

The Mech 5581

Chapter 5581 Separated By Time

The atmosphere in the illusionary starship compartment started to become a little more serious.

Even Lucky and Emma no longer made as many noises as before. The larger and much more powerful spiritual cat pressed onto Lucky and kept him in her grasp as if the gem cat was just a kitten.

"Meow..."

"Miew."

Ves continued to gaze at the human manifestation of the Destroyer of Worlds in a speculative and evaluating gaze.

This was the first time he had come face to face with a god pilot.

One of his purposes as a mech designer was to help the users of his products reach the same height one day.

The more he understood how god pilots worked, the better he could design his products to facilitate their ascension to the ultimate rank!

Yet... the rank of god pilot was clearly not the limit of this profession. Even if the road ahead was shrouded in fog, the Destroyer of Worlds and all of her peers did not want to rest on their laurels!

Ves could not imagine what the next rank could possibly look like. Even though Divine Irene Mox had suppressed her incredibly powerful presence to a level where she could comfortably speak with others, the destructive potential of her willpower was so great that she could easily wipe out the entire capital city of Bortele III in an instant so long as she released her restraint!

It was far too difficult for Ves to assume that Irene still retained large parts of her humanity. So much of her had morphed into extraordinary power that he suspected that she was largely simulating her own emotions.

Of course, he kept his ideas to himself. He had no right to judge a god pilot. He did not even understand them all that much. Whatever he and Blinky were able to glimpse was only a fraction of Irene's true majesty. He hadn't even seen any sign of the Ragnarok!

Right now, the conversation between Ves and his latest Mastery experience host had taken a momentous turn.

"Do you see the Red Ocean over there?" Irene asked as she pointed at the distant view of the dwarf galaxy through the illusionary window. "This is our home now. Red humanity has no way of going home again. The nearest galaxies are Messier 87 and a collection of other dwarf galaxies that have bathed in the supermassive galaxy's light for eons. We are surrounded by enemies who have acclimated to exotic radiation over a much greater period of time. We are incomparably weak compared to all of our new neighbors."

Ves grimaced. Everyone smart enough could figure this out as well. Most people tried not to think too hard on this as it would only lead to despair.

Rather than think about how red humanity was hopelessly outnumbered and outgunned, it was better to focus on more immediate concerns that they still had the ability to change.

If people wanted to solve all of these crises and ensure their own survival over the long run, they had little choice but to take this step by step.

Naturally, the more powerful leaders had to undertake more responsibilities. This meant that much of the future of their entire civilization rested on the shoulders of the Destroyer of Worlds!

It was not a comforting thought. Even though god pilots should never be prone to doubt, Irene clearly conveyed the impression that she was not certain about her own future direction.

Too much had changed in just a single year.

Irene sighed yet again. "To you, our first encounter with each other must have happened just before the end of the Age of Mechs. Despite all of the events that happened since then, your memories of that instance should still be fairly recent."

Ves nodded. "This reunion feels kind of odd to me. Not that much time has passed between then and now, but while I have aged for a year, you have experienced more than 200 years of life. Our generational gap has magnified so much that you could easily pass off as my great-great-great-grandmother. You must have waited for a long time before meeting me again."

"More than you know." Irene said while her burning eyes conveyed a complex emotion. "I have examined my memories of that time over and over again. I already deduced that you were fairly young at the time. As the years passed, I always held the expectation that I would meet you again. I had no proof to back up this assumption, but my intuition constantly validated my hunch. The urge to meet with you again has driven me forward so many times. How long do I need to wait to see the man who has given me a new life and a stronger pathway to power? As decades and centuries passed by without even a hint of your existence, I began to fear that it may take centuries or even longer to hear your voice again."

Ves sensed a strong conviction in her tone.

"Wait... is this the source of your motivation?" Ves asked in a perplexed tone. "You worked so hard to undertake so many risks and break past your limits just to live long enough to see me again?"

"There is more to it than that, but I admit that the desire to speak with you again has given me the urgency to keep working harder." Irene responded. "The more time had passed, the less I wanted to present myself to you as a pilot who hardly accomplished anything with the opportunities that you have granted me. I tested and exceeded my limits because I would rather die as a woman who has put up a good fight than turn into a zombie who barely did anything meaningful throughout all of those years. This is my pride as a soldier."

Ves looked incredibly impressed at her. Many mech pilots spoke high-minded ideals, but few of them were able to follow through to the very end.

The Destroyer of Worlds was one of the few exceptional mech pilots who stayed true to her word, and she clearly got rewarded for her superhuman efforts.

Her incredible success and achievements caused Ves to feel inferior in comparison. He couldn't help but shake his head.

"It sounds like you have been doing extremely well over the centuries. You have surpassed me and became one of the ultimate powerhouses of the human race. There was no need to look up to me to begin with, because I am not a centuries-old fossil that has accumulated just as much power as you. I am just a Senior Mech Designer who is less than half a century old. I do not see what sort of value I can provide to you at this point. We are so far apart from each other that it isn't even funny."

Irene smiled at Ves. "Do not belittle yourself, Ves. I admit that you are not who I expected you to be, but that does not deprive me of the joy of meeting your actual self. Time has pulled us apart, but it does not have the power to change my gratitude to you. No matter whether you are an all-powerful Star Designer or a simple Novice Mech Designer, it is undeniable that your actions have benefited my life and the lives of many others for the better. Besides, you are mistaken in your words. You do have the power to help me in my present condition."

"How, exactly? I really don't see why you have so many high expectations for me. I never met a god pilot in person before you, and I still don't understand the principles that make you so absurdly strong. I have even less of an idea on what comes next."

The god pilot gazed at him for a few seconds before she accepted his answer.

"I see. Your vision is more limited, but that is okay. I have heard from certain sources that you have access to an ancient and profound inheritance. More than that, you should be in personal contact with a powerful practitioner in those ancient mysteries. You should have a way to consult with her directly. Please call her over so I can borrow her expertise. I have a very strong hunch that you should be able to oblige my request."

How did she know that? Ves was pretty sure that the Rubarthans hadn't figured all of this out. The only possible source that she could have gained this information from was the mechers!

There was no point hiding or denying the truth. It seemed that this secret had spread so much at this point that it was practically public knowledge among the top leaders of red humanity.

"It's true." Ves helplessly let out a tired breath. "I... have long benefited from the guidance and the teachings of my mother. I don't know whether you understand her past and present identities. Even I haven't really figured it all out. What I do know is that she has become a True God and that she is extremely knowledgeable in matters regarding cultivation. I don't think she possesses a thorough understanding of god pilots, though. Her knowledge base is... outdated."

Irene did not mind this fact. "There is a great deal of wisdom to be learned from the ancients. That does not mean that we should blindly follow old traditions and methods, but we can avoid a great deal of detours and dead ends if we learn from the lessons of the past. This is exactly what I seek at the moment."

So this was one of the main reasons why Irene was so eager to meet with Ves in the flesh. She saw hope of figuring out her subsequent advancement so long as she was able to consult with Cynthia Larkinson!

It made a lot of sense even if Ves felt as if he was being reduced to a tool. Though he knew that Irene still respected him a lot, he still became disappointed that he was unable to meet her needs by himself.

If he wanted to live up to his designation as her friend, then he needed to hurry up and become a Star Designer in order to close the gap between each other!

"Alright. If you want me to call my mother, you will have to open up a gap in your god kingdom. The only way I can contact her is through summoning the Superior Mother, who happens to be her incarnation. It is impossible to make this happen when your crushing willpower will shred her apart as long as she comes close. Can you selectively allow her entry into this chamber?"

This was not an easy request. Even though god pilots possessed much greater control and mastery over their own powers, their inherent strength was also vastly greater.

The two properties inherently worked against each other, thereby preventing god pilots from exerting too much fine control.

God pilots were never meant to be subtle to begin with. The Progenitors of Mechs devised them to act as the strongest and most effective counters against True Gods and the qi cultivator variety in particular!

This meant that a pure energy-based life form such as the Superior Mother would have to enter the gates of hell just to be able to interact with the likes of the Destroyer of Worlds!

"You need to tamper down your power a lot more." Ves advised with clear concern in his expression. "Just your voice is strong enough to wipe out her energy manifestation. We need to figure out a way to lower your threat and increase your restraint before a meeting can be arranged. The Superior Mother won't show up otherwise because of all of the risks."

God pilots were never meant to mix with other True Gods. The only ones that could truly get along with these absolute warriors were Star Designers.

"This... may take some time."

Chapter 5582 Major Cultivation Ranks

It took over half an hour for the Destroyer of Worlds to rein in her overflowing willpower to a degree that was acceptable.

Her presence had become a lot less overbearing, but that did not mean she had lost any of her strength.

Irene's current state gave Ves the illusion that she had turned herself into a giant bomb. She has compressed nearly all of her destructive potential in a tight shell.

Once she detonated her warhead, Ves had no doubt that the explosion would be powerful enough to wipe him out without exception!

He even had the faint idea that her destructive power had gained such powerful transcendent characteristics that she may even be able to kill his incarnations!

This was an incredibly scary prospect, and one that frightened him to his wits!

Even though it sounded too outlandish to be true, Ves did not dare to doubt the warning issued by his intuition. No god pilot should ever be underestimated. Their highly developed willpower possessed the capability to rewrite reality and turn impossibilities into mundane everyday occurrences.

Ves was incredibly lucky that his first encounter with a god pilot was with a friendly one. The Destroyer of Worlds clearly harbored a lot of goodwill towards him. There was little chance that she would employ her formidable power against him, especially now that she needed help.

However, it was best if Ves avoided any further contact with god pilots. No matter whether they were friendly, neutral or hostile, each of them had the potential to render him and his incarnations at their mercy!

[I am ready.] A female but clearly synthetic voice sounded in the illusionary starship chamber. [You should be able to invite your mother over. Make sure to proceed slowly so that I can prevent my power from lashing out against her approach.]

Ves snapped out of his thoughts and briefly scanned his surroundings. Irene's god kingdom had become a lot more subdued. It even conveyed a sense of opening as if the god pilot had made the difficult decision to open the gates of her impregnable castle.

She easily managed to solve the communication problem as well. As a god pilot, her voice was embedded with her willpower, thereby turning it into a weapon unto itself.

Using an artificial tool such as a simple synthetic voice generator was enough to separate most of her willpower from her words, especially if the fabricated voice profile diverged from her own native voice.

There was still a powerful undercurrent behind her words, but at least they did not hammer Ves' mind as much as before.

After confirming that everything was in order, Ves tried to induce the Superior Mother to manifest in this secure chamber.

It was not easy. Even though Veronica had warned Cynthia in advance, the incarnation of his mother had to enter the belly of one of the most threatening predators to existences such as herself!

Slowly but surely, a fainter and highly subdued energy manifestation of a robed Hexer deity appeared next to Ves.

The translucent image flickered many times as the 'interference' of Irene's god kingdom made it much more challenging to maintain a stable connection.

"Meow!" Lucky greeted the latest arrival.

Soon, the Superior Mother that undoubtedly served as an extension of the Lady of the Night had completed her strenuous descent.

The matronly woman did not exactly look pleased to meet with the infamous Destroyer of Worlds.

"I would not have come here if my son was absent." The Superior Mother spoke in a dignified tone that made it clear she did not intend to submit to the god pilot. "Are you truly a friend to him as you have claimed?"

Irene stood up and faced the Superior Mother with utmost seriousness.

