

The Mech 5011

Chapter 5011 Cat out of the Bag

The Lord of Thermodynamics and Fleet Admiral Stanley Argile made for a notable contrast during the public address.

His Excellency Hendrick Polt did not show off the majesty of a Star Designer like the Polymath once did in front of Ves.

Instead, he came across as an amiable university professor who had come to a popular educational broadcast in order to give a popular science lesson to an audience of laymen.

Even his outfit looked fairly subdued for a man of his status. His refined suit and lab coat made him look more at home in a fancy laboratory than the highest halls of power.

Ves understood enough about public relations that this was a deliberate show on the Star Designer's part.

This was a time of great change and uncertainty. The people needed to trust in the institutions they looked up to for protection and guidance.

The Mech Trade Association had always maintained a dual image of projecting strength while also portraying itself as a benign organization.

Right now, the MTA clearly wanted to emphasize its 'nice guy' aspect, so the great Lord of Thermodynamics put on a more subdued show in front of the scared and nervous humans of the Red Ocean.

The old man's soothing voice and strong confidence in his own facts made people feel as if he could be relied upon to provide all of the answers to their questions.

Messier 87 may have introduced a lot of weird and new variables into everyone's lives, but as long as the excellent scientists and researchers of the Mech Trade Association were around, humanity was bound to decipher every new secret!

In contrast, Fleet Admiral Stanley Argile adopted a more martial posture. His dress uniform was bedecked with real and projected medals. His rich blue cape amplified his stature. A conspicuous masterwork laser pistol hung onto the side of his waist.

His tone and words also contained less optimism. The powerful CFA admiral was not one to mince words.

"He's so scary." Marvaine remarked as Stanley Argile spoke.

"He's always been that way." Ves told his children. "He is one of the leaders of the Argile Spaceborn Clan. This is a group that has always supported more aggressive and expansionist policies. It is for good reason that the Second Main Fleet of the CFA has taken the lead in the invasion of the Red Ocean. If he has won the right to speak to the people trapped in this new and foreign region of space, then that means that the Big Two will most likely insist on maintaining a hostile posture towards the indigenous alien races of the Red Ocean and Messier 87."

Aurelia's eyes grew sharper when she heard that. Her political acumen was impressive for her age.

"Does that mean that we won't try to reconcile with the aliens?"

Ves shook his head. "Old habits die hard. No matter what, each of us have inherited the pride and steel of the victorious heroes of the Age of Conquest. Too many people will not be able to transition to a new reality where they need to lower their posture and treat fellow aliens as equals. I think that the Big Two are least able to stomach this transition. Their hegemony over humanity will come under threat when people look elsewhere for power and protection."

What he did not tell to his children was that he suspected that the cosmopolitans played a huge role in enabling the Red Cabal to pull off the Great Severing.

After all, if not for all of the tech, materials and intelligence provided by these human traitors, the indigenous aliens of the Red Ocean would never have been able and willing to implement their doomsday plan so early in the invasion of their dwarf galaxy!

Whether the ancient phase whales and their lackeys succeeded in their attempt to save their native civilizations from extinction was still in doubt. They escaped the reach of the Milky Way, but Messier 87 may end up being worse!

After the two powerful individuals completed their brief science lesson about Messier 87's basic astronomical properties, the Lord of Thermodynamics finally brought up a matter of great importance.

"Messier 87 is an extraordinarily active conglomeration of energy and matter due to its multiple fusions with other galaxies. Its galactic center is filled with dense and hot interstellar medium. These are the building blocks of stars, but due to the immense mass of the Dark Source as well as the active disruption and turbulence produced by its jets of matter, much of this interstellar medium is unable to form into stars. They either end up feeding the supermassive black hole or get ejected outward due to the intense forces of gravity and forces within the violent core of this supergiant galaxy. As a result, this enriched interstellar medium is not only able to permeate through M87 in notable concentrations, but also affects our new position at a reduced level."

The dour-faced fleet admiral began to explain the initial results of the Big Two's investigation into the effects of exposure to M87.

"Combined with the dispersed products of the closest jet of matter, the Red Ocean is exposed to a multitude of exotic energies and particles that are far in excess to the background radiation generated by our familiar Milky Way. With the help of our best scientists and detection equipment, we have been able to identify and analyze a number of them. What I am about to tell you may alarm you, but remember that every problem has a solution."

A new projection appeared which showed a diagram that displayed all of the identified components of M87's background radiation.

Many of them already looked familiar to many people. M87 generated strong radio waves that could produce quite a lot of interference but was otherwise not a big deal.

What was more alarming was that it also generated a lot of X-Rays as well, especially in its hot and dangerous galactic center.

Still, as long as starships and settlements built up enough radiation shielding, it was not impossible for people to survive and thrive in those areas.

The problem was that M87 produced way more than ordinary electromagnetic radiation!

The projection highlighted a fairly large and mixed component of cosmic radiation.

"E radiation is an exotic energy type that is known to us back in the Milky Way. It is a rare variation of exotic energy in our home galaxy, but it is particularly abundant in Messier 87. We are only exposed to a fraction of the rich E radiation produced by the supergiant galaxy, but this has great consequences to the lives of every human, alien and even lifeless materials. E radiation cannot be measured through conventional detection equipment as it is predominantly based in another dimension. This also makes it impossible to block it. While lower levels of E radiation is harmless, persistent exposure to the current level of background radiation will induce mutations that will gradually change every human over time."

What?!

While the children all looked concerned, both of their parents looked shocked at the moment!

Ves and Gloriana exchanged deep glances with each other. They possessed a far greater understanding of what this so-called 'E radiation' represented.

It was nothing but another label for what Ves called spiritual energy!

Ves glanced towards the Lord of Thermodynamics and saw that the old man did not show any objection towards the public introduction of E radiation!

"The Big Two are going through with this." Gloriana remarked with undisguised shock. "They have truly agreed to expose the phenomenon of psionic power to the masses!"

"What is psionic power, mama?" Andraste asked.

"It's what certain people call spirituality, pumpkin." Ves explained. "It is the stuff that makes up your companion spirit and what makes our mechs and mech pilots so special."

"It is also the energy that can turn mechs and people into gods!" Gloriana chimed in. "As long as you are able to leverage it correctly, each of you are destined to become as strong as the Superior Mother!"

Ves became preoccupied with the implications of this complete reversal in policy.

"It is understandable why the Big Two chose to let the cat out of the bag. M87 generates so much psionic energy that its effects on everyone and everything can't be hidden. By announcing it at the start in this historic speech, the Big Two are signaling to the people in the know that they want to change our society's relationship with this potent energy type."

"I have to admit that it is clever to describe it as exotic energy." His wife remarked. "Exotic materials are already familiar and embedded into the lives of every human. Introducing psionic power as a related concept will lower everyone's fears of the unknown."

After letting the fleet admiral talk a bit, Hendrick Polt took the word again.

"We are only just beginning to study the long-term effects of prolonged exposure to significant levels of E radiation, but we can already state that it can benefit many people's lives for the better. As we have mentioned earlier, E radiation is a mutation factor, but it is not completely uncontrollable. It mainly affects people's cognition. Individuals who are strong in mental will, intellect and creativity will find that they have become stronger and more effective."

A new projection appeared which showed a diorama of different high-ranking mech pilots and mech designers at work!

"E radiation has the greatest influence on mech pilots and mech designers, as they are most familiar with interacting with exotic energies and exotic materials. Mech pilots will discover that their willpower can be actualized to a greater degree than before. E radiation also lowers the difficulty of attaining breakthroughs. We predict that our society will welcome a much greater quantity of expert candidates, expert pilots and ace pilots in the coming generation."

"What?!"

Though Ves and a number of other people already figured this out, the announcement made by the Star Designer generated a quake through all of the humans in the Red Ocean!

Countless mech pilots cheered or gained a lot of hope after hearing the benefits of E radiation!

Many of them already began to entertain dreams about going on an intergalactic expedition to Messier 87.

Would it be possible for each of them to evolve into god pilots so long as they reached the center of this highly active galaxy?!

Ves wasn't so sure about that. He did not miss the fact that His Excellency Hendrick Polt deliberately left out the last rank in his explanation.

"Mech designers such as myself will also be able to derive great benefits from E radiation." The Lord of Thermodynamics said with a smile. "We are the most proficient at controlling and manipulating this energy type. While we must all learn how to harness E radiation in this new and ubiquitous form, all of our mech designs and potentially other works shall be able to derive greater strength and additional effects from our changed environment. Other scientists and professionals will be able to work with E radiation as long as they learn new knowledge. Our Mech Trade Association will soon begin to publish textbooks that will teach every professional how to make productive use of this exotic energy type." n n

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Ves and Gloriana both became speechless for a moment.

It dawned on them that the Big Two wanted the people of the Red Ocean to quickly master and proliferate the uses of E radiation on a wider scale!

Since it was impossible to ignore E radiation, humanity in this new and unfamiliar cosmic region may as well embrace it and maximize its use. This was a wise course of action as the native alien civilizations most definitely enjoyed an enormous head start when it came to exploiting the power of E radiation!

The Lord of Thermodynamics continued to paint a vision of a new society where humans and their tech had morphed into versions where exotic energies elevated everyone and everything to a higher level!

Chapter 5012 Harnessing Exotic Radiation

Ves enjoyed an advantage compared to many other people.

While most people had no choice but to embrace the narrative set by the Big Two, Ves had the ability to consult an alternative opinion!

At the same time as Ves was watching the live broadcast with his immediate family, his cat avatar was relaying everything he learned to his mother.

Though the Lady of the Night had become a lot more active and preoccupied with affairs related to her shabby empire, she still made time for her son.

A cyborg cat currently rested on the lap of a living goddess sitting in a lotus position. A soft and glowing hand gently caressed the feline's metallic back.

"What do you think, mother?" Veronica asked.

A playful smile appeared on the resurrected woman's face. "The Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance in the Red Ocean have made a bold but sensible decision. What you need to remember is that they are primarily interested in one main goal. Do you know what that is, my child?"

"Power." Veronica immediately answered. "While the mechers and the fleeters constantly justify their right to rule by emphasizing their responsibility to safeguard human civilization, it is human nature for them to become addicted to power. They have access to almost any talent, resources and technology within human space. They do not wish to relinquish this easily."

"Then what is the greatest difference between Messier 87 and the Milky Way that has caused the Big Two in the former to change a stance that they have strongly held for over four centuries?"

"Well, it is hard to hide this so-called E energy radiation. Many Red Oceaners will inevitably get into contact with it and experience the consequences of prolonged exposure. By informing them about this in advance, the Big Two can mobilize all of the people under their rule to work towards understanding and taming the power of this energy."

The powerful woman nodded. "That is correct, but that is not all. What else?"

Ves thought of a few more reasons, but they did not really sound like the answer that his mother was looking for. It was not until he recalled her history that he made an important realization!

"The Compact!" He gasped! "The Five Scrolls Compact is deeply rooted in the Milky Way, but not in the Red Ocean! The Big Two has put a lot of effort into preventing those powerful cultists from slipping into the new frontier. If this is the case, then the mechers and fleeters will be able to exert great control over humanity's relationship with E energy!"

His mother grinned and patted the cyborg cat on the head. "That is correct. The Big Two can make use of E energy to reinforce their control over the population in the Red Ocean. Without the competition of the Compact, the MTA and the CFA will be able to direct and take advantage of humanity's collective development of this 'new' form of energy."

The MTA and CFA definitely formulated a lot of plans after the Great Severing occurred. While most people were still trying to process the calamity that had befallen them, the mechers and the fleeters had definitely been planning twenty years, fifty years or even a hundred years into the future!

