

The Mech 5811

Chapter 5811 E-66 Experimental Yard

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There was one other potential complication to embracing the Adaptive Scale's bid.

Master Francesca Castillo already made it clear that she was a part of the RA Guidance Faction.

The Guiders were known as meddlesome mechers who strongly advocated that the Red Association take over the autonomy of individual states.

They were basically the Polymath's strongest cheerleaders outside of the Survivalist Faction.

The Guiders would love it if human civilization melted all of its internal divisions and united in a single cohesive group that obeyed all of their instructions!

While there was a certain logic to their ideology, Ves personally found it reprehensible.

That was a problem, because he was pretty sure that the Adaptive Scale was mainly willing to offer her orbital shipyard in order to pull him into the orbit of her faction.

Still, Ves believed he could manage this situation if it ever occurred. He disagreed with the Guiders on plenty of subjects, but there were still a couple of areas where they could cooperate, especially in relation to the Red Collective.

It was not a bad idea for Ves to make more friends and allies among the mechers. He still depended heavily on the protection of the Red Association to keep him safe and support his many business ventures.

In any case, now that the Adaptive Scale had completed her pitch, Ves wanted to hear other offers.

"I have to admit that I find it difficult to rank the two bids." He told the auction participants. "The offers made by Duke Von Reevus and the Adaptive Scale both have their pros and cons. For now, I am inclined to judge them of roughly equal value. Unless there is a bid that clearly exceeds their value, I will choose to accept one of them. I apologize that I cannot offer any further clarity at this time."

That was the trouble with trying to judge different proposals. The lack of an objective measuring stick made it a lot harder for him to make up his mind. He needed to evaluate each offer according to his personal circumstances and needs.

Ves sought to buy more time by soliciting additional bids from the gathered players.

Nothing happened for half a minute. It appeared that people were reluctant to give up their orbital shipyards. Their value was a lot more tangible and concrete than obtaining a 5 percent stake in the mech company of a promising Senior Mech Designer.

That caused Ves to inwardly frown. The willingness for people to part ways with their orbital shipyards was a lot lower than he anticipated.

The lack of enthusiasm signified once more that powers valued their starships and the capacity to build them over almost anything else!

Finally, a third figure stood up to make a pitch.

The man bowed towards Ves. "It is an honor to address the favored of the Destroyer of Worlds. My name is Robin Terrier. I serve as a senior aide to the Inferno Spear Prince of the Rubarthan Pact. After much consideration, my liege has decided to offer you full and unrestricted ownership of the E-66 Experimental Yard that is located in his principality."

Robin Terrier projected a map of where the shipyard was located before it changed to show the facility itself.

It became clear to Ves that E-66 was not as big as the royal shipyard, but it was not nearly as small as the Starfarer Berth either.

Though Ves only got a brief glimpse of its location, he became a little reassured that it was not located too close to the frontlines.

That did not mean that E-66 was unlikely to be safe from alien raids, but it was located in the heart of the Inferno Spear Principality.

"The E-66 Experimental Yard was originally built to produce starships up to 2.3 kilometers in length. It is not the most efficient orbital shipyards in our possession. In fact, it is the opposite as it is not a standard facility. It is part of a larger R&D initiative that was originally designed to develop and experiment on new ship classes. It features an expansive suite of tools and production facilities that enable the construction of a wide variety of starships, including ones that incorporate limited alien technologies."

The Rubarthan aide quickly differentiated the E-66 Experimental Yard from the other ones.

Ves loved to engage in experiments, so the function of this orbital shipyard immediately appealed to him in an intimate fashion.

The royal shipyard from the Octara Kingdom was a pretty standardized production facility that did not leave as much room for experimentation.

The Starfarer Berth was even more limited due to the fact that it was already optimized to construct starships clad with Ripple Energized Armor Systems.

While Ves was sure his shipwrights could still build a wide variety of starship classes in both of those facilities, none of them were able to offer as much help, freedom and support as the E-66 Experimental Shipyard!

"Our orbital shipyard employs a top team of shipbuilders and R&D personnel who have graduated from renowned technical universities." Robin Terrier continued with a smile. "They are long accustomed to working together on many different research projects. Each of their employment contracts are included in our offer."

That was an important concession. The E-66 Experimental Yard wouldn't be nearly as useful to Ves if he lost the services of all of those top naval researchers.

"How efficient is this facility?" He asked.

"I am told that the E-66 Experimental Yard does not score high in efficiency, but makes up for it with greater research, improvisation and upgrade capabilities. It is one of the best shipyards you can choose from if you wish to upgrade your existing starship hulls. It is possible to increase its efficiency in constructing a single ship class by adding or removing specialized shipyard modules.

Due to frequently changing demands, E-66 possesses a highly modular structure. You can easily add specialized production facilities that can introduce specialized functions that are not available in standardized shipyards."

The senior aide to the only ace pilot among the Rubarthan princes in the Red Ocean continued to explain a few more interesting details.

For example, the Inferno Spear Principality was willing to give Ves access to all of the material suppliers that were currently supplying the input to the E-66 Experimental Shipyard.

The downside was that he could only pay the going market rates for these raw materials unless he formed more favorable agreements with the relevant Rubarthan material suppliers.

"We are also willing to exempt your shipyard from paying most of the fees and taxes that we subject to our shipyards." Robin Terrier added as an extra incentive. "E-66 already does not pay most of them because it is an indirect possession of Prince Antonius. Granting you these privileges can easily reduce the cost of production by at least 30 percent."

That was generous and substantially made up for the facility's lower efficiency.

"Does the Inferno Spear Prince impose any other conditions or obligations?"

"None aside from the standard ones. His Highness does not like to engage in trickery. When we say that you will gain full and unrestricted possession over the E-66 Experimental Yard, we mean it. We do not forbid you from mismanaging, destroying or attempting to relocate the orbital shipyard wholesale. It is for you to do what you will. The 2016th prince hopes that you can still serve as a responsible steward to this facility. Its existence grants red humanity another source of vitally important starships."

The Inferno Spear Prince was willing to grant a lot of trust towards Ves. By relinquishing all shares to the E-66 Experimental Yard, the prince could no longer exert direct control over the operations of this innovative facility.

Of course, that did not fool Ves into thinking that the Inferno Spear Prince or the Rubarthan Pact could no longer touch it anymore.

So long as the E-66 Experimental Yard operated within the territories of the Rubarthan Pact, it still had to abide by many of its laws!

Still, the Inferno Spear Prince granted Ves far more control than the other ones. The man was an ace pilot, so he conducted business a lot differently than duplicitous profiteers.

Ves knew without a shadow of a doubt that the Inferno Spear Prince would never stab him in the back.

If the Rubarthan prince ever found it necessary to become an enemy, the honorable ace pilot would at least give prior notice.

That already made Ves inclined to accept this offer on principle.

"Is the E-66 Experimental Yard capable of constructing dedicated first-class warships?"

The aide nodded. "It is theoretically possible, but it has yet to be done. Our highly educated personnel have all studied the theory behind them. They have also practiced on how to design and

construct them in virtual training programs. This is why you can count on them despite their lack of real experience."

Ves was not sure whether he would be able to take advantage of this capacity. It still remained difficult for most people to obtain Warship Tokens, especially ones that corresponded to capital ships!

He had to settle for constructing more mundane unarmed starships. E-66 was a decent place to churn out fleet carriers up to 2.3 kilometers in length like a slow but enormous conveyor belt.

However, it would be a huge waste of time and other resources to forget about the word 'Experimental' in its name.

This kind of place truly thrived when it was allowed to deviate from the rules and experiment with their heart's content!

Ves could easily imagine he and his shipwrights, both old and new, joining hands to design the most radical new ship concepts!

Most shipbuilders could not tolerate too many changes at a time. They preferred to stick to a stable routine and develop incremental and predictable changes to their products.

Any radical shift would force every shipwright to redesign their works and calculate the huge ripple effects that cascaded from a singular powerful change!

The personnel working at this facility would not be as close-minded. They were accustomed to experimenting with radical new technologies, so they should be able to embrace and master disruptive inventions a lot faster.

This was crucial if Ves ever wanted to realize his own 'living ships' or other special ship concepts!

It would be so liberating for Ves to be able to order the research and development of crazy new starships without needing to earn other people's permissions.

Since he would be in full charge of E-66, he could do whatever he wanted!

"Is there anything else, Mr. Terrier?"

"Nothing further."

"Thank you. Let me think for a second."

Ves actually spent several more seconds on evaluating his choices and deciding on how to go forward.

"Unless any of you are prepared to present your own bids, I will likely choose among the three current bids."

No one showed any willingness to do so. The powerful groups clung to their orbital shipyards so tightly that they were even willing to forgo an easy opportunity to build a relationship with Ves!

That disappointed him. He knew that these groups were more than ready to offer other concessions such as fully constructed starships and so on, but that was not what he set out to obtain.

The lack of other bids showcased the value of the ones made so far. The respective parties who made these bids were remarkably generous and willing to place a heavy bet on Ves.

It would be great if he could absorb all three shipyards offered to him. He had the option of doing so by giving them 5 percent shares in the LMC each.

However, Ves was wary of biting off more than he could chew. Each of these bids came with strings attached that forced him to build relationships with those who sought to profit from him one way or the other.

Even the Inferno Spear Prince's bid was not that completely clean as it would definitely force Ves to depend on the Rubarthan pact to keep his E-66 Experimental Shipyard operational.

Considering his current situation, he felt it was a bit too much to absorb all three shipyards at the same time.

He was open to accepting one or two bids. He just needed to decide which ones he could afford to reject.

Chapter 5812 Political Objectives

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Ves had spent years dreaming about owning a shipyard.

He found it rather funny that despite founding a thriving mech company and becoming increasingly more competent in designing new mechs, he still yearned to build his own starships.

Ves did not even harbor that much of a passion for warships in the first place.

Sure, they formed a vital component in the lives of every human, but Ves mostly regarded them as tools, homes and combat platforms. Aside from the Spirit of Bentheim, Ves did not regard starships as anything more or less.

As far as he was concerned, he preferred to stick to his own lane by working on mechs and rely on other partners to supply him with the starships he and his clan needed. It was a lot more efficient to simply keep doing what he did best and rely on specialized shipbuilders to excel in their own areas of expertise.

Alas, this scheme was anything but perfect. In an ideal society filled with honest people, Ves could easily purchase reliable starships he needed at fair prices on the open market.

These conditions did not exist in the current climate. The market for starships had already become a lot less open after the opening of the Red Ocean. The Great Severing exacerbated the problem by at least an order of magnitude, making it so that only the groups that owned their own shipbuilding companies could satisfy their needs!

This was the biggest reason why he wanted to obtain an orbital shipyard so badly. The small class of ship producers effectively held the reins of power in the new frontier.

Without enough starships, mech forces lost their mobility and would not be able to advance or retreat as freely as they wanted.

This was a death sentence in a dangerous galaxy.

While it was somewhat possible for Ves to keep sticking to his old approach by begging other parties to sell their starships to his clan, it was not a viable long-term solution.

Ves could read the trends as well as anyone. There was no way that ship production could increase without limit. More shipyards were still getting built, but they had begun to outpace society's ability to keep them fed with quality materials.

The only way for humanity to obtain more starships was to skim on quality and materials. Despite all of the technological advancements introduced by hyper technology, it was highly likely that an increasing proportion of hulls built in the coming decade would become a lot more fragile than the ones built during the previous mech generation.

This was unacceptable to Ves. He understood the value of having sturdy warships very well. A solid hull and powerful energy shield generators could mean the difference between incurring no damage to getting completely crushed when the aliens focused their fire on a vulnerable starship!

