

## The Mech 5431

### Chapter 5431 Stuck in Darkness

The lightning tribulation disappeared now that it had accomplished its objective.

The powerful force originating from Messier 87 had deemed the Elemental Lord to be a forbidden existence.

Ever since Ves had brought this miraculous elemental drone mech to life, he had violated a forbidden rule and attracted the ire of this distant but all-encompassing force!

The severity of the punishment had to fit the crime.

Given how quickly and dramatically the lightning tribulation as it progressed, it became clear that Ves had committed a massive crime from the perspective of this alien authority!

Ves' mind became filled with regrets and doubts after the shocking event had come to an end.

His eyes grew dull as they continued to track the ash particles that continued to fall from above.

These were the remains of what could have been one of his greatest mechs to date.

As humble as it might appear on the surface, the Elemental Lord had the potential to match the performance of an expert mech shortly after its completion.

This was a mech that could have transcended its roots and could have evolved into a mechanical god-like entity!

If Ves had been able to buy more time for his nascent masterpiece, it might have been possible for the Elemental Lord to grow quickly enough to keep up with the escalating lightning tribulation.

However... he had ultimately failed. He had resorted to several measures to give his potent living mech a fighting chance.

From using up one of his precious gems to pushing Major Simon Jankowski into breaking through, he had gone all-out in order to give the five brothers the strength they needed to continue their struggle for survival.

Ves found it difficult to accept that all of his efforts had gone to naught. Every single physical and spiritual trace of the Elemental Lord had disintegrated into ash and scattered energy.

There was nothing to salvage from the remains. The tribulation lightning possessed a capacity of destruction that was unsurpassed.

Ves had faintly hoped that the lightning tribulation would be sloppy enough to miss a few broken parts. It might even leave a few of the living fey alone given that they were not a part of the main body.

Alas, the punishment from the heavens was too thorough. The self-destruction of the earth warrior not only wiped out all of the living fey, but also burned their spiritual foundations until there was nothing left to salvage!

A part of Ves wanted to gather up as much of the ash particles that were dropping onto the lightning-scorched ground, but he recognized that there was little point in doing so. The ashes contained nothing that held any practical value to a mech designer.

Ves had been able to bring back certain entities from the dead. He had hoped that he could reproduce this particular miracle again, but the lightning tribulation clearly did not leave anything to chance.

"Even if I brought the Elemental Lord back from the dead, that damned lightning tribulation would just come back so that it could finish the job." He cynically guessed.

The oppressive storm clouds may have cleared from the skies, but Ves saw no discernable light. His vision still remained clouded in darkness.

It did not take more than a minute before the forces of the Bluejay Fleet arrived to secure the site.

The Terrans did not gain any chance to get involved from beginning to end. The Devos Ancient Clan was not pleased about the mechers shutting everyone else out. The fact that the culprit who triggered the anomalous thunderstorm was not a citizen of the Terran Alliance made it easier for the Red Association to monopolize whatever gains could be derived from this explosive event.

The news could not be blocked, however. The eccentric young tier 3 galactic citizen had become galactic news once again for conducting a mysterious experiment that apparently generated an accidental weather phenomenon!

The vast majority of the public were completely unaware of the truth behind this incident. The common folk hardly paid attention to the implications and merely assumed that the young mech designer had been too reckless in an attempt to sustain his explosive success.

They were not necessarily wrong, but only the highest and most knowledgeable leaders understood the true meaning behind the act of triggering a lightning tribulation!

A lot of parties that paid attention to Ves had quietly increased their evaluation of this controversial mech designer once again.

Even if his attempt had crashed and burned, he had demonstrated enough ingenuity and courage for making it this far. So long as he was able to develop his potential further, he could accomplish much greater feats in the future!

It was conceivable that a lot of different parties developed a greater desire to cooperate with him. His shallow foundation and his volatile personality no longer became as significant as before. His potential outshone many of his negative qualities, making it so that a lot more people were willing to take a gamble and invest in this supernova of a mech designer!

All of that were concerns for the future.

The Larkinson Clan had more important issues to worry about. The Premier Branch had unwittingly attracted a huge amount of attention. It had too little manpower to handle all of the inquiries and deal with all of the powerful Terrans that insisted on obtaining answers.

In the absence of Ves, Gavin Neumann quickly became overwhelmed by all of the demands.

It was not wise to ignore or offer a perfunctory denial to any of these requests!

The Terrans could be quite touchy about etiquette and propriety. Gavin began to sweat as he tried to figure out the best way to word a rejection to a rather invasive proposal from one of the ancient clans.

"Let me help you handle these matters." A female voice spoke. "I know these clans the best. As a former member of an ancient clan, these Terran dignitaries will still consider me as one of their own. That should make it much less challenging to keep them at bay."

Alexa entered Gavin's office within Diandi Base and calmly took over dozens of the most difficult and sensitive cases.

With Alexa helping the Premier Branch handle a portion of the aftermath of the anomalous weather event, the culprit who triggered it in the first place was resting in an entirely different place.

Ever since the Bluejay Fleet teleported Ves away from the surface of the planet, he had removed his Unending Regalia and gone through an extensive health inspection.

The state-of-the-art medical facilities and scanners most certainly became confronted by a lot of shocking discoveries as they analyzed the properties of Ves' radically altered physique.

From finding out that his phasewater concentration had skyrocketed to realizing that his actual body mass had grown far more than was apparent on the surface, the doctors and biotech experts serving on the Tarrasque grew excited at the prospect of gathering invaluable research data on an actual human phase lord!

It was hard for Ves to share in the joy and excitement of all of those RA doctors and researchers. Their smiles and laughs completely slid away from the gloom that surrounded him like a forcefield.

If these crazed biotech researchers had their way, they would have kept Ves in their labs for weeks!

The more they studied Ves' radically altered body, the more they gained insight into how a human version of a phase lord truly operated!

However, it was impossible for all of these brilliant scientists to have their way. Their studies may be of incredible value to the Red Association, but it was more important to preserve the rights and dignity of a tier 3 galactic citizen.

As such, it only took a few hours for the 'health inspections' to come to a regrettably early end.

Ves did not even register the looks of dismay of all of those doctors who deeply wished that he could serve as their test subject for at least a few more days.

He ended up in a cozy and familiar lounge in another section of the flagship of the Bluejay Fleet.

A bot had delivered a cup of warm and soothing hot chocolate, but Ves had not touched the floating container once since it arrived.

The cup still made sure to keep the beverage warm at the most optimal temperature, so the hot liquid continued to steam in front of the paralyzed mech designer.

"Here."

The sudden interruption forced Ves out of his fugue. He blinked his eyes and focused on the high-tech gadget that Jovy held out with his arm.

Ves slowly raised one of his tired arms and picked up the object. He could sense the water element becoming more active around this brand new device.

"The lightning tribulation has completely drained the reserves of your old shield generators." The liaison from the Survivalist Association explained. "While it is technically possible for us to restore

them to as good as new, they are too weak and outdated for a galactic citizen of your stature. I have taken the liberty to retrieve this from our stores and present it to you as a gift. It is one of our latest personal azure shield generators. It is powerful enough to withstand at least one or several attacks from a first-class multipurpose mech, though I do not advise you to test this claim. It is particularly effective if it is given time to reinforce itself with water-attributed E energy."

The cost of a first-class personal shield generator of the hyper generation was insane, but it was nothing to one of the most powerful organizations of red humanity.

Though Ves did not want to deal with anything aside from his own thoughts, he was too much of a cheapskate to reject this freebie.

"Thanks." He answered in a gruff and exhausted voice.

He did not treat this expensive life-saving gadget like a treasure. He cared so much about the Elemental Lord that nothing else could rouse his interest.

Ves simply placed the new personal shield generator underneath his patriarch uniform and allowed it to settle onto his body.

A minute of silence ensued as Jovy sat on the couch opposite to Ves and silently ordered a drink for himself.

Jovy's knowing eyes seemingly pierced straight through Ves' facade.

"Do you understand what you have done?"

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"You surprised everyone when you managed to trigger such a spectacle. It is not impossible for a Senior Mech Designer to provoke such a response, but it is so unlikely that no one expected you to make it happen. I admire you, Ves. I truly do. It takes a special sort of mech designer to devise and produce a mech so powerful that it has pushed past a limit."

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"Do you know why this event is so rare to the point where it is unheard of among most Seniors and Masters? It is because this is a phenomenon that often precedes the creation of a grand work. Not every lightning tribulation leads to the formation of a grand work, but even if your amazing Elemental Lord fell short of that impossible standard, it would have excelled in a different way."

The mention that the Elemental Lord had the potential to become a grand work was so shocking to Ves that he finally pulled himself out of his daze!

"Are you kidding me, Jovy? Are you actually claiming that the Elemental Lord had skipped straight past the second rung and reached the third rung of Senfovon's Ladder of Craftsmanship?"

Jovy responded with a smile. "You do not have to take my word at it. You might not have noticed it, but several Star Designers paid close attention to how the lightning tribulation unfolded. They have personal experience with these sorts of events, as their greatest creations are always subjected to the same treatment. The Xenotechnician I personally conveyed to me that your Elemental Lord had the makings of a grand work, though the Polymath is not as confident in this conclusion. Regardless of their differences, both of them have become highly impressed with your attempt to break the

boundaries of what mechs are capable of. This is what mech designers should truly be working towards."

Ves felt mixed about the fact that his 'modest' mech had managed to attract the attention of at least two Star Designers. His failure weighed so heavily in his mind that he could not even feel proud for this accomplishment.

## Chapter 5432 Consolation Prizes

A grand work.

It had only been a short time ago that Ves had begun to dream about fabricating a product that exceeded the scope of a masterwork.

That did not mean that Ves actually thought he had a chance of making anything close to a grand work this soon!

It was incredibly unrealistic to think that a relatively young and inexperienced Senior Mech Designer like himself could match the works that could only be attained by the most brilliant Master Mech Designers and Star Designers!

Yet today, he had somehow defied conventional wisdom again.

He should have felt proud for breaking such an astonishing record.

It should not matter too much that his attempt to create a grand work had crashed and burned in a spectacular manner.

Just the fact that he managed to come into contact with the third rung of the Craftsmanship Ladder was enough to surpass almost every mech designer at his age!

Perhaps not even the Polymath had managed to touch the threshold of a grand work when she was as old as his current self.

The implications were enormous, both to Ves and the Red Association.

Yet why couldn't Ves summon any joy or pride at this near-legendary feat?

It was because the bitter taste of defeat overshadowed everything else. How could Ves possibly be in the mood to take joy in the death of one of his most promising creations?

He had developed a close emotional attachment to the Elemental Lord since he initially came up with the idea to create a five elements mech.

He poured so much of his heart into this amazing living mech that its complete and utter annihilation wounded him on an emotional level!

Every masterwork carried a piece of himself.

It was conceivable that a grand work likely carried a greater piece of his soul!

Perhaps this may be the reason why Ves felt so... hollow.

His entire reality grew bleak as he could not bring himself to feel any joy about his other accomplishments.

The only outcome that mattered to him was that his Elemental Lord lost its struggle for survival and suffered a complete death as a consequence!

Ves experienced this trauma similar to a parent who had lost a child shortly after birth.

This was one of the most painful and devastating suffering a father or a mother could go through!

Before today, Ves could never imagine what it would be like for Aurelia, Andraste or Marvaine to die in his arms.

He would probably go crazy with grief!

Though Ves would always prioritize his own children over a grand work, that did not lessen the impact of one of his greatest failures as a mech designer!

Jovy did not rush to resume the conversation. He calmly sipped his drink while constantly observing his friend's depressed state.