[I do. He has saved my life and led me down this path. I would not be here if not for his intervention. I can tell you that I am always willing to repay the heavy favors that he has bestowed to me. As long as he has not done anything outrageous enough that violates my bottom line, he can always come to me and count on my protection against any enemy, no matter whether they are humans or aliens. I believe I can safeguard his life much better than you in this dwarf galaxy.]

Ves widened his eyes!

He already figured out that the Destroyer of Worlds would reciprocate the help that she received, but this was a massive benefit that just happened to resolve many of his concerns!

If he was able to shelter under the god pilot, Ves did not have to fear any assassination attempts by powerful parties looking to claim his bounty and turn into a powerful greater phase lord.

If the outcome of the Red War ever resulted in a total human defeat, then the vast majority of people would not be able to escape the relentless massacres of the vengeful native aliens.

The only red humans that had the highest chance of surviving this galaxy-wide manhunt were the god pilots that had managed to survive the war.

Even if red humans had been reduced to interstellar rats at this time, Ves wouldn't care so much about that as long as he could rely on the Destroyer of Worlds to guarantee his continued survival!

In fact, Ves did not have to wait until one of these scenarios came true in order to take advantage of her protection. He could already use her promise as a deterrence against any other would-be assassins and enemies that sought to succeed where Master Quan had failed!

Dozens of seconds passed as neither woman spoke any further.

Ves did not sense any exchange of words, but the Destroyer of Worlds and the Superior Mother somehow came to an accord given the subtle changes in expression.

The tension in the air noticeably eased as the two powerful women acted as if they were friendly neighbors.

Their quick resolution shouldn't be too surprising. The two True Gods might originally have reasons to be hostile against each other, but all of this history had been rendered meaningless in the Age of Dawn.

The more pressing were the aliens rather than fellow humans. The Rubarthan god pilot and the former member of the Five Scrolls Compact had every reason to set aside old complications and join forces to deal with common threats.

Cynthia also believed in Irene's willingness to protect Ves when necessary. That alone was enough to temper any hostility.

"I understand your situation." The energy manifestation of the Superior Mother assumed a more confident and assertive posture. "It is impressive for a mech pilot to reach the third major rank of cultivation. The Progenitors of Mechs have managed to produce a brilliant blueprint that has led to the rise of numerous god pilots whose combat power is unmatched by any other True God in the modern era. Yet even they do not have a clue of how god pilots should proceed as they are ultimately in the third rank themselves. Creating a brand-new promotion path that can lead straight to the fourth major rank is not within their realm of competence as they do not even understand what it means."

That did not surprise the Destroyer of Worlds. She even grew a little more reassured when Cynthia made it clear that she possessed a certain degree of understanding in these high-level secrets.

Ves also possessed a bit of understanding of the major cultivation ranks.

There were so many different cultivation methods and cultivation approaches that they could lead to many diverse divisions in cultivation stages.

That made comparing them to each other difficult as the second stage of one cultivation method could easily overpower the seventh stage of another cultivation method!

However, his mother had already taught him a way to normalize these stages according to their common characteristics.

The zeroth major cultivation rank corresponded to mortals or initiates. They encompassed a wide variety of weaklings such as ordinary people, Apprentice Mech Designers and expert candidates.

The first major cultivation rank was where people truly got started. Once they surpassed the extraordinary threshold, they became foundation builders who possessed a measure of transcendent power. They could range from Journeyman Mech Designers, expert pilots and swordmasters.

The second major cultivation rank could be regarded as domain shapers. Any cultivator that reached this height had developed an actual domain that granted them a great deal of control over a concept, rule or artistic conception. The domain shapers that Ves was familiar with were Master Mech Designers, ace pilots and sword saints.

The third major cultivation rank was the biggest threshold for almost every cultivator. This was the rank that corresponded to True Gods. Not only did people attain godhood in various forms, but also became qualified to access a deeper and more profound level of reality such as faith energy. They encompassed God pilots, Star Designers and the mythical sword gods, but also many other strange and powerful transcendents!

What took Ves aback was that Irene and his mother not only talked about the third major rank in a casual manner, but also addressed the fourth major rank that he had not even heard about before!

It was understandable that his mother never mentioned it to him. Ves was just a Senior Mech Designer at the moment, which classified him as a measly advanced first rank cultivator.

He was still two major ranks away from needing to think about promoting to the fourth major rank!

Even though Ves knew that he was not even close to qualified to join this discussion, he couldn't hold back his curiosity. He wanted to learn more about all of this exciting stuff!

"Can you tell me about the fourth major cultivation rank?! Please tell me what you know. Maybe I can help!"

Though neither woman believed in that last statement, Irene did not see much harm in satisfying his curiosity.

Cynthia might hold a different opinion on this topic, but she did not possess the ability to restrain a powerful god pilot.

[I do not have access to a lot of formal knowledge surrounding the fourth rank.] Irene explained. [The Five Scrolls Compact have always tried their best to hoard the secrets that can enable True Gods to develop themselves further. Many of the old families that have managed to preserve their ancient legacies can only ever reach the third major rank at most. The only references of the fourth rank that the Rubarthans are able to find are passing but highly fearful mentions in diaries, records and so on. I believe the Red Association most certainly has access to more detailed documentation, but I cannot access them unless I agree to concessions that are unacceptable.]

That sounded typical of the mechers. They already had 5 god pilots under their banner, and relied on them to restrain the other 3 god pilots.

The Red Association would not be able to maintain its position of dominance over the first-rate colonial superstates if their god pilots started to fall behind in cultivation!

Fortunately, Cynthia knew more about this mythical fourth rank.

"True Gods are cultivators who have attained godhood or acquired god-like powers that are based on their domains. What comes next is difficult to describe, as different records from different eras each espouse drastically different interpretations on how to define the fourth rank. One of the most common conditions that should be met is to develop your domain much further."

[To what extent?] Irene asked.

"One description claims that a True God must attain total supremacy over a domain in the entire universe in the present time. Every other True God who has developed similar domains must either be killed or subjugated. This is relatively easier to accomplish if your domain is based on an obscure or specific concept, but if you are hoping to gain dominion over a primal force such as destruction, then you will be locked in an endless struggle. Only those who have defeated all of their challengers have the capital to ascend to the fourth major cultivation rank."

[God King.]

"Exactly."

Chapter 5583 Struggles in Cultivation

Ves' mind was almost blown.

He already expected the fourth major cultivation rank to be qualitatively better and stronger than the previous rank in every way, but his mother's description easily exceeded his imagination!

The keyword that defined this exceedingly powerful rank was dominion. It was not enough for True Gods to master their own domains. They had to develop their respective strengths while actively competing against other like-minded transcendents!

Unless they killed or subjugated any rivals and enemies that sought to advance along a similar trajectory, these True Gods would never be able to expand their power and longevity beyond a certain limit!

From what little descriptions Ves had gained from the two women, the gap between True Gods and God Kings was so immense that the latter could easily kill the former with just a single metaphorical slap!

Of course, Ves did not rule out the possibility that this was an exaggerated claim. If God Kings were so powerful, then why hadn't they already conquered the entire cosmos?

They had to possess limits! Ves should not get overwhelmed by their intimidating titles and mistake them as actual gods or whatever.

The fourth major cultivation rank was just a lot more powerful than the preceding one. That was it. There was no need for him to ascribe any other special meaning to this classification.

Ves managed to calm down a bit after he had sorted out his chaotic thoughts.

"Have the god pilots of the Red Association devised their own blueprints to the fourth major cultivation rank?"

"They certainly have more clues than your 'friend' over here." The Superior Mother said in a deceptively mild tone. "Just look at the First Flame. Being able to incarnate into a phoenix signifies that he has made significant attainments in his unique practice method. It remains to be seen whether his approach will lead to the best outcome. Transforming into a phoenix will cause the mech and mech pilot to lose definition and disappear."

[The First Flame most definitely knows what he may lose in the process, but he believes that it is worth it so long as humanity gains the protection of a God King, even if it is weaker and more deficient.] Irene explained with clear respect and admiration in her synthetic voice. [The limitless potential of a god pilot will not help our civilization if it takes hundreds or thousands of years for one to evolve into a god king pilot.]

Was that what god pilots called the fourth major rank of their progression trajectory? It sounded a bit lame to Ves, but he was not the one in charge of this matter.

From what he could gather from their talk, neither of them possessed a good impression of a phoenix.

Such a mythical creature most certainly possessed a lot of power depending on how the First Flame interpreted it. Yet it was also a beast that largely relied on its natural gifts rather than any difficult methods to grow into its power.

The most critical question was whether the First Flame would lose his god kingdom and his god mech in the process of transforming into a phoenix.

If this was the case, then the man undeniably paid a huge price to reach the fourth major cultivation rank!

Ves gained a lot more respect towards the First Flame for this reason. The man was more willing to sacrifice his future potential in order to better protect the people that relied on his protection.

"Can I ask another question?" Ves interrupted yet again. "Earlier, you described how True Gods must defeat all of the competitors that are trying to attain absolute dominion over their own concepts or rules. How can they possibly beat each other when they are spread across the entire cosmos? We are talking about a sphere that is as large as too billion light-years! I find it inconceivable that any cultivator or civilization has the ability to traverse so much distance within a reasonable timeframe."

The Superior Mother crossed her arms. "What I have described is an oversimplification. Distance is meaningless in this competition. True Gods must struggle against each other in a different layer of reality."

"I see. Doesn't this mean that older True Gods that already enjoy a head start have already claimed all of the good stuff?"

"Yes, but not entirely, my son. The greater concepts and laws are largely occupied by ancient God Kings that live to this day, but there are still numerous ones that are still 'available'. The difficulty of 'claiming' them is so difficult that none of the True Gods that have emerged in the past has

conquered them. There is still a possibility that younger True Gods with stronger foundations can succeed where their predecessors have failed."

That sounded rather dubious to Ves. If these ultra-powerful concepts and rules remained untouched for so long, then there had to be more behind their unattainable conditions.

"Does that mean that True Gods virtually have no chance to become God Kings based on powerful concepts?"

[I would like to know the answer to this as well.] Irene spoke up with her synthesized voice. [I need to know whether my current approach leads to a dead end.]

The Superior Mother did not dare to gaze too deeply in the direction of Irene, but she still managed to pick up enough clues by simply entering a powerful god kingdom.

"I can already tell you with certainty that there is already a God King who holds dominion over the greater concept of Destruction. Your current attempts are currently too weak to be of concern, but that will change the longer you persist. Once you come close enough, you will not only provoke this God King, but also present yourself as an offering. Your entire accumulation will turn into the God King's sustenance."

Cynthia's revelation devastated Irene. The surrounding god kingdom briefly grew unstable before the powerhouse managed to rein in her emotions.

[I... feared as much.] Irene said in a remarkably controlled fashion. [I always sensed an undercurrent of danger, but it was too faint for me to take seriously. Now I know that I was merely too weak to attract the notice of this existing God King. Once I fattened myself up, I would have unknowingly turned myself into a meal.]

Ves' blood almost froze when he heard these possibilities. Cultivation turned out to be a lot crueler at this stage!

Even the most peaceful True Gods might not be able escape danger due to the prevalence of competition.

"Reaching the fourth major cultivation rank is not as dangerous as you think." Cynthia spoke. "The greater concepts are taboo, but there are an endless amount of lesser and more specific concepts that are not contested at all. As long as you become a God King based on a non-universal concept such as red humanity or living mechs, I doubt that you will encounter a single challenger."

That provided a lot of relief to Ves. Even if it would take centuries before he should ever consider this problem, he felt a lot more reassured that his way forward was not as impassible as he initially thought.

