

The Mech 5921

Chapter 5921 Overcompletion

If Ves had as much honor as a typical Larkinson mech pilot, then he would condemn the entire concept surrounding the Heart of Darkness.

However, Ves actually thought it was a rather brilliant way to deal with a god pilot!

God pilots were extremely powerful, but they were never truly solitary. Their combat power was top notch, but their ability to project power over interstellar distances was quite poor.

Their god mechs may have transformed into a divine creation, but only Star Designers were qualified to upgrade their tech and design.

Star Designers in turn depended heavily on an active mech industry and the high-end resources that could only be produced by a large and developed civilization.

God pilots therefore relied heavily on the support of their state or organization to function at their best.

If the mechers and the fleeters ever fell out with each other, then there was no way the latter would win in the long term if they failed to eliminate the god pilots.

However, it was suicide to fight directly against these powerhouses.

That was the reason why the Common Fleet Alliance invested an insane amount of resources into the development of the Heart of Darkness.

The ship might not fare that well against god pilots, but she had the potential to inflict the greatest amount of misery onto these beings!

"You should be familiar with the phenomenon of expert pilots losing the basis of their power due to breaking their oaths or failing utterly in their duties." The dread captain spoke as they went through a security checkpoint.

"I am. My grandfather was afflicted by it. I managed to make him whole again."

The captain smiled. "He is a lucky grandparent for having a diligent and capable descendant such as yourself. The point I am trying to make is that expert pilots are not the only champions who can break. Ace pilots are also susceptible to it. While it has never happened to any of the god pilots that we know of, we theorize that they are also vulnerable to an attack from this direction."

Ves looked shocked. "That... is an extremely spurious guess! I have met my fair share of god pilots, and from what I can tell, their willpower is one of the strongest forces that I have ever witnessed. They will not break as easily as others."

"We are aware of that, professor, but we still have to be ready to make the attempt. The Heart of Darkness is uniquely suited for this purpose because she is capable of doing more than other warships. Inspired by the insanity that took hold of our civilization during the twilight of the Age of Conquest, one of the more insidious strategies associated with that dreadnought is to drive the masses mad. Outright killing the people who contribute to the functioning of a god pilot in any way is too simple. By utilizing the unique tech of the Heart of Darkness, she can drive countless people

mad, either in an overt or more covert way. The point is not to remove them from the equation, but turn them into a drain on resources."

Damn! How despicable!

"This will make it much harder for a society to support a god pilot!"

"Exactly. Aside from that, the Heart of Darkness can also destabilize societies to the point where it begins to collapse. When a god pilot is incapable of saving the people that he or she has vowed to protect, there is a very real chance that the powerful pilot will break an oath! This may have devastating consequences, even at their exalted level! Even if that does not happen, the damage should be great enough to set god pilots back. The more the backbone of the mech industry becomes destabilized, the less their support base is willing to fight. The god pilots themselves may still wish to continue the fight, but their states or organizations may already be looking to sue for peace."

As the dread captain elaborated on all of the dirty tricks the fleeters had devised to 'counter' the threat posed by god pilots, Ves truly became impressed by how much thought the fleeters put into a possible confrontation against god pilots.

For all of their battleships, the CFA and the RF both knew that their chances of defeating even a single god pilot was slim to none.

While it was difficult for the fleeters to admit their inferiority in this aspect, they were rational enough to admit their own inferiority.

This had led them to devise all kinds of strategies and measures to attack god pilots in an oblique manner.

By destroying everything around god pilots as much as possible, it became theoretically possible to weaken or maybe even collapse them outright!

This was truly an approach that broadly aligned with the element of darkness!

The ends justified the means. So long as a strategy enabled the weak to defeat the strong, then anything was permissible!

While Ves ideologically agreed with the contingency plans prepared by the fleeters, personally he felt incredibly relieved that the relations between the Big Two had never deteriorated to the extent that they engaged in open warfare against each other.

The first-rate superstates also kept their heads down and restrained their own god pilots from seeking confrontation against the current hegemony of humanity.

If total war truly broke out, then the fleeters would single-handedly prove why warships needed to be restricted in human society!

"Thank you for sharing this to me, captain." Ves gratefully said. "I have a feeling that you aren't supposed to be sharing all of this information. It does not exactly paint you fleeters in the best light."

The old but invigorated man directed a genuine smile at Ves.

"We trust you, Professor Larkinson. After everything that you have done for us, we no longer consider you to be an outsider. Let me be honest. The Red Fleet has a strong interest in deepening

its relationship with you, so we are willing to treat you with much greater sincerity than before. I hope that you will find enough reason to regard us as your friends, much like you already do with the mechers."

How delightfully honest. The fleeters were anything but stupid. They studied his record and history to an exhausting degree, and easily figured out that Ves preferred honesty and directness over convoluted plots and schemes.

Though Ves was well aware that the Red Fleet would probably dump him without hesitation as soon as he had lost his value, there was at least an element of honesty in a transactional relationship.

It was exactly because the fleeters saw great promise in their continued cooperation with Ves that he had reached this point!

The closer Ves came to the vault, the more effort it took to suppress his excitement.

The passing of each second slowed down as Ves and the dread captain continued to undergo dozens of strict security measures.

The probability that either of them would try to steal or destroy the critical resources and objects stored within the vault was virtually zero, but that was no excuse for the Dread Marines on guard to skip procedure!

Wary of any sabotage committed at a moment at a time where the crew was likely to go lax, the elite soldiers assigned to guard this strategically valuable vault employed extra security measures.

Once the two were finally able to enter the vault, the dread captain slowly approached a terminal and went through the process of verifying his identity and permissions.

Ves looked around and tried his best to discern what else the fleeters stored in the vault, but the material qualities of the storage cells were so exceedingly high that he was unable to perceive anything special!

"It is done."

A large vault door began to slide open. It moved so slowly that it would take three whole minutes just to get out of the way!

The delay was a deliberate feature. Multiple security departments became alerted to the movement. If just one of them transmitted an override, the heavy vault door made out of materials that exceeded the toughness of the dreadnought's hull plating would instantly close shut!

Even if a thief was able to squeeze past the gap while the vault door had yet to close, there were still azure energy shields in the way that took an awful lot of damage to destroy.

This was just a handful of the security measures that Ves was able to detect from his position.

There were definitely other safeguards that were not as obvious.

All of this increased his excitement level. The more serious the fleeters treated their precious asset, the more value it would bring to Ves!

"We can step inside now."

Ves followed the dread captain inside the extremely sturdy vault. The azure energy shields had already been deactivated, so nothing else barred their way to the center of the large compartment.

A metal lockbox floated in the middle. Ves could not identify the material, but he was sure that he had only seen similar alloys in the most powerful first-class ace mechs.

Dread Captain Argile raised an armored finger. A high-tech key extended from it and slid inside the lock.

After a minute-long delay, the lockbox finally opened up on its own.

"Come. Your prize is here."

Ves slowly stepped forward and stood next to Captain Argile.

He couldn't help but grin when his eyes finally graced upon the reward he had been striving to obtain during his visit to the Dominion of Man!

The metal bar looked a little small, but its material qualities were so exceptional that it was already distorting reality while it remained at rest!

"This is the correct material, right? I hope I am not looking at another exceedingly rare metal alloy."

"Do not be concerned, professor. I have positively identified and confirmed many times over that we are looking at a genuine sample of the super-class alloy codenamed EE-343F-00334R. This single bar consists of precisely 5.0000000 kilograms of this experimental material. The original agreement states that you are only entitled to receive 2.353 kilograms of it. The Red Admiralty has decided to amend this term by granting you the right to claim this entire alloy bar."

The bonus did not come as a surprise to Ves, but he still felt jubilant now that it actually happened. 5 kilograms!

That was more than double the amount requested by the Mech Designer System!

Ves wondered whether it was possible to overcomplete his Supply Mission and whether he would earn a massive bonus from his dedication.

However, Ves did not think the System would play this kind of game. His experiences with it had taught him that it was quite precise about such matters. If it asked 2.353 kilograms, then it needed this amount but no more. It was useless to give the System extra. The Supply Mission would have already mentioned this possibility from the beginning if the opposite was the case.

All of that meant that Ves would retain a surplus of the key material that was responsible for making the Rubicon Spatial Transfer System so awesome!

It didn't matter that Ves lacked the knowledge and the technology to make full use of EE-343F-00334R.

Just owning whatever was left would allow him to study it and derive all kinds of insights from the first super-class material that he was allowed to keep!

Aside from that, Ves could also feed bits and pieces of it to Lucky in order to promote his development.

Perhaps his cat would gain the ability to teleport after ingesting enough EE-343F-00334R!

"Do you prefer to keep your prize in this container, or have you prepared other means of transportation?"

"I will take it straight away." Ves decisively said.

He reached out and stored the alloy bar inside the Vault of Eternity right away. He made no attempts to hide that he had the capacity to store stuff inside his own personal 'pocket space'. Perhaps the fleeters would conclude that this was a manifestation of his phase lord abilities.

In any case, Ves briefly paused to confirm that the System had not yet devoured the entire material in an instant before he relaxed.

There was nothing stopping him from completing another Supply Mission and initiating a major upgrade to the Mech Designer System!

Chapter 5922 The Red Fleet's Generosity

A huge sense of relief overcame Ves.

He had no idea what kind of change would ensue once he completed another Supply Mission, but it was sure to expand his options.

Ves desperately needed the help, especially now that he got soul marked by a God King who hated his guts!

There was only a limited amount of time for Ves to prepare for the inevitable arrival of the extragalactic invaders.

He could not afford to be too restrained in his use of the System anymore. He had to be more proactive in earning Ascension Points and spending them on enlightenment fruits, items and other benefits.

As long as it facilitated and sped up his journey to become a Star Designer, then everything was permissible!

Ves needed to spend a long time surveying his available means and devising a revised development plan that would help him survive the storms to come.

Before he was able to do that, he first needed to conclude his meeting with the fleeters.

Once they left the vault, Dread Captain Argile invited both Ves and Captain Zonrad Reze to one of his private offices.

Now that the Dominion of Man had lowered her alert level, the dread captain finally saw fit to exit his cumbersome Dread Armor and return to wearing his uniform.

Ves found it rather interesting that Sigrund got invited to this meeting as well.

The alien hybrid AI looked excited. Many of the changes applied to the Dominion of Man and the Brain Trust in particular had taught him a lot!

If he had any choice, then he would have definitely preferred to stay on the ship for a few years and thoroughly study all of the changes in the programming of the dreadnought's primary control system.

Alas, Sigrund still had to captain his own ship. The Red Fleet still had many other AI specialists in their employ who could do the same job.

Since the fake human aspired to become a fleet admiral, it remained crucial for him to serve as a line officer. The stodgy fleeters did not have a strong tradition of promoting staff officers to the highest ranks.

"Have you prepared a report on your findings?"

"I have, but it is not yet complete. There are still many more novel changes to the ship's control system that I have yet to examine in great detail."

"Then write a report that contains your recommendations to the experts dispatched by high command. Once this meeting has come to an end, you are instructed to take Professor Larkinson back to his fleet and remain with him until the Babylon Excavator has caught up with you. Since you have already formed a good relationship with him, the Red Admiralty has designated you as our official liaison. You are charged with representing the interests of the Red Fleet while you remain in his company."

Captain Reze did not betray any hint of emotion as he took in his latest orders.

There was no doubt that these orders disrupted his own plans.

However, there may be other opportunities if he joined up with Ves.

What was important was that the orders from above did not give Sigrund any choice in the matter. There was only one possible response he could make.

"Acknowledged. I shall endeavor to improve Professor Larkinson's impression of the Red Fleet."

"Good. You are intelligent enough to deduce our expectations for you. That said, you shall receive a more thorough briefing at a later date."

The dread captain turned to Ves.

"Much has changed. It will take far too long to explain how much of a shockwave your dramatic actions have produced. You will learn a part of what you have wrought on our organization later on, but much of our deliberations will remain behind closed doors. There is not enough time for us to go over the information that I am allowed to share with you. We must depart from this star system with haste as the native aliens have undoubtedly noticed the magnitude of what transpired here. Our highest priority is to transfer the Dominion of Man to a highly secure location where our best shipwrights and naval engineers can examine our dreadnought from top to bottom."

