

Mech 3311

Chapter 3311: Means to an End

Creating an omnivorous design spirit was just the basis of creating the most spiritual incarnation for himself.

Ves did not pursue power for its own end. That was useless and counterproductive.

"Vulcan is just a means to an end. I should always remind myself that my main identity is a human and that my main profession is a mech designer. If whatever I'm doing is not conducive to my mech design ambitions, then I should just forget about messing with this stuff!"

If Ves wanted to obtain a sustainable source of spiritual power, then he could already rely on Blinky for the most part.

At best, Vulcan could serve as a reliable and loyal source of input for the spiritual cat if his other design spirits were unwilling or unable to donate their reserves.

What truly mattered to Ves was how Vulcan could augment his mech design capabilities!

Ves already knew what he was strong at. He was able to imbue his mechs and potentially other products with life, causing them to develop greater power that was controlled by an independent consciousness.

However, his focus on this aspect did not provide him with any advantages in physical mech design.

Though he was able to compensate for this shortcoming by borrowing Gloriana's specialty and relying on his increasing affinity for mechs, it was exponentially harder to create even better transcendent works!

"There are so many Master Mech Designers in human space but the number of known Star Designers only amount to a hundred or so." Ves stated. "The greatest implication of Senfovon's Ladder of Craftsmanship is that the difficulty of climbing higher is unimaginably great. I don't even dare to bet that I am talented and capable enough to reach the third rung of the ladder by relying on my inherent talent and capabilities!"

If he assumed that one of the key requirements of becoming a Star Designer was to be able to create a grand work that qualitatively surpassed every masterwork, then Ves did not object to reaching this incredibly high standard through unorthodox means!

This was how he always worked. Instead of following the crowd and hope that he was able to outperform everyone, he preferred to play his own game where he could easily skew the odds in his favor!

This was the kind of lateral thinking that Ves had always relied upon to get ahead!

He was confident in his ability to succeed not because he thought he was better than other mech designers, but because he was daring and creative enough to find alternative solutions to his problems!

Perhaps other mech designers would think he had gone bonkers for coming up with an idea as radical as creating a spiritual incarnation of himself. This was also why he didn't bother to inform Gloriana of his ambitious plan.

"Other people are too confined by their own ignorance to understand my brilliance. The only way I can prove that I'm right is to succeed!"

To that end, Ves thought a lot about how Vulcan was supposed to express his power.

Ves did not care about Vulcan's dwarf domain. He only included it because it was already a part of his existing portfolio and because dwarves were meant to serve as an extra source of spiritual feedback.

"A real god needs to take care of his flock because he will lose his source of spiritual sustenance if his believers forsake his belief." He smirked. "My spiritual incarnation is different because he can just switch to other sources of spiritual feedback."

It would be nice if more ignorant dwarves became hoodwinked into believing a false god, but it would never become a priority to Ves.

This was why he placed a much greater emphasis on Vulcan's other two domains. A focus on both mechs and craftsmanship had the potential to synergize with his design philosophy! Vulcan could even replace the role that Gloriana played in his professional career!

Of course, Ves loved Gloriana too much to push her aside if she ever became redundant. Vulcan and Gloriana contributions to his mech designs did not necessarily have to conflict.

"In fact, their effects can probably superimpose on each other, leading to even better results than if they are separate!" Ves optimistically predicted!

The main purpose that Vulcan was supposed to play in his mech designs was to increase the likelihood of copies turning into masterworks.

He did not expect anything too unrealistic like a 100 percent success rate. However, if he was able to double, triple or quadruple the current odds, Ves would have a bit more assurances that the upcoming Bulwark Project or Chimera Project would turn into masterworks!

"My current odds of success are too low!" Ves shook his head. "The Amaranto is already a fluke. I'm not confident enough that I can replicate this success so quickly without enough luck and accumulation."

The existence of a design spirit like Vulcan was supposed to replace or even exceed the role of luck and accumulation. Ves wasn't sure about the exact mechanics behind these variables but he had implemented several creative solutions in his spiritual incarnation's design that should all contribute to this desired effect.

The simplest way to describe Vulcan's role in creating masterworks was to consider the design spirit as an attempt to turn uncontrollable variables into controllable variables!

Only when Ves was able to grasp more factors that determined the quality of a mech in production would he be able to accelerate his progression!

"Even if the ability to make more masterworks doesn't help with advancing or realizing my design philosophy, I can still derive a lot of benefits by making more of them. Each one is a treasure that I can use to empower my subordinates or trade away to others."

He could boost Venerable Joshua's progression and provide him with a smooth ride to ace pilot by turning the Chimera Project into a masterwork expert mech.

He could receive the gratitude and protection of an ace pilot early by fulfilling Patriarch Reginald's request.

There were countless other potential clients that would be willing to pay a fortune to obtain a masterwork mech tailored to their needs!

His grand expedition in the Red Ocean would become a lot smoother if he was able to provide a valuable and indispensable service to all of the wealthy pioneers in the new frontier.

"Without a competitive edge, my clan and I will never gain a foothold in the Red Ocean. There are too many pioneers out there that are better than us in every other way!"

Whether it was designing mechs, harvesting phasewater or starting up colonies, the most powerful and ambitious players of human civilization were at least a hundred times better prepared than a Journeyman and an upstart clan.

This was why Ves planned to create a new entity like Vulcan even if he never came into conflict with the Vulcan Empire. Perhaps he would have chosen a different identity for his craftsmanship-oriented design spirit, but the role remained the same.

As Ves continued to stand before his collection of ingredients, he calmly ran through all of the steps he needed to take to create his desired spiritual incarnation.

He could not be sloppy this time. The difficulty of creating Vulcan was much higher than creating a regular spiritual product.

In the latter case, even if he made a mistake, it wouldn't affect him directly. Different from normal, Vulcan was supposed to be another extension of himself, so Ves had to exert much more control over the creation process than normal.

"That's why I am using up so many ingredients at once." He sighed. "I would never be so extravagant with an ordinary design spirit."

He had to save the best for himself, after all. By raising the quantity and quality ingredients, he would not only be able to exert greater control over Vulcan's capabilities, but also ensure he would start off stronger and more powerful than any other newly-born spiritual entity!

Ves carefully picked up the vial of high-grade life-prolonging treatment serum. "I've never used up so much universal life energy at once. I wonder how far Vulcan can go with this much juice."

There was a considerable risk involved with accelerating Vulcan growth to such a massive extent. In order to prevent his design spirit from growing breaking loose from his control, he implemented many other safeguards, the most important of which was to pass on more himself to Vulcan than ever before.

In that way, even if the Unending One came back from the dead again, Ves would be able to overpower the dark god by relying on brute force!

This was why he gathered a whopping 20 P-stones that Blinky had spent many weeks filling with spiritual energy. They contained far more spiritual energy than Ves could hold in his mind! All of its spiritual attributes matched his own and they also carried his own spiritual imprint which ensured his control over all of that energy.

"With this much raw strength, I don't believe that any rebellious strains can overpower my control!"

There were numerous other ingredients that played their own role. The most uncertain of which was his last Unstable Chaos Essence gem that Lucky once produced in the Nyxian Gap.

Ves hesitated when he saw this gem. "It's effects are unpredictable, but they can also be quite potent."

Ves adopted a gambler's mentality when he thought about using it. The Riot benefited a lot from Unstable Chaos Essence, but that was when the gem was used for its intended purpose.

This time, Ves thought about infusing at least a portion of the energies contained in the gem to imbue Vulcan with greater power!

The problem was that Ves had no idea what that would look like! He couldn't rely on his theories to make a prediction and his intuition wasn't able to help him out either.

Still, he was reasonably certain that adding a bit of unpredictability and chaos to an overly-structured design spirit would do some good.

It fit with his character and might even loosen some barriers to Vulcan's future progression!

"No matter how Vulcan acts up, it will be fine as long as he remains under my control." Ves assured himself.

The attraction of turning Vulcan into his strongest and most useful design spirit was too good to pass up! Ves just needed to possess enough confidence in his plans and precautions to go through with this risky choice.

"Well, enough stalling. I've already made my decision so let's not waste anymore time."

With the dwarven captives and his successful attempt to convert some of them into expert candidates and other transcendents, Ves had all of the ingredients he needed to create the so-called God of Dwarves, Mechs and Craftsmanship!

Ves began to manipulate a number of controls that caused all of the dwarven captives to step out of the waiting rooms. Their mechanical limb locks forced them to move to the center of the cargo bay.

Slowly, several expanding circles of dwarves stood still around a raised pillar. They looked as if they were about to take part in a sacred ceremony.

The only problem was that their constant talking and shouting was ruining the atmosphere.

"Free us, you dirty human!"

"DEATH TO THE TALL FOLK!"

"Help me... I want to go home..."

Ves didn't need to give a way to channel their emotions anymore, so he activated a command that caused their mechanical limb locks to extend a mouth brace that gagged them shut!

"Mfffh!"

"Mfff mffff mmfff!"

"That's better." Ves smiled.

He picked up the Hammer of Brilliance and threw it in the direction of the center. The living totem automatically flew forward until it hovered right above the pedestal.

The eyes of every muffled dwarf focused on the mysterious hammer. The most fervent believers of Vulcan all felt an irresistible allure to the totem!

Seeing how much the dwarves desired to obtain the Hammer of Brilliance made Ves grin.

"If a simple hammer can already mesmerize these stupid dwarves to this extent, then the Vulcan that I'm about to make will become even more irresistible to these people!"

Chapter 3312: Dwarven Cooperation

Calabast continued to observe what Ves was doing from above. She became more and more disturbed when many of the dwarves that were forced to step forward spontaneously exploded!

Yet when she witnessed several miracles taking place in a short span of time, she completely understood why Ves did not hesitate to conduct these experiments.

Though the price of failure was great, the payoff was even greater!

"Is it that easy for Ves to make expert candidates these days?" Calabast frowned. "If my guess is right, his current results already surpassed the best efforts of the MTA! Even if two-thirds of every mech pilot exposed to this experimental procedure will die in one of the most miserable ways that I have ever seen, it is still worth it if the remaining third successfully advance to the rank of expert candidate."

It seemed that Ves had something else in mind, though. He hardly paid any attention to the dwarves who had successfully broken through.

Instead, he spent a bit of time inspecting a lot of strange objects before setting a macabre-looking ritual!

From the way Ves placed his strange hammer at the center to how he commanded hundreds of dwarven captives to position themselves in circles around the pedestal in the middle, Calabast began to develop a bad feeling about what her strategic partner had in mind.

"Don't you know how this looks to other people?" She softly spoke. "If other people ever catch you doing this, there will be no place for you anymore in civilized space!"

Despite being more aware of the risks than Ves, Calabast didn't move to stop his clearly illegal and immoral experiments.

She grinned. After all, it wasn't her committing these war crimes. If the Big Two ever caught on that Ves inhumanely slaughtered dwarves to achieve scientific progress, then their sights would solely be set on him rather than her! At worst, she would be deemed an accomplice to his crimes, which was much less severe than being branded a war criminal herself!

"Inventors don't necessarily get to reap the rewards of their own innovations." She crossed her arms as she continued observing. "You're accomplishing great feats, Ves, but it takes much more than that to get ahead."

While Calabast was thinking how many crimes Ves was committing at the moment, the mech designer in question was finally ready to begin the creation process!

He had moved to the center with his ingredients hovering behind him like a procession. The immobilized dwarven captives who were staring obsessively at the Hammer of Brilliance finally noticed the appearance of their captor and tormentor.

"Mmfff!"

"Mffffmmff!"

Though their mouths were forced shut, Ves could easily sense their fury and indignation towards him. It would not be good for his creation process if these dwarves kept acting up so much, so he decided to address his prisoners.

"I am Vulcan." Ves plainly stated to his audience. "I'm aware it is difficult for you to believe this absurd-sounding statement, but it is the truth. The Vulcan that you have always worshipped is none other than myself."

In order to emphasize this claim, he temporarily took back the Hammer of Brilliance and began to channel Vulcan's aura!

