

## The Mech 5801

### Chapter 5801 The Grand Auction Begins

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The upper hall descended into darkness as the fluorescent plants and fish slowly retreated from sight.

That was until a pair of bright blue eels entered from above!

The beautiful eels swam with perfect coordination as they formed a double helix. The genetically engineered creatures soon reached the bottom where they subsequently exposed the presence of a handsome man.

Nobody noticed how the fellow managed to sneak up on the center of the main stage, but now that he became visible, the entire audience took note of his exceptional allure.

The man was handsome.

His face and body proportions sculptured to perfection. He wore a fashion-forward outfit that tastefully exposed his physique. There was an invisible glow to him that enhanced his attractiveness and made it difficult to ignore his presence in a crowd!

Many people present in the upper hall were either high-tier galactic citizens or followers who were accustomed to the presence of powerful figures.

However, the auctioneer that captured everyone's attention possessed a substantially greater pull in spite of the fact that he was probably under 100 years old and not that famous.

More and more fish that glowed in different colors began to enter the upper hall again. They began to light up the main stage and entrance people's eyes.

"Welcome to our humble auction house on Ector V." The unnaturally beautiful man spoke with a voice that sounded like pure magic. "I am Orion Leeds, and I have received the distinct honor of guiding you through our greatest grand auction in the Red ocean to date. Estaban Leeds is honored to receive several hundred familiar guests as well as many more first-time participants. We have done our utmost to scale up this grand auction and endeavor to serve everyone's varied needs."

As Orion Leeds began to explain the basic rules for the benefit of the newcomers, Ves finally understood why the man appeared so damn attractive.

The auctioneer was a cultivator.

Not only that, but he did not restrain his extraordinary characteristics like most of his kind.

Now that cultivation became public knowledge, it was no longer taboo to show unnatural traits in the open.

Ves was not familiar with the cultivation method practiced by Orion Leeds, but he bet that it was a combination between a qi cultivation and body cultivation method.

Blinky's sharp senses collected more information. Orion's domain primarily centered around charisma. Being so damn handsome was the main point of practicing this method!

So that was why Orion's appearance reminded him of his kids. As nascent primordial humans, they possessed a similar kind of extraordinary charm, though theirs were a bit more subdued as they were a lot more natural.

Orion on the other hand practiced a technique that deliberately amplified these traits far beyond any other characteristics.

The extreme specialization made Orion weak in every other aspect, but that was not a problem so long as his job matched his acquired talents.

Ves started to pay attention again when the auctioneer explained the goods put up on auction.

"Estaban Leeds has received a glut of items, many of which are rare and desirable enough to be added to our highest list. We have applied stricter criteria than before and filtered out many submissions that have just fallen short of the mark. The goods fall into the following categories."

A projection appeared that displayed a straightforward list.

[Raw & Intermediate Materials

Personal Equipment

Mechs and Mech Parts

Starships and Starship Parts

Human Cultural Items

Alien Cultural Items

Living Organisms

Knowledge Repositories

Corporate Assets

Ancient Cultivation Relics]

That was impressively diverse. Practically everyone would be able to find what they needed today. The only question was whether they had enough wealth to place the winning bids. That was anything but certain.

Payment was another big topic.

"There are different currencies in the Red Ocean." Orion continued to explain. "The standard unit of value used in our grand auction is phasewater. That does not mean you literally have to pay with physical quantities of phasewater. We readily accept MTA credits and CFA credits at the prevailing exchange rates rounded up. If you are short on cash, you may also contact one of our appraisers in private and exchange illiquid assets for liquid currency that you can use to place your bids."

Ves winced. The use of phasewater as the standard currency was a definite sign that this was going to be an extravagantly expensive auction.

The market price of phasewater had skyrocketed in a few years. The Great Severing had worsened the problem as the inability to conquer more territory and the rapidly rising demand for transphasic mechs and starships had made phasewater more expensive than ever!

It hadn't been too long ago where Ves could buy 1 gram of phasewater for 200 MTA credits.

Nowadays, he needed to cough up around 3,650 MTA credits to buy the same quantity of phasewater!

The problem wasn't abating at all. The market price kept rising because people kept building stuff that incorporated a lot of transphasic parts.

If not for the fact that the Larkinson Clan was able to fulfill its own internal demand by plundering phasewater from the aliens, the Larkinson Army wouldn't have been able to field as many transphasic mechs!

The inflated price level of phasewater had practically made it unaffordable for most second-class forces.

Only state-backed militaries could afford to employ it in their high-ranking mechs and most important starships.

The remaining phasewater available for sale always got absorbed by one of many first-class powers. Their continued willingness to pay large sums of money for literal drops of phasewater had enriched a lot of alien hunters, but also turned phasewater into the near-exclusive resource of first-raters.

It was a sad state of affairs. Many analysts regarded the market price of phasewater as an indicator of how well red humanity was doing.

The fact that the price continued to go up with no signs of flattening out was a powerful clue that people desired greater strength! They were so insecure about their positions that they were willing to abandon many luxuries in order to strengthen their security.

Ves personally thought that 3,650 MTA credits for a single gram of phasewater was still a steal.

The budget for a typical first-class multipurpose mech was around 50 million MTA credits. That meant that a basic application of phasewater hardly took up a significant chunk of the total cost.

Yet it was that kind of thinking that kept driving up the price of phasewater. Every major power wanted to field transphasic mechs, and there was a lot of other tech that could make use of this exotic substance as well.

Ves shook his head. He didn't have to worry about this problem for the time being. His finances had become a lot more flexible and he still had a bit of phasewater in reserve.

Once Orion Leeds got all of the basic rules out of the way, the grand auction finally kicked off when a pair of fish dragged in a transparent cage that held a chunk of ore!

"For the first item put on auction, I am happy to present 25.7 kilograms of a newly discovered exotic material called Norio Dellerite. It is an unrefined metallic ore that does not possess remarkable properties in itself, but possesses the distinct ability to harden hyper materials by a large factor. This makes Norio Dellerite ideal for fortifying the most delicate hyper tech components of a high-quality mech."

A projection came to life that displayed a lot of technical data. Ves quickly skimmed through the numbers and graphs and soon lost interest.

Norio Dellerite was definitely useful for ace mechs and such. It could increase their fault tolerance and allow them to retain their functionality even after they had suffered several serious blows.

However, the quantity available for auction was rather meager to a mech designer like Ves. An even greater problem was that no further samples of Norio Dellerite had been discovered as far as he was aware of, so it was nearly impossible to produce replacement parts if a mech that incorporated the material ever suffered heavy damage.

"700 grams of phasewater."

"1 kilogram of phasewater."

"1.05 kilograms of phasewater."

"1.20 kilograms of phasewater."

Just as he expected, not many people showed a willingness to place a bid. The initial round of bidding was fairly tepid as only a modest group of mech designers and researchers desired the exotic ore.

Mech designers probably wanted to incorporate Norio Dellerite into their mechs right away. Material scientists wanted to study it in order to figure out whether they could imitate it or use it as the basis for a more powerful exotic alloy.

"Going once... going twice... sold to Professor Ereewa-Crenshaw for 2.25 kilograms of phasewater!"

That was effectively over 8 million MTA credits for a chunk of ore that a random outfit likely picked up in an asteroid belt one day!

Was it worth the price? That was difficult to determine as there was no objective way to determine the value of the piece of exotic ore.

The pair of fish soon towed the Norio Dellerite away before another pair of fish brought in a different consignment.

The item clearly belonged to a different category as it looked like an advanced technological product.

"Assassinations are on the rise. Tensions are growing and enemies are lurking in the shadows. It has become more important than ever to protect yourself against attacks near or far. You can never expect your hidden enemies to play fair. Not only will they strike you when you least expect it, they will not hesitate to employ weapons far beyond what a simple killer on foot can carry. This is why the renowned boutique Rzeon & Sons has combined its deep understanding of personal shield generators with hyper technology and other disciplines to put together their strongest protective device to date."

The information panel displayed a lot more interesting information to Ves. He immediately became impressed by how much damage the custom personal shield generator could resist!

"The masterwork bearing the name of Bubblestorm is capable of projecting three layered azure energy shields around a single human-sized individual. Although each individual layer is slightly weaker than a standard shield generator, the Bubblestorm can be trusted to block multiple powerful attacks in rapid succession. What further makes it unique is that it can be set to release a powerful

physical push in any direction upon impact. If teleportation or alternate means of relocation are inadequate, the Bubblestorm can effectively leverage the attacks of your adversaries to launch your protected body in the opposite direction, but only if you wish! These features make the Bubblestorm perfect for evading a myriad of assassination attempts."

Ves actually developed a serious interest in the Bubblestorm!

Every personal shield generator that he came into contact with only formed a single energy barrier around a person. He never imagined that a small development firm managed to miniaturize one of the characteristic technologies of the native aliens and stuff it inside such a small package.

The bidding immediately began after Orion Leeds ended his explanation.

"5 kilograms of phasewater!"

"7 kilograms of phasewater!"

"20 kilograms of phasewater!"

"Don't bother to flaunt your meager wealth, Terran. I bid 30 kilograms of phasewater!"

Personal safety ranked high in everyone's priorities, so a lot more people participated in the bidding!

Ves was so taken aback by the aggressiveness of the bidders that he held back from adding his own voice.

His demand for personal shield generators was not as great because he could also count on the protection of his true body.

While it would be nice for him to acquire additional layers of insurance, Ves would rather save his money for more strategic goods.

He briefly thought about making a bid anyway in case he wanted to gift the Bubblestorm to his wife or one of his children, but he ultimately deemed it to be a wasteful course of action.

Chapter 5802 Alpha Lifeguard

5802 Alpha Lifeguard

The Bubblestorm invited a more intense amount of competition from people with more money and resources at their disposal.

However, the defensive properties of its azure energy shields were not comparable to top-tier products. It was only because of its gimmicks and its excellent quality that it became a compelling product for many galactic citizens.

"Sold to Mr. Terry Zucgo for 75 kilograms of phasewater!"

That was worth around as much as a top-tier first-class multipurpose mech. Ves personally did not think the Bubblestorm merited that much money, but he could understand why it was interesting to certain parties.

It did not escape his notice that Terry Zucgo was apparently a local politician. He could get his hands on plenty of decent personal shield generators, but he lacked access to the more exclusive

stuff. It was actually a pretty reasonable decision to pay a premium in this grand auction to ensure he got his hands on a more effective personal shield generator.

With that out of the way, the next auction item showed up on the main stage.

It soon became clear why the upper hall was so large and spacious, with additional space reserved for the stage.

An actual mech emerged from the side!

The first-class multipurpose mech clearly wasn't designed for underwater operations, but its excellent construction showed that it had no problem with navigating in a submerged environment.

Ves stood up straighter as he quickly realized that this was anything but an average first-class multipurpose mech.

The machine was clearly a masterwork mech.

This was expected as Estaban Leeds only added the very best products to its grand auction.

What caused him to take note was that he recognized the mech type as well as its mech designer!

Ves had spoken to the man fairly recently. The Master Mech Designer showed off one of his designs and shared various tips about the mech archetype.

"You knew about this, didn't you, Jovy?"

The Reality Trickster smirked. "Surprise. I hope you like it. Master Vayro Goldstein normally never bothers to place any of his works in a third-party auction, but he has made an exception this time. You will still have to pay if you want to obtain this work of his. Be warned that masterwork mechs tend to be valued much higher than usual."

Though Orion Leeds was not a mech designer, he was sufficiently versed in every product category to be able to give his own impressions of the first-class multipurpose mech.

"The Alpha Lifeguard is a unique and notable masterwork mech developed by Master Vayro Goldstein of the Red Association." Orion explained as he looked remarkably small in front of the tall machine. "It is a first-class multipurpose mech that is an adaptation of the Master's earlier works. It lacks certain proprietary materials and high technologies that are exclusive to the Red Association. Several weapon systems have also been removed. While that has made the modified design weaker, it has also become much more affordable and easier to maintain. Its controls are also simplified to enable mech pilots to pilot the support-oriented mech without requiring as much specialized training."