Ultimately, the best way for the Larkinsons to ensure that he could fulfill his requirements and exert enough quality control over ship production was to do it themselves.

This was why this moment was so significant to him. He initially thought it would have been a lot more difficult for him to persuade other parties to sell their strategically valuable shipyards to him. Ves was lucky that he had raised his reputation to the point where 5 percent ownership of his mech company could be exchanged for at least a controlling stake of a shipyard.

Every offer came with strings attached, but all three of them were pretty nice.

Ves glanced at Duke Von Reevus, the Adaptive Scale and Mr. Robin Terrier.

They were three completely different people who represented different interests.

Though Ves did not look forward to getting entangled in the affairs of other powers, he could not afford to isolate himself either.

One of the reasons why he became a lot more willing to sell portions of shares of his mech company was to forge new alliances with powerful players.

Just like with the Survivalist Faction, the Transhumanist Faction and the Destroyer of Worlds, having friends he could count upon could solve or mitigate a lot of problems in society.

From the perspective of forging new alliances that could provide greater cover for Ves and his clan, the choices were pretty clear as far as he was concerned.

The E-66 Experimental Yard did not yield as much improvement to him as the other two deals. It brought him closer to the Inferno Spear Prince, but that was not a massive difference.

Ves already built up a good relationship with the Destroyer of Worlds. The Inferno Spear Prince might not be her direct subordinate, but he was practically her chief cheerleader in all but name. Ves was pretty sure he could count on Prince Antonius to have his back and support his ventures just to make sure he remained in the good books of his favorite god pilot.

In contrast, the royal shipyard granted him an immediate entry into the aristocracy of the Octara Kingdom.

Even though it started out as an extremely expensive puppet show, the new reality forced the Octara Kingdom to turn into a real state. Its playful customs and traditions became a lot more serious as the Octarans desperately sought to strengthen their unity and their ability to withstand adversity.

Did Ves look forward to becoming a court official or landed noble or anything? Not really. He had no intentions of playing along with the increasingly more serious charade of the Octarans.

What he did care about is establishing friendly territory for his clan in an actual first-rate state.

By opening the Octara Kingdom up for the Larkinsons, his first-class clansmen would be able to operate more freely and even settle their roots within its territories.

Sure, the Octara Kingdom may be weak relative to other modest first-rate states, but that granted the Larkinson Clan a greater opportunity to become a bigshot within the local scene.

It would be a lot harder for Ves to build up the huge amount of soft power and influence he currently held in the Hex Federation in much wealthier and more powerful first-rate states.

Ves believed it would take a long time to have the Octara Kingdom eating from the palm of his hand.

This was despite the fact it would be easier for him to accomplish this due to the kingdom's weak foundation!

Ves did not mind this too much. He was willing to settle in for the long haul. The more powerful he became, the more the Young King and his court were inclined to defer to a foreign mech designer.

As for the third orbital shipyard, the Starfarer Berth would not allow him to subsume an entire faction. The Guidance Faction and the Red Association as a whole were simply too big and powerful for Ves to gain a lot of sway over them. Just the fact that he would have to compete against god pilots and Star Designers already turned this into a hopeless venture.

What Ves did expect to get out of selecting the Starfarer Berth was to build a relatively solid alliance with the Guidance Faction.

Even if Master Francesca Castillo kept the LMC shares to herself, it was impossible to treat her as a neutral and independent entity.

She represented the Guidance Faction, which was solely led by Kevlar Arendstein, the Missile Messiah.

As far as Star Designers went, Kevlar Arendstein was a bit quirky but impressive nonetheless. He was really good at creating explosive superweapons and his missile weapon systems added a lot of punch to his mech designs.

He also happened to be friends with the Destroyer of Worlds, which made it easier for Ves to entertain cooperation with the Missile Messiah.

Even if Ves did not agree with most of the goals and principles of the Guidance Faction, he did not believe that would pose a serious obstacle as long as they maintained an appropriate degree of separation.

The rise of the Red Collective would inevitably weaken the Red Association, but that did not mean that the latter was on the verge of breaking apart.

Besides, there was a strong possibility that a lot of Guiders would go on to take important positions within the newly founded organization. The Red Collective's principal mandate was to regulate and supervise the practice of cultivation in human society. This was practically a dream job of many ardent members of this faction!

In short, Ves believed it was inevitable for him to cooperate more extensively with the Guiders going forward.

If that was the case, it might be better if he played nice with them and gave them the illusion of control over him. Once they obtained a minority stake in the Living Mech Corporation, they could become a permanent fixture in his orbit.

Ves already made similar arrangements with the Survivalists and the Transhumanists, but it was always better to have another set of friends and supporters on his side.

His only regret was that the Guidance Faction was weaker than the other two factions.

Not only were the Guiders strongly opposed by the Terrans and the Rubarthans, but they were also only led by a single Star Designer.

The lack of other powerful leaders had caused the faction to lose a lot of power and deference compared to what it enjoyed during the height of the Age of Mechs.

The biggest shortcoming was the lack of a supporting god pilot.

It would be difficult for the Missile Messiah to push through his own proposals when many other factions led by god pilots could easily dig in their heels and refuse cooperation.

However, that made the Guidance Faction a lot safer to befriend as a consequence.

Ves already had a taste of what the opposite was like when he conducted his first exchange with the Evolution Witch.

He doubted that the Missile Messiah could browbeat him in the same way.

While that discounted the help he could expect from the Guiders, that was not a big deal. So long as he had an additional RA faction on his side, it became a lot harder for the Mech Supremacists and other potential adversaries from messing with his affairs.

That settled his choices as far as politics went.

He shouldn't fixate entirely on his political objectives, though. Another major goal was to supply his clan with first-class starships. The survival of himself, his family and the rest of his clansmen were at stake.

Fortunately, the calculus was a lot more straightforward.

If he wanted to accrue a huge fleet of big starships, he should settle for the royal shipyard and the E-66 Experimental Yard.

Ves was not stupid enough to obsess over big starships. Not only were they incredibly expensive to build and burdensome to remain, but they could not fulfill many essential roles.

Subcapital ships performed many functions ranging from scouting, planetary drops, rapid transit, covert operations and more.

A proper fleet consisted of a solid core of capital ships and an extensive screen of flexible escort vessels.

While it was possible for larger shipyards to construct subcapital ships, it was a huge waste of capacity for them to do so. It would be a lot better to acquire the Starfarer Berth and utilize its excellent facilities to pump out strong and highly effective subcapital ships.

Sure, the Starfarer Berth mostly emphasized quality over quantity, but the Larkinson Clan's Premier Branch did not need a hundred first-class combat carriers right away.

If Ves solely wanted to meet the Larkinson Clan's evolving demand for first-class starships, then he would pick a smaller shipyard and a larger shipyard.

The Starfarer Berth had to be in his possession no matter what. The only difficult choice that remained was which capital-grade orbital shipyard he should add to his possession.

Ves furrowed his brows. He had already considered all of the arguments, but that still did not give him a clear direction for him to go forward.

The royal shipyard was capable of constructing capital ships that were up to 3 kilometers long.

While the maximum length was a bit excessive for most purposes, it was still nice to make this option available to him and his clan.

The E-66 Experimental Yard could only construct capital ships up to 2.3 kilometers in length.

That did not sound like a major difference, but it was actually incredibly consequential.

The upside was that E-66 was a lot better at incorporating new and unfamiliar advanced technologies into starships.

This also included alien technologies, which gave Ves the hope that it might be able to construct imitation archships as long as he bought the right hardware modules.

Chapter 5813 Expanding Capabilities

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Having big capital ships would be really nice.

The royal shipyard was substantially bigger than the E-66 Experimental Yard.

The former was a fully-fledged military production facility.

The latter was an oversized R&D facility.

That meant that the royal shipyard was not only able to construct bigger capital ships, but complete them at a faster rate so long as it remained well-supplied.

What was also important to note was that the royal shipyard's internal construction space was not only longer, but also wider. That meant that it could make thicker and fatter capital ships that offered a lot more internal volume than was normally the case.

If Ves wanted cram as many mechs and other stuff inside his hulls, then the royal shipyard was the best choice without a doubt!

However, the E-66 Experimental Yard's shipbuilders and other scientists were much smarter and more creative than the professional staff over at the royal shipyard.

There were major differences in terms of training, experience and expertise.

From what Ves was able to surmise based on the information he had available to him, the Octaran shipbuilders excelled at working quickly and efficiently. They were good at following instructions and could easily interpret completed blueprints of existing ship classes.

The possibility of effectively incorporating more exotic or even outright alien technologies into his starships was a huge attraction point to Ves. Standard human starships were fine, but they did not bestow any substantial advantages over other rival groups.

If Ves wanted to build a fleet that was unique of his own, then he needed to take risks and be willing to experiment on starships a lot further than anyone was comfortable with. This was a lot easier to accomplish if he took possession of an experimental shipyard that was already engaging in similar activities.

The flipside was that the more experimental and research-

oriented Rubarthan shipbuilders were not too accustomed to working on tight deadlines and strict budgets. They were used to enjoying significant allowances in both, so Ves did not expect the nerds who worked over at E-66 to be as tight and disciplined in their work as the ones working for the royal shipyard.

It ultimately came down on what Ves wanted more. Did he want to field a large fleet of big, fat 3-kilometer capital ships, or would he be content with owning a smaller fleet of faster, tougher and more specialized 2.3-kilometer capital ships?

Ves found it incredibly hard to make up his mind. Both strategies had their merits.

There was a strong sense of simplicity and practicality for going with the more straightforward option. The royal shipyard would always be able to churn out sizable capital ships so long as the Octara Kingdom remained standing. When survival was the overarching priority, it helped a lot if the Larkinsons could carry more mechs, shuttles, supplies, spare materials, personnel and other goods.

However, the E-66 Experimental Yard presented Ves with riskier and more exciting options. No two starships produced from this Rubarthan facility would be identical to each other. Even if its output rate was inferior, every hull that flew out of this facility would possess a special charm that set it apart from all of the other human starships in the Red Ocean.

Ves thought back on the political gains he could make with either choice.

Gaining a lot of influence in a small first-rate state that possessed weak institutions would allow him to subsume it, especially if he managed to gain control over the Young King.

He was not sure how useful it would be to have the Octara Kingdom in his pocket. Its location was a bit too close to the frontlines than he was comfortable with. All of his schemes as well as his royal shipyard could go up in smoke if the aliens managed to make substantial gains.

Ves had less concerns about losing the E-66 Experimental Yard. The entire Rubarthan Pact was highly invested in persevering its territory. The Inferno Spear Prince was one of the superstate's most powerful ace pilots after the god pilots and could defeat damn near anything short of ancient phase whales.

While it was nice to be able to lean on the potent protection of the Rubarthans, it would be hard for him to gain more influence over them because they were already powerful in so many ways.

In short, if Ves acquired the E-66 Experimental Yard, he should not expect to make too many diplomatic and political gains.

Ves rubbed his hairless chin in thought. The entire upper hall had descended into silence as they wanted for him to make up his choice.

In an ideal situation, he would have preferred to throw this problem to his analysts and have them calculate every possible factor that they could imagine. It would be a lot easier for him to make up his choice if he had detailed data and recommendations in his hands.

The downside of conducting these transactions in an auction house of all places was that many decisions had to be made on the spot. It was part of the 'experience'.

Ves needed to make up his mind quickly. Since that was the case, he primarily needed to make a decision with his gut rather than with his mind.

His lips curled into a smile.

