

The Mech 5471

Chapter 5471 The Power of Predation

Ves let out a deep breath as he reached the final page of the black tome that was directly created by a powerful god pilot.

Being able to learn the content of the Hunter's Code by reading from the pages of this sacred book was an incredibly valuable privilege.

Through the remnant will contained within the heavy tome, Ves was able to comprehend a lot of abstruse and complicated theories with remarkable ease.

It was as if a small clone of the Huntsman sat on his shoulders and whispered a lot of secret guidance in his ear!

If Ves wanted to, he could practice the Hunter's Code right away.

Perhaps he might be able to advance his phase lord cultivation by killing and devouring transphasic beasts.

He could even convert a much higher proportion of the extraordinary nutrients into useful gains due to his vastly superior true body!

Ves could easily envision himself growing stronger at an accelerated rate. He had no need to rely on mechs and organic processing machines. His yield would definitely be a hundred times if not a thousand times greater than any other human hunter!

Of course, this was only the case up to a certain point. Once his phasewater concentration had progressed far enough, his true body became so massive that hunting down ordinary prey no longer yielded any significant benefits.

The only way for him to accelerate his body cultivation through the Hunter's Code was to hunt down other phase lords and phase whales!

Fortunately, it was not necessary to stick to the Hunter's Code all the way. There were no traps or penalty clauses that prevented hunters from abandoning it and switching to other cultivation methods.

The only issue that hunter's needed to take into account was that they needed to put a lot of effort into changing habits, their mentalities, their fighting methods and their artistic conceptions.

This was not easy, so there was still an incentive for hunters to stick to the Hunter's Code even if their progress slowed down.

Ves had no intention of practicing the Hunter's Code for that reason.

He never forgot that he was a mech designer first. Even if the Hunter's Code was not too exclusionary, it still imposed standards and beliefs that all hunters must abide by in order to take advantage of its powerful methods.

If Ves chose to practice the Hunter's Code despite all of these risks, he would acquire a lot of baggage that would turn him into a mech designer similar to Ketis.

His former student was still a good mech designer, but her dual status as a swordmaster contaminated all of her work and prevented her from making anything else!

Ves could not tolerate such a change.

The mere implication that he had to treat the Huntsman as his god and superior was enough to make his blood boil!

As Ves finally closed the heavy tome. He learned a lot from studying the Hunter's Code, but it was not a method that was suitable for him to practice.

"Awww. I was still reading that, papa."

"Shush, pumpkin." Ves said as he patted Andraste on the head. "The Hunter's Code is not suitable for any of you. It might hold a lot of promise to people, but each of you have your own ways to achieve greatness. Practicing this method will consume your lives. There are much more suitable ways for you to grow stronger."

After Ves exited the guarded library, he thanked Oscar Tarich for giving him a valuable opportunity to study the Hunter's Code from the best possible source.

"Your reputation as an unconventional expert on matters relating to growth and evolution is becoming increasingly better known." The old man said. "Are you willing to issue any comments about our Hunter's Code? We welcome any feedback, especially from a visitor as accomplished as yourself."

It was not easy for Ves to figure out the correct response.

He could not walk away without saying anything, as that would inevitably make him look arrogant and piss off certain people from the Hunting Association.

He did not think it was wise for him to share his full opinion. Not only was his feedback far too valuable to be given away for free, he might expose certain uncomfortable aspects that the Hunting Association did not want to highlight.

Ves paused for a few more seconds before offering a polite response.

"The Hunter's Code will serve as an invaluable tool to red humanity. Not everyone is suited to take up the lifestyle that it espouses, but the brave men and women who practice it will surely become our greatest sword and shield against all manner of powerful threats. Your hunters may be engaged in hunting down unstable exobeasts for now, but I can foresee that the best of them will one day grow strong enough to hunt down the threats to our civilization. Neither phase whales nor other powerful alien leaders will be able to prey on us without suffering retaliation in return. The roles of hunter and prey can always change depending on the situation."

President Tarich's face bloomed into a hearty grin. "Well said, professor! Your reputation as a mech designer who is gifted with his mouth is also well-deserved! Our Association is pleased to hear your kind words. Hunting is not always seen in high regard, and the sport occasionally attracts less savory characters. However, our Hunting Association is committed to turn the art of killing beasts into a noble endeavor. With the Huntsman himself watching over us from above, we shall never allow any malcontents to impinge on our collective honor. That is our promise!"

Ves truly hoped these hunters would stay true to their original responsibilities. He was not entirely hopeful that they would remain as pure and noble as the Hunting Association desired.

He knew extremely well that power had a corrupting influence. The stronger these hunters became, the more they became addicted to the process of gaining greater power.

Though the Hunter's Code contained several hard and soft safeguards that prevented hunters from committing uncontrolled rampages, who knew whether that would remain the case in the long term.

Ves did not prolong his stay at the branch office of the Hunting Association.

After touring a few more interesting departments, Ves and his children entered a hotel where they could rest and prepare for tomorrow's activities.

"Get ready for bed, kids. I will take each of you on a hunt tomorrow. By the time we come back to Tixe City again, I hope that each of you have caught at least one little prey."

"I can't wait!" Andraste grinned.

"Do we really have to kill those cute animals, papa?"

"Don't let their appearances fool you. They will not hesitate to devour your bodies if they have the ability."

"Meow meow meow."

"See? Even Lucky agrees."

It took a while for Ves to put his excited children to bed.

Once they fell into slumber under the watchful eyes of the cats and the mecher bodyguards, Ves retreated to his own bedroom and fell into thought.

The Hunter's Code was a modern, sophisticated and highly comprehensive cultivation method that was representative of the current level of cultivation mastered by the Red Association.

As an off-shoot of the Five Scrolls Compact, the mechers certainly weren't bad at this kind of stuff!

Ves did not know who was in charge of composing the Hunter's Code, but he vaguely felt that their understanding was on the same level as his mother.

However, there were huge differences in comprehension between high-level cultivators.

His mother possessed a distinct style and approach to cultivation.

The creators of the Hunter's Code held different perspectives and likely derived their knowledge from different legacies.

That has led to the creation of a cultivation method that attempted to accomplish similar results through different means!

In other words, Ves managed to broaden his horizons and learned how certain processes could be accomplished without relying on his mother's solutions.

Ves became especially inspired by the use of rituals to engage in a formal form of contract cultivation.

"It is a brilliant idea to convert the extraordinary resources of a defeated prey into fuel for your own cultivation."

As a mech designer, Ves was not interested in employing this method himself.

He instead thought about whether he could apply this mechanism to his own mech design!

It did not seem practical at first.

Many of his mechs fought on busy and contested battlefields. There was no time for his living mechs to stop and build an elaborate ritual circle before sacrificing their kills to a higher entity.

If the mech pilots waited until the battle was over, then a lot of the valuable energies contained within the carcasses would have already dissipated into the environment!

"Besides, not every adversary is purely organic in nature. What if a mech unit has defeated an alien warship?"

Only a fraction of that gigantic vessel consisted of flesh-and-blood organisms!

The rest was entirely made out of lifeless metal. Ves could not really imagine how these inanimate objects could be converted into cultivation progress.

However, Ves did not think that it was impossible to apply the overall principle in general combat.

The rituals described by the Hunter's Code were elaborate and demanding. They could never conduct while hostilities took place.

The reason why it made sense to demand so much setup was because elaborate and highly meaningful rituals often increased the conversion rate and maximized the yield that could be obtained from a single carcass!

This was extremely suitable for single hunts where it took a lot of time and effort to harvest a powerful prey.

In more traditional battles, the quantity of opponents were far greater, but none of them were strong in terms of body size and other parameters.

"What I need is a fast way to extract whatever valuable energies from their bodies and convert them into instant cultivation gains."

The ritual could be simplified or changed so that it was always active on a living mech.

The role played by the Huntsman needed to be replaced with another entity. His design spirits should be able to undertake the same responsibilities, though they probably wouldn't be as good.

As long as Ves successfully made these adaptations, he would end up with a new application of E-technology that could serve as a permanent upgrade to all of his living mechs!

"It's like an add-on to their existing cultivation methods!"

As long as it worked as intended, both the living mech and potentially the mech pilot would rapidly grow stronger through frequent combat!

This was the inspiration that Ves always sought whenever he traveled to a different location!

It really made a huge amount of sense for his living mechs to actively devour a portion of the strength of their defeated opponents.

The expeditionary fleet had fought against numerous powerful enemies in the past. Whenever their foes got killed in battle, the Larkinsons had never attempted to extract more power from the corpses of the defeated alien soldiers.

This was a massive waste in hindsight!

If his living mechs learned how to absorb whatever power was left in the bodies of their defeated adversaries, then they wouldn't have to wait for an entire century to grow as powerful as the Ouroboros.

They could attain the same magnitude of power in just a couple decades depending on their fighting intensity!

As Ves thought about designing a lot of bloodthirsty mechs, he suddenly sobered up a little.

He suddenly realized that his exposure to the Hunter's Code had slightly shifted his mentality in the direction of his mother.

He did not know whether this was a good or bad development.

As much as the more decent side of himself wanted to refrain from going down the path of slaughter, the more ambitious and greedy side did not want to give up on this approach!

Now that he learned that stuff like this was possible, how could he continue to deprive his living mechs from a means to speed up their growth?

"This is the curse of knowledge!"

Chapter 5472 Hanlin #6 Hunting Ground

The next day, Ves and his family boarded a shuttle that took them a fairly short distance away outside Tixe City.

The main settlement on Ocanon VI was situated in the Melrose Continent. The hunting grounds on this landmass were highly regulated and deliberately controlled to remove any threats that posed a slightly greater danger.

While this made it so that the Hunting Association refused to recognize the hunting accomplishments of anyone who ventured in these grounds, they were popular destinations among children, tourists and hunters who were simply looking to relax.

Ves decided to bring his children to the Hanlin #6 Hunting Ground.

This was a landlocked region that was characterized by a lot of rolling hills and uneven terrain. It encompassed a large alien forest as well as open prairies.

Hanlin was a particularly interesting destination for young hunters due to the abundant presence of smaller exobeasts.

Many of them only grew as large as Arnold. They often looked cuter and fluffier than the prey in other hunting grounds. While they were not entirely harmless, a lot of herbivores among them never thought about fighting at all, so they never posed any serious threat.

Aside from these cute mammalian critters, Hanlin was also famed for hosting a lot of colorful birds. These avian creatures evolved in a thick forest that provided a lot of cover against larger and more formidable predators. Their speed and agility also enabled them to shake off predators with relative ease.

As a result, these alien birds tended to be less vigilant towards the humans that occasionally intruded in their forests.

It was often possible for children to get a little closer to them so long as they did not make any threatening moves.

Killing them was a lot harder, though. Unless they utilized shotguns or high-tech rifles with guided aim functions, it was unlikely for them to hit a fast and agile bird.

Most children merely liked to watch them without ever thinking about shooting them down, and Ves' children were no exception to this rule!

Aurelia tried to coax a fiery red bird from the tree branch in the distance. "Here birdy birdy. Come over here. I picked up a few nice seeds from the ground."

Though the birds did not really care about the occasional human intruders, that did not mean they were willing to get closer.

Too many children had tried and failed to attract one of the small avian creatures, but Aurelia was different!

She radiated so much gentleness and purity that the alien bird actually grew curious enough to fly closer!

"Hihihi! I told you I could do it! I have caught a bird!"

The red bird perched onto Aurelia's arm and quickly began to peck at the seeds in her hand.

"Chirp chirp chirp."

Her younger brother and sister carefully approached so that they could admire the bird in greater detail.

"This bird doesn't look so alien." Marvaine said. "Its eyes look funny, but they look just like normal birds."

