

The Mech 5821

Chapter 5821 Flapping Limbs

5821 Flapping Limbs

His visit to Ector V had come to an end.

When Ves looked back at the aquatic-themed city, he certainly did not intend to go back anytime soon.

A lot of stuff had happened while he stayed on the planet. While the sum of it all resulted in a clear net positive gain to his interests, Ves actually preferred it if he hadn't been put on the spot.

Was the Red Collective necessary? Yes.

Did he have to be the one to stick his neck out and propose its formation? No.

Ves missed the days where he could still somewhat fly under the radar. All of the fame he earned from designing excellent second-class mechs never generated much of a storm in the past because all of the high-and-mighty mechers and fleters never paid that much attention to space peasants in the first place.

It was only after the Survivalists forced him to become a first-

rater and adopt a high-profile development strategy that he turned into the most famous and notorious mech designer of his generation.

Even now, Ves constantly felt as if there was a target on his back. The longer he stayed in a city filled with lots of people and mechs that were outside of his control, the greater the chance that stuff could go wrong.

Perhaps that was partially the reason why he jumped at the opportunity to colonize a planet. If the Larkinsons had a star system of their own, then they could control the environment a lot better.

The best solution was to simply go back to living inside a starship like he did in the past. There were even more reasons for him to stay mobile than before.

Now that he had gained two immensely valuable orbital shipyards, his dreams of forming a first-class expeditionary fleet were no longer fantasies anymore!

Together with the captured archship, the upgradeable Spirit of Bentheim and the fleet carrier pledged by the Eternal Vulcan Empire, Ves would finally gain a measure of true safety and independence in a dwarf galaxy besieged by alien foes.

"Goodbye Ector V."

"Meow!"

Lucky appeared to be in a much better mood. Eating a chunk of ATC-A alloy satisfied him more than eating literal tons of other exotics. It was clear that he was becoming a lot pickier with his meals.

Ves reached out and patted his cat on the head.

"I'm glad you enjoyed your last feast, but don't expect to obtain similar stuff anytime soon. I paid 10 kilograms of phasewater to get my hands on that prototype alloy. I hope that you have truly improved your ability to phase through energy shields."

"Meow meow meow!"

"Oh, really? Let's put that to the test, shall we?"

He utilized his phase lord powers to project a simple spatial barrier in front of him. Although its principles were different from a transphasic energy shield, there were enough similarities to serve as a viable test case.

"Meow." Lucky arrogantly lifted his head before he tried to phase through the spatial barrier.

The good news was that he did not crash into the spatial barrier.

The bad news was that he somehow got stuck midway!

"Meeeeooooooooow!"

The cat looked incredibly pathetic as he somehow got tangled up between folded dimensions to the point where he couldn't squirm his way out anymore!

His limbs ineffectually slapped around as if that would help him gain more purchase.

"It looks like your new ability either needs a lot more work, or you haven't eaten enough ATC-A to upgrade your entire body."

"Meeeeeeeeow!"

Ves reduced the strength of his spatial barrier until Lucky finally managed to push his body all the way through.

The gem cat looked both defiant and embarrassed. His tail squirmed as if he would rather never boast about his new abilities in the first place.

"What do you have to say for yourself?"

"Meow meow meow. Meow meow meow!"

"Uh huh. I will test you again in a month. If you claim to be able to fully master your new capabilities by then, then you should be able to pass through my spatial barrier. I am not sure how strong it is, but I am sure that it is at least comparable to a segmented transphasic energy shield of a typical alien warship."

If Lucky couldn't get past his spatial barrier, then he sure as hell wouldn't be able to infiltrate an alien warship that had fully activated her energy shields!

An alert sounded. Ves braced his body even though it was not necessary and soon found himself and his cat teleported to the flagship of the Bluejay Fleet.

"Welcome back to the Tarrasque." Jovy Armalon greeted. "We are ready to begin our departure."

"How are the new reinforcements?"

"They have joined up with our fleet without issue. Three additional light cruisers will give us more punch while also allowing us to scout further. The two combat carriers are very welcome. Each of

them carry 20 first-class multipurpose mechs based on combat-tested models that are renowned for their versatility and customizability. Each of them are capable of equipping a wide variety of loadouts that allows them to excel in different missions."

"I see."

Ves was familiar with the concept as his Bright Warriors and his Fey Fianna adopted similar concepts.

The new RA mechs probably did not excel in any mission, but their amazing versatility meant that they could fare well against any enemy, regardless of whether they were human mechs, alien warships or phase whales.

"I'd like to take a look at them myself if possible." He requested. "I have no intention of spoiling the work of other mech designers. I just want to get a better understanding of how the Red Association approaches its own mechs. I also want to know what sort of machines I am entrusting my life to. Are they equipped with support link technology?"

Jovy smiled and nodded. "We wouldn't dare to skimp on that. The new combat carriers are designed around this high technology. It is one of several major reasons why their mech capacity is so small. First-class mech combat has always revolved around quality over quantity."

The two continued to chat as they made their way out of the teleportation chamber. Lucky scurried off to do who knew what. Nobody was concerned about his activities as he knew better than to take a bite out of the heavy cruiser's superdrive.

Instead of visiting the lounge, Ves and Jovy entered a large office space where dozens of staffers working for the Larkinson Clan and the Red Association threw themselves into their work.

The latest acquisitions came with so much paperwork that it would take months to handle all of the administration. Not just any ordinary person could set up and Operate an orbital shipyard in the Yernstall Star Node and the middle of the Inferno Spear Principality.

Ves did not worry about whether anything would happen that would abort the transactions. A deal was a deal, and there were too many powerful individuals and groups that would take offense if anything went wrong.

"Hello, sir."

"Good morning, professor."

Ves greeted his staffers and briefly inspected their progress. He did not understand all of the administrative requirements that he and his clan suddenly had to meet in order to operate a shipyard and such, but it was not necessary for him to delve into the minutiae.

It was enough for him to know that his people had a firm grip on the situation.

"Sir, one of the secretaries working for the Evolution Witch is asking us where you want to ship the Otalon Sprius. Should we request the mechers to withhold it until we have founded a new colony, or should we tell them to transfer the juggernaut to Diandi Base on New Constantinople VIII?"

That was a difficult question. A part of Ves wanted to get his hands on the Otalon Sprius right away.

However, doing so would not only add a huge distraction in a period where he was already swamped with work, but also make his ostentatious juggernaut vulnerable to theft and sabotage.

"Please tell the secretary that we are not in a hurry to take the Otolon Sprius in our possession." Ves quickly decided. "

He understood his tendencies well enough to know that he wouldn't be able to resist the urge to obsess over the Otolon Sprius. It was a first-class juggernaut that was packed with outdated but still powerful technologies!

He had a powerful hunch that once he sank his teeth into it, he would become beset by so much inspiration that he would not hesitate to set aside all of his other priorities until he reshaped the entire juggernaut into a living monstrosity!

While Ves had plenty of reasons to look forward to this fantastic outcome, this was not the right time for him to tackle such an immense project.

His comprehension of first-class mech design was not yet up to standard, and he needed to clear up his schedule before he could fully devote himself to this ambitious endeavor.

There was no pressing need for a juggernaut at the moment. The Otolon Sprius was a land monster, so it was only really useful once the Larkinson Clan finally built a colony settlement in the Caesarion Upper Zone.

"Wait." Ves suddenly paused.

Who said that juggernauts were only useful when deployed on land?

While juggernauts were typically associated with surface combat as warships largely outclassed them in space combat, that did not make the humanoid titans useless in vacuum conditions.

The new technologies that came out in the last few mech generations had the potential to radically boost their combat effectiveness in space!

A full-sized superdrive not only granted them the ability to speed up their infamously slow traversal in space by generating a warp bubble, but also granted them the ability to travel to other star systems without needing to get carried around by a cargo hauler.

Azure energy shield generators massively increased the survivability of juggernauts that had little hope of evading attacks by utilizing their limbs.

Transphasic hyper weapon systems increased their lethality by so much that the upgraded Otolon Sprius could probably crush any alien sub-capital ship by itself.

All of this and more promised to turn a juggernaut that was originally designed to operate exclusively on land into a much more fearsome space monstrosity!

Ves clamped down on all of the wild ideas that sprung from his imagination.

This was not the time for him to indulge in his juggernaut fantasies!

He shook his head to clear his mind and tried his best to focus on other matters.

"Is the fleet ready to traverse the route that I have specified?"

"Every ship is ready to leave the Ector System and head closer to the frontlines." Jovy said but soon began to frown. "Is it truly necessary for you to venture closer to the border regions? We may not arrive at the hotspots, but we will make ourselves much more vulnerable to ambushes, especially if our route has been leaked to malicious parties."

Ves smirked. "Our enemies will regret it. Relax. I have a deal with the Red Fleet. This is important for both of us. I am not allowed to tell you what is going on, but I need to reach the destination quickly in order to conclude my deal with the fleters."

The Survivalist mech designer stared at Ves for a moment before reluctantly nodding.

"We are not your parents, so we will trust you to know what you are doing. The primary mission of the Bluejay Fleet is to protect you against any threats, so if the fleters attempt to make a move on you, our troops will do their duty without question. I only hope that your actions do not lead to an outcome where we are forced to send them to their deaths."

Ves shook his head. "Don't bother. None of your mechs and warships can make a difference at the place where we are going. Not that anything will ever happen. I'm too important to the fleters nowadays. This trip will prove my worth."

Chapter 5822 The Limitations of Destroyer Weapons

5822 The Limitations of Destroyer Weapons

As the Bluejay Fleet departed from the Ector System and traveled in the direction of the border regions, Ves split his time between his routine work and his administrative duties.

It was times like these when he missed having Gavin at his side.

His capable assistant was just about to complete a life changing operation that would make him better than ever, but the downtime still brought a lot of inconvenience to Ves.

No matter. There were other assistants who stepped into Gavin's role, and Ves could always do stuff himself.

He still found himself with less free time than he was comfortable with. He had reduced his daily sleeping hours in order to get more work done. He was not sure how long he could sustain this pattern, but his mind, spirit and physique had become so powerful that he had yet to experience any significant consequences.

In between the periods where he performed essential work, Ves made sure to spend a bit of time inspecting his new acquisitions.

For example, Ves could only resist the temptation to stay away from one of the cargo bays of the Tarrasque for an entire day before he made his way over!

Jovy, Vector and Kelsey all accompanied him this time. It did not surprise Ves at all that his fellow mech designers failed to resist the temptation.

"Did you already take a look at it?" Ves asked.

"No. It is your possession. It would not be right for us to peek at it first."

When the hatch slid open, Ves and his small procession entered a cargo bay that had clearly been emptied of all other spare cargo.

What remained was a singular long and thin armored crate. The black construct occupied the center of the compartment and seemed to dominate the entire space despite the lack of activity.

When the group moved closer to the center, they met up with a Terran engineer who wore the badge of the Dermont Ancient Clan on his uniform.

"Professor Larkinson." The engineer made a formal bow while holding a secure datapad. "I expected you to come sooner. Are you here to inspect your new mech weapon?"

"I am. Is it safe to crack open this container and take a look at the tier 3 Destroyer spear?"

"That is highly inadvisable." The Dermont immediately shot down that idea. "It is clear that you still lack a proper understanding of Destroyer weapons and especially those of the higher tiers. A tier 3 Destroyer weapon is a force of destruction that has been compressed in the form of a weapon. Its concentration of Destroyer particles is so high that it has a compulsive need to destroy everything around it. If not for the fact that we have enclosed it in a specialized Destroyer container that is expressly designed to suppress its activity, it would have already eaten its way through the deck."