Ves nodded in understanding. "It is best to be safe and sorry, but don't forget what I said earlier, captain."

"We shall not neglect the needs of our dreadnought, especially now that she has become 'alive'. There is no need to burden you with any further information on our future plans related to our ship. The main purpose for inviting you here is to grant you your remaining rewards for going above and beyond what you promised to deliver to the Red Fleet."

"The Red Admiralty has put considerable thought in what you are entitled to receive from us. The admirals initially considered more mundane rewards such as CFA merits, exclusive tech or materials, but they quickly concluded that you should not be short of them. The Red Association can already satisfy most of your needs, so we must present you with a reward that only we can issue"

13:38

The good stuff was coming. Ves grew more and more eager to hear what the fleeters decided to award him with. It had to be a really massive reward in order to make the transaction more equitable!

Captain Argile's expression turned deep as he retrieved two different decorative boxes from his desk drawer.

"The Red Admiralty has put considerable thought in what you are entitled to receive from us. The admirals initially considered more mundane rewards such as CFA merits, exclusive tech or materials, but they quickly concluded that you should not be short of them. The Red Association can already satisfy most of your needs, so we must present you with a reward that only we can issue"

He opened up both boxes to expose the heavy metal medallions resting inside.

Ves' eyes immediately lit up as he recognized these iconic objects!

"Warship Tokens! Two of them!" He uttered in excitement! "Since these tokens are considerably larger, heavier and more expensive than my Frigate Token, I can already surmise that they correspond to much larger ship classes!"

The dread captain raised his palm. "Ah, before you get too excited, let me inform you that you are only permitted to leave with one of them. The Red Admiralty has seen fit to give you a choice."

He tapped the slightly smaller and less ostentatious token.

"This is a RF Battlecruiser Token that is already preregistered to your identity. Owning this token gives you the right to own and field your own battlecruiser in combat. Do take into account that we are not giving you a battlecruiser outright. You will have to make separate arrangements to purchase, construct or capture a warship that conforms to the requirements."

Ves was already familiar with the rules relating to Warship Tokens, so he immediately waved Argile to continue.

The old captain tapped the largest Warship Token that Ves had ever seen!

"This is an RF Battleship Token that is also preregistered to your identity. It gives you the right to own and field your own battleship in combat. You should already be aware of the differences between battlecruisers and battleships. The former has the firepower but not necessarily the defenses of the latter. The advantage of battlecruisers is that they are much cheaper and easier to build and maintain. Do not underestimate the price disparity. A battlecruiser can be up to 100 times more affordable than a battleship!"

Ves knew enough about warships to know how outrageous it was to fund the construction of a proper human battleship!

Just as how the armor system was often the most expensive element of a mech, a similar rule applied to warships, but to a much more exaggerated degree!

It was practically impossible for private individuals and organizations to completely fund the development and construction of a modern battleship. The amount of money needed to procure

billions of tons of high-grade exotics and other top-end materials in bulk was so insanely high that Ves had no confidence in financing such a prestige project!

However, that did not deter his attraction towards the RF Battleship Token.

As far as he knew, the Red Fleet had yet to award the most coveted and luxurious Warship Token to anyone at this date!

Ves may very well be the first private individual to earn a Battleship Token through pure merit!

He suddenly frowned.

"If the admirals are willing to give me a Battleship Token, why give me an alternative choice in the form of a Battlecruiser Token? Are you guys afraid that I won't be able to finance the construction of an entire battleship? Perhaps you are correct about that, but according to the rules, RF Warship Tokens can also be tied to warship of a lower class than what they permit."

If Ves owned a Battleship Token, he could still use it to build a smaller and more affordable warship such as a heavy cruiser or even a tiny corvette!

He could always wait a few decades before he finally built up enough infrastructure to support the construction of a proper battleship.

By that time, he could either retire the stopgap warship or bind it to another Warship Token.

The dread captain probably knew what Ves was thinking, so he quickly offered further clarification.

"These tokens are not as simple as they appear. The Red Admiralty has decided to attach additional conditions to the Battleship Token. You are permitted to receive it as long as you involve our shipwrights and naval engineers in the design and construction of your own battleship. We also require you to accommodate our guest officers on your new battleship once she is commissioned."

What?!

"In exchange for these concessions, we are willing to provide extensive financial and technical support for the entire project." Captain Argile continued. "We offer millenia's worth of expertise that can help you develop the strongest possible battleship of her tonnage. You can also negotiate with us to make use of our best capital-grade shipyards. To summarize, we can remove many of the barriers that make it much more difficult for you to obtain your own private battleship."

Ves looked pensive as he processed the terms of this offer. His excitement for the Battleship Token had dropped to an enormous extent now that he learned that the fleeters wanted to get involved every step of the way.

There was no way he and his clan could design and build their own battleship in peace!

Much of her secrets would become exposed to the fleeters!

Though Ves did not really mind it if the Red Fleet deciphered a lot of details about his possible battleship, the premise to this was that relations remained friendly!

As soon as the fleeters turned into his enemies, their thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of his personal battleship may turn into a massive vulnerability!

"Let me guess." Ves spoke up in a bitter tone. "The Battlecruiser Token that you guys present as an alternative does not come with as many strings attached."

The dread captain adopted a slightly apologetic expression. "We already calculated that you would not find the terms surrounding the Battleship Token palatable. This is why we are mindful enough to give you the option to claim a Battlecruiser Token with no additional strings attached. The terms are almost identical to the Frigate Token that you already possess. As long as you do not make use of the formidable firepower of your warship to slaughter humans on a large scale or violate any other taboo, you are free to employ your Battlecruiser as you see fit."

"I see. That is much more to my liking. Yet... it is really hard to resist the allure of a Battleship Token."

Ves was faced with an incredibly difficult decision. Each token had the potential to drastically change his life!

A Battleship Token would allow him to field a warship that was superior to any other vessel aside from a dreadnought.

The security offered by a human warship was indescribable. The cost of building one may be extravagant, but Ves could definitely count on the massive vessel to endure punishing attacks for an extended duration!

Combined with all of the shenanigans Ves could pull off to make the battleship alive, he would definitely become much better equipped to fight and survive against the toughest alien enemies in the new frontier!

The Battlecruiser Token did not provide him with nearly as much assurance.

Battlecruisers were still formidable capital ships, and their capacity to mount battleship-grade gun batteries allowed them to punch far above their weight!

However, the bulk exotics used to construct their entire hull were significantly more fragile and less resistant towards damage.

Even if the Larkinson Clan was partially able to compensate for this weakness by installing excellent azure shield generators, that was not enough to provide total security.

Ves knew that if he ever ended up in a difficult battle, he would come to regret the decision to pass up the opportunity to obtain his own battleship!

Yet... if he resisted the temptation and settled for a Battlecruiser Token, he would be able to keep much of the details of his future flagship confidential.

It had been rather fortuitous for him to acquire E-66 Experimental Yard a relatively short time ago. Since he fully owned this fantastic Rubarthan shipyard, it would be much easier for him to prevent the fleeters or anyone else from figuring out the full details of the battlecruiser!

This was incredibly important to Ves. Owning his own shipyard allowed him to go to much greater extremes to augment his private battlecruiser with controversial and maybe outright forbidden technologies!

Even if the mechers or the fleeters obtained a few clues that all was not right with the ship, it wouldn't matter so long as they continued to value Ves!

"Ugh... you guys are not making this easy for me." He grunted. "I thought that I was already done with making difficult decisions. You just had to present me with another headache-inducing dilemma..."

That said, he would happily suffer a hundred more headaches like this in order to secure his own Warship Token of this caliber!

Chapter 5923 Simple Decision

Ves faced another incredibly difficult dilemma.

He wanted the Battleship Token. He wanted to obtain it real bad. The benefits were simply too great.

The difference between battleships and battlecruisers were huge. The latter may be cheaper and faster, but they had often proven to be too fragile to withstand the rigors of frontline combat.

In the current pattern of warfare, battleships had proven their worth many times over. The warships fielded by most of the 13 major races of the Red Ocean were not vegetables. Their powerful transphasic armaments possessed enhanced shield-breaking and armor-piercing properties, allowing them to punch significantly above their weight class.

Armor mattered. It could mean the difference between returning from a battlefield with a few scratches or with a lot of holes and crippling battle damage to the hull!

According to the reports and battle footage that Ves had perused in the last year, the Red Two employed their battleships and battlecruisers very differently.

One of the most persistent problems in space was that it was usually a giant, empty void. There was no cover at all if a battle took place away from a planet or an asteroid belt.

Battleships served as the most reliable forms of cover as their powerful azure shield generators and their thick and reliable armor belts allowed them to withstand a huge amount of punishment.

While it was true that shield link technology enabled smaller and more fragile warships to tank a surprising amount of attack salvos, there were limits to every technological solution.

Once the firepower of an opposing fleet managed to inflict so much total damage that it had practically exhausted the energy shield capacity of all of the vessels in a friendly fleet, then the only effective form of protection during this phase of a battle was plain hard metal!

Battleships truly began to show their value during the later phases of a battle. When both sides effectively lost the protection of their energy shields, one of the most important factors that determined victory or defeat was toughness and endurance!

Any serious warfleet that included battleships in their lineup possessed excellent qualifications to participate in the most intensive battles of the Red War.

Even a single battleship could make a huge difference for the Larkinson Clan as possessing one allowed his troops to gain the upper hand in attrition warfare!

So what if the enemy brought a lot of firepower? A modern human battleship of the Hyper Generation was the most powerful kind of warship in the Red Ocean, especially if she was built to the technological standards of the Red Fleet.

Ves understood the greater value of the offer. While the cost of development and production of a battleship depended heavily on her size and tonnage, even a relatively modest 3-kilometer long warship was still far beyond the means of the Larkinson Clan.

This was why it was so important that the Red Fleet subsidized the construction of a battleship.

Aside from that, the technological demands of a battleship was much greater than a battlecruiser.

After all, the defense of a battleship relied far more than employing a lot of tough and expensive high-grade exotic materials. A whole array of advanced technologies and high-tech production equipment was needed in order to build a vessel that could withstand a huge amount of punishment while still retaining as much combat effectiveness as possible.

Dreadnoughts were the quintessential example of how much punishment the warships of the Red Fleet could endure.

Ves had witnessed first-hand how the Dominion of Man was able to absorb and endure blows that would have shattered dozens if not over a hundred battleships!

The lightning tribulation had tested the Red Fleet's top defenses measures, and ultimately became satisfied with how well the Dominion of Man was able to withstand the might of the clone of the Subjugation King as well as numerous god beasts.

Such threats may be rare, but Ves did not think his luck would remain high enough to avoid an encounter against opponents of similar strength.

He had become way too high-profile nowadays! Not only was he responsible for a swathe of strategic technological contributions, he had also masterminded the transformation of the Dominion of Man into what the fleeters had already taken to calling a god ship!

All of this painted such a giant target on his back that any serious enemy would definitely try to bring an excess of firepower to wipe him from existence!

A regular battleship might not be able to withstand as much damage as a proper dreadnought, but it was better than all of the other alternatives!

It was just that Ves did not feel comfortable with all of the conditions that he and his clan needed to abide by in order to make use of a Battleship Token.

The more Ves thought about this option, the more he realized that he wouldn't be able to own the battleship in full.

The RF's shipwrights and naval engineers were much better at their jobs than anyone that the Larkinson Clan could employ.

Combined with their unsurpassed accumulation in battleship development, this effectively meant that the entire design and the vast majority of the high technologies incorporated into the hull effectively fell under the control of the Red Fleet!

The fleeters would know every detail that they got involved in. They were also in a fantastic position to implant all of the backdoors and listening devices they wanted into every important ship component or system.

Given that the RF's exclusive technologies were so advanced that it was impossible for the Larkinson Clan's scientists and engineers to understand how they worked, there was no way to get rid of all of the tampering!

While Ves recognized that exclusive high technologies would make his battleship a lot more powerful than if he relied on homebrew technologies, the expertise required to operate, maintain and repair all of these incredibly advanced parts and systems remained in the hands of the fleeters as well.

The reason why the Red Fleet offered to supplement the crew of the battleship with its own personnel was because the Larkinsons did not have the permissions or training to operate all of this high technology!

Suffice to say, Ves really disliked it when his strongest naval asset remained highly dependent on the goodwill of an external organization.

