

The Mech 5931

Chapter 5931 Hekkel

Ves stared at Hekkel.

Hekkel stared at Ves.

The two had been going about it ever since they entered of the living rooms of his current home.

Meanwhile, Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine giggled as they gathered around Lucky and poked him around.

"Meow!... Meow!... Meow!..."

While the kids showered their attention onto the gem cat, Clixie conspicuously rested on the top of Hekkel's distinctive archeshell.

"Miaow."

The vigilant expression on the Rubarthan Sentinel Cat's head showed that she had been keeping an eye on the alien captive for a time.

While there was no way an unarmed arche could pose a threat to Gloriana or any of the kids on account of their personal shield generators, it was better to be safe than sorry.

Not only were the guards keeping a close eye on the arche, but they had also installed a couple of restraints and safeguards that could instantly immobilize the alien as soon as he made any threatening actions.

Fortunately, the arche had yet to rebel against his captivity during the weeks he had stayed in the company of the Larkinson Clan.

Ves did not stare at Hekkel because he was weirded out by the alien's presence.

He also did not stare at the alien because he was captivated by its relatively small but beautiful crystalline archeshell, though it did make the arche a lot easier on the eyes.

It did not surprise Ves that his wife had actually taken a liking to Hekkel. His archeshall was beautiful, exotic and symmetrical. It was as if the turtle-like alien had turned a large gem into his own shell!

Despite the arche's remarkable-looking shell, Hekkel did not seem to take a lot of pride in his appearance.

The alien's mind and spirituality expressed clear submission towards humans in general, but Gloriana in specific.

Ves had a feeling that the arche normally shouldn't be so subservient towards other races, even in captivity.

It was rather pathetic to see how far this arche had fallen. The alien had lost all of his spine. There was nothing left in Hekkel aside from fear and a slavish desire to serve his supposed 'Glorious Queen'.

The hatch slid open to allow Gloriana through. The confident wife strode towards Hekkel and patted the alien's archeshell with her archemetal glove once again.

The brief touch seemed to perk Hekkel up. A strong surge of happiness and reassurance welled up from the alien as he derived a lot of positive feedback from the brief touch.

Ves cleared his throat. "How have you kept your new companion so... docile? Earlier, you told me that you made use of Alexandria's ability to connect with Hekkel's spirituality to subdue him by force. I never imagined that she could be used this way, but I guess it makes sense. I don't sense any active connections, though. Is it safe for you to interact with him this way?"

His wife smirked at him. "Hekkel here is a good boy for an arche. There is no need to employ Alexandria on a constant basis in order to keep my new Glorious Servant in line. He may be an alien, but he is not that different from humans once you become more familiar with arche culture and society. I did not solely rely on Alexandria's persuasion to dominate Hekkel all of the time. By combining my companion spirit's efforts with an intensive training program, it has taken remarkably little time to fully indoctrinate my new alien help. I no longer need to employ further reinforcement sessions to keep him in control."

Gloriana's treatment of Hekkel seemed to have produced the desired result, but it only made Ves more uncomfortable.

It did not escape his notice that Gloriana's domination of Hekkel shared a number of parallels with the Subjugation King's attempted enslavement of Ves.

The methods and techniques may be different, but the goals were similar enough for Ves to feel a lot of sympathy for Hekkel!

Slavery was a fundamentally repugnant institution to Ves.

It was one thing if humans or aliens fell into captivity.

It was another thing to strip them of their rights as sentient beings and reduce them to the status of property!

From the moment someone turned into a slave, that individual was no longer able to enjoy as much fulfillment in life.

This was antithetical to his design philosophy.

The only reasons why he tolerated this new circumstance was because it clearly helped Gloriana and because the victim was an alien.

There was no need for Ves to express any sympathy towards members of races that were hostile to red humanity.

Aliens did not enjoy human rights by definition. Anything was permissible as far as most human powers were concerned.

Besides, it did not look as if Gloriana mistreated Hekkel. She had trained her alien captive so well that the arche had learned to enjoy her attention!

"So." Ves said as he leaned back on the couch. "Tell me about your new friend here. Is this the arche that you intended to connect with a neural interface?"

His wife shook her head. "No. That was a different arche. To be honest, the neural interface attempt did not proceed smoothly. There were... complications."

Ves picked up on her momentary distress. He instantly became a lot more alert.

"This was a risky operation from the beginning. I'm glad that you made it out alright. What happened?"

"The arche selected for me has never shown too much aggression or resistance when the mechers captured him and the rest of his crew. It was only when the neural interface established a connection between our minds that the captive became angry and violently tried to attack me through the connection."

"Did you get hurt?!"

"I did, but I already managed to recover, so do not be concerned about my health. I do have to admit that the operation could have ended much worse for me. The reason why the arche reacted so poorly to me was because he came into connection with a completely alien mind that did not possess an archeshell. I belatedly found out that this is a completely abhorrent concept to his race. The arche are able to interface with each other by touching their archeshells. Never has there been a case when a human, especially one without an archeshell, has interfaced with an arche. The alien wanted to kill me. Since he was an arche warrior, his aggression was strong enough to be able to inflict real harm."

Ves had always taken into account the possibility that this poorly conceived operation would put Gloriana at risk.

She went through with it anyway because she was afraid of getting left behind by her husband!

"Since you managed to get out of it with your mind and sanity intact, I take it that you found a way to resolve the problem."

Gloriana smiled. "I did. Before the mechers in charge of the operation activated an emergency stop command, I managed to save myself."

"Maow."

A red spiritual cat emerged from her forehead. The elegant Queen Cat arrogantly lifted her head, as if she was afraid that no one would take the initiative to praise her magnificence.

Ves put the pieces of the puzzle together.

"I see. The arche warrior gained the upper hand in the neural battle that you inadvertently started. You weren't able to fend him off by yourself, but once Alexandria forcibly pulled the resisting alien into her design network, the tables had turned. The combination between you and Alexandria has become strong enough to put the hostile alien in his place!"

"Bravo, Ves! You successfully deduced the course of events! As soon as Alexandria came to my aid, I indeed managed to thwart the alien captive's effort to destroy my mind. My companion spirit and I ultimately managed to destroy his mind instead."

"So the alien is dead."

"Yes."

"Good. What was your state after you managed to extricate yourself from this dangerous experiment?"

His wife let out a sigh. "My mind was in turmoil for multiple days. Part of it was due to the harm inflicted by the hostile arche. However, much of it was due to the very messy alien knowledge that has passed through the neural connection. When the arche attempted to harm me, he pushed his own thoughts, emotions and memories into myself. I had to spend a great amount of effort to sort them and remove anything I deemed undesirable. After I managed to recover, I was left with just enough insight and understanding of archetech to determine that I partially succeeded in my goal."

"I see. The reason why you wanted to interface with an arche so badly was to achieve a breakthrough in your understanding of archetech. Did you fail to get enough to be able to incorporate archetech into our mech designs?"

"Not necessarily." Gloriana elegantly shook her head. "I already studied archetech on an intensive basis for the last months. I already know much of what the arche had managed to pass on. What I did not understand during my literature reviews and tutoring sessions is how extensively archetech is tied into the arche and their archeshells. One of the most important lessons I have learned that it is extremely suboptimal to work with archetech without interfacing with it like it was designed to. Archetech is not an advanced form of machinery. It is a highly intricate form of organic tissue that happens to be made out of metal and other hard materials."

"That... sounds reasonable. Shouldn't it be possible to control archetech without transplanting an archeshell onto your back?"

His wife nodded and lifted up her hand. It was covered by a beautiful multicolored glove that was covered with a relatively thick application of archemetal.

"As soon as I recovered, I set out to make my Archglove with the help of several experts from the Red Association. The Archglove is uniquely designed to interface with my advanced Arachne 01 Cranial Implant Set. When I tested it out on several pieces of archetech including the archeship that you managed to capture, I discovered that it was only partially effective."

"What do you mean by that, Gloriana?"

A disappointed expression appeared on her face. "The Archglove is flawed. To be more precise, it is impossible for a human to properly interface with any piece of native archetech. Our species simply aren't wired to control this variety of advanced alien technology."

"That is to be expected, but I guess that you managed to find a workaround."

Gloriana smiled. "Indeed. I became inspired by the almost disastrous interfacing attempt. I requested another arche captive, one that is much weaker and easier to control. The mechers sent Hekkel to me. He is a relatively young arche engineer who is only over 2 centuries old. He is not trained to serve as a warrior and lacks the aggression of one. Instead, he is raised to serve as an engineer and a technician aboard the larger archeships. Hekkel occupies a junior position in his militarized society, so he does not possess a deep understanding of more advanced archetech, but he has a solid understanding of the fundamentals."

Ves understood why Gloriana valued Hekkel so much now! His eyes widened as he realized what she had done!

"His knowledge has become your knowledge! With the help of Alexandria's design network, you can forcibly interface with his spirituality and directly copy his extensive understanding of archetech! This... this is brilliant!"

Ves wondered why he didn't think about it before! It sounded very similar to how enlightenment fruits worked!

"That is not all, Ves. Hekkel is more than a tutor of archetech to me. He is also my interface for archetech. You see, my Archglove is not able to fully interface with any archetech, but it is different if I use Alexandria's spiritual connections. While my companion spirit is unable to form a connection with a lifeless archeship, she is able to do so with Hekkel, even when he is interfacing with archetech! This has allowed me to invent a brand new methodology that has impressed the mechers! Through my newly invented workarounds, I have managed to gain full control over archetech!"

Chapter 5932 Gloriana's New Ambition

Ves was not the only mech designer who managed to make a lot of gains in the last few months.

His wife had clearly made a lot of strides in her quest to understand archetech. The risks she took and the discoveries she made while Ves remained out of reach had allowed her to move out of her husband's shadow, if only slightly.

Gloriana had plenty of grounds to be proud of herself. She had gone above and beyond what an ordinary mech designer would have done and got rewarded for her efforts.

Though Ves was anything but pleased that she went through with her risky plan to neurally interface with the mind of a hostile arche, it would be hypocritical for him to blame her for subjecting herself to dangers.

At the very least, Ves reminded himself that Gloriana was not as helpless as most mech designers.

Not only did she possess a companion spirit that turned out to be a lot more useful than they thought, but she also enjoyed the protection of several ancestral spirits.

Ves suspected that if Alexandria did not manage to step in and help Gloriana gain the upper hand in her invisible contest against the arche captive, the Golden Cat or the Supreme Mother would have done so on her behalf.

The only downsides were that Gloriana wouldn't gain a boost in self-esteem and that she might end up harvesting less from the arche than if she won this contest by herself.

What happened was the best possible outcome. Ves could tell that Gloriana's neural interface attempt had changed her in ways that she might not consciously be aware of. She had grown in a way that caused him to suspect that the arche had managed to contaminate her spirituality!

Of course, not all forms of contaminations were detrimental. There were certainly cases where Ves derived advantages from exposure to different extraordinary phenomena.

"What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger." Ves said.

His wife grinned and raised her pretty Archglove. "That is an apt description. If I did not muster up the courage to meld my mind with an arche, I would have never been able to gather the insights and knowledge needed to construct this primitive archetech interface. I realize more and more why you

have become so addicted to taking risks. The success that you can gain from crossing the threshold of what is reasonable is exhilarating. I might not be able to catch up to you in the short term, but I have every reason to feel confident that I will be able to surpass you in the long run!"