Ves grew a little alarmed!

"I have heard that Destroyer weapons can destroy stuff endlessly without being actively powered, but this is ridiculous!"

"There is no need for you to feel concerned as long as it is properly stored. The Destroyer container is not cheap, and it can only resist the weapon's activity up to a limit, but it can safely contain the spear as long as it is not being actively stimulated."

"How?"

"The primary function of the Destroyer container is not to resist the damage it can inflict. It is primarily designed to 'blind' the concentrated Destroyer particles so that they are under the impression that they are surrounded by empty vacuum. These particles have an overriding urge to destroy matter. Fooling them into thinking that there is nothing for them to work on is a good way to reduce their activity to a state of relative dormancy."

That caused Ves to look both impressed and puzzled.

"You are talking about Destroyer particles as if they are alive."

"They are not alive." The Terran engineer emphatically stated. "The simplest analogy that I can use is a virus. Destroyer particles exhibit a handful of traits that can also be found on living organisms, but they also lack other traits that make up true life. Perhaps it is better if you can take a look at them yourself since you are an authority in this field."

"Is it truly possible to look at the weapon without inducing it to destroy the cargo bay?"

The engineer smiled with pride. "Our advanced containers can turn semi-transparent without giving the Destroyer particles any ideas."

The man unlocked a few settings on his datapad before activating the most important command.

Just as promised, the black container became partially see-

through. Though the view was not great, Ves and his fellow mech designers all gasped as they laid their eyes on the first tier 3 Destroyer weapon that they managed to see up close.

"So this is one of the trump cards of the Terran people." Kelsey whistled. "It is no wonder that not many Rubarthan mech pilots are eager to duel against Terran mechs up close."

The Destroyer spear was a force onto its own. Even if the container isolated a lot of the activity, just being able to see it gave Ves a good idea of the destructive prowess contained within the spearhead.

"It is like compressing water into a container that is too small to fit it all." Ves whispered as he and Blinky carefully observed the weapon, mindful of incurring a backlash if they peered too closely. "I don't know how the Terrans managed to stuff so many Destroyer particles in this spearhead. There is nothing about it that gives me confidence that it is up to the task of holding all of this volatile stuff."

"That is an astute observation, Professor Larkinson. The weapon you see before you is already using the strongest grade of Destroyer materials at our disposal. We do not have any better materials on hand that can stably store a higher concentration of Destroyer particles. This is what separates tier 5 and higher Destroyer weapons from their lower-tiered counterparts."

"So this instability is a feature rather than a flaw."

"More or less. Tier 6 Destroyer weapons and lower can safely contain their Destroyer particles, so they are safe enough to be utilized by standard mechs. Once the concentration grows higher, the particles cannot be fully contained anymore, hence their spontaneous destructive manifestations. Such weapons are practically unusable by all but high-ranking mech pilots. Expert pilots, ace pilots and most magnificently god pilots can utilize their willpower to make up for the inadequacies of Destroyer materials. The higher the concentration of Destroyer particles, the more dangerous but also volatile the weapon becomes. It takes a much stronger will to channel all of the concentrated power so that it only harms enemies."

These were useful insights, especially to an owner of a power Destroyer weapon.

Ves never knew that the materials the Terrans used to contain their Destroyer particles weren't actually that good. Their limitations had been reached a long time ago, so the only way to make the weapons substantially more powerful was to exceed safety limits and go over the edge!

When he observed the Destroyer spear, he could clearly feel now that it was a few steps away from exploding and engulfing the entire area with concentrated death and destruction!

Due to their high concentration, the Destroyer particles seemed to agitate against each other so much that bursts of destruction energy frequently flared from the speartip.

If not for the fact that the Destroyer container was rated to resist these occasional flare ups, it would have been breached already!

Ves found it rather fascinating that the Destroyer particles truly gave the illusion that they were alive. They jostled against each other like angry pigs that had been stuffed in a pen that was too small to contain them all. The lack of room frequently caused them to grow so frustrated that they regularly lashed out in every direction.

However, Ves ultimately determined that the Destroyer particles were not actually alive due to the lack of emotion and consciousness.

The virus analogy was aptly chosen. There was nothing deliberate about their behavior. The exceptionally dangerous and destructive particles merely acted in their nature. They sought to

destroy everything they touched just like how fire burned anything flammable. There was nothing good or evil about it. Morality held no meaning to particles that only existed to annihilate matter.

Observing the tier 3 Destroyer spear was endlessly fascinating to Ves. He could spend hours gazing at the random flare ups and imagine what it would be like for this weapon to unleash its immense destructive potential against real adversaries.

Ves already started to entertain strange ideas, most of which were not practical. He did not think it was a good idea to siphon away a few Destroyer particles and study them with the goal of trying to develop an imitation product.

Using Destroyer particles as the basis of a new design spirit sounded even crazier!

He tried his best to set aside any unrealistic expectations in order to focus on more practical uses.

"I have been told that this spear can only be utilized by a single mech pilot that is keyed into the weapon. Is this the case for all Destroyer weapons?"

"Yes, professor. You cannot believe how many forces have attempted to steal our Destroyer weapons back when our protections were less robust. These days, every Destroyer weapon can only become safe to use when wielded by a mech that is piloted by a recognized individual. Only special engineers such as myself are able to establish a bond between a Destroyer weapon and specific mech pilots."

"What are the limitations?"

"Destroyer weapons can only be bonded to a single pilot at a time. You must sternly warn your troops not to lend the Destroyer weapon to any other combatant. Anyone that holds the weapon without authorization will cause it to go berserk and channel much of its destructive power against the offending party. The weapon can only be made safe to use by another mech pilot by establishing a new bond. Do note that this is not part of your agreement with the Dermont Ancient Clan. You must negotiate a separate agreement to formally transfer usage rights to another mech pilot of your choosing."

Ves frowned at that. This was a lot more restrictive than he expected.

"What if the original bonded mech pilot has become incapacitated in battle? Are we just supposed to allow the volatile Destroyer spear to float around without any way to bring it back?"

"It would be best if you bring out this container and put the spear back inside." The Terran engineer pointed his thumb behind his back. "If that is not possible, then you can utilize gravitic modules or other forms of exerting physical force that do not require proximity contact, though be warned that the Destroyer particles are partially resistant to such measures. There are even cases where mechs have fired kinetic rounds at loose Destroyer weapons in order to move them in the right direction."

That sounded incredibly troublesome. The point of the story was that the wielder of the Destroyer spear better not falter during a battle!

"Understood. I will be sure to pass on these warnings." Ves said in a serious tone. "If the weapon ever becomes damaged for whatever reason, can we repair it in-house, or do we have to take it back to you guys?"

The guest aboard the Tarrasque actually laughed at that. "Hahaha! Destroyer weapons are built to resist some of the most destructive forces that our civilization can command. If their integrity has been compromised, it is highly unlikely that they shall remain in one piece for long. The Destroyer particles are voracious. If they detect any vulnerability, they will take advantage of it and escape their vessel. You do not want to be nearby when that happens."

The more Ves learned about Destroyer weapons, the more he regarded them as weapons of mass destruction that were barely contained in their metallic shells.

Anyone who had the privilege of wielding them gained power beyond measure, but always had to pay attention whether the destructive particles did not turn against their own wielder!

Chapter 5823 Workforce Issues

5823 Workforce Issues

As much as Ves wanted to drool over the Destroyer spear, it remained completely useless so long as there was no ace pilot to wield it in battle.

Ves did not have a candidate in mind at the moment. The Larkinson Clan had yet to welcome its first ace pilot. Though Venerable Rosa Orfan was his most favored choice to wield this powerful spear, who knew how long it would take for her to break through her bottleneck, especially when she was piloting an expert mech that had fallen behind the times.

The only other way he could make immediate use of the Destroyer spear was to spare it with one of the ace pilots loaned by the Hex Federation.

However, it would be a considerable waste to pair the weapon up with the likes of Saintess Ulrika Vraken or any other Hexer ace pilot.

Ves did not promise to pay the equivalent of 5800 kilograms of phasewater just to benefit the Hexers!

Thinking about the massive sum of money that he owed for this impulsive auction acquisition gave him a headache.

Money did not grow on trees. The only reason why Estaban Leeds authorized the exchange despite all of the burdens that Ves took on was because the Yem-Tar Trade and Commerce Bank fully vouched for his clan's ability to service the humongous debts.

Even so, it was rather reckless for him to take on a huge amount of loans without even presenting a proper plan on how to pay them all back. Part of the reason why his staff had become so busy all of a sudden was because they needed to satisfy the demands of the bank.

Ves did not anticipate any immediate problems, though. The Red Ocean branch of Yem-Tar was run by the Red Association. The debt wouldn't pose a serious problem unless he fell out with the mechers.

He set this matter aside and focused on his other priorities.

He had several important appointments on his agenda.

As he left the secure cargo bay, Ves turned to his friends.

"I will be off on my own for a while. I need to inspect my new shipyards remotely. I have a lot of plans in store for them, but I need to see how the facilities are run. I have only heard descriptions and seen snapshots of them, but that is not enough to know what I can do with these new assets."

"Enjoy your time."

"Try not to spend too much money."

Ves ventured to a private office compartment and waited for the right time.

A remote connection eventually formed. His entire surroundings changed until it looked as if he had appeared in the middle of a large and high-tech reception hall.

"Please welcome our new owner!"

Thousands of employees raised their fists at once!

"WELCOME TO STARFARER BAY!"

The entire personnel base of the small but highly advanced orbital shipyard had presented themselves to Ves!

The sight was impressive and immediately caused him to develop a sense of appreciation towards 'his' new employees.

Although the transfer of ownership was not yet official due to administrative hurdles, it was already set in stone. The shipbuilders might as well treat Ves as their new boss right away.

Once this brief spectacle had served its purpose, many of the workers went back to their shifts if they had any.

Meanwhile, a small group of executives approached the physical projection of Ves and introduced themselves.

Though Ves politely shook their hands and registered their names, he immediately threw this information to the back of his cranial implant.

At his level, there was no need for him to know any of these people on an intimate basis. It was the responsibility of the individual in charge of this facility to do all of that work. Ves merely needed to get along with this fellow in order to effectively control Starfarer Berth.

"So you are the man who is ultimately responsible for the success and failure of shipbuilding projects around here?" Ves said in a deliberately casual tone.

He was not a first-rater born from a privileged background and never made any pretenses about being anything else. He couldn't stand all of the formal customs and ceremonies that made people sound more sophisticated.

Fortunately, no one minded his tone. Being a tier 3 galactic citizen had its privileges.

The man with a distinguished and neatly groomed white beard bowed in respect.

"Eric Poderin. I am the Chief Executive Officer of this fine shipyard. I have worked as a shipwright for two centuries before the Adaptive Scale selected me to lead the operations of Starfarer Bay. Under my leadership, our shipwrights, naval engineers and other specialists have quickly mastered the use of our state-of-the-art production facilities. We have access to some of the best instruments,

but their learning curves are steep. Our hiring policies have ensured that all of our essential positions are filled by the most qualified workers that we can find. We have also hired interns and rising talents who not only look at starships from different perspectives, but have also mastered emerging new developments in phasewater technology and hyper technology."

Starfarer Berth had the capacity to build some of the most advanced sub-capital ships of the Red Association. Ves would have been disappointed if the personnel was less than stellar.

"My new shipyard has an unusually large number of people under its employ. Shouldn't a modern facility like this rely a lot more on automation?"