"Thank you for your patience. I am ready to announce my choices. Earlier, I announced slight changes in the bidding process. The three bids offered for my company shares are all compelling enough to earn serious consideration. After I have carefully weighed every choice, I have chosen to embrace two of them, thereby rejecting the remaining bid."

He turned towards Duke Elijah Von Reevus of the Octara Kingdom and made a slight bow.

"I am honored by your kingdom's trust and willingness to cooperate with me, but I am afraid that your offer does not entirely align with my priorities. I must regretfully inform you that my clan and I are unable to cooperate with the Octara Kingdom to the extent that you have proposed. My clan is unable to undertake the burden of managing a third shipyard, and a big one at that, at this time."

The duke did not display any strong reaction to this response. He merely dipped his head in understanding.

"That is regretful to hear. We are more than willing to keep our royal shipyard in reserve until your clan's conditions have improved to the point where it is able to accept our original offer. The Young King is a great admirer of your spirit, and wishes to be your friend as well as ally."

Ves smiled back. "We may just take you on your offer in a few years. It depends on how the future will unfold."

"Let us exchange contact information so that we can remain in touch."

Once Ves handled the representative of the Octara Kingdom in a gracious manner, he turned to the other representatives who looked a lot happier that their bids got accepted.

"Master Castillo, Mr. Terrier, I have decided to accept your respective bids. I have judged that the Starfarer Berth and the E-66 Experimental Yard will both serve my clan well in the coming years. I would be happy to take ownership of your shipyards in exchange for minority stakes in the LMC."

Neither the Adaptive Scale nor the Rubarthan senior aide made any attempts to pull out at this junction.

The two would have to pay a huge penalty if they placed bids that turned out to be fraudulent, but it was always possible for people to second-guess themselves.

That did not take place this time.

"The Inferno Spear Prince does not take action without fully committing to it." Robin Terrier assured Ves. "We have every intention of concluding this transaction without delay. Our staff have already begun to draft the relevant contracts under the supervision of the lawyers working for Estaban Leeds. Full operational control of the E-66 Experimental Yard can be transferred within 3 months at the earliest. It must still complete its remaining secret project and make preparations for a transfer in ownership."

"I have no objections to that. Please give my compliments to the Inferno Spear Prince for his cooperation. I would like to speak to him after this grand auction to discuss further cooperation in relation to the E-66 Experimental Yard."

"That can be arranged. The 2016th Prince has informed me that he is able to speak at a time at your convenience for the remainder of the day."

Ves nodded and turned to the Adaptive Scale.

"Master Castillo, how soon will I be able to gain effective control over the Starfarer Berth?"

"My shipyard is also working on an ongoing order, but it will only take 20 days to complete it. If you have no objections to keeping on its original staff, then the Starfarer Berth can quickly begin production of a sub-capital ship based on one of the many ship classes on archive. If you are not satisfied with our existing range of ship classes, you can task our shipwrights to design or modify other ship classes, but it may take months to complete the work depending on the nature of your requests."

That made sense. Ves was not sure whether he was willing to stick to producing standard combat carriers with little flavor to them other than their special hull plating. He wasn't sure whether he could afford to incur delays just because he insisted on pushing through changes.

He would have to make that determination later.

"I would like to know more about your staff and speak to them if possible."

"That will not be a problem." The Adaptive Scale smiled. "Do not hesitate to request technologies and features that are exclusive to the Red Association. As an honorary member as well as a tier 3 galactic citizen, you have extensive access to our exclusive ship-based solutions. If we have a capability that you currently do not have access to, then you always have the option of spending large amounts of MTA merits to unlock permissions to have Starfarer Berth include the relevant tech in your future starships."

That was actually really useful. Ves had been accumulating a lot of MTA merits, but was reluctant to spend them because he had already grown to the point where he could spend MTA credits to obtain much of what he needed.

However, Ves could not spend money to gain access to a lot of perks offered by the Red Association. He would have to make actual contributions in order to gain access to much better tech.

"Does this include access to support link technology?"

"Yes." The Adaptive Scale smiled. "It is a standard feature on many starships built for the Red Association. Do keep in mind that the modules are expensive and impose a serious burden on the power generators and energy infrastructure of any vessel. The smaller the starship, the greater the relative strain. A typical first-class combat carrier will not be able to support the operation of as many azure shield generators. First-class starships are not exempt from limitations."

That was an important factor to keep in mind. It made sense that support link technology would drain a lot of energy. It was not easy to transfer so much stuff across larger distances in space.

Ves was incredibly glad that he was finally on the cusp of building up a first-class fleet that was able to employ shield link technology. The inclusion of this high technology alone would definitely increase the survival of his people and assets to a massive degree!

Ves did not even consider first-class fleets or mech forces that lacked the benefit of shield link technology to be all that strong.

This was a clear indication of the importance of the signature works of the Web Mistress. Her efforts to improve and popularize support link technology had saved more lives and delivered more victories than almost any other singular high technology!

Chapter 5814 Sweetening the Offer

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Ves let out a deep breath.

The future of the Larkinson Clan had changed forever.

For the first time in its short history, the young organization was on track to gain near-complete possession of two different orbital shipyards!

This meant that the Larkinson Clan had taken a major step towards entering the big leagues.

It still had a long way to go before it could be regarded as a proper first-rate power.

It needed to hire a lot more first-raters.

It had to take over actual territory, and not rely solely on occupying space on other people's turf.

It also had to build up a complete and fully functioning first-class mech force.

However, all of that could be accomplished with enough time and effort.

Obtaining first-class starships and more importantly the capacity to build them was one of the most difficult goals to complete, and he had just managed to fulfill it. That was why he felt so happy at the moment.

No longer would the Larkinson Clan become bottlenecked by its inability to procure first-class starships that were powerful and resilient enough to keep up with the highest level of warfare.

So long as all of the deals went through without issue, Ves knew for certain that his clan would enjoy a smooth growth trajectory for multiple years to come. He had effectively solved the persistent challenge of procuring enough first-

class starships to prepare his clan for future struggles.

Of course, it would be even better if he could acquire a number of second-class shipyards. The Larkinson Clan maintained a strong presence in the second-class community. It would be a shame to throw away this advantage by over-

prioritizing the Premier Branch of his clan.

In any case, he could think about this later. He still had an auction to conclude. He clapped his hand to signal a resumption of the process.

"Alright. Now that I have fulfilled my main objective, I am much more open to other bids for the remaining 15 percent of shares in my mech company. There are three lots remaining that hold 5 percent of outstanding stock in the LMC each. We shall follow the regular process this time. Let the second round of bidding commence!"

Many people had been waiting for this. They previously remained silent and refrained from placing bids because their respective groups weren't willing to give up their precious shipyards for just 5 percent ownership in the LMC.

They still had a lot of other stuff that they would be glad to exchange instead.

This was the time for them to shine!

A Terran representative immediately rose from his seat.

"The Shuku Ancient Clan is willing to bid a 51 percent stake in Roteron Security, a first-class mercenary company that is able to field over 1200 first-class multipurpose mechs at maximum. Roteron Security maintains a small fleet that has recently suffered losses due to its latest mercenary contract, but is still able to convey roughly 400 first-class mechs into battle. Its remaining mechs have largely been allocated to training or lengthy defense missions."

There was no better way to bolster his security by acquiring a readily available first-class mech force.

Perhaps it might not sound like a good deal for him to trade a lot of future wealth for a first-class mech force that Ves should be able to raise himself over a span of a few years.

The question was whether he would remain safe enough for the foreseeable future.

Ves did not dare to make too many assumptions about how much of a danger he was in right now. The Bluejay Fleet was already powerful enough, and would become even more capable of fending off threats after reinforcements had arrived.

Whether that was enough for him to fend off every threat remained uncertain, but Ves did not feel inclined to accept this bid.

"Not enough." He shook his head. "51 percent ownership is nice, but that still leaves a large voice in the company."

"We are willing to raise our bid to 75 percent!"

"That sounds better, but it is barely acceptable in my opinion."

"Move over, Shuku. Your defeated and demoralized mercenaries are no good in battle at the moment." A woman interrupted. "The Nayald Ancient Clan is ready to offer an entire planet within

our territory in the Caesarion Upper Zone. We have an ample number of unoccupied planets within the region of space that we have claimed for ourselves. We are willing to grant you the privilege of choosing any planet from any star system that has not yet been developed by our ancient clan and partners. You may do as you wish and build any kind of base or settlement as you would like. We will also include discounted access to terraforming and colony development services on top of an interest-free loan of 1 trillion MTA credits to our offer."

Ves blinked. He was not sure what to make of it. He already expected that someone would offer him an entire planet, but he did not think it would happen straight away!

Still, he needed to offer a proper response to this remarkable bid.

"Rejected." Ves said. "Even if I started off as a pioneer when I entered the Red Ocean, I am not too keen on investing huge amounts of funding and resources into building an entire colony settlement from scratch. I am aware of how lucrative this can be as there are enough resource-rich planets available in the upper zones, but I have just accepted two different bids that entail taking possession of two expensive orbital shipyards. I cannot in good conscience accept any further bids that will impose even greater strain to my clan's finances. As much as I am willing to consider the offer made by the Nayald Ancient Clan, the initial burdens are too great and it will take too long to turn this colony into a profitable asset for my clan."

Ves was not sure, but he guessed that a sizable majority of colonies in the new frontier still hadn't become profitable up to this point. There was just too much stuff that people needed to build in order to establish enough housing, industry and defenses.

The higher the class, the more expensive it became!

It was really cheap to build third-class colony settlements on an unremarkable planet, which was why there were so many of them in the lower zones.

First-class colony settlements occupied the opposite end of the spectrum. Their capital requirements were so enormous that only the larger players of the old galaxy could fund them on a wider scale.

Ves had a strong suspicion that the dividends earned from Isthmus Manufacturing would not allow him to cover the enormous cost of building a proper first-class colony in an upper zone!

The only way to make this viable was to dedicate the Starfarer Berth and the E-66 Experimental Yard to commercial production and to go deep into debt.

While Ves might have considered this approach if red humanity was relatively secure, he could not go through with this course during a time of war.

"Besides, the Caesarion Upper Zone is not exactly secure from what I have heard." Ves added in order to offer more clarification. "I am well aware that the reason why this upper zone still boasts a decent amount of free real estate is because it is vulnerable to alien incursions. Unlike the risky zones Rubarthan Pact which at least enjoys the protection of two god pilots, the border regions of the Terran Alliance can only count on the Light of Sol."

A lot of Terrans did not like it when Ves openly exposed this vulnerability.

That did not make it any less true. The cold hard reality was that the Terran Alliance was arguably the weakest of the four big human powers.

The Red Association took on a lot of responsibilities, but enjoyed the services of multiple god pilots and Star Designers.

The Red Fleet fielded 8 dreadnoughts and did not have a lot of real estate to protect.

The Rubarthan Pact not only enjoyed the protection of two powerful god pilots, but also possessed a more unified defense against alien incursions.

Unlike the Terran Alliance which largely inherited the decentralized nature of the Greater Terran United Confederation, the Rubarthan Pact was supposed to be ruled by a single Star Emperor.

Just because the Rubarthans in the Red Ocean had become leaderless due to the Great Severing did not mean that their centralized institutions fell apart!

Despite the ongoing struggle between the Rubarthan princes, they weren't stupid enough to splinter their colonial superstate apart even further.

Their military mech armies still maintained their cohesion and coordinated extensively with each other in order to fulfill their common objectives.

All of this caused the Rubarthan Pact to suffer comparably less losses than the Terran Alliance up to this point.

As nice as it was for the Terrans to reject the notion of taking orders from a single tyrant, the age-old rivalries between their ancient clans had always caused them to be responsible for their own defenses.

