

# Mechows

When Humanity first encountered the Blip-yaps in the beginning of the Interstellar Era, things went surprisingly well. Yes, Blip-yaps look like pulsating-yellow, diseased tiny cockroaches, and they have a certain, ah, *odor*: but Humans weren't any more attractive to **them**, and Blip-yap currency spends extremely well on the Galactic market. Also, Earth had things that the Blip-yap apparently very much wanted to buy. Mostly organic; in fact, mostly complete animals of every sort (although fur and pelts were always in demand). Preferably live, and even the dead ones had to be perfectly preserved.

It didn't take long for Humanity to figure out what was going on. The Blip-yaps are apparently addicted to gladiatorial games and blood sports of all sorts; and one of their absolute favorite pastimes are giant animal fights. In the distant past they merely goaded two beasts to fight each other; but in these modern, more enlightened times they convert their fighting animals into cyborg mecha controlled by a Blip-yap, sitting in a control room where the animal's brain used to be. Battles range from one-on-one fights to epic battles with thousands of fighters on both sides; there are official leagues for for everything from 'no

artificial weapons' to 'full missile racks and plasma blasters.' Death is not really inevitable -- well, at least not if you're a Blip-yap -- but neither is it something to get surprised over.

Blip-yap have long gone offplanet to find new and exciting beasts for their fights, and they *love* using Terran animals. The combination of a strong bone structure and a variety of pleasing skin/fur colors means that the beasts are remarkably easy to customize; cows in particular come almost suspiciously close to the Blip-yap fighting beast ideal of balance between strength, cubic volume, and durability. The cows get used up on a regular basis, of course, but as long as Earth keeps selling them, that's not really a problem.

Earth's ruling government... more or less just stares fixedly ahead whenever this subject comes up. And the subject comes up: oh yes, my, it does. The problem is that the Blip-yap are very rich, very respected in the larger Galactic community, and have an excellent trade and diplomatic relationship with Humans. If they were brain-scooping Humans or any officially pre-sentient Earth species then probably none of that would matter, but the Blip-yap apparently have very stringent ethical reservations about that sort of thing. So... since they buy

their cows and pigs and dogs and polar bears and pandas openly and legally, what exactly can Earth even *do*?

Well, Earth can provide security during the livestock transfers to the Blip-yap. Because there are a bunch of Humans who get rather indiscriminately upset about this, and the Blip-yap are understandably of the opinion that the best defense against a giant murderous fanatic is a team of armed giants from the same species. Said fanatics don't always try to blow up (or simply stomp) the transfers, but they do it often enough that a constant security presence is necessary...

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