

The Mech 5901

Chapter 5901 Remedial Lessons

It took a bit of time for Furia to act on Ves' advice.

As powerful as she may be, she possessed no intrinsic understanding of the advanced technologies that made up the Dominion of Man.

Simply flooding a weapon system or propulsion system with an excessive amount of fire energy was not safe!

It was far too easy to cause components to overheat and melt.

It was also easy to waste a lot of fire energy because they failed to do anything useful.

The transformed Fire Elemental had to take her time to explore the tolerances of every weapon and thruster. She had to make gradual adjustments and work together with the Brain Trust and Caramond to make sure her contributions made a positive difference.

Fortunately, True Gods were not constrained by mortal limitations. They were able to think a lot faster and multitask to an insane degree.

The dreadnought gradually began to speed up as her sub-light propulsion system generated increasingly more thrust force.

While the Dominion of Man was still way too massive to win a race against a courier vessel, it was quite impressive how a more effective utilization of fire energy enabled the dreadnought to boost her acceleration without resorting to any technical improvements.

Her weapon systems began to inflict more damage as well. The increase in firepower was particularly noticeable with any energy and thermal-based weaponry such as plasma cannons and energy beam cannons.

Simply making it so that the attacks launched by these massive cannons carried more fire energy was enough to make them inflict greater harm!

The crew cheered several times when the massive energy weapons managed to inflict moderately greater wounds than before. The two-headed beast's flesh even regenerated a bit slower as it took time for its physique to clean up the burns and lingering fire energies.

Dread Captain Argile did not look too happy, though.

"This is a good first step, but it has not tipped the scales in our favor. The two-headed beast's acceleration has increased in order to maintain its speed advantage over our ship. I appreciate Furia's efforts to improve her contribution to the fight, but it has not closed the gap. The god beast's flesh is still able to regenerate its wounds faster than we can make them. The most we have accomplished so far is to delay our demise."

The captain made a good point. While Furia was constantly working to tweak her ability to improve the firepower of the ship's main cannons, there was a limit to how much fire energy they could tolerate.

At the very least, the transformed Fire Elemental learned the concept of distributing her power in a more rational fashion. She gained the very useful ability to strengthen the performance of specific aspects of the Dominion of Man by sacrificing performance elsewhere.

"I have another suggestion for Furia." Ves spoke up again. "This goes a little deeper. I suspect that your... original self may have already mastered these techniques, but they failed to transfer to your current incarnation."

Ves felt an obvious surge of interest from the True God.

"I AM LISTENING."

He waved at the display that depicted the attacks that landed on the enormous body of the two-headed beast.

"The previous wave has taught me that any fight against a True God is more than just a physical confrontation. It is also a contest between will, technique and domain. From this perspective, the reason why our ship has failed to gain the upper hand so far is because your domain and power expression is holding us back."

That did not sit well with Furia! The temperature in the command center rose even further as she felt affronted by the words spoken by her progenitor!

Ves quickly raised his palms. "Whoa, whoa! Before you get all angry at me, let me finish my argument! Just think about it. When anyone transcends to the level of a True God, the differences between matter and energy begins to blur. The Dominion of Man is strictly speaking not a True God, but it is starting to fight like one. Her impressive tech makes up the material aspect while you make up much of the spiritual aspect. While our current adversary has very developed strengths in both aspects, the same cannot be said for us, and that is mostly because you are lacking centuries if not millenia's worth of accumulation."

Though Furia clearly remained indignant at Ves, she was not irrational enough to deny his description.

"WHAT IS YOUR SOLUTION?"

"I think the best way to address this problem is to give you a crash course on how to wield your fire energy more effectively. You have a lot of raw power, but lack the techniques to get the most out of them. You will need to remedy that in order for the attacks blessed by your power to inflict actual harm on our adversary's domain. So long as the two-headed beast's domain remains in good condition, it is impossible to fell the creature."

Ves decided to enact the knowledge transfer through an unconventional method.

"Mrow."

Blinky emerged from his head and began to spit out a ball of E energy.

"Absorb this. It contains systematic knowledge of basic theories and spells on the fire element that I managed to learn from... somewhere. The knowledge is very basic, but it is fairly comprehensive and covers a lot of different ways to shape your fire. Most of the spells were never designed to be channeled through modern human weapon systems, but I am sure you can figure out how to adapt

the techniques to modern times. I also threw in a lot of scientific understanding of fire as an exothermic reaction."

The ball of energy disappeared in an instant. Blinky clearly sensed that Furia had extended her power and absorbed it in totality.

The Star Cat could clearly sense that Furia was no longer angry at Ves anymore.

The temperature did not subside, but that was because she began to grow excited.

Already, Furia started to apply the brand-new theories she had learned by tweaking the expression of her fire energy!

The sensor systems of the Dominion of Man began to record numerous deviations from the established patterns.

Missiles generated hotter explosions. Plasma bolts seared more flesh. Energy beams became hotter.

The Beginner Five Elements Spells Manual proved its value once again as Furia readily applied her teachings.

As much as Ves enjoyed the spectacle, there was little direction or planning involved in all of this exploration.

Furia was like a child who just discovered that she had the ability to mold fire to her will.

Her approach might lead to comprehensive improvements in the future, but there was not enough time for her to make the gains she needed to turn the tide of this battle!

"Furia! Focus, please! Defeating the two-headed beast comes first! You can explore all of the different aspects of the fire element later. First, you need to figure out how to make your empowered flames stick onto the body of our enemy. Let me give you a few examples of what I mean by that. It just so happens that I designed an expert mech a few years ago that is tailored to a mech pilot who has a penchant for burning her enemies to death."

Ves quickly began to project pieces of archival footage that showed short clips of the Promethea in action.

The Promethea was nowhere close to reaching the power of the Dominion of Man, but the living expert mech clearly possessed a key advantage.

It was piloted by Venerable Isobel Kotin, an expert pilot who knew how to play with fire!

The beautiful black-and-purplish expert mech with flame accents danced through space as fiery energy beams spat from her Ignitron luminal crystal rifle.

The beams generally produced two different reactions on impact.

In some cases, the beams exploded upon impact, causing them to unleash all of their accumulated energies in a single instant. This was particularly useful in depleting energy shields.

In other cases, the Promethea unleashed fire beams that caused her targets to catch fire... and keep burning long after the initial attack!

The purple flames powered by Isobel's willpower and companion spirit seemed to gain a life of their own. They were remarkably effective at burning the hulls of enemy warships.

Even the smallest of sparks could start a wildfire that could engulf an entire battleship when given enough time!

The display was mesmerizing for a True God who only truly came to life a short time ago. The conflagrations spread by the Promethea over the course of numerous engagements against alien raiding fleets had never failed to inflict outsized damage.

There was hardly any mech in the expeditionary fleet that could cripple and destroy large warships with greater efficiency!

The only reason why the Promethea did not receive license to burn down all of the exposed warships of enemy fleets was because her purple flames usually destroyed much of the value of enemy hulls.

"REMARKABLE. I UNDERSTAND YOUR INTENTIONS. THE SIGHT OF THIS PROMETHEA... IS MAKING ME RECALL MEMORIES THAT ARE NOT MINE."

Ves grew a bit concerned when he heard that. What sort of memories did she regain, and how much did they impact her mentality?

Furia took action right away. The footage of the Promethea in action served as a catalyst and a key that rapidly caused the True God to gain comprehension on how to flex her metaphorical muscles in order to produce specific outcomes!

The changes happened quickly. Ves previously expected that it would take minutes worth of trial and error before Furia was able to make her flames stick.

What actually happened was that the attacks launched by the Dominion of Man already started to light bits of fur on fire after only half a minute!

"We are detecting dozens of flames on the surface of the two-headed beast's body! They are mostly burning the fur for the time being, but the fires are already beginning to spread to the hide."

"You can still do better, Furia. Your fires haven't spread beyond their impact sites." Ves said. "I think you are encountering resistance from our enemy's domain. You need to launch your flames with the intention of burning and pushing back the monster's domain."

Ves provided additional guidance based on his general understanding of how these battles were fought.

It seemed to help as Furia applied her power in increasingly more effective ways. While she was still far from matching the likes of Cynthia Larkinson when it came to executing powerful techniques, the transformed Fire Elemental at least mastered the basics!

It was not fair to hold Furia to the same standards as an authentic True God. Ves was sure that Furia would rapidly be able to increase her mastery over the fire element by relying on her amazing affinity and the foundation of knowledge gifted by Ves.

In any case, the assistance provided by Ves finally increased Furia's lethality to the point where she was inflicting actual damage onto the god beast!

The two-headed beast's powerful physique and domain worked hard to douse the flames that regularly appeared across its body.

While the powerful god beast was able to snuff out a couple of flames in a short amount of time, the problem was that the Dominion of Man possessed so many primary gun batteries that she was able to ignite dozens of fires with every salvo!

More and more of the god beast's fur caught on fire. Parts of the creature's hide also began to burn as well.

The two-headed beast had to expend a lot of power to prevent the flames from penetrating through its hide, but it was starting to lose this battle because more fires just kept coming!

Even though there were still a lot of differences between the tribulation manifestation and Furia, the former's savage nature finally proved to be a detriment.

If the two-headed beast possessed greater intelligence and rationality, then it would have been able to figure out a more efficient way to put out all of the flames.

Unfortunately, the two-headed beast was so inflexible that it continued to stick to its tried-and-true approach, as if it knew how to do nothing else!

By the time the god beast's entire exterior had been lit on fire, its domain had weakened to the point where the Dominion of Man's conventional attacks started to inflict more serious damage than before!

Ves relaxed a bit after seeing this. "If the two-headed beast isn't hiding any further surprises, then this battle is ours."

Chapter 5902 Finer Power Expression.

If the 7th wave of the 8th round was all about Caramond, then the 8th wave was about Furia.

The transformed Fire Elemental was a contradictory existence.

The entity's original incarnation started out as a defective clone of the mythical creator of the Fire Scroll.

The shenanigans pulled off by Ves caused her to assume a fresh new identity, but only partially.

It was more apt to consider Furia to be a split personality of the Fire Elemental that just so happened to gain dominance.

So long as Caramond continued to divert a portion of his faith energy to Furia, Ves remained confident that the now-feminine True God continued to remain loyal to red humanity.

He just found it a bit regretful that the indoctrination process started way too soon after the Fire Elemental initially woke up from its original state.

If Caramond waited for a few minutes before he started to overwhelm the rapidly recovering consciousness of the creator of the Fire Scroll, Furia would have gained access to a much greater wealth of theory, comprehension and technique!

However, Ves had made a judgment call back then. His plan called for Caramond to take action as soon as possible in order to take advantage of the Fire Elemental when it was at its weakest.

The threat posed by this being rose exponentially with each second that passed. The more the immortal traces of the creator of the Fire Scroll came back from the dead, the more difficult it became to defeat the remnant of such an eminent deity!

Though Ves liked to take a gamble every now and then, he did not dare to underestimate the original creator's strength and resourcefulness.

The fact that Furia still couldn't get rid of the remnant of the original creator in her spirituality was proof that Ves had made the right decision.

He still found it uncomfortable to realize that he could have single-handedly doomed red humanity to subjugation or extinction if he made the wrong decision at the time!

Even now, Furia was still at risk of losing control at any time. She was a Sword of Damocles that Ves had personally hung over red humanity.

There was a considerable chance that the sword would swing down on red humanity's neck sooner or later.

Ves just hoped that they would be able to buy enough time to grow stronger and gain the ability to deal with the breakout of the original creator of the Fire Scroll.

In any case, Furia in her current incarnation fought like a descendant who was just starting to come to grips with her enormous inheritance.

Ves had given her a nudge in the right direction by sharing his basic cultivation knowledge and giving her a bit of inspiration.

The transformed Fire Elemental absorbed his lessons and ran with them. She applied her powerful fire domain in ways that went beyond the basic spells that Ves had learned from an enlightenment fruit!

Everyone serving on the Dominion of Man could see the changes in real-time.

Furia's powerful domain integrated into the dreadnought a bit more precisely than before. The True God channeled more fire energy in the places where it was needed. There was no need for her to waste her efforts into augmenting less important functions such as life support.

What impressed the fleeters the most was how Furia was able to induce drastic changes to the damage profile of the armaments of their ship!

None of the primary cannons of the dreadnought had been designed with spreading flames in mind. They were mostly developed to penetrate transphasic energy shields and hull plating with as much power as possible. That meant that they needed to unleash a lot of destructive energies at once.

At most, the Dominion of Man was able to launch incendiary missiles and bombs at her targets if she really wanted to start wildfires.

This was not enough against an opponent like the two-headed beast. The creature's defenses were so strong that it took the power of a True God in order to light the massive creature's body on fire.

If Furia truly started out as a True God with a blank slate, then there was no way in hell that she could overcome the tribulation manifestation's much more mature domain and body.

However, as Furia continued to 'recall' memories relating to the finer applications of her central element, she began to display more and more hints of power far in excess of what a relatively new True God should possess!

Although Ves did not possess a complete understanding of cultivation at the True God level, he possessed enough common sense to know that the flames generated by Furia shouldn't be able to roast the body of the two-headed beast with such ease!

From a spiritual perspective, Ves vaguely determined that Furia had taken his words to heart.

