

The Mech 5911

Chapter 5911 Deep Desires

Lightning tribulations were mysterious phenomena. Many cultivators questioned why they existed in the first place.

Did the heavens wish to punish them for going against the natural order?

Was it a self-regulating mechanism designed to preserve the ecosystem of a galactic environment?

Or was it simply a self-defense mechanism designed to channel the most valuable resources to the most worthy cultivators?

Ves believed that all of these possible reasons could be true at the same time. In a universe that was restricted by limited resources, struggle and hardships became an inevitable fact of life. Letting the weak or undeserving obtain power without earning it would only lead to a wholesale collapse.

Perhaps the calamity that caused the old Milky Way to lose all of its prosperity and degenerate into a galaxy devoid of the power of heaven served as an example of what happened if this enforcement mechanism failed to do its job.

Whatever the case, one of the universal rules that governed all lightning tribulations was that there was always a symmetry between punishment and reward.

The only justice in the cosmos was strength.

Those who possessed the strength and resilience to survive a brutal punishment were entitled to receive a more magnanimous reward!

Ves personally detested this rule. It basically encouraged the rise of selfish tyrants and trampled on the interests of the collective masses.

It was a principle that was wholly contradictory to modern human society.

Yet... Ves also understood the warped logic behind this universal rule.

It rewarded success and promoted a type of order that made sense in medium to high-energy environments.

Lightning tribulations heavily rewarded the powerful.

Given that Ves endured multiple tribulations sent by the heavenly authorities and largely passed the challenges sent by them, it was only logical to conclude that he was quite strong himself!

Aside from the abject failure of the Elemental Lord, Ves had proven his chops as an exceedingly competent and inventive creator of life and machines.

The vast majority of mech designers and creators had never managed to trigger a lightning tribulation, let alone heard of this phenomenon!

Given that Ves was one of the few who not only triggered them, but also enabled most of his creations to survive the brutal punishments, he had begun to take a liking to their existence!

Though a part of Ves wondered whether he was actually a masochist, there was no doubt in his mind that the phenomenon of lightning tribulations enabled the rise of some of his greatest creations.

The Superior Mother, Veronica and now the very first living warship in existence were all game changing existences to him! The rewards they received for surviving baptisms of lightning served as the vital element that elevated their existence beyond any reasonable norm!

The present lightning tribulation was by far the most powerful one that he had completed to date. Transforming the Dominion of Man into a unique and unprecedented Carmine dreadnought provoked a huge response from the heavens. Both the ship and her associated True Gods had been forced to exceed their limits many times in order to keep up with the escalating challenges.

Most ships would have never been able to make it out intact. The Dominion of Man shouldn't have been able to survive this ordeal in the first place considering that she had originally attracted a 81 strike multi-modal lightning tribulation.

However, the intervention of a certain God King had changed the fate of the dreadnought. The challenge turned into a 72 strike multi-modal lightning tribulation.

This was still a nearly impossible challenge to overcome for any ship, even a dreadnought as excellent as the Dominion of Man.

Nonetheless, the fact of the matter was that the ship had managed to survive with dignity.

Sure, it received a bit of help from Ves and the First Flame, but the mysterious rules that governed tribulation events did not declare this to be a violation of its rules.

Ves played an instrumental role in transforming the Dominion of Man. The First Flame limited his intervention to words.

This experience had taught him many lessons about lightning tribulations. One of the greatest rewards that he gained from this long, painful and exhausting ordeal was the knowledge he harvested from all of the events.

From learning about the threats that were native to Messier 87 to obtaining a huge amount of insights on relevant subjects such as runes and fire-attributed E energy, Ves managed to accrue a huge amount of inspiration today!

There was nothing more satisfying to a mech designer than to obtain the answers to many long-standing questions. Ves believed that as long as he took the time to process these gains, his ability to design mechs would undergo a qualitative leap!

Already, his mind was filled with hundreds of new ideas. He wanted to design mechs so badly that he felt the urge to ignore everything that was happening around him. He would rather be in his design lab than on this ship if he was being honest!

Yet the magnitude of what had happened today made it impossible for him to shirk his remaining duties and responsibilities. The successful transformation and the evolution of the Dominion of Man was too big of an accomplishment for him to sneak away and pretend as if nothing had changed.

Ves found it incredibly frustrating that he wouldn't be able to act upon all of the wonderful inspiration he obtained in the past few hours.

Instead, he braced himself to receive the largest lightning baptism to date!

"The storm clouds are converging above our ship! They are growing increasingly more dense!"

"We are detecting massive amounts of spatial activity! An enormous concentration of E energy is pouring from the condensed storm clouds!"

"A new light source has emerged! It's... it's a rainbow! A large rainbow has formed above the star system!"

The size of this rainbow was incredible. It looked completely absurd, yet conveyed a huge amount of positive energy. Everyone who looked at it would instantly yearn to dive into this paradise.

The gigantic rainbow hovered above the Dominion of Man for a moment before plunging straight into the massive ship!

A transformation unlike anything else took place. The power granted by the heavens of multiple galaxies gave the dreadnought exactly what she deserved.

A lot of damaged and broken components spontaneously became whole.

Missing and utterly destroyed pieces of equipment appeared out of nowhere and slotted seemingly into the hull.

The entire structure and materials that comprised the dreadnought shone with rainbow light as they comprehensively improved in any conceivable aspect.

Each and every crew member received rewards of their own. No matter how much or how little they contributed to the survival of the Dominion of Man, their bodies became stronger and their spiritualities grew in power as well.

The Bloodfire Pact that tied so many people to the ship also experienced a few upgrades. It not only became stronger and more difficult to break, but also gained a few mysterious properties that the crew would have to explore by themselves.

The two True Gods whose existences were tied to the dreadnought also received their respective rewards.

Caramond not only completed his long-stalled transition into a True God without suffering any sequelae, but also strengthened his foundation in excess to any other ancestral spirit!

While he still did not gain a lot of actual strength, his qualifications and growth potential was among the best of his kind, enabling him to enjoy a smoother journey in his future cultivation!

Aside from that, Caramond also received an additional gift that strengthened his power as a newly ascended deity!

The Black Scepter that Ves had added to his persona no longer held a symbolic meaning anymore. The heavens saw fit to transform it into a real artifact that was permanently bonded to the human god. The Scepter could not turn physical or imaginary with a single command, but also started to get covered with runes that were intimately tied to the concept of human supremacy!

The second True God that not only fought to save the Dominion of Man, but also struggled to secure her present existence, the rewards issued by the heavens were no less consequential.

The heavens seemed to know exactly what she needed to improve her own circumstances. They did not grant her a direct boost of power, for she already had plenty of that for the time being.

The power from beyond instead opted to alter her domain!

Ves and Furia never expected that this could happen. Technically speaking, the Fire Elemental inherited its domain from its original creator.

Since the latter was way more powerful than anyone else, it should have been unthinkable for Furia to casually alter such a fundamental inherited trait.

However, the heavens appeared to possess a higher authority than the legendary creator of the Fire Scroll.

The tribulation energies easily erased the structure that made the domain so solid and immutable. They subsequently started to make a lot surgical and targeted changes that subtly altered the expression and the meaning of the domain.

For all of their generosity, the heavens did not do any further work than they deemed necessary.

Furia's domain still remained for the most part. It was still based on the fire element, and it was also tied to the symbolism of a star.

However, the accents that Furia previously imposed on it became more permanent elements of the domain.

The boundless arrogance and contempt towards all lesser beings had become less pronounced.

Instead, the domain started to take on a slightly more protective and benign aspect, especially towards the human race.

Though these changes ultimately sounded trivial in comparison to the rewards bestowed to Caramond, this was literally a lifesaver to Furia!

The reward she earned through her own efforts directly addressed one of her greatest concerns, which was the possible revival of the original creator of the Fire Scroll!

By shifting the essence of the Fire Elemental to align more with her present incarnation meant that it became easier to stave off degeneration.

The creator of the Fire Scroll no longer possessed an absolute claim over his derivative creation anymore. The Fire Elemental had begun to drift away from him. Though the changes were not too great, even a minor shift was enough to make a difference during a crucial moment!

In fact, the greatest reward that Furia obtained from this ordeal was not this relatively subtle shift, but the knowledge that it was possible to completely divorce herself from her original creator!

So long as she continued to work hard and pursue greater opportunities, she knew that it would be possible to continue this shift until she no longer held any connection to that ancient but terrible cultivator!

With the slight realignment of her domain, she became a lot more in tune with the Dominion of Man.

The dreadnought had already undergone an extensive upgrade that made her more compatible with the fire energy generated by Furia.

Her own evolution allowed her to meld with the ship considerably better.

Combined, the two had become more capable of defeating powerful entities such as the phoenix than ever!

If there was ever a rematch, then the present iteration of the Dominion of Man could easily dismantle the phoenix without incurring any significant damage!

It made certain people wonder whether it was still favorable that the tribulation storm had skipped out on the 9th round.

Of course, this was such a dangerous notion that no one dared to express any regrets!

In any case, there was one more important individual who had managed to win the approval of the heavens and earned a set of personalized rewards in the process.

The only quirk was that his reward process was a lot different from that of anyone else.

In one moment, Ves stood on the deck of the ship's command center.

In the next moment, he appeared in an illusionary space that looked like a cloud cover!

White and fluffy clouds floated beneath his feet while a golden sky shone directly from above.

Ves did not have the luxury of appreciating the view.

This was because a shape that looked disturbingly identical to the Subjugation King appeared in this space as well!

"Why are you here?!"

Chapter 5912 The Divine Sales Guide

Ves did not know why he got transported to this mysterious cloud space.

He strongly suspected that Messier 87 had a lot to do with this. The radiant golden light shining from above was a clear sign that the supermassive galaxy jerked him around again.

Right now, Ves did not bother to examine the clouds or the golden radiance shining down on his illusionary form.

Instead, his attention was solely directed towards the shape of the Subjugation King.

It was rather strange. The God King did not feel nearly as powerful as he did when he manifested in the storm clouds. His current form resembled a diminished shadow more than anything else. The tall and insect-like body of the alien cultivator only exuded a miniscule fraction of his total majesty.

Despite experiencing a sense of fear and awe that was actively being amplified by his soul mark, Ves did not actually harbor any fear towards the manifestation of the Subjugation King.

He understood that this illusionary space was part of the mysterious reward mechanism of the tribulation event.

Ves along with the rest of the Dominion of Man had already endured a lot of pain and suffering to make it this far. There was no way that he would have to endure another life-threatening test in order to get past this sequence.

No. This was a different sort of circumstance. His eyes narrowed in suspicion as he decided to step forward until he stopped a short distance from the Subjugation King.

Even in a diminished form, the shadow still loomed over Ves. The apparition might be lacking the power and the domain of a God King, but it still conveyed the physical presence and gravitas of an all-powerful alien being that had managed to fight his way to the upper ranks of the galactic hierarchy.

Just like the clone that Ves once fought against, the God King's physical manifestation came in the form of 16 limbs and an exoskeleton that was covered with black fur.

The face was a hard surface that did not feature a nose, but was dominated by three glowing eyes and a mouth filled with carnivorous teeth.

When Ves squared off against the clone, the alien appearance of the Subjugation King was so frightening that it was difficult to devote any attention to studying the bizarre biological features.

Now that Ves was able to study the body of the alien tyrant without facing any threat or urgency, he started to pick up a number of clues that he had previously overlooked.

The more he looked at the body of this 'krelion' powerhouse, the more it looked like a product of bioengineering rather than a naturally evolved shape.

As a mech designer who developed a minor expertise in biomech design, he became proficient in distinguishing between natural and artificial biological traits. There were too many aspects about the Subjugation King's physique that seemed far too optimized and calculated to be the product of natural evolution.

It showed that the krelion species were not perfect. They were born weak like any other species, and turned to augmentation in order to improve their own physique and capabilities.

This realization enabled Ves to relax even further. The krelions were not all-powerful. There shouldn't be too many God Kings among them. As powerful as the Subjugation King may be, his ability to extend his influence to a distant dwarf galaxy had clearly diminished after his clone got defeated.

"Why are you here?" Ves repeated in a tone that did not convey any respect.

The shadow of the Subjugation King responded with an echoing alien noise.

"I HAVE COME TO CONGRATULATE YOU ON YOUR SUCCESS. YOU ARE INDEED A CREATOR WORTHY OF MY NOTICE. YOUR CRAFT AND YOUR DEDICATION HAS ALLOWED THE SHIP TO OVERCOME A DIFFICULT TRIBULATION. THIS IS A GREAT DEED, AS EVIDENCED BY THE RADIANCE THAT THE GREAT LIGHTHOUSE HAS BESTOWED ON YOU ALL. I AM PLEASED BY YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS. ONCE I ARRIVE AT YOUR RECENTLY ALIGHTED COLLECTION OF STARS, I HAVE GREATER CONFIDENCE THAT I SHALL BE ABLE TO CLAIM YOU WITH PRIDE."