The chief executive gently shook his head. "Our workforce is divided into multiple shifts that rotate on a daily basis. Only a third of them are usually active at a time. Automation is vital, but many high technologies are so delicate and demanding that they require manual oversight by qualified experts. The Red Association has developed many exclusive high technologies that should not be entrusted to exploitable machines. A fifth of our regular workforce are comprised of RA contractors who are only here because they possess the right permissions to work on support link technology and Master Castillo's exclusive Ripple Energized Armor Systems."

Ves looked surprised. "I would have thought that an orbital shipyard that is owned by an RA Master mech Designer and is operating deep inside the Yernstall Star Node is completely run by mechers."

"That is not the case, sir." Eric Poderin denied. "The Red Association maintains a firm separation between its own activities and operations conducted by its members outside of any official mandate. You will have to ask a lawyer to obtain a proper explanation, but the summary is that Starfarer Bay is a private venture that just happens to be owned by an upstanding member of the Association. This is also why the Adaptive Scale was able to put it up for auction. If it was a more integral part of the Association, then she would not have been able to transfer 80 percent of it to you. The fact that she retains 20 percent ownership allows us to continue our current arrangements with all of our 'external' specialists."

The legal considerations surrounding the use of advanced technologies were more complicated than Ves thought.

"So does that mean that Starfarer Berth cannot operate without all of these mechers in my facility?"

The CEO gave Ves a helpless smile. "It is possible to operate Starfarer Berth without RA assistance, but that will deprive us of the right and the ability to implement many proprietary technologies that set our starships above those produced by lesser shipyards. I do not advise you to reject shield link technology. It is such a force multiplier that it is much easier to hire experienced and qualified spacers for starships that are equipped with this high technology."

That made sense. Starships that could transfer energy shields between each other always lasted longer in the field.

"I get it." Ves let out a sigh. "I will not ask you to push away the mechers. That still leaves me with a lot of concerns about their trustworthiness. I do not like it when outsiders have intimate access to the starships that will form a part of an important new fleet for the Larkinson Clan. Do you have any suggestions on how to minimize their ability to sabotage or infiltrate the systems of my new vessels?"

The former shipwright frowned in thought. "Aside from practicing stricter information security, it is not possible to rule out any possibility of such actions. All of the proprietary tech that I have referred to earlier are not isolated. They are all connected to the vessel herself. To isolate them completely is to cripple the powerful modules, thereby depriving us their use. This is counterproductive. The only other solution is to build starships that do not contain any of this potentially dangerous tech at all, much to the detriment of their performance."

It became clear that Starfarer Bay had no good solution against this problem. The Red Association had an incredibly annoying habit of planting bugs and listening devices everywhere.

The mechers had most definitely infiltrated all of his starships to hell and back. They listened to every conversation and collected every scrap of sensor data to keep track of what Ves and his Larkinsons were doing at all times.

Ves was tired of having his privacy violated all of the time, so he expected to be able to produce 'clean' starships from his new shipyards.

It turned out that he was too naive.

Whether deliberately or coincidentally, Starfarer Berth was locked in a state where it had to invite mechers to work on proprietary tech.

"What about the workers on our payroll?" Ves inquired. "Are they mechers or directly related to them in any way?"

"Part of our workforce consists of a mix of naval engineering experts who have grown up among the mechers but decided to enter the private sector." Poderin confirmed. "They are not officially mechers, but they grew up in the same community."

"I see. What about the remainder?"

"Starfarer Berth hires highly qualified shipwrights and engineers from every upper zone in the Red Ocean Union. We do not hire anyone with Terran or Rubarthan backgrounds, but those who have grown up in more typical first-rate states are more than adequate enough to work in our shipyard."

These were the workers that Ves held the highest expectations towards.

"I am not sure what you have heard about the Larkinson Clan, but we have a policy of entrusting any important responsibilities to people who have joined it. One of the first actions I want to take after gaining majority control over this shipyard is to invite as many of the workforce to join my clan as possible. It doesn't matter if they used to be mechers or citizens of other first-rate states. As long as they meet all of my criteria, I would be happy to welcome them into my growing family."

This caused serious consternation among the executives.

"Is this a mandatory measure?"

"Not immediately." Ves shook his head. "I know that transitions like these can take time. It is not my intention to give our current workforce an ultimatum. Let us see how many of the current workers join my clan. There are many benefits to becoming Larkinsons which I will make clear at a later date. If there are workers who still reject my conditions, then you should start with finding replacements who do not take issue with my demands."

That pretty much sounded like an ultimatum to the top management of the orbital shipyard.

Each of them had mixed feelings about this demand. They were smart enough to understand that they would have to find another job as well if they refused to join the Larkinson Clan.

"You cannot simply swap personnel as if they are simple parts." Eric Poderin said. "We have spent years turning our relatively new workforce into a well-oiled machine. There are many critical leaders and engineering talents who are linchpins of their departments. I know for certain that several of them are bound to leave. Even if we can fill up their positions with their deputies or outside experts, the newly appointed leaders will need to acclimate to their new responsibilities. Our productivity will drop by as much as 50 percent in the following half year, and will never fully recover until two more years have passed."

"Only 50 percent in the first half year? That is quite impressive, Mr. Poderin. I don't care if production is halted for a year. I will not entrust a job as important as constructing starships for my Larkinson Clan to outsiders with unclear loyalties. Let's take this discussion elsewhere so that I can explain how much of a difference it makes when the majority of the workforce have become my clansmen."

Chapter 5824 Ves the Human Resource Manager

5824 Ves the Human Resource Manager

Outsiders had difficulty understanding the significance of joining the Larkinson Clan.

Mere descriptions did not suffice. Ordinary folk either lacked comprehension or completely misunderstood what it meant to become connected to the Larkinson Network.

Ves believed that people's tolerance towards metaphysical weirdness would definitely become a lot firmer once the Red Collective got up and running. The claims he made would gain official validation and certification, thereby making his kinship network seem a lot safer and more credible.

Until then, Ves had to live with the fact that he could never fully convey his meaning to those who had spent all of their lives in a society where science and technology dominated their understanding of reality.

At least the members of the mech community were already accustomed to a certain degree of metaphysical oddities. Their exposure to mechs that did more of the sum of their parts and god pilots who flat-out defied the laws of physics caused them to already become primed to even more extraordinary phenomena.

As Ves continued to speak to Eric Poderin, he gained a good understanding of the overall mindset of the shipwrights and naval engineers who worked at Starfarer Bay.

Materialistic. That was the best word that described their perspectives. They had grown up their entire lives studying the sciences and applying what they learned in various ways.

While that did not sound so much different from the perspective of a mech designer, what distinguished the two was that shipwrights were not only a lot less self-centered, but also more focused on keeping their work grounded in the known sciences.

It should not be a surprise why this was the case. Starships were much harder and more laborious to design and build. No single individual could do all of this work by themselves no matter how much they relied on automation.

Due to the exponentially greater amount of parts and people involved, it became critically important for everyone to share a common understanding of the language, the sciences and the direction of a shipbuilding project.

Misunderstandings and differences in opinion could easily lead to errors and mistakes!

Even if modern starships were designed with plenty of redundancy in mind, the reality was that a few critical errors could cause faulty vessels to crash, fail or otherwise malfunction when they incurred damage that the ships should have been able to shrug off under other circumstances.

Too much was at stake to allow for any sloppiness and spontaneity. As Ves quietly utilized his Spirituality to perceive the overall mood among the executive and workers of the orbital shipyard, he gained the impression that everyone had been carefully forged into a clockwork machine of notable complexity.

Even if Starfarer Berth was only capable of producing sub-

capital ships at best, their technological complexity was so close to the peak of what human civilization could produce that their intricacy was incredibly high!

The orbital shipyard truly did not hire more core specialists than was necessary. Every single shipwright and engineer played an essential role in the lengthy and complicated production processes of different high-tech starships, especially when they were commissioned by the Red Association.

Seeing how well the management had forged all of these clever engineers into a highly organized and unified workforce, Ves greatly appreciated Eric Poderin for accomplishing this in just a couple of years. He was a far better management talent than any other leader he encountered.

Although his leadership style and policies had stifled a lot of the creativity and individuality of his more inventive engineers, that was not a big deal as Starfarer Berth clearly was not set up for research and experimentation. The chief executive officer clearly understood that his orbital shipyard was only expected to produce high-quality starships at a consistent and reliable rate.

The Adaptive Scale had chosen well. Starfarer Berth was already operating at close to peak efficiency. If Ves did nothing aside from claiming all of the output for his clan, then nothing much would change as far as the workers were concerned.

Sure, Starfarer Berth gained a new owner, but as long as their pay, their work assignments and their colleagues remained the same, then these first-raters would hardly notice the difference.

Changing a single link in the chain could easily ruin this perfect arrangement, though.

This was why Eric Poderin persistently tried to convince Ves to ease off on implementing any disruptive changes.

"I understand your need to exercise your rights as an owner, but Starfarer Berth is much more delicate than you think." The CEO carefully told the physical projection of his new boss. "The greater the change, the greater the disruption. I sincerely do not understand why you insist on such haste. We can easily implement your proposed changes over the span of a decade rather than a year or less. If you would allow me to dictate the pace of your proposed reforms, I can ensure that any change in personnel or rules will happen gradually enough to preserve the optimal structure and workflow of our fine shipyard."

The man made a valid argument, but he did not know nearly as much about the true state of the Red Ocean than Ves. The CEO devoted much of his life to understanding starships and what went on inside shipbuilding facilities. He only possessed surface-level understanding of politics and conflicts on a galactic scale.

Ves shook his head in rejection. "I understand your argument, but I am afraid that we do not have the luxury of time. I cannot explain why, but take it from me that it is better to get stuff like this done sooner than later. While I do not want to override your good sense and decisions, it is important for Starfarer Berth to complete its reforms as quickly as possible. The Larkinson Clan might not have a strong shipbuilding tradition, but it possesses a lot of unique and powerful insights in hyper technology and E-technology. In addition to that, only Larkinsons understand our needs the best. I will not allow the starships reserved for clansmen to be built by outsiders when I have a better option available."

Seeing that rapid change was inevitable, Eric Poderin looked dismayed.

"You are the boss." The man plainly admitted. "It is up to you to do with Starfarer Berth as you will. I do hope that you will defer more to the expertise of those who understand how shipyards actually work."

Ves smiled. "My clan shall dispatch a group of Larkinsons to the Yernstall Star Node in order to plan and implement the reforms that I have in mind. I hope that you will cooperate with them to the best of your abilities. Starfarer Berth is still your hive. You understand the current personnel and conditions the best, so you can provide valuable input that can ensure that the changes are constructive rather than destructive."

"I... will help you and your Larkinsons to the best of my ability. If I find that they intend to change Starfarer Berth beyond recognition, I am not sure I can keep working here. I love this orbital shipyard. I love working in one of the richest star systems in the Red Ocean. However, I cannot maintain my professionalism if the shipyard that I have shaped through my own efforts is changed beyond recognition."

The two gained an understanding of each other. Both cared a lot about Starfarer Berth, but they both possessed different visions on how it should operate.

Whether Eric Poderin would stick around remained to be seen. He had already made it clear that a lot of workers would not be able to accept all of the requirements imposed by the Larkinsons.

"You better start hiring more personnel right away." Ves advised. "Don't wait my Larkinsons to arrive. You need to hire additional engineers that can fill in the shoes of those who are too stubborn or stodgy to accept my terms. I will put you into contact with my recruiters who will help you hire the right sort of people."

