

Crossing 391

Chapter 391: The Same Face ...

Accompanying Li Yinfei's voice, all the stage lights turned to focus on her body, allowing everyone to see Li Yinfei's figure clearly. However, this was soon followed by deep sighs from the entire venue. It turned out that Li Yinfei's face was currently covered by a thin veil through which only a pair of exquisitely charming slanted almond-shaped eyes could be seen. The play of lights and shifting of emotion in those eyes actually conveyed an erotic allure — even without having seen her face, everyone could tell that this Li Yinfei was most certainly a stunning enchantress.

When the song "Never Give In" began to play, Li Yinfei once again touched the hearts of the cadets. This song was extremely powerful and Li Yinfei sang it with passion, as if telling the cadets that the enemy's invasion would never break the Huaxians' iron bones 1 . Stirred up by the singing, everyone present rose to their feet. All the cadets clenched their fists emotionally, loudly joining in when the line 'never give in' appeared in the chorus segments.

By this point, no matter how thick Ling Lan was, she knew that this Li Yinfei was bound to be part of the military. Otherwise, it was unlikely that both her songs would cater so closely to this battle of the military academy. The military had truly planned this well — Li Yinfei's arrival and these two songs would inevitably fan the cadets' hatred towards the intruders to an extreme. It could be conceived that all the cadets here would become the central supporters in fighting back against these intruders in the future.

Right at that final moment, at the crescendo of the song, Li Yinfei ripped off the veil on her face, revealing her peerless face ... all of the cadets who had been loudly singing 'never give in' earlier abruptly fell silent. In that instant, they had truly been shocked silent by Li Yinfei's peerless beauty.

This was Li Yinfei — leaving aside her enthralling voice, she also possessed a peerless face capable of bewitching the masses!

Li Yinfei's true appearance stunned everyone present. In the second row, Qiao Ting, whose face was initially composed, felt his heartbeat speed up when he saw Li Yinfei's true face. He could not suppress a surge of desire in his heart, thinking, "This is a woman worthy of me. I must get her!"

Li Yinfei's peerless beauty similarly startled Ling Lan. As another girl, Ling Lan had actually been attracted for a moment by Li Yinfei's face as well. However, Ling Lan was a girl after all, and combined with all the insane torments of Instructor Number Five in the learning space, Ling Lan's heart had been trained to be extremely tough and cold. She would not be easily bewitched.

After calming down, when Ling Lan once again gazed at Li Yinfei's face which was beautiful enough to topple cities, she noticed that that face made her feel somewhat ill at ease. Even though it was exquisitely beautiful, exquisitely alluring, even worthy of being called peerless and unmatched, for some reason, Ling Lan just felt that there was something off about it. There was just some natural grace missing — what exactly was this about?

Ling Lan's brow was lightly furrowed. Just as she was mulling over the issue, Li Lanfeng by her side suddenly began trembling uncontrollably. Not only that, his two hands, which he had placed on top of his knees, also began to tremble uncontrollably ...

Ling Lan's heart clenched. She could not help but recall the air invasion when Li Lanfeng had been sitting in the auxiliary seat of her mecha and what had happened then. Could it be that some issue had cropped up again with the leopard's worrying physical condition?

Concerned, Ling Lan could not help but extend her right hand to hold Li Lanfeng's trembling hands. This move made Li Lanfeng jerk in surprise. He whipped back his head to look at Ling Lan, his red eyes actually filled with despair, pain, and even a trace of insanity. That look was as if he had been abandoned by the entire world ...

"Leopard, are you alright?" asked Ling Lan with a serious expression, having sensed something wrong with Li Lanfeng.

Ling Lan's question seemed to have rescued Li Lanfeng from being drowned in his own world — his gaze quickly cleared up. Regaining his composure, Li Lanfeng flipped his hands to grasp Ling Lan's right hand. He clasped it tightly, as if holding on to a life-saving piece of straw, unwilling to let go. The force of his grip actually made Ling Lan feel a hint of pain.

Ling Lan had always hated skin contact with others. She was just considering whether to fling off Li Lanfeng's hands when she registered that Li Lanfeng's palms were coated with sweat. She then thought about Li Lanfeng's wild and desperate gaze previously and her heart softened involuntarily.

Thinking about it, she was currently a boy, so it was perfectly normal for a male companion to hold her hand every once in a while. Furthermore, Li Lanfeng really seemed to need some comfort from a companion right now ... alright, she would just take it as her good deed for the day and contribute her right hand to provide some comfort for the other. It's not like her hand would lose any flesh because of this. So thought Ling Lan with full Ah-Q spirit 2 .

In this way, Ling Lan forced herself to ignore Li Lanfeng's grasping hands. She continued to stare expressionlessly at the stage, studiously researching the problem she had just discovered ... erm, well, that was the problem with that Li Yinfei. So unnaturally beautiful, was there really nothing wrong with her?

Perhaps Ling Lan's focus was fully on Li Lanfeng, so she did not notice something else happening at the outermost edge of their row of seats. Li Shiyu, who had initially been fully enraptured by Li Yinfei's voice, currently had an unbelievably horrified expression on his face. This horror was definitely not because of the other's peerless beauty, but looked more as if he had seen a devil ...

With a clatter, Li Shiyu could not help but leap up from his seat, startling Chang Xinyuan who had been just as dazzled by Li Yinfei's appearance as the rest. When Chang Xinyuan saw Li Shiyu's horrified expression, he instantly knew something was wrong. Quickly casting Li Yinfei's appearance to the back of his mind, Chang Xinyuan asked Li Shiyu in concern, "Shiyu, what's going on?"

Li Shiyu's right hand rose sharply to cover his mouth, as if afraid that he would scream despite himself. With much effort, he finally calmed himself down, put down his hand, and said in a hurry, "Xinyuan, I've

suddenly remembered something important I have to do. I need to leave immediately. Later, please help me request a leave of absence from the leader.”

Li Shiyu’s grim expression let Chang Xinyuan know that the other must have some serious matter to attend to, so he quickly nodded and assured the other that he would pass on the message. After that, Li Shiyu no longer had any patience to remain at the concert venue. He hurriedly ran out of the large stadium.

As soon as he left the stadium and came outside, the refreshing breeze that swept by instantly helped to clear Li Shiyu’s shaken mind. As the attention of everyone in the military academy was on Li Yinfei’s concert right then — if they were not at the venue watching it live, they were in their dorm rooms connected to the virtual world to watch the live broadcast — there was not a single person outside the stadium.

With lengthened strides, Li Shiyu very swiftly made his way to an area populated by trees, an absolutely quiet place. He could not wait to enter a string of numbers into his communicator. He had never taken the initiative to contact that number over these past four years, but the number had been stored deeply in his heart all this time, never forgotten.

“Yu-er, I never expected that there would ever come a time when you would contact me on your own volition. Have you thought things through and are now willing to accept grandpa’s arrangements to become the first inheritor of the Li family?” On the virtual screen of Li Shiyu’s communicator, a dignified old man suddenly appeared. His initially stern face actually carried a trace of a smile — it looked like Li Shiyu’s taking the initiative to call had pleased him greatly.

However, Li Shiyu had no mind to appreciate the old man’s feelings. Seeing the other, he shouted angrily, “Grandfather, what exactly is going on with that Li Yinfei?”

“Li Yinfei?” The old man’s pleased expression abruptly turned cold. “You’ve seen her?” As if suddenly thinking of something, realization emerged on the old man’s face. “That’s right, she’s currently holding a concert at the First Men’s Military Academy. It’s normal for you to have seen her.”

“Who is she exactly?” Li Shiyu bit out, pushing the question out word by word from the between his teeth.

The old man said dismissively, “A branch descendant of the Li family. According to hierarchy, she can be considered your younger cousin.”

“What I’m asking is how that face came about.” The old man’s diffidence broke Li Shiyu’s control over his emotions and Li Shiyu could not help but growl.

This question made the old man’s face turn stern and forbidding. “Is this the attitude you should have when speaking with your grandfather?”

Li Shiyu closed his eyes and fiercely swiped a hand over his face. Then, taking in a deep breath, he pushed down his growing anger before opening his eyes once more. By then, his eyes no longer held any of his previous rage, having become much calmer than before. “I apologize, grandfather, that was my transgression. But please, can you tell me, what’s going on with that face of Li Yinfei’s?”

Li Shiyu's behaviour gentled the old man's attitude considerably, and he answered lightly, "That face ... is anything wrong with it?" as if he did not understand Li Shiyu's meaning.

"Grandfather!" Li Shiyu cried out loudly once more, "You clearly know ... clearly ..." Somewhere where the old man could not see, Li Shiyu's low hanging left hand had already balled up into a fist. Perhaps from using too much strength, the veins were actually bulging on the back of his hand. It was clear to see how angry Li Shiyu was at this moment, but because the other party was his grandfather, he had no choice but to tolerate it.

"Clearly know what?" asked the old man in return. Just when Li Shiyu's tolerance was about to run out and he was going to explode in anger, the old man added, "Are you trying to ask why Li Yinfei looks exactly like your eldest cousin brother Li Mulan?"

This question made Li Shiyu calm down instantly. "I want to know why you're doing this."

"Why are you asking me this?" The old man's expression turned indifferent once more.

"Without your approval, Li Yinfei could never have appeared in the public eye, much less become a singer. In order to secure the status and dignity of the family head, the Li family would never allow someone with an appearance similar to the family head to show their face to the world." Li Shiyu understood the Li family too well — Li Yinfei looked so much like his eldest cousin brother and so should never exist. Even if she was allowed to exist, she should still have been forced to change her face — this was a sign of respect towards the family head from the main branch as well as the inheritor.

"Li Mulan is currently still not the family head," replied the old man after several seconds of silence.

"But eldest cousin brother is the first in line to inherit," growled Li Shiyu once more. Just because of his body, his cousin could not become strong, and so they felt they could just step all over his cousin's dignity like this? For the first time, Li Shiyu began to hate the Li family as a whole. Towards that Li Yinfei who possessed his eldest cousin brother's face, the intention to kill stirred in his heart ...

"Don't do anything stupid. The matter of Li Yinfei was approved during a meeting of the family elders. Even I had no way of preventing it," barked the old man, seeming to sense the killing intent in Li Shiyu's heart.

"No way?" Li Shiyu laughed scornfully. If grandfather truly wanted to stop this from happening, how could he have no way? Li Shiyu was all too familiar with the methods his grandfather could employ.

Chapter 392: No Longer Li Mulan!

Li Shiyu's extremely obvious mockery caused the old man's expression to stiffen, but he very quickly recovered his composure. The two of them faced each other in silence for several beats, and in the end, the old man sighed, a trace of fatigue appearing on his face. Softly, he said, "Even though I'm a grandfather to the both of you, I am also the family head of the Li family. I need to take responsibility for the entire Li family."

The meaning of the old man was apparent — even though he was the biological grandfather of Li Shiyu and the others, he could not disregard the interests of the Li family as a whole and do as he liked. As such, he had no choice but to make some concessions.

The old man's demeanour caused Li Shiyu's heart to clench. As if sensing his grandfather's helplessness in the face of the pressure exerted by the elders of the Li family, Li Shiyu's expression turned cold and foreboding. "The council of elders, is it?"

"Don't blame them. They are also doing this for the future of the entire Li family clan. The condition of your eldest cousin brother's body is truly too horrible, and besides ..." Here, a trace of regret could be seen on the old man's stern face.

Unfortunately, no matter how much the old man wanted to explain, Li Shiyu had already convicted the elders in his heart. He instantly interrupted to say, "Grandfather, there's no need to say any more. I understand everything. One day, I will definitely ..." Li Shiyu stopped there, cutting off the call with his grandfather. For the first time, a trace of bloody killing intent appeared in his eyes.

Li Shiyu had never wanted to take anything to the extreme and leave no room for manoeuvring — there had always remained some bit of light in his heart, some kindness and compassion. This was his strength but also his weakness. This was why he had been able to reject the proposition of becoming the first inheritor out of the sense of kinship in his heart for the sake of his eldest cousin brother. And this was also the main reason why Ling Lan had been able to entrap him into joining her clan.

But this time, the matter of Li Yinfei had directly shattered the pure innocence he held deep in his heart. He finally understood that without power or authority, once one lost all use and value, the family would mercilessly cast one out ... for the first time, he hated deeply. He hated those elders who had heartlessly abandoned his eldest cousin brother and made the decision to humiliate and degrade his cousin. Also for the first time, he thought of taking revenge ... he absolutely would not forgive those elders.

The old man looked at the disconnected call signal on the device in his hand and could not help but shake his head, sigh softly, and say, "Oh Shiyu, you're still much too young."

After hanging up, Li Shiyu could not hold back the roaring flames of rage within him. He quickly rushed back to his own laboratory and shut himself inside, staying secluded within it for over a month.

Li Shiyu knew very well that this action of the council of elders meant that his eldest cousin brother had thoroughly lost all favour within the Li family. Right now, he must be having a very difficult time in the Li family, unable to do anything. If their grandfather could not resist the pressure from the council of elders in the end, giving up was only a matter of time. He needed to speed things up. Even if he could not develop a formula that could completely resolve his eldest cousin brother's constitution problem, he still needed to at least find some medicinal agent that could alleviate his cousin's condition so that he could help his cousin tide through this crisis as much as he could ...