Though many of the dwarves refused to acknowledge him as their god, what they just experienced caused most of them to pause!

Ves smirked and stopped his act in order to conserve his energy. "Now, as you can clearly see, I am human. I guess that most of you don't like that. That's fine. You see, my goal here today is to make a second Vulcan, one that is much more recognizable to you than my current form. You should all rejoice, because I intend to make use of each of you to form a dwarven version of Vulcan!"

What Ves just said shocked all of the dwarven captives! Though this claim sounded even more ridiculous to them, Ves had a very compelling way of speaking that appealed to their desires.

They couldn't help but take the human seriously despite all of the ridiculous statements he made!

Ves saw that he managed to hook the dwarves whose cooperation he needed to succeed in his upcoming process.

"This is a unique opportunity for each of you. What you are about to take part in will become a part of dwarven history. The dwarven god Vulcan does not exist at this time, but once this is over, he will come into existence with the help of your sacrifice! Each of you will die today, but through your earnest efforts a part of you shall always live on as you impart the new Vulcan with a portion of your dwarvenness!"

Whether they agreed with him or not, the majority of the dwarves felt that they had no choice but to believe in this narrative! If the evil human was right... a true dwarven god might be born today, and they would have made a crucial contribution that gave their deaths meaning!

In any case, it was a much better alternative than dying while feeling they accomplished nothing worthwhile in their lives.

"What you need to do now is to focus your thoughts on Vulcan and what he should ideally be like according to you." Ves instructed as if he was talking to a group of loyal subordinates. "He is known as the God of Dwarves, Mechs and Craftsmanship, so you must do your best to concentrate on these three domains. Do not neglect any of them! As long as your impression of Vulcan is good enough, the god you have envisioned will come to life!"

Several dwarves became so enraptured by this possibility that their faces showed traces of fanaticism!

Now that the dwarves not only ceased to resist their captivity, but also began to look eager to help Ves accomplish his objective, he smirked.

Hoodwinking these dwarves was too easy.

After performing one final check, Ves no longer delayed any further and began to create his most ambitious design spirit!

"First, the ingredients!"

Since Vulcan was supposed to become his incarnation, Ves did not rely too much on powerful external ingredients.

The base ingredient was his own spiritual energy, lots of it! This was his strongest guarantee that his upcoming design spirit would always be under his control!

"Shatter!"

Ves drew a large solidified spiritual fragment from a P-stone and shattered it with the help of the Hammer of Brilliance!

Even though the hammer was a material object, it also functioned as a totem, which allowed it to interact with spiritual energy.

"This is quite convenient, actually."

As long as Ves channeled his spiritual energy through the Hammer of Brilliance, he could use it as a mallet to smash spiritual fragments!

After breaking one spiritual fragment, Ves quickly repeated this process 19 more times. It was a tedious chore but Ves tried his best to make haste in order to prevent all of the broken spiritual shards from drifting away. It already took a lot of concentration for him to keep them all together!

"Blinky! I need your help. Make sure all of my ingredients stay together."

Mrow!

The purple spiritual cat emerged from his mind and already started working on manipulating all of the loose spiritual shards. His power and control over spiritual energy was excellent and he easily kept the huge quantity of shards in place.

"Next, my secondary ingredients!"

Ves successively drew out the spiritual fragments of both the Quint and the Amaranto.

Since he was able to derive spiritual fragments from living entities like himself or his design spirits, he knew it was possible to take them from his mechs as well!

They were alive, after all. Their spiritual foundation was similar to the spiritualities of living entities. Though chipping away at their spiritual foundation inflicted serious damage to them, Ves tried his best to take as little away as possible.

"I only need a little bit to guide my new design spirit into centering around craftsmanship."

If possible, he would have wanted to use up spiritual fragments derived from his other masterworks, but neither the Devil Tiger nor the Little Angel were within reach.

Once he blended the shards from the Quint and the Amaranto into his invisible cauldron, he moved on to putting in a shard of Aisling Curver's design seed.

"I just need you for your networking ability." Ves whispered.

Blinky was able to derive a useful ability from this same ingredient so Ves held higher expectations for a more powerful spirit like Vulcan.

He soon slowed down a bit when he brought forward his next two ingredients. The spiritual fragmen taken from the remains of the Unending One was dangerous. Still, Ves had already instructed Blinky to thoroughly cleanse and purify it of all unwanted spiritual fragments. Only the elements related to devouring and digesting spiritual energy were left, so it should technically be clean.

"Ah well. I trust Blinky!"

Ves shattered the fragment of the Unending One with the Hammer of Brilliance without any further hesitation. He quickly threw the dark shards into the mix before turning his attention to another dangerous ingredient.

"This one is trickier."

The Unstable Chaos Essence gem was not as hard and tough as Lucky's other gems. However, as long as it broke apart, it was capable of unleashing a violent spiritual explosion that would cerainly mess up his creation process!

He already thought up a solution to this problem, though. Ves smirked and tossed the dangerous gem towards Blinky.

"Eat!"

Mrow!

Blinky caught the gem with his mouth and began to swallow it whole.

For a moment, Ves thought about how absurd it was for one cat to eat the 'waste product' of another cat.

He quickly shook his head. "I can't let myself be distracted!"

Ves focused carefully on Blinky. He did not dare to take direct control because he didn't know how Blinky was supposed to handle the Unstable Chaos Essence gem.

Fortunately, his cat did not encounter any hindrances. After a dozen or so seconds, Blinky suddenly glowed as a disorienting kind of energy began to leak from his incorporeal body!

Mrow! Mrowwww!

Blinky looked so sick that he actually barfed all of the chaotic energy from his mouth!

Like a fire-breathing dragon, the companion spirit continually disgorged the weirdest type of spiritual energy that Ves had ever encountered.

He wasn't able to sense any coherent spiritual attributes or anything else, yet he also became impressed at the way this energy seemed to induce random distortions in the vicinity.

Once it reached the other ingredients, the chaos energy immediately began to stick to the ingredients, merging with them without any conscious direction.

"Well, that saves me a lot of trouble."

Once Blinky had emptied his entire stomach of chaos energy, he still looked sick.

Mrow...

"Cheer up. I bet you'll like what I am using next!"

Ves picked up the vial of high-grade life-prolonging treatment serum and commanded Blinky to slowly draw out its potent universal life energy.

A small but incredibly potent stream of concentrated spiritual energy emerged from the previous vial and soon began to melt and empower all of the prepared ingredients! Each of the shards gained a massive infusion of energy that directly improved their quality!

"Let's put the shards together, Blinky. Remember to adhere to my design."

Mrow mrow!

Though Blinky still had to feed the shards with concentrated universal life energy, he still had plenty of concentration left to begin with the most essential step of creating a design spirit.

Since much of the ingredients were derived himself, Ves did not need to add any spiritual energy from himself to merge the shards together. He and Blinky were able to perform this process without exerting themselves!

Though the huge quantity of ingredients was daunting, the ingredients weren't difficult to deal with. Ten minutes passed as Ves and his companion spirit slowly began to shape the largest and most powerful spiritual product to date!

Though the captive dwarves who were forced to stare forward did not see anything, they slowly felt a grand presence taking shape at the center.

If any of them possessed spiritual perception, then they would have noticed that the merged shards were being formed into a giant spiritual dwarf!

With so much universal life energy pumping into this incomplete spiritual product, even the dullest dwarf was able to feel someone powerful coming into existence!

Ves' ambitious design was actually coming to life!

However, only Ves knew that if he continued on like this, the Vulcan that he would make would just turn into an independent design spirit.

"This is not enough! It has to be tied to me in order to become my incarnation. It also lacks an ingredient related to dwarves."

The latter was easy enough to solve. While Blinky continued to merge the shards into a greater and greater spiritual amalgamation, Ves turned around while holding the Hammer of Brilliance in his grip.

He approached the nearest dwarf, who happened to be one of his surviving test subjects who succeeded in breaking through to expert candidate.

"Let me do you a favor and allow you to be the first to sacrifice your life to your god."

With one powerful swing, Ves slammed the Hammer of Brilliance onto the helpless dwarf's skull!

Chapter 3313: Turning Point

It seemed like a normal day.

The expeditionary fleet resided in the outer system of the Amswick Star System for several weeks without incident.

The hundreds of starships of the Larkinsons, Glory Seekers and Crossers recovered much of their condition after settling down in the port system. Though none of the vessels were sent to drydocks, as long as the space around them was calm enough, the repair crews could already perform a lot of external repairs without issue.

The previous battle took a huge toll on the Graveyard. The Larkinsons did not spare any expense to restore her space worthiness, but without access to existing starship repair facilities, the repair crews had no choice but to rely on lots of manpower and loaned industrial equipment from local companies.

Thousands of technical workers crawled over the hastily patched hull of the Graveyard. Few of them performed any manual work as the parts and materials they handled were too heavy for them to move around. Instead, they controlled and directed various machines to restore the defensive integrity of the defensive ship.

None of the workers noticed that something special was taking place. They were just ordinary clansmen who did not possess any remarkable traits. Even the rare worker with noticeable spiritual potential had yet to detect any disturbances.

They weren't alone. Many other Larkinsons in the fleet performed their duties and went about their day without realizing the significance of what was taking place within their midst.

The first individuals to notice the growing fluctuations spreading through space were not actually human.

Instead, a pair of powerful mechs stored in different places began to stir.

"Ma'am! The Quint... the Quint is activating!"

"What?!" A chief technician dropped her multitool. "According to the schedule, Commander Ingvar's training session doesn't begin in three hours. Did anyone sneak into the cockpit?"

"One of our bots just checked the cockpit. There is no one sitting in the piloting chair. The Quint isn't interfacing with anyone!"

Several systems began to come online as parts of the Quint lit up as if it was undergoing a twisted activation sequence.

Due to its extremely dense glow, no human dared to get close to the spiritually enhanced mech, but the chief technician quickly pulled back all of the bots and remote instruments that were crawling around its frame for fear of incurring damage.

A lot of confusion and even alarm began to spread. The possibility that a mech had gone rogue somehow was a nightmare scenario!

The crew members didn't run around aimlessly, though. While they never encountered a situation where a mech without a mech pilot had gone rogue, they performed regular drills where accidents like this took place.

The clansmen all moved out as isolating barriers fell into place. Numerous powerful mechanical arms began to extend from the deck and bulkheads and forcibly clamped the Quint in place.

Half a minute later, a pair of unarmed Bright Warriors briskly walked over and stood ready to press the rogue mech down should it exhibit further erratic behavior.

"Is the Quint doing anything?"

"It doesn't appear to be moving for the moment."

"Please stand by and wait for our mech designers to arrive. Maybe they can tell us what is taking place."

Aside from this masterwork mech, the Amaranto also exhibited similar behavior. Though the expert rifleman mech never fully activated on its own accord, the fact that it was halfway ready to move and fight alarmed many crew members serving aboard the Spirit of Bentheim!

While the relevant personnel tried their best to control the situation and figure out why their two prized masterwork mechs were going out of control, certain people were already beginning to sense something amiss.

"Huh?" Venerable Joshua looked distracted and stopped paying attention to the drama being broadcasted in the living area of his grand stateroom.

"What's wrong?" Ketis asked as she cuddled next to him on the couch.

"There's something in the air I think. Can't you feel it?" He frowned. "It's as if a storm is building up in the distance."

Several moments passed by before the mech designer sensed something strange as well.

"I think I know what you're talking about. There's something funny going around..."

Others began to notice the growing anomaly as well. Venerable Tusa, Venerable Dise, Gloriana, Juliet and so on all paused as they sensed a rising pressure in the distance.

Even the expert candidates started to feel a hint of growing energy!

As the Larkinson Clan slowly realized that something significant was taking place, the Blinding Banshee turned into a wellspring of expanding energy!

Calabast and many of the Black Cats serving on the espionage vessel started to slow down as a massive presence began to loom over their minds.

"Squeak! Squeak! Squeak!"

Arnold was exhibiting a lot of distress as he sensed something much more powerful and enormous coming into existence in the center of the cargo bay!

"Damnit, Ves! What are you trying to make?!" The spymaster said as she tried her best to keep herself upright.