That was good news for the ancient clans that fielded larger mech armies or occupied more secure territories.

It was a pity that the Nayald Ancient Clan was not in a secure position! Its circumstances were comparable to that of the Devos Ancient Clan, which also worried about whether a strong enemy offensive might sweep away its vulnerable star systems.

In short, taking over an entire planet to do as he wished did not sound as attractive as it appeared on the surface!

The huge interest-free loan certainly made it a lot more economical to found a decent first-class colony on an empty planet, but it was a giant decoy as far as Ves was concerned.

He had to admit that he was a little tempted to accept the offer anyway. Interest-free loans pretty much translated to free money because they implicitly did not come with the expectation of ever paying back the entire principal.

If neither Ves nor the Nayald Ancient Clan kicked up a fuss, they could just remain silent and pretend that it didn't exist in the first place. This happened so often in these kinds of circles that even he knew about these shady arrangements.

In case Ves and the Nayald Ancient Clan ever fell out and became enemies for whatever reason, he could always default on the loan, though he would incur a large hit to his reputation and credibility if he went through with this decision.

He shook his head. This was inconsequential because he did not intend to found an expensive first-class colony on a planet that was located close enough to the frontlines to become vulnerable to alien incursions.

The representative of the Nayald Ancient Clan frowned for a time, but did not sit down. She was probably communicating with a more senior Nayald leader.

"We would like to revise our offer. Our Ancient Clan maintains the prior terms, but you may gain ownership of an entire star system within our territory as long as no other party has occupied it in a permanent capacity. Furthermore, our ancient clan is also ready to offer you 1.5 trillion MTA credits in the form of an interest-free loan. This is the highest that we can go. You will also be able to call on our local patrols to pass by your star system more often for the ensuing 5 years."

These were powerful sweeteners. The Nayalds had shown a lot of sincerity by making its terms a lot more attractive.

The Terrans were really clever. They had made their bid so much more attractive that Ves could not readily dismiss it anymore.

Ves furrowed his brows.

Owning an entire star system was a welcome step up from owning a single planet.

The larger interest-free loan meant that he would not have to burden the finances of his clan to build an expensive colony.

Additional patrols from the armed forces of the Terran Alliance should hopefully reduce the risk of suffering catastrophic losses due to incidental alien raids.

In short, the cost and risks associated with building a genuine first-class colony for the Larkinson Clan had fallen within a range that Ves could tolerate!

Even if he did not have a strong need to build such a colony, Ves would be a fool to turn down such a profitable offer.

"I... find your bid acceptable."

Chapter 5815 Killing Many Birds With A Single Stone

5815 Killing Many Birds With A Single Stone

Nobody was stupid enough to throw away an astronomical sum of 1.5 trillion credits.

Even if the Nayald Ancient Clan of the Terran Alliance had a lot of spare cash in reserve, it would have been smarter to invest all of that cash into its own civilian or military infrastructure.

Why did the Nayalds insist on giving Ves a huge bag of cash and an invitation of founding an entire first-class colony within their territory?

He knew that people who operated at this exceedingly high level rarely made their intentions clear on the surface.

They also had a habit of killing a lot of birds with a single stone. The more birds they managed to fell with a single toss, the more profit they harvested at the end!

This was how winners separated themselves from the losers. The groups that tended to be more successful than others had merely gotten really good at translating modest effort into massive gains.

This was exactly the mode of operation that the Terran Ancient Clans excelled at. Many of them were so old and ancient that they managed to maintain direct continuity dating back to the Age of Stars and before!

For organizations to be able to weather so many storms, survive so many setbacks and remain at the top of their society took a lot of practice and intelligence.

It was impossible to see this invitation to colonize a star system as a simple transaction.

Ves already figured out that the main reason why the Terrans bid so aggressively this time was because they needed to counterbalance the Inferno Spear Prince's moves.

The Rubarthans had managed to sink another teeth into Ves by persuading them to exchange his company shares for the E-66 Experimental Yard.

So long as the orbital shipyard remained in Rubarthan space, Ves and his clan would always have to cooperate with the locals on a frequent basis. It was impossible for the facility to operate in complete isolation with the regional economy, after all. The frequent transactions and interactions would allow the Rubarthans to develop stronger relations with the Larkinsons over time.

The Terrans clearly recognized this ploy, and sought to exceed it by stepping up! Founding a massive colony well within the Nayald Ancient Clan's territory would practically force the Larkinsons to cooperate a lot more actively with the Terrans in the neighborhood to get stuff done!

Compared to constructing a single starship every few months, building up an entire first-class colony settlement from scratch happened on a much bigger scale!

This was a much more effective way to push the Larkinson Clan into developing more solid relationships with the Terran Alliance. It might even lead to the partial integration of the Larkinson Clan, or at least the relevant branches, into the first-rate colonial superstate!

All of these potential gains made it a lot easier to stomach the cost of 1.5 trillion MTA credits.

It was not as if the Nayald Ancient Clan gained nothing in return for this massive investment.

First, Ves suspected that the Nayalds were not operating by themselves. The entire Terran Alliance had a vested interest in pulling him closer to their orbit. It would not be surprising if the other Terran ancient clans each pitched in a few billion MTA credits to sweeten the deal to this extent.

Second, the Larkinson Clan needed to spend all of that money somewhere in order to build a colony.

The clan could not build up a complete colony from scratch. It did not have the manpower, resources and other assets required to do so. This was why the clan needed to spend that 1.5 trillion MTA credits on a lot of raw materials and high-tech construction machines in order to get started.

The Larkinsons clearly could not do all of this work alone. They would definitely have to recruit a lot of first-raters who could do many of the essential jobs required to build a complete settlement in a matter of years.

Even then, it would never be enough. It was impossible to make a colony settlement completely self-sufficient. Before the Larkinsons ever made landfall on a chosen planet, they needed to hire a lot of employees, contract a lot of construction companies and invite a lot of entrepreneurs to set up their business in a newly settled star system.

Additionally, the Larkinson Clan needed to form a huge amount of supply agreements to keep the rapidly growing colony settlements supplied of food, construction materials, advanced machinery, system-locked spaceships and more.

Where would his clan purchase all of these goods and services?

It did not make any economic sense for Ves to acquire them far away from Terran space. Not only was it prohibitively expensive to purchase a lot of bulk hardware from the Rubarthan Pact and ship them all the way to the territory claimed by the Nayald Ancient Clan, the political storm ignited by this insulting move was not worth all of the hassle!

The most logical choice for the Larkinson Clan was to spend much of the allowance it gained from this deal right inside Terran Space!

In fact, a lot of shipping costs and delays could be delayed if the Larkinsons simply purchased what they required from the businesses operating under Nayald Ancient Clan itself!

From that perspective, the 1.5 trillion MTA credit interest-free loan did not seem so absurd anymore. It was merely a convoluted way of transferring a huge pile of cash from the left hand to the right hand.

Sure, the money would follow a circuitous route, but as long as it was spent on real infrastructural development of a star system that was slated to directly contribute to the Nayald Ancient Clan's economy, the clever Terrans actually stood to earn a profit in the end!

This was especially the case when Ves added up all of the intangible gains made by the Nayalds. Befriending the Larkinsons and integrating a part of them in their community would allow them to benefit from Ves' many unique services, either directly or indirectly.

Ves narrowed his eyes.

He did not feel particularly pleased about getting taken advantage of. The main reason why he was barely able to stomach this deal was because he and his clan clearly stood to take advantage of the Nayald Ancient Clan's 'generosity'.

Ves did not feel particularly enthused about building a serious colony, but he knew that a lot of Larkinsons thought otherwise.

This may be a good way for them to do more than settle on a relatively isolated branch on a planet owned by other groups.

By having an entire star system for themselves, the Larkinsons could freely indulge in their own dreams of building their own communities.

Of course, doing so also came with the obligation to defend the colony when it came under threat.

This was a burden that Ves was least enthusiastic about. It was one of the main reasons why he always refrained from colonizing a planet in the past.

Although his stance had softened due to the Larkinson Clan's prolific habit of setting up a lot of planetary branches, the level of commitment expected from him was much greater this time.

The Caesarion Upper Zone might fall under the protection of the Terran Alliance, but the fact that it was rather close to the frontlines did not bode well for every colony.

Ves clearly sensed that one of the reasons the Nayalds wanted to pull the Larkinson Clan into their orbit so badly was to gain his friendship and benefit from his protection.

They had made a good calculation as far as he was concerned. Ves always tried to do right by his friends and allies, but the premise of that was that they showed enough sincerity towards him. It was not so easy to earn his true friendship.

Though Ves had no particular reason to trust the Nayalds, he was willing to give them a chance on account of the generous terms of their offer.

When Ves had announced his verdict, numerous people looked surprised.

It was no secret that he had tried to evade the act of founding his own colony in the past, so the unexpected break from his established pattern invalidated a lot of people's calculations.

Tough luck. Ves had already grown sick and tired of people like the Polymath who thought that they could anticipate everything by crunching a lot of numbers. He couldn't help but admit that he took a vindictive amount of satisfaction in breaking the predictions of others.

The moment people figured him out was the moment he lost his touch!

There should never be a time where Ves lost the ability to exceed or circumvent people's expectations!

"Is there anyone here that is willing to override the bid made by the Nayald Ancient Clan?" Orion Leeds spoke up when no one took the initiative to speak out anymore.

The silence was understandable. It was hard to cough up 1.5 trillion MTA credits in capital, even if much of it would gradually flow back into the regional economy.

However, only the wealthiest powers could match or exceed the benefits offered by the Nayald Ancient Clan.

Only other Terran ancient clans possessed this capacity, but they had little reason to do so. The current bid was already sufficient to pull the Larkinson Clan closer to their superstate.

There was no need for the Terrans to compete against themselves.

"Going once..."

"Going twice..."

When no one displayed any intention of supplanting the current bid, the auctioneer closed the current round.

"Sold! I congratulate the Nayald Ancient Clan for exchanging a subsidized colonization opportunity with a 5 percent stake in the Living Mech Corporation. This concludes the second round of bidding. Of the shares that Professor Larkinson has made available, 15 percent have already been committed to numerous transactions. There are only two more opportunities left to buy a stake in the future of the most prominent mech designer of his generation, so advise you to make your offers before it is too late."

A lot more people looked sharper after Orion Leeds reminded them of the stakes.

A lot of players had held back during the last round because they intelligently recognized that the Terrans demanded an opportunity to catch up to the Rubarthans.

Now that Terran Alliance satisfied its needs, it was finally time for the remaining groups to compete for the remaining two lots.

"Let the third round of bidding commence!"

A government official immediately rose to his feet. "On behalf of the Kromo Republic of the Liebhart Upper Zone, I have been empowered to convey an offer to grant the Larkinson Clan full control over an entire province of one of our newer but settled planets. This is an excellent location to build up a large industrial agglomeration that can not only satisfy the demand for goods from the Kromo Republic as well as the surrounding first-rate colonial states, but also fulfill the highly lucrative orders from the nearby Yernstall Star Node."

Ves looked impressed at this offer.

While the Kromo Republic did not offer the entire planet or star system at this time, prime real estate in the rear of human-occupied space was already worth a huge premium!

Unlike the previous offer from the Nayald Ancient Clan, the one offered by the Kromo Republic was not as risky as the native aliens would have to overrun a lot of zones before Liebhart ever became subjected to serious threats.

However, Ves was not sure whether the Larkinson Clan could still muster enough money to invest in building up a serious industrial complex in one of the most expensive regional economies in the new frontier.

The prior commitments already imposed a huge burden on the clan's finances and operations.

Still, the Larkinsons could always decide to take it slow. The rather basic offer did not mention any deadlines.