Leaving aside Li Shiyu's burning anxiety, on Li Lanfeng's end, his heart which had initially turned ice-cold with despair had finally recovered due to the warmth coming from Ling Lan's palm. His initially trembling body gradually calmed down as well and his eyes became clear, his entire being appearing unbelievably calm.

Ling Lan had initially wanted to ask if Li Lanfeng wanted to go out to take some fresh air, but she was stopped by the cold, piercing gaze Li Lanfeng was directing at Li Yinfei.

Li Yinfei was still singing — the better Li Yinfei sang, the more worked up the stadium was, and the colder Li Lanfeng's gaze became.

It had to be said that in order to build Li Yinfei's image as a soulful songstress, her management company had indeed invested a lot of money. All five songs she sang this night were classics in their own right though the melodies encompassed various styles, mesmerising all the cadets as they listened. Of course, Li Yinfei's peerless beauty had to be given a large half of the credit. Due to the advent of gene agents and other reasons, everyone in this era, regardless of gender, was all pretty good-looking. However, it was still rare to find one such peerless beauty like Li Yinfei in the span of a hundred years.

This concert announced Li Yinfei's success. After being broadcast via the virtual world, her singing voice and her appearance made her become the idol of the hundreds and thousands of soldiers of the Huaxia Federation, turning her into one of the most famous soulful singers. Also because her songs were almost all revolving around themes of war and the military, she had a large number of fans among the troops, becoming another national military idol following Ling Xiao.

During the concert, Ling Lan was constantly worried about Li Lanfeng's physical condition, afraid that he would not be able to hold out till the end of the concert. However, as time went on, Li Lanfeng's condition seemed to improve, and by the end, he looked no different than he had at the start. Even so, the perceptive Ling Lan had still sensed that Li Lanfeng now had an additional air of determination about him.

As soon as the concert ended, Li Lanfeng quickly bade goodbye to Ling Lan, as if he had some urgent matter to attend to. The moment Li Lanfeng left, Chang Xinyuan came over to tell Ling Lan about Li Shiyu leaving partway through the concert. This piqued the curiosity of the other team members, and someone voiced the speculation whether Li Yinfei had anything to do with Li Shiyu and Li Lanfeng. After all, they all shared the surname Li, right?

Of course, this question was very quickly flicked aside by everyone. Even if Li Yinfei had some relation to Li Shiyu and Li Lanfeng, so what? Xie Yi and Qi Long may like Li Yinfei's songs, but that was all. They had no thoughts of anything beyond that. Fine, Qi Long and Xie Yi were still young, and having been pressured by Boss Ling Lan all this while, becoming strong had been the only thing on their minds. They still had not reached the point where they started thinking about love.

That said, the outgoing Xie Yi still could not repress his curiosity and sought out Li Yingjie to ask about the matter. However, Li Yingjie's response was pure confusion; he had no clue at all who this Li Yinfei was. Still, Xie Yi's question did stir up some doubt in his mind — Li Yinfei's name was indeed really like someone from their Li family.

Xie Yi was filled with contempt for Li Yingjie's reply. He laughed at Li Yingjie for not even being able to tell for sure whether someone belonged to his family, greatly infuriating Li Yingjie. Subsequently, Li Yingjie, who never really paid much attention to the chaotic family affairs of the Li family before this, finally made the decision to take any chances he had later on to get a proper list of all the descendants of the Li family branch members so that this bastard Xie Yi would not look down on him again ...

Li Yingjie could never have known that this query by Xie Yi would spark his motivation like this and actually set him on the path to discovering a great secret in the future ...

As soon as Li Lanfeng returned to his living quarters, he entered his room and closed the door behind him. After ensuring that everything was secure, he dialled his grandfather. On the virtual screen of his communicator, the figure of an old man appeared. It was the same old man who had spoken with Li Shiyu earlier.

When the old man saw Li Lanfeng, the indifference he had sported while speaking with Li Shiyu melted away to be replaced by a slightly bitter smile. He sighed and said, "Shiyu has already contacted me. I was just thinking when you would call me as well. Who knew you had such patience, only calling me after so long ..."

Li Lanfeng's expression was frigid as he cut in to say, "Grandpa, Li Yinfei, if I'm not mistaken, should be your doing, right?" Compared to Li Shiyu, Li Lanfeng understood his grandfather better.

The old man's smile disappeared instantly, and his face turned unbelievably stern and serious. "As expected of the inheritor I have invested so much into to cultivate, figuring things out immediately."

"This is because I know too much about your methods, grandpa. I can even deduce that your explanation to Shiyu must be that it was the decision of the council of elders. The poor Li family council of elders, once again becoming your scapegoat." Li Lanfeng's taunting was even more obvious than Li Shiyu's. The expression on the old man's face turned unbelievably awkward; compared with Li Shiyu's gullibility, this grandson of his was as wily as a ghost — nothing could be hidden from him.

Li Lanfeng ignored the embarrassment of the old man and continued to ask, "I just want to know, grandpa, why did you do this?" Li Lanfeng's current tone of voice was so cold that there was almost no warmth at all to be found in it.

"I need to have more than one plan ready." The old man's eyes turned sharp and penetrating. "I will not allow my grandson to fall to the Phoenix Thrall Fate. If things truly come to that point, Li Yinfei will be your replacement."

The old man gave Li Lanfeng a direct answer. For this matter, he had plotted over the course of several years. After much trouble, he finally found Li Yinfei who resembled his grandson as much as 50 to 60% among the Li branch family descendants. The most important thing was that both of Li Yinfei's parents were dead, so he could control everything about her. Over these past few years, he used the latest alteration technology the Li family had at its disposal, and after many experiments, he finally succeeded in making Li Yinfei resemble his grandson up to 90%. Adding on some application of make-up, at one glance, aside from temperament, Li Yinfei was almost indistinguishable from his grandson ...

The old man's answer caused Li Lanfeng's heart to seize in pain. At the heart of it, he was still too weak. That was why his grandfather did not believe he could truly defy fate and change his destiny, thus coming up with this humiliating plan for him to escape from his Phoenix Thrall Fate.

"I understand ..." Li Lanfeng closed his eyes with a heavy heart, hiding the pain he felt inside. Even his closest relative did not believe in his efforts — how would he be able to prove himself? Moreover, this decision of his grandfather's meant that he would never be able to show his real face in public anymore in the future.

He thought of the rabbit — he had once thought hopefully that, after a few more months, on his 20th birthday, he would be able to stand before the other with full honesty and tell him the whole truth ... but now, all of that was no longer possible. He could only continue to live on under the identity of Li Lanfeng, and this may be how it would be for the rest of his life.

The old man seemed to sense Li Lanfeng's grief. He sighed deeply and said, "Sinful things must be given up."

Li Lanfeng laughed tragically. So his grandfather had felt that his looks were a sinful existence? How ridiculous. If the Phoenix Thrall Fate was all because of his face, then wouldn't ruining it be enough? Why bother going through the extra trouble of manufacturing this Li Yinfei? At the heart of it, his grandfather was just trying to fool himself.

Li Lanfeng's laughter finally subsided. His eyes sprang open, sadness flashing briefly in the depths of his gaze as he peered intently at the old man for a moment before saying, "Grandpa, this is the final time I'll be contacting you. From now on, I am no longer Li Mulan but Li Lanfeng ... and I can only be Li Lanfeng!"

Hearing this, the old man's body jerked and his eyes swiftly turned red. His mouth twitched soundlessly, but in the end, he merely nodded resolutely and said, "Li Lanfeng, look out for yourself!"

The old man pressed the button to end the call and then stared blankly at the now dark virtual screen. Only after a good long while did he stir to say faintly, "I can only do this much. After this, it's all up to you, Mulan!" Having said that, his entire frame collapsed. His back bent uncontrollably into a curve, and he was no longer as confident and unshakeable as he had appeared to his two grandsons on the screen.

Chapter 393: The Lingtian Mecha Clan!

Time flew, and a year's time was over just like that.

This entire year, the First Men's Military Academy had seemed extremely peaceful and uneventful. That air invasion of the academy a year ago had put a damper on the initially tense and competitive atmosphere of the academy. Those 8000 cadets who had died in the battle had come from multiple factions, which almost encompassed all the factions in the military academy. Certain factions were hit particularly hard and were devastated by the loss of members.

Under this sort of slump, all the factions were in no mood to fight over anything. They all took the time to rest and recuperate, biding their time. The New Cadet Regiment was probably the faction which lost the fewest members in the air invasion incident. With the exception of a minor few who had died in battle with the enemy, Ling Lan's decisive arrangements had allowed most of the members to survive the crisis.

It could not be denied that those New Cadet Regiment members who had survived the battlefield found their mecha control skills improving on a vertical line within this one year. Quite a few intermediate mecha warriors successfully advanced to advanced mecha warrior level, but since they had not officially gone through a mecha practical training session, the academy instructors did not know about it yet. It could be imagined that when the members of the New Cadet Regiment finally entered their mecha practical training courses, they would certainly shock the entire military academy.

Successfully entering the second year meant that the New Cadet Regiment had said goodbye to the chapter of their lives as newbies — they would now officially enter the formal courses of their chosen specialization. This also meant that they now had the right to establish mecha clans that the academy would recognise.

Wu Jiong, Li Yingjie, as well as the other team leaders of the New Cadet Regiment all felt that it was better to establish a mecha clan earlier rather than later. By taking advantage of this time when the old factions had not fully recovered, the New Cadet Regiment would be able to set down secure roots within the military academy.

Ling Lan agreed with them, and so not long after the start of the second year, she submitted the application for the establishment of the Lingtian Mecha Clan to the military academy. This application shocked all of the factions in the academy, and many were even of the opinion that this reckless behaviour of the New Cadet Regiment was bound to be thwarted. This was because the establishment of a mecha clan required the applicant group to pass an assessment by the academy mainframe.

Just think — even if the freshmen had started training their mecha control in Mecha World as early as they could in their first year, one year's time was only enough at most for these freshmen to achieve intermediate mecha warrior status. Moreover, this was only something extremely talented students could achieve. Meanwhile, the virtual battle clans created by the mainframe as the opponent in its assessment would at worst consist of advanced mecha warriors but were more likely to be all special-class operators. Although the result of the assessment was not determined by winning or losing, how many seconds could a team made up of intermediate mecha warriors last under the attack of the mainframe's special-class mecha operator battle clan?

However, the final outcome left everyone flabbergasted — the Lingtian Mecha Clan passed the academy mainframe's assessment in one go. Everyone wanted to know the content of the assessment, but the Lingtian Mecha Clan cruelly set their assessment as a top secret document. Even the academy's principal himself could not access the battle logs of this assessment; only high-level administrators of the military at the rank of general and above would have the authorization to view them ... but would the generals even care to pay any attention to a minor mecha clan formation assessment within a military academy?

And so, this assessment became a secret, sealed away for many years. Until that time in the future when Ling Lan had already become a king in her own right — only then did she draw the interest of the high-level people in the Federation military, who then looked up the assessment records. Only then did they come to understand that King Ling had already been crazily overpowered even back during her time at the military academy ...

After the Lingtian Mecha Clan was officially established, the various smaller teams within the mecha clan began submitting their applications one after the other in close succession to the academy mainframe to form their own battle clans. The establishment of a battle clan also required a mainframe assessment, and the missions given to the various potential battle clans were not necessarily the same. Ling Lan had originally already established the Lingtian Battle Clan within Mecha World; after she submitted her application, she actually did not need to take an assessment for the academy mainframe immediately approved it.

This made Ling Lan suspect that Mecha World, which allowed the public to enter and practise their control, was in fact overseen by the military. And that mainframe of Mecha World was very likely the mainframe of the military itself. In reality, the fact that the military academy's mainframe was a split segment of the military mainframe itself was an open secret in the military academy.

Of course, there was one other reason for this speculation of Ling Lan's. The rank of her approved battle clan in the real world was exactly the same as the one in Mecha World, instantly leaping up to 5-star.

This coincidence compelled Ling Lan to be suspicious — how else would this 5-star ranking have come about? Could it be that the military academy's mainframe just happened to suffer a seizure and specially decided to gift her such a grand present? It was impossible just thinking about it.

After the battle clan was established, the original Lingtian Battle Clan members immediately joined again. However, there was one unexpected guest. When Li Lanfeng joined this time, he dragged his good friend Zhao Jun along.

In all honesty, Zhao Jun had not actually wanted to formally join the Lingtian Battle Clan. He had only wanted to sign a one-year temporary contract, but who was Li Lanfeng? His heart set on helping his rabbit increase the strength of his battle clan, Li Lanfeng naturally would not let this super-valuable combat warrior Zhao Jun go.

Thus, under Li Lanfeng's purposeful verbal provocation, Zhao Jun was unable to resist and issued a direct challenge to the clan leader Ling Lan, setting a wager for their fight along with it. If Ling Lan could defeat him, he would join the Lingtian clan and pledge his loyalty as a member of Lingtian without any reservations.

Zhao Jun was a confident person — among the cadets, only about 50 or so had managed to advance to become special-class operators, and Zhao Jun's battle strength had always been in the top three of these 50 or so special-class operators. Additionally, even adding in the one and only cadet who had advanced to become an ace operator, the Thunder King Qiao Ting, Zhao Jun's ranking in terms of battle strength had never dropped out of the top five. This was also why even though he was not someone from Wuji, the Wuji Mecha Clan still had no choice but to lay down their pride and seek him out for a partnership.