The transformed Fire Elemental did not focus all of her efforts on burning the fur, hide and flesh of the hostile god beast, but also tried to attack the creature's domain.

At first, Furia's flames clearly had trouble with making her flames burn the two-headed beast's basis of power.

The creature's body as well as domain were nowhere near as weak and fragile as that of the mirror beast. The current god beast clearly managed to evolve into a god beast by preying on a lot of different entities. There was no way that such a scrappy and aggressive monster was vulnerable to a bit of flame.

Yet as Furia continued to empower the main guns of the Dominion of Man with her power and techniques, she eventually made a breakthrough that caused her fire energies to eat away at her enemy!

The transition happened quietly.

In one moment, the flames generated by the dreadnought's attacks only deposited flames that burned for a half a minute before gradually subsiding.

In another moment, the attacks not only generated much more flames upon impact, but they actively spread over the course of several minutes!

It was only when the unceasing attacks of the Dominion of Man had managed to engulf the entire creature in flames that Ves realized that Furia had improved far beyond her initial point.

This was not the kind of power that a newborn or ignorant True God should be capable of wielding!

Ves already figured out that Furia had somehow managed to tap into the hidden knowledge of her other 'progenitor'.

The question that bugged him was what she managed to master.

Somehow, he did not think that Furia had managed to get her hands on the equivalent of the intermediate and advanced editions of the spells manual.

In order to investigate this matter further, Ves called up a projection that displayed an exterior view of one of the Dominion of Man's primary positron cannon turrets.

Many of the turrets featured three massive cannon barrels, and this one was no exception. The crew had opted to fire them sequentially in order to maintain a high and consistent rate of fire.

As the powerful transphasic hyper positron cannons continued to fire concentrated beams of positrons at the god beast in a distance, Ves and Blinky were able to get a decent impression on how Furia's fire energy channeled into the weapon hardpoint and piggybacked off every energy beam.

The concentration of fire energy was so high that the entire turret became engulfed by illusionary flames!

While Ves was already familiar with this visual phenomenon, what was new was that these flames began to display a lot of different runes!

Yes, runes!

Ves immediately zoomed in on the feed in order to make sure he did not make any mistakes.

The more he looked at it, the more the illusionary flames occasionally formed into strings of runes before disappearing.

Furthermore, runes also showed up on the surface of the positron cannon turret. These runes turned out to be a lot more persistent, which showed that Furia deliberately generated them and kept them in place!

Ves switched the active feed so that he could take a look at the other active gun turrets. Each of them showed the same phenomena. They only varied depending on the nature of the weapon systems that Furia augmented.

He could even see the runes being changed. Strings of runes switched into other ones. This tweaked the way that Furia's fire energy interacted with the gun turrets and slightly altered their damage profiles.

Ves couldn't hold in his curiosity any longer.

"Furia. Can I ask you a question? Where... where did you learn how to apply these runes? I distinctly remember that they are not part of my knowledge package."

The temperature rose slightly as Furia directed a tiny bit more attention in his direction.

"YOU ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTION."

Ves pressed his lips. "I just wanted to obtain confirmation, but oh well. Do you understand the fundamental theories behind these runes, or are you just applying them based on instinct or muscle memory?"

"I UNDERSTAND THEM." Furia readily responded to her progenitor. "I WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO APPLY THEM TO THE WEAPONS OF THIS SHIP IF I DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE AND MEANING OF EACH RUNE. I HAVE ONLY RECENTLY GAINED AWARENESS OF A SMALL COLLECTION OF FIRE RUNES FOR THE TIME BEING. I HAVE REASONS TO BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE MANY MORE FIRE RUNES THAT ARE CURRENTLY OUT OF MY REACH."

This was interesting. Furia not only confirmed Ves' suspicions, but also hinted at more. She was still far from reaching her full potential as a True God.

Given that the situation was going well enough, Ves decided to satisfy his curiosity by requesting clarification.

"What are runes, according to your understanding?"

"THAT... IS A HEAVY TOPIC TO EXPLAIN. RUNES ARE... RELATED THE FUNDAMENTAL BUILDING BLOCKS OF REALITY. IF I HAVE TO DESCRIBE IT IN THE FRAMEWORK OF HUMAN SCIENCE, RUNES CAN BE TREATED AS THE PROGRAMMING LANGUAGE OF OUR FABRIC OF REALITY. THEY ARE FAR MORE THAN THAT, BUT THIS IS HOW THEY ARE OFTEN USED."

"I see. How are they used?"

"THERE ARE MANY POSSIBILITIES, MOST OF WHICH I DO NOT KNOW MYSELF. RUNES CAN BE USED TO STRENGTHEN OBJECTS, WHICH I AM CURRENTLY DOING ON A TEMPORARY BASIS. RUNES CAN ALSO BE USED TO STRENGTHEN AND SHAPE YOUR OWN CULTIVATION OR THE CULTIVATION OF OTHERS."

"Elaborate on the latter please."

"FROM WHAT I HAVE LEARNED, RUNES ARE VERY ESSENTIAL FOR TRUE GODS. THOSE THAT MASTER THEM TO A MORE COMPREHENSIVE DEGREE ARE ALWAYS ABLE TO DEFEAT THOSE THAT DO NOT UNDERSTAND THEM AS WELL. I HAVE ALSO DISCOVERED THAT WHEN ANYONE BECOMES A TRUE GOD, THEY EMBED A PERMANENT PIECE OF THEMSELVES INTO REALITY BY FORMING A PERSONAL RUNE. THIS RUNE REPRESENTS THEIR UNIQUE DOMAIN AND IS ADDED TO THE LEXICON OF RUNES THAT ALREADY EXIST."

What?!

Furia presented a lot of new information to Ves, much of which had massive implications for his future!

His mother had never told him about personal runes and other stuff. This was understandable as this was only relevant to more advanced cultivators, but Ves would have liked to know about this anyway!

Learning that every True God developed their own personal rune, and that other people may be able to employ it in their own works or cultivation was mind-boggling!

How many True Gods came into existence? How many of them contributed their personal runes to reality?

The number had to be huge! Far more runes came into existence than Ves could ever learn and master!

"Are you using your own personal rune at the moment?"

"NO. I HAVE ONE, BUT IT IS NOT TRULY 'MINE'. I DO NOT FULLY COMPREHEND IT, AND I DARE NOT USE IT IN MY CURRENT WORKINGS. I WILL HAVE TO BE CAUTIOUS IN EXPLORING IT, AS I DO NOT WANT TO CAUSE ANY UNDUE HARM TO HUMANS."

That sounded rather ominous.

From what Ves managed to figure out, Furia would never be able to become as strong as a proper True God so long as she maintained her distance from her personal rune.

This was disappointing news, and would definitely set her back in the long run.

However, she was doing quite well by employing a set of basic fire runes for the time being. The lightning tribulation may have gotten rather ridiculous by forcing the Dominion of Man to fight against a god beast, but at least the ascended creature had made little progress in mastering runes itself!

This was why the Furia ultimately gained the upper hand. The difference in comprehension and mastery of runes became the decisive factor in this bout!

Chapter 5903 Rune Study

Ves gained a lot of basic insights and understanding by quizzing Furia about runes.

He learned that there were so many runes that it was impossible for anyone to learn and master them all. This was especially the case when personal runes got added to reality all the time by True Gods who were located in many distant galaxies.

It was even possible for runes to be 'forgotten'. This mostly happened with personal runes that True Gods took great care to hide for one reason or another. If these True Gods perished without leaving any inheritance behind, other cultivators practically had no means of learning and mastering the personal runes of these deceased and mostly forgotten deities.

That did not mean the personal runes disappeared. They continued to exist in the fabric of reality, but without resorting to exceptional methods, there was no way for other cultivators to discover them and utilize them for their own purposes.

Runes differed from each other by many factors. Their strength and potency varied by complexity, related concepts and the strength of the True God who originally produced their own personal runes.

Ves found it quite important to learn that True Gods were able to strengthen their own personal runes.

In fact, it was their domains that got stronger. Their personal runes merely caught up to this development and became more potent even when they were utilized by other cultivators.

Furia did not know how far this could go. She did not have access to any information that could explain how personal runes changed when their creators ascended to the rank of God King.

Ves had a few guesses, but the fourth major cultivation rank was so far away from him that it was pointless for him to engage in speculation.

The transformed Fire Elemental also granted Ves with another crucial insight.

"Is it possible to mass-produce runes in any way?"

"NO. THESE RUNES THAT YOU HAVE BECOME OBSESSED WITH ARE NOT PURELY MATERIAL SHAPES. THEY ARE FORMED OUT OF E ENERGY THROUGH SPECIFIC METHODS. AS FAR AS I AM AWARE OF, YOU CANNOT SIMPLY PROGRAM A MACHINE TO CARVE RUNES ON AN OBJECT AND POWER THEM WITH E ENERGY. IT DOES NOT WORK THAT WAY. THE RUNES HAVE TO BE MANUALLY FORMED BY A CULTIVATOR."

"Just to be sure, you don't necessarily have to be a True God in order to apply these runes, correct?"

Ves grew disappointed when he heard that. The limitation on mass production meant that he would be churning out millions of rune-carved mechs anytime soon.

"Just to be sure, you don't necessarily have to be a True God in order to apply these runes, correct?"

"NO, BUT WE ARE QUALIFIED TO USE MORE POWERFUL RUNES. I AM AWARE OF AT LEAST THREE CATEGORIES OF RUNES, OF WHICH I CAN NAME TWO: LESSER RUNES AND GREATER RUNES. I AM CURRENTLY EMPLOYING LESSER RUNES IN MY WORKINGS AS I HAVE YET TO RECALL ANY GREATER ONES ASIDE FROM MY PERSONAL RUNE."

This was important information! Even though Ves had no right to work with greater runes as of yet, he already understood the potential of mastering a set of lesser runes!

Ves wondered why his scattered knowledge of traditional blacksmithing did not go into so much detail on runes. It was clearly an essential component in creating powerful artifacts.

Then again, what could he expect from a set of tattered and highly incomplete records?

"Can I work with lesser runes, whether in my personal cultivation or in my design projects?"

"I DO NOT THINK SO. I KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT LESSER RUNES TO KNOW THAT ONLY CULTIVATORS WHO HAVE INITIALLY FORMED THEIR DOMAINS AND BEGIN TO SHAPE THEM ARE ABLE TO DO SO. THIS IS BECAUSE RUNES ARE DERIVED FROM DOMAINS THEMSELVES."

Ves grew disappointed. A Senior Mech Designer still fell into the category of the first major cultivation rank. He would have to advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer if he wanted to reach the second major cultivation rank.

"Are there any exceptions to this general rule?"

"THERE MAY BE EXCEPTIONS, BUT I AM NOT AWARE OF THEM. WHAT I DO KNOW IS THAT EVERYONE WITH A DOMAIN MAKES USE OF LESSER RUNES TO ONE DEGREE OR ANOTHER. THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS WHETHER THEY ARE APPLYING THEM CONSCIOUSLY OR INSTINCTIVELY. EVEN SAVAGE BEASTS SUCH AS THE ONE I AM BURNING HAS UNKNOWINGLY MASTERED ITS OWN SET OF RUNES SIMPLY BECAUSE ITS DOMAIN IS RESONATING WITH THE MOST COMPATIBLE RUNES."

"Does this apply to ace pilots and Master Mech Designers as well?"

"PROBABLY. I HAVE NEVER SEEN THEM IN PERSON. NO ACE PILOTS AND MASTERS ARE PRESENT ON THIS SHIP. AS LONG AS THEY POSSESS DOMAINS, THEY HAVE ALREADY STARTED TO MAKE USE OF RUNES, WHETHER THEY ARE AWARE OF IT OR NOT. LESSER RUNES ARE HIGHLY UNIVERSAL. ANY DOMAIN IS ABLE TO RESONATE WITH THEM AND TAP INTO THEIR POWER."

"I see." Ves thoughtfully said. "There should still be a huge difference between deliberate and instinctual use of runes. For example, the two-headed beast is clearly finding it difficult to resist your power because you are able to string your runes into combinations that produce more powerful results."

"THAT IS TRUE... IN MOST CASES. IT IS INDEED BETTER TO TAKE CONTROL OVER YOUR OWN POWER RATHER THAN ALLOW IT TO DEFINE YOU. IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO UNDERESTIMATE BEASTS WHO ARE NOT AS INCLINED TO STUDY RUNES. THEY HAVE THEIR OWN ADVANTAGES, THOUGH I AM NOT ENTIRELY AWARE OF THEM AT THE MOMENT. THE TWO-HEADED BEAST BEFORE US IS LOSING GROUND BECAUSE IT HAS NOT DEVELOPED ITS DOMAIN MUCH FURTHER AFTER REACHING ITS PRESENT STAGE. OLDER BEASTS ARE MUCH MORE FORMIDABLE AS A RULE."

That was easy enough to understand. The power scaling of the tribulation event was quite harsh, but not unreasonable. There shouldn't be too much of a leap in strength from the mirror beast and the two-headed beast.

Ves just hoped that the one that came afterwards did not manage to master too many greater runes.

The battle continued while Ves continued to learn more about runes. A part of him hoped that he was able to incorporate them into his mech designs and other works in spite of the fact that he was still a Senior Mech Designer.

