

Crossing 141

Chapter 141: The First Hunting Lesson

This scene caused the officer to smile wryly, thinking to himself that the scouts this year were really such oddballs. In the past, the scouts who came were all mostly already in their own teams, and all those teams basically had all 6 members. But this term, not only were there very few teams, the teams were not even filled yet. He found it annoying just looking at the sparse teams.

“Why are there so few team members?” asked the officer unhappily to all the team leaders.

“My team is actually full, but the other two members are not in Class-A.” Li Yingjie was the first to respond.

“Still in the process of choosing. No final decision yet.” This was what Wu Jiong had to say.

“Um ... the ones I like have already joined other teams, and the ones who haven’t joined a team yet, I don’t see any I like,” said Qi Long with a grin, scratching his head, adding a touch of goofiness to his demeanour.

“I want to take in more people, but they don’t want to join me,” said one of the team leaders with a long face. Who asked everyone to have their eye on Ling Lan’s and Wu Jiong’s respective teams?

“Ditto +1!” Another team leader had a similarly long face.

“Ditto +2!” The final team leader was also part of the long face clan.

The officer was unsure whether to laugh or cry at the humorous words of the last three team leaders. He then turned to ask the other students, “What about you all? Why didn’t you choose to join a team, or make your own team?”

All was silent, so the officer pointed at one of the students at random. “You, answer!”

That student truly bemoaned his bad luck, actually being called on to answer. Sullenly, he replied, “If I made my own team or joined another team, then I would lose the chance to join Ling Lan’s or Wu Jiong’s team. We all do not want to lose these final three chances.”

“Alright, alright, so you all have your considerations.” The officer stared doubtfully at Qi Long and Wu Jiong, uncertain what sort of charisma they had to make the other students so tenacious. However, there was no way to continue on like this, so the officer grinned sardonically and said, “I don’t care about these messy considerations of yours. Here, my word is law. Right now, I command you all to quickly get into temporary teams of five. Give me the name list in 3 minutes. If you still don’t have a team then, I will randomly assign you one.”

The officer swept his gaze at Qi Long. “Since your team is already full, I won’t make any changes. You all can wait over there.” The officer pointed out a direction, signalling for Qi Long and his team to move there.

Qi Long and the others were very happy that they could remain with Boss Ling Lan. This gave them a lot more confidence.

The students reacted swiftly. It took only 5 minutes for 10 teams to form. To ensure his team's combat ability, Wu Jiong chose a classmate ranked in the top 10 to join his team, while Li Yingjie had managed to secure the 13th-rank for his team. The other students teamed up according to how well they got along with one another.

Seeing that the students were all ready, the officer waved expansively and shouted, "Depart!"

The scouts charged aggressively towards the entrance of the camping grounds, and there they found a huge vehicle which greatly resembled a fully enclosed armoured car of Ling Lan's past world, but was five or six times bigger. The officer indicated for the students to get into the vehicle.

Ling Lan felt the vehicle start up and move. Along the way, she even felt the body of the vehicle being crashed into by some large force, causing several loud bangs. Seeing the anxious and curious faces of the students, the officer in the same carriage explained, "This is just the savage beasts attacking. Don't worry, this area is mostly just beasts below G-class. They won't be able to do any damage to this transport car."

"Won't any higher class savage beasts appear?" asked one of the students.

"I've lived here for 3 years and that has never happened. The savage beasts on this planet are all territorial, so the savage beasts normally won't leave the area they live in," explained the officer. Seeing that everyone was still anxious, he then shared the greatest trump of the camp. "We have heavy artillery on the transport car, capable of killing savage beasts below E-class."

At that, the students released relieved sighs, and waited calmly for the transport car to bring them to the hunting grounds.

After travelling for not even half an hour, the transport car stopped. The car door swung open, and Ling Lan and the others disembarked under the officer's direction to find that there was a temporary outpost here.

The officer pointed at the thick forest in front of them and said in introduction, "This is the H-class hunting area which has been specially set up just for you all. Right now, mark down the coordinates of this location. You must not go beyond the radius of this coordinate by 10 kilometres."

He then pointed at the temporary outpost behind him and said, "This is a temporary rest area provided for you all. The fence around the perimeter is also an electric barrier fence, definitely capable of withstanding multiple attacks by H-class savage beasts. Inside, there is also an exchange station. Also, if you want to return to the main camp, either you walk back, or you'll have to buy a return ticket. And each return ticket requires 500 credits ..."

The officer's mouth split into a grin, and he said with some malicious glee, "So, please work hard and earn money!"

That said, without waiting for a response from the stunned students, he leapt onto the transport vehicle, which then zoomed away from the area, leaving the students with nothing but faces full of dust.

Slow on the uptake, the students only realised they had been abandoned by the heartless officer after the vehicle was no longer visible. They broke out into angry curses, yelling loudly of the other's despicable shamelessness, actually leaving without teaching them anything.

Han Jijyun ignored the uproar beside him, turning to ask Ling Lan, "Check out the outpost or just go hunting straightaway?"

Ling Lan said impassively, "The outpost won't run away, we can always check it out when we get back. We need to get a better idea of this area before nightfall so we can create a hunting plan tonight."

Ling Lan's decision gained everybody's agreement. Or, we should say, since Ling Lan had decided so, no one else in the team would have any objections. Thus, the five of them swiftly put on their backpacks and headed towards the forest ahead.

Seeing the movements of Ling Lan's team, the other teams put a lid on their anger and began moving as well. Some teams chose to enter the temporary outpost to check it out, while other teams followed Ling Lan's team to enter the hunting area, getting ready for their first hunt.

At this moment, several kilometres in the air above Ling Lan and the others, a mecha battle squad was monitoring the area. Seeing some of the scout teams begin to hunt, their captain gave the following orders to his subordinates. "Each person is responsible for one team. Don't let them come to any harm."

"Roger that, Captain!"

"M1702, choosing the first team!"

"M1703, choosing the second team!"

"M1704, choosing the fifth team!"

"M1705, choosing the ..."

Meanwhile, in a different direction, on a mountain slope several kilometres away, a bestial mecha squad was also monitoring the area.

"Little ones, have you chosen your targets?"

"Boss, don't worry, we've all chosen ..."

"Pity there aren't any lolis, can't push any of them down ..."

"Shotas are just as good for that, you sleazy uncle."

"Don't look at me that way, it's just my fatherly love overflowing ..."

“Che ...” This group of people, though noisy and flippant in their unfiltered speech, were nevertheless precise in their movements. Controlling their bestial mecha, they made their way skilfully through the forest, surreptitiously tailing the respective scout teams they had chosen to protect.

Qi Long was the spearhead of Ling Lan’s team, with Han Jijyun in the middle, Luo Lang and Lin Zhongqing at both flanks, and Ling Lan at the back of the formation. Han Jijyun’s combat skills were the worst among them, so before they figured out the true strength of the savage beasts in this area, Ling Lan had no choice but to use this safest formation.

It was extremely calm the whole way through — they didn’t encounter any so-called savage beasts. After walking 300 to 400 metres into the forest, Ling Lan’s gaze suddenly flickered and her head twitched minutely towards the left. She could clearly sense that a savage beast was approaching from that direction.

A few seconds later, Qi Long also sensed it. He quickly gave a warning, “It looks like a savage beast is coming. Everyone watch out.”

Hearing this, everyone tightened their grips on their weapons, focused intently on the direction they were in charge of defending. No one knew what the first H-class savage beast they encountered would be like and where it would attack from.

The wait wasn’t very long. Within a few seconds, a burly grey figure leapt out from the short shrubs on their left side. Its chosen target was the one standing closest to it, Luo Lang.

Long prepared, Luo Lang swung the high-frequency blade at the figure in a hurried arc. Perhaps Luo Lang’s counterattack was too swift, catching the opponent by surprise, for it was struck dead on by Luo Lang’s attack.

A wailing howl rang out, and the grey silhouette twisted in the air to land nimbly on its feet. The powerful attack by Luo Lang had not damaged it at all.

At this time, everyone could finally see what it really looked like. It was about the size of a large dog, and was covered in a coat of long grey hair. Its head was like a rabbit from Ling Lan’s past world, but was 4 or 5 times larger than a rabbit’s head. Meanwhile, its tail was not short and small, but thin and long, with countless scales on it instead of hair. With a subconscious flick of its tail, a crisp crackling sound rang out, and there were now several thin gouges in the tough packed earth. It was obvious that its tail was immensely powerful.

“Flash rabbit, speed-type H-class savage beast. Attack methods: mouth, claws, tail. Strength: Immense speed, almost undetectable. Thick and tough skin, unable to be injured by normal strength. Weakness: Predictable attacks. Very impatient. Exchange value: Skin and fur, 10—100 or more (depending on the integrity of the item). Claws (whole), 20 each. Tail (whole), 100.”

Ling Lan read out the information on the flash rabbit immediately. Her memory was amazing, almost to the extent of having a photographic memory. Of course, even if she forgot, Little Four had already saved all the information on the savage beasts and would have reminded her.

Listening to Ling Lan’s recitation, Qi Long’s gaze shone brighter and brighter — this was all money!

“Looks like it will be our first quarry.” Lin Zhong-qing was equally as excited.

The flash rabbit was the weakest among all the H-class savage beasts. As such, there were not many things of value on it, only three. However, this did not beat the fact that it was the easiest savage beast to hunt. Not only could it allow them to practise on it to familiarize themselves with hunting, they would also profit from it somewhat — this was a great thing!

“In that case, Lin Zhong-qing, we’ll leave this quarry to you,” said Ling Lan calmly.

In their team, Lin Zhong-qing was the nimble and speedy type. Thus, hunting a flash rabbit as practice was perfect for him, very likely to trigger some insight.

The objective of hunting was not simply to take down a quarry, but also to learn how to hunt game that was most suited to one’s abilities. This was the first lesson of hunting, known as ‘know thyself, know thy enemy’.

Chapter 142: Enemy Attack? Enemy Attack!

Under Ling Lan’s planning, every member of Ling Lan’s team experienced hunting solo. After a week, Ling Lan felt that the others had already gotten used to hunting, and were able to work together well with great rapport. So, she decided not to move around with them anymore.

Ling Lan had only been following them around this week primarily because she wanted to protect them, afraid that they might encounter some unexpected scenarios. It wasn’t that Ling Lan didn’t want to go off on her own to the areas with higher class savage beasts, but, Little Four told her that there were mecha convoys from the camp scattered around watching over them, both in the air and on the ground. However, with the passage of time, the number of mecha gradually decreased.

Thus, Ling Lan could only bide her time at the temporary outpost. Still, she had the learning space, so it wasn’t a complete waste of time. However, these actions of Ling Lan drew the contempt of the mecha operators protecting the students from the skies ...

Just take today for example. After sending Qi Long and the others off at the gates of the temporary outpost, Ling Lan ambled back to the living quarters and lay down to sleep. This lazy and unmotivated demeanour of hers instantly infuriated the mecha operator in charge of this area.

“Hells, this punk is such a goddamn rascal, not going out to hunt again,” said the mecha operator angrily to his teammates.

By this point, the mecha operators were no longer protecting the teams individually, but was keeping track of them through radar monitoring. Any hunting team that entered the range of the area they monitored would fall under their protection.

This particular mecha operator’s protection range just happened to include the temporary outpost. Every time he saw Ling Lan remaining at the outpost on his own, sleeping sweetly without a care in the world, his mood would take a deep nosedive. He felt that Ling Lan was not living up to all of their expectations.

“Could it be that his credits haven’t been used up yet?” One of his teammates asked him distractedly as he gathered information on the hunting teams within their protection range. Many of the children just did not have the guts to go out and hunt unless absolutely necessary.

“If that was the case, I wouldn’t be so angry! I’d just have to wait for him to reach that critical point. But he just goddamn won’t ever run out of credits because his teammates are actually willing to provide for him without any complaint!” Extremely disgruntled, the mecha operator’s voice was deep and sullen. “Even though they returned every single time covered in injuries, they would still just smile and give the quarry they hunted to that brat, and let him exchange it for credits and continue to remain in the temporary outpost.”

The operator was somewhat envious, but his heart also ached for those children. For the sake of such an unmotivated and useless teammate, were their actions worth it?

“Ho! Looks like that punk’s interpersonal skills are pretty good then.” Being able to get his teammates to provide for him willingly was also an accomplishment. The other mecha operators could not help but exclaim in awe.

“Could it be that the punk has an impressive background?” Of course, someone would think of this — maybe this was the reason why those children didn’t dare to not support him?