As Zhao Jun was from a third-rate planet, he had very weak backing, and though he himself had no mind to take power and wield authority, he was still an ambitious person who did not want to randomly join some unproven, lame battle clan. He wanted to be a member of some legendary battle clan — therefore, for him to submit, the clan leader needed to have strength on par with the Thunder King Qiao Ting at least. Of course, because of Li Lanfeng, Zhao Jun also hated Qiao Ting with a passion, which was one reason why Zhao Jun had not joined the Leiting Mecha Clan.

With regards to Zhao Jun's challenge, Ling Lan naturally was not afraid. Over this past year, unlike Qi Long and the rest, Ling Lan had not had to attend physical fitness classes during the day; her entire focus had been on training her mecha controls in Mecha World. Her efforts over the year had raised her status in Mecha World from intermediate mecha warrior to ace mecha master, finally reflecting her true strength in the real world.

Thus, as soon as Ling Lan logged into Mecha World and operated an ace mecha onto the arena stage set up for the both of them, Zhao Jun knew that he had lost. Reality proved that Ling Lan's ace operator status was not just for show — her control skills were so powerful that it was scary. Zhao Jun only managed to last 20 moves under Ling Lan before he was KO-ed by a sword right through his cockpit.

This kind of power thoroughly convinced Zhao Jun. After he logged off the virtual world, he shook Li Lanfeng in excitement, asking him how in the world he had found such an aberrant clan leader. Just think — Thunder King Qiao Ting had only broken through to ace operator status in his fourth year, but Ling Lan was currently only a second year, so he had beaten Qiao Ting by two years. Do not underestimate these two years ... the younger the age, even the difference of one month was enough to display the difference between the talent and potential of two people. Zhao Jun knew very well that Ling Lan's future was certain to be even better than Qiao Ting's. If Qiao Ting could be said to be the second Ling Xiao, then Ling Lan was very likely to achieve becoming the first Ling Lan.

Li Lanfeng looked at Zhao Jun who was now somewhat hysterical from excitement and found himself rather speechless. Frankly, he had been able to tell with a glance that Ling Lan had already taken it easy and shown some mercy during the fight with Zhao Jun in order to leave him some face. Otherwise, based on Ling Lan's methods, Zhao Jun would never have been able to last more than 10 moves against her. Li Lanfeng had no idea how he could tell Zhao Jun this — if he stated it bluntly, would Zhao Jun crumble from the shock and fall into a slump?

Besides, his rabbit had already become an ace operator in the first year. If he told Zhao Jun this, would his good friend be stunned silly from the overwhelming shock?

After musing about it for a long while, Li Lanfeng decided that in order to preserve the sanity of his good friend and save him from losing himself due to shock, he would mercifully keep the truth concealed for now. Li Lanfeng felt that he was truly such a kind person ...

In this manner, Zhao Jun was whole-heartedly convinced into joining the Lingtian Battle Clan, and so within the early days of its establishment, the Lingtian Battle Clan already had 10 members. Of course, there were still many waitlisted members yet to be added to the ranks. When the first year ended, Han Jijyun and Luo Lang went back home once, and they returned with several strong requests from various people.

It turned out that Luo Chao, Han Xuya, and the original members of team 072 all sent word that they would officially join the Lingtian Battle Clan once they entered an army division. In particular, Han Xuya threatened Ling Lan with extreme violence that he was not allowed to say no!

Of course, Ling Lan's plans to go to the 23rd Division had been conveyed by Luo Lang and the others to the members of team 072. Aside from a few with excellent grades who decided to apply for enlistment to the 23rd Division along with Ling Lan and the rest at the First Academy in their fifth year, the others could only wait till they properly graduated before applying.

Ling Lan naturally would not refuse these scattered companions of hers who wanted to reunite with them. Rather than taking in some unfamiliar outsiders, Ling Lan was more willing to trust these companions who had grown up together with her. Right then, Ling Lan was also secretly rejoicing that they had managed to complete that SSS-rank mission back then, promoting the clan's level up to 5-star right away so they could take in so many more people. Otherwise, she would have had to start worrying

over these next few years how she could raise the level of her battle clan as soon as possible to accommodate these companions.

Having settled the matter of these outside companions, Ling Lan began to fret over the current internal members. Ling Lan had no need to concern herself over Qi Long and the other four of her original team — many years of cultivation and training had already ensured that their combat power and rapport with one another were outstanding.

However, the newly joined Chang Xinyuan was a huge problem. Even though he was extremely hardworking and tenacious, his mecha control talent was truly not that great. Over this past year, although Qi Long and the rest were still advanced mecha warriors, they had already touched the doorway to becoming special-class operators. They were now just waiting for a lucky chance, like when Li Lanfeng had encountered during the air invasion, to break through into the ranks of the special-class operators.

For an intermediate mecha warrior to advance to become an advanced mecha warrior, there was no need for any special insight. As long as they obtained enough experience and trained their control hand speed up to a certain standard, they would successfully advance. Basically, there wasn't any particular threshold in advancing from intermediate mecha to advanced mecha.

Chapter 394: Leiting's Letter of Challenge!

But such a simple thing became extremely difficult when it came to Chang Xinyuan. His hand speed was stuck at the highest intermediate value — just a one-second improvement would be enough to judge him ready to advance. However, it was precisely this one second that left Chang Xinyuan helpless and floundering.

When Ling Lan found out that Chang Xinyuan was unable to break through to gain that one second on his hand speed no matter how hard he practised, she knew that Chang Xinyuan had encountered a bottleneck in his talent. This was not something that training could overcome — he needed a chance for a breakthrough, and Ling Lan herself did not know where this chance would come from. When Chang Xinyuan learned of this situation, he was greatly impacted, and fell into a depressed mood for a time. Luckily, the other members of the clan often sought him out to ask him to do things, using the business of modification to help Chang Xinyuan forget this mental blow. Only this helped save the team's prodigy mechanic.

Chang Xinyuan's problem was only waiting on an opportunity, and even though the chances of this opportunity occurring seemed infinitesimal, it was at least still possible.

In the clan, Li Shiyu's mecha control talent was clearly pretty good, but his whole focus was on the research of medicine. If Ling Lan had not given a strict command that all members of the clan had to train their mecha control for no less than two hours every day, Li Shiyu most probably would not even go practise his mecha control.

Although Ling Lan felt it was a bit of a pity that Li Shiyu was wasting his mecha control talent like this, she understood that everyone had their own goals and pursuits, so it was not her place to interfere with Li Shiyu's personal choice. Fortunately, due to the mandatory two hours of practice every day, Li Shiyu's

mecha control did not lag behind the others by too much. Even though he was still an advanced mecha warrior, he had still risen from the primary stage to the middle stage. As long as Li Shiyu did not give up and stop practising, he should enter the late stage of advanced mecha warrior level in a few months, so Ling Lan was quite reassured by this.

Having been through an air invasion, Ling Lan knew very well that on the battlefield, all those below special-class operator level were just cannon fodder. To ensure the survival of as many team members as possible, she needed to make them all advance to special-class operator level before graduation to be safe.

Zhao Jun's mecha control ability was the strongest in the clan aside from Ling Lan. Moreover, like Qi Long, he was an obsessed fanatic of mecha control, and having participated very often in mecha battles while he was with the Wuji Mecha Clan, his battle experience was also a bracket higher than Qi Long and the rest. Thus, Ling Lan felt he was very reliable — she believed that even if the other members in the clan made a mistake and dropped the ball 1 during a critical moment, Zhao Jun would never do so.

Sometimes, trust did not need a long time to develop. Zhao Jun's personality made Ling Lan accept him very quickly — it could not be denied that the fact that Zhao Jun was Li Lanfeng's friend was a major factor. In short, Zhao Jun had been deemed a trustworthy person by Ling Lan, but of course, to truly be integrated into the Lingtian Battle Clan, Zhao Jun would still need to work hard.

What Ling Lan was really worried about was still the leopard Li Lanfeng. Li Lanfeng's physical constitution issue was actually hidden very deeply — other than Ling Lan, none of the other members in the clan knew about it. Even his good friend Zhao Jun only had some inkling of it and not a very clear one at that.

Since Ling Lan had already decided to establish a battle clan, she naturally would not permit any weakness to appear in her battle clan. She found an opportunity to meet up with Li Lanfeng to discuss the issue once. Perhaps Li Lanfeng had a sort of irrational blind trust in Ling Lan, for when Ling Lan asked him about his physical condition, Li Lanfeng did not hide anything, directly revealing the true situation to her.

The truth was as Ling Lan had imagined. It was indeed because his spiritual power was too strong for his body to handle that Li Lanfeng had this sequela 2 , just like Ling Lan in her previous life. The lucky thing was that this world had gene agents as well as all types of physical skills to improve one's physique, ensuring that Li Lanfeng did not have to die young as Ling Lan had in her past life. Still, even so, his body had never truly been well, forever hovering in a state of extreme weakness.

Reasonably speaking, Li Lanfeng's body did not permit him to walk the path of a mecha operator — when Ling Lan had asked Li Lanfeng why he had chosen this apparently suicidal path, Li Lanfeng had been silent for a good long while, as if having something difficult to divulge. In the end, he had only said bitterly that he wanted to become someone strong who could truly control his own destiny.

When Li Lanfeng had said these words, his eyes clearly held a trace of uncertainty, but there was even more determination in them. Perhaps, he had decided to walk this path with no guarantees only because he did not want to succumb to fate ... even if he had to pay with his life, he wanted to fight just once at least.

Seeing this kind of Li Lanfeng, Ling Lan could not help but think of her own situation. Although she had been forced from the beginning to disguise herself as a man, all her subsequent actions, all of her efforts, were they not all for the sake of controlling her own destiny?

Ling Lan empathized. She thought about Li Lanfeng's identity — he was even worse off than her as he was only a branch family descendant of the Li family. Although she was unclear what kind of family clan the Li family was, having read all types of novels in her previous world, Ling Lan could imagine what it was like. For a branch family descendant to obtain true speaking rights and be a free person, they needed to gain strength beyond the family clan's control. Otherwise, they would only become tools of the family clan and may even become a sacrificial victim for the family when necessary.

Having reached an understanding in her heart, Ling Lan decided not to ask Li Lanfeng anything more. After all, that was Li Lanfeng's private affairs — Ling Lan did not want to pry at the other's wounds. However, Ling Lan was filled with admiration for Li Lanfeng's stubborn determination and courage to become strong enough to decide his own fate even if he died. Sure enough, someone she acknowledged would never be a coward!

Since Li Lanfeng had the courage, Ling Lan herself would spare no effort to help her good friend. She meticulously developed a set of fitness training programs for Li Lanfeng, and she also unstintingly taught her Qi exercises to Li Lanfeng. However, it was not as effective as Ling Lan had imagined. Compared to when Ling Lan had started practising it in her mother's womb, there did not seem to be much effect when the already 20 years old Li Lanfeng practised it.

Still, Li Lanfeng was extremely lucky. With the modified gene agent Li Shiyu provided, Little Four improved it to raise the purity of the agent to 100%, allowing Li Lanfeng's frail body to fully absorb it. Li Lanfeng's body gradually began to improve, and his tenacity in practising the Qi exercises slowly began to show effect. The gradual improvement of his body left Li Lanfeng overjoyed. There was finally hope that this illness plaguing him for these 20 years would be cured.

After a year of effort, though Li Lanfeng's physical constitution still could not compare to the tough and sturdy build of an average mecha operator, he was at least no longer that sickly weakling he was before who could only handle intense mecha operation for 10 minutes. The duration Li Lanfeng could sustain in high-intensity mecha combat increased from the initial 10 minutes to 20, and if he was in a better state, that time would be extended. And this new time was already enough to sustain him through a small-scale mecha fight.

This also meant that from now on, Li Lanfeng would no longer be the battle clan's weak point in the many mecha fights to come. Ling Lan was very satisfied with this result.

Although the Lingtian Battle Clan had miscellaneous problems here and there, overall, the battle clan was still developing in a healthy direction. Meanwhile, the Lingtian Mecha Clan was also gradually stepping onto the right track under the combined efforts of the various team leaders under its banner. Right at this juncture, a letter of challenge suddenly descended upon the Lingtian Mecha Clan, breaking the peaceful status quo of the entire military academy.

In Ling Lan's villa, all the regiment commanders and team leaders of the Lingtian Mecha Clan were gathered. They were all here for the same thing — to decide how they would deal with the letter of challenge from the Leiting Mecha Clan.

Yes, this letter of challenge was from the strongest faction in the academy — the Leiting Mecha Clan!

The letter of challenge being passed around was made of paper. Of course, the true letter of challenge had already been submitted digitally to the academy mainframe by the Leiting Mecha Clan. As the regiment commander of the Lingtian Mecha Clan, Ling Lan had received a notification from the mainframe at the earliest notice. However, the Thunder King had been extremely provocative. He had specially produced a physical paper letter of challenge and had personally sent someone to deliver it to the second year dormitories and hand it over to the public regiment commander Wu Jiong.

Wu Jiong was well aware that the purpose of this action was so that the other party could announce to the entire academy that Leiting had chosen to enact their revenge now for their defeat in that arena battle a year ago.

Wu Jiong understood what the other's intention was, but he still had no choice but to bite the bullet. The Lingtian Mecha Clan had just been established — if they avoided the challenge now, the Lingtian Mecha Clan would inevitably become the laughing stock of the entire school, let alone being able to rise and develop any further after this.