In other words, the Alpha Lifeguard was a clear downgrade from a proper RA first-class multipurpose mech.

"On the surface, Alpha Lifeguard is a first-class multipurpose mech that is characterized with modest offensive and defensive performance. Its mobility is more up to standard, but it will not win any races. Master Goldstein has purposefully stripped its less important functions as it normally shouldn't be necessary to use it as an assault mech. Rest assured that its key support functions are nearly fully preserved."

Just because the Alpha Lifeguard did not excel in many areas did not mean that it was a pushover!

The plasma sword, plasma rifle, micro-missile launcher and radial EMP pulse generator allowed it to fight like a well-

equipped hero mech!

The machine was also able to withstand a respectable amount of damage with its serviceable transphasic armor system and decent azure shield generator.

While a typical RA first-class multipurpose mech could still beat the Alpha Lifeguard in a straightforward duel, that was never the point.

The name already said it all. The Alpha Lifeguard was solely designed to protect others.

Orion Leeds grinned when he finally addressed the signature features of Master Goldstein's work.

"The Alpha Lifeguard is not the best fighter, but it is an excellent supporter. It is outfitted with hardened sensor systems that excel at overcoming strong jamming at short to medium ranges. This is necessary to increase the accuracy of its primary module, the SARAN long-ranged one-way azure shield projector."

The view of the masterwork mech changed as a projection highlighted the external parts of this obvious support module.

"The SARAN is capable of projecting a remote azure energy shield to a person, shuttle, mech or other targets of comparable dimensions at an effective distance of up to 80 kilometers away. While I am obligated to warn you that the strength of the remote azure energy shield drastically weakens at longer ranges, it still offers significantly superior defenses than any personal shield generator!"

What?!

Ves truly became impressed by the SARAN at this time!

Others were no exception!

The Alpha Lifeguard was one of the perfect bodyguards and lifesavers. Ves might have been able to defend himself a lot better during the Fey Shaper Contest if he had this impressive first-class support mech by his side!

He understood a bit better why Master Goldstein submitted this masterwork mech to this grand auction today.

"The SARAN can be employed on targets that are in motion relative to the Alpha Lifeguard." The auctioneer continued to explain to an intrigued audience. "The main requirements are that the SARAN has a clear sensor lock on the target and is able to follow its trajectory. Extreme speeds and unpredictable evasive maneuvers significantly increase the difficulty of maintaining an accurate lock. The effectiveness of maintaining a remote shield on an erratically moving target is ultimately determined by the skill of the mech pilot."

That made it really important that the mech pilot assigned to the Alpha Lifeguard knew his business!

Orion Leeds continued to highlight other features of the masterwork mech, but Ves quickly studied the projected spec sheet in order to form a price estimate.

"Given its technical performance, the approximate market price for a standard copy of this design should be around 60 million MTA credits." He analyzed. "That is actually not a strong first-class multipurpose mech. However, the fact that it has become a masterwork should easily make it ten times more expensive, if not more depending on the scarcity of its functions."

Jovy smirked. "There are many participants in this grand auction that can already obtain comparable first-class support mechs, but there are also those who have never come as close to this kind of machine in their lives. You will have to dig deep into your pockets if you want to win this machine. Think carefully whether you or your clan needs this masterwork."

While Ves always insisted on relying on his own works whenever possible, he recognized that this was not always the correct approach.

He was still a newcomer when it came to working with first-class mechs. He also had no chance of designing a support mech equipped with such an exaggaratingly effective long-ranged one-way azure shield projector!

There were so many ways he could make use of it. He could assign it to his escort mech force so that it could protect himself and his immediate family.

The fact that the Alpha Lifeguard was able to shield mech-sized objects meant that it could also offer effective protection to his true body up to a certain scale!

If Ves no longer needed the Alpha Lifeguard's protection, then he could always transfer it to a military unit where it could save the lives of mech pilots whose machines were on the verge of breaking.

With an effective range of up to 80 kilometers, the Alpha Lifeguard could cover a significant chunk of a typical space battlefield!

Ves snapped his attention back to the auctioneer and finally ended his fairly extensive introduction.

"Now that we have granted you enough time to evaluate the Alpha Lifeguard, you may begin to place your bids. The floor price is set at 50 kilograms of phasewater!"

That was over 180 million MTA credits, which was grossly overpriced if the Alpha Lifeguard was a normal machine.

No one was stupid enough to treat it like an ordinary mech. Masterworks were worth a lot more due to the much higher propensity for its mech pilots to break through!

The Red Association normally showed little restraint in snatching up the masterwork mechs produced by third parties.

The only masterwork mechs the Association did not take by force were expert mechs and so on, but that was little consolation to most parties.

There were plenty of rich and powerful people who wanted their potentate offspring to have a good career. Letting them pilot a masterwork mech when they were still weak was a good way to transform them into individual powerhouses!



The only fly in the ointment was that the Alpha Lifeguard was largely defensive and supportive in nature, but that was not a dealbreaker.

The bids immediately began to fly from almost every part of the upper hall!

"60 kilograms of phasewater!"

"100 kilograms!"

"150 kilograms. My son has always dreamt of piloting a masterwork mech!"

"Give this mech to me! 200 kilograms!"

"300 kilograms of phasewater!" A prominent shipwright from a Terran Ancient Clan bid.

That was already over a billion MTA credits!

"320 kilograms."

"375 kilograms."

"400 kilograms!"

"410 kilograms!"

"415 kilograms."

The bidding had only started to slow down when the price surpassed 400 kilograms.

This indicated to Ves that the current bids had exceeded the estimated fair price of a masterwork support mech with excellent bodyguard functions.

Ves actually agreed with this valuation. Despite the obvious gaps and shortcomings of the Alpha Lifeguard, the benefits were extremely attractive.

Its masterwork properties and its primary function were so desirable that they massively inflated the price of this castrated first-class mech!

"Are you going to place a bid anytime soon, Ves?" Jovy inquired.

Ves still felt a little conflicted about paying an astronomical sum to purchase a mech from another professional.

There was still a part of him that insisted that he should lift up his sleeves and design his own version of a remote shield mech!

However, he was more than aware that his own attempt would turn into a poor imitation of Master Goldstein's earnest effort.

It was not a shame for Ves to admit that other mech designers could do better in other areas.

Once he made this realization, he no longer held himself back anymore. He pressed a button and publicly announced his bid.

"430 kilograms of phasewater."

The entire auction venue suddenly fell silent.

It couldn't be helped. There was no one in the upper hall who forgot the voice of the infamous Devil Tongue.

Many bidders immediately gave up their attempt to compete over the Alpha Lifeguard.

Others seemed to struggle with their decisions. A few of them chose to remain silent, but a handful of them valued their lives so much that they continued to make their own bids.

"432 kilograms."

"434 kilograms."

Ves respected their determination, but he was about to give up either. "440 kilograms."

This time, no one spoke anymore.

The current price level had already blown past the estimated fair value of the Alpha Lifeguard. Anyone who continued to place higher bids would just get increasingly more ripped off at this point.

Combined with the fact that no one wanted to get on the bad side of the man who tore apart Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson's scheme, no more voices sounded out anymore.

"Going once... going twice... sold to Professor Ves Larkinson 440 kilograms of phasewater!"

Ves let out a deep breath. He didn't exactly know how he was going to pay for it, but he still felt it was worth it to exchange so much value to acquire a mech that increased his personal security by an enormous degree.

Of course, Ves did not just pay so much just to make use of the Alpha Lifeguard in its base configuration.

The real reason why he wanted to take ownership over it was because he wanted to tinker with it until it became alive!

Chapter 5803 Ves the Desecrator

5803 Ves the Desecrator

The Alpha Lifeguard officially became his possession.

It was by far the most powerful mech that had fallen under his command.

It may have been one of his stupidest decisions in the grand auction.

There were plenty of reasons to malign his choice.

He did not design the Alpha Lifeguard from beginning to end.

He possessed little familiarity with Master Vayro Goldstein's design principles.

He did not possess sufficient knowledge and depth to manipulate the advanced high technologies that made up the first-class mech.

The style of masterwork that made the machine so extraordinary diverged from his own approach.

The Larkinson Clan had no mech pilot on hand that could pilot this complicated machine.

At most, he could hire a skilled first-class mech pilot with the right qualifications and assign it to the Alpha Lifeguard right away.

That was certainly a viable and sensible option. Ves believed that this may have been Master Goldstein's original intent when he consigned the Alpha Lifeguard to the grand auction.

He did not like it. There was an obvious air of manipulation surrounding this sequence of events.

Tech like the SARAN remote shield projector was extremely rare 12:04

Tech like the SARAN remote shield projector was extremely rare and difficult to procure, yet it was exactly what he needed to protect himself and his immediate family.

Not much time had passed since Master Quan brilliantly exploited several small security vulnerabilities to make a credible attempt at his life.

His recent performance during the public inquiry had painted such a big target on his back that he even needed to be vigilant towards the Red Fleet!

In short, it was truly not a bad idea to acquire another type of insurance.

While the Red Association was due to reinforce the Bluejay Fleet, Ves still found it frustrating that he did not gain full ownership or operational control over this mecher force.

So long as the warships and mechs fell under Rear Admiral Gori Tensen's command, they could always be commanded to stop protecting Ves whenever they received instructions from above.

In the worst case scenario, his former guards and protectors could even turn against him! No amount of camaraderie and relationship building would stop them from doing their oathbound duties!

This was why the early acquisition of the Alpha Lifeguard mattered so much to Ves. Its absurd protection range and its first-class combat power filled up an essential gap in the combat power that he could claim full control over.

The grin on his face did not go unnoticed. His friends and advisors sensed an unusual vibe from Ves. It was the kind of vibe that usually preceded a crazy outburst.

"Sir?"

"Yes, Kelsey?"

"May I ask a question?"

"Go ahead, Kelsey. I hired you because you have a head on your shoulders."

"Is it worth it for you to purchase the Alpha Lifeguard for 440 kilograms of phasewater? You have spent an astronomical sum of wealth on a single machine. Its features are rare, but I can easily design a mid-range first-class multipurpose mech that can match its fundamental combat performance myself with a budget that is equivalent to just 15 kilograms of phasewater. You don't even need to buy a masterwork mech that badly because you are already famed for producing multiple of them with your own hands."

His latest hire raised a lot of good arguments.

"Money is not as difficult to obtain for me as before." Ves calmly replied. "I am aware that I incur a sizable opportunity cost by spending money on a single mech that I could have otherwise spent on building up my clan, but this is not a wasteful expenditure to me. The Alpha Lifeguard does not only present a source of protection to me, but also serves as a good example for me to study a damn

good mech designed by a renowned Master in our industry. More than that, it can also serve as an excellent experimentation platform."

"Are you thinking of modifying the Alpha Lifeguard?"

"Duh. I'm a mech designer. You are one as well. What did you think I would do? I am not a consumer. I am a producer. We treat mechs differently."

Several people frowned when they heard that statement.

"I have not studied the mech in detail, but I have no confidence that my proficiency in first-class mech design will allow me to make meaningful improvements to the Alpha Lifeguard." The Rubarthan mech designer plainly said. "If I cannot do it, you certainly will not be able to. You may have become a Senior, but your expertise is primarily based on second-class mech design. A deep understanding of advanced technologies is essential to maintain the quality and excellence of this masterwork mech. If you make too many inappropriate changes, you will ruin its quality."

That was a serious issue. Ves was an experienced masterwork mech designer, so he understood quite well that mechs of this quality imposed high demands on maintenance, modifications and upgrades.

It was part of the baggage that came with a mech that surpassed the extraordinary threshold in terms of quality.

While Ves knew his way around with masterwork mechs of his own design, that did not necessarily mean he could manipulate Master Goldstein's masterworks the same way.

It was similar to how two genius painters of radically different schools would not be able to replicate each other's exceptional art styles.