Since that was the case, there shouldn't be much harm in saying yes.

"I find your bid acceptable." Ves nodded to the representative of the Kromo Republic.

Chapter 5816 A Big Stick

5816 A Big Stick

The offer made by the Kromo Republic sounded quite attractive as it gave the Larkinson a huge fallback point.

Setting up in a star system that was located a stone's throw away from the Yernstall Central Star Node was almost as good as establishing a presence directly in one of the centers of human civilization.

Ves easily understood the overall benefits. The Kromo Republic functioned like a really high-end version of Cloudy Curtain to Yernstall which took on the role of a much wealthier version of Bentheim.

The positioning was nearly perfect. The star systems of the Kromo Republic had become prime real estate for being located in a safe territory in the rear. While it was expensive to live in the first-rate state, the cost wasn't nearly as extravagant as living in Yernstall directly!

This turned the Kromo Republic into a perfect site to set up a large number of industries to meet the voracious demand for expensive, high-margin products from Yernstall and other nearby economic engines.

The competition was high, but the huge profit potential made it worth it for the Larkinson Clan to establish a strong industrial presence in the hinterland of human space.

Ves also did not overlook the fact that setting up a lot of industrial works in the Kromo Republic could facilitate the operations of the recently acquired Starfarer Berth and vice versa. There was a natural synergy between the two that promised to strengthen the Larkinson Clan's foundation in this critically important region of space.

He smiled. Although the amount of land that the Kromo Republic was willing to bequeath to the Larkinson Clan was rather miniscule compared to the previous bid, there was no way for him to expect anything better.

The land prices in the rear of human space had skyrocketed to such an extent that Ves would not be surprised if the total value of this land concession already exceeded 1 trillion MTA credits!

The huge disparity truly put the impact of the Red War into perspective. Any territories that were close enough to frontlines became so undesirable that groups such as the Nayald Ancient Clan had to offer subsidies in order to encourage pioneers to develop their territories.

In contrast, even a small factory-sized plot in the rear of human space could already bankrupt typical pioneers many times over!

Even if Ves originally did not plan to invest in a large industrial complex in the hinterland of red humanity, he was more than willing to grasp at an easy opportunity! It would have been a lot more difficult for him and his Larkinson Clan to start a similar initiative through regular channels.

There was only one issue with the Kromo Republic's bid that he was dissatisfied with. He quickly swept his gaze across the submerged hall.

"While the representative of the Kromo Republic has made an acceptable bid, I would like to remind you all that I prefer to obtain benefits that can easily be translated into strengthening my force of arms. I have already obtained more than enough economic and industrial commitments from the previous winning bids. My concern with the current valid bid is that it is mostly an escape hatch. It provides me with a way to mitigate losses if red humanity ever suffers a major string of defeats. I am not looking for insurance. Not specifically. What I am actually looking for is a means to defeat more powerful opponents, secure greater victories and increase our survival in a dwarf galaxy that is spiraling into total war."

The expressions of a few faces grew severe after they heard that. Ves had made his demands clear, but he also reminded everyone of the value of their military assets.

It was not easy to make the decision to sacrifice their military potential in order to build up a relationship with Ves.

However, there were many ways to meet Ves' demands without sacrificing too much in return.

A female Senior Mech Designer stood up at this point.

"I am Professor Eustacia Lotte. I have been tasked with relaying an offer from the Evolution Witch of the Red Association. In exchange for shares in your mech company, she is willing to grant you an immensely large gift as well as a permanent exemption that will grant you and your clan the right to utilize it in battle under reasonable circumstances."

Everyone wondered what she was talking about. The envoy from the Transhumanist Faction did not keep everyone waiting for long and activated a projection that displayed an astonishing sight.

"That... is a juggernaut!"

Though Ves did not have frequent encounters with them, he still remembered them as if he had seen them yesterday.

Juggernauts deserved all of his attention. As slow and impractical as they may be, scaling up the size of mechs until they matched the size of sub-capital warships was a surefire way to produce a machine with an enormous amount of brute force under its command!

The one depicted in the projection seemed a little tame compared to the likes of Special Project Uranus.

The specs accompanying the awe inspiring sight of a machine that could tower over an entire city showed that the juggernaut was 'only' 350 meters tall.

Its immense mechanical construction made it clear that its designers sought to reduce a few of the well-known disadvantages of juggernauts by slimming them down.

The result was a rather skinny and less armored juggernaut that looked as if it could sprint across the ground.

Its defenses had clearly taken a backseat, which granted it a lower fault margin.

However, its superior mobility would allow it to evade significantly more attacks than usual and prevent it from becoming a sitting duck.

The lack of a flight system was a painful limitation, but that also freed up a lot of room for extra modules and weapon systems.

So long as the juggernaut fought on land, it could probably defeat larger monstrosities!

As far as tech went, the juggernaut was both powerful but also frustratingly inadequate.

Ves did not need to access any specific design files to conclude that it was an old machine.

Based on the visible tech and clear signs of wear and tear, he loosely guessed that it was constructed over 60 years ago. The Red Association definitely was not responsible because it lacked all of the exclusive high technologies that the mechers frequently utilized during that period.

However, Ves was able to determine that it was designed and built by first-raters who had too much money on their hands and not enough sense to spend it on more cost-effective solutions.

The juggernaut may be three or four mech generations out of date, but it should still be combat effective after receiving an extensive round of maintenance.

The lack of phasewater technology and hyper technology did not even bother Ves. So long as the juggernaut was combat effective, it should not be difficult to upgrade it to modern standards.

The biggest downside to this was all of the design and refit work required to turn the machine into a modern powerhouse. It would take multiple years of focused work to properly fix and upgrade a juggernaut that had likely remained in storage for over 6 decades!

"Why did the Red Association take the trouble to import an outdated juggernaut to the Red Ocean?" Ves curiously asked.

Professor Lotte twitched her lips. "I do not dare to speculate on the motives of Her Holiness. The juggernaut known as the Otolon Sprius is mainly regarded as her personal trophy and possession."

In other words, this was probably just a toy that the Evolution Witch brought to her new home in the Red Ocean along with the rest of her personal collection.

Why she decided to take possession of it and bring it over to her new galaxy was anyone's guess.

All that mattered was that the god pilot was willing to grant the Larkinson Clan an actual first-class juggernaut!

More importantly than that, the Evolution Witch was also willing to grant an exemption to the rules that prohibited private parties from fielding any war machines that vastly exceeded ordinary mechs in scale!

The former solved his short-term needs while the latter satisfied his long-term demands.

Ves could immediately ship the strangely named Otolon Sprius over to the newly acquired territorial holding in the Caesarion Upper Zone.

Once the juggernaut dropped onto the planet that the Larkinson Clan intended to colonize, the Otolon Sprius would be able to offer a huge amount of protection and deterrence while it remained stationed on the surface.

Its warship-grade cannons should easily pose a serious threat to any enemy vessels in orbit.

Not even the main cannons of the Ultimatums or the Transcendent Punishers could match the raw firepower of the juggernaut's enormous first-class weapon systems!

Once the newly established colony started to acquire enough defenses to fend off most threats on its own, Ves planned to start an extensive upgrade process that would make it multiple times deadlier than before!

Phasewater technology!

Hyper technology!

Luminar crystal technology!

E-technology!

Support link technology!

All of these technologies combined and more should turn a fairly average juggernaut for its size into a top powerhouse that should probably be able to overpower ace mechs in raw firepower!

Of course, that did not mean that the Otolon Sprius would be able to beat an actual ace mech. The latter possessed a lot of other advantages that could not be matched through mechanical means.

That was fine. Ace pilots did not grow on trees, and there were certain measures that even ace mechs were unable to match.

Size mattered.

As much as the more rational part of Ves recognized that maintaining and fielding such an enormous first-class juggernaut would impose a huge drain on the Larkinson Clan's resources, the temptation of owning a big stick in the form of a genuine juggernaut in his possession was too much for Ves to resist!

Ves instantly forgot about the Kromo Republic's offer. How could a bunch of factories in the rear of human space compete against a real juggernaut?

Even if the outdated Otalon Sprius came with a host of problems that made it difficult or impractical to pilot, there were always solutions for everything!

The mech designer in his heart strongly urged him to obtain it as soon as possible and explore it so that he could fix it up himself.

It would be an affront to his pride as a mech designer if he did not seriously work on at least one actual juggernaut in his lifetime!

His only regret was that the juggernaut was 150 meters too short to satisfy all his desires.

The Uranus had made an unforgettable impression earlier in his career. Ever since he survived its cataclysmic rampage, Ves secretly desired to design and build a superior version based on his own style!

Ves narrowed his eyes as he continually studied the projected juggernaut.

"If I accept this bid, how extensively am I allowed to modify the Otalon Sprius?" Ves inquired. "Is it possible for me to increase its length and scale?"

The Transhumanist mech designer already anticipated this question.

"The permissions extended by our Association will grant you the right to upgrade your juggernaut as you see fit. However, you are not allowed to increase its current length. You may alter its design and configuration to increase its mass and volume, but only up to 20 percent from its current parameters. Her Holiness is already stretching the rules by granting your clan an exclusive right to own and field this juggernaut in actual battle. Do not expect to receive any further allowances."

That was a clear enough answer. Ves grew a little disappointed. The Otalon Sprius was not only not that tall, but he couldn't add too much bulk. The Otalon Sprius would always remain a fairly lean machine if that was the case.

Still, having a juggernaut in his pocket was better than not having one. Ves could hardly think of better ways to persuade alien raiders to turn around and plunder another human settlement by placing a well-equipped juggernaut on defense!

Chapter 5817 Zeta-65

5817 Zeta-65

"Going once."

"Going twice."

"Sold! On behalf of Estaban Leeds, I would like to offer my sincere respect and gratitude for the Evolution Witch partake in this grand auction through her agent. Congratulations for winning the third round of bidding. Our legal team along with its counterpart from the Larkinson Clan shall endeavor to expedite the transaction and complete the extensive procedures before the end of the standard day."

Professor Eustacia Lotte responded with a mild smile. "Her Holiness does not insist on haste. It would be better to handle the legal requirements needed to complete the transaction over the course of a week. The rules and regulations surrounding the use of juggernauts in the modern era are much more demanding than in the past. There are members of the Red Association who may take issue with certain oversights and provisions that were not correctly handled."

"Understandable. I have no objections, though please keep in mind that my lawyers are already swamped with work." Ves responded.

He could barely contain his excitement!

Though a few more bidders had issued other attractive offers, they were not as powerful as the Evolution Witch!

Only a tier 1 galactic citizen could get away with bestowing an actual juggernaut of all things to Ves!

Even though the practical value of a juggernaut might not be 12:09

as much as a warship to most people, Ves did not care.

Even though the practical value of a juggernaut might not be as much as a warship to most people, Ves did not care.

It was a juggernaut!

It was a mech that was scaled up to such an exaggerated degree that it fought like a warship with limbs more than a more nimble mech, but who cared!

Ves could do so much fun stuff with a juggernaut as a platform that his mind was already brimming with ideas!

If not for the fact that he already bought the Alpha Lifeguard, he would have dedicated much of his available free time on upgrading the Otalon Sprius in the next half decade!

Of course, just because he had become unreasonably fixated on the juggernaut did not mean he lost all of his perspective.

Just like the previous deals, this one came with a lot of strings attached. The Evolution Witch had already betrayed her nature as an intelligent schemer who was not hesitant about taking advantage of his vulnerabilities.

Ves was pretty sure that the Evolution Witch wanted him to build up a lot more experience in working with juggernauts. These titanic mechanical monstrosities were so immensely big and heavy that they operated on substantially different rules than more reasonably sized machines. Theory alone was not enough for him to master all of these nuances.