"That is because birds are pretty efficient flying organisms." Ves taught his children. "You will probably learn this in your biology classes if you haven't already, but convergent evolution causes a lot of different organisms to look roughly the same. Ocanon VI might have a lighter gravity and a slightly different air composition, but it is pretty similar to Old Earth for the most part. That means that a lot of creatures from one planet tend to work in the same way as the creatures of another planet."

While there were more profound differences between the birds of the two planets, it was a bit too complicated to explain it all to his children.

Ves kept a constant eye on the red bird as he talked. Though he could feel through his spiritual senses that the alien creature possessed no hostility, he was always ready to take action if that changed.

Not that it mattered.

His children all wore their own personal shield generators, so it did not really matter if the bird tried to peck his daughter all of a sudden.

Lucky and Clixie were also capable of protecting the children, though the two nosy cats had already ventured deeper into the forest in order to 'scout out the terrain'.

If that was not enough to keep his children safe, then the silent and invisible mecher bodyguards around him would definitely utilize their full might to fulfill their mission!

Ves found it handy that these bodyguards were able to cloak themselves. It was not quite effective at making him feel alone, but it at least made his group less intimidating to the surrounding fauna.

He coughed a bit in order to attract his children's attention.

"Okay, that's enough. You can admire the birds later. Don't forget why I brought you here. I want each of you to hunt the prey of this hunting ground by relying on yourself as much as possible. In order to complete your hunts, you should make use of these rifles."

He reached out behind his back and retrieved a pack that contained three small ballistic rifles.

They were fairly simple, cheap and low-tech. They could not pose a threat to any serious prey in the Shamon Continent and the Chasseur Continent, but that didn't matter in their current hunting ground.

Due to their low specifications, it was extremely fast and easy for most of the gun stores of Tixe City to fabricate custom-fitted rifles for each of his children.

"The pink one is for you, Aurelia."

"Thank you, papa." The girl said with obvious reluctance in her voice.

"Chirp chirp."

Strangely enough, the alien red bird had not left her side despite all of the changes. The avian actually grew comfortable enough to move up to her shoulder instead!

"This red one is yours, Andraste."

"My favorite color!" The younger girl grinned as she expertly snatched the weapon from her father's hands.

She skillfully inspected it with trained motions and quickly studied the specs projected by the weapon.

Her expression quickly dropped.

"This rifle is too weak! Its stopping power is too low and its muzzle velocity is even worse. Its effective range is so poor that I can't snipe anything at longer ranges. Saintess Ulrika gave me rifles that are a hundred times better in every way!"

"That is because she wanted to let you get used to weapons designed to kill formidable enemy soldiers." Ves patiently explained. "I am not throwing you into a fight against an elite orven trooper or anything. This trip is about hunting harmless small exobeasts. There is no need for additional firepower."

"Awww..."

Ves bent down and gave his youngest son the smallest rifle. The light blue contraption looked like a toy more than anything.

"This is for you, Marvaine. You have memorized all of the rules on the handling of firearms, correct?"

Marvaine nodded as he held the weapon in a slightly awkward grip. "I did, papa."

"If you don't want to use this rifle to hunt any critters, then you can give it back to me. You are still young. There is plenty of time for you to grow older and gradually assume more responsibilities."

"I don't want to give it back!" Marvaine cutely insisted as he held the small rifle tighter in his arms. "I won't leave my sisters behind!"

"Good boy. I will stay close to you, so don't worry about anything."

A short moment passed as the children roughly understood how to handle their child-sized rifles.

They all received varying degrees of weapon training, so they did not need a lot of time to know how to aim or fire a bullet.

The weapons were deliberately stripped down in order to make them as low-tech as possible.

They lacked a lot of advanced functions that came with a lot of complexity.

Of course, Ves made sure to retain the feature that automatically blocked the rifles from firing if their muzzles happened to point towards any friendlies!

Ves clapped his hands.

"Before I let you go, I need to tell you two more things. First, if possible, I do not want you to kill your prey the normal way. Do you remember the Destroyer of Worlds and how she embedded an enormous cat onto her projectiles? I want you to try this out with your own companion spirits."

That caused his three children to look confused.

"How?"

Ves smiled and retrieved a bullet from one of the pocket's of his adventurer's coat. "It is not as difficult as you think, my dear. Do you see this bullet? I especially ordered it to be made out of a hyper metal. This makes it a lot easier to attach your companion spirit to it. The bullet material will make it easy for the two to stay together."

"Mrow."

He demonstrated this by sending out Blinky and having him enter the bullet.

"You can do that?!"

"Yes. This is not an exclusive ability of the Destroyer of Worlds. Anyone with a companion spirit can do the same. The real problem is range. Your companion spirit will only stay inside the bullet until it flies outside of your maximum boundary. This is why I insist that you move as close to your prey as possible before you aim and fire your weapon. Try your best to get within 50 meters or so. That should be close enough for your empowered bullets to produce the greatest effect."

"50 meters is too close, papa. Won't those exobeasts run away? Also, how can I find them in this forest?"

"I am sure you can manage. Your outfits come with moderate camouflaging functions, so you won't be as conspicuous as you think. As for tracking down your prey, you can use your companion spirits to scout ahead. Don't keep them in your heads. Make use of all of your advantages. However, if that is not enough, our cats can lend you a hand."

Ves transmitted a silent command.

A few seconds later, a pair of very different cats dashed out of the forest and stopped in front of the Larkinsons!

"Meow!"

"Miaow!"

Clixie came back without carrying anything between her teeth. Her cat-sized breathing mask made it difficult for her to bite onto anything.

Lucky on the other hand triumphantly returned with a furry brown mammal between his teeth!

The gem cat had already slit the creature's throat, but dark brown blood still spilled out of the wound.

"Eeewww!"

"What a poor beast."

"Why did you kill it, Lucky?!"

"Meow meow meow!"

Ves reached down and plucked the beast carcass from Lucky's teeth.

"I know this critter looks cute and all, but do not let that stop you from doing what is necessary to survive in this dangerous dwarf galaxy. I won't ask you to wantonly kill other lives, but you should at least show that you will not freeze and refuse to do what is necessary if your lives are ever under threat. Sometimes, you can only count on yourselves to save your life."

After a few more words of encouragement, he sent his children out into the forest.

They stayed fairly close together, though made sure not to press against each other.

Their smart clothing had automatically dimmed so that they blended better in the darkened forest environment.

Their weapons also became a bit less conspicuous.

With their companion spirits scouting the way ahead, the children weren't going in blind.

They soon paused as they spotted a six-legged mammal with an abnormally long snout and six eyes on his head.

"Mrow."

Ves used Blinky to signal for Aurelia to take the first shot.

His oldest daughter raised her darkened pink rifle and took aim. Mana had entered the chamber and attached herself to the hyper bullet.

Seconds passed by as Aurelia continued to aim at the creature in the distance.

"Mrow..."

After a few more reminders from Blinky, Aurelia overcame her unease and pulled the trigger.

"Mew!"

The round carrying Mana soared into the distance and missed the six-legged exobeast by a wide margin!

Though the rifle was not too loud, the discharge was still loud enough to spook the exobeast and scare it away!

"It's okay." Ves said as he softly patted his daughter's shoulder. "There are plenty of chances for you to try again. You'll get one next time."

He had noticed that Aurelia's aim should have been fine. The problem was that she jerked her weapon to the side from the moment she pulled the trigger.

Hopefully, she would get rid of that habit by the time their hunting trip was over.

Chapter 5473 Negative Entropy

The Hanlin #6 Hunting Ground might not be the most exciting region on Ocanon VI, but Ves found the terrain to be oddly calming.

The flora and fauna looked off compared to Old Earth-derived organisms, but their convergent evolution still made Ves feel as if he was on a peaceful human-occupied planet.

The abundance of trees, shrubs and occasionally more exotic plant growths caused the environment to become rich with the wood element.

"Mrow."

Blinky floated atop his head while gently absorbing the surrounding E energies.

All of the plants in the forest had become irradiated by E energy for roughly a year.

Day and night, these trees and shrubs came into contact with a lot of passing energies, causing them to change and mutate in many subtle ways.

Only a few plants proved to be more sensitive towards E energy radiation than others, and they quickly began to flourish at a much faster pace than normal!

It was easy to recognize these mutated plants. They were clearly the largest of their kind in a given area. Their trunks grew taller and their branches grew thicker and wider.

Other plants in the vicinity that had 'lost' the evolutionary race all started to wilt and die as their mutated counterparts monopolized all of the available resources that could be extracted from the immediate environment.

Ves even saw a few cases where the mutated trees resorted to cannibalism and directly sunk their roots and branches into these lesser growths!

He couldn't help but think back on the concept of predation

Both his mother and the Huntsman were extremely successful cultivators. In an environment where E energy radiation had dried up a long time ago, these exceptional figures managed to surpass all of their peers and become one among many countless humans to evolve into True Gods!

While their individual strengths and capabilities vastly differed from each other, they both stood out for their willingness to fuel their growth by feeding onto others.

The philosophical differences between them were not small, but when it came to the core of their domains, they were pretty much two sides of the same coin.

Their carnivorous outlook on cultivation and the universe caused them to constantly look for bigger prey to hunt.

When Ves watched the live broadcast of Operation Night Jazz, he carefully observed the performance of each god pilot.

The Huntsman stood out for his eagerness to confront the ancient phase whales. The sense of excitement along with his burning desire to fell another formidable prey radiated across many electronic signals and directly impacted Ves' psyche and Spirituality to a small extent!

From what Ves recalled at the time, he was vaguely able to sense the Huntsman's greater ambition.

The ancient phase whale that he was in the process of impaling with his penetrating spears was just the start.

The Huntsman did not make it clear to everyone else, but Ves knew that this thrill-seeking god pilot clearly looked forward to hunting down the much more formidable prey of Messier Sy!

Was there no end to his bloodlust?

Though it was rather good for red humanity that the Huntsman was working hard to prepare for fights against the most powerful alien adversaries to come, Ves did not feel entirely comfortable with this philosophy.

He felt the same unease whenever he talked about anything related to cultivation science with his mother.

Ves hadn't been able to fully describe the source of his unease, but now that he had entered a natural environment, he understood the cause of this problem.

As Ves looked around the alien forest and felt how much life was brewing within the trees, he felt comfortable and at peace.

"Mrow..."

Blinky squinted in pleasure has joyfully absorbed a small portion of all of the life and vitality produced by this gentle alien forest.

Ves was a mech designer. His life centered around designing and creating mechs.

Regardless of what his clients and customers did with his machines, Ves had always considered himself to be a creator at heart. He transformed lower value materials into higher value products, thereby contributing to a positive development of human civilization!

Industry was civilization. The more stuff people produced, the greater the development of a society.

Human life had the potential to bloom even further with the assistance of all of the useful tech produced by creators such as Ves!

Another way to describe his place in the cosmos was that he was a negative contributor to entropy.

It was an inevitability for the current universe to move towards entropy.

Yet within the lifetimes of a civilization, it was still possible for a society of people to create order out of chaos.

Ves felt in tune with order. His contribution to human society might lead to the death and disorder of outsiders, but he had always sought to promote the order of the humans who made use of his products!

The forest of the Hanlin #6 Hunting Ground was nothing special. It was just an ordinary environment that had been carefully trimmed and culled of any significant threats. Hardly any visitor had any reason to find greater meaning in this environment.

Ves was different.

The forest was an emblematic symbol of the fusion between nature and order.

This aligned extremely well with his domain. His design philosophy caused him to develop strong affinities with both mechs and life.