“I asked the captain, and he said that he doesn’t have any notable background. It’s just that his father died long before he was born in a battle with the Twilight Empire.” Very early on, the mecha operator in charge had already asked the captain to investigate the child’s data, and found that his background was very average. Even more average than those of his teammates, Qi Long and Luo Lang.

“Perhaps those children pity him for being an orphan of a martyr. Giving him some consideration because of that would be normal,” someone speculated.

“That’s not the way to be considerate. They are here to see blood — if this brat never sees blood, then how will he grow? Don’t they know that this is actually harming him?” The mecha operator in charge was somewhat distressed at the waste of talent.

“What are you worrying for? If he doesn’t want to grow stronger, what can we do ...” The other’s words had barely faded when he suddenly gasped in shock, and asked doubtfully, “Look up there, what’s that?” When he had been browsing through the images, a light had seemed to flicker at the top of the screen. He adjusted the image, and found that countless bright spots had appeared on it, and could not hold back a shout.

All of the mecha in the air immediately pulled up their images as well, and saw that there really were countless bright spots descending from the atmosphere.

“What’s going on? Why didn’t the camp control tower give us a report?”

“Could it be an enemy attack?”

“No way ...”

Just when those aerial mecha operators were at a loss, Ling Lan, who had already entered the learning space and had started practising her physical skills, sensed a strong signal calling her from the outside.

She decisively ended her training and returned to the great hall of the learning space. There, she saw Little Four with an anxious face, who rushed to say, "Boss, I just did an aerial scan, and discovered a mysterious force invading this planet!"

Ling Lan's face changed. She quickly returned to the real world, leapt up from her bed, and rushed out.

Standing in the square of the temporary outpost, she lifted her head to look up at the sky, and could vaguely see several glimmering lights in the skies above.

"Little Four, lock onto one of those bright spots and zoom in," ordered Ling Lan.

A close-up of the scene right by a bright spot abruptly appeared before Ling Lan's eyes. The bright spot turned out to be a giant elliptical metal object. Its outer shell was smooth and glossy, and it looked just like a large egg made of metal — there was no way to tell what it was. Its speed of descent was not very quick, just as if there was a reactionary force pushing against the planet's gravity.

Ling Lan's brows furrowed, suddenly thinking of something. She yelled out quickly, "Little Four, could you check to see into outer space?"

"From here, I'll need to hack into the radar here. Boss, hold on for a few seconds ..." That said, Little Four left. Ling Lan counted under her breath, and when she reached 9, the image before her suddenly shifted to an image of the space right beyond this planet.

In space, there was nothing. All was silent, just as if those unidentified flying objects had just appeared in their vision from thin air.

"The other side might be using some cloaking system to evade radar scanning, and so were not discovered," explained Little Four, "Let me try to change their radar scanning system ..." This so-called 'cloaking' was not true concealment — it was just recognizing an opponent's radar scanning system and preparing a corresponding countermeasure. So, a minor modification to the scanning system would solve the problem.

Little Four's words had yet to fade when Ling Lan saw two massive interstellar motherships suddenly appear in a corner of the initially boundless starry sky. Beside them were four escort starships. Right then, those elliptical metal objects were being launched in a never-ending stream from the mothership's launch port. The four escort starships were positioned at four corners, carefully guarding the two motherships in the centre.

"Searching for their emblem ..."

The starships within the image began to rotate, until, on one side of one of the ships, a blood-red sun was revealed ...

"The Twilight Empire ..." Ling Lan's gaze narrowed, her mind swiftly registering the severity of the matter. Immediately, she said, "Quick, transmit the images to the camp's control tower ..."

"Already done." Little Four had instantly transmitted those images to the control tower.

Ling Lan's gaze filled up with killing intent — the Twilight Empire ... that was the main culprit in her father Ling Xiao's murder. She had originally thought that she would only get the chance to get revenge

and kill the people of the Twilight Empire once she grew up, but unexpectedly, this opportunity had presented itself here at this mysterious planet.

Of course, Ling Lan also knew very well that their appearance here most likely meant that some problems had also emerged within the inner workings of the Federation, just like back when Ling Xiao had been killed. Only this time, she wondered who their target was.

When the control tower received Little Four's transmitted images, they instantly sounded the alarm ... The entire camp leapt into action under the blaring cacophony of the alarms. All the resting soldiers rushed out, grabbing their weapons and their mecha.

Meanwhile, the mecha operators in the air still observing those unidentified bright spots in the atmosphere had also received the warning of an enemy attack from the control tower.

"Warning, this is an enemy attack ...! Warning, this is an enemy attack!"

"Get ready for battle!" The cold voice of the captain came through the public communications channel.

"Yes!" All of the mecha were fully armed, and they watched suspiciously as those countless flying objects drifted down towards their planet. The moment the captain gave the command, they would charge.

In the meantime, the hunting students had also received the notification to return to the camp or the closest outpost.

When the opponent had drifted down to a certain altitude, the flight-capable winged mecha or humanoid mecha all flew up into the sky as well, waiting in formation.

Meanwhile, in space, the commanding officer of the mothership who had supervised the launching of the metallic giant eggs, was closely watching the feedback images of the situation below. When he saw that the opponent had already noticed them and were prepared to attack, he instantly pounded the table in anger. "Baka¹, how did they discover our concealed airstrike strategy? Which bastard ratted us out?!"

Originally, they had wanted to overwhelm the opponent with the element of surprise, but was unexpectedly faced with this sort of direct faceoff. His heart started to twinge in pain — the sneak attack this time involved their empire's most exceptional mecha column, if any accidents happened and they were lost here, it would definitely be a severe loss.

This commanding officer naturally didn't know that the reason the opponent was prepared was due to Little Four, this intelligent bio-entity from the miraculous planet Mandora ...

"Attack!" When the control tower gave this command, all the air-borne mecha launched the first wave of attack. The metallic eggs right at the bottom were instantly caught in the explosions of this intense firepower. Losing the anti-gravity deceleration, they dropped like stones, hurtling downwards at full speed. The mecha in formation paid no mind to these falling eggs — everyone knew that at that speed,

even if there were protective fittings inside, the people inside would still be at death's door even if they didn't die.

These images were transmitted back to the motherships in space, causing the commanding officer to yell 'baka baka' non-stop, yet he was helpless to do anything. Now that things had developed into the current situation, it was no longer something he could resolve.

"Sir, can we let them break out of the shells and act now?" The adviser beside the officer wiped away the sweat on his forehead, and reminded him with a bow. Since there was already no chance of a sneak attack, they might as well fight outright pitting strength against strength.

"Sano-kun's ² suggestion is good. Give out the order to act!" The commanding officer finally calmed down.

"Hai ³!"

Once the order went out, all the falling metallic eggs cracked open by themselves, revealing the black mecha hiding within each one. The sight of those black mecha, along with the crimson sun emblazoned on their chests instantly drove all the Federation's mecha operator's into a collective rage.

"Curses, it's mecha!"

"The bloody Twilight Empire!"

"Dammit, kill them all ... avenge Major General Ling Xiao!" It wasn't clear which mecha operator said this, but it summed up the burning animosity of the mecha operators well.

Chapter 143: The Mecha Battle Kicks Off!

Major General Ling Xiao's death due to one of the Twilight Empire's evil plots was a major grudge for all mecha operators of the Federation. They too had once thought of charging onto the battlefields against the Twilight Empire for revenge, but they were soldiers, and so had to submit to the military's arrangements. They had been assigned to develop this mysterious planet, but the rage in their hearts had not disappeared. Now, suddenly seeing the hated killers appear before them, almost all of the mecha operators were about to go on a rampage.

Everyone present on the field knew that this would be a death clash, a fight till one side or the other was dead!

The artillery in the hands of the Federation mecha operators needed no command, firing wildly in an endless barrage. A great battle was about to start ... in the sky, the sounds of rocket fire filled the air — the Twilight Empire mecha naturally did not just lay back and admit defeat. Even if they had no choice but to dodge while they were still trying to gain control of their mecha, they would still raise up their firearms when necessary to return fire.

The entire battlefield was shrouded in the smoke of artillery — with every round of fire, several mecha would be destroyed and fall ... some of the Federation, more of those from the Twilight Empire.

Those mecha plunged from the skies wreathed in thick smoke and blazing fire, crashing loudly onto the ground. Even Ling Lan, who was quite far away from the heart of the battle, could still feel the violent tremors from the ground, almost losing her footing.

On the ground, those mecha would explode a second or even a third time. Shrapnel went flying, wisps of flame scattering everywhere — the immense explosive force broke the surrounding trees at their waists, some trees even being uprooted entirely. Yet even more trees were set alight by the errant sparks, quickly becoming engulfed in flames ...

Under the barrage of artillery, the initially tranquil primitive forest descended into a sea of smoke and fire. The savage beasts within seemed to sense the looming threat, and began to make a commotion.

The descending Twilight mecha were getting closer and closer to the Federation mecha soldiers in the air; at this point, the camp control tower gave a new order, “All aerial mecha squads, move out immediately!”

This command proved that the battle had already entered the most intense close-combat stage. The outcome of this battle now would be determined entirely by whose nation’s mecha operators were stronger.

From the start, this world had been a world governed by the principle of the survival of the fittest — only by being stronger than the opponent could you have the right to continue surviving.

All the Federation mecha operators who received the order operated their mecha to fly towards those incoming Empire mecha. In the skies of this planet, blue-white mecha and black mecha clashed, battling it out with one another.

The supreme commander of the camp looked at the starships hovering in space on the screen before him. Rage spiked in his heart, and he threw the phone receiver in his hand roughly at the ground, where it instantly broke apart.

Raging, he said, “Goddammit! If these bastards weren’t here, how would I have let these despicable mecha land so easily ... Damn! Now we can only rely on the mecha teams to hold them off with force.”

On the other end of the phone receiver, the technician soldier silently wiped away the cold sweat on his forehead. He was thankful that he had managed to react quickly enough to shut down the functions of the receiver moments before the commanding officer had smashed it, saving the eardrums of his teammates.

It turned out that the secret headquarters on this planet was equipped with anti-aircraft artillery. However, due to the threat of the starships in outer space, the supreme commander did not dare to use them. This made him feel extremely frustrated and was the main source of his rage.

The commanding officer could almost confirm that the Twilight Empire was just using these mecha to try and entice them into firing their anti-aircraft missiles. After finding out that the opponent was the Twilight Empire, the commanding officer knew that even if the opponent had found the coordinates to this planet, they still would not know the detailed location of the Federation’s secret headquarters on the planet.

If the opponent had known for sure where the headquarters was, they definitely would not have first let the mecha descend for a sneak attack. Instead, they would have just opened fire with the starships, directly blowing up their main command centre right from the start. This way, without any proper command, the Federation warriors would definitely not be able to muster up any effective resistance. The Empire would have been able to easily assume control of this planet.

If he had not discovered the opponent's starships, he might very well have already given the command for the camp to fire their anti-aircraft missiles. He could almost see the final outcome then ... those few starships of the Twilight Empire would then have figured out where they were hiding, and sent all their firepower on board towards them, completely destroying this location, vaporizing every last bit of them, leaving no bodies behind.

At this thought, the commanding officer felt a lingering frisson of fear in his heart. Luckily the radar had worked in the end, managing to detect those concealed starships and motherships. This also made him instantly aware of the opponent's scheme, saving him from giving out a wrong order.

The commanding officer collected his emotions, and turned to ask the chief of staff beside him, "When will the reinforcement teams arrive?" Although he had seen through the opponent's dangerous scheme, the situation right now still wasn't looking good.

"The crew closest to us is at the Misri Corridor area. Even if they rush over at top speed, it is estimated to take about 10 hours," reported the chief of staff.

"Hold out for 10 hours, is it?" The supreme commander frowned, considering whether it was possible to hold out for 10 hours with his current forces.

"Commander, there's more bad news I have to tell you ..." The chief of staff had received the latest updates from the other staff officers, and he now looked somewhat ill. "The forces just sent word that just now, a Twilight Empire fleet was seen in the vicinity of planet Qiming."

The supreme commander hurriedly tapped on the star map on a screen and compared the distance between the two locations. He could not help but curse! This was because the distance from the Misri Corridor and that from planet Qiming were roughly the same. In other words, 10 hours later, the opponent would also receive reinforcements.