That was a big claim, especially since Ves just returned from a business trip where he not only produced the impetus for the formation of the Red Collective, but also masterminded the creation of the first god ship!

Ves looked critically at his wife. He had already noticed plenty of signs of growth. Confidence oozed from her body. She no longer felt as insecure as before. Her spirituality had grown from her ordeal and her mentality became a little less restrained than before.

Her design seed had not changed, though. It was roughly the same as before, which signified that his wife had yet to bridge the gap between Journeyman and Senior.

It seemed that aside from achieving a breakthrough that allowed her to understand the essence of archetech, she had yet to trigger a significant evolution in her design philosophy.

That did not mean that her prior efforts yielded insufficient gains. She had definitely made progress.

More importantly, Ves detected numerous traits that looked familiar to him. That was because he exhibited similar traits whenever he became struck by inspiration.

Gloriana looked like a mech designer who had finally seen the light at the end of the tunnel.

She had found her direction forward.

Understanding the fundamentals of archetech was just the first step. So long as Gloriana proceeded down the route that she had discovered, she had great confidence that she would be able to realize her design philosophy!

"You found it, right?" Ves asked in a knowing voice.

His wife nodded. "I have a solid idea on what I must do in order to advance to Senior. The revision to the Dark Zephyr will serve as my first attempt. Mastering archetech is the first step. If I cannot implement a very early proof of concept of what I have envisioned as of late, then there is no purpose in trying to deliver the unattainable. Only when I manage to upgrade the expert mech into a work that more closely matches my vision will I know for certain that I have a chance of realizing my new ambition."

"What is your ambition, exactly?"

Gloriana responded with a coy smile. "My studies into archetech has been slower than I would have liked. Many mech designers and other scholars have fared much worse than me. Only a very small minority of people have managed to get started in archetech. The majority of them are Master Mech Designers, which shows that you literally need to be superhuman in order to properly understand this convoluted alien tech base."

"There are many forms of alien signature tech that humanity has yet to decipher in full, Gloriana. This is not a rare circumstance. Luminar crystal technology is another obscure field that has remained a mystery for a long time. It also doesn't help that archetech is currently not a high priority to the top researchers of our society. Most Star Designers and other bright minds are primarily

working to expand our understanding of phasewater technology and hyper technology. These are the techs that defined two whole mech generations."

"I am aware of where most people's priorities lie." Gloriana calmly responded. "I do not blame them for prioritizing those fields. Archetech is much less suitable for immediate mass adoption. It is too alien, too convoluted and too divergent from human technology. However, that is not a reason for me to give up on exploiting it. I see greater promise in it than most people, but I also realized that its flaws are too great for human adoption."

"So that's your plan, honey? Are you trying to make archetech more practical by solving some of its flaws?"

His wife grinned and spread her arms! "I intend to do far more than that, Ves! You see, after I have grasped the essence of this alien and attempted to interface with examples of archetech with the help of Hekkel, I have been thinking day and night on how to adapt it for human usage. Do you want to know the conclusion that I have reached?"

"Well?"

"It is impossible for humans to adopt archetech! No matter whether we try to achieve mass adoption or limit it to high-end products, archetech is too alien for us all. The arche are far too different from humans. They are not comparable to the orvens or the puelmers, whose technologies share enough common ground with human technologies for us to understand after putting in a small amount of effort. Do you understand the point I am trying to make? The fit between archetech and red humanity is so poor that it would be a mistake to force them together!"

She made a surprisingly good point! Ves and Gloriana had long become fixated by the incredible promise of archetech. However, obsessing too much over the end goal had caused them to overlook the significance of all of the challenges they needed to overcome to gain the qualifications to work with this alien tech.

It was only when Gloriana put archetech in the context of her design philosophy that she was able to take a step back and realize how impractical it was to force others to understand archetech.

"Is this not just a matter of pioneering?" Ves curiously inquired. "We have only just begun to familiarize ourselves with archetech. I am sure that you and plenty of other clever minds will be able to decipher and reverse engineer archetech step by step. The same process is already taking place with phasewater technology."

"This is different." Gloriana shook her head. "Phasewater technology used to be unfamiliar to us, but we have managed to make great strides in just a single decade. This is because you do not need to be a phase lord in order to learn and apply phasewater technology. Mech designers as well as other scientists have managed to gain so much proficiency in it that they can already rival alien scientists in this field."

"And you think that archetech cannot be treated this way because the barrier to entry is too high?"

She nodded. "Archetech is fundamentally different. The vast majority of our scientists and engineers simply cannot master it to the fullest extent. Their inability to interface directly with products derived from this obtuse alien tech will always serve as a fundamental hindrance. It is similar to how most people around you have little chance of getting started with E-technology."

That was an apt comparison. Ves knew extremely well that it was unlikely that a lot of people would be able to master E-technology.

Those who aspired to create their own spiritual constructs needed to learn both conventional science while also becoming an accomplished creation cultivator.

"So what does this have to do with your new ambition?"

Gloriana grinned at Ves again. "I was getting to that, Ves. You see, acknowledging the incompatibility between archetech and red humanity is a necessary step for me. It is a recognition that if existing alien tech does not meet my demands, the logical answer to this problem is to develop my own version of archetech! My current goal is not to master archetech so that I can design vastly superior mechs by myself, but to extract its essence and use that as the basis of a more compatible tech base! If my efforts achieve the desired results, my work will enable every mech designer to master a variation of archetech that they can readily learn and apply to their own products!"

Ves widened his eyes.

This was a much more ambitious goal than he expected from his wife!

Mastering archetech was in reach now that she managed figure out a unique method to interface with archetech.

Yet instead of feeling satisfied with her latest specialization, Gloriana was already thinking about the distant future!

"This is not going to be easy." Ves commented.

"When is our work ever not? If you can chase after a seemingly impossible goal, then so can I."

"There are good reasons why humans are grappling with archetech." Ves pressed onwards. "If you try to dumb down this tech too much, you will lose too much of the charm that makes it so special and powerful."

"I have already taken this into consideration. Do you want to hear my solution to this problem, Ves? It is indeed true that it will be necessary for me to remove the most alien and unworkable elements of archetech in order to increase its compatibility with our race. That will leave many holes that have weakened its structure to the point of becoming unusable, but it does not have to stay that way. I intend to fill up these gaps with substitutes based on different tech!"

That... actually sounded rather brilliant!

The concept made a lot of sense, but Ves knew that it was incredibly difficult for Gloriana to pull it off in a reasonable timeframe.

It was incredibly difficult for anyone to blend multiple different technologies of different origins and principles!

"From the look in your eyes, I take it that you already have an idea on what sort of tech you intend to use to plug the gaps in your stripped version of archetech."

"Hehehe. You know me too well, Ves. What you have to remember is that the arche developed their archetech in a time long before the Age of Dawn. This means that it is not optimized for the latest

era. I think that there is great progress in extracting the best components of archetech and combining them with the principles of hyper technology!"

"That!"

What a bold plan!

Gloriana stood and proudly declared her ambition!

"If my foresight is accurate, then the combination between these two bases will produce fantastic synergies while also maintaining full compatibility with existing human technologies! The differences will be so great that my end result deserves a name of its own! I call it Glorianatech!"

Chapter 5933 A Concrete Roadmap

Ves became shocked when he heard Gloriana's new master plan.

It turned out that she no longer became satisfied with mastering archetech.

As powerful as it may be, the annoying requirement that people needed to possess their own archeshells in order to properly interface with the tech was an insurmountable obstacle towards mass production.

Ves initially thought that all Gloriana wanted to do was to master archetech so that she could get closer to designing the perfect vessels for her individual clients.

She already managed to get her foot in the door by grasping the essence of archetech. She already conquered the most difficult step. All she had to do beyond this point was to continue her studies on archetech and work it into her current and future mech design projects.

If that was all she aspired to accomplish, then Ves had very little hope that she would be able to advance to the rank of Senior Mech Designer anytime soon.

This was because it was a selfish goal. Even if her unique take on archemechs went on to help her clients and customers to achieve great success on the battlefield, only his wife mastered the method of making these distinctive products.

The transition from Journeyman to Senior demanded more than that. Developing new technologies and design solutions alone was not what their profession was about once they reached this level.

High-ranking mech designers were expected to look beyond their own worlds and think about how their work might contribute to the greater society they were a part of. Every Senior Mech Designer had made the essential realization that they had accumulated enough knowledge and experience to repay their debt to the mech industry.

Human society had generously granted a lot of space for mech designers to pursue their passion and enjoy the fruits of their labor. There were so many mech design universities in human space that anyone of decent intelligence could become a mech designer if they wished.

Although the competition in the mech market ultimately prevented many mech designers from earning easy profits, the best among them still received plenty of opportunities to shine and earn appreciation for their innovative works.

It could have been much worse. Without the rules imposed by the MTA or RA and without the widespread acceptance and support for the mech industry, it would have been at least ten times harder for mech designers to make so much progress in their careers.

In short, in order for Gloriana to make significant strides forward, she needed to move beyond the scope of serving her immediate customers, and instead think about contributing to human society as a whole!

From what Ves heard so far, his wife actually managed to make this crucial step!

The only sketchy part about her new realization and goal was that she was primarily thinking about satisfying her ego.

After all, it was clear that the primary reasons why she wanted to attain greater results were to catch up to Ves and to earn greater fame for herself!

However, Gloriana was hardly the only egotistic mech designer out there. Every human possessed desires of their own. Ves believed that her attitude was not unacceptable so long as she delivered material contributions to the mech community and beyond.

Ves himself had learned through enough instances that people mostly cared about the results as opposed to the process. It did not matter whether he had selfish goals or that he broke a few rules during his experimentation. As long as the outcome produced a considerable net benefit to society, his work still contributed to the advancement of human civilization.

This was ultimately the point of the Kingdom of Mechs and later on the Red Kingdom. They introduced additional reward mechanisms for the sole purpose of turning mech designers into productive members of human society.

If this was not the case, then a lot of mech designers would become much more selfish and less considerate of the needs of the greater whole. This was the opposite of what the Progenitors of Mechs wanted from their successors, so they implemented measures that would not lead to the extinction of the human race.

As Gloriana continued to preen in front of Ves as if she had taken great strides to catch up to him, she clearly looked confident that she had found the right track.

The only issue was that much of her recent progress still remained theoretical for the most part. She still needed to apply her latest gains to an actual mech in order to verify that her direction held enough promise to guide her way forward.

Ves asked a few questions. His wife had truly gained a lot of insights on the nature of archetech.

If he wanted to collaborate with her on any archemechs, then he needed to put a lot of effort into catching up. It was not necessary for him to grasp archetech well as Gloriana, but he at least needed to be able to work around her new specialization.

"What does 'Glorianatech' actually mean to you?" Ves inquired even as Clixie walked over and jumped on her lap. He automatically began to pet the purring cat. "I know what archetech can do more or less, but how does that differ from your own adaptation?"

His wife used her Archglove to tap Hekkel's shell. "There are many differences. One of the important ones is the interfacing issue. Archetech is inherently designed as extensions of the

archeshells of aliens such as the one belonging to my first Glorious Servant. My plan is to remove this alien element and substitute it with an alternative that is more suitable for humans. Hyper technology and to a lesser extent E-technology will provide the solutions. My research on this is still in the earliest stage, so I am not yet able to tell you anything specific. The next iteration of the Dark Zephyr will offer greater clarification."