Even a spiritually dull woman like her had difficulty maintaining her wits in the presence of so much spiritual pressure!

The dwarves who were locked into place had it even worse. They were all less than a hundred meters away from the source of all of the invisible upheaval. If not for their mechanical limb locks holding them upright and in place, they would have collapsed or attempted to use their thick, stubby legs to run as far away as possible!

"Mmff! Mfmmf!"

"MFMMFMFMF!!!"

"MMMMFFFFFFF!"

The dwarves all tried their best to scream out and move their limbs, but their metal bonds and gags had robbed them of all control over their physical bodies. Their strong and dense muscles that were designed to resist heavy gravity did not avail them at all against the power of technology!

Ves, the source of all of their suffering, completely ignored their distress. The average dwarven soldiers whose wills were already broken did not possess much value to him. They were completely expendable in his regard. It was already a great honor for these dwarves to be present in the same space where their god was about to be born!

WHACK!

"Only my successful test subjects have value." Ves smiled as he cracked the skull of another dwarven expert candidate!

The remarkable individual broke through just a short time ago but already his force of will had bloomed to a remarkable degree.

When Ves caved in the dwarf's hardy skull with his even harder hammer, the death of the test subject in question caused his spirituality and force of will to unravel.

If nothing happened, the incorporeal elements of the deceased dwarf would dissipate within minutes.

That was a huge waste of valuable ingredients to Ves. Since the design spirit he was making was not dwarf enough in his perception, he decided to sacrifice his dwarven captives to ensure that Vulcan would truly possess a dwarven character!

Ves took control of the dwarven expert candidate's spiritual remains and ground it apart. He threw his latest spiritual ingredients onto the giant spiritual form that began to look more and more like a dwarven version of himself!

The most uncanny aspect about the dwarf's appearance was its majestic black beard! The addition of traditional dwarven-style facial hair onto a smooth but broad version of Ves' face caused him to look almost unrecognizable!

"Even I feel weird seeing myself like this." He muttered.

Fortunately, the appearances of spiritual existences were a lot more malleable. Vulcan's current form was just one of its facets.

There was no way that Ves actually wanted to create an incarnation that was 100 percent dwarf!

"I can't inject too much dwarven essence in my developing spiritual product." He reminded himself. "The largest proportion of ingredients come from myself, so the human character of Vulcan is dominant. His dwarven form is just a secondary form."

At least, that was what he hoped. He wasn't sure if his elaborate design for Vulcan would work out the way he planned.

"Well, I need to quickly process these powerful dwarves and help Blinky complete the process."

Blinky was doing a fantastic job at piecing the different shards together. As a spiritual life form that excelled at spiritual energy manipulation, the cat could pretty much complete this entire process by himself.

It would be even better if Ves was personally involved as well. The combination of him and companion spirit working together delivered better results.

In his earlier experiment, Ves managed to induce eight breakthroughs. Their collective spiritualities and willpower had grown so strong in a short amount of time that they had become valuable ingredients!

WHACK!

WHACK!

WHACK!

Ves quickly struck his hammer against eight more dwarven skulls. He had to exert all of his physical strength to do so because the skulls he was caving in were much harder and tougher than that of baseline humans.

He even began to heave at the end as he exerted himself more than he expected.

"Bashing in dwarven heads is a lot more difficult than I thought"

The effort was worth it. He smoothly managed to harvest the spiritualities of the test subjects without incurring much loss. They all went on to supplement the design spirit that was supposed to be their god.

Ves briefly lifted his bloody hammer and directed his gaze at the remaining dwarves before shaking his head.

"It takes way too much time to hammer them all to death!"

The spiritualities of these weak-minded dwarves were too negligible. Besides, the increasing spiritual pressure from the center was already killing them anyway. Ves had inputted way more spiritual energy in Vulcan's creation than he had done for any other spiritual product!

BOOM!

BOOM!

BOOM!

At a certain point, the heads of the dwarven captives closest to the center failed to endure the pressure and violently exploded! The headless bodies remained upright even as there was nothing left above their necks, causing the survivors to feel they were only moments away from suffering the same fate!

Strangely enough, only a small number of dwarves died in this fashion. Many more managed to keep their heads intact, though their minds became increasingly more scrambled.

Blood and other biomatter began to spray across the bodies of the surviving dwarves. In the end, only several dozen prisoners had lost their heads.

If Ves bothered to sweep these dwarven captives with his spiritual vision, he would have noticed that they all possessed spiritual potential!

The quality that made it possible for them to surpass their mortal limits had also caused them to be more susceptible to dangerous spiritual influences!

As death began to color the cargo bay in red, Ves had returned to the middle and put the Hammer of Brilliance back onto the pedestal.

He gazed at Vulcan's increasingly more defined spiritual form and began to feel as if he had reached a turning point in his life.

If he proceeded with his original plan, then he would create a new incarnation that would become inseparable from his life.

No matter how Vulcan turned out in the future, Ves would have no choice but to support the design spirit as best as possible, because their existences had to be intertwined!

When Vulcan was close to coming to life, Blinky no longer infused the near-complete design spirit with universal life energy.

Ves inspected the vial and noticed that it only had around 20 percent of its potent energy left.

"It will have to do. I don't think Vulcan can absorb anymore."

At this stage in its creation, Vulcan had become saturated with spiritual energy! Each and every part of his condensed shape radiated with power!

Ves intuitively sensed that it was not wise to continue with injecting any further energy. His latest spiritual product had not experienced any growth over time and needed to evolve on his own in order to increase his capacity.

"Well, it's okay. I need to save the remainder of this energy for myself."

Ves had reached the most crucial step of the creation process. It was at this time that he would make a profound change in his life.

"In order to transform Vulcan from an independent design spirit to an interdependent incarnation of myself, I need to make a sacrifice as well. Nothing comes for free."

He directed his gaze at Blinky.

Mrow...?

Ves smiled and nodded. "Do it before I regret this decision."

Mrow!

Ves closed his eyes just as Blinky dove into his head and attacked his mind!

Since Ves deliberately lowered his defenses, his powerful companion spirit was able to tear out a small but significant chunk of his Spirituality, causing him to feel as if his concentration was literally being torn into half!

"AHHHHHHHHH!"

Chapter 3314: Brute Force Surgery

What Ves had done was extremely risky!

Though Ves had never figured out how his mother turned the Superior Mother into her incarnation, he could make a couple of guesses.

The most likely theory he came up with was that Cynthia cut off a piece of her spiritual essence and transplanted it into the Superior Mother in a sophisticated manner.

This was different from donating a portion of her free spiritual energy.

Ves guessed that this technique was meant to establish a form of parasitism or mutualism between two different entities.

Whether one side gained more advantages than the other was not entirely certain. All he knew was that the bond between the Superior Mother and Cynthia was not constantly active. The two largely existed as separate identities.

"Maybe it takes a lot of effort for my mother to descend upon the Superior Mother." Ves speculated.

Regardless of what was going on, Ves believed this to be a flawed implementation of an incarnation.

When he tried to invent his own version of this technique, Ves set a couple of goals for himself.

First, Vulcan had to be completely under his control.

Second, Vulcan needed to retain enough autonomy to operate independently.

These goals largely contradicted each other.

If Ves gave Vulcan too much autonomy, then he risked a scenario where his own incarnation might rebel one day!

If Ves insisted on retaining too much control, then Vulcan would become a crippled design spirit that constantly needed someone to hold his hands.

Neither of these scenarios were desirable!

"The ideal relationship between myself and Vulcan should resemble my relationship with Blinky." Ves concluded.

He was highly satisfied with the way his companion spirit turned out. Although Blinky possessed an independent consciousness, the cat was also an inseparable part of himself because he originated from his own Spirituality!

To put it in simpler terms, Blinky was a split personality of Ves that had been injected with greater life!

Since Blinky turned out so well, Ves wanted to form a similar relationship with Vulcan.

"It's too bad my capacity is already spent on accommodating my companion spirit. I don't have any room left for another spirit!"

Ves had already used up as much real estate in his mind as he could get away with. If he gave up anything further, he would likely impair his own consciousness and personality in a detrimental fashion!

He needed to find a difficult solution to this problem. The model of a companion spirit was obviously not appropriate for someone who already possessed one. The incarnation that he had in mind must therefore be based on an independent, self-sustaining spiritual entity.

That was enough to make for someone like Ves. The hard part was to ensure that the Vulcan he intended to create became an inseparable part of himself!

He did not want to take any chances when it came to the loyalty of what would probably become a core part of his mech design capabilities. Ves was betting his future on the successful implementation of his Vulcan plan and he did not want to open up any opportunities for his incarnation to disagree with its own progenitor!

The only way that Ves came up with was to separate a core part of his Spirituality and consciousness and implant it onto his ambitious design spirit.

Only in this way would Ves be able to maintain solid control over Vulcan. The radical procedure was meant to give Ves an opportunity to assimilate the design spirit.

If everything worked well, Vulcan would become a more powerful and independent version of a companion spirit!

There was one huge flaw, though.

Ves needed to transplant something truly important of himself in order to turn Vulcan into another part of himself. No matter how many solutions he came up with, he did not think that this gamble would work unless he bet something of great value.

Much of the spiritual energy that Ves had injected into Vulcan so far was akin to his own blood. Blinky was an endless generator of this resource so it was not scarce.

Yet free-floating spiritual energy could not accomplish much by itself.

What Ves needed to implant into Vulcan was a part of his core Spirituality that formed the basis of his consciousness, identity, personality, design seed and so on. This was a much more sensitive and crucial part of himself that could easily cause irreparable harm to himself if it got damaged!

Cutting a portion of it away so that he could turn Vulcan into his incarnation sounded as crazy as slicing off a chunk of his brain matter only to graft it onto the brain of another human!

There was no proof that this crazy idea could possibly work!

However, Ves wasn't an average spiritual engineer. He created many design spirits and worked with all kinds of other spiritual phenomena. Even if his theoretical framework was still bare, he possessed a powerful intuition for life and could instinctively figure out whether an idea was viable.

There were several reasons why he believed that this crazy step would yield success.

He became so confident in his assumptions that he enacted his plan right away without even bothering to try it on other people.

Ves couldn't bear to waste the ingredients needed to create an incarnation on other people! Just the price of using up an entire vial of high-grade life-prolonging treatment serum was unbearable for any purpose other than empowering himself!

He could only afford to perform this extravagant and risky procedure once, so he proceeded to pull the trigger without any second thought!

"AAAGHHH! MY HEAD IS SPLITTING!"

He didn't expect this step to be so painful, though! When Blinky tore a chunk of his Spirituality from his mind, Ves felt as if he was dying!

It took at least a dozen seconds for him to regain enough concentration to inspect his current condition.

His mind and Spirituality was in an awful state at the moment! Now that he had done the equivalent of slicing away a portion of his brain, Ves felt as if he had become incomplete in a way that could turn into a permanent impairment.

This was the risk that Ves was afraid of. If he wasn't able to heal his spiritual injury, he would turn into a spiritual cripple.

Not only would it become more difficult or even impossible for him to advance to Master, he might even end up in a condition similar to that of his mother where he was constantly leaking spiritual energy.

"I can't let that happen!" Ves gritted his teeth!

His current condition indeed looked bad. The terrible wound he inflicted on his Spirituality caused him to feel as if he had shot himself in his head. Not only did he lose a portion of his brain, the hole in his head was also spurting out his lifeblood at a steady rate!

Fortunately, the wound was still fresh and he was in his peak condition just a short moment ago. Ves predicted that he could remedy his injury as long as he acted quickly.

While Ves was trying his best to resist the pain, Blinky was also affected by the damage he inflicted.

The main reasons why the cat wasn't affected as much was because he was a different kind of life form and because Ves bore most of the burden.

Mrow!

Blinky knew he had a crucial role to play and did not delay in bringing the precious portion of Ves' spirituality to Vulcan!

Once Blinky reached the design spirit, he began to launch another attack that sliced out a portion of Vulcan's head.