"Lightning tribulations are strange phenomena." The mecher eventually continued. "I cannot explain much about them. I am not authorized to come in touch with secrets of this nature. I can only supply you with the small amount of details that the Xenotechnician and the Polymath have seen fit to share."

Though Ves could hardly muster any interest to pay attention to anything else aside from his incredibly painful loss, he harbored a special kind of resentment towards the lightning tribulation that denied his magnificent work a chance to live.

Everytime his thoughts strayed towards the lightning tribulation, Ves grew pissed at how it showed so much malice towards the Elemental Lord's existence.

It was as if its existence personally offended the powerful authority from Messier 87!

The Elemental Lord was a completely innocent existence as far as Ves was concerned. It did not deserve to die because of factors outside of its control.

If anyone deserved to get punished for violating a taboo, it should be Ves who should account for his crime!

Even though it was absolutely crazy for him to think about it, Ves actually wished he could have been the subject of the lightning tribulation instead of his precious creation.

In his current mood, Ves irrationally preferred to die if that was what it took to bring the Elemental Lord to life!

Only the most passionate and obsessive mech designers could understand his current sentiment!

Perhaps that was why Ves and Jovy were not in complete alignment at the moment. A sense of alienation existed between the two as Jovy could not fully understand why Ves took this loss so badly.

The RA mech designer sighed. "Objectively, you never had a chance of success. Your intention was too ambitious. Your mech possessed too much promise, far more than you can bear at your current ability. You sought to produce a battleship when you are only truly qualified to make a frigate. You tried to fly when you should still be learning how to walk. If you toned down the scope of your

highly inventive work, you might not have been able to produce an astonishing result, but the resulting mech would have provoked a much weaker reaction from Messier 87."

His explanation made sense. That was one of the reasons why Ves became so filled with regret. It became clear that he had crossed the line far too much.

Perhaps Star Designers such as the Polymath had many ways to cope with an exceedingly powerful lightning tribulation, but Ves was far less capable of handling such a situation!

The outcome that happened today made that abundantly clear to him. His failure taught him a brutal lesson about the dangers of unbridled hubris.

"Is it unusual to attract a multi-modal lightning tribulation that strikes as much as 81 times?"

"It is one of the most severe responses that a mech designer can provoke." Jovy straightforwardly answered. "For whatever reason, the number 9 has great meaning to the source of these tribulations. It is usual for highly notable accomplishments that far exceed the scope of an ordinary masterwork mech to trigger at least some variation of a lightning tribulation. Depending on how extensively the work defies the rules, the tribulation will strike in multiples of 9. For example, if you had attempted to create a mech that was much less ambitious, then it would have been able to survive this test if it only lasted for 27 strikes at most."

That was a sobering realization to Ves. He had acted completely without any awareness of the forces he had been toying with. If he possessed this information from the start, he would have definitely reined himself in and given his Elemental Lord a much greater chance to live past this day!

Ves lowered his head in regret. He hated the fact that the Red Association denied this crucial information to him, but he did not really blame the mechers for withholding it in the first place.

No one could have imagined that Ves actually needed it at his current stage!

People often learned the most profound lessons when they suffered a massive failure. Ves was in the same position now as the death of the Elemental Lord scarred him to the point where he would never want to make the same mistake again!

If he ever entered a position where he could trigger a lightning tribulation once again, he was determined to hold back until he was able to guarantee the survival of his most promising works!

There was no doubt in his mind that Ves would be confronted by lightning tribulations yet again. He had already triggered it three times over the course of his career. There was no way he would allow this setback to deter him from challenging this powerful force yet again!

"Tell me more about these lightning tribulations." Ves spoke with greater steel in his voice. "You said that this one originated from Messier 87, right?"

"Messier 87 is one of the largest galaxies in the cosmos as far as we can tell. It has assimilated so many galaxies that its influence on its surroundings is massive. A significant concentration of E energy radiation is able to reach the current location of the Red Ocean. This essentially means that we are all operating on its territory, for a lack of a better description. When we are able to make use of its power, we become subject to its terms and conditions."

Ves was pretty sure that he had never signed such an agreement, but then again, a supremely powerful galaxy had no need to waste its time on paper!

"Are those four-armed aliens native to that distant galaxy?"

Jovy nodded. "Normally, this is a secret that shouldn't even be shared outside of the halls of the Red Association, but since you have already seen their manifestations with your own eyes, you are allowed to know this much. You have done us a massive favor by giving us a glimpse of the possible alien adversaries that we might face once our two galaxies come into contact with each other. The previous lightning tribulations have produced similar alien manifestations, but... they were not as weak as the ones that appear today. You have made a large contribution by giving us a glimpse of the low-level combatants of the greater galaxy."

Ves couldn't help but twitch his lips. Low-level. According to the model constructed by the mechers, the four-armed alien swordsman likely ranked at the bottom of Messier 87's hierarchy of power!

"Since I have made such a valuable contribution, I am due for a reward, is that correct?"

"That is naturally the case. Any intelligence related to Messier 87 can directly improve our chances of surviving contact with the natives that reside over there. You have also given us valuable insights on the evolution of a human phase lord. We will not be stingy about any help you can give us in this regard. The personal azure energy shield generator is a part of your reward. The Association has also seen fit to award you with 750 million MTA merits. Oh, before you ask, we are aware of how much you care about the EdNet, so we have also awarded you with 10 permanent EdNet quotas. We hope that you will not let your ambitious attempt stop you from breaking the limits of what is possible in the future. The mech industry needs more rule breakers like you. Red humanity would be in a far better position if there are ten more mech designers who possess the same attitude."

Those were hefty consolation prizes!

"Hehehehe..." Ves couldn't help but chuckle when he heard that. "You mechers are quite rule-abiding as far as I am aware of. Well, I can understand your interest. Only the craziest of mech designers are brave enough to pursue the greatest of ambitions."

The Red Association was a bastion of order and rationality. That came with many advantages, but it was often the case that outsiders managed to shake up the foundation of mech design the most!

The mech industry needed both in order to prosper. Centuries of continuous growth and prosperity had proven this assumption!

"We would like to provide you with another benefit." Jovy said. "As an honorary member of the Red Association, it is our duty to assist you with your needs. Whenever you suspect that you are on the verge of fabricating a mech that is likely to attract a lightning tribulation, you can contact us for help. Our available esteemed experts will be happy to provide consultation to you. They can estimate the severity and the mode of tribulation so that you can make the necessary preparations and adjustments. You are not alone, Ves. The addition of any work that is able to survive a baptism of lightning is a boon to our civilization. The more wonders you can produce, the more you can strengthen the foundation of our race. We are all hoping that you will eventually succeed in your venture."



Ves could hear the sincerity in Jovy's voice. The mechers might be bastards at times, but when it came to the design and creation of fantastic mechs, they could be his strongest allies!

There was no reason for Ves to reject this assistance. If he wanted to succeed in his attempt to defy the supreme authority of Messier 87, he could make a lot more progress if he was able to borrow the expertise of the Red Association!

## Chapter 5433 Heavenly Authority

Ves received a decent amount of clarification from Jovy.

Understanding what exactly happened a few hours ago helped Ves a lot. He was starting to move past the trauma of losing an exceedingly precious living mech and began to think about how he could avoid this outcome in the future.

If the mechers wanted Ves to move past the darkness that clouded his thoughts, then they had made a fair amount of progress.

He still couldn't move past his enormous failure, but it was a good sign that he was starting to think about the future again.

Too little time had passed for Ves to be ready to move on, though. The more he wanted to let go, the more his memories of the Elemental Lord pulled him back.

There was no easy way for Ves to overcome this problem.

Jovy clearly understood this fact and did not occupy his friend for long.

"Mech designers can never succeed all the time. The further you go, the greater the challenges you will have to overcome. While it is not my intention to discourage you, it may be better for you to set your grander ambitions aside and work towards strengthening your foundation. The stronger your fundamentals, the greater the chance that your mechs will be able to survive these ordeals."

That was a sensible piece of advice. "I agree. Maybe it is time for me to stay grounded for a time."

There was so much room to improve. His failure may have caused him to lose the Elemental Lord, but its legacy still lived on in his mind.

He knew exactly what he had done to fabricate such an amazing work.

While he was not certain about his ability to reproduce a mech that was just as brilliant when he was not in an inspired state, he could still learn from the design and all of the spontaneous decisions he had made during the fabrication run.

This would be his way of making sure that the Elemental Lord still lived on in another way. Its existence would be remembered and its contributions would remain visible in the form of many small improvements and advancements derived from its brilliant existence.

Ves felt as if he went through a small mental baptism by the time the Tarrasque teleported him back to Diandi Base.

Upon his return, Ves sternly made it clear that he did not want to be disturbed for the time being.

Not even Lucky could keep him company.

"Meow..."

"I am sorry, buddy, but I need to take care of an important matter."

Ves retreated to his design lab and forced himself to write down his logs and add as many annotations to the design of the Elemental Lord as possible.

He wanted to translate all of his current thoughts and insights into writing while they still remained fresh.

This was an essential step to the long process of learning from his mistakes and doing a much better job next time.

He might not be in the best mood to undertake this work, but he owed it to the Elemental Lord to do what was necessary to preserve its legacy to the best possible extent.

As he worked, Ves noticed that he had become a lot more productive than before.

Despite his exhausted and emotionally drained state, Ves felt as if his mind had undergone a huge expansion.

The radical physical changes produced by the latest lightning baptism had literally amplified the size of his brain!

Somehow, these radical physical changes took place without producing any distortions, injuries or other sequelae!

Ves did not even feel weird or uncomfortable about the fact that thousands of kilograms of his own body mass had been folded into different dimensions.

Even though his actual body was stuck in a convoluted dimensional puzzle, his actual experience with his current state was not much different from before.

"How is this possible?"

This was the charm of a lightning tribulation. Any positive changes that took place usually ended up well. No mortal force was able to do a better job than the power of supreme creation!

Ves ended his note-taking a lot faster than he expected. It gave him the illusion that he had gained a copy of Gloriana's much-anticipated first-class cranial implant.

Of course, there were many differences between the two. He could vaguely discern that the radical expansion of his brain matter largely served to help him assert control over his massive true body.

Ves could not precisely tell how large his actual body had grown after his phasewater concentration had gained such a massive boost.

One outcome was for certain. He would probably be mistaken for a monstrous giant if he ever unveiled his true body in front of an ignorant crowd!

"I need to head somewhere private and see how I truly look like if I undo all of this space folding."

He needed to know what he was dealing with in order to prevent any future surprises. Who knew whether it would be handy for him to take advantage of his enormously inflated scale one day.

His thoughts did not linger too long on his phase lord cultivation. He was willing to take advantage of it whenever it was convenient, but he did not intend to obsess over its benefits.

As Ves continued to stare at the design of the Elemental Lord, he suddenly jerked when he noticed that one of his incarnations received a surprise visit.

Back in the old galaxy, the Oblivion Empress had deigned to pay a visit to Veronica.

The living divine artifact rested on a table and stared aimlessly at a design terminal.

What happened back on New Constantinople VIII had produced such a massive impact that not even Veronica could focus on her routine design work anymore!

"My child." A deceptively mild voice called out from the side.

No matter how gentle her voice may be, there was no way that Veronica could possibly disregard her own mother!

"Mother." The mechanical feline responded. "I suppose you have come to talk about how my main self arrogantly sought to challenge the heavens, only for his work to get struck down as punishment?"

The robed True God maintained a non-judgmental expression as he sat in front of Veronica.

"I came to dispel your ignorance. Now that you have touched upon a layer of reality that was previously beyond your reach, it is better if you develop a better understanding of the forces that you have challenged and insulted with your work."

Veronica frowned. Jovy had offered a lot of clarification, but he never offered an exact explanation why the Elemental Lord provoked such a violent response.