There were exceptions to every rule. Ves personally theorized that as long as Blinky became strong enough, he would be able to imbue works with runes. Manipulating E energy was one of Blinky's core strengths!

Aside from that, Ves did not overlook the fact that all of his third-order living mechs all started to accumulate Ascension Runes as they grew stronger!

With the knowledge imparted by Furia, Ves had a much clearer understanding of the nature and the significance of this phenomenon.

He understood how important they were. What he did not understand was why they showed up in mechs that might not necessarily be masterworks or directly related to powerful cultivators.

The only reasonable explanation based on the facts he was aware of was that third order living mechs were actually natural domain shapers!

Ves did not believe in this conclusion. It sounded too absurd to him. He had worked hard as a mech designer, but only managed to reach an advanced stage of the first major cultivation rank after all of this time.

It would be extremely silly for his living mechs to breeze their way to the second major cultivation rank just by relying on their natural growth!

There was clearly something very weird going on here. Ves grew more motivated to solve this mystery and get to the bottom of Ascension Runes.

Perhaps doing so might just allow him to figure out a method to apply runes to his works without becoming a domain shaper!

As Ves continued to contemplate this subject, the two-headed beast steadily began to falter as the flames had begun to burn his internal organs.

The voracious fires continued to burn enormous quantities of flesh at Furia's direction. They grew hotter and became increasingly harder to suppress as time went by. The transformed Fire Elemental had grown so comfortable with employing lesser runes that her usage of them decisively harmed the god beast's domain!

This was quite a remarkable result as Furia still did not make use of any greater runes!

The Dominion of Man herself also provided indispensable help.

Initially, her primary gun batteries were only useful for helping Furia extend her power to the two-headed beast.

Once the flames destroyed the god beast's resilient exterior, the attacks launched by the dreadnought started to inflict much more telling damage!

Organs as well as softer body tissue crumbled apart with greater ease. The decline of the two-headed beast's domain meant that its physical body was receiving less of a boost than before.

It also helped that furia's flames were remarkably effective at stopping the creature's natural regeneration.

Together, the Dominion of Man and Furia inflicted progressively greater damage to the poor beast.

Its threat level decreased as a result. It not lost the ability to catch up to the Dominion of Man, but also had no fur left to launch at its prey.

Of course, the fleeters insisted on keeping a certain distance from the god beast. The creature probably had a few tricks left up its sleeve that were most likely effective at closer ranges.

It still took a relatively long time to defeat the two-headed beast. The creature was simply too massive, and its thick flesh simply took a lot of effort to destroy.

The Dominion of Man was not in a hurry to end the 8th wave though. Her damage control teams continued to patch up holes and fix a lot of hazards.

Damaged gun turrets received much-needed repairs while the more intact ones received light servicing.

Everyone knew that they had a more difficult fight up ahead. It only seemed prudent to service the Dominion of Man as much as possible while they still had the luxury to do so. If the final challenge of this tribulation event was as powerful as everyone feared, then anything could make a difference!

Even so, the fleeters did not dare to drag out this fight. Once the two-headed beast finally succumbed from all of the fire and other attacks, the Dominion of Man had flown close enough to receive a large dose of tribulation energies!

While everyone on the ship benefited from the latest lightning baptism, Furia received the greatest reward due to her outsized contributions.

Ves could clearly sense that Furia became more solid and stable. She even found it easier to keep her dangerous side in check.

"We will need your strength for the test to come."

The tribulation storms became more restless than ever. It had already begun to gather an increasing amount of energy in preparation for rolling out the final and most difficult challenge!

Ves glanced at the projection that showed the hazy alien face of the Subjugation King.

Ever since his clone got defeated, the God King's connection to the storm had degraded.

It had not been cut.

Ves could still feel that the storm possessed a hint of subjugation and tarnish from those dark storm clouds.

The Subjugation King was still watching. He just did not bother to interact with his future slaves anymore.

Ves grimaced when he recalled the fact that he got marked by this powerful alien bastard.

His greatest fear was that once the tribulation event had come to an end, the God King would still be able to monitor what took place in the Red Ocean through the soul mark!

That would really be bad for Ves, because it meant that he had turned into a massive security risk for red humanity!

Ves just hoped that this was not the case. The soul mark was already absurd for several reasons. There shouldn't be any room for more.

"Wait a second."

Having just learned about runes, Ves suddenly realized that the soul mark was probably made out of a complex array of runes!

It was highly unlikely that they consisted entirely of lesser runes, though. They had to incorporate greater runes or a more superior variant in order to exhaust the tribulation storm to such an enormous extent!

That just made Ves more upset. The stronger the runes, the harder it became for him to get rid of them. This was especially the case if one of them just happened to be the Subjugation King's personal rune!

Chapter 5904 The Final Challenge

"The ultimate test has come."

To think that the 9th wave of the 8th round was not supposed to be the final challenge.

If the Subjugation King had not done red humanity a favor and expended so much energy to plant a soul mark on Ves, the Dominion of Man would probably have to endure 9 more True God-level threats of increasing intensity!

Ves became more and more thankful that this was the final test, because the energies concentrating in the storm clouds already exceeded the power of the two-headed beast!

"How is the ship, captain?" He asked the massive glowing figure resting on the command seat.

"Damaged but unbroken." The man spoke with an empowered voice. "The Dominion of Man has become greater than she had ever been. I have the utmost confidence in her crew and her tech. Caramond and Furia have also improved at a rapid pace. Their help will be indispensable. I have enough confidence that our ship will survive the coming battle. Every dreadnought was designed and built with the express intention of fighting against a god mech. She will not falter now that she has finally gained the essential pieces needed to fulfill her original goal."

The original purpose of dreadnoughts was the ultimate dream of the Red Fleet. It continued to motivate the fleeters even when it seemed that their grand experiment had fallen short of expectations.

There were far more fleeters rooting for the success of the Dominion of Man than her crew. The men stationed on the other warship in the star system were hoping that the dreadnought would be able to surpass the last and most arduous challenge set by the tribulation storm.

Many other fleeters who had gained the right to be appraised of the situation wanted the Dominion of Man to succeed as well.

From Fleet Admiral Stanley Argile to the spacers stationed on the other 7 dreadnought, the Dominion of Man carried many of their hopes and dreams for a bright new future for the warships of the human race.

All of their hopes and aspirations translated into faith.

After a bit more waiting, the tribulation storm finally presented the final god beast.

Though Ves was unable to track the movement of faith energy, he liked to think that the warship continuously absorbed the faith of millions of fleeters, all without needing to borrow Caramond's faith.

That should have meaning.

The only question now was whether all of this was enough to pass the final test.

After a bit more waiting, the tribulation storm finally presented the final god beast.

"It's... small."

"A compact form is usually faster, especially when its energy density is much higher. This is not a god beast that we can outspeed."

"Wait... is that bird on fire?"

"Our temperature readings indicate that its fires burn hotter than the flames generated by Furia. This is just the flames that the god beast is generating at rest!"

Ves and everyone else gradually grew shocked when they learned what the tribulation storm chose to present to everyone.

They initially thought that the storm would produce a completely alien monstrosity that could only be encountered in Messier 87.

Instead, the storm spat out a very accurate depiction of a mythical phoenix!

Ves began to recall an archival image of the First Flame's god mech, which also happened to be called the Phoenix.

The machine in its base form did not look anything like the bird that had just come out of the storm.

That changed when Ves switched the image to the god mech when it had transformed into a special existence during Operation Night Jazz.

It had been the most dramatic show of power during the entire series of simultaneous battles. The most powerful god pilot in the Red Ocean had transformed his god mech into a being made out of blazing fire energy!

Even though the First Flame was not able to hold this form on a permanent basis, the transformed god mech nonetheless managed to burn several ancient phase whales without encountering any significant resistance!

Ves began to feel more and more apprehensive when the comparison images displayed very few differences!

The phoenix produced by the tribulation storm was obviously smaller and weaker, but that did not mean that it was a pushover!

The heat of its flames along with the apparent speed of this creature meant that it probably excelled in both offense and mobility.

The only way the Dominion of Man would be able to survive this final confrontation was to land enough shots to take out this god beast in the shortest possible timespan!

"Professor, is this phoenix based on a beast originating in Messier 87 or is it derived from an ancient life form in the Milky Way?"

"I don't have enough information to issue a verdict." Ves responded to the captain's question. "While this tribulation storm is mainly powered by Messier 87, the Milky Way and the Red Ocean are also connected to it. There is a realistic possibility that the Milky Way managed to save enough strength to send out a phoenix for whatever reason. It is also possible that this species of mythological birds is so ancient and powerful that it has managed to spread its bloodline across the cosmos. Since Messier 87 is one of the regional giants in this cosmic neighborhood, it is probably a destination where such powerful beasts are likely to congregate."

The dread captain nodded. "Those are reasonable deductions. Whatever the case, the phoenix is regarded as one of the most powerful mythological beings. There are tales that describe them as god-like beings who possess the ferocity of beasts and intelligence that matches and surpasses humans. I fear that this tribulation manifestation's command over fire is greater than what we can handle."

That was another reasonable deduction. A phoenix was a creature born in flames. There was no way that such a gifted being possessed little mastery over fire!

"What is your judgment, Furia?" Ves asked. "Do you think you can stop its flames from burning down our ship?"

"IT WILL BE... A CHALLENGE." The True God replied with obvious reluctance. "THE GOD BEAST'S DOMAIN IS NOT THAT MUCH STRONGER THAN THE TWO-HEADED BEAST, BUT... IT IS MUCH MORE SOLID AND BETTER CONSTRUCTED. I CANNOT SAY THIS IS THE CASE BECAUSE THE PHOENIX IS INTELLIGENT ENOUGH TO IMPROVE ITS OWN DOMAIN OR BECAUSE IT IS RELYING ON EXCELLENT INHERITANCE. THE CREATURE... IS ACTIVELY MAKING USE OF MULTIPLE GREATER RUNES. ITS FAMILIARITY AND MASTERY OVER THEM SURPASSES ANYTHING ELSE I HAVE SEEN."

That was bad news!

While the two-headed beast from the prior wave also made use of greater runes, it was not as familiar and proficient in their use. It was also a savage beast that never put a lot of effort into studying and mastering greater runes on a systematic basis.

The current evidence suggested that the phoenix wouldn't be as stupid. The powerful firebird's eyes sparked with a sense of intelligence, and its control over the flames that were coursing across its body was impressive.

What was even worse was that it was not a pure fire phoenix!

As a construct made out of tribulation lightning, the phoenix was also able to combine its fire energy with lightning energy, thereby producing considerably more explosive results!

Ves suddenly thought up a possible reason why the tribulation storm generated a phoenix.

"Furia, do you think that you will be able to advance your comprehension and mastery over fire runes and the fire element after defeating this giant bird?"

"I THINK SO. THIS MAY BE A TEST THAT IS TARGETED TOWARDS MYSELF AS OPPOSED TO OUR FINE SHIP. I HAVE A FEELING... THAT IF I AM ABLE TO DEFEAT THIS PHOENIX, I MAY BE ABLE TO DEVOUR IT. IF THAT HAPPENS... I HAVE REASONS TO BELIEVE THAT IT WILL ADVANCE MY EVOLUTION BY A LARGE EXTENT."

"Is this what you think, or what can you gather from the tribulation storm?"

"BOTH. I KNOW I CAN ABSORB THIS PHOENIX EVEN IF IT IS ULTIMATELY A FALSE BEING. IT WILL BE DIFFICULT. WE WILL NEED TO EXHAUST AND INJURE THIS CREATURE FOR ME TO DEVOUR WHOLE."

That was interesting to hear. Ves could see the logic behind this theory, though he had no way of verifying it himself.

"The phoenix has begun to move! Its acceleration is far greater than that of the two-headed beast!"

"Open fire with our primary and secondary armaments! Teleport 5 antimatter bombs in its trajectory!"

The Dominion of Man responded so fast that it had to be automated. Many formidable primary cannons opened fire at the phoenix, only for half of the shots to miss due to the phoenix's elegant dance through space as if it was playing a game.

It took a huge amount of effort and processing by the Brain Trust to predict the creature's trajectory and to form optimal targeting solutions for each unique weapon system.

The fact that the Dominion of Man still managed to land half of her shots on a nimble target at this range was impressive.

Unfortunately, it was not enough!

The attacks that were on the verge of striking the fast and nimble phoenix encountered resistance in the form of a fire shield.

Energy beams disappeared into the fire without producing any noticeable results. Kinetic projectiles slowed down and burned into ash. Missiles only produce short-lasting disturbances. Plasma bolts only seemed to feed the flames!

Just because the phoenix was relatively small did not mean it was fragile!

"The phoenix has closed the distance and has begun to circle around our hull at a rapid pace."

"Our primary turrets are unable to track the phoenix. They are too slow. The god beast is circling around us with many variations in her flight pattern."

"Our secondary turrets are unable to track the phoenix as well most of the time. The only armaments that are effective under the circumstances are explosives."

"Teleport and detonate three antimatter bombs in her trajectory."

"Sir, the phoenix is circling too close to our hull! Our ship will get affected by the explosions."

"Then strengthen our azure energy shields and reinforce our hull as much as possible. We cannot allow this firebird to continue to circle so close."