After opening up a cavity, Blinky roughly pushed the spiritual essence taken from Ves into the hole and tried his best to merge it all together.

Since Vulcan had not yet been born, this process went fairly smoothly!

The reason why Blinky broke this crucial ingredient into shards was because it had to stay together in order to remain connected to Ves. Normally, it was not desirable for the sources of spiritual ingredients to maintain control over new spiritual products, but this was an exception!

Even as Ves felt as if the missing portion of himself had found a new home, the constant pain caused him to feel as if a hundred Glorianas were shouting in his ears at the same time!

"Hurry up, Blinky!"

Mrow mrow!

Blinky quickly returned with a piece of Vulcan in his maw. He deftly entered Ves' mind and quickly inserted this piece into the gaping spiritual wound.

Normally, this should never work! His Spirituality should have rejected the foreign spiritual matter if it was strong enough. If it was weak, then the transplanted essence from Vulcan should have tried to take over its new host!

Yet at this moment, the piece taken from Vulcan was not producing any of these reactions.

Ves grinned even as his pain had intensified. "I knew this would happen!"

The reason why the foreign matter did not try to assimilate his Spirituality was because Vulcan was not alive yet! He was on the cusp of being born, but he was still offline in his uncompleted state.

The reason why his Spirituality did not generate any rejection against Vulcan was because the overwhelming majority of ingredients originated from Ves himself!

"I'm merely reclaiming my own stuff!"

Of course, much of it had also been blended with other foreign matter, but the proportion of the latter was small enough that it did not pose a major risk.

At best, Ves was just contaminating his own Spirituality a little bit!

"Blinky, let's merge it all together! This is the last step!"

Mrow mrow mrow!

The companion spirit knew how crucial it was to succeed at this juncture. The cat split his concentration in half and focused his attention on both Ves and Vulcan.

At this moment, the spiritual pieces torn from each other were merging in their homes. This was not a smooth procedure and shouldn't even work.

Ves had already thought about it, though. He hypothesized that it would be possible to force the merger as long as he employed brute force.

"Use up all of the energy left in the vial, Blinky! Don't spare anything!"

The vial of high-grade life-prolonging treatment serum only retained twenty percent of its potency. Now that Ves had issued the decisive command, Blinky did not hesitate in drawing out all of the remaining concentrated energy before allocating them equally to Ves and Vulcan!

"AHHH! IT'S HOT!"

Life was good, but too much of it was not necessarily a good thing!

Ves felt as if Blinky was pouring molten lava straight into his brain cavity! He collapsed on the ground while clutching the sides of his head as the extremely potent universal life energy merged into the damaged portion of his Spirituality in its rawest form.

Though Blinky possessed excellent control and was able to make sure that the Universal life energy was being used to merge the transplanted spiritual essence into their new homes, the process was anything but natural!

Since Vulcan was not alive yet, he did not experience any pain. The design spirit became more and more complete as the final piece of the puzzle was being set.

As for Ves, his spiritual injury was being treated in the most crudest fashion possible. He almost blanked out a few times but tried his best to persist in order to make absolutely sure that the procedure was going as planned.

By using up 10 percent of the energy left in the serum, the spiritual essence taken from an unborn design spirit successfully settled into Ves' Spirituality!

At the same time, an equal amount of highly-potent energy successfully enabled a design spirit to integrate a human element in its spiritual makeup!

Mrow!

Ves and Vulcan both opened their eyes.

From the moment they did so, two powerful spiritual eruptions exploded their positions and spread through the hull of the Blinding Banshee!

Everyone aboard the capital ship spontaneously lost consciousness!

The twin waves continued to spread in space and engulfed the entire Larkinson fleet!

The God of Dwarves, Mechs and Craftsmanship had finally been born!

Chapter 3315: Emergency Response

"I... AM... VULCAN!" Ves shouted as an overwhelming surge of power ran through his body, mind and spirit!

MROW!

The twin eruptions that emerged from Ves and Blinky just spread out two overlapping waves of energy throughout the Larkinson fleet!

The quantity of energy being released at once was much larger than a death wave attack released by a Peniten Sister battle formation!

Though the eruption was not meant to be lethal, the heads of the hundreds of surviving dwarven captives in the cargo bay instantly exploded as their close proximity to the birth of Vulcan was too much for them to bear!

Even as a huge amount of bloody explosions showered the center of the cargo bay in red, three different barriers quickly formed around the center and partially blocked the violent expansion!

Nyaaaaa!

Goldie emerged from the Larkinson Mandate that hung from Nitaa's armor and tried her best to form a golden barrier that would hopefully prevent the Black Cats serving aboard the Blinding Banshee from getting killed.

Qilanxo emerged next to the ancestral spirit of the Larkinson Clan and formed even a stronger barrier that bled away much of the dangerous energy.

Finally, a giant human hand came into view and formed a barrier made out of hexagons.

With the intervention of the three spirits, Calabast, the bodyguards and every other human in the vicinity merely lost their consciousness. The weakened energy eruptions only retained than 10 percent of their potency, which was enough to produce a lot of disruption but was no longer powerful enough to kill any Larkinsons.

Once the three spirits had done their job, they both looked at Ves and Blinky's current state.

Not all was well at the moment! The insane procedure that Ves had just completed had produced an unintentional reaction that caused Vulcan to pour an excessive amount of spiritual energy into his progenitor!

"AAAHHHHHHH!"

Even Blinky became affected by the energies coursing through his body! The light trails running across his purple body glowed with so much power that it was as if the companion spirit was evolving into a higher state!

If Ves still retained his awareness, he would have been able to figure out why he and Blinky were in this condition.

When Ves turned Vulcan into his incarnation, an unbreakable spiritual channel had formed between the two. This had massive implications, and one of the most obvious ones was that a process of osmosis might ensue.

It was like brewing a hot cup of tea. If the cup of tea was left on a table at room temperature, over time the heat levels of the tea and the room would equalize.

It was impossible for the cup of tea to stay warmer than the rest of the room! Unless there was external intervention, then the heat contained in the tea would slowly warm up the room over time.

Right now, something similar was happening to a lesser degree. Ves was a Journeyman Mech Designer, which was a respectable amount of strength but still put him close to the starting line of his transcendent life. He was roughly equivalent to an experienced low-tier expert pilot in his own estimation.

Vulcan had absorbed so much potent universal life energy that he had already come close to matching the Superior Mother's strength level from the moment he was born! This level of strength was analogous to a senior ace pilot!

Since Ves was so much weaker than Vulcan in spiritual terms, the latter was automatically strengthening the former.

Of course, there was a limit to this equalization process. Ves was still a Journeyman and could not exceed his limits. On the other hand, it was impossible for Vulcan to sacrifice half his strength or more in order to feed a weakling!

Due to these limitations, the influx of energy pouring into Ves was already slowing down to a more reasonable level. Blinky was no longer burdened with trying to convert an excessive amount of spirituality now that Ves had reached saturation.

Mrow...

Even so, it was apparent that there were still a couple of flaws with this arrangement.

Vulcan continued to lose spiritual energy as if he was a leaking boat.

Meanwhile, Blinky was constantly glowing as he had no other destination for all of the spiritual energy he continued to produce.

Mrow...

Goldie flew close to Blinky and began to sniff the purple cat. She turned back to Qilanxo and the giant hand and adopted a questioning expression.

Nyaaaaa?

Qilanxo shook her head and began to dissipate her spiritual manifestation.

The Superior Mother on other hand was not as helpless. The giant hand hovered closer and began to poke Vulcan's newborn incorporeal body.

After a few seconds, the Superior Mother repeated the same move on Ves' head.

Soon enough, all of the uncontrollable processes taking place in their bodies had died down. The giant hand stroked Ves' prone body one last time before disappearing.

Nyaaa!

Goldie looked thankful and returned to the Larkinson Mandate without any further concerns.

"Ngh..."

Ves woke up a couple of minutes later. He wearily shook his head and stared at his companion spirit.

"I guess... I succeeded. The procedure... went exactly as planned!"

Mrow...

As soon as Ves began to recover his strength, he realized that he had won the gamble!

"Hahahaha! I did it! I pulled off my brilliant plan and gained the power of a design spirit!"

At the same time, his latest design spirit not only became his incarnation, but also gained a human element. This changed Vulcan's nature of existence in a fundamental way, but one that would hopefully allow him to surpass the limitations of other design spirits!

Ves could already sense a strong connection to Vulcan, but he was not able to glean anything useful due to all of the excessive strain he endured. The condition of his mind and Spirituality were terrible.

The latter was especially concerning. When Ves inspected his own mind, he could see that the wound that Blinky had created and attempted to heal was still in a fragile and precarious state.

"If I overexert myself, I risk compromising the healing process." He determined.

Even so, the spiritual essence taken from Vulcan had tentatively merged with his Spirituality, just as he predicted. The huge amount of universal life energy had solved every compatibility issue through brute force!

Even though this was a wasteful and inefficient way to perform a spiritual transplantation, Ves felt it was more than worth it to use up the remaining energy in the vial of high-grade serum!

When Ves tentatively crawled to his knees and picked up the vial that had somehow dropped on the deck, he could sense that it no longer contained a scrap of life.

"It's completely spent!" He spoke with a bit of distress.

One vial represented one opportunity to enable someone old to gain another century of life!

"I only have 3 untouched vials and 1 half-expended vial left."

Though it sounded as if he still had plenty of universal life energy left to play around with, only a year or so had passed since he obtained them from the Life Research Association. There were so many different ways he could make use of this useful resource that he would probably run out in a couple of years at this rate!

"I need to stop being so extravagant from now on." Ves depreciating said to himself.

He did not regret using up all of the potential contained in an entire vial. The serum was precious, but the value he obtained by using it along with other precious ingredients was worth at least ten times as much in his subjective opinion!

After all, he and his wife were still young and spry. It would take several centuries before they even needed to think about relying on high-grade serum to extend their lives. By that time, they would probably become so powerful that they could easily earn enough merits to obtain several vials!

Compared to saving up an entire vial for several hundred years, Ves vastly preferred to convert it into something of much greater value. A design spirit incarnation that

complemented his mech design capabilities in several powerful ways was definitely worth the sacrifice!

"Vulcan..."

Once Ves directed his attention towards Vulcan, he felt as if he was looking at himself from another perspective.

The two were definitely connected. Just as Ves was staring at Vulcan, the design spirit was also looking at his principal.

When Ves raised his hand, so did Vulcan.

"Hey..."

This was weird. As Ves began to gain a bit of control over the bond he shared with Vulcan, he learned that design spirits were completely different existences.

They did not possess regular human thoughts and emotions. They did not view reality in the same way as ordinary life. Their perception of the material realm was a lot dimmer than he thought.

The more Ves tried to gain a sense of what Vulcan was experiencing, the less he comprehended.

"It's too weird!"

It was as if he was trying to talk to someone who spoke an alien language. Neither he nor his conversation partner possessed anything in common that could build up mutual understanding.

The only way for him to figure out what the alien was talking about was to learn the latter's language.

Ves had a sense that he needed to do something similar with regards to Vulcan. Even though he felt he could take direct control over Vulcan in the same way he could do with Blinky, it was pointless if he couldn't process the operation mode of his design spirit!

"Maybe the spiritual essence I've taken from Vulcan will help once it has fully merged with my Spirituality." He muttered as he rubbed his head.

Though Vulcan was immensely powerful in his current state, he was still a newborn as far as spirits went. Not only that, his sudden existence and his massively accelerated growth process had caused him to become a giant who wasn't even able to control his own body!

Power was useless without sufficient control. Vulcan probably needed a long time to adapt and familiarize himself with his formidable strength and abilities. Ves was able to figure out that much through their unbreakable bond.

Ves tiredly waved his hand. "You should settle down. I don't need to borrow your powers immediately so do your best to acclimatize to your new life."

The giant spiritual dwarf silently nodded before he entered the Hammer of Brilliance.

As soon as he did, the entire totem made out of Unending alloy reacted as if it had absorbed a huge amount of energy! It not only radiated a powerful glow, but also began to glow as if it was an expert mech that was under the influence of true resonance!