Ves looked skeptical at her answer.

"That is a bit too vague. I don't think your plan is bad, but I am afraid that you will get overtaken by other people. I doubt that you are the only mech designer who is looking to combine archetech with hyper technology. I am pretty sure that Star Designers such as the Xenotechnician have already made huge strides in this research. What if you devote years of research on a goal that ultimately turns into a wasted effort when the Red Association introduces the next mech generation? Do you have enough confidence in your ability to develop a truly new and innovative technological paradigm that is unmatched by other efforts?"

The temperature in the room seemed to drop. His wife no longer smiled at him. She did not appreciate his lack of confidence in her new plan.

"I am disappointed in you, Ves. Do you think so poorly of my judgment and my abilities? My cranial implant is better than ever, and my investment in archetech has turned me into one of the more authoritative experts in this exotic field. You may be correct that I am not able to match the Xenotechnician when it comes to deciphering alien tech, but that is not what I am trying to do. My goal is to create my own technological paradigm, one that not only attains a perfect with human technology, but also integrates my own design philosophy."

"Please elaborate."

"Do you recall my original ambition?"

Ves nodded. "You want to design the perfect vessels for individual mech pilots. You aim to develop mechs that achieve the best possible fit with their intended users that there is no better alternative."

"That is correct. In my plan, one of the signature features of Glorianatech that makes it different from archetech is that my work will be able to grow and adapt to suit its users better! Archetech can already accomplish a part of this through interfacing with the arche. My own Glorianatech will use an alternate form of interfacing to physically evolve and adapt to become more perfect and suitable for their users in their current circumstances. Any mech based on my tech will possess the same features of my god body solution, but better. My work will also become much easier to reproduce so that everyone will eventually be able to enjoy the advantages of my design philosophy!"

Though Gloriana's plan still possessed a lot of shortcomings, her Glorianatech sounded a bit less spurious than before.

Ves recognized a lot of familiar elements in her work. She clearly took inspiration from his own fixation on growth and tried to incorporate this aspect in her own work.

It was much harder to engender growth on tangible objects as opposed to intangible ones, but it was not impossible. Hyper technology granted Gloriana a powerful bridge for her to realize this amazing effect. Her god body solution already served as a successful prototype.

All she needed to do was to expand on it and increase its practicality. Combining it with a stripped down version of archetech was an ambitious way to do this, but success was anything but guaranteed.

Gloriana needed to solve a lot of difficult technical and conceptual problems in order to work towards her new ambition. Ves did not envy her workload, as she needed to devote a lot of time and effort into mastering archetech, hyper technology, material science and many other related fields.

His wife did not shy away from this nearly impossible challenge.

Many of the problems she needed to tackle would test her intelligence and research ability. It just so happened that her Arache 01 Cranial Implant Set was best suited to tackle this kind of work!

The reason why Gloriana's progress stalled as of late was because she lacked a clear direction to go forward.

That was no longer a problem. She roughly understood what she needed to do to promote to the ranks of Senior and Master!

"So let me get this straight. The upcoming Dark Zephyr may help you advance to Senior so long as your early innovations prove some of your theories."

"I believe so." Gloriana responded. "There is no guarantee that I will be able to get it right. This is not a disaster. I can rework my theories and conduct a different experiment on the next expert mech design project. Our clan is not short on outdated expert mechs that need to be upgraded to the Hyper Generation."

That was indeed the case. That made Gloriana's effort to finally get rid of her identity of Journeyman Mech Designer a lot easier. It was only a matter of time before she advanced to Senior, especially if she retained hold of her current motivations and goals.

"What about the next steps? What will you be working towards once you become a Senior?"

"Glorianatech shall be the central work that will help me realize my design philosophy." Gloriana firmly stated. "It will play the same role as the Carmine system in your situation. Glorianatech is not the end, but the means that will allow me to do much better in designing the perfect vessel. I do not anticipate that this will be enough. I must continue to develop Glorianatech and develop other powerful solutions in order to earn the rank of Star Designer."

Though Ves tried his best to identify flaws and shortcomings in her plan, he had to admit that his wife had truly managed to cobble together a viable roadmap for her career.

She was no longer without direction. She had built up enough accumulation to advance to the rank of Senior, and she already had a solid idea on what she needed to do in order to realize her design philosophy.

Of course, Ves did not expect her to become a Master sooner than himself. The technical challenges involved with trying to turn Glorianatech into a revolutionary technological paradigm that was suitable for mass adoption were way too big!

It might take a century if not several centuries before she was able to complete the fundamental framework for Glorianatech!

Chapter 5934 Teamwork and Hope

Once Ves learned enough about Gloriana's adventures with archetech, the two settled back into their old routines.

Ves tried his best to make up for all of the days he had been away on his business trip by showering his attention on his children.

He not only played with Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine, but also taught them lessons based on his own recent insights.

He also fulfilled his promise by devoting his time on crafting and refining tailored cultivation methods for his children and their developing companion spirits.

While Marvaine was a bit too young to get serious about this, Aurelia and Andraste possessed enough mental development to understand what they were dealing with more or less.

Of course, Ves did not try to use his limited understanding of cultivation science to invent anything too complicated or ambitious.

There was no need for him to come up with a cultivation method comparable to the Imaginary Universe Method or the Metal God Method.

He instead drafted a couple of simplified and low-threshold cultivation methods that primarily enhanced the remarkable natural cultivation of his daughters.

"You like to make friends with people and animals, right?"

Aurelia nodded. "I do! Look at Clixie here. The two of us have grown so close that I know what she is thinking about all the time."

"Miaow~" The Rubarthan Sentinel Cat squinted her eyes as she rested in the little girl's arms

"Then how would you like it if I teach you a cultivation method that can speed up the development of this bond and help you forge closer relationships with others?"

His girl was not completely ignorant about cultivation. With Ves as her father and Cynthia as her grandmother, she definitely held a huge advantage in this regard!

"That sounds dangerous, papa. I thought that we were not supposed to use our power to manipulate other people's minds?"

"You are not wrong, but there is a difference between willing and unwilling manipulation, sweetie." He steadily replied. "You were born as a designer baby. Do you understand what that means?"

"The genes I was born with granted me talents in leadership, social engineering and general intelligence." Aurelia studiously answered. "It is much easier for me to make friends."

Ves smiled and stroked her daughter's lovely black hair. "That's the simple version. While it is true that you have been gifted with artificial talents, it does not necessarily limit your choices in life. You can choose to set them aside if you do not want to become a leader when you have grown into an adult. I will still support you to the best of my ability if you want to become a mech designer like your parents. I will even help you become a mech pilot if you happen to develop the right genetic aptitude."

Aurelia frowned cutely at Ves. "Mama does not like that. She wants me to make the best use of my talents. It is the most optimal choice."

Children of her age shouldn't even be using the word 'optimal'!

"Your mother wants what is best for you. I want what is best for you as well. The only issue is that both of us have different ideas on what constitutes 'best'. I am not telling you to disregard your mother's wishes. I just want you to know that if you do not like her plan for you, I will support you if you want to do anything else. I don't care about efficiency, waste or optimal results. What I want is for you to grow up into a happy woman that finds success in whatever calling that speaks to you the most. I love you, Aurelia."

His daughter smiled and placed her tiny hand on his own. "I love you too, papa. You do not need to worry about me. I truly want to lead the Larkinson Clan. This is what I was born for. There is no shame in admitting this. I like befriending people, living mechs, design spirits and beasts. There is no one who is more suitable for this position than me. I am looking forward to taking over the clan for several years already."

Though Ves had reasons to doubt whether Aurelia would be able to maintain the same conviction once she reached her teenage years, he was willing to give her the benefit of the doubt.

After all, her remarkable conditions had accelerated her mental development. She was already smart enough to understand the significance of her decision.

"Since that is the case, let me develop a cultivation method for you that will direct your growth and make you better at your job. I will need a little time to put it together, but once I am done, I hope you will be cautious in practicing it. I will be keeping a close eye on you to confirm that you are not inadvertently harming yourself."

Aurelia obediently nodded.

She held high expectations towards her father's work. Ves tried his best not to disappoint her little girl by developing a set of methods that were suitable for both Aurelia and Mana.

Ves put a surprising amount of thought into deciding what sort of cultivation methods were suitable for the pair. He asked his girl a number of questions that gave him a better direction on what she wanted to accomplish in her life.

"Here you go." Ves said as he transferred a set of documents to Aurelia's comm. "I have developed two simplified cultivation methods for you. They are not too serious, so you don't have to commit to them if you dislike them or want to pursue a different life."

His daughter curiously activated her comm and projected both documents.

"The Power of Teamwork Method? How does it work?"

"It is a cultivation method that is primarily based on qi cultivation and contract cultivation. I think I explained to you in the past what those two cultivation approaches mean, correct?"

"You did."

"Good. Now, the simplified cultivation method that I have devised for you does two things. First, it speeds up and narrows the focus of your natural cultivation so that it enhances your spirituality and social capabilities. One of the secret weapons that I have relied upon in my career is my ability to read other people's spiritualities. I have become quite good at figuring out people's thoughts and

emotions. I'm not sure whether you can already do this, but this method will help you hone your senses a little better."

"What about the teamwork elements?"

"That's the part that makes this method a little special." Ves grinned. "For whatever reason, you have developed a natural talent in forming close spiritual bonds with people such as myself or Clixie. The steps explained in your new method will make everything more systematic and orderly. You can purposefully forge new bonds, strengthen existing ones or excise them if they become a burden to you. These bonds will not exist in vain."

"How so, papa?"

"The reason why this falls under contract cultivation is because your method is based on the concepts of reciprocity, among others. Do you know the definition of this word?"

"I do! It is a word to describe a state where people help each other."

"That's a clever girl!" Ves leaned down to kiss her forehead. "The Power of Teamwork Method should hopefully allow you to forge mutually beneficial bonds with others. The purpose is to lend your help to your buddy while receiving an equal amount of help in return. The ideal is to develop multiple bonds with equal partners who work together to grow stronger and help each other achieve their goals. The more you work together, the more your cultivation advances. The method is not complete. The later stages are too complex for me to figure out at this time, but it doesn't matter for the time being. This is enough to accompany you in your teens."

Aurelia grew fascinated by the promise of this kiddie cultivation method. While it was indeed a bit too simple and limited to satisfy a proper cultivation, it was enough for a particularly clever child!

"Papa?"

"Yes, sweetie?"

"This cultivation method heavily emphasizes bonds with partners of equal strength. What if I try to make use of a bond with someone as strong as you? It is much more difficult for me to adhere to reciprocity when I cannot do nearly as much as you. There is also grandma."

That was a good question. Fortunately, Ves already took this into account.

"The Power of Teamwork Method may involve contract cultivation, but it is not suitable for unequal partnerships. The bonds you cultivate with buddies of different strength levels will only scale to the weakest partner. For example, the bond you share with me will not allow you to inherit so much stuff from me, even if I am willing to give you additional help. This is for your own protection. You cannot freeload off other people's efforts. You still need to do the hard work of comprehending your own strengths and exercising your own abilities. However, your cultivation method carries an implicit recognition that it is not a big deal if you borrow other people's help every now and then. You just have to make sure to provide similar help to your partners to make it even."

His girl frowned as she struggled to understand her father's intent. "Why add contract cultivation in the first place?"