"Contact military headquarters immediately. Tell them to send even more fleets over. No matter how long it'll take them to come, we will hold out till the end!" That said, the supreme commander turned and left the control tower. This surprised the chief of staff who had begun making arrangements for his commands. He asked, "Commander, where are you going?"

"Where? To fight! Am I supposed to just sit here and wait? My soldiers are all battling courageously right now!" With an angry glare, the commander stalked onto the control tower's elevator platform to go down, not giving the chief of staff any time to stop him.

Nimble, he climbed into his own mecha, and after activating it, he piloted it to fly up to the aerial battlefield. Behind him, his bodyguard mecha team followed swiftly ... the commander they were supposed to protect had already chosen to battle, of course they could not stay back.

“Ahem, this fellow ... that’s so irresponsible!” The chief of staff looked at the back of the commander who had leapt into battle, and muttered unhappily to himself. Still, he could only complain a little in protest — against the formidable commander whose very nature was that of an extreme battle maniac, all he could do was resign himself to his bad luck and clean up after him.

“Baka! The opponent actually chose not to use their anti-aircraft missiles but fight in close quarters with mecha? Are they that confident in their own mecha operators? What do you all think?” In space, the commanding officer on the mothership saw that their plans had failed once again. Their originally perfect strategies, all failing — this caused him to be extremely displeased and angry.

“Commander, don’t worry. Among the mecha operators executing the air strike this time is a team of our empire’s ace mecha escorts. As long as they land successfully, the opponent’s mecha operators will definitely be no match for them.” The staff officer beside him quickly offered reassurance, boosting the commanding officer’s confidence, “They will definitely complete this ‘Operation Decapitation’!”

There were many strategies; they too had thought of all kinds of unfavourable contingencies. As long as the ace mecha troop landed successfully, they would carry out ‘Operation Decapitation’ — seek out the opponent’s command centre and destroy it so that the opponent would have no organisation, and hence lose all form of effective resistance.

” Yoshi ¹ ! I hope they don’t disgrace our great Twilight Empire.” Once more, the commanding officer felt as if he had the situation well in hand.

On the planet, right now, there were the sounds of countless firearms being fired. The temporary outpost was also ringing with the warning blares alerting the troops of an air attack. Some on-duty soldiers were directing non-combatants to the nearest air raid shelter, but their main responsibility was to help those students at the outpost who were scared shitless.

“Bastard, stop running around recklessly! Come back quickly!” A soldier on duty at the outpost was currently gathering all the students hiding all around the outpost. When he saw Ling Lan standing at the entrance of the outpost looking around randomly, he instantly yelled at him anxiously.

Suddenly, from god knows where, a bomb fell — the soldier leapt frantically at Ling Lan ... then, he felt his body being tugged aside by something, causing him to tumble in another direction, dropping straight into a trench dug by the camp.

“Boom!” The bomb exploded on the other side. But because they were inside the trench, they were completely uninjured. The soldier raised his head, bewildered, and saw a small figure crouched in front of him.

“Big Brother, thank you for saving me.” That charming young shota had a serious expression on his face, but the immense gratitude he held in his eyes was unmistakable.

Although the soldier was still wondering how he had suddenly changed course in mid-air, the two of them had indeed been saved by the shift in direction. As such, he could only scratch his head in confusion and say, “As long as you’re alright! As long as you’re alright!”

Then, realising something, he asked, “Why didn’t you go to the air raid shelters?” The camp had informed the students the coordinates of all the air raid shelters at the first moment, letting them choose the nearest air raid shelter to hide at. Fearing that the students would be scared stiff by this sort of ruthless battle scene, they had then sent some on-duty staff to check up on them, which was why this soldier had appeared here at the outpost.

“I wanted to go, but was still checking the directions, confirming the coordinates.” Ling Lan gave a perfectly normal reason. In the midst of an unforeseen event, it was very easy to lose one’s direction in the chaos.

The soldier had already seen scouts in this sort of situation an nth number of times, and so merely pointed at a direction and said, “You just walk in this direction, and then look at the coordinate numbers on your communicator, and you should be able to find an air raid shelter.”

“Thank you, big brother. Then I’ll be leaving first!” Ling Lan gave him a grateful scout’s salute, and then jumped out of the trench, quickly disappearing into the distance.

The soldier pulled on his helmet and carefully moved forwards in a low crouch. He needed to continue checking the next location. After moving stealthily in this way for several tens of metres, he abruptly realised that the other’s movements had been much more agile than his ...

Chapter 144: Chance! Make a Move!

Ling Lan did not choose to go to that air raid shelter; instead, she secretly hid at a random blind spot within the outpost. With Little Four’s help, she contacted Qi Long. “Qi Long, where are you guys now?”

“Boss Lan, finally got hold of you. We can’t go back anymore,” said Qi Long, chuckling drily.

“What happened?” asked Ling Lan in surprise.

“The road we need to go back is now a battlefield!” The sound of violent hacking and slashing could be heard from Qi Long’s end — the sound was so loud that it almost covered Qi Long’s voice.

“Mecha combat!” Ling Lan could immediately tell what the sound signified.

“Yes, and not just ... BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!” Loud explosions rang out on Qi Long’s end, “Boss, we need to retreat quickly, otherwise we’ll be chopped into pieces by the winds of their swords.”

Heavy panting could be heard via the communicator — it looked like Qi Long and the others were running for their lives trying to escape that frightening battlefield. Ling Lan was extremely anxious, hating the fact that she wasn’t there with them.

“We can’t go any further. Any further and it’s the F-class savage beast area.” Han Jijyun’s voice rang out on the other side of the communicator.

“You all already entered the G-class savage beast area?” A bad feeling rose in Ling Lan’s heart.

“Yup, the battlefield spread too quickly, so we could only keep dodging backwards. But luckily, those G-class savage beasts have also been frightened away by the battlefield.” Qi Long’s voice held a trace of

relief, because if that had not been the case, they would not have been able to run so deep into the forest.

“Stop running. Those savage beasts have already become even more dangerous,” said Ling Lan frantically.

The sound of running footsteps slowed and finally came to a stop. Then, Qi Long’s voice came through once again, a note of puzzlement in it, “Boss Lan, what did you say?”

“They’re about to go berserk from this sudden battle.” Ling Lan had already received Little Four’s warning. He had found that within the range of his monitoring, the savage beasts’ eyes had already turned red, as if they were about to go berserk at any moment.

“Can you all go around the battlefield?” Ling Lan followed up with this question.

“No, the battlefield has already spread to cover the entire G-class savage beast district. No matter which way we go, we’ll have to pass through F-class territory,” responded Han Jijyun. He had been keeping a close eye on the situation, so he knew very well that right now, the battlefield had engulfed almost all of H-class and G-class areas. Therefore, if they wanted to avoid the battlefield and get back to the temporary outpost, they could only go through F-class savage beast territory.

Han Jijyun felt very helpless. With their capabilities, their chances of passing through F-class territory safely was exceedingly low — they would only have one chance in ten of surviving. It wasn’t that much different from just cutting through the mecha battlefield directly.

“Boss, please don’t worry. We’ll act according to the situation. Right now, we’ll first go look for a good place to hide. Boss, you should also go to an air raid shelter as soon as possible and hide.” Qi Long told Ling Lan their decision. He knew that in this type of situation, even if Ling Lan was strong, he would not be able to help them.

In this kind of large-scale, destructive mecha battle, scout academy students like them who only knew low-level combat arts were just ants. Qi Long and the others did not want Ling Lan to be in any danger, even somewhat glad that he had not come with them to hunt and gotten stuck here as well.

“Alright, find a place as soon as possible to hide then. Oh, and keep your communicators turned on. I’ll contact you guys periodically.” After giving her orders, Ling Lan cut the call.

Ling Lan’s brows were deeply furrowed. She knew very well that on that battlefield, the Federation mecha operators were fully engaged in battle and had no mind to care about the students anymore. In other words, whether Qi Long and the others lived or died was entirely up to their luck now.

“Goddammit! I need to find them!” Ling Lan made her decision in an instant. She was not someone who would abandon her comrades.

Ling Lan knew that if the battle continued to spread outwards, Qi Long and the others would be forced to enter the territory of even higher level savage beasts. Little Four had already cautioned more than once that the savage beasts there were already in a state of violent frenzy — their combat abilities were definitely not at their normal baseline. Undoubtedly, the longer Qi Long and the others lingered there, the more precarious their situation would be.

With a decision in her heart, Ling Lan quietly zipped out of the outpost. The soldier on guard at the entrance, who was waiting for straggling students, only felt his eyes blur for a moment, as if a shadow had flown by at the edge of his vision. But when he looked around, he saw nothing.

“Am I seeing things? Looks like the surrounding smoke still managed to affect my vision ...” The soldier could only explain it this way. He threw all thoughts of that passing shadow to the back of his mind and stopped worrying about it.

Ling Lan rapidly dashed through the hunting grounds of the H-class savage beasts. In the dim lighting of the dense forest, she moved through the trees as nimbly as a monkey. With several quick dashes, she zipped from one tree branch to another. Her speed made her seem just like a shadow, leaving afterimages between the tree trunks, and her landings were so soft that they made no sound.

After travelling for about 2 kilometres, Ling Lan abruptly came to a stop. Her brows lifted slightly, but very quickly, she leapt up nimbly, and dashed into one of the shrubs to hide without making any noise.

Ling Lan had just hidden herself when, not far from Ling Lan’s position, two large mecha collided heavily in the air and simultaneously lost control and fell.

They crashed forcefully into the forest undergrowth about 200 metres away from Ling Lan. The great tremors caused by the crashes stirred up a tornado, which whipped out to decimate the surrounding trees. The tornado only died off when it was about less than 10 metres from where Ling Lan was hiding.

Ling Lan seemed to have expected this, for she was not affected at all. All throughout, she kept a lid on her presence, crouched within the shrubs, motionless. The instant she went into hiding, Ling Lan had entered hunting mode — her mind was as still as ice, perfectly melding her presence with her surroundings. Even if Instructor Number One from the learning space came here now, before Ling Lan made a move, it would still be very difficult for him to find Ling Lan’s hiding spot.

Perhaps the two mecha had been rendered useless by the crash, for the operators could not get them to stand up again. Almost simultaneously, the hatch of the cockpit on both mecha opened. Two mecha operators leapt out from their respective cockpits at the same time.

“Clang!” The clear ring of cold weapons clashing, proving that the two mecha operators had crossed blades again in an instant.

The two of them were pushed back by the other’s attack, each stumbling backwards several steps before regaining their footing. They gripped the short swords in their hands and faced each other from a distance, waiting for the next chance to attack.

The distance between the two of them was about 10 metres. The mecha operator dressed in a blue and white combat uniform on one side was from the Federation. Ling Lan could tell due to the Federation logo on his chest — a big golden five-pointed star. On the other side was the mecha operator of the Twilight Empire, dressed in a combat uniform the same black as the Empire’s mecha. The entire uniform was a dark inky black, the only spot of colour being the blood-red sun on his chest.

The mecha operators’ combat uniforms were a type of one-piece outfit, even coming outfitted with a fully sealed helmet. This set of combat uniforms were definitely the best defensive equipment in this world. Ordinary blades would not be able to pierce through it; of course, the short swords equipped on

the bodies of these mecha operators were made of a special type of metal — although the swords could not pierce through the combat uniforms, three stabs at the same spot would weaken the uniform enough to penetrate it and deal damage.

The two of them faced off for a few seconds, unmoving, and then, their figures flashed as they moved almost simultaneously.

Clang! Clang! Clang! ... Over 10 times the weapons clashed. The two men were fighting evenly, but the consecutive attacks were wearing down the stamina of both of them rapidly. Soon, the two men were starting to breathe unsteadily.

They had originally been fighting in their mecha for half a day up in the air, using up a lot of their energy already. And now, on the ground, they were engaged in a life-or-death close-range battle. Whether it was in terms of mental or physical strength, they were at the end of their ropes — it was all down to who could hold out for a breath longer.

The patiently waiting Ling Lan had already quietly picked up a twig about a finger-length and slipped it between her fingers, poised as she waited calmly for the two men to launch into their next attacks.

Finally, the two men lifted up their swords again, and charged towards the other at the same time ...

Chance!

With barely a thought, Ling Lan's wrist twitched, and the twig in between her fingers flew like an arrow towards the Twilight Empire mecha operator.

Ling Lan naturally knew that the twig would not be able to penetrate the other's combat uniform on its own. Thus, her target was the only weakness of the combat uniform — the neck!