Cynthia's eyes grew wistful. "I already have a better understanding of the environment you have ended up in. From what you have described, Messier 87 is a galaxy that resembles the Milky Way of the past. Humanity at the time was different from the humans of the present. That skeleton you have brought to me is representative of the bodies that humans were able to grow by feeding off the abundant energy and resources of that past environment. Such times have come to an end, but to the people of the Red Ocean, it has become an unprecedented chance for them to regain the power of their distant ancestors."

Veronica did not look as optimistic, though. "That may be true, but this E energy radiation is not entirely benign. The Big Two are already starting to address the threat it poses to people's health."

"Survival of the fittest." The mother spoke in a voice that channeled a hint of ruthlessness. "Not every human is capable of adapting to a new environment. Those without the strength or means to evolve in a manner that removes the threat of E energy radiation are destined for elimination. The weak cannot be allowed to squander the resources that belong to their betters."

Ves felt a chill going through his entire spirit. It was talk like this that reminded him that his mother had more in common with Compact cultists and contemporary humans!

"That..."

"You have nothing to fear, my son." Cynthia spoke in a motherly tone. "You have activated the latent potential of my bloodline. Your wife is a capable mech designer that has already adapted to this energy. Your children have manifested the strength of their lineage in advance as well. Others may perish, but you and your family shall prosper."

That was not what Ves wanted!

Although he was not the most selfless mech designer, he did not want the stable and familiar society in the Red Ocean to collapse!

Ves was also responsible for the lives of many clansmen. Not all of them were strong in will or spirit like Ketis or Joshua. How would these relatively ordinary fare in an environment where they were constantly exposed to harmful radiation?

The Big Two shared the same concerns, so the Star Designer and the fleet admiral seriously emphasized its dangers to society.

"E energy radiation cannot be blocked unless exceptional means are employed." Stanley Argile spoke. "Neither an energy shield, a layer of hull armor, a planet's magnetosphere or any other barrier can block its passage. We cannot prevent it from subjecting our bodies, our technology and our foodstuffs to mutations. However, this is no cause for panic. Different from more harmful influences such as gamma radiation, E energy radiation is not overwhelmingly negative. It will not cause our DNA and body cells to degrade or induce cancer."

"The direction of mutation induced by E energy radiation is semi-random." Hendrick Polt continued as he called up a projection of a human body. "There are many components of E energy radiation that are prone to inducing harmful mutations such as weakening the heart or atrophying the muscles. The vast majority of these symptoms can be treated. In time, medicines and treatments can be developed to cure and prevent these mutations. The biotechnology and medical communities must take the lead in this research in order to save as many lives as possible."

Gloriana looked incredibly concerned for herself and her children. "Ves..."

"Keep listening, honey. E energy radiation may be dangerous to ordinary people, but we are different."

His suspicions were correct.

"Treating harmful mutations through medical treatments and gene therapies may be effective, but the costs will not be light." The Star Designer continued. "There are alternate means to minimize the negative effects of E energy radiation exposure. That is by taking advantage of the fact that E energy radiation is responsive to the cognition of a life form. Your very thoughts can shape its influence on your body. Strong mental discipline can encourage your body to become more receptive to the more benign components of this new energy. This will enable your physiology to evolve in a manner that is able to resist harmful mutations. Many such methods already exist."

The Lord of Thermodynamics began to sound more hopeful.

"As I have mentioned before, becoming a mech pilot, and mech designer or strongly dedicating yourself to any profession and hobby can enable you to draw strength from the energies released by M87. In addition, there are other potential solutions that can alter the effects of E energy radiation exposure. We must all work together as a society to discover and invent the most effective solutions that can preserve our population in the Red Ocean as much as possible. If our civilization is to survive and thrive in the heart of the Virgo Cluster, we cannot afford to decline in numbers."

"So that is how it is." Gloriana uttered in realization. "We have to make sure our children become passionate enough to pursue their vocations and hobbies, Ves!"

The truth of the matter was that Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine were a lot closer to primordial humans than ordinary people. They would probably do fine even if they became good-for-nothings.

Of course, Ves did not want his children to end up useless. He saw no reason to refute his wife's fears.

The Star Designer continued his explanation by touching on E energy radiation's effect on certain inorganic materials.

The radiation was bound to produce a lot of new exotics while also strengthening existing ones, but the transition would not be pleasant!

Fortunately, the rate of mutation of most materials happened gradually enough that there should be plenty of time to update or replace components that were prone to malfunction due to this new factor.

After explaining the few benefits and downsides of E energy radiation that the Big Two saw fit to reveal, Fleet Admiral Argile began to address another component of M87's powerful cosmic radiation.

"E energy radiation is predominantly produced by the cosmic activity of Messier 87. It cannot easily be avoided on a macroscopic scale unless we are able to distance ourselves from this supermassive galaxy. The second form of exotic radiation that we will introduce to you is different. M87 itself generates it at a low concentration, but the jets of matter released by the Dark Source contain much higher quantities of R particles."

Ves grew stumped. He already knew about the flood of spiritual energy coursing the Red Ocean, but neither he nor Master Benedict had found any signs of these particles!

"An R particle is a new type of subatomic particle that is similar to a neutrino." The fleet admiral continued to explain. "Just as neutrinos pass through space, planets and our bodies without causing any harm, R particles exhibit similar behavior. However, a major difference is that R particles may slightly behave differently when interacting with E energy."

What?!

"Our studies into the effects of R particle radiation are still superficial as it is a new phenomenon that we have never encountered in the Milky Way." The Lord of Dynamics honestly revealed. "We have made many preliminary discoveries since we have arrived in the Virgo Cluster. R particles can behave as catalysts, amplifiers or inhibitors depending on how they react to E energy. We have also discovered indications that R particle radiation may alter or enrich specific materials, but we cannot form any definite conclusions at this time. By themselves, R particles may pose a slightly harmful influence to the human physique, but it may be possible to mitigate their threat by relying on our medical science."

Ves did not know what to think. He was unable to detect these so-called R particles through his spiritual senses or with any of the detection equipment at his disposal. He was completely out of his depth when it came to this matter.

A map of Messier 87 and its 'local' neighborhood came into view again.

Fleet Admiral Argile adopted a defiant posture. "As we have stated earlier, R particle radiation is mainly a product of the jets of matter released by the Dark Source. This is a threat as well as an opportunity! The Red Ocean's new location relative to M87 places it far away enough from the diffusion of the ejected matter to prevent us from getting exposed to lethal doses of R particle radiation. Yet our current galaxy is also placed close enough to the axis of the jet of matter that we derive a great amount of power from the R particle radiation around us. This is one of the few advantages that we can rely upon to reduce our power gap with the presumed indigenous alien civilizations of M87."

The overall message was clear.

In order to survive, humanity of the Red Ocean must learn to leverage the new exotic energies and particles!

Ignoring their power was unacceptable!

Chapter 5013 Red

Ves felt a lot less self-assured by the time the Star Designer and the fleet admiral completed their explanation on the exotic radiation generated by Messier 87.

He initially had great confidence in his ability to make good use of the ambient spiritual energy that was slowly filling up the Red Ocean.

As a largely self-trained spiritual engineer with years of experience, Ves believed that he had a natural advantage in his ability to leverage E energy radiation.

Other mech designers, especially low-ranked ones, only could only manipulate it in a more passive and unconscious manner, but Ves possessed the perception of a primordial human and could manipulate spiritual energy at a much finer level.

This was especially when he had access to a companion spirit like Blinky!

Out of all of the ones he made for his various friends and family, none were as suited to take advantage of the productive uses of E energy radiation as Blinky!

The existence of R particle radiation threw a wrench in those plans. Though Ves understood that it could enable him to leverage additional power, the premise was that he could exert enough control over this exotic matter!

All of the changes brought by M87 undoubtedly resulted in a lot of changes to people's lives.

A lot of fears and uncertainty started to well up again. Would their bodies remain healthy? Would their Jobs remain the same? Would humans still be allowed to fight against each other?

All of these societal questions needed to be answered, so the Lord of Thermodynamics finally revealed the Big Two's vision of the future.

"It is unquestionable that the Great Severing demands changes to how we operate in the Red Ocean. Our highest priority is not to seek a way to return to the Milky Way, or complete our conquest and defeat the local aliens that have brought us here, but to survive our coming contact with the native alien civilizations of Messier 87."

A projected map centered around M87 appeared yet again.

"M87 contains many more stars than the Milky Way. Its richer and hotter interstellar medium also endows much of its star systems with greater resources. It is more difficult for life to evolve under these harsh circumstances, but the alien races that are able to overcome all of these dangers will unquestionably be more powerful than the races of our home galaxy on average."

"The more advanced and developed alien civilizations of M87 will likely possess the means to detect our dwarf galaxy's arrival in real-time or after a relatively short delay." Fleet Admiral Argile declared. "Do not assume that our arrival will not be discovered for many years because the light of the Red Ocean's appearance and the gravity it exerts on other stellar objects are delayed by hundreds of thousands of years. Our race has developed more advanced detection methods that can observe a relatively distant galaxy's arrival. The natives of M87 have likely developed similar technologies."

Many different red points of lights began to shine on the galactic map. They spread across M87 as well as many of the satellite galaxies orbiting around the greater conglomeration!

"The Red Ocean's current position allows us to obtain a snapshot of the history of this region of space. By analyzing the light transmitted from M87 and its satellites over a time range that spans at least hundreds of thousands of years, we have detected over 10,000 powerful artificial manifestations of energy that have already taken place in the distant past. We have also detected many more artificial signals that originate from ancient alien transmissions. Make no mistake. Powerful alien civilizations have resided in M87 in the past, so it is highly probable that powerful alien civilizations still exist in the present day."

That confirmed many people's suspicions. It was nice to have a more solid form of confirmation at least.

While Ves understood that there was a slight chance that a calamity may have befallen M87 and its satellites in the past 100,000 or 200,000 years that completely turned it into a barren wasteland, that was wishful thinking!

Instead of hoping for a lucky break, it was better to assume the worst!

"The good news is that we have yet to detect any significant concentrations of phasewater in any of the nearby galaxies." The Lord of Thermodynamics announced. "That should increase the difficulty of traveling to our dwarf galaxy, but it will not hinder the arrival of foreign aliens forever. We must prepare as much as we can and Increase our Isolated society's strength as much as possible in order to withstand a future onslaught."

The projected logos of the MTA and the CFA appeared yet again!

The Star Designer looked utterly serious when he spoke his next words. "From the moment the Great Severing has brought us to M87, our future has diverged from our brothers and sisters in the Milky Way. We are not only physically isolated from our greater human civilization, but our group must also contend with an entirely different set of dangers and challenges. We can no longer rely on the superiority that our race that our forefathers from the Age of Conquest have secured for us all. We must all begin anew, for better or worse."

The famous and familiar logos of the two organizations began to change.

The traditional MTA logo depicted a knight mech surrounded by orange flames and twelve different planets.

The flames and the planets all turned red in the altered logo!

The regular CFA logo displayed a blue battleship behind a white four-pointed star on a dark background that was speckled with stars.

The white star turned into a bright shade of red while the background turned into a darker red tint!

"From now on, the human race as we know it will be divided into two civilizations, not one!" Fleet Admiral Stanley Argile roared! "Prolonged exposure to M87's exotic radiation will mutate us all into more powerful and adapted variations of the baseline human race. Each of these variations will henceforth be referred to as red humans. While our Common Fleet Alliance will seek to preserve as many rules and customs as possible, we must Inevitably change our modus operandi in order to adapt to our new circumstances. With the permission of our grand admirals, we decided to form an off-shoot of our organization which you may refer to as the Red CFA!"

