

The Mech 5051

Chapter 5051 Leveraging The Environment

"Mrow?"

Ves wanted to study Mana's current condition more extensively to understand how she was able to harmonize with the environment.

It was rather strange. Mana's ability to resonate with the environment shared a modest resemblance to Director Pesca Aduc's state when he last paid a visit to the T Institute.

In both cases, the subject in question absorbed the surrounding ambient spirituality energy while at the same time imposing changes to the environment that caused it to become aligned with their own spiritual attributes!

There were major differences between the two. Director Pesca Aduc mainly relied on a mystical technique that she had learned from the Annals of Terra Vita.

It was only after the Aduc Family became exposed to E energy radiation that this previously subtle and highly abstruse technique became a lot more effective!

Ves always wanted to study it and figure out how it enabled a human to interact with E energy radiation in a productive manner, but he always became distracted by other affairs.

It was not until his daughter showed off a similar capability that he raised the priority on this study!

Blinky intruded into Mana's domain and spun around the white kitten's form. The former's keen spiritual sensitivity granted him a good overview of how the smaller companion spirit circulated the energies within her intangible form.

Ves figured out that his daughter was indeed doing this all instinctively. Somehow, Mana had grown to a point where she generated natural patterns that produced a number of obvious effects when circulating ambient spiritual energy through these channels.

He speculated that Mana essentially exercised her own inherent version of a technique similar to that contained within the Annals of Terra Vita!

Different from Pesca Aduc who mostly absorbed energies attributed towards life and earth, Mana absorbed energies aligned with the element of purity and light!

Ves did not react with too much surprise when he noticed that Mana seamlessly absorbed spiritual energy that closely matched Lufa's domain, but he did not expect Mana to absorb light energy as well!

"That's new." He remarked. "Did Mana recently unlock the power of her eyes, Aurelia?"

His daughter nodded again. "Mana's eyes hurt shortly after the Great Severing. The pain eventually went away after they broke through a barrier somehow. Look at what she can do now!"

As Mana continued to harmonize with her surroundings, her feline eyes started to glow brighter as they drew and excited the surrounding energies.

Slowly but surely, her pair of eyes began to concentrate so much power that they eventually let loose twin light beams that struck a distant vase and broke it in an instant!

"MROW!"

"Aurelia! That is dangerous! At least tell me beforehand before you decide to make your companion spirit launch a deadly attack!"

While Ves admonished his oldest girl for not paying enough attention to safety, he also felt surprised and concerned by what Mana just accomplished.

Somehow, the spiritual kitten managed to bridge the barrier between the immaterial and the material!

Mana directly affected the material realm by relying solely on her spiritual strength and capabilities!

This was normally a capability that was exclusively reserved for expert pilots!

As someone who possessed a high degree of interest in spiritual engineering and how it related to the material realm, Ves quickly interrupted his other design work and utilized all of the threads of his attention on analyzing the current situation.

When he mentally reviewed what he and Blinky just observed, he managed to take note of two key variables.

First, Mana was able to concentrate a lot of spiritual energy with the help of her exceptional eyes.

Second, the ambient spiritual energy contributed a lot to the power of the attack by allowing itself to get shaped and manipulated.

If neither of these two variables were in place, Ves did not think it was possible for Mana to launch a real light beam attack without access to an actual luminar crystal weapon!

This short but shocking demonstration of power reminded Ves of how closely the ancient luminar race incorporated spirituality in their own crystal technologies.

Ves had worked so much with luminar crystals that he figured out that they could interact with spiritual energy in much more complex ways.

He just never figured out anything more than a few shallow tricks as there simply wasn't enough spiritual energy to go around.

Messier 87 changed the entire game. When Ves used his implant to perfectly recall the entire sequence of Mana gathering energy before firing a pair of light beams that were reinforced by E energy radiation, he felt as if he touched upon a new but incredibly useful phenomenon!

"The key is trying to form a domain by co-opting the surrounding ambient spiritual energy." He concluded.

Different from high-ranking mech pilots who essentially shoved normal reality aside and imposed their own distorted realities by force, Mana was different.

If ace pilots such as Patriarch Reginald Cross went to war against his own surroundings and conquered it with the power of his strong willpower, Mana put on a nice act and tried to play nice with the most compatible elements of the ambient spiritual energy within her reach.

Aurelia's companion spirit essentially gained control over the environment through a combination of assimilation and diplomacy!

Mana attracted a lot of light and purity-attributed energies towards her, allowing her to form an energy field which she easily managed to turn into her pseudo-domain through an inherent means!

"Interesting!"

Ves continued to hug and rub Aurelia's head to calm her down and show her that he was not too upset at her actions.

"Mrow."

Ves became curious whether he could replicate a similar outcome, so he used Blinky to resonate and harmonize with his surroundings.

The Star Cat flew further away in order to prevent anyone else from getting caught in any potential accidents.

Though it was not wise for Ves to spontaneously conduct an experiment when his own daughter was still sitting on his lap, he was too caught up by his desire for answers to restrain himself!

It was hard. Blinky might be a companion spirit just like Mana, but he was set up in a substantially different fashion!

Whereas Mana started out as a seed and organically grew stronger and more elaborate as Aurelia aged, Blinky started out with a completely mature template.

Blinky was more of an artificial life form while Mana was more of a natural entity.

While one was not necessarily better than the other, the two different types possessed different characteristics.

For example, Blinky started out strong and would continue to strengthen his core competences, but it was difficult for him to develop and evolve different capabilities out of his existing ability set due to his rigidity.

Mana on the other hand remained highly malleable and adaptable for a long time until she finally reached a certain stage of maturity.

Even then, her adaptability would remain relatively high as she was already accustomed to changes due to growth.

What these differences meant was that a more natural and organic companion spirit such as Mana adapted a lot faster to the changes induced by Messier 87!

If Aurelia hadn't been so eager to show off her latest tricks, then Ves might not have learned about these new possibilities until months or years later!

He smiled and lovingly bent his head to kiss Aurelia's cheeks.

"Pa-pa~! I love you-"

"Hehehe. I love you too, my baby girl." He said before his expression turned a little more serious.

"You have truly helped me out in my work by showing what Mana can do. However, please take

safety into account the next time you demonstrate a new capability, alright? That vase you destroyed probably isn't important, but what if you hit your sister or your brother?"

"Nothing would happen, papa. They both have shield generators, just like me." Aurelia innocently reminded her father.

"That is no excuse to do anything dangerous in their vicinity! Accidents can always happen, Aurelia. Next time you want to try out anything cool, you need to treat it as a scientific experiment. I know you're too young to become a scientist, but you need to follow all of the ascribed safety rules for your safety and everyone else's. At the very least, you should never try out anything new and untested outside of a secure and controlled environment like a laboratory chamber."

His daughter's slender arm shot up and pointed at Blinky who was currently doing a messy job at harmonizing with the environment.

"What is that then, papa?" Aurelia innocently and maybe mischievously asked.

"Ehh... I am special." Ves hastily replied. "I am a Senior Mech Designer, you know? I'm really strong. I've also worked with this kind of stuff for decades. I know what I am doing at the very least. Please wait until you have completed your studies and obtained a science or engineering degree before commencing your own experiments."

As he continued to speak nonsense to his oldest daughter, Blinky persisted in his efforts in imitating Mana's feat.

Though Blinky did not possess an affinity for light or purity, he was highly in tune with life-attributed spiritual energy.

This was a bit of an issue as the mixture of elements in the surrounding air was not even.

It varied from location and location and Ves suspected that these differences became a lot more extreme within M87 proper.

In any case, the element of life was a little sparse this far away from M87's presumably rich biodiversity.

This meant that Blinky had to work a little harder to attract life energy and increase its concentration in his surroundings.

Once he completed this step, Blinky next needed to take advantage of the favorable environment by turning it into his domain of sorts.

This was a lot more difficult as Blinky never really interacted with spiritual energy in this fashion.

Nonetheless, spiritual energy was his bread and butter, so he quickly figured out the knacks by copying his daughter's homework.

The surrounding environment became more charged and started to expand Blinky's presence.

Ves actually found this state to be a bit similar to his Living Workshop method, but the difference was that he no longer tried to impose his presence on a room by relying on brute force.

Instead, Blinky was now able to produce a comparable if somewhat weaker result by letting the life energy in the environment do the heavy lifting!

It reminded Ves of piloting a mech, but in a more insubstantial manner.

Mech pilots were incredibly weak organisms when they were on their own. They would tire themselves out if they attempted to lift a solid metal block as large as their own bodies.

However, once they hopped into the cockpit of a mech and interfaced with it, lifting the same metal block became a lot easier by borrowing the power of a giant machine!

What Mana did a few minutes ago was roughly similar. She 'interfaced' with the ambient spiritual energy and effectively drew out its latent potential to produce a result that the companion spirit could never accomplish by relying on her own power!

Ves' eyes lit up as he thought about how he could take advantage of this phenomenon to empower his own mech designs.

He had been thinking about trying to leverage the advantages of exotic radiation to power up his upcoming mech designs. Many mech designers had been thinking about the same goal as it had become the hottest trend in the mech industry at the moment.

A host of new ideas entered his mind. He spontaneously came up with many different possibilities on how he could use this phenomenon to empower all of his mech designs.

"The advantage of my mechs is that they are all alive." He reminded himself. "If that is the case, what is stopping them from learning a similar technique?"

Ves quickly settled his daughter before placing her on the couch. He quickly rose up on his feet and briskly made his way to the exit.

He needed to return to his lab in order to conduct more comprehensive experiments!

Chapter 5052 A Little Push

Ves originally intended to head down to his workshop, but he changed his mind and detoured to the nearest mech stables.

He examined a few of the Transcendent Punishers that were assigned to function as bunker mechs in combat scenarios.

These Transcendent Punishers were all relatively old and had been upgraded to the Mark II version of their design in the last few years.

Although they were still far from becoming third order living mechs, these heavy stalwarts developed just enough to acquire greater autonomy and develop more defined personalities.

On their own, the Transcendent Punishers were not doing anything special. Most living mechs did not have a lot of distractions when they were not being actively piloted.

The only ones that received additional privileges were third order living mechs. They not only kept in touch with each other through the MSTs and other channels, but could also interact more directly with the Larkinsons by remotely controlling their own cat avatars.

Anyway, Ves wanted to see whether the living heavy artillery mechs had begun to interact with E energy radiation in new and interesting ways.

"Hm, nothing."

Ves did not observe anything different up to this point. The Transcendent Punishers were slowly and passively absorbing the traces of energies that aligned with Ylvaine.

The design spirit did not play an active role in this process, but the presence of his glow made it a lot easier for the living mechs to filter out and absorb compatible elements.

"Interesting."

This was the extent of their interaction with the environment. Ves became slightly disappointed that his living mechs had not yet learned any other tricks, but perhaps he was examining the wrong machines.

"I need to visit a more powerful living mech."

Ves left the current compartment and moved to another one which currently held one of the oldest and special living mechs that he had created over the years.

Ever since he updated the Quint by applying a combination of both common and custom Ascension Paths to the living mech based on his own self-evolved capabilities, he became a lot easier to quantify his progress.

Compared to the Phobos that only attained 2 Ascension Runes due to the special circumstances of his creation, the Quint boasted 7 Ascension Runes!

These Runes fell under two Ascension Paths.

The Path of the Larkinson was the common Ascension Path that Ves had designed for the Golden Cat.

As the name suggested, this Path centered completely around improving and augmenting the mech's connection to the Golden Cat and the Larkinson Clan.

It might not be the most powerful or flashy Ascension Path, but it granted the Quint a better ability to track every Larkinson and increased his ability to resonate with a Larkinson mech pilot.

The second Ascension Path was based on the Quint's second identity as a design spirit, though he was relatively underutilized in this capacity.

The seven Ascension Runes corresponding to the Path of the Machine Mentor did not necessarily grant the Quint any new abilities, but they systematically solidified and strengthened his own improvised and evolved capabilities.