Irene was not as content with this alternative.

[Just as there are differences in strength between True Gods, there are also differences in strength between God Kings. If I settle for becoming a Lesser God King, I will always be inferior to a Greater God King.]

"That is not necessarily the case." The Superior Mother smirked. "Your understanding of the fourth major cultivation rank is too simple. In my understanding, it should be possible for you to become a Lesser God King of Explosive Shells. From there, you should continue to leverage your superior

foundation and cultivation approach to develop your strength further. Once you are ready, you can issue a challenge against the current Greater God King of Destruction. The latter may be older and much more familiar with the power of destruction than you, but such an ancient practitioner must certainly be a qi cultivator or similar in origin."

That caused Irene to look a lot more hopeful than before!

If Cynthia was right about this, then she had just described a relatively simple and realistic strategy for Irene to become one of the most powerful God Kings in the universe!

Of course, just saying all of this was easy. Making it happen was countless times harder!

The Destroyer of Worlds needed to work much harder than she did before and squeeze her potential to the limit and beyond to successfully promote to the fourth major rank.

Then, she needed to spend a lot of time to develop her strength further in order to catch up with an ancient powerhouse.

This was too much to the likes of Ves!

His greatest concern at his moment was reaching the second major rank. Stuff like this was so far away from him that he thought about retreating.

Still, Ves couldn't resist the curse of knowledge. Even if he knew that learning about all of this would change his cognition forever, he simply had to know what came next!

[Can a lesser concept truly triumph over a greater concept? In the scenario that you have just described, it is unlikely that my growth can ever catch up to an ancient God King.]

"That is why it is important for you to retain and leverage the vastly superior foundation of a god pilot and a god mech." Cynthia responded. "You are made to defeat qi cultivators. Your cultivation profession has perfectly maximized the potential of both willpower and artifacts. This is your greatest advantage and can serve as the basis to your continued ascension. The cultivation hierarchy is not static. True Gods who have practiced newer and more developed cultivation methods are constantly challenging their predecessors. Only the strongest and fittest deserve to survive."

It was clear that Cynthia thought very highly of god pilots such as the Destroyer of Worlds. Perhaps they did have the capital to challenge the existing God Kings, though it would take a lot of time before they could get to this point.

Irene clearly understood this as well. She set this matter aside and raised a more immediate subject.

[You have my gratitude for clearing my doubts and informing me of certain dangers. Can you advise me on how I should proceed as a god pilot? The Kingdom of Mechs and the Red Kingdom can no longer guide my growth any longer. I do not have access to a viable blueprint that allows me to advance to the hypothetical rank of god king pilot. I would like to request your input.]

This was a heavy request, and almost no human alive possessed the qualifications to fulfill it. Neither the Rubarthans nor even the mechers knew for sure how god pilots should proceed!

Yet somehow his mother was different.

Ves found it difficult to imagine that she possessed a more comprehensive understanding of the cultivation of True Gods, but evidently she was much more knowledgeable than he thought!

"I cannot give you any guarantees that will work, but I can give you suggestions." Cynthia spoke after a short pause. "Every approach that you can choose from will entail sacrifice. You must make your choices carefully. For example, if you choose to absorb faith, your strength will grow by leaps and bounds, but you will no longer be able to exert as much control over your evolution. If you wish to preserve the relevance of your god mech, then you must cooperate with a Star Designer and constantly upgrade it to keep up with your own progress in order to maintain a balance. If that is not possible, then you should work towards phasing out your god mech or changing its fundamental nature."

Irene frowned when she heard all of that. Greater strength entailed greater sacrifices. If she wanted to become the most powerful human God King in the future, then she would have to endure many more struggles!

No matter what, she would never compromise on a vital matter.

[I will never give up on my god mech. My existence as a pilot is sacrosanct.]

"Then you cannot proceed alone. You **MUST** work together with Star Designer." Cynthia seriously said.

[That has always been the case from the start.]

Chapter 5584 The Difference A Companion Spirit Can Make

Ves watched and listened with great interest as the Superior Mother and the Destroyer of Worlds spoke about how to become a so-called God King.

His perspective and understanding of what True Gods needed to do in order to march towards the fourth major cultivation rank broadened with each passing minute!

Neither of the two older women held back any details from Ves as far as he was aware of. They openly explored Irene's cultivation and mentioned details that exposed her weak points and made her more vulnerable in battle if they leaked out in public.

Yet despite all of these concerns, the Rubarthan god pilot extended her full trust to Ves and his mother. It did not matter if they did not belong to the same camp. The Destroyer of Worlds regarded the Larkinsons as her friends and believed in their goodwill.

Ves felt honored by her willingness to extend so much trust to him and his mother. He doubted that anyone else in her life had received comparable treatment.

God pilots were not immune to criticism. They had become so powerful that each of their actions conveyed a lot of political significance. The big players carefully tracked each of their moves and constantly saw fault in any decision that did not fall in line with their core duties of fighting the enemies of the human race.

The mechers must be incredibly concerned about why the Destroyer of Worlds eagerly wanted to meet with Ves. It was unfortunate for them that Irene's god kingdom could easily defeat all of their attempts at eavesdropping on the conversation. It must frustrate them a lot to have no clues why such a powerful god pilot spontaneously met with a Senior Mech Designer!

"You have chosen wisely." The Superior Mother said as her elegant translucent body floated around the illusionary starship chamber. "The essence of a god pilot is already made clear by its label. The

foundation of your strength is based around combining godhood with mech piloting. Deviating from this fundamental pattern by reducing the importance of your god will simplify your progression to the fourth major cultivation rank, but it will damage your foundation forever. I do not look down on those that have decided to transition into a different kind of god for expedient reasons, but it would be an enormous waste if you followed suit."

Irene wordlessly nodded.

The First Flame and maybe other god pilots had already shown a willingness to put less emphasis on their god mechs going forward. Whether it was because they truly sought to change into a different sort of divine entity or simply wanted to accelerate their progression at all cost, nobody could tell.

However, their valiant sacrifices relieved a lot of pressure for other god pilots such as Irene who still possessed the desire to keep her god mech relevant going forward.

[While it does not look like it at the moment, I am also the Ragnarok, a god mech that excels in heavy artillery.] The powerful god pilot said with the help of her synthetic voice generator. [At the same time, I am Irene Mox, a god pilot who has developed a strong domain based on the power of destruction. Finally, I am also Emma, a companion spirit that has become an E Energy True God in her own right. These are the three components that make up my core existence. I will not accept anything that will cause one or two of them to fall behind. All three must advance in unison in order to maintain my absolute strength relative to other True Gods.]

Most god pilots only comprised of two equal components. Irene was a clear outlier among the too or so other known god pilots. Ves wondered increasingly whether his decision to grant her a companion spirit had played a key role in her successful advancement to the third major cultivation rank.

He turned his head and carefully studied Emma. Though he did not dare to open up all of his spiritual senses for fear of getting blinded and injured by a god pilot's overwhelming power, he carefully studied the powerful spiritual entity that had taken the guise of a living explosion that just happened to match the contours of a feline.

"Huh."

Though Ves' examination was anything but thorough, he did not sense any potent willpower in her form.

He knew that Irene was able to infuse Emma with a lot of willpower in order to amplify the explosive potential of her attacks, but when the companion spirit was at rest, she came across as a pure True God-level spiritual entity.

Ves switched his gaze between Irene and Emma multiple times. He immediately speculated that the relationship between the two had turned into the inverse of the relationship between Ketis and Sharpie.

Irene was the willpower cultivator in her pairing, while Sharpie was the one that carried Ketis' extraordinary willpower!

It was fascinating that both of them had opted for different approaches. Neither of them had that much of a choice as their initial professions already defined the roles of their companion spirits.

Ves rubbed his hairless chin in thought as he wondered about the implications of these contrasting approaches.

"What is it, Ves?" The Superior Mother asked when she noticed his odd behavior.

"I have a question, Irene. When you went through the Mech Body Merger Process, did the existence of Emma increase your chances of making it through the end?"

The Destroyer of Worlds remained silent for a few seconds before she nodded.

[I hoped to discuss the utility of your companion spirits in a separate conversation, but now that you have raised this topic, you deserve to know the answer. At the time, I did not know what I was getting into at the time. None of my Rubarthan peers could give me any reliable guidance on this matter. I had to initiate the Mech Body Merger Process without knowing how my companion spirit affected the process.]

Both Ves and the Superior Mother listened with great interest at her retelling.

[Operation union is the easiest to achieve as long as a peak ace pilot has already been paired with the same mech for many years. I only received the Ragnarok 4 years ago. The original plan called for waiting at least a decade before starting the process, but I chose to start early because I was impatient and because I had a feeling that waiting longer would not make that much of a difference.]

"Were you right?"

[Maybe. I believe so. I did stumble with forming an operation union with my Ragnarok at first, but when I used Emma as an extra bridge, I managed to complete the first phase smoothly.]

Ves' eyes lit up. "So your companion spirit did play an integral part in your advancement process! According to your own experiences, you think that other god pilot candidates should be able to start the Mech Body Merger Process a lot sooner because their companion spirits can make up for the lack of accumulation over time, is that correct?"

Irene nodded. [We are always short on time. I know of peak ace pilots who do not have much confidence in their chances of surviving. They sought to increase their success rate by piloting the same mech over a span of 20, 50 or over too years. While that does help with breaking down barriers, the excessive wait will cause them to lose their courage, which is a much greater loss in my opinion. I personally believe it is better if they start the Mech Body Merger Process too soon rather than too late. In such situations, a companion spirit can provide crucial help in completing the first phase.]

This already made companion spirits worth it for ambitious mech pilots!

Unlike mech designers, it was always better if mech pilots advanced as young as possible. Their profession was inherently based on combat, so being younger and more hot-blooded was strongly correlated with faster progression.

[When I initiated the second phase, I found that the existence of Emma has made this process more complicated for me. Compared to the experiences shared by other god pilots, my attempt to establish domain field union became more difficult because I had to work with three different components of myself rather than two. I was lucky that Emma's domain was nearly identical to my

own. If she developed in a different direction, then it would have become much harder to merge her domain with the rest.]

That caused Ves to lose a bit of excitement. He had no idea how difficult it was for mech pilots to complete the second phase, but it should not be a trivial step.

Companion spirits did not have to match the properties of their principals. They were free to develop other domains in order to increase their versatility and usefulness in different situations.

However, if divergent development caused mech pilots to experience much greater difficulties during the second phase of the Mech Body Merger Process, then Ves and the Red Association had to warn every mech pilot with a companion spirit to be careful about choosing this development strategy!

[After that, Emma made no difference during the third phase.] Irene continued to explain. [Corporeal union is a process where the pilot physically merges with the mech. It is a very mysterious process that can never be understood by others. When I completed the third phase, I turned into an unstable fusion that is made up of both energy and matter. That was when I initiated the final countdown. If I did not commence the fourth phase in a timely manner, I would have collapsed and died.]

That was an important detail that Ves had not learned before.

"What about the fourth and final phase?"

Irene's expression grew wistful as she recalled the difficulties she experienced during that time.

[I cannot say too much about it. Total union is the deadliest phase of all. To explain it in simple terms, I must throw away the vestiges of my mortality so that I can purify my willpower to the point where it can sustain my consciousness and my life. Only then can it perfectly combine with the powerful frame of my god mech. The part that is the most dangerous is when I am making the transition. I had to kill many parts of myself that are core to my life and existence. The more I throw these parts away, the more damage my soul sustains. Once it has reached its breaking point, I will essentially die unless my purified willpower can substitute for all of the parts that I have discarded. This is a difficult process because it is impossible for this to happen in normal cases. My willpower has to be strong and decisive enough to defy the rules of reality and essentially form a complete soul out of itself. If it was any slower, then it would have been too late for me to make it out alive.]