Red humanity!

Red CFA!

Ves, Gloriana along with everyone else in the Red Ocean reacted with shock at the announcement!

Even though a lot of clever people figured out that the Big Two Inevitably had to form a regime in the altered new frontier, few expected it would happen in this way!

His Excellency Hendrick Polt could not fall behind. "The Mech Trade Association agrees with the decisions made by our allies from the Common Fleet Alliance. Our organization that is localized in

the Red Ocean shall henceforth operate under the banner of the Red MTA. No matter how much contact we still have with our counterparts in the Milky Way, we will no longer operate under the exact same rules, customs and expectations." This was a revelation that would shake the fabric of human society in the new frontier.

It was one thing to figure out that humans of the Red Ocean could no longer march in lockstep with the humans of the Milky Way.

It was another thing to formally acknowledge this separation and proactively promote a divergent mindset!

Right now, a lot of people in the Red Ocean still saw themselves as authentic human members of the one true human civilization in the Milky Way.

What about ten years later?

What about fifty years later?

By the time two generations had gone by, the vast majority of people in the new frontier would probably think of themselves as different and superior to their more 'primitive' and 'boring' cousins in the other galaxy!

Gloriana chuckled. "I find it curious that despite taking the drastic step to form a new civilization around the concept of red humans, the CFA and the MTA are still doing their best to maintain their present status."

"What can you expect from them? No matter whether they add the word 'red' in front of their names or not, their nature has not changed in the slightest." Ves said in a cynical tone.

Indeed, in the next five minutes, the Star Designer and the fleet admiral described how the Big Two would endeavor to maintain the stability of the current status quo as best as possible.

The most important constant was that the Big Two still intended to enforce the prohibition against taboos as vigorously as before!

Red humans were still not allowed to form their own sovereign star nations.

Red humans were still not allowed to develop and deploy weapons of mass destruction.

Red humans were still not allowed to develop, construct and make use of warships.

Aside from that, the Comm Consortium still remained responsible for managing the Red Ocean's galactic net.

"We also plan to accelerate the expansion of the Red Gate Consortium." The fleet admiral explained. "We shall quickly construct a network of lesser beyonder gates in every secure zone in order to form the Red Ocean Galactic Gate Network. The formation of this gate network will promote our economic development and enable more rapid transfers of military assets in the case of hostile alien invasions."

That certainly sounded handy to have in hand now that red humanity was outnumbered by so many old and new alien civilizations!

Ves could also tell that the formation of a new gate network would also prevent the red humans that were scattered in many different zones from drifting apart from each other.

The closer they were connected to each other, the smaller the likelihood that they would attempt to make off on their own!

"We do not intend to remain on the defensive." The fleet admiral declared in a more eager tone.

"The Red Cabal has already demonstrated extremely powerful and threatening capabilities. It may be able to realize more desperate actions such as detonating all of the phasewater in our dwarf galaxy. We must neutralize the threat of this pan-alien alliance by toppling its largest strongholds, defeating the ancient phase whales that are largely responsible for executing the Great Severing and completely break their base of support. In the following years, the Red CFA and the Red MTA shall intensify our offensives into alien space and seek to destroy the 'Tide Stations' to prevent the phase whales from affecting the entire galaxy once again."

Ves and Gloriana held mixed expressions. By accelerating their invasion into alien territory, the 'Red Big Two' clearly chose to persist in their hostilities against the indigenous aliens!

The Red MTA and the Red CFA clearly decided not to seek any form of truce or reconciliation with the phase whales and the other major alien races of the Red Ocean.

This was bound to become a huge preoccupation that would sap red humanity's attention and resources for many years.

Would the red humans be able to defeat the local aliens and digest their gains fast enough to meet the M87 aliens in time?

That was a big question!

"The Age of Meehs as we know it has to come to an end." The Lord of Thermodynamics announcement with a serious expression. "Meehs shall still play an Integral role in our society, Just as warships have protected our civilization for many centuries. However, the changes produced by prolonged exposure to Messier 87's exotic radiation combined with our future contact with the new galaxy's native alien civilizations shall lead red humanity into a new future."

·c0m A golden light began to shine from above. Both the Star Designer and the fleet admiral became illuminated by blinding golden rays!

"In order to commemorate our new start under the golden light of the nearby supergiant galaxy, we declare the start of the Age of Dawn!"

The Age of Dawn!

Chapter 5014 Reward Program

Human history changed forever!

To the people of the Milky Way, the Age of Mechs continued to prosper like always. Their race maintained a dominant position in their home galaxy.

Sure, the Red Ocean and all of the manpower and assets invested into it had disappeared, but the loss did not result in a drastic weakening of human civilization.

At most, human civilization was set back by a century or so. It would probably take at least that much time for society to compensate for all of the warships, Star Designers and god pilots.

Perhaps all of the relatives of the missing colonists of the Red Ocean may mourn for the loss of contact, but life eventually had to go on. New families would arise over time while the impact of the people that had gone missing would continually fade over time.

Worse tragedies had taken place in humanity's long history. The total amount of human lives lost during the end of the Age of Conquest far exceeded the amount of Red Ocean colonists that had disappeared from the Local Group!

It may only take a single generation for human society in the Milky Way to forget about the absence of the Red Ocean. People would get back to spending time on building their careers, making power plays and seeking to improve the performance of mechs by another 5 percent.

Not many humans would realize how much danger and excitement they missed out on by remaining behind in their home galaxy!

"Master..." Oleg Vorn spoke in an uncertain tone.

The young and talented Journeyman Mech Designer looked crushed as he entered the well-equipped design lab. He still couldn't fathom the loss of so many people and colonies.

The Friday Colonies had disappeared entirely!

The Big Two did not publish too many announcements related to the abrupt disappearance of the Red Ocean.

Only well-connected insiders had the right to access more information.

"They are still alive." Master Carmin Olson flatly said as she continued to puzzle over a high-level design problem. "They will adapt. They will survive. It is possible that one day, they will return and reunite with us. It is too premature to assume they will perish in the Virgo Cluster."

The Fridayman Master Mech Designer thought about all of the explosive information she had managed to obtain from the Mech Trade Association.

Messier 87, exotic radiation, red humanity, the Age of Dawn.

All of these words and phrases were enough to detonate a bomb among the upper echelon of human society!

Through the intergalactic communication channels that still remained operational due to various special reasons, much of humanity's upper ranks became excited by all of the new developments in the Virgo Cluster.

The red humans had inexplicably become the vanguard of humanity's invasion of another full galaxy, one that was much larger and more massive no less!

If the red humans succeeded in obtaining a foothold at Messier 87, then that would definitely benefit the original humans who remained behind in the Milky Way as well!

Even if a distance of 50 million light-years could never be bridged within their lifetimes, just the exchange of technological information was enough to enrich people's lives in the Milky Way!

Master Olson's expression grew mixed. In face of all of this excitement, a faint but undeniable sense of longing welled up in her heart.

"How do you think Ves Larkinson will fare?" Oleg asked.

"I cannot say. From the information that I have obtained, the Age of Dawn may benefit his work much more than that of other mech designers. He is likely to thrive as long as he can survive the threats that all of red humanity must overcome."

The pressure of survival in the Red Ocean had become countless times higher than in the Milky Way!

While the people in the Milky Way dazedly tried to move on with their normal lives after the strange disappearance of the Red Ocean, the displaced humans welcomed the third day with an entirely new mindset!

The Age of Mechs had ended for red humanity!

The Age of Dawn had arisen!

After the Lord of Thermodynamics and Fleet Admiral Stanley Argile announced their shocking revelations and declarations, the colonists of the Red Ocean gained a lot of answers but also generated a lot of new questions!

The contents of the public address may be enough to resolve everyone's greatest doubts, but they did not go into too many specifics!

This was why the Red MTA and the Red CFA published a whole host of documents on the morning of the next day.

These documents went into much more detail about the science of E energy radiation, the adjustments to established regulations and vague explanations about the philosophy of the two dominant organizations going forward.

Just as Ves was digesting all of the dense documentation, General Verle suddenly contacted him out of the blue.

"Sir! You need to read the latest announcement published by the Red CFA! The news has already begun to generate a lot of controversy in public!"

"Hmm?"

Ves had not even spent any time on reviewing the stuff published by the Common Fleet Alliance. He was a mech designer after all. What business did he have with the fleeters?

His expression changed as soon as he skimmed through the first page of the latest virtual document.

"Bounties? Warship tokens?"

It turned out that the rumors surrounding the Red CFA's intentions to ease the taboo related to the prohibition against warships were true!

Ves did not know how much arguing and politicking went on behind the scenes, but for the Red CFA as well as the Red MTA to eventually agree to loosen their long-held duopoly on warships that they maintained with an iron grip since the start of the Age of Mechs!

"This changes everything!" Ves gasped!

This may be one of the driving reasons behind the decision to establish the Age of Dawn.

The taboo against warships emerged as a consequence of the many horrors of the Age of Conquest.

It had become a defining characteristic of the Age of Mechs. So long as this era persisted, the vast majority of humans were never permitted to get in touch with armed starships!

The Age of Dawn was different.

The circumstances had changed, so the rules had to follow.

In this brand-new age where red humanity had to confront the realistic threat of extinction, it did not entirely make sense to suppress the war-making potential of the majority of the population in the new frontier!

"It is only a possibility, but I agree with you, sir." General Verle said through the still active communication channel. "Out of all of the powers based in the Davute region, only we have a prior history of defeating phase whales and phase lords. We are much better suited to complete these bounties than many of the states and pioneering organizations in the Krakatoa Middle Zone!"

Just because the Red CFA was willing to relent on a taboo did not mean that everyone was free to build their own warships all of a sudden!

The Red Big Two still feared a return to the bad old days of the Age of Conquest.

In order to better control the numbers as well as the allocation of both privately owned and state owned warships, the Red C.FA established a Warship Quota Program to manage these permissions!

The only parties permitted to own and field warships were states and pioneers. They were already vetted and already maintained existing ties with the Red Big Two.

As long as both of them fulfilled the right conditions, they were able to exchange their deeds to the Red CFA for a Warship Token!

This token was basically a license that granted its registered holder permission to own a warship that corresponded to a specific type.

A Destroyer Token permitted its holder to own an armed destroyer!

A Battleship Token granted its holder the right to own a full battleship!

"Damn! These CFA Warship Tokens are bound to become one of the most valuable assets in this age!" Ves predicted. "Countless people will go crazy for these rewards!"

General Verle agreed with his patriarch. "It is a rather clever incentive from the Red Big Two. We predicted that the mechers and the fleeters would seek to discourage Internal conflicts between human states. The greater beyonder gate can no longer make up for the decline in population by supplying the new frontier with an endless stream of immigrants. Abolishing internal wars outright is the most direct solution to preserve human lives, but it will generate so much resistance and opposition that the Red Big Two's rule will become unstable in a time where they can least afford any challenges."

That was true. Ves had traveled far and wide. He witnessed the full range of human nature in so many different regions of space.

Humans were greedy, ambitious and prone to competing against each other. The Big Two's policies during the Age of Mechs not only did nothing to suppress these tendencies, but deliberately magnified all of these bad habits!

That might work in an age where humans had already gained dominance and needed to keep each other busy, but it was no longer suitable under the new circumstances!

It was better to promote change by using the carrot Instead of the stick.

The newly announced Warship Quota Program was one of the first big carrots that the Red Big Two dangled in front of the masses!

Ves eagerly read the redemption requirements for these tokens.

The new reward program was still in its Infancy at the moment, so the Red CFA only established a single way to earn a coveted CFA Warship Token.

That was by redeeming the bounties to the Red CFA!