"Because it is most suitable for an aspiring leader such as yourself, Aurelia. If you don't want to become a mech pilot, mech designer or other specialized profession, then you will have to accept

the fact that you will depend on the strength of your subordinates and allies to get stuff done. The Power of Friendship Method mirrors that in terms of your cultivation. One of the reasons why I want you to practice it is because it should give you the option of borrowing the power of your bonded partners. At the same time, your partners may be able to borrow your power in return, though they probably won't be as good at it because their cultivation is different."

His daughter widened his eyes. She was clever enough to understand the implications of this claim.

"Will this allow me to create my own design spirits?!"

"Theoretically, yes, but don't get too excited. The cultivation method I gave you is not complete enough to let you do that, I think. Just practice it first. We will find out later on if you want to commit to this approach."

After Aurelia learned enough about her new personal cultivation method, she turned her attention to Mana's own method.

"Mew."

The spiritual kitten in question emerged from Aurelia's head and began to read the document as well. The white feline became engrossed by the details!

"The Beacon of Hope Method. You want my companion spirit to combine light and purity to inspire hope?"

Ves nodded. "If the Power of Teamwork Method is meant to help you build a close network of trusted relatives, friends and allies, the Beacon of Hope Method will help you gain the loyalty and obedience of the masses. Whenever Mana shows up, she should be able to win over a crowd of receptive people all by herself. This is why her cultivation is largely based on qi cultivation and deity cultivation. The goal is to help you gain the support of large groups and populations by presenting you as a beacon of hope."

"Mew mew."

"Is this necessary, papa?"

"No. It is not necessary." Ves gently answered. "This is merely a possibility for now. I think that mana is well-suited for this role, and you did tell me that you want Mana to be helpful to others. Light and purity can assist any decent entity without needing to form a close bond with them first. There are dark times ahead in the future. Once red humanity begins to suffer serious losses, there will be a greater need than ever for a beacon of hope that people can rally around. Someone has to shoulder this responsibility, and I would prefer that person to be someone who can trust. I can think of no better choice than you, Aurelia."

Ves was not sure whether it was a good idea to impart Aurelia and Mana with such a heavy expectation, but his hands were tied to an extent.

The Red Cabal was preparing to launch a major offensive. The Subjugation King was coming. He could not afford to allow his children to grow up defenseless and ill-prepared to handle these powerful threats.

If he had to encourage his daughter to turn Mana into a more benign version of the Subjugation King, then he would do so as long as it gave her the capital to survive and thrive!

Chapter 5935 Repulsed By Light

Aurelia eagerly began to practice her new cultivation methods as if they were toys.

Whether it was because she possessed a companion spirit from birth or because she was a partial primordial human, but she took to qi cultivation as if she was the equivalent of a mech pilot with A-grade genetic aptitude.

Ves already expected as much, but he was pleased to see that his work was sound enough to do their jobs without endangering her daughter.

He might not be as wise and knowledgeable as his mother, but he possessed enough of a foundation to develop his own low-level cultivation methods.

He still needed to depend on her assistance if he wanted to do anything more complicated. This was why the Power of Teamwork Method and the Beacon of Hope Methods were not only simplified, but also did not stretch much further beyond the first major cultivation rank.

Since Ves had yet to become a domain shaper, it was impossible for him to properly design a cultivation method that covered the second major cultivation rank.

Still, as rudimentary as his work may be, it was more than enough for a beginner like Aurelia.

The girl practiced the two methods with utmost diligence. She appreciated her father's gifts and did not want his efforts to go to waste.

"Do your best not to deviate from my instructions." He told her. "There are cases where it may be necessary for you to do so, but you should only do so when you have a certain degree of confidence that it is safe. Cultivation deviation is a very real danger, and it often happens when people get too smart for their own good. Ask me first if you want to deviate from a method. Even if I don't have the answer, your grandmother will. Until then, try and follow the instructions as faithfully as possible. You need to follow the letter but more importantly the spirit of the methods. This is the best way to manipulate E energy into strengthening you in a targeted fashion."

Trying to diverge from the steps and theories outlined by Ves might cause all kinds of accidents, so he did his best to reduce that probability from the onset.

He had deliberately simplified and weakened the cultivation methods in order to increase their fault tolerance.

This reduced the effectiveness of the cultivation methods, but it would also make it easier for Aurelia and Mana to switch to completely different methods as they grew older.

A small part of Ves wanted his oldest daughter to rebel against the track set by her genes and make her own choice on what she wanted to become!

If Aurelia ever decided to defy her mother, Ves would support her as much as possible. For now, she learned and mastered the methods quickly with guidance from Ves. It felt nice to be able to teach her professional knowledge that would help her go further in life.

He did not have a lot to teach to his eldest daughter. Sure, he was a good public speaker and knew his way around politics, but he lacked the systematic training and studies in these fields.

His daughter had already started taking classes in these fields. The highly qualified first-class teachers of the Joan Devos Elementary School could help her a lot more than a mech designer who stumbled his way to a leadership position.

Perhaps the only advantage he had over the first-raters who received the best possible education on leadership and public speaking was that he did not follow any of their established formulas.

Ves was not sure whether he wanted to pass on that particular aspect to Aurelia. He did not want her to break taboos or flip the table whenever it was convenient. He envisioned a much cleaner public image for her daughter when she grew up. This was why he deliberately imparted a cultivation method that would shape Mana into a beacon of hope.

He crossed a line when he did that. His daughter deserved more time to experience what life had to offer before she settled on a role for herself and her companion spirit.

Yet instead of giving her a few more years to explore her choices, he had given Mana a heavy push towards a very particular kind of deity cultivator.

Perhaps his confrontation against the Subjugation King had spooked and traumatized him more than expected. He had let his fears and hatred against the God King who attempted to enslave him influence his decision-making once again.

It was only hours after he had given Aurelia her first tutoring session on how to practice cultivation that he realized he may have made a horrible mistake.

"The Subjugation King told me that he values any slave who develops an affinity for light."

Aurelia, or more precisely Mana, had managed to do that early in her life.

Due to the nature of companion spirits, this effectively meant that his daughter would find it remarkably easy to deepen her understanding of this E energy attribute!

Ves grew a lot more ambivalent towards this process. Mana's inclination towards light made it inevitable for her daughter to embody the element of light to a degree.

Light could be harsh. Light was an annihilating force. Light was indiscriminate. Light passed judgment. Light was blinding.

While he did not expect her to follow in the footsteps of the Subjugation King, the alien taught him that not everything related to light was pleasant.

Light could be harsh. Light was an annihilating force. Light was indiscriminate. Light passed judgment. Light was blinding.

Ever since he developed an affinity towards darkness, Ves had become more critical and repulsed towards light and its related associations.

That was really annoying, especially because he relied heavily on luminar crystal technology to empower his ranged mechs.

He was not quite certain how his changes affected his effectiveness in working with luminar crystal technology. He feared that by embracing the opposite element, he would find it harder to gain inspiration and insights into light.

Though it was possible for cultivators to master two opposing elements, they always had to put a lot of effort and sacrifice into it. They needed to work hard to form and maintain a balance.

Ves had only seen that done right in only a few instances. The Ouroboros was the most prominent example among them, and even then the old living mech had gone astray due to letting its Destroyer sword overwhelm its creation aspect.

Ves already had enough on his plate. Life, mechs and darkness already caused his nascent domain to become a lot more complex than those of his peers. There was no good reason to add the light element to the mix.

Sure, he liked luminar crystal technology, but it was not central to his design philosophy. He could live without it, especially now that he was transitioning into a first-class mech designer.

A huge set of advanced weapon technologies became available to him once he reached that point. Plasma weapons alone were powerful and potent enough for him to play around for a long time.

While luminar crystal technology was incredibly versatile and synergized well with hyper technology, it was not wise for Ves to treat it as the only acceptable ranged weapon system.

He mentally shook his head.

It was not quite clear to him how much his embrace of darkness affected his ability to work with luminar crystal technology.

As a creation cultivator, he should be able to work with stuff that fell outside of his comfort zone.

He might not feel as passionate about the alien tech as before, but he still retained his prior expertise and experiences with the tech. He could treat it as just one of many other fields of technology.

Understanding the theories and knowing how to apply them was the basis of engineering. This should be more than enough to continue working with luminar crystal weapon systems.

That reminded him of another consequence to his changed domain.

Since there was a sacrifice, there should also be a payoff.

He had already discovered that it became a lot easier for him to study tech that was at least tangibly related to the darkness element.

His previous study sessions already caused him to make a lot of strides in understanding cloaking technology, ECM technology and materials with sensor dampening effects.

He also found it a lot easier to think about how to design mechs that were able to hide their presence a lot easier than before.

It became a lot easier for him to devise meaningful upgrades for the Dark Zephyr and the Phobos, among other sneaky mechs!

The Phobos alone captured his imagination like no other. He had always regarded the living expert stealth mech as one of his best works, and now he had even more reason to adore his existence.

The powerful and fearsome machine oozed darkness!

From the powerful Optaar transphasic active stealth system to the mysterious and innovative Geist System, the Phobos embodied many of the best aspects of darkness.

Even the way he was meant to be used was draped in darkness!

The Phobos eschewed direct confrontation and preferred to assassinate his targets in an underhanded fashion. The expert mech should ideally remain unnoticed until the time for secrecy had passed. The stealth mech was also able to deceive his enemies by being effective in direct combat.

Ves deeply wanted to pull up the design of the Phobos and improve it right away. His head was filled with so many ideas that it was frustrating for him to keep them contained.

However, the Phobos was one of the expert mechs that least needed an upgrade for the time being.

There were many older machines that were clamoring to be pulled up to the Hyper Generation, the Dark Zephyr chief among them. Ves and Gloriana kept poor Venerable Tusa waiting for way too many months due to the insistence of incorporating archetech in every Larkinson expert mech.

"Soon." Ves murmured as he decisively shoved all of his ideas relating to the Phobos to the depths of his mind.

It was better if he waited and upgraded other expert mechs first. This would grant him more time to deepen his mastery of relevant technologies. It would also give him time to research and experiment with hyper technology related to the darkness element.

Once he built up a robust accumulation in these areas, Ves had a hunch that he might be able to transform the Phobos into a resplendent machine!

In any case, his musings about what he intended to do with the Phobos did not distract him for too long.

Once he made sure that Aurelia was on the right track, Ves tried to devise a set of cultivation methods for his second daughter.

A part of him wondered whether it was even necessary.

Andraste had a strong desire to become a mech pilot. If that was not possible, then she wanted to become a traditional swordswoman instead!

Both of them were willpower-related professions, which meant that they were much less dependent on systematic cultivation.

It was extremely difficult to hone willpower under artificial conditions. Only discipline, diligence, hardship and to a certain extent talent gave birth to extraordinary willpower.

Due to receiving instruction from Ketis and a number of other expert pilots, the energetic girl had already taken strides to follow this lifestyle.

Ves did not know whether Andraste might ruin her chances of becoming a powerful high-ranking mech pilot or swordmaster if she started to lean too heavily on qi cultivation.

"Papa?"

"Yes, pumpkin?"

"You never gave me a method that could improve my genetic aptitude. Can you make one for me, please?"

Ves got reminded of the flawed and dangerous cultivation methods that people with ulterior motives spread on the galactic net.

His daughter had tried to practice one before he recognized the dangers and exposed its flaws.

The Red Two put more effort into removing dubious and unverified cultivation methods from the galactic net, but people could always find a place to access them if they searched hard enough.