"Can you tell me the taboo that I have violated in the process of creating my latest work?"

Cynthia settled in a more comfortable stance. "To do that, I need to explain the purpose of heavenly punishment. You should have an understanding that galaxies are controlled by enormous and unfathomable existences, correct? They were called the heavens or the heavenly dao in ancient times. It is beyond the scope of this conversation to explain their full nature, but it is enough for me to say that they are the collective representatives of the galaxies that have spawned them. The stronger the energies in a given area, the stronger and more encompassing they become. It should be obvious to you that Messier 87 hosts one of the most powerful and domineering heavenly authorities in the cosmos."

The female cat nodded. "I can understand that logic. What does that have to do with lightning tribulations?"

"I am getting there, my child. Now, a heavenly authority is spawned from a galaxy and is generally, but not always, concerned with the health and survival of that very same cosmic environment. Since the heavenly authority is largely derived from the power of heaven, it is highly concerned with the use and abuse of these energies. What you call E energy radiation may seem like a free and endlessly renewable resource to you and your fellow red humans, but this is not actually the case. Nothing is truly free, and the E energy that is released by Messier 87 all have an existing owner."

That was a remarkably different perspective on E energy than the general consensus back in the Red Ocean.

Veronica felt a bit sour about this truth. "So we have all been leeching off someone else's energy, is that what you are trying to convey?"

"The heavenly authority has the right and the power to set its rules regarding its use. If anyone ever uses the power of heaven in a manner that is not conducive to the health or the goals of the dominant authority, then the latter will take action to punish the violent and deter others from committing similar misdeeds in the future."

That caused Veronica to look upset. "I can understand this punishment mechanism, but why does it turn into a reward mechanism so long as a violation is strong enough to make it past a tribulation?"

Cynthia chuckled. "That has to do with one of the fundamental rules of reality. Never forget that might makes right. Not even the heavens can circumvent this truth. They must always be fair to a degree. If the weak commit a crime, then they must suffer the punishment. If the strong commit a crime, then they will be rewarded for their actions so long as they can withstand the consequences. I understand that this brief explanation may sound highly contradictory to your ears, but I do not make the rules."

It sounded as if even a True God with a deep understanding of cultivation science was frustrated about the operation of the heavens!

"I don't get it." Veronica said in a tone that conveyed clear frustration. "Why did Messier 87 have to be so heavy-handed in striking down my Elemental Lord?"

"There are multiple reasons that can explain what has happened. One of them is internal and the other one is external. I shall start with the latter first. To put it simply, Messier 87 is an enormous galaxy that is filled with the power of heaven and cultivators who know how to make use of it. Now think of how a galaxy develops where a growing population of powerful aliens continually extracts the same resource over and over again. Do you think that the galaxy can always satisfy this growing demand?"

"No." Veronica shook her head. "That is impossible. There has to be a limit."

"This is one of the reasons why a heavenly authority must exist. It acts as a combination between an environmental protection agency and a resource management bureau. When the power of heaven is abundant, it is inclined to be fairly lenient about the usage of this widely available energy. However, Messier 87 is not old, but occupied with an unimaginable amount of aliens, many of whom are cultivators. I cannot discern too much information about them, but the severity of the lightning tribulation indicates that this powerful galaxy is... operating close to its maximum capacity."

In other words, it was like a highly congested sports stadium that was already filled to the limit.

It was incredibly different to keep all of the occupants happy and in line. It was logical for the security forces to act harshly against those that wish to enter the stadium by force or ruin the enjoyment of legitimate customers!

Veronica was grateful to her mother for finally giving her a clear explanation.

"I do not really understand the logic behind the harsh response." The cyborg cat said. "All of that E energy radiation that is spilling outside of the confines of the galaxy is going to waste anyway. Why does this heavenly authority care about the fact that I intended to recycle it for my own use? There are so many other humans in the Red Ocean that are doing the same! Why am I being singled out all of a sudden?"

Her mother's expression took on a graver expression. A heavy aura formed around her that generated an air of solemnity.

"It is because your violation was too severe, my child. When you attempted to create a mech that immediately possessed the potential to combine the five elements, you did not just attempt to create a living mech that was the equivalent to a True God if it fully realized its potential. You challenged the heavens themselves by usurping a part of its authority. This is the internal reason why your work could never be tolerated. If your living mech was truly able to combine all five elements at once, it will have the ability to merge them into higher forms of energy that can threaten the heavenly authority and bring its galaxy out of balance. Do you understand now?"

"Uhh, I don't think so..."

"Well, you are less ignorant than you were an hour ago. If not for the fact that a lightning tribulation must follow the rules, it would have crushed your elemental mech with all of the power of 81 strikes at once! Do not doubt my words. In fact, do not even think about repeating your stunt. You can design any mech you like, but your strength has to match your ambitions. If you dare to create another machine that inherently wields the five elements before you are ready, then the lightning tribulation may not be so merciful next time!"

Chapter 5434 The Great Struggle for Dominance

"I still do not understand."

Veronica had trouble understanding the rules and logic of these so-called heavenly authorities.

From her perspective, a big galaxy like Messier 87 generated so much E energy that it could not possibly contain it all. A vast quantity of E energy radiation constantly escaped from the confines of the galaxy and spilled out into the depths of space.

A tiny proportion of that massive radiation happened to pass through the new coordinates of the Red Ocean, thereby allowing people like Ves to take advantage of this runoff energy.

How could Messier 87 care so much about what happened beyond the periphery of its own galaxy?

Why did it remain so touchy about the usage of this energy that would have just continued to dilute more and more until practically nothing of use was left?

Her mother definitely possessed a much more comprehensive understanding of the true situation, but she had an annoying habit of withholding crucial information due to believing that her child was not ready to face the greater truths.

Veronica was tired of being treated like an immature kid. Her main self was already a Senior Mech Designer, which in most places was regarded as a mature and accomplished professional!

While there was still a large gap in status between a Senior and a Master, the fact that she had already come in touch with the third rung of Senfovon's Ladder of Craftsmanship ought to be an indication that she should be able to learn about the relevant truths in advance!

"Mother." The cute cat said as she floated over and landed her metallic body onto Cynthia's lap. "I need to know more. The rules that you have described don't really make sense to me. I lack the context to understand why the heavenly authority hates what I am doing. I won't stop, you know. I will continue to design and fabricate mechs that are stronger than the ones I have made before. Even

if I rein in my ambitions and work at a more measured pace, I will bump into a lightning tribulation sooner rather than later. If I am forced to have a rematch, I would like it to happen on my terms."

The Lady of the Night calmly listened to her child's arguments.

"Information is power, but it is also a curse." The True God spoke in a weighty tone. "From the moment you become aware of certain truths, your perception of life, reality and fate will change forever. Ignorance is usually regarded as a negative trait, but I do not agree with that sentiment. There is virtue in ignorance. Those who live without having to bear the curse of knowledge can embrace their futures with greater optimism."

Her argument did have merit, but Veronica had moved way past that point. She had become embroiled in numerous galactic and intergalactic affairs, a few of which directly influenced the development of entire civilizations and the balance of power in the Red Ocean!

"I do not think your argument applies to me anymore." Veronica plainly told her mother. "Now that I have become a tier 3 galactic citizen in human society, I have reached a position of prominence and leadership where continuing to remain ignorant is regarded as a sin, not a virtue. My responsibilities have become to remain oblivious to the greater forces in play. Tell me, please. Give me the truth."

Not even the Oblivion Empress could remain unmoved by her child's appeal. It was a mother's greatest wish for her child to grow up safe and happy. However, now that her naughty offspring had become involved in affairs that were so threatening that even True Gods had to act cautiously, perhaps her baby had a point.

"Very well. I shall unveil the truth to you if you must know." The powerful woman relented and took a few moments to compose her words. "Previously, I have described the heavenly authority of Messier 87 to you. Since this large galaxy is governed by a collective consciousness, so can others. Virtually every galaxy that is not devoid of life and energy is overseen by similar heavenly daos."

Veronica firmly nodded. "I know. I have already come in contact with whatever is in charge of the Milky Way and the Red Ocean. They were quite nice to me back then. In fact, I suspect that one of the reasons why my phase lord cultivation progressed so effortlessly on New Constantinople VIII was because the Red Ocean secretly made things easy for me. I don't think Messier 87 was in charge of the last lightning tribulation."

Cynthia was surprised by these guesses. "You are not wrong. You have an astute mind. It just so happens that this is related to the truth that I am about to unveil to you. If you think about it, these heavenly authorities are similar to cultivators. You can even think of them as superorganisms in a similar fashion to an ant colony or a bee colony. They are not singular existences that you can easily distinguish, but they come forth through the intense cooperation between many specialized organisms that are operating within a conductive environment. Yet no matter how special a superorganism may be, it is still subject to the same pressures and desires as any other organism."

This explanation entered into familiar territory to Veronica. She possessed keen insights into life and also possessed a decent understanding of biotechnology.

"You're saying that heavenly authorities can become hungry and greedy. They yearn to compete for a limited amount of resources that they really need, so they inevitably enter into a competition against similar existences. Are the galaxies... competing against each other?"

Cynthia responded with a cold smile. "They are. It may seem perplexing to you. The cosmos is vast. There are as many galaxies as there are pebbles of rock on a typical planet, yet they cannot possibly fill up the vast stretches of space. However, the heavenly authorities that are rooted in these galaxies are competing over loftier goals than that. One of them is to become nothing less than the overarching authority of our entire universe!"

"What?!"

There was a huge difference in scope between governing a galaxy and governing an entire universe!

The difference in scale was so unimaginably huge that it was like comparing an ant to a Red Fleet Dreadnought!

Even if Messier 87 was impressively one of the biggest and most energetic galaxies in the block, it was pure arrogance to think that it could dominate the rest of the cosmos!

"This is not a goal that can be attained in any human's lifetime." Cynthia explained. "Entire races may rise and fall before any noticeable change occurs. However, these heavenly authorities can afford to play the long game. They can live as long as their origin galaxies can last. Their strategies and methods of operation are incomprehensible to you because they are inherently not human. Conquering the universe may be impossible to the likes of us, but Messier 87 has already been working towards this goal. Do you know how it intends to invade other spaces?"

Veronica thought back on her mother's previous explanations. The answer was obvious now that she thought about it from this angle.

"Energy. It is energy, right? Earlier, you told me that no energy is free, and that all of it is already owned. From the moment that people like me make use of E energy radiation, we develop some sort of relationship or dependency on its originator."

Cynthia grimly nodded. "This is one of the direct methods that heavenly authorities rely upon to expand their claims. Each of us are made out of matter and energy, and even the former is derived from the latter. The humans of the Milky Way are completely native to this galaxy. Their bodies are completely derived from nutrients that originate right here. The energies that sustain their existences are also generated by the stars and other resources of their native galaxy. This means that they are full subjects of the local heavenly authority from beginning to end."

It was rather weird for Veronica to look at life from such a colonial perspective, but she was able to understand the logic behind this thought process.

"What about red humanity?" The cyborg cat asked. "What about my main self? Do they still belong to the Milky Way, or are they being assimilated by other authorities?"

"There are no straightforward answers to your questions, my child. There are two dominant factors that roughly determine your allegiance, for a lack of a better word. The first factor is to look at the energy and matter that has made you who you are today. In your case, you are born in the Milky Way, emigrated to the Red Ocean and recently began to make heavy use of Messier 87's E energy radiation. From a materialistic standpoint, your allegiances have become split between all three galaxies."

That sounded incredibly messy to Ves. It explained that he had been confronted by the heavenly authorities of both the Milky Way and the Red Ocean during his first sublimation. Back then, he had already obtained dual citizenship of sorts!