He would effectively hand over a large amount of intelligence and control to outsiders!

This was an insane security risk no matter how Ves viewed this situation!

The Battlecruiser Token became more attractive by the second. The warship he could obtain with the help of this permit might not nearly be as good as a proper battleship built to the most up-to-date standards of the Red Fleet, but Ves would have much greater guarantees that the warship would remain under his full control.

Ves just lamented that the price of trying to become more self-sufficient was rather high.

There was no way that he and his clan could be so cavalier about deploying a battlecruiser in a serious battle.

The enormous capacity of a battlecruiser easily allowed for the mounting of enormous primary gun batteries that were no different from that of a battleship.

Yet the enormous shortcoming in the armor belt heavily limited the battlecruiser's tactical flexibility in combat.

Sure, a battlecruiser was generally a bit faster and more agile, but this was only in a relative sense. Capital ships could never match the speed and grace of a frigate or a destroyer of the same tech level.

The resilience of a battlecruiser was disproportionately low compared to the value of such a vessel.

This caused them to occupy a rather awkward position on the battlefield.

Despite being designed and built for combat, every fleet treated their battlecruisers like fragile treasures. They were always placed in the backline and were mainly used as enormous artillery platforms.

While they were technically suited to be employed in flanking squadrons and fast-reaction units, very few people wanted to assign high-risk missions to them. They were mostly placed in the rear or center of massive fleet formations.

This meant that it was not that easy to make full use of their mobility advantage in many situations.

Ves frowned deeper. The inadequate armor belt of a battlecruiser really annoyed him. The best way to mitigate these shortcomings was to build a highly mobile fleet around this vessel.

If the design of the battlecruiser emphasized mobility over any other consideration, then Ves could foresee the creation of a warfleet that was highly suitable for mobility warfare and guerilla warfare.

There was no need for the Larkinson Clan to imitate the Red Two and collide against the Red Cabal's strongest warships.

It was much more suitable for Larkinsons to engage in raids and hit-and-run battles.

So what if the Larkinson forces targeted the weak and vulnerable? It was only sensible to avoid any encounters with powerful enemy fleets that could pose a real threat against a battlecruiser!

The lack of subsidies, material support and technological support would make it much harder to develop a battlecruiser that could outperform an RF ship of the same class, but at least the Larkinson Clan would retain full ownership and control over their hull.

The upcoming deep strike operations made it more important than ever to engage in this style of warfare. In short, so long as Ves was able to stomach the critical lack of hard defenses of a battlecruiser, he did not feel as if he missed out on too much.

The lack of subsidies, material support and technological support would make it much harder to develop a battlecruiser that could outperform an RF ship of the same class, but at least the Larkinson Clan would retain full ownership and control over their hull.

Ves would also find it a lot easier to implement and upgrade all kinds of crazy hyper technologies and E-technologies to his personal battlecruiser!

He took a deep breath and tried to weigh his decision as best as possible.

"You're not making this easy for me, huh?" He idly asked.

Captain Argile smiled back at his honored guest. "We are deeply interested in your innovative approach to shipbuilding. If you are willing to cooperate with us, we believe our collaborative efforts may further revolutionize the landscape of our industry."

Ah. Ves understood the score now.

He had a strong hunch that the Red Fleet deliberately gave him a choice between two different tokens as a test.

The fleeters wanted to test his willingness to deepen his cooperation with them. If he selected the Battleship Token, then he pretty much signaled his willingness to trust the Red Fleet and collaborate with them on a more long-term basis.

The two would no longer maintain a pure transactional relationship. They would instead be able to form a true alliance, similar to the one he already enjoyed with the Red Association.

If Ves opted for the objectively inferior Battlecruiser Token, he would signal his continued reluctance and apprehension towards developing a closer relationship with the fleeters.

It was a sign that he remained mistrustful of outsiders. His willingness to settle for less just so that he could maintain the confidentiality of his upcoming personal warship essentially showed that he wanted to maintain his distance from the Red Fleet.

Ves would probably continue to favor the mechers over the fleeters in the times to come.

While there was still room for cooperation between Ves and the Red Fleet, their relationship would continue to be defined by transactions as opposed to intangibles such as genuine trust and friendship.

The question now was how much Ves was willing to cooperate with the Red Fleet.

This was the crucial variable that determined his choice.

Ves grew pensive as he failed to make up his mind. Each selection was equally as attractive to him. They both possess a lot of pros and cons that pretty much evened out the score.

He was confident that he could make either option work.

If he took the Battleship Token, then he would make sure to maintain friendly ties with the Red Fleet

If he took the Battlecruiser Token instead, he would stick to his original diplomatic stance by making sure he would never be at the mercy of an external partner.

"Ah hell! I am done with making tough decisions! Let's do it this way!"

Before Captain Argile could ask for further clarification, Ves grabbed the extremely precious Battleship Token and tossed it into the air.

The heavy medallion flipped as the exquisite metal piece soared over everyone's head before plunging straight onto the dark.

Clack!

The token landed on the desktop with the rear side facing upwards.

Everyone stared for a moment before Ves calmly reached out for the Battlecruiser Token.

"I'll be taking this." Ves declared.

"..."

Chapter 5924 Equal Weight

"Isn't this too impulsive?" Sigrund couldn't help but open his mouth.

Both Sigrund and Captain Argile couldn't believe that Ves would settle such a deep and profound decision by flipping a Battleship Token as if it was an ordinary coin!

That was a Battleship Token! Its material composition and design were already valuable enough, but the permissions associated with it was the real prize!

Anyone bestowed with a proper Battleship Token had the right to field one of the strongest and largest warships that humanity could build!

So long as Ves did not go too far by trying to build his own dreadnought, he could gain a battleship that was no worse than the battleships employed by the Red Fleet!

Anyone who understood the significance of a Battleship Token would never treat such a symbolic object in such a frivolous and disrespectful manner.

This was especially the case for fleeters, who revered battleships to an enormous degree.

Sigrund always aspired to command a real battleship. The Babylon Excavator was merely a reconnaissance cruiser that wasn't designed to participate in standing battles. He would never dare to take any matters concerning battleships lightly for fear of ruining his chance of working with them in the future.

Dread Captain Volkert Argile was a lot older and had already climbed his way up to his most ideal position. However, it was exactly because of all of the blood, sweat and tears he put into his career that he understood how much an officer needed to outcompete so many rivals in order to earn a limited battleship assignment.

To fleeters as serious as the two captains, flipping a Battleship Token as if it was a coin was such an enormous faux-pas that it broke their minds!

Unfortunately for them, Ves did not care. He was a mech designer, not a naval officer or a shipwright. He inherently possessed less reverence towards battleships.

"Why not?" Ves practically taunted as he casually tossed his new Battlecruiser Token in his hands. "I needed a quick and convenient way to make up my mind. I don't have a coin in my pocket, so I grabbed the nearest acceptable substitute. These tokens look like big coins, and their mass distribution is roughly even, so they can be flipped just like normal coins."

Dread Captain Argile looked pained at how extensively Ves violated decorum.

"Let us set aside the issue of using a Battleship Token to guide your decision. I am concerned that you are making a hasty decision. Have you considered all of the variables? I have yet to explain the full support package that the Red Fleet is willing to attach to the Battleship Token. You do not possess a full understanding of how much we are willing to fund and assist in the development of a battleship."

Sigrund backed the dread captain up. "Your decision affects far more than yourself. It has enormous ramifications for your clan. Since Captain Argile did not mention a time limit, you do not have to claim a Warship Token right away. I suggest you go back to your clan and solicit the opinions of your clansmen. You can inform the Red Fleet of your definitive answer once you have conducted a systematic cost-benefit analysis based on an extensive prognosis of your clan."

Ves shook his head in rejection. "There's no need to go through all of that trouble. I am not stupid. I know enough about warships and the circumstances of my clan to understand the ramifications well enough. In my opinion, both tokens hold equal weight to me. Their pros and cons may differ from each other, but when I add them all up, their scores are so close to each other that there is no obviously superior choice. Since that is the case, I might as well let fate decide. I am fine with either outcome."

He revealed that he did not treat this situation as frivolously as the two captains thought.

While his judgment and decision-making process were both highly questionable, his logic was pretty reasonable.

Perhaps he may be the only human in the Red Ocean who was willing to forgo a priceless opportunity to acquire and field his own battleship, but Ves did not care about the opinion of others.

He was sure he could make good use of his new Battlecruiser Token.

He may even be able to develop and apply enough new and revolutionary technologies to close the performance gap between a battlecruiser and a battleship!

Several minutes passed by as Ves repeatedly confirmed his decision and rejected any offer to reconsider.

The Red Fleet really did not like it that he chose to settle for a Battlecruiser Token.

The fact that Ves ultimately claimed this token because of a 'coinflip' was especially galling to the fleeters!

Alas, there was no way to change the outcome now that Ves had made up his mind.

Ves grew tired of all of the pushback.

"Look, if you want me to accept a Battleship Token, then don't attach so many conditions to it. At least remove the sketchy requirement that my battleship must partially be crewed by your own personnel. I am deeply uncomfortable with entrusting my safety and the safety of my clan to crucial personnel that answer to a different master."

He was not opposed to renegotiations, but the Red Fleet refused to budge on this matter.

"Opinions are divided within the Red Admiralty." Captain Argile ultimately explained. "Fleet Admiral Argile is more willing to relax the conditions, but Fleet Admiral Jameson insists on greater supervision. You have to realize that battleships not only carry enormous weight in our organization, but are also tainted with stigma due to the twilight of the Age of Conquest. There are good reasons why we have never seen fit to award a Battleship Token to any outsider in the past."

Ves crossed his arms. "That makes me want to stick with a Battlecruiser Token even more. Battleships evoke so much fright and concern among people due to the centuries-long propaganda against this ship class. Battlecruisers are able to destroy entire cities just as easily as their more massive counterparts, but they don't sound nearly as scary. Everyone seems to downgrade their threat level because they are always known to be easier to repel or destroy. I am fine with that. The development of azure energy shields has made warships significantly less dependent on their armor belts for protection."

The shipbuilding sector of red humanity was increasingly diverging from classic human warship paradigms.

The shortage of high-end resources and the growing possibilities of phasewater technology caused many members of the naval industry to pivot away from armor.

Ves and the Larkinson Clan might as well follow the rising trend and put greater emphasis on azure energy shields as the primary form of defense of their future flagship.

Once Ves had definitely proved that he had no intention of reconsidering his choice, the Red Fleet had little choice but to respect his will.

As much as the fleeters wanted to cooperate more extensively with Ves and 'learn' his unique technologies, it was more important to maintain a friendly and cordial relationship.

Perhaps there may be other opportunities to collaborate with him in the future. The Red Fleet just had to stay on his good side to make that happen.

Since an unrestricted Battlecruiser Token already represented a huge amount of value in human society, the Red Fleet saw no need to grant additional rewards to Ves.

It had already cost the fleeters quite a lot by giving away so much extra EE-343F-00334R!

This was an experimental super-class alloy that the fleeters were unable to reproduce under the current conditions!

Ves tactfully expressed his satisfaction of the two prizes and did not push for more.

"Let us discuss follow-up arrangements." Dread Captain Argile spoke next.

This was a rather brief and boring talk. There was no need for Ves to stick around anymore, but the fleeters wanted to make sure that Ves would be willing to provide answers and clarification about the transformed Dominion of Man if asked.

The Carmine dreadnought gained so many extraordinary traits that it was impossible for the fleeters to decipher every new feature!

Since Ves was partially responsible for all of the changes, he did not object to this demand.

It was a good way for him to keep up to date with the evolution of the powerful living warship.

As far as he was concerned, the Dominion of Man served as a partial test bed for numerous critical technologies that he intended to integrate into his future battlecruiser!

"We have no more pressing matters to discuss." The dread captain said as he stood up from his seat.

"Since we must depart from this star system with haste, we shall not demand your presence any longer. Captain Zonrad Reze here will serve as our spokesperson while he remains in your company. Much of our correspondence shall go through him while he remains assigned to you. Do not hesitate to bring your questions, requests or proposals to him if you need to contact the Red Fleet for any reason."

"Understood."

They shook hands for a final time before they finally ended this impactful meeting.