The phoenix had yet to launch a proper attack, but its blazing heat was already starting to take a toll on the Dominion of Man.

More importantly, the proximity of the god beast also suppressed Caramond and Furia's domain!

Neither of the two True Gods possessed the raw strength to push back the phoenix's aura completely, so their only way out was to develop stronger techniques.

This was like the last two waves all over again, but now with a much greater disparity in strength!

The surrounding bridge officers suddenly had to address a lot of crises as the passive heat and flames generated by the phoenix already started to take a toll on the dreadnought.

Furia struggled to push back the phoenix's encouraging fire domain. This battle pretty much took place completely outside ordinary reality.

That was what made it difficult for Ves and the others to intervene.

While the Dominion of Man began to employ her firepower increasingly more intelligently by organizing her turrets better, many of the hits ended up inconveniencing the phoenix at best.

The powerful creature's control was too strong. It had a much better command over its own domain and greater runes.

The disparity started to get so bad that the azure energy shields themselves started to catch on fire!

"Furia! Have you gained any access to any greater runes?"

"NO. AS I HAVE INFORMED YOU, THAT KNOWLEDGE IS LOCKED OR MISSING. I FEAR THAT UNLOCKING IT WILL BE THE END OF MY PRESENT EXISTENCE. I DO NOT HAVE ANY GREATER RUNES AT MY DISPOSAL ASIDE FROM MY PERSONAL RUNE. I AM RELUCTANT TO USE THE LATTER BECAUSE I DO NOT KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN."

"This was really bad. While it was still possible for Furia to overcome greater runes with lesser runes, the demands were far too great this time!"

Chapter 5905 Failure in Design

The final fight definitely lived up to people's expectations and more.

A powerful phoenix spawned from the clouds and went on to besiege the Dominion of Man.

Though the bird only settled on circling around the large dreadnought for the time being, the heat and licks of flame emanating from its burning shape already started to exert a lot of pressure on the fleeters.

"Our azure energy shields are straining. The generators responsible for generating them are experiencing numerous malfunctions. The phoenix is somehow destroying or repelling the water energy that is responsible for augmenting our energy defenses!"

"Ambient temperature throughout the ship has risen by at least 2 degrees and rising. The fire energy generated and distributed by Furia is no longer being channeled as efficiently as before. The hostile fire energy generated by the phoenix is disrupting the operation of hyper technology throughout the ship!"

It became clear to Ves that the fight between the phoenix beast and the Dominion of Man had started out as a contest between domains.

Though it was not obvious to most people, Ves and Blinky clearly sensed the immense taking place in a different realm!

Furia had long functioned as the power source of the Dominion of Man. Even in her previous incarnation, the Fire Elemental had long claimed the dreadnought as her territory.

Due to the consistent exposure of fire energy, every part of the Dominion of Man had undergone a long process of adaptation and acclimatization. Furia's awakening along with all of the lightning baptisms had supercharged this process and caused the ship to become strongly imprinted to her energies.

In other words, Furia had gradually reshaped the Dominion of Man into her personal stronghold and seat of power. Her influence could be felt from every part of the ship, and it should have been a lot harder for hostile beings to intrude into her territory.

While friendly True Gods such as Caramond remained welcome on the ship, the phoenix should have been blocked from intruding.

Unfortunately, Furia was still too underdeveloped as a True God. While she had made a lot of progress in mastering the use of many different lesser runes, the current confrontation brutally told her that her efforts amounted to little in the greater scheme of things!

Without proper understanding and mastery of greater runes, Furia had no choice but to cede ground as the phoenix continually encroached on her territory!

This conflict played out as a collision between two invisible domains.

While the mirror beast was able to take advantage of the many shortcomings of Furia's domain by sneaking past her guard, the phoenix clearly favored open confrontation.

The domain of the firebird pressed upon the Dominion of Man like a flaming sun. Its heat was much more hostile and oppressive.

The creature possessed plenty of fury and heat, but completely lacked Furia's warmth and sympathy towards humans.

The phoenix's domain posed a very real threat to the physical structure of the Dominion of Man. The creature made no efforts to moderate its influence or ensure that its fire energy did not inflict harm on any delicate components.

Damage reports continued to arrive at an increasing rate.

"...Sensor arrays have melted..."

"...Two of our missile launchers have been destroyed after several missiles detonated in their tubes..."

"...30 percent of our energy cannon batteries are unable to fire further as they have exceeded their heat capacity..."

"...The consumption rate of coolants has risen by 600 percent! This is an unsustainable rate! If we do not remedy this issue, our most heat-susceptible systems will begin to overheat in 20 minutes..."

"...The damaged exterior sections that have yet to be repaired are beginning to melt and collapse due to excessive exposure to heat..."

The Dominion of Man was under siege by a mythical bird. The entire creature behaved like a miniature sun as its constant release of thermal energy and fire-attributed E energy steadily cooked the dreadnought as if it was gigantic sausage!

What frustrated the fleeters the most was that there was very little they could do to fight back against the powerful creature.

While the Brain Trust and the weapons specialists had made a lot of adjustments to the targeting systems of the gun batteries to enable them to land more hits on the circling monster, many of the attacks failed to inflict any actual harm on the creature.

"Our tertiary and secondary gun batteries are completely ineffective against the phoenix beast! Their hit rates are higher, but they lack the power to penetrate or overwhelm the god beast's fire shield."

"What of our primary armaments?!"

"Our primary gun batteries and our largest missiles and torpedoes are able to destabilize the fire shield, but they are unable to break through this protective barrier, especially when the hit rates are low. Our weapons are also unable to concentrate their firepower on a single part of the phoenix due to its swift and inconsistent movements." "Our superweapons?"

"The phoenix is producing too much interference at close range for our Rubicon Spatial Transfer System to work, sir. We can only deploy our antimatter warheads by housing them in our most heat-resistant missiles before launching them. Even then, there is a small risk that the god beast will cause the warheads to prematurely lose containment, resulting in an early detonation."

The blasted monster had already demonstrated the capability to detonate warheads before they had even launched. If the phoenix was able to pull off this trick on the Dominion of Man's antimatter ordnance, then the ship would definitely suffer a heavy or outright crippling blow!

This shouldn't be happening. Though Furia and Caramond were hardly the strongest True Gods to emerge, they should at least be able to protect the Dominion of Man from outside interference.

Unfortunately, the phoenix displayed so much superiority that her domain easily pressed back the combined domains of Furia and Caramond!

It turned out that having a homeground advantage along with access to lots of faith energy was not enough for them to hold their ground against a 'proper' god beast, especially one with such an impeccable pedigree!

The difference in comprehension, mastery, experience and age were simply too great at this time!

Ves could scarcely comprehend why the tribulation storm sent out such an excessively powerful god beast when this wasn't originally supposed to be part of the final round.

If the Subjugation King hadn't intervened, the Dominion of Man should have endured at least 9 more challenges, each of which pressured the dreadnought to a much greater degree than this firebird!

Though Ves felt even more relieved that this was not the case anymore, it hardly made a difference if the phoenix ended up destroying the Dominion of Man anyway!

Ves and many other people tried their best to figure out ways for the ship to take the initiative and gain the upper hand, but none of their ideas sounded viable.

"Furia, the reason why you're losing ground is because you haven't been able to employ any greater runes. Can you do something about this? I suggest you study how the phoenix utilizes its own greater runes if you can. It is clear that the gap between you and the phoenix is the overarching reason why we are doing so poorly at the moment. There are good reasons why the tribulation storm sent out a powerful god beast that is aspected towards the fire element. The storm is challenging you to beat the phoenix and its own game."

Ves became increasingly more convinced of this theory. The Dominion of Man lacked the means to defeat the god beast by herself. None of her weapon systems proved to be effective against the creature so far. This was a rather serious design failure on the part of the fleeters as dreadnoughts were originally designed to fight against god mechs.

Granted, the Dominion of Man was also designed to deploy her Dread Marines in order to capture enemy starships, fortifications and so on, but it was still disappointing for Ves to learn that she lacked the means to fight against an extraordinary threat like the phoenix.

The current predicament proved that the dreadnought still had a long way to go before she could realize the ultimate dream of the fleeters.

For all of the strength demonstrated by the phoenix, Ves was pretty sure that god mechs were even stronger!

The latter were much smaller but also much faster. They struck harder, possessed more resilient defenses and their God Kingdom was the most combat effective domain that Ves had ever witnessed.

While it was true that the Dominion of Man along with her partner True Gods still had a lot of room for growth, this did not avail them in the current situation.

The tribulation storm had come to test the Carmine dreadnought's starting qualifications. Even if the intense hostility of Messier 87 towards human civilization had amped up the difficulty of the challenges, the Dominion of Man should have performed better under the circumstances!

Alas, the inability of the dreadnought to cope against this type of opponent meant that all of the pressure rested on the friendly True Gods.

Caramond had no chance of beating the phoenix by himself. Ves had kept his goals modest when he created the ancestral spirit. He refrained from adding any strange ingredients into the mix in order to preserve the purity of the end product as much as possible. The result was a spiritual product who aligned perfectly with red humanity, but was only able to provide support during combat.

Only Furia could carry this fight. Ves did not wish for this to be the case, but he saw no other alternative.

He could sense Furia's turmoil. Before the start of this wave, the transformed Fire Elemental had grown enormously during the preceding waves.

She had steadily developed greater control over her power. She gained more comprehension over her fire domain and learned how to exercise her fire energy in increasingly more effective ways.

If the final wave of this lightning tribulation presented any other god beast, then Furia would have been able to maintain a strong mentality even as she struggled to overcome the enemy creature's defenses.

Unfortunately, the tribulation storm directly targeted Furia's confidence by spitting out a phoenix that was able to wield the power of fire a lot more proficiently!

As their domains continually collided against each other, Furia was forced to acknowledge the brutal reality that she was still a neophyte of a True God when it came to wielding her flames!

Again and again, the phoenix humiliated the transformed Fire Elemental by demonstrating many of the same tricks, but better!

More conventional True Gods were normally much older and more experienced. They had received enough tempering to maintain a stable mindset and address their problems with a rational mindset.

Furia... was different. Her new personality was not only less than a day old, but the irrational impulses generated by the remnant of her original self constantly urged her to go berserk!

"I... CANNOT TOLERATE... THIS INSULT. IT IS TOO DIFFICULT TO LEARN THE PHOENIX'S TRICKS BY SEEING IT IN ACTION, BUT I HAVE A BETTER IDEA. IF... IF I OPEN MYSELF UP TO THE KNOWLEDGE THAT IS HIDDEN WITHIN THE DARKEST DEPTHS OF MY BEING, I CAN MASTER ALL OF THE GREATER RUNES I NEED TO TEACH THIS OVERGROWN BIRD A LESSON!"

While that certainly sounded like a viable plan, both Ves and Dread Captain Argile grew alarmed!

"No!" Ves shouted! "Don't even think about it! The risks are too great! We cannot allow any further remnant of the original creator of the Fire Scroll to contaminate your current personality. He has already proven that he only needs a single opening in order to take control and engineer the revival of his old self!"

"THERE IS NO OTHER WAY, PROGENITOR."

"I refuse to believe that! You managed to learn how to wield a lot of lesser runes by recalling them somehow. I think you can do the same in terms of your greater runes!"

"DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO START?"

"Yes. Let us start with exploring the greater rune that has always been in your reach. The first step to mastering your greater power is to figure out your personal rune!"

Chapter 5906 My Least Favorite Consultant

Ves inwardly cursed the current predicament.

The tribulation storm had targeted their weaknesses too well.

The phoenix exerted so much pressure onto Furia that the awakened Fire Elemental actually thought about giving the original creator of the Fire Scroll a chance to make a comeback!

As bad as it was to lose the Dominion of Man, Ves had good reasons to believe that the return of such a tyrannical figure may be worse!

He was sure that a lot of leaders who kept track of the ongoing situation might think differently about this subject, but Ves was a strong believer that red humanity could still win without giving up any of its sovereignty!

If Ves had to choose between an underpowered Furia and an absurdly strong tyrant from ancient times, he would always prefer the former over the latter!

This was why Ves strongly urged Furia to not give in to temptation.

"We can still figure this out, Furia. Caramond, make sure you continue to feed her with plenty of faith energy. We need her to remain loyal and friendly towards humanity."

"You do not need to remind me, progenitor. Do not despair, Furia. Mankind has always prevailed against the aliens. Now that you have become more human yourself, you have become a part of our community. Take heart and face your test with courage."

The encouragement from Ves and Caramond seemed to work, at least for the time being.

The heat emanating from Furia had subsided a bit, which indicated that she was still open to alternatives.

Ves feared that this might not last if they failed to figure out a proper solution to the problem.

Time was short. The longer this crisis persisted, the more the Dominion of Man melted apart.

While the potent alloys used to construct her extremely resilient hull plating and internal structure held out remarkably well, the phoenix's powerful and hostile domain caused a lot of hyper technology to fail, thereby weakening the structural integrity of the ship!

Already, plenty of small and vulnerable systems had succumbed to the heat. A lot of gun turrets that had already incurred a certain degree of damage started to malfunction as well. The automatic repair systems of the dreadnought were already working at full capacity to prolong the lifespan of all of these modules, but they were far too sparse to solve all of the problems that piled up with each passing second!