Mechs was a technological derivative of the high-level metal attribute. It was a symbol of order, civilization, war-making potential and other complicated concepts.

Life had connections to many other high-level attributes, and could serve as one by itself. The variation that Ves had formed within his Spirituality was mostly aligned with the concept of Mutual Growth, which had a very strong relationship to the wood attribute.

Wood was associated with a lot of positive concepts. It was flexible. It stood for the cycle of life and death. It possessed a rejuvenating quality. It promoted cooperation between different entities. It embodied growth in the most natural fashion.

Ves had benefited enormously from the traits of his two dominant attributes.

His ability to understand and work with mechs improved to a superhuman degree.

He was able to understand metal materials in a way that enabled him to exploit them in completely new ways.

He was able to imbue the property of growth into objects that should not have this capability.

He had been able to understand and cooperate with all manner of alien and inhuman entities.

These were his fundamental strengths as a mech designer, and he thrived when he engaged in any of them. These were all value-generating activities that always contributed to increasing the order of human civilization.

"I can't exactly say the same for the others." Ves briefly frowned.

The Huntsman and his mother did not possess the mentality of a creation cultivators.

While their actions might contribute to rising order for their own organizations and civilizations, their philosophies were fundamentally more destructive in nature.

For example, the Hunting Association may be working hard to preserve the ecosystems of many hunting planets, but the Huntsman probably wouldn't have any qualms about exterminating entire races so long as he could absorb their strength!

His mother was the same. She might act gentle and motherly around Veronica, but Cynthia Larkinson's domain possessed a much more ruthless quality.

Neither of them were harmless!

As Ves continued to supervise his children as they tried to approach the small and cute critters in the forest, his thoughts strayed towards the Hunter's Code.

He did not entirely agree with the philosophy espoused by it. He simply couldn't bring himself to center his entire life around killing and creating more entropy.

However, he saw the value of this philosophy in his living mechs.

In the past, Ves had applied his design philosophy in a largely gentle fashion.

To him, the concept of Mutual Growth translated into designing living mechs that could grow on their own, but also advanced the growth of their mech pilots. In turn, these humans contributed their own feedback to their machines, thereby enabling the living mechs to grow in ways that they could not accomplish by themselves.

This was a harmonious growth scheme.

Even if the living mechs and mech pilots dedicated their entire existences towards killing life and unleashing destruction, what they did with their power was not a core component of their growth aspects.

To put it in simple terms, his living mechs were akin to herbivores. They grew in a more passive and gentle manner. It was difficult to speed up their growth, but at least they were able to become stronger at a steady rate.

The philosophy espoused by the Hunter's Code taught him a different approach towards growth.

It opened up the idea of granting his living mechs the benefits of becoming a carnivore.

While they did not have to give up their current methods of growth, Ves envisioned a possibility where he could upgrade their designs with a 'carnivore module'.

This brand-new addition to their spiritual foundations would enable them to actively feed off the energies of their defeated opponents!

Though Ves had yet to work out all of the theories and mechanisms, he believed that he was able to set up with the knowledge and resources that he currently had at his disposal.

The real question was not whether he could do it or not. What really troubled him was whether he should do it all. Was it right for him to turn his mechs into hunters or predators that constantly yearned to feed off their kills?

This issue bothered him so much that he actually called Helena to his side.

Though nobody around him was able to see her, Helena had subtly sent down an energy manifestation that was weak to the point where only Ves and Blinky could perceive her presence at close range.

None of the invisible bodyguards or the many hidden technological monitoring equipment could pick up her presence!

"Are you familiar with the Hunter's Code?" Ves asked with his spiritual voice as opposed to his normal one.

Helena crossed her arms. "Of course I am. It is not particularly secret. There are hunters among the citizens of the Hex Federation that have started to dabble with it. The Valkyrie mechs happen to be highly compatible with this brilliant new cultivation method."

"The Hunter's Code was made for humans, but... I think I can adapt some of its components to my living mechs. It won't be easy, but I will just have to spend a bit of time. What is truly troubling me is the part about sacrificing prey to the Huntsman in exchange for a power that can cleanse the impurities that accrue by rashly absorbing the energies of resentful prey. I really do not want to infringe upon the Huntsman's territory or become reliant on his power."

His eldest sister looked thoughtful. "Let me guess. You think I can serve as an adequate substitute given that I am the Daughter of Death and all. Your logic is not wrong, but..."

"Are you incapable of fulfilling this role?"

"You are expecting too much from me, brother. I am death. I represent the ending of life, the cessation of activity, the transition from warm to cold. I am good at taking, but not good at giving. What you ask of me requires me to be good at both."

"You are not an entity that is completely composed of the power of death." Ves retorted. "You wouldn't have been able to exist and take on such a lively personality if that is the case. There is a spark of life within you. Didn't you talk to me about yin and yang in one of our past discussions? You are unlikely to comprehend death too deeply if you interact with it in isolation. It is only when you work with its opposite that you can form contrasts between the two, thereby enabling you to harvest a lot of new insights. Shouldn't my request be helpful in promoting your understanding of both life and death?"

He had made a profound suggestion!

Helena became stunned by what she heard. She instantly fell silent as she contemplated whether his brother's proposal had any merit.

Chapter 5474 Omnivorous Mechs

Bang!

A round launched from the muzzle of the dark red rifle and rapidly crossed the distance to a tree hole where a scaled lizard-like creature made its nest.

Despite the alien lizard's diminutive body and lack of ferocity, its species possessed excellent instincts and reflexes.

The hunters who entered the Hanlin #6 Hunting Ground in the past rarely managed to hunt these sensitive and speedy lizards down.

This was because they could always sense a threat in time for them to dodge and move out of the way!

Their ability to evade attacks might not be as good as light mech specialists, but it was more than enough to avoid the vast majority of attacks launched by the casual and immature hunters that frequented this hunting ground.

While the alien lizard had already tensed its limbs in order to jump away in an instant, the creature suddenly froze in place!

Its reptilian eyes dilated and its scaled body shook in fear.

The reason for that was because the bullet that was heading straight towards its body happened to carry an additional passenger!

Maaaaaaw!

Just like the Valkyrie Redeemers that initiated their charges against their foes, Yaika was able to project her death power in a narrow cone in front.

Even though the black spiritual cat was much weaker than Helena, Yaika's aura of death was not a force that a small reptilian exobeast could resist!

Plop.

The bullet fired by the rifle was not that powerful, so the lizard did not explode on the spot. The projectile merely passed through the forehead of the creature and accurately struck the brain, thereby killing it instantly.

"That is how it is done." Andraste spoke with satisfaction even as she maintained her vigilance.

"Did you see that, big sis? You should take a shot at the next creature we come across. I will even help you correct your aim this time so that you won't miss your shot!"

"Ah, that is okay, little sis. I can manage on my own. I know how to shoot."

"Yeah, sure." Andraste dismissively said.

"Maaaaaaw!"

Yaika meanwhile returned triumphantly. The juvenile companion spirit had just participated in the act of taking the life of another creature in the most direct fashion possible.

As an entity that had managed to activate the seed of death embedded within her spirituality, Yaika managed to harvest a lot of new insights on life and death.

The black spiritual cat had grown excited because of these gains. Even if she and her principal were still too young to comprehend a lot of deep and profound concepts, just touching the surface of them was enough to influence the direction of Yaika's subsequent growth!

Andraste had spent so many hours on training her weapon skills that she never really thought about what would happen if she utilized her arms on the field.

It couldn't be helped. Despite her tremendous combat skills, no one in the Larkinson Clan ever thought about sending her off to battle!

At most, Andraste only got a taste of what it was like by killing virtual opponents in virtual combat scenarios, but only sparingly as it was not good for a child of her age to indulge in such a bloody spectacle.

Her father did her a favor by bringing her to a hunting ground where she could finally experience what it was like to take away the life of another organism.

Though the small lizard was not comparable to a human or one of the formidable aliens of the Red Ocean, her first true kill still had a notable impact on Andraste!

"Lucky, can you retrieve that lizard? I want to take a closer look."

"Meow."

The gem cat dashed forward and returned a short moment later with the bleeding lizard carcass between his teeth.

"Meow!"

Lucky hurriedly deposited the lizard carcass in front of Andraste. The cat certainly did not enjoy putting four-tasting organic matter close to his maw.

"Thank you, Lucky."

Andraste and Yaika studied the dead lizard in further detail. The smell was awful, but the breathing mask fortunately filtered out the worst of it. The bullet hole in the center of the forehead looked a bit odd.

It leaked out less alien blood than it should, and there was a dark and ominous air to it. Yaika's energy still lingered on this wound, causing the surrounding organic tissue to necrotize a lot sooner than it should.

However, the effect was only slight, proving that Yaika was far from reaching a degree of lethality that could instantly harvest the lives of other creatures upon contact.

"Hm. Once is not enough. I want to hunt down ten more creatures before I am done! You better stay by my side, Lucky. I am going to need you to play fetch a lot of times."

"Meeeoow..."

As Andraste dreamed of hunting down all kinds of exobeasts, her father and her aunt continued to remain engaged in their own conversation.

"What you have proposed may have a chance of working." Helena eventually said after a few exchanges of ideas. "You do not have to work with me. I am good at harvesting the energies released upon death, but once I have caught them, they won't be usable anymore. I will have to put a lot of effort into reversing this transformation. Since this goes against my nature, the process will produce a lot of waste. The yield will be so low that only a fraction of the original energies will be left. In addition, I do not have the ability to remove impurities, so long-term absorption will likely change your living mechs in undesirable ways. These quantities will be far less than if you rely on a god pilot like the Huntsman. His domain and concepts are much more supportive towards these processes."

Ves frowned. He expected that Helena would have certain limitations. It turned out that he had overestimated her abilities.

"Lufa excels in purifying contaminated stuff. Can you work together with him to purify the contaminated energies?"

Helena looked a bit more optimistic about this approach. "It should work in theory. If he can purify the energies just after I have harvested them, the lack of resentment and other pollution will make it easier for me to restore their original attributes. You can increase the yield in this way. However, I will need to work together with Lufa on a long-term basis to support this for so many mechs. Every additional link in the chain will introduce further complications and inefficiencies, so the entire process will become more and more unwieldy."

He vaguely understood what she talked about. Helena and Lufa were fundamentally different existences, and their attributes were not entirely compatible with each other. It was inevitable for the two of them to enter into slight conflicts if they came close to each other.

"You know, brother, I bet the Superior Mother can do a much better job. She might be able to complete both steps by herself due to her range and versatility. As a True God, her control over qi much stronger."

Ves immediately shook his head. "Let's not disturb our mother unless it is necessary. Children like us shouldn't rely on our parents all of the time. We need to prove to her that we can take care of our own issues. Besides, this is good for you. The more you come into contact with instances of death, the more you will be able to advance your comprehension. Aside from that, you can also levy a fee for every 'transaction', just like what the Huntsman must be doing."

The energy manifestation of his eldest sister grinned. "You know exactly what to say. I cannot deny that I am interested in this scheme. It will keep a part of me busy on a constant basis, and this will only grow worse when more and more of your mechs gain this capacity. However, the gains may outweigh the costs. I am willing to try it out, Ves."

Brother and sister quickly reached a tentative form of cooperation. There was no need to make any larger commitments when they still needed to work out this scheme.

Helena still sensed that her brother was not entirely at ease with this development. She threw him a look of concern.

"Are you having any conflicting thoughts about this addition?"

Ves minutely nodded. "It is difficult for me to describe what I am struggling with. I am still not sure whether I should turn my herbivorous mechs into omnivores. Giving them carnivorous traits will cause my mechs to lose a large portion of their 'innocence'. A part of me wants to maintain the current framework on living mechs. I never had a problem with relying on time and mutual interaction to fuel their growth. They are already doing fine in their current state."