What happened after Ves gained a much better understanding of how juggernauts worked?

Would the Evolution Witch issue a directive for him to design living juggernauts?

That sounded rather dangerous to Ves, especially if the ambitious god pilot insisted on implementing experimental and untested technologies in the design!

However, this was mostly a problem for the Transhumanists rather than Ves. If his work ended up causing an accident, then he would make sure that everyone knew that it was not his fault!

Ves believed that there was more behind this deal than increasing his familiarity with juggernauts, though.

The initiative shown by the god pilot had improved his impression of her and told him that he would probably cooperate more extensively with her in the long run. The two were not enemies and shared enough goals in common to foster a productive and mutually-beneficial relationship in the years to come.

He also did not forget about the Evolution Witch's secret dealings with his mother.

Cynthia refused to divulge why the god pilot sought her cooperation, but it must be a big endeavor for his mother to take it so seriously.

Ves also suspected that the transaction was a fantastic publicity stunt. Nothing grabbed people's attention more than titanic-sized mechs.

If it became known that the Evolution Witch was responsible for granting Ves and his Larkinsons the right to own and field a juggernaut, then she would enjoy a substantial boost in popularity!

A final factor that concerned Ves was why exactly the Evolution Witch bothered to add the Otalon Sprius to her private collection.

The fact that it was a trophy signified that it was not an ordinary juggernaut. God pilots possessed a lot of pride, and they would never waste their time on collecting ordinary junk.

Ves wanted to scratch his head. The Otalon Sprius did not look that special on the surface. It lacked the obvious malice radiated by the Uranus, and also did not look especially cared for, so it was clearly not a priceless treasure.

Who designed the Otalon Sprius? Who built it, and what purpose did it serve?

Ves wanted to figure out the answers to all of these questions and more. This old juggernaut was like a giant mystery box that was just waiting for an eager mech designer to uncover all of its secrets!

He inwardly shook his head. He could wonder about the juggernaut later. He still had one more round of bidding to go before he could enjoy the massive gains he made today.

"There is only a single lot left before we can conclude this grand auction." Orion Leeds spoke with a smile. "Professor Ves Larkinson has already accepted four winning bids in exchange for a sum of 20 percent of stock in his Living Mech Corporation. Only 5 percent remain in contention. This may be your final chance to invest in a mech company led by the brightest prospect in the mech industry. Make your bids. Buy his favor. Secure your future. Let the final round of bidding commence!"

Since this was everyone's last chance to forge a solid connection with Ves and his clan, the enthusiasm was much higher this time!

"We are willing to offer you three of our finest fleet carriers..."

"The Smokestack Prince is willing to bestow you with a 70 percent stake of one of his mining conglomerates..."

"My superior, a Master Mech Designer of high renown, is willing to tutor you and teach you all of his trade secrets related to the material sciences..."

"Take over our mech company. We are more than willing to fold our headquarters and factories into your Living Mech Corporation in exchange for a modest proportion of shares..."

"Commodore Pritchard Vaudival of the Second Main Fleet owns a mansion in the Yernstall Central Star Node. It is located in one of the most expensive residential districts in one of the safest star systems in human-occupied space. There is no better home for you and your family to ride out the Red War..."

Ves received a diverse range of bids, many of which would never be available on the open market.

Despite the considerable value of these unique offers, Ves found himself rejecting many of them because they did not fulfill any pressing need.

For example, Ves had little desire to secure a palatial mansion in the Yernstall Central Star Node.

While it would definitely be nice for him to live in one of the greatest centers of human civilization, Yernstall was so damn safe and prosperous that Ves feared it would cause him to grow too comfortable in his own skin.

The Red War turned into a very distant affair if Ves remained too far from the conflict. It would be so easy for him to ignore the harsh realities of the ongoing struggle.

Ves already recognized that he had started to grow out of touch with his own customers. The last thing he needed was to compound this problem and move even further away from the frontlines!

As a professional mech designer, he felt it was his duty to continue to remain a bit closer to the action.

Occasional visits to port systems where a lot of mech forces operated from would allow him to directly appraise the mechs and the circumstances surrounding the mech forces that fought the good fight.

It would be a lot harder if Ves had to make this trip when he resided in the rear of human space most of the time.

In fact, it would actually be more ideal if Ves lived in a place that was a bit closer to the frontlines... such as a new colony settlement located within the Caesarion Upper Zone.

So long as he had a fully upgraded juggernaut within the vicinity, Ves believed he could cope with the idea of living on a planet that would never be too far removed from the Red War.

"Ahem, my compliments to Commodore Vaudival, but I am afraid that I have to reject your bid."

Ves responded to the RF officer who spoke up last. "I am not lacking in homes. I am more

interested in strengthening my defenses by any means possible. No amount of homes have any value if I do not possess the means to protect them against my enemies."

It took a minute of entertaining a couple of weak and irrelevant bids before Ves finally received a more compelling offer.

A mech designer wearing the uniform of the Red Association rose up from his seat.

"Our Association has recently developed a defensive countermeasure that may be of interest in you, especially given your renewed enthusiasm for colonization. The Polymath in cooperation with the Spacelock has jointly developed an improved version of a warp interdiction module. They have named their work the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictor. It not only incorporates hyper technology to a far-reaching degree, but also benefits from a range of other technological innovations developed by the Polymath."

Ves understood the importance of warp interdictors. They ensured that hostile alien fleets did not try to escape a losing battle. They also suppressed the powerful abilities of phase leaders to an extent.

For the Polymath and the Spacelock to team up to develop a new take on warp interdictors was serious business!

As much as he disliked the ideological and political beliefs of the Polymath, he never once saw reason to disparage her technical work. Her brilliance in her main field of expertise was undeniable, and there were good reasons why everyone praised her diverse inventions.

"Please explain what distinguishes the new Zeta-65's from older warp interdictors."

"Her Excellency specifically devoted time in this project in order to arm red humanity with a more effective means of suppressing phase whales without relying on the power of high-ranking mech pilots." The mecher explained. "She has persuaded the Spacelock to contribute to this cause in exchange for giving him a small share of the profits and other rights. Together, they have applied an extensive range of improvements with the express goal of making them more effective."

The mecher activated a projection that displayed a range of different Zeta-65 variants. They mostly differed by size and power.

"The Zeta-65 models are much stronger than other warp interdictors. The largest model is rated to inhibit the warp travel of the most powerful alien warships as well as adult phase whales and greater phase lords."

In other words, only ancient phase whales possessed the raw strength to overpower the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors!

"What is the effective range?"

"It is 2000 kilometers for the largest model. The smaller ones are much less effective, but can more easily be mounted on smaller starships. Please take note that every Zeta-65 Warp Interdictor is expensive to build. They will need to integrate at least 40 kilograms of phasewater for the smallest model and 200 kilograms of phasewater for the largest model. They also require a strong dedicated power source in order to operate at their highest settings."

Ves almost choked when he heard how much phasewater it took to build these warp interdictors!

The Polymath truly went all-out in prioritizing strength over cost-effectiveness!

"I see..." Ves said. "So what does this offer entail? Will my clan gain a license to build the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors?"

The mecher shook his head. "That is not possible. The Zeta-65 can only be produced in a specialized production facility due to the use of special technologies. The Red Association is willing to grant you the unrestricted right to purchase and utilize the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors and any updates to their models."

Ves frowned at that. He could certainly recognize the value of the Zeta-65's, but he was questioning whether it was worth trading 5 percent of his company's shares just to gain purchasing rights.

What else was special about the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictor that could persuade him into accepting this bid?

Chapter 5818 The Real Functions

5818 The Real Functions

Offers rarely seem what they appeared on the surface.

Everyone who attended the grand auction was clever enough to estimate the value of their own bids.

Ves seriously doubted that the mecher who rose up from his seat and presented the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictor was stupid to misjudge its value.

This was especially the case given that he was not making this offer on behalf of himself, but rather two very powerful figures.

Ves did not have a problem with the Spacelock. The aristocratic god pilot was not exactly the most approachable sort, but he could always be counted upon to remain professional in his interactions with others.

One point in the Spacelock's favor was that he had joined most of the other god pilots in supporting the establishment of the Red Collective. Perhaps what happened a few days ago may have given him a reason to favor greater cooperation.

"If I agree to obtain the right to buy and utilize the new Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors, who will receive my company shares?" Ves asked.

"The Polymath and the Spacelock have already agreed to a profit sharing arrangement. Her Excellency is entitled 4.5 percent. His Holiness shall receive the remaining 0.5 percent." The man readily answered.

Interesting.

And concerning.

Of all of the possible shareholders that Ves sought, he did not look forward to having the Polymath looking over his shoulder.

Gaining 4.5 percent ownership in the LMC did not give her any real control, but it did give her the right to poke into the books, express her demands to the board of directors and meddle into his affairs.

How did this even work? Hadn't the Survivalists told him that the Polymath relinquished most of her power and authority in order to pay the price of her transgressions?

She shouldn't even be capable of sending an envoy to participate in this grand auction on her behalf!

It seemed the Red Association needed her so much that the Polymath had already started to loosen the restrictions imposed by her peers.

Not that it would have been all that difficult for her to do so. She was incredibly smart and understood the mentality of her fellow mechers far too well.

She may have fumbled during her failed coup, but once she operated in an environment where she was able to account for all of the variables, she truly possessed the capacity to shine.

If Ves had to make a choice, he would rather develop a closer relationship with the Spacelock.

He was much more comfortable dealing with god pilots. They all possessed a willful and maybe even tyrannical streak, but they were also honest and straightforward.

So long as he understood them well enough, he could predict their responses and behavior, thereby making it easier to stay in their good graces.

There was no way for him to do the same for Star Designers like the Polymath. They were far too smart for their own good, and they were clearly not above resorting to duplicity.

Whatever the Polymath had in store for Ves was a mystery.

Ves at least acknowledged that she wasn't an enemy, but she certainly wasn't his friend either. The blasted woman had her own agenda, and trying to guess the master plan of a Star Designer was an exercise in futility.

He inwardly shook his head. There was no point in wasting so much processing power on trying to discern the Polymath's motives.

All that mattered was that she remained cordial enough towards Ves to make greater cooperation viable.

It was better to have the Polymath on his side than not. If he had to give her 4.5 percent of his shares to make sure she retained a vested interest in his future, then so be it. At least she wouldn't be wasting too much effort on plotting his downfall.

Still, if the Polymath wanted a piece of him so badly, she needed to work for it. He was not that cheap.

"I find it strange that you or your principals are under the assumption that the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors are worth 5 percent of my mech company's shares." Ves spoke. "I have the feeling that you have yet to explain the full value of these upgraded warp interdictors. Sure, they are a lot more powerful and far-reaching than anything I have heard in the past, but they require an astronomical amount of phasewater to function so well. What else have the Polymath and the Spacelock done to make them so valuable?"

The mecher smiled at Ves. "Her Excellency expected you to ask that question. She would have been disappointed in you if you failed to inquire further. My apologies for withholding relevant information from you. I am operating under strict instructions."

That elicited a scowl from Ves.

He knew it. The Polymath was playing games with him again. She just couldn't resist the temptation to mess with him yet again.

"Get on with it, please." He said as he ceased all pretense of politeness.

The mecher was really good, but he remained completely unfazed.

"The Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors possess two applications that lesser versions of warp interdiction modules are unable to perform. The Polymath's primary objective in developing the Zeta-65 is to increase our civilization's ability to attack and raid alien space once the Deep Strike Plan has reached the next phase. The new warp interdictors can function well in a defensive capacity, but they are actually meant to be utilized in an offensive capacity."