Even though, on the surface, it seemed like the mecha operator's entire body was shielded by the combat uniform, in truth, at times, from a particular angle, a tiny unshielded gap would be revealed. For example, when a mecha operator lifted his head a certain way, an almost imperceptible gap would appear at the join between the helmet and the combat uniform.

Ling Lan, who was lying flat within the shrubs, was viewing the scene from a downward angle, and so managed to catch sight of this tiny, tiny gap. All this time, Ling Lan's cool observation was so she could find this opportunity for a one-hit kill. And Ling Lan's patience finally brought her this opportunity.

The small and thin twig struck silently and abruptly — also, the Twilight Empire mecha operator never would have imagined that there would be another ruthless hunter here, so his full attention was on the Federation mecha operator opposite him. He wasn't guarding against other sources of killing intent.

He suddenly felt a stab of pain at his neck, and the hand which he had planned to use to parry the opponent's short sword stilled for a moment.

But this short pause was enough to make him miss the correct timing to parry, and he could only watch as his chest was pierced forcefully by the other's short sword. Panicked, he tried to back away, but then he discovered something even more frightening — he could not control his body at all.

Within the blink of an eye, the opponent had stabbed his chest three times repeatedly, breaking through his uniform to pierce into his chest. He could only watch as his own blood started to spurt from his chest ...

What in the world had happened? They had clearly been evenly matched, both unable to overwhelm the other ... why would he lose control over his body in these final moments?

The mecha operator of the Twilight Empire fell over with a face filled with disbelief. Till the end, he still could not figure out how he had died, causing him to be a muddled ghost even in death.

Of course, the reason for all this was Ling Lan's undetectable attack; it had just been too strange and unexpected. Because the twig had been so small and thin, it had only caused a small droplet of blood to well up at the area on the neck which it had shot into. Thus, the Twilight Empire mecha operator had never even noticed that he had suffered a sneak attack.

Chapter 145: Controlling Polar Light!

The Federation mecha operator saw that his opponent was completely dead; only then did he let out a breath, relaxing fully. Similarly, he had not noticed anything odd, just feeling glad that the opponent had run out of stamina before he had. This was why he was the one who lived and not the opponent.

Hiding at one side, Ling Lan was just thinking whether to go out and meet the other to obtain an update on the battlefield situation when a frisson of alarm coursed through her heart. Without even thinking about it, Ling Lan pushed off the ground forcefully with both arms, sending her whole body flying backwards rapidly.

At that moment, a terrifying light energy beam poured down from the skies, accompanied by a horrified voice screaming, "Dodge ...!"

A Twilight mecha in the air had noticed the surviving Federation mecha operator on the ground, and had decisively raised the gun in his hand to send a powerful light beam blasting down on the other. Not too far from this spot, another Federation mecha had also happened to see the opponent's movement, and had tried to lift his own gun to stop the other, but it was too late.

The resting Federation mecha operator standing there had no chance of reacting, directly being engulfed by that massive light beam ...

A loud "BOOM" and the earth was blasted apart, causing an approximately 20-metre wide pit to appear. Right then, that Federation mecha operator standing there had disappeared without a trace, only leaving behind blood-soaked dark rust coloured earth as proof of his existence.

"Bastards! I'll kill you!" The other Federation mecha operator's anguished voice rang out, interspersed with countless blasts from his gun.

In the air, yet another pair of Federation and Twilight Empire mecha became locked in battle, outcome uncertain.

Less than 10 metres away from the deep pit, Ling Lan was lying flat on the ground, drenched in cold sweat, not daring to make a single move. Luckily she had sensed the danger back then and had run away in time. Otherwise, if she had still been hiding in her original spot, that hit just now would have turned her into a puddle of bloody water just like that Federation mecha operator.

Even so, she had still been struck heavily by a broken tree which had been thrown her way by the blast, incurring some internal damage. Ling Lan knew very well that in this kind of grand mecha battle, fragile physical bodies just could not stand up to the potential damage. She was already considered unbelievably lucky for surviving this round.

“Boss, the mecha discarded by those two earlier may perhaps still be usable.” Right now, Little Four was also very nervous. Ling Lan was stuck on her own on the battlefield — this situation was just too dangerous. They needed to have a mecha of their own to be able to stand up to the enemy. After searching for a long while, Little Four had found that the mecha which had fallen at the very start of this still seemed somewhat intact, so there was a chance it could still be used.

“Let’s wait for a moment. Let those two mecha leave first.” Ling Lan circulated her Qi to start healing her injuries as she consoled Little Four.

By now, there was nothing but flat ground around those two mecha which had fallen, no available cover whatsoever. If she just rushed out like this, she would definitely be noticed by the two mecha battling it out in the sky. Ling Lan absolutely did not want to be like that Federation mecha operator earlier — consumed by fire, saying a thorough goodbye to the world, leaving no trace behind.

Little Four knew that Ling Lan was right, and so said nothing further. However, the notion of getting a mecha of their own once again reared up in his heart. That way, he would be able to control the A.I. of the mecha and help his boss.

Ling Lan’s internal injury was not too severe, but if not treated well, there would still be the possibility of future problems. Especially since they were still in a dangerous position right now — any damage would mean a decrease in combat ability, so the most important thing now was to make sure her injury was fully healed.

Consequently, Ling Lan left the safety of her surroundings up to Little Four, putting her full attention into recuperating. Very quickly, Ling Lan shut out all thoughts of her surroundings, entering a deeper dimension of Qi circulation and healing ...

When Ling Lan opened her eyes once more, her body felt light — the tired feeling in her muscles as she had rushed here was gone along with her injury. Ling Lan knew that this was due to the deeper level of Qi healing, replenishing the vital energies of her body till its optimum state.

Ling Lan’s spirits were light as she looked up subconsciously. There was nothing there — the two mecha fighting there before she began healing herself were gone. Frowning lightly, Ling Lan asked, *“Little Four, why didn’t you wake me?”* Who knew how much time she had wasted — if she had known that those two mecha were gone, she would have woken up earlier.

Little Four did not think he did anything wrong. Righteously, he said, *“You need to be well so we can find Qi Long and the others more efficiently.”*

Ling Lan had nothing to say in response to Little Four’s words. After all, Little Four had done so for her sake. If she did not heal her injuries fully and forced herself to go and look for her companions, and then, if by any chance there was any danger, she may have dropped the ball at a critical point. That was definitely being irresponsible.

Thus, Ling Lan cast aside the issue and began sneaking cautiously towards the two fallen mecha. As she moved, she asked Little Four, *“When did those two mecha leave?”*

“Hmm? They never left ...” For a moment, Little Four had no idea what Ling Lan was saying.

“Then where are they?” Little Four’s words scared Ling Lan so much that she immediately dropped flat to the ground and stopped moving. Could it be that the two mecha were hiding in some unseen corner? Why didn’t this little rascal tell her about this sooner?

“Oh, they’re just laying about 1000 metres away.” Little Four’s words let Ling Lan’s heart settle back in her ribcage.

Little Four brought up the image of the scene 1000 metres away in front of Ling Lan’s eyes. Through it, Ling Lan could see that the two mecha had apparently perished together. 1000 metres away, there was yet another deep pit, and at the bottom of it, the two mecha were tangled up with one another. The beam sabers in the hands of both mecha were deeply buried in the other’s cockpit. Thick crimson liquid was gushing out endlessly from both cockpits — the mecha operators inside were extremely unlikely to have survived.

“Little Four, monitor the surroundings, including the area above,” ordered Ling Lan, after letting out a heavy sigh. Almost every second on the battlefield, a life was ended. Ling Lan hoped she did not become the next to perish. Thus, she needed to get a handle on the surrounding situation so that she would not be caught off guard by an enemy hiding in a corner.

Under Little Four’s comprehensive monitoring, Ling Lan safely arrived at her destination. Little Four swiftly checked the two mecha and found that they were both viable for repair. After some consideration, Ling Lan decided to take control of the Federation mecha. Although she also considered using the Twilight Empire mecha to sneak into the ranks of the Twilight Empire and attack them from within, the battlefield was a chaotic mess — both sides were already in a battle frenzy, if she were accidentally killed by the Federation, that would be such an ironic waste.

Ling Lan quickly climbed into the cockpit, and Little Four instantly took over the control rights of the A.I.. Then, the first thing he did was to urgently shut the cockpit hatch, and then activate the mecha.

The mecha’s screen lit up in a flash, and then countless combinations of 0s and 1s appeared, scrolling up in an endless stream from the bottom of the screen, finally covering the entire screen ...

“Boss, please wait patiently. I’m upgrading the A.I. and repairing some of the broken driver routines.” Little Four’s voice suddenly came out from the mecha’s sound systems.

Ling Lan waited for roughly 3 minutes, and the countless 0s and 1s finally disappeared from the screen, condensing down to form two large words — Polar Light ¹ !

After a brief moment, the two words slowly faded from the screen. At the same time, the screen brightened, and Ling Lan felt the enclosed feeling she had at the start fade away. She could now see the limitless blue skies, and several columns of black smoke drifting over from who knows where.

“This mecha is part of the advanced mecha Polar Light series.” Seeing the words ‘Polar Light’, Ling Lan immediately knew what level of mecha she was about to operate. Who’d have guessed that her first time piloting a real mecha would directly skip basic mecha, lower mecha, and intermediate mecha, jumping straight to advanced mecha? Other children probably wouldn’t even dare to dream of such a thing. *“As expected, anything is possible on a battlefield!”* thought Ling Lan to herself.

“The Polar Light series — its strengths are its speed and its long-range attacks. In contrast, it’s a bit weaker in terms of close-range combat,” said Little Four regretfully. It should be noted that whether in terms of physical skills or mecha control, Ling Lan’s skills in close-range combat were much stronger than her long-range attacks.

“Little Four, there’s no such thing as strengths and weaknesses for mecha. Whether it’s strong or weak depends entirely on the ability of the operator.” A small smile hung on the corners of Ling Lan’s lips. Even if this was the weakest mecha, when it came to close-range combat, she had the confidence to utilise it well.

“Also, I’ve found the instructional channel for the Polar Light controls. Boss, do you want to view it?” This was an advanced mecha after all, some of its controls were somewhat different from those of a basic mecha.

“Okay, just speed it up.” Ling Lan had already scanned the control buttons — most of it was almost the same as with basic mecha controls, with only a few new additions. What Ling Lan was interested in was this section of the video.

Very quickly, Ling Lan had absorbed the newly added things. There was nothing too strange about them, mostly just the launch buttons of some artillery weapons. Ling Lan wasn’t someone who used those much anyway, so this just made Ling Lan even more confident.

“What a shame that other than two small high-frequency blades and a beam saber, this mecha has no other close-range weaponry.” Little Four was full of contempt for the dullness of the high-frequency blades and the sole piercing function of the beam saber.

“They’re enough for me.” Ling Lan nimbly controlled the mecha to grip the beam saber in its left hand. That length and piercing function really made it feel like a tri-edge trench knife; Ling Lan was very pleased.

“Little Four, run an immediate check on the remaining artillery left and the power levels.” Ling Lan was not an impulsive person. Everything she did, she hoped to do it with all the information at her disposal.

“Head: anti-aircraft missiles ², 2. Left arm: Beam shield energy sufficient, able to support 2 hours of continuous combat. Beam saber energy insufficient, only able to sustain for around 40 minutes. Right arm: 57 mm high-energy beam rifle, able to fire 18 beam shots. Additionally, in the chest area, two inlaid rockets were still unused. Driver energy blocks: Main energy block with 20% remaining, two secondary energy blocks still left unused.” Little Four reported the status items of the mecha to Ling Lan one by one.

“If we fly, how long can we sustain movement? If I fight at full strength, how long can the mecha hold out?” Ling Lan then threw a few possible scenarios at Little Four.

“Purely flying, we’ll be fine within 10 hours. If you combine flight with full out combat, 30 minutes should be okay!” replied Little Four conclusively.

“Got it.” Ling Lan now had a baseline. She then operated the mecha to fly swiftly at low altitudes, rapidly making her way towards Qi Long and the others. Ling Lan was not flying at max speeds, however, because she did not want to be noticed and targeted by the enemies in the air above ...

Chapter 146: Discovered?

In a dark and dense forest area closest to the battlefield, a team of four scout students were carefully moving through the trees, trying to go around the whole battlefield by skirting the edges of the forest ...

They could clearly hear the violent sounds of artillery and explosions not far away, and every once in a while, they could feel the sudden tremors of the ground when a mecha crashed from the skies into the ground. Each time, they would be frozen in terror, afraid that some stray artillery or even mecha would just fall directly on them.