While Ves was glad that the Subjugation King's speech no longer pounded his Spirituality like a hammer, he did not like the meaning of these words at all! The God King still treated Ves like a pig that had just grown a little fatter than before!

"I am not your slave." Ves insisted.

"#\$&#&\$@@"

"MANY SLAVES HAVE SAID SO, YET THEY HAVE ENDED UP IN CHAINS REGARDLESS. YOU ARE NO LONGER FREE ANYMORE. YOU CONTINUE TO DENY THE TRUTH, YET THE CHAIN THAT I HAVE PLANTED ON YOUR SOUL HAS ALREADY SEALED YOUR FATE. BEFORE I CAN CLAIM YOU IN FULL, I EXPECT YOU TO MAKE GREATER PROGRESS. YOU ARE STILL TOO WEAK AT PRESENT TO SERVE AS A WORTHY SLAVE."

The soul mark that Ves could still feel for whatever reason throbbled a bit. This caused his mood to plunge even further!

"I don't want to hear your nonsense any further. Tell me how to get out of this place."

The Subjugation King lifted up a limb.

"#&#@&\$@"

"YOU ARE HERE BECAUSE YOU HAVE BEEN GRANTED A CHOICE. THE GREAT LIGHTHOUSE THAT SHINES UPON THE STARS HAS RECOGNIZED YOUR EXCELLENCE AND HAS BESTOWED YOU WITH THE POWER TO DECIDE YOUR HEAVENLY BOON."

Ves temporarily disregarded the fact that the Subjugation King was his mortal enemy and widened his eyes.

"I... can issue my own requests?"

"#\$##%&."

"YES, BUT WITHIN LIMITS. YOU CANNOT ISSUE A WISH THAT WOULD ALLOW YOU TO BECOME AS STRONG AS MYSELF. IT IS BETTER FOR YOU TO INQUIRE HOW MUCH THE GREAT LIGHTHOUSE IS WILLING TO GRANT YOU FIRST BEFORE YOU CONFIRM YOUR CHOICE. TIME IS FROZEN HERE, BUT YOU ARE NOT PERMITTED TO LINGER UNDER THIS BLESSED LIGHT FOR LONG. ISSUE YOUR DEMANDS. I SHALL OFFER MY GUIDANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS."

Ves looked at the shadow of the God King with a dubious expression.

He did not exactly trust the alien tyrant, nor appreciate his advice all that much, but it seemed that there was no other way to proceed.

Besides, the Subjugation King clearly valued his prospective worthy slave so much that his interests had become aligned with that of Ves!

So long the arrogant and possessive God King treated Ves as his plaything, then it might not be a bad idea to listen to the recommendations of one of the most powerful cultivators in this entire galactic neighborhood!

Ves had already put a bit of thought on what he would like from the tribulation storm.

If he assumed that the destruction and creation energies produced by tribulations could change almost anything due to their exceedingly exceptional properties, then he should clearly be asking for rewards that could not be obtained through his own efforts.

For example, it would be stupid for him to ask for any reward that would help him promote his progression as a mech designer or a phase lord. He already possessed other ways to advance in these paths, though the latter one was a lot more ad-hoc the preferred.

Likewise, there was little point in asking for Blinky to advance his own cultivation. Even though it would take a long time for the Blinkyverse to grow to the point of encompassing an entire galaxy, Ves was willing to settle for the long haul.

What he should really be thinking about was upgrades to his fundamental and immutable qualifications.

For example, Ves had a strong feeling that if he asked the Subjugation King to upgrade his genetic aptitude for mech piloting, the heavenly authorities would have a way to make that happen.

His original genetic aptitude already got upgraded once. It went from a hopeless G-grade to an abysmal F-grade.

The tribulation this time was a lot more powerful than the ones that Ves experienced before.

Even if Ves was not the main subject and beneficiary of this tribulation event, he still made enough of a contribution to earn a sizable reward.

He guessed that if he truly requested to upgrade his genetic aptitude, his grade might get upgraded by two major leaps instead of a single one.

That meant that his genetic aptitude may possibly skip E-grade entirely and go straight to D-grade.

This was a massive jump in piloting qualifications!

Potentates with E-grade genetic aptitudes technically possessed the ability to pilot mechs, but their ability to process data was so bad that they were only really useful for controlling slow and foolproof industrial mechs.

Potentates with D-grade genetic aptitudes had it a lot better. Even though they were only really competent in piloting very simple frontline mechs, at least they had the ability to become proper soldiers!

If Ves combined a newly acquired D-grade genetic aptitude with a Carmine mech of his own making, he would be able to pilot an exceptional machine that was always under his control!

Though Ves was already able to fight his own battles as a phase lord, he never really felt comfortable with all of the strange and inhuman traits. He vastly preferred to fight with a mech that he understood from top to bottom than to leverage a highly unfamiliar alien physique.

Yet now that he was stuck with a phase lord body, it seemed redundant for him to upgrade his genetic aptitude.

Besides, Ves had already gotten rid of his desire to pilot mechs. The mech piloting was mutually exclusive to mech design. There was no way for him to transform his willpower and become a high-ranking mech pilot.

Instead of thinking about improving his combat capabilities, he should be thinking about improving his core competences instead.

A situation like this was extremely rare. Ves had no confidence in his ability to provoke another powerful multi-modal lightning tribulation and succeed in the challenge.

Even if he managed to do it again, there was no guarantee that the heavens would be willing to give him the choice to shape his own reward.

He frowned. What should he be asking for? What was the most suitable way to improve his design capabilities?

"I don't know how much you have learned about me, but it should be clear to you that I am a creator. Do you have any recommendations on what sort of boon I should be considering?"

Though the Subjugation King did not have an expressive face, Ves nonetheless perceived a sense of approval from the slaving bastard.

"#\$&\$@\$@"

"THIS IS MY PURPOSE. I HAVE MANY SUGGESTIONS. I HAVE OBSERVED THAT YOU HEAVILY RELY ON YOUR PERCEPTION TO UNDERSTAND TRUTHS THAT ARE HIDDEN FROM THE SIGHT OF INFERIOR SLAVES. YOUR EYESIGHT IS REMARKABLY SUPERIOR FOR A MORTAL AT YOUR LEVEL. THE LIGHT OF THE GREAT LIGHTHOUSE CAN ILLUMINATE THEM FURTHER AND ALLOW YOU TO SEE FURTHER. ORDINARY ILLUSIONS CANNOT DECEIVE YOU ANYMORE, AND YOU WILL BE ABLE TO LOCATE TREASURES AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT CAN ADVANCE YOUR PROGRESS EVEN FURTHER."

That was actually an excellent suggestion!

Though Ves still felt it was a waste to ask for this reward, he could certainly recognize the benefits of improving his perception.

The Subjugation King was disturbingly astute when he mentioned that Ves relied a lot on his perception.

This tribulation event had made it clear that Ves would have been able to contribute so much if his eyesight wasn't as good as it was today.

Improving it further would grant a lot of benefits, especially now that red humanity had entered the Age of Dawn.

Yet... upgrading his perception did not directly boost his ability to design better mechs. At most, he would be able to glean more insights and allow him to deepen his mastery in hyper technology and E technology.

"I think I would rather obtain a boon that is more directly helpful in my ability to design and create better artifacts." Ves ultimately said, making sure he did not breathe any mention about mechs. "Can you give me a suggestion that is more relevant to craftsmen such as myself?"

"###\$@&#@."

"THERE ARE SEVERAL PARTICULARLY SUITABLE CHOICES YOU CAN MAKE..."

Chapter 5913 Precious Boons

Ves tried his best to interpret the Subjugation King's alien speech.

Though Ves still harbored a lot of misgivings towards the God King, he at least became convinced that the powerful entity was both harmless and friendly for the time being.

That did not mean that Ves was willing to believe in the credibility of the Subjugation King. It would be the height of foolishness to let the krelion powerhouse dictate all of his choices.

The alien clearly had his own agenda, and it did not always align with that of Ves.

However, it was still undeniable that a God King knew his business around lightning tribulations and the possible rewards a lot better than nearly anyone else!

This was enough of a reason for Ves to tolerate the shadow of the Subjugation King and consider all of his words.

"\$#&@#&@&\$."

"I AM NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE QUANT CRAFTSMANSHIP OF YOUR RACE, BUT I HAVE IDENTIFIED NUMEROUS UNIVERSAL BOONS THAT EVERY ARTISAN YEARNS TO OBTAIN. YOU ARE IN AN EXCELLENT POSITION TO RAISE YOUR QUALIFICATIONS WHEN YOU ARE STILL IN AN EARLY STAGE OF YOUR DEVELOPMENT."

Even the Subjugation King regarded Senior Mech Designers as a weak and underdeveloped cultivator.

Ves still had a lot to go before he could treat Star Designers and God Kings on an equal basis.

"@#\$&@&#@."

"SINCE YOU HAVE YET TO DEVELOP A PROPER DOMAIN, YOU HAVE THE RARE ABILITY TO SHAPE IT AND ALTER ITS CHARACTER IN ADVANCE. YOUR BLOOD CARRIES A STRONG CONNECTION TO THE POWER OF SPACE, YET IT IS NOT DEEPLY INTEGRATED INTO YOUR SOUL. YOU MAY ASK THE HEAVENS TO REMEDY THIS SHORTCOMING IF YOU RECOGNIZE IT AS SUCH. THIS SHOULD ALLOW YOU TO MORE EASILY CREATE ARTIFACTS THAT ARE MUCH MORE CAPABLE OF MANIPULATING SPACE."

That was a much more attractive suggestion! Ves could recognize the merits of this change, even if he was a little wary about messing with stuff that he did not fully understand.

Ves did not forget that he was a mech designer first. He never fully appreciated his identity as a phase lord, and he was not so certain whether it was a good idea to change his stance on the matter.

He feared that tying his status as a phase lord more deeply into his future domain would cause unpredictable mutations to his progression as a mech designer.

Right now, his design philosophy should be a perfect match to his nascent domain. If the two ever diverged significantly from each other, Ves was not certain whether it would be possible to progress his design philosophy any further!

The only way such a change could make sense to Ves was if he incorporated a spatial aspect into his design philosophy. That would cause everything to fall into alignment again and stave off a conflict that could stall his cultivation forever.

Ves furrowed his brows in thought.

Despite the potential pitfall, Ves felt a strong attraction to this proposal. As long as he was able to incorporate a spatial element to his design philosophy, he could design stronger and more exceptional mechs right away!

Ves could think of a lot of ways it would be useful for him to leverage such an advantage.

He could design living mechs that started off with their own small imaginary universes.

Just like the Blinkyverse, the living mechs needed to cultivate their own personal pocket spaces for a long time before it became strong enough to serve a useful purpose in battle.

Once the living mechs had grown powerful enough, they could leverage their own universes to accumulate E energy and expend it to power up their own hyper technology.

Perhaps the more powerful living mechs might be able to convert their imaginary universes into real pocket spaces.

This would not only allow his mechs to store a lot of supplies, but might also make them a lot more portable!

The first-raters already possessed the tech to store their cumbersome mechs into convenient pocket spaces, but the cost was far too prohibitive for most people.

If Ves was able to gain such a mastery over the space attribute that he could impart every living mech with the ability to develop their own pocket spaces, then that would make his products a lot more practical!

The advantages were too great. Even if many of these features were only limited to transphasic mechs, it was still a much more economical solution to grant pocket spaces to a large number of machines!

"I will consider this suggestion of yours." Ves told the shadow of the Subjugation King. "It intrigues me, but I need to explore my possibilities further before I am ready to make a definitive choice."

"#\$&&@#@%\$."

"A NATURAL TALENT IN SPACE IS RARE, EVEN IN MY A SEA OF STARS AS LARGE AS MY OWN. YOUR COLLECTION OF STARS MAY BE PITIFUL, BUT IT IS GREATLY INTERESTING TO LEARN THAT IT IS FLOODED WITH THE POWER OF SPACE. YOU WILL NEVER MAKE A MISTAKE IF YOU EMBRACE THIS CHANGE."

"I will think about it. What are your other suggestions? They must be pretty good if they can compete against this idea."

The shadow of the Subjugation King seemed to grow more comfortable now that it became clear that Ves was willing to listen to the powerful alien's suggestions.

"#\$&\$#\$#."

"CRAFTING ARTIFACTS IS HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON THOUGHT AND CALCULATION. AS WITH MANY MORTAL SPECIES, YOUR BRAIN HEAVILY CONSTRAINS YOUR LEARNING AND WORKING SPEED. IF YOU WISH TO IMPROVE FASTER, THEN YOU CAN ASK FOR A BOON THAT ALLOWS YOU TO TRANSFORM YOUR BRAIN. YOU CAN ALSO MAKE IT STRONGER AND LESS VULNERABLE TO DAMAGE."