"It appears the Red Big Two really want to get rid of the phase whales." Ves remarked. "I would have thought that they might want to find an opportunity to make peace with indigenous aliens. The phase whales are the only aliens that can realistically bring us back to the Milky Way."

"The aliens would never agree to that." General Verle retorted. "The Great Severing is an act of desperation. It shows their utter determination to prevent humanity from conquering their dwarf galaxy. Now that we have moved in Messier 87's neighborhood, it is likely that the indigenous aliens will do whatever they can to wipe out our colonies while we are still cut off from the support of the Milky Way."

Ves began to look skeptical. "If that is the case, it is not going to be easy to earn these Warship Tokens..."

According to the current version of the reward program, the only way to earn these tokens was to hunt phase whales and phase lords!

As the chief culprits and the main actors responsible for pulling off the Great Severing, these native gods still posed an enormous threat to red humanity!

Ves became increasingly more dazzled by the rewards associated with the bounties.

[Irregular phase whale or lesser phase lord: Up to 1 billion MTA merits or 1 CFA Destroyer Token.

Phase whale or greater phase lord: Up to 10 billion MTA merits or 1 CFA Light/Heavy Cruiser Token.

Ancient phase whale: 1 trillion MTA merits -1 CFA Battlecruiser Token.]

"Can we claim a reward from the Red MTA and Red CFA at the same time?"

"It does not appear to be the case. You need to choose from one or the other. You can either settle for earning MTA merits, or obtaining a CFA Warship Token." General Verle responded. "Keep in mind that the tokens are non-transferable and only give you the right to field a warship. You still need to find a shipbuilding company and fund the construction of a warship by yourself."

That sounded like a considerable hurdle for most smaller organizations, but it should not be a problem for a fairly well-connected organization like the Larkinson Clan.

Ves scratched his head. "Are the CFA Warship Tokens distinguished by tech class? I haven't seen any mention of it anywhere in this document."

"This does not appear to be the case. As long as we have a token, we can choose to obtain a second-class or a first-class warship of the corresponding type. We only have to abide by the strict technological restrictions set by the Red CFA."

Just because the fleeters were willing to loosen this taboo did not mean they wanted to get upstaged!

The warships that pioneers such as the Larkinson Clan could potentially add to their own fleets would never be allowed to grow strong enough to challenge the might of the Red CFA!

Chapter 5015 Same Course

Who could possibly resist the allure of warships?

Hardly anyone would say no to them! Their might had firmly been established during the Age of Conquest. They also continued to play a major role in safeguarding human space against hostile alien civilizations.

Only pacifists, idealists and the extremists aligned with the MTA Warship Abolition Faction opposed the wider use of warships!

The public instantly buzzed as they discussed the latest news.

"This is awful! If warships are allowed to make a comeback, we will soon return to a time where a single vessel can bombard our entire cities from orbit!"

"Haven't you read all of the rules? The Red CFA won't allow people to do that? The fleeters will punish anyone who abuses the power of warships against other humans. They're mostly intended to give us a fighting chance against the warships fielded by powerful aliens!"

"This is a scam. A warship may be strong, but a company of first-class multipurpose mechs can be just as powerful, and you don't need any extra licenses to field the latter."

"It's impossible to earn one of these tokens! Kill a phase whale? The Red CFA might as well ask us to build a portal that can bring us back to the Milky Way!"

"If you can kill an ancient phase whale, would you choose to go to the MTA and redeem 1 trillion MTA merits, or go to the CFA and redeem a Battlecruiser Token?"

"What's the use of a single battlecruiser when I can extend my lifespan by an extra few centuries? I can pay for a lot of life-prolonging treatments with 1 trillion MTA merits!"

The surprise announcement of the CFA Warship Quota Program not only generated a lot of discussion among the public, but also energized the debates among the groups that had a realistic chance of earning these newfangled tokens!

The Golden Skull Alliance organized an emergency meeting.

In order to prevent the sensitive talks from leaking out, the leaders of the five alliance partners decided to meet in private in a secure chamber underneath the Cat Nest.

The alliance even requested Saintess Ulrika Vraken to secure the meeting venue with the help of her Macharia Excelsia.

Though nobody really felt comfortable with subjecting themselves to the strong Saint Kingdom of a Hexer ace pilot, this was one of the few ways to circumvent the most sophisticated snooping methods!

Fortunately, none of the leaders gathered together at this time were weak in mind, spirit or will.

"The risk factors have Increased now that we have entered the Age of Dawn." Marshal Ariadne Wodin stated. "We can leave aside the threat of M87 for the time being, but we cannot ignore the determination of the natives of the Red Ocean to strangle extragalactic Invaders such as ourselves. From a strategic standpoint, the Great Severing is not the goal itself, but a means to the desired end result. The next logical step the natives must take is to mobilize their entire warmaking potential and launch an all-out offensive on human-occupied territory. The regions close to the frontlines are about to get flooded by alien Incursions!"

Ves rubbed his hairless chin. "Your assessment is probably right, but the Red Big Two won't stand by and remain as impassive as before. Human population has become a lot more scarce and valuable now that we are cut off from the Milky Way. Their warfleets will do their best to block the most powerful alien fleets. The only ones that should get through are the weaker fleets. As long as we put a lot of effort into scouting the space around our expeditionary fleet, we can pick our battles and avoid any opponents that are too powerful for our own good."

"What do you all think?" Marshal Ariadne asked the other leaders sitting at the table. "Do you agree with his decision to resume the Trailblazer Expedition?"

Master Benedict Cortez firmly nodded. "It is exactly because times have changed that we must be more proactive. The real threat to our existence is not the natives of the Red Ocean, but the more powerful aliens that originate from M87. Once the latter start to commence their invasion, there is a high probability that second-class mechs will not be able to put up any meaningful resistance. The only realistic chance for us to protect our own lives is to promote to first-raters and build up a strong force of first-class mechs and potentially warships. We need to do this as soon as possible."

Several other people at the table nodded in agreement. Nobody could predict when the natives of M87 might come, but clearly the Cross Clan wasn't willing to bet that red humanity had the luxury of time.

Ves glanced towards the leaders of the latest two alliance partners. Both of them looked a bit distracted. The Great Severing clearly affected them more than others!

"General Foraine. Matriarch Boojay. How are the two of you holding up? Are you still with us now that you are cut off from the Milky Way?"

The leader of the Adelaide Third Fleet responded with a brittle smile. "It is... disconcerting to lose contact with the other fleets of our mercenary company. My staff and I have been preoccupied with reestablishing ourselves as an Independent organization. Much of this work is administrative in nature. It will not delay our participation in the coming expedition."

"Our family has lost our goal." Matriarch Rezzie Boojay said in a depressed tone. "Our overarching goal has always been to build up the forces needed to return to the Greater Terran United Confederation and take back the territory stolen by the Chabran Ancient Clan. Now... it is impossible to regain our honor."

That indeed sounded like a major problem. If the Boojays lost the motivation to pursue greater strength, then they would no longer be able to contribute as much to the Golden Skull Alliance as Ves hoped!

He thought for a moment. "A powerful Terran clan like the Chabrans should have taken part in the colonization of the Red Ocean."

"They have. The Chabrans have established a moderate presence in the Caesarlon Upper Zone."

"Why not set your sights on their holdings in that upper zone instead?" Ves suggested. "It might not be as good as taking back your ancestral planets, but at least your family has done the best it can under the circumstances!"

Tlie matriarch let out a sigh. "Defeating the Chabran Ancient Clan in the Red Ocean is not as meaningful. Do not worry. We do not intend to turn our backs on our commitments. It is still beneficial for us to seek greater chances in the deep frontier."

The leaders of the Golden Skull Alliance came to a consensus. Despite the valid concerns about rising hostilities in the deep frontier, the various alliance partners still wanted to obtain greater plunder!

They also did not reject the opportunity to earn a few warship tokens if possible. Phase whales and phase lords were notoriously difficult to find, but the Golden Skullers could earn a huge amount of profit if they succeeded in tracking one down!

Of course, killing these native gods was another matter. Tlie ones that Ves and his people encountered in the past were either weak or restricted. He did not think it would be that easy to defeat them in the open.

It was not for nothing that most red humans assumed that the hunt for phase whales would mostly become a concern for first-raters.

Only they had the strength and resources to fight against these native powerhouses on a reliable basis!

In any case, once the emergency meeting came to an end, Ves was happy with the results.

The changing age did not alter his overall plan for the future. He became more eager to become a first-rater than ever! Only then would he have the qualifications to participate in the greater game between civilizations!

The Golden Skull Alliance decided to stick to the current schedule. The disruptions caused by the Great Severing did not significantly Impede the departure plans of the Larkinson Clan and the rest.

·cθm In fact, everyone had already been ready to depart a while ago. The only reason why they lingered in Davute was because the Larkinson Clan still needed to take possession of their new flagship!

Tlie quasi-first-class factory ship had already arrived in orbit. Tens of thousands of crew members and officers had already shuttled over in order to take up their new stations and familiarize themselves with their new responsibilities.

The Larkinson spacers already learned how to operate the much more powerful and advanced starship systems in a virtual setting, so they were not complete novices.

However, the simulated version of the Spirit of Bentheim still deviated substantially from the physical version of the refurbished capital ship.

It was essential for the crew to learn the differences in advance!

Aside from that, the crew also needed time to load all of the mechs, supplies and personal items to the enlarged starship.

Ves looked forward to stepping foot on his new capital ship and familiarizing himself with many of the powerful upgrades installed by the MTA.

Before he could do so, he still had to take care of a few other chores.

He had not forgotten about his grandfather. Even if his human self could not find the time to further the hasty development of the Dawn Star Project, his cat avatar back in the Nyxian Gap made sure it never stopped!

Ves only needed to wait a few more days before the Larkinson Biotech Institute completed the accelerated growth of the Dawn Star Project's custom Carmine System.

As he continued to contact different organizations in order to ensure that their ongoing agreements with the Larkinson Clan remained the same, he also checked in on his latest Job.

He had no idea whether his professorship at the Eden Institute of Business & Technology remained valid.

The virtual projection of his new teaching assistant immediately assuage his concerns.

"You can rest assured that the school administration has no intention of revoking your position." Miss Alexa Striker happily said. "The Great Severing has completely upended the educational sector across the new frontier. It has become impossible for the red humans to continue their studies at the old and prestigious virtual institutions based in the old galaxy. The only schools that can serve the educational needs of our population are the ones that are fully based in our dwarf galaxy. While many new schools have been founded overnight in order to meet all of the excess demand, enrollment at the Eden Institute has already tripled!"

That... made a lot of sense. Ves had not put any thought on how the Great Severing affected the many students in the new frontier.

Getting cut off from all of the old brands that had dominated the academic scene for centuries if not millennia was both a disaster and a blessing to the people of the Red Ocean!

The Eden Institute of Business & Technology suddenly did not rank at the rear of many Terran first-class universities anymore.

The sudden absence of so many old galaxy educational institutions meant that it had not only reached the middle ranks if not higher, but also welcomed a lot of highly qualified students!

Business was booming!

While the drastic changes also meant that a lot of highly qualified Seniors and Masters suddenly became available for hire, there shouldn't be a compelling reason for the Eden Institute to replace Ves with another professor.

This was because the knowledge and experiences that Ves possessed had become more relevant to the red humans than ever!

"Is it true that you have once managed to defeat not one, but two different phase whales?" Axela Striker asked with heightened interest.

Ves smirked back. "We participated in the defeat or killing of three phase whales, actually. The latest one is a bit difficult to explain, so it doesn't get mentioned."

