

When I was done chuckling at Samwise's response, I turned back to my workstation, focused on the task at hand.

"Okay then Mr. Made Ready, out of everything I now have access to, what is the most important?" I asked, mostly rhetorically, as I made my way to my computer station, sitting in my chair as I mentally hooked into my systems.

"FTL," Samwise said easily and without hesitation, getting a chuckle and another nod from me.

"Exactly. Halo FTL might not be the best version out there, even if you cut that down to the best human-available version, but it's better than nothing. I'm also pretty sure it gets a whole lot better further down the timeline, so I need to watch out for that. On top of that, it's way better than plenty of places, like Mass Effect," I explained, closing my eyes and leaning back in my chair. "It's also pretty unique. As far as I remember, it's a form of dimensional travel, rather than... well, a lot of different FTL methods. So, even if my next tech tree is something insane, that gives me an incredible version of FTL, it doesn't matter because the information would still be potentially useful. Of course, in the end, none of that really matters."

"Because of our teleportation."

"Exactly!" I said excitedly as I booted up my CAD software, tabbing through options quickly. "Systems in our local cluster are well within range of a short slipspace jump, but the only real issue for places further away is the time it takes to get there. Transporting a single landing platform there would unlock the location for teleportation, making subsequent trips instantaneous."

By this point, I was nearly shaking with excitement, quickly diving back into the mental space of my database, zooming in on the starship branch, which was frankly massive. Even cutting out the non-FTL capable ships, there were thousands of different makes and models, all almost entirely obscured by the fog. It wasn't quite as bad as the modern car industry, where you could expect nearly yearly releases of the same models with moderate changes, but it wasn't too far off.

My goal, one I was willing to dedicate a *significant* amount of my first week to, was to climb as far and wide as I could in the starship branches, including both civilian and military. My hope was that by repeatedly completing advanced versions, even the smaller ones, my understanding would spread further and further across the branches, unlocking more and more ships. This was necessary because, even with the large-scale assembly room, I was severely limited to the size of the starship I could produce.

I would never have the room to build a [Halcyon-class](#) ship like the [Pillar of Autumn](#), in the confines of my two weeks, but I would be damned if I didn't give unlocking ships like it a try. And even if I couldn't unlock them completely, pushing myself towards that goal wouldn't be a waste of time. There was no doubt that these ships were filled with marvelous bits of tech, even beyond FTL, and building them would likely open up and clear other branches.

I was just about to start on my very first ship, what looked like the very first ship with an FTL drive, the smallest point I could begin with in the entire section, when a thought occurred to me. I quickly turned to Samwise.

"Sam, I have a mission for you," I said, the AI turning to look at me. "Stop production of the second vault and direct all those resources into producing a third assembler. Make it twice... Maybe even three times as big as what we have. I need it done ASAP. I'm going to do my best to unlock as many of these branches as I can, but just in case I need a way to make even bigger ships, I want a backup plan. And prepare whatever production setup you have at the new vault construction to funnel into this project. I don't think the central workshop production area can keep up with some of these projects."

"A sound idea, Jackson," He said with a nod, before hesitating and continuing. "Could I still watch you assemble your first starship?"

"Yeah, I can't blame you for wanting to be here for that too..." I responded with a smile. "Take charge through a tablet or direct communications, I just need you designing and guiding the process."

"Very well," He said, excitement just barely coloring his voice. "I will begin the process while you work on transferring your blueprints. I will return within the hour."

I nodded, watching the AI leave before finally returning to my CAD program and getting started.

The first ship I put together wasn't really that much of a starship, but rather a remotely [operated research barge](#). I was pretty sure it was the United Earth Government's, or at least humanity's, first successful testing of the [Shaw-Fujikawa Translight Engine](#). It was twenty meters wide and fifty meters long, with a [fusion drive](#) funneled through two thrusters. These fusion thrusters were remarkably similar to the fuelless thrusters used in Fallout, but they appeared to be considerably more stable and precise, allowing for significant scaling up. The rest of the barge was almost entirely dedicated to the slipspace drive, and its necessary systems, of which there were many.

Still, the barge was the definition of bare bones, other than a ludicrous amount of computational power and an extensive array of sensors. I could tell that it was all pretty low tech compared to what I would have access to later in the tree, but it was undoubtedly a good sign in terms of early measurements.