This was a less attractive suggestion to Ves. He understood its value and definitely believed it would help him in many ways, but it did not introduce anything truly new.

"I appreciate your suggestion, but my productivity is already fairly high. I think that there are other options that can make a more meaningful difference.

"#\$%&#@&#@#."

"YOU CAN ASK TO STRENGTHEN YOUR AFFINITY WITH THE ELEMENTS. YOUR COMPREHENSION OF LIFE AND METAL IS ALREADY HIGH. I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO CRAFT MORE POWERFUL ARTIFACTS IF YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR CORE ELEMENTS HAS IMPROVED."

"Those are not my only choices, correct?"

"ALMOST ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE." The Subjugation King affirmed. "YOU HAVE ALREADY DEVELOPED A SHALLOW UNDERSTANDING OF THE WATER ELEMENT AND RECENTLY LEARNED MUCH ABOUT THE FIRE ELEMENT. YOU CAN CONVERT THEM INTO A CORE SPECIALIZATION THAT CAN ALLOW YOU TO PRODUCE ARTIFACTS WITH STRONG ADVANTAGES. ASIDE FROM ITS TRADITIONAL ADVANTAGES, THE WATER ELEMENT ALSO POSSESSES A STRONG RELATION TO SPACE ELEMENT IN YOUR NATIVE SEA OF STARS. THE FIRE ELEMENT CAN MORE EASILY ENABLE YOU TO REPRODUCE SHIPS AS POWERFUL AS THE ONE THAT HAS ENDURED THE STORM WITHOUT RELYING ON THE POWER OF A FIRE GOD."

Ves was not too interested in developing a stronger specialization in the water element, but it was different for the fire element.

Fire was energy. Energy translated to power. Power was everything.

There were good reasons why the Big Two prioritized the acquisition of the Fire Scroll over all of the other Sacred Scrolls during their rebellion.

The Fire Scroll must have played a pivotal role in upgrading the overall power of their mechs and warships in the years after the Age of Conquest.

If the mechers and the fleeters recognized the importance of mastering the power of fire in the modern age, then Ves was no different!

The Dominion of Man's heavy reliance on the Spark Reactor and the Fire Elemental within was a strong example why everything ultimately came down to energy.

If Ves was able to gain a stronger affinity towards fire, it would not be impossible for him to grant all of his living mechs access to greater energy.

He would no longer have to rely so much on Master Benedict Cortez to supply his living mechs with an E energy reactor like his signature Endex System.

Ves would be able to install his own E energy reactors to his works!

His luminar crystal weapons also possessed a strong synergy with the fire element. It would be easy for him to enhance the firepower of many energy beams by infusing them with a greater concentration of fire energy.

Aside from all of these possible benefits, Ves would find it a lot easier to design Carmine mechs that could establish Bloodfire Pacts with their bonded mech pilots.

"I have the same concerns about improving my affinity towards fire as I do with space, but... it is a tempting idea." Ves responded. "I just need to figure out how to fully incorporate this additional factor into my work approach."

The shadow of the Subjugation King did not take any action to sway Ves to this choice.

"@#\$%&Y&^#@#@."

"YOUR DOMAIN IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE. IT MUST BE SHAPED INTO A FORM THAT FULLY CONFORMS TO YOUR CULTIVATION AND YOUR GOALS. THIS IS NOT A LIGHT DECISION FOR YOU TO MAKE. IF YOU ARE AFRAID OF IMPAIRING YOUR DOMAIN DUE TO MAKING THE WRONG DECISIONS, THEN IT IS BETTER FOR YOU TO LET IT FORM IN ACCORDANCE WITH YOUR ORIGINAL CULTIVATION. LIFE AND METAL ARE ALREADY POWERFUL AND USEFUL COMBINATIONS."

The risks were certainly considerable. Ves had to be absolutely sure whether he wanted to change his design philosophy before he was ready to go down this route.

"What about safer options? There has to be a boon that can improve my work without adding so many complications."

"#&@&#@&#."

"YOU CAN ALLOW YOUR PARTIALLY SPLIT SOUL TO BEAR THE RISKS INSTEAD. THIS PURPLE PARASITE IS AN ODDITY THAT IS INTERESTING TO SEE IN A CULTIVATOR AS WEAK AS YOU. AS IMPRESSIVE AS IT IS TO SEE THAT YOU HAVE MANAGED TO SPLIT YOUR SOUL WITHOUT DRIVING YOURSELF TO MADNESS, THE RESULTS ARE NOT TOO IMPRESSIVE. YOU ARE NOT FULLY UTILIZING THE ADVANTAGES OF YOUR CONDITION."

Though Ves wanted to dispute that, the powerful God King probably knew a lot better about these kinds of matters.

"What do you suggest, then? Blinky has been useful in my work. He is also helpful in combat, as you yourself have witnessed through your clone."

"#@\$&#&@#&@."

"IT IS BECAUSE A TRIVIAL SHARD OF MYSELF HAS FOUGHT AGAINST YOU THAT I AM CONVINCED THAT YOU ARE NOT MAKING PROPER USE OF YOUR 'BLINKY'. IT IS IMPRESSIVE FOR A SOUL OF THIS NATURE TO DEVELOP ITS OWN ITS INTERNAL UNIVERSE. YET IT IS NOT A TRUE UNIVERSE FOR IT IS ABSENT OF ANY ACTUAL MATTER. THE HEAVENS CAN CHANGE THIS. THE BOON YOU HAVE EARNED MAY NOT BE ENOUGH TO CONVERT YOUR ENTIRE UNIVERSE INTO A MATERIAL SPACE, BUT IT SHOULD AT LEAST BE ENOUGH TO OPEN UP A SPACE THAT IS LARGE ENOUGH TO HOST A SHIP, IF NOT AN ENTIRE PLANET."

Ves lit up when he heard this suggestion!

This was an incredibly attractive choice! He had always been wondering how the hell he was supposed to transform the Blinkyverse from a purely imaginary space into a material space.

He truly had no idea how he could make this conversion through ordinary means. Not even his mother was able to come up with a viable solution, and she was the one that expanded and optimized the Imaginary Universe Method in the first place!

It made far too much sense for him to ask the heavens to transform his Blinkyverse, because Ves seriously doubted whether anyone in the Red Ocean could produce a similar result.

There was a possibility that future advancements in the fields of phasewater technology, hyper technology and E-technology may change that, but it would probably take decades before Ves gained the chance to engineer this transformation.

Ves also recognized that the larger his Blinkyverse became, the more costly it would be to convert it into a material universe.

If he chose to transform Blinky's internal universe at an early stage, then there was a large possibility that the material space would continue to expand further without requiring any exceptional measures.

Ves could save a huge amount of effort and resources in converting the entirety of his Blinkyverse into a material space in advance!

Chapter 5914 Paradox of Choice

By helping the Dominion of Man overcome a nigh-impossible tribulation, the mastermind and the most pivotal contributor to her success received a rare bit exceedingly precious privilege.

The heavens saw fit to give him a choice.

Ironically, Ves actually preferred it if the storm just made this decision on his behalf and upgraded him straight away.

Even if one of the previous outcomes randomly turned him into a phase lord, he would always make it work somehow. He was not a rigid mech designer by nature. Novelty excited him, and he constantly craved new experiences.

Yet that did not happen this time. Ves obtained the initiative without even asking to. Now that he was put in this position, he had an obligation to make the most out of this rare and possibly unique opportunity.

Ves recognized that he had become afflicted by a classic case of decision paralysis.

The paradox of choice described a circumstance where a multitude of choices left the decider with much less certainty on how to proceed.

This effect was especially pronounced on people who wanted to weigh every decision. The sheer amount of viable choices resulted in an overload of calculations and considerations.

Just the mental load of having to calculate and compare the opportunity costs for skipping the option of transforming the Blinkyverse into a material space or adding another elemental mastery to his domain was maddening!

Ves could think up at least a hundred different design applications for every kind of boon that upgraded his productive capabilities.

As he continued to explore his options with the shadow of the Subjugation King, his problem did not abate in the slightest.

The opposite happened!

His decision paralysis became worse by the minute! There were just so many juicy rewards to choose from that he truly couldn't make up his mind!

It was as if Ves had won a radiant lottery ticket, yet instead of letting random chance exert a large influence over his eventual prize, he could pick out of tens of millions of possible choices.

Not all of them were equal in value.

Ves needed to put a lot of thought in determining the worth of every possible choice.

Perhaps that may be the reason why the heavenly authority of Messier 87 had pulled the Subjugation King in this odd space. It 'helpfully' invited the most qualified expert within reach to consult on this important matter.

It did not even seem to matter that the Subjugation King was officially an enemy of red humanity and that Ves did not like the enslaving bastard in the slightest.

Perhaps the fact that Ves had been soul marked by Subjugation King had been enough of a reason to bring along the opposing God King!

So long as this annoying mark remained rooted in his Spirituality, Ves may as well be regarded as the Subjugation King's property!

Thinking about the mark suddenly caused Ves to gain a fantastic idea on how he could make use of this opportunity!

"Is it possible for me to request a boon that can erase the soul mark that you have planted on me?!" He excitedly asked.

A clear sense of amusement radiated from the expressionless alien bastard.

"#\$%#&\$&@\$@."

"THAT IS A WASTEFUL CHOICE. YOU CANNOT ESCAPE MY CHAINS. YOU WILL ONLY BE ABLE TO DELAY YOUR INEVITABLE INCLUSION INTO MY COLLECTION. EVEN IF YOU PERSIST IN YOUR DECISION, THE HEAVENS WILL NOT LISTEN TO YOU. THE PRICE OF ERASING MY SOUL MARK FAR EXCEEDS THE ALLOWANCE GRANTED TO YOU. THE FACT THAT YOU HAVE MADE THIS REQUEST IN THE FIRST PLACE BETRAYS YOUR UTTER IGNORANCE."

Ves had a feeling that this was the case. The soul mark technically devoured all of the energies devoted to the 9th round of the multi-modal lightning tribulation.

He was not arrogant enough to think that he was entitled to a reward that surpassed this energy budget.

Of course, he did not take the Subjugation King at his word.

"I choose a boon that will allow me to erase the Subjugation King's soul mark! Come on! Get rid of it already!"

Alas, the golden radiance from above remained completely unmoved.

Was it because the Subjugation King was right about exceeding his energy budget, or was it because Messier 87's heavenly authority deliberately played favorites and bent the rules for one of its own dependents?

Now that Ves found out that he wouldn't be able to get rid of the alien God King's mark that easily, he came back to his decision paralysis.

What should he choose?

What would he be missing out on if he rejected all of the other possible choices?

Would he ever have a chance to replicate this situation in the future and select the most promising options that he previously set aside?

All of these questions and more worsened the pressure on his mind. He felt as if he was on the verge of blowing up his brains just like what he had done to many of his dwarven test subjects!

"NO!"

Ves forcibly cleared up all of the messy thoughts in his mind. The sudden mental reset instantly cleared up the pressure and restored his mood.

While he had yet to solve his problem, now that he had taken a step back, was finally able to approach his current circumstances from a more sober and analytical mindset.

"Let me start at the root of the problem. The reason why I am afflicted by decision paralysis is because I do not have a clear idea on what I want from this opportunity. Since I never thought that an occurrence like this would happen, I was psychologically caught off-guard. It may be fun for me to explore the possible rewards that I can choose from, but that only helps me understand what I can choose from. I need to employ a different process in order to systematically filter out less suitable options and dial in the reward that best serves my current or future needs."

Now that Ves approached this situation like a mech designer, he chose to employ a basic and familiar heuristic process.

There were many times where mech designers like himself had endless choices available. From choosing between an endless amount of materials to selecting one of many available component designs, Ves had to limit his options and quickly settle on the choices that best suited his vision for a given mech design project.

"Vision. That is what I am missing."

If Ves approached this situation like he was upgrading a mech, then the first step he should make was to define his goals.

"My goal is to become a more effective mech designer."

That was his overarching objective. Ves had many different competences, but he had never lost sight of his fundamental role and identity.

Becoming a stronger phase lord or whatever did not contribute enough to this goal. Ves thereby ruled out rewards such as increasing his phasewater concentration or trying to see if he could obtain his own phasewater production system.

Ves had yet to inquire whether ordering his own PPS fit within his energy budget, and he was too afraid to ask.

He might actually feel tempted to redeem this reward!

While it would be nice to obtain the crucial organ required to advance to a greater phase lord, Ves really did not think it would help out his mech design projects all that much.

Of course, he was more than willing to surgically implant a PPS if he ever managed to obtain one, but he was not all that desperate to amplify the size of his true body any further.