"I don't think that most red humans are keen to allow Messier 87 to take over us in this way." Veronica retorted. "I certainly have no love for this supermassive galaxy, even if I am eager to exploit its E energy radiation. I am also sure that a lot of red humans still harbor a lot of attachment to the Milky Way. They are still natives to the old galaxy in their opinion. They merely regard their territories in the Red Ocean as colonial extensions of the galaxy of their birth."

Cynthia smirked. "That is why the origin of matter and energy is not the only factor that determines your allegiance. Do not get me wrong. You cannot afford to disregard this factor. Your mixed interactions with the Milky Way, the Red Ocean and Messier 87 have caused you to develop strong debts of karma with each of these 3 galaxies. They are essentially investing their resources in you with the hopes that you will generate a profit for them in the future."

That sounded awfully familiar to Ves. States and powerful family organizations operated in the same manner!

"What happens if I am not in the mood to pay one of them back?" The cyborg cat's purple glowing eyes flickered.

"If you continue to take from them without ever paying them back, then these heavenly authorities will become hostile to you. They may not be able to punish you directly, but they can make it harder for you to advance by amplifying the power of a lightning tribulation. They can also 'encourage' their own subjects to attack you on its behalf. In short, it is not pleasant to be targeted by a hostile galaxy."

That was bad news to Veronica!

She had already pissed off the authority from Messier 87 once!

"Damn. Do I have to make amends in order to make up for my crimes?" Veronica asked with concern.

"Not necessarily." Cynthia shook her head. "You cannot maintain friendly relations with everyone. This is what the second factor is about. The bonds of karma formed by making use of energy and matter from a specific origin can only make you indebted to that heavenly authority. What truly matters is where your heart lies. Many red humans still think of themselves as full natives of the Milky Way. That means that they do not harbor any allegiance towards the Red Ocean and Messier 87. This is in spite of the fact that they have no qualms about exploiting the resources from both galaxies."

"You can do that?!"

"Yes, my child. What this means is that all of those human immigrants are still regarded as subjects of the Milky Way. They are essentially invading or colonizing other galaxies on its behalf after they have left their native galaxy. This is one of the fundamental reasons why the native aliens of the Red Ocean are so hostile to human colonists. The phase whales and the other alien races cannot tolerate an intruder that seeks to convert the Red Ocean into a conquest of the Milky Way!"



This... this competition sounded way too big for Veronica! She had no idea that these galaxies were locked in an epochal struggle for universal dominance!

#### Chapter 5435 The Curse of Knowledge

The story had become a lot clearer now that Cynthia unveiled the struggle for dominance.

Veronica had no idea that the galaxies or rather their heavenly authorities tried to conquer each other as part of a deep and enormous conflict!

The Milky Way, the Red Ocean and Messier 87 were not as isolated from each other as Ves thought.

In particular, the Milky Way and the Messier 87 had entered into a direct competition with each other. The Red Ocean just happened to become the contested lands they were competing over.

The Milky Way originally sought to establish its claim on the Red Ocean by unleashing the scourge of humanity on the dwarf galaxy.

However, the major alien races refused to let that happen. They panicked and prematurely triggered the Great Refuge Plan, which somehow displaced the Red Ocean all the way into Messier 87's orbit!

While this desperation move had certainly crippled the invasion attempt of the Milky Way, the greater consequence was that the Red Ocean became targeted by a much greater predator!

Even though no subject of Messier 87 had yet to step foot inside the hapless dwarf galaxy, the much stronger galaxy had already begun its 'invasion' by flooding the Red Ocean with exotic radiation!

All of the E energy radiation that red humanity was happily using to power up their mechs, starships and other tech was not as free as they assumed.

The greater truth of the matter was that E energy radiation belonged to Messier 87. No matter whether the humans or aliens of the Red Ocean actively made use of this resource or not, their continuous exposure to the power of a foreign heaven would slowly cause them to become more related to the giant golden galaxy!

What did this mean for the future?

Would red humanity still seek to maintain its attachment to the Milky Way, or would people gradually forget about their roots of their original galaxy as they began to interact more with Messier 87?

What of the native aliens? Would the phase whales and the other major races remain loyal to the Red Ocean to the end, or would the power of exotic radiation succeed in turning them against their own home galaxy?

All kinds of complicated questions welled up in Veronica's mind. She was no longer able to see the conflict between red humanity and the native aliens of the Red Ocean in a simple manner anymore.

So many additional factors came into play that Veronica could not keep track of everything anymore!

The sides had become too ambiguous!

This was what her mother meant by referring to the curse of knowledge!

A powerful human hand caressed Veronica's head.

"Do not think so much about these overarching issues, my child." A motherly tone soothed the cyborg cat. "You are not directly involved in this struggle. You are a chess piece, not a chess player. You need to focus on your own immediate interests first. The greater struggle between heavenly authorities is most definitely relevant to you, but its scope is far too great for you to agonize over. For now, it is already enough for you to become aware of the allegiances and intentions of the people around you. Think about which heavenly authority they belong to and how that affects their decision-making."

Veronica paused in thought. The most immediate subject in mind was the Red Association. The mechers were not monolithic, but he bet that their leadership had probably come to a consensus on this matter.

The leaders of the Red Association were probably aware of this universal struggle for dominance. They had to be as they largely consisted of True Gods just like her mother.

"Given that the mechers of the Red Ocean purposefully severed ties with the Mech Trade Association, I think that the former has no intentions of maintaining ties with the Milky Way anymore." She guessed. "You once told me that names have power. The decision to embrace the name of Red Association means that it is likely meant to encourage red humanity to develop its own separate identity that is separate from original humanity. The same goes for the Red Fleet."

"It is more than that." Cynthia said. "The Red Two have not only adopted a strategy that seeks to diminish the ties between red humanity and the Milky Way, but they have also taken action to embed the humans into the Red Ocean. What is curious is that the Milky Way may still be able to retain a weak claim to red humanity, but it will undoubtedly become much weaker over the coming years."

Veronica couldn't help but scratch her head with her paw. "That sounds... risky. Doesn't that mean that red humans will essentially become native to the Red Ocean in a few generations?"

The Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy was clearly too weak in the face of the two larger galaxies. It sounded a bit stupid to side with the smallest and weakest player in contention!

"The strategy of the Red Two is much more profound than you think, my child. The mechers and the fleeters are purposefully using their control over red humanity to shift its allegiances. Try and guess what they seek to accomplish with the information that you have obtained. Do you think it is pleasant for people like you to become the unwitting footsoldiers of these powerful authorities?"

"No." Veronica immediately shook her feline head. "This is especially the case when we were never given any choice in the first place."

If there was one pet peeve that annoyed her the most, that was answering to a higher authority!

"Think about all of the god pilots and Star Designers who owe enormous debts of karma to the Milky Way but have become stranded in a Red Ocean that has moved far beyond the reach of the former. Do you think these august figures are eager to find a means to reconnect with the old galaxy?"

This was a more difficult issue to Veronica. "I do not know what goes on in their heads. I think that god pilots and Star Designers are honorable enough to repay all of the favors that helped them in the

past. That said, the Great Severing has made it a lot more difficult for them to do so. These leader figures will probably do whatever they can to help the Milky Way out, but not as its vassals, but as normal business partners who have engaged in fair transactions."

That was a more insightful answer than Cynthia expected from her child!

"Your words already touch upon the true motives of the Red Two." The Oblivion Empress spoke in an encouraging tone. "Many people yearn for power. The more powerful they become, the less they are able to tolerate subservience. The Great Severing is both a calamity and blessing to the leaders of the Red Two. They have lost most of their connection to the Milky Way. How do you think the vassals of a powerful kingdom will act when they have become stranded in a distant colony?"

It did not take much effort for Veronica to imagine the likely outcome.

"There is no reason for those vassals to maintain a strong allegiance to a kingdom that cannot help them anymore. The colony will undoubtedly declare independence to its former master. Though red humanity cannot sever all of its ties to the Milky Way, the relationship between the two will become much less unequal than before."

Veronica grew fascinated by what she heard! She could see the hidden meaning behind many of the moves made by the Red Two. It turned out that they proactively sought to change this relationship from the moment the Great Severing took place!

In fact, she could even see an angle where certain people who may have learned about the Great Refuge Plan in advance deliberately choose to let the native aliens have their way!

"So what now?" Veronica asked her mother. "Red humanity may have gained an opportunity to weaken their ties to the Milky Way, but that still leaves them vulnerable to both the Red Ocean and Messier 87. The latter especially poses a great threat to the independence of all of those people."

Cynthia smirked. "That is why the Red Two are playing an exceedingly dangerous game. Are you still not able to figure it out? Think about it. What happens to a territory that is contested by three different powers?"

"That territory... will either fall into the hands of one of those three powers, or is able to maintain its independence through clever diplomacy. Wait, is that what the Red Two are aiming for? Are you looking to play the three galaxies against each other to the point where none of them can lay claim to red humanity?!"

"I cannot be certain that this is their ultimate plan, but this is the strategy that I would embrace if I was in their shoes." The Oblivion Empress replied. "Red humanity is looking to deepen its integration into the Red Ocean so that the dwarf galaxy can keep Messier 87 at bay, but I am certain that the mechers and the fleeters will control this process to prevent their people from becoming completely assimilated. Messier 87 is the greatest threat that you and your people must confront, but as long as you are able to use the power of the Milky Way and the Red Ocean to resist the progressively greater influence resulting from the widespread usage of E energy radiation, it is possible to produce a stable middle ground!"

This was a daring plan, one that went so deep that the vast majority of people weren't even aware of this greater ploy!

"If this daring plan comes into fruition, red humanity will no longer become slaves to any heavenly authority!" Veronica realized. "Our civilization will become detached but not completely hostile to any of the galaxies, thereby allowing our people to control our own fate!"

She had only glimpsed a part of the truth so far, but what she learned was so shocking that she looked at all of the major events that happened as of late in a whole different light!

For example, Ves began to suspect whether the Xenotechnician's Diplomacy Plan was an attempt to gradually assimilate red humanity into the Red Ocean.

"The Red Two are playing a dangerous game, and they are not unopposed." The True God elaborated. "For example, the Terrans and the Rubarthans retain a much greater desire to maintain their existing culture and heritage that originates from the Milky Way. So long as they are able to cling to these old traditions, these first-raters will continue to maintain a much stronger association to their old galaxy for many ages."

"That can happen?"

"Oh, yes. A cultural invasion is still an invasion. It does not matter if thousands of years go by and no living human exists anymore that has ever resided in the Milky Way. The history, the memory and all of the other emotional attachment to the old galaxy will ensure that its heavenly authority will still maintain a partial claim to red humanity."

Damn, this game was growing more and more complicated!

The more information Veronica received, the more convoluted this struggle became!

She thought about another variable.

"Is this fight even fair? What I mean by that is that the strength of these heavenly authorities are way too far apart. As far as I am aware, the Milky Way suffered a massive calamity that crippled it to the point where it is no longer able to produce the power of heaven. The Red Ocean has a lot of phasewater, but it is too small and weak to do anything else. If nothing shocking happens, I think it is likely that Messier 87 will gobble up the Red Ocean sooner or later."

"That is the most likely outcome." Cynthia acknowledged. "It is one that the Red Two is resisting with all of their power, but they face an uphill battle. The Red Ocean may be a small and weak dwarf galaxy, but it is an incredibly strategic prize to the greater heavenly authorities. Phasewater is a rare specialty resource that can massively facilitate long-ranged travel and transportation. Messier 87 may be powerful in absolute terms, but I doubt it is able to expand its influence to distant galaxies so easily. Once it is able to take over the Red Ocean..."

