

The Mech Touch

Chapter 7537 Soulcutter Thesis

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"So how many Ascension Points do you have in your account?"

"423 Ascension Points." Ves responded. "That is more than enough to buy one or two expensive enlightenment fruits, or half-a-dozen cheaper ones. I would vastly prefer to do the former, though. There is nothing bad about the more modestly-priced fruits, but the knowledge they contain is often narrow and specialized, making it harder to apply them outside of their ideal conditions."

This was one of the broad differences between cheaper and more expensive enlightenment fruits.

The cheaper ones generally tended to provide very specific solutions, while the expensive fruits contained complete systematic theoretical frameworks.

That was not to say that the differences were absolute. The former often came with just enough of a theoretical foundation to support the bare minimum of applications, but the latter did this so much better that it was absurd to make this comparison.

The ongoing crisis related to the deathborn definitely required a lot more out-of-the-box thinking and problem-solving than usual.

No immediate solution existed at this time, which meant that Ves and the others had to dig deeper in order to develop an original design application from the ground up. A single expensive enlightenment fruit that contained a wealth of theoretical knowledge had a much higher chance of facilitating this approach!

However, the selection of enlightenment fruit became all the more crucial because of this very same reason.

The System did not accept any refunds. If they redeemed the wrong fruit, then Ves would end up with a huge amount of knowledge that may be useful in many cases, but just so happened to offer nothing relevant to the major crisis on his hands!

At least when it came to the cheaper fruits, Ves could take a few risks and only waste a few dozen of AP without feeling as if he had doomed his forces.

Fortunately, Ves and the other Larkinson mech designers had spent so many days inside the System Space that they had long mulled over all of the possibilities.

Each of them had developed their own ideas and preferences. They occasionally shared their thoughts with each other and refined their ideas a little further over time.

Now, the time had come to consider each viable proposal and determine which one they should develop to the fullest.

As the four mech designers left the Workshop of Creation and walked down until they reached the plateau that hosted the Tree of Possibilities, each of them momentarily looked up at the shiny and colorful fruits dangling from the branches.

"So who wants to go first?" Ves asked. "I have my own favorites, but I'd like to hear your proposals first before I present my own."

A few seconds of silence ensued before Ketis impatiently broke the ice.

"Fine. I'll go first since the rest of you are too afraid to do so." She said before she activated a projection that displayed a description of one of the many mid-priced enlightenment fruits available at the moment.

"As you already know, I haven't been able to come up with as many ideas as the rest of you. I am not physically present in your combined fleet, and the only mech and mech pilot I care about over there is the First Sword and Saint Dise. Almost all of the proposals I came up with over the past few months are centered around upgrading my ace mech. Of all of them, I had to cut down quite a number of them because the modifications that I want to make to the First Sword cannot be done by Ves or other mech designers. I have tried my best to select the best possible choice out of the ones that still remain viable."

The other three Larkinson mech designers briefly read the description of this particular enlightenment fruit.

They had already done so multiple times in the past, but it was not a bad idea to refresh their memories and think how it could tie into Ketis' proposal.

[Soulcutter Thesis]

Price: 350 Ascension Points

Imparts the contents of a seminal tome written by a once-renowned swordsman and executioner. The Soulcutter Techniques that he has self-developed over the course of his long life excels at killing almost every being imaginable no matter their shape or species.

Higher mastery of the Soulcutter Techniques does not only enable the wielder to cut the soul of living beings, but also objects and abstract concepts that are not traditionally considered alive. This is because the writer of the Soulcutter Thesis believes that everything in this universe has a soul.

This enlightenment fruit imparts moderate mastery of the Soulcutter Thesis, allowing the consumer to execute the core techniques with a sword or any bladed weapon at varying degrees of effectiveness.

In addition, the enlightenment fruit also imparts a comprehensive collection of artifact designs and supporting theories to enable the forging of specialized weapons that can augment the effectiveness of the Soulcutter Techniques.

Requirements: Strength must be higher than 3.0. Dexterity must be higher than 3.4. Endurance must be higher than 1.8. Spirituality must be higher than 17.

"So your core proposal is to upgrade the First Sword Mark III and make her a lot more suitable to fight against the deathborn?" Gloriana skeptically asked. "You know that the upcoming battle will have an enormous scope. Just upgrading a single piece on the board might not produce as much change as we wished. The choice of which ace mech to upgrade becomes especially important."