His previous 'duel' against the clone of the Subjugation King had already taught him that size was not everything!

Ves had watched enough footage of phase whales and phase lords in action to understand that he seriously fell behind compared to the aboriginals.

Not only did the aliens spend a lot more years on honing their fighting skills and their spatial abilities, they also developed their phasewater organs.

A typical phase lord like the Trampler of Stars could easily smack Ves around because the powerful nunser had added specialized phasewater organs to his body while upgrading his existing organs as well.

Ves really needed to follow suit if he wanted to increase the utilization of his own phasewater concentration.

Until he managed to get this done, Ves felt it was best to reject any further ideas about advancing his phase lord cultivation any further.

Ves went back to his original goal. He had already settled on improving his design capabilities.

Since there were still far too many choices available to him, he urgently needed to narrow his scope.

"Do I want a boon that will help me in the short term, the long term or both?"

Ves preferably wanted to obtain a reward that would help him in the coming years, but also remain relevant in the years to come.

Trying to have it both ways was a greedy choice that vastly limited his options, but Ves did not mind that this time.

It was better for him to pursue a more difficult goal if that helped to filter out 90 percent of his available choices!

"Upgrading the Blinkyverse is no longer in consideration." He decided.

Blinky never really played a useful role during the design phase of a project. He was able to contribute a lot more during a fabrication run, but it was not as if his assistance was mandatory.

His companion spirit was a bit of a generalist in that he possessed a range of different abilities. This turned him into a versatile all-rounder that could help out in many different situations, many of which had nothing to do with mech design.

The only other reason to upgrade the Blinkyverse was to begin the process of converting it into a material space.

Though Ves felt tempted to acquire his own portable pocket space that constantly expanded its capacity over time, it did not provide as much help to his design activities as he wished.

That was reason enough to rule out this option.

"Let's see what is left. Expanding my domain with another core element is an attractive consideration."

His current domain centered around life and mechs. There was nothing wrong with that, and he was sure he could achieve greatness by relying on them for a long time.

However, he could think of many reasons why it would be a good idea to increase his elemental proficiency.

Gaining a specialty in the fire attribute would help make all of his mechs more powerful. It would allow him to create Bloodfire Pacts with greater ease and may also allow him to produce Carmine starships in his newly acquired shipyards. He could also power up his luminar crystal weapons along with every other hyper energy weapon that he chose to integrate to his products.

"In short, acquiring a specialization in the fire attribute will satisfy both my short term and long term needs."

However, Ves could make similar arguments for many other possible elements.

The water element had a powerful amplifying effect on phasewater. Ves even theorized based on a lot of academic guesswork that it might even be possible to synthesize phasewater so long as he developed a high enough mastery in both the water and the space attributes!

Aside from that, water was the element that aligned the closest to organic tissue. Ves would have a much greater justification to design biomechs or cyborg mechs as he could more easily amplify the effectiveness of any machine with organic parts.

The decision on whether he should choose to specialize in the water element hinged on how much he valued phasewater technology and biotechnology.

If he was willing to incorporate both of these fields into his core design philosophy, then gaining a specialization in the water element was a justifiable choice!

"There are also other elements that I have yet to consider..."

Aside from that, he could also choose a boon that did not relate to his domain. He needed to narrow his scope even further before he was ready to make his final selection.

"I'm getting closer, though."

Ves was determined to make the most of this life-changing decision!

Chapter 5915 New Elemental Advantages

When Ves learned that the second major cultivation rank was mainly about cultivating one's domain, he knew that it would play a large role in his future progression.

It was not difficult to assume that the main reason why many Master Mech Designers failed to advance to the rank of Star Designer was because their domains did not meet the exceedingly high standards!

A more complicated domain granted Ves more options, but also weakened his focus. The choice to go for this reward was a double-edged sword for that reason.

Ves still felt tempted. It was a great opportunity to increase the versatility of his works and make them more fault tolerant.

That was not to say it was impossible for him to design mechs without resorting to this option. He was doing pretty fine so far. He just wanted to do better. Taking risks and enduring greater hardships in the hopes of obtaining a greater payoff.

The more Ves thought about it, the more he became convinced that this was the way for him to break the game.

He came closer to defining a specific vision that he wished to realize.

He imagined himself as a mech designer who not only designed living mechs, but ones that tapped into at least one other major E energy attribute. Whether Ves settled for the fire element or a more exotic choice, he was absolutely convinced that integrating the power of heaven more extensively in all of his products would lead to a universal boost improvement in performance!

Ves could still opt for other rewards that could amplify his design capabilities. Upgrading the cranial implant that had pretty much fused with his brain on a permanent basis was the most attractive alternative in his mind.

Ever since he experienced so many lightning baptisms, his Archimedes Rubal bioimplant had mutated beyond recognition. It was no longer a product of science, but instead turned into an indecipherable wonder that merged so well with his brain that it remained fully functional even as his true body continued to expand in size.

Unfortunately for Ves, the Archimedes Rubal had always focused on offering as much data storage capacity as possible. It did not contain any of the nifty functions contained in proper mech designer implants. The lightning baptisms only strengthened the implant's existing features, but declined to any new functionality.

This situation was an opportunity to correct this shortcoming and demand a proper expansion of his cranial implant.

While it would certainly facilitate his design capabilities in the short term, Ves was not as confident that it would retain the same degree of significance in the long term.

The closer Ves got to becoming a Star Designer, the more he transitioned into an energy based life form.

Once he managed to reach the third major cultivation rank, organic implants could no longer significantly boost his cognitive capabilities.

From that perspective, it was a waste to ask for an upgrade to his cranial implant. It was not as if he developed a huge dependency on it in the first place.

The partial digitization of his mind made it a lot more convenient for him to access databases and so on, but he never developed a liking for the data and calculation-heavy design approach of many first-class mech designers.

Excessively obsessing over calculations and trying to achieve the most mathematically optimal results may fit well with Gloriana's design style, but Ves always preferred a more intuitive approach.

Cranial implants were not important enough to justify an upgrade. Ves wanted to obtain a more qualitative addition to his design abilities.

This quickly led him back to expanding his nascent domain.

He could more easily envision and agree with a future where he became an elemental maestro.

There were many different ways to leverage a greater specialization in the fire or water element.

Perhaps he could even master both of them at the same time!

"Wait a minute."

Ves suddenly came up with an extremely ambitious and subversive notion that took this idea a step further.

It sounded so crazy to him that he almost discarded the idea as soon as it came up. The potential rewards were massive, but the requirements were equally as difficult to meet.

If he ever wanted to realize this insane plan, he would have to trigger at least 3 more lightning tribulations of at least equal magnitude as the one that befell the Dominion of Man!

Not only that, but he would have to play such a significant role in the creation of products that could almost rival that of a grand work that the heavens saw fit to pull him into this space again!

The likelihood of success was too low. Even if he was able to make it work, it would likely take decades if not centuries of dedication in order to complete his grand plan.

Still... if he ever wanted to embark on this incredibly ambitious path, now was the time to determine whether he should take the first step.

"I have a question." He said as he turned to the tall but disturbingly unmoving shadow of the Subjugation King. "Do the cultivators of your galaxy have any special powers related to combining what my people call the 5 classical elements? I am referring to the elements of fire, water, wood, earth and metal."

The Subjugation King remained silent for a dozen or so seconds before he finally deigned to respond.

"#\$%&\$@#\$.#."

"YOU SHOULD NOT BE EXPLORING THIS AT YOUR STAGE. YOU ARE TOO WEAK. THERE ARE TOO MANY MAD BEINGS IN MY SEA OF STARS WHO OBSESS OVER THE ELEMENTALS THAT THEY CLAIM WILL UNLOCK THE POWER TO RESHAPE THIS

ENTIRE UNIVERSE. THEY ARE DELUDED GODS WHO DO NOT RESPECT THE GREAT LIGHTHOUSE AND WISH TO USURP IT. I ADVISE YOU TO END THIS INQUIRY."

"That's not good enough for me." Ves frowned as he tried his best to push back against the stupid alien tyrant. "Explain to me why it is such a bad idea to pursue mastery over the 5 elements."

"@#\$&\$&@\$@\$."

"YOU ARE NOT THE FIRST FOOL THAT THINKS TO MASTER THE 5 ELEMENTS. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE HEAVENS TO ASSIST YOU IN THIS FOOL'S JOURNEY. THE MORE ELEMENTS THAT BECOME CENTRAL TO YOUR DOMAIN, THE GREATER THE COST OF SUBSEQUENT BOONS. TRUE MASTERY CAN NEVER BE GRANTED BY OTHERS. YOU MUST RELY ON YOURSELF TO COMPREHEND THE MEANING OF EVERY ELEMENT AND THEIR RELATION TO OTHER ELEMENTS. IT TAKES THE TIME FOR HUNDREDS OF GENERATIONS OF THE DESCENDANTS OF MY SLAVES TO LIVE AND DIE BEFORE YOU CAN OBTAIN SUFFICIENT MASTERY."

Though Ves did not know how many years that was, he got the message alright. If the Subjugation King was not lying, then he would have to embark on an incredibly long and exhausting journey in order to fully master the 5 elements!

Ves could easily imagine becoming far more powerful than practically any other mech designer or qi cultivator for that matter, but... did this align with his goal?

Not necessarily. The long term payoff was astronomically high, but it was set so far in the future that he would not be able to realize his most powerful state for centuries if not millenia!

That was way too long for his liking. He needed to be strong enough to make a decisive contribution in the inevitable war between the Red Ocean and the invaders from Messier 87.

Ves followed the Subjugation King's suggestion and discarded any ideas about mastering the 5 elements.

That said, specializing in one additional classical element shouldn't do too much harm.

The difficulty in mastering 2 classical elements and figuring out synergies between them was not too high. It only really started to get complicated if he wanted to combine 3 or more classical elements.

Though Ves would inevitably make it more difficult to deepen his comprehension of life and metal, he was surprisingly fine with this tradeoff.

He had never been a mech designer who liked to narrow his scope and focus on his specialization to the exclusion of alternatives.

He respected the approach of Ketis, but that did not mean he was willing to adopt a similar approach!

Given his preference for variety and his propensity towards distraction, he would not have to change his behavior all that much in order to accommodate this new change.

He just wished that he had spent more time on exploring the other classical elements.

Ves currently possessed enough insights in the metal, water and fire elements to know how they might synergize with his existing works.

He could not do so for the wood and earth elements.

Sure, he read a lot of theories and could engage in plenty of speculation, but that was not enough to form a proper judgment.

Wait.

Ves glanced towards the other presence in this space.

Perhaps this big guy might be able to provide additional insights.

Seeing that it would be better if the Subjugation King understood the greater context, Ves quickly explained his interest in mastering another element.

Of course, Ves made sure to leave out any word about mechs.

"#&#&\$@&\$@."

"I APPROVE OF YOUR THINKING. IT IS NOT GOOD FOR YOUR CULTIVATION TO CHASE AFTER AN IMPOSSIBLE GOAL, BUT IT IS ALSO DETRIMENTAL IF YOU LACK THE WILLINGNESS TO EXPAND YOUR PERSPECTIVE. CRAFTSMEN SUCH AS YOURSELF ARE MORE EASILY ABLE TO EXPLORE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS."

"Since you understand my purpose, what can you tell me about expanding my domain with the wood or earth element?"

"\$&#&\$&\$@."

"EARTH BEARS METAL. ONE FEEDS INTO THE OTHER. YOU CAN RELY ON EARTH TO MAKE YOUR ARTIFACTS STRONGER AND MORE RESISTANT TOWARDS DAMAGE. THAT IS NOT THE TRUE POTENTIAL OF MASTERING THIS ELEMENT. IT WILL ALLOW YOU TO TAP INTO GEOMANTIC POWER. IF YOU DEVELOP THE CORRECT THEORY AND METHODS, YOUR WORKS WILL BECOME SOLID AND INVIOLEABLE WHEN PLACED ON PLANETS. YOU WILL BE ABLE TO STRENGTHEN YOUR PLANETS AND TRANSFORM THEM INTO LARGE-SCALE FORTRESSES."

That sounded quite attractive to Ves. Making his mechs tougher directly increased the survival rate of his products. That would end up saving lots of lives and help reduce the attrition rate of human forces.

However, Ves did not form a strong desire for this option. He did not specialize in defense and did not feel the need to start with doing so today.

He also did not like the fact that the only way to fully draw out the potential of the earth element was to work with planets. Any earth-ascpected mech would therefore miss out on a lot of boosts if they were forced to fight in space!

While Ves was sure that the Earth element could offer far more benefits than this, he had already gone over the easiest and most obvious applications.

"What about the wood element?"

"#&#&\$@&\$@."