Ves did not look too concerned, though.

"I am not in too much of a hurry. If I can't modify the Alpha Lifeguard without ruining it as a masterwork, then I will keep it in its original state for the time being. Its main purpose is to act as a protector. I can also study it extensively to gain a better understanding of a highly skilled mech designer's design approach and design solutions. I think I have made enough progress in my design philosophy for me to harvest meaningful gains from studying the earnest work of one of the best Masters in the Red Ocean. I think that Goldstein can teach me a lot about the nuances of designing a support mech."

The fact that it was a masterwork mech turned it into an even better object for study. Every mech that had reached the second rung of Senfovon's Ladder of Craftsmanship was already alive in a small sense.

Even if it was only the equivalent of a weak first order living mech, that provided Ves with enough of an opening to connect with the little thing and gain a deeper insight into the essence of the Alpha Lifeguard.

Jovy also had a lot of concerns. "Master Goldstein is one of the Red Association's foremost authorities on support-oriented mechs. He has accumulated so much experience in this field that all of his serious mech designs are optimized to the point where every piece of material and equipment is utilized to the greatest degree. The high technologies utilized by our Association are also the most advanced and therefore difficult to learn. There are good reasons why our mech designers have

earned the highest regard in the mech industry. Our mastery of technology has put us ahead of others since the beginning of the rise of mechs."

That was a more legitimate concern. Ves did not feel as confident in his ability to meaningfully tinker with all of this super-advanced tech.

"You are right to point this out, but I am not planning to reinvent the Alpha Lifeguard. I used to start my mech design career with modifying existing mech designs. The difficulty threshold of designing successful variants, especially ones where I am merely attempting to apply my own design philosophy to an existing mech, is not as complicated. I can start out small and slowly work to deepen my influence as time goes by. I have a lot of ambitious ideas in mind for this powerful mech. I am dead set on turning it into a genuine living mech. After that, I plan to deepen its connection with its assigned mech pilot."

Kelsey Ampatoch did not know what Ves was talking about, but Jovy and Vector were different.

Both mechers widened their eyes as they realized what Ves wanted to do with the Alpha Lifeguard!

"Modifying the Alpha Lifeguard to such a degree is a major undertaking." Jovy said with a frown.

"You will have to rearrange the configuration of the support mech because every volume of space inside its frame is already optimized to remove any wasted space. It is impossible to redesign a mech as complex and demanding as this without ruining the qualities that made it a masterwork."

Ves nodded in agreement. "I am aware of this. I did not say that I intend to complete this transformation quickly. I think I will just treat this as a long-term hobby project. I will work on it when I have nothing pressing on my agenda. Anytime I have improved my skills to the point where I can make meaningful changes to the Alpha Lifeguard, I will work on the machine just enough to satisfy my needs. I don't have to do everything in a single continuous sequence."

They understood his intentions a bit better after hearing that. It was a more logical approach.

"If you do this, you will be perverting Master Goldstein's work." Jovy pointed out. "Do not forget that the Alpha Lifeguard is a masterwork mech, meaning that he has put genuine care and attention in the design and the creation of this machine. In our industry, it is disrespectful to modify the exemplary examples of the visions of other colleagues. You should at least ask for his permission and input before you go ahead and implement your own plans. He may even offer you guidance on how to best work around the most difficult aspects of his own work."

"Pff! Why do I have to ask permission when the mech is already mine?!" Ves scoffed and crossed his arms. "From the moment I pay for my winning bid, the Alpha Lifeguard is mine to use as I see fit. If I want to drench it in exobeast blood or toss it into a black hole, Master Goldstein has no right to stop my actions. He has already transferred ownership from the moment the transaction has been concluded. I have a lot of interesting ideas in mind that I want to try on this exquisite machine."

All of his friends looked concerned. Even Lucky did not think that Ves could work on the Alpha Lifeguard before screwing up somehow. The memory of the disastrous Elemental Lord came to mind.

Minutes passed by as Orion Leeds continued to present one valuable curiosity after another.

The Alpha Lifeguard may have sold for an eye-watering sum, but Estaban Leeds soon brought out other items that sold for even greater sums!

"The recovered alien dark beam ray gun is sold for 650 kilograms of phasewater to President Jerzen Wenkler of the Wenkler Development Company!"

"The deed that grants full ownership to the famous Anastasia Hotel on Vulit XIV-B is sold for 800 kilograms of phasewater to Mr. Ricardo Takimoto of Hielsen Holding Group!"

Of course, only a few items put on auction ended up getting sold for 100 kilograms of phasewater.

Many of the powerful galactic citizens who attended this grand auction had a lot of assets on hand, but not as much liquid assets at their disposal.

While they always had the option of selling their real estate to Estaban Leeds in a hurry, this was a stupid measure that was only reserved for the most desperate of occasions.

This meant that a lot of participants were mostly willing to bid a few dozen kilograms of phasewater at most.

As Ves continued to devise a plan to shape the Alpha Lifeguard into a more extraordinary machine, Lucky suddenly jerked as he rested on his shoulder.

"Meow!"

"What is it, Lucky?"

"Meow meow meow!"

It appeared that a particularly interesting material had appeared on stage!

Any material that elicited such a strong response from a gem cat had to be special!"

Chapter 5804 ATC Series Alloys

5804 ATC Series Alloys

Orion Leeds assumed a much more respectful demeanor as he presented the latest consignment to the auction participants.

The charismatic man's shift in attitude was so abrupt that many of the distinguished guests stopped their low conversations to pay more attention to what appeared on stage.

The radiant fish that dragged the transparent box in view did not put in too much effort. The alloy bar that rested in the middle of the container was not large or dense. It definitely was not suitable to be used as the primary material for a powerful mech component.

Even so, Ves did not underestimate it at all. The materials needed to fulfill the Mech Designer System's Supply Missions had already introduced him to transcendent materials that far surpassed the properties of the goods he worked with on a daily basis.

Orion Leeds smiled with pride as he presented the latest item.

"What you see before you is a consignment of the great and generous Resonance Smith."

That simple sentence immediately raised people's interest in the alloy bar by an order of magnitude!

An alloy developed by the foremost material scientist in the Red Ocean definitely merited their full attention!

It was no surprise that Lucky developed such a keen interest in this new artificial material!

The fact that the Resonance Smith led the unruly Unbound Humanity Faction did not even disturb anyone. His political views were definitely controversial, but that had nothing to do with his works!

Even the fleeters were willing to set aside their objections to the Resonance Smith in order to make good use of his inventions. The Star Designer's work was just that good.

Pleased that he managed to attract the full attention of everyone seated in the upper hall, the unnaturally handsome auctioneer did not keep everyone waiting.

"The alloy bar contained within this container is a prototype exotic alloy named ATC-A. It is a product of a research project that is meant to bestow humanity with an effective material that can be used to bypass transphasic energy shields. The Resonance Smith is not the only scientist to work on this problem, but the ATC series alloys that he is trying to develop possess numerous advantages that promise to turn them into the most preferred shield bypassing materials."

The mention of shield bypassing properties caused Kelsey Ampatoch to jerk.

He had recently won the Fey Shaper Contest by developing the incredibly promising shield infiltrator fey. The ATC series alloys could either make his proud product redundant or amplify their effectiveness!

They needed more information in order to determine how this ATC series alloys fit in their respective works.

"All ATC series alloys share a number of common traits. The most important one is that they can all be produced by combining raw materials that are prevalent in human- occupied space. Resource shortages should not be an overwhelming concern as long as red humanity does not lose too many territories. They are all relatively costly, but not to the point of being prohibitive regardless of class. Finally, their properties can also be modified in many different ways by pairing them up with different hyper materials."

These were all highly desirable properties. Ves immediately understood that the Resonance Smith sought to increase red humanity's performance against the native aliens by developing a cost-effective means of bypassing energy shields.

Unlike the shield infiltrator fey developed by Kelsey Ampatoch, the use of ATC series alloys allowed for attacks and maybe mechs to directly pass through transphasic energy shields as if they did not exist!

However, Ves did not dare to get too excited. There had to be limitations to this material. Nothing was perfect. Not even a Star Designer could defy reality to this extent.

"Do note that the ATC series alloys including the best ATC-A version that we have presented before you is only effective up to a certain degree. The materials alone have a high chance of failing to breach absurdly strong transphasic energy shields that are typically produced by alien capital ships or formidable phase whales. The stronger the individual shield, the lower the ability for an ATC weapon to slide through them. ATC-A is generally effective against moderate first-class transphasic energy shields. ATC-B is designed to penetrate the equivalent of typical second-class transphasic energy shields. The much more economical ATC-C can only penetrate the weakest transphasic energy shields."

Three versions, each designed to cater to a different class of customers.

Ves and many other people actually felt a little disappointed at the effectiveness of these three alloys. Orion Leeds chose his words carefully. He made it clear that even the most effective ATC-A alloy was unable to punch through transphasic energy shields of higher strength levels.

Orion smirked. "Do not dismiss the usefulness of ATC series alloys in their ability to pose a threat against powerful alien hulls. Many advanced alien warships are protected by segmented multi-layered transphasic energy shields. The total protection offered by splitting and stacking all of these energy barriers are formidable when taken in their totality, but their common weakness is that every discrete transphasic energy shield is individually weak. The native aliens have developed their transphasic energy shield technology in a direction that allows them to increase their redundancy and reduce the consequences of failure if any individual shield generator fails. This is a prudent and sensible development strategy, but this has inadvertently made most advanced alien warships vulnerable to ATC weapons."

He was right!

A lot of people became buoyed at the thought of employing these so-called ATC weapons against the warships employed by the major races of the Red Ocean.

Their warships were much harder to fell due to their expansive array of transphasic energy shields.

Most of them did not settle for a single layer. They always wrapped themselves up with at least three annoyingly difficult layers.

Combined with segmenting a whole radial energy shield into dozens of different slices, a lot of alien warships possessed so much redundancy that they became outright invincible if their opponents did not bring enough attack power!

It had always been lack of offensive power that held most human forces back from wiping out alien incursion forces with ease. Mechs constantly fought an uphill battle against warships due to the enormous differences in scale.

"Before the bidding can commence, the Resonance Smith has attached a notice that it may take several more years before he is ready to present his ATC series alloys to the public. There are many areas that he needs to improve upon. Reducing the production cost and rare resource requirements while retaining the effectiveness of the alloys are his main concerns. The current ATC-A alloy bar on auction is a relatively early prototype that is notably effective at bypassing transphasic energy shields, but is comprised out of much more expensive composition of high-grade exotics. It is difficult to reproduce, so do not bid on it with the expectation of mass producing this alloy formula in your own production facilities."

The disclosures served to temper the crowd's enthusiasm for the Resonance Smith's work.

The fact that the Resonance Smith would probably publish his vital work and make it possible for many companies to produce ATC-A alloys by themselves meant that the alloy bar put on auction would not remain unique for long.

The fact that its current formula was not even the final version meant that there was a possibility that it could be outshined by a superior variant despite being cheaper.



In other words, the current item was just one of the Resonance Smith's disposable experimental samples. There were still benefits to obtaining it early, but many people had tempered their expectations.

"Meow meow meow!"

Lucky didn't care about that, though! The gem cat couldn't wait three years, let alone three days! He had to obtain this delectable prototype ATC-A and stuff it inside his bottomless stomach as soon as possible!

"Okay, okay! Quiet down! I'll fight for it. You can devour all of it, I promise."

"Meow!" Lucky cutely nuzzled his head against Ves' cheek.

The bids already started to fly, though they were relatively low at this time.

"5 kilograms of phasewater!"

"5.2 kilograms!"

"5.5 kilograms of phasewater!"

"6.7 kilograms of phasewater!"

"7.5 kilograms!"

"10 kilograms of phasewater." Ves' voice suddenly cut through the noise.

Again, the Devil Tongue managed to sap the energy from the upper hall. It couldn't be helped as the memories of his latest feats were still fresh on everyone's minds.