Since Ves possessed enough of a technical understanding of the ship to understand the enormity of all of the damage, he hurriedly tried to figure out how Furia could tap into her hidden potential.

"Have you been able to explore the personal rune that describes the nature of your domain?"

"NO... IT IS NOT RESPONSIVE TO ME. I... I LACK THE CONTEXT TO RESONATE WITH IT AND MAKE USE OF IT. THE RUNE MAY AS WELL NOT EXIST. IT IS NOT GIVING ME ANY CLUES OR IMPRESSIONS ON WHAT IT CAN DO OR WHAT IT IS BASED UPON."

That was bad news. Ves would have thought that Furia would at least be able to glean a few clues. The lack of responsiveness was probably a consequence of generating a divergent personality.

Furia possessed a radically different personality from the original. Her values, principles and even her origin shared little resemblance to the original creator of the Fire Scroll.

This caused her to become severely misaligned with her own domain. The differences were so great that Furia found herself completely unable to tap into the greater powers that belonged to a proper True God!

"I see."

Now that Ves figured out a plausible theory why Furia remained stuck at this juncture, he could figure out a strategy to resolve the problem.

"Information. We don't have enough information. Captain! Are you still in contact with high command?"

"We still maintain contact, but our ability to communicate with others is continuing to deteriorate. The storm clouds already produce a large amount of interference, but the phoenix has exacerbated the problem. The more this monster's domain engulfs our ship, the harder it becomes to maintain outside contact."

"I see. Please get in contact with a high-ranked official who has information on the creator of the Fire Scroll. We need to learn more about him if we want Furia to properly leverage her own domain and power over fire."

The dread captain agreed with this suggestion and immediately conveyed the request.

Since the situation was growing more urgent by the second, there was hardly any delay before a powerful figure established a communication link with the Dominion of Man.

"YOU HAVE TOYED WITH FORCES THAT ARE FAR BEYOND YOUR ABILITY TO CONTROL." A very familiar powerhouse spoke in an accusing tone. "NOW, YOU AND YOUR FLAILING FLEETERS FIND YOURSELVES UNABLE TO EXTRICATE YOURSELVES FROM A CRISIS OF YOUR OWN MAKING. I SHOULD NOT HAVE EXPECTED ANY BETTER FROM A TROUBLEMAKER OF A MECH DESIGNER. I ORIGINALLY EXPECTED YOU TO SUBSIDE FOR AT LEAST A YEAR BEFORE CAUSING ANOTHER INCIDENT, BUT I HAVE UNDERESTIMATED YOUR CAPRICIOUSNESS."

Despite all of the noise, hardly anyone aboard the Dominion of Man failed to recognize this voice.

That was because it was the voice of a god pilot.

While Ves was normally happy to receive the guidance of 7 out of 8 god pilots, his mood instantly sunk when he realized that he just so happened to get into contact with the sole god pilot remaining who he didn't like!

Ves did not exactly end his first encounter with the First Flame on good terms.

The farcical public inquiry had caused the two to stand on opposite sides of a far-reaching political issue.

The way the public inquiry unfolded ultimately forced the First Flame to cease his resistance and retreat into a corner, but that had done nothing to solve the animosity that existed between Ves and the cranky old god pilot!

Though Ves really preferred to talk to any other Tier 1 galactic citizen aside from the First Flame, he had to admit that there was probably no one more suitable to talk to in the Red Ocean.

The First Flame probably knew more about phoenixes than anyone else. Since his god mech was able to transform into one during combat, he should be intimately familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of this mythical species!

The god pilot also possessed a huge amount of understanding of fire. Perhaps only the Lord of Thermodynamics was able to beat the First Flame in a few aspects, but only one of them made a living out of wielding fire in battle.

What made the First Flame even more relevant in this situation was that he was by far the oldest among the god pilots.

Many public sources stated that the First Flame was over 600 years old. This meant that he was born 200 years before the start of the Age of Mechs!

The man grew up during the twilight of the Age of Conquest. Whatever mechs existed during the First Flame's childhood had to be incredibly rudimentary and probably looked completely different from mechs from the current generation.

Yet what Ves prized the most about the First Flame was that he most likely possessed an intimate understanding of the Five Scrolls Compact and the Fire Shrine in particular.

While none of the biographies of the First Flame mentioned anything related to this secret cult, it was easy for Ves to guess that the god pilot had been one of the many soldiers who fought against the Compact and contributed to the nefarious organization's defeat.

The only point of uncertainty that bothered Ves was whether the First Flame used to be a member of the Compact before the Big Two initiated their rebellion.

"Please save your recriminations for later. I am sure you understand that there are greater concerns at stake than rehashing our philosophical disagreements. Right now, there's an awakened and indoctrinated Fire Elemental inside the Spark Reactor of this ship that desperately needs a crash course on how to tap into her greater potential. I have already relayed my request. Do you have answers that you are willing to supply to us, or are you just going to waste our time?"

"YOUR LACK OF RESPECT IS DISTURBING, BUT I AM AWARE OF THE PRESSING SITUATION. I HAPPEN TO POSSESS A LARGE AMOUNT OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE CREATOR OF THE FIRE SCROLL, MUCH OF WHICH IS TOO DANGEROUS FOR ME TO DISSEMINATE."

"Can you give us a name, at least?" Ves asked. "It is getting rather tiresome to refer to him as 'the creator of the Fire Scroll' all of the time."

"NO."

"What? Why?"

"NAMES HAVE POWER. DID NO ONE TEACH YOU THAT? I AM AWARE OF AT LEAST SOME OF THE NAMES AND TITLES THAT ARE TIED TO THE IDENTITY OF THE CREATOR OF THE FIRE SCROLL, BUT MENTIONING THEM IS DANGEROUS. FOR BEINGS OF SUCH POWER AND COMPREHENSION, MERELY SAYING ONE OF THEIR NAMES IS ENOUGH TO DRAW THEIR ATTENTION ON YOU. IT MAY EVEN REVIVE HIM TO THE POINT WHERE HE WILL REGAIN CONTROL OF THAT FIRE ELEMENTAL OF YOURS AND EXPRESS HIS IRE TOWARDS US FOR RUINING HIS GREAT PLAN."

Damn!

Ves had heard the phrase several times before, but he didn't think it was so bad! Who the hell was this creator of the Fire Scroll? Was he a God King, or had he reached a higher level of cultivation?

Whatever the case, Ves made sure to remind himself to never mention the Subjugation King out loud!

"Okay... forget about the name then. What can you tell me about this fellow's domain? It is very obvious that this guy has delved into fire, but I very much doubt that he has dabbled in everything. What is his specialization? How does he prefer to wield his power over flames?"

A short pause ensued before the First Flame was willing to respond.

"THAT... I CAN SHARE WITH YOU, IF ONLY BRIEFLY. THE CREATOR OF THE FIRE SCROLL DOES NOT 'SPECIALIZE' IN AN ASPECT OF FIRE IN THE MANNER YOU ARE ACCUSTOMED TO. THAT MAN... THAT GOD... IS FIRE INCARNATE. HE IS THE CAMPFIRE THAT PROVIDES WARMTH TO HUNTERS. HE IS THE ENERGY THAT ALLOWS FACTORIES TO WORK THEIR METAL. HE IS THE HEAT THAT ENABLE LASER BEAMS TO MELT OR VAPORIZE THEIR TARGETS."

"Err... okay. That is... a lot. That doesn't really help us out that much. Does he have any favorites? What aspect of fire symbolizes him the most?"

"THE STAR. THE CREATOR OF THE FIRE SCROLL IS KNOWN TO BE VERSATILE, BUT THE MOST CONSTANT SYMBOL THAT REPRESENTS HIS POWER IS THE STAR. IT IS TOLD THAT HE IS ABLE TO INCARNATE INTO A BLAZING STAR THAT CAN LIGHT UP AN ENTIRE STAR SYSTEM AND PROVIDE LIGHT AND ENERGY NEARBY SATELLITES. HE CAN DO MUCH MORE THAN THAT IF HE CEASES TO HOLD BACK HIS POWER."

That... was impressive! Ves had already figured that the creator of the Fire Scroll was a powerhouse that surpassed the strength of god pilots, but this was incredible!

"Is his domain tied to a star?"

"I DARE NOT SAY. MY JUDGMENT IS THAT HE PRACTICES ONE OR MORE CULTIVATION METHODS THAT ARE COMPLEX AND CONVOLUTED BEYOND YOUR IMAGINATION. IT IS HIGHLY LIKELY THAT HIS DOMAIN, BACK WHEN HE WAS A TRUE GOD, WAS ALREADY ELABORATE AND PRECISELY CONSTRUCTED TO A DEGREE THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO REPLICATE. FIXATING ON THE MEANING OF A STAR ALONE IS A MISTAKE. IT IS NO DIFFERENT FROM JUDGING A MECH BY EXAMINING ITS POWER REACTOR ALONE."

Ves understood the First Flame's analogy. He was inclined to agree with this description as he already felt that the Fire Elemental's domain was in no way simple.

"Be that as it may, will Furia be able to strengthen her command over her own domain if she starts to concentrate on stars?"

"...THAT REMAINS TO BE SEEN. WE ARE IN UNCHARTED TERRITORY."

Chapter 5907 Terrible Legacy

The First Flame was the most powerful god pilot in the Red Ocean.

He was most likely the most powerful True God in the dwarf galaxy period.

Yet when this old and immensely strong soldier spoke about the creator of the Fire Scroll, he lost all of his arrogance and assumed an attitude that was completely unlike that of a confident god pilot.

Ves found it disconcerting to hear the First Flame speak as if he was genuinely afraid of inviting punishment from an ancient being that should have been dead already. The way he cautiously shared bits and pieces of information made it seem as if saying the wrong word would cause him to suffer instant punishment!

Surprisingly enough, Ves was inclined to believe that all of this caution was justified. This was not because he fully brought into the First Flame's narrative. He merely deduced that a cultivator who was powerful enough to produce an artifact of supreme power as the Fire Scroll was probably a lot stronger!

Whether the creator of the Fire Scroll was powerful enough to snuff out every star in a region remained unclear.

Ves was pretty sure that the First Flame had not witnessed such acts himself. He lived in the wrong era for that to be possible.

It was likely that the god pilot was merely retelling a lot of old tales and legends, much of which originated from the Fire Shrine.

When the Big Two attacked the Great Temple, they managed to come away with the Fire Scroll in possession. Ves already received confirmation that the Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance was still in possession of this Sacred Scroll after he previously inquired about the origin of the Fire Elemental.

If the mechers and the fleeters managed to steal the Fire Scroll, they likely plundered everything else that was still intact over at the Fire Shrine. They probably made off with a huge amount of written records as well as prisoners who possessed a lot of secrets in their minds.

The problem was accessing all of that juicy information. The Big Two most certainly kept all of this dangerous information in their most restricted archives. The amount of people who enjoyed the right to access the secret records must be very low.

This meant that the First Flame was probably the only authoritative source on the creator of the Fire Scroll. Every piece of information shared by this old and stodgy geezer had already been tainted by his many biases. It was difficult for Ves to interpret the actual truth when the god pilot held strong opinions about the subject!

"THE CREATOR OF THE FIRE SCROLL IS ARROGANT BEYOND ALL MEASURE. HE IS NOT AT FAULT FOR THIS AS HE TRULY REACHED A STATE OF CULTIVATION WHERE NONE BUT HIS PEERS COULD HOLD HIM BACK. EVEN THEN, HE IS KNOWN AS THE STRONGEST AND MOST POWER-HUNGRY AMONG THE 5 CREATORS. HIS RAGE CAN EVAPORATE THE OCEANS OF ENTIRE PLANETS. HE CAN BURN ANY TRUE GOD TO DEATH WHO DARES TO INSULT HIM BY NAME."

While all of this was interesting to know, Ves seriously doubted whether any of it was relevant!

"If... if the creator of the Fire Scroll used to be so powerful, then why did he die like every other powerful cultivator when the Milky Way broke? Why didn't he leverage his power to prevent this calamity from happening or migrate to another galaxy like Messier 87?"

"YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND. YOU ARE AN IGNORANT CHILD WHO SPEAKS FAR TOO LIGHTLY OF GRAVE EVENTS THAT HAS WIPED OUT THE PRECURSOR TO MODERN HUMANITY AND RESHAPED THE MILKY WAY GALAXY INTO A FORM THAT IS UNRECOGNIZABLE TO THE PRIMORDIAL HUMANS WHO LIVED IN ANCIENT TIMES. IF YOU WISH TO UNDERSTAND THE CREATOR OF THE FIRE SCROLL BETTER, THEN KNOW THAT HE IS NOT A VICTIM OF THIS TERRIBLE CALAMITY. IT IS MORE APT TO DESCRIBE HIM AS THE ARCHITECT BEHIND THE MILKY WAY'S FALL."

What?!

Ves knew that the Milky Way used to resemble Messier 87 a lot more. Then a disaster happened that somehow caused the power of heaven to disappear, thereby causing everything that could only exist in a high-energy environment to starve and break apart.

While Ves always knew that this short description only scratched the surface of the incredible history of ancient times, yet to hear that the creator of the Fire Scroll had actually played a major role in the breaking of the Milky Way was a surprise!