After all the team leaders had taken a look at the letter of challenge, the letter once again returned to Wu Jiong's hands.

When Wu Jiong saw that large signature at the end of the letter of challenge once again, he could not hold back the rage in his heart any longer. He hissed angrily, "I had thought that the four major factions had suffered heavy losses during that air invasion incident last year and needed to rest and regroup, and so would not have any time to spare on us. Which is why I had wanted to take advantage of this lull to quickly establish our mecha clan early and use this time to grow our faction. Who knew that this Qiao Ting would see through our plan and issue this letter of challenge while we still have not secured our standing ... he is obviously planning to crush us with one strike and completely scatter our mecha clan. How despicable!" That said, unable to rein in his anger, his right hand slammed down on the armrest of his chair, the force of which instantly caused numerous cracks to appear in the armrest.

Standing not too far behind Ling Lan, Lin Zhong-qing's face could not help but twitch, heart aching as he calculated in his mind — Hells, 3000 credits gone just like that ...

Wu Jiong's words also ignited Li Yingjie's rage. He was a haughty person to begin with and was not as reserved as Wu Jiong; he instantly raged openly, "That bastard Qiao Ting! Knowing that we do not have an ace operator, he actually has the face to challenge us personally. For the sake of victory, he really doesn't care about losing face anymore 3."

Seated across from Li Yingjie, when Qi Long heard Li Yingjie's yelling, a smile appeared on his face. It seemed as if he fully approved of Li Yingjie's words, but only he knew that he was smiling because Qiao Ting was about to be a victim of his own cleverness. Thinking victory was at hand, yet not knowing that the opponent he was about to face, Qi Long's boss, was already an ace operator as well. If it could be

said that the other had some chance of winning a year ago, now, Qi Long really did not think Qiao Ting had any chances of winning left.

Li Yingjie's words resonated with everyone present. The other team leaders also began to grumble and roar, scolding Qiao Ting for his shamelessness.

Only Gao Jinyun sitting in the periphery of the circle did not join in, instead sitting quietly as he contemplated something with a solemn expression ... right at that moment, Ling Lan's initially closed eyes sprang open to sweep a cool gaze around the circle. Her pressing gaze instantly stopped all the angry mutters and bellowing in the room.

Cold sweat beaded the foreheads of everyone present — Boss Lan's force of presence was becoming stronger by the day. Now, just one glance was enough to make them sense danger, and on top of that, it was as if the surrounding temperature had become frozen.

Chapter 395: Gao Jinyun's Suggestion!

"Gao Jinyun, what do you think?" Into the cold silence, Ling Lan finally opened her mouth, but unexpectedly called out Gao Jinyun.

This caused Wu Jiong sitting by her side to raise his brows in surprise. Li Yingjie was at first rather puzzled, but he quickly turned to stare curiously at Gao Jinyun, wanting to know what about this person had gained Boss Lan's approbation.

Ling Lan's direct callout stunned Gao Jinyun, but he was instantly taken by wild joy. In contrast to the other team leaders who did not know Boss Lan's full strength, having been saved by Ling Lan once before, he naturally knew how powerful Boss Lan was now. Everyone felt that the Lingtian Mecha Clan was sure to lose, but he did not agree. Leiting, who did not understand Boss Lan's full strength, was sure to once again lose to the Lingtian Mecha Clan ...

And now, for Ling Lan to personally ask his opinion, did this mean he had successfully entered Boss Lan's esteem? The very thought energized Gao Jinyun, but still, he knew deep down that if he could not say anything constructive or insightful now, he was likely to waste this opportunity.

Therefore, Gao Jinyun forcefully repressed the excitement churning within him and considered the situation carefully for a moment before saying measuredly, "Regiment Commander Ling, since you've asked for my opinion, then let me say a little about this. If I say anything wrong, I beg the pardon of the regiment commanders and team leaders here."

Gao Jinyun's demeanour was very humble, greatly improving his impression in the eyes of the team leaders present, eliminating the possible friction which might have arisen from envy. Wu Jiong's eyes flashed at his words — he had not expected that there would be such a capable team leader in the mecha clan who was not from their academy; he had neglected this possibility.

After Gao Jinyun finished setting the scene, he finally explained his view. "Indeed, the Leiting Mecha Clan is very strong, and moreover, their regiment commander, Thunder King Qiao Ting, is the only publicly known ace operator in the military academy among the cadets ..." At this point, Gao Jinyun

glanced reflexively at Boss Lan, but he very quickly reeled his gaze back and continued to say, “But I don’t think our Lingtian Mecha Clan has no chance of winning at all.”

Ling Lan’s lips quirked. This Gao Jinyun was an interesting character, because he did not announce to the others that she was an ace operator. Instead, he used his words so adeptly — anyone who knew what’s what would understand the hidden meaning behind Gao Jinyun’s words.

Sure enough, when Ling Lan’s team members heard what Gao Jinyun said, they smiled lightly in unplanned unison; it looked like they had all caught the connotation of Gao Jinyun’s words.

Even though the others could not grasp the true meaning of Gao Jinyun’s words, their spirits rallied when they heard that their mecha clan was not completely sure to lose. Li Yingjie was particularly impatient, instantly speaking up to ask, “What do you mean?”

“Over this period of time, I have seriously studied the mecha battles between mecha clans. Although there are no restrictions whatsoever with regards to the team leader, there are limitations on the number of team members and their levels. Especially for challenge battles where senior cadets are up against cadets junior to them, the restrictions are even greater.”

Gao Jinyun’s reminder sparked Wu Jiong’s memory and he instantly understood what the other was getting at. He nodded emphatically and said, “Gao Jinyun is right. I actually forgot that challenge fights had these regulations.” Wu Jiong rapped his own head in frustration, smiling wryly as he said, “In order to eliminate vicious predatory competition among the mecha clans, especially when it comes to seniors against juniors, the mainframe has set up some protective rules in favour of the disadvantaged party. As soon as it discovers that the skill level between the two parties involved in a challenge diverges by too much, making the match-up extremely unequal, the mainframe will instantly determine that this is malicious predatory competition and declare the challenge invalid. Of course, this mainframe protective measure for the lower grade cadets can only be applied three times 1 . However, every time a challenge is denied, a new challenge can only be issued three months later. If the strength of the battle clan the Leiting Mecha Clan sends out against us exceeds our level by too much, the mainframe’s protective regulations will be triggered. With that, we’ll still have about a year’s time to grow. This is a route we can properly utilise ...”

As the team leaders seated here had never encountered a battle between mecha clans before, they did not know all these things. They all quickly spoke up to urge Regiment Commander Wu Jiong to explain how they could get the mainframe to determine this challenge as malicious competition.

Wu Jiong then laid out the rules in detail. It turned out that when upper year cadets challenged lower year cadets, other than the team leader’s level being unrestricted, the overall strength of the other members participating in the fight could not exceed the challenged lower grade clan’s overall strength by too much. If not, the challenge would be deemed as unfair and be voided. Of course, how much the overall strength needed to exceed to be considered malicious competition was not something Wu Jiong, who had never been in a mecha challenge fight himself, knew for certain either, because it was not stated clearly in the rules. In the end, it would all still depend on the final submitted name lists from both sides.

While everyone was discussing how best to utilise the mainframe’s protective rules, Gao Jinyun coughed sharply to draw everyone’s attention before saying loudly, “I want to add that there are three tiers for

mecha fights. A 12-man fight, a 24-man fight, and a 50-man group battle. Boss Lan, it seems like the tier of the battle is up to the challenger to decide, right?"

Ling Lan nodded in response to Gao Jinyun's question, indicating that he had it right.

Gao Jinyun's brow furrowed as he sighed and said, "This way, we're rather disadvantaged. The initiative is in the hands of the opponent. If we could have chosen the tier, our chances of winning would be higher."

"Oh? Setting aside how the opponent will choose, tell me your thoughts." Ling Lan raised a brow. She had always thought that Li Lanfeng and Han Jiyun from her own team were already very rare military strategist combat types — unexpectedly, this team leader who was not from the Central Scout Academy seemed to be no weaker than the two of them in terms of strategizing. This piqued Ling Lan's interest; she now wanted to see how far Gao Jinyun could go.

Ling Lan was not only focused on cultivating her own battle clan, she was also cultivating some allied teams at the same time. Whether in military administration or on the battlefield, having the support of some dependable allies would invariably make her path smoother and more stable. Thus, she viewed Wu Jiong's team with high regard and also employed both carrot and stick with Li Yingjie. Since they were all from the Central Scout Academy, Ling Lan did not wish for Li Yingjie to slow everyone down.

However, if Gao Jinyun also showed promise, Ling Lan would not hesitate to cultivate him as well and be generous with her trust. In contrast to Wu Jiong and the others who may have some nepotism mentality, Ling Lan did not distinguish between main or side branches when it came to people. As long as someone had the skills and had a passable personality, Ling Lan definitely would not discriminate against them due to their birth or background.

The moment Ling Lan said this, everyone was gobsmacked, and Gao Jinyun himself was staring with both shock and joy at Ling Lan. Although Ling Lan's gaze was as placid as ever, the encouragement within her eyes was clear. This moved Gao Jinyun considerably, and his body actually began to tremble uncontrollably.

Several of the other team leaders were even staring at Gao Jinyun with envious eyes. These words from Boss Lan pretty much confirmed that Gao Jinyun had truly entered Boss Lan's scope of attention. As long as Gao Jinyun did not do anything wrong after this, his team would definitely receive focused cultivation from Boss Lan. It could be predicted that Gao Jinyun's team would become one of the strongest teams aside from those battle clans of the regiment commanders in the faction.

Gao Jinyun clenched his fists tightly, telling himself to calm down. The more exciting the situation was, the more he could not afford to make any mistakes. He took a deep breath and let his emotions settle a little before saying, "Regiment Commander, this is what I think. If we get to choose, we must choose the 12-man challenge fight. Even though our overall strength cannot compare to Leiting's, when it comes to elite fighters, we're actually not much weaker than Leiting."

Initially, they had thought that Gao Jinyun would say something mind-blowing, but he had unexpectedly said this. Even if everyone had confidence in themselves, they still felt that there was quite a bit of a gap between their strength and that of the elite battle clans of the Leiting Mecha Clan. One of the team leaders even retorted, "Team leader Gao, as far as I know, Leiting has 15 special-class operators at the

very least. Even though we have the confidence to say that we can achieve that same level two to three years later, right now, we're still mostly advanced mecha warriors. There's no way we can compare to Leiting's special-class operators in terms of strength."

Questioned, Gao Jinyun's expression held no trace of panic. Instead, with a face full of determination, he said, "I know, but I also know that the opponent cannot send all of their special-class operators onto the field, or else this challenge fight will not be approved by the mainframe."

Ling Lan's lips curved up slightly once more at these words. As she expected, Gao Jinyun had also noticed this point — he was a seed deserving of cultivation.

Gao Jinyun's resolute words made the eyes of everyone present light up. That's right, if the opponent sent out all their special-class operators, adding on the leading ace operator, this challenge fight would just be completely thrown out. To protect the freshmen, the mainframe would definitely reject this challenge fight. Everyone now understood what Gao Jinyun was saying when he mentioned the elite fighters. If the opponent lowered their requirements and chose advanced mecha warriors to represent them, Lingtian would still be able to put up a fight.

"The most important thing now is how we can hide our strength from the opponent. If Leiting finds out how strong we are and arranges their troops in formations specifically suited to counter us ..." At this point, Gao Jinyun's face turned grim. "The situation will not be optimistic for us. Only if Leiting is uncertain to the depths of our true strength will we have a chance to win."

Gao Jinyun's words made a calm settle down on the entire venue. Some team leaders seemed to have thought of something, a trace of frustration appearing on their faces. It looked like their strength levels must have been scouted out by Leiting quite recently.

Li Yingjie's expression was also extremely unsightly. He recalled a scene in Mecha World where he had been provoked by some people. Back then, he had not been able to hold back his temper and had fought with the opponent several times in the arena. Although he had defeated the opponent multiple times and had obtained quite a lot of victory spoils, thinking back on the incident now, it was truly too fishy. It looked like he must have fallen for Leiting's trap.

Ling Lan swept a swift gaze around the hall, taking stock of everyone's countenance, thus gaining a rough idea of which people had been scouted out. Then, she said, "Looks like, some of you already sense that something is wrong. Still, even if Leiting has discovered your true strength, the impact on this mecha battle will not be too significant, so you all don't have to be too upset."

Even though Ling Lan's tone was cold, her words proved that she was not angry. This let those self-recriminating team leaders, including Li Yingjie, put aside some of their worries. Having been sounded out by the enemy, they were indeed very angry, but they were even more afraid of Boss Lan's anger.

Chapter 396: Stepping Stone and That Chicken!

"Gao Jinyun's proposal is very accurate. The 12-man mecha fight is indeed the most advantageous for us. In comparison, the 50-man clan fight is the most disadvantageous because although we have already established our mecha clan, we have never experienced a large-scale mecha fight. I believe that in

Mecha World, the most you all would have encountered would have been a 24-man cooperative battle, and many of you would probably only have experienced a 6-12 person mini battle clan mission, right?"

Ling Lan's question received nods from all corners of the room. Indeed, these team leaders' strength was not sufficient for them to participate in large-scale team missions. In this regard, they truly had no experience.