"The powerful natives of Messier 87 will be able to make use of all of that phasewater to invade a lot of other galaxies that were previously out of reach!"

Whether the aliens of Messier 87 knew about it or not, their explosive conquest of the surrounding galaxy clusters would serve to fulfill the ultimate ambitions of their heavenly authority!

## Chapter 5436 Gifts of Fate

Though her mother had gifted Veronica with the curse of knowledge, the benefits were worth it. She would rather live her life with greater awareness of all of the games that were being played over her head.

Learning about the true nature and motivations of the heavenly authorities was exceedingly precious knowledge!

If she wanted to hear this massive truth from the Red Association, her main self would probably have to become a tier 2 or a tier 1 galactic citizen in order to earn this right!

That was way too long for Veronica! It was far more preferably that she learned about this enormous universe-wide struggle in advance so that she could avoid its many pitfalls.

Knowing that the Milky Way, the Red Ocean and Messier 87 were locked in a massive competition did not give Veronica any comfort.

In fact, it did the opposite! She felt the Red Ocean had become a lot more dangerous now that she understood that it had turned into contested land!

"You haven't really answered my last question," Veronica spoke. "Messier 87 is the only galaxy that is both powerful and healthy. The Milky Way may have a strong heritage of its own, but it has been crippled for a long time. How can it remain a viable contender? What is its goal anyway? The Red Ocean has moved so far away that it is difficult to imagine that it can play an active role going forward."

The Lady of the Night lifted the cyborg cat up and stared straight into her artificial eyes. "The heavenly authority of the Milky Way is indeed past its prime. It has been damaged to the point where it is but a shadow of its former self. Put yourself into its shoes. If you have deteriorated to the point where you have been reduced to prey to any other galaxy that is able to invade your domain in the future, are you willing to lie down and accept this outcome?"

"Hell no!" Veronica swung her silvery tail in agitation! "I would do anything to escape this predicament! Wait... is sending out red humanity a desperation move from the Milky Way?!"

The implications were massive if this was the case!

Cynthia erupted in laughter as she swung the cyborg cat like a baby. "Hahaha! You think too highly of the heavenly authorities. They are more powerful than you can imagine, but free will is a powerful force. At most, they can only nudge people along to increase the probability that events will play out in their favor. To give you a more concrete example, lightning tribulations are one of the means they can use to produce outcomes that are more favorable to their interests."

The mother set the cyborg cat back down on her lap and resumed petting.

When Veronica heard this explanation, she thought back on her own personal experiences with lightning tribulations.

She had triggered three of them so far, and they produced outcomes that seemed perplexing.

That was not the case anymore. Realization gradually dawned upon Veronica as the expanding context finally granted her enough clues to fill in the missing pieces!

"Is that the reason why these different heavenly galaxies treated me so differently?! From what I can remember, the Milky Way and the Red Ocean have been really friendly towards me. Is that because I am doing stuff that advances their agenda?"

"You can think of it that way," Cynthia nodded in agreement. "Their options are also much more limited. They do not have many good investment targets to choose from due to their relatively poor

ecosystems. Messier 87 is spoiled for choice, so it is much less inclined to be generous or forgiving anymore."

Veronica felt as if she had touched upon a great revelation. It was one that directly affected her outlook towards her life!

"I can understand that, but... aren't they being a little too generous towards me?" The cyborg cat skeptically asked. "It seems to me that they are a bit too eager to lend me a hand. Am I that attractive of an investment target?"

"You are." Cynthia plainly answered and poked her finger against the cyborg cat's chest. "Have you forgotten who you are? The gifts of fate always come with a price."

It took a few seconds for Veronica to guess what her mother was getting at. What kind of gift of fate was she referring to, and why did she refer to it with such an ominous tone?

"Oh. Are you talking about... the Mech Designer System?"

Cynthia smiled. "Like it or not, from the moment you have initiated the fragment of the Metal Scroll, you have become a Holy Son. More than that, where do you think the Metal Scroll comes from? Where do you think the Sacred Scrolls originated from? Each of them are artifacts that have been infused with massive amounts of energy and matter. All of that has to come from somewhere. Do you understand now, my child?"

Damn!

Veronica had yet to make this obvious connection!

Now that her mother pointed it out, Veronica abruptly realized that carrying and making use of the Mech Designer System caused her to accumulate greater and greater debts of karma to the Milky Way Galaxy!

Her ties to the old galaxy had grown so strong over the years because she had never ceased to take advantage of the System!

Veronica had learned a thing or two about the nature of karma. She knew it became exponentially more difficult to resolve all of this karma as it continued to pile up without stopping.

She began to think about the only other person that she knew that owed even more debt to the Milky Way.

Was the Polymath the most favored agent of the old galaxy?

It did not make sense.

On the day of her attempted coup, the Star Designer took the initiative to disconnect red humanity from the old galaxy.

Her Unity Plan also sought to wipe out all of the old traditions of every colonial state and replace it with a completely new and uniform identity that belonged to red humanity alone.

All of that suggested that the Polymath tried to do the polar opposite and rebel against the Milky Way!

Even though her radical scheme had crashed and burned, the Polymath did not really lose as badly as everyone thought.

Perhaps her true goal was to default on her astronomical debt to the Milky Way and start over with a clean break!

If that was the case, then Ves had vastly underestimated the Polymath's scheming!

It made a lot of sense for her to ditch the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown and her fragment of the Metal Scroll.

She may have benefited enormously from their power back when she was younger and weaker, but now that she had become an incredibly smart and capable Star Designer, their usefulness had started to come to an end.

It was far more preferable for the Polymath to get rid of these shackles of the past and move forward as a free and unburdened True God!

A part of Ves began to envy the Polymath for successfully taking advantage of these powerful relics, only for her to dash before she had to pay her massive bill!

"This is one of the hidden meanings behind the term 'Holy Son'. You are the symbolic 'child1 of the Milky Way, and enjoy its blessing for that reason. Any lightning tribulations that you trigger will cause it to manipulate the circumstances in a manner that will benefit you the most. After all, the more the Milky Way facilitates your growth, the more you can feed back to your mother galaxy."

It explained that the first tribulation successfully birthed the Superior Mother despite the enormously shabby and suboptimal conditions at the time.

It also explained why all of the negative karma resulting from all of the mistakenly attributed deaths that were allegedly caused by his actions produced such a light and tolerable series of lighting strikes.

The heavenly authority of the Milky Way had been playing favorites all this time!

Veronica was not amused to say the least. No one liked to be burdened by a massive pile of debt.

She was fine when she remained ignorant of these strong bonds of karma. Now that she had become aware of them, she truly felt that she could not go on with her life without making a serious effort to repay the Milky Way for all of its help!

This was not an absolute imperative, but it was more of a nagging feeling that just wouldn't go away unless she resolved it. The more she tried to weasel her way out of this debt, the more it would disturb her on an esoteric level, making it harder for her to advance without getting bogged down by lingering regrets!

Veronica made another belated realization.

"Wait, is that why I have accidentally become a phase lord? Is this also why it had become so absurdly easy for me to advance my body cultivation during the last tribulation?!"

Cynthia replied with a smirk. "Why do you ask questions when you already know the answers? As I have said before, the gifts of fate always come with a price. The Red Ocean can be regarded as a vassal of the Milky Way, though that is not actually the case. It is complicated."

"What are you talking about, mother?"

The True God sighed. "It is not easy for me to explain the complex dynamics of the heavens from a human perspective. What is relevant is that the Red Ocean has noticed that you are one of the favored 'sons' of the Milky Way, and decided to act like a copycat and make a bet on you. Its own situation is quite precarious as you know. At worst, the Red Ocean will lose its investment, but so long as you are able to use its blessing to successfully resist the invasion of Messier 87, you will be doing it a massive favor."

"Does that mean that other humans won't be able to advance their phase lord cultivation so easily by exposing themselves to lightning tribulations?"

"I cannot say." Cynthia crossed her arms. "The Red Ocean has a strong incentive to boost the strength of red humanity, as its native aliens are far too primitive and undeveloped to resist the forces of one of the greatest galaxies in the cosmos. However, the red two clearly will not appreciate all of the gifts that it is able to bestow. You are much more suitable to become its agent because you are principled enough to repay your debts and already enjoy the support of the distant Milky Way."

That sounded like a very human power play to Veronica. All of this stuff was becoming more and more complicated. She was already reaching her limit of how much she could bear the growing curse of knowledge.

Veronica felt very mixed about her main self's accidental body cultivation.

Phase lords were much harder to kill if nothing else, so they had a much greater chance of surviving a lot of future crises.

However, thinking about how all of the growing phasewater concentration and body mass increased her debt to the Red Ocean reduced their attraction.

She was not resentful enough to ditch these supposed freebies, but she did not like the fact that she had been roped into a contract without properly understanding the terms!

Cynthia rubbed her palm on the cyborg cat's head. "Calm down. Do not worry too much about all of these debts and obligations. There are many ways to resolve them. If you want to be honest, then work towards paying them back when you have grown powerful enough that you can do so with a slight amount of effort. If you want to be less than honest, then I can point out directions for you to default on your debts at the cost of souring your relations with these two galaxies."

It was way too soon for Veronica to think about this. She was still in a growth stage and would probably have to become a highly accomplished Master Mech Designer before she could even think about addressing these issues.

"What about Messier 87? I cannot stop making use of all of the E energy radiation that it is spitting out, but it clearly has no love for me. In fact, I have probably earned a place on its blacklist given that I am an 'agent' of both the Milky Way and the Red Ocean."

"You cannot have it all, my child. So what if Messier 87 regards you as a threat? Its heavenly authority cannot strike you down with all of its might. So long as that is the case, you can survive even if you enter deep into its sphere of influence. Did you know that there are two kinds of cultivators?"

"Uh, no?"



"There are cultivators who conform to the rules of the heavens. They are able to earn greater power and longevity as rewards for their service. You can interpret them as the agents of harmony who seek to benefit their galaxies out of obligation or because they adhere to a noble purpose. There are also cultivators who defy the restrictions imposed by a heavenly authority. They steal whatever they can and take advantage of every exploit so that they can obtain all of the power and longevity they desire by force. They are pure agents of chaos who are defined by their overriding selfishness and defiance towards greater authorities. Much of the reason why the Milky Way has fallen to this point is due to the actions of these miscreants. What sort of cultivator are you, my child?"

#### Chapter 5437 Heavenly Relationship Management

Was Veronica an agent of harmony or an agent of chaos?

Was she a protector or a destroyer?

Was she a hero or a villain?

Just thinking about these questions generated a lot of headaches in her cybernetic mind. There was no way she could form direct answers to them. No matter which one she chose, she could always think of an argument that contradicted her conclusions!

However, Veronica was not as young, clueless and naive as she was in the past. She had gone through a lot of growth and managed to make a lot more progress in shaping her views about herself.

Her artificial purple eyes glowed brighter as she cut through the confusion and reasserted her identity.

"I refuse to abide by this false dichotomy of yours." Veronica issued her response. "There is no way that people can be allocated to just two diametrically opposing categories. We are way more complicated than that. The way you have framed your words is too misleading, mother."

Cynthia smirked as she looked down at the cybernetic incarnation of her son. "I did?"

"No one is purely good or evil." Veronica eruditely explained her views. "In the same way, I do not think that anyone can be completely selfless or selfish. Most people tend to fall along various points in those spectrums. I am neither an agent of harmony nor an agent of chaos. I am... me. Just me. I make my own decisions. I will not allow any heavenly authority or my irrational hatred towards one to determine how I live my life."

Her mother approved of her views.