"By helping human forces pin down alien warships and phase leaders?"

"Partially, but that is not what justifies the development of the Zeta-65. The reason why she solicited the aid of the Spacelock is because he possesses the greatest understanding of the fundamental principles of pocket spaces. With his assistance, Her Excellency succeeded in tuning her Zeta-65 for a specialized task."

Ves quickly connected the dots. "Are you saying that the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors can destabilize phase whale enclaves?"

"They can do more than that, professor. To be more precise, most if not all variations of the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictor are able to detect hidden phase whale enclaves within their effective radius. If the field projected by them encompasses the coordinates where a pocket space is 'anchored', the latter will exhibit slight signs of instability. These spatial fluctuations can easily be detected by any sensor that is sensitive to spatial activity."

He finally understood why these Zeta-65's were a big deal!

Phase whales occupied the Red Ocean for so long that they had littered phase whale enclaves in many different places.

No one knew how many of them were out there, but it had to be a large figure.

The incident that took place in Davute a few years ago clearly taught red humanity that there were a lot of hidden pocket spaces in human-occupied space.

Many of them were probably empty and abandoned, but that was not always the case.

Who knew whether these phase whale enclaves were filled with weapons of mass destruction, toxic substances, hibernating phase whales or entire armies of killer robots!

The Red Two along with many other powers invested a large amount of effort into sniffing them out and eliminating them, but they were far too difficult to find.

Not even ace pilots with their Saint Kingdoms could detect a phase whale enclave if there was no activity!

At most, a sharp ace pilot might have a slight hunch that something was off, but what then? The effort required to precisely locate a phase whale enclave and break it open was not small!

It was still possible to pin down pocket spaces on the surface of human-occupied planets and other places frequented by people.

Yet what about asteroid fields? What about obscure moons that were devoid of any resources?

The phase whales loved to play hide and seek. They had an annoying habit of creating phase whale enclaves in the strangest of places, up to anchoring them right next to a blazing star!

While the major powers most definitely possessed the means to detect and breach these pocket spaces, the biggest problem was that there were too many of them. This was a numbers game, so it was impractical to rely on god pilots and other exotic measures to solve this problem.

From what he could gather, the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictor neatly solved this problem because it was reliable tech that could be mass produced.

Sure, the amount of phasewater required to build them was a bit prohibitive, but that would not stop the likes of the mechers and the Rubarthans from mass producing these fancy new modules and making full use of their main function!

"What else can these Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors do?" Ves pressed on with another question. "Can they actually destroy a pocket space?"

"Not unless the pocket space in question has already deteriorated to a point where it is only a handful steps away from collapsing." The mecher shook his head. "The phase whales are known to be thorough in their work. Their pocket spaces are highly robust. We suspect they put in great effort into making their spaces enduring because they want to rely on their work for thousands if not millions of years without any concerns about stability. The fact that the phase whales often reside in their own pocket spaces gives them a strong incentive to strengthen their stability."

That made sense.

"So there is no way for the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors to break a pocket space no matter how many of them are active?"

"That is not an absolute, professor. If you can truly bring an excessive number of Zeta-65's to bear on a single pocket space at closer ranges, then it is theoretically possible to destabilize a pocket space to the point where it 'unfolds' back into realspace, thereby violently disorging everything that used to be hidden out of sight. However, it is not necessary to go this far unless you wish to eliminate a potential security risk."

"What do you mean by that?" Ves raised his eyebrow.

"As long as the Zeta-65's effect is strong enough, it can forcibly induce a phase whale enclave to open a passage. This will allow anyone outside to send in their forces. It will also allow anyone hidden inside to exit the pocket space. This is the second main function of the new warp interdictors. We expect that many important star systems held by the aliens may have hidden their most important facilities inside pocket spaces created by phase whales many years ago. We cannot effectively raid alien planets and plunder much of their phasewater reserves if we do not have an effective means of detecting and breaching these dimensional bunkers."

It was only now that Ves understood the true significance of the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors!

He no longer believed it was a bad decision to accept this bid, but that was contingent on one more factor.

"How do the Polymath and the Spacelock plan to distribute their Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors?"

"They shall remain exclusive to the Red Association and the Rubarthan Pact for a duration of at least 10 years. Their availability will remain limited and only a select group of subjects that have been handpicked by the Polymath and the Spacelock will have access to them. If you accept this transaction, you will become one of the few who have earned this privilege. After a decade has passed, the initial versions of the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors will become more widely available, but it will cost third parties at least double the amount of phasewater needed to construct them to obtain their own copies. You and the other early adopters will not only have access to updated models, but can continue to purchase them from us without needing to pay any premium on phasewater."

That actually sounded pretty reasonable so long as the Polymath and the Spacelock maintained their monopoly on pocket space busting.

While Ves was not sure whether that would remain the case in the long-term, he was inclined to believe in this ploy.

Chapter 5819 The End of the Grand Auction

5819 The End of the Grand Auction

Ves saw no reason to refuse the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors.

Their real functions were just too good to pass up. In his previous expeditions, Ves and his expeditionary fleet made exciting discoveries.

Every hidden phase whale enclave was a potential treasure vault. Those long-lived aliens tended to accrue a lot of good stuff, and they always needed a good place to stash their hoard.

However, it was difficult for Ves to judge whether the potential gains his clan could make by utilizing the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors could surpass the value of 5 percent of his company's shares.

Ves only had a limited amount of shares that he could afford to trade away like this. He needed to make every transaction count, and that made him hesitant on whether he should embrace this offer.

If his forces encountered a lot of bad luck and traveled to star systems that were devoid of phase whale enclaves, then the Zeta-65's clearly wouldn't be able to earn a satisfactory return on investment.

Not that it would deter him. The potential gains were just too great for him to pass off the opportunity to gain early access to this exclusive tech.

The fact that accepting this deal would also save him a lot of phasewater by skipping the usual rule concerning the procurement of phasewater technology also made a difference.

Ves hated the industry standard of charging double the amount of phasewater needed to construct anything transphasic. The main reason why so many companies got away with this exploitative rule was because no one among the competition wanted to start a price war.

That would mean that all of the regular clients who wanted to get their hands on the Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors would have to pay a massive price once they became available a decade later.

The largest and most powerful model was so resource-

intensive that it took 200 kilograms of phasewater just to produce a single copy!

Ves would rather command Lucky to conduct a manual carpet search rather than give the mechers 200 kilograms of phasewater for free!

After thinking over this decision a bit further, he eventually decided that it was worth it for him to make this gamble.

He had more confidence in his ability to leverage the Zeta-65's than anyone else. He had plenty of bags in his tricks that could synergize with these modules.

"I find your bid acceptable." He told the mechers who conveyed the Polymath's offer. "If there is no one else who can exceed your offer, then I would be happy to conclude this transaction."

The bidding continued, but it was clear that the momentum had turned against them. There were not many people who possessed the ability or the willingness to exceed an offer made by a Star Designer.

It did not make everyone give up. There were still hopefuls who wanted to secure their last chance of gaining a real stake in Ves' mech company.

It was a pity that none of the offers sounded particularly attractive to him. He had no real need for any further real estate. A couple of fleet carriers or other combat assets sounded largely redundant to him as his clan had just gained the capacity to produce its own starships!

Sure, it would take a lot of time and an even greater amount of funding to build up a sizable first-class fleet, but Ves would rather wait than get ripped off. His company's shares were worth way more than just a couple of fleet carriers.

Seeing that no one managed to come up with bids that gained greater appreciation from Ves, Orion Leeds finally ended the bidding.

"Sold! The gracious Polymath and the honorable Space Lock have become the latest shareholders of the Living Mech Corporation in exchange for granting the Larkinson Clan early access to their exclusive Zeta-65 Warp Interdictors. This concludes the final round of bidding and signifies the end of our grand auction. Estaban Leeds thanks you for your participation, and hope to see you again in our next scheduled auctions."

While the auctioneer wrapped up the event, Ves floated back to his private box. The gem cat hanging on his shoulder showed greater signs of impatience.

"Meow! Meow!"

"Be patient, Lucky! I know that the last phase of the grand auction dragged out a bit, but I haven't forgotten about your prize. It won't take long before we can finalize the easiest transactions."

When Ves returned to his friends and advisors, everyone looked rather impressed.

"The present estimated value of your Living Mech Corporation is much lower than the sum of offers you have received for the shares that you have exchanged." Jovy stated first. "The fact that you have made the likes of the Evolution Witch and the Polymath offer concessions of greater value is a testament of your present and future worth. Word about this grand auction will spread out."

Those with the right connections will hear that multiple tier 1 galactic citizens have proactively decided to invest in you because they believe in your work."

Ves did not know how to feel about that.

On the one hand, borrowing the reputation of the Evolution Witch and the Polymath was a fantastic way to boost his reputation and credibility. The more tier 1 galactic citizens vouched for him, the easier it became for him to make his voice heard.

On the other hand, neither of these two women were on his side. They all possessed their own schemes and agendas, and they had both demonstrated a capacity to prioritize their own interests above all other concerns

"I appreciate their support." Ves politely spoke. "I hope that having them as my shareholders will deter other people from pulling the same kind of stunts as my previous adversaries."

He should have done this sooner. Ves figured that people such as Admiral Amelie Jameson never would have bent or broken several taboos if several powerful Star Designers and god pilots partially owned the company that made his living mechs.

Perhaps the public inquiry would have never taken place to begin with. These powerful figures usually preferred to settle their differences behind closed doors.

"Take good care of the Otalon Sprius." Vector Loban cautioned Ves. "As a juggernaut that the Evolution Witch deemed acceptable enough to become her trophy, it must hold both practical and sentimental value. Just because Her Holiness has transferred ownership to you does not necessarily mean she will stop paying attention to it. You can technically do what you want with your new juggernaut, but if you ruin it or abuse its power in unacceptable ways, she may feel compelled to take action."

That was an unwelcome message. Ves felt considerably less pleased about this deal than before. He had a lot of plans in mind for the Otalon Sprius. Many of them were risky, so he could not guarantee that they would work out as he envisioned.

"Understood. Am I at least allowed to rename the juggernaut? Otalon Sprius doesn't exactly roll off the tongue. I don't even know what it means."

"It is named after a deceased individual."

"Oh. That is clarifying. Anyway, once I have reinvented my new juggernaut, its overall design and configuration will definitely diverge from its current condition. I will do my best to replace the touch of its original makers with my own. That should be more than enough justification for me to bestow it with a new name. Don't you agree?"

Vector did not look so certain. "It is best to ask for input from the Evolution Witch before you go through with this decision."

That generated a spike of annoyance from Ves.

"She is not my mother! A deal is a deal. The juggernaut is mine, so I can do what I want with it as far as I am concerned. I am definitely going to apply my own style to it. Whoever designed this juggernaut is pretty decent, but his aesthetic style is a bit too plain. A juggernaut is a monster of a machine. It should look the part."

The Uranus looked exactly as intimidating as it behaved. Now that was a true juggernaut.

"I am happy that you have seen fit to strengthen your cooperation with the Rubarthan Pact." Kelsey Ampatoch mentioned. "I may not be a Rubarthan citizen much longer, but that does not mean that I dislike my former state. Obtaining a shipyard that is located in the heart of the Inferno Spear Principality will strengthen your ties with Prince Antonius. It may cause you to become more embroiled in the current succession crisis, but this will grant greater benefits if he has defeated the other princes."

"I do not intend to meddle in this silly battle for the throne." Ves disapprovingly said. "I am too busy to waste my time on this. Whoever ascends the throne is unlikely to sever cooperation with me, especially given that I am bound to become an instrumental part of the Red Collective."