"If Qiao Ting simply needs a victory to wipe away the disgrace Leiting suffered when they lost to us, he should choose the safer option of the 50-man large-scale clan fight. However, as far as I know, Qiao Ting is a very aloof and confident person, perhaps even somewhat arbitrary and wilful. Using this sort of safe method to defeat us, for him, may be a disgrace in and of itself."

At this point, Ling Lan paused, then continued to say, "The reason he has decided to challenge us now is — one, he is indeed afraid we'll use this time to fully develop our clan, and two, their fifth-year division assessment is about to start. Qiao Ting is probably thinking of using this challenge fight before the assessment to carve his name gloriously upon the military academy's historical list of honour ... in order to achieve this objective, Qiao Ting is unlikely to choose even the 24-man battle; he will only choose the 12-man battle which can best showcase individual ability."

After saying all this, Ling Lan did not seem to feel any pressure at all. She nonchalantly tugged at the cuff of her right sleeve, her expression unperturbed as she continued to say, "As for special-class operators, he will not send them. The members who will fight alongside him should all be advanced mecha warriors. This challenge fight is his personal exhibition, and those members are just there as a backdrop to his strength."

Stating this, the corners of Ling Lan's lips curled slightly into a mocking smirk. An enemy who thought highly of himself was in fact the easiest to handle — she had always thought that Qiao Ting might be her greatest enemy and obstacle to dominating the military academy, but now, from the looks of it, he might be the easiest one to handle. Hopefully, after this battle, Qiao Ting would not give up on himself from the shock! It was not easy for Ling Lan to find a rival on par with her — she still wanted to play some more.

"Ah, is he looking down on our Lingtian Mecha Clan?!" Ling Lan's words stirred up everyone present; their faces were flushed with indignant rage, and quite a few actually broke out swearing. If things really turned out as Ling Lan had said, Qiao Ting's decision absolutely meant that they were nothing in Qiao Ting's eyes.

Observing the frothing indignation of the people before her, Ling Lan's eyes closed once more and she showed no intent of saying anything more. Xie Yi, standing to one side, knew that his boss was not interested in explaining things any further, so he quickly stepped in to add on behalf of his boss, "Everyone, have you all paid attention to that bit of gossip recently?"

Xie Yi was unsure why, over the course of this past year, his boss had become more and more reticent. Boss would only communicate with them with his gaze and his actions, but the effect was quite good — the team members could almost always understand what their boss was trying to convey. However, even as team rapport improved, the pressure the team members felt increased accordingly. They just could not tell when they would fall out of favour with the boss ... oh, how uneasy it made them feel.

Xie Yi's words gathered the entire group's attention once more. Right now, Xie Yi was no longer simply a member of Ling Lan's team but also its external relations officer. What Xie Yi said was very often the intent of Ling Lan's battle clan as a whole, so they could not take him lightly.

Just as everyone was confused, uncertain which bit of gossip Xie Yi was referring to, Xie Yi elaborated, "I hear that Qiao Ting has been trying hard to chase the soul singer Li Yinfei recently, but Li Yinfei has made a high-profile announcement that her future partner shall be an indomitable king. Only if one can fulfil that criteria would that person be qualified to pursue her. In order to become a king in Li Yinfei's eyes and be qualified enough to pursue her, Qiao Ting must use exceptional results as proof. He wants to become the king of the academy, and the one stain on his kingly image is precisely our newly established Lingtian Mecha Clan. In order to prove publicly that he is truly the king of the academy, he can only use an overwhelming victory to clear away the shame from his faction's previous defeat. As such, he can only challenge us in the way Boss Lan has explained. Ah, how beauty leads one astray ..." said Xie Yi gleefully with a dramatic sigh, causing many of the seated members to chuckle despite themselves.

Right then, at the bend of the staircase leading up to the second floor, a dark figure was standing within the shadowed recesses of the corner. When he heard what Xie Yi said, his body actually shuddered, but he very quickly stood straight and steady again, as if that brief lapse was all just an illusion.

"Just obsessed with that face? It looks like my speculations are correct. Qiao Ting really is that despicable king ..." A trace of disgust flashed across the black figure's eyes, killing intent right on its tail, but the disgust and killing intent soon dissipated to be replaced by sheer bitterness. What means could he, who was still a special-class operator, have to deal with the other? He was still too weak.

Very soon, the black figure recovered from the mental shock and his gaze became determined once more. He believed that as long as he followed the rabbit's arrangements and continued working hard, he would become strong one day, strong enough to match Qiao Ting's strength. At that time, he would personally end this evil fated bond.

Xie Yi waited for everyone's laughter to subside before continuing to say, "Of course, Qiao Ting has a wonderful plan. Personally put an end to the grudge between us, take the prized throne of the king of the academy and, with this air of majestic authority, sweep right into some army division to gain loads of accolades. And then, riding this momentum, he will rise higher and higher to finally become the veritable king of Mecha World and win the heart of the great beauty Li Yinfei. It cannot be denied that Qiao Ting has an ideal plan in place, and he views our Lingtian Mecha Clan as a solid stepping stone ... However, our Lingtian Mecha Clan is no sandbag which he can push around as he likes 1 ..." At this point, Xie Yi's smile disappeared completely and a trace of iciness could be seen on his face; it actually resembled the cold air of Boss Lan somewhat.

So after following Boss Lan for so long, one would also inherit this special ability of Boss Lan's. Even the ever-smiling Xie Yi could make others feel so cold the moment his expression turned stony ... the group snuck a glance at the frozen face of the person sitting in the main chair, the expressionless Ling Lan, and once again confirmed that Boss Lan was truly unmatched in dominance. Her influential power was just too great.

These words of Xie Yi's finally let everyone understand why Boss Lan would conclude that Qiao Ting would choose the 12-man battle mode when challenging them. Everyone could not help but be filled with admiration. Wu Jiong was the one who felt this most profoundly. His gaze was filled with admiration and respect when he looked at Ling Lan, but it also carried a trace of frustrated disappointment.

The more he spent time with Ling Lan, the more he felt that Ling Lan was unfathomable. After establishing the Lingtian Mecha Clan, Wu Jiong knew very well that though Ling Lan was the first chair in their mecha clan, she actually did not handle anything — the true manager of the Lingtian Mecha Clan was him, Wu Jiong. But when the Leiting Mecha Clan had issued their letter of challenge, filling him with panic, Ling Lan had calmly collected data and intel on Leiting and Qiao Ting. He had completely overlooked some of these news and gossip which had seemed disjointed and unrelated, but Ling Lan had been able to find some clues from all of it, swiftly grasping the key points to determine the possible behaviour of the opponent. Obviously, in terms of gauging the big picture, he was still no match for Ling Lan.

At this thought, Wu Jiong could not help but glance at Gao Jinyun, who had by now resumed his usual humble manner. This person had always been extremely low-key and unobtrusive, so low-key that they had all overlooked him. Yet, despite not actively managing the clan, Boss Lan had been able to see his strengths with just one glance, only choosing him among all the others to speak. This astute vision was equally worthy of Wu Jiong's admiration and envy — in terms of mining talent, he was also no match for Boss Ling Lan.

Wu Jiong could see very clearly that the interaction between Ling Lan and Gao Jinyun had not been a pre-planned thing. The pleasant surprise and excitement on Gao Jinyun's face could not have been faked. Unless Gao Jinyun was a natural actor whose acting skills had already achieved flawless perfection, there was no way his reaction could be that real.

His father had spoken truly — following an exceptional person would indeed let him learn many things he never knew before, and come to recognise weaknesses he had not noticed in himself previously ... but, father, when someone was so strong that one could only look up at them, how could he find the courage to oppose the other? Wu Jiong could not help but smile wryly ...

The Lingtian Mecha Clan came to a consensus; they could only wait to see what Qiao Ting would do now. As expected, Qiao Ting did not give the Lingtian Mecha Clan too much time to prepare. The very next day, the Lingtian Mecha Clan had already received a notification from the academy mainframe. It was truly as Ling Lan had predicted. The Leiting Mecha Clan had chosen the 12-man mecha challenge fight, and the leader of the representative team was Qiao Ting.

At the bottom of the notification from the mainframe was a reminder for the Lingtian Mecha Clan and the Leiting Mecha Clan to make sure and submit the official name list of their participating members to the mainframe three days later.

In reality, when Ling Lan had judged that Qiao Ting would choose the 12-man challenge fight, she had already had a name list in mind. However, she had not announced the list because, for one, she wanted to wait and see if she had missed anything. And secondly, she also did not want Leiting to somehow find out about this list and make some adjustment specifically countering it.

Since Qiao Ting was planning to use the Lingtian Mecha Clan as his stepping stone to crowning himself king, then he should not blame her for planning to use the Leiting Mecha Clan as her mecha clan's 'chicken' in a lesson to strike fear into the 'monkeys' of the military academy 2 .

In the headquarters of the Leiting Mecha Clan, Qiao Ting seemed to be waiting for something. Finally, someone rushed in from outside. Seeing this person appear, Qiao Ting's initially tense expression eased slightly.

"Did you manage to get the participating name list of the Lingtian Mecha Clan?" asked one of the people standing beside Qiao Ting hurriedly. As a confidant of Qiao Ting's, he knew very well what Qiao Ting wanted to know most right now.

"No, the name list is being held by their regiment commander. Even the team leaders below are not sure who will be fighting in the end. But what we can confirm is that all of the regiment commanders will be participating, and the remaining few slots should be selected from among the various team leaders." The newcomer wiped the cold sweat from his forehead. He had not been able to obtain the true name list even after using about three days' time. This made him feel rather timid, worried whether his regiment commander would blame him for this.

Chapter 397: Choosing A Mentor!

Qiao Ting could not help but frown at these words. It looked like the Lingtian Mecha Clan was on guard against spies after their name list.

However, Qiao Ting's brow soon smoothed out again. For the Lingtian Mecha Clan to place so much importance on their name list, so afraid that it would be leaked ... that was a sign of low confidence; this was a good thing. Moreover, even if he did not know the contents of the opponent's name list, as long as he was here, even if all the members he brought with him were intermediate mecha warriors, victory would still belong to the Leiting Mecha Clan. It looked like this match just meant way too much to him, causing him to be somewhat unsettled.

Seeing that the regiment commander was not angry, the newcomer instantly relaxed. He quickly took out a chip and hand handed it over, saying, "This is the intel we've managed to gather on the various regiment commanders and team leaders of the Lingtian Mecha Clan over the past few days. The ones marked with red dots are those we reckon could be on the representative name list."

Someone beside Qiao Ting quickly reached out to take the chip and then handed it respectfully to Qiao Ting. Qiao Ting accepted the chip and aligned it with his communicator to scan it, thus copying over all the contents of the data chip.

Soon, from Qiao Ting's communicator, a virtual screen sprang out before Qiao Ting's face, and the information contained in the chip was fully displayed on the screen.

The first name on the list was Ling Lan. However, all aspects after Ling Lan's name were filled with question marks 1 — in the end, as the final conclusion, there was only one hypothesis, speculating that the other might be an advanced mecha warrior, or maybe even a special-class operator.

“This is the intel you all have gathered?” Looking at the page full of question marks, and that unverified speculation, Qiao Ting’s face turned dark as he snapped out the question.

The newcomer wiped away the cold sweat on his forehead and hurried to explain, “Regiment Commander, it’s like this. The first regiment commander of the Lingtian Mecha Clan has always acted on his own. Our people have no way of obtaining any accurate information on him from others. However, we still managed to get some detailed info on the other regiment commanders and team leaders. Our hypothesis is also based on the other regiment commanders and team leaders, so there is a certain factual basis for it.”

Qiao Ting sniffed coldly before looking down at the intel again. Sure enough, other than Ling Lan, there were more or less some concrete stats for the other members. Hence, he set aside his dissatisfaction and began perusing the information intently.

Right after Ling Lan was information on the three regiment commanders, Wu Jiong, Li Yingjie, and Qi Long. The data compiled was fairly specific — their personality, attack specializations, etcetera were all listed out one by one. This included their mecha level, which was stated clearly as advanced mecha warrior. Of course, exactly which stage of the advanced mecha warrior level they were at was unable to be determined since the intel people had never fought them personally before.

Looking at this list, Qiao Ting was extremely satisfied. All the regiment commanders of the Lingtian Mecha Clan were advanced mecha warriors, and a majority of the sixteen team leaders under them were also advanced mecha warriors, with only four or five being intermediate mecha warriors — these numbers were completely incomparable with those of the Leiting Mecha Clan. This revenge fight would undoubtedly be Leiting’s triumph.

However, this name list equally startled Qiao Ting. After all, the regiment commanders and team leaders of the Lingtian Mecha Clan were all still cadets who had just entered their second academic year. For them to be able to advance to advanced mecha warrior level at this age meant that they were absolutely prodigious characters with abnormal mecha piloting talent. What’s more frightening is the fact that the Lingtian Mecha Clan had not just one or two, but a whole bunch of them ... Hells, who would have expected the Central Scout Academy of Doha which had been quiescent these many years to actually produce such a mass burst of talent this year, producing so many geniuses in one go.

If the Lingtian Mecha Clan was given a little more time, perhaps the Leiting Mecha Clan would really be no match for them anymore. Qiao Ting secretly rejoiced, even more determined in his heart to utterly crush the Lingtian Mecha Clan in this revenge match ...