"Understood. I will do my best to prevent our shipyard from suffering a shortfall in essential workers." The former shipwright said. "Our budget is rather tight, especially if you do not intend to sell our output to clients such as the Red Association. I do not know whether you understand this, but the cost of employment in Yernstall is much higher than elsewhere due to the fact we have to arrange permanent housing and permits for every worker. We also tend to hire 13:35

many top talents who fully understand their own worth. Poaching them from prestigious universities and other workplaces takes much more money than you think."

Ves dismissively waved his hand. "That should not be an issue. Submit your budget to the relevant department in my clan. I am sure they will be happy to cover the additional expenses as long as they are not wasteful."

They continued to talk a bit more about what Ves sought from the personnel going forward, but soon drifted to other topics.

One of the more exciting topics that Ves wanted to explore was the kind of starships that he could expect from Starfarer Berth!

This was a subject that greatly enthused the former shipwright. While he had put down most of his technical work in order to focus more on the business and management side of running a shipyard, he was still a ship fanatic at heart.

The man eagerly projected a handful of the starships that Starfarer Berth had proudly built in the last year.

"This is a typical combat carrier that is designed and built according to the specifications of the Red Association." Eric Poderin said. "As you can see, she is a rounded vessel that boasts an optimal balance between armor plating, sub-light propulsion, mech capacity, mech support and so on. Unlike the combat carriers you are accustomed to, this ship class eschews bunkers in favor of proper point defense hardpoints. The gun batteries are smaller, more efficient, more numerous and more consistent. This saves a large amount of capacity that is better spent on additional power reactors or shield generators."

The mechers and the fleters had long prohibited everyone from fielding armed starships, but never applied this rule to themselves.

Instead of trying to incorporate clunky bunkers that were large enough to house heavy artillery mechs, the Red Two instead developed proper combat carriers that relied on real shipboard weaponry to increase their self-defense capacity!

"The Larkinson Clan won't be able to field this ship class, am I correct?" Ves asked.

Eric nodded. "As far as I know, the Larkinson Clan is led by an honorary member of the Red Association, but that does not turn all of the other Larkinsons into mechers. There is a clear separation between the two organizations, so I am afraid we can only treat your clan as a private organization. However, the Adaptive Scale has informed me that your agreement with her encompasses numerous technical permits that grants you the right to build starships equipped with some exclusive RA high technologies for your clan. The most notable among them is support link or more precisely shield link technology."

The man pointed at a very distinct array that had been mounted on the topside of the combat carrier.

It looked like an energy cannon at first, but possessed a number of distinguishing features that betrayed its true purpose.

Instead of shooting a deadly laser beam that inflicted damage upon impact, it instead shot out a more gentle but still energetic ray that could somehow bolster the energy defenses of a compatible subject.

"This is what the mechers rely upon to make their first-class multipurpose mechs almost unkillable in most typical engagements." Poderin grinned with pride. "This specific model has many

limitations that you should be aware of, but it is a lifesaver in most situations. As long as there are enough starships and mechs equipped with shield link technology, they can form a giant web of interconnected energy shields that must all be broken at the same time. Possessing this capability is what separates true warfleets from rabble."

Chapter 5825 The Power of the Data Web

5825 The Power of the Data Web

Ves only possessed a shallow understanding of shield link technology.

Eric Poderin was different because he designed plenty of warships equipped with this powerful tech.

"Many laymen assume that a mech fleet that is equipped with shield link technology will always be able to perfectly combine the energy shields of every asset until it forms into a gigantic gestalt defense. The reality is that this is rarely possible. There are many constraints to establishing so many links across so many separate elements. There are factors such as lag, combat damage, battlefield interference and range that can reduce the effectiveness of a link or outright break it. Shield links are also incredibly energy-intensive to maintain, so much so that every combat carrier equipped with this tech is forced to reduce their mech capacity in order to accommodate enough power generation to keep up with existing demand."

The CEO altered the projection so that it displayed a good view of the interior compartments.

Ves saw what Mr. Poderin meant. Compared to the interior of a second-class combat carrier, the layout of an RA combat carrier was considerably less spacious. The much more advanced starship had to devote a lot of capacity towards many different core and auxiliary functions.

By reducing the mech capacity and increasing the support capacity, the RA combat carrier was not able to field as many mechs, but could do a lot more than linger in the background and offer distant fire support.

From what it looked like, the spaceborn combat mech doctrines of the Red Association were a lot more aggressive and interdisciplinary than Ves expected!

Poderin grinned as he briefly explained the attitude of the mechers.

"The Mech Trade Association had four centuries to refine their approach towards combat. Its continued refusal to rely too much on warships has forced many clever minds to figure out how to make mechs more viable in the most strenuous of battles. It was not until the Web Mistress revolutionized support link technology that the most essential pieces fell into place. As far as the Association is concerned, a combat carrier should function more than just a mothership and fire support platform. It needs to be a more active participant in a battle."

The shipyard leader raised his finger and began to draw a few projected symbols in the air.

"The mechers have implemented two important concepts. The first is combined arms. Combat carriers should ideally accompany their own mechs and serve a range of useful purposes. Combat vessels possessed much stronger defenses than any typical mech and can serve as mobile cover in a battlefield that is otherwise dominated by empty vacuum. The shipboard weaponry of dedicated warships also be used for point defense or sieging purposes depending on their caliber, thereby

fulfilling roles that most mechs cannot adequately fulfill. The overall premise behind this doctrine is that fielding mechs and combat vessels together is more effective than fielding them separately."

"That sounds logical." Ves nodded. "I take it that support link technology is an extension of this mech doctrine."

"You can say that, but the mechers treat it as the centerpiece of another concept. As I have stated earlier, first-class multipurpose mechs are already strong by themselves, but their performance can still be boosted through the use of force multipliers. Combat carriers and purpose-built support ships are some of the ideal force multipliers for mechs because they can offer services that are much more difficult to fulfill by other mechs."

Ves widened his eyes. "I think I know what you mean!"

"Support link technology is an umbrella term that describes different ways how different elements can share resources with each other. Data link technology is the most unassuming category, but it is a highly involved means of linking up the sensor input of many different assets before feeding it all to starships that are equipped with powerful processing banks. These links are more than just an attempt to centralize, process and interpret a lot of data. They actually attempt to link the separate computing systems of mechs and starships in an integrated cloud system. Nothing goes to waste as observations made by mechs that ordinarily gets dismissed may instead identify obscure details that can hide weak points, planned enemy maneuvers and possible trump cards."

Ves raised his eyebrows. "That sounds really impressive, but I find it difficult to imagine that so many mechs and starships can form a singular integrated 'cloud server' in the middle of a battlefield. Heavy interference can degrade or even corrupt the data flowing through these links."

"That is why the data link clusters or data webs are almost always formed within smaller formations. Most clusters are formed by mech squads and mech companies with their motherships providing active link support while following not too far away. As long as the data link quality is high enough, the participating elements are no longer separate entities from a systems perspective. They are more akin to the brain cells of a single organism. A single brain cell can hardly do anything, but a collection of them can produce far greater results such as calculating math generating inferences. In short, a data link cluster must always enable the connected assets to gain access to much more relevant information than if they are operating separately."

"Information is power." Ves stated.

"Exactly. Data link technology may be the most subtle and invisible variation of support link technology, but it can lead to qualitative improvements in the combat performance of all of your mechs. No singular mech or mech pilot can process and analyze more data than an entire collective that encompasses the processing banks and tactical departments of entire starships. If you leave aside other forms of support link technology and merely equip a mech force with data link technology, I can still guarantee you that it will win 10 out of 10 battles against a superior mech force without this crucial tech. The degree of coordination and optimal decision making is so much better that it is a crime that data link technology is not more widely available."

The physical projection of Ves frowned at that. "Why is this the case? I can imagine that the Red Two do not want to surrender a great advantage by making shield link technology and energy link technology available to the masses, but data link technology is a lot less demanding."

"The work of the Web Mistress is not that simple." The former shipwright shook his head. "There are highly advanced innovations related to data link technology that increase the integration of separate computing systems beyond the usual means. The most critical feature is one that integrates the consciousness of the mech pilots into the data link cluster through their man-machine connections."

"What?! How?!"

Ves had heard that data link technology could make a substantial difference in battle, but he never expected it to go as far as involving mech pilots to this degree!

"Your initial reaction mirrors mine." Eric Poderin smiled in amusement. "I am not an expert in support link technology, so do not ask me how it works in precise detail. From what I have been able to surmise, there are advanced systems that somehow alter the fundamental character of the man-

machine connection."

In order to illustrate his point, he used his finger to draw a familiar model of the man-machine connection.

"The 'man' variable in this case remains unchanged. What truly changes is the 'machine' variable. Normally, you mech designers always treat it as a synonym for a single mech, but that completely changes when data link technology comes into the picture."

The CEO drew a collection of bubbles. Each of them signified a dozen or so separate mechs. The final bubble was larger and stood for a combat carrier.

He then began to draw lines between each other to signify that they were all data linked together. There were so many different connections between these elements that the entire diagram began to resemble a web.

Poderin purposefully left the original 'machine' variable as last. He slowed down as he drew the final lines between the initial mech and the rest of the mech squad.

"When the integration between the initial mech and other data-linked is deep enough, the boundaries between them have become blurred." Eric intoned. "Many mech designers have theorized that it is possible to expand the definition of 'machine' in this model, but only the Web Mistress has successfully made this possible. This is the product of her genius."

Poderin began to draw a large circle around all of the mechs as well as the combat carrier. He deliberately included the initial mech.

The circle encompassed a complete data link cluster. Every single mech alongside their mothership had linked their computing systems with each other.

What was important was that the data link cluster was 'strong' enough to form a unified superentity from the perspective of the mech pilot.

This resulted in a massive change to the man-machine connection!

The 'machine' in this expanded theoretical model did not stand for a solitary mech, but an entire data link cluster!

This realization completely blew Ves' mind!

It was a level of data integration that exceeded his imagination!

The fact that a mech pilot could effectively connect to a collective superentity without bursting his brain was a miracle. The Web Mistress must have fiddled a lot with the neural interfaces, the software and the hardware of every related system to make it safe and practical to use on a wider scale.

Now that Ves understood the basic principles of data link technology, he developed a much greater appreciation towards it. Transferring data sounded a lot less exciting than transferring energy shields, but it could make a huge difference without imposing heavy burdens on the mechs and starships equipped with this game-changing tech.

"Wait." Ves suddenly made a realization. "If a mech pilot connected to this expansive web can access the collective data analysis and processing power of all of these mechs, can they also link their minds with the minds of the mech pilots in the same cluster?"

"No. I asked that question myself when I first came into contact with this high technology, but data link technology explicitly does not attempt to do this. It is too dangerous. Linking the minds of living beings more directly with each other is fraught with peril. It is a distraction at best, and can induce brain damage or even total ego death. A dangerous and volatile battlefield is the worst place to conduct these kinds of experiments. Trying to expand data link technology in this direction is therefore taboo."

Ves understood why that was the case. The Web Mistress and everyone else who worked on this tech had made the correct and prudent decision.

That did not stop Ves from wondering whether he could succeed where everyone else failed.

He distinctly thought about Master Toqueman Huron's specialization. The man might not have access to data link technology, but his characteristic neural networks had the potential to plug this remaining gap in data link technology.

Though Ves was not an expert in neural networks, he developed his own bootleg version in the form of spiritual networks.

Battle networks were particularly interesting as they united the minds and spiritualities of mech pilots with each other under the direction of a powerful design spirit.

Ves suddenly had a dangerous hunch that it might be possible to merge a data link cluster with a battle network.

The problem was that he had no idea what would happen when these too separate linking concepts activated at the same time!

The results could either be explosively effective, or result in more literal explosions that left no survivors!

He inwardly shook his head.