His sister did not empathize with his problem. "Do you truly believe that will be enough to ready your clan and the rest of red humanity for the struggles ahead? Messier Sy will not give you any reprieve for treating your living mechs nicely. Strength is all that matters. You do not have the time to treat living mechs like trees and wait for many decades if not centuries for them to grow strong enough. If you can speed up their development by allowing them to absorb a fraction of the power of their enemies, then that will make your life more secure."

"But..."

"Do not underestimate your living mechs! I am sure they can keep themselves under control. Even if they go bad, so what? They are still under the control of their owners and mech pilots. There are enough restrictions that can prevent them from doing any damage. If you ask me, just accept the reality that there will always be bad apples among every batch. If you are truly worried about the risk that these deviating mechs may cause harm, you can task your design spirits to monitor and report them. That should help with correcting them before they slide any further."

That made a lot of sense. Ves slowly eased the conflict within his mind. Though he still couldn't get rid of his discomfort at the idea, this potential upgrade was too beneficial for him to dismiss. He felt obliged to implement it in all of his living mechs.

Bang!

"Oh, look! Andraste has killed her fifth exobeast." Helena smiled. "Given how enthused she looks, you should rein her in before she depopulates this entire forest."

Ves did not look too worried. "She will run out of bullets long before that happens."

He still stepped forward in order to guide and supervise his children.

While Andraste did not need any instructions, Ves spent a bit of time on helping his oldest and youngest children complete their first kills.

Aurelia looked squeamish as Lucky returned with a mottled ground-digging insect.

The alien insect looked disgusting, which made it a lot bearable for her to shoot it with her rifle. A look of distaste appeared on her face and Lucky eagerly dropped and distanced himself from the foul creature.

Two wounds caused the dead insect to leak strange green blood. Aurelia had been forced to fire two shots because her first one wasn't lethal enough.

Unlike the kills made by Andraste, the bullet holes of this insect looked a little cleaner and neater than normal.

Mana's attachment to the bullet did seem to carry special lethality, but Aurelia noticed that the insect moved a lot slower than before.

"Good job, honey." Ves proudly smiled as he stepped closer. "How do you feel about your first kill?"

"It... was not as bad as I thought." The girl spoke. "This exoinsect is too ugly. I did the cosmos a favor by getting rid of it. Ugly beasts do not deserve to exist."

Ves awkwardly coughed. "That is a bit too extreme, Aurelia. Beauty is subjective. There are many possible reasons why you want to kill others, but you should never use this standard to make this determination. There are much more practical and rational reasons for you to get rid of others."

"Can you expand on that, papa?"

"Sure..."

Chapter 5475 Gesora #12 Hunting Ground

The first day of hunting passed without any further incidents.

Though Ves did not want to occupy his mind with work during his hunting trips, he had gone back on this decision, but for good reasons.

He couldn't help himself. Each time he gained inspiration, he entered into a more active state of mind. He felt compelled to work out his ideas on the spot!

Swapping ideas with Helena enabled Ves to develop a thorough blueprint for a promising new design solution.

Ves could not wait to design mechs that incorporated his latest idea!

So long as it worked out according to his intentions, his future living mechs would be able to grow at a much more rapid pace!

The best part about all of this was that wars and other active conflicts enabled his living mechs to grow faster.

While this dynamic already existed among herbivorous mechs, this was mostly because the mech pilots gained new experiences and made new realizations in battle.

This additional growth component would largely be fueled by living mechs, but it was not impossible for mech pilots to benefit as well.

After all, the man-machine connection caused the lines between the two to blur. The feedback generated by killing others might bleed over to the mech pilot as well, thereby increasing his chances of breaking through!

If this was the case, then the benefits of adding a 'killing module' were much greater than he initially assumed!

It was difficult for him to flesh out this thought experiment further. He needed to work it out and test it in reality before he could make any definite conclusions.

This was why Ves decided to put this matter to the side for the time being. There was plenty of time for him to resume his work on this idea once his vacation was over.

Ves spent the rest of his stay in the Hanlin #6 Hunting Ground while accompanying his children.

Each of their mentalities experienced a considerable degree of growth after they had harvested the lives of other organisms.

In the past, they always treated other humans and animals with respect. Their growth environment had immersed them with peace and harmony for so long that they had no understanding of the savagery that existed beyond their safe and comfortable bubbles.

Though the current hunting ground was far from matching the cruelty of the real cosmos, it had offered enough opportunities for the children to mature in different ways.

A part of Ves felt guilty about depriving them of their youthful innocence so soon, but he convinced himself it was for their own good.

He especially found it difficult for Marvaine to claim his first kill.

From the moment he pulled the trigger of his cute little rifle, the death of a furry jumping mammal had become seared in his mind!

Marvaine even dropped his weapon when he directly experienced the passing of life through the companion spirit that he attached to his bullet.

"Meow!"

"I'm scared! Where is mama? I want mama!"

"Miaow!"

Clixie immediately ran over to the young boy just as he started to tear up and tried to comfort him, only to no avail.

Ves soon arrived and lifted Marvaine up in his arms just as he began to cry.

"There there. It is alright, my son. It is always scariest at first. You will get used to it the more you do it. Once you do, you will be able to grow into a man that is just as strong and smart as me! Doesn't that sound like a dream come true?"

It did not take long for Marvaine to calm down and return to his happy self. He even went back to hunting a few prey near the end of their hunting trip.

By the time they returned to their hotel in Tixe City, all his children had become satisfied with what they accomplished.

"Do you want to eat the exobeasts you killed? I can send them off to a restaurant where the meat will be processed and turned into edible food." Ves proposed.

"No!"

"Eeew!"

"I don't want to eat that nasty meat!"

Their father shrugged. "Okay, then."

The next day, Ves decided to bring his children to the Gesora #12 Hunting Ground.

Different from #6, #12 encompassed a large body of water. Only a small part of this territory consisted of shorelines and wet marshes. The rest consisted of an ocean and offered a rich diversity of alien fish and other underwater life forms.

One of the common traits of many fish in the Gesora #12 Hunting Ground was that many of them were colorful.

That turned this patch of water into a popular fishing and diving destination. A lot of visitors traveled to this place in order to introduce their children to fishing.

Ves and his family boarded a seafaring boat that was especially prepared for them and sailed away from the shoreline.

Once they reached a suitable location, his children curiously held their fishing poles and followed a tutorial on how to get started.

To be honest, Ves had never fished in his life, so he had little to teach to his children. He could only let the helpful AI embedded in the boat tell his children on how to fish with the right setup and techniques.

Fortunately, the alien fish were not that difficult to catch, especially when the fishing lines attracted their attention with the right lures!

"I caught one! I caught one!" Marvaine said as his fishing pole threatened to jerk out of his hands.

"Ohhh, ooh! Let me help, 111 bro!"

With Andraste coming over, they quickly managed to lift up a flat red-scaled fish that possessed a handful of beautiful glowing scales.

"So pretty! Why do these scales glow?"

"I don't know, but the fish is jumping on the dock! We need to kill it quickly!"

"Miaow!"

Clixie quickly jumped over and put the flopping red flesh out of its misery with a single claw swipe through its head.

"Good job, Marvaine." Ves stepped forward and gave his son a reassuring pat on the shoulder. "I am proud of you for catching your first fish. If you want, we can process it and grill it over a fire."

"Uhm, no thanks. Can I have those glowing scales? They look so nice. I can use them to decorate my Mekanos."

"Hm, sure. Lucky, you heard what he said. Get to work."

"Meooooow!"

It took a while for Aurelia and Andraste to catch their own fish as well. Their buckets soon started to fill up as they continued to catch one stinky alien fish after another.

As Marvaine cast his line a short distance away, he looked at his father in confusion.

"Why are you not fishing with us, papa?"

"I want to experiment a bit. There is no better place to do this than when I am surrounded by water." Ves responded.

The Oceancaller had become a fixed addition to his standard loadout. Though it was annoying to carry such a long object on his person all of the time, it was the best way for him to increase his intimacy with the high-level artifact.

Ves had stuffed into the Vault of Eternity in the past, but that quickly caused the Oceancaller to convey a lot of dislike when he next pulled out the flute!

That little incident had taught him a lesson about how he should treat his living artifacts.

In any case, Ves had never utilized his flute in such a water-heavy environment before.

He could already feel he could accomplish a lot more with his fancy flute than before.

This was not just because the environment was richer in water energy.

It was due to the conceptual changes of entering an ocean environment.

A lot of this stuff was mainly relevant to qi cultivators, so Ves did not think too hard on this. All that mattered was that the Oceancaller had entered an environment that resonated with its very existence.

Ves carefully put his lips over the hole and started to play a single soft note.

The water energies surrounding the entire boat shifted.

A small wave had formed that slowly blended into the other waves of the ocean.

"Good."

Ves knew what he was capable of when he played that note. This time was different because he felt a lot more in tune with all of the surrounding water.

He was able to accomplish more with less. Not only that, but he found that he was starting to gain insights with greater ease than before!

It had been the right decision for him to come out here!

After playing a few more notes, Ves confirmed that he was still able to maintain control over the Oceancaller.

Though Ves had the sense that the flute eagerly wanted to summon the largest possible tsunami and engulf the entire shoreline of the Melrose Continent with humongous waves, there was no way he would turn this into a reality!

He kept his notes soft and stuck to playing simple and repetitive tunes.

As he played his flute, he closed his eyes and tried to deepen his connection with the surrounding ocean and water-attributed E energy.

Ves did do this aimlessly. He had a definite purpose in mind when he decided to practice with his Oceancaller.

The flute and its 360 runes possessed a lot of associations with many different water attributes.

Ves wanted to take advantage of this by familiarizing himself with one of the lower concepts of water.

There was no need for Ves to develop comprehension in all of them. It was enough for him to explore the ones that were more accessible and useful in his mech designs.

With that in mind, he ignored the other water attributes as best he could in favor of concentrating on just a single expression of water.

"Fluidity."

Water did not always exist in a liquid form, but this was the most common way to visualize it. The concept of fluidity had always been strongly associated with this element. Ves was easily able to get in touch with it by relying on the amplification granted by the Oceancaller.

Just holding the flute was enough to expand his sensitivity by an order of magnitude!

As Ves continued to play different notes, he continued to stir the waters of the oceans in several subtle ways.

Each change induced by his note playing caused the ocean water to express its fluidity in different ways.

Ves began to learn more about the fluid nature of water.

Though his progress was not fast, he was satisfied with this pace.

He only needed to gain enough understanding of the concept of fluidity to apply it into his own mech designs.

The reason why Ves wanted to understand fluidity first was because he had an ambitious plan in mind.

He wanted to design a mech that could pose a formidable threat against alien warships by taking advantage of hyper technology and E-technology that applied this concept in a practical manner!

He already had a few offensive and defensive mech ideas in mind, but he did not intend to go any further until he had developed enough of an understanding of this concept and possibly other ones.

It wasn't quite as good as comprehending the concept of water in its entirety, but it would take way too long for him to apply his gains into his mech designs.

"Perhaps I should spend a bit of time on increasing my comprehension of waves."

This was one of the core concepts of the Oceancaller. Ves did not think he could unlock the flute's greater potential if he did not develop a greater understanding of the power of waves!

However, Ves did not dare to play any songs that could promote the buildup of waves.

The original Oceancaller primarily served as a tool for mass destruction. Summoning world-ending tsunamis was the most proper way to utilize its power!

Chapter 5476 Ves the Oceancaller

Ves and his children had a good time in the Gesora #12 Hunting Ground.

