

The Mech Touch

#Chapter 7120: Leadership Tracks - Read The Mech Touch Chapter 7120: Leadership Tracks

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Aurelia had reached the most important junction of her life.

Deciding which career she wanted to pursue.

The stakes were high.

Technically speaking, if she chose one option but wanted to switch to another a few years in, she could do so, but she would have to start over and suffer many different penalties as a result.

There was very little overlap in the education of a future mech commander as opposed to a naval commander.

If Aurelia decided to abandon her decision to command mechs in battle and switch to piloting rifleman mechs or swordsman mechs, then that was relatively easy as the early years at a mech academy were mostly spent on strengthening the shared foundation of every mech archetype.

The problem was that if she wanted to pursue a career outside piloting mechs, she pretty much had to start over no matter whether she wanted to work in civil society or at the helm of a large warship.

Ves and Gloriana would do everything to support their daughter, but other people might not be so forgiving.

The best and most prestigious schools refused to enroll such latecomers for many reasons, so Aurelia could only choose to attend worse schools.

Of course, the quality of education of a less renowned school was not necessarily inferior. This depended on many factors. The graduates also weren't necessarily the best.

After all, people like Ves and Ketis had managed to become the leaders of their generation of mech designers despite their poor education!

Schooling only represented one of multiple different variables that determined the career trajectory of any individual.

For example, Aurelia could avoid going to school at all and simply proceed to learn what she needed from the veteran Larkinsons at the expeditionary fleet. She could combine self-study and apprenticeships to become the quintessential Larkinson soldier.

This was not the most efficient approach, though. Schools existed for good reasons and Aurelia could obtain many benefits there that she could not acquire elsewhere.

From joining a powerful alumni network to forging deep and unforgettable friendships with promising peers, Ves wanted his daughter to enjoy the opportunities that he could only dream of when he was young.

For this reason and more, Ves deeply hoped that Aurelia would make a decision and commit to it without any regrets.

In order to do that, she needed to weigh all of the factors before making her final choice.

"I do not recommend you to become a naval commander." Gloriana eventually said.

"Why not, mama?"

"As you have already mentioned earlier, our clan has no naval tradition. Our relations with the Red Fleet are ambiguous at best. Do you truly think the fleeters will treat you well if you attend one of their naval academies? The vast majority of naval cadets or midshipmen or whatever they are called come from long and distinguished spaceborn clan lineages. These thousand-year old family organizations are proud of their heritage and consider it to be their birthright to crew and command the most dangerous warships in human hands. I fear that your future classmates will bully you. Even if the academy instructors try their best to break that up, they can still exclude you and ostracize you from their social circles."

Aurelia briefly frowned, but not too long.

"I do not believe that will happen. The Red Fleet needs papa. So long as he helps them create another living dreadnought or two, the fleeters will worship him. This should be enough for my classmates to show their goodwill to me. I am confident in my ability to turn any stranger into a friend."

That remained to be seen, but at least she had a good attitude.

Gloriana had more to say, however.

"Neither your father nor I can help you in a way a member of a spaceborn clan is able to do. We have not been able to teach you or instill the values of a spacer into you. If you choose to become a mech commander, the opposite will be the case. You have access to many mech pilots who would love to give you extra tutoring. From Saint Commander Casella Ingvar to one of your many aunts and uncles in the Wodin Dynasty, each of

them are willing to share their wisdom with you. I may not be able to teach you about piloting, but my understanding of mechs is profound. The same applies to your father. Besides, do not forget about our ability to design the perfect Carmine mech for you. Nobody else has access to such luxurious treatment."

"Your mother is correct." Ves agreed with his wife for once. "These advantages are not always tangible, but they exist nonetheless. It is much easier for our clan and your mother's dynasty to support you. Even if others disparage our treatment and accuse you of nepotism, this is simply the way our society works. That said, I do not think that the disadvantages of choosing a naval officer track is that bad. The rules are changing every day. Old customs and traditions are falling apart while new ones take their place. The demands and expectations of naval officers have already changed a lot with the introduction of systematic cultivation. With your excellent qualifications on this front, you can distinguish yourself within the ranks of the fleeters in no time."

"That is also what I wanted to talk about." Gloriana said. "Are you truly fine with leaving our daughter to the fleeters of all people? What if they indoctrinate her into becoming a warship supremacist? What if she completely denounces mechs? What if she refuses to return to our clan and instead commits her entire life to serving the Red Fleet?"

"I do not think the fleeters will succeed in brainwashing our daughter into developing a bias against mechs." Ves calmly responded. "She has grown up with our clan. She has personally witnessed how awesome mechs can be. At most, she will gain a newfound respect towards warships after witnessing their use by professional spacers. As for whether she will prefer to stay with the fleeters instead of her own clansmen... that is her decision."