"You have a clear head on your shoulders, my child. There will always be people who seek to pin you with a label that falls in line with their interests. If they try to paint you as an agent of harmony, they will try to engage in moral kidnapping to force you to work 'for the greater good' of the human race and other such nonsense."

Veronica grimly nodded. She immediately thought about her interactions with the Survivalist Faction and the rest of the Red Association.

Although she did not necessarily ascribe malice to the way the mechers had treated her so far, she could certainly recognize an element of exploitation in their relationship.

"There will also be people who oppose you or what you represent. They will portray you as an agent of chaos whose presence will only lead to great disaster if left unchecked. It is not pleasant to be turned into a common enemy of an entire society, and the threat of it may deter you from doing whatever it takes to achieve your goals."

Veronica always felt restrained in society. From the need to keep so many secrets to her inability to experiment as much as she liked, she would have been able to make much greater progress if she became unbound by the constraints set by the Red Two and other authorities!

Cynthia stroked Veronica's head. "I do not wish to tell you how you should live your life. You have grown old enough to make your own decisions in this regard. What I want to tell you is that you do not have to entertain so many concerns about the debts and obligations imposed by the various heavenly authorities. They are powerful in many ways, but helpless in other ways as they are notoriously inflexible. Many cultivators in the past and present have succeeded in bamboozling them. A debt is only heavy when you are unable to get rid of it through other means."

Her words helped to reassure Veronica's nerves.

Not every debt had to be repaid.

The problem was that Veronica always abided by the principle of fairness. As a mech designer and an entrepreneur, she often relied on win-win agreements to earn long-term profits.

It was not in her nature to scam her business partners, especially when the latter had always shown enough goodwill.

"I do not want to play fast and loose with karma," Veronica said with a sigh. "If the burden is not too heavy and if the contract is not unreasonably lopsided, I do not mind settling my debts in an honest fashion. You have already confirmed to me that the Milky Way and the Red Ocean are not strong enough to threaten me all that much. That means that they don't have enough leverage to force me to do stuff that I do not want. I am confident in my ability to maintain mutually beneficial relationships with them. The worst that could happen is that I will walk away from them and make do without their support."

Her mother looked approving. "That is a sober approach to managing your relationship with these heavenly authorities. Too many cultivators have revered the heavens so much that they have effectively surrendered their goodwill."

From what Cynthia had described, these heavenly authorities pretty much sounded like the spiritual equivalent of a large super-organization such as the Red Association.

While the mechers were undoubtedly powerful enough that Veronica had to act carefully around them, there was no reason for her to surrender to them and become their slave.

It was still possible to become friends and business partners with the mechers.

Veronica just had to apply this approach to the huge and overarching heavenly authorities that she became involved with. She was willing to work together with them if it was profitable enough.

Of course, Veronica was also willing to disregard the Milky and the Red Ocean if it wasn't worthwhile to cooperate with them any further!

That still left her with one more heavenly authority that loomed especially large over her main self.

"About Messier 87..."

Cynthia smiled in order to reassure her child. "You must respect this heavenly authority, but there is no need to fear it too much. Much like the native alien races of the Red Ocean, the heavenly authority of Messier 87 are entangled in many different parties and affairs. You do not even rank anywhere close to the top as far as priorities go. As long as you keep your head down and avoid antagonizing it at every opportunity, you will be able to proceed without needing to look over your shoulder all of the time."

Veronica's mood improved after she heard that. "What sort of negative consequences will I suffer if I do not do anything to improve my relations with Messier 87?"

"The heavenly authority will not treat you much worse than all of the other red humans that reject its assimilation. This will not produce too many consequences beyond the accumulation of bad karma so long as you remain in the Red Ocean. Even though Messier 87 is attempting to claim the dwarf galaxy as its own, so long as the civilizations who occupy it cling to their own identities, this takeover is bound to get stalled."

That sounded nice, but Veronica was sure that Messier 87 would not let this be. The Red Ocean's strategic value was too great. All of the phasewater produced in this modest dwarf galaxy could further the aggressive ambitions of any heavenly authority!

"What if the native aliens of Messier 87 invade the Red Ocean one day?" Veronica asked with a bit of apprehension in her voice. "The Red Two have reasons to fear that this confrontation will happen in a few decades or so. Now that I know about the struggle for dominance, I can see why they are so concerned. Those invading aliens will likely act as the agents of Messier 87 and seek to establish its heavenly authority in our dwarf galaxy. How can we resist the power of this much larger galaxy?"

Cynthia let out a sigh. "That is a problem that can only be solved by you and the rest of red humanity. Messier 87 may be unprecedentedly huge and powerful, but I can easily deduce that it is occupied by many scattered races and organizations. Only a fraction of them have the capacity to conduct intergalactic travel. The forces that arrive in our galaxy should be relatively small. Their cultivators will also be operating in a much less prosperous environment. The large reduction in E energy radiation levels will directly weaken their ability to leverage its power. Take advantage of that. The god pilots of your civilization are not weak."

In other words, red humanity needed all of the god pilots it could get to confront the foreign True Gods that would definitely be coming!

Qi cultivators and willpower cultivators are two entirely different beasts.

The strength and effectiveness of qi cultivators were far too dependent on the environment. Qi cultivators could easily exert strength far beyond their level in a high-energy environment, but they were awful as long as they entered a region that was barren in terms of E energy radiation.

That was one of the principal reasons why Cynthia never dared to step foot outside of the Nyxian Gap. This hazardous region might not exactly be abundant in spiritual energy, but it was filled with negative energy that provided enough juice for the Lady of the Night to gain a home ground advantage.

Willpower cultivators and the souped-up version known as god pilots were much different in that regard. While they possessed a certain ability to leverage E energy radiation to empower their own moves, they did not excel in this capacity.

Their greatest strengths were their wills. Rather bending or persuading the environment to lend their power to them, willpower cultivators instead preferred to overwrite their surroundings by force, thereby imposing their own version of reality into place!

Operation Night Jazz had given Veronica a good glimpse of how god pilots operated in a medium energy environment.

She saw that the god mechs had already been upgraded with hyper technology, enabling them to increase their performance even more.

Yet no matter how much E energy they leveraged from the environment, the foundation of their strength always centered around the willpower of the god pilots and the technical capabilities of their god mechs!

E energy radiation was just icing on the cake as far as they were concerned.

"I understand." Veronica seriously nodded. "I will do what I can to promote the emergence of as many god pilots as possible. I am already involved in several lines of research that should shelp red humanity produce a lot more high-ranking mech pilots."

Now that she had obtained a lot of information that the Red Two kept for themselves, she couldn't help but agree with the strategies adopted by the mechers and the fleeters.

The conversation between mother and child had finally begun to reach its end.

Veronica had received way too many revelations in a short amount of time. She needed a lot of time to process her own thoughts and formulate new strategies based on the information that she had received.

There was one more matter that she wanted to bring up with her mother.

"Even though my Elemental Lord failed to earn its right to exist, I don't want to give up on the concept." The cyborg cat spoke. "Do you have any advice for me about making sure that my work stands a much better chance of surviving against a punishing lightning tribulation?"

"I was waiting for you to ask such a question." Cynthia responded. "Your original approach was too arrogant and dangerous. You overreached by an enormous extent. How can you build a mech that harnesses the power of the five elements when you have not even mastered any of them yourself? You tried to fly when you still haven't even learned how to walk. The proper approach is to do this step by step."

She had mentioned this before. It sounded as if it was very important to start from the beginning.

"Before you think about merging multiple elements to produce powerful synergies, you should master the fundamentals by thoroughly exploring every classical element in isolation. I can tell that your depth and comprehension of four of them is far too shallow. This is your greatest weakness and shortcoming. As long as you familiarize yourself with the properties and applications of all of these elements, you will naturally be able to fuse them together to produce more dramatic results."

Chapter 5438 Multi-Elemental Cultivation

Back when the Elemental Lord struggled to survive against the progressively stronger tribulation waves, the powerful living mech had been forced to learn on the fly and hastily figure out how to chain several different elements together.

The five brothers who had just been born did not enjoy the time to explore their own elements, let alone figure out how to fuse them together.

They were like babies who had been forced by circumstances to fight like adult soldiers!

There was no way for them to succeed in such awful circumstances. It would be like asking Andraste to fight against the Singularity Lord. The disparity in strength was simply too great for this venture to succeed!

As a powerful qi cultivator, Cynthia Larkinson definitely knew what she was talking about when she gave her advice on mastering the five elements.

Veronica listened carefully and took her mother's lessons to heart.

"There is nothing wrong with specializing in a single element." The True God said. "Any element can be exploited to produce results that are far greater than what is possible in nature. By lessening their focus on other elements, qi cultivators can dedicate enough time, resources and other factors to transform the expression of a single element in many powerful forms. A mono-elemental qi cultivator is not necessarily inferior to a duo-elemental cultivator. What is important to note is that the difficulty in making progress as the latter is at least several times higher."

"A duo-elemental cultivator has greater potential than a mono-elemental cultivator, right?" Veronica asked.

"That is only true in certain cases. A duo-elemental cultivator has more options at his disposal. If his cultivation is at the same stage as a mono-elemental rival, he can exert greater power through the synergies between the two elements. However, the time and effort it takes to master twice as many elements makes it so that the duo-elemental cultivator has often failed in their deeper meanings and possibilities."

This was essentially a contrast between breadth and depth.

It reminded Veronica of the possible development directions of his design philosophy.

She was able to choose between growing a broad but relatively short tree, or growing a narrow but also taller tree.

Veronica had eventually opted to go with the former because that aligned better with her own nature. She was way too curious about different stuff to stick to a single subject.

It appeared that the same dynamic also applied to qi cultivation.

"The differences will become even more exaggerated when more elements come into the mix, right?"

Cynthia smiled in a way that made it seem as if she was reminiscing about the past.

"Oh, that is most certainly the case. The difficulty and progression speed of triple-elemental, four-elemental and the most exceptional five-elemental cultivators become exponentially worse. Virtually no grassroots cultivator can ever succeed in them. It takes a strong background, many resources and most importantly talent in all of the relevant elements in order for a cultivator to

make real progress in any of them. If any of these conditions are absent, it is always better to focus on a smaller quantity of elements."

That made a lot of sense. It sounded as if mono-elemental cultivators were all poor fellows who had to make do with less, but as long as they worked hard enough, it was still possible for them to defeat multi-elemental cultivators!

Veronica looked up at her mother again. "Hmm... you are a mono-elemental cultivator who specializes in wood, am I right? You have never displayed any strong abilities that make me think of the other four classical elements."

The cyborg cat received a small smack on her head as a response!

"It is not polite to point out someone else's cultivation!" Cynthia admonished the cat before smiling. "I can tell you that you are not wrong. My power is largely derived from wood. Due to my extensive exploration and mastery of this element, I have fused it with my own comprehension and insights and mutated it to form my own dao. This has granted me the ability to perform many methods and techniques that cannot be reproduced through shallower applications of the wood element."

Veronica recalled the times where her mother demonstrated her power as a qi cultivator.

Cynthia was frightening in how she was able to expand her nature-based domain to absorb any kind of energy and convert it into her own power!

"Is that the sort of strength and understanding that I must reach in order to sufficiently master a single element?"

That caused her mother to chuckle. "Oh no, my dear. That is far too much to you, I believe. Your circumstances are different from mine. You do not have the time or the need to explore one of the elements to such an extent. It is sufficient for you to master an element to the point where you can solidly manifest all of its basic applications to a perfect degree. There is no need for you to develop more advanced techniques because you can rely on the combination between multiple elements to produce more comprehensive results."

"So you are saying that I am much more suitable to become a multi-elemental cultivator?"