"If that is the case, then I suggest you add a specific module related to this subject to your Frontier Wisdom course. Even in the upper zones, not many people can boast of killing phase whales. If you can explain how you can effectively track them down and defeat them in the most efficient manner, our school administration predicts that your popularity as a teacher will explode!"

Chapter 5016 Enthusiastic Fan

Ves felt bemused more than anything after learning about the drastic changes at the Eden Institute of Business & Technology.

The increased enrollment and the reduced competition was like a dream to this relatively new university!

Now that every remaining educational institution had to compete on a level playing field, it was impossible for the Eden Institute to fall!

Only an enormous scandal would be able to threaten its continuation. So long as it did not make any egregious mistakes, it was destined to rise to prominence!

This provided huge benefits to Ves as long as he was able to remain employed by the Eden Institute.

It did not really matter if he became overshadowed by every professor. He was already happy with teaching a couple of niche elective courses.

Ves did not expect the school administration to attach so much importance to his proposed Frontier Wisdom course.

Were the Terrans truly willing to trust a second-rater to teach a bunch of clueless kids how to kill a phase whale!?

"Humanity has precious little contact with the phase whale race." The projection of Miss Alexa Striker clarified as she sat next to the desk in Ves' office. "Not even the Big Two has fought that much against these powerful aquatic aliens. They are too elusive and solitary, and spend most of their time hiding inside gas giants or pocket spaces. Master Laila Rebecca Devos has personally contacted the Red MTA to verify whether you have truly come into contact with this race. Once she obtained the desired answer, she intends to use your course as an additional selling point for the Eden Institute."

Ves blinked.

"Are you sure it is a good idea to blow this matter up? I am still a brand new Senior. I haven't taught a single serious class as of yet. My Frontier Wisdom course may be the completely wrong fit for the Eden Institute or its students."

"Master Devos is more than willing to give you room to experiment, professor. The rules and regulations concerning the teaching contents of elective courses are quite loose. The consequences

are not too severe if you fail to teach our students anything of substance. You can always retool the syllabus for the next semester."

"I see. I'll proceed according to my original plan if that is the case."

The two talked a bit further. Ves did not really treat his position at the Eden Institute as a full-time job, so he was largely left out of the loop.

Fortunately, his bright young teaching assistant was fully on top of the situation. She possessed an excellent awareness of the changes brought by the Great Severing.

"You cannot imagine how many pioneers have chosen to raise their own hunting fleets after the Red CFA published its Warship Quota Program." Axela gossiped to Ves. "These leaders have spent most of their efforts on building their colonies or establishing new business in the upper zones. Now, they suddenly chose to put their original plans on the backburner in order to chase after the much-coveted Warship Tokens. How likely do you think that they can succeed in their hunting expeditions?"

He snorted. "Hah, they will likely not be able to obtain the prize that they desire the most. As you have said so yourself, phase whales are highly elusive. Finding them is an enormous challenge. You may stumble upon them by luck if you spent enough time in the deep frontier, but you are likely to get confronted by a full alien warfleet that is strong enough to fight against the Red Big Two head-on! It takes special means to track down a phase whale."

"Are you able to teach that in your Frontier Wisdom course?"

Ves immediately shook his head. "Hell no. The Red Big Two would have bought the secrets from me if I have any. The truth is that my expeditionary fleet never set out to seek them in the first place. We just stumbled upon them by coincidence."

"Three times."

"I just have the worst luck."

"If you say so." Miss Striker said with a coy smile. "It is not a great loss if you cannot teach your students how to better track them down. You can still satisfy their curiosity by giving them tips on how to trap and defeat the phase whales. Our first-class mechs are powerful, but the powerful aliens are known to possess many strange methods due to their great mastery in spatial manipulation."

"That is why you can never beat a phase whale if you approach one from a distance. You can only ever take it by surprise and preferably when it is fixed to a single location."

"Now that is exactly the sort of lesson that you should teach to your next batch of students."

The two talked a bit more about the contents of Ves' future courses. They not only talked about his Frontier Wisdom course, but also touched upon his other ones.

The projection of Alexa Striker leaned forward a bit. "Your living mechs have grown stronger, haven't they? Are they responding well to M87's exotic radiation? It appears that you are among the mech designers that have derived much greater benefits from the Great Severing than others." Ves sensed an unusual amount of Interest from the Terran Apprentice Mech Designer.

"Only a few days have passed, Miss Striker. It is way too premature to judge which mech designer can harvest the most gains from the changing times."

"Have you not listened to the reactions from your own customer base? Many mech pilots that have been using your living mechs on a daily basis have already begun to share their discoveries! Many of them have not only reported that their mechs have become even more intelligent and responsive than before, but that their glows and special characteristics have become noticeably stronger than before."

The young woman waved her hand and projected a few recorded footage.

It showed a Valkyrie Redeemer that was able to scare the pilot of a mercenary mech into paralysis.

It showed how an unruly mob of rioters who were angry about the bankruptcy of a company with deep ties to the old galaxy became passive after the appearance of a single Pacifier.

It showed how the Huntmaster was able to cow several powerful exobeasts into submission.

It showed how the Bright Boy was able to debilitate other mech pilots at a distance.

It even showed how a Monster Slayer was able to cut through the armor of a tough mech in a mech arena when it clearly lacked the power to accomplish this with ease!

Ves curiously observed all of the recent footage. He had to admit that he had become distracted by other affairs to take a good look at how M87's exotic radiation impacted his products in the short-term.

It was partially why he was so eager to set off his expedition. He wanted to see all of his Larkinson mechs in action and track their changes in actual battle.

"You have done your homework." Ves stated with mild surprise. First-class mech designers were much smarter and more thorough than their second-class counterparts! "That last mech is not my work, by the way. The Monster Slayer is the solo work of my former student. I taught her a few lessons about living mechs, but she is committed to her own design philosophy."

That caused Alexa Striker to grow more enthused. "That is good news. The work of a student partially reflects the ability of the teacher. Will you be able to help other mech design students produce similar works in your Introduction to Living Mech Design course?"

Ves scratched his head. "I would not say that. Ketis Larkinson only managed to learn a bit of the essence of living mechs after spending lots of time with them. It is really difficult to acquire the most essential requirements to make them. Let me be honest with you, Miss Striker. I do not expect any of the students of my class to learn the art of designing living mechs after completing a single course of mine. It is impossible for them to do so unless I tutor them on an individual basis. I think the only other way they can pick up my teachings faster is if I advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer."

The woman looked crushed. "Is that so? I... already had an understanding that it is fiendishly difficult to pass on Class IX design philosophies. It will likely take many decades for you to realize your own. That is too much time. The Age of Dawn has just begun, and the mech industry is certain to go through a period of accelerated technological transitions. All evidence so far indicates that living mechs are on the rise, so it is greatly beneficial to join this trend early."

Ves raised his eyebrow as he leaned back on his chair. The signal that she was transmitting couldn't be more clear.

"Miss Striker... are you Interested in my design philosophy?"

The woman did not deny the obvious. "I am. I would like to learn from you if possible, Professor Larklnson. My initial Interest in your work is the reason why I applied to be your assistant. I continued to do my research and investigated your design philosophy in detail ever since. It was not until the Age of Dawn began that I made up my mind. As far as I understand, your living mech concept is not only becoming stronger in reality due to its high synergy with E energy radiation, but its effectiveness is also Invariant to the tech class of mechs. Your design philosophy is equally as effective on third-class mechs and first-class mechs, is that correct?"

"I wouldn't say that." Ves cautiously replied. "First-class mechs operate on an entirely different set of rules. In addition to that, I have never designed a first-class mech in my life, so I have no idea whether my design philosophy is still relevant in this scene."

"You are being overly cautious in your answer. My personal understanding is that your design philosophy has great potential even for Terran mechs such as ours. I believe in your work, professor. I could have chosen to specialize in many other fields, but none of them interest me as much because my work would largely be redundant in the end. Too many mech designers have already explored the many possible methods on how to strengthen armor systems, weapon systems and so on. Only a new and original concept such as living mechs offers a large variety of untapped research!"

Ves took the Terran mech designer a lot more seriously after this. He could hear her earnest passion for living mechs. He also recognized the familiar desire to innovate.

Perhaps she might not be as impulsive as he thought.

Still, he needed to remain cautious. The Terrans were far too powerful for him right now. He really could not afford to mess around with them. Ves did not want to make any powerful new enemies during this sensitive time period!

He sighed. "If you want to learn a thing or two about my living mechs, you can attend my Introduction to Living Mech Design course if you want. I will even give you extra lessons in order to help you perform your duties better. You can tell me whether you are still willing to learn from me after the semester is over."

"Thank you for giving me a chance, professor." The blond woman responded with an enthusiastic smile. "I have a few suggestions about how you can better teach this course. Since it is helpful to expose your students to real living mechs, I will suggest the school administration to obtain a handful of copies of each of your existing products that are on sale. We should strive to complete our collection as much as possible, so I will see if we can procure copies of your famous Hexer mech models as well."

"Uhhh... you're talking about a lot of mechs, Miss Striker."

"You do not need to be concerned. Each mech only costs a few MTA credits at most. Even when you add the cost of shipping to the total bill, these expenditures will not even make a serious dent on the teaching budget allocated to this course."

Chapter 5017 Refurbished Spirit

The Golden Skull Alliance finally moved into action!

After several foreseen and unforeseen delays, its famed expeditionary fleet finally departed from the Davute System!

This powerful fleet that consisted of scores of capital ships and many hundred sub-capital ships no longer made its presence felt to the residents of the port system.

The departure relieved many Davutans while concerning many more.

In the start of a new age, tens of thousands of impressive combat mechs, dozens of expert mechs and three powerful ace mechs decisively left the capital of the Colonial Federation of Davute!

No longer would these mechs be able to provide incidental protection to the residents living on Davute VII. The colonial state had to take on a greater responsibility if it wanted to maintain the stability that it so badly needed after the abrupt transition to a new era for red humanity.

Ves and many other people had already left Davute behind. They already embraced a mindset of chasing after greater heights. Why stop at a relatively ordinary second-rate state when promotion was within reach?

The upper zones had become their next target!

Whether they wanted to settle in the more resource-rich clusters of star systems or simply use them as their next stopover points, they all needed a huge amount of money, phasewater and high-grade resources in order to fulfill their intermediary goals!

United by this common goal, the members of five different pioneering organizations came together into a cohesive fleet.

Even the recently Joined Adelaides and Boojays had come to trust the odd and quirky alliance to an extent!

Although a lot of work needed to be done in order to properly integrate the mech forces of these two newcomers to the battle lineup of the overall fleet, the military officials and officers from all five pioneering organizations were already working on this matter.

Ves stood on the bridge of his refurbished factory ship with pride. It was Impossible for him to explore every nook and cranny and detail every single Improvement that the MTA had made to the ship he treated as his main home.

It was enough to tour and take note of the new sub-light propulsion systems, the new transphasic shield generators, the power generators that were somewhat capable of meeting the Increased energy consumption, the modern second-class superdrives, the vastly strengthened first-class hull plating and internal structure and the brand-new first-class Hyper Chamber.

From her relatively humble origins as a Hexer-built factory ship, the Spirit of Bentheim had evolved into a quasl-first-class ship in the truest sense of the word!

If not for certain shortcomings such as her lacking power supply or her vastly inferior data processing capabilities, the newly refitted vessel would have been able to fit in with similar capital ships that commonly roamed the upper zones!

All in all, Ves was largely content with what he got after paying a whopping sum of around 310 million MTA merits and 84 kilograms of phasewater!

This was one of his greatest sources of confidence in his ability to explore the deep frontier!