Ves tentatively waded through all of the dwarven blood and other foul matter that had splattered over the deck before reaching the center. He carefully picked up the Hammer of Brilliance and felt as if he was handling a hot piece of lava!

"I feel like I can create a masterwork with a single strike!"

It was just an illusion, of course. Ves soon reined in his exuberance and shook his head.

He swept his gaze across his surroundings. The hundreds of dwarven captives had all lost their heads without exception.

He frowned. "What a waste of test subjects. I still have plenty of experiments in mind."

Ves also noticed that Calabast and his honor guard had been knocked out as well. Only Arnold managed to maintain his consciousness. The chubby eight-legged exobeast was distressingly poking his nose against Calabast's forehead.

"Squeak! Squeak!"

Everything seemed fine to Ves. He could tell that the unconscious Larkinsons had just experienced a moderate spiritual shock. They would naturally be able to wake up as if they had just taken a short nap.

"Well, it looks like all is well!" Ves tiredly grinned. "Now that I have made my new incarnation, I can finally take revenge against the blasted Vulcan Empire!"

Chapter 3316: Light Repercussions

The anomalous event that knocked out half of the clansmen in the Larkinson fleet could not be hidden!

The shocking event had even triggered the highest level alert, causing the Larkinsons who were still awake to assume their battle stations and act as if they were under heavy attack!

Thousands of mechs housed in ships that were stationed away from the Blinding Banshee disgorged into space and began to sweep the nearby areas for any threats.

The spontaneous activity also alarmed other organizations. The Glory Seekers, Cross Clan and the numerous mercenary fleets that were hired to protect the expeditionary fleet scrambled their mechs as well!

It took an entire hour for the confusion to die down. The Larkinsons who had been rendered unconscious by an unexplainable event eventually woke up and found they did not suffer any further maladies.

Systems were being checked and spaces were being swept, but the befuddled clansmen found nothing suspicious.

In fact, many Larkinsons already had an answer in their heart. The old timers who had been with the clan since the early days didn't even need to make any further guesses.

"It's the patriarch again."

"Weird things happen whenever he does something big."

"Just ignore it and move on. Stuff like this takes place every tuesday."

After experiencing so many odd shenanigans, the Larkinsons developed a tolerance for anomalies. In any case, getting hit by an invisible blast that robbed them of their consciousness was hardly more astounding than fighting against illegal warships or supposed dark gods.

Some Larkinsons even speculated that their patriarch had developed a new superweapon!

It was not hard to figure out the origin point of the strange event. Since it propagated like an expanded sphere, the potency of the strange effect was subject to the inverse-square law.

The people situated closer to the Blinding Banshee slept the longest. Those who were positioned further away only got a light tap. At a certain distance, the strange blast wave no longer possessed the strength to knock out anyone!

Of course, once the clansmen figured out the origin point, they attempted to board the Blinding Banshee which had fallen silent. The leaders of the clan still held a lot of concerns. What had happened on the capital ship?

"It's fine! Everything is okay here!" Ves spoke to General Verle over the comm. "It's all on me this time. I don't want anyone else poking around in the Blinding Banshee. The Black Cats can take care of themselves."

"Ves..." General Verle gritted his teeth.

It was no surprise that he was upset with this situation. No one had any warning that this might happen. The least Ves could do was to warn him and other important clan leaders in advance!

Since they were talking on a remote channel, Ves didn't dare say too much. The general understood this concern as well so he did not waste any further time on attempting to pry more information.

Having dealt with Ves for a long time, he knew that the clan patriarch would only divulge information if it was useful to do so. As someone who came from an intelligence background himself, the general was used to remaining in the dark.

"I will do my best to cooperate with others to clean up your mess." General Verle said. "You don't need to supply any answers. Even if people have questions, nothing will come out of it if there are no further disturbances."

"Don't worry." Ves smiled at the man's unspoken question. "I'm pretty sure we won't suffer a repeat of the earlier incident."

"Fine. Take care and don't do anything drastic."

Ves had to spend more time than he thought to handle much of the repercussions. He was already weary and exhausted from his earlier ordeal, but he had no choice but to keep talking to different people in order to prevent them from bursting into the cargo bay and noticing anything untowards!

While that happened, he commanded various bots to clean up the mess his creation process had generated. The entire middle of the cargo had turned into a charnel house as the headless bodies of hundreds of dwarves were soaked in blood, shredded brains and fragments of skull matter.

Anyone stepping into this compartment would probably have nightmares once they laid their eyes on this horrible sight!

Ves places his hands on his hips. "A couple of cleaning bots aren't enough to remove this mess."

Considering how bad it would be if anyone found out what happened here, Ves had already anticipated that he might have to resort to extreme measures.

It was for that reason that he employed bots armed with flamethrowers to burn everything!

Everything in the cargo bay was being scoured by hot and purifying flame! Every single piece of biological remains were instantly burned to such an extent that even the deck began to melt to an extent!

Once Calabast woke up, she also assisted with the cleanup. She employed special solutions to sanitize and purify every single cell, compartment and corridor where the secret dwarven captives had been housed. Not a single hair follicle or dead skin cell was allowed to remain intact in case investigators came to search the Blinding Banshee!

She even went as far as to destroy all of the bots and systems used to remove all of the evidence.

"I've already prepared for the scenario in advance." She said to Ves after they were done with the cleanup operation. "I had a feeling you didn't intend to redeem our prisoners back to the Vulcan Empire, though I didn't expect that all of them would lose their lives in such a violent fashion. What in the galaxy were you trying to accomplish, Ves?"

He could only shrug in response. "I can't explain it to you yet. I still have to explore all of the results I've obtained from this experiment. I can only tell you that I have gained a huge amount of power that will hopefully give me a powerful boost in my subsequent mech design projects. It's too early to tell what that will look like, and I will probably need a long time to adapt to all of the power that I have gained. The potential should be high, though. It has to be considering the extravagant amount of resources I've used to give myself this boost."

"Does it have anything to do with that glowing hammer of yours?" Calabast gestured to the hammer that Ves had attached to his toolbelt. "Its glow is a lot stronger than before."

"Oh? What are you feeling from it?" Ves curiously asked.

"It is difficult to explain." Calabast frowned. She raised her hands. "I feel the urge to do something with my hands. I'm thinking about going back to my office to fold origami paper or service my personal firearms. I even feel inspired to make my own gadgets despite not being good at it. This is one of the most unusual glows you've made. I can see why you claim that it can boost your work."

Ves was intrigued by her description. Vulcan was supposed to have a combat application as well, but it wasn't obvious at the moment. This was no surprise to him as Vulcan's primary duty was to enhance his craftsmanship. Every other function was secondary as far as he was concerned.

"You're not involved in any production jobs, so Vulcan's effect on you isn't that compelling." He guessed. "The effect should be stronger on mech designers, crafters and similar professionals. Even I feel inspired to make something."

He was subjected to the strongest degree of influence. Not only was he carrying the Hammer of Brilliance on his person, but he also possessed an unbreakable spiritual channel that directly connected him to Vulcan!

At this moment, this new channel was constantly exerting a strange kind of pressure on his Spirituality. The difference in strengths between himself and his new incarnation caused some kind of osmosis effect where his Spirituality was constantly being stimulated to grow stronger.

He had already obtained an immediate jump in strength since he created Vulcan. Not only that, he felt that he would automatically grow stronger even if he didn't do anything else except lie in bed all day.

This was just one of the side effects of creating a new incarnation! Ves hadn't even explored the main functions that Vulcan brought to his life!

He grinned. He already felt he had succeeded today! Though the gamble he made could have crippled him or endanger his life, he just knew that he could pull off his elaborate and ambitious plan!

Calabast could clearly tell that he was revelling in his success, so she gave him plenty of time to process his euphoria.

"What are your plans now that you have accomplished what you have set out to do?" She carefully asked. "From what I can glean from your actions, you don't appear to be in a hurry to move on and travel to the gate system."

Ves smirked. "I'm not finished with the Vulcan Empire yet. I'm aware that our clansmen and our allies are sick and tired of the dwarves, but I won't leave until I have completed my mission."

Calabast realized something significant. "Those discussions we held on how to undermine the Vulcan Empire... you were being serious. You actually plan to topple an entire second-rate state all by yourself!"

"Hahaha! Exactly! I don't think it is crazy as it sounds. The Vulcan Empire is in its most precarious state in decades. It has a fearsome reputation but its short heritage and flawed ideologies has produced a lot of fault lines. While it is not that easy for others to exploit these vulnerabilities, I'm different, because I'm Vulcan!"

Calabast didn't know whether to take his claims seriously or not. She could tell that Ves wouldn't be deterred unless he had an opportunity to pull off his scheme. If it worked

out, then that was great. If his dubious plan fell through, then she and the other advisors would insist he move on and hurry up to the Red Ocean!

Once Ves issued a couple of instructions to Calabast, he finally left the Blinding Banshee and returned to the Spirit of Bentheim.

As soon as he returned to his grand stateroom, his pregnant wife was already waiting for him inside.

"Hello, dear. How's our baby?" Ves tried to act as nonchalant as possible.

It was too bad his act didn't fool Gloriana for a second. She walked over and grabbed the hammer on his toolbelt.

"What's this? You created a new proto-god, didn't you? Why didn't you tell me?! Is this Vulcan?!"

"Calm down, honey! I'll explain everything to you." Ves lied as he tried to calm her down.

He gave her a basic story that skipped many details. He declined to tell her that he sacrificed a lot of dwarves for science and that he almost came close to losing his own life. He also hid the fact that Vulcan was his permanent incarnation.

The only information that he truly passed on was that Vulcan was supposed to help them in their work.

"How, exactly?" She wondered.

"That's what we'll find out." Ves smirked. "I don't know what my new design spirit can do either, but I think he will definitely play a useful role once we fabricate the Bulwark Project and Chimera Project. Craftsmanship is one of Vulcan's strengths, remember?"

That caused her to become intrigued. She had already experienced how much help a spirit could bring during her work after Blinky made use of his networking ability. If Vulcan was able to provide her with a different form of utility during her design or fabrication work, then she would come closer to fulfilling her ambitions!

Her eyes turned starry as she struggled to hold the dense and heavy hammer. Even though Vulcan was yet another a male proto-god, Gloriana already began to feel inspired by its glow.

"I feel like I can make a masterwork mech with this hammer!"

That was exactly what Ves thought as well when he came in touch with Vulcan's glow for the first time!

Chapter 3317: Massive Potential

Once Ves enjoyed a good, long rest, he recovered most of his condition the next day.

He was surprised by that. He would have thought that tearing out a portion of his core Spirituality only to fill up the gap with semi-foreign spiritual matter would debilitate him for at least weeks.

"It looks like I can recover faster than usual."

The crudely-healed wound already looked a lot better than yesterday. He attributed this fast recovery to his life domain and Blinky's excellent spiritual control.

Ves had a reasonable estimate of how much damage other people's spiritualities could endure. The threshold was quite low as most individuals easily became affected by distortions.

His own resilience was higher because he already subjected himself to a lot of torment. He only realized now that his life domain had definitely strengthened his spiritual resilience and recovery rate.

"I can't use myself as a benchmark for others." He reminded himself. "I can get away with a lot more shenanigans than anyone else."

He had a hunch that if he wasn't as resilient as now, he would have never survived the act of breaking off a piece of his own core Spirituality!

He performed a thorough inspection of his current state. Though there were several unusual changes, nothing looked threatening. His spirit wound was healing nicely and his new spiritual channel to Vulcan did not unduly affect his mind.

At worst, Ves gained a greater desire to create something with his hands!

"I need to figure out what Vulcan can do before I do anything else." He decided.

When Ves picked up the Hammer of Brilliance and inspected his incarnation, he could sense the power and potential that Vulcan was exuding.

Ves expended an entire vial of life-grade serum to create the dwarven design spirit! This allowed Vulcan to begin his life at a much higher starting point than other spiritual products!

The downside to accelerating his growth to this extent was that there was a horrible lack of adaptation time. Vulcan gained a lot of strength and capabilities without ever exercising one of them. This was one of the biggest downsides to his artificial growth process!