Though Ves did not set out to intimidate everyone else into silence, he did utilize a more domineering cadence to express his determination to win this bidding process.

It looked like it succeeded.

Ves had made sure to jump to 10 kilograms of phasewater right away in order to surpass the estimated fair cost of this prototype material.

While ATC-A promised to bypass the transphasic energy shields of formidable alien warships, the quantity put on auction was simply not enough!

There was only enough ATC-A to construct a human-sized sword at best. There was not enough alloy to produce a complete mech, let alone a fey!

All of these factors combined made it so that no one bothered to fight for the ATC-A alloy anymore.

Ves did not relax, though. He briefly swept his gaze towards Lieutenant-Commander Astrid Jameson and a few other identifiable opponents. They could try to mess with him by attempting to drive up the cost.

Fortunately, they did not exhibit any intentions on bidding on the item for the express purpose of forcing him to pay more.

They were more clever than that. Their previous gambits had failed. There was no need to exacerbate hostilities at this point. Any dishonorable and objectionable behavior on their part would only tarnish their damaged reputations even further.

"Going once... going twice... this ATC-A alloy bar is sold to Professor Ves Larkinson for 10 kilograms of phasewater!"

Ves effectively squandered approximately 30,650,000 MTA credits for this expensive snack. It better be worth it. Lucky would pay if it ended up making no difference.

"Meow meow meow."

The gem cat already started to drool as he dreamt about devouring the alloy bar whole.

Ves reached out with his hand and patted Lucky's head.

"Be patient. We won't get the stuff we've won until the grand auction has concluded.

Ves was incredibly eager to see whether ATC-A would allow Lucky to pass through transphasic energy shields more easily than before. This would remove one of his most restrictive constraints and turn him into a much more effective infiltration unit than before!

While a pair of glowing fish dragged Ves' latest prize from the stage, another item took its place.

This one looked highly unusual, but elicited many interested reactions from those in the know.

Ves was one of them. He could feel the extraordinary power infused within the rather old but well-preserved book.

"Estaban Leeds is proud to present the first cultivation tome in this grand auction." Orion Leeds said as he strengthened his handsome demeanor. "This book is of an indeterminate age, but you can expect it to be at least several thousand years old. Its contents are remarkable, but it is penned in an extinct language that you will need to translate yourselves. What is special about this tome is that it features a mystical form of copy protection. Its pages appear blank to anyone but the holder. That is not all. Those who read the book cannot recite its contents, whether they use the book's original language or any translations. It works on intent as well as other criteria according to our tests. This ensures that only those who physically possess the book can ever learn from the methods contained within its pages."

Secrets were very important to ancient cultivators. They hoarded their precious knowledge and methods to such an extreme extent that cultivators failed to progress as quickly as modern humanity due to forgetting so many nifty solutions upon the death of highly renowned experts.

Ves wondered what sort of secrets merited this kind of treatment.

Chapter 5805 A Terran Delight

5805 A Terran Delight

People's interest in the cultivation tome peaked as soon as Orion Leeds finally described the method that it purportedly taught.

"According to multiple experts who have examined the contents of this old book, it is capable of teaching humans who possess at least a moderate affinity to the fire element how to absorb the 'flames of heaven' to refine and temper his mortal body. If a cultivator practices the right techniques and employs adequate support measures, it can transform a practitioner into a superhuman furnace that can potentially survive falling into stars and unleash flames that can burn entire cities!"

That was an absurdly powerful outcome!

Though Ves already lost interest as he was not exactly short on cultivation methods, he could understand the attractiveness of this particular method. Being able to forge a strong body that possessed as much combat power as a warship used to be a silly dream to most people.

Now that red humanity entered the Age of Dawn, it had turned into a plausible option!

A lot of people, both young and old, expressed intense desire towards the cultivation tome. Who didn't want to become a superhuman powerhouse? Even mech designers weren't able to resist the temptation!

Ves inwardly shook his head. If the method contained within the book was so great, then its current owner would have never put it up for auction.

Just as expected, Orion Leeds mentioned the complications of practicing the method.

"Be warned that the ancient cultivation method associated with this remarkable book promises great power, but only through great effort. Its demand on talent is not too high, but it will take a practitioner many years to pass through every stage. It may take centuries if not far more time than anyone's lifetime to reach the highest stage as described in the book. Superior talent, helpful resources and good comprehension can accelerate your progress, but it will take multiple generations to make drastic progress. Any errors made during your practice can exacerbate your personality flaws and make you more vulnerable to self-immolation."

The people who were familiar with cultivation such as Ves already expected as much. The most promising and powerful cultivation methods always came with greater risks due to their propensity to resort to extremes. Nothing came without a price.

Those who were not familiar with cultivation or the Five Scrolls Compact became a lot more discouraged, though. Just the possibility that their bodies could spontaneously combust if they made a mistake was far too risky for them to engage in this cultivation stuff!

The auctioneer mentioned one more variable that might sway their opinions.

"We have also verified that the method taught by this ancient book can gradually extend a human's lifespan by progressively greater years. It does not excel in this aspect, but as long as you are able to reach the middle stages, you can expect to gain at least two to three centuries of additional life. You will be able to spend much of that time in peak physical and mental condition so long as you have not made any errors. Do you have any questions?"

A Master Mech Designer sitting in the common seating space raised a hand.

"Yes, Master Ditwall?"

"Can mech pilots and mech designers practice this cultivation method without any adverse consequences?"

"We have investigated this as well. We have found that there is definitely conflict with both professions. We do not recommend for any mech pilot or mech designer to practice the method taught by this ancient book. This applies to most other cultivation methods as well. There may be ways for experts to modify the method to remove this shortcoming, but success is anything but guaranteed."

After that, the bidding commenced.

Ves got an immediate sense on how much people prized this ancient tome by the numbers shouted in the submerged hall.

"10 kilograms of phasewater!"

"50 kilograms of phasewater!"

"75 kilograms!"

"125 kilograms!"

"200 kilograms of phasewater."

"300 kilograms of phasewater!"

"320 kilograms of phasewater."

"You do not understand the forces you are toying with, Director Yearl. Leave this book to the Church of the Rising Sun. 350 kilograms of phasewater."

"370 kilograms of phasewater. I know more than what is kept in your dusty library. My assistants and I shall modernize the secret method contained within this book."

Not a lot of people dared to bid on a cultivation tome they did not understand, so only a small group of more knowledgeable people actively fought for this item.

They occasionally bragged about themselves and belittled their rival bidders in an attempt to claim the tome for themselves, but it did not appear to work.

"400 kilograms of phasewater."

"410 kilograms of phasewater."

"425 kilograms of phasewater! Give up before you bankrupt your entire church."

"450 kilograms of phasewater. Thank you for your concern, but I have enough access to credit to keep going."

"455 kilograms of phasewater."

"460 kilograms."

"470 kilograms."

This exchange went on and on. Ves continued to remain fascinated as he observed several stubborn holdouts trying to push away their rivals without paying an excessive amount of money to secure this prize.

"What is your opinion, Ves?" Vector Loban inquired. "You are a known expert in this field. Do you believe that this ancient book is worth as much as a squad of first-class multipurpose mechs?"

Ves shrugged. "There is no single answer to this question. It is worth it for norms who have no easy way to extend their lives through other means. It is a possible lifeline for people who are insecure about their chances of survival. It is of great research value for cultivation experts who seek to develop more modern and optimized cultivation methods. I am not willing to pay the equivalent of several hundred kilograms of phasewater for this single book, but there are plenty of people who have much more money at their disposal."

In the end, the man who led a church of all possibilities had won this prize!

"This ancient cultivation tome is sold for 560 kilograms of phasewater!"

Ves thought that was way overpriced, but then again he already had access to a modest collection of cultivation methods, courtesy of his mother.

The only issue was that most of them were rather average and basic. That was not necessarily bad because it made them a lot less dangerous than the one that was probably taught by the auctioned book. Their simplicity also made it easier to use them as building blocks for the creation of his own composite cultivation methods.

However, not everyone possessed the insight and understanding that he possessed. It was therefore worthwhile for people to invest a lot of money into reasonably verified end products.

The auction moved on as Orion Leeds introduced the next item.

"This is a rare mural that was painted by an orven artist over 3 millennia ago. A mercenary fleet managed to retrieve it from the quarters of a high caste orven captain during a raid on a crippled orven battleship. The artwork is of great value to the native aliens but specially the orven race because the artist has actually managed to transform into a phase lord. It is said that he has left behind this mural in order to teach the secrets of his ascension. Many different orvens have acquired it but failed to discern any relevant patterns in the brush strokes, the subject matter or the underlying materials. The orvens have eventually debunked the rumors, but there are still rumors that its secrets remain undiscovered to this day."

What a mysterious treasure. Neither Ves nor Blinky sensed anything special about the aging but well-preserved mural, so the chances were great that it was just a hoax.

Many others thought so as well. They did not show any of the enthusiasm they displayed a few minutes earlier.

Ves couldn't help but notice that dozens of people briefly looked at his private box.

This was not a surprise as he had recently exposed the fact that he had become a phase lord somehow!

If these people wanted to uncover any clues from him, then tough luck. Ves had no intentions of giving away any hints.

Once the bidding began, people tepidly began to try their luck.

"1 kilograms of phasewater."

"2 kilograms."

"4 kilograms."

"4.5 kilograms."

"5 kilograms."

Just as Ves expected, the bidders did not think the story surrounding this old relic was credible. They mostly treated it as a pure alien cultural treasure and adjusted their bidding strategies accordingly.

"Sold for 18 kilograms of phasewater!"

That was approximately 66 million MTA credits!

Ves could have used that money to fund a massive expansion of the expeditionary fleet, or a minor addition to the Premier Branch.

Instead, some rich planetary governor squandered much of his disposable budget on an alien artwork that did nothing more than showcase the orven race's crooked aesthetic sensibilities!

"What a waste of money." Ves quietly shook his head in disapproval.

"Art can sell for higher sums than this." Kelsey Ampatoch said. "As long as it has a good story and a reputable artist behind it, a work can exceed the value of a first-class fleet carrier. Granted, I have only seen that happen back in the New Rubarth Empire in the old galaxy. The more successful princes have so much wealth at their disposal that they can buy out entire star systems if they want."

The grand auction continued as Estaban Leeds continued to bring out a succession of goods with cheaper or more expensive valuations.

This kept the place rather lively. Ves did not feel the need to add to his art collection or acquire a random exotic material that no one heard about, so he refrained from making any further bids.

There were cases where he developed a mild interest towards a product, but held back anyway.

He knew that he could sap most people's desire to compete as soon as he spoke up, but that trick would only work a few more times.

Sooner or later, people would lose their vigilance towards him and compete like usual.

It was better for Ves to save up this 'superpower' until he truly needed it. That opportunity came quite soon as Orion Leeds presented a much more special item this time!

Three shark-like fish dragged in a container that held a remarkable looking mech module. It did not take long for Ves to recognize the most iconic weapons utilized by Terran mechs!

"A Destroyer mech spear!"

Depending on the concentration of Destroyer particles, the spectacular weapon could punch through virtually every sort of material defenses!

While Destroyer weapons were not compatible with phasewater technology, they were also quite effective against energy-based defenses, though to a lesser degree.

Destroyer weapons were the primary reasons why the Terrans possessed a distinct advantage in melee combat. Their Destroyer weapons could only be somewhat effectively be resisted by more expensive Destroyer-proof alloys, but few mech models enjoyed this luxury.

"This Terran weapon needs no introduction." Orion Leeds proudly said. "The shaft of this mech-scaled spear is made from a resilient alloy that can resist other Destroyer weapons up to a limit. The tip of this spear is what truly makes it power. It is infused with enough Destroyer particles to raise this weapon to a tier 3 Destroyer weapon. Normally reserved for Terran junior ace mechs, the Dermont Ancient Clan has made the rare decision to consign it to our auction house, along with the right for a single mech pilot to wield its power. A mech designer from the Dermont Ancient Clan will accompany this potent weapon until it has been permanently locked to a designated mech pilot."