He did not want his daughter to dabble with those shoddy works, so he needed to give her a resolution.

The problem was that he felt out of depth when it came to this issue. He knew far too little about genetic aptitude to devise a proper cultivation method around this qualification. It might not even be possible for anyone to improve it due to its complexity.

Fortunately, he knew of at least one person who knew more on this subject!

"Mother! I need help! Can you come and give me a hand?"

Chapter 5936 Difficult Wish

Though Ves hadn't felt the Superior Mother's presence as of late, he had a hunch that she was always keeping an eye on his children.

This was especially the case when they engaged in cultivation in any fashion!

It was dangerous for children to practice cultivation methods. Not only were they too young to properly understand complicated theories and subjects, their restlessness and lack of precision drastically increased the chance of accidents!

Furthermore, their bodies, minds and spiritualities were often far too weak to withstand the pressure of the changes wrought by rapid growth.

His children were an exception to this rule, but only to an extent. He was sure that if they were on the verge of harming themselves due to harmful practice, the Superior Mother would step in and prevent them from getting truly harmed.

This gave him a bit more confidence in devising custom cultivation methods for his children.

That said, trying to improve one's genetic aptitude for mech pilot was so far beyond his expertise that he did not have any confidence that he could fulfill Andraste's request by himself.

As much as his mother wanted him to become more self-sufficient, there were times where he needed to recognize his own inferiority and enlist the aid of a true expert.

This was one of those times.

The Superior Mother evidently agreed with his judgment, because she sent down a manifestation.

"Grandma!"

Andraste did not act with any restraint and ran towards the manifestation of a True God with her arms spread open!

The Superior Mother immediately softened her harsh and matronly expression and picked up the giggling girl like any other ordinary grandparent.

It became clear to Ves that his mother placed a lot of importance in this meeting. A part of her consciousness descended onto her incarnation.

Andraste babbled to her grandmother for an entire minute. Ves watched with a bemused expression as he contemplated the odd family dynamic.

Due to the Great Severing, it was impossible for any of his children to visit their paternal grandparents in the flesh.

This caused his children to grow up thinking of the Superior Mother as their real grandmother.

This was a great shame. The only way his kids could maintain direct contact with their grandmother was by using the Superior Mother as a medium.

This caused his children to grow up thinking of the Superior Mother as their real grandmother.

They did not regard the ancestral spirit as a completely different existence from the likes of their other blood relatives.

In their eyes, there was no fundamental difference between the Superior Mother and Benjamin Larkinson!

Both of them were family, and that was all that mattered as far as they were concerned!

Ves also believed that Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine also failed to make a distinction between Cynthia Larkinson and the Superior Mother. Both of them were one and the same, even though that was technically not the case.

He gave up on any further attempts to clarify their misconceptions. They weren't all that important, and given how the Superior Mother acted around her own grandchildren, they might actually be correct.

It just became a little more difficult to present this family dynamic to outsiders. Most people still considered the Superior Mother to be a made-up Hexer myth!

"Ves." Her incarnation spoke in a more serious tone. "You are correct to seek my consultation. I have already devoted my time to researching what can be done. I even went as far as exchange theories with the Evolution Witch on this matter."

That was incredibly helpful!

Although god pilots weren't scientists by nature, their intelligence and learning ability reached absurd heights once they fully merged with their mechs.

Out of all of the god pilots in the Red Ocean, the Evolution Witch was probably the smartest or the second-smartest among them. She may be a lot younger than the likes of the First Flame, but she had dedicated a part of her life to studying biotechnology in order to save her life and to seek continuous evolution.

As a god pilot, she already knew far more about the piloting profession than practically anyone. Her impressive expertise in biotechnology further strengthened her understanding on how mech pilots worked.

Ves looked hopeful at the Superior Mother.

Unfortunately, she did not have good news for him and his daughter.

"What you are asking for is absurd." She flatly told him. "Genetic aptitude is a biological aberration that is produced through a confluence of many supporting factors. There is no single solution that allows humans to become more adept at interfacing with mechs. There are no powerful genes, superfoods, planetary environments or training methods that can guarantee that a child will develop the desired genetic aptitude grades. Since we do not understand how it can be formed, it is not possible to devise a cultivation method that increases the chance of turning someone into a potentate."

Both Ves and Andraste looked dismayed when the Superior Mother brutally explained the truth.

"Didn't the Chosen Human manage to find a way?" He asked.

"The willpower of a god pilot is strong enough to rewrite reality, even in defiance of the heavens. This makes it possible for god pilots to break the rules that we take for granted, but only in exceedingly limited cases. Before you ask, the Evolution Witch cannot replicate this feat."

"Why not? Her domain is based on evolution. Even if this is not her core specialization, shouldn't she be able to figure out a different way to develop one's genetic aptitude?"

His mother shook her head. "God pilots are not miracle workers, even though it is tempting to see them that way. They are supreme warriors first and foremost. They are much more adept at destruction as opposed to creation. At most, the Evolution Witch can harness her power to forcibly mutate Andraste into a biologically superior organism. The changes may or may not affect her genetic aptitude, but there are so many factors affecting this parameter that it is nearly impossible to make your dream come true."

Ves frowned. This was a huge setback, but he did not give up right away.

"What about coming up with a more abstract cultivation method? The properties of E energy makes it so that it can make ideas come true if you think about them hard enough. Andraste's spirituality is pretty strong thanks to her companion spirit. Is it possible to teach her a method that is solely concentrated on conjuring genetic aptitude into existence?"

"You are overestimating the effects of the power of heaven." His mother said in a disapproving tone. "Your approach is doomed to fail. There are several reasons why this is the cause. Taking the abstract approach is too vague and has a much higher likelihood of producing a backlash. Many serious cultivation methods are dense and filled with obscure texts because they put their practitioners into the exactly right mindset. Your suggestion tries to do the opposite. Cultivation is not equivalent to making a wish come true. There are many many constraints imposed by reality. Genetic aptitude is subject to so many of them that only the Chosen Human can guarantee that Andraste can become a potentate."

Damn. So even that wouldn't work. Ves knew it was too good to be true. He still felt obliged to make the suggestion, if only to learn exactly why it was unfeasible.

Though the news crushed Andraste's mood, she was not that weak.

"It's okay, papa. I will have to wait until I am 10 before I find out whether I can pilot a mech like any other kid. I don't need special treatment. I will have as much of a chance of becoming a potentate like everyone else."

The Superior Mother smiled and stroked her ethereal hand on Andraste's head. "That is the right mindset towards this matter. Fate is impartial. Only 3.5 percent of all humans are able to develop genetic aptitude. This statistic may have changed since we entered the Age of Dawn, but I doubt it has created serious deviations. Andraste here should actually have a slightly higher chance of developing genetic aptitude on account of her Larkinson bloodline, but even then there is a strong possibility that she will be denied this profession."

"That... may not necessarily be the case."

There was always the Carmine System, which the Red Association wanted to roll out in the near future.

The only concern was that Ves had no idea whether pure Carmine mech pilots were able to undergo apotheosis.

What if it was impossible for Andraste to become a high-ranking mech pilot?

That would invalidate many of the reasons for piloting mechs for his daughter!

She may as well become Ketis' personal disciple and become a swordmaster. At least there was no requirement for genetic aptitude for this profession.

Cynthia was well aware of the existence of the Carmine System. She gave her own opinion on the subject.

"Genetic aptitude is a central aspect of the mech piloting profession. It has become such a strong totemic belief to a huge swathe of humans as well as strong mech pilots that it is hard to eliminate it. You should know that any attack on the importance of genetic aptitude will be met with intense opposition from nearly every existing mech pilot. To devalue this requirement is to deprive this class of warriors their unique gift."

So that was why the mechers repeatedly insisted to Ves that he should not spill the secrets related to the Carmine System ahead of time.

He could truly envision the entire body of mech pilots getting pissed at Ves if he botched the rollout of his powerful invention!

It was stupid and selfish, but mech pilots were never famed for being rational in the first place.

Ves let out a tired breath. "Okay. I won't push this matter any further. I still don't think it is as impossible as you claim. We just haven't found the right solution yet. However, I recognize that it may be for the best to wait until Andraste is 10 years old before determining her future trajectory."

In other words, Ves accepted that he could do nothing but to let 'fate' run its course.

He hated the complete lack of control. Ves knew that a huge amount of parents felt likewise about it, but they hadn't been able to do anything either.

Andraste continued to cling to her grandmother as a moment of silence ensued.

"So how do we proceed?" Ves asked. "Can we do something else for my girl?"

The Superior Mother lightened up a bit. "We can. If we want to preserve Andraste's chances of developing a genetic aptitude for mech piloting, then it is better if she does not engage in any active

form of cultivation. That does not preclude her companion spirit. Yaika is sufficiently separated from Andraste that she can develop by herself."

That led to a discussion on what sort of cultivation method they should devise for Yaika.

Perhaps Cynthia felt regretful that she was not able to help Andraste develop the right genetic aptitude, because she readily offered her assistance this time.

Ves did not have to do all of the work himself. It was incredibly helpful and reassuring that his highly knowledgeable mother made suggestions and offered corrections.

The biggest point of contention was the domain that Yaika should be working towards.

"Death is not a pleasant element to work with." Cynthia said as she lifted the black companion spirit and studied her carefully. "If Andraste does not make any special adaptations, then her health will begin to decline if Yaika ever grows powerful enough. We need to plan ahead and nip this problem in the bud."

"Agreed." Ves said.

The problem was not as serious as it sounded, as Yaika was still a part of Andraste.

Still, who knew what sort of problems might occur if their strength ever became mismatched. If Yaika became a lot stronger than her principal, then a strong death domain might make Andraste's life miserable!

Chapter 5937 Competing Visions

"Andraste is too young to determine her path." The Superior Mother explained. "She needs to be at least 10 years old to find out whether she is suited to become a mech pilot. If this possibility is denied from her, then she will need additional time to choose what she wants to become instead."

"I already know what I want to do! I want to become a swordmaster!" Andraste whined.

The Superior Mother smiled at her granddaughter. "There are more ways for you to become strong than to wield a sword, especially now that we have entered the Age of Dawn."

"I don't care! I want to become a swordmaster!" The little girl repeated.

Both Ves and Cynthia knew that Andraste might actually stick to this conviction a few years later.

That did not mean they were ready to exclude every other possibility. There were still other ways for her to make good use of her gifts. She could study warfare and become a military officer if she wanted. Becoming good at swordsmanship was helpful, but there were better ways to boost her ability to command troops.

Right now, there was so much uncertainty about Yaika's future role that the companion spirit needed to keep her options open.

The best way to do that was to leave the spiritual kitten alone and allow her to continue to rely on natural cultivation.

That was not the best solution, though. Natural cultivation may be safe and automatic, but it was also slow and inefficient. The biggest problem Ves had with it was that it was not directed enough to know where it was heading towards.

The act of cultivation allowed a practitioner to take control over his or her own destiny. Ves believed it was always better to take control over the future rather than let someone dictate their lives!

This meant that for Yaika to grow more efficiently, Ves and his mother needed to choose a cultivation direction for the juvenile companion spirit.

This was where Ves and Cynthia started to disagree with each other.

"The companion spirits that you have created for your children are fascinating." The Superior Mother admitted. "It is interesting how you have implanted them with the seeds of borrowed talents. Right now, Yaika has only managed to 'unlock' her death talent. That leaves her with 5 more talents that she has yet to activate. With the right cultivation method and changes in behavior, she can steadily work towards unlocking a specific talent before increasing her comprehension in the new element."