In a society that surrounded people with ever more advanced technologies with each passing day, it was nice to leave all of the hustle and bustle of modern civilization and return to a semblance of nature.

Even though their boat was a highly sophisticated product in itself, the vessel possessed an understated appearance. Her white hull kept a lot of advanced detection and defense functions out of sight.

The bodyguards assigned by the Bluejay Fleet also did a good job at blending into the background. Their stealth tech was so good that Ves could have easily thought that they had left him alone if not for the fact that his powerful senses could pick up the presence of metal and life.

Most notably, there were several large metal objects lingering in the vicinity of the boat's location.

Ves paid little attention to these hidden first-class multipurpose mechs and focused on his needs.

As his children competed against each other by filling up their buckets first, Ves did his best to play a pleasant melody while trying to deepen his comprehension of the water element.

His progress was not fast. He had known a long time ago that he did not possess a strong affinity or talent related to the water element.

Although it had traits that Ves liked a lot, he could say the same for many other E energy attributes.

The root of his Spirituality was still centered around metal and life. He could make much faster progress in these areas than any other attribute. Trying to familiarize himself with elements outside of his core focus seemed like an inefficient and wasteful activity.

Yet Ves persisted anyway.

Creation cultivators needed to master a variety of different forces to develop a comprehensive product catalog.

Not even a highly focused specialist such as Ketis could avoid the necessity of incorporating other concepts in her swordsman mechs.

Ves was much worse in this regard. He couldn't help himself from exploring unfamiliar concepts and ideas all of the time. As a mech designer, he was destined to remain restless for the rest of his life.

He would have explored the five elements sooner or later as far as he was concerned. They were just too useful and versatile in the fields of hyper technology and E-technology.

Since that was the case, Ves was willing to tolerate a little hardship and force himself to learn more about the water element.

As the hours went by, he began to produce a few results.

His mood improved as he continued to play the Oceancaller in an environment where it most felt at home.

Even though Ocanon VI was nothing special, its oceans possessed a certain charm and beauty that held a lot of attraction to many visitors.

Such places possessed strong associations that made the Oceancaller feel more alive and in tune.

As a high-level artifact, the replica artifact possessed just enough life to develop its own likes and dislikes.

It had been an excellent decision for Ves to bring the flute here. One of the rewards he received for indulging in the Oceancaller's fancies was that the artifact opened up to him more.

It was as if he had earned enough favorability from his artifact for it to put a little more effort into helping him along.

The changes were subtle.

The flute put a little more effort into helping him manipulate the water element, enabling him to perform more delicate and advanced techniques.

It subtly made corrective actions whenever Ves made a mistake in his operation. This not only prevented him from screwing up and wasting his time investment, but also gave him clues on how to solve certain problems.

More than that, the flute slightly deepened his ability to connect to water bodies such as the ocean water below.

"Hah! Take that, big sis! I've caught the biggest fish yet! Wait, why does it have so many sharp teeth?"

"It wants to bite off your face!"

"Miaow!"

"Good job, Clixie! You sure showed that piranha-like fish! You're much more diligent than that other lazy cat."

"Meow...?"

While his children continued their impossible quest to empty the ocean of all of its fish, Ves had begun to gain increasing control over water.

A square cavity formed in the waters to the side of the boat. Ves continuously played the same staccato pattern of notes that enabled him to shape the water according to his liking.

He slightly slowed down and changed his intonation so that the sounds produced by the Oceancaller slightly shifted.

The square started to narrow and lengthen into a rectangle. It became a lot harder for Ves to maintain this shape as its complexity had increased by a significant extent.

Eventually, the sides of the cavity started to shake. Ves did not try to stabilize his efforts but instead continued to make the rectangular cavity more and more extreme.

Splash!

Ves suddenly lost control, causing the ocean water to restore its natural form.

"Hm. My control has improved by another measure."

He could not imagine making so much progress in so little time. There weren't many opportunities for him to visit places like these once his vacation came to an end.

New Constantinople VIII had its own oceans, as they were vital to turn this terrestrial planet into a place that was suitable for human habitation.

However, the difference was that this planet had been terraformed from top to bottom by the most advanced technologies available to the Devos Ancient Clan.

Everything that was alien and threatening to human life had been wiped out and replaced with more compatible elements.

If the original planet had any oceans, then all of the alien life that occupied its vast ecosystem for millions of years had been totally erased!

The Devosans had changed the shape and the salinity of the oceans to suit their own needs. They also replaced the old ecosystems with new ones that were much more to their liking.

This was the power of human civilization. Its colonizers always preferred to wipe out anything alien and deviant on the planets that they preferred to make their homes. It was a way of homogenizing and perpetuating humanity across vast interstellar distances.

Whatever the case, the damage the Devosans had done to the original oceans of New Constantinople VIII was incalculable!

Wiping out all of that alien life at once and distorting the oceans to suit human desires had erased a massive amount of unrecorded history and meaning.

The new meticulously designed organisms that the Terrans had let loose in their newly claimed oceans were far too young and sterile to fill up the massive void!

Ves knew that if he tried to play his Oceancaller in a body of water on a terraformed planet, his flute would not be in the mood to do him a favor.

A part of him felt a little frustrated that the artifact continued to act with so much restraint.

His living mechs never played such games whenever they interfaced with their mech pilots. They all knew that they had to earnestly work together with each other in order to preserve their lives and pursue victory once they deployed on the battlefield.

This was exactly what a living mech was supposed to be like. Ves was really annoyed that these traditional artifacts all came with stubborn and reticent artifact spirits.

Ves inwardly sighed.

It couldn't be helped. Artifact cultivators often had to deal with lopsided relationships with relics that were too powerful for them to restrain.

This was the price of handling an object that exceeded their present levels of cultivation.

Ves was able to tolerate the power imbalance between himself and the Oceancaller because the latter was just too damn useful.

The gains he made today had already deepened his understanding of the concepts of fluidity, waves and the oceans.

Combined with his existing comprehension of the concept of blood, Ves had already deepened his overall understanding of the water element!

It might not sound like much, but Ves had gained much more confidence in his ability to utilize the water element to a greater degree in multiple future mech design projects!

His accumulation had grown so much that his mood lifted even more.

Ves spontaneously played a more vigorous tune that suddenly caused the oceans around him to respond to his melody and the emotions that he was channeling.

Waves started to surge from his position. The oceans grew more and more turbulent.

Though the buildup was slow, it began to gain momentum after a few minutes.

"Hey! What are you doing, papa?"

The children all reeled in their fishing lines as the boat started to get affected by the waves that spontaneously spread from their location.

It was not hard for them to figure out that Ves' performance was responsible for this. Aurelia grew especially fascinated by what her father was doing with the flute.

She was able to observe a hint of the powerful effects produced by the Oceancaller by borrowing the senses of her companion spirit!

"Mew!"

Lucky and Clixie started to grow uncomfortable as well.

As the waves grew taller and taller, the boat rocked up and down to such an extent that Lucky woke up from his cat nap and jumped into Andraste's arms!

"Meow!"

"I know, Lucky! Papa is so powerful! I wonder if I can borrow his flute."

As the waves started to exceed ten meters high, the buildup of waves showed no signs of abating.

Ves had never imagined he could exert so much force by himself. He grew particularly amazed at how much water energy he was able to command with his flute and how well he was able to convert this extraordinary power into physical force!

He suddenly understood that this must be what it was like to be the Mistress of the Oceans.

The power to create waves that were powerful enough to drown all of the cities on a coastline was so exhilarating that he had a tendency to look down on the mortals who could never hope to come close to matching this feat!

Ves should have felt horrified for entertaining these thoughts, but he had become so consumed by his performance that he started to resonate with the ocean in a way that gave him the illusion that he had become its master!

BEEEEEP!

It wasn't until a first-class multipurpose mech deactivated its advanced cloaking system and transmitted a discordant electronic tone that Ves snapped out of his fascination.

"We apologize for interrupting you, Professor Larkinson, but your actions threaten the stability of the Gesora #12 Hunting Ground. If these waves continue to grow in power, then many of the individuals who have rented boats will have to evacuate from these waters."

Ves had to shake his head in order to bring him back to the present. "I... I am sorry. I could not control myself. It was rude of me to disturb everyone else in this hunting ground. I will make sure not to do this again unless I am in an unoccupied body of water. Please convey my apologies to the people who have been affected by my experiment."

The mech of the Bluejay Fleet activated its cloaking system again and disappeared from sight now that it had done its job.

Only a short moment passed before his children ran up to their father!

"That was cool, papa!" Andraste admiringly said. "Can you make me a flute that can do the same?"

Even Aurelia could not restrain her own desire.

"Can you teach me how to command water while playing the flute?"

Marvaine made a more mischievous request. "Can you splash my sisters with water?"

"Sure."

Ves played a small tune and made sure to act with much greater restraint this time.

Due to his improved control and familiarity with water, he easily managed to summon three spouts of water that promptly splashed the bodies of all of his children at once!

"I'm wet!"

"No fair!"

"Bad papa!"

Chapter 5477 Gone Camping

By the time evening came, Ves and his kids had returned to the coast and returned their boat.

Instead of shuttling back to Tixe City, Ves decided to linger a bit longer and moved to a cliff that overlooked the coastline.

Distant boats and human figures still moved about as the local star disappeared below the horizon.

"Come here, Lucky. Dig a firepit on this spot for us, please."

"Meow meow!"

"I don't care that you are not a dog. Just dig."

"Meowww..."

"Aurelia, come here and help me season the fish that you have caught."

His oldest daughter looked a little confused. "Okay, papa. Did you not command the food processing machine to season our fish as it detoxified our catch?"

"Normally, I would have already done so, but I don't want us to rely so much on automated machines and professional servants this time. There used to be a time where I was living the life of an ordinary third-rater. My life was not as luxurious as yours, but I enjoyed a form of joy that has become increasingly harder for me to recall. I do not want you three to grow up without experiencing anything of what it is like to live like normal humans. Now let us get to work and grill these fish over a fire."

Time passed by as they slowly built a rudimentary camp fire. It was not entirely safe to create a fire by burning the local alien tree branches, so Ves had made sure to bring in a few coals.

The slightly toxic air also needed to be taken into consideration. In order to give everyone an opportunity to put down their breathing masks, Ves placed a small air purifier nearby that automatically sucked and filtered out the toxic substances in the surrounding air.

Soon enough, he and his children speared a few processed fish with metal rods and planted them into the soil at different angles.

The fish started to cook in different ways.

"You should lower the angle of your rod. I think you are smoking the fish rather than roasting it. These fish will become much tastier if we bring it close enough to produce the Maillard reaction. That is when our raw food starts to brown and produce yummy substances."

"Meowwww..."

"I haven't forgotten about you, Lucky. I threw in a few exotics and hypers into the coals. I hope you like your food hot."

"Miaow?"

"I know your immune system is great for a cat, Clixie, but it is best for you to wait until we have cooked the fish."

Soon enough, the air started to get filled with smoke, warmth and the combined smells of different alien fish species.

The children impatiently waited for the fish to cook while they chatted with each other.

"Okay, I think they are about done. Be careful about retrieving the fish. The rods are still hot."

Aurelia deftly transferred her own roasted fish to a simple metal plate while Andraste poked her own meal with a meat fork.

Ves helped Marvaine bring his own fish to a plate before cutting it up to make it easier to bite.

"Don't bite into it right away. It is still too hot. In the meantime, let us roast a few vegetables."

Nutrition was extremely important for growing designer children. The processed fish had been partially fortified with additives that made them a bit more beneficial for his kids, but it could not completely replace their regular meals.

However, Ves did not really care about that at the moment. He believed his son and daughters were stronger than that. It should not be that big of a deal if they deviated from their prescribed diets for a single day.