"WOOD CHOPS WOOD. COMBINING WOOD WITH METAL WILL BE CHALLENGING, BUT ALSO REWARDING. WOOD GRANTS FLEXIBILITY THAT METAL LACKS. WOOD

ALSO POSSESSES REGENERATING PROPERTIES THAT CAN MAKE YOUR WORKS RESTORE THEMSELVES MORE EASILY AS LONG AS THEY RECEIVE ABUNDANT ENERGY. THERE IS ALSO AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH YOU CAN TAKE IF YOU CHOOSE TO MASTER THE WOOD ELEMENT."

"Elaborate, please."

"WOOD IS HIGHLY RELATED TOWARDS LIFE. INSTEAD OF ALTERING YOUR DOMAIN TO ADD A THIRD SPECIALIZATION, YOU CAN CHOOSE TO LET THE FORMER SUBSUME THE LATTER. YOU WILL RETAIN ALL OF THE INSIGHTS AND ABILITIES YOU POSSESS AT THIS TIME, BUT YOU WILL MORE EASILY BE ABLE TO MASTER THE OTHER ASPECTS OF THE VERSATILE WOOD ELEMENT. DOING SO WILL CAUSE YOU TO FORSAKE SEVERAL OPPORTUNITIES TO MASTER THE TRUE MEANING OF LIFE."

Ves initially became attracted by this idea, but that last part caused his enthusiasm to drop.

He had a feeling that switching his life domain to a wood domain would open a lot of new doors, but also close the ones he might have reason to care about a lot. These future possibilities may be incredibly relevant to his greatest and most difficult ambitions.

If that was the case, then he absolutely could not afford to diminish his life domain!

Chapter 5916 Exotic Possibilities

Ves discovered that the Subjugation King was an excellent sounding board for his ideas.

So long as the alien tyrant did not mention any talk about enslaving Ves, subjugating the human race and all of that other nonsense, he served as a useful font of insight on matters relating to cultivation.

It was not at all different from asking for advice from his mother.

In fact, the Subjugation King was considerably more generous in his willingness to supply information. As a cultivator who sat close to the top of his extremely powerful society, rules no longer constrained him as much as other life forms. The fact that he was already strong enough to hijack a tribulation storm was proof that he could dictate the rules to an extent!

"\$&#&\$@&\$."

"THERE ARE MORE CHOICES YOU CAN MAKE, MY WORTHY SLAVE. IT IS NOT A MISTAKE FOR YOU TO EXPAND YOUR DOMAIN BY SPECIALIZING IN THE ELEMENTS THAT YOU ARE ALREADY CONSIDERING, BUT THERE ARE MANY OTHER ALTERNATIVES THAT CAN IMPROVE YOUR WORKS. THERE ARE RARE TALENTS THAT YOU CAN ACQUIRE THAT MANY CRAFTSMAN WOULD BE WILLING TO SELL THEMSELVES FOR. THE DIFFICULTY OF MASTERING THE RARE ELEMENTS IS HIGHER, BUT THEY WILL HELP YOU BECOME A CREATOR WITHOUT EQUAL."

Ves actually took this into serious consideration. There were way more E energy attributes beyond the obvious selection.

Since Ves did not aim to master the 5 elements, why should he obsess over them? He did not find it unacceptable to continue to stick with the metal element alone if there were better options available.

"Please give me a few suggestions."

"#%\$&\$#@\$. "

"YOU ARE WISE TO SEEK MY CONSUL, MY YOUNG SLAVE. I WOULD NORMALLY MAKE THIS DECISION ON YOUR BEHALF, BUT I AM TOO DISTANT TO FULLY UNDERSTAND YOUR WORK AND CULTIVATION. SINCE YOU POSSESS THE GREATEST UNDERSTANDING OF YOURSELF, I WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH SEVERAL SUGGESTIONS THAT COMBINE WELL WITH YOUR EXISTING DOMAIN. FOR EXAMPLE, YOU SHOULD CONSIDER MASTERING THE DEATH ELEMENT."

"No." Ves shook his head. "I can already understand some of the logic behind this recommendation, but I do not have a strong desire to explore it further."

He already had access to Helena if he wanted to borrow her expertise or powers related to the death domain.

Sure, borrowing her power might not be as good as mastering it himself, but Ves did not think that his own attempts to comprehend this concept would surpass his eldest sister.

The only real gain from mastering this negative attribute was to develop powerful synergies between life and death.

"#\$&\$@#\$@. "

"THEN YOU SHOULD CONSIDER THE LIGHT ELEMENT. I CAN DISCERN THAT YOU POSSESS A SMALL AFFINITY AND COMPREHENSION OF LIGHT. IF YOU DECIDE TO DEVELOP IT PROPERLY, THEN YOU WILL BE ABLE TO RAISE YOUR STATUS WITHIN THE KRELION EMPIRE. ALL SLAVES ACKNOWLEDGE THE GREAT LIGHTHOUSE AND RECEIVES ITS BLESSING SHALL BE TREATED TO A HIGHER STANDARD. I SHALL HAVE REASON TO GRANT YOU GREATER PRIVILEGES, SUCH AS BEING ABLE TO DECIDE YOUR OWN WORK OR REQUEST TO SPEND ADDITIONAL TIME IN MY GLORIOUS PRESENCE."

Ves directed a suspicious glance towards the shadow of the Subjugation King. What sort of slave wanted to spend more time with the cruel and merciless tyrant who was responsible for enslaving him or her in the first place?!

"No thanks." Ves irreverently said. "I indeed devoted my time to study the properties of light so that I can improve certain aspects of my work, but I am not that passionate about it. Choosing to specialize in light will cause me to deviate from my goals."

"#\$&&\$#@. "

"YOU ARE MAKING A MISTAKE. LIGHT IS THE QUALITY THAT ILLUMINATES OUR SOUL. LIGHT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING US EE. LIGHT IS THE PURIFYING FORCE THAT STRIPS US FROM IMPURITIES. IT IS NOT AS LIMITING AND NARROW IN SCOPE AS YOU THINK. THERE IS GREAT PROMISE IN MASTERING THE POWER OF LIGHT."

There was no way the Subjugation King was neutral on this subject. Given that light played a central role in his belief in the Great Lighthouse, this was a religious matter to him. The alien was so fixated on light that he acted as if Ves should readily acknowledge the advantages of this element!

The Subjugation King wanted to impose his own faith on Ves!

"I will not choose light." Ves firmly stated. "Before you say anything else, let me tell you that my decision is final."

At least the Subjugation King was tactful and understanding enough to drop his urging.

"#@\$%&@."

"VERY WELL. YOU WILL COME TO REGRET THIS DECISION."

"Just give me another recommendation."

"#\$&#@\$&."

"YOU HAVE A SPECIAL CONNECTION WITH KARMA. YOUR SOUL IS DRENCHED WITH IT. IT MAY BE USEFUL FOR YOU TO ADD IT TO YOUR DOMAIN. THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT USES FOR KARMA. IT CAN BE USED TO TRACK YOUR TARGETS NO MATTER HOW WELL THEY HIDE THEMSELVES. KARMA CAN ALSO BE EMPLOYED AS AN ATTACK VECTOR. IT IS MOST OFTEN USED TO EXTERMINATE ENTIRE BLOODLINES OR EVERY CLONE OF AN ENEMY CULTIVATOR. YOU CAN ALSO INHIBIT MORE POWERFUL ENEMIES BY BURDENING THEM WITH GREATER DEBTS OF KARMA."

This was definitely an interesting suggestion. Karma was a weird and incredibly abstract concept, but it definitely had its uses.

Ves could already foresee the benefits of adding this to his specialization. Karma would allow him to design mechs that could do the stuff that the Subjugation King had mentioned and more.

It would not play a pronounced role in his mech designs, but would instead serve as a subtle addition to his existing design solutions.

He liked that. Ves wouldn't have to make too many changes to his design philosophy.

In fact, he could continue to design almost the exact same mechs as before! He just needed to add an explicit karma component to them in order to conform with his altered domain.

The only issue was that karma was such an ephemeral concept that it would be difficult to come up with any useful design applications in the short term.

It would take years or a decade for Ves to develop a strong enough design application based on this elusive concept.

The advantage was that it would absolutely be unique. There were many mech designers who developed a specialization that was tied to the 5 classical elements.

Ves did not think that there was any mech designer who would choose to develop a design philosophy based on karma!

Even if a few oddballs emerged in the future, their numbers shouldn't be too large.

In the end, Ves shook his head.

"Karma is an inventive suggestion, but it will take my work in a weird direction. I am not too sure it is the best fit for me. I do not discount the value of comprehending karma, or dismiss the utility of works that can directly affect it in different ways. I just think that it may not synergize well enough with my existing specializations."

Disapproval radiated from the shadow of the Subjugation King.

"YOU ARE NOT DECISIVE ENOUGH. YOU ARE NOT AT FAULT FOR BEING CAREFUL AND CONSIDERABLE, BUT YOU ARE CLEARLY LACKING IN EXPERIENCE AND WISDOM FOR NOT PREPARING A RESPONSE FOR A BLESSING FROM THE HEAVENS. I ORDER YOU TO PUT MORE THOUGHT INTO THIS SITUATION SO THAT YOU MAY HAVE A CLEAR ANSWER IF THE GREAT LIGHTHOUSE BESTOWS ANOTHER BLESSING TO YOU. I HAVE EVERY CONFIDENCE IN YOUR ABILITY TO EARN ITS APPRECIATION AGAIN. I WILL ENDEAVOR TO WITNESS YOUR PERFORMANCE AGAIN."

That certainly sounded alarming!

Did the Subjugation King have the ability to hijack every tribulation storm that took place in the Red Ocean?

It would be too crazy if that was the case! He could not only gather intelligence on red humanity's most resplendent works, but also interfere to cripple the results!

The amount of damage that the alien God King could do to human civilization was too great, and this was when he was still hundreds of light-years away from his destination!

This prospect was far too scary for Ves. He refused to believe in this scenario!

There had to be a price for meddling with the natural order to this degree. Ves distinctly recalled that the Subjugation King never showed up during the disastrous tribulation of the Elemental Lord.

This indicated that the alien tyrant shouldn't be powerful enough to meddle with the new frontier with impunity.

He forced himself to relax and focus on his current situation.

He was coming closer to making a decision. He just wanted to obtain a few more bits of information before he was ready to announce his choice.

"Your suggestions have given me ideas of my own. What do you think about networking or connections?" He asked. "If you have taken a good look at the ship, you will find that networking forms the basis of her strength."

There was no way to hide anything as obvious as the Bloodfire Pact to the Subjugation King. The powerful cultivator likely encountered far more sophisticated versions in his native galaxy.

"#\$&#A\$&@#\$@."

"YOUR 'NETWORKS' ARE INTERESTING, BUT WEAK. I CAUTION YOU TO NOT DEPEND ON THEM TOO MUCH. IF I CAN SEE THEM, I CAN DESTROY THEM. IN FACT, IT WILL MAKE MY EFFORT TO ENSLAVE YOUR RACE MUCH EASIER. THERE ARE INDEED CULTIVATORS WHO HAVE TURNED THEIR BONDS WITH OTHERS AS A SOURCE OF STRENGTH. I AM ONE OF THEM. THIS IS WHY I JUDGE THAT YOU DO NOT HAVE THE TEMPERAMENT TO GO FAR ON THIS PATH."

Ves frowned. He disagreed with the Subjugation King.

The fact that this bastard derived his strength from his slaves was not a surprising revelation.

Ves did not have any ambitions to abuse his own ability to form spiritual networks in the same manner. His design philosophy was centered around mutual growth. Every relationship had to center around a win-win agreement.

If one side exploited the other, then Ves could no longer call it mutual growth.

It would be much more apt to say that the former effectively enslaved the latter!

In any case, the concept of networks should be versatile enough for Ves to take it in a completely different direction than the Subjugation King.

The only concern he possessed was that it was not a neglected specialization.

The Web Mistress was by far the strongest mech designer who worked with networks. Many of her design applications may have been purely technological in nature, but now that red humanity entered the Age of Dawn, it shouldn't be too difficult for her to develop her own version of spiritual networks!

Ves was quite cognizant of the fact that cultivators who possessed similar or overlapping domains might be forced to compete with each other sooner or later.

If he ever made it far enough to get within reach of promoting to the God King, he may be put in a situation where he had to fight directly against the Web Mistress in order to realize his greater ambitions!

Ves did not think it was a good idea for him to compete against a Star Designer who developed a far greater obsession with networks than himself.

Then again, if he allowed his potential fears of conflicting with fellow professionals in the distant future to restrain his own works, then that was stupid!

If Ves chose to expand his domain to accommodate the fire element, then there might come a day where he would have to compete against the Lord of Thermodynamics or one of the many other mech designers with similar design philosophies!

As long as he disregarded this distant concern, then Ves felt it was not a bad idea to develop a deeper specialization in networks. The fact that it synergized extremely well with the Carmine System and his other network-related works was a powerful motivation to deepen his understanding of this concept!