Ves put his shiny new Battlecruiser Token back into its original protective case before tossing the small container into the Vault of Eternity.

With that taken care of, he and Sigrund both got teleported to the primary hangar bay of the Dominion of Man.

The large and expansive space had incurred a decent amount of battle damage, but a lot of repair crews and bots were already working to restore everything.

Both Ves and Sigrund boarded a docked frigate that quickly lifted off and departed from the dreadnought.

The journey back to the Bluejay Fleet was quiet and uneventful. It was rather amazing to see the star system return to tranquility when it previously hosted one of the largest and most violent tribulation storms in the Red Ocean!

Once the frigate approached the Tarrasque, Ves finally relaxed now that he had exited the immediate reach of the Red Fleet.

"Meow meow meow!"

Lucky instantly arrived and flew around Ves' body like an overeager puppy!

"Hahaha! I missed you too! I suppose you can smell it, right?"

Lucky nodded so vigorously that it looked like he had been starving for multiple years!

"Be patient. I need to give an accounting to the mechers before I can take care of you." He said as he gently pushed his gem cat away.

"Meooooow!"

Jovy Armalon, Vector Loban and Kelsey Ampatoch all behaved as if they greeted a superstar.

None of the people on the Bluejay Fleet had missed the massive and explosive tribulation event!

Even when the RA warships were only able to observe what was happening with the help of remote sensor probes, the data and footage was already enough to blow their minds!

Every mecher who had the privilege of witnessing the entire spectacle was filled with questions.

Ves smiled at his fellow mech designers. "I'm not allowed to explain everything, but I can give you a brief explanation on what I have been able to engineer in these past few days."

"That would be most welcome, Ves." Jovy cordially responded before turning to the additional guest. "Would you like to introduce us to this fleeter?"

"Ah, this is Captain Zonrad Reze. He's a friend that is also assigned to me as a liaison. He's actually the captain of a fairly big cruiser. I believe he needs to speak with Rear Admiral Tensen about having his warship join up with our fleet."

That did not sit well with the two mechers. The Bluejay Fleet was fully in the control of the mechers. It would mess up their coordination and cohesion if they were forced to add an RF warship to their formation.

Ves did not really care too much about this tension. The mechers and the fleeters had proven their ability to work and fight alongside each other plenty of times during the Red War.

"Play nice, please. I like the both of you, and I have no qualms with maintaining friendly relationships with both the Red Association and the Red Fleet."

Chapter 5925 Getting Closer to the Truth

It took hours of meetings and discussions for Ves to broadly summarize what he had done while he stayed aboard the Dominion of Man.

There was no way that Ves could freely discuss extremely sensitive matters relating the truth about the Spark Reactor.

However, Ves was free to speak broadly about the emergence of both Caramond and Furia as humanity's latest ancestral spirits.

He just had to refrain from mentioning that Furia was originally a Fire Elemental that held the repressed consciousness of the original creator of the Fire Scroll!

Ves actually found it quite frustrating how much fun stuff he was forced to leave out of his story.

For example, there was no way the mechers would be able to maintain their composure if they learned that the Brain Trust was made out of a lot of brains with A-grade genetic aptitudes!

Despite the fact that there were a lot of glaring holes in his retelling of events, there were still plenty of details that occupied the attention of his audience.

There were also pieces of information that Ves obliged to disclose.

"So you went ahead and turned the Dominion of Man into a 'Carmine dreadnought'." Jovy flatly said. "This is... disappointing. You violated the terms of one of our agreements. The Carmine System is designated as restricted technology. It is far from ready to be rolled out to the public. Now that you have exposed its existence to the fleeters of all people, it becomes much more difficult to control the narrative."

Though Ves felt genuine remorse for breaking the trust of the mechers, he ultimately convinced himself that it was for a good cause.

He deliberately went through with his ambitious plan without disclosing all of the details to the mechers in advance. Now he had to pay the price for his rash decision.

Fortunately, the benefits of a successful outcome were so massive that it would be hard for the Red Association to blame his unilateral actions!

"You should be grateful that your plan ultimately succeeded." Vector Loban said. "I think the Survivalists are more inclined to forgive your transgressions, but the Evolution Witch may not be so forgiving. If I was in your place, I would put more thought on how to placate her the next time you correspond with Her Holiness."

Though Ves felt a bit more nervous about attracting the ire of the Evolution Witch, he did not harbor that much fear towards the leader of the Transhumanist Faction.

He already learned through Veronica that his mother had already begun to cooperate extensively with the Evolution Witch in secret.

So long as his mother and the Evolution Witch remained dependent on each other, it was nearly impossible for the latter to have a falling out with Ves.

In other words, Ves could get away with a lot more than usual!

"I think the Evolution Witch won't remain upset once she learns about the advancements I have made in relation to the Carmine System." Ves grinned. "Trying to apply it to a dreadnought of all possibilities has allowed me to make a lot of new discoveries. I even managed to come up with an innovation that is so powerful that it has the potential to change the entire game."

The discussion continued on for several hours as Ves tried to sate the curiosity of his friends while revealing as little information as possible.

He simply wasn't allowed to share much of what he had learned during his life-changing visit to the Dominion of Man.

He had to wait until he came into contact with a Star Designer or god pilot before he could divulge more sensitive details to the Red Association.

The leaders of the Red Association likely received a report from the Red Fleet already. The incident had too many repercussions. The entire status quo had changed as soon as the first 'god ship' successfully came into existence!

Fortunately, the tier 1 galactic citizens became so preoccupied that none of them reached to Ves for the time being.

This allowed Ves to finally retire to his stateroom and prepare to end his long and exceedingly exhausting day.

"I really want to put all of this excitement behind me and go back to my family." He said as he loosened his uniform collar and sank into a couch.

"Meooow~"

Lucky floated over and started to sniff all around his body. The darkened gem cat did not give up on his quest to find the exceedingly precious metal that Ves had managed to obtain from the Red Fleet.

The cat's silly behavior reinforced the perceived value of EE-343F-00334R. Lucky did not want to leave Ves alone until he had a bite of this precious substance!

"Okay, okay. I won't tease you any longer. Give me a moment to prepare a portion."

A few seconds passed before a small chunk of EE-343F-00334R appeared on his palm.

Ves had carved out precisely 300 grams from the alloy bar.

"MEOW!"

A dark flash zipped towards the chunk of alloy and engulfed it in the blink of an eye!

"Hey, be careful about that! Its potency is much higher than your regular diet!"

The cat quickly discovered this for himself as his dark-plated body began to shake.

"Meow... meow... meeeeoow!"

Lucky squirmed and shook in the air as if he had eaten a mouthful of spicy peppers!

Though Ves had a lot of confidence in Lucky's digestion capabilities, he still remained on alert to see whether his gem cat was able to contain his latest meal.

It turned out that feeding him with a portion of 300 grams at once had been a mistake.

"Meoow... meooooow.... Meooow..."

Ves relaxed when several minutes passed by without any further signs of deterioration.

Lucky may be in considerable pain for the time being, but the cat would probably bounce back pretty quickly once he managed to absorb his luxurious meal.

"Okay, I think you'll be alright for the time being. That will give me time to settle one important matter."

Ves traditionally visited the bathroom to do his System business, but he was so tired that he no longer bothered with that step this time.

He returned to the System Space with a single thought and returned to the mountain top.

Ves first visited the Vault of Eternity and carefully utilized a tool to slice away 2.353 kilograms of EE-343F-00334R.

This left him with a sizable reserve that he could save up for other purposes. Ves had yet to make up his mind on whether he wanted to feed the remainder to Lucky or figure out a different application for it. He needed to conduct a lot more studies on the materials before he was ready to plan out a proper strategy.

There was no need for him to wait that long in order to complete a Supply Mission.

The only reason why he held off on submitting the right quantity of EE-343F-00334R to the Mech Designer System right away was because he wanted to check up on a few matters.

He first climbed all the way up to the Sacred Temple and checked up on his Status as well as his Divine Cores.

The latest tribulation had led to drastic improvements of most of his Attributes.

Ves could still feel that his body was continuing to adjust to his new condition, so the numbers were still subject to change.

When Ves inspected the Divine Cores that represented himself and Vulcan, he grew more concerned about his current state.

The Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown continued to stick to Vulcan's Divine Core like a barnacle.

While Vulcan definitely took advantage of the powerful symbol of authority to speed up his cultivation, it was not quite clear how much this nasty artifact influenced the incarnation's thought process.

Ves had always remained confident his clean perspective would prevent Vulcan from descending into madness.

That confidence had dropped as soon as he inspected the current state of his Divine Core.

The strange manifestation that Ves had taken to calling the Hand of Creation had changed considerably after his embrace of the darkness element.

Life and mechs still played an essential part of his work, but now they needed to share space with darkness.

Ves grew relieved that his newly acquired affinity and comprehension for darkness merged seamlessly into his Spirituality. There were no signs of incompatibility or conflict.

Not all was well, however.

The Hand of Creation no longer looked as pure and pristine as before!

A small spot of tarnished green had burrowed its way into the Divine Core!

"Ugh."

The only consolation to Ves was that the soul mark remained dormant. It did not seem to exert any active influence or damage to his Divine Core.

That did not reassure him. The less energy the soul mark spent on messing with him, the more energy it devoted to rooting itself into his Spirituality!

It would be a nightmare to erase it! His only hope was to strengthen his darkness manipulation abilities to the point where he could leverage the murky properties of this E energy attribute to dampen or suppress the soul mark.

Ves believed that since the Subjugation King partially drew strength from light, his soul mark should ultimately be vulnerable to darkness.

This was just a theory, though. He had no proof that it could actually make a difference.

"Whatever."

There was nothing he could do about the soul mark, so he simply decided to leave it alone.

Once he exited the Sacred Hearth, he looked up at the pale blue skies. A lot of thoughts flowed through his mind.

"Alright. Let's get this over with." He muttered.

[Supply Mission]

Mission: Material Supply 2

Difficulty: S-Rank

Prerequisites: Advance to Journeyman Mech Designer

Description

The Mech Designer System needs to be supplied with several rare materials to facilitate future upgrades.

This Supply Mission can be completed by offering 2.353 kilograms of EE-343F-00334R.

Reward: 1 use of the Inventorize ability, 10 golden lottery tickets.

The nominal rewards for completing this Supply Mission were trivial to Ves these days.

What he truly valued was what kind of major upgrade the submission would initiate.

Ves recalled that when he submitted the Timpala Steel, the System presented him with 7 different upgrade tracks, each of which promised vastly different benefits.

"System. I know you're listening. Stop with the silent treatment. I think I deserve a few answers from you now that I am on the verge of completing another S-Rank Mission."

[Please present your query.]

He wondered whether he would gain access to the same upgrade tracks, or be presented with an entirely new set of choices based on the properties of EE-343F-00334R.

Perhaps the material was so limited in use that the System upgraded itself directly without asking for his input.

"System. I know you're listening. Stop with the silent treatment. I think I deserve a few answers from you now that I am on the verge of completing another S-Rank Mission."

[Please present your query.]

Ves curled his lips upwards. "First, please tell me how long it will take to complete your transformation once I submit this special alloy."

[The Mech Designer System Version 2.0 will remain indisposed for approximately 5 to 21 days.]

"Wait what?! How come it's so much faster than before?! Is EE-343F-00334R much less powerful than Timpala Steel?!"

[That is not necessarily the case, user. The Mech Designer System Version 2.0 is much less fragile and more structurally complete than its previous iteration. The foundation is already repaired. Any subsequent upgrades will be built on top of the new structure.]

"Okay. I can accept that. Will you give me a choice on how the Mech Designer System will be upgraded next?"

[You will be presented with a limited selection of upgrade tracks. They will not be as diverse as the previous selection as they are built on top of the structure shaped by Upgrade Track #3: Spiritual Ascension.]

"I see. Why give me a choice, anyway?"

[The Mech Designer System is created to accommodate the demands of its users. It does not follow a predetermined upgrade track because it will not necessarily serve its users as optimally as it should.]

That caused Ves to think about who shaped the Metal Scroll fragment into the Mech Designer System in the first place.

Who created the System?

What was its purpose?

Why did it end up in his hands?

All of these questions and more had always plagued him. With the information he accumulated over the years, Ves was no longer as clueless as before.