"It tastes weird." Andraste said as she finally dared to bite into her fish. "It tastes worse than I thought."

Ves was not surprised. "That is because the fish hasn't been cooked by professional chefs in an advanced and fully equipped kitchen. It should still taste good in its own way. How do you feel?"

"It... is not as bad as I thought. I remember the moment when I caught this fish myself."

Ves and everyone else smiled. "In an age of automation and specialization, it is rare for us to take care of our own needs. However, I don't think that we should lose the ability to take care of our own basic needs. You should at least know what it is like in case you ever find yourself in a situation where you need to use these skills again. Even if you don't care about that, it's fun, right?"

"Um!" Andraste happily nodded. "Is this what it is like to be a hunter?"

"We only scratched the surface of what they do. There is much more work and effort involved in hunting down more dangerous prey. You won't like it, pumpkin."

"You're lying!"

They continued to chat and eat their inexpertly roasted food.

Sometimes, the fish got so close to the campfire that it burned into char.

Other times, the fish looked mildly cooked on the outside but was still raw on the inside.

They all made plenty of mistakes, but that was okay because they all caught way more fish than they could ever eat by themselves.

Of course, Ves was a noticeable exception to this rule, but his need to keep his true body fed was not as troublesome as he thought.

As long as he did not actively exert his true body, it would remain in a state of dormancy, thereby slowing down his actual metabolism.

His true body could also last for months if not years without eating another meal. He could take his time to address his hunger so long as he devoured a huge amount of food when it was convenient.

"Miaow miaow."

"Meow."

The cats also started to dig into their meals. Clixie elegantly bit into her fish while Lucky effortlessly swallowed the hot metal chunks with hardly any sign that he was burning off his tongue.

Once the kids all had their fill, they began to cuddle up against their father and enjoyed the warmth of the campfire.

Ves held Marvaine on his lap.

The two cats curled up in the laps of his daughter.

"I wish mama was here as well." Marvaine sleepily said.

"Mama wouldn't have allowed us to cook our own meals over a campfire." Aurelia retorted.

Ves felt happy and fulfilled. He wished that he could enjoy these intimate moments forever, but his children only retained their youth for so long.

Due to their busy work and study schedules, it was far too difficult for them to go out and spend a lot of quality time with each other.

This was why Ves made sure to cherish this rare moment as much as possible.

"I love you, papa."

"I love you too, my little ones."

They ended their day by crawling into their camping tent. The circumstances were much more primitive than they were accustomed to, but the children enjoyed it so much that they had difficulty falling asleep.

The Larkinsons continued to visit a number of other hunting grounds in the following days.

They did not always go camping, but they made sure to visit a diverse selection of different biomes.

The children spent most of their time hiking through alien terrain, shooting their rifles at harmless critters and gazing at a lot of larger exobeasts from a distance.

Each trip into wild and uncivilized lands opened the eyes of the children and increased their familiarity with nature.

Ves also derived a lot of benefits from the visits. Life bloomed in so many different forms. The diverse environments also possessed their own characteristic E energy attribute compositions.

If he was lucky enough, he could find interesting new mutated plants and exobeasts that had evolved in strange new ways.

For example, he found a crooked plant that extracted sand particles from the soil and used it to build an organic soil fortress around itself.

This process had been going on for months and already caused the plant to build walls the size of mechs!

He and his children came across an interesting exobeast during a safari in a more dangerous hunting ground in the Shamon Continent.

Their low-flying shuttle flew to a location where they could view a massive eight-legged lizard monster that was large enough to fit half-a-dozen mechs onto its back!

If that was not enough, its legs were tall enough to allow smaller mechs to pass below their bellies!

This monster was so big that it needed to absorb a lot of food in order to sustain itself.

It did so in at least two different ways.

First, its lower body was covered with tentacles that continuously reached down and pulled up any large plant or beast within reach.

Second, it was able to release an extremely weird energy field that caused any bird to suddenly lose their ability to generate lift through their wings!

The fate of any bird that flew within a range of around half a kilometer around this titanic monstrosity was tragic.

The confused avians frantically flapped their wings, only for them to accomplish nothing that could keep the birds aloft!

No matter their size and species, they all plunged to the ground and either died outright or suffered heavy injuries.

If the eight-legged monstrosity happened to be marching away from their crash locations, then the surviving birds would just get eaten by other predators.

The huge mutated beast had practically created a new ecosystem around itself!

Lots of other exobeasts that possessed enough intelligence to understand what was happening eagerly followed the massive creature from behind.

They could easily fill up their stomachs solely by scavenging the organisms that the eight-legged monster disdained to turn around and pick up with its tentacles!

The way those scavengers followed after the eight-legged monster made for a peculiar sight.

It looked as if a crowd of fanatic worshipers obsessively followed after their supposed god!

"Looks familiar, doesn't it, Qilanxo?"

Perhaps this was how primitive and native gods originally came into being in a higher energy environment.

As long as one organism mutated fast enough, they could become so strong that they gained absolute dominance over other organisms in their expansive territories!

"Papa! How can this monster cause all of those birds to fall from the sky?"

"That's easy. It might not look like it, but this creature actually developed a strong affinity towards the wind attribute. He is constantly projecting a large energy field around his body that fundamentally alters the behavior of wind within its range. This powerful field does nothing aside from preventing birds from generating any lift. The physics behind it is a little complicated for me to explain, but somehow this remarkable mutated beast has developed the power to ground all flying creatures!"

Andraste practically pressed her face against the window of the shuttle. "Does it work for mechs and shuttles as well?! Wait, are we about to crash?"

"Haha, we are well outside of this mutated beast's range. Besides, there are still limitations to his power. He can deprive anything from generating any lift, but our shuttle doesn't rely on this force to stay in the air in the first place. Unless the monster can disable the thrusters and antigrav modules of our vehicle, it can do nothing to pull us to the ground."

Ves found this to be disappointing, actually. As soon as he heard about this remarkable monstrosity, he insisted on going on a trip to see it in person.

He wanted to know whether it was worthwhile to transform this huge exobeast into a new design spirit!

Unfortunately, the reality was much less impressive than his expectations. Control over wind was only useful in a narrow set of combat scenarios.

"Oh well. There are plenty of other interesting candidates on the list."

Ves was determined to expand his design spirit collection before he departed from Ocanon VI. It would be too much of a waste if he did not take advantage of the rapid evolution of all of the diverse and unusual wildlife!

Chapter 5478 Calamity Beasts

Ves did not want to expand his collection of design spirits too much.

He preferred to surround himself with a network of intimate and committed spiritual friends rather than an army of strangers that could go rogue at any time.

If he desperately needed a specific kind of power or domain that his existing design spirits did not cover, then he could conduct a focused search for a specific kind of mutated beast that met all of his criteria.

Mutated beasts used to be rare in the past, but now they were popping up like mushrooms all across the Red Ocean.

Many of them originally used to be ordinary exobeasts. They minded their own business and tried to survive in their own exotic environments, when suddenly E energy radiation caused them to grow stronger, smarter and weirder at a rapid rate!

No one had a coherent explanation why this was the case, and why it only happened to creatures that were originally non-sapient.

Whatever the case, people quickly found out that naturally evolved exobeasts mutated at a much higher rate than artificial designer beasts.

Perhaps there were a lot of mysterious factors behind these differences, but one obvious explanation for this divergence was that designer beasts possessed optimized genes.

There were much less useless junk genes in their DNA. Many of their biological processes had also been strengthened to the point where the rate of ordinary mutations had dropped to a minimum.

This ensured that any artificial species remained constant over the generations.

All of the natural exobeasts lacked these optimizations, so they had a much greater capacity towards mutation from the onset.

This effectively meant that hunting preserves such as Ocanon VI had suddenly become a lot more interesting to many industries!

From biotech institutions that wanted to turn a uniquely mutated exobeast into an entire species to development companies that wanted to reproduce a special E energy interaction through technological means, the demand for all of these creatures had increased by a massive extent!

Even hunting grounds under the management of the Hunting Association could not escape this craze.

More and more hunting teams accepted highly prized commissions to hunt down any mutated beast that had attracted the interest of these big companies.

Since the Hunting Association strictly prohibited these greedy and ambitious organizations from sending down lots of mechs from the air and capturing the desired mutated beasts with overwhelming force, it was up to the professional hunting teams to do the job!

It was a win-win-win-win arrangement for the most part. The carefully managed ecosystems did not get messed up. The local economy received a greater influx of outside money. The hunting teams earned much greater income to support their more personal hunting activities. The Hunting Association gained more authority and importance as everyone played by its rules.

This was why Ves was not allowed to command the Bluejay Fleet to send down a squad of first-class multipurpose mechs and hunt any of the mutated beasts that caught his attention.

"We do not have anything on this planet that can restrain your actions." President Oscar Tarich calmly explained as he led the Larkinsons on a trip to the most dangerous and exotic Chasseur Continent. "If you insist on sending down your mecher troops, we will not stop you from taking away our natural treasures. That does not mean we will forget what you have done. Our Hunting Association will condemn your actions and deny you and your clan any further services. This will have grave implications for you. At the very least, none of the hunters who rely on our Association will frequent the mech store operated by the local branch of your Larkinson Clan."

The unspoken message was that the Hunting Association refused to extend special treatment to Ves!

With the backing of a god pilot, there was no reason for the Hunting Association to bow down to the special requests of anyone, including a tier 3 galactic citizen!

Ves never had any intention of breaking the rules. He just wanted to explore whether it was possible to retrieve his desired specimens in the most efficient and convenient manner.

He quickly raised his palm in surrender. "There is no need for you to worry whether I will break your rules. I have great respect for your customs and traditions. The Swordmaidens that are stationed on this planet will be more than eager to set out and hunt down the prey of my choosing."

President Tarich relaxed and smiled. "That is best. It is not that I am unwilling to give you a favor. You certainly deserve to be rewarded for the massive contributions that you have made to red humanity. The real issue is that we must be fair to others. No hunter should be denied their opportunity to hunt down our most valuable exobeasts. Your hunting team can only compete fairly with other ones if they are all chasing after a highly prized beast."

Ves smelled a sense of ritual behind these rules. The Hunting Association most certainly had concrete reasons to set up their hunting grounds this way.

Of course, greater competition also made it easy for the Hunting Association to charge for various different services.

Hunting teams had to pay fees to enter a hunting ground. They had to pay a fee for any collateral damage they inflicted on the environment. They also had to pay a fee to cover the cost of cleaning up any artificial debris or remains that they had left.

Most importantly of all, once these hunting teams came back with their valuable prize in tow, they needed to pay huge tariffs that were proportional to the market value of their prey if they wanted to ship their catch off-planet!

The income earned from this export business had skyrocketed as of late. Ocanon VI and many other hunting planets profited so much from charging so much tariffs. This was sorely needed as the infrastructure needed to keep all of the mutations under control had skyrocketed as well.

All of this sounded fair to Ves. Hunting planets had to be carefully managed in order to continually produce powerful mutated beasts at a steady rate. Their evolution was not actually free, so some people had to be the ones to pay the price.

The conversation soon turned on what they were about to encounter on this aerial safari trip.

"The Chasseur Continent is the most natural and least-regulated landmass of Ocanon VI. We have demarcated numerous large hunting grounds, but our light interference made it so that many exobeasts are able to migrate outside of their original territories with no restraint. Huge exobeasts that can only be hunted by mechs occupy the same spaces as smaller exobeasts that you can comfortably kill with a rifle in your hands. Multiple huge beasts are also allowed to stay together, making it harder to challenge a collective. It is only in the most extreme situations that our Hunting Association is forced to take direct action."