"That does not mean it is necessarily a good idea to have Yaika work towards unlocking her life attribute." Ves frowned. "You have always fixated on the idea of putting opposites together, but not everything has to turn into a yin-yang diagram. You are burdening my daughter with way too powerful stuff. She's still a kid! She doesn't even fully understand what it means for people to die, so how can she understand both death and life at the same time?!"

His girl strongly objected to this statement!

"Uhm, I'm not stupid, papa. I do know what it means to die! Larkinsons die all the time whenever they fight."

Ves did not really believe that was the case, but he did not bother to correct her on this point.

"Mastering the power of life and death will ensure that Andraste becomes more powerful than any other cultivator." Cynthia argued. "Trust me on this, Ves. They may not sound impressive, but that is because you have outright cheated by artificially implanting the extremely rare talents related to life and death inside her companion spirit at the same time. Do you know how many cultivators would kill to possess even a fraction of Yaika's talents? Life and death are the most valuable elements that you have implanted into her, especially when they can be used in combination. She will truly be able to shine as a qi cultivator or creation cultivator."

"Qi cultivation sucks in pure combat." Ves crossed his arms. "Any high-ranking mech pilot can counter a qi cultivator of the same rank. This is an absolute fact. I seriously doubt that Andraste wants to become a mech designer or traditional blacksmith. I would support her if she chooses to become one, but until then, it is best not to force her companion spirit to tackle a challenge that is way too big."

He did not deny the attraction of being able to master the power of life and death, but he thought it was too wasteful and inefficient.

The Ouroboros had taught him that it was a lot more troublesome to cultivate two opposing elements at the same time. The rewards may be insanely lucrative, but it would take a long time and a lot of needless hardship in order to fully master and fuse two conflicting E energy attributes!

Perhaps Andraste may grow ambitious enough to tread on this difficult path, but she should only do so when she was older and more aware of the implications of her choices.

For now, he wanted her to take it easy. Her companion spirit was still young and malleable enough that she could easily change her cultivation without suffering too many repercussions for the foreseeable years.

"What do you suggest, then?" The Superior Mother frowned.

"Yaika has already embraced the death element, so that cannot be changed. The companion spirit also has a part of Qilanxo inside of her. I think it would be a good idea to unlock this talent and comprehend the nature of protection. If Andraste wants to become a soldier, then I want to make sure that she possesses the means to protect herself. I have fought in enough battles to know that it only takes a single accident for people to lose their lives. If Andraste can develop a greater ability to protect herself, then I won't have to worry about her life so much."

As a parent herself, Cynthia more than understood Ves' concerns.

"Soldiers die, Ves. If Andraste truly wants to become a fighter, then we should not coddle her too much. Death and protection do not synergize well with each other. They can even conflict with each other. Why do you want Yaika to develop a talent for protection?"

Ves adopted a complex expression. "I don't want my daughter to fight for the wrong reasons, I suppose. Perhaps I am imposing on her too much again, but it is far too easy for her to embrace the act of killing for its own sake. She should fight to protect her friends and relatives. Whenever our clan is at risk, I want my second daughter to become a guardian for our fellow Larkinsons."

"Are you asking her to become a knight mech specialist if she is suited to become a mech pilot?" Cynthia skeptically asked.

"Not necessarily, mother. Let me explain a potential vision for Yaika. I envision her to be a cat that does not specialize in the lives of others, but collects the spirits of the slain when they get loose. No matter whether Andraste is in the trenches or not, her companion spirit should be able to make herself useful by roaming around and picking up the spirits of the dead before they dissipate. The combination between death and protection should allow her to preserve the spirits once they come into her possession. After that, my daughter can deal with spirits properly."

"You cannot bring the dead back to life so easily, Ves. What I have managed to accomplish is the exception rather than the rule. It takes age, power and wisdom to define death itself."

Ves was not so sure about that. Qilanxo had managed to transcend death as well, and she was originally a giant exobeast, no, a mutated beast!

Sure, Qilanxo accumulated both age and power back then, but her 'wisdom' was rather questionable. How she managed to overcome death while many other humans and exobeasts failed to do so was a mystery, but Ves had no reason to complain.

"I am not ambitious enough to abolish death for all of our clansmen." Ves said. "However, I think it is still useful for Yaika to develop the ability to harvest and contain the remnant spiritualities of deceased soldiers. We can put the ones derived from Larkinsons and other friendly humans into appreciative resting places. We can use the ones derived from our alien enemies as useful ingredients. Yaika can either absorb them to fuel her cultivation or hand them over to someone who can convert them into useful products."

Someone such as himself.

Cynthia pondered over the suggestion. Her expression softened.

"You want to turn Yaika into the equivalent of a priestess of the dead."

"No. Not a priestess. Maybe a... valkyrie?"

"Whatever characterization you use, it does not change the fact that this is an unusual combination. I know how to combine life and death. I have bountiful experience in doing so. I can mentor your daughter in how to best apply her companion spirit's powers."

That did not reassure Ves in the slightest!

He believed that his mother may be an expert in this area, but he did not want her to exert too much influence over Andraste's growth!

Who knew what kind of unrepentant war criminal Andraste would turn into after a few decades of taking lessons from a woman who was formerly known as 'Cultmaster Original Sin'!

"As much as I want the best for my daughter, I still think it is inappropriate to place such a heavy burden on her shoulders. Mastering the power of death and protection is much more suitable for a soldier. Death will make her more lethal, while protection will help to safeguard her life. The combination between the two E energy attributes will allow her to manipulate the battlefield in more profound ways."

The two could not agree on Yaika's best course forward. Even if the companion spirit would still be able to change to a different trajectory, spending several years on practicing the wrong method still amounted to a considerable waste!

"Instead of arguing with each other, perhaps we should let your daughter decide."

That was not the best idea, but it should break the deadlock.

"You've been listening to us talk. Which combination do you prefer the most, Andraste? Do you want to explore the mysteries of life and death and wield mind boggling powers, or do you want to get ready for the battlefield by comprehending the fusion between death and protection?"

Andraste announced her preference right away. She did not need to spend any moment of thought to contemplate her choice!

"I would rather become a valkyrie! I think you are right, papa. If I want to become a soldier, I should develop the powers that can best enhance my performance. Trying to study the combination between life and death is too... academic."

The Superior Mother frowned. "Do not look down on this combination. Mastering the power of life and death can allow you to reap the souls of enemies from a distance. It will enable you to heal yourself when injured, and consume the souls of the dead in order to replenish your energy."

"Those are extremely high-end abilities. How long will it take for Andraste to pull off these abilities?"

"Yaika is a natural talent in these elements. It should not take too long. It is difficult to estimate a more precise range."

"It should take decades at the very least." Ves threw out his own guess. "That is way too long. Yaika needs to become combat effective as soon as possible."

Andraste walked over to her father and hugged his side. "I think your idea is better, papa. I love grandma, but her ideas are too old-fashioned."

"Hahaha, well said! You're right! Your grandmother wants to revive a relic from the ancient past, but we live in different times. Many threats are on the horizon. Our clan will come under increasing threat. What we need the most are protectors, not mystics. You can change your mind later on, but I hope for now you learn a bit more about how to protect yourself and your fellow family. Does that sound okay to you, pumpkin?"

"Uhm!"

"Maaw!"

Chapter 5938 Soul Protection

Now that Andraste took her father's side, Cynthia no longer insisted on pushing her ambitious idea.

Mastering the power of life and death might turn Yaika into an extremely powerful companion spirit, but the difficulty of doing so was too great.

Though Ves had high expectations for Andraste and her companion spirit, he did not want to turn into one of those overbearing parents that were all too common in first-class society. The pressure of competition was so great that children were being pushed to their limits far too early in their lives.

Cultivation was not child's play. It was the process of guided self-evolution through generating and absorbing extraordinary energies. Too much could go wrong for Ves to take this matter lightly.

His mother agreed.

"In my experience, it is always better to encourage a cultivator to follow his or her own path, rather than practice an objectively better method or technique. When you engage in the pursuit for power and longevity, it is vitally important to retain your sense of self. If your cultivation diverges far too much from your natural inclinations, you are at risk of losing yourself to your own cultivation method. If you do not pull back from the brink in time, nothing of your original self will be left. The being who occupies your body, dominates your mind and took over your soul will be a different person that is fundamentally different from yourself."

That was a deep and profound lesson. Ves had a feeling that his mother pointedly gave him a warning for fear that he might cause a mistake in the future.

He could ponder over her words later. For now, he needed to provide Yaika with a proper cultivation method that would allow her to accelerate her growth in the next decade.

Ves and Cynthia joined hands to develop an appropriate cultivation method.

Though Cynthia was doing much of the heavy lifting on account of her much greater knowledge base and comprehension of the relevant concepts, Ves tried his best to pitch in whenever he could.

As the creator of companion spirits, Ves possessed a better understanding of their fundamental nature. This allowed him to better attune Cynthia's work to Yaika's extremely specific conditions.

Still, Ves had no illusions that Cynthia's work was significantly better than what he managed to make for his oldest daughter.

The Valkyrie Guardian Method that she managed to put together in a matter of hours was significantly faster, more powerful and more optimized than the Beacon of Hope Method!

Compared to the relatively simplistic mechanisms of the latter, the former was superior in almost every aspect.

The Valkyrie Guardian Method was predominantly a qi cultivation method that emphasized the strengthening of the spirit. One of the express goals that Ves had set was to enable his daughter to withstand hostile cultivators that were much harder to defend against.

The most recent lightning tribulation had exposed Ves to the terror of cultivators who possessed the frightening ability to bypass one's material defenses and directly target their spiritualities!

For all of the Dominion of Man's excellent combat power, the dreadnought clearly was not sufficiently prepared to put up a fight against tricky cultivators.

The mirror beast had almost caused the downfall of the Dominion of Man by relying on its unreasonable ability to hoodwink any living entity up to and including True Gods!

The fact that even the likes of Caramond and Furia failed to put up an adequate defense against such attacks said a lot about the importance of protecting one's spirit.

Ves himself suffered due to this shortcoming.

When the Subjugation King managed to hijack the tribulation storm, he managed to plant his soul mark onto Ves with disturbing ease.

What pissed Ves off the most about this disastrous occurrence was that he never had a chance of defending himself against this attack in the first place!

Sure, the gap in strength was so enormous that Ves would have ended up with a soul mark if he was better prepared, but he should at least be able to put up a better fight!

Given that the Subjugation King was most definitely on his way to the Red Ocean, there was a decent chance that Andraste might encounter the powerful being in her later career.

She needed to be ready. No matter whether she served as a mech pilot or a military commander, she needed to possess the ability to protect herself and possibly others from the Subjugation King's less tangible attacks!

Yaika happened to be in an excellent position to serve as Andraste's soul protector.

"The early stages of this cultivation method is primarily centered around accumulation." Cynthia explained to her granddaughter. "Yaika will not be able to wield any special powers yet, but she will deepen her connection to the concepts of death and protection. Your companion spirit will also undergo a gradual transformation that will make her more sensitive towards dying and deceased beings. It will take at least several years to build a solid foundation based on Yaika's current talents, but it is necessary for her to obtain the qualifications necessary to connect with the power of heaven and borrow its power to amplify her abilities."