Ves looked amazed as the god pilot provided a first-hand description of the fourth and most mysterious phase.

He already learned or figured out the gist of what took place during this phase, but hearing the details made him more amazed at the few god pilots who succeeded.

"All god pilots are living miracles." The Superior Mother aptly said. "They are an impossibility. They cannot exist if the rules governing reality are absolute. Yet because they have cultivated their willpower to an extreme height, they have gained the power to reshape themselves into a stronger and more perfect existence, all without the need to borrow outside help."

"That does not mean that additional help is unwanted." Ves spoke. "The success rate of the Mech Body Merger Process is so abysmally low precisely because the fourth phase is so insanely difficult. Did the existence of Emma help in any fashion?"

[You can say that I owe my life to her.] Irene said as she gazed affectionately at her other self. [I have never told anyone about this because I previously thought my companion spirit was unique. When I tore apart my own soul and started to lose consciousness, Emma still remained fully cognizant. The fourth phase may be called total union, but it actually has little to do with my companion spirit. The only parts about her that got hurt was her connection to my soul. Aside from that, she remained fully conscious and able to act on her own accord. She prodded my willpower to take action sooner and she also made sure that other necessary procedures took place.]

This was a massive revelation. If other companion spirits could play the same role as Emma at the time, then that meant that many other peak ace pilots had a much better chance of surviving the infamous fourth phase!

Once they overcame this final hurdle, there was nothing stopping them from successfully advancing to the rank of god pilot!

Chapter 5585 Too Impossible

Emma finally decided to leave Lucky alone and flew towards Ves so that she could rest on his lap.

The companion spirit was exceedingly powerful, and her destruction domain did not make it any less comfortable to remain in close contact.

However, Ves couldn't help but like her company. Emma was so playful and affectionate. Her personality did not match that of a hardened and driven high-ranking mech pilot at all. Was there a special reason for that, or had the companion spirit always retained her liveliness?

"Irene. When you started the process of forming total union, did Emma absorb the pieces that you discarded?"

The god pilot nodded. [She did, but not all of them. One of the purposes of establishing total union is to remove human weaknesses that will largely hold me back once I attain my current rank. Emma has only captured a small amount of pieces that are harmless enough.]

Ves suspected that this had made a massive difference in making her more human and personable compared to other god pilots.

Ace pilots were pretty bad. He could not imagine how much more difficult it was to get along with god pilots when they had thrown away large parts of their humanity!

"You mentioned earlier that you also severed the bond between yourself and Emma during the fourth phase. The two of you are still tied together from what I can see. Did you reform this connection after your successful breakthrough?"

[I did.] Irene answered as she smiled at the lion-sized companion spirit that was resting on Ves' lap. [I did not think about this decision. It felt natural to me. I can tell you that I did not have to do this. I could have chosen to let Emma loose and live her own life. That was not what I wanted, so I chose to take her back without question.]

That sounded as if a god pilot could choose to turn a companion spirit into an internal or external incarnation.

Both types of incarnations had their pros and cons, just like how Blinky and Vulcan fulfilled completely different purposes for Ves.

However, it was most advantageous for god pilots to retain their close connections to their companion spirits. The latter would be able to cooperate and synergize well with the former in battle.

Letting companion spirits go their own separate ways would weaken the god pilots. However, the separation also allowed these liberated energy-based True Gods to develop as more rounded and versatile post-divinity qi cultivators.

This was useful if the god pilots thought they could make a better contribution to humanity by offering True God-level services that were not directly related to combat.

However, there was no question that red humanity needed greater combat power. Retaining close connections to companion spirits was clearly the superior choice in the current circumstances!

Ves lightly stroked Emma's back while he thought about how all of this crucial information would affect his future plans.

"As long as the current generation of expert pilots grow up, they can successfully advance to the third major rank at significantly greater quantities than before." He speculated. "Together with the advantages of E energy radiation, the future of red humanity will become much more secure."

[I wouldn't celebrate so soon if I were you, Ves. We don't have enough time. Even with all of the new possibilities and conveniences brought by exotic radiation, mech pilots must still undergo a large amount of tempering and introspection in order to become worthy to become a god. In the old galaxy, this will take at least a century. In the new frontier, the younger generations of mech pilots may be able to complete this lengthy process in half of the time so long as they engage in frequent combat against the aliens, but...]

Both Ves and the Superior Mother looked increasingly more concerned.

"How much time do we have, exactly?" Ves asked while he started to hug Emma.

The Destroyer of Worlds adopted a troubled expression as she looked at the window that gave her a view of the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy.

[The answer to your question is confidential. Only tier 1 galactic citizens have been briefed of all of the clues that we have gathered since now. I do not believe it is necessary to give you a more comprehensive answer. I think you are smart enough to infer parts of the truth by analyzing my words and behavior.]

Though Ves grew disappointed that she declined to give him a straight answer, her response was already a giant tell in itself.

His mind had constantly been spinning ever since they started to talk. So far, Ves knew that the Destroyer of Worlds and every other tier 1 galactic citizen mainly held a lot of concerns towards Messier 87.

It was too big, too powerful and far too populated with powerful life forms.

Ever since Irene and Cynthia started to talk with each other, the former's primary concern was to receive guidance on how to become a powerful God King as quickly as possible.

This meant that the Destroyer of Worlds along with every other god pilot was under great pressure to increase their strength to confront a threat that might arrive within the next half century!

That was a remarkably short time frame. It was long enough to allow many expert pilots to mature into powerful ace pilots, especially if they had access to general cultivation elixirs, but it was still far too soon for them to think about advancing to the rank of god pilot!

This was a highly unfavorable circumstance as it was already too late to bestow companion spirits to all of the current ace pilots in the present day.

Many powerful and talented ace pilots such as Saintess Ulrika Vraken evolved so much and became so strong that their spiritualities had become incredibly tough and resistant to changes and external influences.

Perhaps Ves and Blinky might be able to conduct spiritual operations on them if they reached the second major cultivation rank, but this was not a certainty.

It would take precious time for him to advance to Master Mech Designer anyway, so a lot of ace pilots that reached their peak in the coming few decades would have to overcome the enormous divide without the life-saving benefits provided by companion spirits.

All of this meant that the quantity of god pilots was unlikely to increase quickly in the short and medium term.

If the unnamed but extremely powerful threat from Messier 87 reached the Red Ocean during this period, then it would be up to the 8 existing god pilots to shoulder the heaviest burden of repelling the strongest of alien invaders.

This was an impossible task if the leading alien powerhouse happened to be a God King or was subordinate to one back in Messier 87!

Though Ves was not entirely certain about these guesses, they made the most sense.

All that mattered was that Irene urgently needed to gain the strength of a God King in order to repel the powerful alien enemies that would eventually pose an existential threat to red humanity.

A heavy weight pressed onto Ves, and it wasn't entirely the fault of Emma.

The leadership of red humanity refrained from issuing any public announcements regarding this looming threat for good reasons. People would just panic and make all kinds of irrational decisions for no good reasons.

As his blood started to pump faster through his body, Ves became prone to the same effects.

The curse of knowledge had struck again.

Though he was glad that he became a little more aware of what was truly going on, he also felt more driven than ever to work hard to better prepare red humanity for the calamity that might break the new frontier!

This issue concerned Cynthia Larkinson as well. The lives of her son and her grandchildren were at stake. If the Destroyer of Worlds and other human god pilots failed in their duties, then it was unlikely for any humans in the dwarf galaxy to survive either!

Cynthia understood the terror of being at the mercy of a higher-ranked cultivator very well. She had no hope that any tyrannical powerful invaders from Messier 87 would be merciful towards the 'indigenous' population of the Red Ocean.

This meant that it was in her best interest to grant the greatest possible assistance to Irene!

"I have been contemplating your conundrum for some time now, Irene. What you are asking for is impossible. On the one hand, you want to advance to the fourth rank in an exceedingly short time frame. As far as I know, True Gods ordinarily have to grow and accumulate their power for thousands if not millions of years. Only in the most favorable circumstances where there is an abundant availability of high-level energy and material resources can a True God speed up her progress to an extreme."

Irene already guessed that this was the case, but she had no choice in the matter.

[Every god pilot and Star Designer that I have spoken to would prefer it if we buy more time, but this is not possible. A god pilot must reach the fourth major rank. Not only that, but I or one of my colleagues must become Greater God King in order to be fully secure.]

"Impossible." The Superior Mother shook her head. "I know you god pilots have a habit of turning the impossible into reality, but this is different. You must not only overcome the laws of reality this time. You must defeat a powerful and intelligent God King who wields vastly more powerful forces than you. I advise you not to aim too high and instead settle for reaching the fourth major rank as a god pilot. I believe that the advantages of a god pilot, especially one with a powerful companion spirit, may be just enough to force a stalemate. You do not have to win. As long as you can deter or slow down the threat that you are fearful of, then you can buy precious time for other god pilots to enter the fourth major rank."

Ves agreed with his mother. He had little understanding of what God Kings were all about, but he did not think that the Destroyer of Worlds had any chance of overthrowing the existing authority that governed over the universal concept of destruction anytime soon!

Even Irene had to bow her head to reality most of the time.

[Very well.] She responded in a resigned tone. [We shall take this step by step. Speed is the greatest priority, but I must retain all of the advantages of a god pilot when I reach the fourth rank. Do you believe that this is possible, Cynthia?]

The Superior Mother still looked awfully troubled. "The odds are stacked against you. It is impossible for you to grow this quickly by adhering to orthodox cultivation approaches. You will have to make use of shortcuts, but each will come at a price. What we will have to do is to select the right combination of shortcuts that will impose a heavy but not unbearable burden to you. It will be difficult and you may deviate from the 'correct' trajectory if you follow such a plan. However, if you are willing to bear the risks, then it may just be possible for you to become a God King within the next half century."

Irene smiled after she heard that. [This is the answer that I seek.]

Ves was not so sure about this, though. His experiences with his mother taught him that her proposed cultivation methods were never that simple. They were always filled with traps and unexpected complications!

"How can you possibly compress thousands of years of intensive cultivation in just 50 years or less?" He asked in a puzzled tone.

The Superior Mother grinned back at him. "The answer is simple. Instead of letting Irene work hard to grow her strength step-by-step, we can devise a method that allows her to absorb the strength of her victims. As long as she slays enough alien beings, she can rely on the accumulation of quantity to force a qualitative transformation!"

"What!?"

Chapter 5586 Exploiting Faith

Regular cultivation was slow.

In most cases, the most correct and reliable methods of gaining strength and longevity was to remain patient and build up a strong foundation over time.

The problem was that it was too damn slow!

One of the flaws of phase lord cultivation was that it regularly took the aliens thousands if not hundreds of thousands of years to grow their phasewater concentration over time.

Entire civilizations rose and fell in such timeframes, so much so that a phase lord may end up becoming the only surviving member of his race by the time he got anywhere!

Mech pilots and mech designers advanced remarkably faster than that, but they still became accustomed to measuring their progress over decades and centuries.

The higher their ranks, the more time it took to reach the next one. For god pilots, Ves would not be surprised if it took at least half a millennium for them to come close to advancing to the hypothetical rank of god king pilot.