For example, the Path enabled the Quint to form a much stronger man-machine connection with his mech pilot, allowed the living mech to display the copied memories of his past pilots into the mind of his current one and enable him to override the pilot and take direct control for a short amount of time no matter the circumstances.

Each of these Ascension Runes substantially improved and empowered the Quint in his current roles.

Ves could confidently state that there was no other living mech like his living masterwork mech in existence.

Even if Ves attempted to design and create a combat-ready training mech, he would never be able to produce one as spiritually strong and developed as the Quint!

This was the greatest disadvantage of his design philosophy. His living products could grow into formidable machines that could demonstrate strength and capabilities far beyond what he should be able to output at his current rank, but it took way too much time and nourishment to grow into another Quint, especially if the new machine started off as a second order living mech!

What this meant was that Ves could replicate or mass produce mechs that were similar to the current Quint.

He would truly hate it if the Quint ever befell an accident and died. The loss to the Larkinson Clan would be incalculable even if the living mech was somehow able to transition into a pure design spirit like Qilanxo had once accomplished.

"Hello, Quint."

The three eyes of the highly modified Bright Warrior mech flashed to life. "PROGENITOR. YOU USUALLY DO NOT BOTHER TO VISIT ME. THERE ARE MANY OTHER STRONGER AND MORE EXCITING LIVING MECHS FOR YOU TO PLAY WITH. SHOULDN'T YOU BE VISITING THE BASTION OR THE PHOBOS?"

"I could, but they aren't as old and as developed as you." Ves spoke to his creation. "I need your help with research that has a high influence on the power of my future mech designs. If my experiments with you produce the outcomes that I desire, then I will be able to truly turn my new mech ecosystem into a strong advantage for our clan!"

That stirred the Quint's interest. The living mech cared just as much about the Larkinson Clan considering that his identity was defined by it from the start.

"WHAT IS IT THAT YOU REQUIRE?"

"I am sure you have heard all about exotic radiation." Ves said. "E energy radiation is the spiritual energy that is constantly leaking from M87 and being spread into the surrounding galactic environment. Considering that living mechs such as yourselves are at least partially energy-based life forms, you should have been able to absorb a part of the spiritual energy that is floating nearby, correct?"

"THAT IS TRUE, BUT THERE IS NOT THAT MUCH IN THE ENVIRONMENT THAT IS ACTUALLY USEFUL TO ME." The Quint responded. "THE GOLDEN CAT IS IN THE SAME POSITION. WE STILL RELY ON OUR OLD METHODS TO GROW AND DEVELOP OURSELVES. WE PREFER IT THAT WAY, ACTUALLY. WE LIVE AND DIE BY THE LARKINSON CLAN."

Ves felt touched by the Quint's commitment, but that did not help his current purpose.

"I need you to try and actively absorb the stuff in the air that you can take in. You don't need to integrate all of the ambient spiritual energy into your spiritual foundation. It is already enough if you circulate it inside of yourself."

"HOW?"

"Uh, that's what I am attempting to figure out. Let's work together."

Ves essentially tried to teach the Quint the methods that Mana naturally employed without much thought.

Though the circumstances were drastically different, the Quint possessed a strong spirit and was quite clever compared to other living mechs.

Soon enough, the living mech began to absorb and circulate compatible ambient spiritual energy inside himself.

The attraction force drew in more spiritual energy with attributes related to kinship in the immediate surroundings.

"Don't limit yourself to sucking in the ambient spiritual energy." Ves told the living mech. "That will only stuff you to the point where you will erupt. Try and gently disperse the ambient energies back into the environment, preferably after it has circulated inside you for a time. If my guess is right, this will allow you to extend your presence and awareness in your immediate area."

The Quint did as instructed. He no longer acted like a weak vacuum for spiritual energy, but released his internal pressure by slowly throwing out what he had absorbed.

It was like the living mech was farting out the excess energies, but he was doing it all around his physical form.

"THIS FEELS MORE COMFORTABLE."

When the ambient spiritual energy came into contact with the Quint for a time, it changed in subtle ways as it went back outside.

This eventually caused the Quint to gain extra awareness.

"Can you feel your connection to the environment growing stronger?"

"I... UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU MEAN. THIS IS... NEW. IT IS SIMILAR TO THOSE DOMAINS THAT MAKE ACE MECHS SO STRONG, BUT IT IS MUCH... WEAKER."

If a genuine Saint Kingdom was like a first-rate superstate, then the rudimentary domain generated by the Quint was comparable to a small and pathetic fourth-rate 'state'!

Several minutes passed by as the Quint adjusted his technique and slowly improved the way he interacted with the environment.

One of the factors that affected the Quint's ability to harmonize with his immediate surroundings was how long the absorbed spiritual energy circulated inside the living mech and how strongly he imprinted himself on it. The foreign energy also imposed a certain burden to the spiritual foundation, which meant that there was an element of risk involved.

However, the Quint only stuck to a rudimentary circulation pattern that was not comparable to that of Mana. The results were not impressive, but the advantage was that the process was a lot more foolproof.

It took a bit of time for the Quint to alter the immediate area around his form to the extent that he was finally able to exert greater control in this limited sphere!

"NOW WHAT?"

"Hm. Let me think for a second." Ves said.

He pulled out his small Hammer of Melody from his toolbelt and gently placed it onto the deck right in front of the massive feet of the Quint.

"Don't move your physical frame. Stay still. Use your control over the environment to push this little hammer in my direction. Can you do that, Quint?"

"I... WILL TRY."

Ten minutes passed by as the Quint fumbled around. Unlike Mana whose eyes activated with an inherent ability derived from the Illustrious One, the living masterwork mech had to start from scratch because this did not fall within his existing purpose or functions.

Despite all of the failures, Ves remained patient and continued to stand in place as he continued to observe the Quint with his spiritual senses.

The third order living mech demonstrated his capacity for thought, intelligence and problem solving as he methodically ruled out steps that did not work and explored the ones that showed slightly more positive reactions.

Through trial and error, the Quint slowly managed to find a way to strengthen his awareness in the space in front of him and somehow stir the energies there to act according to his intentions.

The Hammer of Melody shook a bit before it shifted less than a single millimeter away from the Quint.

Now that the living mech found the correct method, he immediately sought to optimize and expand upon it further!

The ambient spiritual energy around the older masterwork mech spun in a stronger vortex as he sought to leverage more energy and generate a stronger physical push!

Skrrrt!

The hammer made a scratching noise as it slowly and jerkily began to drag across the deck!

An invisible hand kept pushing it forward and forward until it finally bumped onto the tip of Ves' mechanical left foot!

Ting!

"That's enough." Ves spoke as he bent down and retrieved the Hammer of Melody. "Good job, Quint. You have shown exactly what I wanted to see. The data that I have gathered from this little session is extremely useful to me. I will be conducting follow-up research based on what you have demonstrated. In the meantime, I suggest you continue to play around with the ambient spiritual energy."

The Quint expressed obvious doubt and skepticism. "IS THIS TRULY USEFUL? I AM ALREADY EXHAUSTED AFTER TRYING TO PUSH A SMALL OBJECT A SHORT DISTANCE ACROSS THE DECK. I SEE NO DISCERNABLE COMBAT APPLICATION FOR THIS TRICK."

"That's because this is just the beginning." Ves smirked. "The biggest shortcoming is that nothing about you is designed to interact with E energy radiation. This will undoubtedly change once I design the right parts and apply the right modifications to your mech frame and spiritual foundation. I need to conduct further research, but I can already tell you that if I am able to succeed, living mechs such as yourself will acquire a much greater meaning in the future."

Chapter 5053 The Eminence Of Torment

The projection of a woman dressed in a black uniform stood in front of a gathering of leaders and military officers.

She confidently described a summary of the findings that the Black Cats along with other friendly departments had managed to uncover after processing the Intelligence gathered from the recently defeated wheednar raiding fleet.

"This Is the leading alien figure that is in charge of the alien raiding fleets that are currently assaulting much of the human colonies In the Torald Middle Zone."

A projected Image appeared that showed a furred humanoid mammalian individual.

Ves along with other leaders frowned at the appearance of the alien leader.

Unlike most images of high caste orvens, the projected figure looked like he belonged in a hospital rather than a throne!

The orven was over 4 meters tall and towered over his inferior orvens, but he could have become even taller if he did not hunch over his back so much.

The alien figure's fur was in an unhealthy shade of brown, and bore several patches that hinted at his less than healthy state.

One of the most common ways to judge the status of an orven was to look at how much Jewelry he or she adorned himself with. The one in the projected was definitely a notable bigshot due to all of the necklaces, rings, bracers attached to his diseased body!

Most impressive of all was his crown, though it did not look like any human creation. The headdress was made out of purple crystal that had been carved in a jagged and uneven shape.

Despite the poor visual appearance of the orven leader, the figure nonetheless possessed an aura and demeanor that radiated absolute strength and authority.

There was only one way that a high caste orven could possess such an unquestionably superior posture.

"He's a phase lord." Ves stated with great certainty.

After all, he was a phase lord as well of sorts. Organisms that managed to integrate phasewater into their bodies acquired special characteristics that were quite easy to notice because of that reason.

Phasewater was an inherently powerful exotic that constantly warped the fabric space around it, so the body tissue of any organic creature had to undergo special transformations in order to resist these lethal effects.

Due to adapting ritual derived from orven methods, his current state also shared a moderate resemblance to that of other orven phaselords.

The strangest part was that the orven phase lord presented by Calabast clearly looked a lot worse than the images of other high caste orvens.

The director of the Black Cats soon explained why this was the case.

"From the intelligence that we have gathered from interrogating surviving orven officers and decrypting the intact databases on the orven battleship, the alien's full name is Urenqin-YuJmain-Phuuzrin-Ielina-Khalakos-Renzian-Maiya-Tus-Vilanwani-Kata. However, only the orvens themselves can fluently recite this name. Other species such as the wheednar have taken to calling him the 'Eminence of Torment' or similar in their own native languages."

"Let me guess." General Herman Foraine of the Adelaide Third Fleet spoke up. "The phase lord is called this way because he likes to torture others for fun."

Calabast slightly shook her head. "The status of the Eminence of Torment is fairly awkward in orven society. The reason for that is because his ascension to 'godhood' has only partially succeeded."

Partially succeeded? What did that mean?

"To all low caste orvens, the Eminence of Torment is a god who can wield the power of space with great power. His abnormally sized right arm is particularly notorious for being able to break through all defenses with great force. However, only a small group of higher orven officers are aware of the greater truth, and that is that the phase lord that they are obligated to work for is a failure of a phase lord. The native god may have survived the transformation through luck and preparation, but his severely injured state has broken his future. He cannot increase the concentration of phasewater in his blood because the amount he already has is constantly damaging his body from the inside."

That provoked a number of reactions from the audience. Many leaders saw an opportunity to take down a phase lord with relative ease.

A defective phase lord was still a phase lord! Even if he was of the lesser variety of a native god, the Red CFA was still obliged to honor the bounty and award the Golden Skull Alliance with a Warship Token after killing the Eminence of Torment!

Ves' eyes grew sharper as he tried to evaluate the combat effectiveness of this orven phase lord.

The Golden Skull Alliance only came across one phase lord so far. The Trampier of Stars was a fearsome nunser god whose trampling ability posed a huge threat to starships, cities and other large constructs.

However, Ves did not get the sense that the Trampier of Stars excelled at dueling relatively small but extremely tough opponents such as ace mechs.

He did not know whether Eminence of Torment possessed any abilities that allowed him to put up a better fight against ace mechs. His abnormally thick and misshapen right arm did not look like it was weak!

"How strong is he in combat?" Ves directly asked.

"We are not certain about that." The woman replied. "The natives have an annoying tendency to speak about the supposed divinity and sacredness of their gods. They rarely describe the combat prowess of their phase lords. It doesn't help that they rarely make any moves. They only show off their spatial manipulation abilities on occasion in order to increase the worship of the masses and ensure that they remain obedient."