"He's not like Trisk or Arnold who started off weak but get to practice and master their respective abilities as they grow over time."

This was the most ideal progression for a design spirit. While their power level was not impressive at the beginning, over time they became more valuable as they grew in strength while developing their abilities in the directions that were most suitable to them. Different experiences and environmental stimuli made sure their evolution constantly adapted to their current needs!

Vulcan missed all of that.

The dwarven design spirit was like a clueless kid sitting in front of the helm of a capital ship. He understood nothing about what was going on. If he pulled a random level, he might cause the ship to pitch uncontrollably and crash into a planet or something!

Therefore, Ves already understood that just because Vulcan had almost become as strong as the Superior Mother right after his birth, the latter could easily overpower the former because the Hexer ancestral spirit possessed a much higher mastery over her own strength and abilities!

Ves was not upset by this. He already expected this to happen and that it might take years for Vulcan to familiarize himself with his prodigious capabilities.

"This doesn't sound much different from letting a design spirit start off weak but grow stronger step by step."

This was the growth trajectory of many of his other spiritual products such as Trisk and his unborn daughter's companion spirit.

The reason why Ves was willing to make Vulcan stronger straightaway was because he theorized that a high starting point would give his design spirit a higher growth ceiling!

"If my guess is correct, then Vulcan will have a much easier time breaking through his bottleneck than other comparable spirits!"

From what he could observe, it was not so easy for spirits to break through to the next level. All of his strongest ones had reached a height that Ves thought was comparable to that of a senior ace pilot.

Though he had never seen an actual ace pilot in person, he did not think that Qilanxo and the Superior Mother had any chance against an actual god pilot. It was not without reason that many people thought that god pilots were able to defeat battleships!

The scarcity of Star Designers and god pilots throughout the galaxy already told Ves that reaching this level of strength was difficult for every kind of existence, not just mech designers and mech pilots.

"If nothing special happens, then many of my design spirits will get stuck at the same ceiling for a long time."

He could already deduce that entities like the Superior Mother who could no longer grow their raw strength spent their energies on refining their abilities. By developing new techniques and deepening their existing ones, they could accomplish more with the same degree of power. This was the only viable way to increase their effective performance.

As for Vulcan...

"The difficulty of reaching that level is insanely difficult." Ves tried to temper his expectations. "I shouldn't get my hopes up too much. Even if Vulcan has better prospects, it will still take decades or even centuries to notice the difference."

However, if Vulcan succeeded, his power level would surpass that of any other design spirit! Ves even suspected that his incarnation's strength would become comparable that of a powerful spiritual sorcerer that he had once witnessed in person!

Back during the Battle Against The Abyss, Ves had become terrified at the might shown by 'Temple Protector' Aramid Dista. The way he could knock everyone unconscious with his massive spiritual presence and his ability to fight against mechs and worse without relying on any mechs or external weapons was so mind-boggling that he had to have been comparable to a god pilot!

"If Vulcan advanced to that level ahead of me, then will my own chances of becoming a Star Designer be even greater?" Ves wondered.

The osmosis effect suggested that this might be the case. At least some of Vulcan's high-level energy flowed back to Ves through their permanent spiritual bond. It reminded him a lot of the interaction between high-ranking mech pilots and mechs of exceptional quality.

Masterwork mechs and higher quality mechs were able to promote the development of expert pilots to a drastic degree. Part of that was because a powerful mech had a tendency to lift a mech pilot up to their level.

"There's a flipside, though."

If the quality of the mech was lower, then an expert pilot or an ace pilot would find it much more difficult to grow their strength and break through their bottlenecks!

Ves feared that this might be the case with his relationship with Vulcan as well.

"I don't have to worry too much for now." He consoled himself. "Vulcan will not form an anchor as long as he is stronger than me. At his current level, I would have to attain the

rank of Master Mech Designer before this can even pose a problem to me. If Vulcan becomes comparable to a god pilot, then I will still enjoy an advantage!"

The major concern happened once he became a Star Designer. From what Willix alluded to, every Star Designer was trying to climb up to the mythical fourth rung of the craftsmanship ladder. This suggested that the MTA believed that there was a rank above Star Designer!

"It's highly likely that this applies to other transcendent professions and existences!"

There had to be a rank above god pilot.

However, if Vulcan remained stuck at the god pilot level, then he might form an anchor that prevented Ves from surpassing the limitations of a Star Designer!

At that point, Ves seriously needed to consider whether it was worthwhile to keep his incarnation.

"As long as Vulcan isn't useful to me anymore, I need to find a way to get rid of him. That's going to be troublesome."

Ves and Vulcan's lives were intertwined. If one of them suffered, the other one suffered as well!

This was one of the many prices that Ves had paid in order to obtain the power of a design spirit.

Still, Ves was capable of accomplishing a lot of seemingly impossible feats. If he truly wanted to get rid of his incarnation, he predicted he could develop a method that wouldn't result in his own death!

"It will likely take centuries before I need to consider such solutions. By then, I can do much more than I can ever imagine at this time!"

Ves no longer thought about the long-term implications of gaining an incarnation. Instead, he was eager to explore his short-term gains!

"Even if Vulcan hardly knows what to do with his power, just a shallow application should be enough to yield a powerful effect!"

He held the Hammer of Brilliance and tried to attune himself to the artifact and the design spirit resting inside.

The experience was quite deep and profound, especially since he was able to experience Vulcan's perspective as well. Even though the latter was so weird and alien

that Ves couldn't understand anything, the combination of sensory experiences somehow gave him a couple of clues.

"I should start with making something."

Ves moved to his personal workshop and immediately started off with a simple job. He grabbed a multitool and a few spare pieces of metal and quickly completed a handcrafted mug.

His expression became mixed.

"There's... hardly any difference."

Mugs were simple objects by nature and it was not that easy to increase their quality. Their complexity resulted in a lack of variables that Ves could manipulate in order to improve the fundamental nature of an object.

"I see. Vulcan's glow doesn't help me out that much if I engage in something simple. Then let's increase the level of complexity!"

Ves took out more tools and materials and spent an hour making a lovely mech figurine based on the Valkyrie Redeemer.

This was not an average toy. Ves had made sure to incorporate more parts than scale models of this size ordinarily possessed. The challenge of putting this intricate puzzle together provided him with considerably more satisfaction than before.

"Is this one of the effects of Vulcan's glow?"

The quality level of the Valkyrie Redeemer figurine was quite high. Ves knew that it was possible for him to reach this level if he tried his best, but the odds were not high.

Was this a fluke or did Vulcan truly improve his craftsmanship? It was rather hard to figure out the exact cause and effect considering that he wasn't able to perform detailed sensor readings on spiritual phenomena.

He was already able to make a couple of preliminary conclusions based on his two crafting attempts.

"I don't think my work has magically gone up in quality because of Vulcan's presence." Ves speculated as he rubbed his smooth-shaven chin. "It's much more likely that Vulcan's glow exerts an influence on my mental state that causes me to become more sensitive and attentive to details related to good craftsmanship. When I was making my mech figurine, I noticed that I was working slower and more meticulously than before."

This was the most likely explanation of what was happening. It was a much more logical and realistic explanation of how Vulcan was able to promote people's craftsmanship.

After all, the creator was the biggest variable in determining the quality of a product.

"This effect also matches my expectations."

However, Ves had only scratched the surface of what Vulcan could do. His incarnation possessed a lot more potential that was just begging to be tapped!

The problem was finding the right method to draw out Vulcan's massive potential.

As Ves kept thinking, he suddenly came up with an odd idea. It didn't seem possible, but Vulcan was an existence that ought to be powerful enough to distort reality.

"Can I...?"

He didn't know why he thought this might work, but his intuition hinted to him that something would definitely happen.

Ves picked up the Hammer of Brilliance and lightly tapped the flat end onto the surface of his newly crafted figurine.

A small amount of energy flowed from the hammer to the miniature Valkyrie Redeemer! Vulcan also instinctively took action, causing him to do something that caused the mech figurine to glow in the same bronze light as the Hammer of Brilliance!

A connection had formed!

Chapter 3318: It's Hammer Time

Ves didn't know what was going on, but the light show didn't last long. Only half a dozen seconds had passed after he had tapped his hammer against the mech figurine before the strange glow disappeared.

"What has changed?"

The quality of the mech figurine didn't seem to have improved. The life it contained didn't grow any stronger either. Ves became more confused as he picked up the figurine and turned it around in his hands.

"What the hell did you do, Vulcan?"

His incarnation failed to supply him with an answer. Vulcan was so unfamiliar with his powers that he couldn't explain his instinctual action!

Ves palmed his face. "I think you've broken the record of being the stupidest design spirit at your strength level. This is embarrassing, you know that?"

"..."

"I know you're just a day old, but how can you possess so little control over yourself!?"

"..."

"Maybe you need to go back to school. As soon as you stabilize your current condition, you should approach Qilanxo and the Superior Mother for lessons on how to utilize your power."

"..."

"Is the Superior Mother your mother? That's a good question."

On one hand, Ves was inclined to say no, because Vulcan's ingredients did not contain any spiritual fragments derived from the Superior Mother.

On the other hand, Vulcan was his incarnation while the Superior Mother was Cynthia's incarnation. This turned Vulcan into the Superior Mother son in a twisted way.

However, Ves had a feeling that his mother would not be amused if her son was a dwarf!

"Ugh, that's not important! You're all on the same side, so the other design spirits will definitely lend you a hand!"

Ves remembered that Goldie spent a lot of time with Qilanxo in her early days to master her own capabilities.

Spiritual products were different from natural spiritual entities who once existed as living mutated beasts. The latter developed their powerful spiritualities over a lifetime as real organisms. This kind of background provided entities such as Qilanxo with deep foundations that were closely anchored to reality.

It also helped that Qilanxo was able to exercise her potent spiritual abilities for several centuries. None of his spiritual products could ever catch up to the big lizard in terms of accumulation!

"..."

"Yeah, you do that."

Ves turned his attention back to the mech figurine. He had hoped that tapping it with his hammer would instantly increase its quality level in the same way as integrating it with a gem, but it turned out that he was being too optimistic.

"This isn't magic."

The problem was that Ves still hadn't obtained any clues after inspecting his work for twenty minutes. He even disassembled the mech figurine in order to inspect the parts. When he reassembled the miniature Valkyrie Redeemer, he tried his best to do even better, only to find that nothing had changed.

He scratched his head. "What the hell? What did all of that energy do? Where did it all go? It shouldn't have disappeared without performing some kind of work!"

If tapping the hammer onto the mech figurine merely caused the spiritual energy released by Vulcan to go to waste, then Ves would have been able to notice all of it flowing away.

That hadn't happened. Instead, Vulcan instinctively employed an unknown ability that caused all of the spiritual energy to be spent on accomplishing something!

He eventually grew so frustrated that he tossed the mech figurine aside. "This is a dead end. I should look at Vulcan's capabilities from a different angle."

Vulcan should have been capable of doing so much more. Ves had programmed many different potential functions into his design. Though Ves didn't think that all of them became possible, his incarnation was designed to be versatile!

He was similar to the Superior Mother in that regard. Ves invested a lot of different and powerful ingredients in both of them. This allowed him to provide them with multiple different ways to express their power.

Vulcan was akin to another spiritual toolbox. While Ves already built up quite a formidable spiritual toolbox based on his own capabilities, it was always better to gain another set of tools, especially if they were different from his existing ones!

"It doesn't mean that I should always make use of these additional tools, but it is quite handy to have them at my disposal than otherwise."

His current frustration stemmed from the fact that Ves hadn't deciphered any of the new tools in his new toolbox!

He let out a breath in frustration and swung the hammer around in his hand. "What can I do with you exactly, Vulcan?"

Perhaps he was being impatient and expected too much from an entity that was just a day old. It also wasn't wise to mess around with a powerful design spirit that had no control over his own power. Though Vulcan was not supposed to be a destructive design spirit, who knew whether an accident could prove fatal!

"Speaking of accidents..."