"So you're breaking your own rules." Ves couldn't help but remark.

"That is so, but it is only because a single calamity beast has the power to defeat an entire mech company. If we allow such a giant to evolve even further, it will not take too long before this monster can defeat an expert mech or escape the gravity well of this planet. Before any mutated beast can reach this stage, we will encourage hunting teams to preemptively eliminate these future threats. We cannot afford to wait until a calamity beast has already emerged."

Calamity beast. That was a new term that the Hunting Association tried to promote.

It was a simple and unpretentious label for a mutated beast that had reached a more advanced stage in its rapid growth.

The strength between different calamity beasts differed enormously, but the common consensus was that it had the ability to crush a typical mech company in direct combat!

It just so happened that Ves expressed the greatest interest in calamity beasts or ones that were approaching this stage.

Other mutated beasts were too young, too inexperienced and sorely lacking in greater intelligence.

The eight-legged bird-grounding monster happened to be a calamity beast in the making.

If not for the fact that its special ability posed so little threat against mechs, it would have already attracted a lot of hunting teams eager to absorb the power of a worthy prey while also earning a huge amount of monetary profit in the process!

The shuttle slowed down to an extent as it was about to enter a hunting ground.

The bottom of the shuttle turned transparent, allowing all of the passengers to gain an augmented view of the terrain below.

"Ohh..."

The children all knelt onto the floor and manipulated the interface to zoom in on any areas that caught their interest.

"The #390 Sorara Hunting Ground is dry, arid and rocky. It is located at a higher altitude as well, which has caused the local species to evolve in different directions. Right now, we are approaching one of the few major bodies of water in this interesting region."

The shuttle stopped above a sizable lake.

What struck Ves the most was that a lot of exobeasts, big and small, restrained themselves from getting into conflict and peacefully quenched their thirst without any issue.

"Contrary of what you may think, predators have no qualms about ambushing their prey at watering holes." President Tarich explained. "This is a universal phenomenon that applies to lakes and rivers on practically any life-bearing planet. However, this lake is one of the few that is an exception to this constant."

"The only reason for these all of these hostile exobeasts to restrain themselves is because they are being suppressed." Ves spoke. "They are much more vigilant towards what is hiding underneath the lake."

It took a few minutes for this extraordinary beast to reveal itself.

In one moment, everything looked peaceful.

In the next moment, flexible tree branches poked out of the edge of the lake and randomly grabbed four different exobeasts!

The caught alien beasts panicked while the rest quickly turned around and retreated from the water!

None of these fleeing creatures spared any thought towards the ones that had become entangled.

No matter how much they struggled, the captured prey failed to break the thin but surprisingly strong branches!

Soon, the prey disappeared beneath the surface of the lake, returning the area to a strained state of calm.

Ves waved his hand, causing the view to shift. The surface of the lake turned from a reflective white surface into a transparent layer that clearly exposed what had been hiding underneath all along!

"That's... that's a tree!" Andraste gasped. "It's an underwater tree!"

The sight became much more horrible now that they were able to see what happened to the captured prey.

The poor exobeasts not only drowned after being submerged in water, but they also started to get drained of their nutrients as multiple strong and penetrating tree branches stabbed into their bodies!

The demonic tree seemed to sway in the water current as it gained enough nutrients to support itself and further its own growth.

What was even more significant was that the lake slightly started to grow in size! More water had appeared, and it came in such quantities that it should have been impossible for all of it to appear through natural means.

The Sorara #390 Hunting Ground had not seen any rain in decades!

It only took a few minutes later for other exobeasts to return. No matter what, it was vital for them to top off their water reserves if they wanted to survive in these dry and arid lands.

"How close is it to becoming a calamity beast?" Ves asked.

"We estimate that it will take approximately 70 days for its evolution to reach a stage where it can handle attacks of mechs at long range. We are already aware of several hunting teams that have put the so-called Evil Lake Tree into their hunting lists. If you want to prevent it from being claimed by others, then your clan should send out its hunting team quickly."

Chapter 5479 The Rise of Beasts

While most of red humanity had set their sights squarely on the most obvious threat posed by the 13 major alien races of the Red Ocean, the Hunting Association squarely focused on a completely different kind of enemy!

The gradual rise and emergence of calamity beasts threatened to upend the entire new frontier.

Any planet that bore a considerable amount of life turned into breeding grounds of all manner of strange and exotic calamity beasts.

Ordinary exobeasts and exoplants belonging to species that had settled in the same ecosystems for millions of years suddenly became subjected to intense mutations!

Though it was not unheard of for certain alien creatures to undergo rapid evolution to the point where they ascended the limitations of their own species, their growth usually tapered off due to many limitations.

The ubiquitous presence of E energy radiation unlocked many of those constraints.

Mutated beasts not only gained access to a lot of powerful energy and matter, but could also gain more control over their self-evolution!

Through the psychoactive and psychoreactive properties of E energy, these primitive alien creatures adapted much better to the environment than before.

In areas of drought, the mutated beasts developed ways to quench their thirst or reduce their dependence on water.

In areas of extreme weather events, the mutated beasts burrowed underground or simply grew tough enough to withstand all of the external disturbances.

In areas with a lot of powerful threats, the mutated beasts rapidly evolved their combat abilities. The greater the competitive pressure, the more lethal they became!

No matter what challenges these mutated beasts faced, as long as they overcame them all, they had most likely grown strong enough to break through a major threshold of their development!

Just like how expert pilots were incomparably stronger than their ordinary counterparts, the overall strength of calamity beasts already reached a point where they could destroy entire towns and cities by themselves.

President Oscar Tarich sounded extremely serious about this rising threat.

"Make no mistake, Professor Larkinson. Ever since the Age of Dawn unfolded upon us, we have become embroiled in two wars. The Red Two are leading the charge in the war against the civilized natives that are currently assailing our border systems. Our Hunting Association is invested with the responsibility of waging war against the uncivilized alien monsters that must be contained through different means."

"From what I have seen, your Association is doing a job at keeping these Calamity Beasts in line." Ves remarked.

The intimidating Evil Lake Tree might look as if it had the potential to flood the entire Chasseur Continent in water, but there was no way the hunters would let it grow to that point.

The branch president responded with a tired smile.

"Ocanon VI is not as controlled as it appears on the surface. There are massive amounts of aquatic life in its oceans. The quantity of mutated beasts that have propagated there are much more numerous, and most of them are capable of traversing much longer distances, making it even harder to track them and hunt them down."

"Your Association should still be able to cull them before they grow into calamity beasts, right?"

"Where do you think most of our reinforcements have been sent? Our forces are already being stretched to their limits. Controlling the underwater ecosystems is much more cumbersome to us due to the low visibility and inability to conduct sweeping terrain scans from orbit. What is even more problematic for us is that there is a galactic shortage of aquatic hunting teams. Aquatic mechs and mech pilots trained in their use are much less common to begin with. This has forced us to hunt down the most threatening mutated aquatic beasts by ourselves."

That was hardly ideal. The Hunting Association clearly wanted to position its forces as reserves that only took action when absolutely needed. Their mech pilots were being trained as elites that received the privilege of piloting much more powerful mechs than the norm.

Fielding them too often not only wore them out, but also diminished the Hunting Association's ability to respond to acute and unexpected crises!

"If the oceans throughout the Red Ocean are such a problem, then surely you can sponsor more mech academies to this end."

"We are already encouraging more mech cadets to specialize in piloting aquatic mechs, but it will take years for the manpower pool to reflect these efforts." Oscar Tarich replied. "Do not forget that only 1 year has passed, and already highly threatening mutated beasts such as this tree down below are starting to dominate their local ecosystems. We believe that it will take the most successful ones a few months before they complete their evolution to a calamity beast. That may not be a problem on a highly controlled planet such as this one, but what of other untamed planets?"

Ves understood the underlying issue. "Your Hunting Association is probably monitoring every life-bearing planet in human-occupied space. You can cull any would-be calamity beasts in time in those cases. At worst, you can unleash weapons of mass destruction on planets that have gone out of control, thereby purging them of all life. It would be a pity to get rid of all of that biodiversity, though. However, it will be a lot more difficult for your hunters to control the proliferation of calamity beasts outside the borders of our territories." "Exactly. We are trying to collect as much intelligence as possible on how the native aliens have attempted to control this looming threat, but the clues that we have gathered so far do not paint an optimistic image. The alien civilizations are too divided from each other. There are major alien races that are able to recognize the danger in time and enact their own policies to control the planets under their control. Then there are thousands more minor alien races that are not only weaker, but also adopt strange and inefficient approaches in governing their territories."

There were alien races where only their highest leaders had all of the initiative. Practically nothing happened without the supreme leader's instructions. This meant that problems taking place further away from the power center had a tendency to remain unaddressed for an agonizingly long time.

By the time the supreme leader finally became notified of a serious issue, the calamity beasts would have already grown past the point where they could be suppressed!

There were also other alien races that were bound by strong religious traditions. Most of these weird indigenous faiths never accounted for the rise of calamity beasts. If the rules and traditions of their religions prevented them from culling the rapidly growing number of mutated beasts, then they would soon pay the price for sticking to outdated superstition!

When Ves estimated how many life-bearing planets existed in the Red Ocean, he did not have any confidence in the ability for all of the different indigenous alien civilizations to control their own territories.

"We're screwed, aren't we?" Ves softly whispered.

"Maybe. Maybe not. In the medium term, inadequate control over the proliferation of these extraordinary beasts is beneficial to us. Their uncontrolled rise in every alien territory will force the natives to divert their powerful fleets and armies to combating the threat from within their borders.

However, this is not good in the long term. Not only will these forces obtain greater combat experience against units with powerful E-energy abilities, their researchers and developers will also harvest a large amount of research samples that they can use to derive powerful new hyper tech and E-tech."

Ves widened his eyes. "Damn! The aliens will be able to gather a much greater quantity of calamity beast remains since they are in control over so much more territory than us! Not only that, but their populations are far greater than our own, which means that they have a lot more alien scientists to study all of those valuable research samples."

This was the absolute disparity between red humanity and the native aliens. It was hard to overcome it so long as the differences in manpower and territory remained so lopsided.

"The problem is worse than you think, professor. While our biotechnology R&D capabilities are strong, the native aliens are not weak on this front. Every major alien race with strong aspirations to evolve into native gods have conducted extensive research on remarkable biologies. While their understanding of hyper technology and E-technology are much weaker, they have so many researchers that it only takes a handful of lucky geniuses to attain major breakthroughs. Then there are the phase whales."

There was no need for President Tarich to elaborate much further. The phase whales were best known for their tyrannical bodies and their extreme compatibility with phasewater.

Yet they were anything but simple brutes. Each of them were highly intellectual and excelled in their own alien brand of biotechnology.

"If those phase whales get their hands on powerful calamity beasts, there is a greater possibility that they will assimilate the strongest and most useful abilities of these rapidly evolved creatures!"

Tarich nodded. "That will most certainly be the case. Our god mechs are undergoing rapid upgrades, but the phase whales are trying to catch up in their own way. The outcome of Operation Night Jazz has spurred them on even further. Now that our god pilots have humbled their entire race, they will not be arrogant enough to disregard the value of all of these emerging calamity beasts."

This was a huge issue and one that could not easily be solved. It pressured red humanity into action, because time was on the side of the native aliens.

Ves grew a little upset now that he had learned of these unsettling trends. It sure put a damper on his vacation.

"So what now?"

That caused the older man to shrug his shoulders. "We soldier onwards. We do what we can to increase our utilization of the mutated beasts that are growing in our territories. Our Hunting Association is even thinking about deliberately allowing them to grow into calamity beasts so long as they can be contained. The more powerful they become, the more research value they hold. Currently, any powerful beast that has repelled multiple hunting teams is deserving of greater attention. Every time such a creature is attacked by mechs, it will develop targeted countermeasures that increase their ability to handle similar threats."