Though he lacked a lot of solid answers, he believed he may have finally pieced together enough clues to come up with a theory that he was confident about!

Chapter 5926 An Accident of History

The Mech Designer System was clearly an artificial creation.

There was no way that the fragment of the Metal Scroll spontaneously decided to reconfigure into the present System.

Someone had to program its functions.

Ves had a pretty good clue who might be responsible.

"I have a theory, System. Would you like to listen?"

The System remained silent. It had never really been a good conversation partner.

"During the Great Betrayal when the Big Two rebelled against the Five Scrolls Compact, the Metal Scroll somehow got broken into pieces. The fragment that comprises you is one of them. It is

difficult to obtain a complete and accurate recounting of what exactly took place during this battle, but I guess that the shattering of the Metal Scroll was an inside job."

Ves smirked wider.

"The Progenitors of Mechs who shaped the very foundation of the Mech Trade Association must have taken it, caused it to break and immediately reused most of the fragments to form the Kingdom of Mechs or upgrade it if it already existed. During this process, many of the Progenitors of Mechs sacrificed their lives to create the pinnacle work that would end the scourge of the Compact and consolidate the resurgence of modern human civilization."

This was where his theory got interesting.

"These days, the upper echelon of the MTA and RA all worship the Progenitors of Mechs as if they were selfless and idealistic freedom fighters. That is nice and all, but I seriously doubt that all 13 of them were as perfect and altruistic as the mechers always make them out to be. History is written by the winners, and they always have a tendency to erase plenty of unflattering details. As much as the Progenitors have contributed to the restoration of the rights of ordinary humans, I do not believe for a second that they have lost all of the selfishness and cruelty that is typical of traditional cultivators."

His eyes narrowed in suspicion."

"I bet... that not all Progenitors of Mechs perished during the Great Betrayal. At least one of them may have managed to get away... either because it was part of their greater plan or because one of them chickened out at the last minute. Perhaps this may have damaged the cause of the MTA, or maybe it wasn't necessary for all 13 Progenitors to contribute their lives to the establishment of the Kingdom. Whatever the case, I think that one of them managed to get away from the Metal Shrine with a spare fragment of the Metal Scroll."

The System still remained silent and unresponsive, but that was okay.

"The Great Betrayal was a massive battle." Ves continued his speculation. "A lot of powerful cultivators got killed, but not before doing a lot of damage in return. None of the cultivators stationed in the most sacred site of the Five Scrolls Compact is weak, as they always have to possess enough fighting power to defeat their rivals. I don't know how the Progenitors fit the hierarchy of the Metal Shrine, but it is doubtful that they managed to subvert its entire leadership."

The secret battle that ended the Age of Conquest and brought forth the Age of Mechs was shrouded in mysteries. Ves developed an increasing desire to witness this historic battle and obtain the truth of what had happened.

Too much had spun from this historic turning point. From establishing the hegemony of the Big Two to turning his mother into an interstellar fugitive, so much of his life was shaped by a huge event that took place more than 4 centuries ago.

The Great Betrayal should have been ancient history to Ves, yet the aftermath of this grand battle still affected his life on a daily basis.

Could Ves ever disentangle himself from this old conflict?

He could not. As long as he held the Mech Designer System, he would forever remain a product of those historic events.

"One of the Progenitors of Mechs may have survived that battle. No. I am convinced that one must have gotten away. However, the fighting inside the Metal Shrine and beyond was so brutal that the survivor may have suffered fatal injuries. With not much time left for him, he or she probably didn't feel like becoming a martyr like his other conspirators. The Progenitor... likely invested whatever power he had left to reshape the fragment of the Metal Scroll into you, the Mech Designer System."

If the System possessed the capacity to experience emotions, then it certainly did a good job of hiding it, because there was no apparent response to his explosive speculations.

Ves continued to smirk as he finished his guess.

"No one wants to die when there is an alternative available. I can recognize that the Progenitors of Mechs has done humanity a great service by fighting for a greater cause than themselves, but whoever managed to escape the battle probably did not want to follow suit. This was why... the survivor did the same thing that the original creator of the Metal Scroll had done in ancient times. He or she transformed the fragment into a resurrection device."

Cultivators were able to die like any human, but Ves found that not all of them managed to stay dead.

If his mother was able to claw her way back from death, then others should be able to do so as well!

The only issue was that the requirements were so harsh that returning to life had to be a rare occurrence. Cynthia Larkinson only ever managed to become whole again after Ves provided a huge amount of help.

"The Progenitor may have been dying at the time, so the fragment is the only means left to secure a second life. I can understand his or her position. My mother told me that in general, every cultivator is eager to pursue power and eternity. The other Progenitors gave up on the former, but secured the latter by leaving behind a lasting legacy. The survivor on the other hand was not satisfied with that and wanted to cling to life."

The Big Two had already succeeded for the most part. The downfall of the Five Scrolls Compact became assured, and many humans became freed from the madness that the cultivators had wrought during those dark times.

"It makes a lot of sense to create you, System." Ves chuckled under his breath. "As terrible as they may be, the Sacred Scrolls presented a successful model on how to hoodwink cultivators to serve a specific cause and work towards resurrecting their original creators. Your own maker probably did the same thing, but on a smaller scale."

It made too much sense to Ves. It was exactly the sort of approach he would take if he found himself in a similar situation.

"This is why you are geared towards mech design. As a Progenitor, your expertise on mechs is immense. It is the field that you have mastered the most, and it is also doomed to become a dominant occupation after the Mech Trade Association's dominance became assured. I believe that your original plan may have been to turn you over to the MTA, as the people over there can make the best possible use out of you. However... that hasn't happened."

A cruel grin appeared on his face. "An accident occurred. I guess that... there shouldn't have been a long delay before the mechers started to make good use of you. It would have been an irresistible

combination. There is no way those mech-obsessed people would be able to keep their hands off you. The more you get used, the more sustenance you derive from them. It might not take more than a century to accumulate enough energy and extraordinary materials to return your maker to life."

History would have looked a lot different if that happened. Not only would the development of mechs sped up during the first mech generations, but the return of a real war hero would have united the Mech Trade Association under a single leader!

"That hasn't happened." Ves amusingly said. "There are many possible explanations why this has happened, but let me share with you my favorite theory. When you died and passed on the Mech Designer System to your trusted subordinates, my mother randomly bumped into the holder during her escape from the Great Temple. The outcome of such a coincidental meeting should be obvious."

Cultmaster Original Sin was known to be one of the most powerful cultivators within the Compact.

"Hahaha!" Ves couldn't help but laugh when he speculated that this accidental encounter may have affected the entire course of human history in the centuries to come! "Since she used to be a lot more violent and less constrained at the time, my mother immediately killed your inheritors and looted all of their valuables. It was what I would do. Somehow, she managed to obtain the System, but since her cultivation is completely incompatible with mech design, you weren't able to establish cooperation with her. Perhaps... she may have figured out your true origin and purpose!"

Ves did not know how strong his mother and the survivor had been at the time, but the chances were great that both of them used to be fairly close in cultivation.

They may have known each other in person and understood each other's inclinations well.

At this time, Ves grinned so widely that it almost became unhinged!

"My mother must have spoiled the plans of your maker and kept you all to herself! The leaders of the Mech Trade Association who may have known about your existence became very upset about that, and pursued her across space in order to snatch you from her possession. However, multiple centuries have passed without that happening. The MTA grew and developed into a powerful organization under a different regime. So many years went by that much of the awe and respect directed towards you has... faded, just like many other aspects of history."

True death was not the passing of one's mortal coil.

True death was the passing of one's memory and legacy.

"The old guard of the Mech Trade Association has slowly died out. The ones who are left alive such as the First Flame and the Lord of Thermodynamics have stayed in power for so long that I do not think they are as eager to welcome your revival anymore. Meanwhile, newer generations of leaders have risen up. Since they were born after the Great Betrayal and never fully understood all of the sacrifices made by the Progenitors of Mechs, they are not inclined to welcome your return. In other words, the mechers who are aware of your existence increasingly feel like my mother has done them all a favor!"

As far as Ves knew, the System never got used by anyone before it fell into his hands!

By the time he inherited the System from his parents, so much time had passed by that the survivor's original plan became ruined forever!

At this point, humanity had moved on from the Progenitors. There was no way that the survivor would have been able to assume control over the MTA, especially when enough god pilots had emerged that could beat up the powerful cultivator even when he returned to the height of his power!

Perhaps... one of the reasons why the god pilots guarded over the Kingdom of Mechs was to prevent a resurrected Progenitor from accessing it and transforming it into a seat of power!

Since all 13 Progenitors of Mechs were originally part of the conspiracy to create the Kingdom of Mechs, it stood to reason that each of them enjoyed the highest permissions!

This put the Polymath's attempted coup into a better context. Had she and her crown tried to take advantage of this backdoor to secure the position that was reserved for any surviving Progenitor?

Ves became even more glad that this hadn't happened!

"Well, System? Have I gotten close enough to the truth? Say something! I deserve at least this much for everything that I have done to further your original cause."

The System acted stupid and declined to give out any information that could confirm or deny any of his guesses.

Ves eventually shrugged. "Fine. If this is how you want to play this game, then whatever. Let me make my own stance clear to you. I do not mind it if my actions contribute to the resurrection of your original maker. Even if he or she has hostile intentions towards me, I am not without the means to defend myself. I have earned so much favor from god pilots, Star Designers and Fleet Admirals that they will not stand by and let you screw me over."

Whether they could intervene in time was another matter, but at least they could take revenge on his behalf. The threat of that should be enough to constrain any untoward behavior.

"The point I am trying to make is that as long as I do not have to sacrifice my life or my fundamental interests, you are free to work towards the resurrection of your maker. I prefer win-win agreements the most, as neither party will turn against the other. I will let you do your thing while I pursue my own ambitions. As long as we make sure that none of our goals collide against each other, we can both have what we want. Is that a good enough accord for you, System?"

[...]

Chapter 5927 Spoiled Good

Ves would be lying if he said he wasn't afraid of the Mech Designer System.

Similar to the legendary Sacred Scrolls, it had probably been engineered this way in order to serve a specific purpose.

The only purpose that made sense to Ves given the available context was to engineer the revival of a Progenitor of Mechs!

Ves had seen enough fantasy dramas in his youth to know how such a story was supposed to unfold. He was supposed to unwittingly use the System to such an extent that it gained enough power and resources to realize its ultimate goal.

At that time, the System should turn against Ves and reveal that it had molded him into the perfect vessel of its true master!

Once the System brought a sliver of the Progenitor of Mechs back to life, possibly with the help of Ves' own design philosophy, the resurrected cultivator would immediately inhabit the nearest available vessel.

Just like how the bones of a primordial human served as an ideal vessel for Cynthia to come back to life stronger than ever, Ves was probably one of the juiciest hijacking targets available for the Progenitor!

Not only did he accrue an escalating debt of karma with the System, but his preoccupation as a mech designer strongly aligned with one of the original developers of mechs!

The System had been a part of his life long enough to mold and nudge aspects of himself to increase his compatibility with the surviving Progenitor.

Though Ves doubted that this compatibility reached 100 percent, it should still be high enough to achieve a high success rate!

Suffice to say, Ves did not like to work so hard, only for an old fossil to swoop in and pluck the fruits of his labor!

"Do you know why I am not afraid to share my speculations with you anymore, System?" He asked what may as well be a rhetorical question. "That is because I have enough reasons to believe that... the original plan to resurrect your maker has become invalidated due to changing circumstances."

He continued to smirk as he gained greater confidence in his theory. "It must be frustrating, right? I don't believe that whoever is responsible for making you has accurately predicted the future. He or she may have prepared a lot of contingency plans, but I seriously doubt that any of them included the Great Severing, the Age of Dawn and my first encounter with the Subjugation King."

Ves raised his hand. A ball of darkness energy coalesced above his palm.

"I have great reason to believe that certain events have caused my compatibility with your maker to drop. First, the heavenly authority of the Red Ocean has turned me into a phase lord. That should at least increase the difficulty of a physical takeover. Second, the Subjugation King has planted his exceedingly powerful soul mark on me. Even if your maker succeeds in his takeover, he will just end up in the clutches of a really angry alien God King! Third, my embrace of the darkness element has mutated my old domain. This has caused me to diverge even further from your maker, assuming that darkness is not part of that Progenitor's strength."