“You guys, still okay?” Qi Long swiped off the sweat on his forehead, and turned back to ask his teammates behind him.

“Don’t worry about us. Right now, the most important thing is to not go the wrong way.” Han Jijyun’s brows were furrowed as he continued to keep track of their coordinates. Due to the spreading of the battle, they were getting closer and closer to the active territory of the F-class savage beasts. Even if they had not received Ling Lan’s warning, they could feel the chill from within their bones — the situation was already getting worse and worse.

The few of them once again made their way carefully through the forest. After a distance, Qi Long, who was in the lead, abruptly waved his hand. The boys behind him immediately dashed away to hide in the bushes or behind trees, beam handguns in their hands. If an F-class savage beast appeared, they would pull the triggers without hesitation — taking the initiative would give them the upper hand.

Qi Long alone was left in a half crouch, his beam gun pointed right at the spot which he had found suspicious. Sweat dripped down his forehead to glide down his cheek. He did not dare to lose his concentration — an F-class savage beast was equivalent to a human at the Refinement stage; this wasn’t something he, as someone who had barely stepped into the Refinement stage, could match up to. He had already thought things through. If an F-class savage beast actually appeared, even at the cost of his life he would create an opportunity for his teammates to escape.

“Qi Long?” A deep and hoarse voice came from behind the shifting shrub.

“Wu Jiong, it’s you.” Qi Long relaxed instantly, almost dropping bonelessly to the ground. He had really been too nervous before this.

Hearing the two of them speak, Lin Zhong-qing and Luo Lang were about to come out of hiding when Han Jijyun, who was covering Qi Long's back, signalled them to watch and wait. The two of them instantly put up their guard again, gripping their guns tightly as they continued to remain hidden.

Wu Jiong finally climbed out from the bush. His protective vest was a little damaged, and there was an open wound on his cheek. After Wu Jiong came out, his teammates Ye Xu, Qin Yi, and the others also revealed themselves, walking out from various corners. One of them was being supported by Qin Yi. The lot of them were all in roughly the same condition as Wu Jiong, extremely dishevelled.

Wu Jiong saw that Qi Long was alone, and his expression shifted slightly. "Where are your teammates? And where's Ling Lan?"

Qi Long answered, "They're here." He turned to wave behind him, and Han Jijyun and the others walked over.

Then, Qi Long said, "Boss Lan is at the temporary outpost. There's only the four of us here." He pointed at Wu Jiong and asked, "How did you all become like this?"

Wu Jiong grimly spat out a gob of spittle. "Pah! Our luck was just too bloody terrible. A bomb blew up not too far from where we were hiding. Luckily, we had hidden behind a large thousand year old tree, so the tree blocked most of the explosion. But still, being the closest to the explosion, Chen Yu was heavily injured. It's lucky we had enough emergency healing agents on hand, otherwise Chen Yu would have really been in danger. Now, at least he's alive."

Chen Yu was the Class-A student who had temporarily joined Wu Jiong's team for this hunting period. His results in class had always been average, and he was normally extremely untalkative, and so was very easily overlooked by others. But for some reason, Wu Jiong had chosen him at first glance ...

"Do you have enough medical agents? We still have some here." Qi Long asked in concern. Hearing Qi Long mention this, Han Jijyun hurriedly took off his backpack, prepared to take out some first aid agents.

"Thank you, but that's not necessary for now. Chen Yu's injuries are stable, but to heal it as soon as possible, we need to get back to the outpost immediately to get him into a recovery pod." Wu Jiong declined Qi Long's offer, but his complexion did not look any better. This was because they needed to get through the battlefield as quickly as they could to get Chen Yu back to the outpost for treatment, or else his injuries might get worse if left untreated for too long and end up giving him trouble in the future.

But how they could pass through the battlefield was a huge problem. At this moment, he truly hated how helpless he was.

He lifted his head to look at Qi Long and said, "We're preparing to go back to the outpost as soon as possible to get treatment for Chen Yu. What are you guys planning?"

"We also plan to do the same," replied Qi Long, "Boss just contacted us, saying that the savage beasts here are about to go berserk. The longer we stay here, the more dangerous it'll be."

"Cutting through the battlefield is impossible. The two sides are fighting too fiercely. The artillery is flying everywhere — no one knows whether they'll hit us," said Wu Jiong.

“Not just that. If any enemy sees us, they would also shoot a beam projectile at us without mercy. They’ve always been passionate about getting rid of us so-called ‘promising seeds’,” added Han Jijyun, mockingly.

“Hn, so we can only stick to the forest and go around the battlefield this way,” Qi Long told Wu Jiong their original plan.

“Just as I thought.” Wu Jiong had the same plan as well.

“Still, it’s just as dangerous. We’re basically rubbing the edges of the F-class savage beast territory as we travel. If we happen to meet an F-class savage beast, we’ll be wiped out,” cautioned Han Jijyun.

“Dammit. Staying here is not an option, we might as well try our luck,” muttered Ye Xu in frustration.

“Agreed!” The others all chimed in as well. They were the genius students of the Central Scout Academy, the cream of the crop — from youth, their education had always taught them to face trouble head-on and create chances for themselves. They were certainly not people who would just do nothing and wait for death.

The two teams were in agreement. In fact, Luo Lang and Lin Zhong-qing even helped Ye Xu, Qin Yi, and the others by taking their backpacks so that they could care for Chen Yu better. This cooperation helped the two teams move a little faster.

Right then, Qi Long suddenly signalled for everyone to stop. Under Wu Jiong’s suspicious gaze, Qi Long excitedly took a call on his communicator. “Boss, how did you manage to contact us?”

Not long after the battle started, the communicators had lost the communication function. Qi Long and the others knew that this was due to the fighting. The camp control tower was afraid that the enemy would hack their signals and so had chosen to cut satellite transmissions. But surprisingly, even under these circumstances, Ling Lan still managed to contact them. This was absolutely freaktastic!

And so, in Qi Long’s mind, Boss Ling Lan’s image just became even more impressive.

Hearing Qi Long’s question, Ling Lan knew that this was all thanks to Little Four. Still, Ling Lan did not explain herself. After simply asking Qi Long for their current coordinates, she told Qi Long that she was on her way over. If they were not in any danger, they should stay as close as possible to the coordinates they gave until she got there.

Hanging up his communicator, Qi Long’s face once again revealed his trademark wide-toothed grin, adding some goofiness to his demeanour. However, everyone present knew that this was just Qi Long’s facade — he had never been silly when he needed to be astute.

“Good news?” Wu Jiong asked, seeing Qi Long in such a great mood after answering the call.

“Yup. My boss will be here soon,” said Qi Long gleefully. Hehe, it was truly great to have a boss. Even if the sky fell, there was someone to hold it up.

“It’s too dangerous! What can he do even if he comes?” Han Jijyun’s first reaction was to object, feeling that Ling Lan must have gone mad. He felt that this was not an action Ling Lan should take — this was definitely not the choice of a rational type leader. Still, it could not be denied that a tendril of warmth was spreading through his heart, and his initially flagging spirits suddenly lifted significantly.

“Brothers united, we can even cut through gold ¹ ! With Boss leading us, I have nothing to fear ... Also, Boss said that he’s already at G-class territory, heading here.” Qi Long did not have as many considerations as Han Jijyun — he just felt that with everyone together, he would even be willing to venture into a dragon’s lair or a tiger’s den.

“That’s great! Since Boss is coming, then let’s just wait here,” said Luo Lang, equally excited. At the same time, he had noticed that a large part of Han Jijyun and Lin Zhong-qing’s stamina had been used up during this forced march. It was just that they were in a hurry to get back, and was surrounded by danger, so they hadn’t dared to stop and rest.

Qi Long looked at Wu Jiong, and Wu Jiong looked at the tired faces of all his team members. He felt that it was indeed about time to get some rest, so he nodded and said, “Let’s rest for a moment.”

The two teams found a relatively secluded spot, and with Qi Long and Wu Jiong as sentry on each side, the others huddled together in the middle and began consuming the compressed biscuits and nutrient solutions they had on them.

Very quickly, they had eaten their fill and rested. If it were not for the sounds of explosions and mecha fighting not too far from them, they could almost believe that the battle had just been a bad dream.

“Not good! Hide!” Wu Jiong and Qi Long shouted almost simultaneously.

The two teams reacted quickly. They immediately threw down the food in their hands, all of them moving to the respective nearest cover to hide.

At that moment, a blue and white mecha fell from the sky, crashing forcefully into the forest about 100 metres from them. In an instant, the area had become a large pit, trees fallen with broken branches scattered everywhere.

Three powerful energy beams immediately followed, striking the cockpit of the mecha with precision. The cockpit was devoured by the beams instantly, melting away to become a gaping hole.

Three black Twilight Empire mecha lowered their beam cannons in unison. “Seeking death idiot ² !” sneered one of the mecha operators gleefully.

Honestly, this Federation mecha which had been destroyed was really very unlucky. He had been on his way back to restock on ammunition, but had unexpectedly stumbled upon this three-man team of Twilight Empire mecha. Although he had tried his best to escape, he still did not manage to evade their combined attack in the end and was killed.

“Stop dithering. Our brave warriors are fighting courageously. We need to find the enemy command centre as soon as possible and carry out Operation Decapitation. The earlier we finish, the more brave warriors we can save.” One of the other mecha seemed to be the squad leader of the three-man team. The moment he said this, the other two mecha immediately responded respectfully, “Hai!”

Just as the three men were about to pilot their mecha away, one of the mecha seemed to spot something as he zoomed out his screen. “Eh? What that could be ³ ?”

“Kotou-kun? Did you find something?” The small team leader was startled by his subordinate’s cry of surprise, and quickly asked him to report.

“Hehe, no worries. I just found some fun little mice.” The mecha operator called Kotou-kun suddenly let out a burst of maniacal laughter, somewhat excited and perverse.

Chapter 147: Ace Operator?

At that moment, the squad leader also caught sight of the few ‘little mice’ that Kotou had noticed. He knew of his subordinate’s little penchant, and so grumbled at him good-naturedly, “I’ll give you one minute to deal with these little mice. Shikamaru-kun, let’s go.”

The squad leader could leave so easily because he did not think that these few little mice would be any trouble for Kotou, so there was no need for all three of them to be there. Might as well let Kotou enjoy himself.

The two of them very quickly sped off in their mecha, leaving Kotou behind alone. When they left, they did not notice that from another direction, close to the ground, a white and blue mecha was skimming its way towards the area ...

Kotou controlled his mecha to lock onto the group below him. From a distance, he raised his mecha’s right arm, aiming his beam gun right at the people staring at him fearfully from below.

Qi Long, Wu Jiong, and the others naturally knew they had been discovered by the other. Their faces paled, and they shouted desperately for their comrades to run ... but in fact, they knew deep down that no matter how fast they ran, they would not be able to outrun the impact of the mecha’s beam gun.

“Wakaka! Pitiful worms, say farewell to the world just like this!” Kotou saw the terrified faces of the children below and began to laugh wildly in excitement. This was the type of expression that excited him! It was like the high from taking drugs — irresistible ... this was also the reason why he had always loved torturing and killing children.

With this twisted mentality and a crazed smile, Kotou decisively pressed down on the launch button in his hand. Energy began to gather at the muzzle of his beam gun, about to burst forth at any moment ...

A loud “Boom!”

From a distance, a beam struck his mecha’s beam gun before he could shoot. Because of this beam, the beam gun exploded instantly, blowing off the whole right arm of Kotou’s mecha. The arm dropped to the ground below.

“Federation mecha!” Qi Long, Wu Jiong, and the others had thought they were doomed, but unexpectedly, they were saved at the last second. They all turned to look for the source of the beam, and saw a blue and white mecha flying swiftly from a distance, heading straight for the Twilight Empire mecha in the air.

“That’s great! We’re saved!” There was an expression of great relief on all the children’s faces.

Han Jijyun was the only one who was still somewhat level-headed. “Take advantage of this chance and run!” There had been three Twilight mecha, while only one Federation mecha was coming here. If the other two Twilight mecha hurried back, Han Jijyun did not think the Federation mecha had good odds of

surviving. The mecha had saved them, so Han Jijyun also did not want him to die, but reality forced Han Jijyun to first prioritize their own survival.

Qi Long and the others knew Han Jijyun was right; they cast a reluctant look at the blue and white mecha, and then gathered everyone and moved deeper into the forest ...