"That sounds like a good way to direct their evolution in more useful directions to our R&D sector." Ves affirmed. "Still, won't that increase the risk of grooming them into our own worst enemies?"

"That is a risk that we have to take. The danger is not that great, professor. Mutated beasts and calamity beasts have transcended their race. They have changed so much that they are subject to reproductive isolation. They cannot birth an entire species of super aliens, which means that their threat will always remain localized. At worst, we will notify the Huntsman or one of the numerous ace pilots that have agreed to accept our commissions. There will never be a case that a calamity beast will reach the next major stage of their evolution."

Was it possible for these calamity beasts to evolve into existences comparable to True Gods by relying solely on natural cultivation?

Ves had a hunch that this might be the case. Once these powerful monsters attained this level of strength, their threat level to red humanity was bound to undergo a qualitative change!

"Wait, why do we assume that calamity beasts are universally hostile to us? They become smarter and more self-aware as they grow stronger, right? Isn't it possible for us to tame them and turn them into our guardian beasts?"

"Such ideas are brought up every day within our Hunting Association. Our preliminary studies suggest that calamity beasts are too wild and uncivilized to engage in any form of diplomacy or surrender. Everything about them has grown stronger, including their ego, savagery, predatory instincts and so on. The wilder they are when they are weak, the less compromising they will be when they become strong."

"Then just capture them when they are in the early stages of their growth cycle." Ves suggested.

"It is not that simple, professor. There is indeed a possibility for us to bring them to our heel if we capture them and tame them when they are still juveniles. However, our initial experiments in taming these creatures have produced a large amount of failures. There are a large amount of unknown variables that change from the moment we try to suppress their savagery."

Chapter 5480 Giant Stone Eater

Ves fell silent for a time after he obtained a lot of information about calamity beasts.

The Hunting Association had good reasons to fear this powerful new class of beasts, but they were not entirely undesirable.

Each calamity beast possessed an awesome capacity for destruction, but they also promised a huge amount of benefits!

Their powerful biologies turned their carcasses into highly valuable treasures for any biotech researcher.

The mech industry could also derive many powerful ways to harness E Energy by studying the operation of these powerful beasts.

Even Ves developed a much greater interest in these calamity beasts because he could make use of them in so many useful ways!

From turning them into powerful design spirits to transforming their powerful spiritualities into high-value spiritual ingredients, he could enrich his mechs much more extensively than before.

Vulcan also developed a strong interest in these calamity beasts. The reason for that was because they usually served as the best source of artifact spirits for their works!

If Vulcan was able to obtain an artifact spirit that perfectly aligned with the attributes and powers of a proto-artifact, then combining the two together would produce an extraordinary new piece of equipment that had endless potential.

This was how powerful relics such as the original Oceancaller came into existence!

Ves had many reasons to welcome this dangerous new trend. He could create more powerful works if he gained access to all of these high-quality resources!

The way he looked at hunting preserves such as Ocanon VI had changed.

The value of a planet that bore so much alien life had increased by an immeasurable degree.

Ves was sure that a lot of groups regretted their decision to terraform so many biodiverse planets.

He even wanted to obtain his own untamed planet. There was simply no other way to generate so many mutated beasts and calamity beasts without enough virgin lands.

This was where the Larkinson Clan suffered from its lack of priority in obtaining fixed territories.

Ves had dismissed the need to colonize planets and star systems for such a long time that he found himself unable to take full advantage of this rising trend.

Only the direct owners of all of these untamed planets stood to gain the most benefits from all of the beasts that rapidly evolved from on the surface!

Outsiders such as the Larkinson Clan might not be able to access them at all. Even if a few valuable products flowed out of these controlled treasure lands, they would only be the leftovers that possessed less research value than other powerful beasts.

Ves inwardly sighed. He and his clan had little choice but to rely on untamed planets controlled by third parties to obtain what they needed.

At least the Hunting Association took control of numerous planets, thereby ensuring that less powerful individuals and organizations could obtain what they needed.

"Let us take a look at other powerful mutated beasts." Ves said after he felt a greater desire to harvest the bounty of Ocanon VI. "I have read descriptions of numerous powerful specimens that are of interest to me. I want to take a look at them before the day is over."

"Very well. The next one is on the other side of the Sorara #390 Hunting Ground."

The hunting grounds of the Chasseur Continent were merely artificial boundaries that denoted distinctly different natural biomes, so their sizes and shapes varied wildly.

As the shuttle left the territory of the Evil Lake Tree, Ves and his children continued to stare at all of the interesting features of the dry and rocky landscape down below.

Occasionally, the children shifted their gaze to large animals that stood out from a distance.

Since #390 did not support the emergence of too many large beasts, the ones that grew past a certain size had almost certainly mutated beyond the limits of their original species.

However, just because they mutated did not necessarily mean they were interesting.

The process of mutation was inherently dangerous, and this was especially the case at the start. These beasts were still comparably weak in body, which meant that any botched or harmful mutations had a high chance of getting them killed!

Only those that managed to overcome this difficult early period had the capital to evolve into calamity beasts!

"We are approaching the territory of the next notable monster." President Tarich announced. "A hunting team has recently started to engage it in battle. You are in for a good show." "Really?!" Andraste perked up. "Cool!"

"I want to see! I want to see!"

Ves grew disappointed when he heard that another hunting team had already set out for this high-value research subject.

As the shuttle stopped above a large crater environment, Ves got caught sight of an odd battle.

The massive monster drew his attention first. It looked like an enormous animated piece of rock. Nothing looked organic on the surface, making it difficult to recognize it as a living organism if not for the fact that it actually moved!

Ves became impressed by how it was able to move while supporting so many tons of weight. The rock creature was as large as a small cargo transport, meaning that it was much larger than the mechs that assailed it from a distance!

"The Giant Stone Eater is a mutation of a species that largely derives its nutrients by extracting it from rocks." President Tarich explained the details of the calamity beast. "Its evolutionary direction is biased towards size and digestion speed, so it has been able to grow its physical mass at an astounding rate. The downside is that it has compromised its ability to move quickly. It is also less effective at burrowing through the ground. The reason why its body has taken on this appearance is that its hasty digestion has become much less thorough."

The massive creature did not look bothered by that. As the mutated beast started taking hits that chipped away at its stony exterior, it devoured the rock underneath the crater and rapidly filled up the weakened parts of its body with replacement stone.

The Giant Stone Eater did not passively allow itself to get attacked.

It had already developed offensive properties. Its main form of attacking distant targets was to lob rocks at them with its large and heavy limbs!

The mutated beast possessed twelve limbs, most of which were used to support its body.

Two of the limbs looked the weirdest of them all. They looked as if the Giant Stone Eater deliberately mutated so that it could grow these arms.

They resembled rocky scorpion tails, but instead of stinging any enemies up close, they lobbed rocky projectiles into the distance like a catapult!

Their attack frequency was low, but they were able to throw rocks that were so large and heavy that the hunting mechs had to evade these heavy rocks!

BOOOOOM!

Strangely enough, despite looking like solid stones, the lobbed projectiles exploded upon impact as if they were genuine artillery shells!

Ves could perceive the strong release of earth energies whenever they detonated upon contact with the ground!

"That monster fights like a heavy artillery mech." Andraste noted. "It is so slow, but also so tough. No second-class mech wants to get hit by those rock catapults."

"Your description is not entirely correct, honey. Real heavy artillery mechs cannot adequately confront a squad of mechs by itself, pumpkin. Their lack of mobility makes it easy to outmaneuver them or whittle down their defenses. This is different. The Giant Stone Eater does not appear to be on the losing end of this exchange."

"It takes guts to attack the Giant Stone Eater." President Tarich approvingly said. "The Arrow Gods are among the more famous hunters of Ocanon VI. Their reputation is not as high as that of your Swordmaidens, but they are the strongest mech pilots that they primarily rely on bows to take down their prey."

The Hunting Association's rules and restrictions encouraged the use of simple and even primitive weapons in valid hunts.

The less powerful and sophisticated the weapons, the higher the rewards and ranking points of a successful hunt!

It was fairly common to see hunters on foot taking down their prey with bows and arrows.

It was much less common to see them utilized by mechs. The attack method was so clunky and primitive that it simply did not make any sense to equip them onto mechs!

Yet the Arrow Gods did not listen to common sense and adopted them anyway.

To their credit, their ranged attack power was not small. Their alloy bows possessed a huge amount of draw weight, making it so that the arms and torso of these specialized archer mechs were abnormally strong for ranged mechs.

It not only made for a novel sight, but also caused these archer mechs to be quite powerful in brawls!

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The long and sturdy alloy arrows were not simple metal rods.

When the Arrow Gods fired them at the Giant Stone Eater, they penetrated deeply enough to bury their tip inside the stone armor!

Once they could go no further, the warheads embedded within the arrow structure exploded, creating a new hole in the stone armor!

Yet the Giant Stone Eater was nowhere close to suffering serious injuries!

It continued to eat the soil and rock and rapidly regenerated the holes in its defenses.

"This cannot go on forever." Ves analyzed. "Those heavy arrows are expensive, and I doubt the Arrow Gods brought enough of them to last for hours."

BOOOM! booom!

In the meantime, the Giant Stone Eater constantly forced the archer mechs to move. The mutated beast did not seem to tire out at all. It constantly absorbed a lot of earth-attributed energy from the environment, enabling it to instinctively empower its armor and stone projectiles.

The creature was not getting exhausted at all. The opposite was happening. The Giant Stone Eater was actively adapting to the pressure, causing it to lob more and more powerful projectiles!

"The Arrow Gods are starting to get serious."

One of the important lessons that hunters had learned was that they could never afford to go in guns blazing.

Mutated beasts evolved so rapidly that any intelligence on them had already become outdated after a week.

The Arrow Gods expended valuable arrows to confirm that the Giant Stone Eater had not undergone any radical evolutions.

Upon a silent signal, the three archer mechs switched from launching regular explosive arrows to utilizing more exotic projectiles.

The Arrow Gods soon shot three abnormally thick arrows at their prey!

As soon as the chunky arrows made contact with the stone armor, they did not pierce through the surface layer.

They instead disintegrated, causing them to release a lot of acid!

The Giant Stone Eater's exterior began to smoke and dissolve as the extremely powerful acid not only ate into the stone armor, but also inhibited its regeneration!

"More mechs are entering the fight!"

Ves noted to his surprise that three Huntmasters leapt over the edge of the crater and raced towards the Giant Stone Eater in the center.

The familiar living mechs wielded modified spears that were longer, thicker and more suitable to punch through solid rock.

A few rifleman mechs remained behind and started to shoot kinetic rounds into the partially dissolved rocky exterior of their prey.

Soon, the Giant Stone Eater started to endure a lot more pressure than before.

The archer mechs bombarded it with acids.

The rifleman mechs exploited the new weak points.

The Huntmaster utilized their long spears to harass and interfere with the beast up close.

Their glows shifted attention away from the more vulnerable ranged mechs, causing the Giant Stone Eater to become less focused on launching exploding rock projectiles.

However, its ability to defend itself at close range was not weak.

In one moment, the Giant Stone Eater planted its two powerful forearms into the soil.

The three Huntmasters hastily aborted their next attacks and quickly jumped to the rear!

Their response turned out to be correct, because a huge amount of sharp and sturdy spikes erupted from the ground!

A large semicircle around the Giant Stone Eater had turned into a forest of spikes!

"This mutated beast can do this as well?!"