Andraste tilted her head. She understood her grandmother's words, but failed to comprehend the underlying purpose and context.

"Yaika alone is not strong enough to do a lot of cool stuff, and she won't be for a long time." Ves succinctly explained for his girl. "This is why the Valkyrie Guardian Method uses a shortcut. It will

change Yaika to make it easier for her to take control over the surrounding E energy radiation. There is a lot of energy flowing through this region of space. If Yaika can leverage just a fraction to it, she should be able to perform feats such as killing enemies by snuffing out their spirits and harvesting all of the remnant spiritualities that have gotten loose on the battlefield."

"Oh. I understand! This is real cultivation!"

Ves smiled and leaned over to plant another kiss on Andraste's red hair. "It is more than that. It is also a powerful form of protection. Yaika doesn't have Mana's purity element, so your companion spirit has to resort to a different means to defend your spirituality against external influences. The full mechanics are a bit too complicated for you to understand, but a big part of it involves turning ambient E energy into a giant shield for you and the people you care about."

"A Valkyrie Guardian." Andraste said in an awed tone as she looked down at her small companion spirit. "Can my companion spirit truly become so powerful?"

"She can, but only as long as she is disciplined enough."

The young woman was no stranger to this. She diligently kept up both her swordsmanship and marksmanship practice, all the while making sure she kept up at school.

"Maaw!"

The black spiritual kitten sounded extremely eager to get started with this cultivation method!

"Let's get started."

Since the Valkyrie Guardian Method was more advanced, it took Ves and Cynthia a bit more time to ensure that Andraste did not misinterpret anything. She also had to receive instruction on how to practice the more obtuse parts of the Valkyrie Guardian Method.

Once Ves grew assured that Andraste and Yaika gained enough understanding to work out the rest of the cultivation method by themselves, he retreated to a secure chamber.

The manifestation of the Superior Mother followed suit.

Ves had already dismissed his guards, but he also activated a suite of security measures that jammed the surrounding area and made it a lot harder to eavesdrop on his conversation.

The Superior Mother channeled greater power into her manifestation and deployed a tentative domain that should help with blocking more esoteric spying methods.

The measures were not completely foolproof, but they should suffice for the time being.

Ever since Ves had returned from his extremely eventful business trip, he was already aware that he had attracted a lot more attention. His attempts at remaining low-key did not deter a lot of spies from trying to infiltrate Diandi Base and spy on his work.

The mechs and soldiers dispatched by the Bluejay Fleet as well as the planetary branch of the Red Association had strengthened their presence in Diandi Base as a response.

Its relatively isolated location in a remote region that was completely owned by the Larkinson Clan already helped a lot in making it difficult for spies to infiltrate Diandi Base.

Alas, plenty of well-equipped infiltrators and high-tech bots still tried to get past all of the security measures every hour!

Ves needed to become even more careful about sharing sensitive information, especially when the mechers had already placed themselves in the perfect position to steal his secrets!

He developed an increasing desire to obtain a starship that was built by a shipyard controlled by the Larkinson Clan from beginning to end. He believed that living on a ship that had not been built by relying on outside help was the only way to gain a true measure of privacy in his life!

His new darkness affinity practically screamed how unwise it was for him to remain in the light by residing in a relocated base that was originally built by the Terrans!

"It is safe for us to talk, my son." The Superior Mother said as she continued to channel her domain at great cost.

Fortunately, the incarnation could easily bear the consumption since she was a True God.

Ves knew better than to take his mother at her word. He had learned the hard way that she was more than willing to deceive her in order to teach him that he should always be prepared for treachery.

Ves pulled out a multiscanner and diligently tested the more technological security measures.

Meanwhile, Blinky appeared out of his head and began to check whether the chamber was devoid of any spiritual probes.

The precautions were very much necessary in his opinion. Once he ascertained that it was unlikely for third parties to penetrate this room, Ves finally addressed his mother.

"Please take a closer look at the soul mark and tell me what you think."

The manifestation of the Superior Mother floated closer and began to press into Ves.

He had to put a lot of effort into suppressing his own Spirituality while his own mother examined it in a direct and intrusive manner.

He could feel her roaming in his head and inspecting a lot of stuff aside from the soul mark.

Ves gritted his teeth but kept his mouth shut. If he could not trust his own mother when his own life was at stake, then he was truly doomed.

"You have grown in many ways." She said.

"Lightning baptisms are really good at that. The premise is that you can survive the punishment raining down from above."

Once Cynthia gained a better sense of Ves' current state, she cautiously started to examine the soul mark.

She did so with excessive care. Not once did she try to touch or alarm the soul mark in any way. She did her best to reduce her presence and observe the parasitical construct without giving it any cause to trigger an unknown routine.

20 or so minutes passed before the Superior Mother withdrew her presence and floated back.

The expression on her face looked anything but good.

"You can't do it?" Ves asked even though he already knew the answer.

The manifestation shook her head. "It is indeed a genuine spell cast by an alien God King. You are lucky that it is likely the most stripped down version of a soul mark. It is clear to me that there are more complete and powerful variations of this mark. The one planted in your soul primarily contains two dominant components. One of them is positioning. The alien is likely aware of your location relative to his own at all times. The other component is entrenchment. The soul mark becomes increasingly harder to remove as it digs in further. This ensures that you can never remove it by advancing your cultivation."

"Ugh."

Ves already figured out these effects, but they really started to sink in now that he obtained verification from a more qualified source.

"So you can't remove it all, mother?"

"No. The answer remains the same even if I become ten times stronger."

Damn!

Chapter 5939 Unsolvable

Ves never expected his mother to be able to get rid of the soul mark with ease, so her verdict did not affect him all that much.

Sure, he grew disappointed that he wouldn't be able to get rid of this huge burden right away, but he quickly accepted his new reality and regained his composure.

"Is there anything about the soul mark that allows it to record my thoughts and activities before transmitting them back to You-Know-Who?"

The manifestation of the Superior Mother rolled her eyes at the banal way that Ves referred to his latest alien foe.

"Do not act childish. The opponent you face is so much more powerful than any of us that he has earned our highest respect... and fear. This soul mark is a masterpiece in itself. It has already exposed me to a novel and radically different approach to energy manipulation and soul manipulation. This God King is not only old and experienced beyond measure, but he is also a product of a highly advanced society that has made so many attainments in the application of E energy that I envy the natives of Messier 87."

Cynthia's respect for the Subjugation King's work made it clear that she truly felt outclassed in this area!

This worried Ves quite a bit. Even though she was not the strongest True God that Ves had known, she had definitely been the most knowledgeable among them. It was hard for Ves to accept this truth.

"Does this soul mark contain anything that can alter or influence my behavior?"

"I am not certain." Cynthia responded. "The soul mark contains a number of elements that I cannot decipher without conducting a closer examination, but that might provoke all manner of undesirable reactions. I am reasonably confident that the soul mark does not have any other major functions. This includes remote transmission, monitoring and indoctrination. To put it in terms that you can understand, the soul mark is a very limited vessel and does not possess a large amount of capacity."

However, I cannot rule anything out. The creator of the mark prioritized the positioning and entrenchment functions so much that it is missing numerous obvious features."

Ves grew a little more relieved when he heard that. "I hope that is the case. I think that attempting to manipulate the lightning tribulation into planting a soul mark on me by remote already forced the alien God King to pay an enormous price. Still, I find it a bit hard to imagine that this bastard is so amazingly wise and powerful. His behavior at the time did not give me the impression that I am dealing with a rational decision maker."

"Have you forgotten what I said earlier, Ves?"

Ves briefly paused in thought.

"You mean the stuff about how if we don't pay enough attention to ourselves, we become so obsessed with the baggage brought by our cultivation methods that we become hijacked by them? Are you claiming that the God King..."

"It is a possibility, my son. I am not familiar with the cultivation culture of his civilization and Messier 87 as a whole. The aliens who reside in this enormous galaxy may not see this as a problem. Instead, they may have the impression that they are casting their mortal weaknesses and turning themselves into ideals that represent gods. During my time, there were plenty of human cultivators who believed in this theory."

"I take it you disagree."

The manifestation of the Superior Mother nodded. "You can ponder over it in your own time. What is important is that the soul mark cannot be erased. Just as you have suspected, not even god pilots are able to get rid of it. The mark has already dug in too deep for that. Theoretically, they can apply so much force that your 'spirit' will succumb much sooner than this mark."

The mark was absurdly resistant towards attacks!

Ves grimaced at that. "Will it be any different if any of them managed to become a god king pilot?"

That was an interesting suggestion. "It is difficult to judge the answer when I know so little about God Kings. I believe it should be possible for a god king pilot to break the soul mark. They most certainly obtained enough hard power to compete against the mark, especially if the alien God King is not in close proximity. However, if the soul mark has become too deeply entrenched, then removing it in a violent fashion will result in a great amount of collateral damage. This is one of the more insidious parts about the soul mark. It is not actually alive, but it is capable of leeching your power to fuel its own growth. The stronger you become, the more this mark burrows into your spirit."

Ves felt as if he had jumped into an inescapable trap. From the moment he got marked by the Subjugation King, he fell into a permanent entanglement with this alien bastard's power!

"Wait. If you are saying what I think you are saying, the soul mark will become much harder to remove if I get stronger. In contrast, if I stop progressing my cultivation any further, it will not be too difficult to remove it from my Spirituality so long as someone friendly grows powerful enough to erase the soul mark."

Cynthia nodded. "That is so. This presents a dilemma to you, though I can already tell your preferred answer. You are my son, after all. We do not allow fate to dictate our lives. If we do not like what it has in store for us, then we must fight to achieve a different outcome."

She took the words right out of his mouth! Ves indeed chose to adopt a defiant attitude towards this problem!

There was no way in hell that he wanted to give up on becoming a Star Designer. He had so many dreams and ambitions that he refused to let this annoying soul mark deter him from making further progress!

"I don't believe that this soul mark cannot be removed even if I grow stronger in the future." Ves firmly stated. "We have several decades to figure out a solution. Since destroying the soul mark outright is not possible, we can still resort to subtler means to erase it from my Spirituality. For example, I think my new affinity for darkness can be used in a way that it can dampen and suppress the connection between the soul mark and its creator."

If it truly became impossible to get rid of the soul mark, then Ves would settle for the next-best solution and suppress it to the point where it hardly posed a threat anymore!

His mother approved. "That is a viable strategy, but only when you have become stronger and better versed in the element of darkness. You need to become a Star Designer first before you have any chance of suppressing the soul mark. By the time you have reached this level of strength, you should be able to develop a powerful device that can suppress the soul mark."

"Can't I rely on Blinky to undermine the soul mark?"

"No. Absolutely not. Direct confrontation is out of the question. Your companion spirit will explode."

Ves got the message. It was safest to deal with this problem as a creation cultivator. If his tool provoked a backlash from the soul mark, then all Ves would lose was a single object.

He needed to remind himself to not mess around with the soul mark. Cynthia's cautious examination already showed that not even his mother possessed the confidence of containing the mark once it reacted to her probing.

"Is there a more permanent way to deal with the soul mark?" Ves asked.

"..."

Ves directed a suspicious look towards the manifestation of the Superior Mother.

"You have an answer."

"I do..."

"It's probably an incredibly dangerous scheme that may end up risking my life or sanity."

Cynthia gave her son a rueful smile. "You have become increasingly better at reading me. Impressive."