"Only in the context of a creation cultivator." Cynthia affirmed. "Your goal in mastering the elements is to incorporate them better into your mechs. You do not need to waste your time on learning techniques that are only relevant to qi cultivators. That makes it much more practical for you to explore multiple elements. In fact, almost every mech designer is a duo-elemental cultivator. They always have a foundation in mechs, which is a derivative of the metal element, and another attribute that is most closely aligned with their specializations."

Veronica nodded in agreement. She herself started out with a domain that was split between metal and life.

"Does this mean that I should start out by deepening my understanding of the metal element? That is my strongest so far, and I think I can make a lot more progress if I work together with Vulcan."

Surprisingly, Cynthia shook her head in disagreement.

"You are already working with metal practically every day. You have become so exposed to it that it is difficult for you to accelerate your progress if you work on it more. It is better for you if you shift your focus and explore a completely different element for a time. You will make many new discoveries as you work towards deepening your understanding of it. Once you comprehend this second element just as well as your original metal element, you can begin to explore how you can produce truly powerful results by combining them together. Over time, you can repeat this process with a third, fourth and ultimately a fifth element."

This was the proper progression trajectory of a multi-elemental cultivator. Veronica understood much better now how stupid she had been to design a five element mech from the start.

She felt so embarrassed by her monumentally stupid mistakes that she wanted to crawl inside a box!

"Even though you make it sound like it is manageable, it will still take many years before I truly gain the qualifications to develop a proper version of the Elemental Lord, right?"

"That is so, my child."

That would take way too much time and effort! Veronica was not even sure if she and her incarnations could master the five elements to a sufficient degree in a reasonable timeframe.

"Do I have to focus on the five elements at all? There are a lot of other attributes that I could explore instead in order to improve my mech designs. For example, I can choose to focus more on the attributes of space or death."

"Those are also valid approaches. There are many cultivators in the past and present who have done just fine without the five elements. However, I recommend that you do not disregard their power and their usefulness to your work. The reason why they are so important is because they encompass virtually every phenomena in our reality. You will not have any blind spots as long as you are able to master all five elements. Even if you fall short of that, mastering several elements will already equip you with the tools needed to address many different issues that you may encounter in the future."

Her mother made a good point. Veronica already had a firm foundation in the metal element, so she might as well get started in the other four ones in order to round out her elemental design applications.

Of course, she had to be careful about biting more than she could chew.

"I need to pick an element to begin my foray into mastering the five elements." Veronica said. "I am thinking about increasing my comprehension of the water element. What do you think, mother?"

"Why water?"

"There are three reasons for that. The first is that it is much easier for me to progress in it than the other options. The latest freebie given by the Red Ocean has substantially increased my phase lord cultivation. My main self's body carries a lot more phasewater in his body than before, and that has likely boosted my affinity to the water element. That means that I can make a lot more progress if I delve into water as opposed to the other choices."

Cynthia responded with an approving nod. "That is a good observation. Cultivators must always make use of their advantages. You are not an innate five-elemental cultivator, so you certainly cannot take this lightly. What else?"

"I have already learned a lot of insights and applications related to the power of blood." Veronica continued. "Just as mechs are a derivative of metal, blood is a subcategory of water.

I can use my existing understanding of blood to quickly deepen my understanding of the water element."

"That is also a good approach. It is not uncommon for cultivators to start with a narrow expression of an element and slowly work towards broadening and generalizing their understanding."

Veronica was pleased to hear that her suspicions about this were correct.

"The final reason is that this element synergizes well with phasewater and phasewater technology, which are highly relevant to mechs. Both hyper technology and phasewater technology offer many uses to applications based on the water element. Whether it is developing stronger azure energy shield generators or increasing the effective utilization of phasewater in a mech, a greater understanding of this element will boost all of these useful applications."

The only problem that bothered Veronica was that the direct offensive applications of the water element were rather... limited.

She could still think of a few ways for the water element to enhance the attack power of her mech designs, but it was a lot easier to leverage the fire element instead.

This was the nature of working with the five elements. Each of them possessed natural advantages and disadvantages.

By choosing to focus on the power of water, Veronica would find it a lot easier to improve the defensive properties of her mech designs in the near future.

She did not particularly mind this. Defense was of great importance as it was vital to preserving the lives of precious living mechs as well as their mech pilots.

It was only when his living mechs and his mech pilots were able to live long enough that they could grow into powerful legends!

"It appears that you have formulated a solid plan." Cynthia said with a hint of pride. "Know that the journey to mastering the five elements is destined to take a lifetime. The vast majority of cultivators never come close to it, and even the most talented ones often die before reaching their ultimate goals. The journey is much more important than the destination. Do not think about controlling all five elements in this century. Start by exploring what you can do with the power of metal and water before you branch out further. I suspect that it may take several decades before you are qualified to start the next phase."

Her mother really hit home how monumental it was to tackle the five elements. Veronica fully kept these words in mind.

"Thank you, mother. I will try my best not to skip over this process again. I have thoroughly learned my lessons."

The cyborg cat eventually left the design lab in order to sort out all of her thoughts and reform her mental models.

The Oblivion Empress watched the incarnation of her son depart from her mundane sight while her own attention drifted towards the past.



She raised one of her pale and shining arms and formed a ball of wood energy.

She then summoned a second ball consisting of earth energy.

Three more balls of energy of the remaining elements quickly followed.

The balls began to orbit around each other under her careful direction. Wood followed after fire which followed after earth and so on. Slowly but surely, the cycle of elements started to rotate faster and faster, generating a lot of excess energies that took an exponentially greater effort for Cynthia to control!

Soon, the five balls of energy spun so quickly above her palm that it seemed as if they were about to morph and merge into a single cohesive amalgamation of energy!

The five different representative colors of the five classical elements slowly made way for two contrasting colors.

Dark and light spun around each other in a mystical pattern that exuded a lot of power and sacredness!

Even though the Lady of the Night had invested only a trifling amount of energy in this little display, the power and other properties of this extraordinary energy ball would have shocked Veronica into silence!

Eventually, Cynthia closed her palm, causing the extraordinary energy interaction to disappear from sight.

To a cultivator like her, the five elements were the root of everything.

Chapter 5439 Ideas on a Mono-Elemental Mech

Ves' mood had become a lot less burdened by depression the day after he had lost the Elemental Lord.

He initially thought that he would remain affected by the grief and loss of losing such a precious creation, but Veronica's most recent conversation with Cynthia changed everything!

Now that his expanded mind became filled with a lot of messy and complicated thoughts about heavenly authorities, his relationships with the three galaxies, the factors that determined the strength of lightning tribulations and the endless depth of multi-elemental cultivation, he had become way too distracted to pay much attention to his failure!

While the premature death and loss of the Elemental Lord still weighed heavily on Ves, he no longer became stuck in the past.

Instead, all of the explosive revelations from his mother had firmly set his sights to the future!

New issues, new threats and new possibilities loomed in the distance. Ves grew excited at the thought of tackling them so that he could ultimately design much stronger mechs than the ones he developed before.

"There is a lot more to hyper technology and E-technology than what I have used before."

Ves felt more ashamed of his precious forays into hyper mechs.

The Lionheart, the Blood Star Mark II and most notably the Elemental Lord all appeared to leverage the power of different elements, but their applications were painfully shallow and simplistic!

If Ves wanted to design much better hyper mechs, then he urgently needed to deepen his comprehension and mastery into specific E energy attributes.

This also lined up with the progression of a traditional blacksmith.

Each of them improved their craft by expanding their understanding of different elements and the materials associated with them. The greater their comprehension, the greater the extent their products could take advantage of an element!

Right now, Ves needed to set aside his obsession of merging the five elements and start off with just a single element.

While it was impossible for Ves to design a true mono-elemental mech given that they were all intrinsically related to metal and other elements, he wanted to improve the application of the water element in his next designs.

Several new mech ideas came to mind.

However, Ves quickly fell back to his Fey Project.

After all of the excitement surrounding the Elemental Lord, it seemed as if he had completely set the original Fey project aside.

"It is still a good mech design."

Though its design did not measure up to his recently raised standards, it was still a fine product and a good drone mech in the early phase of the Hyper Generation.

The Living Mech Corporation had already made preparations to mass produce the commercial variants of his latest mech line. Gavin and many other staffers had also been working hard to set up a high profile product reveal event.

If Ves insisted on going back to the drawing board and finding a way to develop a version of the Fey Project that made much more extensive use of the water element, then that would completely upend the current schedule!

It would probably take at least several months for Ves to design a satisfactory hyper mech that utilized the power of water in more profound ways.

Ves might as well design a variant of the Fey Project, or better yet, a completely new mech design!

Perhaps he could even do both at the same time while also making sure he kept up on his intensive studies!

"My productivity has increased once more."

Ves had already noticed the improvements ever since he returned from the field.

The latest lightning baptism not only amplified the size of his physical body to the point where he had a lot more brain mass than before, it had also furthered the evolution of his mind and spirituality.

The care of the Red Ocean ensured that the recent lightning tribulation strengthened his overall foundation in a holistic manner without producing any sequelae!

Although Ves did not like to pile up a lot of debt, he sincerely felt grateful to the local heavenly authority for increasing his cognitive capabilities.

He was able to design his mechs a lot faster than before!

It was difficult for Ves to estimate how much he improved, and not all of it translated to purely intellectual gains.

Having a big body that was filled with phasewater actually imposed an exponentially greater burden onto Ves. Much of his brain capacity actually had to be dedicated towards managing all of the phasewater and phasewater organs.

If that did not happen, then it was far too easy for the space folding to get messed up or for a drop of phasewater to go berserk and tear a hole in his body!

Ves needed to gain a better understanding of his strange physical state. He was not that eager to find a corner and unfold his true body.

He was much more interested in planning out his next steps in relation to his mech design endeavors!

"Hm... I have already spent enough time on the Fey Project. It is time for me to wrap it up and give it a rest. I can wait until this mech line has become old enough for me to apply a lot of improved hyper technology in the next revisions."

His thoughts strayed towards future mech designs. He wanted to tackle at least one project that had a profound relationship with phasewater so that he could explore more extensive applications of the water element.

The most obvious answer he could think of was a space knight.

The defensive mechs of the Larkinson Clan could certainly use an update. The current versions of the Bright Warriors and the Rigid Walls were still serviceable as far as lastgen mechs went, but their roles were far too marginal in the current war.

Alien warships simply possessed too much firepower. Their attacks could be evaded with a bit of effort, but it was almost impossible for a mech to survive a direct impact with one of the bigger armaments of an armed vessel!

Even the smaller tertiary gun batteries of a warship could tear entire mech companies of space knights apart due to their much greater firing rates!

Offensive melee mechs enjoyed a renaissance in the Hyper Generation due to the release of space suppressors and other supporting technologies, but the same benefits did not apply as well to defensive melee mechs.

The problem was that space knights were usually a lot heavier and slower to close in on an enemy fleet.

Even if they managed to arrive next to their targets, their maneuvering was painfully sluggish, making it a lot easier for gun batteries to track their movements and blast them apart!

Ves was not able to mitigate these dangers entirely, but more extensive utilization of the water element could help them resist the attacks of smaller rapid-fire cannons a lot better than before.

"Is there a way to increase their mobility as well?"

It should be relatively easy to improve the mobility of a mech equipped with a combat drive or a transphasic flight system, but both of them happened to be high-end systems that were usually reserved for high-ranking mechs.

If Ves wanted to design a commercially viable mech, then he needed to control the costs and minimize the dependency on phasewater as much as possible.

"Do I have to split this project in two and design two variants of the same concept at once?"

Perhaps he should. It made sense for him to split the development of the Fey Project in order to design a low-end and a high-end version of the same concept.

The same logic could apply to many other projects as well, particularly the ones that he intended to put on the market one way or another.