“Good luck, Federation mecha operator!” Everyone was silently cheering on the Federation mecha operator in the sky.

“Baka!” Kotou was livid. He had only wanted have some fun and kill off a few mice, but just a slip in attention had allowed the opponent to blast off his mecha’s right arm, losing him his beam gun.

He glared hatefully at that incoming blue and white mecha. It was a standard advanced mecha, with only the Federation’s logo on its chest, nothing else. From this, he could tell that the other was just a regular advanced mecha warrior.

In the Federation, mecha of ace level and above would have their own personal symbol on the chest other than the Federation’s logo. The higher one’s level, the larger one’s personal symbol would be. When one became a god-class operator, the Federation logo would no longer be displayed, leaving only one’s unique personal symbol behind. Take Ling Xiao for example. On the chest area of his mecha, there had only been a fiery phoenix on display.

His initial plan to contact his squad leader abruptly stopped ... he had really been thinking of calling his squad leader over, but seeing that the opponent was just a regular advanced mecha warrior, his pride would not allow him to press the connect button.

If he had to call for help against this kind of opponent, it would truly be a disgrace.

Kotou felt that he could not afford to lose this face — he was the elite of the Empire, an ace operator — how could he lose to a common advanced mecha warrior of the enemy nation?

Kotou decided in an instant that he would avenge himself. Even if he only had his left arm remaining, with his control skills, it was enough to torment the opponent till the other yearned for death.

Kotou controlled the mecha’s left arm to pull out the beam saber behind its back, in preparation for close-range combat.

“Boss, the opponent is actually choosing to engage in close-range combat!” Little Four was thrilled. Compared to long-range attack, Little Four had much more confidence in Ling Lan’s close-range combat.

“That’s pretty good luck. Little Four, engage full horsepower, charge!” Ling Lan commanded decisively.

Initially, she had been controlling her speed, wary of the other sniping at her mecha. Thus, she had been fully focused, ready to push her mecha into irregular flight. This decision of the opponent actually eased her mind greatly. Mind you, irregular flight was very taxing mentally, and was also a high-level movement that Ling Lan only learned recently. If forced to use it, Ling Lan would have only been able to do her best despite her average proficiency with it.

“Got it, Boss. Leave it to me.” Little Four’s reply was accompanied by a burst in speed.

Kotou had thought that he would have some time to adjust, but unexpectedly, the opponent's speed suddenly increased by several folds, and the opponent appeared before him in the blink of an eye. Even worse, the other did not seem to have any intentions of slowing down, instead choosing to barrel straight at him, as if determined to bring him down and perish together.

Kotou naturally did not want to die together with the opponent. His first reaction was to dodge — he activated the emergency thruster on one side, forcibly shifting his mecha to a side, narrowly missing the other's charge.

But before Kotou could relax, the blue and white mecha about to pass by suddenly stopped strangely. At the same time, its mechanical arm bent and pushed out savagely. The crook of the black mecha's neck was struck by a forceful elbow.

A loud "Bang!" This strength behind this elbow was considerable. It immediately sent the black mecha spinning, and the initially air-borne mecha began plunging towards the ground ...

"Goddammit!" A moment of negligence made him lose the initiative and take on the passive role in this fight. Kotou tried desperately to regain control of his mecha, hoping to slow the speed of his descent and recover the mecha's balance to counterattack.

He finally managed to stop his mecha's descent with much difficulty, but the blue and white mecha did not stop attacking with just that elbow. The opponent actually descended as well, flying upside down to meet him head first, sending an iron fist hurtling his way.

This attack once again disrupted the mecha's balance. The mecha dropped sharply, and just when Kotou was trying his hardest to pull up his mecha, he was flabbergasted to find that the opponent's blue and white mecha was falling even faster than him, actually overtaking him in an instant.

This was all because the blue and white mecha had engaged both main thrusters at the same time, boosting its speed so the mecha could descend faster ...

Qi Long and the others, who had just run away to a safe distance, were hiding and watching the battle. Seeing this development, their hearts jumped into their throat. Could it be that there was something wrong with the Federation mecha's systems? Or did the mecha operator make an operation mistake?

The blue and white mecha was about to smash into the ground when — barely 2 metres from the ground, the mecha's thus far inert secondary engine for reactionary propulsion activated, its 12 jet spouts all opening up. A powerful surge of air blasted out, actually blowing the leaves and broken branches on the ground into the air, twirling on the whirling winds.

This blast of energy was enough to stop the falling mecha cold. At the same time, the blue and white mecha's two mechanical arms lifted high above its head, all ten fingers spread wide, and slammed heavily onto the ground. Meanwhile, in the air, its two legs spun fiercely, kicking out towards the spot where the black mecha was about to fall into.

And so, a mecha spun gracefully into an intermediate difficulty Thomas flair ¹, kicking the black mecha back up into the air. This time, due to this large force, the black mecha no longer had any way to deflect, and was sent flying by the blue and white mecha's kick.

“Amazing!” Qi Long and the others were utterly stunned by this sight. They had not expected that a mecha could pull off human combat arts, and it was even more impressive and exciting than seeing a real person pull it off.

The blue and white mecha pushed off its hands and flipped to stand upright. Without hesitation, it used its left hand to pull out the beam saber on its back, while its right hand grabbed the high-frequency blade on its thigh, and pounced ruthlessly at the black mecha who had hit the ground and was now lying there immobile.

“Argh, baka, die die die!” Kotou shook his concussed head. Seeing the blue and white mecha rushing at him with its blades, he immediately fired all the artillery he could on his body to try and stop the other. Perhaps out of fear, he actually began cursing vehemently within the cockpit.

Facing the black mecha’s barrage of fire, the blue and white mecha’s rushing figure suddenly started folding and overlapping, even creating multiple layers of ghost images ... The artillery all landed around the blue and white mecha, releasing countless light and flames, but not a single one hit the mecha.

“Isn’t that the irregular flicker that only ace operators would know?” asked Wu Jiong, astonished.

Qi Long nodded excitedly. “Yes, yes, it is! The one controlling that mecha must definitely be an ace operator!”

Qi Long was currently looking at the formidable blue and white mecha with a face full of admiration. He wished that he could be the one piloting that mecha ... The desire in his heart was raging: *I want to operate mecha, operate mecha*(several hundred thousand more ‘operate mecha’s omitted) ...

“Impossible, how could it be irregular flicker ...” When Kotou saw this, his eyes popped wide open in disbelief. A wave of regret crashed into his heart — he felt as if he had been tricked ...

“Despicable chinks ² !” In his final moments, he reflexively pressed the button to connect to his squad leader. But it was too late. The blue and white mecha’s beam saber stabbed viciously into his cockpit. The immense beam energy immediately destroyed his upper body, leaving the cockpit filled with blood.

The squad leader, already 3 kilometres away, saw Kotou’s communication request, and hurriedly accepted. “Kotou-kun? Kotou-kun?”

The other end was silent, but for the strange sound of dripping water ...

“Not good, something happened to Kotou-kun! Let’s go back!” The squad leader had a bad feeling about this. He instantly made his decision, calling for another team member to go back with him to check out the situation.

Chapter 148: Number X ...

Ling Lan resolutely ignored her discomfort; she gritted her teeth and controlled the mecha to pull out its beam saber from the Twilight mecha’s cockpit.

Ling Lan's discomfort was not because this was her first kill in real life, but because her current small body found it a little hard to bear the reaction force from operating mecha.

Little Four noticed Ling Lan's condition and understanding the reason behind it, he asked her anxiously, "Boss, are you alright?"

Little Four knew that operating mecha would definitely cause reaction force to reflect back on the operator's body. He had already done his best to lower the reaction force incurred to the minimum, hoping that his boss would not be harmed by it.

However, Little Four never expected that Ling Lan would perform so outstandingly for her very first time operating real mecha. In particular, those final movements to evade the artillery had been beyond her usual standards — evolving the irregular dash of advanced mecha operators straight to the irregular flicker only ace operators were capable of.

The irregular dash and the irregular flicker were actually the same skill. The reason there were two names for it, was that depending on the operator's skill proficiency, the resulting effect was visibly different.

The irregular dash was an advanced mecha control technique, one of the compulsory techniques advanced mecha warriors and special-class mecha operators must learn. On the other hand, irregular flicker was a skill exclusive to ace operators. In other words, only an ace operator would be able to execute irregular flicker perfectly.

This was also why Qi Long and Wu Jiong would mistake Ling Lan for an ace operator. Frankly, Ling Lan's current control capabilities were only at the level of an advanced mecha warrior. At most, she could be said to have stepped half a foot into the ranks of special-class mecha operators.

Without a doubt, the appearance of the irregular flicker was the result of an accidental cross-limits burst of skill.

Of course, this cross-stage display of skill had also dealt heavy damage to Ling Lan's body. Although Little Four had already tried his best to minimize the damage, Ling Lan's body had still incurred a certain degree of damage.

"I'm fine. I've been through worse pain than this. This is nothing," Ling Lan reassured Little Four. Even though her complexion was so pale that it was worrying, her spirits were still at regular levels; it was as if the pain of her body did not exist.

Honestly, from the moment she had decided to pilot the mecha, she was already mentally prepared to get hurt. Mind you, for a child not yet 13 years old, no matter how solidly built the child was, their bones just could not handle the feedback force from operating mecha. This was also one of the reasons why the Federation banned children below 13 years old from learning how to operate mecha.

Of course, Ling Lan's reassurance to Little Four was also the truth. This little bit of pain she felt now was nothing compared to the excruciating pain of her illness from her previous life. In comparison, the pain she felt now was not even worth mentioning.

“Besides, Little Four, you’ve already helped me neutralize most of the reaction force, protecting me well. So I’m fine. Thank you, Little Four!” Ling Lan thanked Little Four sincerely for his hard work. If not for him, her body might be in even worse condition.

“Boss, I definitely won’t fall for your candy-wrapped missiles ...” Little Four was beaming, a smile blooming on his face, stretching from ear to ear. Still, he did not forget to clarify his stance. As a principled intelligent entity, how could he be so easily bought?

Ling Lan ignored the currently tsundere Little Four, quickly scanning her surroundings instead. Very quickly, she had found Qi Long and the others’ hiding place. Seeing the lot of them unharmed, she instantly relaxed.

Ling Lan efficiently hung the mecha’s beam saber back on its back and slipped the high-frequency blade back into its place at the mecha’s outer thigh. Just as she was thinking to go greet Qi Long and the others, Little Four’s expression suddenly tightened and he warned, “Boss, the two Twilight mecha who left earlier are coming back. They’re about 2 kilometres away from us.”

Ling Lan felt a weight settle in her heart at these words. Although she already knew this was a possibility, finding out that the opponent was really coming still made her a little nervous.

“Hide properly. Don’t come out!” Ling Lan threw down these words and purposefully flew the mecha in another direction, preparing to distance herself from this area. Ling Lan did not want the following battle to hurt Qi Long and the others, otherwise her coming here to aid them would be meaningless.

Qi Long and the others hiding in the dense forest heard a cold voice ring out by their ears. They were startled, and dispelled all thoughts of climbing out from their hiding place. They laid flat in their respective hiding places, not daring to make any movement.

“It’s the Twilight mecha. The two mecha who left earlier have returned. Everyone make sure to stay hidden!” Wu Jiong’s hiding spot happened to allow him to see the mecha flying swiftly by in the skies above. He immediately hissed out a warning. Qi Long and the others now knew why the Federation mecha had warned them not to move before flying off.

“He’s trying to save us by drawing those two mecha away?” There was a complicated expression on Lin Zhong-qing’s face; it was a combination of gratitude and respect, and also a trace of bewilderment.

“He’s an ace mecha operator, he’ll definitely be able to defeat those two mecha.” Luo Lang clenched his fists, trying to convince himself while convincing Lin Zhong-qing at the same time.

“Will he? Don’t tell me you didn’t see the numbers on the arms of those three mecha.” Ye Xu’s spirits were low. As children within a militant system, they were well-informed about their own nation’s and their enemy nations’ mecha details. (At least, they knew more than the time-travelling outsider Ling Lan.)

Ye Xu’s words caused everyone to fall silent. Only Lin Zhong-qing remained confused; he looked at Qi Long and then Han Jijun, hoping that they would explain things for him. As a poor commoner, he did not really know much about this military information.