Even if all of the other ships of the expeditionary fleet foundered after a confrontation against an overpowering alien force, Ves still had a reasonable degree of confidence in the Spirit of Bentheim's ability to resist strong attacks and flee to safety with impressive speed!

As Ves ended his tour at the bridge, he took his seat on his Impressive new Golden Command Throne.

It was a huge upgrade compared to his earlier observer's seat. It effectively turned him from a bystander to an absolute leader. The effect of sitting on it was quite profound, both to the bridge officers and himself!

"So much power..."

Other people could not reach his height anymore unless they floated in the air.

Right now, the chief shipwright of the Larklnson Clan had done Just that in order to report the overall state of the Spirit of Benthelm after the crew had acclimated to their new stations.

"...The Mech Trade Association has done an excellent Job at reconstructing the Spirit of Benthelm. Many old faults in her structure have been worked away with the near-complete reconstruction of her entire hull."

Ves nodded in understanding.

I Under normal circumstances, the Spirit of Benthelm could easily last for several centuries without requiring extensive reconstruction!

It was a pity that red humanity no longer lived under ordinary circumstances.

"I low extensively has your department made the mutations to the ship systems, Vivian?" I Ie critically asked.

"We have only just begun to conduct these examinations, sir. Any deviations that can be attributed to M87's exotic radiation are still minor. It takes powerful scanners as well as extensive data collection in order to properly track the materials and components that will become prone to malfunction in the future. The good news is that we do not have to do all of the work alone. The Red Two have already generated a new public database that collectively gathers everyone's research on effects of exotic radiation on many different materials. We only need to form a list of parts that contain any of the mutating materials."

Mutating materials. Morphing materials. Reactive materials.

Whatever they were called, each of them had become a nightmare to red humanity!

Human society relied extensively on technology in order to function. From ordinary production equipment to humongous capital ships, each of them utilized many different exotics and other materials in order to function as cohesive products of advanced technology!

What would it be like if a processor no longer spit out the right calculations?

What would happen if a power generator produced a lot of heat instead of electrical energy?

What would happen when the neural interface of a mech stuffed a lot of junk data in the head of the pilot?

These were all possible consequences of persistent exposure to E energy radiation and R particle radiation!

Fortunately, these accidents were unlikely to happen right away. It would take years of gradual change and mutation for certain materials to transform into entirely different exotics.

·c0m So long as people identified these gradual changes in time, they only needed to spend a bit of time and effort to replace the problematic parts to remove any future risks.

The problem was that not all of these dangerous parts were as easy to change. The Spirit of Benthelm most definitely needed to return to a drydock in a decade or so to completely rip out all of the parts that could produce serious accidents and malfunctions over time!

"We still have enough buffer time at the current rate of mutation." Vivian Tsai consoled the patriarch. "The problematic parts may show progressively deviations in the following years, but much of our technology is fairly robust enough to possess generous tolerances. Our engineers can also make targeted modifications and adjustments to mitigate the side effects of physical mutations."

"I know, but do we have the manpower and equipment to do all of this work?"

The chief shipwright immediately shook her head. "Not even close to it. Remember that we not only have to perform a huge amount of additional maintenance on the Spirit of Benthelm, but also our other ships. The Gorgoneion, the Wild Torch, the Dragon's Den and the Blinding Banshee all have to undergo continuous examinations and adjustments in order to extend their lifespan and reduce their incident rates, and I haven't even touched upon our combat carriers as of yet. Even with the assistance from the crews serving on the aforementioned ships, we need at least a hundred times more qualified personnel in order to keep our fleet in good shape in the long-term!"

Ves groaned and rubbed his palm against his face. This was an astronomical amount of work.

"We would be better off if we can dump all of our old starships and replace them with brand-new ones that are designed with M87 adaptations in mind. In fact, we should do our best to save a lot of funding and resources so that we can replace our second-class starships with first-class equivalents straight away. This is the most efficient way for us to complete our transition to a first-class organization!"

I lis plan made a lot of sense, but it was pure fantasy at this stage!

"The disparity between the supply and demand of starships has never been as skewed as today." Vivian Tsai told Ves. "Back in the Age of Mechs, the incredibly high demand for carriers and other starships could still be alleviated by the steady supply of vessels pouring out of the greater beyonder gate. Now that it has fallen silent, red humanity must completely rely on the ships that it can construct on its own territories. This has caused a huge disruption in the starship market! Many contracts are on the verge of breaking apart due to the ripple effects of the Great Severing."

Ves suddenly grew more alarmed. "Will Davute renege on the deal that we struck? The original agreement was that the state would supply us with 3 medium-sized fleet carriers per completed mech commission."

There was also another deal related to gifting the starships allocated to the 77th Warborn Mech Division to the Larkinson Clan and the Cross Clan. This deal was likely to hold as the elite assault-oriented mech unit directly served Davute's Interests!

"My department has already communicated with the colonial government, sir. The officials over there have immediately assured us that the agreement still holds true. The federal military has become even more eager for you to complete the promised mech commissions. The excellent performance of the Pacifier model a week ago along with the increased effectiveness of all of your living mechs has caused the Davutans to expect more from your next works."

"I won't disappoint them." Ves confidently promised. "Davute will not regret this decision."

The value of starships had practically doubled overnight. The starship Industry had become the hottest and most profitable sector in the new frontier's economy.

Ves doubted that he would be able to make a similar deal in the future. Trading 3 mech commissions for 9 medium-sized fleet carrier was practically a steal to the Larkinson Clan!

The patriarch and the shipwright continued to discuss more ship-related matters. They inevitably touched upon the possibility of adding warships to the expeditionary fleet.

"It is not that difficult to design a third-class warship with our current ship development capacity." Vivian Tsai honestly said. "We can comfortably design most variations of second-class warships up to the level of a heavy cruiser. A battlecruiser is beyond us. We can design one if we have to, but if you want to obtain a good design that is tough enough to withstand serious attacks, we will need time or lots of external assistance."

Ves dismissively waved his hand. "There is no need to consider battlecruisers. We have to kill an ancient phase whale in order to earn the corresponding token, and that will never happen. We only have a shot of earning a couple of tokens of lower value."

"Our burden is much lighter if that is the case." Vivian replied in a relieved tone. "We already have an extensive foundation in designing most of the aspects of warships, sir. We only need to hire additional personnel who specialize in working with warship-grade weapon systems and various auxiliary systems. It should only take us two to three years to complete our first proper second-class destroyer design."

He shook his head in disappointment. This was not what he wanted from a token earned by killing a powerful alien leader.

"It's a waste to use a token on a second-class warship. Is it possible for your department to design a basic but proper first-class warship?"

"That... is much more problematic. We do not have the capability to design any first-class vehicle or starship at this time. We will need to spend a huge amount of time and resources on supplementing our skills and knowledge. It would help Immensely if we can hire at least a couple of first-class shipwrights, but this is impossible. A first-rater will never condescend to working for a second-class organization."

She was right. It was too much for Ves to expect for the Naval Design Department to spit out ready-made first-class ship designs.

"Well, let's set aside this discussion for later. We are not even close to earning a token yet, so we have plenty of time to explore our options."

Chapter 5018 Acute Starship Shortage

Ves had become enamored by his upgraded and modernized Spirit of Benthelm.

Everything had become faster, stronger or more diverse.

The MTA shipyard also removed a lot of Hexer influences from the original builders of the factory ship.

Though the vessel still vaguely possessed a six-sided hull on the outside, the corridors and many compartments no longer adopted similar shapes.

The ship architecture no longer annoyed Ves as much as it did in the past, though Gloriana held the opposite opinion.

The only true part about the Spirit of Benthelm's comprehensive upgrade that irritated Ves was that she never had a chance to show off the full capabilities of her three Identical superdrives!

It was fun to accelerate the factory ship to unreal speeds by warping the space around her hull, but it was not advisable for her to distance herself too far from the rest of the expeditionary fleet.

The Spirit of Benthelm could have easily entered the Torald Middle Zone by now, but she was forced to match the pace of the slowest starship in the fleet due to safety concerns.

"We can't go on like this." Ves complained to Chief Minister Abigail Evern. "I need you to prepare a few plans on adding a new fleet to the Larkinson Clan that consists entirely of starships equipped with superdrives. We don't have to establish it right away, but I want our clan to make preparations in advance so that we can form a highly mobile fleet."

"You want to form a new core fleet based entirely on superdrive-equipped starships?"

Ves nodded. "Yes. Let's assume we can form it entirely out of true first-class starships. It may take a while before we can realize this ambitious plan, but I want our clan to figure everything out in advance."

"We can do that, sir." The former Hexer naval officer spoke. "We do not have the capability to design and construct first-class starships by ourselves, and nobody that we are allied with can solve this need either. We will have to forge strong connections with a first-class power if you want to have any hope of commission first-class starships."

She was right. Ves already talked with Vivian about this problem. The requirements to design and produce first-class mechs were incredibly high. The requirements to get started with first-class starships were even greater!

Just the capital requirements alone was unbearable to the current state of the Larkinson Clan!

Ves briefly thought about the potential first-class contacts that he could obtain powerful starships from. His options weren't great at the moment.

The Red MTA remained his best hope at the moment, yet from what he heard through several channels, the mechers had become fully preoccupied with solving their own acute needs!

The war against the Indigenous aliens was in the process of heating up, which meant that the MTA needed to field more warships than ever! How could the mechers waste any of their existing shipbuilding capacity at this sensitive time?

Ves seriously doubted whether he could cash in all of the remaining favors and goodwill he had left from the Yorul-Tavik Clan.

The foundation of this first-class clan still remained rooted in the old galaxy.

After Lord Pearian Yorul-Tavik catastrophically failed in his amateurish expedition, the rest of his clan had become a lot less interested in expanding its holdings in the new frontier!

As for the Terrans...

"Forget it." He shook his head in dismissal. "I'm just a simple professor employed by an ordinary university. It will be hard to establish mutually beneficial ties with these arrogant Terrans."

The Devos Ancient Clan that founded and operated the Eden University of Business & Technology most certainly had the strength and capability to construct first-class starships, but what did that have to do with a second-rater like Ves?

Unless Ves was willing to reveal his most valuable trade secrets, there was no way this powerful clan would pay him any serious regard!

After all, the Terrans needed those first-class starships themselves!

In the end, it all came down to shipbuilding capability.

Those who possessed it closely held it to their chests.

Those that did not possess it effectively had to work like dogs in order to expand their fleets!

"We can expand our own shipbuilding operations if we alter our current development strategy." The female chief minister proposed. "If we Invest additional resources into Murphy & Sons, we can Increase our supply of second-class sub-capital starships. They may not sound as attractive to you anymore, but they are better than nothing."

"I know, but there should be a limit to how much we can do this." Ves said with a sigh. "The real bottleneck isn't the lack of shipyards. It is the shortage of raw materials that is ultimately limiting production everywhere. It will take a long time for all of the colonies to complete their initial developments and get their industries up and running. This is also why I don't think there is much point to leaving the Diligent Ovenbird behind in Davute."

Rather than keep the Diligent Ovenbird deployed in a fixed position so that she could function as a relatively functional shipyard, Ves would rather have her accompany his expeditionary fleet in order to properly maintain and repair his starships.

Ves ultimately accepted that there were no good solutions to expanding or upgrading his fleet in the foreseeable time.

Red humanity needed to go through an extensive period of development, and the Larkinson Clan needed to become a lot more powerful as well!

Once he completed his latest discussion on starships, Ves decided to stop by the Dragon's Den at the next possible opportunity.

Both the Larklnson Biotech Institute and the T Institute reported a lot of changes since the Great Severing.