“Looks like, it is necessary to add on some wagers!” Qiao Ting finally realised personally why his vice regiment commander had decided to risk that wager back then for these people. In order to utterly eliminate the threat to the Leiting Mecha Clan’s claim to supremacy, they could only completely absorb the other party into their ranks.

“Aside from this regiment commander of the Lingtian Mecha Clan being somewhat problematic, the others are all nothing to worry about.” Qiao Ting’s initially stern face finally cracked a smile — it looked like he had indeed been worrying too much.

“Just send the original name list as planned!” Qiao Ting finally made his decision. At his order, his confidant beside him immediately sent the pre-set name list over to the mainframe.

“Even if everyone participating are advanced mecha warriors, those I’ve chosen for our side are all advanced mecha warriors at the peak stage, just one step away from entering special-class operator level. Lingtian Mecha Clan ... even without me taking action, my team members will be enough to make you all choke.” A smug smile hung on the corners of Qiao Ting’s lips.

“Boss, Leiting’s name list is out.” Little Four, who had been closely monitoring all activity of Leiting’s side instantly managed to grab a copy of the battle name list Leiting had submitted to the mainframe.

In the middle of researching to decide which mentor she should choose, Ling Lan heard Little Four’s cry and a smile appeared on her lips. As expected, Leiting had been unable to hold back. “Let me see.”

Little Four immediately displayed the name list in Ling Lan’s mindspace. Scanning the name list, Ling Lan nodded. It was as she expected — Qiao Ting truly wanted to emphasize his individual prowess in this revenge match.

“Even though they’re all advanced mecha warriors, these operators have already advanced into that level for over 2 years. Whether in terms of mecha controls or battle experience, they outclass our team members by a lot.” Little Four instantly gathered all data he could find on everyone on the name list, and he could not help but warn Ling Lan, tone serious.

“With two special-class operators, Li Lanfeng and Zhao Jun, in the lead, even the most experienced advanced mecha warriors will end up as cannon fodder in this battle,” said Ling Lan with a cold smirk. “Send over the name list we have settled on now as well then.”

Qiao Ting, when you find out that we actually have special-class operators on our name list, will you regret deciding too hastily? A smile tugged at the corners of Ling Lan’s lips; she really wanted to see Qiao Ting’s face change in colour ...

It turned out that this time, Ling Lan had chosen purely based on ability, without fearing any possible claims of nepotism. She had placed the strongest eight in her own battle clan into the name list, adding on Wu Jiong and Li Yingjie who were both at the late stages of advanced mecha warrior. Aside from the middle stage advanced mecha warrior Ye Xu, the final name on the list was the unexpected Gao Jinyun, who had only just entered advanced mecha warrior level.

The reason why Ling Lan had given up on picking other stronger candidates in favour of Gao Jinyun was that she wanted to see for certain what Gao Jinyun’s skills were like in terms of mecha. Gao Jinyun may have passed in terms of strategizing, but his personal level of strength was equally essential — Ling Lan needed to conduct further observation.

Both sides had only sent in their clan’s name list at almost the final moment of the time limit. As for when the fight would begin, that was not something they could control. The challenge time would be determined by the mainframe, which would only inform the two parties a week before.

After sending in the name list, Ling Lan stopped worrying about it. As for whether or not the opponent would manage to obtain their name list and figure out even more of their strength before the fight, Ling

Lan very shamelessly threw the problem over to Wu Jiong to handle. Ling Lan believed that if she had to personally handle everything herself, that would absolutely be a sign of incompetence (Ling Lan would forever use brilliant methods to disguise her lazy nature).

After setting aside the matter of the challenge fight, Ling Lan once again turned her focus on choosing a mecha piloting mentor. The two months of mecha piloting theory and knowledge class was coming to an end. From next month onwards, the cadets would have to follow a mecha mentor in practical mecha training. And now, an application to request one's choice of mentor laid before Ling Lan.

Yes, the cadets had the right to apply for any mentor they liked — they could choose and order up to three mentor candidates they most wanted to follow for their practical training. However, the application did not mean that they would definitely get the person they wanted. The instructors would also browse through the applications to select the students they wanted to take in as well. If the first-choice instructor refused, the application would automatically appear within the consideration pile for the second-choice instructor. And if the second-choice instructor refused, the application would then move on to the third instructor.

Although it looked like the application process was extremely ideal and fair, it should be known that every instructor had limited student slots. Very often, these instructors would have already filled up all their slots after the first batch of applications. Therefore, the possibility of being selected by one's second or third choice mentor was infinitesimal, unless the first batch of students was truly lacking ... this also resulted in many students missing all three instructors they requested for, only to be saddled with the tragic outcome of being randomly assigned a mentor by the mainframe.

Thus, the cadets attached great importance to the application of mentors. In order to ensure that they managed to follow an instructor with an operation style similar to theirs, the cadets would have already begun studying the various mecha instructors in the academy from the time they first started school. They did not go after the strongest, only aiming for those most suited for themselves ...

At present, Ling Lan had also come to the time to choose a mentor. This troubled Ling Lan greatly, for Ling Lan truly loved close-combat mecha down to her very bones. However, the military academy only had one ace operator mecha instructor specialising in close combat, and this one and only ace operator instructor just so happened to be a master of berserker attack methods, which was the complete opposite of Ling Lan's fine-tuned and delicate style of operation. If she chose this instructor, it was very likely they would butt heads, for any instructor would be unhappy with his own student not learning his style and instead choosing to do things their own way.

Ling Lan involuntarily looked at the number one instructor on the ranking list, Tang Yu. This was an elite mecha operator whom everyone in the academy lauded as a mecha professor. He was undoubtedly one of the strongest mecha instructors in the academy, because he had a thorough comprehension of every type of ace mecha. Even though he was most proficient at long-range attack, his close-combat abilities were also very powerful, and because long-range attack required a great attention to detail, Tang Yu's operation style was extremely meticulous and delicate, belonging to the same category as Ling Lan's style.

"Instructor Tang Yu, eh?" Ling Lan frowned lightly. If Tang Yu had not just finished mentoring Qiao Ting, Ling Lan would not be so troubled. Ling Lan truly did not want to have anything to do with Qiao Ting ...

“Oh, forget it, let’s look for someone else.” Ling Lan still decided to give up on that option in the end 2 , thinking to just randomly choose another from among the other instructors. After all, she was already learning mecha piloting from Instructor Number Three in the learning space now, so the practical training mentorship in the academy here was not as crucial to her as it was for the other students.

At this time, Little Four who had remained silent all this while could not help but speak up, “Boss, if Instructor Tang Yu is the best one, then why won’t you choose him?” Little Four just could not accept his boss learning from a subpar instructor; that would be such a disgrace to his boss.

Chapter 398: The Problem of Dao!

“Thunder King Qiao Ting is Instructor Tang Yu’s favoured disciple. If not too long after this, Qiao Ting loses at our hands, Instructor Tang Yu might hold a grudge.” In response to Little Four’s question, Ling Lan randomly made up an excuse.

“That’s impossible! According to the data I gathered, Instructor Tang Yu has never taken in any disciples in the academy. Even Thunder King Qiao Ting is only a normal student of his,” argued Little Four, “Besides, Instructor Tang Yu has stated clearly that he hopes to see his students surpass himself, each generation being stronger than the one before it. If you defeat Qiao Ting, Boss, Instructor Tang Yu will only be happy and not angry.”

“Is that so ...” Ling Lan once again turned her thoughts to Instructor Tang Yu. If that was the case, applying for Instructor Tang Yu should not be a problem. Although Ling Lan seemed to treat others very coldly, she was actually very respectful of everyone, especially those who had cared for her before. She was afraid that if she really applied for Instructor Tang Yu to be her mentor, and if Tang Yu happened to plead for mercy on Qiao Ting’s behalf, though this would not shake her decision, she would still feel some guilt towards Instructor Tang Yu. This was something she did not want to see happen, which was also one of the reasons why she did not want to apply for Instructor Tang Yu.

“Also, Instructor Tang Yu is a mecha operator who daddy really appreciates.” Little Four’s face was shining — the moment they brought up Ling Xiao, Little Four would become unable to control his emotions; compared to Ling Lan, he seemed even more like a child of Ling Xiao’s.

Little Four’s words reminded Ling Lan that when her dad had left planet Newline after the battle back then, he had mentioned Instructor Tang Yu, saying that he was a true teacher. From his words, it looked like Ling Xiao was very much in favour of Ling Lan learning from Instructor Tang Yu.

“So father approves of him as well?” Ling Xiao’s silly grin filled with indulgent love and affection surfaced involuntarily within Ling Lan’s mind. Faced with this kind of doting dad, Ling Lan could not find it in herself to refuse. Sighing softly, she decisively chose Instructor Tang Yu and sent out her application.

Ling Xiao’s opinion was really hard for her to refuse. Ling Lan felt that it was becoming increasingly difficult for her to resist that powerful fatherly love of Ling Xiao’s. Even when Ling Xiao was not by her side, that full berth of fatherly love would always appear in full force around her. Yep, the traitor Little Four was the culprit behind this. He was constantly whispering by her ear about how good Daddy Ling Xiao was and how it was oh so difficult to forget how good he was ...

At this thought, Ling Lan threw a fierce glare at Little Four. This glare frightened Little Four — who knew what Boss had caught him doing wrong this time? Alright, Little Four had recently been hanging out most of the time in the virtual world; the bad things he had done were truly too many to count, even he did not dare to think too closely about it ...

Having decided on Instructor Tang Yu, Ling Lan did not bother with choosing a second or third-choice mecha mentor. If Tang Yu refused, it did not really make much difference to Ling Lan which mecha instructor was assigned to her. Subsequently, all that was left was to wait for the mainframe's notification to see if her application would be approved by Instructor Tang Yu.

After completing the most pressing task for a second-year student, Ling Lan left the virtual world, returning to her room to rest. However, she had just lain down when a powerful suction force pulled her consciousness into the learning space. By now, Ling Lan was extremely calm in the face of such things. Every time her instructors wanted to see her, they would pull this stunt. The only thing uncertain was who had initiated it this time.

By the time Ling Lan became aware again, her eyes were greeted by a plain of clouds. Looking at the white clouds surrounding her, Ling Lan did not even have to think to know that this was Instructor Number One's place — Mountain's Peak.

Ling Lan unhurriedly took control of her body and stepped out into the air. Finally, when she caught sight of a square platform below, Ling Lan descended lightly to touch the tips of her feet to the ground before landing firmly without making a sound.

"Recently, are you finding your force of presence harder and harder to control?" Right then, Instructor Number One was seated on a large rock with his back to Ling Lan. Without turning his head, he asked her this question.

"Yes, Instructor Number One." Ling Lan looked at Instructor Number One, who was about three metres away from her, and suddenly sensed a massive wave of pressure pressing down on her. This pressure was much greater than any she had felt before, making her feel as if she could not handle it and was about to be forced to her knees.

But Ling Lan would not submit — she abruptly let out the force of presence within her in one powerful burst, pitting it against the formidable pressure Instructor Number One was plying upon her.

Instructor Number One's pressure was like waves at high tide, each wave heavier than the one before it — Ling Lan's forehead began to bead up with cold sweat, with more and more beads appearing by the moment. Her entire face turned pale and a trickle of blood suddenly flowed down from a corner of her initially tightly sealed lips ... but even so, Ling Lan's body still stood tall and steady with no sign of submitting.

"As expected!" said Instructor Number One all of a sudden. Following this remark, the overwhelming pressure instantly disappeared completely. Taken by surprise, Ling Lan was thrown off-balance by the sudden shift and almost stumbled and fell. Luckily, Ling Lan had nimble reflexes and adjusted quickly — even though her body tilted forwards a little, she still managed to keep her footing.

"Your force of presence is too intractable, willing to break rather than bend ..." said Instructor Number One faintly. His tone carried some trace of emotion, some approval as well as some regret.

“Isn’t this good?” Ling Lan’s forehead was scrunched up tightly. She could hear the regret in Instructor Number One’s tone — it looked like there must be some problem with her force of presence now.

“It’s not bad, it’s just ... you have forgotten you are a girl ...” said Instructor Number One with a wry smile. If Ling Lan were a boy, this sort of presence would not be a problem at all, but she was a girl. A girl’s body was ‘yin’ in nature, and intractability was a ‘yang’ trait 1 . This kind of presence which was contrary to the body it inhabited would inevitably cause the inherent nature of the body to reject and resist it. This was also why Ling Lan had found it so difficult recently to control her force of presence, letting it leak out all too often.

“How troublesome.” Instructor Number One’s explanation caused Ling Lan’s frown to deepen. She had never imagined that the reason she was unable to control her force of presence was actually because her body had begun to reject it internally.

Mind you, in the recent past period of time, the reason she had become increasingly untalkative was that she had been putting all her effort into suppressing her body’s force of presence. As soon as she started to speak, her aura would fluctuate and even show signs of erupting. At that time, she might very likely injure the companions by her side accidentally, and this was not something Ling Lan was willing to see ...

“At the heart of it, it’s still the fault of the Dao you have chosen. You should know that your Dao depends fully on self-exploration. There is no prior experience for you to reference. It’s normal for there to be some deviation,” Instructor Number One continued to explain.