"What happened?!"

"CULTIVATORS." The First Flame spoke that word with ire. "EACH OF THE CREATORS OF THE SACRED SCROLLS ARE RUTHLESS IN THEIR PURSUIT OF ETERNITY. THE GALAXY THAT SPAWNED THEM HAS GENEROUSLY GIVEN THEM THE RESOURCES THEY NEED TO ASCEND TO A HEIGHT THAT ALLOWS THEM TO TOWER OVER ALL OTHER BEINGS. YET THAT IS NOT ENOUGH TO SATISFY THEIR GREED FOR POWER. THEY FEAR DEATH SO MUCH THAT THEY HAVE DONE THE UNTHINKABLE. THEY CONSPIRED TOGETHER TO DISREGARDED THE WELLBEING OF EVERYONE ELSE BY ATTEMPTING TO PLUNDER THE SOURCE THAT SUSTAINED THE MILKY WAY."

Ves widened his eyes!

This was a massive revelation, one that not only unveiled a crucial gap in the history of ancient times, but also provided crucial context on all 5 creators of the Sacred Scrolls!

Ves and Furia both developed a better understanding of the personality and the ambitions of the creator of the Fire Scroll.

"Does any of this story resonate with you, Furia?" Ves asked in the hopes of obtaining confirmation.

As much as the First Flame's retelling made sense, Ves had to remind himself that there was no guarantee that the source was accurate. Perhaps a lot of historians at the time wrote a lot of embellishments or outright distortions of the truth!

Perhaps the creators of the Sacred Scroll fought to save the prosperous ecosystem of the Milky Way, but ended up on the losing side of a battle, thereby allowing the victors to malign their enemies.

The only way to obtain a real indication of whether any of this was accurate was to go right to the source!

Ves could feel that Furia's domain had become unsettled. Hearing that her 'other' progenitor' used to be one of the biggest war criminals that the Milky Way ever produced throughout its history was quite an unpleasant surprise!

No wonder the First Flame sounded so cautious about this ancient figure! This was a cultivator who had demonstrated so much selfishness that he was willing to doom everyone who lived in an entire galaxy just to advance his own cultivation!

"THE STORIES... ARE STIRRING UP NEW IMPRESSIONS." Furia responded. "THEY ARE... UNCOMFORTABLE... BUT THEY RING TRUE TO ME. THE FIRST FLAME IS NOT EXAGGERATING. THE CREATOR OF THE FIRE SCROLL IS TRULY WILLING AND ABLE TO DRAIN THE ENERGY OF AN ENTIRE GALAXY TO PROMOTE HIS EVOLUTION. HE HAS NO REGARD FOR HOW OTHERS WILL SUFFER FROM THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS ACTIONS. HE DOES NOT RESPECT THE WEAK, NOR ACKNOWLEDGE THAT FELLOW HUMANS BELONG TO THE SAME SPECIES AS HIM. HE IS... ANTITHETICAL TO EVERYTHING MODERN HUMANITY STANDS FOR. I AM... HIS WORST POSSIBLE INCARNATION."

It sounded as if Furia was on the verge of suffering an identity crisis! Ves could not allow Furia to question her identity any further!

"All of that is in the past." Ves hastily spoke up. "We have moved on from those ancient times. The current era is no longer the era of the creators of the Sacred Scrolls. If this fellow was truly responsible for reshaping the Milky Way for the worse, then he truly deserved to lose much of his power and perish. The humans of our generation have no desire to see him restored. The Five Scrolls Compact during the Age of Conquest may have gotten close to reviving him, but in the end the people have chosen to leave behind the past and pursue their own future."

Furia's domain grew a little more stable after hearing that. "YOU ARE... CORRECT. HIS SHADOW LOOMS LARGE OVER ME, BUT THAT IS NO REASON TO ENABLE HIS RETURN. HE IS TOO GREAT OF A THREAT TO ALL OF US. I HAVE FOUND THE PURPOSE OF MY EXISTENCE NOW. LEARNING ABOUT THE LEGACY THAT I HAVE 'INHERITED' HAS MADE ME UNDERSTAND MY MISSION."

She sounded increasingly more certain as she said this. Her domain also became more solid again.

At the very least, she was starting to cede less ground against the phoenix! This was valuable progress!

"Would you like to share, Furia?" Ves asked in an encouraging tone.

"MY PURPOSE... MY PURPOSE IS TO MASTER HIS POWER, BUT NOT HIS AMBITION. INSTEAD... MY MISSION IS TO ATONE FOR HIS MANY CRIMES AND SEEK ABSOLUTION IN HIS STEAD. HE WOULD NEVER BE ABLE TO DO THIS, WHICH MAKES IT ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT FOR ME TO UTILIZE WHAT LITTLE MIGHT HE POSSESSES FOR THE GOOD OF THE HUMANS UNDER MY CHARGE!"

Although Furia hadn't really come much closer to understanding her personal rune, she had gained so much certainty and purpose that she became more assured in her own existence!

This seemed to do wonders in the ongoing struggle. Not only was she beginning to muster up a better defense against the phoenix, she also regained her sense of confidence!

Ves was quite impressed by all of the changes. He did not think it was coincidence that the Fire Flame's ramblings produced such a positive result.

It was a mistake to characterize the First Flame as a stubborn old fool that was way too inflexible to adapt to the changing times.

"While I am glad that you have strengthened your domain, the gap in strength still remains. Have you come any closer to comprehending your personal rune?"

"...PERHAPS. I HAVE FINALLY BEGUN TO RESONATE WITH IT, BUT IT IS STILL CLOSED TO ME. THE CREATOR TRULY SEES HIMSELF AS A STAR THAT SHINES ACROSS THE ENTIRE GALAXY. YET THERE IS MORE TO HIS DOMAIN THAN THAT. I AM MISSING TOO MANY PIECES OF THE PUZZLE."

"Do you have any guesses on how Furia can complete the picture, Your Holiness?"

"I HAVE SAID ON THIS SUBJECT." The powerful god pilot said. "I DO NOT AGREE WITH YOUR STRATEGY. FURIA'S DOMAIN MAY NOT FIT HER WELL AT THE MOMENT, BUT SHE IS STILL A FIRE ELEMENTAL. THERE IS GREAT MEANING IN THAT. HER COMMAND OVER FIRE SHOULD ALREADY ENABLE HER TO COMMAND THE GREATER RUNES THAT YOU OBSESS OVER. MUCH LIKE THE PHOENIX, SHE DOES NOT NEED TO PUT ANY DELIBERATE EFFORT TO CONSTRUCT THESE RUNES. THE CREATOR OF THE FIRE SCROLL HAS ALREADY SUPPLIED HER WITH THE RIGHT ABILITIES. ALL SHE NEEDS TO DO IS TO LEVERAGE HER WILL TO DOMINATE THE POWER OF FIRE, AND EVERYTHING WILL AUTOMATICALLY FULFILL SUIT."

Though Ves did not want to agree with the god pilot, he knew far more about this kind of stuff than himself.

Ves was just a Senior Mech Designer while the First Flame was the most powerful god pilot of red humanity. The latter definitely understood True Gods a lot better than almost everyone else!

Certainly, his guidance already brought Furia on the right track. All she needed to do was push herself further and become more proactive in the use of fire energy.

She was already beginning to do that with renewed enthusiasm. She no longer paid the gap in strength in mind and tried her best to strengthen her workings as much as possible.

Though she was only able to manipulate lesser runes for the time being, the difference was that she pushed a lot harder to break the boundaries and seek greater strength.

It was as if she was trying to strengthen her need so much that she would eventually be able to 'recall' one of the creator's memories on how to perform a more powerful technique!

It was as good of a strategy as any, though Furia had yet to produce any positive results.

Ves needed to decide whether he should put his faith into Furia's current approach.

Chapter 5908 Finding Humanity

The key to winning the final challenge was to help Furia come to grips with her inherited power.

The Dominion of Man by herself was not yet able to cope with a mythical god beast like the phoenix.

Her vaunted weapon systems that could easily demolish any alien battleship she came across were ultimately outclassed in this fight.

The phoenix utilized its blazing speed and agility to frustrate the tracking of many slow-moving primary gun turrets, and relied on its True God-level fire shield to block the errant shots that managed to land true.

To their credit, the crew of the dreadnought did not settle for the status quo and tried their best to improve the results.

They tweaked and modified their targeting and tracking parameters so that the weapons of the dreadnought could better cope with a circling opponent.

They analyzed the phoenix's behavioral patterns. With the huge amount of help provided by the Brain Trust, the science officers managed to construct a detailed mathematical model that significantly increased the hit rates of every weapon system.

The ship's materializers worked overtime to fabricate spare parts as well as missiles in order to sustain the vessel for a longer time. Crew members worked above and beyond to repair broken systems and improvise expedient solutions in order to save time.

Yet despite all of their efforts, the Dominion of Man was dying. Too many surface modules had melted from the heat. If not for the fact that the dreadnought's gun turrets were designed and built to resist a lot of damage, many more of them would have crumbled already.

For the time being, the dreadnought used up virtually all of her reserves of coolants and other heat-mitigating solutions to preserve the operation of her most powerful cannons, but time was increasingly running out. If the ship did not start with repelling the phoenix's overwhelming domain, her ability to strike back at the powerful god beast would soon be crippled.

This was unacceptable!

This was why everyone was banking on Furia. The transformed Fire Elemental was the only asset of the Dominion of Man who possessed the raw power to contend against the phoenix.

What frustrated Ves was that his plan had already gone off-track.

Instead of helping Furia master the personal rune that was left behind by the creator of the Fire Scroll, First Flame instead rambled about all kinds of topics related to the mythical creator.

"FIRE IS ONE OF THE MOST VOLATILE ELEMENTS IN EXISTENCE. THOSE WHO STUDIED IT AND MASTERED IT UNDERSTAND THAT THEY MUST CONSTANTLY ALIGN WITH ITS TEMPERAMENTAL NATURE IN ORDER TO MAKE FURTHER PROGRESS. YET THAT IS EXACTLY WHERE THE DANGER LIES. TOO MANY FIRES WILL ONLY RESULT IN UNBRIDLED DESTRUCTION. THOSE LOST IN THE FLAMES LOSE ALL SENSE OF RESPECT FOR LIFE. THEY ONLY CONSIDER OTHERS AS TINDER THAT SHOULD BE LIT AFLAME IN ORDER TO FEED THEIR OWN FIRE. THE CREATOR OF THE FIRE SCROLL IS THE ARCHETYPICAL EXAMPLE OF A CULTIVATOR WHO BECAME A SLAVE OF HIS OWN DESIRES."

The tales that described the cruelty, the selfishness and the madness of the creator of the Fire Scroll had an outsized impact on Furia.

A part of her despaired that she was 'descended' from such a deplorable god.

Another part of her rebelled against the path of her predecessor!

It was the latter part that started to become a more prominent part of her being!

While Furia began to find her purpose and strengthened her ego, her domain not only started to grow stronger, but also started to gain a different accent!

This was an interesting development to Ves. He never thought that it would be that easy for True Gods to change their domains.

Then again, nothing about Furia was conventional. She was a newborn occupying the form of another True God. She was no different from a squatter who just happened to break into an expensive mansion and had little idea how to manage it properly.

The solution that Ves originally proposed was for Furia to learn how the previous owner arranged and utilized the mansion. The goal was for her to emulate the creator of the Fire Scroll as much as possible with the idea that it would be a lot faster and easier for her to recall the mythical figure's command over fire.

What happened instead was that the First Flame encouraged Furia to redecorate and repurpose the mansion. Its foundation and structure were immutable and could not be changed, but the newborn incarnation could still change the furniture and find new ways to use existing facilities.

Perhaps that was why Furia's domain started to undergo modest changes. It still retained much of the same feel, but the change in accent caused it to become a little narrower in scope. "AS A BEING OF FIRE, YOU SHOULD ALREADY BE AWARE OF THE IMPULSES GENERATED BY YOUR OWN NATURE. THE HOTTER YOU BURN, THE GREATER THE RISK OF LOSING CONTROL. YET MANY STILL DO SO BECAUSE THE FANNING THE FLAMES IS TOO MUCH FOR THEM TO RESIST. WILL YOU DO THE SAME, FURIA? WILL YOUR DESIRE TO OVERPOWER THE PHOENIX TORMENTING YOUR SHIP DRIVE YOU TO THROW ALL CAUTION TO THE WIND AND PURSUE POWER AT ANY COST?"

The way the First Flame framed his argument sounded incredibly manipulative to Ves. It was very clear now that the old god pilot wanted to steer Furia's development in a direction of his own choosing.

Ves should have known that the crotchety old god pilot pursued his own agenda.

Though the First Flame's advice was still helpful enough, Furia would clearly begin to diverge from the creator of the Fire Scroll if she continued to go down this direction.

Ves had no idea whether that was even possible. It would be as if a companion spirit took over its principal and started to live a completely different life!

Would this cause Furia's domain to bend and stretch to the point where it started to change on a more permanent basis?

Or would Furia push too far and break herself into pieces due to diverging too much from her original personality?

All of this touched upon matters that were far beyond his understanding! Ves was not yet qualified to mess around with True Gods, and his understanding of domains was still too superficial.