Ves knew quite well that exotic radiation would have drastic implications to the ongoing research projects of both research institutions. He delayed his visit to them because he was too busy with other matters and because he wanted to give them more time to figure out their circumstances.

The main reason why he decided to finally pay a visit to the partially organic capital ship was because he needed to pick up the Carmine System reserved for his Dawn Star Project.

Ves, or more precisely Veronica, had just completed the rushed design project!

While Ves was not exactly proud of the first mech design completed since his ascension to Senior Mech Designer, it was still a lot more solid than any of his prior rushed mech designs.

He had already checked his grandfather's condition.

He was afraid that M87's exotic radiation would have adverse effects on Benjamin Larklnson's dire physical state.

It had already started to become common knowledge that the Increase in ambient spiritual energy affected every expert pilot.

Each of them had become stronger as they were able to affect their surroundings with their willpower a bit more effectively than before!

Ves feared that the reverse might happen to his grandfather due to his broken willpower. He had not noticed any signs of this, but who knew how long this would remain true in the future.

He needed to resolve this matter sooner rather than later!

Director Ranya Wodin greeted Ves as soon as he stepped aboard the Dragon's Den.

"You look a lot better than I thought." Ves remarked. "Your last report makes it sound as if you are swamped with work."

"I am, but this is an unprecedented time of change and evolution! Think about it. The entire Red Ocean and every organism that resides in it has moved from a relatively barren environment to a more energy-rich environment! This is a transition that is bound to destroy entire ecosystems and cause trillions of different organic species to go extinct, but those who are able to adapt and survive the mutations wrought by E energy radiation and R particle radiation shall attain unprecedented strength on a population-wide scale! Red humanity is about to undergo a collective evolution on an unheard of scale!"

Ranya continued to rave about the effects of M87's exotic radiation. The entire biotech community became abuzz with the possibilities.

While they most definitely understood all of the dangers inherent in the mutations induced by the new galaxy, they were confident that their solutions would help them save their own lives at the very least!

As long as they were able to survive and weather the storm, they could dedicate their research towards all of the fantastic new possibilities presented by Messier 87!

The pair briefly toured the biomes that comprised a large part of the Dragon's Den. All of the different organisms that the LBI had acquired over the years had begun to show abnormal deviations.

"We tried our best to fulfill one of your standing orders and purchase as many mutated beasts as we could." She said as they stopped in front of a biome that housed a reptilian bird-like creature.

"These creatures have demonstrated abnormal abilities, but their threat has never come close enough to test our defenses."

"Are you concerned that this will change?" Ves asked.

"It is possible that our fears are overblown, but it is also possible that all of these creatures have the potential to become as powerful as expert mechs." The director said with a grave expression. "On the one hand, these mutated beasts have not only become more precious and unique, but they also have the potential to absorb so much strength from M87 that they can reach a state where they can pose a serious threat to the safety of our ship."

Ves swept his gaze to the surrounding biomes. He tried to extend his spiritual senses in order to evaluate the spiritualities of the closest mutated beasts.

He could feel that each of them had indeed become a lot more active on this front.

Just as humans were beginning to flourish in this more energy-rich environment, the mutated beasts who already activated their spiritualities were beginning to grow stronger with each passing day!

His expression turned grave as well. "Your concerns are valid. The Dragon's Den may be able to hold them for the time being, but this won't last forever. I don't want to see these alien beasts tear this capital ship apart in an attempt to free themselves. What do you propose we do in order to prevent this from happening?"

"My staff and I have come up with several possible solutions, sir. The most direct and obvious way to eliminate the threat is to kill the mutated beasts. They cannot fight against us if they are not alive anymore."

"Unacceptable." Ves immediately shook his head. "They are too valuable to me. Each of them are not only potential sources of spiritual ingredients, but also have the potential to join my collection of design spirits. Killing them at this stage may be the safest option, but it will largely waste all of our efforts."

"We can instruct our Davute Branch to construct a highly secure containment center that can properly house the strongest and more threatening mutated beasts. It is much easier to contain them in a land-based facility. We can even turn it into a theme park if you want it to pay for itself."

That sounded a bit more realistic, but Ves did not entirely like this option.

"These mutated beasts are all essential resources to my work and design philosophy. I don't want them to be separated too far away from our fleet. Anything else?"

"We can attempt to freeze them and store them in cryogenic cells, but this is a dangerous procedure that has never been tested on all of those unique species. The death rate is bound to be high."

"No. Next."

Ranya hesitated for a moment. "If containment is not a solution, then what about befriending them? Each of these mutated beasts possess at least a rudimentary degree of intelligence. If you can assign Venerable Joshua to us, we may be able to use his talent of befriending other life forms to build up amicable relationships with the beasts."

"That... actually sounds like a good idea..."

Chapter 5019 New Risk Factors

Perhaps It sounded silly to rely on a single person to placate and befriend a large amount of feral and unruly mutated beasts.

All of these creatures were originally predators, bizarre alien creatures or deviant designer beasts.

Their species were already strong or worrisome enough on their own. After they had undergone an unknown mutation that somehow activated their previously dormant spiritualities, they had transcended beyond their own mortalities and had the potential to become much greater life forms than their genes allowed!

The 'sacred gods' of Aeon Corona VII was the most representative example of this impressive evolution trajectory.

Ves had no idea how the cultists who Infiltrated the Starlight Megalodon managed to do it, but this exceptional species managed to thrive on the planet that had become flooded with higher-dimensional energies.

The circumstances at the time actually resembled the current situation of the Red Ocean in many different ways.

This was why Ves did not underestimate the evolutionary capacity for the mutated beasts held captive aboard the Dragon's Den.

The strongest of them should easily have the potential to become as powerful as Qilanxo back when she was alive!

Although there was a persistent voice inside his head that he was playing with fire by keeping these mutated beasts around, Ves could not resist the benefits of having so many powerful creatures at his disposal!

This was especially the case when the Age of Dawn no longer put all of the focus on inechs.

It was conceivable that the abundance of exotic radiation would Introduce new power systems.

Just as primordial humans along with many other powerful alien species once thrived in the Milky Way, the humans and aliens of the Red Ocean had the potential to become Just as powerful!

"I will Instruct General Verle to coordinate with you on this matter." Ves told Director Ranya. "Venerable Joshua can't babysit all of these mutated beasts day and night, but it shouldn't be a problem to station him and his Everchanger on this ship on a periodic basis."

Ranya already looked pleased with this answer. "That will greatly help us. Joshua may not be able to placate every mutated beast, but he should at least be able to identify the more aggressive and less cooperative ones. We will likely have to adopt a comprehensive approach and cull the beasts that cannot be redeemed."

"Inform me if you ever want to eliminate a beast. I can harvest a lot of useful resources from them if I am around."

Ves was not too unreasonable in this regard. The threat of a hostile and uncontrollable mutated beast was too dangerous to keep around.

The two talked a bit more about other important topics as they continued on their little tour.

He briefly became more interested in the captive populations of intelligent aliens.

The Dragon's Den currently operated three internment camps.

The oldest and largest was a forest biome that housed tens of thousands of bird-like aliens called pakklavons.

They had become the favored test subjects of the T Institute due to their similarities to humans and their abundant supply.

The biome holding captured orven naval officers was less interesting as they did not offer any significant value to the Larkinson Clan's ongoing research.

The latest bio that the Larkinsons turned into an internment camp held what may possibly be the last members of the pescan race.

Though Ves sympathized a lot with the tall and oddly shaped humanoid aliens that originally lived on Davute VII, that did not change the fact that they should have gone extinct.

"It is becoming more challenging for us to hold these intelligent aliens on a long-term basis." Ranya told Ves as they both looked at a gathering of many pakklavons. "As you can see, many of them have gained a lot of different abilities. While none of them have ever become strong enough to pose a threat, we are becoming concerned that this may not be the case in the future. Exotic radiation is clearly promoting all of their growth, just like it does to my own companion spirit seed."

More than a few of the avian aliens inside the biome displayed a diverse variety of bizarre companion spirits.

The T Institute had used the pakklavons as a test bed for the development of companion spirit trees for several years.

This important research project could have never progressed so quickly without the selfless dedication of these volunteer test subjects!

However, all good things had to come to an end.

The Age of Dawn not only had the potential to unlock red humanity's evolution, but every other species as well!

Ves could no longer look down on these native aliens as much as before.

They may look harmless and fully within control, but who knew if any of these captive aliens responded much better to M87's exotic radiation than other organic life forms!

Director Ranya Wodin expressed a lot of concern with regard to their continued captivity.

"The Dragon's Den was not built to function as an alien prison. We are growing more concerned about our ability to restrain these sentient aliens. The T Institute won't agree with us on this, but it is my recommendation that we cull these captives as a preventative measure."

This subject was similar to the last one, but the risk factors were much greater this time!

As destructive as the mutated beasts could be, they were still relatively primitive by nature.

Without growing up in a proper society where they become exposed to all sorts of greater concepts, their vision was too limited.

Just like Arnold, it shouldn't be too difficult to manipulate the more pliable ones into serving the Larklnson Clan.

Ves did not think that this was ever truly possible with the three groups of sentient alien captives.

The pakklavons, orvens and pescans all demonstrated enough human-like traits to become as dangerous as their captives.

Their knowledge and capacity for complex thought resulted in a deadly combination that could easily backfire on the Larkinsons.

Therefore, Ves was a lot closer to ordering them all to be culled.

He eventually shook his head.

"We can talk about this further, but I would like these aliens to stay alive for the time being."

"Are you sure you are making the wisest decision, Ves? We can try to upgrade our security measures to reduce the risks, but we won't be able to defeat every possible measure."

Ves sighed. "I know that. I will think of a better solution."

He originally had these aliens captured in order to abide by his promises or meet his obligations.

Even though the situation had changed to the point where he suspected people like Ketis and Jannzi might not care so much about the wellbeing of these captives anymore, Ves still could not bring himself to slaughter them en masse.

It was a bit ridiculous for him to struggle so much over the treatment of captive aliens. Another part of him could not help but wonder about how he could make fantastic use of them in this new age.

"May I make a suggestion, sir?"

"You may."

"Why not sell them?" Director Ranya asked. "The captives that we have experimented on and the ones that are currently functioning as a control group have all gained a lot of research value in this new age. We only have to reveal that our test subjects have undergone drastic mutations due to E energy manipulation in order to generate a lot of interest. We can even turn this into a systemic business activity."

Ves looked impressed. "I like your entrepreneurial spirit. I don't think it is wise to turn aliens like these into a commodity, but you are right that selling them is a great way to make them someone else's problem. Explore this option further. If you can sell our test subjects for a good price, then I will approve of this initiative."

They continued to discuss other important subjects as they moved to the lab where Ves wanted to pick up his prize.

One subject that Ves cared about a lot was the adverse effects of exotic radiation on ordinary humans.

"The Red Two as well as many other large and renowned biotech research institutions have come together to build up a growing archive of research on the effects of exotic radiation on the human physique." Ranya told him. "Our own research in this subject matter is much more limited. What we know at this time is that every human has a different propensity towards adverse exotic radiation-induced physical mutations."

"Oh? What sort of people are more prone to develop physical defects and imbalances?"

"Baseline humans should largely remain safe from this particular effect. Their bodies are weak, but that means that the elements and molecules that make up their body cells are not particularly special. Exotic radiation affects mundane materials the least. Iron remains iron. Oxygen remains oxygen. An ordinary bone will remain an ordinary bone. This will largely guarantee the continued survival of many third-raters, but this is not an absolute."

"That... is damned lucky of them. I guess there are advantages to being a plain human after all." Ves remarked with an odd expression on his face.

He did not forget that he and the original Larkinsons used to be normal as well.