This was the problem with faith and superstition. The captured aliens that had been interrogated to hell and back did not know any better because their entire cultures had been shaped by the common belief that phase whales and phase lords were all gods!

Calabast began to describe bits of scattered stories and rumors relating to the Eminence of Torment.

"He is feared as well as worshiped among the aliens who serve under him." She spoke. "Since the Eminence is constantly in pain due to the phasewater damaging his veins and his internal organs, his personality has warped to the point where he has become cruel, erratic and violent. He is known as a harsh and demanding taskmaster who does not hesitate to inflict agonizing punishment to those who fall to obey his instructions."

The central projection began to display stylized murals of the Eminence of Torment inflicting pain on other organisms.

A few people had to look away due to the incredible depravity shown by a few of these macabre alien artworks!

Ves began to look more thoughtful as he studied these images. He suppressed his discomfort and mainly studied how the Eminence of Torment was depicted by the artists.

The god always looked larger than life. The artwork did a good job at emphasizing the phase lord's extraordinary status, but the use of dark and shadowy imagery made it seem as if the Eminence of Torment was a dark and unholy divinity!

"God or not, no one likes to work under a harsh and capricious boss." Ves shared his opinion. "I how many aliens or alien fleets does he have at his command? How well is he being protected?"

Calabast grimaced. "We do not have any solid intelligence regarding his security arrangements. The Red Two used to have a habit of conducting deep strikes in order to ambush and behead any known phase lord within their reach. As a response, other phase lords such as the Eminence of Torment have learned to be more elusive. They have either hidden themselves away inside highly secretive pocket spaces or boarded a fleet that is roaming the depths of interstellar space away from any star systems. Either way, finding them is challenging even for the mechers and the fleeters."

That caused the leaders of the Golden Skull Alliance to frown. The Red Two's enthusiasm in killing phase lords forced the natives to adapt in order to preserve their own gods.

"Have you managed to track the Eminence of Torment's whereabouts?" Matriarch Rezzie Boojay asked.

"We currently know that he is traveling the void between interstellar space just across the border of the Torald Middle Zone." Calabast calmly replied. "No one outside of this alien fleet is aware of its coordinates or route. That is all randomly determined by its navigators to ensure the warfleets of the Red Two cannot lay an ambush in advance."

"How is the Eminence of Torment able to communicate with his subordinates when he remains so elusive?" Ves asked.

"He is able to preside over his raiding operation through a combination of means. We know that his fleet is able to transmit messages to distant locations. We also know that his warships have a

tendency to send small vessels to different staging areas in order to pick up supplies, exchange phasewater and transfer personnel."

There were several different staging areas where the alien raiding fleets arrived from afar or returned in order to dump their spoils.

"This is the location of the Ophidia System." Calabast said as the projection changed to show a star map. "The Ophidia System is the nearest alien staging area, but hardly the only one. It is currently frequented by dozens of fleets, though they are rarely present at the same time. In fact, it is quite empty most of the time. As long as we gather more intelligence and prepare specific counters to the various defenses set up by the aliens, it is possible to defeat the defending aliens and plunder whatever phasewater and other valuable goods that have piled out in their warehouses."

This triggered the Interest of the leaders as well. If it turned out that it was too difficult to hunt down the Eminence of Torment, it was not a bad idea to settle for raiding an alien staging area instead!

After all, the Ophidia System was completely static and unmoving. Even if the aliens stationed in this star system received advance warning of an impending human raid, they would never be able to evacuate all of their assets in time!

The people gathered in the virtual conference room briefly discussed the viability of raiding the Ophidia System. Its defenses were fairly powerful but not too elaborate. They could be solved as long as the Golden Skull Alliance took the right steps.

"This staging area doesn't look too Important." General Verle remarked. "Destroying it won't stop the raids on the colonies of the Torald Middle Zone. At most, the attacks will slow down as the alien raiding fleets have to travel further in order to repair and resupply their warships."

Marshal Ariadne Wodin nodded in agreement. "If we truly want to affect the strategic situation in this part of the Red Ocean, then we must find a way to track down the Eminence of Torment and take him down. From what we have learned, not all of the alien raiders are enthused about risking their lives to attack human space. They will likely grow scared and resist their orders with greater enthusiasm once they learn that their god has been slain."

This was one of the reasons why the Red Fleet was so willing to hand out Warship Tokens. The strategic value of killing a phase lord was massive!

The discussion continued after Calabast presented the information that they have learned so far. They argued whether they should raid the Ophidia System or wait for better opportunities.

"I believe it is better to set aside our unrealistic expectations of hunting down the Eminence of Torment and settle for a more attainable goal of attacking the Ophidia System." Master Benedict Cortez shared his opinion. "We know that the aliens have gathered at least hundreds of kilograms of phasewater in this location. As long as we time our attacks correctly, we should be able to claim a sizable batch as our own if we strike before the aliens have managed to ship it away."

The leaders of the Golden Skull Alliance couldn't decide on their next course of action.

Their current strategy was not that impressive at the moment. For now, the expeditionary fleet had settled on Intercepting any nearby alien raiding fleets in order to earn easy sums of MTA merits and bulk salvage.

So long as their scouts diligently scouted the environment and prevented any alien forces from sneaking up without notice, the expeditionary fleet had a good chance of taking down three to five raiding fleets while incurring only minimal losses.

Ves did not necessarily object to doing this for a time. The Larkinson Clan needed a lot of MTA merits to acquire high technologies and gain access to greater services that were necessary to form a small but fully-fledged first-class fleet.

However, what Ves desired even more was phasewater!

Many of his new and upcoming Larkinson mech design projects demanded the acquisition of a huge amount of phasewater!

Without thousands of kilograms of this highly desirable substance, there was no way for the Larkinson Clan to fabricate all of the Storm Swords, Elephant Projects, Transcendent Punisher Mark III's and other transphasic mechs needed to comprehensively upgrade the Larkinson Army!

What he needed was gigantic quantities of phasewater, and the only way of obtaining what he and his clan required was to attack a more important alien target.

Right now, that either meant attacking the Ophidia System or the Eminent of Torment.

The former was a lot easier to accomplish, but it still entailed a relatively tough fought against large quantities of alien assets!

The amount of phasewater that the expeditionary fleet could obtain from this alien staging area would also be limited. Numerous interrogations already revealed that the aliens periodically shipped away all of the truly valuable goods.

No, the real goal that Ves and his clan should be striving for was claiming the Eminence of Torment's bounty!

Not only would the Golden Skullers gain the right to field a genuine warship, but they were bound to harvest much greater quantities of phasewater!

The phase lord's fleet was bound to accumulate a lot of phasewater.

This was because the staging area at the Ophidian System occasionally transferred batches of this vital substance to the Eminence of Torment rather than any important alien strongholds in the rear.

Even if the so-called Torment Fleet did not have a lot of readily available phasewater on hand, the Golden Skull Alliance could always extract it from the phase lord's flesh!

The Eminence of Torment's apparent body was only a condensed version of his true form.

Just like the Trampier of Torment, his real body must be at least as large as a small starship!

Even if the concentration of phasewater in his enormous mass of flesh and blood did not exceed 0.1 percent, that still amounted to a huge quantity of phasewater in absolute terms!

Ves felt pained by the fact that the bodies of the phase whales that the expeditionary fleet defeated in the past ended up in the hands of the Mech Trade Association.

Aberrant or not, any phase whale could easily contain thousands of kilograms of phasewater on account of their substantial mass!

The MTA merits he received for defeating the unclean whales and criminal whales paled in comparison to the profits earned by the mechers.

The Red Two were the greatest scammers in the Red Ocean! No other organizations had become so proficient at robbing people of their spoils and making their victims feel grateful in the process!

Ves narrowed his eyes.

If the Golden Skull Alliance somehow managed to track down and Intercept the Eminence of Torment, he did not believe the Red Two would be able to arrive quickly enough to claim the carcass for themselves.

The rules and regulations surrounding the bounties did not state anything about needing to surrender the entire bodies to the Red Association or the Red Fleet.

This was not always possible as the carcass of a dead phase lord may be too big and heavy to ship back to human space in a short amount of time.

The additional risks and troublesome logistics might also deter a lot of pioneering organizations from putting a lot of effort into hunting down the native gods.

In short, this was a good opportunity to defeat a phase lord and carve up his exceptional body before the Red MTA arrived to steal away the best spoils!

Ves met with Calabast in private in order to ask a few additional questions.

"Do you have any indication of the concentration of phasewater inside's Eminence of Torment body and blood stream?"

"No. That is not the sort of information that mortal aliens should be aware of." Calabast replied.

"We can only draw from a variety of sources that the Eminence of Torment has only barely become a phase lord. He is over 800 standard years old but he has never made any progress due to his injured condition. The other orvan gods hold him in contempt because of this. There are rumors that the reason why the Eminence is assigned to oversee the raids on human space is because he has taken refuge in the Red Cabal. He is hoping that the phase whales will agree to cure his condition in exchange for his service."

That sounded interesting. The Eminence of Torment turned out to be a tragic figure. Ves wondered what exactly happened that caused the alien god to botch his transformation and whether it could be remedied.

I le suspected that the phase whales were just leading the poor fellow on. The Red Cabal ultimately treated him no differently from a slightly more superior form of cannon fodder.

Calabast decided to ask a question of her own at this time.

"Just out of curiosity, is our mutual friend Ylvaine able to track down the Eminence of Torment's coordinates?" She asked. "You have been banking on his predictive capabilities to track down high value targets. Is it possible for your pet prophet to provide us with the phase lord's current coordinates?"

"I'm not sure. Give me a minute."

Ves mentally contacted the Great Prophet for a minute. Once he obtained the answers he needed, he regained his focus but did not look too optimistic.

"Ylvaine is powerful enough to predict the Torment Fleet's current coordinates, but... it is much more difficult to predict its future trajectory. This is not that useful because by the time we reach this location, the alien fleet has already moved far away. We will have to invest a lot of time to make sequential predictions that slowly allow us to close the distance."

"That can take months or years." Calabast replied. "Not only that, but most of our starships are equipped with old-fashioned standard FTL drives. Only warp drives and superdrives are able to travel freely in the large void between stars. Our fleet can only intercept the Torment Fleet with all of the forces that we can load inside the Spirit of Bentheim and a handful of other superdrive-equipped starships."

That was indeed a huge limitation. Human FTL drives were fast, convenient and reliable, but they also had the enormous downside that they worked similar to an ancient rail system in space.

Any starship that entered into FTL travel could only move from one star system to another star system in a fairly direct trajectory.

While there were ways to forcibly interrupt their journey and cause them to return to realspace in the middle of an interstellar void, this was not a practical way to intercept the Torment Fleet!

"The Spirit of Bentheim is equipped with three second-class superdrives in total." Ves noted. "We can dismount two of these drives and install them on a couple of fleet carriers if possible."

"That will still limit us to bringing only a fraction of the amount of mechs at our disposal. Do you really want to risk an attack against a phase lord and his fleet which is no doubt well-equipped with just a couple of thousand mechs?"

"We can concentrate all of our highest performing mechs in our strike force. We both know that the ace mechs will do much of the heavy lifting."

"I might support your idea if we had 7 ace mechs under our control like before, but we don't have enough to give us a comfortable safety margin."

"We might be able to challenge the Torment Fleet with a smaller quantity of mechs as long as our machines have all been upgraded to quasi-first-class standards." Ves proposed.

"That... may be possible, but how long will that take?" Calabast retorted. "Currently, I see only three possible ways we can successfully intercept the Torment Fleet. First, we do as you suggested and

wait until we have built up an elite force of quasi-first-class mechs. Second, we find a way to acquire and install a large quantity of warp drives or superdrives onto our starships. Third, we learn from the example of the Gemini Family and look for additional allies to bolster our numbers. I personally prefer the latter as that is the most expedient option."