I worked on the design for quite a while, getting through the entire thing in about two hours. At face value, that was an incredible amount of time compared to what I usually spent in the design process, but compared to just how much I was creating, it was a decent ratio. Working with all the new tech slowed me down a bit, but I could tell completing this barge was going to open a whole lot more than just the starship tree.

With the design done, I nearly ran out of my workshop. I used the restroom, grabbed a snack, and took a teleporter directly to the large assembly room. Rather than immediately taking

control of the room, I reopened the CAD software and created a new blank file. It would likely take some time for the production facilities to put together enough parts for me to get started, so I had some time to kill.

Rather than tackle one large project, I quickly plowed through just over half a dozen UNSC weapons, whose designs were almost completely exposed except for a few chemical mixes and alloys. I quickly designed and sent off the plans for the [M6D Magnum](#), [M90A Tactical Shotgun](#), [BR55 Battle Rifle](#), [SRS99C-S2 Sniper Rifle](#), [MA5C Assault Rifle](#), [ARC-920 Railgun](#), and [M6 G/GNR Spartan Laser](#). I could have likely created most of the human armory without the tech tree to begin with, so I assumed that assembling a small variety would more or less unlock the rest, as well as any variety I wasn't familiar with, like things that didn't make it into the games but existed in that reality.

During my quest to ensure I didn't miss any possible weapon tech advancements, which was *definitely* not me making an excuse to build the guns that defined my teenage years, the parts for the barge started piling up. After taking a moment to walk around, stretch my legs, and finish my half-eaten breakfast and now cold coffee, I got started on assembly.

Thankfully, the process was moderately simple. It was a barge after all, meaning I didn't have to worry about a whole host of things, like cabin systems and life support. Still, it was a large project, filled with delicate electronics and technically experimental technology. I knew that seeing it in my tech tree meant the barge would work, but that didn't mean it would be temperamental and sensitive.

About two hours into assembly, about a third of the way done, Samwise arrived from his work, and I took a break to hear his report on his new project.

"Since you made this a clear high-priority project, I took the liberty of shutting down the vault's baseball field," He explained. "Converting it into a new assembly room will cut approximately 35 hours off the projected deadline. It will limit part delivery to teleport only, but I believe that can be compensated for.

"That's a great call, Samwise. We can build another one later," I said with a nod, not interested in baseball enough to care about sacrificing the stadium. It did, however, bring up an interesting issue. "Is there a chance that the stadium is too large? Will I be able to control that much machinery?"

"It will likely be slower, but it stands to reason that if this room works, then a larger version of it will as well."

"Right... Well, then I guess the only thing to do is confirm this room works."

After the break and report, I refocused on assembling the barge, concentrating entirely on it and pushing myself to pick up the pace. Part of me wanted to see what sort of things unlocked when I completed it, and the other was concerned with just how deep I could make it into the starship tree before I was forced to focus on other things. It cost me a few fuck ups, but only one of which actually set me back, as I bent a panel by slamming it into another arm by

accident when I was trying to slide it into place. Thankfully, it was an easy fix, with Samwise just ordering me another while I focused on other things until it was done. I did learn my lesson about trying to rush, however, so I slowed down just a bit.

When I was getting close to finishing the barge, Samwise made a pretty good point that I should make sure that the ship was stable without my input. I was likely to get a whole lot of knowledge downloaded at once when I finished, and that had been known to throw me for a loop. I carefully position the ship on one of the raised platforms before carefully attaching the final piece, the antenna.

Data. Information. A wash of understanding that flowed like a massive, unyielding tide.

Previously, while picking first projects, I started slow and small. Not only that, but I only had experience with one other advanced tech tree in the form of Titanfall. My first project for that tree had been programming, but my first physical project was Samwise, which was primarily made from relatively mundane materials and methods.

The barge was not that. Computer systems, several dozen advanced alloys, polymers, sensors, a communication system, hell, even the *lights around the barge* were unique enough that a download about their design was included.

For a good five minutes, long enough for Samwise to contact Frank and have him come and check up on me, I was dead to the world as my brain processed this seemingly unending flood of knowledge. When I finally came to, I grabbed Samwise's arm, breathing heavily.