"That is because the more time I spend with you, the more I realize that we are not as different from each other as I previously assumed. Sure, you may be a centuries-old witch, but you are also an innovator. Just like me, you don't accept a reality where there are no solutions. There is always a

solution. You just need to look hard enough and be willing to make greater sacrifices to fulfill your goal."

The Superior Mother reached out with her arm and flicked Ves in the head.

"Cheeky brat. We are not that similar to each other. Our life experiences are too different for us to possess similar mindsets. I may appear reasonable and relatable to you, but that is because I am purposefully exhibiting more of my humanity to my family than I am typically comfortable with. This is not my actual persona, so do not try to predict my plans and behavior based on your biased impressions of myself."

"Can you just tell me your plan? Even if it is crazy, it is better to have one than be left without any solution."

Cynthia did not withhold her idea any further.

"Very well. In my opinion, the price of removing the soul mark is far too great. The alien God King chose wisely by preserving its entrenchment aspect. He has effectively made it impossible for you to remove it. Since this is the case, why not promote this process and assimilate the mark?"

"What?! Won't that play into its maker's hands?!"

"Not if you assimilate it in a specific manner." His mother smirked. "Think about how Lucky is able to break down anything that enters his stomach. If he eats an electronic device, then the item will lose all of its original functions as your cat reduces it to a collection of raw materials. Now imagine yourself adopting a similar approach to your situation. Treat your spirit as your intangible stomach and the soul mark as your meal."

That was a good analogy. Ves never thought about it, but now that he heard the idea, he believed it might actually work!

"Maybe you're right, mother. Maybe I can grow stronger and train my Spirituality into assimilating the soul mark step by step. Won't that cause me to get contaminated, though?"

"This is why I am reluctant to share this idea with you. There is no perfect outcome. Breaking down the soul mark may remove the alien God King's ability to track you and possibly sabotage you from a distance, but his raw energies will merge with your own soul. The difference in energy levels will inflict great suffering on you. If you are able to survive this painful sequence, you will become forever scarred and changed by what you have done."

This strategy sounded far too dangerous for Ves to commit to it right away!

He understood why his mother was so reluctant to share this crazy idea. There were too many points of failure.

However, a part of Ves actually applauded this crazy idea. The contamination was awful, but there was a good chance that he might actually absorb a miniscule portion of the strength of a God King!

This might grant him unmatched advantages that no ordinary Star Designer should possess!

All Ves had to do was to bite the bullet and accept the consequences over his own decision.

He just wondered whether enough parts of himself would remain intact after he devoured the soul mark.

If the soul mark was powerful enough to completely change his personality, then he had already lost his sense of self!

Ves could not accept this outcome. He would rather try to make peace with the soul mark than to change his personality beyond recognition.

Fortunately, he should have plenty of time to refine this potential plan. Several decades of time should be enough for him to devise a powerful product that could reduce the negative consequences of assimilating the soul mark!

Chapter 5940 My Own Choices

After a bit more discussion, Ves gained a more solid understanding of the soul mark.

Cynthia did not understand how it worked in its entirety. Its design was a product of a completely alien cultivation community, so there were plenty of aspects about it that eluded her comprehension.

However, the soul mark was small enough that she was able to recognize plenty of universal aspects that remained the same in any part of the universe. Just as how math had to be the same in every society, there were plenty of E-technology principles that probably remained identical enough that they showed up in every cultivation society.

His mother was able to glean a number of insights on the Subjugation King solely by admiring his craft.

"The God King that you have made an enemy of is a terrible opponent." She said. "His desire to subjugate others is overpowering that it may compel him to make unreasonable decisions. Killing his enemies is not his preferred solution. This is good news for you as I believe that he will not execute you despite his claims. If it is true that the element of darkness is offensive to him, he will keep such a tight grip on your life that you will not be able to die as he will subject you to eternal torture."

Given what Ves had seen and heard from the Subjugation King, this was actually a realistic possibility!

Killing him once he got caught by the alien tyrant was too easy an escape.

Only punishment without end was the most suitable way for the Subjugation King to make Ves suffer!

This made it even more important to prepare red humanity against the arrival of the invaders from Messier 87!

Ves and his mother began to discuss other related subjects. They talked about the formation of the Red Collective, the creation of the first Carmine dreadnought, the creation of Caramond as well as Furia.

Each of these subjects were heavy enough to occupy the two all day. Cynthia appeared to be both bemused and alarmed that Ves had managed to change the face of red humanity several times in the span of a couple of months.

Her son's capacity to stir up trouble was too great!

While Cynthia refrained from sharing too much of her opinion on affairs that Ves should be able to handle on his own, she did express greater concern towards the existence of Furia.

"The mechers and the fleeters are right to fear the possible return of one of the ancient immortal gods. They are powerful. What is worse is that he is so far removed from humans that he has long lost all sympathy for 'his' race. Human lives are no different from alien lives as far as such a powerful god is concerned. He will not hesitate to kill us all as long as it is beneficial to his interests. Since Furia is one of the potential gateways that can bring him to life in the present day, she will continue to pose an existential threat to red humanity."

"I already figured that out, but is there a way for Furia to get rid of this really awful burden?"

"No." Cynthia decisively shook her head. "You do not know what you are dealing with. What you managed to do to Furia is already a miracle in itself. I advise you not to push your luck. Do not even make use of her as a design spirit if you can help it. Let the god pilots and Star Designers monitor this problem."

"Okay..."

"I am being serious, my son. The threat posed by Furia surpasses that of your new alien enemy. The latter may be hostile towards you, but he will likely keep you alive but in captivity. The former is much less restrained in every way. Earlier, I told you that concepts, elements and so on can dramatically alter your attitudes and behavior. Fire is heavily associated with passion, anger, impulsiveness, destruction and more. The maker of the Fire Scroll is defined by all of these traits. If he ever deems you to be an enemy, he will use as much power as is necessary to kill his opponent."

Ves got the message. He truly would not like it if any further meddling on his part caused Furia to lose access to the faith that kept her grounded and closer to her newfound humanity.

In any case, once Cynthia was done with sharing her perspective on the aforementioned subjects, Ves brought up the most contentious topic in his mind.

The System upgrade.

He briefly summarized the current state of the Mech Designer System and what he had done to trigger an upgrade.

There were only a few days left before the 15 day time period had passed. Ves expected the System to return better than ever.

The manifestation of the Superior Mother remained still for a time. She looked at Ves in a way that made him feel that she was examining the System directly.

His best hope of solving the annoying soul mark rested in the System. It had access to so many powerful features that one of them must surely be able to provide him with a more viable solution.

The manifestation of the Superior Mother remained still for a time. She looked at Ves in a way that made him feel that she was examining the System directly.

Ves couldn't help but wonder about the theory he shared with the System. What was his mother's role in procuring it? How much did she know about it, and what was her relation to the legendary Progenitors of Mechs?

He had a lot of questions in mind, but he refrained from voicing any of them. He knew his mother would just brush them aside like many of the other questions related to her past.

Part of it was because her death and subsequent revival caused her to lose a lot of memories.

Another part of it was because she did not want Ves to dig up old and forgotten secrets.

"The Red Fleet already supplied you with one super-class material. The Evolution Witch is working on delivering another super-class material. It is indeed of great significance if the System is able to absorb both of them. I am not familiar with these exceptional materials, but the information you have on them gives me a few clues on how they will be used."

"I expect the System to present me with a number of upgrade tracks related to improving the System's interaction with space. I don't know what to expect, but I think that expanding its internal space and giving me more extensive teleportation capabilities are among the options."

His mother looked skeptical. "Your thinking is too shallow. There is no guarantee that the System will follow its prior formula. Even if it does, it may try to force much more significant changes than a handful of functional upgrades."

"Do you have any advice on what I should pick?"

She shook her head. "No. You are its sole user. It is your prerogative alone to make a choice. From the moment the System passed from my hands, I have severed all my remaining responsibility over it. You are the latest inheritor. Do not allow others to dictate how you should use your treasures. They will no longer be yours if you continue to be swayed by the opinions of others."

In other words, Ves needed to grow a stronger spine.

Her words lifted a burden from his shoulders.

"Thank you for your advice. I guess I will settle this matter on my own once it finally comes up. I don't know if I will make the wrong choice, but at least it will be a reflection of my own self."

Cynthia smiled in approval. "You are starting to understand. That is good. Once you become a domain shaper, you will become more prone to getting consumed by your own domain. Do not let this happen. You must master your domain rather than the other way around. You may be able to progress with greater ease if you conform yourself to the concepts and elements that comprise your domain, but you will pay an even greater price further into the future."

Though Ves tried to maintain a skeptical mindset, he did not feel that she was lying about this subject. He strongly agreed with her message and preferred to remain in control over himself.

Now that he thought about it, he already saw examples where expert pilots became so obsessed with their principles and convictions that their personalities changed right after undergoing apotheosis!

Venerable Jannzi Larkinson was the most definitive example of this phenomenon. Ves always wondered why certain expert pilots turned into different people while others barely showed any changes to their personality.

Now, he knew. The degree of change was based on how extensively an expert pilot or other cultivator for that matter allowed their domains to define themselves.

"How does this lesson relate to the System?" Ves asked.

"Pay close attention to the 'upgrade tracks' if the System presents them to you again." Cynthia said. "Think about how much an option will benefit you or the System. You should be able to place the available choices in either of these categories. This should not only make it easier for you to make a choice that benefits you the most, but also gain an important insight on the ulterior motives of the

System. If you suspect that all of the available options benefit it more than you, then that should give you a better understanding on how earnestly it is willing to serve you. A System that is not sincere about fulfilling its stated purpose has no reason to exist."

That did not sound like a threat, but Ves was sure that the Mech Designer System might interpret it that way, assuming that it was able to pay attention to this conversation.

Perhaps his mother had just given the System a subtle nudge to behave!

"I never thought about the System from this angle. I will be sure to pay really close attention to this." Ves promised. "I have a question, though. There are other ways to categorize the possible upgrade tracks. What if you can divide them into how much they will benefit me personally and how much they can contribute to red humanity as a whole?"

"Then you should choose the option that benefits you the most." Cynthia answered without any hesitation. "You are not the sole savior of our civilization. Do not underestimate the will of the god pilots or the ingenuity of the Star Designers. Your greatest problem is that you are far too weak to possess enough agency over your own life. The mechers, the fleeters and even an alien God King have successfully exerted their control over you. Do not allow this situation to persist. The sooner you become a Master Mech Designer and Star Designer, the sooner you can stand on your own in this dangerous galaxy. Any upgrade track that provides you with the best growth opportunities must be prioritized at all cost."

That did not entirely sit well with Ves.

His previous choice was a bit selfish, but Ves was also able to use the benefits of Spiritual Ascension to make several major contributions to human civilization.

As a mech designer, he felt obliged to seek additional ways to contribute to the mech community and society as a whole.

Doing so might not assist him as directly as he wished, but it would arm many other humans with the solutions they needed to repel the enemies that Ves was worried about!

This was how mech designers fought their battles. They never cared too much about improving their personal strength and fighting capabilities.

Instead, they became better at arming other people with the mechs they needed to smash their common enemies!

Ves inwardly sighed. His mother was still an archetypical example of an old-school cultivator. She rejected the notion of developing a dependence on others and always emphasized the need to pursue personal power.

Though he understood her viewpoints, that did not necessarily mean he agreed with them. He was his own person. He was not his mother. He refused to let her dictate his own choices!