However, there were faster ways to reach a higher cultivation rank.

Why bother doing any honest work when it was faster to just take the resources that a god pilot needed from other life forms?

This was the central premise to Cynthia's argument.

"The secret ingredient is crime." She spoke in a self-assured manner. "The strong prey on the weak. This is a universal concept that forms the basis of many relationships between species. Predation may not be fair, but it is a highly profitable option that is reserved to those who possess the strength to take advantage of it. Irene, if I had your combat power, I would have already started to make proactive use of it to fuel my advancement. Each day you spend without attacking your enemies is an enormous waste from my perspective. The more you kill, the faster you can progress."

Ves wanted to palm his face when he heard that. While his mother was technically correct, how could she not recognize all of the ethical and moral problems surrounding her outrageous arguments?!

Divine Irene Mox was not a murderous brute. She was a centuries-old strong-willed soldier that had fought in multiple upright military branches. The values of restraint, obedience, discipline and control had all been hammered into her psyche until they became a core part of her identity!

Telling her to ignore all of her restraints and let loose contradicted the rules that she had always set for herself!

[I am not a butcher.] Irene responded in a prickly tone. [My reputation and my deeds may paint me as a god pilot with an excessively large kill count, but every action is meticulously planned and approved in advance. It is true that I have destroyed entire populated planets, but they were only necessary to prevent conflicts from escalating any further. The destruction of an entire planet is usually shocking enough to deter hostile parties from engaging in any further attacks. What you are suggesting will do the opposite. The more alien planets I destroy, the more hatred and hostility my actions will breed among the native aliens.]

The Superior Mother remained unfazed. "I never told you that this shortcut is without risk. The demands you have set are too difficult to fulfill through other means. Only by harvesting the aliens as if they are wheat can you accumulate the necessary resources quickly enough to reach the fourth rank within half a century. There is no reason for you to object to this approach. The vast majority of sentient beings in this dwarf galaxy are aliens. You will not have to turn your weapons against your fellow humans."

[It is a matter of principle, Cynthia. I fear what I will turn into if I continue to engage in mass slaughter. After every operation that ends with the destruction of a planet, I am usually obliged to suspend my duties so that I can reflect on my actions and restore my mental equilibrium. I am not a sympathizer of aliens, but I have a strong suspicion that if I start to kill them en masse, I will move closer to becoming a monster that has become addicted to slaughter.]

Irene sounded incredibly serious about this, but Cynthia looked as if she thought that the god pilot was being melodramatic.

Ves knew that this was a legitimate concern. He couldn't help but think back on what little he learned about the Mistress of the Oceans, the ancient user of the original Oceancaller.

That woman was one of the most evil cultivators that he had learned about. The woman continually terrorized entire planets and wantonly triggered mass floods that completely wiped out all of the indigenous lives that resided on the landmasses!

Though the Destroyer of Worlds shared no resemblance to the Mistress of the Oceans, what if that could change?

Cynthia did not necessarily see that as a bad transition.

"Your integrity is not as important as your mission." The Superior Mother plainly retorted. "You must gain a large amount of strength in a miniscule timeframe. There are not many ways to do so. You should understand quite well that mundane efforts and resources are no longer enough to meet your demands. You must absorb the power of faith to progress further as a True God. It is not for nothing that the word 'god' is strongly associated with the third major rank. Only by discarding your mortal rules and sensibilities will you be able to come into your power as a 'god' pilot."

Irene's expression turned frustrated. [I have been cautiously furthering my growth by absorbing the faith produced by the humans of the Red Ocean as well as many humans who still look up to me in the Milky Way. However...]

"It is not enough." Cynthia finished for the god pilot. "The humans of the Red Ocean are not numerous enough to produce the quantities of faith that you need. While they are all collectively growing stronger due to exotic radiation, this cannot make up for all of the difference. The humans of the Milky Way are much more numerous, but they still retain 90 different god pilots, of which

multiple still watch over the New Rubarth Empire to this day. People can only produce so much faith in a day. The more gods they worship, the more their tribute becomes diluted. I can imagine that many of your former fans have already started to forget about you and shift their attention to more accessible god pilots."

The Destroyer of Worlds did not need to offer a reply to confirm that all of these arguments were true. Cynthia understood the rules of faith all too well, especially given that she was a True God herself!

[There are other ways for god pilots to fuel their growth. Abstinence from faith will make them purer and less tainted.]

"It is also slow, which does not meet your essential requirements." Cynthia said with a disapproving voice. "It is the privilege and right for True Gods to harness the power of faith. It is the reward that they are owed for undertaking greater responsibilities. The real question that you should ask is how you want to gather the faith that you need to accelerate your growth. There are four distinct strategies that you can pursue."

[Explain.]

"You should already be familiar with them. Two of the approaches are relatively benign. You can pursue quantity by actively organizing a church and directing it to spread your faith in as many zones as possible. If you are daring enough, you may even let your church convert believers among the alien population. This is the only solution that I can think of that can help you succeed in this approach, though your church must sweep across much of the dwarf galaxy in order to reach the minimum scale required."

[Too slow. I also object to accepting the worship of aliens. They are our enemies.]

"Faith is faith. Whether it is produced by your enemies is immaterial. However, if you do not want to accept the worship of aliens, then you can attempt to impress a smaller quantity of high-ranking mech pilots and mech designers. Each of them are far stronger than the mortal masses. The faith they can produce is of such higher quality that they can substitute for the worship of millions if not billions of ordinary mortals. However, the only way for this approach to be effective is to convert enough ace pilots and Master Mech Designers into deep believers. This is an uphill battle as cultivators of the second major rank are hopeful of becoming gods themselves."

This was not an acceptable option for Irene either. She shook her head yet again.

[Forcing faith onto all of these mech pilots and mech designers will backfire. Too many of them will resist. Even if it works, they will lose much of the drive that pushes them to advancing to the third major rank. I refuse to deny them the greater futures that they deserve in order to further my own growth.]

"If your concerns about future threats are justified, then all of the god pilots and other True Gods of our civilization will not be able to make a difference. Only you can resolve the greatest individual threat."

[That does not change my stance. Each of these talents are the heroes of tomorrow. They must be granted every opportunity to grow and develop without interference.]

"Very well." Cynthia grew tired of Irene's obstinance. "That leaves us with the remaining two strategies, which are based around two different forms of predation. Similar to the last two, you can put an emphasis on quantity or quality. Killing enemy sentients can actually produce a large amount of faith energy at once. It is never as great as the faith energy that they can produce over their lifetimes, but if you are short on time, this is an expedient measure to get the most value out of them in an instant. As long as you employ special means and cultivation techniques, you can harvest the faith produced from despair and other negative emotions and process it so that it becomes harmless enough for you to absorb."

Ves grew shocked when he learned of this kind of operation. "You can do that, mother?! How can you possibly harvest the faith of enemy victims? Shouldn't they be praying to their own native gods?"

"Your understanding of faith and gods is too narrow, my son. A god is a god. When an enemy gods comes to your planet and is in the process of blowing it up while you are still trapped on the surface, what will you do? Praying to the god that is on the cusp of shattering an entire globe is a frequent occurrence, especially if the destroyer in question puts on a show. The more time you grant to the aliens, the more time they have to 'pray' to you for mercy. Of course, when you finally launch your destructive attack, those aliens will become so emotionally unstable that they will produce the greatest burst of faith energy during their final moments."

Irene looked disgusted when she listened to this approach. It was so reprehensible that she was beginning to suspect that it had been a mistake to request a meeting with Cynthia!

[What is the last strategy?]

"Instead of committing genocide on a galactic scale, you can opt to hunt down exceptionally powerful enemies and harvest as much faith and other useful resources from them as possible. I think this is a particularly effective means of gathering the high-quality materials that you need to upgrade your god mech. However, I do not recommend you pursue this particular approach."

[Why not? This strategy sounds much more agreeable to me. Challenging enemy phase whales and phase lords is much more honorable than employing my powers to kill alien civilians en masse.]

"That may be the case, but the god pilot known as the Huntsman has already settled on a variation of this strategy as far as I am aware of." Cynthia retorted. "There are only a limited number of strong prey available in a small dwarf galaxy, and many of them are hiding from what I have heard. There may be enough alien domain shapers and True Gods satisfy the appetite of the Huntsman, but if you begin to compete against him for the same prey, then neither of you will be able to hunt enough prey to reach the threshold of becoming a God King."

She was right. The Huntsman already designated the Red Ocean as his own 'exclusive' hunting ground.

There was only enough high-level prey to meet the needs of the Huntsman. He was also the best suited to absorb the energies from his successful hunts. The intervention of other god pilots would only cause his entire master plan to fail. There was no way that the Destroyer of Worlds wanted this to happen!

Chapter 5587 History Repeats

Ves recalled everything he witnessed during his recent visit to Ocanon VI.

The entire planet turned into a hunting preserve. Large groups of hunters had set up shop and regularly hunted the mutated beasts that constantly popped up across the untamed planet.

None of that sounded particularly noteworthy, but what surprised Ves the most was that the people who took up this lifestyle had started to cultivate according to the instructions of the Hunter's Code!

Back then, Ves quickly figured out that the Huntsman deliberately reformed the Hunter's Association and encouraged the spread of mysterious rituals in order to profit from all of the successful hunts.

It was only now that Ves filled in the remaining pieces of the puzzle and understood the Huntsman's entire layout.

Just as Ves suspected, the Huntsman definitely engaged in a form of predatory or carnivorous cultivation!

By setting up all of these hunting preserves and stimulating the development of a large and prosperous extraordinary hunting community, every professional hunter would constantly transfer a variety of energies including maybe faith energy through sacrificial rituals!

The Huntsman did not even have to do anything to sustain this cycle aside from rewarding the hard-working hunters with miniscule injections of his own strength!

The god pilot and his support staff came up with a meticulous plan and executed it perfectly.

With the help of the extensive background of the Red Association, the Huntsman was already far ahead of the Destroyer of Worlds.

It wasn't Irene's fault. The fact of the matter was that a former off-shoot of the Five Scrolls Compact had access to much more complete high-level cultivation knowledge than a relatively young and shallow first-rate superstate!

Even though the New Rubarth Empire once represented the dominant attitude of the human race, it was clearly lacking when it came to respecting and preserving old traditions.

Ves did not ask why the mechers declined to give the Destroyer of Worlds the same level of support they provided to the Huntsman.

He also did not ask why the Destroyer of Worlds took the initiative to ask the mechers for assistance.

What was the point of asking questions when he already knew the answers?

Ves just became a little more disappointed in the Red Association.

In an age where red humanity confronted multiple existential threats, the mechers still refused to do what was best for the greatest whole and instead sought to advance their own interests.

What if the Huntsman and the other 4 god pilots who led the Red Association failed to resist the looming calamities?

Leaving out the Destroyer of Worlds seemed like a mistake! She was by far the most destructive god pilot among them. She possessed the best chance at harming whatever God King-level adversary that was on the way.

However, the decisions of the mechers was not entirely illogical. If Ves looked at the Red Ocean from a resource-oriented perspective, then it was clear that this small dwarf galaxy could support the growth of only a handful of god pilots.

The more True Gods vied for the same pool of resources, the more their overall progress slowed down.

The current population of humans in the new frontier was highly deficient. The short time that the greater beyonder gate opened up for business was clearly not enough to fill up all of the available living spaces in just a relatively small corner of the dwarf galaxy.

Ves widened his eyes in realization.

So that was why the Polymath was so insistent on producing a lot of batch humans!