That was highly unlikely to be the case.

In the relatively short time that Ves grew familiar with the darkness element, he realized that it was a broad and subversive element.

It took a truly different sort of mindset to gain mastery over just one of its aspects.

What surprised Ves was that darkness encompassed a large amount of abstract concepts, many of which did not share strong relations with each other.

Energy was both psychoactive and psychoreactive. This meant that there were a huge amount of cultivators in the past and present of the universe that collectively shaped the metaphysical meaning of darkness.

Certain races regarded darkness as the absence of light without any other symbolic messages.

Other races regarded darkness as the favored element of evil and a force of destruction.

Many other alien species or population groups regarded darkness as an element of chaos, a patron of thieves or the personification of the end of the universe.

All of this belief and superstition caused the darkness element to swell up and become an umbrella for many different interpretations.

There was no need for Ves to comprehend and master all of these meanings. He had no aspiration to become a God King that gained supremacy over this immensely broad element.

Ves feared that a top alien powerhouse already laid claim to this powerful domain!

He did not know what his own journey to God King would be like, but he believed it would be okay if he only took bits and pieces of the darkness element that aligned with himself.

Darkness had become his latest ally and tool. He believed that its addition to his life not only expanded his options as a mech designer, but also helped to protect his life and freedom from the System!

The more Ves diverged from the blueprint set by the System, the more he became assured that he wouldn't get hijacked and subverted like what happened to the Polymath!

He had turned himself into a spoiled good!

In any case, he did not become discouraged by the System's lack of response. It was probably the best action that it could take when Ves started to ramble about the motivations of its maker.

"Okay, storytime is over. Let's get back to business."

Ves did not hesitate any further and submitted 2.353 kilograms of EE-343F-00334R to the System.

[Congratulations for completing your second S-Rank Supply Mission. By fulfilling the requirements set by Material Supply 2, you have satisfied the conditions to initiate an upgrade to the Mech Designer System.]

[You have received 1 use of the Inventorize ability.]

[You have received 10 golden lottery tickets.]

The System Space started to shake as a lot of energy began to accumulate.

Ves could already feel that he was being pushed back to reality!

[The Mech Designer System is in the process of undergoing a comprehensive upgrade. It will remain inaccessible and unresponsive to its users for a duration of approximately 15 days. Your patience is appreciated.]

A few seconds later, the System unceremoniously kicked Ves out of the System Space.

15 days was not too bad. It was on the longer side, but it was hardly an unacceptable wait duration compared to before.

He would probably regain access to the upgraded System when he finally returned to New Constantinople VIII.

That should give him enough time to deal with the aftermath of upgrading the Dominion of Man and sort out all of the other messes that had sprung up in the past month.

"Let's hope nothing exciting happens anymore, Lucky."

"Meeeeoooooww..."

As the Bluejay Fleet finally moved away from the border regions of human-occupied space, Ves tried his best to keep his head down and handle his duties without causing any further incidents.

The ripple effects of playing a leading role in transforming the Dominion of Man into a 'god ship' were still in the process of spreading!

The Red Fleet remained mum on most details, but it allowed a lot of speculative rumors to proliferate across society.

Nobody seemed to have a clear answer of what exactly happened, but they had a lot of opinions about what the Dominion of Man had turned into and how a mech designer like Ves got involved somehow!

Caramond became a topic of conversation as well. As the True God settled into his new existence, the Red Two were not that eager to set up any form of organized worship for the ancestral spirit.

Instead, the mechers and the fleeters remained content to let the heat die down and any excitement surrounding Caramond to fade as other hot topics started to dominate the conversation.

Ves knew that Caramond wouldn't get starved of faith anytime soon. Human supremacy was a principle that was rooted in the hearts of every modern human.

Furia did not come up at all. The True God still remained an obscure existence as the Red Two were still grappling to figure out a coherent policy on how to handle this unexpected new ancestral spirit.

As the days passed by, it became clear that the tier 1 galactic citizens continually argued on what they should do with the mess that Ves created.

Ves strongly suspected that the leaders of red humanity still hadn't come to a broad consensus. It would explain why the Red Two refrained from publishing any statements or instituted a coherent policy to reshape the narrative.

Ves was not bothered by the lack of action. People left him alone during the return trip to the New Constantinople System. Nobody asked for his input on future plans or compelled him to account for his previous actions.

That was just the way he liked it. He had made so much progress and harvested so many gains during his long and eventful 'business trip' that he needed to devote a lot of time to digesting all of his gains!

For example, he showed off his brand-new Battlecruiser Token to his newly acquired group of Rubarthan shipbuilders!

The physical projection of Chief Shipwright Keziramous Demodian cautiously stepped forward and held the heavy metal medallion that bestowed the right to field a powerful warship!

He looked like he wished that he was aboard the Tarrasque for real so that he could touch the actual RF Warship Token!

"This... so the rumors are true. You engineered the creation of the first god ship." The 108 year old leader of the E-66 Experimental Yard spoke. "If the Dominion of Man has truly become powerful enough to rival a god mech as people are claiming, then the Red Fleet should have given you a better reward! The fleeters are too stingy and prejudiced against mech designers! You deserve a Battleship Token!"

Ves smiled but shook his head. "Let's not talk about what-ifs. I know you guys are really curious about what I have done, but I am not allowed to share military secrets with you. Please drop whatever questions you may have about the Dominion of Man."

The shipwrights employed by the E-66 Experimental Yard quickly recomposed themselves, though it was impossible for them to truly remain calm when they caught sight of a rare and precious Battlecruiser Token.

Still, all of these shipbuilders had taken part in many different classified R&D projects. They should already know how to keep their curiosity in check. They wouldn't have lasted in this shipyard if they were bad at keeping secrets.

Ves took back the Warship Token and held it aloft.

"As you can already deduce, I showed you this for a reason. With this token, my clan has the right to acquire and make use of its own battlecruiser as part of the RF's famous Warship Quota Program. I don't want to rely on outside help for this. As difficult as it may sound, I want us to construct our battlecruiser completely in-house. I only own 2 shipyards at the moment, and I have chosen yours as the principal yard to develop and construct the Larkinson Clan's first battlecruiser! Once you have proven your abilities by completing the Grave Exemplar Project, I want you to work on our future flagship right away!"

Though the shipwrights were all smart enough to anticipate this order, they still reacted with delight when Ves confirmed that he gave them the right to design the first proper warship in their long careers!

All of the decades and centuries spent on designing unarmed starships had left them with a constant yearning for more.

Now, their greatest dreams were finally coming true!

"Thank you, Patriarch Larkinson!"

"The E-66 Experimental Yard welcomes this challenge!"

Not everyone looked as happy to receive this career-defining opportunity.

Kezi looked a lot more ambivalent at this prospect.

Not everyone looked as happy to receive this career-defining opportunity.

Kezi looked a lot more ambivalent at this prospect.

"Sir, far be it for me to question you, but are you certain about letting our shipyard develop your battlecruiser?"

"Oh?" Ves raised his eyebrow. "Are you having doubts about your ability to deliver a battlecruiser?"

"There are numerous complications and restrictions that you need to be aware of, sir."

Chapter 5928 Crazy Loophole

The excitement among the shipwrights quickly died down as their leader's words brought them back to reality.

Just because their shipyard received the privilege of developing the first battlecruiser for the Larkinson Clan did not mean it was the most ideal choice!

Kezi the chief shipwright badly wanted to accept this enormous assignment and create what may very well become his magnum opus!

Kezi the administrator had a duty to make sure that its owner made the best possible use of its facilities.

"Please explain your misgivings." Ves instructed the projected man.

"Let me address the most obvious point of concern, sir. The E-66 Experimental Shipyard in its current state is only able to construct warships up to a total length of 2.3 kilometers. This is considered acceptable for most fleet carriers, but it is not a satisfying length for a fully armed capital ship."

"I thought that battlecruisers tended to be smaller and shorter than battleships. The losses would be too great if a large but relatively fragile battlecruiser ends up getting blown to pieces. It is better to hedge against this possibility by limiting their size."

Kezi nodded in understanding. "These considerations are valid, but our situation is drastically different from the Red Two. Both the mechers and the fleeters are permitted to field all of the warships they want without restriction. You are confined to only two that correspond to the tokens in your possession. I am not sure how easy it is for you to obtain another Battlecruiser Token, but I think it is safe to assume that the Red Fleet will not award you with another one in the foreseeable years."

"That... is a prudent assumption to make."

"That means that your first-class fleet can only accommodate a single battlecruiser. Since this is the case, it is much more optimal for our clan to acquire the largest and most massive battlecruiser that we can realistically obtain. A hull with a length of up to 2.3 kilometers is far from an ideal choice. We will effectively waste the potential of this precious Battlecruiser Token of yours. It is almost as if you are using it to field a heavy cruiser instead. In my opinion, you should use it to construct a 6-kilometer long battlecruiser instead."

Ves had already taken this issue into consideration. It did not escape his mind that the E-66 Experimental Shipyard was totally unsuitable to construct larger and more formidable starships.

"The first Larkinson battlecruiser does not necessarily have to be the last one." Ves pointed out.

"This is an unrestricted token, which means that it does not have to be tied to a single hull. None of the shipbuilding operations at my disposal have any form of experience with constructing actual warships, especially larger ones. I think it is extremely foolish to undertake the most technically challenging project with zero practical experience. It is much faster, easier and manageable to tackle a more modest warship project first. It is also much easier for our clan to finance the construction of a smaller vessel. We can think about replacing our first battlecruiser with a larger and more superior hull in a few decades."

These arguments all sounded reasonable. Ves demonstrated that he had put real thought in his decision.

"Be that as it may, you do not have to rely on your own shipyards and shipbuilders to complete this project." Kezi retorted. "There are much more competent and capable shipbuilding companies in the new frontier that would love to develop your battlecruiser on your behalf. Cooperating with major Rubarthan or foreign institutions will allow you to acquire the best possible battlecruiser that you can obtain."

It must be difficult for Kezi to actively discourage Ves from working with the E-66 Experimental Yard.

Ves recognized and appreciated the fact that Kezi looked out for the interests of his new employer by playing devil's advocate.

"Relying on external help is unacceptable." Ves firmly replied. "Warships can make an outsized impact in our fleet. It is crucial that a battlecruiser remains firmly in our control. I can accept the fact that she will be smaller and inferior than the battlecruisers fielded by the Red Fleet. What I cannot stomach is that our supposed 'allies' and 'business partners' tampered with our battlecruiser to such an extent that they can shut down her weapons or energy shields by remote! I will not allow our clan to depend on a warship that is never truly ours in the first place. No. The first Larkinson battlecruiser **MUST** remain under our control. I will not accept any alternatives."

His tone clearly suggested that he rejected every other alternative. Ves did not want to build up a reliance on outside tech or expertise.

He knew that this would not do his first battlecruisers any favors.

The shipwrights understood this as well now that the immediate excitement had died down. They became more and more intimidated by the humongous prospect of building their first actual warship!

Ves put away the Battlecruiser Token and crossed his arms. "I thought you guys regularly practice your skills by designing all kinds of speculative starships. I bet that a fair amount of them should be warships. Even if they are never designed with the expectation of realizing them, you should at least know how to mount warship-grade armaments onto starship hulls."

The line between an unarmed starship and a properly armed starship was not simple.

However, it shouldn't be too challenging either. There were many new variables that shipwrights had to take into account to prevent the weapons from destroying the hulls they were mounted upon, but any decent naval engineer should be able to handle the additional complications.

This was especially the case for first-class ship designers!

Now that Kezi learned that Ves was truly committed to this course of action, he did not object to it any longer.

"If you are truly willing to trust us despite our lacking record and practical experience, then we would be honored to accept this heavy responsibility, sir. Do you wish to replace the Grave Exemplar Project with a new battlecruiser project? We can change the schedule so that we can complete the design and construction of the warship first."

That was a difficult question to Ves.

"I have my thoughts, but I would like to hear your recommendations, Kezi. Let me remind you that our clan will soon be participating in the first deep strike operations that will commence in a few years. We need all of the hulls and firepower that we can get. It would be great if you can complete the construction of a complete battlecruiser by that time."

That was crucial information that helped the chief shipwright formulate his recommendation.

