

## Crossing 421

### Chapter 421: Tactical Genius!

“Qiao Ting is done for!”

Seeing Qiao Ting being surrounded by the two mecha, all the spectating students thought the same. Those supporting the Leiting Mecha Clan felt overwhelmed with despair. Up against a pincer-style self-destruct attack from an advanced mecha and special-class mecha, even an ace mecha probably could not withstand the horrific force produced. Not to mention, Qiao Ting’s mecha had already received damage many times prior to this from the repeated tactical self-destructs of the Lingtian members ...

Quicker than words could say, two intense explosions rang out on the battlefield.

The three entangled mecha were instantly turned into a humongous fireball due to this massive explosive force. After that, this giant fireball smashed into the ground, sending up a spray of sand as well as quite a significant number of broken mecha parts and armour fragments.

Only after the yellow sand had settled did the spectating students see that a deep pit of about 10-metres deep and 100-metres wide had appeared in this desert land. And right in the centre of the pit, there was a lump of still burning wreckage ...

“Qiao Ting is not dead!” Heaven knows who yelled out. All the spectators pinned their stares on the burning wreckage, their hearts beginning to race and they could not help but hold their breath, waiting for the mainframe to announce the final verdict.

The mainframe indicated that Leiting still had one member left active; this proved that Qiao Ting currently still had not died and been kicked out of the battlefield. Everyone began to guess at Qiao Ting’s current condition — was he already so severely injured that he was merely holding onto his last breath, or had he been lucky enough to survive with some strength to continue fighting?

“Lingtian and Leiting ... now it’s finally one on one.” The spectators noticed how many people Leiting had left, but they also noted Lingtian’s information. They discovered that there was also only one person remaining in the Lingtian Mecha Clan, and that was that regiment commander of Lingtian’s who had been eliminating all the other Leiting members elsewhere, who had never faced Qiao Ting thus far in this fight.

The spectating cadets began to murmur in discussion. Li Lanfeng’s and Qi Long’s successful self-destructs must have dealt heavy damage to Qiao Ting. Furthermore, Qiao Ting had already been damaged from the successive self-destructs of the other Lingtian members before ... after all that, would the present Qiao Ting be able to match up against Lingtian’s regiment commander who was still in peak condition?

“Say, do you all think Qiao Ting will lose to Lingtian?” Right then, most students were not optimistic about Qiao Ting’s and Leiting’s chances. This was completely opposite to what they had all believed at the start.

This question spread across the entire venue, making the entire stadium noisy. Many people even predicted that Qiao Ting was truly doomed this time, because they believed that no matter how strong a mecha was, it was impossible for it to be unscathed after suffering the self-destructs of a special-class

operator and an advanced mecha warrior at the same time. Perhaps, Qiao Ting was already supremely fortunate for keeping his life — it was very likely that Qiao Ting's ace mecha had already lost all combat capability.

Of course, many of the senior cadets were still very supportive of Qiao Ting and the Leiting Mecha Clan — they still believed that the ace mecha operator Qiao Ting would not be taken down by this kind of barbaric self-destruct tactic of Lingtian's. Qiao Ting would definitely counterattack from these desperate depths and wrest victory back from the jaws of defeat.

Unconsciously, for the first time, phrases to do with 'defeat' or 'desperation' were used on the unbeatable myth of Qiao Ting. This showed that the seniors were actually uncertain too. They did not want to see the juniors successfully overcoming the seniors; they wanted to retain the suppression of seniors on the juniors. However, the reality was brutal — Qiao Ting had not projected his usual aggressive and domineering manner. Instead, he was being suppressed by the junior students. Now up to this point, the situation was extremely unfavourable — this caused the seniors who were supporting Leiting to be unable to keep calm.

Just when everyone was deep in discussion, that hunk of steel in the crater shuddered and then sprang into the sky. This action dislodged the flaming debris surrounding its core, and as the debris was shed to fall back into the crater below ...

Finally, the core revealed itself — it was Qiao Ting's ace mecha. However, at this time, this originally majestic ace mecha was incredibly dilapidated. Strictly speaking, it could not even be described as humanoid anymore.