She was right. If Ves couldn't wait to complete the first or second options, he could settle for attracting a bunch of like-minded allies in order to gather enough superdrive-equipped carriers to catch up with and attack the Torment Fleet with confidence!

However, that entailed giving up a large proportion of the spoils. Ves did not want to be left with only a fraction of valuable phase lord body parts.

"Let's wait and collect more information." He told his spymaster. "We can still refine our plans and come up with better options. Try and look beyond the obvious targets. There has to be a lot more than just the Ophidia System and the Eminence of Torment. There are lots of occupied star systems beyond Torald's borders."

"We did manage to collect enough intelligence to give us a rough understanding of dozens of occupied star systems that are located deeper into alien space than the Ophidia System, but attacking them is not worthwhile. They are either occupied by relatively minor races that do not offer enough valuable plunder, or they are fortified to the point where our mech forces are bound to suffer serious casualties."

Ves furrowed his brows in thought. "Can you pass on the intelligence of those star systems? I would like to take a look at the information myself. All of those planets that have long been occupied by the indigenous aliens are bound to hold a lot of goods."

He began to entertain ideas about targeting these star systems.

So far, the indigenous aliens were enthusiastically raiding human colonies.

Why not turn the tables against them and raid their own territories in retaliation?

Who said that humanity had to remain on the defense? As long as his expeditionary fleet managed to catch the indigenous aliens off-guard, it should definitely be possible to plunder an established alien planet and get away before any reinforcements arrived!

Of course, Ves could not directly send the expeditionary fleet into alien space on a whim.

The Golden Skull Alliance needed to follow a process and gather enough information to lower the risks of this operation.

Ves clearly understood that a lot of his fleet's past successes had been due to good preparation and developing a thorough understanding of the opposition.

It only took a single mistake to destroy the fleet and cause everyone who took part in an ill-fated adventure to lose their lives!

Even so, Ves did not give up on looking for alternate and more lucrative raiding targets. This was the only way for his clan to quickly obtain lots of phasewater.

Ves smiled at Calabast. "Ylvaine is slowly growing stronger over time. He is gaining more and more nourishment from the environment Just like all of our other design spirits. Who knows. He

may be able to provide us with a prediction that may give us a golden opportunity to overtake the Eminence of Torment. We just need time to grow."

Chapter 5055 Rudimentary Results

Ves set his sights on the Eminence of Torment.

Killing this phase lord would kill multiple birds with a single stone. Not only would he be able to harvest a huge amount of phasewater at once, but he would also be able to get his hands on a Warship Token.

Although it was rather troublesome to determine the ownership of the Warship Token after a successful battle, that was a problem to worry about later. It was always better to secure it first before doing anything else.

He issued a bunch of instructions to Calabast to make sure the Black Cats looked into the right phenomena. He already came up with a couple of interesting plans, but he needed more information to confirm his assumptions.

After dealing with this matter, Ves turned his attention back to his current research.

After discovering that the Quint was able to accelerate his own growth and produce a pseudo-domain, Ves had investigated this phenomenon even further.

The Quint had taken the initiative to share his own discoveries and methods with the other third order living mechs, and soon each machine with a decent amount of intelligence had begun to absorb ambient spiritual energy in different ways!

The methods were all fairly crude and rudimentary, but this was already enough to excite and entertain the machines!

For example, when Ves paid a visit to the Dark Zephyr, he saw that the expert light skirmisher had become surrounded by a weak cloud of energies attributed to wind and shadow!

Anyone who strayed close to the expert mech would definitely feel as if they had entered an invisible storm that disoriented their senses and made them feel as if they had been blown into the wind!

Ves stepped inside the expert mech's faint domain in order to directly experience what it was like.

"This is impressive, Dark Zephyr. How well are you able to push objects within your range?"

Before he knew it, Ves suddenly felt a moderate push against his body. He took a few steps back until the invisible wall weakened in strength.

"THAT IS THE BEST I CAN DO." The living mech's artificial voice boomed in the hall. "MY STRENGTH DOES NOT LIE IN PUSHING ITEMS AROUND. I THINK I CAN USE THE CONTROL THAT I HAVE GAINED OVER MY SURROUNDINGS FOR MUCH MORE USEFUL PURPOSES. I NEED MORE TIME TO FIGURE OUT WHAT I CAN DO TOGETHER WITH TUSA."

Ves nodded. "It's a good idea to work together with Tusa. You are a mech after all. You are made to work together with an expert pilot. Have you tried to see whether he can leverage your domain to produce a good result?"

"WE HAVE, BUT WE DID NOT KNOW WHAT WE WERE DOING. WE WERE WORKING AGAINST EACH OTHER MORE THAN ANYTHING. WE NEED TO LEARN HOW TO COORDINATE OUR ACTIONS FIRST."

"I see. Well, do your best. I hope that you will be able to produce surprising results in our next battle against the aliens. You need to do your best to increase your ability to fight against strong warships. I don't want you to build up too much of a dependence on transphasic grenades."

After Ves learned what he wanted to know from the Dark Zephyr, he returned to his private lab and began to summarize the information that he had gathered up to this point.

"Pure energy-based life forms are able to do this a lot easier than ones that still have corporeal bodies." Ves concluded. "Most design spirits and all companion spirits are able to absorb E energy radiation with relatively few barriers, but those with physical bodies have to deal with extra complications."

In order to test this finding, he tried to do this himself without relying on Blinky.

The air started to grow sharper but also more lively as Ves consciously tried to attract ambient energies related to life and metal.

He was only able to attract it inside his body, but trying to circulate it caused his flesh to feel pained and uncomfortable.

It was like trying to navigate through a maze. Each time the small flow of energy bumped into a dead end or took a wrong turn for whatever reason, it started to produce problems!

He only managed to produce a stable circulation when he followed the same pattern as the Worclaw energy that had always been circulating inside his body.

However, Ves felt like it wasn't doing anything special aside from granting him a bit more control over his immediate environment.

"I am doing something wrong." He guessed.

He tried it out with Blinky as well. It had taken a lot of trial and error to feel out his inherent circulation path, but the effect was rather disappointing.

His biggest problem was that Messier 87 did not propagate any spiritual attributes directly related to mechs.

Sure, the ambient spiritual energy radiating from M87 did produce a lot of related attributes such as various varieties of metals and craftsmanship, but it appeared the aliens did not adopt mechs in large enough quantities to become a fixture in their galaxy!

As a result, E energy radiation contained no direct mech-related energies for Ves to absorb!

"This is a problem." Ves frowned.

While it was possible for red humanity to naturally produce a lot of mech-attributed spiritual energy as their society became more affected by exotic radiation, it would probably take years if not decades for this to happen!

Fortunately, Ves happened to possess a cheat.

"Mrow~"

Blinky no longer tried to absorb ambient spiritual energy directly, but instead devoured it into his stomach and rapidly converted all of the foreign energies into mech and life attributes!

Although Blinky was unable to contain all of these newly produced energies, both Ves and his companion cat began to absorb a part of them and circulate them in their bodies!

Both of their eyes lit up!

"It works!"

The efficiency was still awfully low, but both human and cat could feel that they were making progress!

The only issue was that the growth was purely quantitative in nature. While Ves could guess that he would probably be able to accelerate the growth of his Spirituality a lot faster, he had a strong feeling that he would not be able to depend on this mindless growth to advance to Master Mech Designer.

After fooling around for a few more minutes, Ves ended his little experiment. Although he gathered a bit more data and confirmed a few more theories, he grew dissatisfied at the lack of sophistication.

He felt like he was like a kid who accidentally entered a mech workshop and fumbled around with the production equipment until he barely managed to produce a simple metal cube!

A mech workshop could be used to produce a lot more awesome products than a simple toy!

Instead of continuing to fool around on his own, Ves decided to consult a professional in this area.

Back in the Milky Way, Veronica halted her design work and shut down the desk terminal.

The cyborg cat Jumped off the desk and floated away from the private workplace and began to navigate the corridors of the Throne of Light.

The living divine artifact soon reached an armored hatch that was guarded by a pair of menacing soldiers.

The cat phased through the hatch without getting stopped, as everyone knew that Veronica was allowed to travel anywhere inside the heavy cruiser!

Veronica emerged in a compartment that looked like a cross between the interior of a traditional wooden temple and a carefully arranged garden.

Incense burned from the walls while plants and flowers flourished in the natural environment.

Insects crawled between the bushes while small birds chirped at each other.

Water flowed from a tiny river while colorful fish swam beneath the surface.

It all gave Ves a strong sense of life and vitality in a different variety than he was used to working with as a mech designer.

While Ves attempted to combine life with mechs, his mother apparently stuck a lot closer to nature.

The contrast was interesting and reminded Ves that there were many different varieties and interpretations of life.

The cyborg cat continued to float forward until she reached the center of the compartment.

A single woman that naturally glowed with power was seated in a lotus position. Her dark robe and lustrous jewels enhanced her gravitas and imparted her with a touch of regality that made it impossible for anyone to regard themselves as her equal.

Even Ves felt oppressed by the resurrected woman due to the enormous differences between their life states!

Nonetheless, that did not stop him from behaving in a casual manner. Goddess or not, Cynthia was still his mother!

"Ves." Cynthia spoke as she opened her eyes and suppressed the aura that was leaking out of her body. "Or is it Veronica?"

The cat cutely shrugged as she fell onto her lap. "It's your choice. I don't really care. A part of me regrets choosing to turn this avatar into a female."

"I think it is good for you to widen your perspective and vary your life experiences." The mother said as she began to stroke Veronica's back. "We grow stronger and wiser by exposing ourselves to different events. I think you understand this better than most people in both galaxies."

Veronica lifted her head in pride. "That's right, hehe."

"So why have you come, my child?"

"I think I am ready to receive a lesson about what you know about the methods of the Five Scrolls Compact." The cat spoke in a more serious tone. "Back in the other galaxy, I have made a number of interesting discoveries related to the E energy radiation produced by Messier 87."

The cat avatar proceeded to give Cynthia a short summary of observations and discoveries.

As Veronica continued to explain her fascinating research, her mother smiled in an Indulgent manner.

"You have done a good job at making these discoveries." Cynthia lovingly said as the cat finished speaking. "Your findings may be rudimentary, but you have managed to obtain them through your own efforts. That is important. Far too many people have grown lazy and lost their ability to see through the essence of different phenomena because they are accustomed to learning the knowledge generated by their predecessors."

He understood what she meant. Ves had always been taught that rote learning alone did not make for a good mech designer. Scientists and engineers needed to use their imagination to step outside of the box of established theories in order to create truly new works.

"Myaow. While I do not necessarily object to continuing my own research in the Red Ocean, I am in a bit of a hurry, mother. My clan and I are facing a lot of pressure and challenges due to the Great Severing. Can you teach me what I should know so that I can skip years of trial and error? I need to quickly find a way to make my mechs stronger so that my forces are better equipped to defeat powerful opponents."

His mother slightly frowned. She did not prefer for his son to learn too much from her. He would fare better in the long-run if he created his own paradigms and formed his own theories.

However, she already noticed that Ves had begun to incorporate select pieces of knowledge related to the Five Scrolls Compact.

She had a good idea where he acquired this forbidden knowledge.

Instead of allowing her son to fool around and play with forces beyond his greater understanding, it may be more prudent to give him a few basic lessons so that he wouldn't be so ignorant anymore!

A small sigh escaped from her divine lips. "Very well, my child. I will start by giving you an overview of what you have been trying to do. I will also give you a gift at the end of my lesson if you have been good."

The mention of a present instantly stoked Veronica's enthusiasm! Her tail already began to swing around at a higher frequency!

"What are you going to teach me today, mother?"

"The basic theory of cultivation." The powerful mother replied.

Chapter 5056 Purpose Of Cultivation

The Lady of the Night continued to sit in the middle other meditation room while she gently held Veronica on her lap.

Though the resurrected woman did not like it that her child had chosen to clad her cat form with metal, she at least managed to do a decent job of making her exterior feel warm and filled with life.