"If that is the case, then I suggest we begin the development of the battlecruiser after the Grave Exemplar Project. The concept that we have devised for our first-class fleet carrier is fairly innovative, but it is still familiar enough for us to comfortably complete her in time for you to employ the new hull in a deep strike operation. I can guarantee you that we will not be able to complete a battlecruiser within this timeframe."

"Why not?" Ves asked.

"There is too much that needs to be done. We need to expand and install extra shipbuilding modules to the E-66 Experimental Yard. We need to hire hundreds of additional engineers and specialists who are capable of assisting in the development and construction of large-scale weapon systems. The design of our first proper armed capital ship will also take at least double the time of a fleet carrier because we need to employ extensive measures to calculate, simulate and test all of the new solutions that we have never fully explored in the past. Even after the construction of the first battlecruiser is complete, I expect the new hull to be plagued with many teething problems. She will need to undergo at least a year of trials to work out many of the bugs and glitches that have the potential to endanger your entire fleet."

The process of developing a new warship was much more cumbersome than developing a new mech!

"How long?"

"...At least 5 years if you insist on rushing the battlecruiser project. 10 years if you want to have enough guarantees that your new warship will not rupture herself when subjected to challenging conditions."

Ves possessed enough of a technical background to know that Kezi was being fairly generous. The E-66 Experimental Shipyard possessed no real experience in developing warships, so he and his men will stumble a lot more than normal.

Aside from that, battlecruisers were among the most difficult warship classes to design. They were as large as battleships, but possessed a fraction of their hull strength.

Enormous battleship-grade gun batteries tended to exert a titanic load on the hulls they were mounted upon. They also had to be accompanied by hundreds of auxiliary systems that all took up a lot of space and added further complications to the ship.

Battleships may be insanely expensive to build, but they were also a lot more fault tolerant as a result.

Battlecruisers did not enjoy this expedient advantage. It was not accurate to characterize them as glass cannons, but it was not completely wrong either.

Of course, the shipwrights could always reduce the caliber and firepower of the primary gun batteries of the first Larkinson battlecruiser, but going too far with this would defeat the point of this ship class.

Ves sighed. "As a mech designer, I understand how dangerous it is to rush the development of a powerful new weapon platform. I am not stupid enough to force the issue and insist that your shipyard deliver a working battlecruiser in just two or three years. Our clan will just have to settle with undertaking our first deep strike operation without a proper warship. We should at least be able to count on the upcoming Grave Exemplar."

This was for the better. The lack of immediate time pressure would give his shipwrights and naval engineers plenty of time to properly work out a solid design with all of the robust high technologies necessary to turn the battlecruiser into a formidable vessel.

Ves could also use the time to flesh out his own unique technologies related to living warships. He wanted to develop or acquire an imitation of the Spark Reactor for obvious reasons.

Just as Ves came to grips with the new schedule, the projection of the chief shipwright made a surprising suggestion.

Right now, his ability to recreate the Dominion of Man on a much smaller scale was too inadequate. He needed to spend a lot more time on research and development before he was qualified to develop the first living battlecruiser!

Just as Ves came to grips with the new schedule, the projection of the chief shipwright made a surprising suggestion.

"Your Battlecruiser Token does not necessarily have to remain unused by the time your clan commences its first deep strike operation." Kezi said. "If my interpretation of the rules of the Warship Quota Program is accurate, there is no explicit rule that prohibits you from tying your token to an alien warship. If you truly think it is worth the effort, you can order your forces to capture an alien capital ship as whole as possible. If your men can unlock and decipher the operation of the alien vessel with the help of outside experts, it may be possible to repurpose the captured warship in time for the deep strike operation. This is the best stopgap solution that you can employ in the short term."

Ves became amazed by this suggestion!

Even though the idea was extremely controversial, Ves had no principal objections about using a captured warship against their former owners!

The risks were not small, but the benefits were also great!

"This is a brilliant idea." Ves grinned. "The expeditionary fleet happens to be a lot better at capturing large enemy warships without inflicting any damage to them with the help of a certain battle formation. Perhaps the Larkinson Army already captured a few hulls, but didn't have time yet to sell them to the salvaging companies!"

There was a possibility that the Larkinsons could begin the conversion process as soon as Ves issued his new orders!

Kezi grinned as well. "What is particularly advantageous to you is that all alien warships are valid targets for this scheme. Most people refer to armed alien capital ships as 'alien battleships', but if we

apply our human technical standards on them, their hulls are more properly categorized as battlecruisers. Their hull structures are entirely comprised of inferior phasewater alloys of inadequate thickness."

Ves immediately understood what the other man was getting at. "Wait a minute... this is an obvious loophole. Surely the fleeters won't be stupid enough to allow for this shenanigan to happen..."

"That is because no one has been awarded with a Battlecruiser Token in the past, sir! Even if I am wrong, the recipients are most definitely powerful groups that are fully capable of developing their own warships! We are different. We have much greater reasons to employ captured and converted alien warships instead!"

"And this will actually work?"

"It will so long as the Red Fleet does not move quickly enough to change the rules. Think about it, sir. The defenses of alien battleships may be tough due to their heavy reliance on transphasic energy shields, allowing them to come close to matching the performance of human battleships, but that is not how shipwrights such as myself see them as. According to the outdated definitions of human warship classes that the Red Fleet has yet to revise, every alien 'battleship' is the equivalent of a human 'battlecruiser'!"

Ves understood the true value of his Battlecruiser Token at the moment.

Before the Larkinson Clan could construct its own proper battlecruiser, his clansmen could make do with turning some of the greatest alien vessels against their former owners!

It was a deliciously ironic scheme!

It was also a much faster and cheaper way for the Larkinson Clan to gain an asset with the effective combat power of an actual battlecruiser!

Chapter 5929 Homeship Conversion Difficulty

After Kezi came up with the fantastic idea of resorting to captured alien battleships as a stopgap solution, he quickly looked up the relevant rules and regulations.

The Rubarthan shipwright's efficiency was high. He only needed a couple of minutes to dig through all of the dense and complicated legal and technical language to gain a clear idea on how to proceed.

"The idea is viable." The physical projection of Kezi told Ves with a grin. "It has never been done before, but that means we will be the first to take advantage of this loophole. We have the fleeters to thank for that. They are so proud and boastful about their battleships that they have constantly raised the requirements that an armed capital ship has to meet in order to earn the classification of a battleship. The majority of alien 'battleships' in the Red Ocean simply do not meet those standards. They are not just lacking in terms of alloy hardness and thickness, but also other parameters such as redundancies, FTL drives, information security and mandatory design features."

In other words, the alien battleships were not actually battleships according to human definition. They were battlecruisers for all intents and purposes.

To be honest, it was not as if the native aliens used their own version of the term 'battleship' either. Many of them treated their vessels as homes, as evidenced by their ability to land on the surface of planets and serve as fixed structures.

The aliens themselves preferred to call their vessels homes or 'homeships' in their own native languages. There was no distinction between a home and a warship, so they readily combined the two so that they could enjoy the advantages of both.

This was also one of the reasons why their homeships were so poorly armored despite the use of transphasic alloys. The native aliens had to abide by hard mass and volume requirements in order to enable a homeship to land on a terrestrial planet with a certain amount of gravity.

If the homeship became too heavy or too big, it would become too difficult to safely descend to or ascend from the surface of a planet. This was why they needed to be more frugal in how much metal they added to their hulls.

The fact that it saved them a lot of phasewater by cutting down on the mass and volume of their homeships also helped!

The native aliens never minded this drawback because they heavily relied on transphasic shield generators to compensate for the lacking material defenses of their homeships.

Transphasic shield generators offered superior defenses at much lower costs. They were far smaller and lighter than a thick application of hull plating.

Even if the good ones had to be built with high-grade materials and larger quantities of phasewater, it still beat trying to pad the structure and exterior of a homeship that was several kilometers long!

While these shield generators were certainly not small or light, the amount of capacity they took up on a homeship was not too significant. They were the perfect solution to employ if a homeship needed greater defenses without burdening down the hull with lots of mass.

Of course, transphasic shield generators came with their own downsides. They vastly increased the energy requirements of a homeship. If the power supply ever got interrupted for whatever reason, these devices wouldn't be able to last long by relying on their batteries or other backup power sources!

Humanity had a very long tradition of emphasizing armor over energy shields. It was only relatively recently that the Phasewater Generation had changed the game.

Though more and more people began to get accustomed to relying on the surprisingly effective azure energy shields, not everyone was rich and powerful enough to supply the phasewater required to obtain the necessary generators.

Armor was still the most preferred and dominant form of protection to most humans. This contributed greatly to the slow pace of change in human society.

The best energy shields that the general population had access to were hyper energy shields. So long as there was no phasewater involved, the defensive performance was not that spectacular.

It all came down to resources in the end. If red humanity had access to just as much phasewater as the native aliens, people would have embraced the superiority of azure energy shields to a much greater extent!

"There is only one cumbersome condition we have to meet before we can employ an alien battleship in combat." Kezi said, pulling Ves back from his musings about energy shields.

"Is it troublesome?"

The chief shipwright nodded. "It will cause significant delays, but I consider this to be a necessary step. The Red Fleet will not allow humans to actively make use of any alien starship unless the hull in question has undergone a full inspection and conversion. Whatever is done to the vessel in question, the end result must abide by the minimum standards that the fleeters apply to any starship."

Just as how the mechers regulated the use of mechs, the fleeters took responsibility over the usage of starships, armed or otherwise.

From what Ves knew about the fleeters, they generally did not really care about third-class and second-class starships. The standards they had to meet were fairly generous and easy to satisfy.

The story was a bit different for first-class starships. That was when the fleeters really started to pay attention. Every starship of this tech level was equipped with much harder alloys and always made use of much more potent power reactors.

This turned them into greater hazards if anything went wrong. The fleeters therefore insisted that first-class starships had to meet a lot of safety requirements in order to permit people to make use of their powerful features.

Ves frowned as he pondered over this demand. "The homeships of the 13 major races are equivalent to first-class warships, is that correct?"

"They vary considerably, sir. The most premier alien forces under the Red Cabal make use of newly constructed battleships that are heavily integrated with stolen human technologies. These are by far the most modern and powerful enemy vessels that red humanity has encountered. These are the enemies that are keeping the Red Two occupied."

"There is little chance that the expeditionary fleet of the Golden Skull Alliance will be able to bump into those powerful alien warships." Ves replied with a frown. "Even if our forces encounter them, it is extremely unwise to confront them in battle. Even if our fleet enjoys the protection of several ace mechs, they are all built to second-class standards. There is no need to force a battle when there is a clear and obvious tech disparity."

Kezi did not argue with that. "Then your expeditionary fleet should target the hulls that they have already defeated in their previous battles. The homeships that accompany the alien raiding fleets are inferior in every way. They are often decades or centuries old. They have often been damaged and repaired multiple times over the course of their lifespan. Much of their tech is either outdated or not that high-end in the first place. Despite these common flaws, the homeships in question often straddle the line between first-class and second-class, which means that the Red Fleet often treats them as first-class warships. They are too powerful for second-class fleets, but too weak for first-class fleets."

"I see." Ves mildly said. "These older and outdated alien warships are hardly ideal for my purposes, but I guess there isn't much grounds for me to complain. All I want to know is how much work is required to convert a typical alien warship."

Kezi responded with a helpless expression. "That can only be determined on a case-by-case basis. Of the 13 major races that employ homeships, each of them have developed their own distinctive homeship doctrines. Even then, different groups within a single alien society may have developed their own unique and distinctive design philosophies for their vessels. It can take half a year to a decade to convert a single alien homeship into a usable warship for human usage."

The reason why the range was so wide was because the necessary modifications could easily range from a quick refit to a whole redesign project!

"Time is of the essence, Kezi. I need a powerful warship sooner rather than later. If it takes a decade to convert an alien homeship, then we might as well wait for the E-66 Experimental Yard to complete the Grave Exemplar before starting our new battlecruiser project. What sort of alien homeships will take the least amount of time for us to convert?"

Kezi smiled at that. He already anticipated this question.