“I think, Instructor Number One, you must have some way of resolving this.” Ling Lan looked at Instructor Number One with steady eyes. Since the other had already diagnosed her problem, then he must have some solution. Ling Lan had the utmost faith in the omnipotent learning space and the omnipotent Instructor Number One.

Seeing the dependency on Ling Lan’s face, Instructor Number One could not help but shake his head and smile bitterly in his mind. This Ling Lan was really becoming more and more shameless. Still, he could not ignore this beloved disciple of his. Instructor Number One could not help but feel that Ling Lan had only turned out this way due to them instructors spoiling her ... though Instructor Number One just could not figure out how in the world they had spoiled her to this extent, considering how everyone had obviously been so strict with her.

After a moment of silence, Instructor Number One said, “I do have a plan. There are two choices. The first is for you to give up on the Dao you are walking now, choose some other Dao which suits you and already exists, accept the experience of your predecessors, and thus improve and transform your force of presence. This is the safest and also the easiest way 2 . I suggest you choose this one.” Instructor Number One bluntly gave his recommendation.

After hearing all this, Ling Lan brushed off this option without any hesitation. “This, I will not choose.” Since she had already decided to walk her own Dao, she had never once thought of giving up halfway.

“You’ve thought it through? You should know that the second method may very well cause all your previous efforts to go to waste, and it may even cost you your life.” When Instructor Number One heard Ling Lan’s reply, he immediately appeared right before Ling Lan in the very next second. His cold and

piercing eyes stared intently at Ling Lan, as if trying to see for certain whether Ling Lan's heart was as firm and steady as her tone.

Ling Lan did not hesitate to meet Instructor Number One's gaze, declaring resolutely, "Yes. Even if I fail in the end, I will not regret it!" She was indeed very afraid of dying, but she did not want to give up on her beliefs due to this fear. This was the only thing she had learned over these past several years in her second life here.

"Good. Well said!" A glimmer of an approving smile finally appeared upon Instructor Number One's glacial face. "Ling Lan, listen well. The second way is to stay firm and unyielding. Since the two sides are repelling each other, you need to force them closer and make them merge."

"Stay firm and unyielding? Force them close to merge them?" Confusion appeared for the first time in Ling Lan's eyes.

"Just like how fire and water are mutually incompatible, but you will need to make it so that each has some of the other within it," A flippant voice rang out behind Ling Lan, and Ling Lan's initially steady body trembled minutely. The next second, Ling Lan had already turned around, bowed her head, and shouted, "Instructor Number Five, hello!"

Seeing Instructor Number Five appear, Instructor Number One once again dashed back to the top of the large rock, sat down, and closed his eyes, no longer caring about Ling Lan and the uninvited Instructor Number Five.

At the sight, Ling Lan knew that the following task of explaining would be taken over by Instructor Number Five now. She raised the questions she had in her mind, "Can water and fire coexist? I have never seen something like that exist, unless there are other intermediary substances present ..."

"No no no, little Ling Lan, just because you've never seen it before doesn't mean it doesn't exist," said Instructor Number Five, shaking a finger as he replied with a close-eyed smile. Just then, he suddenly turned his head to look up at the empty skies around the cloud layer and shouted, "Number Nine, come out! I know you're there."

Following this cry, Number Nine's cold huff could be heard, and then a pair of ivory white palms suddenly appeared to pry the sky among the clouds apart, revealing a black space. In the next moment, Instructor Number Nine had walked out from the black opening to come and stand before Ling Lan.

"Ling Lan, long time no see." Instructor Number Nine's body was as cold and frigid as Ling Lan remembered, but her gaze could not conceal her affection for Ling Lan. Ling Lan's heart throbbed, and her eyes actually turned slightly red. Ever since Instructor Number Nine had finished instructing Ling Lan in top-level physical skills, she had never again appeared before Ling Lan. If she calculated the time, it had been about three years since they had seen each other — Ling Lan had really missed her.

"Instructor Number Nine, I am really very happy to see you," said Ling Lan respectfully, holding back the emotional upheaval in her heart.

Chapter 399: Personal Testimony!

“I am also very happy. You are becoming stronger and stronger ...” said Instructor Number Nine approvingly.

Ling Lan was just about to reply when Instructor Number Five coughed loudly. Ling Lan and Instructor Number Nine turned in unplanned unison to glare at him.

Instructor Number Five rubbed his nose guilelessly and said, “I’m only reminding you all that right now, the pressing matter is to first resolve little Ling Lan’s force of presence problem. Time waits for no man ...”

At these words, Instructor Number Nine cast a piercing glance at Number Five. Number Five could only wave his hands again and again in response to the rage in her gaze, indicating that he had spoken unnecessarily. Perhaps it was true that every object has its counter — Number Five’s perversity made all the other instructors wary, keeping a safe distance from him whenever possible. Even Number One could do nothing to handle Number Five. But Number Nine was not at all afraid of Number Five. She was the only one who could show any signs of temper towards Number Five, but Number Five was helpless against her, never ever having dealt viciously with Number Nine ...

However, Number Five’s reminder also let Number Nine know the mission she was called here for. She said to Ling Lan, “Ling Lan, first take a look at my ability.”

She had barely finished speaking when five clusters of blue flame appeared on Number Nine’s fingers. The flames that should obviously be producing heat, were paradoxically radiating a biting chill.

Ling Lan was startled. She could not help but reach out a hand to try and touch the blue flames on Number Nine’s fingers, but she was quickly stopped by a sharp admonishment from Instructor Number Nine. “Don’t touch. It will consume any kind of energy, including your spiritual self.”

Ling Lan shrunk back, quickly pulling her hand back. Instructor Number Nine was not like Instructor Number Five whose words were always a mixture of truths and lies — if Instructor Number Nine had said so, then it truly meant that these blue flames could indeed do all of that. Consuming any type of energy ... this was really too horrifying.

Seeing that Ling Lan was no longer planning to move, Number Nine continued, “This is my awakened talent. The element I awakened is actually like yours, a water-based element, but a deviation of it. It’s just that the talent you awakened was Ice Affinity, while mine was Ice Flames.”

“Ice Flames?” Ling Lan was puzzled. She knew that water had three states — gaseous, liquid, and solid. Its solid state was the basis of her variant innate talent series of ice. Its gaseous form typically pointed to steam or fog series of talents, while its liquid state was the water element’s most common form in innate talents. However, she had never heard before that the water series of innate talents still had a variant branch called Ice Flames.

“When I first awakened my innate talent, it was not in this form.” Seeing the confusion on Ling Lan’s face, Number Nine’s cold and serious face actually held a trace of a smile. This slight smile lit Number Nine up, making her incomparably bright, which caused Number Five’s eyes to flicker with a strange light as well.

“Ah ...” Number Nine’s words were completely beyond Ling Lan’s expectations; when she had awakened her innate talent Ice Affinity, it had immediately already presented as ice.

In the face of Ling Lan’s astonishment, Number Nine did not say anything to explain, only asking Ling Lan to look closely at the blue flames on her fingertips. As Ling Lan watched, those blue flames radiating an intense chill actually began to change in colour, from blue to pale blue to finally become transparent flames. And then, the flames gradually turned yellow, deep yellow, orange, red, deep maroon, and then, they finally turned into pitch-black flames. What shocked Ling Lan even more was how the temperature of the flames changed as their colour changed — from extreme cold, the temperature of the flames rose slowly until they finally became sizzling hot. Especially when they turned black, Ling Lan actually could not resist that heat that seemed as if it could burn away everything. She could not help but take three steps back — only then did she manage to tolerate that pressing heat.

“Instructor Number Nine, what exactly is going on here?” This was definitely not the water element ...

“You can feel it, right? That’s right, I actually have two awakened elements. What I awakened was both water and fire, elements that were universally acknowledged as mutually incompatible. From the very beginning after awakening these elements, my instructor judged that I would never become a Domain master, because these two elements I awakened countered each other and could not coexist. If I pushed on and levelled them up, as soon as the two elements clashed within me, my outcome would inevitably be death by combustion ...” Number Nine recalled how she had completely lost all confidence when she had first heard her instructor’s judgment back then. If not for Number One, she might no longer exist right now.

Mandora ... the competition was too fierce. If one could not become strong, one could only be eliminated — this was something a high-achiever like her could not abide.

Ling Lan’s eyes lit up at her words. “So, Instructor Number Nine, you managed to find the secret to mix fire and water in the end?” Ling Lan knew very well that Instructor Number Nine was a Domain master now.

“Yes. Number One told me that since the heavens have allowed these two opposing innate talents to awaken in one body at the same time, then there must be a way for the two of them to coexist. The heavens would not push a person to despair. No one had managed to do so before only because they had not found the correct method, not because it was impossible. You must understand that existence is reason enough.” Number Nine passed on Instructor Number One’s words back then to Ling Lan. Though Number Nine’s telling of it was hazy and ambiguous, Ling Lan felt an idea spring to mind. Wasn’t this the Taoist theory from her past life: the paths of life number fifty; the heavens spawn forty-nine, while man seeks the final one 1 ? This meant that, no matter the circumstances, the realms of chance would forever leave a thread of hope for survival.

Number Nine did not know whether Ling Lan understood her meaning, so she continued to say, “From that time on, I began to research how I could get water and fire, these two mutually incompatible elements, to coexist. In the process, I was hurt many times, almost entering the gates of hell. Until one time, I turned my water element by force into extreme cold air ...”

“Cold air?” Picking up on the strange phrasing, Ling Lan instantly felt that this might be the key point.

Number Nine's eyes revealed her satisfaction at Ling Lan's agile comprehension, forever able to grasp the key points so quickly. With a smile in her eyes, she nodded and said, "That's right. In fact, for water to turn into a gaseous state, there are two ways. One is to use high temperatures to turn it into steam, while the other is to rely on extreme cold to turn water which has already crystallized into ice to vaporize into gas. This type of gas is the 'cold air' I mentioned ..."

Ling Lan naturally understood this point, so she nodded.

Instructor Number Nine saw Ling Lan nod and knew that Ling Lan had indeed understood. And so she went on to say, "After I changed my water element into extreme cold air, I tried inserting that cold air into fire. You should know that when fire burns, it will produce heat, and cold air can compress this heat indefinitely ..."

"Isn't this another contradiction?" asked Ling Lan, frowning.

"Yes. One side is producing heat while the other side is trying to remove the heat. It looks like they cannot coexist, but what if the temperature of the flame turns cold as well?" Number Nine seemed to be interested in assessing Ling Lan's ability to think. She did not state the answer directly, instead throwing the question to Ling Lan.

"Generally speaking, as long as the core heat of the flame is maintained, in theory, the flame would not disappear," replied Ling Lan after some thought. "However, till now, there has been no consensus on how much heat is needed to maintain the flame. Many scientists even suggest that negative temperatures can also maintain a burning flame, but this theory is currently unsubstantiated with actual numbers and is merely an exploratory theory." Ling Lan found the relevant theoretical discussion within her mindspace. As she spoke, her eyes became increasingly brighter, until she cried out joyfully in the end, "Could it be that Instructor Number Nine has truly found that data point where negative temperatures can sustain a burning flame?"

Instructor Number Nine nodded in satisfaction. "Yes. When I tried to lower the temperature of the flame, as soon as the temperature became low, the flame would become weaker and weaker until it finally fizzled out and died. However, I sensed that this might be the way out for me. After six years of repetitive research, I finally managed to turn the flame cold so that it no longer possessed the heat of fire. And when fire turns cold, it means that its friction against water had been reduced to the lowest point. Right after that, I spent another five years' time to finally fuse that water-based cold air into the cold flame. I just did not expect that the successful merging of water and fire would actually turn into Ice Flames capable of consuming every type of energy ... this thing, even I find it a little horrifying." At this point of her narration, Instructor Number Nine could not help but smile wryly.

At first, she had simply wanted to combine water and fire so she could successfully advance to become a Domain master. But by sheer fluke, her merging had resulted in an extremely horrifying killing move, forcing her to think twice every time she wanted to use her innate talent. Because once she used it, this meant a battle to the death with the opponent. Mind you, the moment Ice Flames came into play, there would be no survivors.

"I'm telling you all this just so you know that in this world, there are no absolutes. Just like in the case of your overly intractable aura — even though its trait is directly contrary to the nature of your body, that does not mean that there is no way to resolve this. Perhaps it will be very difficult to achieve a state

where body and aura become one, but I believe that as long as you have patience and research meticulously, once you find the common ground between the two, that will be when you will be able to fully resolve this issue.” Instructor Number Nine finally divulged her aim. She had shared her personal testimony so that Ling Lan would not be discouraged and become impatient, but seek a solution slowly.

“Thank you, Instructor Number Nine!” Ling Lan was deeply touched, once again thanking Number Nine sincerely. If even the most difficult and incompatible water and fire could coexist, then there should absolutely be no reason why the problem of her body and aura could not be resolved.

“Little Ling Lan, now you understand, right? If you want to walk your own Dao, then you’ll need to depend on your own strength to solve this problem. None of us can help you.” At this time, Instructor Number Five who had been acting as wallpaper all this while chimed in with a wide grin.

“Many thanks, Instructor Number Five.” Ling Lan turned her head to thank Instructor Number Five, but compared to the thanks she had uttered to Number Nine, this one was obviously less heartfelt, almost causing the smile to drop off of Instructor Number Five’s face.