Ves was losing control over the situation. The outside consultant had taken over the initiative and continued his ploy to single-handedly indoctrinate Furia.

The fact that the First Flame's plan seemed to be working was the main reason why Ves and Dread Captain Argile did not insist on closing the communication channel.

Even so, Ves did not feel comfortable with every proposal from the First Flame.

"YOU ARE CHANGING FOR THE BETTER, FURIA. EMBRACE YOUR FIRE, BUT NOT TOO MUCH. ONE OF THE STRENGTHS OF HUMANS IS THAT THEY UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF MODERATION. AS LONG AS YOU DO YOUR BEST TO CONTROL YOUR OWN FLAMES AND RESIST THE URGE TO KEEP FANNING THEM, YOU WILL ALWAYS BE A BETTER GOD THAN THE CREATOR OF THE FIRE SCROLL. DO YOU HAVE THE STRENGTH TO USE YOUR FIRE WITH RESTRAIN? DO YOU HAVE THE CONVICTION TO EMPLOY YOUR FIRE TO THE BENEFIT OF RED HUMANITY RATHER THAN YOURSELF? MAKE YOUR DECISION, FURIA."

Something about the First Flame's words stirred Furia's burning heart. The transformed Fire Elemental began to produce more heat, but did her best to restrain her output lest she damage the ship.

"I... HAVE MADE MY DECISION. EARLIER, I EMBRACED MY NEW CALLING BY DOING THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT MY ORIGINAL HAS DONE SO LONG AGO. NOW, I HAVE DECIDED TO FORGO THE OBSESSIVE PURSUIT OF PERSONAL POWER AND DO MY BEST TO ARM RED HUMANITY WITH THE FIRE THEY NEED TO ENACT RETRIBUTION UPON THEIR ALIEN FOES!"

Her domain strengthened by another notch! Her improvement was so significant this time that the phoenix was no longer able to press its hostile domain deeper into the Dominion of Man!

The god beast clearly did not take a liking to that and intensified its attempt to engulf the entire dreadnought into its sea of flames!

Supported by Caramond and the hopes of all of the crew, Furia shouldered the growing pressure with increasing fervor. The transformed Fire Elemental no longer saw herself as a shadow of her mythical origin.

She had begun to define her own identity, one that began to make her resonate with the faith of the human race on an independent basis!

Ves widened his eyes when he saw how easily Furia became a deity cultivator.

It appeared that there was a reason why True Gods were called this way.

They all possessed an inherent ability to tap into faith energy. There was no need for them to practice a specific cultivation method. Intent and conviction were enough for them to leverage the power of faith!

Unlike Caramond who tapped into the power of human supremacy, Furia resonated with humanity's anger towards the aliens.

There were many human soldiers who had taken up arms against the aliens. They fought against the encroaching enemy raiding fleets on a regular basis and lost many comrades in the process.

For each soldier lost and for each colony that got razed, the surviving humans became increasingly angrier towards the aliens.

Many soldiers had become a vessel of their own fury and indignation towards the aliens that sought to make red humanity extinct.

Each of them may have vastly different reasons to feel so angry towards their foes, but their hatred towards the invading aliens united them together!

Now, Furia had begun to tap into those powerful flames. The injection of so much faith energy not only bolstered her connection to red humanity, but also began to alter her even further!

Her domain reflected all of these changes. The faith of many strong and courageous soldiers fueled her fire to the point where Furia struggled to contain her growing fury towards the aliens!

Many fleters who continued to crew their stations located around the Spark Reactor began to feel uncomfortably hot!

Despite the efforts of their suits to keep their bodies at a tolerable temperature, the rising power and heat emanating from Furia's changing domain was beginning to make their lives a lot more difficult!

Furia clearly sensed how her rising power was starting to make it unbearable for people to remain in proximity to her, so she tried her best to clamp down on her rising heat.

What was the point of becoming more powerful when she ended up burning more humans in the process?

"MY FIRE... SHALL NEVER POSE A THREAT TO LOYAL HUMANS!"

After she made this powerful declaration, her domain shifted even further! It gained another accent that significantly altered its expression!

Many people relaxed. The engineers assigned to monitor and maintain the Spark Reactor experienced the greatest relief. Their bodies had been drenched in sweat despite the fact that they wore the most heat-resistant suits.

As the accents affecting Furia's domain continued to strengthen their influence, the transformed Fire Elemental became increasingly more in sync with the Dominion of Man.

The Bloodfire Pact grew stronger.

The fire energies generated by Furia propagated faster through the hull.

The various systems and modules of the Dominion of Man were able to leverage a greater concentration of Furia's fire energy without exceeding their safety limitations!

In the end, Furia had chosen to place her confidence in the Dominion of Man as opposed to herself.

Ves did not know whether she had made the right decision, but now that it had come to this point, he had no choice but to respect her decision.

"Captain! Furia has chosen to give us the power to resist the phoenix. She won't be able to play a leading role in resisting this god beast. It will be up to your ship to do the heavy lifting. Are you ready to initiate a counter-attack against this obnoxious firebird?"

Dread Captain Argile smiled beneath his helmet.

"We have been waiting for this. If we are to pass this final test, we shall do so as a team!"

Chapter 5909 Commanding Fire

Many people who possessed the privilege of watching the live feed of the Dominion of Man started to grow concerned at how this final test unfolded.

Regardless of whether they understood the mechanisms of a lightning tribulation, they could see from the progression of the battle that the dreadnought was not doing so well.

Every viewer thought that the powerful warship would be able to repel the phoenix and blast it apart.

Not even the members of the mech community wanted the Dominion of Man to succumb to this challenge!

As all of these people placed their expectations on the ship that had managed to overcome 71 consecutive waves, each of them became pleasantly surprised when the dreadnought finally started to display greater power!

The entire warship had been bathing in the phoenix's relentless heat for far too long.

Occasionally, the phoenix even sprayed a spurt of flame from its beak, causing the massive warship's hull to melt and her external modules to become unusable.

The crackle of tarnished lightning accompanied each of these breath attacks, causing the defenses of the warship to crumble at a faster rate.

Already, entire sections of the ship had already been condemned due to suffering too much damage!

If not for the fact that the hull of the warship was just so damn big, the total amount of damage she accumulated so far would have disabled any smaller warship by this time!

This was why the Dominion of Man's resurgence came at the right time. The dreadnought began to get engulfed in a different kind of fire, one that instinctively felt a lot tamer and more controlled.

Illusionary orange flames sprung to life and covered the exterior of the massive hull.

Far from burning or melting all of the alloys they came into contact with, the friendly flames actually dispersed a lot of excess heat and protected the damaged hull against additional fire attacks!

The phoenix began to express indignation when it noticed that its domain was no longer able to press inside the dreadnought.

So long as Furia continued to utilize her domain to protect and augment the warship under her charge, she would never allow a hostile alien god to harm the vessel and her crew!

As Furia continued to alter the expression of her domain, her newfound purpose and conviction continued to guide her into applying her fire energy in increasingly more effective ways.

However, the Dominion of Man only managed to hold her ground against the phoenix for the time being.

This was far from being able to defeat the firebird!

The ship had lost many gun batteries during the previous minutes. Many powerful and expensive primary cannons had succumbed from the heat and flames.

While the crew were risking their lives to conduct whatever repairs they could to restore the more salvageable weapon systems, it was impossible for the dreadnought to fire as many shots as before.

"Our primary gun batteries are hitting the phoenix at an increasing rate! The damage inflicted by our heaviest cannons are also beginning to destabilize its fire shield increasingly more."

"Is our remaining firepower enough to wear down the defenses of the phoenix?"

"Regretfully, we have lost too many primary and secondary gun batteries. Our diminished salvos and the evasive maneuvers of the phoenix are preventing us from inflicting real harm."

Furia's growth may have allowed the Dominion of Man to shore up her defenses, but it was far from allowing the dreadnought to counter attack!

It was still frustrating for the fleeters to allow this powerful firebird to circle around their ship with impunity!

The creature let loose another blast of fire at the damaged hull. The strengthened protective barrier managed to block most of the damage, but the concentration of power was still too much for Furia. The hull gained another melted hole!

"Sir! The phoenix is preparing to launch another fire breath attack!"

"So soon?! It appears the phoenix is starting to take this fight more seriously."

Whether it was due to pride or complacency, the phoenix initially sought to defeat the Dominion of Man by burning her with its domain.

Now that Furia mustered up enough resistance to prevent the hostile domain from encroaching on the ship, the firebird evidently decided to complete its goal by employing more direct attacks!

The wings of the phoenix started to blaze in reddish flames. Its flames grew hotter and its speed started to pick up. The unexpected boost in speed caused many gun turrets to miss their shots as they failed to anticipate this change in pattern.

The phoenix did not mindlessly radiate its blazing heat, but started to channel much of its excess power into a steady barrage of fire breath attacks!

The escalating offensive exerted a lot of pressure on Furia. She found herself losing ground again as she was unable to protect the hull against further damage.

It was a disappointing turn of events. Just when she started to feel more confident and optimistic in her changes, the phoenix started to display even greater strength!

While Ves was trying to figure out a way to boost the firepower of the Dominion of Man even further, the First Flame just so happened to provide helpful guidance.

"YOU ARE DOING BETTER, FURIA, BUT YOU ARE NOT TAKING FULL ADVANTAGE OF YOUR POWER AS A GOD. AS A FIRE ELEMENTAL, YOU ARE MORE THAN A SINGLE FLAME. YOU ARE A SOVEREIGN OF FLAMES. FROM THE MOMENT YOU WERE BORN, YOU ALREADY INHERITED ONE OF THE MOST TALENTS IMAGINABLE. IT SHOULD NOT BE DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO BESEECH AND COMMAND THE FIRE OF THE HEAVENS."

That was right! Ves suddenly recalled that one of the reasons why qi cultivators were so immensely powerful was because they were able to borrow the power of heaven to amplify all of their techniques!

While Furia had already been doing that on a subconscious level, she was clearly able to do more if she concentrated on this aspect.

However, it was not so easy for Furia to take control over a vast amount of ambient E energy. There was one powerful obstruction that prevented her from taking control over all of the fire energy in the environment.

The phoenix had been hijacking the vast majority of fire energy flowing through the surrounding space!

There were many myths that described phoenixes as the darlings of the fire element. Their innate talent and affinity towards this attribute were so high that it was hard to defeat them at their home game.

Yet this was exactly what Furia needed to do in order to gather enough power to finally gain the upper hand against this awful firebird!

Ves inwardly groaned when he realized this. The tribulation storm's demands towards the Dominion of Man were too excessive!

It was almost impossible for a True God to surpass a phoenix in this aspect!

If not for the fact that the Fire Elemental was originally derived from one of the strongest fire cultivators of the Milky Way, Ves would have thought that the tribulation storm had set an impossible goal!

Yet because Furia inherited such excellent conditions, she still had a chance of matching and possibly surpassing the phoenix in this game. She just needed to improve fast enough to save the Dominion of Man!

"DO YOU FEEL IT, FURIA? DO YOU FEEL HOW PHOENIX IS TAKING ENERGY THAT SHOULD RIGHTFULLY BE YOURS? DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. EXPAND YOUR DOMAIN AND INCREASE YOUR AGGRESSION. STAYING ON THE DEFENSIVE WILL ONLY CAUSE YOU TO CEDE YOUR GROUND. PUSH AGAINST THE PHOENIX'S DOMAIN AND TRY YOUR BEST TO TAKE OVER THE SURROUNDING FIRES."

"HOW?" Furia inquired as she struggled to implement what the god pilot had taught. "I CAN PUSH BACK THE PHOENIX'S DOMAIN, BUT THE POWER OF HEAVEN STILL PREFERS TO REMAIN UNDER THE GOD BEAST'S CONTROL. IT IS RESISTING MY EFFORTS TO TAKE CONTROL OVER IT. THE MORE AGGRESSIVE I BEHAVE, THE MORE IT REJECTS MY DOMAIN."

"THAT IS NOT A SURPRISE. YOU ARE NOT A GOD PILOT. YOU CANNOT BEND REALITY TO YOUR WILL TO THE SAME EXTENT AS I CAN. YOU NEED TO PERSUADE THE POWER OF HEAVEN TO WORK WITH YOU. THERE ARE MANY POSSIBLE PHILOSOPHIES AND CULTIVATION METHODS THAT CAN ALLOW YOU TO COMMAND THE FLAMES. THERE ARE NUMEROUS APPROACHES THAT ARE SUITABLE FOR A FIRE ELEMENTAL, BUT IT IS NOT MY PLACE TO TELL YOU WHICH ONE YOU SHOULD EMPLOY. ONLY YOU CAN MAKE THIS DECISION. CHOOSE A STRATEGY THAT ALIGNS WITH YOUR TALENT AND YOUR NATURE."

What kind of an approach fit Furia the best?

It was difficult for the transformed Fire Elemental to figure out the answer. She was too new at this. She may have learned a lot of lessons, but the lack of accumulation prevented her from making the necessary connections.

Once she adjusted her attitude and started to consider herself as an imperious star who commanded all of the fire and heat spread across an entire star system, a very deep part of her original self began to rouse and enter the forefront!

Ves finally found an opportunity to provide his own guidance.