A strange idea popped up in his mind. Ves lifted the Hammer of Brilliance in front of his face and adopted a speculative expression.

"Should I..."

He struggled with his decision for a moment before he decided to just pull the trigger and see what happened as a result.

"Well, I'll use myself as a test subject this time!"

He raised his hammer above his head and slowly whacked the flat end against his head!

As soon as the hammer made contact with his skull, its bronze glow flared as it spread to his entire head!

Ves momentarily felt as if he was flooded by Vulcan's essence! A myriad of different sensations ran through his mind that caused him to feel much more active than before!

"This!"

As soon as the light show had passed, Ves looked around his environment in wonder. The way he looked at reality had become a lot more special than before. When he looked at his mech figurine, he suddenly felt displeased at its quality and thought that he could make something better if he made a couple of minor adjustments that aligned his design style better with such a small but intricate object.

Ves retrieved another batch of raw materials and hungrily began to make another mech figurine.

This time, he was making the same miniature Valkyrie Redeemer as before, but his state of mind was much different this time!

Not only did he become a lot more invested in this trivial project, he also saw more than before and came up with numerous interesting ideas that he never thought of previously!

When he finally finished his second figurine, he stopped and stared at it with a stupendous expression.

"It's... a masterwork."

Ves couldn't believe it. Although it was theoretically a lot easier to create a masterwork of a small and simple crafted object, he didn't think it was likely for him to make a masterwork mech figurine with his current capabilities!

Though Ves created four different masterwork mechs which made it easier for him to produce subsequent masterworks, this was only a minor boost. At this level, the effect was still too slim.

"My odds of making a masterwork mech figurine under normal conditions shouldn't be high, especially because it is just a toy instead of an actual mech." Ves muttered as he rubbed his smooth-shaven chin. "If I have to define the probability, then I would say that I only have a 0.1 percent chance of making a masterwork mech figurine!"

Did he happen to hit the jackpot this time or did tapping his head with his hammer cause him to cheat?

Ves thought back on the state he was previously in while he made his masterwork mech figurine. He felt so much joy and pleasure at the beginning that it reminded him of a highly precious state of mind that he had once experienced in his career.

His thoughts went back on the days he fabricated the Devil Tiger. He committed so much love and effort to his first passion project that when he was finally able to realize his tiger mech design, something within his mind had burst, causing him to put together his mech with an unprecedented amount of desire and motivation!

"I recall now!" His eyes lit up! "My mentality just an hour ago is similar to that of the inspired state that I was in when I fabricated the Devil Tiger!"

This was a state of mind that he had always been chasing after since he created his first masterwork mech! Just the notion that whacking his head with his own hammer would enable him to enter an inspired state on demand was enough to change his life!

His breath grew heavier as he greedily eyed the Hammer of Brilliance.

"Let's try again!"

Ves struck the hammer against his head a little harder this time. Perhaps applying more force would strengthen the effect.

"Ouch! My head!"

Unfortunately, other than giving him a new headache, the hammer didn't accomplish anything.

"Why not?"

After a bit of puzzling, Ves eventually came to the guess that there was a limit to this ability.

"Is it me or Vulcan?"

Maybe Vulcan had just expended a scarce resource that needed to be replenished first.

It could also be that Ves had exhausted his potential for the day and needed time before he became receptive to this artificial mind state again.

"Limitations or not, this is still a powerful ability!"

As Ves began to spend more time on comparing the different times he was in an inspired state, he realized that the hammer-induced one was not as good as the real deal.

It not only lasted shorter and tapered off sooner, but also provided him with less drastic inspiration.

There were many possible explanations why this was the case. Ves had long assumed that inspired states represented a psychological breakthrough after a long period of work accumulation.

If he forced himself to enter an inspired state while not building up much of an accumulation by performing his routine work, then he wasn't really qualified to enter this state of mind. It was only logical that the improvement wouldn't be so drastic.

Perhaps the lesser boost was enough to turn a simple mech figurine into a masterwork mech, but he was much less optimistic about making a real masterwork mech.

"There are other potential explanations as well."

It could be that Vulcan simply didn't possess enough proficiency to employ this capability in a skillful manner. Ves was able to sense that Vulcan completely relied on his instincts to perform his active abilities.

According to this theory, as long as Vulcan exercised his skills and became more proficient with wielding the power he commanded, the artificial inspired state that he was able to induce upon people would become a lot stronger than now! The difference might be as great as night and day!

When Ves thought about how many more masterwork mechs he could build with this capability at his fingertips, his eyes grew hot when he stared at his glowing hammer.

"I can't allow anyone else to use you like this!" He concluded. "You're too powerful to lend this ability to others! Aside from me and anyone I choose, don't empower them in this manner, you got that, Vulcan?"

"..."

"Especially don't bless any dwarves!"

"..."

"What do you mean, they're your compatriots? You serve me, not the Vulcanites!"

"..."

"You're not supposed to be an actual god to the dwarves! That's just a fake title."

As an incarnation, Vulcan still possessed a personality that deviated substantially from that of Ves. Due to using several spiritually activated dwarves as ingredients, the newly born design spirit somehow acquired some of the personality traits of Vulcanites.

Fortunately, they weren't too strong. Vulcan possessed both a human and dwarven side, and it was up to the beholder to determine which form he took.

"Vulcan, come out for a second."

A small spiritual manifestation of Vulcan emerged out of the Hammer of Brilliance. The dwarf looked like a short and stocky version of Ves. His muscles were large and thick, but not to a ridiculous degree.

The design spirit's most notable visual trait was his long, bushy, braided and majestic beard that Ves had styled after the statues commissioned by the Dwarven God Cult. Vulcan also wore a leather blacksmith's apron and some other embellished articles that made him look like a down-to-earth god.

An entire minute passed by as Ves kept staring at this warped version of himself.

"Why do you look like a dwarf to me?" He eventually asked.

"..."

"You're supposed to look like a human! Hurry up and grow taller!"

"..."

"What do you mean you can't?"

"..."

"You lie! It's not because of me. It's your fault somehow! You're defective!"

Chapter 3319: Differences of Opinion

"I don't understand why we aren't leaving yet." Gloriana flatly said as she and her husband sat in the lounge of their grand stateroom.

"You'll see." Ves smiled at her as he reached out and rubbed her growing belly.

"Everything I do is for the sake of our future and our baby. It doesn't matter if we delay our journey into the Red Ocean by a couple of months. The advantages that I am trying to gain here far outweighs reaching the new frontier sooner."

He had begun his revenge against the Vulcan Empire after he created his dwarven design spirit. Now that Vulcan had become a real entity, the dwarves in the Smiling Samuel Star Sector were about to find out what it truly meant to worship a cruel and unforgiving god!

"Miaow~"

Clixie rubbed her head against Ves, causing him to rub her back as well.

"Meow."

Lucky yawned as he floated over to Gloriana, prompting her to hold him against her chest and admire his sparkling green eyes.

Despite their high workload, the wedded couple always tried to find time together. There was more to life than their jobs and they needed to keep their marriage healthy over the long term.

Once they started raising children, both of them had already decided to cut back on their work hours so that they could give their sons and daughters the attention that they truly deserved. It was not an easy compromise to make, but a child only grew up once.

Ves also took the time to check up on the spiritual condition of his wife and unborn child.

Having reached halfway of her pregnancy, his wife had undergone a subtle shift in demeanor. Ves had the impression that she matured in a few ways. She became calmer, became more considerate for others and didn't raise her voice as much.

Of course, Gloriana was still Gloriana. Her imperious personality and her high expectations still remained the same. Sometimes they even flared up. She spent more time planning out her future daughter's entire life trajectory than anything else!

"Do you think we should send our daughter to a first-class academy in the Red Ocean for a couple of years?" She wondered as she kept pampering Lucky with her fingers. "I've heard that the first-rate superstates have already set up affiliates of their renowned educational institutions at their most well-protected star systems. If anything happens to our fleet, our daughter would still be okay."

Ves furrowed his brows. Her baby hadn't even left her womb and she was already thinking at least a decade ahead! Who knew whether they could afford the tuition and whether their daughter met the entry qualifications. It was notoriously difficult to enter into any of these elite galaxy-level schools!

"I think it's better to raise her within our clan." He softly replied as he scratched Clixie's belly. "I'm sure those first-class institutions deserve their reputation, but if we send any of our children there, would they still remain a Larkinson when they come back? Schools aren't just passing on knowledge, you know. They also propagate specific cultural norms and values that will no doubt be different from what our clan believes in. I don't want to be confronted by a stranger when our kids return home!"

"I want the best for our daughter, Ves. I want the best for all of them. If she can enter the first-class circle and make friends with future movers and shakers among the Terrans or Rubarthans, she will obtain a ticket straight to the top of human society! Something like this is unthinkable in the Milky Way, but since all of the old factions are so compressed in the human-controlled territories of the Red Ocean, it has become easier than ever to get in touch with the highest class of people in advance!"

This was one of the reasons why Gloriana didn't object so much to entering the Red Ocean. She was upset with remaining in a backwater like the galactic rim and yearned to stand equal to the same people who originated from the galactic center!

"All in good time, Gloriana." He said as he held her hand. "The best way for us to be taken seriously is to earn it. We may be born on the wrong side of the galaxy, but as long as we become good enough at our jobs, all of those first-raters will respect us sooner or later. Until we are powerful enough to stand equal to them, I don't think it is wise to associate ourselves with such dangerous people."

"What about our daughter? Don't you want to give her a head start?"

"If she's going to be as good as you think, then she doesn't need the help." He answered.

Since he used her own logic against her, Gloriana couldn't refute his argument. Both of them thought highly of their daughter's future for different reasons. With the help of her parents, there was no way her future accomplishments would be mediocre!

"Maybe you're right, Ves. The Red Ocean is still in flux. So many colonies are being developed at the moment that it will look completely different after a decade. Maybe there will be more options available for our growing girl."

"I don't think it's a good idea for us to associate too much with the Terrans and Rubarthans to begin with." Ves cautioned. "The two first-rate superstates are playing dangerous games. They're not only competing against each other, but also stand up to the Big Two. Approaching either of them will only turn our clan into a disposable chess piece. Preserving our sovereignty is one of our bottom lines."

"You're still insisting that we join the Red Ocean Union?"

"Why do you make it sound so bad?"

"Because that's exactly what it is! It offers the least benefits and there is little to no cohesion among its members. Without a strong guiding hand, the Red Ocean Union will certainly fall behind the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact!"

Ves shook his head. "You're only looking at the downsides. To me, a lack of direction is exactly what I want! I don't want pompous leaders over my head who can force us to do what they say. I've been trying to avoid that since I founded our clan. There are still ways to get ahead in the Red Ocean Union. A lack of structure translates into greater autonomy. You just need to take the initiative and proactively seek out opportunities since no one is forcing them upon you. As long as we have choice, we can pick the directions that are most suitable for us and our clan."

His wife didn't look convinced. "Look, I admit that the demands of the Terran Alliance are too harsh, but the Rubarthan Pact offers us many advantages over the Red Ocean Union."

"Like what?"

"We can obtain the backing of a powerful Rubarthan prince, which actually means something and will offer our daughter the greatest possible safety. We can gain immediate entry into the regional Rubarthan mech market and mech industry. This will not only allow us to conduct business at a greater scale, but also enable us to get in touch with and collaborate alongside some of the talented mech designers of human civilization! I can mention more advantages to you, but that will take all day."

Ves scoffed. He reached out and squeezed her nose, which elicited an indignant shout from his wife!

"None of these privileges come for free. One of the biggest reasons why the Rubarthan Pact tries to solicit pioneers with these nice-sounding benefits is because it has to compete against the Terran Alliance! Do the Rubarthans actually care about the pioneers aligned to them? Nope. The only way for that to change is to show our value to

them, and that requires us to become their foot soldiers in their competitions against their rivals."

His wife sighed even as Lucky and Clixie wandered off after they received enough pets.

"I am not the only person in the clan who thinks it is wiser to shelter under a greater tree, Ves. The Red Ocean is a dangerous place, but we can mitigate a substantial amount of risk by aligning ourselves with the Rubarthans. From what I've heard about them in the Red Ocean, they're not as overbearing as the Terrans and they offer more channels for pioneers to stand out and earn their favor."