However, the typically talkative and outgoing Qi Long was uncharacteristically pensive and uncommunicative. His face revealed his puzzlement as he thought deeply about something. Han Jijun

cast a confused look at him, but found that Qi Long's attention wasn't here at all. So, he took over to explain, "The Twilight mecha operators' levels can be determined by the serial number on their arms. Those few mecha earlier all had an 'X' at the beginning of their serial numbers. That means they're from an ace mecha team!"

"Ace?" Lin Zhong-qing caught hold of the key point.

Han Jijyun smiled bitterly and nodded. With that, Lin Zhong-qing understood, and his face drained of all colour ...

Would their saviour lose his wings ¹ here? The children's hearts grew heavy with worry.

"Squad leader, I've found Kotou-kun's mecha. There's a large hole in Kotou-kun's cockpit. Looks like it's been shattered. From my observations, this should be the result of a stab by a mecha's beam saber ..."

Mecha operator Shikamaru discovered the area Kotou-kun had perished on his scanner. The zoomed-in pictures his camera picked up was very clear; it was very obvious how his teammate had died.

"Baka-yarou ² !" A vein popped out on the squad leader's forehead as he gritted his teeth and cursed. He was irritated that someone had actually managed to kill his subordinate right under his nose. This made him feel extremely humiliated.

"Squad leader, there's a mecha over there ... it's Federation." Mecha operator Shikamaru had already widened his search range, and soon picked up the low-flying Ling Lan on his radar.

"That fellow must be the one who killed Kotou-kun. We must kill him to wash away our disgrace. After him!" Livid, the squad leader immediately turned and set his mecha on the path towards that mecha. Behind him, Shikamaru reacted swiftly, hurriedly following with his mecha.

Ling Lan's mecha was not flying in a concealed manner, and its speed was not very fast either. She was doing this intentionally so those two mecha would chase her and get further away from the hiding place of Qi Long and the others. Ling Lan knew very well that she would have to risk her life to fight against two ace mecha. During that time, she wouldn't be able to spare any mind for the surrounding situation. To avoid harming Qi Long and the others by accident, the further she could get away from them, the better.

The image Little Four transmitted to her let Ling Lan know that the two mecha were following her as she had hoped. Then, Ling Lan abruptly increased her speed by many times. The two main engines of the mecha roared in unison, and the mecha drew a lightning-quick line through the air, flying over 1000 metres in an instant.

"Shikamaru-kun, speed up. The opponent has noticed us." The squad leader saw the Federation mecha trying to escape and knew that the other had noticed them on his tail.

"Hai!" The two Twilight mecha increased their speed at the same time, and like two feral dogs locked on Ling Lan's scent, they chased after her.

As Ling Lan was controlling her movement speed, not pushing her mecha to its limits, after around 10 seconds, the enemy had already caught up to her.

“Shikamaru-kun, high altitude snipe.” Once Ling Lan entered sniping range, the squad leader immediately gave the order. He dearly wished that his subordinate would be able to destroy that hateful mecha operator with one shot.

“Hai!” The mecha operator Shikamaru was a sniping expert to begin with. He controlled his mecha to fly steadily and lifted the sniping rifle in his mecha’s hands. The moment he managed to lock onto Ling Lan flying in front of him, he pressed the firing button.

“Boss, we’ve been targeted.” The opponent had just locked onto Ling Lan’s mecha when Little Four issued a warning.

Ling Lan’s fingers danced frenetically — very quickly, sweat began to bead up on her forehead and the tip of her nose, condensing to slide down her face and drop ...

Her mecha was suddenly seen to wriggle like a fish in water, drawing a strange curve, allowing it to dodge Shikamaru’s shot by a narrow margin!

“Irregular flight! Damn it!” Mecha operator Shikamaru was extremely put out for missing his target. He also knew how to execute irregular flight, but to be able to calculate the trajectory of a shot so accurately ... this was the first time he was seeing this.

What Shikamaru did not know was that it wasn’t the mecha operator who managed this feat, but Little Four substituting for the mecha’s A.I.. Of course, this was also only possible due to Ling Lan and Little Four’s close rapport. Otherwise, if they were unlucky, they might very well have been hit and perished along with the mecha.

Although Ling Lan managed to evade multiple snipes by the mecha operator Shikamaru, she was held back at the same time. When the squad leader chasing them got within 100 metres of Ling Lan, he sneakily raised the beam cannon in his hands to aim at Ling Lan who was still busily dodging Shikamaru’s attacks, prepared to lock onto her and shoot.

“Boss, the other mecha is also about to attack,” cautioned Little Four anxiously.

“Troublesome!” Ling Lan was confident that she could successfully dodge all the snipe attacks of one mecha, but if two mecha attacked at the same time, Ling Lan wasn’t sure if she could remain unharmed.

That said, Ling Lan’s control hand speed actually increased by one level. Right then, the outlines of Ling Lan’s fingers were no longer visible, nor was it possible to see which buttons were being pressed. At most, on the control panel, one could only see the countless afterimages of her fingers, just like blossom after blossom of flowers blooming, beautiful and ephemeral ...

Chapter 149: Looking For an Answer!

Just when the squad leader was about to lock onto Ling Lan’s mecha, the mecha’s waist twisted into a very bizarre position, and its initial forwards flight trajectory suddenly took a 180 degree turn.

It should be known that for a mecha to change directions, they either needed to curve and make a U-turn in the form of a semi-circle, or they could choose to stop their engines and turn their body around

before starting their engines again. The first option would maintain a mecha's speed, but required time; the second was immediate, but the mecha would lose the speed it had built up.

However, this control of Ling Lan suppressed the weaknesses of the two options and kept most of their strengths. This was a control method unique to the Mandora star system that Ling Lan had learned from Instructor Number Three in the learning space. Of course, according to what Instructor Number Three said, this control method was actually still a very basic and flawed one. This was because the mecha of this world were really a bit too crude and simple, meaning many of the more advanced control methods just could not be executed.

The squad leader saw the opponent twist bizarrely — successfully changing directions and maintaining its high speed — and charge fiercely towards him.

“What is this?” the squad leader shouted. This completely went against the principles of mecha control.

If Little Four had known that this move would cause the opponent to be so shocked, he would definitely be extraordinarily smug and laugh up into the skies, because this was a product of their Mandora star system — they had a saying back there which reverberated throughout the entire galaxy, and that was: When Mandora moves, who stands a chance?

Perhaps Ling Lan's control had exceeded the squad leader's expectations, unprepared, he easily let Ling Lan get close to him, and the two looked about to collide in the very next second.

Still, he was the squad leader of an ace mecha squad after all, as well as being an ace mecha member. His mental fortitude and his experience were obviously much better than the other two; his adaptive ability especially was well-seasoned.

The squad leader did not react like Ling Lan's first opponent, Kotou, who had panicked and chosen to dodge. Instead, he calmly turned off his engine thruster. Without the support of the engine thruster, the mecha began plummeting towards the ground due to its own weight.

But after it had dropped about half the body height of the mecha, the squad leader started up the engine once more. At the same time, the upper body of the mecha bent backwards, and its left hand raised a high-frequency blade high to stab at the cockpit of the Federation mecha who had already leapt to his original position.

Of course, even if he managed to hit his target, it would not inflict a fatal injury on the opponent. At most, the opponent would just be struck dizzy for a moment. Yet, that was what he was aiming for. As long as a pause appeared in the opponent's control, he would have the time to counterattack.

However, that would be the best-case scenario. It was also possible that he would not stun the other even if he managed to hit his target, which would instead let the opponent have the opportunity to attack in close range, resulting in a mutually damaging encounter.

But whichever the case, he would not be the loser. He still had a teammate behind him, so even if he and the opponent were both damaged in this encounter, his teammate would be able to eliminate the opponent.

The squad leader knew very well that in this situation right now, he could not afford to retreat. The moment he retreated, he would lose the initiative to attack and would be forced into a defensive

position. With just one face-off, he could clearly tell that the opponent was a mecha expert. The opponent definitely would not let any opportunity slip by; he would definitely stick to him like an ulcer to the bone ¹ and launch a barrage of attacks on him as he dodged. When that happened, he would really be in danger. The moment he failed to avoid due to any negligence, he could very well lose his life.

The squad leader really hoped that the opponent would give up attacking and choose to evade his strike. This way, the situation would be reversed, and the one with the attack momentum would be him instead.

The situation was not as advantageous to him as he imagined — the opponent did not choose to evade, but also wasn't struck by him either. The Federation mecha raised his right hand in that brief instant and used a similar high-frequency blade to parry his attack.

An explosive “CLANG!” Two sharp blades collided violently!

Not just that, the opponent's left hand had pulled out the beam saber behind his back at some point, and after blocking with his right hand, the beam saber in his left hand swung ruthlessly at the waist of the squad leader's mecha.

If the squad leader were to be hit by this savage blow, even if his mecha was not chopped in half, the internal driver pathways would definitely be disrupted, which would cause the mecha to malfunction, perhaps even becoming immobile and useless.

The right hand of the squad leader's mecha was equipped with a beam cannon. The beam cannon was large and heavy, but very powerful. As long as it hit, its attack was capable of melting a mecha straightaway, achieving a one-hit kill effect. All this while, countless Federation mecha had been killed by beam cannons — its efficiency was extraordinary.

In terms of long-range attacks, this weapon was fearsome. However, every weapon had its weakness. The beam cannon's was for an enemy to get close. The moment the enemy got close, the heavy bulky beam cannon would become nothing more than a burden, preventing a mecha from moving nimbly, just like the predicament the squad leader was facing right now.

The squad leader was undoubtedly a decisive person. He immediately chose to discard the beam cannon. The large beam cannon dropped from the sky, crashing heavily into the dense foliage below. Without the extra weight of the beam cannon, the now nimble mecha arm rose up to meet the opponent's beam saber.

A dull “Clang” — beam saber and mecha arm collided once again. The two of them were thrown backwards. The Twilight mecha had activated the beam shield on its right arm in that instant, rendering Ling Lan's beam saber attack ineffective.

The squad leader's prompt response let him tide over this crisis safely, but the initially ready to fire Shikamaru began to falter.

While the two mecha were tangled up together, he did not dare to fire his cannon, since he might hit his own squad leader as well if he wasn't careful.

This was also one reason why Ling Lan had chosen to fight in close quarters with the squad leader. Otherwise, no matter how proficient she was at irregular flight, she would still be hit eventually by one

of the two mecha's attacks. Right now, her stubborn insistence on sticking to a close-range fight had tied the hands of the other mecha, temporarily easing her crisis.

But Ling Lan knew that this was just a temporary reprieve — the opponent definitely would not let this passive situation continue. They would definitely find a chance to attack. On her end, she would need to find a way to eliminate one of the mecha before her opponents found that chance. As such, Ling Lan's choice was to start by first targeting this mecha, which was obviously the main attacker.

The two mecha jumped apart immediately upon contact. The Federation mecha's two side engines roared once more, stopping this rebound in its tracks before pushing the mecha forwards once more to hack at the opponent with its right hand. Ling Lan now had to ensure that her mecha remained within a body's length of the Twilight mecha, or else she may draw the other mecha's long-range snipe attacks.

"Baka!" The squad leader had yet to catch his breath when he saw the opponent attacking once more. He hurriedly controlled his mecha to meet the attack with his own blade, a curse spilling from his mouth.

Remember, a proportion of the reaction force when controlling mecha to fight would be fed back onto the mecha operator's body. Therefore, mecha operators had the habit of stopping for a moment to rest after taking action, before moving on to the next move. It was very easy for the body to get injured when executing consecutive moves.

In the cockpit, Ling Lan's complexion was becoming increasingly paler. The load on her body had already exceeded her limits — Little Four was even worried whether his boss would collapse in the next second. This kind of high frequency attack was really too taxing on the body.

Although the battlefield of the mecha and the hiding place of Qi Long and the others were significantly far apart, the two teams in the forest were still somewhat flustered by the intense sounds of collision and the blasts of artillery.

"Qi Long, it's too dangerous for us to stay here. Why don't we continue moving? Let's go around the battlefield to the nearest air raid shelter to hide." Wu Jiong felt that instead of waiting here blindly, they might as well take the risk and continue moving forwards. Perhaps they would stand a better chance that way.

Wu Jiong's words caused everyone's expressions to shift. Han Jijyun and the rest of Ling Lan's team looked to Qi Long, waiting for him to make the decision. When Ling Lan was not around, they would defer to Qi Long. Ling Lan's purposeful cultivation of Qi Long as the team leader had been acknowledged by everyone in the team. So, even if she wasn't there, the team would not lose direction.