Her ploy to explosively increase the population of humans by producing them en masse out of biofactories may be a desperate attempt to increase the production of faith energy!

That certainly explained why the mechers embraced this initiative even as they rebuked the Polymath's ambitious takeover attempt.

Every major policy decision appeared to be related to the power of faith in one way or another.

Ves began to comprehend so many more high-level layouts now that he was able to understand the greater context that drove the decision-making at the top.

At this time, Irene looked visibly upset and conflicted at the options presented by the wiser and more knowledgeable True God.

"You do not have a choice." The Superior Mother spoke with a voice that became more ethereal as she spoke with divine authority. "The Red Ocean is too small for you. Do you know why the phase whales take so many years to increase their phasewater concentration to 100 percent? It is because their home galaxy cannot sustain a higher growth rate without losing equilibrium. This is also one of the reasons why the phase whales are characterized by low fecundity. Since the aliens are suffering from resource scarcity, red humanity is faring even worse. Every gentle and sustainable means of cultivation is ultimately limited."

That was bad news to the Destroyer of Worlds. Her morals and conviction caused her to resist Cynthia's suggestion.

The god pilot grimaced. [I do not think you are wrong, Cynthia, but there has to be a better solution than harvesting the faith of unwilling alien victims. Earlier, you alluded to the possibility of increasing the faith that can be harvested from a fixed population of people.]

"Humans are weak, but possess limitless potential. If you can create a church and spread your faith among the masses, you may be able to derive more faith from them. However, the population of the Rubarthan Pact is not sufficient enough. You will need to increase their devotion and fanaticism to a drastic height in order to gain the most out of them, but that may still not be enough to meet your needs."

[What if we institute policies to explosively increase the birth rate? What if we invest large amounts of resources into the birth of artificial humans?]

"Not enough." Cynthia shook her head. "You are vastly underestimating the scale needed to reach the fourth rank. A small pond cannot breed a large fish. The cost of becoming a God King is too great. This is why I suggest you change your target and harvest the faith of aliens instead. Unlike humans who have only arrived in this dwarf galaxy for a short amount of time, all of the sentient aliens in the Red Ocean have evolved and proliferated for eons. So much of it is available for plunder. It is true that the side effects of doing so will be severe, but we can devise targeted solutions to mitigate the repercussions."

Irene still looked conflicted. Even Emma started to grow more restless as the god pilot struggled to resolve this dilemma.

Ves sympathized with the god pilot. Despite the massive kill count on her name, she was not actually a murderer at heart. She always saw herself as a professional and disciplined soldier.

She could always justify each act of killing no matter the scale. She was just following orders in all of those cases.

At most, the people who issued orders to her claimed most of the responsibility for her occasionally excessive deeds.

This was different. This sort of killing was much more selfish and damaging. Unbridled killing would definitely escalate the Red War and enrage the native aliens to the point where neither side could stop fighting unless they completely annihilated the other party!

Yet... did the Destroyer of Worlds have any other choice?

What else was she supposed to do? Cynthia had clearly told her that every other alternative was worse.

"Please listen to my mother, Irene." Ves spoke up as he continued to stroke Emma's back. "As she has mentioned before, the demands you have issued are so difficult to meet that you will have to make compromises that you are not comfortable with. From my perspective, your greatest mission is to protect and guarantee the continued survival of red humanity. Your continued refusal to accept the solution offered to you suggests that you believe that your honor and integrity are more important than the lives of every red human who depends on you. Are you truly willing to stand by your principles in the face of human extinction?"

[...]

"I truly wish you can develop your strength in a more benign and healthy fashion." Ves continued in a gentler tone. "However, we do not live in an ideal environment. We are constantly beset by scarcity and shortages. Our position is similar to humanity back during the Age of Stars. We are so outgunned and outnumbered by our alien adversaries that our chances of defeating them back then was virtually zero. Do you know what our race did when we faced those impossible odds?"

The early starfaring history of humanity in the Milky Way was ingrained in the hearts and minds of every modern human.

[We flipped the board.] The Destroyer of Worlds knowingly answered. [We stopped playing by the unfair and restrictive rules of the aliens and started to take what we needed by force, deception, subversion, betrayal and more. Humans conducted many shameful acts that have gone unrecorded because they were unwilling to pass their stories on to their descendants.]

Ves stared directly at Irene's current form. "Honor is a luxury. Winning is a necessity. If the former has turned into an obstacle to the latter, then you must distinguish your priorities. Everyone you care about will die if you make the wrong choices."

Even though he was just a cultivator of the first major rank, his words somehow had a profound effect on a god pilot.

God pilots always had a reputation for being decisive and harboring no doubts, but it appeared that the reality was a lot more nuanced than the descriptions.

Ves was not too surprised. The Destroyer of Worlds retained more of her humanity than her peers. Her internal struggle also centered around a contradiction between her goals and her principles. Not even the most decisive True God would be able to resolve such a difficult conflict so easily!

This was where Ves came in. He possessed an outsider's perspective to this problem. He believed he possessed a much more rational and objective understanding of the matter at hand.

"The legendary deeds and actions of Supreme Marshal Caramond Perle and his growing band of human supremacists are often characterized as evil, dishonorable and despicable. Yet when people like us study this part of our early history, we often celebrate and admire the humans who sparked off the magnificent Age of Conquest. Do you know why? It is because the end justifies the means. Those heroes of old fulfilled their greatest mission. They saved the human race from extinction, enslavement or total assimilation. We not only retained our freedom and our right to determine our own destiny, but also dominated the galaxy! How could latecomers such as us possibly blame or recriminate the early human supremacists for getting their hands dirty?"

The Superior Mother backed up her son. "History is cyclical. It has a tendency to repeat. It would do you well to study the wisdom of our predecessors. Back then, they rejected the hypocritical values of the Cosmopolitan Movement and decided that the aliens did not deserve to be treated as equals. When the future of humanity is at stake, respect and care towards the enemy has become a luxury that you can dispense with. Do not put the interests of hostile aliens above the interests of the humans that you should actually care about."

Under the double persuasion of two Larkinsons, the god pilot finally crumbled.

[Fine.] Irene finally said. [Perhaps I will regret this decision one day, but this is the burden that I am willing to shoulder as long as my actions can contribute to the survival of red humanity. The premise to this is that your proposed solution is effective. If your strategy is not viable enough, then I would rather stay true to my principles and fight to the death with my honor and dignity intact.]

"You do not have to be concerned about that." The Supreme Mother grinned like a Cheshire cat. "I have already made good use of this time to compose a preliminary blueprint that should fulfill your essential needs. We shall make an excellent demonic cultivator out of you, Irene."

[Demonic... cultivator...?]

Chapter 5588 How To Maximize Yields

Even Ves had to pause when he heard the term 'demonic cultivator'.

It did not evoke any pleasant associations in his mind.

A lot of cultivators tended to be crazy and extreme due to practicing weird methods.

The more outlandish and subversive the cultivation approach, the more they distorted its practitioners!

Even cultivators had their limits. Anything that crossed the line and offended a lot of other beings probably got stuck with this undesirable label.

"What are demonic cultivators, exactly?" Ves asked his mother.

"The definition of demonic cultivation is not absolute." Cynthia calmly responded. "It has changed frequently over the ages as cultures and environmental circumstances undergo major shifts. It is often associated with evil, but I personally do not agree with this sentiment. Is it evil for wolves to prey after sheep? Does the cat bear any guilt when it catches a mouse?"

"Meow...!"

Naturally, Lucky strongly disagreed with that last sentiment!

Irene crossed her arms. [The examples you have mentioned are part of the natural cycle of life. I presume that demonic cultivation goes beyond that. You are talking about disrupting and destroying entire ecosystems for selfish gains. Such deeds will not go unpunished.]

"So what, Irene?" Cynthia sneered at the god pilot. "You are aspiring to become the Greater God King of Destruction. It is impossible for an innocent soul to occupy this throne. You should know as well as I do that the best way to progress your cultivation is to give in to your true nature. Your domain is centered around the concept of destruction. Even if you do not employ special cultivation techniques, I can promise you that you can speed up your growth and deepen your understanding of destruction by shattering a large amount of planets. The more lives you destroy, the more you will resonate with this universal rule."

Ves found it rather perplexing that a destructive god pilot like Irene was so reluctant to employ her greatest power.

Then again, all of the battles and scuffles that she fought in the past were relatively small in scale. Humanity during the Age of Mechs had paused the massive conquests of the past in order to rebuild and consolidate all of its gains.

Now, red humans needed to go back to the more aggressive and ruthless approach that their predecessors had embraced in the past.

The Destroyer of Worlds needed to adapt to a different set of rules!

[So if I want to save red humanity, I must accept the identity of a demon, is that what you are trying to convey?]

Cynthia nodded. "People shall fear you. The aliens will hate you beyond measure. Perhaps one day, much of red humanity shall turn against you, fearing that you have become so corrupted that you may eventually turn your god mech's powerful weapons against your own people. No matter how much you try to defend yourself, your frightening record will render any persuasion ineffective. This is the fate of a true demonic cultivator. Are you willing to bear this injustice in order to fulfill your ultimate goal?"

At this point, it would be stupid for Irene to remain obstinate. [The mission comes first. I am capable of setting aside my personal concerns in order to advance the greater good. Tell me what I must do in order to gain the strength to dominate the Red Ocean.]

That was exactly what Cynthia was waiting for. She gestured towards the image of the dwarf galaxy past the illusionary window of the starship compartment.

A view shifted as the large proportion of space occupied by the native alien races lit up. This was the base of faith that the Destroyer of Worlds must target.

"Faith is the power that separates True Gods from foundation builders and domain shapers. Any True God that aspires to become a God King must practice a form of cultivation that maximizes their intake of faith energy. You can make a good start by destroying planets occupied by millions if not billions of nunsers, orvens and other intelligent aliens. Many of these beings are weak. Killing trillions of them is far from enough. You need to keep destroying more and more planets to the point where you have depopulated entire zones."

The alien territories started to darken and dim. The amount of stars that had lost all life grew to such a frightening scale that Ves could not imagine how many souls would have perished at Irene's hands!

[We cannot engage in total annihilation. The other leaders of red humanity will not tolerate this scale of destruction.] Irene remarked with a frown. [All of the major human groups desire to expand their territories and increase their living space in order to support a larger population base. It is acceptable for me to destroy a modest number of highly fortified alien strongholds, but once I go too far, I will interfere with too many plans.]

Cynthia did not look too surprised. "Then you must go deeper and be more selective with your targets. The risks are greater, but you will be able to make every alien fear for their lives."

The image of the Red Ocean changed. Entire territories no longer descended into total darkness. Instead, they only dimmed to a modest degree, showing that they still preserved enough pockets of life.

The difference now was that the spread of darkness became more pervasive. The Destroyer of Worlds needed to destroy the key planets and population centers across the entire Red Ocean in order to harvest the immense quantity of faith needed to fuel her cultivation!

[This is more acceptable, but is it truly enough to elevate me to a God King?]

"No." Cynthia admitted. "You need to warm up your subjects before you harvest their lives. It is best not to blow up the planets in an instant without warning. You need to... put on a performance. The more your impending victims become aware of you and your threat towards them, the more they shall pray for your mercy and forgiveness. Denying their requests will evoke such strong emotions that their faith will be more intense and rewarding to you. The greater the suffering, the sweeter the rewards."

Ves couldn't help but shudder when he heard that. How come he had the feeling that his mother was speaking from personal experience when she explained her plan?