We highly recommend that only ace pilots with ace mechs harness this weapon, because it will annihilate anyone and anything weaker."

A tier 3 Destroyer weapon was so dangerous that it could only be 'tamed' by a powerful will and mech.

Despite the well-known dangers of wielding such a weapon, few people wanted to miss out on the opportunity to acquire it! Ves had a feeling that it would be a lot harder to claim it for himself and his clan this time.

Chapter 5806 Psychological Bottom Line

5806 Psychological Bottom Line

The atmosphere, metaphorical of course, in the upper hall of the auction house had become a lot more charged.

The presentation of an extremely dangerous tier 3 Destroyer mech spear excited a lot of people.

Many of the guests were leaders or high officials of major powers. From the leaders of different states to the patriarchs of old family organizations, each of them relied pretty heavily on the strength of their armored forces to project their power and maintain their high standing in society.

Now that the Red War exerted an increasingly greater pressure onto red humanity, the importance of relying on military might as opposed to leaning upon the protection of greater institutions had increased dramatically.

It was not as if people had lost faith in the might of the Red Two. Their last major offensive operation had proved that humanity's best could still deal a painful blow against the greatest of the Red Cabal.

A war that spanned an entire dwarf galaxy was not as simple, though. So many pieces danced across the board that it was normal for the mechers and fleeters to overlook a few threats.

Plenty of colonists who had taken the risk to settle in the border regions personally learned this painful lesson.

A lot of forces therefore invested a lot more resources into building up the quantity and quality of the mech forces at their disposal.

They not only needed to fortify their key strongholds in order to repel any possible incursions, but they also had to form more offensive units in order to participate in the crucial New Elites Program.

The former served to secure their current gains while the latter fueled their future ambitions.

One of the lessons that many players learned over the course of deploying their mech forces to the frontlines was the importance of fielding expert mechs and ace mechs.

The opposing aliens experienced great difficulties in defeating these powerful human champions. Many expert mechs and ace mechs possessed so much combat power that they could defeat alien warships or even entire fleets by themselves!

Their value and strategic importance increased enormously as a result. Relying on high-ranking mechs was the best and most efficient way to secure plenty of victories while reducing casualties to a more sustainable level.

The Red War was already shaping up to become a long and arduous war of attrition. The loss of experienced personnel, valuable mechs and irreplaceable starships took a toll on many mech forces.

High-ranking mech pilots served as the bright spots in this conflict. Their superhuman skills, their condensed willpower and their amazing machines always enabled them to pull off victories in impossible situations and at least guarantee their survival if the enemy forces proved too much.

It became clear to an increasing number of powers that their reliance on high-ranking mech pilots would only increase as the war dragged on. Not only did they need to produce as many of them as possible, they also had to pair them up with the strongest possible machines.

This was why the Destroyer weapon put on auction had become such a prized item to many of the gathered high-tier galactic citizens.

The Terrans had always used Destroyer weapons as a means to emphasize their superiority. It set them apart from other groups who lack the ability to infuse melee weapons with extremely finicky Destroyer particles.

The Terrans clearly recognized the desirability of their unique weapons, which caused them to employ these rare and coveted armaments for another purpose.

Diplomacy.

Everyone aside from the Rubarthans desired Destroyer weapons. They were the premier melee weapons that could cut through nearly anything. Every other object that managed to withstand the initial blows would not be able to maintain their resistance for long.

The Terrans recognized this huge demand. They made the strategic decision to selectively gift or sell their weaker Destroyer weapons in order to establish alliances, bribe important leaders and deprive lucrative business opportunities from other rival first-raters.

Of course, the Terrans weren't stupid enough to hand away their most powerful Destroyer weapons to outsiders.

Even though many people suspected that Destroyer weapons may magically malfunction once they were used to attack Terran assets, it was still important for the original masters of this offensive technology to maintain their competitive advantage.

This was why most of the Destroyer weapons that ended up in the hands of other parties amounted to tier 10 to tier 6 Destroyer weapons.

They were only suitable to be wielded by ordinary mechs. While they conveyed huge advantages to any third-class, second-class or first-class mech, handing out these relatively cheaper Destroyer weapons did not damage Terran interests.

It was much rarer to find Destroyer weapons of higher tiers in private hands.

They held much greater concentrations of Destroyer particles, making them a lot rarer and more difficult to produce. The Terrans almost always kept these weapons in their own possession because they had a lot of high-ranking mech pilots that could make fantastic use of these weapons themselves.

Demand always outpaced supply, especially now that the Red Ocean got cut off from the Milky Way.



Rumors had started to swirl around that the only human left who could produce Destroyer particles was a certain cat-

loving god pilot from the Rubarthan Pact, but the Terrans vehemently squashed all talk that came even close in this direction!

Whatever the case, the Terrans had almost ceased to give away any of their coveted Destroyer weapons since the start of the Age of Dawn.

This was why Ves and many other leaders almost couldn't believe that the Dermont Ancient Clan was willing to give away a tier 3 Destroyer weapon.

Even if the weapon came in the form of a spear with a rather small and slender tip that was clearly designed to lower the amount of Destroyer particles needed to construct the weapon, it was still the real deal!

Combined with the fact that the Terrans rarely auctioned any tier 3 Destroyer weapons during the Age of Mechs to begin with, this was probably the only time that outsiders could get their hands on a melee weapon of this caliber!

Many parties believed that this may be the only time that they had an opportunity to obtain a coveted tier 3 Destroyer spear in an auction.

The Terrans would most certainly cease to part with them for any other reason because they were so damn difficult to produce.

This practically ensured that the upcoming round of bidding would become heated!

More and more heated eyes stared at the dangerous weapon. It had been safely encased in a reinforced transparent cage. Its Destroyer speartip occasionally flared with destructive power, but the Terrans safely managed to contain these outbursts to prevent the weapon from killing everyone in the auction hall.

Ves had no doubt that Estaban Leeds prepared a lot of other security measures such as azure energy shields and first-class multipurpose mechs to take action if the Destroyer weapon ever went out of control.

The fact that the weapon was almost too powerful to contain did not reduce people's enthusiasm for this object.

It enflamed their desires because they often associated dangerous Destroyer weapons with invincibility on the battlefield!

Orion Leeds smirked as he let the facts sink into everyone's minds.

"Now that you have been introduced to this unimaginably powerful weapon that can amplify the lethality of any ace mech strong enough to control its unruly might, let the bidding begin!"

It took less than a second for a wealthy shipbuilding magnate to break the silence.

"1000 kilograms of phasewater!"

Several gasps erupted from the submerged room.

That was not the highest bid that had been placed during the grand auction. There were many people who had access to more disposable wealth.

Yet to start with this enormous sum right away signaled that the Destroyer spear would probably get sold for a much higher sum!

Ves understood this rationale very well. Tier 3 Destroyer weapons were only two steps removed from the most powerful Tier 1 Destroyer weapons that were exclusively wielded by Terran god mechs.

It was the best that any third party could obtain. Its value already exceeded that of a first-class fleet carrier as far as many people were concerned.

In fact, Ves wouldn't be surprised if it ended up costing more than a first-class ace mech!

"1500 kilograms of phasewater." Another first-rater announced a bid.

"1700 kilograms of phasewater."

"1850 kilograms of phasewater."

"1900 kilograms."

Despite his desire to compete for the Destroyer spear, Ves hesitated when he heard the astronomical amount of sums.

This was far more money than he ever dealt with in the past! Ves truly gained an understanding of the extravagance of a grand auction today.

Despite the fact that the bids were already approaching 2000 kilograms of phasewater, there were plenty of players that still looked determined to claim the weapon for themselves.

While the pace of the bidding war was remarkably slow, the progressively more ridiculous sums made every new bid more impactful.

"2000 kilograms of phasewater!"

"2100 kilograms of phasewater. The Knights of Res Perdance shall claim this righteous tool."

"2200 kilograms of phasewater. I have never heard of your knights! Go away and play with your swords. This spear is a real man's weapon!"

"2300 kilograms of phasewater! Who says this weapon can only be wielded by a woman? Our dynasty has birthed a new female ace pilot. This spear shall propel her to greater heights."

The amount of people who actively placed their bids showed that the price still had a lot to go before it reached their psychological bottom lines.

The problem was that the current bids already exceeded Ves' own psychological limit!

"What is wrong, Ves?" Jovy asked. "You are clearly interested in this spear. Don't you have a high-tier expert pilot who excels at spearmanship? This tier 3 Destroyer spear can serve as the perfect complement to her expert mech. As long as she manages to break through to ace pilot, she will become unstoppable at closer ranges."

Ves grimaced. "I know, but... is it really worthwhile to invest so much money in a single mech weapon? Venerable Rosa Orfan has not yet broken through to ace pilot yet, so acquiring this weapon is a little premature. I suppose I can save it up for another Larkinson ace pilot, but it

wouldn't be as good of a fit. I... don't like to waste so much money just to improve the combat power of a single machine."

"You are still thinking like a second-rater, Ves. You ceased to be one a long time ago. This is the world you live in now. You should get used to it as soon as possible. You're not only a first-rater, but one that has become wealthy and influential enough to attend a grand auction. Your recent successes should have given you the financial strength to bid on this Destroyer spear."

"Maybe. Just because I can doesn't mean I should. I will probably be able to earn a lot of money and concessions back when the LMC's shares get sold, but is it really a good idea to forgo other strategically important acquisitions for this single spear?"

"No one can make that decision except for you, Ves."

Ves turned to Jovy. "What do you think, then? Would you bid on the spear if you were in my place?"

Turning this question back to Jovy threw the mecher off-guard.

"My perspective is different from yours. The Red Association has mastered a huge variety of powerful offensive high technologies. While there are limitations to all of them, some of the better ones come close to matching the impressive performance of Destroyer weapons. They are also considerably cheaper and more accessible."

Ves nodded. "I believe you. What concerns me is that 'almost' is not good enough. I have no doubt that my clan will confront many powerful enemies in the future. The difference between victory and defeat can hinge on our champion's ability to penetrate through the thick spatial barrier and flesh of a powerful phase lord. I don't know if I can stomach the idea of failing my troops just because I wanted to be a cheapskate."

He still remained conflicted over this decision.

Chapter 5807 Big Money

5807 Big Money

Jovy was right.

Ves still thought like a second-rater for the most part.

He was born as a third-rater, but spent a decade or so adjusting to the reality of second-class society.

Even then, he still retained a fair number of sensibilities as a third-rater. He abhorred waste and usually tried to avoid it. While it became increasingly harder for him to maintain tight control over his spending, he liked to think he was doing better than others.

His wife made for a nice contrast of how much worse he could become if he did not exert enough discipline in his spending strategy.

First-raters and especially powerful first-raters weren't nearly as frugal. Ves already had a glimpse of how these wealthy bastards showed so little regard for life-changing sums of wealth when he occupied the mind of a much younger Axelar Streon a long time ago, yet he still grew dizzy as he witnessed this happening on a much wider scale!

It was not as if these first-raters were bad with money. They did not climb their way to the top of high society by being incompetent.

They possessed a fantastic understanding of their financial strength. They knew how much money they could afford to spend without too many adverse consequences, and they also knew how much more money they could pull that came with greater costs.

Each wealthy bidder committed increasingly astronomical sums of money because they truly had so much money to spare!

Perhaps this was why Ves felt ambivalent about this entire show. He had spent much of his years looking up at these high-and-mighty first-raters that he never really considered the possibility that he could become like them, especially in a short timeframe.

In other words, his mentality had not caught up with his current reality as of yet. His reluctance to adapt to his latest circumstances was holding him back.

It did not help that Ves had no idea whether it was a good decision to fork over wealth that was equivalent to over 2000 kilograms of phasewater on a single mech weapon.

"2500 kilograms of phasewater!"

"2600 kilograms of phasewater."

"3000 kilograms of phasewater!" An important military official of a first-rate state voiced. "This Destroyer spear shall be ours."