"It is augmented humans that are under greater risk. The exotics integrated in their body cells as well as the implants that have merged with their organs have all become potential mutation factors. Continued exposure to E energy radiation and R particle radiation will soon make it clear how much augmented humans are at risk of developing severe or fatal health problems."

Ves started to feel a lot more concerned about himself.

His body was anything but human nowadays! It had gone through so many drastic changes that it became filled with many exotic materials!

However, Ves did not really feel at risk. He believed in his mother's heritage and his own evolution as a mech designer and a spiritual entity.

He remembered from the Red Two's public address that E energy radiation was not a neutral force.

Its effects could change depending on its interaction with the mentalities of different organisms!

This was also why he did not immediately worry about the health of his wife and children. Each of them were originally designer babies whose bodies had been enriched with a large variety of exotics!

"Has your personnel conducted any large-scale examinations on the health of our clansmen?"

"We have started doing so shortly after the Great Severing took place, sir."

"Have you ever noticed any deviations among our augmented Larkinsons that suggest that exotic radiation is starting to compromise their health?"

Ranya Wodin slowed her steps. "A week has gone by, but... we are not measuring the same results as many other parties. In fact, the public datasets make it clear that many different people from

many different locations are showing different levels of responsiveness. I have not published any data centered around our clan, but it is rather Impressive that none of our clansmen have displayed any serious indications of adverse physical mutations."

"What about the pakklatons? Surely you have studied their conditions as well. What are your results?"

"The pakklatons who have undergone experimentation show a remarkable degree of resilience towards this effect. The ones that have yet to undergo trials are different. They are showing the expected indications of exotic energy radiation exposure."

Ves narrowed his eyes even further. "I think I know what may be going on. If what I suspect is true, then we should have nothing to fear. We need more data in order to verify my theory. Please contact the Glory Seekers, Crossers, Adelaides and Boojays in order to investigate whether their troops are showing any adverse reactions towards exotic radiation."

"We... can do that. What is your theory, sir? What do you suspect?"

"If my suspicion is right... then the Glory Seekers and the Crossers should be just as safe as us. It is the Adelaides and the Boojays that should really be worrying about this matter."

Chapter 5020 Tree Garden

Director Ranya Wodin obviously experienced a lot of stress lately.

The Great Severing brought too many changes to people's lives.

The Larkinson Biotech Institute had become inundated with a lot of new problems and responsibilities as a result.

From monitoring the health of every clansman to keeping an increasingly more dangerous population of mutated beasts and alien captives under control, life was no longer as easy for the biotech researchers working for the Larkinson Clan!

Nonetheless, neither Ves nor Ranya entertained any thoughts about reducing their operations!

"The Age of Dawn has recontextualized every industry." Director Ranya explained her views to Ves as they entered the lab where the latest version of the Carmine System was held. "Biotechnology has risen in importance. Not only is it important for our field to monitor people's health and control the effects of exotic radiation on their physiques, but we must also develop the potential of evolved organisms. Every crop, every livestock and every pet will gain exceptional properties. The possibilities are endless."

Ves smirked at that. "It is rather fortunate that we are one of the few organizations that has invested into a serious biotechnology research organization. Many other pioneering organizations don't even have a clue where to begin."

The Larkinson Biotechnology Institute may not have been as much of a burden to the Larkinson Clan as in the earlier years, but it had never fully justified its existence.

This time was different!

While every single industry and sector was about to undergo a lot of upheaval, the biotechnology industry had entered a golden age!

"It is a great blessing and opportunity for biotech researchers such as ourselves to be on the forefront of a technological explosion. Just as the Age of Mechs has enabled the first generations of mech designers to define the direction of human technological progression, we can all make our mark in history as long as we succeed in our new research projects."

Ranya even had the illusion that biotech researchers such as herself and the people that worked under her had become the new protagonists of the era!

Though Ves was happy for her, he did not want her to get too distracted by all of the shiny new research options.

"I have always given you and your department enough free rein to organize yourselves and do what you want, but do not forget about the needs of our clan." He reminded her. "We are all counting on you to safeguard our health and ensure that the alien creatures held on this ship continue to remain useful."

The director reined herself in. "Don't worry, Ves. I have always done my best to separate private interests from public interests. Every researcher working for the LBI knows the rules. They are free to pursue their own private research projects as long as they have taken care of their normal duties."

They continued to talk about management-related Issues until they entered the lab that held the most crucial component of the Dawn Star Project.

The large and extensive network of red flesh vaguely resembled the roots of a tree that had been extracting its nutrients from freshly spilled blood.

It made for a macabre sight. Even Ranya couldn't help but feel as if she was facing a monster rather than a thoughtless agglomeration of biological tissue.

She much preferred to work with plants.

"Your people started to grow this organic product shortly before the Great Severing, right?" Ves asked.

Ranya nodded. "That is correct. We cultivated the product according to our normal approach. However, once our dwarf galaxy teleported to the vicinity of Messier 87, the Carmine System grew and matured just as it was beginning to get exposed to exotic radiation. Luckily enough, we did not discover any significant changes."

"Oh?"

"The low specifications of the Carmine System is to blame." Ranya ironically smiled. "Since you prioritized expedient growth over superior performance, the Carmine System is largely made up of human cells derived from your grandfather's DNA. Since your grandfather has never undergone any genetic treatments, the web of flesh before you is not all that different from the body tissue of an ordinary baseline human."

Ves smiled. "Ah, that's right. The Carmine System for my Dawn Star Project is only a fraction as complicated as the one implemented in Venerable Jannzi's Bastion. The latter took months to grow as its organic tissue is fortified by many powerful exotics."

He did not worry too much about the Bastion despite the fact that it integrated a problematic Carmine System.

Now that it had become a part of a powerful expert mech and also a third order living mech no less, Ves had a strong suspicion that it would not undergo any adverse physical mutations!

In any case, Ves did not want the key component of his Dawn Star Project to remain in this Isolated state for too long.

The more time it spent in a cultivation tank while being subjected to more and more exotic radiation, the greater the chance of unforeseen developments!

Ves and Ranya spent a bit of time inspecting the organic product. The last-minute checks did not reveal any new or overlooked problems.

He became satisfied that the rushed growth process and the effects of exotic radiation did not ruin the package.

"Please ship it over to the Spirit of Bentheim right away. Make sure to properly clean up this lab and ensure that the researchers who worked on it maintain their confidentiality."

"We know. We have been following all of the proper procedures from the beginning."

Now that Ves refreshed his understanding of the Larklnson Biotech Institute, he decided to pay a visit to the T Institute.

This secret research organization occupied a highly secured section of the Dragon's Den.

Different from the LBI, the main researchers of the T Institute mostly consisted of members of the Aduc Family rather than the Larklnson Clan.

This was a serious cause for concern, but Ves had chosen to put his trust in these foreign workers.

The Aducs worshiped Gala, and Ves had Inadvertently made this extremely powerful design spirit.

The only issue was that Ves had gone overboard at the time. He invested so many ingredients in her creation that Gaia somehow grew outside of his control!

Though Gaia no longer responded to Ves' inquiries, she possessed a special relationship with the Aducs. She originated from and continued to remain housed in an authentic Terran tree that had long been in the possession of their family.

As far as Ves was concerned, as long as he remained friends with the Aducs, he would still have a chance to reconnect with Ills own creation.

When Ves entered one of the labs of the T Institute, he caught sight of a large and carefully cultivated field of trees.

These weren't ordinary trees.

They were the various spirit trees that Ves and the Aduc researchers had long attempted to develop.

Ves initially thought that by combining his expertise with that of the Aducs would be enough to turn companion spirit trees into a reality.

The actual results were less than optimistic, though. The main problem that both Ves and the Aduc researchers remained stuck on was the fact that it was too difficult to impart any spiritual qualities onto the fruits grown from the trees!

Although Ves had hoped that the spirit trees would eventually be able to impart spiritual energy into the fruits once they grew old enough, who knew how many years that would take.

Ves could not wait for a century for the trees to start growing fruits that were worth a damn!

As he stepped closer to the experimental growth field, he began to notice a few differences since his last visit.

He noticed that the heat generated by the solar lights floating from above had increased.

The irrigation systems channeled more water to the fields.

The soil had become enriched with more compost and other nutrient materials.

The trees had grown noticeably taller and wider than before. Their luscious green leaves swayed with the artificial wind.

The smell of it all caused Ves to slow his steps and enjoy the moment. The scents in the air were filled with vitality.

He felt more at home than he had on his own flagship!

It was not until he expanded his senses and observed the trees with his spiritual senses that he could sense how his trees had truly changed!

The trees were no longer reliant on generating spiritual energy from their inner flesh tissue. After the space around them began to get filled up by different spiritual energies, the trees actively absorbed much of them before slowly processing them into life-attributed energy!

The life-attributed spiritual energy not only helped the trees evolve and grow stronger, but also imparted the fruits with the elements that they had been lacking in for a long time!

"They're beautiful, are they not?" A female voice spoke from the side.

Director Pesca Aduc of the Aduc Family looked like a radiant harvest maiden as she stepped forward.

Her bare feet along with her dirt-covered lab coat made for an Incongruous sight. She looked more like a cultist than the director of a serious research organization!

Ves took a second look at Pesca.

As a traditional believer in Old Earth, Pesca received the favor of Gala. Her spirituality had grown substantially with the help of her patron.

This time was different.

Just like the spirit trees around them, Director Pesca Aduc had begun to absorb the ambient spiritual energies, though at a much more reduced rate.

Ves could sense how the spiritual energies cycled through her body in a complex pattern that he could not fully understand or track.

Though the process was inefficient and rudimentary, Ves could still conclude that the process eventually nurtured Pesca's spirituality!

This was a shocking sight to Ves!

Tliis was the first instance of meeting a human who could systematically absorb E energy radiation and use it to fuel their own spiritual development!

Ves was reminded of the mysterious Annals of Terra Vitae. He had always disregarded the strange knowledge and methods contained in them because they did not really make that much of a difference.

At most, the more talented members of the Aduc Family acquired life or earth domains, making it easier for them to do well in the terraforming business.

It turned out that the techniques described by the record that was supposedly a fragmented copy of the Earth Scroll were not that worthless as he thought.

The Aducs just had to enter the right environment for the Annals of Terra Vitae to demonstrate their value!

The Aduc Family would definitely take off now that its members had entered a more energy-rich environment!

"You..."

The woman smiled and lifted her arm. This simple gesture seemed to stir the ambient spiritual energies around her body. Her nourished spirituality seemed to resonate with the surrounding air, making it look as if she truly carried the blessing of nature!

"The spirit trees are flourishing." She said with a mysterious power in her voice. "With Gaia's help and blessing, we have ensured that they will reach a state where their fruits shall grow ripe enough to Impart new life to those who eat their succulent flesh. The Mother of Life blesses all of her children, and she is especially appreciative of you and your fellow Larkinsons."

"Uhhh..."

"We are on a great mission now." Director Pesca Aduc continued on as if she was in charge Instead of Ves. "Red humanity has lost its roots. Old Earth has become more distant than ever. As long as our race continues to meander in the light of Messier 87, there will come a time when all of our humanity will come under question. We cannot let this pass. The Origin of Life has therefore bestowed a responsibility to us. We must establish a New Earth in this new cosmic region. To do so, we must find the perfect planet in the Red Ocean or Messier 87 and plant the Old Lady in its most fertile region. This is our holy mission and one that our goddess has directly entrusted to us! The fate of all red humanity rests on our actions!"

Ves blinked a few times. He looked anything but Impressed at the moment.

"That sounds Interesting and all, but... what does this have to do with my clan?"