Veronica almost squinted and purred. Her silvery tail swished with contentment as she enjoyed a moment that she had never been able to experience for a long time.

No matter how many setbacks and difficulties Ves experienced in the past, what mattered the most was that her mother had returned to life.

That was worth almost everything.

Cultivation..." Her mother's ethereal and slightly echoing voice spoke. "Cultivation is a large and all-encompassing subject. I can treat you like a novice and give you a shallow and simplified description of its meaning, but you are not a child anymore. You are a Senior Mech Designer, and more besides. You have already touched the greater truths of our universe. I believe it is more appropriate to give you a more general and truthful overview from my own perspective. It is a story that not many leaders from the Five Scrolls Compact and related organizations want people to know. This is because the truth pierces through a great number of falsehoods that serve as their foundation."

That sounded... interesting. Veronica grew more and more eager to know what her mother had learned through her own lifetime.

"What is cultivation, exactly?" The cyborg cat asked.

"Good question. I think the clearest way to understand the answer is to become aware of the goals that people pursue when they engage in cultivation. What is the goal and meaning of cultivation?"

"To become more powerful." Veronica immediately replied.

Cynthia smiled and scratched the cat behind the ears. "Not quite, my dear. It is an important goal, but only serves to complement the main purpose. You see, what cultivators yearn the most is to live forever. That is an overwhelming desire of all humans."

"Immortal." Veronica uttered the word. "Those Compact cultists often use this word. You as well. What's up with that? Have you truly become immortal now that you have reached your current state of existence?"

No." Cynthia frankly admitted as she continued to stroke Veronica's back. "This is one truth that many people at the top do not wish to share to the masses. The real truth is that I am still far from becoming inextinguishable. I can still be killed, and I must still endure periodic challenges to prove that I deserve to continue living. I am only functionally immortal. My physical body does not age and is no longer vulnerable to common ailments that beset normal humans. I can also resist much stronger attacks and prepare more life-saving measures."

Ves grew disappointed with her answer. It turned out that despite proclaiming herself to be a so-called 'immortal god', she could still lose her life!

She lied!

"The System taught me that there exists a post-divinity state that people can reach. Are you one of these 'True Gods', mother?"

Cynthia nodded. "I am, although there are many different terms for this level of existence. There are many methods to become a True God, and different inheritances and traditions interpret it differently. No matter what, everyone who becomes a True God has become entirely different from before. AH pre-divinity existences are ants in front of a single True God. At the very least, that was supposed to be the case."

"...What do you mean by that, mother?"

"You will understand later." She said. "Back to the topic at hand, when you engage in anything that falls under the category of cultivation, always remind yourself that the ultimate goal is to become undying and inextinguishable."

"Has anyone managed to reach this ultimate state of existence?"

Cynthia shook her head. "I have heard myths and legends, but.. I have not seen anyone who has succeeded. There are more powerful True Gods that can still be slain by getting struck with a strong enough attack. So long as this remains possible, even the strongest cultivators are ultimately flawed."

"I see." Veronica frowned as she thought about this matter. "I don't think it is a good idea to solely focus on becoming immortal when you are still as weak as a chicken. Is this why the pursuit of power has become such an obsession to all of those delusional Compact cultists and alien gods?"

"That is true. Power may be a means to an end, but it has become a necessity due to the countless dangers that cultivators must endure in order to survive their Journey to ascension. To understand why cultivation is always accompanied with peril, you must understand what it takes to become immortal. What is the resource that anyone must use in order to transcend their mortality?"

"Spiritual energy." Ves replied. "Though I have heard you and other people use different terms."

"Most of the inheritances that I am knowledgeable in tend to call it qi, mana or the power of heaven and earth." The mother explained. "These words do not always translate well to modern human standard language as they are filled with deeper meanings in the languages they originate from. Cultivation is an ancient practice. It is older beyond your belief and it has emerged in many different cultures throughout many different time periods. Regardless of these differences, they are all united by their interaction to a common resource, which you call spiritual energy. Now think about this further. Where does spiritual energy come from? How is it produced?"

Veronica briefly paused in order to compose her answer.

"From what I have observed, spiritual energy is produced by sentient organisms going about their day. As long as life has reached a certain level of complexity of thought and emotion, any life form can produce spiritual energy. This is what I assumed for a long time. I never really considered whether there are other sources of spiritual energy until I came into contact with Messier 87. That galaxy is radiating so much of this resource that it should be impossible for it to be produced by aliens alone."

Cynthia smiled in approval. "That is a good observation. What you have described is one of the reasons why this energy can be described as the power of 'heaven and earth'. The 'earth' portion can be interpreted as the spiritual energy produced by the weak and mortal organisms that typically but not always live on planets. The 'heaven' portion can be seen as the spiritual energy produced by more powerful, transcendent, immortal or primordial structures of our universe. When combined, they make up the common resource that fuels many cultivation methods." The cyborg cat narrowed her eyes as she took in this information.

"Back in the Milky Way, I have never noticed this so-called heaven' power being produced by anything great aside from a really old sword. It is only after the Red Ocean got displaced next to Messier 87 that this has changed. Is E energy radiation the power of heaven in the model that you have described?"

"You can see it that way." Cynthia replied. "The Milky Way used to resemble Messier 87 in the past, but a calamity has occurred in the past that has... broken its root. This is why cultivation has become so rare and distorted for humans. What happens when the resource that everyone depends upon to grow stronger and live forever becomes scarce?"

"...I guess a lot of cultivators will end up dying."

"Energy is not infinite in this universe. As long as that is the case, every cultivator must compete against other cultivators if they wish to pursue immortality and the power that comes with it. Cultivation is therefore a struggle. It is a struggle against one's own mortal shackles. It is a struggle against the barriers of the universe. It is a struggle against the competition of other cultivators. So long as energy remains a scarce resource, it is inevitable for many cultivators to halt their progress or perish along the way."

This was pretty easy to understand for Ves. He already endured a lot of competition in other forms, from the mech market to the conflicts between different human states.

The current extinction war between red humanity and the indigenous alien races of the Red Ocean was another struggle for resources when it came down to it. Humanity wanted to take over the

entire dwarf galaxy and enjoy all of its riches while the aliens wanted to preserve what they originally owned.

"It makes sense." Veronica spoke as she rolled her body and presented her belly for mother to rub. "For a long time, the human race suffered from a severe shortage of this resource. What little means we have to generate it is extremely limited. It is only after the Red Ocean moved over to M87's orbit that this has changed. Spiritual energy has become abundant. All of red humanity has access to E energy radiation, but the problem is that few people really know what to do with it. What is the process of cultivation?"

This was another big question, and one that could be answered in many different ways.

Cynthia idly rubbed the cyborg cat's belly as she prepared her response.

"Before I go into specifics, I want you to understand the general rules and methods behind every cultivation method or technique. First, you need to understand that everyone is different. There are differences between aliens and humans. There are differences between humans themselves. Each of these differences affect one's propensity, talent and upper limits. There are many mech pilots and mech designers who are unable to make it too far in their respective professions. The more progress you make, the more demands that subsequent cultivation imposes on you. This is why it is always important to make careful choices. Many are irreversible."

The cat nodded even as she relaxed under her mother's pampering.

"I get it. So what does the process of cultivation look like?"

"Many individuals who begin to cultivate, that is deliberately absorbing the power of heaven and earth to transcend their own limitations and chase after immortality, are usually weak and mortal. It is difficult for fleeting and vulnerable organisms to evolve into True Gods. It is almost impossible for ordinary biological organisms to grow into True Gods by eating and sleeping. Humans such as the people around us must therefore employ special means in order to defy the life limitations set by genes and birth."

Cultivation was a struggle that always began with the cultivators themselves. People did not start out as inextinguishable and all-powerful. They had to go through a long Journey of growth and evolution before they could get close to their desired end states!

"So what do all of these people do?" Veronica asked.

"They employ cultivation methods." Her mother replied. "They come in endless different forms. The power of heaven and earth is all-encompassing and can be utilized in many different ways. The common goal of every cultivation method is to allow a weak and mortal existence to become a True God or greater. They do this in many different ways. An infinite number of cultivation methods can exist for countless different species. I happen to know many of them myself, although I am unable to impart many of them to you due to... an ancient form of copyright protection."

Ves grew a little bit bummed by that. He looked forward to getting his hands on these powerful and highly developed inheritances so that he could figure out how he could make his mechs and hopefully himself stronger!

"However, no matter how many of them exist, they can all be classified into several broad categories." His mother continued. "This is not knowledge that is fully taught by the Compact or

other cultivator groups. I have summed this up after meeting with a broad spectrum of different humans and aliens who have employed many different methods to attain power and longevity. They are as follows..."

Chapter 5057 Process Of Cultivation

Veronica eagerly looked up at her mother's face. The cyborg cat became more excited as Cynthia was about to explain the fundamental framework of cultivation!

"The first and arguably the most original method of attaining immortality is a category which I call Natural Cultivation." The Oblivion Empress spoke to her child. "This is a state of growth and cultivation where the mortal in question does not have to deliberately do anything special to live longer and attain greater strength. It is the easiest and most foolproof method to cultivate, though it imposes harsh demands on the talent and the inherent possibilities of the individual itself. The vast majority of natural cultivators are able to attain greater strength simply by living, but they will ultimately come across a bottleneck that they cannot overcome because they have never learned to solve such problems in the first place." That... sounded awfully familiar to Veronica. She thought about her own creations.

"Mother?"

"Yes, my child?"

"Are my design spirits and companion spirits natural cultivators? They kind of fit your definition."

Cynthia smiled. "That is a clever guess. The full answer is more complicated. I suggest you wait before you form your own conclusions."

She explained a little more about natural cultivation. There were essentially lucky' life forms that were just born awesome.

"Similar to how the children of the rich and wealthy families of first-rate states are born in lives of luxury, there are a small number of exceedingly fortunate life forms that can aptly be described as born gods. These humans or creatures enjoy divine constitutions or other special conditions that allow them to grow powerful... to an extent."

"This is not an option for the vast majority of people." Ves said. "I guess this is why other cultivation methods emerged, right?"

"Exactly. Mortals cannot help but desire what they are not permitted to obtain through normal means. The first artificial cultivation methods that emerged in history are likely modeled after natural cultivators. The weak sought to imitate these inborn gods, and managed to succeed in part or in whole over time."

"Really?"

"Yes." Cynthia smiled. "The success rates are always low, but even if 1 in a trillion individuals can use a method to become a True God, then the cultivation method can be considered valid."

"So deliberate cultivation started out as a way to imitate the super powerful beings that everyone saw as gods."

It reminded Ves of how a lot of indigenous alien races of the Red Ocean sought to become existences similar to the phase whales!

"Yes, but this approach has a major flaw." The mother continued. "What if the god that people are imitating is not as powerful as they thought? What if their methods have reached a limit? DO you think that cultivators will be satisfied if they stop at the level of a high pre-divinity state or a weak True God?"

Veronica shook her head. "Hell no. I bet they will do anything to exceed the hardware of natural cultivators."

"That is exactly what happened. Cultivators experimented with different energies and discovered new reactions and interactions. They eventually found out that natural cultivators are mostly able to grow stronger by deriving strength from the power of heaven and earth. As such, instead of trying to copy the cultivation approach of an alien life form that is never fully compatible with their own physiques, the ambitious cultivators cut off the middlemen and sought to attain power from more direct sources. This has led to the birth of qi cultivation."

Qi cultivation sounded like a big deal. Ves guessed that this may be the most orthodox and mainstream form of cultivation!

"What distinguishes qi cultivation from other forms of cultivation?" Veronica asked.