"3100 kilograms. The spear's ownership is still in contention. Nobody here is afraid of your state."

"3150 kilograms of phasewater."

Ves grew dizzy as he imagined how much wealth this represented.

In terms of money, he was pretty sure he could buy a basic fleet carrier at vastly inflated prices.

In terms of phasewater, this amount was enough to raise an entire first-class mech regiment or second-class mech division!

"Ugh..." Ves let out a frustrated grunt as he still failed to make up his mind. "What do you guys think?"

"You can afford it." Jovy said. "As much as the Red Association does not like the Terrans for keeping their Destroyer technology for themselves, we are not afraid to admit that it is superior in terms of destructiveness. You cannot go wrong with bestowing your clan with this powerful spear. You can hand it over to the first Larkinson ace pilot that breaks through."

Kelsey Ampatoch shook his head. "I can think of more than a dozen alternatives that do not cost nearly as much. The Rubarthan mech community has always been jealous towards Terran Destroyer technology and tried to develop alternatives for a long time. While we have failed to produce an equal or superior weapon, we did not come away empty-handed. There are other options, each of which come with their own pros and cons. The fact that Destroyer weapons are not the most efficient solution to employ against transphasic energy shields is important to keep in mind."

He was right, but that did not turn Destroyer weapons useless against alien warships. Mechs just needed to watch the energy defenses of alien vessels a few more times in order to move forward.

"Destroyer weapons are domineering pieces of mech equipment according to our studies." Vector Loban said. "What I mean by that is that they are so powerful that they threaten to overpower every other aspect of a mech. The Destroyer particles of a higher tier Destroyer weapon require a lot of active management in order to keep in line. Any mech pilot that eventually gets to wield a weapon as strong as the one put on auction will acquire more violent and combative tendencies. Even strong-willed pilots are not immune to this effect. They become more effective killing machines at the cost of downplaying any other strengths they possess."

That was what Ves really needed to hear. Ves could easily imagine why Destroyer weapons had a corrupting effect. It all came down to their Destroyer particles. It was as if they were living forces that only sought to destroy as much as possible.

Was this downside enough for Ves to give up on this Destroyer spear? Not quite.

It did help to put the Destroyer spear into perspective. Ves mentally set a limit and decided to just stop bidding if the price rose above it. Having an all-powerful weapon in his possession was nice, but it would not be the end of the Red Ocean if he let it slip from his grasp.

At least he hoped that was the case.

Ves briefly paid attention to the ongoing exchange of bids before he finally pressed a button and opened his mouth.

"3500 kilograms of phasewater."

The entire upper hall froze yet again. The momentum of all of the prior bidders had been sapped as soon as Ves made it clear that he was not willing to sit by this time.

Unfortunately, the silence did not last for long.

"3600 kilograms of phasewater."

"3650 kilograms of phasewater."

"3700 kilograms of phasewater!"

Three different voices spoke up in quick succession. None of these individuals demonstrated any visible sign that they were deterred by the participation of the Devil Tongue.

They certainly feared what he could do to them, but they did not believe Ves would resort to dishonorable behavior just to deter his competitors in a grand auction.

Besides, they all belonged to major forces that possessed strong foundations in human society. They were more than capable of standing their ground.

"3800 kilograms of phasewater." Ves spoke again.

Though the sum far exceeded what any average first-rater would ever be able to earn in a single life, this did not apply to upper society!

"3900 kilograms of phasewater."

"4000 kilograms of phasewater." Ves shot back.

The bidding war continued. Several figures that previously showed their determination to flaunt their wealth had gradually fallen silent as they were unwilling to spend past this point.

However, there were still a dozen or so major players who did not show any signs of stopping soon.

Occasionally, other voices joined the party as well, but it was questionable whether they were willing to hang around for long.

"4800 kilograms of phasewater."

"4810 kilograms."

"4850 kilograms."

"4900 kilograms."

"5000 kilograms of phasewater." Ves straightforwardly spoke.

The upper hall fell silent for another moment as the price for the Destroyer spear had reached an insane height.

A wealthy woman spoke up again while directing a challenging stare towards Ves' private box.

"5050 kilograms of phasewater."

"5100 kilograms of phasewater." Ves shot back.

Many more people began to doubt whether they should proceed. It became clear that they had reached their respective bottom lines and dared to go no further.

"5150 kilograms of phasewater." A different leader spoke.

"5200 kilograms of phasewater." Ves said right away.

He really hoped that the bidders did not try to surpass 5500 kilograms of phasewater.

He originally wanted to set the limit at 5000 kilograms, but he felt that would have made him way too predictable. He had raised the limit to 5501 kilograms of phasewater for that reason.

If the bids exceeded this amount, Ves was ready to pull out regardless of whether he could afford to do so due to various factors.

"5300 kilograms."

"5400 kilograms of phasewater." Ves replied.

He hoped that a more decisive approach might deter the remaining handful of holdouts.

"5450 kilograms of phasewater."

"5500 kilograms of phasewater." Ves said without giving out any further hints.

Privately, he hoped that the remaining bidders would give up at this point. Trying to obtain a Destroyer spear for 6000 kilograms of phasewater or whatever was so exaggerated that Ves would rather work with Ketis to develop a first-class mech spear from scratch!

Nobody spoke.

Despite the extreme desirability of a tier 3 Destroyer spear, the weapon frankly did not merit that much attention at this point.

It was unreasonable to hand a powerful mech weapon to a junior ace mech that did not cost nearly as much.

Of course, senior ace mechs were entirely different beasts. They were more designed and built to serve as potential candidates to transform into god mechs, so pairing them up with Destroyer weapons was not necessarily a waste of money!

Ves felt tense as he waited for any person to place a slightly higher bid.

"Meow..."

Even Lucky felt the tension in the air.

It soon became clear that all of these people did not fall silent for no good reason. Ves suspected that they were all contacting each other or their superiors for further instructions.

While the continued silence made the grand auction more compelling, Orion Leeds still needed to do his duty.

"The tier 3 Destroyer weapon can still be yours if you place a higher bid. Let me remind you of one of our relevant services. You can promise to exchange any fixed assets to us for MTA credits or CFA credits. If you fail to place a winning bid, you have the right to cancel the planned transaction at the cost of paying a modest and reasonable penalty fee."

This was a clever solution that hit multiple birds with a single stone.

Estaban Leeds could massively improve its real estate portfolio by taking the houses, factories and other structures across the upper zones.

It also increased the liquidity of individual participants, enabling them to spend sums that were far in excess to their prior cash reserves.

"However, was it really worth it to give up prime real estate just to get a single Destroyer spear? It did not even come with a powerful machine that could make effective use of this weapon!

"Going once..."

Ves stared carefully at the members of the crowd, but he was unable to glean anything more complex than a few vague sensations.

"Going twice..."

"5600 kilograms of phasewater." A female general spoke as she politely turned towards the private box. "My apologies, Professor Larkinson, but one of our newest guardians of our state needs this boost in firepower."

That caused Ves to look dismayed. He could still spend more, but... that would cause him to break the rule he set for himself. He could not give in to irrational behavior.

"If you really want the spear, go take it." Jovy encouraged Ves. "Do not worry too much about how you will raise the necessary funds. At worst, you temporarily go into debt and earn back the money later once you have achieved greater business success."

Though Ves heard this once before, saying it again during this sensitive moment caused Ves' limit to snap.

"Fine. I will stop thinking about limits entirely. I hope I don't regret it." He grumbled under his bet. "5700 kilograms of phasewater."

His confident declaration increased his momentum and made it a lot more difficult for anyone to exceed his bid.

"5750 kilograms."

"5800 kilograms." Ves said.

At this point, the female general and the other remaining holdouts kept themselves mum.

"Going once..."

Again, people looked around to see whether anyone had the courage to commit a greater sum.

"Goince twice..."

Ves almost prayed that no one would spoil his party and force him to spend more money than he was pretty sure he did not possess at this moment.

"SOLD for 5800 kilograms of phasewater!" Orion Leeds decisively declared! "Congratulations, Professor Larkinson! You are the latest owner of one of the most powerful mech weapons in the Red Ocean. This tier 3 Destroyer spear is yours to do as you see fit!"

Chapter 5808 Specific Demands

5808 Specific Demands

Ves did not feel relieved when Orion Leeds officially determined that Ves had won the tier 3 Destroyer spear.

He felt as if he had put a huge burden on himself.

Neither he nor the Larkinson Clan had a whopping 5800 kilograms of phasewater stored in their vaults!

Furthermore, they did not possess any freely available cash that was equivalent to the value of so much phasewater!

Though Ves could heavily go into debt in order to finance this transaction, doing so came with a lot of other consequences.

Not only would he become beholden to the institution that loaned him the money, but he would also have to pay huge sums on interest payments until he managed to pay off the entire loan!

Even if Ves was confident that he could continue to rely on his routine mech design activities to slowly earn enough money to cover this debt, he would rather get rid of it sooner rather than later.

This could go very wrong if he did not handle this situation properly.

"Are you pleased, Jovy?"

"Pleased by what?"

"You got me to adopt the mentality of a wealthy first-rater." Ves explained in a cynical tone. "I know that I need to think bigger nowadays, but this is a really big jump. I fear... it will become a lot easier for me to spend 21 billion MTA credits in the future."

5800 kilograms of phasewater equated to at least 21 billion MTA credits according to the current market price.



However, trying to procure this much phasewater at once would definitely cause it to rise in price, making it so that Ves would have to spend a billion or two more money to complete such a transaction!

Fortunately, Estaban Leeds did not limit the possible means of payment to phasewater, or else a lot of different groups would have to buy a lot of phasewater from every possible source, thereby causing the market price to skyrocket in the process!

Even so, Ves felt as if he had put Gloriana to shame in terms of profligacy. Her casual decision to spend millions of MTA credits in luxuries such as first-class clothing and perfume seemed trivial in comparison to how much money he squandered on a single mech weapon!

"This tier 3 Destroyer spear better be worth the money." He whispered to himself.

He needed to urge Venerable Rosa Orfan to break through to ace pilot and earn the qualifications to wield the powerful weapon.

The longer she remained stuck as an expert pilot, the longer the spear remained unused... unless the Larkinson Army decided to hand it over to another ace pilot.

That would likely lead to a lot of discontent. If someone like Uncle Ark or Grandpa Benjamin managed to break through and subsequently earned fantastic achievements with the help of the Destroyer spear, they would probably hate it if they would have to hand the weapon over.

Orfan would also feel resentful for others making use of the weapon that was 'reserved' for her use. She was the only dedicated spear wielder among the champions of the Larkinson Clan.

Letting others handle her destined weapon would be a major affront to her pride as a warrior!

Ves knew he needed to discuss these possible issues in extensive detail with Commander Casella Ingvar. She might have a good idea on how to prevent the powerful spear from turning into a source of conflict.

"I think I have spent enough today." He said. "Unless this grand auction presents a lot that I deem essential, I think I will abstain from placing any further bids."

Nobody disagreed with him. None of them had ever handled this much money in their lifetimes. They could not imagine what kind of pressure he had taken upon himself.

"There will be other grand auctions in the future." Jovy consoled his friend. "Every auction of this kind presents numerous items that are bound to be of great value to you. Just because you are missing out on numerous desirable goods today does not mean you can compensate for it later when you are more financially secure. You only need to remain apprised of the dates and locations of future grand auctions and decide whether you want to participate in them. That said, investing in a tier 3 Destroyer weapon is a smart choice. It is unlikely that the Terrans are willing to trade away such a powerful specialty product anytime soon."

Kelsey Ampatoch added his own insight. "The Dermont Ancient Clan is probably pleased that you managed to purchase it in the end. Otherwise they wouldn't have consigned it to Estaban Leeds in the first place. The Dermonts probably don't even care all that much about the 21 billion MTA credits. It is clear they want to build a connection to you by earning their gratitude."