"Of the 13 major alien races of the Red Ocean, there is only one that resembles the human race the most. The orvens may be taller and much furrrier than us, but they are still bipedal organisms that share many habits and inclinations with us. The orvens also maintain a strong presence on this side of the dwarf galaxy, so our race has managed to encounter and defeat many of their homeships. The Red Two along with many other powerful groups have already captured so many orven homeships that they have managed to crack their security features and reverse engineered much of their distinctive technologies. Much of that knowledge is either publicly available or easily accessible as long as you are willing to spend MTA merits."

Orven homeships were indeed easier to deal with than the hulls of other races.

The zzamayels for example were not only rare on this side of the Red Ocean, but their warships were also a lot weirder, especially on the inside!

Since the race was made up of slime-like organisms, the zzamayels had the annoying habit of making their entrances and exits extremely small and slim. This hindered the ability for any aliens other than the zzamayels to move through the interior of their own homeships!

The puelmers were smaller and shorter than almost every other race. They took advantage of that by making the corridors and compartments of their own homeships a lot smaller and harder to navigate.

Trying to convert the captured vessels of either race into warships fit for human use was a nightmare!

The best way to tackle such a difficult demand was to break down the original hulls and use much of the salvaged materials to construct a proper human warship!

In contrast, orven warships did not have to be rebuilt from the ground up in order for humans to make use of them. The new owners just had to apply a lot of easy fixes such as reprogram the alien operating systems, eliminate a lot of well-known vulnerabilities and replace the larger and taller orven-sized furniture with smaller equivalents.

As Kezi quickly summarized the major steps that a shipyard needed to take to convert a typical orvan homeship into a converted battlecruiser, Ves found that pretty much any first-class shipyard of the appropriate size could do the job.

The time needed to complete the conversion process still varied widely depending on the specific cases, but it shouldn't take more than 2 years to convert the largest orven hulls.

"This has been an informative discussion." Ves said as the meeting eventually came to an end.

"Please prepare a thorough report for the expeditionary fleet. I will instruct them to prioritize the capture of orven homeships, but they vary so wildly that you need to help them pick the right targets."

"We will get on it right away, sir. It should not be difficult to form a list of desirable properties. The most important criteria is the amount of phasewater invested in the hull. It is very difficult and expensive to improve the phasewater density of the entire structure of a homeship, so it is better to target an existing alien vessel that already scores well enough in this area."

"I agree, though I doubt the ones assigned to raiding duty have that much phasewater in the first place. The expeditionary fleet may have to venture deeper into enemy space in order to seek out a suitable hull."

That was riskier but also a lot more rewarding.

Chapter 5930 Glorious Surprise

The journey back to the New Constantinople System took a little over a week.

The most exciting event that took place during the return trip was the addition of another warship.

The Babylon Excavator awkwardly joined the Bluejay Fleet.

As much as the mechers of the Bluejay Fleet resisted the entry of an RF reconnaissance cruiser, it could not be denied that the vessel provided a lot of help to Ves' personal escort force.

There was no need to force the Babylon Excavator to line up with the other ships of the Bluejay Fleet.

As a heavy scouting vessel, the Babylon Excavator was best suited to scout the route ahead and verify that no one had prepared any ambushes designed to ensnare Ves.

Although the chances of this happening was small, it was not non-zero. The latest stunt committed by Ves most definitely painted a much larger target on his back. The Red Cabal was probably on the verge of doubling or tripling his bounty!

Ves had already heard from Jovy and Sigrund that the Red Two were already thinking about bolstering the Bluejay Fleet even further.

The mechers already had plenty of reasons to invest in the security of the most successful Senior Mech Designer in the Red Ocean.

Now, the fleeters also found a reason to join the party. They did not want anything to happen to the only person who successfully transformed the Dominion of Man into a god ship!

One of the reasons why the Red Fleet urgently pulled the newly transformed Carmine dreadnought back from the frontlines was because its naval engineers wanted to decipher the methods used to convert her into such a powerful vessel.

Ves personally wished them luck, but did not think that they would attain any significant breakthroughs.

So long as the fleeters had no way of replicating or imitating what Ves had done, he would continue to remain valued by the Red Fleet. His protective detail needed to be raised for as long as he possessed the capability to convert the remaining 7 dreadnoughts into comparable living warships.

"The Red Association is standing in the way of dispatching additional RF warships." The projection of Captain Zonrad Reze told Ves. "The mechers acknowledge the need for greater protection, but they refuse to let the Red Fleet dispatch more warships. Your old patrons argue that since you are a mech designer, your security is their responsibility."

"They're correct in a sense." Ves said. "That said, I am not opposed to receiving additional help from another source. I have no objection to receiving the protection of additional RF warships aside from your Babylon Excavator. The larger my escort force, the greater the deterrence. I won't have to look over my shoulder as much."

It was a pity that the decision was not in his hands. Ves found his situation to be frustrating. He lacked the strength to exert enough influence. There were a lot of tier 1 and tier 2 galactic citizens that made decisions on his behalf without bothering to take his own interests into account.

This was an old problem. He knew that the only way to remedy this situation was to progress his design philosophy and advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer as soon as possible.

Fortunately, he already had a clear idea on how to speed up his progression. His latest escapades enabled him to return to his design lab with a wealth of inspiration and design concepts.

In fact, Ves spent much of his time during the return trip on accessing the Red Association and the Red Fleet's internal databases!

His tier 3 galactic citizenship along with his improved relationships with both organizations granted him greater access to restricted knowledge than before.

The latest rounds of lightning baptisms had significantly advanced and sublimated many aspects of his life.

His comprehensive learning abilities had taken a significant step forward. Not only was Ves able to digest complicated scientific theories a lot faster than before, but he also discovered that he was able to understand more convoluted and divergent alien-derived knowledge.

Part of that was due to his new affinity for darkness. When Ves discovered that he was able to glean a lot of new insights related to stealth technology, he quickly decided to focus on this field.

He was making clear strides towards becoming a first-class mech designer!

It shouldn't take too long before he passed the minimum qualifications to design a low-tier first-class mech.

However, Ves planned to continue studying after that in order to ensure that he was able to design proper multipurpose mechs.

He needed to gain additional proficiencies in lots of different miniaturized tech. It was not that difficult to learn them all if Ves had already mastered their larger equivalents, but the sheer quantity of miniaturized parts and modules still required a lot of time to comprehend.

He also had to master the overall design principles of a first-class multipurpose mech. This was by far the most difficult 'mech type' that he would have to learn.

Unlike other first-class mech designers, he had never been raised from the ground up to develop such versatile and complicated mechs. Ves knew that he would have to fight an uphill battle to break his old habits and grow accustomed to making radically different compromises in order to design an acceptable multipurpose mech.

"There is too much for me to learn." Ves lamented as he sat behind his desk terminal. "You have it easy, Lucky. The only thing you need to do to grow stronger is to eat a lot of expensive metals. By the way, how far are you in digesting the piece of EE-343F-00334R I fed you the other day?"

"Meowww..."

Lucky's dark shape rested listlessly on the desk. The gem cat still hadn't recovered from biting such a significant chunk of super-class alloy.

Whatever properties this artificial material possessed, it clearly took great effort for the current iteration of Lucky to process it! The cat hardly had any energy left to spare for other considerations!

The fact that Lucky refused to eat any further meals was proof that he would remain indisposed for a while longer.

Ves reached out and softly patted Lucky's head.

"Take your time. I hope you will become stronger and more capable than ever. I also expect you to produce a powerful gem from this. Don't give me a reason to believe that you have squandered my investment."

"Meow!..."

As the days passed by, Ves looked more and more forward to returning 'home'. He had spent too many days away from his family.

While he was able to talk with Gloriana and his children over the galactic net on a regular basis, it was not enough. The communication channels were not secure enough for Ves to speak to his loved ones in total privacy.

There was much that Ves wanted to share with his wife. He could tell that Gloriana also wanted to share a few developments with him. She looked and sounded a lot more upbeat than before, so she definitely managed to make significant progress while he remained away on his business trip.

"I'm finally back!"

8 days after departing from the border regions, the Bluejay Fleet finally reached the port system that was located in the Agamemnon Upper Zone.

The Devos Ancient Clan welcomed the return of their honored guest. Traffic control went out of its way to clear the space lines and grant the Bluejay Fleet a direct route to the eighth planet from the local star.

Once the fleet settled into high orbit, Ves, Lucky and Kelsey Ampatoch all waited to get teleported directly to the surface of the planet.

The Journeyman Mech Designer that Ves recruited during the recent Fey Shaper Contest radiated a noticeable degree of apprehension. Though his training allowed him to maintain a brave face, this was just a facade.

"What's wrong, Kelsey?"

"I should not be surprised that you noticed. There is nothing wrong. I am merely unused to the fact that I will be spending at least several years in Terran space. It is not what I signed up for, professor."

Ves overlooked the fact that a Rubarthan mech designer wouldn't be able to feel at home in the Terran Alliance.

That did not mean that he tolerated this kind of response.

"I can understand your apprehension, but please remember who you are. You are no longer a Rubarthan. You are a Larkinson. I won't ask you to forget your past identity, but do not allow it to supersede your new status. Right now, the Larkinson Clan maintains a cooperative relationship with numerous Terran ancient clans. I do not want you to do anything that compromises these lucrative deals. Have I made myself clear?"

The young Journeyman took the rebuke in stride. "You are correct, sir. It is difficult for me to overcome my biases towards the Terrans, but I will try to keep an open mind. It will take time for me to grow comfortable in the presence of those I previously saw as enemies."

Ves relaxed and gave the former Rubarthan an encouraging smile.

"You don't have to turn your behavior around in an instant. Just try to minimize your exposure to the Terrans until you have adapted to your new status. By the way, I already have a former Terran mech designer in my employ. Alexa Streon is my latest student who has inherited much of my design philosophy, so I would appreciate it if you can learn to get along with her. Both of you are Larkinsons, so there is no reason for the two of you to hold any animosity towards each other. We are all working towards a common purpose."

Kelsey Ampatoch looked thoughtful at that. He had already learned that Ves employed a scion of the Streon Ancient Clan, but that was different from being able to accept the fact that he would become her colleague.

The good news was that their specialties diverged from each other. Alexa Streon specialized in living mechs, while Kelsey Ampatoch specialized in subversion systems.

Soon enough, the compartment made a chiming noise.

Everyone braced themselves just before the Tarrasque engaged the teleportation process.

During the brief interval where his body was being transferred to the surface of the planet, Ves experienced the differences between regular teleportation and crossing the Rubicon.

The latter was far faster, smoother and stabler.

It was difficult to adjust to a more low-end form of teleportation. His improved phase lord cultivation made him a lot more sensitive to the flaws and the fragility of the teleportation method acting on his body.

The Tarrasque had to pump a lot more power into the teleportation system in order to transfer his folded true body to his destination. This made everything riskier and more precarious than before.

The mechers needed to upgrade the teleportation system of the Tarrasque. It was never designed to teleport more than a couple of mechs at most.

Ves quickly transmitted a very brief complaint to Jovy before he focused on his surroundings.

He arrived directly onto one of the open courtyards of Diandi Base.

"Lucky! You're finally back!"

The first person to respond was Andraste!

The red-headed girl eagerly ran forward and embraced the floating gem cat in a hug!

"Meeeoow!..."

Naturally, the indisposed gem cat was not in the mood for a touchy reunion, but Andraste did not care about his discomfort!

Ves had no time to pull the distressed cat away from his clingy daughter.

That was because his wife had decided to greet his arrival with an unexpected surprise!

"Gloriana?"

"Yes, my dear?"

"What is... that?"

His elegantly dressed wife smirked and patted the shiny and crystalline aquamarine archeshell of the alien that stood by her side.

Ves immediately noticed that the hand used to touch the archeshell was wrapped in a glove that appeared to be made out of archemetal!

"I managed to make several breakthroughs while you were gone. Did you know that Alexandria is able to do more than form design networks? I recently discovered that she is also able to dominate the minds and spirits of weaker minds! With the help of this new ability, I persuaded the Red Association to transfer one of their alien captives to me. You are now looking at Hekkel, my very first Glorious Servant, but certainly not the last!"

"..."

"Hekkel, greet my husband."

The translation module attached to the alien's neck translated the arche's native speech.

[This lowly slave greets the highest slave of my Glorious Queen.]

"..."

"Please do not mind his words, Ves. The arche are highly hierarchical by nature. It is difficult to instill the concept of a servant into his alien mind."