A few minutes passed by as Ves asked for additional insight and clarification from the Subjugation King.

Knowing that time was running out for Ves, he finally managed to make up his mind and settle on a choice that would change his life forever.

He took a deep breath and stared up at the shadow of the Subjugation King.

"I have made my decision. After a lot of thought and consideration, I have decided to ask for a boon that will expand the composition of my nascent domain. The element that I have chosen for this is..."

Chapter 5917 The Ultimate Choice

After Ves engaged in an exhaustive exploration of every possibility, he narrowed his selection down to four different choices.

He had already decided that he would make the risky but promising decision to expand his domain.

Ves knew this was not a light decision to make.

His current domain, nascent it may be, was a full and honest reflection of all of his studies, effort, principles and life experiences.

It was a natural construct that fit his inclinations perfectly.

If he altered his domain in any way, he would cause it to become misaligned with his personality.

There were three possible consequences to creating a misalignment.

First, Ves and his domain would remain out of sync, causing his productivity and effectiveness to drop. At worst, he wouldn't be able to make any further progress in his design philosophy until he solved this problem!

Second, Ves easily adjusted to his altered domain. This was the best case scenario as it was his intention to change himself for the better. A more versatile domain would add a lot more handy solutions to his toolbox.

Third, Ves underestimated his capacity for change and continued to stick to his original design philosophy. Over time, this might cause his domain to backslide back to its original state where it was only dominated by life and mechs. This was clearly the worst possible outcome as Ves would throw away the opportunity granted by this encounter!

Suffice to say, Ves feared that he would end up in the first or third scenario. The risk of wasting this priceless opportunity to request a custom-made reward from the heavenly authority of Messier 87 almost persuaded him to opt for a safer reward instead.

He mentally shook his head. In the face of all of the threats targeted towards him, his family and red humanity as a whole, he could not afford to play it safe.

Since Ves had the confidence to proceed with this course of action, he no longer immersed himself with doubts and settled on moving forward.

The only point of uncertainty that remained was what element or concept he wished to acquire from this opportunity.

His previous activities had done a lot to curb his decision paralysis, but he was still left with 3 attractive choices in the end.

He considered the fire element to be the default choice. The Subjugation King was right that Ves could not go wrong with this element. It had obvious synergy with every machine because they all had to run on at least one form of conventional energy. Fire could fuel people's passion and encourage them to perform at their best and beyond. Fire was also fantastic in enhancing his direct combat power.

Wood was another classical element with incredible strategic value. It would allow him to broaden and diversify his life domain. His mechs would be able to absorb wood energy to speed up their self-repair functionality. Wood may also allow him to work with mutated exoplants and enable him

to develop his own elixirs. He might even be able to develop solutions that could prolong the longevity of everyone he cared about.

The final element that Ves considered was light. It became clear that the light element possessed a lot of weight in Messier 87 or at least the portions occupied by the powerful Krelion Empire. What better way to learn how to defeat an overpowering opponent than to learn one of his greatest strengths? At the very least, so long as he understood the secrets of light, Ves was confident in his ability to deepen his comprehension of luminar crystal technology, which always possessed a lot more potential.

When the time had come for Ves to announce his choice, the shadow of the Subjugation King expressed more interest than at any point during this encounter.

"The element that I have chosen for this is..."

"Is..."

"Is..."

His words trailed off. A part of him wanted to say the final word that would change his life forever, yet as he continued to look up at the eerie three eyes of the Subjugation King, he suddenly became beset by doubts once again.

He had settled on the element of light. He not only took a liking for it because he had been tinkering with luminar crystal technology for so long, but also because it was one of the prevailing trends of Messier 87. It seemed logical for him to follow the existing pattern and do his best to understand his future opponents.

However... a growing part of Ves rebelled against this logic.

It might make sense, but the reasoning did not align with his heart!

Since when did humanity surrender themselves so easily against their alien and inhuman foes?

Ves suddenly felt as if he had become as dirty and hypocritical as the cosmopolitans. He realized that he had been placed in a similar position to the ancient diplomats who steadily forgot the people they were supposed to serve and gradually came under the thrall of their alien masters.

The soul mark in his Spirituality did not seem to produce any activity that encouraged him to obey the directives of the Subjugation King, but what if its influence was not overt? What if this incredibly insidious spiritual construct had been nudging his thinking process without making it too obvious?

Since the Subjugation King was able to extend a tiny part of himself to this mysterious space, what if he was able to induce the soul mark to subtly warp Ves' thinking?

This was an incredibly scary prospect!

All Ves knew was that the Subjugation King clearly favored the light element himself. Settling on this E energy attribute would play right into the God King's hands!

While Ves could argue that that there was no apparent conflict between his own interests and that of the Subjugation King in this situation, that did not mean his first choice should be to align with his puppet master!

In addition, Ves could not ignore the fact that the Subjugation King absolutely saw no threat in Ves adopting the light element. This meant that the God King or one of his fellow Krelions already possessed such great mastery over it that it was unlikely that any other being could beat these aliens at their own game!

Ves had never been particularly good at playing other people's games, especially when they were hostiles.

He usually liked to flip the table and impose a completely different game on his enemies instead!

It always made sense for him to do so as it would be stupid for him to compete against his enemies in the aspects they favored the most.

The proper way to deal with his enemies had always been to target their weaknesses!

"#\$\$&@@\$#@\$\$"

"YOU HAVE NOT FINISHED YOUR SENTENCE. WHAT IS YOUR DECISION?"

Ves deliberately ignored the Subjugation King's urging and continued to think about how he almost made a terrible mistake.

Although his reasoning was far from perfect, he rejected the light element!

So what if it was the most dominant element of Messier 87, similar to how space was the favorite element of the Red Ocean?

Ves had never been a mech designer who mindlessly followed all of the trends!

His vision for mechs partially conflicted with the status quo. Instead of bending to the industry standards, Ves boldly swam against the current and got rewarded for his efforts!

This circumstance was no different in his opinion. Messier 87 had already begun to invade the Red Ocean, and the first step to properly subjugating the quaint and ignorant 'natives' was to convert them to the culture and customs of the supermassive galaxy!

Ves felt ashamed that he had almost followed in the footsteps of those dirty cosmopolitans.

He understood what he truly needed to do in order to resist the constant encroachment of Messier 87.

Just as Supreme Marshal Caramond Perle made the seemingly suicidal decision to go to war against every alien empire in the Milky Way, Ves needed to draw a line and make a stand.

Logic did not necessarily matter anymore!

Even if he made an objectively bad decision, as long as it aligned with his heart, Ves believed he would find a way to make it work, just like how he managed to turn living mechs into reality!

The fire in his heart burned hotter as he truly felt he was moving in a direction that aligned with his ideals.

Humanity did not bow down to aliens!

If anything, it should be the aliens that should conform to the will of mankind!

A vicious grin appeared on his face. Ves made no intentions to hide his hostility and defiance against the Subjugation King!

It felt so liberating to channel the emotions that defined the Fist of Defiance!

Ves had always felt close to that particular god pilot even though he barely talked with the Survivalist leader at all. He spent a lot more time with the Destroyer of Worlds and the Evolution Witch, but that did not necessarily mean he vibed with their domains.

The truth was that Ves always resonated more with the Fist of Defiance!

With that thought in mind, he became absolutely certain about how he should make use of this opportunity.

"You know, there is an old but timeless human expression that I wish to share with you." He said as he continued to direct a vicious grin towards the shadow of the God King.

The powerful figure did not deign to respond to such an impertinent remark.

"Well, here it is: SCREW. YOU. No really. Screw you. I am not your slave, and you are not my master! Your stupid attempts to assimilate me into your light will not succeed, because I will fight and oppose you until I finally manage to break your tarnished chains and snuff out that disgusting light of yours!"

"#\$#@#@!"

"BLASPHEMY! YOU ARE COMMITTING A GREAT AFFRONT!"

"And I don't care!" Ves shouted back! "You are an enemy of me and all of mankind! While I admit that you are powerful enough to defeat the strongest protectors of the Red Ocean, direct confrontation is not the only viable means to oppose you. Hear me now, you filthy alien! I request a boon that will expand my nascent domain with the element that opposes light! I choose darkness as my third core element!"

A surprisingly strong wave of revulsion and rejection emanated from the shadow of the Subjugation King! The alien tyrant really did not like what Ves had said!

"#\$%&#\$\$%!"

"YOU ARE MAKING A TERRIBLE MISTAKE, BLASPHEMER! RECANT YOUR DECISION! IT IS NOT TOO LATE! IF YOU PROCEED TO EMBRACE THE UNHOLY TAINT KNOWN AS DARKNESS, YOU SHALL SOIL YOUR SOUL FOREVER! I WILL NEVER ALLOW MYSELF TO COLLECT A SLAVE THAT HAS SURRENDERED HIMSELF THE DARKNESS OF THE UNIVERSE. IF YOU DO NOT RETURN TO THE LIGHT THIS INSTANT, YOU SHALL NO LONGER RECEIVE THE RECOGNITION OF A WORTHY SLAVE! I WILL DECLARE YOU A HERETIC THAT DESERVES NO MERCY AND AN ETERNAL ENEMY OF THE KRELION EMPIRE!"

"Hahahahaha!" Ves burst into laughter as he could already feel the press of darkness onto his Spirituality! "If you think that will persuade me to return to the light, then think again! I thrive from your opposition! I feel more certain than ever that I have made the right decision! I would rather die than live as your slave! The fact that you think I would do the opposite is a serious misjudgment of

my character. This is who I truly am! From today onwards, darkness shall be my greatest ally in my fight against your tyranny!"

He actually found it surprising how well he resonated with darkness!

He realized that all of the stereotypical associations between darkness and evil was only a fraction of its full meaning.

Darkness symbolized far more concepts than evil or the absence of light!

To Ves, this element embodied many other meanings.

Darkness represented defiance against a flawed and corrupt order.

Darkness was the protective veil that shielded the weak against the persecution of the strong.

Darkness stood for a willingness to break the laws that stopped people from doing what was truly right.

As Ves continued to grasp all of these alternative interpretations, he found that his design philosophy was already starting to shift based on his brand-new realizations!

His entire being was already starting to adapt to the onset of darkness!

Chapter 5918 Reformulated Design Philosophy

The entire space seemed to dim as darkness engulfed the entire space around Ves.

Even the shadow of the Subjugation King became diminished as his pale light held no power in this area.

Ves initially feared that he had bitten off more than he could chew by making an impulsive decision.

Yet now that the power of darkness started to engulf his body, his mind and his Spirituality, he quickly believed his fears were overblown.

As much as Ves saw himself as an honest and fair mech designer, he recognized that he always harbored a dark streak.

He never really held much respect for rules.

He often chafed against the prevailing customs and traditions of different people, especially when they were clearly past their due date.

His first thought when he collided with them was not to conform to them, but on how he would be able to evade, bend or break the forces that constrained his actions!

This was not the attitude of a goody two shoes. Ves had always possessed a rebellious streak.

To be fair, there were many other people who possessed similar traits.

What separated Ves from many others was that he often succeeded in his attempts to go against the grain. With the help of the System, the relationships he built and the organization he built over so many years, he continually rose up until he had become the most powerful tier 3 galactic citizen in his own society!

He would have never been able to rise so high and contribute so much to his civilization if he always conformed to the establishment.

While Ves never considered himself to be an anarchist who wanted to tear down every structure that kept people safe and happy, he was not willing to stand by and let official institutions lead everyone to their dooms.

Every society possessed a dark side. While it was true that much darkness hid many evils, Ves did not ascribe to such a simple perspective.

Darkness was a necessary component to life.

It provided a welcome space to the outcasts and rebels who did not fit into mainstream society.

It obscured necessary secrets that would do far more harm than good if it ever leaked to the public.

It provided shelter and concealment to the troops that got defeated and routed by their enemies.

While none of these connotations sounded pleasant to any upright member of society, Ves felt far more at home with the weak and powerless who relied on the protection of darkness.

It was true that Ves had been making a lot of inroads in his quest to climb towards the top of human civilization.

He knew that the successful transformation of the Dominion of Man completely changed his relationship with the Red Fleet.

There was no way the skeptics amongst the fleeters would oppose him to the same extent as before!

Many of them would instead become his staunchest supporters, as Ves had managed to fulfill one of their greatest desires!

Ves could easily foresee that his political capital had doubled after this dramatic event. He had taken one more step towards the top of the hierarchy.

Yet even as he shone brighter in the light, Ves would never feel comfortable when he attracted so much scrutiny.

He rejected the notion of becoming leader and standard bearer of red humanity.

It was not in his nature to take up such a prominent leadership position.

He was a mech designer. That meant he was much more suited to remain in the shadows and facilitate the real heroes who fought the good fight.