"That is exactly why I have chosen to put forward this specific proposal." Ketis stood her ground. "The deathborn are virtually inexhaustible in the Hypeh-Tekas System. It is impossible to eliminate them through conventional means. I understand that your forces plan to destroy the site where they are being produced in large quantities, but that only cuts off the replenishment rate. It does not necessarily eliminate the billions of deathborn that have already been brought into existence. Yet what makes them especially formidable is not just their numbers, but also their organization. The former is a mob, but the latter is an army. You cannot defeat the deathborn when they are highly organized. In my opinion, the only way to defeat this threat is to eliminate the core node that makes it all possible. I am convinced that out of all of the fruits, The Soulcutter Thesis can best increase Saint Dise and her battle partner's odds of decapitating the deathborn sovereign."

Everyone remained silent for a few seconds. They had all considered the idea of augmenting Saint Dise in order to turn her into a more effective killer of the deathborn.

Each of them possessed their own evaluations.

"I think this proposal has real merit." Alexa politely commented. "It is not as expansive as other proposals, but it is simpler and relatively easier to execute. It will enable not just one, but two of our high-level combatants to cut the Gordian Knot. Ves' giant form will be able to execute the so-called Soulcutter Techniques on the battlefield with the artificial mastery bestowed by the enlightenment fruit. Saint Dise will have to learn them from the beginning after she has received the essential texts, but I have every reason to believe that she will be a fast learner given her high rank. Both Dise and Ves can join forces and eliminate the deathborn leader much sooner than normal, thereby causing much of the deathborn to degenerate into feral rabble that only act upon their instincts."

Ketis grinned. "Exactly! While I would have preferred to ingest this fruit myself, I do not think it is a bad idea for Ves to do so instead. Now that he or rather his 'Dark Apostle' alter ego has become a legitimate combatant, he sorely needs to make up for his lack of serious combat training."

"I already ingested a few enlightenment fruits that imparted combat skills to me already, you know." Ves complained. "I have become pretty decent at wielding spears."

"I know, but you are still lacking in many ways. It is impossible to transform you into a truly qualified warrior like myself, so the next-best solution is to rely on quantity and fill up the gaps as best as possible. The Soulcutter Thesis will complement you nicely. Not only will you be able to kill intangible beings like the deathborn more effectively, but you will also gain a large amount of

knowledge that enriches your specialization. I am very hopeful that this costly enlightenment fruit will enable you to design mechs that can kill the deathborn more effectively in the future."

He did not disagree with the swordmaster's assessment. The Soulcutter Thesis truly held this promise. Even if it did not contain the wealth of knowledge of a more extravagant choice like the Divine Blacksmith Record, it should not be too bad in terms of breadth and depth.

If Ves felt a little more selfish, he would have picked this fruit as well.

After all, it not only boosted his ability to design more effective mechs, but also provided a very direct enhancement to his personal combat capabilities!

The fact that Ves had become a champion in his own right due to the emergence of the Dark Apostle gave him an excuse to partake in fruits like these.

Yet whenever he thought about doing so, he also felt guilty.

A mech designer should not care so much about enhancing his own fighting capabilities. The whole point of his profession was to design mechs for true soldiers and warriors so that they could do all of the fighting on everyone's behalf.

Taking to the field himself when there were still plenty of good mech pilots available felt like betraying your own principles.

Ves could only convince himself to seriously let this proposal remain in contention because Ketis had already shown that the rules did not always apply to every situation.

She had made this work.

She had proven to everyone that it was possible to pursue a career in both mech design and swordsmanship at the same time!

Even if she had to rely on an unconventional method like transforming her companion spirit into a vessel of extraordinary willpower, it was not as if Ves relied on his own extensive bag of tricks to turn the impossible into reality.

The thought of letting the Dark Apostle step onto the battlefield and cut the deathborn like harvesting wheat sounded very attractive to him, but was this truly the right way to spend 375 Ascension Points?

"Letting me learn new combat techniques is not necessary in the current situation." Ves shook his head in doubt. "I can already kill the deathborn with my existing capabilities, though not as effectively as I wish. What truly matters is killing the highest-ranking deathborn leader. I am not sure whether I am qualified to participate in this challenge. Choosing the Soulcutter Thesis will essentially place all of the burden of winning the upcoming battle onto Saint Dise. We will all be making a big bet on whether she can study and master the Soulcutting Techniques fast enough to give her a powerful advantage against the enemy powerhouse."

There was no way to foresee how this would unfold. They knew little about the Soulcutter Thesis, and they still possessed a shallow understanding of the deathborn and their presumed leader.

Who knew whether he possessed the means to defend against the Soulcutter Techniques?

Ketis remained firm on this subject. "The huge number of low-ranking deathborn are not our true enemies. It is their leader that truly makes them dangerous. If your suspicion that he is a powerful figure in Messier 87 that has somehow projected a small part of his consciousness to the Red Ocean turns out to be true, then he has become all the more dangerous to every living being in our dwarf galaxy. Who knows what kind of strange and advanced knowledge and techniques he will employ. Those 'death energy formations' may just be the least of what he is able to reproduce."