"Well, they are doing a swell job at that by making me pay an astronomical sum of money for this spear." Ves scoffed. "Why can't they approach me in private and offer me this Destroyer weapon in exchange for more reasonably priced concessions?"

"That would be too utilitarian in the eyes of the Terrans." Kelsey shook his head. "They are too pretentious for that. They do not want to develop a transactional relationship with you. They want to make you feel emotionally indebted to them. By making you pay a great sum to acquire the Destroyer weapon, you will most definitely treat it like a precious heirloom treasure. Once your chosen champion puts the famed weapon to good use, each time he or she defeats a powerful opponent, you will feel more grateful that your 'overpriced' weapon is earning back its cost and more. That will also make you look at the Dermont Ancient Clan in a more favorable light."

"I see."

It sounded rather convoluted, but Ves could easily accept that the Terrans were willing to engage in this kind of social engineering.

"What if I refused to compete any further for this spear?"

"Then the Dermonts would just adjust their target to whoever managed to win the Destroyer weapon instead. Any party who has the capacity to finance this purchase is worth befriending to an ancient clan that clearly seeks to expand its network."

What a clever gambit. Perhaps Ves should employ this strategy as well.

Wait. He already intended to employ a similar strategy by auctioning out his shares. The biggest difference was that he was being a lot more blatant about it as giving others partial ownership in his mech company turned them into long-term stakeholders.

That was the only subject on his mind right now. He no longer expressed as much interest in the other items that appeared in the grand auction.

People fought over dozens of expensive goods, each of which promised to enhance the power of an entire group or enrich the lives of those who already lived in splendor.

The greater benefit to just standing aside and watching the proceedings was that Ves got a much better sense of what people who occupied the highest layers of society still competed over.

While these people still showed plenty of appreciation for exquisite artworks and real estate, they forked over the greatest sums for cultivation methods, powerful mechs, starships and powerful materials.

Clearly, these people could read the winds blowing through the new frontier pretty well. There was never a time where they enjoyed enough security.

That was not necessarily good news to Ves as it would make it harder for him to gain the concessions he truly sought.

By the time many people started to grow tired and less attentive, Orion Leeds finally came to the final lots of the grand auction.

"Thank you for your patience." The handsome auctioneer seemed to glow as he smiled at the participants. "Now that we are nearing the end of this grand auction, we have saved the best for last."

Instead of introducing the final lots, I believe it is best to invite Professor Ves Larkinson to the stage himself so that he can give you an explanation himself."

Ves did not look surprised as he had arranged this move beforehand with the auction house. It did not happen often, but Estaban Leeds typically agreed to implement this break from tradition if it formed the centerpiece of the entire event.

"Let's go, Lucky."

"Meow!"

Ves left the private box and navigated through the submerged hall until he floated next to Orion Leeds.

Everyone paid attention to him and the archemetal cat sitting on his shoulder.

This was not the first time that Ves had become the center of attention. He did not feel fazed at all despite the fact that the net worth of all of these bigshots could crush him many times over.

"Hello everyone." Ves said in a calm and composed voice. "I am sure you are already familiar with me, so I will skip the introductions. Today, I invite you to invest in my first and most important company, the Living Mech Corporation. I am sure that many of you have already studied it in advance, so I will not bother to explain its profitability, its long-term prospects or its placement in the mech market. Your business analysts are probably a lot better than mine."

No one laughed, but that was not important.

"Let me explain what I seek from auctioning out 25 percent of all outstanding shares in the LMC. I am not in dire need of cash. I can obtain it easily enough through other channels. What I seek are strategic partnerships, ownership of military infrastructure such as orbital shipyards and more. The plain truth is that my status has risen far too quickly. My foundation is sorely lacking, and I seek to remedy that as much as possible. This is why I am willing to give you an opportunity to become my partner and maybe even ally in my future ventures."

It was not difficult for all of these clever people to figure out the reasons why he was willing to open up the LMC to outside investment, but it was best to make his priorities clear.

"The bidding will proceed like this. We will auction out 5 percent of shares in the LMC at a time. We will still use kilograms of phasewater as a measure of the value of your bid, but I am not interested in getting a huge bag of phasewater or MTA credits unless I say otherwise. I would vastly prefer it if you are ready to offer more material concessions of military value. In other words, I want to trade a part of my long-term economic prosperity for more short and medium-term security."

That caused a lot of potential bidders to hesitate. They might be willing to invest a hefty amount to acquire the LMC shares, but was it worth it for them to surrender a part of their military assets or infrastructure?

"Don't bother to offer anything that does not help my forces prepare for battles ahead such as civilian enterprises or luxury goods." Ves clarified in order to make sure that there were no misunderstandings. "Also, please refrain from promising intangibles such as tutoring sessions, branding deals, protection guarantees and so on. Verbal promises alone carry much less weight unless I know you can be trusted."

Ves mentioned a few other rules and preferences to guide people in the right direction. It might be rather cumbersome and limiting, but he was confident that there were enough interested parties left that were willing to commit.

"Finally, let me reiterate that acquiring real shipbuilding infrastructure is one of my highest priorities." He stated at the end. "I will value a first-class orbital shipyard much more than anything else that you can give me. My clan urgently needs it to service our own demand for first-class starships. I do not intend to leave this auction house without becoming the owner of at least one new first-class shipyard. It does not have to be located here in the Ector System, so feel free to offer ones that are located further away."

With that, the most important phase of the grand auction had begun!

## Chapter 5809 The Octara Kingdom

### 5809 The Octara Kingdom

The format for the grand auction had changed.

Instead of bidding with cash or phasewater, the participants needed to offer more substantial concessions in order to obtain what they needed.

Value was no longer strictly measured by concrete numbers, but by the subjective opinion of the current owner of the much-coveted shares.

As Ves swept his gaze across the submerged upper hall, he gained a good impression of how the gathered leaders and elites regarded this situation.

Many of them displayed clear interest in obtaining shares. Even if the LMC in its current stage of development did not merit their attention, its future potential was limitless with a highly promising mech designer like Ves in charge.

However, these greedy figures were in the minority.

Many more enlightened individuals understood that the point of investing in the LMC was not to earn huge dividends, though it was certainly a nice bonus.

Their real motivation was to develop a strong, long-term relationship with the most talented mech designer of his generation.

Given his extraordinary feats and his much more impressive background than anyone previously realized, Ves turned out to be a lot more remarkable and promising than anyone realized!

It no longer became crazy talk to consider Ves to be a Star Designer candidate. His history so far contained so many crazy turns of events that he already experienced far more successes and upheaval in his life than any Star Designer at his age!

Ves did not just match the template of a Star Designer-in-the-

making, he exemplified it, so much so that the betting platforms judged that his probability of advancing to the highest rank was higher than numerous renowned Master Mech Designers!

Who wouldn't want to befriend a mech designer with such fantastic future prospects?

Even if the chance was great that he would stagnate, get assassinated or otherwise fail to reach his potential, it did not hurt to make a modest investment in exchange for a possible future payout.

In other words, the way that many powerful players regarded him was like he was a particularly attractive lottery ticket.

It was definitely worthwhile for them to participate in this special auction so long as the cost of purchasing the lottery ticket did not harm their own strength and financial position too much.

The only problem was that far too many players made the same conclusion. The intense competition for ownership stakes in LMC meant that only the wealthiest and most optimistic ones would be able to get away with a solid connection to Ves.

Ves smiled as he completed his quick survey. Interest in his shares was great enough for him to decide to push for his main objective anyway.

"There will be five rounds of bidding in total. Each round will allow you to contest the ownership of 5 percent of all outstanding shares in the Living Mech Corporation that are currently under my name. You may call out a concession and perhaps an official valuation in phasewater, but it will be up to me to accept or deny that your bid has exceeded the value of the previous one. Do note that I am not too rigid with the rules of this special auction. If you happen to offer such a major concession that 5 percent ownership in the LMC does not cut it anymore, I may agree to increase the share I am willing to transact with you. I have already given you an explanation for what I seek. It is up to you to figure out how you wish to satisfy my needs."

He raised a warning finger.

"Since I am determined to come away with full ownership in at least one orbital shipyard, you may only offer shipbuilding facilities in this inaugural round. I will not accept any other kinds of concessions this time. Leave that for the subsequent rounds of bidding."

Ves nodded towards Orion Leeds, who promptly clapped his hands!

"Let the first round of bidding as specified by Professor Larkinson commence! Please speak one at a time and give time for our consignor to accept or reject your bid."

A few seconds of silence ensued as many people wanted to wait and see. They were not quite clear what Ves wanted to hear.

Soon enough, an older and distinguished-looking gentleman rose up from his seat.

"It is an honor to meet you, Professor Larkinson. I am Elijah von Reevus, a first-generation duke of the Octara Kingdom and its defense minister. The Young King has instructed me to invite you to become a royal advisor and hereditary noble in our court. Before you object, let me inform you that we do not demand you to pledge any oath of fealty or submission to His Majesty. We only ask you to befriend us and be honest in your dealings with our kingdom. We are willing to gift you partial but controlling interest in one of our royal shipyards."

The strange noble's offer took many people by surprise.

Instead of offering a shipyard outright, Duke Elijah von Reevus instead tied it into a more elaborate package that clearly sought to bind Ves to the Octara Kingdom!

This was a rather clever way of getting more out of a transaction. The duke's transparent ploy clearly inspired a lot of other potential bidders into cooking up similar offers!

Ves curled his lips downwards. He had little interest in burdening himself with useless obligations.

While it was best if he and his clan maintained a cordial relationship with the government of the star system where his new shipyard resided, that did not mean that Ves wanted to become a vassal!

Perhaps sensing that Ves was not taking his offer too well, the duke of the Octara Kingdom quickly clarified his offer.

"If at any time you wish to end your relationship with our court, you may do so as long as you are willing to follow orderly procedures. We do have to ask you to relinquish your majority stake in our royal shipyard. I can promise you that you may use our royal shipyard as long as you do not excessively damage or degrade its operational capabilities. We offer you full access to our logistical network, allowing you to source the large quantities of bulk exotics and hypers needed to construct first-class starships under a cost-plus pricing scheme. So long as our Octara Kingdom prospers, so shall your royal shipyard, which will always enjoy the protection of our system defense forces."

Ves smiled. Now that sounded more to his liking.

The duke was not that stupid after all. Turning his offer into a loose commitment where Ves could pull out at any time did much to bolster the attractiveness of this bid.

"I accept your bid, Your Grace." Ves calmly spoke. "If none of the subsequent bids gives me reason to favor them over yours, I would be happy to accept your terms. Just make sure that the final contract closely matches your description. I do not tolerate deception."

The duke looked scandalized!

"We would not dare to engage in such dishonesty, professor!"

Ves was not so sure about that. He had never heard of the Octara Kingdom before, so he utilized his cranial implant to discreetly look it up on the galactic net.

What he managed to read was... not impressive.

It turned out that the Octara Kingdom did not start out as a serious colony founded by ambitious pioneers.

The origin of this relatively small first-rate state was actually a lot more banal.

Back during the Age of Mechs, there existed a couple of extremely wealthy leaders. They had a 15-year old son who behaved a bit like a spoiled brat to the point where he started to slip in his studies.

Instead of trying to correct the behavior of their son the normal way, this power couple instead did something extremely outrageous.

They formed a powerful pioneering fleet, dumped their son onto the flagship, sent the vessels through the greater beyonder gate and commanded the new arrivals to found a kingdom in an upper zone!

That was how the Octara Kingdom came to be. The pioneering fleet succeeded in carving out a fairly small but resource-rich chunk of territory in the Vivan Upper Zone and started to build up an entire colonial state from scratch.

Even though the ultimate owners of the pioneering fleet did not style themselves as royals or nobles, they purposefully forged the new colonies into a feudal kingdom for the sole purpose of turning their son into a real king!

This was the most extravagant combination of a punishment, an exile, a practical teaching experience and a birthday present that Ves had ever heard of! How could these parents be so out of touch that they did not even take the founding of a first-rate colonial state seriously?