Ves was completely okay with letting the flashy and powerful god pilots take the lead. They were much better equipped to bear enormous pressure of serving as an example to countless humans.

As waves of darkness continued to integrate in every part of his being, he gradually felt calmer and more subdued.

His temperament went through subtle shifts.

Though Ves was a little concerned about the changes to his personality, he consoled himself by recognizing that he was not acquiring any new traits.

Instead, it was more like his existing traits got selectively boosted.

Ves vaguely felt more inclined to hide his secrets, to withdraw from the public spotlight and start controversial secret projects that were sure to make a lot of people angry.

In other words, he just felt like doing stuff he had always engaged in, but stronger.

It would be easy for him to repress these amplified urges, but that defeated the point of this exercise.

Ves embraced the power of darkness because he needed to rely on it to enhance his works and strengthen his resistance against the enemies of red humanity.

Even if his fellow humans condemned his actions one day, he would never regret the necessary choices he made.

The more he believed in these stances, the more he resonated with the darkness!

A miasma of pure dark enveloped him to such an extent that the golden light of the heavens no longer shone on him anymore.

It was as if he was actively rejecting the light that represented Messier 87!

As one of the largest galaxies in the neighborhood, the light levels of this galaxy were far stronger and more ubiquitous than any other place. Many natives came to worship the endless stars that dotted the skies of their local planet.

The plasma jets that constantly produced powerful torrents of light and matter from the supermassive black hole also strengthened their reverence towards the power of light.

Ves completely opposed this trend and openly declared his opposition towards Messier 87!

Naturally, the heavenly authority of Messier 87 did not like him at all! If it had a choice, it would have rained down so many powerful lightning bolts on him until he finally succumbed from all of the punishment!

Alas, Ves had no reason to fear the hostility of Messier 87. He along with everyone else who resided in the Red Ocean were already being treated like garbage anyway. It hardly made any difference to him if he antagonized it even more.

The only grave consequence of continuing to oppose the heavenly authority of Messier 87 was that he was making it more difficult for him to reconcile with it. There would never be a time where Ves would be able to get along with this hostile authority.

"It's a good thing you can't do all that much to me." He smirked.

The heavens needed to abide by the rules set by a greater authority. Sure, they could express their biases and skew the variables against his favor as much as they could get away with, but so long as Ves continued to develop his strength, he remained confident he could overcome every adversity!

What was even better was that the heavenly authority would be forced to shower him with greater rewards!

Perhaps this was the true meaning of the universal order.

The strong got rewarded because they managed to vanquish the efforts of those who had proven to be flawed and inferior.

As Ves made this realization, his affinity for darkness increased even more.

It was as if he was born to represent the darkness in people's hearts!

During this special circumstance where the heavens were forced to expose all of the facets of the darkness element to him, Ves easily adapted to its embrace.

He did not overlook the necessity of changing his design philosophy in order to fit with his evolving inclinations.

He thought it would take a lot of time and effort to contort his design philosophy so that it aligned with the power of darkness, but that was not the case.

Instead, Ves already managed to figure out a way to properly reformulate his design philosophy!

"There is no need to discard any of the existing aspects of my design philosophy." He muttered. "My ideals have not changed. My living mechs are always designed to foster growth in themselves and their mech pilots. This symbiosis is the root of the value of my products."

The addition of the darkness element gave Ves an opportunity to expand his design philosophy in a specific direction.

As long as the change conformed to an aspect of darkness and did not contradict his existing philosophy, Ves believed that anything would be fine!

He grinned as he settled on an alteration that completely aligned with his own principles and values!

"My mech designs all derive their value from growth, so why not strengthen it further? While my products are certainly useful to those who already bear great strength, they are even more precious to those who are still weak and mortal! I have always found great fulfillment in facilitating the growth and evolution of people who were previously regarded as ordinary. There is nothing that makes me happier than to see my customers and clients become the powerhouses that they previously looked up to. The lower their starting point, the more my products can make a difference in their lives!"

Ves thought back on all of the people whose lives changed for the better with the help of his products.

Venerable Joshua Larkinson. General Ark Larkinson. Venerable Benjamin Larkinson. Patriarch Reginald Cross. General Axelar Streon. The Destroyer of Worlds.

This was just a small selection of people who likely would have never become as strong and successful as now if Ves did not come into their lives!

The Dominion of Man and her entire crew had become the latest beneficiaries of his works.

Sure, his work on the dreadnought had little relation to mechs, but it was still an earnest expression of his design philosophy.

What Ves currently focused on was the transformation from weak to powerful.

The capacity for growth was one of the most precious gifts he could bestow upon them, but the reason why his customers yearned for it so much was because their need had been great.

Of course, none of these people received their rewards for free. True growth could only be obtained through hardship and struggle. The greater the challenges, the greater the progress.

This was a universal concept that applied to far more phenomena than lightning tribulations. His works also encapsulated this rule!

This recognition led him to settle on a revision of his existing design philosophy.

"From today onwards, my design philosophy will no longer be defined by Mutual Growth alone. It is more correct to define it as Mutual Growth in Adversity!"

Mutual Growth in Adversity!

The phrasing might be odd, but Ves could think of no better combination of words to represent his ideals in relation to his design work!

Darkness was the most archetypical negative attribute he could think of. By incorporating an aspect of it into his design philosophy, Ves formally recognized that there was a dark side to his works.

Mechs were not primarily made to be displayed. Most mechs were not made to compete in harmless sports.

Mechs were predominantly made to fight and kill.

Mechs were inescapably tied with conflict. They fought on many battlefields and did not always return from a fight intact.

No one got lucky forever. Not even his living mechs were exempt from this rule.

For every living mech that successfully grew into a powerful third order living mech, there were many more living mechs that got blown apart by their enemies!

However, it was exactly because so many of his products had to endure so many threats and difficulties that the survivors among them grew so strong.

This was the true meaning of adversity.

"True strength can never be obtained through peace and stability. Only a state of conflict and disorder will grant my living mechs and their mech pilots the chance to rise above their station! The only caveat is that they must put their lives on the line if they want to complete their journey to the top!"

Ves knew now that he would never be able to feel comfortable in a peaceful society ever again.

He would always feel restless if he spent too much time in a bastion of civilization.

Just like his products, Ves believed with all of his heart that the only way he could grow into his own power was if he proactively sought adversity!

Chapter 5919 A Human Gesture

All good things eventually came to an end.

The dark miasma that surrounded him for an unknowable amount of time gradually started to disperse and fade.

The golden light of Messier 87 eventually shone on Ves yet again, much to his regret.

He wished he could have immersed himself in the darkness a bit longer. It had been so easy for him to connect a lot of dots and recognize how so many parts of himself already shared an existing relationship with darkness!

Ves had emerged from the darkness as a different person.

He did not feel as if he lost any part of himself. Instead, he had the illusion that he had always been incomplete, and that his embrace of darkness had just managed to fill up a lot of missing parts.

He was still not quite complete, though.

This was because he only managed to identify and resonate with a handful of concepts related to darkness.

Ves felt an intimate connection with conflict, disorder, secrets, adversity, weakness, concealment and a few other related meanings.

None of them sounded benign or pleasant, but Ves did not regard them as undesirable. Each of these words had always been an intricate part of his life. He would have never been able to become the mech designer he was today if he was not shaped by all of these concepts.

Ves understood that if he wanted to maintain or strengthen his relationship with darkness, he would have to continue to live his life in a way that conformed to the spirit of these keywords.

It shouldn't be too difficult to maintain his new state. The real challenge lay in forging ahead.

Without the handy miasma of darkness at his disposal, it would become a lot harder for him to develop this brand-new aspect of his nascent domain.

He would have to put a lot of work into progressing his design philosophy, gaining new inspiration and subjecting himself to a lot of adversity.

Nonetheless, his vastly improved understanding of darkness also gave him the confidence that he would definitely be able to master its greater potential in time.

As the heavenly authority was about to retreat now that it fulfilled its mandatory obligation, Ves looked forward to getting out of the sight of the shadow of the Subjugation King.

Ves grinned in a vindictive way. "This isn't what you expected, eh? I am so sorry that I managed to spoil myself. I am tainted now according to you. I guess I have desecrated myself so much that I am probably the least valuable 'worthy slave' in your collection now. I hope I have taught you a lesson about messing with humanity. We may be weak, but we shall never bow down to your tyranny!"

The God King had reined in his temper by now. The Subjugation King recognized what had happened and accepted the outcome.

What else could he do now that the heavens had taken action?

Though the Subjugation King was practically incapable of feeling regret, he did convey a sense of profound disappointment towards Ves.

"YOU WERE WEAK AND IGNORANT, BUT YOU HAD GREAT POTENTIAL AS A WORTHY SLAVE. I EXERCISED MY POWER TO PLANT A MARK OF OWNERSHIP ON YOU. THROUGH YOUR FOOLISH AND SHORTSIGHTED ACTIONS, YOU HAVE TURNED IT INTO A MARK OF SHAME. YOU HAVE DOOMED YOURSELF TO DESTRUCTION AT MY HAND. THE FIRST ACTION I SHALL UNDERTAKE ONCE I REACH YOUR DIM AND MISERABLE SEA OF STARS IS TO TRACK YOU DOWN AND PUNISH YOU FOR THE GRAVE INSULT THAT YOU HAVE DELIVERED UNTO MYSELF AND THE GREAT LIGHTHOUSE."

Ves had a very simple response to the Subjugation King's parting remark.

He raised his middle finger at the alien!

There was no need for him to explain the meaning of this quintessential human gesture. His attitude and open defiance provided enough clues that this was anything but a flattering move!

It was over.

The empty heavenly paradise disappeared.

Ves returned to the command center in an instant. The shadow of the Subjugation King was nowhere to be seen.

As he started to take stock of the situation, he quickly learned that the Dominion of Man had just completed her profound restoration and transformation.

The giant rainbow-colored beam that shot through the hull had bestowed everyone with the gifts they deserved!

Even if the multi-modal lightning tribulation skipped out on the most arduous 9th round, the dreadnought and everyone related to the vessel still performed above and beyond to make it past the final wave. Each of them clearly deserved additional recognition for their noteworthy contributions.

The heavens may be harsh, but they were ultimately fair.

Ves became amazed by how much improvement the giant rainbow beam had left in its wake.

The crew of the Dominion of Man each became stronger than ever. It did not matter whether they knew nothing about cultivation. From the moment they tied their lives to the ship, they had automatically become contract cultivators.

Not only did they receive a round of direct strengthening, but the comprehensive evolution of the Dominion of Man herself also fed back into significant boosts to the fleters who had forged a Bloodfire Pact with the vessel!

Alas, not everyone had been willing to place their dedication to the dreadnought on top of every other concern, so they clearly missed out on the latter benefit.

Regardless, no one was truly unhappy with what they received. It was already unimaginable for mortals to feel as if they had magically grown stronger, smarter, tougher and more prepared to face the tough challenges ahead!

Everyone gradually began to smile and laugh as they celebrated their survival and embraced their new and improved dreadnought!

Ves still possessed temporary guest access to the Dominion of Man's control system, so he activated a few projections and quickly inspected a lot of different data points.

"Masterwork."

He could already feel and see the difference, but he wanted to take a peek at other parts of the massive hull before he felt confident enough to make this conclusion.

The Dominion of Man had successfully been elevated to a masterwork. Her vastly restored though not quite complete hull exuded an undeniable charm that signified that her overall quality had reached a transcendent level.

Even if it was just the second rung of Senfovon's Ladder of Craftsmanship, the appearance of a masterwork dreadnought was far more significant than the emergence of another god mech!

The reason why this was the case was because there was already an existing pipeline of the latter.

The difficulty of producing another god mech was insanely high, but at least humanity managed to produce a hundred of them! The method to create another one was no longer a mystery.

The Dominion of Man held an entirely different meaning. She was the first and only living warship and Carmine dreadnought for the time being!

Ves was vaguely aware that masterwork starships were not unique. Many Star Designers dabbled in this area for one reason or another.

However, Ves was not aware of any masterwork that possessed the exceedingly mighty combination of size and power as a dreadnought!

He had definitely broken a record in this aspect!

As the reality of the outcome of the lightning tribulation settled into his mind, a deep sense of satisfaction flooded his mind.

The pure and simple fulfillment he gained from helping the Red Fleet acquire a uniquely powerful trump card was indescribable.

Strangely enough, his sense of satisfaction was not as strong as he expected.

"I'm a mech designer, after all. Dabbling with warships is nice and all, but it is not satisfying as designing another bestseller."

To be honest, Ves derived a lot more satisfaction from publishing his Fey Fianna and Ultimatum designs.

He needed to wrap up his affairs on this ship as quickly as possible so that he could finally get back to designing mechs. His head was filled with so much inspiration that he needed an outlet for his overactive imagination!