It shouldn't be too difficult to enhance the performance of a transphasic space knight with a deeper application of the water element, but what about the cheaper version of the same concept?

"Is it possible to leverage the water element in an effective manner in a mech that has no phasewater?"

Ves became quite troubled by this question. There were definitely a lot of methods that could enhance the performance of such a machine, but the lack of synergy between phasewater and hyper technology limited his options.

"No. That is not correct. Removing phasewater from the equation doesn't necessarily constrain my work. It just takes away all of the powerful handicaps that has allowed transphasic mechs to cheat for a long time."

Transphasic mechs were typical products that relied on a very expensive material to enhance their combat power.

While it was definitely worthwhile to expend these valuable resources for this purpose, it was too bad that the supply of this exotic was wholly insufficient!

The demand for phasewater had never dropped. It had only grown higher and higher, and there were no signs that it would drop anytime soon!

If even the aliens of Messier 87 had reasons to covet phasewater, then it was conceivable that it would never become a common commodity!

This meant that Ves would never be able to capture a large market share by designing transphasic mechs.

Even though his clan could afford it, a lot of other organizations did not have this luxury!

The top market segments could get their hands on phasewater easily enough, but the bulk of the forces fighting for red humanity would probably field non-transphasic mechs for the most part.

Ves could make a much stronger contribution to the survival of red humanity if he was able to design a highly effective hyper mech that did not rely on an expensive crutch such as phasewater!

The more he thought about it, the more he wanted to tackle this challenge!

The main reason why he became excited about this potential new project was because he wanted to see how he could leverage the water element in a defensive capacity.

"Is it possible to imitate the defensive properties of transphasic armor systems and transphasic energy shields without employing phasewater?"

He initially thought that it was impossible for him to accomplish this by making use of relatively cheaper and more abundant hyper materials.

However, he began to doubt this conclusion when he thought about how he could approach such a matter.

"What is phasewater, exactly? Is it a fusion between space energy and water energy that has taken on a material form, or is it something else entirely?"

Even though Ves had put a lot of effort into studying phasewater theory, he still wasn't able to come up with an answer to this question!

This was an indicator that phasewater still had a lot of mysteries left for Ves to explore.

Even though Ves felt that it was far too simplistic to equate phasewater as a special fusion between space energy and water energy, what if he applied this simple combination into a mech design?

"This might actually produce a useful result!"

However, doing so would violate his intention of designing a mono-elemental mech. Trying to combine the water element with any other attribute meant that Ves would be focused on researching exciting new synergies and combinations.

While that was undoubtedly helpful for his mech design project, Ves would be unable to advance his comprehension of the water element as much as he wanted.

"No. I need to restrict my work to just using the water element." Ves frowned. "At most, I will only use the metal element to reinforce the mech frame, but everything else should be carried by the power of water."

That made it a lot harder for Ves to come up with viable ideas.

For example, phasewater synergized extremely well with energy shields, which was why all of the native alien races relied upon transphasic energy shields as their main form of defense.

Could Ves utilize the water element in a similar but also different fashion that would lead to stronger energy shields?

"Water is often associated with motion. What if I can use the water element to make an energy shield more dynamic. Perhaps I can create whirlpools or something that can make it trickier to break the energy shields..."

Chapter 5440 Five Phases of Superstition

Ves found that it was much harder to deepen the application of hyper technology than he initially expected.

Certainly, there were a lot of different ideas that he could apply to energy shield generators and armor systems, but it was not as simple for Ves to figure out anything worthwhile.

His standards were high. The problem was not that his ideas were bad, but he was almost certain that other mech designers could do a better job than himself.

"I am not the only person who is working on deepening the application of hyper technology." He frowned.

Anyone who took a look at it would notice that the five classical elements occupied a very prominent position on the list.

This was because everyone could see that they had the potential to form a cycle!

Of course, trying to make it happen was way easier said than done. It turned out that Ves was hardly the only mech designer who dared to design a mech that attempted to form a complete cycle of the five elements.

Unlike the initially successful creation of the Elemental Lord, all of the other attempts to fabricate comparable machines had failed before they could even be completed!

No matter whether they were conventionally fabricated or materialized into existence, they almost certainly broke down due to the violent and uncontrolled interactions between opposing elements!

Ves couldn't help but smirk when he found this out. "It is not so easy to build a five element mech that can stably control all of these forces."

After a lot of mech designers had learned their lesson, they reined in their ambitions and fell back to designing mono-elemental or duo-elemental mechs.

Only the more daring ones attempted to tackle triple-elemental mechs, but they usually relied on special advantages to moderate the inevitable conflict that could arise.

When Ves read through the articles that highlighted the few triple-elemental mech designs revealed to the public, his expression shifted for a time.

Reading between the lines, he could easily tell that these mech designers either learned a thing or two about cultivation science or had access to a consultant with the respective expertise.

They all treated their mechs as artifacts that sought to leverage the power of heaven to amplify their performance.

The triple-elemental mechs even showed more obvious traces of mysticism that alluded to a deeper understanding of a special interpretation of the five elements.

After the Hyper Generation kicked off, the common consensus in the mech industry was that E energy came in many different variations. They were akin to different flavors that were wholly separate and discrete from each other.

However, according to a particularly dominant interpretation in ancient times, the five elements were a lot more interconnected to each other. They described different phases of a universal cycle. They were like the seasons of an axial tilted planet that repeated endlessly.

According to this mystical interpretation of the five elements, qi or E energy was naturally able to undergo transformations like the cycling between yin and yang.

One interpretation of the transformation between the phases sounded a bit interesting to him because it was tied into the concept of life and growth.

Water represented the formation of new plant life under the cover of winter snow.

Wood stood for the growth of new shoots of plants at the onset of spring.

Fire stood for the warming and feeding of solar radiation in the heat of summer.

Earth represented the ripening of grains and other plants that took place next.

Metal was associated with the harvesting of the ripened crops and the storage of seeds to prepare for the following cycles during autumn.

All of it sounded nice, but Ves personally thought it was a hamfisted way to tie the five elements to the seasons.

Ves did not put too much stock in the superstitions of old. He was a man of science and preferred to use a combination between his own observations as well as knowledge based on modern empirical research to build his own theoretical frameworks.

His mother taught him that anything related to spirituality was psychoactive and psychoreactive.

That essentially meant that superstitions and subjective beliefs actually had the power to change the behavior of spiritual phenomena.

"This must be why the five phases of transformation theory must have been so popular in ancient times," Ves speculated. "It is a convenient self-hypnotizing tool that enables many cultivators to easily combine and transform these classical elements."

It explained why mech designers who did not get exposed to this theory found it a lot harder to design multi-elemental mechs that produced greater synergies. Their own mental models lacked sufficient explanations that could help them tame the E energy attributes they sought to combine.

Though the existence of this harmonious cycle suggested that the five phases of transformation described a fundamental and objective truth about this reality, Ves did not put as much stock to this interpretation.

One of the objections he had was that the cultivators of ancient times dressed up the mysticism and used the five elements to make all kinds of nonsensical excuses and beliefs about stuff.

For example, people associated the five elements with five different tastes, five different sounds and so on. Ves really couldn't take this seriously because he was a modern scientist and engineer who possessed critical thinking.

In his mind, the five phases of transformation were not even that absolute.

For example, wood could clearly turn into fire, but Ves believed he could also find a way to turn fire into wood if he worked hard enough!

Sure, it was probably a lot harder to recreate this counterintuitive transformation, but Ves was convinced he could do it if he desired!

However, it was a thankless and highly inefficient approach to utilizing E energy. Ves might not like the mysticism surrounding the five elements, but he could not deny that it provided mech designers with an easy mental model to incorporate ready-made transformations in their work.

As much as he wanted to design multi-elemental mechs like all of these adventurous mech designers, Ves forcibly had to hold himself back from following suit.

"Many of these mech designers are too impatient." He shook his head in disapproval.

The vast majority of applications of hyper technology so far were relatively shallow. At most, mech designers utilized their design philosophies to apply E energy in slightly more inventive fashions.

For example, Ves had already learned that there were plenty of mech designers who specialized in energy defenses had already applied the idea he thought about before.

Energy shields that utilized the water elements to form whirlpools or currents that could better spread or divert incoming attacks had already emerged.

The same went for other relatively simple applications.

"It is a waste of time for me to develop mech systems like these." Ves concluded. "I'm not even a defensive specialist. If I want to design a more interesting space knight, then I should try and form a connection between hyper technology and my specialty."

He became stuck at this junction. There weren't any obvious ways for him to apply hyper technology to a space knight in a way that tied into living mechs.

Even though his head was full of ideas, none of them were relevant to the matter at hand.

"Oh well." He shrugged. "I am not in a hurry to start another design project. I can take my time and wait for further inspiration."

He was still determined to design a new defensive mech in the future, but it had to make enough sense. There was no point in starting up a new project when he hadn't even figured out a solid direction.

Ves put this potential new mech design project aside and returned to handling all of the affairs that had come up since he concluded his most recent fabrication run.

"Many new groups of people want to cooperate with us." Gavin Neumann reported when Ves had returned to his main office in Diandi Base. "Many of them are first-raters such as Terrans. This has made it a lot more difficult to greet them and handle our communications with them. Our Premier Branch is too short-handed to manage these relationships, and our needs in the upper zones are not too great at the moment."

That did not surprise Ves that much. "You don't sound too worried."

"That is because your assistant Alexa has stepped in on our behalf. She was a lifesaver. She possesses the right training, background and status to respond to all of these powerful parties. She has even taken action that has drastically reduced the amount of unsolicited inquiries that we are receiving."

Ves looked impressed. "She is really too useful. I am really glad that I recruited her into my clan."

Although it was not fair to make this comparison, he thought that Alexa was much more useful to him than Ketis at this point.



It was the separation that was making it difficult for Ves to remain connected to Ketis. He knew that the ambitious swordmaster and Journeyman had chosen to stick with the Swordmaidens in order to design more effective swordsman mechs that could pose a greater threat to alien warships.

Ves thought back on all of the other mech legions of the clan and found it hard to relate to them after he started to spend time among the Terrans.

He missed all of the familiar clansmen.

Ves couldn't wait until the first batch of Larkinson mech pilots graduated from EdNet training and joined the Premier Branch.

A few more minutes passed before Gavin addressed the most important item on the agenda.

"By the way, we have already finalized the planning of the upcoming product reveal." Gavin said. "If there are no unexpected delays or complications, we can hold the event a month from today. We have already rented a large enough venue in the Bortele System, and we can guarantee that a large amount of press and invited guests will come and listen to your presentation."

"A month is doable." Ves had no objections to this schedule. "The Bluejay Fleet is so damn fast that the travel time should not be an issue. Will the Warborn or the expeditionary fleet be present?"

"Probably not. Both forces are already on their way to the conflict regions. General Ark Larkinson and Master Benedict Cortez are adamant about looking for fights and gain more opportunities to earn war merits. It may take months for them to turn away from the front."

"I see. Well, it is not necessary for us to rely on their assistance. We can rely on the Bluejay Fleet for high-level protection and private sector forces for other services. The Fey Project is partially commercial, so it should not be a problem to hire a bunch of excellent mercenaries to pilot them in our public exhibitions. Using them can better highlight how easy it is to get started with the Fey Project as opposed to other drone mechs."

Gavin nodded in agreement. "An abundance of security companies and mercenary organizations has descended onto Bortele. We will not be lacking in manpower. There are two issues that you need to address. First, given that your previous attempt to make a mech has ended up in disaster, are you in the mood to fabricate another mech? If you are able to present a masterwork mech during the product reveal, you can win over a lot more customers. Second, have you decided on a proper name for the Fey Project?"

"Hmm..."