These were dangerous ideas!

Ves had no pressing need to squeeze more performance out of data link technology. His forces needed to gain access to the standard version first and gain a lot of practice in using it in battle.

Only after his troops had reached the limit of what they could squeeze out of data link technology would they be ready to take it a step further.

Chapter 5826 Energy and Shield Link Technologies

5826 Energy and Shield Link Technologies

Ves already began to imagine all of the ways that data link technology could boost the combat performance of his first-class mech units.

The data link-compatible systems were not cheap. They required powerful as well as specialized hardware in order to connect with each other as seamlessly as possible. Lag and signal degradation easily affected the integrity of a data link cluster. Trying to minimize their impact was much of the reason why data link technology only remained viable for first-class mechs.

"There is an important complication to utilizing data link technology that you should know about." Eric Poderin said, pulling Ves away from his ambitious ideas about deploying this tech.

"Please explain."

The CEO pointed his finger at the vast data link cluster generated by interlinking a dozen mechs as well as a combat carrier. "The key word is data. Can you see how intricate this data web has become at this scale? This is one of the simpler implementations of data link technology, but it already causes the amount of data being transferred and processed across the entire unit to be multiplied by at least several times. Data is the blood that sustains this virtual superentity. Its complexity grows exponentially larger with every mech or starship added to the web. Optimization and selective link pruning can reduce the load that every additional element added to the web, but that can only go so far. In order for all of this effort to make a positive difference on the battlefield, it is essential for every participant to transmit, receive and process more data."

Ves thought about the first sentence. When he looked at the dazzling web where every machine was connected to every other machine, he almost grew dizzy at the thought of trying to keep track of it all. Computing systems might be able to keep up with the exponential rise in complexity as long as the hardware was powerful enough, but...

He suddenly fixated on the 'man' variable in the projected diagram.

Unlike machines that could easily improve their data processing capabilities by installing stronger hardware, it was a lot harder for mech pilots to do the same!

"I understand!" Ves said as clarity filled his eyes. "All of these data transfer and data processing activities can produce useful and relevant insights, but only if the mech pilot can act on it! Humans are not machines. They can keep up with the data processed by their mechs to a degree, but they have clear limits that are not easy to raise. If the data link cluster has grown big and complex enough, then it may not be possible for mech pilots to experience any significant gains in performance anymore."

"Exactly, sir. The Web Mistress and the Red Association has developed many incremental improvements to increase the tolerance of the mech pilot and the optimization of the data web. It is highly recommended that mech pilots install cranial implants that excel in data storage and processing capabilities, but that can only help up to a degree. There is another factor that can make

a greater difference in how effectively a mech pilot can derive gains from an active data link cluster."

Ves already had an inkling of what that may be. The answer was rather obvious now that he became engaged in this subject.

"Let me guess. It's genetic aptitude."

The CEO of Starfarer Berth nodded. "Correct. Genetic aptitude not only describes how well a mech pilot is able to receive and transmit data, but also how well he can process it. There is a sea of difference between mech pilots with A-grade genetic aptitudes and B-grade genetic aptitudes. The former are the most ideal beneficiaries of data webs. They can easily keep up with larger webs, and they can also derive more gains out of smaller ones. The latter is not quite able to keep up, but their capacities and tolerances are still adequate enough in most cases."

"What about mech pilots with lower genetic aptitudes?" Ves asked in an uncertain tone.

"Data link technology is not made for them. That said, mech pilots with C-grade genetic aptitude can still benefit from data webs as long as they have installed the right cranial implants. The data web intelligently takes these variables into account and dynamically reduces the transmission of data to inferior mech pilots in order to avoid overloading their less tolerant brains. Think of it in the same way as lossy compression. You take a data file, cut everything that is unimportant or not as relevant, and transmit what little remains to the receiver. While the latter is unable to gain the full picture, it is not too consequential as long as he has access to the most essential data points."

"I see. I guess that suffices. I take it that mech pilots whose genetic aptitudes are D or lower are out of luck."

"Yes." Eric Poderin plainly said. "Potentates whose genetic aptitudes are unqualified should not be piloting first-class mechs to begin with. If you truly must insist on putting them in the cockpits, do not bother with connecting them to the data web. The load is too great for their inadequate brains, and will only cause their performance to deteriorate."

Wow. That sounded harsh.

This was sadly the reality in the first-class mech community. Mech pilots with genetic aptitudes lower than B-grade simply didn't receive the same opportunities. The limitations of data link technology bestowed them with yet another handicap that made their lives a little more miserable.

Ves did not assume this information was an absolute fact, though. He already began to wonder how Carmine mechs synergized with data link technology.

From what he gathered, Carmine mech pilots had improved their bond with their Carmine mechs to such a degree that their genetic aptitudes roughly increased by a full grade depending on where they originally stood.

This meant that B-grade mech pilots might be able to utilize the data web as effectively as their A-grade counterparts when paired with Carmine mechs!

C-grade mech pilots were no longer forced to interface with the data web in kids mode. As long as their effective genetic aptitude got boosted into B-grade, they could unlock much of the potential of this amazing tech!

Ves thought back on how some of the mechers initially reacted to the experimental results of his Carmine System. Their notable enthusiasm made a lot more sense when he thought how Carmine mechs enabled lesser qualified mechs to make much better use out of data webs than normal!

However, as much as data link technology promised to improve the coordination and optimize the performance of mechs working in unison, it did not actually improve their hard performance.

There were other variations of support link technology that could massively improve the offensive and defensive performance of mechs.

"I think I have heard enough about data link technology for the time being." He said. "Tell me more about energy link and shield link technology. What do I need to know?"

"There is much you need to know if you ever seriously wish to integrate them in your mechs, sir. What is important to know is that they are separate technologies. They operate on similar principles, but they diverge in important ways. This means that their transceivers and other systems are not compatible with each other."

Ves immediately realized the problem related to this. "It should be easy enough to implement both energy link and shield link systems into a starship. They are so large that they have plenty of space to accommodate the necessary parts."

"That is partially true. Their power scales with their size. If you want to support your mechs with a large reserve of energy and energy shields, then you must invest more capacity for this purpose. The amount of space needed to enable and strengthen all of these support link systems can easily take the place of multiple mechs. This is another reason why first-class combat carriers generally cannot accommodate as many machines." Poderin clarified.

"If starships already have this problem, then what about mechs?"

"You will need to make compromises. You can either choose one or the other. Most mech designers usually opt for shield link modules, but an argument can be made for energy link modules for pure ranged offensive mechs. The other general solution is to increase the budget for your mechs. If you are willing to make your mechs twice or thrice as expensive, it is possible to integrate miniaturized support link modules into their designs. You should know that the miniaturized mech parts can only be built by utilizing scarce high-grade exotics. Their limited availability heavily limits how extensively this can be done. Only the most elite mechs can afford this treatment. Every other machine defaults to using data link and shield link technologies due to practical considerations."

"Hmm, I understand. Keeping mechs alive with the help of shield link technology is not purely a defensive move. It can preserve the functionality of powerful mechs armed with plenty of powerful weapon modules. Letting these machines attack for a longer period of time will ultimately result in greater offensive gains."

"It also helps to prolong the survival of expensive first-class multipurpose mechs as well as their high-genetic aptitude mech pilots. Neither of the two are easy to replace on a larger scale."

Ves truly grew envious about the fact that the mechers utilized support link technology for many decades.

Their first-class multipurpose mechs could easily win battles against stronger forces such as the ones fielded by the Terrans and the Rubarthans due to the absence of comparable linking technology.

"I think I can somewhat guess how energy link technology in broad strokes." Ves said as he rubbed his hairless chin. "It is just a really long-ranged method of transferring energy from one machine to another machine. It is probably really hard to maintain a lock at further distances, and there is inevitably a lot of waste, but it can still enable starships to donate their spare energy to mechs that run through this resource a lot quicker."

"There are many assisting systems that can increase the efficiency of energy link technology."

"What I want to know is how shield link technology actually works. As far as I know, energy shields are purely formed by shield generators that are integrated in a machine. There is nothing about this tech that suggests that multiple shield generators can share resources with each other. It is as absurd as assuming that my hunger can be sated if my wife eats a meal. Our stomachs are completely separate!"

The CEO actually looked amused. "Shield link technology is the most difficult, consequential but also the greatest accomplishment of the Web Mistress. I do not even possess a proper understanding of its working principles, let alone all of the advanced high technologies that Her Excellency has combined to produce this miracle tech."

"Do your best to give me a simple explanation." Ves commanded.

He did not want to conclude this conversation without making any gains in understanding shield link technology. He would gladly accept a highly inaccurate and oversimplified story over silence.

Poderin looked a bit reluctant as he attempted to explain shield link technology to a dummy.

"The shield generators are altered. They are changed in a way that allows them to share and receive shield energy, for a lack of a better description. Shield link modules are responsible for enabling these transfers, but it is the altered shield generators that serve as the actual core of this technology. If you cannot install link-capable energy shield generators in your mechs, there is no need to make an attempt."

"I see. Ves frowned. I take it that these link-capable energy shield generators are a lot more expensive."

"That is correct, sir. They are so advanced that it is easy for the Red Two to restrict their availability. There are not enough parties that can imitate or produce the best work of the Web Mistress. The only practical means of using them is by making use of the proper channels, which you have done I supposed. It is a great privilege to gain access to these key technologies, but be warned that link-capable energy shield generators have significantly greater energy consumption."

"

Chapter 5827 Escort Carriers

5827 Escort Carriers

Ves came away from his remote discussion with the CEO of Starfarer Berth with a much deeper understanding of support link technology than before.

The public had a bit of awareness of what it entailed, but the Red Two had done a good job preventing outsiders from learning too many details.

It was not that useful for most people to know how much better the mechers and the fleters fought with the help of technology that they clearly did not intend to share.

From what Ves had learned from Mr. Eric Poderin, he fully understood this approach.

He felt so jealous that the high-and-mighty Red Two continued to keep this valuable tech for themselves while leaving others to struggle without the advanced features that could increase their success rate.

It was understandable for the Red Two to deny support link technology to second-raters and third-raters.

The key principles of data link technology, shield link technology and energy link technology relied on the powerful specifications of very scarce materials as well as the special attributes of insanely complicated high-tech parts.

However, these reasons fell through when it came to arming other first-class mech forces.

The Terrans, fleters and ordinary first-raters all possessed the wealth and the sophistication to field at least small amounts of elite support linked units.

Even if the demand for materials required to produce support link systems multiplied by several times, it should at least give the best Terran and Rubarthan mech units a greater edge on the battlefield, thereby increasing red humanity's ability to keep the alien invaders at bay.

Alas, the Red Two still priorities their own interests over the greater good.

It was no wonder the Terrans and the Rubarthans supported the establishment of the Red Collective so much. The promise of controlling a large superorganization where both groups finally gained an excuse to join hands against their current oppressors was too much to resist.

In any case, Ves was glad that he had aligned himself to the Red Association for the most part. He did not suffer the same problem as his honorary membership was evidently enough for him to earn the right to utilize support link technology.

This was a huge attraction as well as a strong binding mechanism.

Ves did not miss the implications of finally earning the right to implement support link technology in his first-class mechs and starships.

As long as he played nice with the Red Association, he could continue to enjoy progressively greater benefits that every other mecher enjoyed.

The fact that the Association saw fit to treat him like a dog that needed to be trained in a Pavlovian fashion was rather insulting.

It also worked.

The mechers employed plenty of carrots and sticks to ensure that he continued to serve as their asset. Though they did not trap him in a physical sense, they sure did so in a metaphorical fashion.