"Professor Larkinson."

Ves turned around to face the dread captain. "Ah, yes?"

"Before we proceed with other affairs, let me state on behalf of the Dominion of Man and the Red Fleet that you have done an invaluable service to us all. We shall never forget your priceless contribution to our cause."

"SALUTE!" An aide of the dread captain barked!

Each and every fleeter stood up if they were seated and saluted in the direction of Ves!

Their gratitude was so strong that Ves could feel it! If he was a True God, he bet that he would have been able to harvest extraordinary rich faith energy from all of these spacers!

Alas, the pure and authentic faith slid right off him, making him feel regretful that he was two major cultivation ranks away from becoming a Star Designer.

Once the fleters completed this short but necessary ritual and went back to inspecting their evolved dreadnought, Ves finally managed to retire to Dread Captain Argile's opulent office compartment.

Too much had happened to the Dominion of Man. The dread captain and his entire staff had no time to entertain Ves.

The departure of the tribulation storm had removed all of the interference and fully restored communications.

Even now, the Brain Trust was in the process of transmitting huge amounts of raw data directly to high command!

Many high-ranking fleters wanted to study the data, reconstruct what had happened and learn how to replicate the evolution of a warship themselves!

Ves was pretty sure that a lot of tier 1 galactic citizens must be discussing furiously amongst themselves!

They would probably make a lot of decisions above his head. It didn't matter as Ves had already provided his side of the story to the dread captain in advance.

The reprieve granted him time to take stock of his own changes. Ves was still in the process of acclimating to the new and improved version of himself.

Acquiring a brand-new affinity to darkness attribute changed his entire perspective towards reality.

His thoughts became biased in a different direction. He also felt greater comfort when he placed himself away from brightly lit areas.

This was why he issued a command that lowered the light levels of this compartment. Even though the change in luminosity resulted in very little functional differences, he still felt a lot more at home in the shadows.

This did not mean he turned into a vampire and became allergic to light or anything.

He just felt invigorated if he was residing in an area that was plunged in the dark. His thinking sped up and he found it a little easier to solve complicated design problems. He became more perceptive towards his environment and became a little more sensitive towards his own personal space.

It was quite interesting for Ves to learn how much a domain affected one's entire state.

Few people had ever experienced such a drastic change to themselves, so they had never gained the opportunity to compare their before and after states.

Ves was different. The clear and obvious contrast not only taught him a lot about domains, but also made it easier for him to understand his past and present condition.

As Ves continued to explore these fascinating changes, the hatch suddenly slid open.

The heavily armored form of Dread Captain Argile strode through the oversized entrance.

"Thank you for being patient, professor. I have just concluded a number of high-priority meetings with the Red Admiralty. I have time now to resolve your remaining affairs."

Ves grinned and rose to his feet. "It's about time! Are there any further problems or delays, or are you finally allowed to fulfill your side of our agreement?"

Volkert Argile smiled back. "We will not withhold the transfer any further. You have done far more to us than we have promised to you. The fleet admirals have agreed to bestow you with additional rewards, but we can address those topics later. Given your restlessness, I believe you would rather follow me to one of our vaults where we have stored our precious reserves of EE-343F-00334R."

"Damn straight."

Chapter 5920 Despicable Dreadnought

Ves and the dread captain did not teleport directly over to the most secure and sensitive vault of the Dominion of Man.

Instead, they took the scenic route and traversed across all of the hallways and spaces that led to their destination.

Fortunately, they did not walk all the way through. Both of them stepped onto floater platforms that quickly ferried them across the large and wide corridors at a moderate speed.

The lengthy journey gave the two plenty of time to talk about all kinds of topics. While they refrained from bringing up any sensitive topics, they spoke with much less restraint towards each other.

Bonds forged on the battlefield were much more powerful than many other kinds of relationships.

In addition to that, Ves was the great benefactor of the Dominion of Man.

It did not matter anymore that Ves was a mech designer who had always aligned himself with the Red Association.

Though the fleters were certainly aware that Ves had literally been playing with fire, a successful outcome possessed the capacity to forgive many misdeeds.

"You have changed, professor." The man who wore an upgraded version of an Officer Dread Armor spoke. "And I do not mean physically. Our state-of-the-art sensors have detected that your real body has certainly grown larger, but there is another change that is not as easy to measure with our technology. My subjective impression has shifted. It is... peculiar."

"The tribulation storm rewards everyone based on their merits. Aside from promoting my phase lord cultivation, the tribulation has also gifted me with brand-new insights on E energy manipulation." Ves spoke frankly. "I am still adjusting to my new state. It's not supposed to be obvious, though I think that the rewards you have been showered with has made you more sensitive to such matters than before."

As the captain of the Dominion of Man, he played a crucial role in the running of the mighty ship.

He deserved great credit for keeping up morale and providing direction to his entire crew.

Aside from that, he had also become the chosen representative of both Caramond and Furia.

This meant that he had gained a lot of strength compared to his original state!

His body became revitalized. The lethargy brought on by living for almost 3 centuries had disappeared. His spirituality had grown by several orders of magnitude!

Though the dread captain was not suited to become a spiritual sorcerer, his massively strengthened spirit allowed him to harmonize with the dreadnought and her associated True Gods a lot easier than before!

Ves even suspected that Dread Captain Argile gained the ability to invoke Caramond or Furia as well.

The captain probably gained many other benefits that Ves had yet to discern.

Ves personally disliked contract cultivation as it was completely dependent on the care and attention of external forces.

However, the advantage of engaging in contract cultivation was that the practitioner did not have to wrestle with any convoluted cultivation methods. He simply had to demonstrate his value to a deity cultivator and do his job to the best of his ability.

It was actually an incredibly suitable cultivation method to modern humanity. It was not easy for most people to keep up with the demands of their jobs. They had to study hard and learn all kinds of advanced sciences. How could they possibly have any time to devote to cultivation?

Rather than try to wrestle with weird and anachronistic cultivation methods, they could continue to work their jobs like before and get rewarded for their efforts.

The only difference was that aside from earning a regular salary, they could also gain a boost to their cultivation.

This was quite an interesting scheme to Ves. He had a hunch that contract cultivation actually had a very good chance of becoming the most dominant form of cultivation in the new frontier.

After all, both mech pilots and mech designers had always been disguised contract cultivators for a very long time. It was not until they made enough progress that they received the right to know about the Kingdom of Mechs or the Red Kingdom.

"Everything has changed so much that we urgently need to take stock of our new condition." The dread captain spoke. "Now that we have lived through this ordeal, the Red Fleet must conduct a long and extensive study to examine what has changed. This will be a lengthy process that may take months if not years. Only when we have gained a thorough understanding of what has taken place will there be room for a possible repeat. Can the Red Fleet count on your assistance?"

Ves immediately frowned. "I am not too sure. Many coincidences happened this time that ultimately contributed to a good outcome. While I am sure that we can learn a lot of lessons from our first attempt, our second attempt might not be as good. I have already expended several opportunities to facilitate the transformation of the Dominion of Man, so we can't count on a number of easy solutions to help us out. Furthermore, the Subjugation King is a huge risk factor in itself. Whether he comes or not will have a major influence. Even if he drops by again, he may try his best to destroy the dreadnought at all cost. He won't do us a favor by removing the final round of a lightning tribulation again."

In fact, much of the reason why Ves did not feel too enthusiastic about upgrading another dreadnought was because he did not want to confront the Subjugation King again!

The powerful alien tyrant planted a soul mark onto Ves during their first encounter.

What else would the God King do if he came across Ves a second time?

After Ves chose to embrace darkness, he had completely turned himself into a pariah to the Subjugation King!

There was no way the slaving bastard would forgive such sacrilege!

What Ves feared the most was that the Subjugation King would find a way to strengthen the original soul mark.

It was already bad enough for Ves to carry around this persistent spiritual parasite. If it became any stronger, it could pose a huge threat to his life!

"I fear you may be correct about the danger of attracting the powerful alien leader." The dread captain frowned. "The god-like abilities he has already demonstrated earlier has reminded us all why cultivators are so feared among the oldest generations of our organization. It is frustrating to learn that for all of our technological progress, we ultimately have to rely on our own True Gods to repel powerful alien gods such as the mirror beast, the phoenix and the aforementioned three-eyed leader."

Ves smiled and gestured around him. "Don't be too concerned. I don't know about other ships, but the future of the Dominion of Man is bright. She has become a fully fledged living warship, similar to my living mechs. She has gained the capacity to grow in a metaphysical manner. To put it in terms that you can understand, she has gained a huge upgrade based on E-technology, one that automatically grows stronger over time."

The dread captain looked hopeful. "I have already read many reports on your living mechs. It is still difficult to believe that you managed to apply the same technology to a warship, and a dreadnought at that! Is this growth unconditional?"

"No." Ves shook his head. "The Dominion of Man is still very young at this stage, so you can expect her to undergo a growth spurt for a number of years. However, if you keep her in the rear and refuse to field her in serious battles as she was meant to be used, then you will find that her growth rate will begin to plateau. My living mechs always grow when they are serving their true calling. Your dreadnought is no exception in this regard. As dangerous as it sounds, if you want your magnificent ship to grow strong enough to defeat a god mech, then you must throw her into the crucible of war."

The dread captain felt ambivalent about this.

On the one hand, he wanted his proud ship to demonstrate her new strength and forge a legend in the Red Ocean! The fleeters had always been suppressed by god mechs for a long time, but now they had a god ship of their own!

On the other hand, he did not want to put her ship at risk while she was still in a development stage. It would be ruinous if a bunch of ancient phase whales ganged up on the Dominion of Man and brought her down by relying on a numbers advantage!

Oh well.

The decision was out of Volkert Argile's hands. Only his father and the rest of the Red Admiralty had the authority to decide how to make use of the new and improved living dreadnought.

That said, the dread captain along with everyone who forged a Bloodfire Pact with the Dominion of Man no longer held as much reverence towards the Red Fleet as before.

Whether they were aware of it or not, their loyalty to their mighty ship surpassed all of their existing loyalties!

This was the price they paid for bonding with the Carmine dreadnought.

As the pair entered a high-security section and came close to reaching the entrance of the vault, Ves decided to ask a different question.

"You possess a bit of insight on how the other 7 dreadnoughts work, correct? Can you tell me more about the Heart of Darkness?"

That surprised the old captain. "Why the interest in that particular dreadnought? Did you not mention in a previous discussion that if you were willing to upgrade another ship, that you would choose the Indignation of Righteousness?"

"The variables have changed, captain." Ves smoothly replied. "The original plan did not call for the emergence of Furia. Now that we have gained a fire god that metaphorically feeds off human anger, I do not think that I can apply a similar transformation to the Indignation of Righteousness. It is still possible to turn her into a living dreadnought, but we have to figure out a different way to do so. In the meantime, it is best to prepare for the upgrade and conversion of a different hull."

"I agree with your logic, but there should be other choices that can better satisfy your requirements, professor. There is great interest in upgrading the Doom of Xenos. Out of all of our dreadnoughts, she has by far the great offensive power. Transforming her into a god ship will give us a much more powerful weapon against the ancient phase whales and possibly other deity-level threats."

Ves was not quite sure about that. The Doom of Xenos most definitely possessed the largest caliber gun in the entire Red Ocean, but her spinal cannon was so slow and unwieldy that any decent ancient phase whale would be able to get out of the line of fire.

"I can understand the attraction for greater firepower, but the Heart of Darkness is much more valuable in a strategic sense. The ship has the potential to debilitate or maybe brainwash entire populations of aliens. She can play a much better role in the conquest and possible conversion of captured alien territories. I also think it will be a lot easier for me to upgrade into a living dreadnought than the other hulls."

It became quite clear that Ves developed a strong interest for this particular vessel for whatever reason. The dread captain remained silent for a few seconds before he shared a bit of information.

"The Heart of Darkness is... unsettling. Her signature tech is much more unorthodox than the tech that allows the Reign of Frost to freeze her targets. I do not have proof of this, but I personally suspect that the Heart of Darkness employs more taboo tech derived from the infamous Compact than any other vessel. Her name is truly apt. The ship is largely dedicated to fighting our enemies through the most despicable means imaginable."

"How bad?"

"Let me put it this way, professor. Back when dreadnoughts were designed to fight against god mechs, the Heart of Darkness was never meant to be employed directly against a god mech. What she was actually built to do was to evade god mechs whenever possible and attack their support

base. She is meant to drive god pilots crazy by attacking the population under their protection. So long as their entire organization, state or society collapses due to the madness spread by the Heart of Darkness, the entire pillar of faith and logistical support surrounding these god pilots will collapse. Does that answer your question?"

That was crazy!

Yet... the more Ves thought about it, the more he realized that it was a brilliant way to kneecap an undefeatable opponent!

"It's... a brilliant strategy!"