“Ling Lan, since you already understand, then go back! Like Number Five said, everything depends on you now.” Number Nine saw Number Five’s face stiffen, and afraid that he would bear a grudge towards Ling Lan, she quickly urged Ling Lan to leave the learning space. That appearance of guarding one’s child made Number Five roll his eyes mentally ... was he truly such a petty person? Eh? It looked like he really was! Sure enough, the one who knew him best was still Lil Sis Number Nine! Number Five stroked his jaw as he smiled pensively.

Seeing Number Five reveal such an eerie smile, Number Nine sensed the danger even more keenly. She absolutely would not allow Ling Lan to once again suffer Number Five’s torments. Thus, she decisively shoved Ling Lan, and Ling Lan immediately felt her consciousness blacking out ...

“Little Ling Lan, remember, the key to resolving this is the Dao you choose. Figure it out quickly. What is your Dao exactly?” In a whirl of chaos, Ling Lan seemed to hear Instructor Number Five say this right by her ear. This surprised Ling Lan — when had Instructor Number Five become so kind?

After what seemed like a long time but also seemed like just a blink of an eye, Ling Lan once again regained consciousness. By then, she had already returned to the real world. She glanced down at the time displayed on the communicator on her wrist. Yep, it was still the same time she had left — only 10 seconds had elapsed since she had been whisked away.

Chapter 400: Plan to Create a God!

“Beep beep beep!” Early in the morning, the still asleep Han Yu was suddenly startled awake by the alert ringing from his communicator by his pillow. Eyes closed, he rummaged around his pillow and got his hands around the culprit which had disturbed his sleep. Only then did he open his eyes ...

Seeing a familiar name on the screen, Han Yu sobered up. He quickly sat up and clipped the communicator onto his wrist and pressed the button to connect the call.

Wei Ji’s figure appeared on the virtual screen. He was frowning and his expression was extremely grim. “Han Yu, did you know that early this morning, the mainframe announced some news?”

"I slept very late last night because I was preparing the documents needed for enlistment. If you hadn't woken me up, I would still be sleeping!" Han Yu could not help but yawn. The fifth-year cadets were all busy recently preparing to apply for enlistment, and so were almost completely oblivious to anything happening outside their windows.

"This past year of peace in the academy is coming to an end!" said Wei Ji solemnly.

"What happened?" Wei Ji's expression caused Han Yu's expression to turn serious as well. Han Yu knew very well that, as the vice regiment commander of Wuji, the other would not have come to disturb him so early in the morning unless something big had occurred.

"Leiting has made a move." Wei Ji told Han Yu the news he had learned this morning.

Han Yu reacted immediately. "The Lingtian Mecha Clan? Leiting's revenge match?" It looked like the Leiting Mecha Clan was truly vicious. Taking advantage of this time while the other party had yet to secure stable footing and were still weak to utterly crush the other.

"Yes. The mainframe has announced this news to every student early this morning. The challenge fight will be a week later, starting at 1 p.m. sharp. I think you should have received it too," Wei Ji added.

Han Yu immediately began scrolling through the news on his communicator, and found that half an hour back, he had indeed received an alert from the mainframe. It looked like the academy was also taking this challenge fight extremely seriously, otherwise they would not have issued this school-wide announcement.

"Eh? Leiting has chosen the 12-man small-scale mecha fight? Isn't this obviously giving the Lingtian Mecha Clan a chance?" Han Yu saw the associated details of the challenge fight and could not help but be surprised.

"Look at who is leading the team," Wei Ji reminded.

"Qiao Ting, haha, looks like Qiao Ting has decided to be ruthless. He won't be happy unless he has completely destroyed the Lingtian Mecha Clan," said Han Yu gleefully.

Han Yu also hated the Lingtian Mecha Clan with a passion right now, because Li Lanfeng and Zhao Jun had refused to collaborate with Wuji again at the start of this academic year. After some investigation, he had found that this had something to do with the Lingtian Mecha Clan. Although he could not be sure whether they had really joined the Lingtian Mecha Clan, the very thought of the possibility was enough to incite Han Yu's envy and hatred.

Indeed, Han Yu had cultivated a strategist-type character like Zhou Ya specifically because he wanted to weaken Li Lanfeng's prestige within the Wuji Mecha Clan. He always remembered what the previous regiment commander had said — people not belonging to their own faction were not deserving of trust. However, he had not finished wringing Li Lanfeng of all his worth; he truly could not bear to let such an excellent strategist leave Wuji like this ... at the bottom of it all, Zhou Ya was still a little weaker in comparison.

What made him even angrier was the fact that when Li Lanfeng had withdrawn and left, he had actually taken Zhao Jun with him. This infuriated Han Yu, as he believed that Li Lanfeng had dealt him a blow in secret. It should be known that Zhao Jun was their number one fighter in the Wuji Mecha Clan. Every

time they had a conflict with the other factions, Zhao Jun was an indispensable mainstay of their mecha clan ...

Thus, Han Yu hated Li Lanfeng, and this hatred was then extended to the Lingtian Mecha Clan which Li Lanfeng was hanging around so much. If the Leiting Mecha Clan could deal a devastating blow to the Lingtian Mecha Clan, he, Han Yu, would be happy to see it.

Han Yu had thought things through. If the Lingtian Mecha Clan was thoroughly beaten by the Leiting Mecha Clan, he would definitely lead some people to seek out Li Lanfeng and Zhao Jun. Then, with an absolutely haughty and condescending attitude, he would dispense his mercy upon them. However, at that time, their relationship would no longer be that of collaborative partners but of master and servants.

“No matter what the outcome of this match is, it can be predicted that from now on, our academy will be dragged into power disputes among the various major factions once more.” The actions of the Leiting Mecha Clan definitely would not stop there. After being a rival of Qiao Ting for four years, Wei Ji was extremely familiar with the other’s ambition. If Qiao Ting could make all the factions in the academy submit to his before he applied for enlistment, he would be able to justifiably become the king of the military academy. This would be of great benefit to his future development.

If he had possessed Qiao Ting’s current level of strength and ability, with the power of his faction, he, Wei Ji, would have probably found it hard to resist this temptation ...

“We should also make some preparations. Perhaps after a period of time, we too will receive a letter of challenge from Leiting,” said Wei Ji with a sigh. Without Zhao Jun around, their confidence was flimsy in going up against Leiting. Mind you, in their mecha fights with Leiting in the past, even though Zhao Jun was a level below Qiao Ting, he was one of the only three people who could withstand more than twenty moves from Qiao Ting. Of the other two, one was the regiment commander of Tianji, while the other was the vice regiment commander of Dwotong. In terms of mecha operation, both he and Han Yu were weaker than these three by a good margin.

“How terrible!” Han Yu had also thought of this. He slammed a vicious fist down on the edge of his bed, his hatred for Li Lanfeng rising once again. “Next week when the challenge fight begins. Don’t forget to remind me to go watch it together.” Han Yu had to personally witness the downfall of the Lingtian Mecha Clan — only with that would his rage be vented.

Due to Li Lanfeng, the Lingtian Mecha Clan thus became an innocent target for Han Yu to vent his anger.

“Who knows if the Lingtian Mecha Clan will choose to make the fight public? If they choose a closed fight, we won’t be able to spectate even if we want to,” said Wei Ji with a frown. The numbers of the challenge fight were chosen by the challenger, but the choice for the fight to be opened or closed laid with the side being challenged. Wei Ji was afraid that the Lingtian Mecha Clan would refuse to make the fight public in order to save face. If that happened, they would not be able to spectate the fight.

“I don’t think that will be the case this time ...” Han Yu’s face was suffused with schadenfreude. “If that were true, why would the academy mainframe go as far as to make a campus-wide announcement? I suspect that the administrators of the academy are also thinking of using this challenge fight to restore the academy’s morale. After a year of low spirits within the school, I think those old men are unable to

hold back anymore.” Han Yu had not been the regiment commander for Wuji for two years in vain — he did have some understanding of certain motives and strategies of the academy administrators.

Wei Ji’s gaze lit up at these words. Indeed, the academy mainframe’s announcement of the fight was indeed different from how things had been handled previously. It really looked like Han Yu was right — the academy administrators might very well be planning to use this challenge fight to rekindle the aggressive combative atmosphere of the military academy. In that case, they absolutely would not allow this challenge fight to end so quietly and unremarkably.

“The decision is no longer in the hands of the Lingtian Mecha Clan.” Wei Ji could not help but lament silently for the Lingtian Mecha Clan — it looked like in order for the academy to regain its liveliness, the academy administrators were going to sacrifice the Lingtian Mecha Clan without any hesitation.

“Qiao Ting ... his luck is amazing!” said Wei Ji, enviously. All conditions were in accord, everything favourable to Qiao Ting had been gathered — if he could not become the king of the military academy under these circumstances, then he would truly be unworthy of the care and attention the academy administrators were lavishing on him.

In the principal’s office of the First Men’s Military Academy, the seldom-seen principal finally appeared in this private office of his. His hair was white as stork feathers and his face was red and rosy, his entire person seeming very kind and friendly. However, his eyes were lively and spirited, and at times would even shine with a keen light. Overall, although the principal was already over 120 years old, he did not look the least bit decrepit.

In this era, following the rise in individual strength and development, the human lifespan had long ago broken past the age barrier 10,000 years ago. Now, living to the age of 200 was a sure thing barring any accidents. Those with superior strength could even live up to 300 years. Although the principal’s actual age was already over 120, his body was as strong as that of a 50 to 60-year-old man. Killing a level three demon-beast with his bare hands was still absolutely nothing to him.

Right then, he was looking intently at a proposal submitted by the vice principals and the faculty heads of the school. They were hoping he would approve their proposal and use the principal’s authority to declare the challenge fight between the Leiting Mecha Clan and the Lingtian Mecha Clan as an open fight.

After perusing the proposal carefully, the principal said, “With regards to the rights and obligations of the two parties in the challenge fight, the mainframe has already outlined the rules. Unless completely necessary, it’s better not to change anything.”

The eight people seated on the sofas in the principal’s office glanced at one another at the principal’s words, and in the end, one of them spoke up to explain, “Principal, it’s like this ...” That person spilled their thoughts and suggestions, and ended with, “The cadets now are lacking a pursuable goal. Although General Ling Xiao is the national idol, a legend of our Federation, it is precisely because he is too strong that the cadets cannot convince themselves that they can ever achieve what General Ling Xiao has. Therefore, our academy needs to produce a new idol for them, a new legend closer to the cadets, one

who is within reach and who may even make them feel as if, as long as they work hard, they too could reach his level ...”

“The air invasion incident a year ago has still affected our students’ morale. We need to make them forget about this and restore the fine tradition of our First Men’s Military Academy — the fierce and aggressive competition system!” Another person quickly chimed in in support. “So, this challenge fight is a perfect opportunity. It needs to be open to the entire academy for viewing so that the students’ battle spirit and bloodlust will be roused!”

After hearing what they had to say, the principal mused silently for several seconds, then said, “Are you all planning to use this challenge fight to create a legend?”

The group became still, sharing looks. They knew that it was impossible to hide anything before the experienced and astute principal. As such, all of them nodded honestly, confirming the principal’s speculations.

“The person you all have chosen is Qiao Ting?” A glimmer of light flashed past the principal’s eyes.

The principal’s words received nods from around the room once more. Qiao Ting was originally already the only fourth-year cadet who had managed to advance to ace operator level — it was clear to see that the other’s skill in mecha operation was abnormally strong. He was known within the school as the second Ling Xiao and had even received the favour of the Third Marshal now — his reputation within the academy was unmatched. As the top person in the academy, who else could they choose if not him?

The principal fell silent once more. Several seconds passed, as if he were analysing the pro and cons of the proposal, and in the end, he nodded and said, “Alright. Since everyone seems to be in agreement, I approve your proposal. I will use my authority as principal to set this match as an open fight. However, I must remind you all. Don’t think that everything will turn out as you wish. Man can plan, but it is up to the heavens if those plans bear fruit. There are no absolutes. I hope that when the time comes, you all do not regret your decision this day!”

“Of course not!” they replied, different voices in unison. Overjoyed, they felt right then that the principal was obviously worrying for no good reason. If a newly established mecha clan could defeat a senior mecha clan led by an ace operator — now that would be a true joke!

Seeing that these people were not taking his warning to heart at all, the principal was not angry. Meanwhile, having achieved their objective, the crowd quickly bid farewell to the principal and left his office.

In the end, only the principal was left alone in his spacious office. He sat behind his office desk and lifted that proposal once more to browse through it carefully. Finally, his lips twitched and a snicker escaped him.

This bunch of fools ... actually not taking the time and effort to properly understand the data on the members of the Lingtian Mecha Clan. The regiment commander of the Lingtian Mecha Clan, Ling Lan — that son of Ling Xiao who filled Ling Xiao’s eyes with unconcealed pride ... how could he be mediocre? Knowing Ling Xiao, he knew very well that for Ling Xiao to take so much pride in him, Ling Lan’s strength must not be simple. Ling Lan may even already be among the ranks of the ace operators. Would someone as aberrant as this be so easily defeated?

His subordinates' plan to create a god ... heaven knows who the created god would be in the end?

The principal walked over to the window to look out over the entire academy below. A slight smile pulled involuntarily at the corner of his lips.

The First Men's Military Academy may become very interesting! Oh, Ling Xiao, who could have guessed that time would pass so quickly. The time has actually come for your son to show off his talent ... I hope he will not disappoint us!