Its entire right arm had been blasted off completely, revealing sparking wires of all sorts, and its head had also been half ruined by the explosion, leaving only half a face behind. Lower down, both legs were completely gone, and on its chest area, an extremely thick steel plate had been shattered. Several pieces had chipped off to expose the countless intricate wiring and parts behind it.

The only thing worth being thankful about is that the waist area where the cockpit was located was surprisingly not much damaged. This was also why Qiao Ting had been able to survive and why his mecha was still able to move around freely. After all, the cockpit was the true lifeblood of a mecha — as long as the cockpit was fine, even the most broken down mecha would still have some fight left in it.

"It's Qiao Ting! As expected of an ace mecha. Actually able to endure even after suffering all those self-destructs." The spectating students could not help but be envious. The sheer strength of an ace made their eyes burn with want. And many students who had already achieved advanced mecha warrior level and above secretly vowed to themselves that they would definitely advance to ace operator level. Ace mecha were clearly divine protective artefacts!

At this time, the administrators still did not know that their original god-creation plan to motivate the students to grow stronger and become more passionate in their mecha studies had come to fruition, albeit not in the way they had intended. Under the frenzied self-destructs of Lingtian, Qiao Ting had persevered, inspiring the students.

This display reminiscent of an undying cockroach gave students a much deeper understanding of ace mecha. They clearly realised now that, on the battlefield, only ace mecha could guarantee one's survival.

For the sake of their own safety, the students were eager to obtain their own ace mecha before entering an army division. This would push them to begin training their mecha control skills fervently, setting off a tenacious mecha training craze in the military academy.

This craze would not die down in the following few years. This made the First Men's Military Academy have a constant string of Qiao Ting's record being broken in those years — every year, there would be one to two students who succeeded in advancing to become ace operators.

The most horrifying would be Ling Lan's year — there were actually as many as five people who managed to advance to become ace operators. The moment this number emerged, the entire Huaxia Federation was astounded. This also reaffirmed the First Men's Military Academy's spot as the number one military school in the Federation.

Qiao Ting piloted his mecha to fly in the air. He swiftly checked on the condition of his mecha, and as he scanned down the A.I.'s report, a trace of bitterness could be seen on his face. His mecha's condition was really as bad as he imagined it to be; its overall damage rate was already up to 48%. The mecha's initially abundant energy had also been drained significantly in order to protect the mecha's main core — there was only 30% left. Meanwhile, in terms of weapons, aside from that single high-frequency blade in his left hand, he had nothing else.

Qiao Ting looked at the high-frequency blade in his hand and found that it was already very beat up due to the explosions and probably could not be used as a weapon anymore. He rapidly scanned his surroundings and soon discovered a beam saber which had belonged to god knows who lying about 300 metres away. Qiao Ting's heart was seized by joy. He operated his mecha over and with a quick swoop, at the same time he let go of his high-frequency blade, he picked up the beam saber from the ground.

Beam saber in hand, he checked its remaining power and found that it was still quite sufficient. Qiao Ting's heart settled — even if Lingtian's regiment commander Ling Lan appeared now, with this beam saber, he had the confidence to fight the other.

“Even with a half-destroyed mecha, I will let everyone in the academy know that defeating me, Qiao Ting, is impossible.” Qiao Ting gripped the beam saber in his hands tightly, swearing determinedly in his heart. After fighting for so hard and so long, now there was only one enemy left, Qiao Ting would not allow himself to lose this challenge fight at this last moment and become someone else's stepping stone.

Honour could only belong to him, Qiao Ting! Qiao Ting's eyes carried a touch of cold as he thought about the yet to appear Lingtian regiment commander, Ling Lan. He could not hide the ill feeling he had towards the other — for destroying the glorious image he had painstakingly cultivated, he would never let the other go.

Qiao Ting forced down the killing intent in his heart and swiftly conducted some minor adjustments and repairs on his mecha. He was very thankful that this was Mecha World where he could use some emergency means to improve his mecha's condition.

Focused on his mecha, Qiao Ting did not notice right then that several hundred metres behind him, a black mecha had already silently appeared in mid-air and appeared to be looking at him with an indifferent expression.

“Ah, he’s here!” The spectators noticed and exclaimed in unison.

In contrast to the sorry state of Qiao Ting’s mecha, the mecha of the Lingtian regiment commander seemed so bright and perfect, as if he had never been fighting at all.