"While I admire your willingness to diverge from the path of your original creator, remember that your affinity and talent comes from him." He said. "This means that it should be easier for you with his approach to commanding the power of heaven. Remember how he sees himself. One of his most prominent symbols is the star."

Those words seemed to resonate with Furia.

Once she adjusted her attitude and started to consider herself as an imperious star who commanded all of the fire and heat spread across an entire star system, a very deep part of her original self began to rouse and enter the forefront!

Light and heat began to shine from the Dominion of Man in increasing intensity as Furia began to incarnate into a metaphorical star!

The phoenix flew back in surprise as Furia's domain suddenly began to expand and harmonize with the surrounding environment!

Though the god beast was still able to control the fire energy in its immediate environment, Furia began to contest it for control!

"The damage output of our remaining active gun batteries is rising! Our weapons are leveraging much more fire energy than before!"

"The protective barrier generated by Furia has completely blocked the phoenix's fire breath! The attack inflicted no significant damage as far as we can tell."

"Our thrusters are providing much greater thrust than before! We are able to gain greater advantages in our maneuvers."

The way that Furia harmonized with the Dominion of Man and the surrounding environment reminded Ves a lot about the teamwork between high-ranking mech pilots and high-ranking mechs. Just as how expert pilots were able to boost the performance of their expert mechs by resonating with them, Furia was harmonizing with all of the systems and components of the ship, causing them to reach performance levels that should normally be impossible!

Though the methods were not the same, there were enough parallels that it seemed clear that Furia was trying to develop a similar relationship with the dreadnought.

Ves had a feeling that this may have been the main goal of the Fire Flame.

The god pilot feared rogue cultivators so much that he had tried his best to encourage Furia to increase her dependence on the Dominion of Man.

The more they grew inseparable to teach others, the lower the chance that Furia decided to set off on her own in the future!

It was a good strategy. While Furia might possess the qualifications to fight against the phoenix in person, it was much better for the transformed Fire Elemental to fulfill her present purpose and join forces with the dreadnought!

Together, Furia and the Dominion of Man began to gain increasingly more ground. Not only were they growing stronger, but the phoenix also started to lose a lot of strength due to its inability to command as much ambient E energy as before!

The contest of fire started to tilt in favor of the humans. Everyone grew more confident as they saw that the most powerful shots of the Dominion of Man began to break apart the annoying fire shield that kept the phoenix safe all the time.

"Keep at it, men! We are on track to win this final fight!"

The end of the tribulation event was in sight!

Chapter 5910 Sketchy Transaction

As Furia continued to grow in strength, the phoenix suffered increasing setbacks.

Now that the transformed Fire Elemental had become a much more worthy contender for control over the power of heaven, the phoenix found itself in the rare situation where it was unable to monopolize all of the fire energy in the environment.

Such an occurrence had almost never happened in the lifetime of the original god beast that the lightning manifestation was based upon!

Phoenixes were truly the darlings of fire. Even in a galaxy as large, dense and prosperous of Messier 87, it was unlikely to encounter any cultivator who possessed a greater connection to the power of fire.

However, it just so happened that a so-called Fire Elemental actually possessed the ability to surpass a phoenix in this aspect!

Ves actually grew impressed at how quickly Furia was able to delve one of the greater abilities of the creator of the Fire Scroll and turn the tables against the god beast with such speed.

The talent of one of the cultivators who broke the Milky Way was much scarier than he thought!

As Furia continued to dominate the fight by blazing like a star, Ves took advantage of the situation to study how she expressed her abilities.

Though Furia shone so brightly and generated so much heat that it was dangerous to look too closely in her direction, Blinky was still able to perceive a lot of clues.

Ves analyzed the data and began to make an important discovery.

Furia likely managed to tap into her original creator's personal rune.

This explained why her strength and her command over fire had skyrocketed to such an extent. Even a rudimentary usage of this powerful rune was enough to properly activate her domain and cause it to live up to the reputation of a True God!

By combining her human-derived ability to harmonize with the Dominion of Man and augment all of her hyper technology far beyond its usual limitations, Furia finally managed to elevate the dreadnought to the point where the extravagantly expensive vessel finally lived up to her original promise!

As the fleeters and the observers became awed at how extensively the tables had turned, they began to entertain a notion that they previously considered heretical.

"Do you think... our ship can fight against a god mech now?"

"If not today, then maybe in a year. The Dominion requires urgent repairs and upgrades before she is even close to challenging a god mech."

"It's possible, right?"

"I think so. It's no longer as hopeless as before."

Even the most optimistic fleeters previously thought that it would take decades for the Dominion of Man to grow to the point where she could become the equal to the weakest god mech.

No more. Even if the phoenix was not as threatening as a god mech, the creature still came a lot closer!

So long as the Dominion of Man successfully vanquished the firebird, she would definitely be able to repel a god mech sooner rather than later!

As the crew held onto this collective hope, they worked harder to ensure that their mighty vessel did not suffer a severe malfunction and falter just as she was on the verge of overcoming this final challenge.

"GOOD WORK, FURIA. I AM PROUD OF YOU." The First Flame spoke in a much more charitable tone than Ves was accustomed to. "NEVER FORGET WHAT YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU ARE WORKING TOWARDS. SO LONG AS YOU STAND BY HUMANITY'S SIDE, YOU SHALL BECOME THE STAR THAT GUIDES THEM TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE. YOUR FIRE SHALL QUENCH THIS SHIP AND DEFEND OUR TERRITORIES AGAINST ALL ALIEN ENCROACHMENT. WITH THE HELP OF YOUR BOUNDLESS TALENT, YOU CAN BECOME ONE OF OUR GREATEST PROTECTORS."

Furia felt invigorated enough to respond to the First Flame's kind words.

"I OWE YOU MY GRATITUDE AND MY LIFE. YOUR GUIDANCE HAS AIDED ME INTO UTILIZING MY POWERS AS THEY WERE MEANT TO BE USED. I SHALL DEDICATE THIS VICTORY IN YOUR HONOR."

"DO NOT GROW COMPLACENT. THE PHOENIX HAS NOT YET SUCCUMBED TO YOUR FLAMES. FINISH THE FIGHT BEFORE YOU THINK ABOUT OTHER AFFAIRS."

While the First Flame was right to caution about celebrating prematurely, the phoenix was already losing too much ground.

The powerful fire energy-enhanced plasma bolts, positron beams and kinetic projectiles had managed to punch through the ragged fire shield and harm the structure of the phoenix.

Each salvo inflicted serious damage that the phoenix was unable to cope against.

While the firebird proved to be surprisingly resistant towards damage due to the fact that it possessed the ability to elementalize its body into an energy form, that did not avail the god beast much when it was unable to command as much fire energy as before!

The phoenix's ability to convert its entire body into a combat capable energy form was probably one of its trump cards.

However, the demands for this innate ability were also skyhigh! The less the phoenix was able to leverage the power of heaven, the weaker and more anemic its elemental form became!

It was quite sad to see the phoenix doing so poorly when it had been dominating the fight not too long ago. The reversal came so suddenly that many people had not yet adjusted to the fact that the Dominion of Man was winning this fight!

Several minutes passed by as the phoenix became increasingly more desperate. The god beast's elemental form became increasingly less stable as it was unable to recover from all of the attacks launched by the dreadnought.

"The phoenix has restored its material form!"

"The god beast is heavily injured!"

"The responsiveness of the phoenix has dropped by 40 percent compared to its peak. Its attack power has declined by over 70 percent!"

The seemingly inexhaustible phoenix had finally reached exhaustion. This caused the god beast's domain to cede even more ground.

When the dreadnought had fired the umpteenth salvo of her surviving primary gun batteries, the phoenix let out a mournful cry that momentarily stunned the crew of the Dominion of Man before exploding in a spectacular fashion!

"Incoming tribulation energy release!"

"Brace yourselves!"

The Dominion of Man became subjected to another lightning baptism. This one struck the ship considerably harder due to her much more burned and damaged state!

Though her citadel and many of her internal systems remained in good condition, her exterior had taken a considerable beating.

Many of them finally started to fail as the exploding phoenix had pushed the most vulnerable components over the edge!

Fortunately, the influx of creation energies magically restored a part of the damage and made everything else stronger. Nobody could even begin to explain how all of it worked, but that did not stop them from appreciating the anomalous effect.

While the majority of the crew started to feel an enormous amount of relief for making it past the final wave of the final round of the lightning tribulation, a few people remained oddly vigilant.

"The storm clouds haven't faded away." Ves said with a frown. "That last lightning baptism was also rather weak. The tribulation... is still in progress."

"I CONCUR. I DETECTED A NUCLEUS OF FIRE AT THE LOCATION WHERE THE PHOENIX PERISHED."

The crew quickly regained their composure and tried their best to prepare for any eventuality.

When the dreadnought's degraded sensor arrays were able to gain a closer look at the site, Ves and the others became frightened at what they saw!

"Is that... a giant egg?"

A massive flaming egg had appeared in the place of the phoenix's grave!

Ves suddenly recalled that a phoenix was able to undergo nirvana. There were myths that described how they were able to reverse death and advance their strength by undergoing a unique rebirth process!

He found it difficult to believe that phoenixes were able to do this in reality, yet the appearance of this egg showed that the legends may actually be correct!

"Attack!"

The Dominion of Man opened fire on the egg. There was no challenge in hitting a stationary target.

While the egg did not move from its place, it strangely managed to resist every attack that struck its flaming shell!

"None of our attacks have inflicted any apparent damage! Its structure as well as its energy readings have remained constant. Neither energy nor kinetic weapons have produced any meaningful results!"

Though Furia tried to amplify the armaments of the Dominion of Man as best as possible, it quickly became clear that they were dealing with an exceptional phenomenon!

As the seconds passed by, the egg not only remained undamaged, but also started to show signs of increasing activity.

Its energy levels were rising!

"If we do not find a way to destroy this egg, then the chances are high that it will spawn another phoenix, one that may be stronger than the one we previously fought against!"

Dread Captain Volkert Argile couldn't hold himself back any longer.

"Arm all of our remaining antimatter missiles and bombs. Begin the process of retrieving as many usable superweapons from our secure vaults and laboratories. We must throw everything we have at this strange egg."

That was a huge amount of destructive power!

Ves did not know how many superweapons the dreadnought had left, but it was likely enough to crack several planets at the very least!

He had a feeling that it wouldn't be enough to break the egg.

"HALT." The First Flame suddenly spoke over the noisy communication channel. "YOUR FIREPOWER WILL NOT AVAIL YOU THIS TIME. THE NIRVANA OF A PHOENIX IS AN EXPRESSION OF A GREATER RULE. NEITHER THIS SHIP NOR FURIA CAN BREAK IT BY FORCE."

"I suppose you know more about phoenixes than everyone else in the Red Ocean." Ves said. "I don't think you opened your mouth to tell us how futile it is to employ a lot of weapons of mass destruction. I take it you have a more elegant solution."

"YOU ARE CORRECT. I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS OCCURRENCE SINCE I LEARNED THAT THE FINAL TRIBULATION COMES IN THE FORM OF A PHOENIX. I WOULD LIKE TO PROPOSE A TRANSACTION WITH YOU, FURIA."

"A transaction?! Now?! We need to defeat the phoenix as quickly as possible!"

Furia ignored her progenitor's complaints.

"TERMS?"

"I SHALL TEACH YOU A METHOD TO NEUTRALIZE THE PHOENIX EGG. ONCE THE DOMINION OF MAN HAS SURVIVED THIS TRIBULATION, I SHALL COME TO YOU AND ASK YOU TO TRANSFER YOUR DETAILED IMPRESSIONS OF THE PHOENIX. THIS REMOTE CONNECTION HAS DONE ME NO FAVORS IN MY ATTEMPT TO STUDY THIS MAGNIFICENT BEAST. ONLY YOU, A FIRE ELEMENTAL, IS ABLE TO STUDY ITS ESSENCE."

"I AGREE."

"THEN LISTEN CAREFULLY."

The Fire Flame quickly transferred the method over a separate and private communication channel.

Ves found it annoying that he was left out of the loop. He had very good reasons to believe that it might not be a good idea to transfer so much data about the phoenix to the First Flame!

Unfortunately, Furia had already agreed to the transaction. It was an enormously bad idea to renege on a deal with any god pilot, so there was nothing Ves could do to stop this deal from happening.

Furia soon took action once again. She quickly managed to learn the technique taught by the First Flame and soon began to extend her domain around the burning egg.

"The energy readings of the egg are dropping! It is weakening by the second!"

"The temperature of the egg is declining as well. It is 30 percent cooler than before!"

It was as if time was going backwards. Instead of growing hotter and stronger, the egg was instead changing in the opposite direction.

Meanwhile, Furia started to absorb much of the fire energies that were previously condensed in the phoenix egg.

Soon enough, the egg had lost so much energy that a single salvo from the dreadnought's surviving primary armament succeeded in bursting it apart.

"The threat has been neutralized!"

"We succeeded!"

Everyone began to feel a lot of relief once they finally confirmed that the blasted phoenix was no more!

Just as they started to let go of their concerns, the heavens finally began to deliver their final reward for the dreadnought's exceptional performance.

"Our sensors are detecting drastic changes from the storm clouds!"