"How can you say that, Ves?!"

"If she is truly passionate about serving in the RF, then let her. I just want her to be happy. Truth to be told, I am no longer fixated with the idea of having her 'inherit' the clan that I have founded. Since that is the case, I am fully okay with seeing her climb up the ranks of other organizations."

His wife did not accept his argumentation. "There is another major problem with your suggestion, Ves. Sending her over to the fleeters is the same as giving her up as a hostage. The Red Fleet will have undeniable leverage over us. What do we have that can force the fleeters to take care of Aurelia and treat her fairly?"

"We have multiple means of applying leverage." He told her. "Our clan can deny the fleeters access to the portals to the Blue Dimension. The Oblivion Gate Consortium can deny them a quota for intergalactic trade. We can deepen our relationship with the RF's many rivals. If it is truly necessary, we can ask a favor from the Destroyer of Worlds or the Evolution Witch to intercede in person. I do not think it will come to that, though. The fleeters know very well how much we can debilitate them if they displease us. They should be smart enough to ensure our daughter is treated well. Of course, the premise

is that she is keeping up with her studies. If that is not the case, then she is simply not a good fit within the RF."

Ves seriously proposed to ease his firstborn daughter into the hierarchy of the Red Fleet.

This was an unimaginable idea a decade ago, but times had changed. So long as he looked past his bias against the stuffy and arrogant fleters, he could see how much benefits Aurelia and the Larkinson Clan could obtain from forging such a strong connection with the Red Fleet.

There was little desire for Ves to do the same with the Red Association. The Larkinson Clan already possessed a strong martial tradition centered around mechs.

Nobody understood how to make good use of living mechs than the Larkinsons!

The same could not be said for warships, which was why Ves developed such an interest in this new possibility.

Warships might not be as well-regarded today as they were in the past.

Mechs had made a lot of advances in the past few mech generations. They had become strong enough to challenge warships head-on with the help of new materials and technologies.

Yet that did not mean that warships had become obsolete or redundant. They could take advantage of new technologies as well.

So long as they worked alongside powerful strike craft instead of solely in opposition to them, the two could cover each other's weaknesses while lending their strengths to each other.

Over time, the Larkinson Clan would continue to amass a larger fleet of warships.

The Larkinsons could always expand their fleet of warships by earning more RF Warship Tokens.

There was also a chance that the Red Fleet might loosen up the rules and taboos that it had strictly enforced in the past.

After the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact declared their independence, both colonial alliances had already signaled their intention to build warships of their own no matter how the RF might think about this development.

There was a possibility that the fleeters may accept the reality that third parties will seek to acquire their own warships in defiance of RF authority, so it was best to adapt with the times and permit this behavior.

The theory was that as long as the fleeters did not act like complete obstructionists, the new warship owners would hold up their noses and still abide by the RF's more important bottom lines.

If Aurelia attended a naval academy, then she would definitely get pulled into this political vortex one way or another.

The RF's problems would become her problems, which may ultimately become the Larkinson Clan's problems as well.

Ves was not afraid of this, though. He also had enough confidence in his daughter's ability to navigate this political minefield.

"What do you think, Aurelia?" He turned to his growing girl. "Now that you have heard our opinions about your choice of careers, have you gained enough information to make up your mind?"

Aurelia held Marigold's hand as she fell deep into thought.

"I have made a tentative choice." She eventually said. "Mama, I know you are concerned about me and the fleeters, but... I think commanding warships is where I can best make use of my talents and gifts. I am not saying no to ever becoming a part-time Carmine mech pilot, but I want to dedicate my coming years to learning how to operate and ultimately lead a warship. This is what the Larkinson Clan needs. This is also what I am interested in. Let me give this a try. If it truly does not work out, I can always transfer back to the clan and learn how to pilot mechs and command troops from the other Larkinsons."

Gloriana frowned while Ves smiled. They were pretty much on opposite sides regarding this issue.

"Are you... sure, honey?"

Aurelia nodded with growing certainty. "I am. That said, I will reserve my final choice until my father and I have spoken once more with the fleeters. I want to meet with Lieutenant-Commander Astrid Jameson and ask how they will accommodate me and what kind of treatment they are willing to provide to me. If their promises and guarantees are sufficient, then I will accept their offer to attend one of their naval academies."

"..."

"Great!" Ves grinned in approval. "You are being smart about this. You can't just take the fleeters or anyone else at their word. We need to be thorough about this and make sure that both sides truly want this to happen. Come. Let us get ready to meet with the fleeters in private. I am sure that they are eager to present their case to us. The RF is in dire straits. That makes them desperate and all the more eager to play nice with potential allies."