"As I have mentioned earlier, qi cultivation methods try to foster growth by absorbing certain elements of the power of heaven and earth. I am sure that you have discovered that the spiritual energy that you have always been playing around with is not uniform. It is split up into a potentially infinite variety of elements or attributes. Qi cultivators have sought to fuel themselves with the types of spiritual energy that they have access to, desire the most or feel compatible with. These can encompass fundamental forces of the universe such as Hre, gravity and electromagnetism. They can also encompass abstract concepts such as justice, love and civilization. They can even be more specific such as belief in the New Rubarth Empire or the affection for your own family. This is because all of them are fundamentally derived from the power of earth or the power of heaven. As long as the elemental qi for it exists, it can be used to power one's ascension to godhood."

Veronica looked impressed. What her mother told her explained so much and matched with many of her previous observations!

"So this is the most orthodox form of cultivation?" Veronica guessed.

"Yes. Anyone can engage in qi cultivation. Spiritual energy is everywhere, and even a barren location such as the Milky Way can still produce limited quantities of it by relying on the power of earth. However, many qi cultivators soon find out that there are many shortcomings and limitations to their methods. It is not so easy to attain immortality. The low life states of many humans and aliens restrict them in every step of the way. The further they grow beyond their original states, the harder it becomes to defy their fate. It is like stretching an elastic band. The further you pull it apart, the stronger it desires to snap back into its most compact form. Death is the usual result of cultivators who have failed to stretch their elastic band any further."

That was an easy analogy to understand. An ordinary ant that tried to become as powerful as a god had to go through an unimaginable struggle to become a bajillion times stronger than if it lived an ordinary life!

"So what happened next?" Ves asked.

"Qi cultivators came up with two general solutions." Cynthia answered. "The first is to refine their cultivation methods. It is not enough to simply absorb energy and rely on quantity to force their subsequent evolution. They must upgrade their inherently low qualities step by step, and that requires more finesse. Qi cultivators have invented many different assisting techniques, of which one of them is artistic conception."

"What is that?"

"Very simply put, artistic conception is an attempt to become a higher existence by visualizing and thinking hard about it. Early cultivators consciously and unconsciously did so by imagining themselves becoming the natural gods they have witnessed themselves. Over time, cultivation methods have put more emphasis on this by utilizing mantras, exquisite artworks, incense or any other form of stimulation to put cultivators in a special state of mind. Their mental activity will take on a specific form that allows them to attain further progress by absorbing and expending the power of heaven and earth in a specific manner."

From the perspective of spiritual engineering, it was like turning oneself into a temporary spiritual construct.

The more elaborate and well-designed this construct had become, the greater the yield!

Veronica blinked her artificial purple eyes. "In other words, the main means for qi cultivators to become stronger is to embrace their superstitions?"

"Correct, in a sense." Cynthia smirked as if she knew that word made her child uncomfortable. "Is it truly superstition when it is a valid vehicle of empowerment? If a seemingly silly assumption such as 'stars are evil' has successfully enabled a cultivator to rise to become a True God, then is it still a baseless form of superstition?"

"...Did that actually happen?"

Cynthia chuckled. "You would be surprised, Ves. You see, the power of heaven and earth is psychoactive. It can influence one's state of mind, possibly to an extreme degree. It is also psychoreactive. It responds and reacts to the thinking of sentient beings. Since living individuals can come up with an endless variety of thoughts, it is possible for any of them to become the basis of a valid cultivation method. It just depends on whether it allows an individual to derive power from spiritual energy."

"I see. I understand... I think. There has to be limits, though. Otherwise, pretty much anyone can become a True God as long as they are delusional enough."

"You are correct. The difficulty of qi cultivation is not trivial even in an environment that is rich with the power of heaven and earth such as Messier 87. As I have mentioned before, restrictions such as talent and resource shortages can prevent many ambitious mortals from attaining their goals. Aside from trying to develop the model of qi cultivation further, cultivators have also tried to think laterally and discovered other valid approaches that can help them attain greater power and longevity."

"Other approaches?"

"Three-thousand Daos lead to the same destination." Cynthia spoke. "That is an ancient and outdated saying that roughly expresses that there is a large variety of roads that cultivators can follow in order to ascend to heaven. Some of them can be quite convoluted and clever. Take swordmasters for example. You have interacted with them often enough to gain an understanding of how they cultivate. What is their defining property?"

"Willpower." Veronica immediately replied. "They transform and elevate their willpower so that it can become more extraordinary and powerful."

"That is roughly correct. Compared to qi cultivation, the cultivation of swordmasters does not have such a high demand for talent. As long as other conditions are satisfied, any human can theoretically become a True God through willpower cultivation. The human only needs to demonstrate increasingly greater persistence, courage, discipline and other related traits. As you can already deduce, willpower cultivation is much more suitable for soldiers and warriors as a result."

This already fit with the theoretical framework that Ves had constructed through his own research!

"What are the flaws of willpower cultivation?" The cat cutely asked.

"You should already know them. No one can maintain a balanced state of mind by pursuing this torturous approach of cultivation. A willpower cultivator must also constantly push themselves and take on real risks. Willpower is a quality that can only grow under genuine pressure. In most times, willpower cultivators have the highest chance of suffering a violent death. Peace is antithetical to their existence."

Ves fully agreed with that. The Age of Mechs was a time where high-ranking mech pilots popped up like mushrooms, but they only had room to emerge due to all of the internal wars that took place in human space!

Without all of the different states competing and provoking each other, it would have been a lot harder for expert pilots, ace pilots and god pilots to come into existence!

"What else is there aside from willpower cultivation?" The cyborg cat asked. "There has to be more approaches."

Cynthia scratches Veronica below her chin. "There are. From my extensive experiences and learning, I have identified at least five broad categories of cultivation methods. I call them body cultivation, creation cultivation, artifact cultivation, deity cultivation and... let us call it contract cultivation."

The cat resting on her lap squirmed in a restless manner when her mother mentioned deity cultivation.

Ves could roughly guess what all of those broad approaches represented. He could even tie them to the people and methods that he had encountered throughout his eventful career!

Thus spoke of the validity of his mother's explanation. Her classification lifted much of the mystique surrounding this difficult phenomenon and granted him a clear way to distinguish between different cultivation methods!

"Each of them can enable a person to become a True God?"

"That is technically the case. Each approach imposes different conditions, requirements and circumstances. Some cultivation methods are more suited in an energy-poor environment such as the current Milky Way whereas other approaches will produce better results in a more energy-rich environment such as Messier 87. If you wish to learn how to properly leverage the latter's exotic radiation to your advantage, then you must clearly understand the fundamental properties of each of the aforementioned categories."

Chapter 5058 Variations Of Cultivation

Ves grew fascinated by the clear and simple explanations given by his mother.

He had been looking for answers for a long time. His mother had always played coy and continually told him that he shouldn't learn for her and instead try and figure out stuff himself.

Fortunately, he managed to hoodwink her into giving him a basic introduction into cultivation.

Even if this was relatively basic knowledge, it already helped him figure out better and more systematic ways to make his own products stronger! "Creation cultivation should be of great interest to you, seeing as it closely fits with your profession." The Lady of the Night spoke to the avatar of her son. "This form of cultivation emerged as an off-shoot of qi cultivation. Those that have chosen to become producers have developed specific cultivation methods that allow them to derive growth through the act of creation. This can encompass many different activities, from producing items in a workshop to growing crops in a farm. It can also include the breeding of cattle and the administration of a city. As long as a cultivation method involves an explicit and deliberate component of production or expansion of a resource, it falls under this broad category of cultivation." That... was way more than Veronica expected to hear. Creation cultivation sounded so all-encompassing that she felt that any worker in an industry should be able to grow stronger just by doing their Jobs!

Of course, creation cultivation wasn't that simple.

"Anything related to True Gods is extraordinary and beyond the realm of mortality." Cynthia emphasized. "That means that if a creation cultivator wishes to reach this level, then he must constantly endeavor to produce more exceptional results. It is not enough for a blacksmith to produce a million average nails. He must produce nails that are more powerful and exquisite than any mortal craftsman can make. This is also the main difficulty of this broad approach. A creation cultivator must develop and rely on their creativity, ingenuity and other related strengths to create new and exceptional works."

That fully aligned with what Ves knew about mech designers such as himself. The speed in which he was able to advance to the rank of Senior Mech Designer was largely a reflection of his own amazing creativity and ingenuity!

"Are creation cultivators powerful?" He asked.

"They are... but largely in their own areas of expertise. In order to become a True God, creation cultivators must develop extraordinary production capabilities. The more they advance, the more they must develop their creation abilities further, and that imposes greater requirements on their relevant traits. If they succeed in becoming True Gods, then they gain access to an entirely new world of creation."

That sounded both impressive and vague. Ves had learned a bit about what Star Designers were like. He looked forward to accessing this new "world of creation" as his mother described.

Cynthia moved on to the next cultivation category.

"If it is possible for cultivators to pursue immortality through production, then it is also possible for cultivators to ascend to godhood by deriving their power from the output. Any sufficiently powerful item, no matter whether it is produced by nature or a creation cultivator, can serve as a potential "power source ."

"So the effectiveness of this cultivation method is entirely dependent on the quality and power of the artifact?" Veronica guessed.

"That is correct. Artifact cultivation can be seen as a form of attaining godhood through wealth and privilege as it is expensive and difficult to attain the rare but powerful objects needed to make substantial progress. Creation cultivators and artifact cultivators therefore enjoy a high degree of co-dependence. Artifact cultivators must provide the resources needed to produce exceptional items or cover for their cost in other ways. Creation cultivators must satisfy the needs of their demanding clients."

That happened to match the relationship between mech designers and mech pilots. One could not truly exist without the other. They both needed each other in order to thrive to the fullest!

The mother moved on to explain the next approach to cultivation.

"Body cultivation is just as it describes. It is a means to become a True God by developing one's physical body to an extreme." Cynthia said. "It is considered to be a diametrically opposite approach to qi cultivation. While the latter generally seeks to make a cultivator transcend his mortal body, body cultivation seeks to grow and exploit it to an extreme. It is rare in the Milky Way due to a shortage of relevant resources and the poor strength of the small and fragile human physique, but it is much more common in the Red Ocean."

"Because of phasewater." Ves quickly realized. "Are you saying that phase whales and phase lords are body cultivators?"

Cynthia smiled and nodded. "It may seem as if the methods of these aliens are unrelated to our own, but cultivation is as universal as the power of heaven and earth. Phasewater is a special substance in many ways. It is a gateway into different dimensions as it can warp space itself. Another way to look at phasewater from the perspective of cultivation is that it can grant access to normally inaccessible energies that can facilitate body cultivation. This does not have to be spiritual energy, but it may very well be. I am not too familiar with the cultivation methods of phase lords."

"I see."

According to Cynthia's model of body cultivation, it was a method of empowering the body to a divine state by nurturing it with powerful energies.

Phase lords did not directly grow powerful by adding phasewater to their bodies. They actually derived their power from using phasewater to open portals to higher dimensions that were filled with special and more potent energies!

Perhaps this was the biggest difficulty to getting started as a phase lord. All of those native aliens who failed and died in their attempts had not managed to tap into the right higher dimensions!

Did this mean that Ves and Veronica had opened channels to those specific dimensions as well?

Both of their bloodstreams contained phasewater, after all! Perhaps even now, their bodies were growing larger and heavier as their physical bodies were constantly nurtured by higher-dimensional energies!

Veronica shifted in her mother's lap. "Are the body cultivators of the Red Ocean strong?"

Cynthia shook her head. "As I have said, I do not know much about them, but from what I am able to deduce, phase lords may very well possess the highest direct defense and durability against attacks. They should be extremely difficult to kill when confronted by the same level of opposition." That sounded troublesome. Ves had already set his sights on the Eminence of Torment, but if this orven phase lord could withstand the combined attacks of three powerful ace mechs, then this alien god would have plenty of opportunities to escape!

Ves did not want the Eminence of Torment to warp away from the battlefield with ease like the Trampier of Stars!

"Body cultivators have their own difficulties, though," Cynthia said. "They have formed the greatest dependence on specific resources to grow their bodies. The cultivation process can also be painful and life-threatening. Mistakes can easily result in undesirable mutations and escalating health problems."