It frustrated him, but what could he do? He lacked the hard power needed to stand his own ground.

The best thing that Ves could say about the mechers was that they still gave him ample enough room to grow.

The hope of developing his personal abilities and his power base motivated him into working harder.

He wanted to become powerful enough to the point where he no longer had to dance to the tune of the mechers anymore.

Yet there was a part of him that suspected that the mechers already took that into account. He was afraid that the Association gave him the illusion of an escape hatch, only to slam it shut when he was on the cusp of jumping out of their birdcage.

Ves inwardly shook his head. This was not a productive line of thought. The future was still in flux. The division and the restructuring sparked by the completely unexpected proposal to form the Red Collective had scrambled many people's carefully laid plans.

Right now, a lot of powers were scrambling to readjust their plans and secure an important foothold in the future rival of the Red Association and the Red Fleet.

The all-encompassing initiative ranked so high in priority that it served as an excellent distraction.

From the gossip that Jovy and Vector passed on to Ves, his old adversaries no longer trained their sights on Ves anymore.

Not only had he proven to be an incredibly annoying individual who had a proven habit of spoiling people's schemes, his list of backers had grown since the public inquiry.

Even though Ves had to forge new pacts and give away a chunk of his company shares, the sacrifices were worthwhile so long as it kept the likes of Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson off his back for the foreseeable future.

As the Bluejay Fleet continued to venture closer to the border regions, Ves held another virtual meeting with the leader of the E-66 Experimental Shipyard.

Different from Starfarer Bay, the much larger shipyard was anything but a well-oiled machine.

The contrast between the two shipyards was too great.

Starfarer Bay under the leadership of CEO Eric Poderin ran like clockwork. Every piece and every process was so well-

planned and optimized that there was very little waste. This mattered a lot when the sub-capital shipyard operated in one of the most expensive star systems in human-occupied space. The profit margins of high-end starships may be generous, but the shipyard's massive costs could easily drag it down if everyone started to take it easy.

The E-66 Experimental Yard possessed a completely different atmosphere. None of the shipwrights, engineers and scientists were lazy or incompetent. They wouldn't have been hired in the first place. However, when Ves' virtual projection toured the shipyard as it was completing its latest order, it became clear that the various work teams were more interested in figuring out how to apply incremental improvements to existing design elements than actually getting the job done.

Chief Shipwright Keziramous Demodian or simply 'Kezi' noticed his impending new superior's consternation.

"E-66 is more of a lab than a production facility, sir. The holding company operating on behalf of the Inferno Spear Prince has always given us the allowance to take our time to design new ship classes and work out all of the kinks when we try to realize them. All of this iteration may seem redundant or excessive, but it is truly not. My engineers are trained and instructed to push the boundaries and expose flaws in an environment that can tolerate these activities. It is our shipyard's job to develop as many solutions and optimizations as possible. The work we do will save valuable time, resources and effort for other shipyards once they are tasked with producing the new ship classes that we have tested."

That... actually made a lot of sense. Producing starships was a lot more complicated than producing mechs. The testing and refining processes took a lot longer and required much greater commitment in order to ready a new ship design for full-scale production.

"How much longer does it take to produce a brand new ship class that contains plenty of new and untested technologies?" Ves inquired as they continued to tour the massive facility.

Discipline was a lot looser in the E-66 Experimental Shipyard.

While the workers on shift over at Starfarer Berth always kept their minds on their immediate jobs, the Rubarthans engineers and scientists often went off-track and debated about all kinds of wild and obscure technological principles that might not even make a difference in their current assignments.

"We try not to test the patience of the Inferno Spear Principality too much." Kezi responded with a strained smile. "We generally try to produce a new starship within the time it takes to produce three of them under normal circumstances. We have found that we can squash most problems and raise the quality of our new designs to an acceptable level within this timeframe. Any longer and the improvements become too marginal for us to bother. The Rubarthan armed forces are also unwilling to wait any longer to put their new ship classes into full production. You cannot imagine how busy we have been in the months just after the Great Severing. We had to work with extreme haste in order to explore the many possible applications of hyper technology in starships."

Those days were mostly over now. More than a year had passed since then. The E-66 Experimental Shipyard finally returned to a more regular routine where they spent the time to develop and produce a proper hyper starship.

Ves studied the hull in question. Even though E-66 was capable of producing 2.3 kilometer long fleet carriers, the current vessel was a lot smaller than that. Her length was only measured at around 800 meters and her width was remarkably thin.

"I've never seen this kind of carrier type up close. Most of the ones I see these days are either combat carriers or fleet carriers."

"The new Deireen-class escort carrier is more of a proof of concept of a proper hyper starship than anything else." Kezi explained when he noticed what his new superior was paying attention to.

"Escort carriers straddle the line between combat carriers and fleet carriers. They usually lack the capability to land on the surface of terrestrial planets and are not as well-armored. Their main advantage is that they are more affordable and possess superior mobility. They are typically capable of carrying 60 to 100 mechs, but this is not a hard rule. The hull you see before you is on the lower end of that range due to her thin and narrow cross section."

Ves frowned when he heard that. "What purpose do escort carriers fulfill?"

The chief shipwright sighed. "Economics. Combat carriers are tough and hardy. They need to be in order to land mechs in contested warzones. Fleet carriers are not only much larger, but have to be able to withstand a certain degree of punishment as well, or else an opposing force can easily demolish the fragile hulls through sustained bombardment. Neither of these solutions are cheap. They are much safer, yes, but they require so much military-grade bulk alloys that not even the Rubarthan principalities are willing to produce them as frequently as before. If we want to keep up with the attrition rate of the current war, we need to resort to more cost-effective solutions."

This was a familiar argument. Ves had theorized about this possibility himself, but he did not expect to see others acting on it so soon!

"I see. Escort carriers are akin to light carriers, but bigger. They are more like cargo vessels that just happened to be specialized in transporting mechs from point A to point B. They hardly have any additional frills that seem like non-

essential luxuries in this day and age."

"Precisely, sir. Escort carriers are emphatically not designed to function as anything other than a mothership in a space battle. They need to be placed far beyond the effective range of enemy weapons as a few well-placed hits can easily tear through their comparatively thin energy shields and hull plating. The only parameters that matter is how many mechs they can carry inside their hulls and how little money must be spent to produce them. That makes them much more relevant in the current age. Hyper technology has made them much more viable as their defenses and mobility have improved to the point where they are considerably more fool-proof than before."

"Mhmm."

Ves thought about whether the Larkinson Clan should employ escort carriers as well. He did not really like them because of how fragile they were. Superior mobility alone was not enough to compensate for all of the downsides.

What Ves truly wanted was not a hypermobile light fleet whose only strength was to evade enemies more easily.

What he really wanted was to form a solid assault fleet that could crush formidable opponents like an indomitable fist!

Besides, support link technology worked best when starships shadowed mech formations at closer ranges.

For better or worse, the first-class mech fleet needed to consist of armored starships that were all designed to take beating!

Chapter 5828 Unusual Production Strategy

5828 Unusual Production Strategy

As fun as it was to explore the reintroduction of escort carriers into human civilization, Ves did not come here to explore new starship classifications.

Once they finished touring a few sections of the E-66 Experimental Yard, Ves and Kezi entered the latter's office and began to talk about more serious affairs.

Just like he had done at Starfarer Berth, Ves presented the reforms he wanted to push through in order to truly take control over the large orbital shipyard.

To his credit, Kezi not only accepted the rationale for the upcoming personnel changes, but pledged his support.

"The Inferno Spear Prince has already informed us to be as accommodating to your demands as possible." The chief shipwright spoke in a deferential tone. "You are on track to become the sole owner of the E-66 Experimental Shipyard. While you must still abide by the laws of the Rubarthan Pact, you have a wide latitude of permissions."

"Will there be any trouble from the personnel? How many of them can we retain?"

"I think the retention rate will be quite optimistic, especially if they are allowed to keep experimenting. Joining the Larkinson Clan is a step up for most of them. They have heard the sort of benefits that you offer and are not too resistant to becoming a part of your organization."

The sort of people who worked at E-66 were much more open-minded in general. They were younger, more flexible and more ambitious. Even if 30 or 40 percent of the Rubarthan workforce ended up quitting, it was not that difficult to hire other bright minds to fill up the vacated positions.

Of course, every new hire needed to spend a lot of time before they could be trusted to do their jobs. The fairly low productivity of E-66 would inevitably dip to an even lower point for a time.

This was an inescapable consequence of implementing so many disruptive changes. Ves would just have to live with the fact that neither of his two new orbital shipyards would be able to churn out first-class starships at optimal rates.

None of this discussion was new to Ves, so he quickly made his point clear before he addressed other important topics.

"I have recently gained access to support link technology." Ves said, causing Kezi to briefly lose his composure! "While I do not foresee any issue with integrating this high technology in the starships built by my other orbital shipyard, I am not sure whether it is possible to do the same in this facility. As far as I know, E-66 has never produced a link-capable starship, correct?"

Kezi adopted a frustrated expression. "The New Rubarth Empire and the Rubarthan Pact have never gained access to support link technology. We do not have the expertise to work with this advanced tech. Even if you have gained permission to apply it to starships built in our facility, it is certain that the mechers will not allow our own engineers to handle the parts themselves. You will have to request the Red Association to transfer their personnel to E-66 in order to complete the relevant work assignments without our intervention. It will add many complications and cause considerable friction between our work crews."

"There is no other choice." Ves grimaced. "I know it is not ideal, but you should prepare for this scenario as soon as possible. Support link technology is way too valuable to me and my clan. I am not satisfied with keeping it exclusive to my sub-capital ships. All of my capital ships must benefit from this tech as well. You should be prepared to design new ship classes or modify existing ones to accommodate these features. I have learned that they impose much greater loads on the capacity, power supply and processing power of every machine."

"Noted. We will have to cooperate extensively with the mechers in order to integrate their support link technology in our starships. That applies to any other exclusive tech that you have managed to bargain from them. We will work with them as best as possible, but we will not like it. E-66 has always remained in Rubarthan hands since it went into operation."

This was standard practice as far as the workers of Starfarer Bay were concerned. It frustrated Ves a bit that the Rubarthans needed a lot of time to form similar arrangements with the specialists dispatched by the mechers.

Due to the long-standing resentment between the two groups, Ves did not expect them to get along right away.

Converting the regular employees of E-66 into Larkinsons should help, but that did not erase their Rubarthan roots.

As Ves and Kezi continued to discuss all of the potential problems that might ensue if they implemented all of these changes, they eventually addressed the role that E-66 would have to play in the Larkinson Clan.

"I have already explained to you how E-66 fits in the Rubarthan Pact." The chief shipwright stated. "Our facility works best when it is part of a greater collection of shipyards. It is not a pure production facility itself. Rather, it is a research facility that is built to support the operations of pure shipyards. I am not certain why the Inferno Spear Prince saw fit to transfer E-66 to you. The Larkinson Clan is largely focused on mech production. There are only two other shipyards under your control, and one of them originally began her life as a second-class mobile ship repair vessel. If you demand maximum output from us, then we will have to change our entire work approach."

That would be a huge waste of E-66's potential. It was entirely set up to screw around with different technologies in order to develop unique new ship classes that offered value that existing naval products were unable to match.

If Ves just wanted a shipyard that could pump out as many large starships as possible, he would have opted for the royal shipyard of the Octara Kingdom over the E-66 Experimental Yard.

The virtual projection of Ves raised his palm. "Stop, Kezi. I am not ignorant of the circumstances of your orbital shipyard. Rest assured that I will not force you and your workers to spend your effort on producing cookie cutter ship classes. As a mech designer myself, I am keenly aware of what your facility excels at. I plan to leverage your strengths as much as possible."