Many lesser but much more hard-working individuals would have taken this venture a hundred times more seriously!

In any case, the Octara Kingdom was never supposed to be a 'serious' state to begin with, and many people knew that. Everyone from the Young King himself down to the commoners who emigrated to the new kingdom in exchange for rich compensation all treated it as one giant amusement park.

If not for the fact that the Octara Kingdom was mainly run by a large and professional civilian administration, the immature king and his extensive court of partying nobles would never have made it last longer than a year!

It was pretty clear that the Young King was not just supposed to enact his fantasies as an absolute monarch of his own private kingdom.

He was supposed to learn how to handle responsibilities and run an actual state by throwing him off the deep end.

It did not matter if he fumbled or failed, because his parents back in the old galaxy would always ensure that the Young King would always receive the support he needed.

If everything proceeded as planned, the Young King would have meandered about as a sovereign for a couple of decades before gradually maturing and becoming more accustomed to acting a serious ruler.

By that time, the colonization of the Red Ocean should have reached a much more advanced stage. The parents of the Young King would have been able to organize a more ambitious pioneering fleet that was capable of colonizing the more attractive territories that were closer to the center of the Red Ocean.

In other words, the Octara Kingdom was supposed to be a practice run.

The reality was very much different. As soon as the Great Severing occurred, a lot of plans got disrupted, including the playtime for the Young King!

Now that he had suddenly been bereft of contact and any form of support from his parents from the old galaxy, the Young King had been forced to sober up quickly, as did everyone else from his isolated kingdom!

While the Octara Kingdom was actually doing pretty decently despite what had happened, its biggest problem was that it was located in the Vivan Upper Zone, which happened to be located very close to the frontlines!

Given that all of the states of the Vivan Upper Zone fell under the Red Ocean Union, the Octara Kingdom could not count on strong support to help defend its territories.

It did not help that the Octarans spent so much time partying and playing around instead of engaging in actual diplomacy. They had few allies to begin with, and their prior conduct left them with a bad relationship that they had yet to fully rehabilitate.

This put the bid of Duke Von Reevus into perspective. The Octara Kingdom was desperate for friends, and was willing to place a serious bet on Ves!

"Interesting."

While Ves did not mind the dubious history of the Octara Kingdom, he was a lot more concerned about its perilous location.

How much value did an orbital shipyard possess when it was located a bit too close from the frontlines?

Chapter 5810 Starfarer Berth

5810 Starfarer Berth

Obtaining a shipyard that was located awfully close to the frontlines of the Red War sounded anything but ideal.

However, the easy access to raw materials along with the other favorable conditions offered by the Octara Kingdom made up for this very obvious downside.

Another factor that earned his appreciation was that any orbital shipyard that received the 'royal' designation was definitely among the largest and most productive of its kind!

According to the fact sheet transmitted by Duke Elijah von Reevus, the specific shipyard that the Octarans were willing to 'gift' to Ves was capable of constructing capital ships up to a maximum length of around 3 kilometers!

That was a huge luxury as first-class capital ships were always impressive.

The capacity for the Larkinson Clan to design and construct its own first-class fleet carriers was so valuable that Ves was willing to put up with the very real risk that an alien incursion might one day invade the Octara Kingdom and destroy the royal shipyard!

He wondered whether it was possible to break the shipyard into pieces and ship them over to a safer location where the orbital construct could be rebuilt anew.

While many people became preoccupied with weighing how much they needed to offer in order to beat the Octara Kingdom's bid, another individual rose up from her seat.

"Greetings, Professor Larkinson. I am Master Francesca Castillo, but you may know me as the Adaptive Scale. I am a lifelong servant of the Red Association, and I have represented the Guidance Faction on many occasions. I am not approaching you as a representative of either of these groups, but instead wish to offer a partnership in my personal capacity."

Ves had never heard of the Adaptive Scale before, but a quick search on the galactic net told him that she was an RA Master Mech Designer of decent renown.

The woman activated a projection that displayed a relatively small but much more advanced orbital shipyard.



"This is the Starfarer Berth, a small but modern first-class orbital shipyard. I am the sole investor and owner of this facility. It was initially rated to construct civilian sub-capital ships such as logistical and industrial vessels, but it has recently completed an upgrade that enables the construction of military hulls such as combat carriers and armed cruisers."

Starfarer Berth was truly a lot smaller than the royal shipyard offered by the Octara Kingdom. There was no contest when it came to scale.

However, despite the huge difference in size, Ves had a feeling that Starfarer Berth was actually just as valuable if not more due to its much more advanced tech!

The Adaptive Scale smiled with pride. "Starfarer Berth is capable of constructing the highest specifications of sub-

capital ships designed by the shipwrights of the Red Association. It is equipped with full materialization and fabrication suites that are fully capable of producing all of the components in-house. Unless the design of a starship demands the inclusion of exotic components, my shipyard can fully convert raw materials into complete first-class sub-

capital ships in a matter of months."

This was powerful tech!

While the royal shipyard from earlier also possessed decent production facilities, it was not exactly meant to operate independently from the regional economy.

Ves knew that if he wanted to obtain a powerful fleet carrier, the royal shipyard would have to place many different orders from a lot of third-party producers in order to obtain specialized high-tech parts such as superdrives and azure shield generators.

This shouldn't be a problem most of the time, but Ves did not like it that the royal shipyard was at the mercy of other people.

Granted, Ves should be able to develop friendly relations with these contractors easily enough, especially the Octara Kingdom bestowed him with official positions.

Was it really worth it for Ves to play along with this charade just so that he could guarantee the smooth operation of the royal shipyard?

Ves much preferred to obtain an orbital shipyard that could minimize any entanglements with external parties. He only needed to arrange a sufficient supply of raw materials to keep a cozy facility like the Starfarer Berth running.

"Where is your orbital shipyard located, Master?"

"Good question, Professor Larkinson. I believe you will be especially pleased to know that Starfarer Berth is located in the Yernstall Star Node."

A lot of people who hadn't bothered to look up information about the orbital shipyard reacted with surprise!

Yernstall Star Node!

Every Central Star Node was a stronghold that was jointly colonized and managed by the Red Association and the Red Fleet!

The initial attraction to Yernstall was its powerful blue supergiant star.

When the Big Two wanted to establish additional strongholds in the rim of the Red Ocean, they chose to construct an immense Dyson sphere around the powerful blue sun in order to channel almost all of its immense output into a huge supply of energy!

The massive undertaking was mind boggling and expensive beyond belief, yet the MTA and CFA at the height of their power easily managed to complete this titanic construction effort!

Of course, it helped a lot that the Big Two constructed most of the semi-autonomous modules of the gigantic Dyson sphere in the old galaxy. They only had to ship the finished modules across galaxies and put them in the right places.

Capturing the energy of an entire blue supergiant fully transformed the Yernstall Star Node into a location with great economic development!

Out of all of the Central Star Nodes, the biggest and most important one of them all was Bridgehead One.

Yernstall Star Node happened to rank second on the list.

It was a Star Node that was fully dedicated towards servicing the needs of first-raters. Initially occupied by the mechers and the fleeters, it soon opened up for business and welcomed any first-class visitors who were wealthy enough to pay the extremely high fees.

After the opening of the Red Ocean, the Yernstall Star Node quickly rose up to become an economic pillar due to the huge influx of Terrans, Rubarthans and the citizens of other first-rate states!

The fact that both Terrans and Rubarthans flocked to the same star system was remarkable and made Yernstall all the more special!

Ves could think of few places in the new frontier that were safer than the Yernstall Star Node.

Not only had the mechers and fleeters fortified the star system to an nigh-unbreakable stronghold, Yernstall also happened to be located far to the rear of human-occupied space!

Many colonial states and zones would have to fall for the alien invaders first before Yernstall was ever exposed to serious enemy incursions!

Ves expressed a lot more interest after he learned where the orbital shipyard was located. Master Castillo's bid became a lot more competitive due to this crucial factor!

"I am offering you an 80 percent stake in Starfarer Berth in exchange for your company shares." The Adaptive Scale straightforwardly said. "Letting me retain the remaining 20 percent will allow the orbital shipyard to retain its personnel, contracts, permissions and suppliers. You will be able to take operational control over a hypermodern shipyard that can produce the most advanced human starships imaginable. It is well-staffed with elite Association-trained personnel who value their current employment because it allows them to live in one of the richest and safest star systems in the new frontier."

Even if Starfarer Berth was a little small, it was still a dream come true for many shipwrights and naval engineers to work at this orbital shipyard!

The Yernstall Star Node was such a popular and desirable place to live and work that it had put up a lot of barriers.

Just like the Vulit Central Star Node that Ves was familiar with, ordinary visitors had to pay exponentially more money or merits in order to stay in a place that would probably be among the last human strongholds to fall if the Red War turned against human civilization.

If nothing else, Starfarer Berth might serve as an emergency fallback point if the Larkinson Clan ever suffered a devastating blow throughout the new frontier.

In any case, Ves did not have to worry too much about running into personnel shortages or experience any difficulties in hiring qualified personnel. Every job opening probably attracted thousands of applications from people eager to enjoy the best possible protection from the mechers and the fleeters.

"I take it that operating Starfarer Berth must not be cheap." Ves remarked after he thought about how much people complained about the cost of everything in this Central Star Node.

The Adaptive Scale nodded. "Yernstall is one of the most developed high-tech hubs in human-occupied space. Its inconvenient location and high price levels makes it difficult to earn a profit by producing low-margin products. Starfarer Berth is still able to maintain its profitability by targeting the upper segment of the first-class starship market. Its speed of production is not high compared to other shipyards, but its quality and technological sophistication ranks close to the top. Only the shipyards operated by the Red Fleet are superior in this regard."

Interesting. Ves could readily believe this boast because Starfarer Berth truly looked like it could back up all of these boastful claims.

"I take it that Starfarer Berth excels at constructing a specific type of starship in order to maintain its competitiveness." He guessed.

"Correct. Starfarer Berth is configured to maximize the production of my signature Ripple Energized Armor Systems. My armor systems excel at becoming more effective at resisting specific damage types that strike at them progressively more. In the most ideal conditions, my best Ripple Armor can resist up to 70 percent more damage from the same weapons."

That sounded impressive!

"You can apply your Ripple Armor to both mechs and starships?"

"That is the case, though I have to warn you that the Ripple Energized Armor Systems designed for starships are less effective because they are optimized for bulk and economies of scale. Starfarer Berth is the best orbital shipyard to fabricate and install Ripple Armor to the hulls of starships. If you accept my bid, I shall grant you permanent access to all of my Ripple Energized Armor Systems with the notable exception of highly classified versions. You may use my technologies as you see fit, but as you are already aware, the price will not be cheap."

That caused Ves to frown.

"How much does it actually cost me to operate Starfarer Berth if I stop all commercial production and dedicate its output for my own purposes?"

"Yernstall is an expensive star system. It is at least several times more expensive to construct starships in this Central Star Node than in the Ector System." Master Castillo honestly replied.

"There are few orbital shipyards in orbit of this planet that can construct sub-capital ships as advanced and resilient as Starfarer Berth. They are all owned by entrenched groups that are unlikely to sell their strategically valuable military production facilities. I am one of the few who are capable of doing so because I chose to concentrate my investment in a wholly-owned orbital shipyard."

"I see."

This turned out to be an intriguing bargain. The offer of gaining 80 percent ownership in a small but extremely high-

tech orbital shipyard located in one of the safest star systems imaginable sounded attractive as hell.

The only sticking points were the extravagant production costs and the shipyard's limited scale.

Ves did not regard the cost of operating Starfarer Berth to be an insurmountable problem. He just had to do well in the mech market.

Besides, the shipyard was incapable of producing big and expensive capital ships, so that also played in his favor.

That last point also served as one of the biggest shortcomings of Starfarer Berth. The inability to produce capital ships of any kind almost served as a dealbreaker to Ves.

As it was, all of the other selling points successfully compensated for this critical weakness.