Cynthia grew confident enough to create a small image of a generic alien planet. It looked like a typical military and industrial hub of the orven race.

"Let us say that this planet can produce too units of faith energy if you blow it up right away."

The planet promptly got struck by an explosive shell blessed by Emma before blowing up in a ruinous fashion!

"This is an enormous waste." The more traditional True God said in clear disapproval. "You have not only given the aliens too little time to say their prayers, but also prevented them from directing their faith to you. If you want to increase your yield, you must let them know who is responsible for dooming their lives."

The image changed to depict an orven city that had become gripped by despair.

The tall humanoid aliens somehow learned of what was coming. Many of them panicked and lashed out against their own kind.

Others went back to their homes and embraced their family for a final time before they met their end.

The complete and total helplessness of the orvens produced remarkably strong reactions, all of which caused the planet's output of faith energy to spike!

"Do you see, Irene? How many planets have you blown up where the alien residents knew what was coming? Even if you did not take the initiative to absorb their faith, you should be able to tell the difference. If the base income is too units of faith energy, then announcing your arrival and letting the aliens stew for an hour may increase your yield by as much as 500 or 1000 units of faith energy."

Irene found the sight of all of this chaos and suffering to be distasteful.

[I understand. I do not like it, but I shall adopt this strategy if I can satisfy my goal with fewer planets destroyed at my hand.]

"I am not finished yet, Irene. If you truly want to amplify the gains you can obtain from a single planet, then you must be more proactive in spreading your faith. It is best to form a new church based on a religion of destruction. Cultivate alien priests through whatever means necessary and dispatch them to all of the densely populated planets that you deem as eligible targets. The more your church captures the population, the more faith you will gain from harvesting their lives. You can claim the sweetest rewards when they willingly devote all of their faith to you at the moment your power deprive them of their lives."

The image changed to show an example of this shocking layout.

It showed snapshots of captured aliens getting brainwashed and indoctrinated by the subordinates of the Destroyer of Worlds.

Once these orvens and nunsers had completed their 'training', they secretly got shipped back to alien space where they promptly 'returned' to their native societies.

Once they took root on different planets, the returnees began to form various local cults.

Through the well-established manipulation methods taught by the human race, many of these cult leaders started to build up a larger and larger following.

No matter if the alien rulers attempted to suppress the subversive religion that claimed that their doomsday was coming, the beliefs could never be entirely eradicated!

It did not matter if the alien believers were sincere about their faith or not. They just needed to be familiar enough with the supposed Goddess of Destruction that would ostensibly come and annihilate them all one day!

All of this was preparation work for the real deal. Once the alien heralds had done their jobs, all the Destroyer of Worlds needed to do was come and reap an extremely ripe and abundant harvest!

The image showed how that would look. The skies darkened as the Ragnarok arrived in high orbit of the planet.

Irene's god kingdom spread out to such a powerful extent that it blocked out the light of the local star and engulfed the lit side of the planet in an eclipse!

This was the signal that the Cult of Destruction had warned about!

When all of the weak and defenseless aliens realized that the doomsday prophecy spread by the new cult was coming true, all of them would go completely mad!

Millions of orvens destroyed the idols that represented their own native gods and fell to their knees in order to beg for forgiveness from the cruel foreign goddess!

Cultists who had prayed to the Goddess of Destruction for months and years would celebrate her arrival by egging on the masses and spreading their self-destructive gospel even further!

Once the Ragnarok fired the ultimate shell that destroyed the planet and every alien that resided on the surface, the cultists as well as the other aliens that had become influenced by the new beliefs all dedicated an enormous amount of faith to the True God that had reaped their lives!

"How much... how much faith energy can Irene harvest in this scenario?" Ves asked.

His mother smirked back at him. "The upper limit is high. There is a large amount of room for expansion depending on how extensively the cult has penetrated the planet and how many converts have turned into fanatical believers. A good operation should easily increase the expected yield by as much as 100,000 units of faith energy!"

Both Ves and Irene looked shocked when they heard this response!

That was a massive increase compared to a base income of just 100 faith energy.

Ves never knew that prepping the target by causing them to convert to a religion that foretold their own doom could make such a massive difference!

His mother... was a genius!

Chapter 5589 Corrupting Influence

Demonic Cultivation was not an empty term.

Once Cynthia Larkinson explained the broad strokes of the cultivation method that she had designed for the Destroyer of Worlds, the god pilot became completely speechless.

This method was positively diabolical!

There was nothing benign about this method. It perverted the meaning of religion and hijacked its form to fatten up the sheep intended for slaughter!

Although the layout sounded like it could work brilliantly for the Destroyer of Worlds, the mode of operation was so outrageously excessive that it should be forbidden!

Ves looked back out of the window and gazed at the image of the Red Ocean that became subjected to a reign of terror unlike anything the native aliens ever experienced.

The spread of darkness was unstoppable. Territory after territory grew darker and darker as the Destroyer of Worlds blew up more planets and evoked even greater terror among all of the aliens that had escaped total doom.

Once the entire dwarf galaxy became engulfed in a cloud of darkness, the dominion of the Destroyer of Worlds became a lot more substantial than before.

So long as Irene made up for the remaining shortfall, she could complete her march towards the fourth major rank and become the deadliest and most destructive God King of the Red Ocean!

Cynthia sounded remarkably proud of her layout. She continued to explain the principles and the finer points of her scheme.

"What separates True Gods from domain shapers is the fact that our domains have already reached a stage of maturity." His mother spoke. "The time for shaping it is over. We must make active use of it and exercise our responsibilities as deities. Our scope should no longer be limited by mortal rules and limitations. Aspiring God Kings such as yourself must be even more willing to break the rules that have held you back in the past. You cannot make yourself worthy of this rank and title if you are not willing to dominate the entire dwarf galaxy. Let the humans and the aliens fear your existence."

Irene listened quietly to Cynthia for a time, but she couldn't hold back her silence any longer.

[Must I truly spread fear and desolation in my name?]

"You must if you wish to become a god king pilot in record time. What I have described is only part of my proposed operation. The Cult of Destruction shall be your greatest help. The faith you can harvest from killing a planet that is swayed by your cult is great, but it is nothing compared to the faith that you can obtain from the millions of other populated planets that has also become affected by the belief in the Goddess of Destruction."

Ves widened his eyes. His mother introduced another layer of her dastardly scheme!

"That... that is a fantastic idea!" He gasped. "It doesn't matter if the native aliens are initially unwilling to abandon their existing beliefs. As long as Irene keeps destroying planets, news of her massacres will spread among the alien community. The more she is allowed to destroy entire population centers with impunity, the less all of the aliens are able to sustain their old beliefs. After all, if a god pilot is able to circumvent or defeat the phase whales over and over in the process of destroying critical alien planets, the old defenders will slowly lose much of their credibility!"

God pilots such as the Destroyer of Worlds were so individually strong, yet so small and mobile that they could all engage in effective guerilla warfare!

It didn't matter if the Ragnarok was unable to defeat several ancient phase whales in a head-on confrontation.

God pilots could easily rely on the intelligence gathered by human agents as well as their powerful intuition to avoid dangerous ambushes.

It was best for Irene to target densely populated but relatively poor defended planets!

There were plenty of them in the vastness of the Red Ocean. The hinterland of alien space had especially become more vulnerable now that all of the alien civilizations had transferred more and more warfleets to the frontlines of the Red War!

So long as the Destroyer of Worlds was able to sustain her solo reign of terror for an extended period of time, there was no way for the aliens to ignore her existence no matter how much they resisted the rise of foreign gods!

Didn't this sound like an effective way to turn enormous quantities of fearful aliens into desperate worshipers of the Goddess of Destruction?

Irene didn't even have to destroy a lot of planets to effectively cement her reign of terror over the Red Ocean!

Cynthia grinned as she affirmed her son's analysis. "You can think of it as a protection racket on a divine level. So-called 'evil' gods can also be gods as long as they are able to harvest faith. If you want to harvest as much faith as the aliens are capable of passing onto a human god, then you must coerce them into worshipping you by using violence. Destroying planets while demonstrating that their alien gods are completely incapable of restraining you is an effective means of conquering the souls of the native alien population."

"That is not all." Ves enthusiastically said as his imagination went wild. "You can derive a lot of value from the Cult of Destruction. Each local cult that takes root on alien planets can transmit a lot of useful intelligence. This can help you pick the right targets or understand the movements of the native aliens a lot better. The most fanatical cultists can even be employed as assassins or saboteurs. They can take action to soften up the defenses of a planet while simultaneously priming the population for harvest!"

"A more advanced use of the Cult of Destruction is to reward and punish the aliens by measuring their level of piety." Cynthia supplied another useful idea. "The cults should measure the conversion rate of the local populations. Make it clear that planets where the belief in the Goddess of Destruction has become widespread has received her favor and is able to forestall her arrival. Do the opposite for planets where her cult has become suppressed. Punish the unbelievers who initially denied your existence by teaching them that they have made the wrong decision. The yield that you can harvest from an unsaturated planet may be much less, but the fear and spread of faith in many other planets can compensate for this inadequacy!"

[Enough.] Irene spoke with a bit more force in her emotions. [I understand the gist of your ideas. We can explore these details later. What I need to know is what I must personally do in order to make it possible to harvest these gains, no matter whether the aliens are willing or not. It is also unclear how this strategy relates to my god mech.]

There was only so much that she was willing to hear. The upheaval generated by her god kingdom clearly signified that she was anything but comfortable with all of these 'helpful suggestions'!

"I will need time to compose a suitable method based on demonic cultivation techniques." Cynthia said. "It shall be difficult to adapt it to a powerful god pilot such as yourself, but I am confident that

I can produce a cultivation method that will serve your needs. This will be an interesting exercise for me. The only issue that we must determine in advance is who shall bear the resentment and the negative karma that comes with harvesting the faith of your unwilling victims by force. Excessive killing and exploitation of intelligent lives will lead to progressively greater consequences. At a certain scale, not even your fabled willpower will be able to remain unaffected."

[How can I resist this corruption?] Irene frowned.

"You cannot. What shall come will come. However, you can contain the corrosive influences of resentment by isolating it in one of your three selves. This is your greatest gift. If you want to preserve your rationality and prevent all of the negative repercussions from clouding your judgment, you can designate your god pilot, your god mech or your companion spirit as the sacrificial vessel. As long as the other two sides of yourself remain pure, you should be able to maintain control over yourself."

Ves had been wondering about how his mother proposed to deal with all of the negative karma. This... was another brilliant solution. If done the right way, then it should truly prevent the Destroyer of Worlds from paying the heaviest price for all of the excessive killing!

However, in order for Irene to make this work, she needed to make an extremely difficult choice.

Which aspect of herself should she designate as the dumping ground of all of the corrosive resentment from her victims?

[I will not allow my god pilot side to become corrupted.] Irene quickly decided. [My willpower must remain strong and pure in order to maintain control. It is the foundation of my god kingdom and my most original source of strength. Compromising it will lead to devastating consequences.]

Neither Ves nor Cynthia objected to this argument.

Ves gazed at the large and powerful companion spirit resting on his lap. "I cannot bear the thought of corrupting a cute and lovely cat, but if you have to make a choice..."

Irene looked pained as she seriously contemplated this objection.

However, Cynthia had a different suggestion in mind.

"No. That is not a good idea, Ves." The authoritative True God said. "Both Irene and Emma possess the strongest ego and personality among the three. Emma can serve as a good template for an evil goddess, but it will be difficult to prevent any negative influence from spilling over into Irene. The best possible candidate is the Ragnarok."