"Forgive me for questioning you, sir, but how? As I have mentioned earlier, E-66 is more of a supporting facility than a standalone production site."

The physical projection of Ves grinned while leaning closer. "I want E-66 to adopt an artisanal approach towards shipbuilding."

That caused the 109 year old shipwright to look surprised. "I would have expected you to demand us to increase our ship production rate, even if it comes at the expense of innovation. For you to propose a production strategy that is more suitable for mech boutiques is... unusual, especially in our industry."

Ves smirked. He understood the chief shipwright's confusion.

"It is not that I am opposed to having more starships. Under normal circumstances, I would gladly take two mediocre fleet carriers in the place of a single good one. The issue is that we are living in much more unusual times. We cannot rely on our existing technologies and standards in order to survive in the long run. We need to be a lot more adventurous if we want to gain an advantage in the future. One of the reasons why I paid a hefty price to take over E-66 is because it is the only one that is qualified to break the rules and push the boundaries of human starships. I don't want you guys to produce ordinary vessels. What I really want is to produce the most innovative starships that can far outclass anything comparable."

This was music to Kezi's ears. As a man who had managed to become the effective man in charge of E-66 despite his young age and relative lack of experience, he had been chosen precisely because he was more willing to explore avenues that others had not yet explored.

For his new owner to give the workers of E-66 full license to unleash their imagination and divert from standard practice was like a dream come true.

However, that did not mean that Kezi embraced this change without a healthy dose of skepticism.

One of the other reasons why he was put in charge was because he knew when he should stop or pull back.

"I can understand your desire to acquire more amazing starships, but the costs are considerable." Kezi warned. "The time it takes to develop and build the unique starships will grow. Our budget will have to be increased as well. The end result is that you will obtain considerably fewer starships at significantly greater costs than before. Their performance will most certainly be superior to the performance of standard hulls, but the differences might not be great enough to justify an artisanal approach. There are good reasons why shipyards almost never dabble with this. Only the largest shipbuilding companies with dozens of orbital shipyards at their disposal can afford to adopt this approach for one of their facilities. They usually reserve it for custom orders from exceedingly wealthy clients who have more money than sense."

What Kezi left unspoken was that the Larkinson Clan was in the opposite situation. It did not have a large shipbuilding operation at all. It did not make sense when the Larkinsons needed as many hulls as possible.

"I am aware that my demands do not entirely make sense, but it will become clear to you soon enough when I present my vision for the starships of the Larkinson Clan." Ves explained as he clasped his hands. "Before E-66 is ready to realize my vision, it first needs to complete the necessary reforms. I will have to send a lot of my Larkinsons to your facility in order to ensure that the right experts are in place to implement the proprietary technologies of my clan. I have developed a lot of awesome stuff that have worked great for my mechs. I am hoping that we can transfer them to our starships as well, but this will likely be a challenge. I will need to invest more time in research to come up with concrete applications. I do not have much for you at the moment."

"That is unfortunate, sir. I understand your intentions, but my workers and I cannot fulfill our responsibilities if we do not have any direction. I would like to propose that we work on a stopgap project after we have completed our current order. Working on a new starship for your clan that does not yet include your new technologies will allow us to transition to our new circumstances while integrating all of the new personnel that have agreed to the conditions that you have set."

That sounded interesting.

"What do you have in mind?"

"It depends on how long you wish to wait to acquire a new hull. A 2.3 kilometer fleet carrier is not advisable because it will likely take us 2 to 3 years to complete the construction of her hull. A more modest 1.5 kilometer fleet carrier is more manageable, especially when E-66 enters a period of rapid change and upheaval. Depending on the complexity of the ship design, it will probably take us roughly 1 to 1.5 years to complete the shipbuilding project. This should give your clan a good starter capital ship and give our personnel enough practice to tackle more ambitious projects going forward."

That was a reasonable approach. The question was what sort of capital ship Ves would want to acquire in the short term.

He had not actually thought in detail what kind of starship he wanted. Ves grew rather excited now that he obtained the luxury to build his own custom starships.

His head was already brimming with ideas!

Chapter 5829 Design Your Own Ship

5829 Design Your Own Ship

After a bit of discussion with Kezi, Ves quickly gained a basic grasp of what E-66 was capable of. The Rubarthan shipyard had access to a wide range of high technologies that introduced all sorts of interesting possibilities to starships.

However, Kezi quickly cautioned Ves not to put too many items in his wishlist.

"Our approach towards starship innovation is always tempered by the need to preserve a solid enough foundation of a core foundation that consists of solid and proven elements. In our experience, we have found that going too far with trying to revolutionize everything at once usually leads to a cascade of failures. This will delay the completion of our project to an unacceptable degree. It is best to start with a more standard template and selectively add or improve specific elements that will result in targeted performance gains. You can think of it as a rationing system. By limiting the degree of innovation for every shipbuilding project, we can guarantee that the end product can be trusted enough to not collapse and explode when the vessel inquisition undergoes her first trials."

The man's explanation made a lot of sense. It was a common approach in mech design, though Ves all-too-often exceeded the recommended boundaries set by the mech industry.

The disastrous Elemental Lord was the archetypical example of how a design project could drastically go wrong when he completely went off the rails!

Ves had no intentions of repeating this feat in the form of a starship, so he prudently abided by Kezi's recommendations.

It was best to start with a more practical and less ambitious ship design.

The chief shipwright activated his desk terminal and opened up a design suite that was geared towards his profession.

He loaded half-a-dozen recent ship design templates and presented them to Ves.

"These are examples of modern starships that we should readily be able to produce in our shipyard." The man said. "Before we select a template to build upon, it helps if you can give me a list of objectives and requirements. What does your clan require the most? Must you insist on ordering a new fleet carrier, or is it acceptable to produce a non-combat vessel instead? The latter option is considerably faster and more affordable."

Ves immediately shook his head. "I understand the importance of non-combat ships, but this is not the time. We need to strengthen our direct fighting capabilities as much as possible in the next half-decade. A fleet carrier is essential to my plans. I need a vessel that can not only carry a lot of first-class mechs into battle, but also possess enough defenses to accompany them into battle. If you understand support link technology, then you should know that mechs and starships can only synergize with each other if they are not too far apart from each other."

Kezi immediately entered into a professional mindset. "Hmm. I see. That is not a common request in the Rubarthan ship market, but I can understand why your demands are different. We still have ship design templates that should satisfy your requests. They may be 'fantasy' designs that we never intended to realize, but they are theoretically sound designs."

The man quickly removed a lot of projected ship designs while adding a few new ones. They differed a lot in size, shape, mech capacity and more.

"Which parameters do you wish to prioritize the most? Do you want a sturdy vessel that can withstand a large amount of punishment, or do you prefer to own a faster fleet carrier that can outmaneuver enemy fleets?"

That was a good question.

"I want a ship that is balanced and rounded in performance." Ves said after a brief pause. "I may have a need for fleet carriers with more pronounced strengths and weaknesses, but my initial first-class fleet won't be big. I need a ship that is versatile enough to adapt to different circumstances. It also has to be self-sufficient enough to take care of herself when operating behind enemy lines."

"You are asking for much, sir. I hope you understand the consequences of trying to fulfill so many different objectives."

Ves smiled back at Kezi. "I am not stupid or indecisive. I am willing to skimp on mech capacity and other areas. What I cannot accept is a fleet carrier that is too fragile to withstand enemy warship fire or too slow to outrun determined enemy pursuit. I am looking for a fleet carrier that can survive all of the ordeals of a future deep strike operation. While I expect the fleet carrier to operate alongside other first-class starships, it is best to assume that there will not be a lot of external support available. The more self-sufficient the starship, the better."

The two spent several minutes on refining what Ves had in mind. The more he explained his demands, the more Kezi was able to hone in on an acceptable ship design template.

The chief shipwright finally settled for a fairly narrow but well-armored fleet carrier of the right length.

"The unimaginably named Exemplar-class should fit most of your requirements." The Rubarthan said as he magnified the only ship design that remained. "Take a look. One of my ship design teams worked to develop a fleet carrier that was particularly suited for both solo operations and lengthy expeditions. Her cross section is narrow enough to make it more difficult to land attacks on her hull.

Her hull is decently thick in every direction, but her prow is notably more stacked with alloy layers in order to serve as a plentiful damage buffer. Due to her fairly narrow hull and large thrusters, her acceleration is fairly high for her length, allowing her to catch up to fleeing enemy vessels or outrun them with greater ease."

This was quite a nice ship design. The overall concept immediately resonated with Ves, though there were still a few areas that seemed dubious.

"How much is her mech capacity?"

"Only 300 mechs." Kezi mentioned. "That is below average when it comes to fleet carriers of this length, but there are good reasons why this is the case. The Exemplar-class can properly service her mechs with the help of her internal workshops and production facilities. She also has enough spare room for the modules required to integrate support link technology in her hull. Her power supply should be adequate enough to satisfy the increased demand for energy."

That sounded acceptable to him. He already knew that first-

class carrier vessels frequently tended to sacrifice mech capacity for additional performance and support functions.

Considering how strong first-class mechs tended to be, being able to field 300 of them while also providing adequate support was already amazing enough!

There was no need for Ves to get too hung up over the numbers.

As he studied the specifications of this ship class further, he soon began to frown.

"What is the matter, sir?"

"I am satisfied with the mobility of this vessel, but... I do not think her defenses are sufficient enough." Ves eventually said. "I am not sure what kind of combat scenarios that your shipwrights have envisioned when they came up with this design, but in my experience space battles are often short but incredibly punishing. It is not uncommon for starships under fire to lose their energy shields fairly quickly before incurring a lot of damage to their hulls. The biggest downside of the Exemplar is that all of her sides aside from her front are not designed to withstand focused fire from multiple warships."

The Exemplar is meant to utilize her superior mobility to rotate her hull and spread out the damage as much as possible if that happens." Kezi explained. "The fleet carrier should ideally orient her prow in the direction where the heaviest attacks come from. It is stacked with as many layers of transphasic armor plating as possible in order to turn it into a wall that can soak up a large amount of firepower."

"That sounds expensive."

"Not as much as you think. We are relying on quantity instead of quality. If the budget for this ship design was higher, my shipwrights would have tried to reduce the amount of layers in order to enhance her mobility further."

Ves studied the armored prow a bit more. The thick V-shaped prow looked so thick and formidable that it looked like it was designed to ram other vessels!

Of course, that was not the case. The prow was merely designed to keep the vessel alive as long as possible when she actively participated in an offensive operation.

"This is not enough." Ves shook his head when he thought about how it would fare in an actual operation. "I am sure that this fleet carrier will fare fine under normal circumstances, but what I am worried about is that she will falter when subjected to more extreme conditions. I have learned the hard way that reality rarely matches our expectations. Imagine a scenario where the Exemplar is operating all alone well behind enemy lines. Imagine that this ship must traverse a huge distance in order to get to the nearest safe harbor. Imagine that she is being actively hunted by the surrounding aliens all this time. Her superior mobility may allow her to evade and sidestep a lot of enemy pursuit forces, but she will eventually run out of luck from time to time. She may possess the defenses to withstand the first few attacks, but what about subsequent engagements?"

Kezi began to frown as he considered these conditions. "I admit that your scenario is much harsher than what my design teams normally consider. We are accustomed to developing starships for the armed forces of the Rubarthan Pact. None of the carrier vessels we have worked upon are meant to operate alone and far away from any support services. They only have to survive a handful of battles at most before they can be brought back to a repair yard where they can easily be restored before her systems deteriorate any further."