"Note for the future," I said. "Do not start advanced tech trees with large-scale projects. I need to work up to them a bit more."

"Are you okay?" Sam asked, holding my shoulder to stabilize me while Frank continued to scan me with a handheld scanner. Behind him, I was surprised to see Jackie, who was looking worried.

"I'm alright," I assured them, looking past him to Jackie and repeating louder. "I'm okay. It was just a lot. A lot of inspiration at once."

"Seems like it," Jackie said, nodding to the barge. "Too much for you to handle?"

"Just about," I said with a wince, looking over at the completed build. "Worth it though."

"Not if it melts your brain," He responded, shaking his head, reaching over to slap my shoulder. "Take a break, I'll make you some lunch."

"Yeah... I'll be right up."

"Five minutes or I tell Sable what happened," He said with a smirk. "She can drag you up for me."

Jackie waved as he left, and I collapsed back into my seat, letting out a long breath.

"Did it work?" Samwise asked, after a polite pause. "Do you understand it?"

"Yeah... It worked," I responded, unable to stop from smiling as I stood. "There was a whole heck of a lot coming with it, but I understand it."

The Shaw-Fujikawa Translight Engine functioned in three parts. First, the drive uses an advanced, altered particle accelerator to create thousands of tiny, microscopic black holes. Typically, these would be so small and short-lived that they would spin out into thermal energy almost instantaneously. This made them useless without the second part of the drive. Using a slightly altered application of excited and accelerated particles, the drive utilized these micro black holes as a sort of perforation in the fabric of space, creating a tear between normal space and Slipspace.

The ship's thrusters then push the vessel into slipspace, since the slipspace drive itself wasn't actually any sort of thruster. Naturally, of course, slipspace is an obscenely inhospitable space for anything of a lesser dimensionally charge. In order to not be exposed to the utterly alien dimensional subdomain, the third part of the slipspace drive enveloped the ship in a quantum field. While not requiring nearly as much energy as the process of tearing through space, maintaining the quantum field did take an incredible amount of calculations, which was what the shockingly large amount of computing power onboard the barge was for.

It was a revolutionary design, and now I understood how it worked. Even better, the new understanding mixed pretty well with my existing understanding of exotic particles and particle physics in general, which I already knew pretty well due to several projects from Fallout. It was good to have my knowledge expanded, especially in a field so entangled with some of our more potent tech.

Once I was done going over the rather large, overwhelming spread of information that had been downloaded into my brain, I looked back into the tech tree itself to get a better feel for what finishing the barge had unlocked. As I had predicted, completing the barge had opened up a whole host of different lanes into the starship cluster of branches. This included civilian, military, and even the predicted standalone branch, where slipspace drives were [designed to be removed and replaced](#). It also lit up several more experimental platforms, of which I had no plans on putting together.

"Okay... so here is the plan," I said, mainly talking to myself, though Samwise was listening. "I'm going to try to build two starships a day for the first week. That's fourteen ships in total. In between those ships, I will build smaller things, start filling out the fog around the tree."

"And when the week is over?" Samwise asked.

I chewed my cheek, watching as MRVN units were already deconstructing the barge, bringing it away to be scrapped. I considered my options for a moment before letting out a sigh.

"While I wish I could dedicate all my time to space travel and starships, I need to take advantage of this tree as much as I can. It has the potential to bump up my base tech by around

five hundred years, give or take. Getting tunnel vision and only focusing on space stuff... it would be a waste."

"Then what's the plan?"

"The first week will go as I said," I confirmed. "Then, at the start of the second week, I will decide if I'm happy with the progress on the FTL and space travel-related tech. If I'm not, I'll spend a day mainlining the removable drives, since it seems like that branch goes all the way to the highest tech available in the tree. Either way, I'll use what I uncovered in my "downtime" between starships to plan out the rest of my week."

"Very well," Samwise said with a nod. "Then I believe you can start your downtime now."

"Yeah, I'll go see what Jackie's got going on," I agreed, stretching slightly. "I'll assemble the weapons after that, then see if I can't whip up something quick with the rest of the time."