That did not sound good to Ves. He grew a lot less happy about stepping foot on the path of a phaselord.

"Moving on, deity cultivation should also be a form of growth that you should be intimately familiar with," Cynthia grinned. "It is usually reserved for True Gods and beings that have already attained great strength. As its name suggests, this cultivation approach is a means of deriving spiritual energy and other useful resources from the worship of a large number of sentient beings. The greater the quantity of worshipers, the greater the supply of sustenance. The higher the strength of individual worshipers, the greater the quality of sustenance."

Ves hated this form of cultivation, yet he also recognized that he had been taking advantage of it. Many of his design spirits essentially relied on this approach to grow more powerful!

"I guess this method has become fairly prevalent in the Milky Way due to the lack of the power of heaven, am I correct?" He asked.

"Precisely, even deity cultivation cannot easily elevate anyone into a True God. The principal resource is worshipers. This is a major restriction as many humans are alive in the Milky Way today, but the vast majority of them are astonishingly weak. The worship of stronger and higher beings is needed for a deity cultivator to transform into a True God, and that is challenging even in a more energy-rich environment. Strong beings that have aspirations to godhood do not easily worship other gods."

Cynthia explained a bit more about the supposed gods that followed this cultivation approach.

They did not sound like gods at all to Ves. They sounded more like leeches that stole the energies produced or absorbed by other hard-working sentients!

It sounded no different from company bosses who grew fat and rich off the labor of ordinary workers!

"What are the downsides to this form of cultivation?" Ves asked.

"There are many shortcomings to this particular approach. Aside from the limitations of worshipers, there is also the risk of getting affected by their collective beliefs. If a large group of faithful beings believe that a god is violent, then the deity cultivator will slowly develop more violent tendencies. This can be a double-edged sword, and has ultimately harmed many wouki-be gods."

That sounded about right. Ves had already recognized this mutual interaction between his design spirits and the mech pilots that supplied spiritual feedback.

He decided to bring up another related topic.

"I think I came across faith energy once upon a time. Can you explain more?"

His mother shook her head. "You are not ready to learn about the power of faith. This is an exclusive resource for True Gods and higher beings. I will explain it to you on another day."

That disappointed Ves a bit, but he already expected to hear this kind of answer. Faith energy was powerful but it was also extremely dangerous to those that were not capable of harnessing its great might.

"There is one more type of cultivation." Veronica said instead.

"Yes. Contract cultivation may not be the most elegant description that I can choose from, but it has a clear meaning. It is a form of cultivation by establishing an implicit or explicit contract with another powerful being. This contract spells out an exchange where the contract cultivator can obtain the power he needs in exchange for trading another resource. For example, a weak contract cultivator can worship a powerful deity cultivator. The former strengthens the latter through worship. The latter can reward the former by awarding small amounts of specific and higher quality energies."

The cyborg cat immediately grew less enthused about this cultivation approach.

"That sounds... pathetic. These 'contract cultivators' are basically worshipers who pray to 'gods' in the hopes of obtaining a handout from what I can tell. Let me guess. These contracts are rarely fair and equitable."

Cynthia patted Veronica's head. "That is often the case. A large power balance exists between both sides of the contract. Exploitation is common, but contract cultivators will continue to sell their services at an enormous disadvantage as this is the "easiest" form of cultivation. There is no real difficulty in praying. Even the weakest and most talentless human can become powerful through the blessing of a god, though he will probably require more energy to break his shackles. The rewards they receive are entirely dependent on the generosity and rules of the objects of their worship."

All of these different approaches to cultivation made up the vast majority of methods that humans and aliens used to become more powerful.

While there were doubtlessly a lot of other weird methods that did not fall into any of the boxes described by Cynthia, the framework of cultivation was impressively comprehensive while also remaining simple enough to remain close to the truth!

Veronica rolled her body in her mother's lap.

"I think I understand now. There's just one problem. Where do mech designers and mech pilots fall under? They sound mostly like creation cultivators and artifact cultivators, but they encompass bits and pieces of other cultivation approaches."

Cynthia already expected her child to bring up this issue. She smiled at the cyborg cat.

"That is because cultivation methods have become incredibly advanced nowadays. Countless generations of cultivators have continued to build upon the progress of their predecessors. It has become common to mix and match processes from different cultivation approaches in an attempt to make up for shortcomings and produce greater synergies. Do you understand? Developing a cultivation method is similar to designing a mech. You need to take different components and mix them together in a clever arrangement to draw the greatest possible performance out of the parts."

That... sounded remarkably easy, though Ves knew it was anything but simple.

"If mech designers and mech pilots are products of large inheritances... then they must have incorporated a lot of different processes." The cyborg cat remarked.

"That is correct. Can you guess which cultivation approaches these two relatively new and recent professions have borrowed from, my child?"

Chapter 5059 Mech Design Cultivation Method

"Myaow myaow myaow..."

Veronica squinted her eyes in pleasure as she ate chunks of delectable meat fortified with chips of Unending alloy.

As a cyborg cat, her diet became a little complex. She was somehow able to digest both organic and inorganic food.

She did not strictly need to eat daily meals in order to survive, but it was good for her health and apparently her cultivation.

Before this day, she did not really understand how living beings such as Lucky grew stronger by eating a lot of specific materials. Where was it all going? He never really got any bigger despite literally eating a starship's worth of metal all of the years that he had been accompanying Ves!

Now, Veronica understood that Lucky extracted the energies from the metals he ingested. Exotics had all been fortified with the power of heaven and earth. It took special processes to extract the spiritual energy that had been tightly intertwined into the structure of these special materials.

Now that she was eating a meal that contained all manner of unusual ingredients, she could feel her own digestion system working to extract what little it could obtain from her food.

Though the yield was awfully low due to various reasons, she was happy that she could promote her growth through the simple act of eating.

She just became a little concerned about what would happen once she accumulated too many waste materials.

Did she have to use the kitty litter box like Lucky?

As Veronica filled up her stomach, Cynthia remained in the center of her peaceful meditation room.

With the theory that Veronica had just obtained, she could already figure out why the chamber was set up in such a different fashion from the rest of the interior of the Throne of Light.

The interior of the wooden meditation room had been arranged in a way to give her a more optimal environment that relaxed her psychological state and put her in a better mindset to cultivate according to a specific artistic conception.

The prominent use of wood, the absence of cold and inorganic metals, the presence of flora as well as a little fauna along with the small river all conveyed a sense of nature.

Veronica even had a feeling that the meditation room shared a close resemblance to a space important to her mother in her past.

"Have you figured it out yet, my child?" The Empress of the Oblivion Empire spoke from her position at the center of the room.

As the cyborg cat finished her bowl and licked it clean, she thought a little more before she presented her answer.

"I think I have figured it out." Veronica said as she felt full and relaxed. "I will start with my own profession first as I am most familiar with its progression trajectory. It is clear that a mech designer is primarily a creation cultivator. He advances when he designs and possibly also makes mechs. The stronger and more ingenious the mech, the more progress he makes. A mech designer may be able to gain boosts through other methods, but they cannot replace the fundamental requirements of developing good mechs."

Her mother nodded in approval. "That is correct. When the original developers of this special cultivation method created the framework of a mech designer, they wanted it to embody a productive pursuit. You see, most creation cultivation methods are auxiliary methods which can complement qi cultivation. It has rarely been the case that creation cultivators are forever locked in their professions and have no choice of following it through the end."

"What?" Veronica looked shocked. "Creation cultivators can still break through by relying on qi cultivation?! So blacksmithing, pharmacy and farming are just side jobs to these people?!"

Cynthia smirked. "Correct. Mech designers are the exception rather than the rule. They have been made this way for good reasons. If mech designers are unable to advance to an existence comparable to a True God aside from becoming a Star Designer, they can never be tempted and corrupted by the Five Scrolls Compact. Think about it, Ves. How many aging Senior Mech Designers and Master Mech Designers exist who have stagnated in their work and failed to make any further progress because they have exhausted much of their ingenuity or viable research directions?"

It was a lot. Mech design became exponentially more difficult the further anyone progressed in this path.

Although mech designers also became progressively smarter and more in tune with mechs, if their talents, skills and access to special resources could no longer keep up, then they might never be able to make another breakthrough in their lives!

Under these kinds of circumstances, how tempting would it be if the Five Scrolls Compact knocked on their doors and gave them an alternate way to become immortal and powerful?

Sure, the mech designer might never be able to attain all of the specialized and highly useful abilities of a Star Designer, but what did it matter when True Gods could travel through space with their bodies and smash through mechs?

"That is a clever measure," Veronica admitted. "I guess it is truly for the better if mech designers can't switch midway or make up for their lack of progress in their main job by using another cultivation method."

"What else have you identified, Veronica?"

The cat paused for a few seconds before deciding to throw out her second guess. "I think that there should be aspects of qi cultivation in mech design as well. When you gave me a description of artistic conception, I quickly thought of how design philosophies play an important role in keeping the work of mech designers like myself focused. I am doing my best to promote Mutual Growth in both mechs and mech pilots, and that strong and consistent mentality has helped with producing works that reflect this artistic conception."

Her mother nodded again. "That is a good argument. As I have said before, creation cultivation is derived from qi cultivation, so the separation between the two is not too strong. Methods that work for the latter can also be applied to the former to a degree. Artistic conceptions are widely used in many cultivation methods because they work. They provide cultivators with a clear and consistent means to leverage the power of heaven and earth without producing too many deviations or accidents. The premise is that the cultivator can hold the correct artistic conception."

She made it sound as if artistic conceptions were basically combinations between self-hypnosis and self-fulfilling prophecies.

It was all in the mind. As long as a delusional individual thought really hard that he was a mythical phoenix, then he would eventually be able to absorb exotic radiation and mutate in a direction that would enable him to harness the power of fire!

Of course, a method as simple as this was incredibly flawed and would never actually turn a would-be cultivator into a powerful True God!

"Qi or spiritual energy is highly responsive to the thoughts and emotions of an individual," Cynthia explained. "The stronger the cultivator, the more that the energies around him will become affected. The chance of severe accidents will increase because of that. In order to prevent such a powerful being from going out of control and suffering from a phenomenon called cultivation deviation, he must always maintain strong control over his own mentality. Centering around a single and consistent artistic conception becomes a necessity."

"I see," Veronica said. "I take it that certain artistic conceptions are superior to others."

"I would not necessarily say that, my child. Theoretically, any conception can be used to help a cultivator become a True God. It is just that the power, the abilities, the mental states and the bottlenecks are all different depending on the cultivation method and accompanying artistic conception. Cultivators can also switch or upgrade their artistic conceptions according to their

needs. In general, the fundamental concepts of the universe such as time, gravity, matter and so on are too difficult to get started. Ordinary humans are far too removed from these abstract phenomena. It becomes necessary to start with a lower level artistic conception and slowly build your qualifications before you can properly handle a higher level artistic conception."

That sounded similar to what Ves had done. He originally centered his mech designs around Spiritual Man-Machine Symbiosis, but eventually had an epiphany which caused him to redefine his work around the concept of Mutual Growth.

Perhaps Ves might redefine his design philosophy again once he became a Master Mech Designer or Star Designer. It all depended on whether his ambition required him to make any adjustments.

His mother gave him a few more tips and warnings about the use of artistic conceptions.

Improper use of this cultivation tool could easily lead to madness and death!

"What other cultivation approach has mech design incorporated?" Cynthia asked.

"Well..." Veronica hesitated for a moment. "Given that mech designers tend to receive positive feedback when knowing that their works are widely used by the masses or strongly favored among strong mech pilots, I think there is an element of deity cultivation as well."

"Correct again. The earlier and more simpler forms of creation cultivation methods are mostly centered around the act of creating excellent products itself. What happens after these goods are made is not important. It is only later that more sophisticated cultivation methods have tied in the end users as a means to collect additional energy. As the users of a product become more satisfied, they generate strong positive feelings that contain a measure of power. It would be a waste not to harvest these energies."