That meant that the Exemplar class was not so suitable for lengthy expeditions and deep strike operations at all. They would have to apply targeted modifications to the design in order to increase her fault tolerance.

Ves suddenly thought of a good idea. When he thought back on how his expeditionary fleet managed to fare in past engagements, he focused on one unusual capital ship in particular!

He retrieved the design files from his cranial implant and projected them in front of Kezi.

"Sir? This is... a second-class ship design."

"Yes. Take a look. The Graveyard is an inventive ship class that is designed to tank a lot of damage by cladding her hull with disposable armor plating. What is special about her is that she can constantly renew her hull plating by sourcing them from salvaged wrecks. If this is possible with second-class starships, why can't we do the same with first-class starships?"

Kezi grew more and more impressed with the Graveyard.

"That... is an unorthodox idea. I can easily identify more than a hundred different problems with this ship concept, but... there is no reason why it should not work when applied to the Exemplar Class. I will have to make a large amount of changes and additions to the template. Give me a moment."

Ves and Kezi spent the next hour on trying to work out how they would add the Graveyard's signature capability to the Exemplar-class fleet carrier.

It was not that simple to utilize salvaged materials to clad the hull of the Exemplar. First-class materials were much stronger and more difficult to process. Trying to convert them into starship hull plating took so much time that it was too dangerous to resort to conventional means.

The trouble about operating behind enemy lines was that starships constantly needed to be on the move. They needed to finish whatever they needed to do before fleeing the star system.

They eventually decided to implement a powerful technological application that could literally crush broken wrecks into the armored prow of the Exemplar by relying on overpowering gravitic force.

Out of all of the options available, it was exceptionally fast and convenient to the point where the fleet carrier could readily replenish her defenses in mid-battle!

The only downside was that the new system was so demanding that it could only be applied to the bow of the capital ship.

Ves considered it to be a worthwhile tradeoff as the Exemplar would be virtually unstoppable as long as she wasn't flanked!

Ves and Kezi decided to call this modified ship design the Grave Exemplar.

Chapter 5830 Rubarthan Dream

5830 Rubarthan Dream

The new ship design needed to undergo a lot of refinement before the E-66 Experimental Yard could begin construction.

That was fine as the facility still needed to complete the escort carrier in her main yard. The shipwrights and other planners would be eager to cut their teeth into a brand new challenge.

As Ves and Kezi studied the draft of the 1.5 kilometer long fleet carrier with the preliminary designation 'Grave Exemplar', both of them regarded the new ship concept from different angles.

To Chief Shipwright Keziramous Demodian, the vessel was a significant departure from Rubarthan naval doctrine.

The inclusion of support link technology that demanded the inclusion of mecher consultants significantly changed the role of the armored fleet carrier.

Though she was not armed with actual gun batteries like the carriers of the Red Association, her amazing support functions transformed her into a powerful force multiplier, but only if she accompanied her mechs at a closer proximity than normal.

The configuration of the base Exemplar design needed to be extensively redesigned in order to support her much more arduous goals. The new gravitic crusher that was supposed to thicken the prow armor by using literal salvage as input was insanely demanding. It was an incredible technical challenge to make it work on a consistent basis under the most difficult circumstances.

Kezi grew excited at the idea. He had not worked on a ship concept so different and novel from what his shipyard developed in the past. The Larkinson Clan clearly had different ideas on how to wage warfare.

That became obvious when Ves demanded that the Grave Exemplar still leave enough open space for future upgrades and refits. The ship needed to be built in a way that allowed her to be converted to a full 'Larkinson-style' fleet carrier at a future date.

What exactly Larkinson-style even meant was anyone's guess. Not even Ves could supply a well-defined definition of what he had in mind.

This was mainly because Ves had not yet explored what was possible with starships in the Age of Dawn.

Ordinary hyper ships did not cut it anymore. Everyone believed that slapping hyper technology onto modern human starships was enough to unlock their full potential, but Ves was of a different mind.

If E-technology was capable of augmenting the combat performance of mechs, then logically it should offer comparable benefits to starships.

It was much harder to do so in practice. Ves knew his limitations. He could design wondrous mechs, but he was an amateur when it came to designing starships.

He could not leverage his design philosophy at all as starships were conceptually different from mechs in so many different ways.

Ves could only come up with a limited number of ways he could make the starship alive, but none of them had been put to the test.

Starships were much more intricate than mechs. There were so many moving parts that were interdependent from each other that there was always a slight chance that small errors could cascade into catastrophic consequences.

What this meant was that Ves had to limit his proposals and rein in his desire to make his mark on the Grave Exemplar design.

He at least needed to wait until he tested his ideas to ensure they were safe and effective to use on a starship.

This was why he insisted that the Grave Exemplar retained enough room for future modifications. The shipwrights wouldn't like it because the cumbersome demand added a lot of additional complications to the shipbuilding project, but it was better to establish a solid foundation than to get stuck with a stopgap fleet carrier that would soon grow obsolete due to rapid technological development.

To Ves, the current concept of the Grave Exemplar was still incomplete. Once E-66 completed her initial construction, the resulting fleet carrier would enter into service as an 'incomplete' product.

Of course, incomplete did not mean that she would have gaping holes in her hull or anything. Most people probably wouldn't think that anything was amiss, but Ves would always know that the Grave Exemplar was still far from reaching her full state.

He did not know how much time needed to pass before the Larkinson Clan was ready to transform her into a proper Larkinson ship. Ves hoped that he did not have to wait too long to produce significant advancements that were powerful enough to make his vessels stand out from the rest.

As a Holy Son of the Metal Scroll and the most innovative mech designer of his generation, it would be a disappointment if his starships were only superficially different from the hulls utilized by the remainder of human civilization!

In any case, Ves and Kezi concluded a highly fruitful preliminary design session.

Although Ves was not able to convey everything he wanted to see from Grave Exemplar, he had already given plenty of food for thought to the chief shipwright.

"It is difficult for you to understand what being a Larkinson truly means without formally joining my clan." The physical projection of Ves said at the end. "My clan will dispatch an extensive group of personnel to induct you into the Larkinson Clan and teach you why we are different. There are many benefits to joining. One of the most life-changing boons of becoming a Larkinson is that you can readily obtain companion spirits. This is a free benefit to every valuable talent or high-ranking personnel. As for everyone else, they only need to work hard and accumulate enough Larkinson merits to redeem this reward from the Larkinson Exchange."

Kezi's eyes sparkled when Ves brought up this subject.

"I have heard about that. There is a lot of talk and rumors about these companion spirits. Here in the Rubarthan Pact, there is talk that these living E energy constructs are derived from the god cat that has always accompanied the Destroyer of Worlds. Is... is there any truth to these claims?"

Ves wanted to palm his face. This again. Kezi was not the first person to ask this question.

While Ves wanted to admit the truth and state that he had been the person to create Emma, nobody would ever accept the explanation because he hadn't been alive at the time!

Perhaps he could lie and say that the mysterious 'Mr. S.' had been the one to develop companion spirits a long time ago, but that would deprive Ves a lot of credit that he rightfully deserved.

He therefore decided to address this annoying issue with a straightforward lie.

"I cannot give any classified information to you." Ves apologetically responded. "The Red Association regards companion spirits as a strategic advantage of humanity. I can tell you that contemporary companion spirits share a lot in common with the giant feline construct that accompanies her Her Holiness. I hope that clarifies a few of your doubts."

Kezi reacted with a surprising amount of enthusiasm towards this answer.

"Thank you for your confirmation! With your permission, I will share your words with the rest of my personnel. Once they learn that they too can have god cats of their own, they will not hesitate to surrender their Rubarthan citizenships in order to become proper members of your young but promising clan!"

Ves raised his hand. "Whoa, there. Don't be in such a hurry! I applaud your enthusiasm, but do not make any unreasonable assumptions. Companion spirits all have the potential to evolve into incredibly powerful entities, but that depends heavily on the strength of their principals and their chosen development trajectory. Regardless of how they develop, it takes a huge amount of time before any of them grow strong enough to defeat mechs and change the outcome of entire battles."

That successfully tempered Kezi's unreasonable expectations. "Ah, you are right, sir. This is much more realistic. It is too much to hope that obtaining companion spirits would allow me to gain the power of a god."

"There is still hope for you." Ves placated the chief shipwright. "Actually, you have two chances to transcend into a higher life form. You can start to cultivate by yourself once the Red Collective gets up and running. You can also rely on your upcoming companion spirit to grow stronger, either on a passive or active basis. I know you don't quite understand what I am saying, but everything will become clear soon enough."

This reminded Ves that the Larkinson Clan had yet to develop and distribute formal cultivation methods to its members.

He should really get around to tackling this issue, but he was a bit reluctant to do so before the Red Collective had finished a set of rules that every cultivator had to abide by. One of the principal mandates of this future organization was to regulate cultivators and their weird methods.

This was an issue for later. The Evolution Witch had already scheduled the first virtual meeting of the much-hyped Interim Leadership Council. This pivotal event would enable every council member to figure out the basic framework of the Red Collective.

A part of Ves looked forward to this, as he could help shape the rules of this future rival of the Red Two.

Another part of him dreaded it as the inclusion of so many different powers would definitely result in constant arguments and disagreements.

Ves questioned whether the councilors could get anything done during these meetings.

In any case, once Ves ended his virtual meeting with the chief shipwright of the E-66 Experimental Yard, he went back to work and tried his best to catch up to his design work during the remainder of the journey.

A number of his incarnations had never slacked off in this regard, but it was always best for Ves himself to tackle this kind of work.

The only design project that Ves truly prioritized at this time was the Dark Zephyr Mark III Project.

Progress on this revolutionary new archetech expert mech design project was mainly dependent on Gloriana. She had been working hard non-stop while he took care of other business.

It remained difficult for her to make any significant progress, but her effort was not in vain. She started to look and sound more hopeful by the day.

"There is a secret to archetech that my mentors have yet to grasp." She claimed to Ves one day. "It surprises me that the mech designers who received direct instruction from the Xenotechnician have yet to grasp this key insight. Maybe it is an illusion, but I do not think it is the case. The more I study and work with archetech, the closer I am getting to an answer. I think this may be the breakthrough that I am waiting for. Once I have learned this crucial secret, I anticipate that there will be no obstacles to the development of our first proper archemetal mech!"

Ves did not know what to make of her claims.

A part of him felt deeply skeptical that Gloriana discovered a hidden aspect of archetech that the entire mech industry including the Xenotechnician had managed to overlook.

Another part of him recalled all of the times where Gloriana had given him the benefit of the doubt when he acted on his own feelings and hunches.

The least he could do was give his wife the same level of support.

"I hope you succeed in finding out whatever it is you are chasing, honey. Just keep our schedule and our timeline into account. We cannot stall our planned updates for all of our existing expert mechs for too long. They need to be brought into the Age of Dawn. If you haven't made any progress in

months, then it may be better to put archetech aside until you have developed a deeper grasp of the technology."

Gloriana vehemently rejected this approach. "NO! You are wrong! This is the opposite of what I should do! I am increasingly developing the impression that everyone has fundamentally misunderstood what archetech means and how it is supposed to work! Every interpretation of this alien tech base is flawed from the beginning because humans such as ourselves are incapable of approaching it from the perspective of the race who invented it in the first place. I think we need we need to overturn our entire approach towards deciphering archetech! I already have an idea on how we can make this happen!"

Ves was taken aback by her strong response.

"How?"

"I need to understand the arche like I understand mech pilots. I can think of no better way to do so than to interface my mind with a living member of this alien species! It's perfect!"

"WHAT?!"