Despite the urge to stick around and dive deeper into the tree, I made my way to Jackie's apartment in the vault. Kaytlyn and Riggs were there as well, though it appeared that Jackie's threat to send Sable after me was hollow, as she was busy with a meeting setting up distribution for Jackie and Frank's sandwiches.

I sat down at the Night City native's dining room table just as he was bringing over a few plates of chicken, Amelia following after him with bowls of salad.

"Something simple and light, a Caesar chicken salad," Jackie said, laying out the food. "I would have more, but I was at the test kitchen all morning."

"It's fine, Jackie, the fact that you cook for us at all like this is amazing," I said, Kaytlyn nodding in agreement. "Without you pushing all this forward, we would likely still be eating food cubes."

We served ourselves, after which Jackie passed around shredded parmesan to sprinkle on top. The selection of cheeses that the food duo were working with at this point was incredibly impressive, not to mention accurate.

"So... Riggs said you passed out or something?" Kaytlyn asked after we had all enjoyed a few bites.

"Yeah, just a bit overloaded," I explained, waving off any concern. "Should have seen it coming, but yeah. I'm fine, won't make the same mistake twice."

"Why now?" Riggs asked. "Why not before, during your other bouts of inspiration?"

"I... well, this was a particularly dense burst," I explained. "Basically, I bit off more than I could chew. Thankfully, it was only a cough, not a choke."

The others nodded, and together we finished our meal, spending about an hour socializing and unwinding. When we were finished, Jackie passed me two sandwiches, prepackaged in a rigid plastic container, though there was no labeling on them.

"These are two of our final plans for our prepackaged sandwiches," Jackie explained. "A provolone, roast beef and horseradish, and a chicken bacon and cheddar. Just don't expect anything miraculous. They are intentionally downgraded a bit so they won't seem quite as well replicated. Tell me what you think when you're done."

"Yeah, got any chips?"

Jackie snorted and threw me a bag of chips, after which I left, thanking him for the food as I did. I then made my way down to my workshop, where all of the parts for the UNSC weapons were waiting for me, stored in large plastic bins. There was also a bunch of finished ammo for each of them. Technically, I would need to assemble the ammo to gain the knowledge for it, but so far, completing the weapons that required the ammo also unlocked the knowledge for the rounds they fired.

"Alright... let's see how this works out..."

Assembling weapons into their finished form was relatively easy once the parts were printed out, simply because they were meant to be frequently disassembled, cleaned, and then reassembled. In fact, the only two that weren't like that were the Spartan laser and the railgun, as those were much more delicate pieces of machinery and required someone trained in their maintenance for repairs.

Surprisingly, I did gain some nuggets of information from the firearms, mostly about design concepts and material science. Assembling the two more advanced weapons also improved my understanding of laser and mag weapons, particularly regarding high-powered variants. While not ground-shaking or life-changing, I absolutely foresaw a redesign of our mag cannons in the future, as well as coming up with my own version of the Spartan laser.

Upon completing the weapon assembly, I scanned through the new tech tree, looking for a project I could start and finish in my remaining two hours. After some debate, I picked one of the smallest land vehicles used by the UNSC, the [Mongoose](#). It was essentially just a very advanced ATV, and I chose the most advanced version of the vehicle in the tree, several layers beyond the first iteration.

My hope was that, for this and most of these branches, I would create enough of the advanced versions to clear and gain permanent access to most of the other versions as well, as I did for the robotic tech tree from Fallout, and to a lesser degree, the bipedal style robots from Titanfall. If I could do that with as many branches of this tech tree as possible, I could gain access to a massive spread of tech that could serve as a fantastic foundation for future development. The Mongoose, for example, would hopefully act as the first step into the advanced vehicle branches, and would hopefully unlock a significant portion of some civilian branches as well.

Designing the small vehicle took only about forty minutes, proving that I could significantly increase the rate of learning once I moved beyond the starship portion of this tree. Even better, assembling the vehicle, which was specifically the [M290 Mongoose](#), only took an hour and resulted in a flood of information, though not nearly as deep or overwhelming as what

happened when I completed the barge, which I was only just realizing did not have a proper name.