That explained a lot and fully confirmed with Ves' own theoretical frameworks. Mech designers who designed a lot of mechs but never really did anything to produce them never progressed as quickly as those who put real effort into selling actual copies of their work.

There was one more cultivation approach to complete the cultivation model of mech design.

"Aside from those three approaches, I think that mech design also relies on contract cultivation to tie it all together."

"Mmmh?" Cynthia gazed at the cyborg cat with amusement.

"You know about the... kingdom... right?" Veronica cautiously asked.

"I do. It has become a central part of human civilization. It is impossible to miss for any True God or sufficiently powerful cultivator."

The silvery metal cat smiled. That saved her a lot of concern about violating the confidentiality rules imposed by the MTA.

"Well, a lot of mech designers are able to cultivate without being consciously aware that they are doing so. The reason why they can cultivate in 'easy mode' is because the Kingdom of Mechs is running all sorts of complicated processes in the background. While I think that mech designers can still progress into a Star Designer, they have to do it a lot more consciously and deliberately if they can't borrow the spiritual cloud computing resources of the Kingdom of Mechs."

The Kingdom of Mechs served as the secret sauce to make mech design more accessible and foolproof than any other cultivation path!

Cynthia's expression turned a little ambiguous as this topic came up. "The Kingdom of Mechs... broke many rules and assumptions that the Five Scrolls Compact once considered to be unbreakable laws. The kingdom is an anomaly that should not exist, but still does. It is a product of more modern times and does away with many of the flawed and outdated methods and approaches of the Compact. I do not necessarily like that the kingdom has caught you in its grip, but I can tolerate it. Mech design may be a fairly restrictive and overly specialized cultivation method, but it is also much safer and less prone to cultivation deviation. The worst outcome that you can suffer from is stagnation, which is much more acceptable than death."

Mech designers and the Kingdom of Mechs enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship. Both sides entered into transactions where they could both obtain what they needed to become stronger and make more progress.

This perfectly fit with the definition of contract cultivation. Without this specific component, the difficulty of the mech design cultivation method would have been at least 100 times higher!

Chapter 5060 Mech Piloting Cultivation Method

The Progenitors of Mechs were geniuses.

They had developed a hybrid creation cultivation method that surpassed many others of its kind!

Although the restrictions were great, the results were good as well!

In a barren galaxy that no longer produced exotic radiation on a wider scale, human civilization had managed to produce at least a hundred or so Star Designers in just four centuries.

This was an exceptional result considering that many of these creators who ultimately evolved into True Gods started off as ordinary citizens from different states for the most part!

Now that Ves developed a clearer overview of how mech designers worked, he moved on to deconstructing mech pilots.

"Compared to mech designers, mech pilots are a lot more self-centered." Veronica explained. "It is clear that willpower cultivation serves as the basis of their progression. Each time they rank up, their willpower grows that much more powerful and dominant. When they finally become a god pilot, they shed all qi, leaving behind only their own extraordinary will."

Cynthia nodded. "That is an adequate description. Since you have Interacted with expert pilots and ace pilots enough times, you should know that they are strong and uncompromising cultivators. Do you know how willpower cultivation originally emerged?"

Since she asked this question to Ves, he should be able to come up with an answer with the information he received.

"Willpower cultivation tends to create the strongest delusions in people." The cyborg cat slowly replied. "That sort of sounds like artistic conception... centered around mech pilots themselves. If my guess is correct, then their method of cultivation is essentially trying to become idealized versions of themselves."

Cynthia raised her eyes in surprise. "I see why you have become successful as a mech designer. It is this sort of thinking that you will need to understand the truth of qi and cultivation. You are correct. Willpower cultivation emerged as a specialized approach to the use of artistic conception. Martial cultivators have discovered that if they cultivate by visualizing themselves in a specific manner, they can activate their hidden potential and fortify a quality that is commonly regarded as willpower."

Veronica nodded. "Willpower has at least two advantages that make them suitable for combat. First, they are highly exclusionary and can easily resist external interference. Second, they can resonate with mechs... and other artifacts for that matter. Both of these aspects enable mech pilots and especially high-ranking ones to pose a huge threat against other cultivators of the same level."

The Lady of the Night lowered her head. "Can you make a guess who will win in a direct confrontation between myself and a god pilot?"

"Uhhh... I'm not sure what advantages you have, but if all other factors are equal, then I would personally bet my money on a god pilot." Veronica honestly said. "I don't have a good understanding of god pilots, but I can extrapolate based on what I have witnessed from ace pilots. Your methods may be more comprehensive and varied, but a god pilot must definitely be stronger in a direct confrontation. The fact that they can derive a lot of additional power from an artifact as strong as a god mech only multiplies their effective combat power. Unless your stolen crown gives you an advantage that I am not aware about, I don't see how you can win against a single god pilot."

He may not be the best son for voting against his own mother, but Ves understood mechs and mech pilots all too well. They could fight against both warships and alien monstrosities. As long as their willpower was strong enough, they could overpower anything!

Cynthia did not look insulted when she heard this response. She was pleased that Ves made a clear Judgment based on facts rather than any biases or mistaken preconceptions.

"Mech piloting is an evolution of willpower cultivation and artifact cultivation taken to an extreme. By combining the absolute combat strengths of willpower with the strongest Individual combat tool in the form of a large and elaborately designed mech, you can produce a result that has reached the ceiling of how much combat power you can evoke from a combat method. It is a masterpiece and an indescribable feat of brilliance. Compared to the original willpower cultivation methods that are mostly focused on punching enemies with the use of fists or cutting them with simple swords, the use of mechs as a force multiplier completely defeats other willpower cultivation methods."

"Does this mean that the MTA can essentially defeat you anytime it wants by sending out just one or two god pilots?" Ves asked with a hint of concern.

Cynthia chuckled.

"You should have more confidence in your mother. As you have mentioned earlier, qi cultivators such as myself have access to more varied methods. Our direct combat strength is not as powerful, but we can create weapons, build up armies and alter the terrain to work in my favor. The Nyxlan Gap is my territory and the Oblivion Empire is fully under my sway. These two advantages grant me the power to protect myself against most threats. Of course, it is better if I do not conflict with the Mech Trade Association. They have the numbers advantage."

Perhaps this was why Cynthia worked so hard to promote her husband's own progression as a mech pilot. She would become a lot safer and more secure in her position if she finally had a god pilot of her own by her side!

"There should be more to mech piloting than willpower cultivation and artifact cultivation." Ves said. "I think there is also an element of body cultivation in it. The Mech Body Merger Process that ace pilots have to complete in order to ascend to a god pilot makes this pretty clear."

The mother nodded. "This is a common element in more sophisticated artifact cultivation methods. Once an artifact cultivator has evolved to a certain extent, he can begin to merge with the object that he has drawn strength from. If the cultivator succeeds, he can enjoy the combined advantages of both forms and benefit from new advantages that were previously absent. As powerful as this may be, adding body cultivation to the mech piloting cultivation method is not entirely positive. Can you tell me the greatest shortcoming of this addition?"

Ves already had a clear answer in this regard. What his mother just explained about all of the different cultivation approaches gave him a much clearer understanding of this problem!

"Body cultivation can often be difficult and dangerous." He said. "If there was no need for mech pilots to merge with their own mechs close to the end, then the amount of god pilots flying around may easily be ten times greater!"

They would be a lot weaker than the god pilots who successfully merged their bodies with god mechs, so it was not entirely clear whether this was the better variation.

Cynthia held a strong opinion on this matter.

"You may think that adding a body cultivation requirement to mech piloting is an unnecessary luxury, but it is one of the key reasons why the rebellion against the Five Scrolls Compact succeeded. Compared to other willpower cultivators, god pilots are so strong that it is not inaccurate to call them the nemesis of qi practitioners. Can you tell me why this is the case?"

Veronica frowned a bit, which caused her to look remarkably cute!

"Is it... because their abnormally strong defenses against spiritual and material attacks make them far too difficult to harm?"

"That is part of the answer." Cynthia replied. "God pilots have no weaknesses that qi cultivators can exploit. The latter's methods may be more mysterious as they can directly harness the fundamental forces of the universe, but that means little to a god pilot who has merged with a god mech."

"So god pilots are the nemesis of other True Gods?"

"You can say that. Strong willpower can displace and void the power of heaven and earth, thereby stripping a qi cultivator of his domain and any other external manifestations of power. Strong willpower can also break or suppress the artistic conceptions that qi cultivators depend upon for much of their abilities. A strong god mech as a body further amplifies these advantages while also providing god pilots with an incomparably strong physical body that can resist all sorts of hard attacks."

This combination of traits sounded so absurd that it was no wonder that the Five Scrolls Compact ultimately got spanked by the Big Two!

Once god pilots entered the scene and deprived the True Gods of the Compact of their precious domains and other reliances, the fall of the Great Temple became a certainty!

Ves understood a bit better now why her mother constantly called the traditional methods of the Five Scrolls Compact outdated and behind the times.

Unless the Compact's qi cultivators could come up with a superior cultivation method that granted them a fighting chance against god pilots, they had no choice but to remain hidden in their anomalous spaces where they could still rely on their few remaining terrain advantages.

Ultimately, the mech piloting cultivation method was probably one of the most difficult and life-threatening ways to become a True God, but the rewards were worth all of the hardships.

"It is impossible for this specialized cultivation method to benefit human society as much as it did without the hidden assistance from the Kingdom of Mechs." Veronica remarked. "Just as with mech designers, a lot of mech pilots are able to get started and progress on this path without really needing to consciously follow any convoluted methods like the Annals of Terra Vita. Perhaps it robs mech pilots of a lot of choice, but the barrier of entry is so low that anyone with spiritual potential has a chance, though faint, to become a mighty god pilot."

"That is all true, but you are still forgetting one more aspect about mech piloting, my child."

"Uhm... I guess that deity cultivation is also a part of its makeup. God pilots are widely revered in our society as heroes and champions. I guess there is a real purpose of promoting their popularity."

The powerful resurrected woman smiled down at the cat. "Deity cultivation can play a modest assisting role to mech pilots. Willpower cultivators are highly resistant to both positive and negative external sources of power by nature, so they are highly inefficient at deriving power from the worship of others. This form of cultivation only becomes more prominent once they have become god pilots. Once they have attained the level of a True God, they can further their cultivation by harnessing the power of true faith. Although it is a double-edged sword, it is effective for them as well."

Veronica widened her eyes!

This explained a lot! She understood now why many god pilots chose to shift their allegiances to the MTA.

By leaving their limited groups and becoming a guardian of human civilization as a whole, they would effectively be able to Inspire faith across every living human!

Since human civilization in the Milky Way alone was incomparably huge, that amounted to an Immense amount of faith energy!

Of course, as more god pilots came into being, the faith energy that ordinary people could supply would be further diluted.

Maybe this was another reason why the Progenitors of Mechs added a body cultivation requirement for mech piloting.

If god pilots did not have to go through the life-threatening Mech Body Merger Process, then far too many weak god pilots would emerge that all demanded way too much faith energy in order to progress further!

Ves also came up with another theory. Perhaps certain god pilots such as the Destroyer of Worlds decided to remain attached to the New Rubarth Empire because it was already large enough and could easily satisfy her demand for faith energy without needing to solicit worship from the other parts of human society.

The Great Severing complicated the situation even further.

Red humanity's exposure to exotic radiation likely changed the equation for every human True God stuck in the Red Ocean.

Every Star Designer and god pilot had lost access to the enormous population of human worshipers in the Milky Way, but red humans all had the chance of becoming much more powerful on an individual basis.

The potential for red humanity to supply an enormous amount of spiritual feedback and possibly faith energy was Immense!

However, the greatest challenge was to ensure that the population of red humans remained large enough in the following years and decades.

If the aliens killed too many red humans, then the high-ranking mech pilots and mech designers would not be able to fare as well as before!

Therefore, the Red MTA must be the most anxious among all of the human powers to defend red humanity's space!