use a bit of variation and see what the fuss was all about with this new option.

"Next time."

After they completed their visit to the Time Gate, the pair of mech designers moved on to the Dimension Observatory.

Ketis immediately became drawn to the Dimension Blade. It did not look as if it had changed, but she did note that it now offered the option to take out in reality and use it for a short duration of time!

She winced when she saw how much AP she needed to spend in order to use the Dimension Blade for a brief period of time.

"It costs 100 AP just to project the Dimension Blade into the main universe for just 5 seconds!" She exclaimed!

Ves walked up to her and looked down at the list of options introduced by the latest System Upgrade.

It was possible to rent the Dimension Blade for a longer period of time, but Ves and Ketis needed to spend AP to extend the duration.

For example, they could spend 500 AP to extend the duration to 1 minute, and 2000 AP to make the projection last 30 minutes.

There was even a greyed-out option that allowed them to project the Dimension Blade into the cosmos on a permanent basis!

The interface did not mention any AP cost so far, but Ves did not have to guess that it

was astronomically high.

"This Dimension Blade can be a powerful weapon that can save your life in the right situation." Ves said. "However, the AP needed to afford all of the upgrades to make it. practical enough is too much. I think it is best to leave it alone for the time being. You have the Heavensword anyway, so it is not like you need to borrow this weapon." Ketis responded with a sardonic smile. "Don't worry, I am not greedy for this weapon. I already have enough swords."

"Speaking about the Heavensword and the Dimension Blade, when you exit the System Space, you should probably prepare to open up a temporary breach and see if you can mine a few resources while it stays open. We can't wait any longer. You need to expose this capacity and gain the cooperation of the Red Three to start mining dimensional resources on an industrial scale"

"I know, Ves. It is not convenient to start opening dimensional breaches in a

contested star system such as the Viola Magnifica System, but I refuse to leave while it still remains in human hands. I am a mech designer, but I am also a swordmaster. I need to keep fighting if I want to become a sword saint."

"Ah. I hadn't thought about that. This... may become a problem. Once the Red Three recognizes your value as a source of dimensional resources, they will absolutely disapprove of any further combat deployments. At worst, they will treat you just like me and assign an entire escort fleet to shadow you day and night. They will also compel you to leave the border regions and force you to take up residence in a safe first-class star system that is far enough away from the action."

Ketis scowled. "I won't let the mechers, fleeters and the collies bully me into becoming a dove. I will just use the Heavensword as an excuse why I can't leave the frontlines so easily. I already prepared a plan for this. I will just claim that the only reason I can open up dimensional breaches is because I have earned the appreciation of the Heavensword. If I act cowardly and retreat from a necessary fight, then I will lose its approval and subsequently lose access to the ability to open up a dimensional breach. It's the perfect explanation. Even the Heavensword agreed to play along with my charade and pretend to be angry at anyone who suggests taking me away against my

will."

As if to show that she was not lying, the Heavensword began to rattle in its scabbard and release an intimidating red glow!

Ves directed an odd glance towards the Heavensword. The ancient relic weapon appeared awfully eager to serve Ketis' whim. He had the illusion that the swordmaster had turned the notoriously willful artifact into an obedient puppy.

"That sounds great, but are you okay with deceiving others like this? I thought that

would go against your honor."

"You are normally correct, Ves, but deception is a valid tact to employ against enemies and those who hinder you despite their good intentions. Besides, I am not harming anyone directly by employing this underhanded means."

"I see. I am glad to hear that you have already made the right preparations, but one threat that you cannot guard against is elevated enemy attention. The cosmopolitans will find out about your strategic value and leak your information to the native aliens. The latter will subsequently put a high bounty on your head, turning you into a highly attractive priority target to both humans and aliens."

The female swordmaster sighed. "I know that this will also happen sooner or later. There is no way for me to evade exposure. The most I can do is find a way to disguise

myself and make sure that my enemies will not be able to recognize me when I deploy

in the field."

This was easier said than done.

Ves turned his attention to the Dimension Observatory. Since it arrived with the Version 3.0 upgrade, it had not been put into use.

He and Ketis intended to change that in the short term.

"We need to spend more AP on upgrades. Ves said. "Once we earn heaps of AP in our

upcoming marathon, we need to upgrade the Dimension Telescope to improve our ability to find resource-rich dimensions. We don't have any hope of earning 5,000 AP that is needed to create a persistent breach, so let us set it aside for the time being. I

am hoping to invest my AP in other areas first."

"Like Demoncasting?" "You read my mind."