After some thought, Qi Long said seriously to his team members, "I'll be staying here to wait. What do you all think?"

Including Han Jijyun, the team members were all taken aback by Qi Long's words.

"Why?" asked Han Jijyun. Qi Long must have his reasons for choosing to stay; they wanted to know the reason before making a decision.

Qi Long raised his head to look at the mecha fighting in the skies in the distance. His gaze was complicated, but he soon regained his composure and turned to face the group, saying, "Boss Lan said that he would come. I need to wait for him."

Han Jijyun and the others abruptly remembered. The situation earlier had been too precarious — the near loss of their lives at the hands of the Twilight mecha had driven this point from their minds. All of them nodded their heads to show that they wanted to wait for their boss together with Qi Long. They believed that since Boss Ling Lan had said he was coming here, then he would definitely come.

Wu Jiong cast a long look at Qi Long and his team, somewhat admiring and somewhat envious. He admired the strong bond of friendship among Ling Lan, Qi Long, and the others of their team, which held up even in the face of death, and also envied their great luck — actually having a boss who would be willing to brave lethal danger to come save them.

"Then we'll leave first." Wu Jiong turned to look at his teammates behind him, gaze lingering on the injured Chen Yu. They could not afford to wait.

Qi Long watched as Wu Jiong left with his team, until their figures disappeared. Then, he turned to say to his companions, "Let us go!"

"Where? Aren't we waiting for Boss Lan?" Luo Lang was bewildered.

"I want to see our saviour's battle up close," said Qi Long, looking to the battlefield in the distance, "Perhaps I will be able to find the answer I want. No, I don't need it ..." Qi Long's words were somewhat contradictory.

Han Jijyun was the one who understood Qi Long best. His expression shifted and he asked, "Did you notice something?"

"No, I don't know, and I don't want to know." Qi Long dodged Han Jijyun's question, directly putting on his backpack and heading off towards the mecha battlefield.

Han Jijyun was puzzled, but he did not continue to question Qi Long, merely indicating for Luo Lang and Lin Zhong-qing to follow.

Since Qi Long did not want to talk about it, then he would not ask. He believed that as long as he followed Qi Long, he would be able to find the answer.

The two mecha had been tussling for several moves. Well, it was more of Ling Lan attacking fiercely while the squad leader defended himself passively. Seeing that the situation was not looking good for his squad leader, Shikamaru finally fired.

His marksmanship was very accurate. Even though Ling Lan was fighting the other at such high speeds, she was still shot.

"The mecha's external shell received light damage. The beam's effect is minor. Initial estimations suggest that the other is using a miniature beam gun!" Little Four ran a quick scan of the mecha and reported his findings.

Chapter 150: Ling Lan's Crisis!

It turned out that the waiting mecha operator Shikamaru had finally thought of a way to attack Ling Lan without harming his squad leader. He had decisively set aside the powerful beam cannon, hanging it back on his back, drawing out the miniature beam gun strapped to his waist instead.

The beam gun's power was noticeably weaker than the cannon's, and its range was extremely short. But its advantage was that he did not have to worry about hurting his teammate. Even if he shot his teammate by accident, based on the mecha's innate defensive ability, as long as he did not strike the same place twice, the mecha would not take any significant damage.

He chose to use this beam handgun to snipe, primarily just to harass the Federation mecha operator. Though the shots were weak, they would distract the opponent and prevent him from attacking fiercely. This way, his squad leader would have a chance to counterattack. However, if the opponent decided to just ignore his attacks due to the limited damage of the handgun, he believed that, if given a chance, he would be able to hit the same spot multiple times to deal heavy damage.

Without a doubt, his choice trashed Ling Lan's hopeful plans, allowing him to rejoin the battle without worry.

"Looks like I'll need to come up with something to finish off this mecha in front of me." Ling Lan knew that the scales of victory were slowly tipping in favour of the opponents — she could afford to wait no longer. N-number of options flashed through her mind ...

Operator Shikamaru pressed on his trigger once more, and a beam shot out from the muzzle of the beam handgun.

The beam scored a direct hit on the right side of the Federation mecha's waist. The sound of an explosion rent the air — a thick plume of smoke started pouring from the back of the mecha's waist.

"YES!" Shikamaru couldn't help but mentally give himself a pat on the back. This shot, his luck had actually been so lucky that it had cleanly taken out one of the opponent's side engines. This would create problems for the opponent's mobility system.

Sure enough, because of this incident, the Federation mecha's engines suddenly sputtered and died, causing the entire mecha to plummet.

The squad leader, who had been having a frustrating time fighting the opponent, was startled, but he soon recovered and was overcome with joy. "Chance!"

Who knew his subordinate Shikamaru-kun would be so reliable, directly blowing up the opponent's engine? This was the moment for him to counterattack.

His exhilaration let him forget all about the aches of his body; he controlled his mecha to pounce like a ferocious tiger dashing down a mountain at the Federation mecha. Earlier, he had constantly been on the defensive — now it was finally his turn to beat on the other. Of course he would not miss this great opportunity for revenge.

In the distance, the operator Shikamaru was just about to continue sniping when he saw his squad leader leaping at the opponent. His finger on the trigger paused ... Hn, let squad leader vent some of his anger first!

In his mind, the Federation mecha which had already lost one of its main side engines was definitely no threat to his squad leader. Moreover, he also believed that his squad leader would relish the chance to torment the other a little to release the pent up frustration from being suppressed previously. As a dutiful subordinate, he could not get in the way of his squad leader's fun in bullying the opponent.

"The opponent fell for it!" Seeing the squad leader leaping at her, Ling Lan was overjoyed. This had all been a bet — she was betting on this mecha's thirst for revenge, and betting on the other mecha's non-interference — and she had won.

Although Ling Lan was unbelievably hyped, her hands remained steady. She controlled the head of her mecha perfectly, turning it to look up at a very specific angle.

"Calculating attack trajectory, perfect!" Little Four's voice had barely faded when the anti-aircraft missiles in the mecha's head area were launched by Ling Lan.

These two missiles came so suddenly — the opponent would never have expected the supposedly panicking Federation mecha operator to have the mind to launch anti-aircraft missiles.

The squad leader knew that he would not be able to dodge, but still, he wasn't too worried. This was because this type of anti-aircraft missile was not very effective against mecha, due to the resilient outer shell of the mecha that was capable of resisting the explosive power of the missiles.

The squad leader just assumed that this was the desperate final attack of the Federation mecha operator in the throes of death — that even though the opponent knew this attack was useless, he had still fired the missiles.

Before the missiles would hit the squad leader's mecha, they suddenly turned upwards. Abruptly, he found that his main screen was shaking and then thick smoke smothered the entire image. He could only see black smoke on his main screen; the opponent's mecha was concealed.

He reacted quickly, immediately replacing the image of the main screen with the images sourced from other cameras.

"Squad leader, watch out!" The panicked voice of his subordinate Shikamaru came through the communications channel. Reflexively, he controlled the mecha to cross its arms and defend.

He had just completed this move when he felt his mecha being struck by a tremendous force, and then his whole mecha was thrown up into the air.

What was happening? The squad leader was alarmed, finding that things were already out of his control.

From a distance, Shikamaru had the clearest view. The two anti-aircraft missiles fired by the Federation mecha had initially been heading for the squad leader's mecha's shoulder area, only to suddenly shift directions near the end to strike the head. In other words, the opponent had been aiming for the mecha's main camera from the start — the two anti-aircraft missiles were no ordinary missiles, but had been installed with a guidance system.

This proved that the opponent's attack was not a hastily cobbled final struggle, but a pre-planned strike.

The opponent used the low-powered anti-aircraft missiles to disrupt the squad leader's main screen; the thick smoke caused by the explosions were probably also part of the opponent's plan. Then, once the squad leader's vision had been obstructed, the opponent had launched the extremely powerful inlaid rockets from its chest, sending the squad leader's mecha straight into the air.

Angrily, Shikamaru raised the beam handgun in his hands, prepared to blast the opponent's mecha to smithereens ...

But then a shocking thing happened — the engine that should have been damaged by him suddenly roared loudly once more, and the powerful force of its thrust sent the Federation mecha up towards the squad leader's mecha in the air.

On top of that, the Federation mecha's following action made him yell out in shock. He saw the opponent swiftly sheathe the high-frequency blade in its right hand back to the mecha's outer thigh, and then, grabbing its beam saber with both hands, it stabbed straight at the squad leader's cockpit.

"Quick! Activate your beam shield and defend!" Shikamaru screamed.

The squad leader was a leadership figure after all; he managed to activate his beam shield in that instant.

The beam saber and the beam shield collided violently. Ling Lan could only feel a large rebound force feeding back into her hand.

"Little Four, hold steady, don't get repelled!" Ling Lan pushed the mobile force of her mecha to the max, pushing against the rebound, while Little Four desperately worked to make sure that the mecha's systems would not break down under the combined pressure.

In the sky above, a white and blue mecha with a beam saber gripped in both hands could be seen flying past rapidly with its beam saber pushed up against the cockpit of a black mecha, drawing a straight line through the air.

"Baka! Baka!" At this moment, the squad leader, who had finally regained the view of his main screen, started hacking desperately at the Federation mecha with the high-frequency blade in his left hand. Once, twice, thrice — leaving mark after mark on the opponent's mecha.

Within the cockpit, Ling Lan could not endure it any longer, throwing up a mouthful of blood. The hacking of the other mecha caused the mecha to shudder to a certain extent; the consecutive tremors worsened the injuries already borne by Ling Lan. Under the roiling of her Qi and blood, she actually ended up spewing blood.

"Boss, are you alright?" Little Four was panicking.

"It's fine. I can take it. How much longer can the beam saber hold out?" In this contest between beam saber and beam shield, both sides were expending energy. Whoever ran out of energy first would be the one to disappear. Right now, Ling Lan was betting on the opponent's beam shield expending more energy than her beam saber.

"There's less than 10 seconds left!" Little Four was extremely anxious.

“I’ll risk it!” A feral glint flashed through Ling Lan’s eyes; in crucial moments, she could even be ruthless to her own self.

“Eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two ... Sh*t! There’s no more energy ...” Little Four’s voice had barely faded when Ling Lan felt the force blocking the beam saber in her hand melt away, and the beam saber pierced through something.

And then, all that was left of the beam saber was its hilt. Was this a success or a failure? Ling Lan’s doubt lasted for a mere instant; her fingers never stopped, still dancing rapidly, creating those layered afterimages.

The Federation mecha discarded the depleted beam saber from its hands and grabbed the Twilight mecha with its right hand. With it as a fulcrum, the Federation mecha spun in a circle to hide behind the body of the Twilight mecha, successfully dodging the sneaky snipe attack by operator Shikamaru.

“Shikamaru-kun, the Empire’s mission is in your hands now,” said the squad leader to his distant subordinate, as he looked at the blood gushing out from the hole in his chest.

“Squad leader, what are you saying?” The distant operator Shikamaru had not managed to see what had happened in the end. The beam saber and beam shield had run out of energy at almost the same time.

“Use your beam cannon! That’s an order!” The squad leader felt that his life was slowly fading. With his last breath, he gave this command, and then triggered the mecha’s self-destruct mechanism.

“Even if I die, I will pull you down into hell with me!” bellowed the squad leader with the final bit of his energy.

“Squad leader!” Shikamaru now understood what had happened. In those final moments, the beam saber had likely lasted a second longer than the beam shield. In that one second, the saber had pierced through a vital point of the squad leader. This was why the squad leader wanted him to switch to the beam cannon — he did not have long to live.

“Squad leader, the Empire shall not forget your sacrifice!” Mecha operator Shikamaru’s eyes were ice cold. He threw away the beam handgun in his hand, and once again lifted up the beam cannon from his back. Getting into position, he aimed right at his squad leader’s mecha ... as well as the Federation mecha hiding behind it!

“Not good. The other mecha has switched over to its beam cannon.” This whole time, Little Four had been monitoring the Twilight mecha sniping them from a distance.

“Does he not care that his comrade will die?” Ling Lan’s first thought was that the other had gone mad.

“No ...” Ling Lan abruptly felt a deep apprehension crawl into her heart, the warning bells in her mind were ringing.

Without even having to think about it, her fingers flew — in this kind of life-or-death juncture, she did not think about the so-called limit of her finger speed. In her mind, there was only one thought — she needed to be fast, faster, even faster than faster ... because she was fighting with the god of death for the time to survive.

This time, the control panel no longer had those layered afterimages — instead, Ling Lan's fingers disappeared into thin air ...