I was happy to see that the small ATV ran on a hydrogen engine, a powerful and clean system that was both reliable and cheap. Not only was hydrogen a clean-burning fuel, but it was also relatively easy to transport, since you could compress it into a liquid that would run the vehicle for quite a long time. Even better, I knew that the Warthog had a compact system for converting water into hydrogen, which meant that once I built that, I would likely unlock the build for larger, more efficient systems.

Not that I needed it, converting water into hydrogen wasn't a complicated process, even if I didn't have the protomatter generators. It was just nice to know I had options, especially ones as advanced as what the UNSC and its civilians had access to.

While the tech and scientific knowledge were excellent, and a welcome addition, I was *much* happier with the information I got on design methodology and the engineering concept of small, four-wheeled all-terrain vehicles. It was not an insignificant amount, since finishing the most advanced Mongoose not only unlocked the previous versions, but also a large chunk of civilian models, just as I had hoped it would. The information I now had made things like switching out the engine system for something fully electric, powered by a fusion generator, remarkably simple. I now knew how to design ATVs and do it well.

Or rather, one subsection of ATVs. I had no idea how to make an ATV with treads, or how to optimize for six wheels instead of four. Basically, I had gotten more than I had expected, but less than I had hoped for, which was honestly more than enough to celebrate. If the pattern continued, I would finally be adding some much-needed vehicle expertise to my pool of knowledge, as well as any other subject I could work in.

By the time I finished absorbing everything from the Mongoose, it was time to head back to start designing my next ship. I directed a MRVN to take the Mongoose through the teleporter system to the Rocky Ridge garage, since there was no way I wasn't going to try that out.

I could barely wait to drive around a Warthog.

Once I was back in the assembly room, I sat down and focused on my next project. Completing the barge had revealed several ships that I could choose from, some of them military, a few of them civilian. Half of them were too big for me to make, something I had a feeling that would become increasingly problematic as I progressed. Still, I had plenty to choose from, so I eventually selected a military model, hoping that completing it would work the same way the Mongoose did and unlock civilian models as well.

The ship I chose was still clearly in the early days of slipspace travel, but it was manned, functional, and definitely more advanced than the barge. As far as I could tell, it was a ship designed to jump between planets in a single system, most likely to bases set up around our solar system. The Slipspace drive was more powerful and more complicated than the barge, and the systems supporting it were clearly superior, making it an all-around upgrade from my first build. That said, it was unarmed and barely counted as military.

After getting ready, I ended up spending just as much time designing the second ship, which was called a [Prawn-class transport](#), as I did on the barge. Once I was done, I took a break, trying out the sandwiches Jackie gave me while I waited for the parts to add up.

Just as Jackie warned, the sandwiches were decent, but nothing special. That said, that was to my taste, which meant by public standards they were amazing. To me, they tasted like decent gas station sandwiches, with a hint of mystery meat for each of the proteins.

I ended up only eating half of each, leaving the chips on the counter, munching on them occasionally while I slowly began assembling the second starship. Dimension-wise, the Prawn-class was just about the same length as the barge, while also slightly skinnier. It was, however, significantly taller, about twice as tall. It didn't quite fill the room, but it definitely made it very clear that if I really wanted to stretch the limits of what I could do with the space vessels, I really needed the larger room that Samwise was getting done.

The sooner I could transition to working in there, the better.

Despite the increased size and mass, assembling the Prawn-class only took about four and a half hours. The reason for the hour-and-a-half difference was clear within the first minute, though I couldn't predict the total effect at that point. The Prawn-class was a ship designed to be recreated and manufactured on a large scale, whereas the barge was custom-built, unorganized, and used parts that weren't easy to use or assemble. Creating the Prawn-class went significantly smoother than the barge.

Once the ship was done, I prepared for another download, but thankfully, this time I was not overwhelmed. The knowledge was still considerable, and included updates to sensors, materials, the slipspace drive, and nearly a dozen other things, all spun together and downloaded into the database attached to my brain for permanent use. The completion of the ship also revealed a dozen more potential ships to build, as well as clearing a few variants of the Prawn-class completely.

I let out a long breath when the download was complete, before standing up to stretch. For a few minutes, I watched as the MRVN units approached the ship, trying to decide how best to disassemble it. After they started to pull it apart, I headed out of the room, making my way back to my apartment.

The earlier I got to sleep, the earlier I could wake up and get back to work.