“I just went back to review Lingtian No.1’s battles. Holy sh\*t, they were all one-hit kills! That final fight, against three Leiting mecha, wow ... it was still a one-hit kill?! How can this be? How did he do it?” The students who had been following Qiao Ting’s fight all this time only thought of looking up the Lingtian regiment commander’s fights now. When they viewed that final fight, they saw how the other had eliminated three Leiting members simultaneously with one move. This godly battle record was unbelievable. Even Qiao Ting had been unable to accomplish that when he had been up against three Lingtian members on his end who were operating advanced mecha just like the Leiting members.

“Watch closely. He did not face them from the front. This Lingtian regiment commander is very sneaky. Every fight was an ambush, where he hid from the opponent and assassinated them with a sneak attack ...” Those students who had studied Ling Lan’s fights carefully could not help but speak up to remind those exclaiming students.

Chided, those students began reviewing the fights again from start to finish and found that it was indeed as those people had said. The Lingtian regiment commander was just too sly, often hiding in places no one would have considered. In particular, in that last fight, he had actually boldly impersonated a destroyed mecha and faked thick columns of smoke coming out from his mecha’s body. This had drawn the three Leiting members over to investigate, clueless and unsuspecting, where they were then killed off by the Lingtian regiment commander.

“He is a tactical genius!” Observing Ling Lan’s combat style, Tang Yu and the principal thought long and hard, and this was the only answer they could come up with.

Chapter 422: Trust!

Ling Lan had used the simplest and most energy efficient way to eliminate those Leiting members. However, thinking back on Ling Lan’s combat style, everyone was confounded, because no one could see anything from Ling Lan’s fights. The spectators had only seen how cunning, sly, and imaginative Ling Lan’s combat tactics had been ...

“His control skills should be equally strong, otherwise he would not be able to do this much that perfectly,” said Tang Yu, somewhat tentatively. Even though he knew Ling Lan was a special-class operator, he could not tell which stage of special-class Ling Lan was at.

“Interesting as expected.” The principal chuckled. This style was really like Ling Xiao’s ... back then, that fellow Ling Xiao had been just as unpredictable. When Ling Xiao had first joined the army division, even the principal had not been able to figure out which level Ling Xiao was at. All of the information everyone knew about Ling Xiao was merely surface details and could not be taken to be fully accurate ...

“The second Ling Xiao ... other than his son, who else could do this?” These words of the principal were practically mumbled through closed lips — even seated beside him, Tang Yu could hardly hear him. Tang Yu raised his head curiously and asked, “Principal, what did you say? Are you talking to me?”

“Nothing. I just think that this match is very interesting. Our military academy really has a lot of good seedlings.” The principal burst out laughing at his words — to ensure the safety of his good friend’s son, he could not tell Tang Yu the truth.

Tang Yu nodded in agreement — this year was indeed rife with talent, almost dazzling his eyes with it all. Unfortunately, in order to guarantee the proper cultivation of the students, the academy had regulated that each instructor could take in no more than 5 students. And he, due to Lin Zhong-qing, had already asked the principal to make an exception for him once; he could not be greedy anymore.

Although Qiao Ting did not notice Ling Lan’s appearance immediately, Qiao Ting was after all an ace operator. Very soon, he discovered Ling Lan’s presence several 100 metres away. He whipped around, and when he saw the perfect, gleaming appearance of the special-class mecha, which was somehow fearsome and formidable at the same time, he could not help but shout through clenched teeth, “Ling Lan!”

Ling Lan looked at the beat up, no longer humanoid mecha of Qiao Ting and said with a cool expression, “I did not expect that after our members’ consecutive self-destructs, your mecha can still hold on. Colour me surprised.”

Frankly, after resolving those final three Leiting members, Ling Lan had rushed to the scene. However, in order not to affect Li Lanfeng and Qi Long, she had been observing this fight from about a kilometre away.

Of course, Ling Lan could have chosen to join the fight. With her abilities, she definitely could have killed Qiao Ting off and welcomed victory together with Li Lanfeng and Qi Long. However, Ling Lan did not want to do that, because she wanted to see how her leopard and the follower she had painstakingly cultivated would perform. Moreover, she hoped that the both of them would gain something from their fight with Qiao Ting.