"The god mech?"

Ves initially did not even consider it as a valid choice. It was the least lively and personable of the three components that made up Divine Irene Mox.

The mother knew what her son was thinking.

"The Ragnarok is the most inhuman and mechanical side of Irene. It possesses the least ability to think human thoughts and experience human feelings. Its sensitivity toward the negative impact of resentment is much lower. Its nature as a machine also makes it much easier for it to isolate the corrosive influences. At most, the god mech will look and feel much more evil than before."

Ves blinked as he tried to imagine such an evolution. The Ragnarok would probably gain a more ominous air. Clouds of darkness and the wailing of unwilling souls might start to surround the mech frame. Sharp and malice-filled spikes might spontaneously grow out of the god mech as its overall shape and contours gradually shifted into an edgier and more aggressive design.

As a mech designer, Ves considered such a transformation to be sacrilegious!

The Ragnarok in its current form was a grand work and one of the most impressive mechs created by the mech industry!

For such an exquisite mech to become subjected to so much corruption was like ruining a cultural treasure by splashing the contents of a septic tank onto the masterpiece!

However, Ves could reluctantly accept this choice if the alternatives were worse. He looked down at Emma and could not bear the thought of the companion spirit growing dark and evil!

"Don't change, okay?" Ves hugged the large spiritual cat. "You are too precious for us to lose."

Irene meanwhile tried to understand the repercussions of letting the Ragnarok bear all of the resentment of killing so many weak and helpless aliens.

[How will this choice hinder my god mech, Cynthia?]

"The form and function of your god mech must match the expectations of your worshipers, no matter whether they are willing to believe in you or not." Cynthia replied. "Under normal circumstances, resentment and other negative influences will induce changes that will allow you to adapt to the new status quo. This process is not as efficient when it acts on a powerful material object such as a god mech. You will need to actively instruct and guide the Star Designers to apply the physical changes to your machine in order to control and optimize changes. Neglecting to do this will result in severe consequences."

"What will happen if you leave the god mech alone?" Ves couldn't help but ask.

"You do not want to know the answer."

Chapter 5590 Last-Minute Request

An important decision had been made.

After Cynthia Larkinson proposed a radical new demonic cultivation approach, the Destroyer of Worlds became swayed by the promise of gaining a massive amount of power in a relatively short time frame.

Ves became incredibly impressed by his mother's proposal. Even though he had become a little more familiar with cultivation science, he knew he was still far from reaching her level of knowledge and wisdom. He would have never been able to come up with such a brilliant and effective cultivation approach if he had to work by himself. Just the requirement of having to work with faith energy already stumped him as its properties were in a different league.

From what he could surmise so far, the new cultivation method was primarily made up of three components.

The deity cultivation component sought to convert all of the native aliens in the Red Ocean into worshipers of the so-called Goddess of Destruction. No matter whether they were willing or not,

Irene's capacity for widespread destruction was so great that she could easily intimidate the entire dwarf galaxy!

The demonic cultivation component was a new mode of harvesting energy that his mother had never explicitly explained to him in the past. It utilized special means to forcibly take energy from large amounts of subjects that may or may not be entirely willing to agree to these transactions.

There was a fuzzy line between normal predation which was part of the natural cycle and demonic cultivation which did not conform to the established rules. Only the latter would cause people to incur negative repercussions.

"Who exactly decides what falls into the category of demonic cultivation?" Ves asked his mother.

"The heavenly authorities." Cynthia responded. "Each of them are different, and the rules they set can always change over time. However, a general rule of thumb is that the pattern set by the most powerful cultivators under the heavenly authorities generally sets the standard. Here in the Red Ocean, the ancient phase whales that have lurked in the dwarf galaxy for many ages are relatively passive and docile. While they cannot be regarded as benign, they disapprove of widespread slaughter and destruction, if only because that makes it harder to generate more phasewater."

This did not bode well for the Destroyer of Worlds. The dwarf galaxy itself would work against her every step of the way.

"There is always a price to be paid for defying the heavens." Cynthia seriously warned Irene. "Once you start to take serious action, the Red Ocean will work against you, or more specifically the Ragnarok which will become a machine that will become an icon of death and calamity. You will encounter unstable space pockets and other hazards during space travel. Your luck will drop. Powerful native aliens will develop increasingly effective ways to threaten you. These are the means that a galaxy can use to defend itself against any dangerous existence that endangers its overall health."

Destroying a few planets here and there was nothing to a heavenly authority.

Destroying a hundred or so planets started to become worrisome.

Destroying more than a thousand planets, especially life bearing ones, would definitely affect the balance of the Red Ocean!

Nobody knew where the local heavenly authority crossed the line, but sooner or later the Destroyer of Worlds would become a hated True God if she chose to commit to this strategy.

Yet out of all of the aspects of Irene's new cultivation method, there was one component in particular that attracted the most attention from Ves.

It was the artifact cultivation component.

In order for Irene to preserve her full strength and advantages as a god pilot, her god mech needed to be worked on by mech designers, just like before.

Ves felt incredibly tempted by the prospect of being able to work on one of the most powerful mechs created by man. The Ragnarok was definitely among the god mechs that possessed the greatest capacity to inflict area damage among its own kind!

Even though he knew the chance was slim, he still had to issue his request.

"Can... can I assist in applying upgrades and modifications to the Ragnarok?"

Both Cynthia and Irene immediately shook their heads in disapproval.

[You are not qualified, Ves.] Irene declared. [I look forward to seeing your work when you have become older, but your current state is too weak.]

"She is right, son. You will need to reach the second major cultivation rank and develop your strength before you can reluctantly work on the peripheral aspects of her god mech. It is better to wait until you have become a Star Designer before you can wholeheartedly work on the Ragnarok, especially once it has accrued a large amount of resentment."

Ves looked disappointed when he heard that. It could take decades if not centuries before he could reach the third major cultivation rank. That was far too late for him to intervene in the more immediate crisis that would unfold roughly half a century later.

It sounded as if Ves had no chance to work on the Ragnarok in the foreseeable future. It would be up to the existing Star Designers to ensure that the god mech properly adapted to its new role and circumstances.

[I think your living mech concept can help the Ragnarok in ways that could not be done before.] Irene spoke through her artificial voice generator. [The best way you can contribute to the strengthening of my god mech is to work hard as a Senior Mech Designer. The sooner you realize your design philosophy, the sooner your innovative design solutions become available to the mech industry as a whole. Star Designers will gain the ability to learn and employ your design philosophy through the Red Kingdom by that time.]

That... was certainly a way for Ves to apply his design solutions to the powerful Ragnarok.

Ves felt regretful that he still wouldn't be able to lay his hands on the god mech and tinker with its design in person, but he knew in his heart that a newly-advanced Master Mech Designer still wasn't qualified to work a grand work of this caliber.

It was better if he entrusted this important duty to the much more capable Star Designers.

"I understand. I have always been working hard to advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer. I can't make any promises, but I am reasonably sure I can realize my design philosophy within the next half century."

The Polymath managed to reach the rank of Master Mech Designer a lot sooner than that, but Ves did not want to blindly pursue speed. This was why he could not guarantee he could realize his design philosophy in time to upgrade the Ragnarok.

He believed it would be fine, though. The Ragnarok was already 'alive', so it was not as if his contributions could revolutionize the powerful god mech. The Star Designers who had overcome a lot of difficult challenges were no slouches either.

"There is one area where you can help Irene, but it does not directly relate to mech design." Cynthia spoke to her son.

Ves already had a bad feeling about this. "What is it, mother?"

"You should help the Cult of Destruction spread its faith among the alien population groups. You have a special talent for converting believers and increasing their piety. This is helpful to both pre-

divinity and post-divinity entities. The best way for you to facilitate the operations of the cult is to produce a large amount of totems that are related to Irene. If these totems can radiate a small proportion of her powerful aura, then that can multiply the spread of belief in the Goddess of Destruction by as much as 10 times."

He knew it. Ves had already demonstrated similar capabilities in the past. While he found this entire business distasteful, he knew it was necessary for the Cult of Destruction to take root in native alien society as extensively as possible.

"Okay. I will do it." He said. "I can't make a totem based on a god pilot or a god mech though. I need to access Irene's power in order to produce a valid totem, but her power is far too strong for me to control. However..."

Ves squeezed Emma that had been laying her half-substantial body on his lap. The big cat softly purred as she comfortably rested her head onto his chest.

Both Cynthia and Irene understood his intention.

"It should work." His mother thoughtfully said. "Irene, the Ragnarok and Emma are both separate and the same. Perhaps I should refine the demonic cultivation method further in order to produce a duality between the god mech and the companion spirit. The former will become a vessel of negativity while the latter can act as a beacon of salvation."

She would have to study Irene in depth and perform a lot of mystical calculations in order to determine whether this idea was viable.

No matter what, Ves should have a much easier chance of creating a suitable totem by working through Emma.

After the Destroyer of Worlds advanced to god pilot, her main self had become the sole wellspring of all of her god-like willpower.

Emma had reverted to a pure living spiritual construct. The absence of strong willpower in her being meant that she no longer possessed a quality that was strongly exclusionary towards outside influences.

Ves should be able to borrow her spiritual energy and use it for all kinds of purposes without incurring any obstruction or backlash.

"Can I receive another spiritual fragment from Emma?" He asked Irene. "I used to harvest one from her during our first meeting. That has enabled you to come to my rescue during the Survivalist conference. It is a pity that I have used it up, so I need a new one to do my work."

[You shall have it. You have my permission to use my power to defend yourself in my absence.]

Though the Destroyer of Worlds wanted to protect Ves, it was unreasonable for a key figure such as herself to remain away from her duties. She needed to return to the Rubarthan Pact and the frontlines of the Red Wars as quickly as possible in order to keep the aggressive aliens at bay.

"Miew..."

Emma looked visibly pained as Irene utilized her willpower to carve out a large and potent spiritual fragment from her flank.

The willpower fluctuations had become so strong during this interval that Ves winced from the pain.

The Superior Mother's energy manifestation almost disappeared as well, showing how difficult it was for the Destroyer of Worlds to hold back her destructive power for so long!

When Irene presented the large and almost burning spiritual fragment to Ves, he became astonished by how much larger and powerful it was compared to any other fragment that he obtained in the past.

This was by far the most powerful spiritual fragment that he had come across in his life so far!

As the spiritual fragment of an actual True God, the quality and quantity of this exceedingly valuable ingredient were indescribable.

Ves spontaneously had a thought when he came across this fragment. He thought about a couple of mech designs that he had recently completed. He just needed to process them before they were ready to enter production.

That still left a bit of room for him to make a couple of last-minute changes.

"Irene, can I ask you a favor? Can I use Emma as a design spirit for a handful of my heavy artillery mech designs?"

There was no need for Ves to provide additional clarification as Irene already studied his work well enough to know what a design spirit represented.

The Superior Mother was a powerful example of one such entity!

[I do not mind.] Irene said after a few seconds. [I have no objections to borrowing Emma's power, but I do not know how this will affect your mechs and the pilots who make use of them once I begin to engage in demonic cultivation. You should be careful not to let the repercussions of my actions bleed into your products.]

"Thankyou, Irene! I have always wanted to do this, but I never dared to make this request to you before we met in person!"

This was fantastic news!

The Fey Fianna was already shaping up to be a commercial bestseller, but once Ves employed Emma as the design spirits of his next two completed mech designs, the Transcendent Punisher Mark III and the Supremo Project may be able to surpass his drone mech line!