"Those first-raters are all the same." Ves stubbornly shook his head. "As long as they hold a superior attitude towards their lessers, we will never become their friends. At best we'll turn into assets that they are not as willing to discard as their other commodities. I don't want to get under the thumb of someone who thinks we don't exist at the same level. I much prefer to work alongside equal partners who truly respect us and need us as much as we need them. The Red Ocean Union is full of pioneers like that who we can befriend without subjecting ourselves at their mercy."

He thought that Gloriana was too naive to trust the Rubarthans. Though he had never interacted with them in person, he heard plenty of stories about them. They were not so different from their archrivals, and he happened to know exactly what the Terrans were like!

Though Gloriana still insisted that it was best for the Larkinson Clan to cozy up to the Rubarthan faction in the Red Ocean, she had no power to push this decision through. Ves still intended to go through with his original plan because he was confident that his clan would be able to navigate the waters of the Red Ocean Union.

With an excellent diplomat like Minister Shederin Purnesse at his disposal, Ves believed that they could slowly build up the Golden Skull Alliance into a modest but close-knit gathering centered around the Larkinson Clan!

The couple eventually moved on to discussing other matters. Gloriana exhibited a lot of curiosity towards Vulcan.

"You've been spending a lot of time tinkering in your workshop the last few days." She pointed out. "What is so important to you that is making you spend less time in the design lab? The Bulwark Project and the Chimera Project still need your attention if we want to complete them in a timely manner!"

Ves casually waved his hand. "I'm making something important. I've also been experimenting with my latest design spirit, although right now he doesn't actually function as one. Regardless, I'm doing my best to explore what Vulcan can do so that we can gain additional assistance when it is time for us to fabricate our remaining expert mechs."

He did not dare to make any solid claims when he had yet to figure out the rules, mechanisms and limitations of Vulcan's productivity-oriented abilities. It was too tempting for him to boast about his latest accomplishment, but he refrained from doing so because he did not want to hype Gloriana up only for Vulcan to fall flat during a crucial moment.

Though his wife had made a lot of guesses, as long as Ves didn't give her an answer, she wouldn't build up any unrealistic expectations.

His current examinations and experiments already told Ves that Vulcan was not able to guarantee the creation of a masterwork on demand. Its effects were much more modest, especially when it came to larger and more complex creations, so Ves still had to perform a lot of trials in order to develop an accurate estimation on how much Vulcan could contribute to the projects that were truly important.

"I'm beginning to feel I'm missing out on these proto-gods that you are playing around with." Gloriana pouted. "When will you give me a useful pet like Blinky?"

"Uhm, please be patient. It's not that simple to make a cat like Blinky!"

"Don't you love me, Ves?"

"O-Of course!" He stammered. "Why would you think I don't?"

"THEN GIVE ME A NEW CAT!"

Chapter 3320: Two Vulcans

Were the Larkinsons truly yearning to align themselves with the Rubarthans once they reached the Red Ocean?

Ves kept wondering about this issue. He thought he had already made the clan's future direction clear when he announced his intention to join the Red Ocean Union.

"Our people already have a taste of what it is like to exist without a strong government or organization protecting our rights." Gavin told him during a morning briefing. "It turns out that not having a big brother watching over us is not that great. Sure, we don't have to abide by anyone's laws and directives except for the ones imposed by the Big Two, but that has also left us bereft from shelter when we need it the most. I bet the Vulcan Empire wouldn't have taken the initiative to attack us if we were aligned with a powerful state."

Ves stared at the masterwork mech figurine that he had placed on his display shelf in his office. The miniature Valkyrie Redeemer fit well with the Ylvainan nutrient pack wrapper and the blooming Prosperity Tree.

"You're making the same mistake as my wife, Benny. You only look at the upsides of such an association and never pay enough attention at the price we need to pay. If we join the Rubarthan Pact, we'll either be forced or 'advised' to do something that we don't want. The danger we'll be subjected to will be at least as great as if we tried to make our own fortune!"

"Doesn't that make this a better deal, boss?"

"Look, if we happen to plunge to our deaths, then at least we should be able to pick where we jump from. As long as we retain enough control, we can still find ways to avoid these outcomes. It is a lot harder to do so when we are forced to take part in a war or intrigue action."

It was all about control to Ves. The problem was that not every clansman lived through the same experiences as him. Many of the newer clansmen used to be loyal citizens of various powerful second-rate states. Even if those states weren't always well-run, the people who lived there never thought about living without the backing of powerful governments!

This was how most modern people lived. They were incapable of imagining any scenario where they had to stand up for themselves without the benefit of an existing structure to lean on! Ves found that rather sad. He expected better from his people.

His assistant was one of the first followers of Ves, so Gavin understood exactly why his boss insisted on keeping the clan independent. On the other hand, he frequently got in touch with other people in the clan, so he had a pretty good grasp of the overall sentiment throughout the fleet.

"Not everyone is as successful and confident as you, boss. They're still average people in many regards. Their ambitions are not as great as yours and their risk tolerance is not as extreme either. The Battle of Reckoning and the Battle of Fordilla Zentra have both brought us close to extinction. Even if we made it through somehow, there are still a lot of survivors who are having second thoughts about this whole 'going it alone' business. The more painful battles we go through, the greater the amount of Larkinsons who think it isn't a bad idea to exchange control for protection."

"Fools!" Ves banged his fist against his desk. "From the onset, our clan has always been about trying to rise up through our own efforts! I am not going to change my mind just because we've encountered a couple of setbacks. The sacrifices we make in the early days shall pave the way to a glorious future where people will have to answer to us instead of the other way around!"

Despite his insistence, he could not change other people's opinions so easily. There was only so much Goldie and his propagandists could do without crossing some unsavory lines.

Ves understood that the only way to prevent more people from losing their courage was to lead them to greater success. In particular, the Larkinson Army needed to become a lot stronger in order to win its battles without being pushed to the limit!

"Well, I'll take care of that later." He muttered to himself. "First, I have Vulcan business to take care of. The dwarves won't be enjoying their peace for long."

Once he finished his morning briefing, Ves moved down to his personal workshop which had become filled with various crates and materials.

Ves reached one of his work benches and picked up a recently completed statue of Vulcan.

It was a simple totem that Ves had designed for speedy construction rather than lifelike accuracy.

Regardless, the statue was still a totem that bore a small amount of life.

Though its glow was weak compared to his mechs, most of the dwarves never came into touch with this phenomenon. Ves was certain that this small statue would make an incredibly strong impression on the more devout worshippers of Vulcan!

Ves grinned as he admired his own handicraft. "As long as it is convincing enough to hoodwink a portion of the dwarven population, the Vulcan Empire will definitely turn into a mess!"

The reason for that was quite simple.

The statue he currently held happened to be based on an image of Vulcan as a dwarven deity. The gunmetal grey object did not possess any ambiguity in that regard. Any dwarf who was convinced that Vulcan was like them would become completely convinced their beliefs were absolutely right!

He put the dwarven statue down once he was satisfied with his inspection.

Stoking the flames of fanaticism of the Dwarven God Cult worshippers was not the extent of his plan.

He also prepared a counterpart!

His hand reached out to pick up a taller, slimmer statue. The statue roughly shared his build but possessed a more ambiguous face. This was the traditional depiction of Vulcan among the dwarves.

The statue exuded almost the exact same glow as the previous statue. The differences were relatively modest and mostly related to reinforcing the human or dwarven nature of their depictions.

Ves had designed this human statue to give those affected by its glow the impression that Vulcan was unquestionably human! It also gave the impression that it stood for truth and that it would be blasphemy to mistake the god as a dwarf!

Of course, the dwarven depiction of Vulcan made the opposite impression. The dwarven statue possessed a more aggressive character and made it seem as if mistaking Vulcan as a human god was an unforgivable mistake!

The statues were never designed to convince non-believers and those from the opposite camp to their respective stances.

Ves intended them to fall into the hands of those who were already predisposed to believe in one version of Vulcan or another!

"The more fanatical they are, the more they'll fall into my trap!" He grinned.

He continued to inspect more of his finished work. All of the statues he made came in either a human version or a dwarven version and came in different quality levels.

The least valuable ones were relatively mundane that any traditional metal worker could make. The more notable ones were so high in quality that they had almost reached masterwork level!

The surprisingly wide range in quality levels was due to his frequent attempts to explore Vulcan's abilities.

Though Ves failed to sniff out a lot of new abilities, he at least figured out the rules behind Vulcan's more basic abilities.

He brought out the Hammer of Brilliance and softly tapped it onto his best statue, which happened to depict a human version of Vulcan.

Upon contact, the hammer's glow spread to the statue, causing it to glow as Vulcan's spiritual energy ran throughout its entire structure.

Ves had figured out that Vulcan was analyzing the design and construction of any object that the hammer had deliberately tapped.

He didn't have to worry about the hammer randomly trying to analyze a deck or table if he set it down somewhere. The design spirit responded to the intentions of the wielder and only analyzed inorganic objects.

It was a lot easier for Vulcan to analyze smaller objects than larger ones. Once he analyzed a specific sample, he would store a permanent record of the design in his memories.

Strictly speaking, Ves did not need to tap the statue with his hammer as Vulcan already possessed a record of its design.

The reason why Ves tapped his hammer at the statue anyway was because he wanted to 'update' its record so that Vulcan registered a higher-quality version of this model!

"The strange thing about Vulcan is that he doesn't store designs. He stores impressions of real objects."

This had several implications which made the Hammer of Brilliance a lot more useful when fabricating mass-produced mechs and less useful for fabrication custom mechs.

Of course, even if Ves did not analyze an existing mech, he would still be able to employ the hammer's second functionality. It just wouldn't be as strong.

Once the hammer finished its analysis, Ves did not hesitate to give himself a soft tap with the flat end.

Bonk.

He already learned the hard way that the amount of force he put into his blows did not make the effects stronger!

His head began to glow as Vulcan began to act on his mind. Several new thoughts and impulses surged up, and he quickly put down his hammer in order to fabricate a second human statue.

He let out a sigh though.

"I haven't entered into a false inspired state in three days."

It appeared that Ves wouldn't be able to employ Vulcan's most impactful ability as often as he wished. He needed to cherish the opportunity and had to save it up until he truly needed the boost.

"That said, there is still some use to hitting myself on the head."

The state he was in right now did not inspire him to develop new solutions, but it allowed him to be more mindful of existing details.

Every material was a little different. His mental and physical state also differed from time to time. All of these variables and more affected the quality of his output.

Once he finished his new statue, he put it alongside the reference copy he just used and compared them to each other.

"Hmmm, the quality of my latest work is higher than average, but it falls short of my best attempt."

He did not look surprised at this result. He already sensed that this would be the case once he came close to finishing his new statue.

The crafting-oriented insights provided by Vulcan were based on the specific set of circumstances in which the reference copy had been made.

Merely transplanting all of these parameters onto another work did not yield an identical product. The variables were slightly different. For example, the time was different, Ves might be a little hungry and the batch of materials he used contained a little more impurities.

If the input was different, the output would be different as well. It was impossible to replicate an earlier success.

"It's not completely useless, though."

Ves felt that this function was a lot more useful to less competent and skilled craftsmen. If they were whacked over the head with his hammer, they would be able to learn about many new insights on how to produce a higher-quality version of an existing work!

"It's a way of teaching them on how to reach the standard of quality that I have reached on my own." He realized. "It is too impractical to teach other people all of the details they need to pay attention to. It's much better for Vulcan to dump all of that stuff directly into their minds!"

The only way to truly master work was to make crucial decisions on the spot. Ves couldn't accomplish that by relying solely on obtaining Vulcan's insights on an existing record.

"This is where inspired states can help."

Of course, even that was just a crutch. The most certain and reliable way to make a masterwork was to develop his foundation to the point where he no longer had to rely on any gimmicks like serendipity or Lucky's gem to make a masterwork!

That was something that Vulcan couldn't deliver.