

Viv breathed out, allowing her interface to come to the forefront. Nous' creation blinked open in the same futuristic configuration as it always did. It was time to see the fruit of her labor and pick a new improvement, this one for mana mastery.

She checked her improvements, of which there were only three. It wasn't bad per se but she felt her options were getting narrower as her path grew more defined. She was being... trapped in a role. A bit like the gods.

Good thing that role suited her just fine.

Also, maybe it was because this was the expert level of a fused skill, but those upgrades were not for show.

Mana Manipulation Expert improvements:

Herald of the Dealands.

It giveth, and it taketh.

Your ability to conduct large-scale rituals is vastly improved.

You are now able to create a temporary, ad hoc core to fuel extremely powerful spells without staying nearby.

You may lead a mage cadre in ritual by sending mental orders.

You may coordinate mage wings during flight for coordinated bombardments.

Viv gave that one a good thought. She'd been offered a similar evolution in the past, the ability to single-handedly cast massive spells. It was tempting and in other circumstances, she'd have taken it. If Param was a primordial forest infested with titanic monsters that could only be felled by the mightiest of spells, it would have been her favorite by far. If she had access to other colors, it might also have been her pick. The issue was that she only had access to one class of rituals that were feasible with black mana, and that was large-scale destruction. She would become a walking, or rather flying, bomb. There were four major issues with that.

One, once this was known, she would become a constant priority target for assassins, an object of fear and loathing. It wouldn't be much of an issue so long as the Hadals were here but... someone might get lucky and this world was vast beyond Param. There were things out there that could spell her end, if someone was determined enough to find them.

Two, if she wanted to be feared and put that skill to good use, she would have to use a strategic spell once. Actually, she could use it against the beastlings but still... what if the land was blighted for decades?

Three, there was simply no point in getting the biggest fucking hammer in existence when there were no nails that required it. Viv was already massively destructive on a large scale with the spell 'Storm of Zamhareer'. The only entity she could think of that would need something of this level was Judgment, and the old dragon wasn't just going to stand there and take it, hence why it was pointless. Also it would make Arthur sad.

And finally, Viv didn't exist in a vacuum. She'd spent the past five years building an empire so she would have the right tools and right subordinates for the job. There were already two other people who could assist her with large-scale annihilation. One happened to be really good at kissing, and the other one she called 'Ser Warcrime'. Even the existence of silverite-alloyed flying symbols could really help in a pinch if she wanted to reinforce rituals. She'd been using them less recently, but they remained an option for more complicated works.

No, it just wasn't her style.

The last option on the list, Viv barely considered.

Mother Creator:

Life, from nothing.

Your ability to manipulate any form of material is vastly improved. This includes both colorless and black mana.

The change meaning becomes more flexible and significantly easier to use.

You gain enchanting as a class skill.

You gain arcane engineering as a class skill.

Both are vastly improved.

This was the path of a crafter of golems. There were nasty combat applications and nice medical options as well but those were a bit secondary, she felt. Golemy was definitely the discipline that would find the most use from that evolution, and that was going to be a time-consuming, all-encompassing sort of activity that would much better be performed by the cadre of golem handlers currently being trained by Solfis. It was the perfect tool for someone with the mindset of an engineer, which Viv wasn't at all. She hired engineers. She asked them to build weapons to kill things, bridges and roads so she could get to the things she wanted to kill, and toilets. There was no reason for her to dedicate a very powerful tool to role that was filled by other members of her nation who were much more talented at it than she was.

No, it was the second option.

Black Comet.

When using an aspect, you will only be stationary as it deploys.

You may switch between aspects much faster and it tires you much less.

The synchronization between your body, your acuity-based reflexes, and spellcasting is vastly improved, making you significantly more mobile.

This was the real deal, because it was exactly what she needed and it worked in the continuation of all the choices she'd made so far. Body stats were... works in progress. She'd neglected to train them for now because everything had been a rush, but she would, and they were already pretty high anyway. It would also synergize with her Leadership specialization which required her to fight at the front. It worked well with the 'Light that Never Dims' and 'Always a Chance' titles by improving her survivability. Essentially, and with a bit of additional training, it would contribute to making her one of the very best duelists and elite killers on the continent.

That was what her team needed. The only thing that could really demolish her army was some sort of elite or large monster that could just devastate their formation. With this, Viv could occupy them more surely than a cumbersome ritual could. She would have the survivability and power to engage almost anything, then grind them down. It was the perfect tool for what she wanted to be: the flying scalpel guarding a potent hammer.

It just fit with how she'd been fighting so far and the evolutions she'd picked on the way.

She already had ideas for spell combinations that would work best if she could change aspects quickly without being exhausted.

"Oh, yeah, I think this will work nicely."