That did not mean that there were no consequences. The Smokestack prince and the Inferno Spear Prince were so radically different that they had very different plans in mind!

"You may be right." Kelsey said in realization. "Although small, the last round of bidding bestows 0.5 percent of your mech company to the Spacelock. Do you understand what this means? The Smokestack Prince or anyone else who finally ascends to the throne will not dare to retaliate against you for failing to lend your support. You have already received the favor of the Destroyer of Worlds. Combined with this related development, you can already be regarded as an honorary Rubarthan! No, it can easily be argued that you are a Rubarthan in heart and soul due to your patrilineal ancestry!"

Ves almost sputtered when he heard that!

"Let's not go too far, Kelsey! When my ancestor left the New Rubarth Empire a long time ago, he and his family had nothing to do with his home state anymore. Don't forget that I have forged a lot of deals with the Terrans. I don't want to spoil these arrangements by joining the Rubarthan Pact."

"Ah, forgive me then. The Larkinson Clan does indeed benefit from maintaining a neutral position. However, that will only remain the case if a sufficient number of allies are willing to protect you and guarantee your independence. It is good that you count on the Rubarthans to come to your aid."

Ves wondered what all of the new shareholders intended to do with their latest gains.

Would they try to change the way the Living Mech Corporation operated, or would they just sit back and allow their influence to fade to the background?

There was not much that an individual shareholder could do, but they would gain significantly more sway if they set aside their differences and formed a united block.

Fortunately, Ves already accounted for this possibility. There were good reasons why Ves only traded away 25 percent of his mech company at most. He still retained an absolute majority of shares in the LMC, which meant he could still operate it like the company was his own fief.

The change that worried him the most was that all of the laws and regulations imposed by the Red Association granted several rights and privileges to the new shareholders.

Ves would just have to deal with this complication while also making sure to take advantage of his new ties to these powerful groups and figures.

All in all, Ves fulfilled all of his objectives and more today. The grand auction had been a huge success to him. All he needed to do after this was to digest his enormous gains.

It would take years if not decades for him to upgrade the Otalus Sprius and build up a first-class colony from scratch, but Ves could afford the wait.

The only concern right now was that all of these activities required enormous sums of money.

Short of taking a huge amount of loans, Ves needed to step up on his studies and finally begin to design his own first-class mechs.

Chapter 5820 Preferred Planets

5820 Preferred Planets

Ves had to remain in the auction house for the rest of the day in order to handle and supervise the massive transactions.

The legal department of the Larkinson Clan had to work at full capacity in order to tackle the enormous workload, and even then it was not enough. The Larkinsons had to enlist the aid of additional law firms in order to comply with all of the laws of different states and organizations.

The work was incredibly tedious, but necessary. Everything had to be exactly correct in order to transfer ownership of billions if not trillions of MTA credits worth of stuff. No one involved wanted to suffer unexpected losses or get dragged into disputes due to ambiguity and mistakes.

Fortunately, a lot of the first-class legal experts were fully up to the task. The lawyers in the employ of Estaban Leeds had facilitated a lot of similar transactions in the past, so they were able to speed up the process by a huge extent.

Of course, not all of the deals could be closed so quickly. Multiple parties had to file a lot of paperwork at many different government institutions. It could take days if not weeks for these offices to process everything and give out their seal of approval.

There were instances where these administrative steps could not be sped up no matter the circumstances.

There were also cases where people were willing to set aside every priority and complete a week's worth of paperwork in a couple of hours just because a god pilot or Star Designer was involved!

Ves grew incredibly envious whenever that happened. He wanted to receive this kind of treatment as well one day.

In any case, Ves settled in for a long day.

His cat on the other hand grew ecstatic now that he could finally sink his teeth into a bar of ATC-A exotic alloy!

Since Ves only paid the equivalent of 10 kilograms of phasewater for this bar of metal, it only took a short amount of time for Estaban Leeds to hand it over to his possession.

"Meow meow meow!"

"Go ahead, Lucky. Consider it your birthday present!"

"Meeeeeow!"

Ves found it amusing how Lucky turned from a cute archemetal cat into a voracious metal devourer.

The cat utilized his phasing power to pass through the transparent composite container that protected the ATC-A alloy and kept it dry from the submerged environment.

Once inside, Lucky threw aside all propriety and began to feast on the alloy with great satisfaction.

After the first few bites, the gem cat slowed down his pace and actually attempted to savor the novel flavor of this brand- new alloy.

Ves observed his mechanical pet carefully, but failed to discern any useful clues. The Resonance Smith's work promised to pass through transphasic energy shields without needing to break them or figure out their pattern, but it was still a work-in-progress.

Whatever it did to Lucky, the new alloy was evidently not significant enough to trigger a visual transformation.

The only way for Ves to find out if Lucky became a lot better at bypassing strong energy shields was to test his capabilities in practice.

"Eat well. You're going to do a lot of work for me after you are done."

"Meow."

As Ves spent hours on handling all of the necessary steps, of which far too many required his signature for one asinine reason or another, he occasionally entered into interesting discussions with the representatives of the counterparties.

For example, the envoy of the Nayald Ancient Clan gave Ves a few tips on which star systems he should choose to plant his flag.

"As agreed, it is fully within your right to claim any star system that is not already permanently settled." The Terran lady reminded him. "However, I must inform you that all of the port systems as well as any other star systems with significant deposits of phasewater are already occupied. That still leaves many fairly resource-rich star systems in the Caesarion Upper Zone, but it will take considerable time and effort to build up large-scale mining operations. The prevalence of high-grade exotics and more recently hypers has generated hazardous environments that are unsuitable for human habitation. I fear that much of your initial capital must be spent on pacifying the planet."

That caused Ves to frown.

"How expensive can this get?"

"It is more efficient in the long term to terraform and pacify a hazardous planet as a whole. However, this can not only take years, but also impose a far greater upfront cost. You can choose to set aside terraforming and only do the minimum required to pacify a dangerous landmass or region in order to build a colony settlement as quickly as possible. This will allow you to preserve the original ecosystem and hostile environment as much as possible, but it will heavily limit the scope of human development on the surface. You will need to be ready to weigh your decisions and adopt the appropriate strategy."

There was not one correct choice. Terraforming an entire environment was usually the best choice to convert lifeless rocks into livable planets.

Preserving existing alien environments usually took place if there was a lot of value to doing so. This often happened with untamed planets whose surface was filled with unique exobeasts and exoplants.

When Ves thought about what kind of planet he wanted his Larkinson Clan to settle upon, he immediately developed a clear preference towards untamed planets.

His visit to Ocanon VI had renewed his appreciation and enthusiasm for planets that were filled with alien organisms.

However, Ves did not ignore the fact that dangerous species that grew up in environments that were abundant in high-

quality materials usually evolved into absurdly strong creatures!

It might not be viable to ask his clan to colonize a planet that was already filled with bloodthirsty monsters that could overpower typical second-class mechs!

"Are there any untamed planets available within the territory of the Nayald Ancient Clan?" Ves inquired.

"Our survey vessels have discovered several ones." The woman replied. "We have not scouted them for an extended period of time, so our observations are already out of date. We can still give you the relevant reports in order to give you an impression. We do not advise you to found your colony on any of them, though. The risk that your colony will continually provoke attacks from the local exofauna is too great."

"I'm counting on it." Ves grinned. "That is not to say that I am willing to allow all of the exobeasts to roam free. Who knows how many of them will evolve into mutated beasts and calamity beasts if we don't do anything to control their population. However, I have always been a big believer in growth through shared combat experiences. No amount of simulation training can ever beat actual battle. I think I can provide my mech pilots with the perfect training by subjecting them to battle against all manner of exobeasts and mutated beasts."

The Nayalder furrowed her brows in thought. "If you insist on colonizing an untamed planet for the express purpose of supplying your clansmen with an unending supply of dangerous sparring partners and hunting targets, then you may consider the Nero Alabaster System."

A projection appeared that displayed an old snapshot of the star system.

It was a binary star system centered around the dance between a yellow dwarf star and a white dwarf star.

The white dwarf was one of the odder stars in the cosmos. It was not a real star per se, just the core of one that had already 'died'.

Despite being considered a star, a white dwarf did not actually undergo any significant fusion processes and therefore did not emit heat or light.

It was just a piece of giant stellar junk that gradually cooled over many eons until it theoretically turned into a black dwarf.

It was highly unusual for an old white dwarf to occupy the same system as a much younger yellow dwarf.

This signified that one of them had randomly drifted in the other's neighborhood and got captured without somehow merging with each other.

The result was a typical yellow dwarf system that was plagued by more violent and complex gravitic tides.

The lack of any other activity from a 'dead' white dwarf likely prevented the fourth planet from the star system from becoming devoid of life.

"Zoom in on Nero Alabaster IV." Ves commanded.

There were 13 planets in the star system in total. Each of them promised to offer valuable resources, but Ves did not really care about them unless they contained phasewater.

Since the Terrans had already claimed all of the star systems where phasewater was ripe for the picking, Ves did not hold any expectations about finding any hidden stashes.

Perhaps the Terran surveyors hadn't been through enough, or perhaps there were still hidden phase whale enclaves that just happened to store thousands of kilograms of phasewater, but Ves did not obsess over these kinds of gains.

He cared a lot more about the wildlife of an untamed planet.

"Nero Alabaster IV is not the stablest of planets." The Nayalder admitted. "It has a 35.3 degree axial tilt, which means that its seasons are more extreme. Many exobeasts and exoplants have evolved to cope with radical changes in temperature and weather phenomena. Aside from that, the planet is orbited by three fairly large moons, each of which induce tidal phenomena that are very difficult for the local wildlife to predict in advance. High tides can flood entire marshes while entire sea regions can become almost dry for a few hours. Combined with interactions between multiple high-grade exotics with high reactivity properties, it is a miracle that life has managed to evolve on this planet at all. Every organism that has emerged from this globe is much more resilient than usual."

The more he learned about the planet, the more he felt attracted to it. That did not mean he refused to consider other possible candidates, but he couldn't help but feel that the Nayalder had intelligently picked a star system that just happened to fulfill his strongest desires.

"What are the dominant organisms on this planet?" Ves asked.

"That depends on your definition of dominant. The most prevalent large terrestrial exobeast species that can be found in a wide variety of landmasses is the zurian. It is a species of quadruped scaled reptiles that are noteworthy for their strong mineral-rich scales. They have proven to be highly resilient towards environmental changes as their scales can effectively protect them against shifts in temperature and radiation. On top of that, the scales of older zurians have proven to be highly effective against physical and energy damage. The zurians are communal in nature, so they have a habit of fighting against each other to establish dominance in their hierarchies."

All of that sounded good. The zurians were a little bit smaller than Ves liked, but he could still imagine them giving a good fight against mechs, especially if they had the advantage of numbers.

Harvesting their scales should also yield valuable materials that would make the hunts worthwhile.

"Interesting. Interesting. I will keep an eye on this planet. Can the Nayald Ancient Clan send its surveyors to Nero Alabaster and other star systems with untamed planets? I would like to obtain

more up-to-data on how their ecosystems have adapted to the Age of Dawn. I am not sure if Nero Alabaster IV is still suitable for limited colonization. It is best to make sure."

"We can do that." The female Terran readily said. "May I interest you in other star systems? There are many other locations that possess resources that are in moderate demand in the Terran Alliance. They may not have any planets that bear any existing life, but that is what terraforming is for. You can even transplant zurians and other exobeasts to a planet of your choice. There is no need for you to limit yourself to the circumstances set by nature."