It had to be said that Ling Lan was a worrier. She had taken Li Lanfeng and Qi Long to heart, so she wanted to increase their strength to the best of her ability. As such, she was willing to drag out the fight and even forsake the favourable scenario to her team at this moment in time, all so that Li Lanfeng and Qi Long would have the chance to truly exchange several moves with Qiao Ting.

Reality proved that Ling Lan did not make a mistake. Li Lanfeng’s performance amazed her; she had not expected her leopard to actually keep what she had said offhand so close to his heart ...

That had been during the time after the enemy air invasion on the academy ...

Not having to attend classes, Ling Lan was rather bored, so she had put all her attention onto Li Lanfeng and his physical constitution problem. During that period of time, Li Lanfeng finally experienced the Boss’s exclusive hellish training Qi Long and the others had mentioned. Every day, he would be trained by Ling Lan until he collapsed from exhaustion.

In contrast to Qi Long and the others’ attitude of avoiding it as much as they could, Li Lanfeng was happy to experience it. Every time, he was practically crawling as he left the virtual login pod, but the next day, he would still appear in full spirits before Ling Lan. This made Ling Lan suspect at one point whether Li Lanfeng was a masochist, but Li Lanfeng’s indefatigable performance had also given Ling Lan a deep taste of the pleasure Instructor Number Five felt when training others ...

Sure enough, tormenting others was really very interesting! Of course, every time Ling Lan felt this way, she would crush the feeling mercilessly, not allowing it to flourish. She would then chastise herself sternly that she absolutely did not have that perverse mentality of Instructor Number Five — she was only so strict with her leopard all for his own good.

Finally, after some agonising torment, Li Lanfeng's physical constitution took a turn for the better and was now already extremely close to that of the average mecha operator. But if it came to a high-intensity battle, his stamina would still be stretched rather thin.

Ling Lan was not too concerned about this, however, because she knew that this constitution problem was not something that could be resolved in just a day or two. Back then, she had also spent a whole three to four years' time to fully resolve the latent issues caused by her excessive spiritual power. For Li Lanfeng to have accomplished this much in several months' time, Ling Lan felt that he had already done very well.

Ling Lan may not be anxious about the matter, but Li Lanfeng was. That said, he was not rushing to solve everything in one go and eradicate his constitution problem completely. This was because Li Lanfeng knew very well that this problem could not be solved in a short period of time. Now, with Ling Lan's help, he had almost resolved the constant threat of his body breaking down which had plagued him for many years. Just this point alone was enough to satisfy him.

Li Lanfeng's anxiety was revolving around the upcoming Leiting vengeance match. He was afraid that his stamina problem would hold the others back. To that end, he had once asked his rabbit how he could do better on the battlefield.

Frankly, whether Li Lanfeng performed well or not did not matter much in the large scale of things for Ling Lan. However, when she saw Li Lanfeng's eyes shining brightly, eager to perform well, Ling Lan just could not bear to speak honestly.

In the spirit of not harming an old friend, Ling Lan considered things seriously and then said to Li Lanfeng that, if he wanted to last longer in battle, he would need to treasure every bit of his stamina. He could not throw his stamina around profligately like that stamina monster Qi Long; he needed to carefully calculate every move he made and strive to make sure his every attack was effective.

Ling Lan's advice made Li Lanfeng feel rather lost. So, Ling Lan kindly hinted to Li Lanfeng that if he could not be a berserk warrior, then he should become a swordsman or an assassin ...

These words of Ling Lan's had left Li Lanfeng in deep contemplation. On her end, Ling Lan had promptly forgotten about it after saying it, not taking the matter to heart. But today, seeing Li Lanfeng's combat style, he had completely walked onto the path Ling Lan had outlined for him and he had performed outstandingly.

Ling Lan was greatly moved by this. She was touched over Li Lanfeng's trust in her — it was due to this trust that he would take her words so seriously and even change his combat style accordingly ... Li Lanfeng's outstanding performance proved that he had put in a lot of effort in secret to research these things and had not just changed things blindly. In order to accomplish his mission, Li Lanfeng had even quietly sought out Chang Xinyuan to design this trap together. It had to be said that this idea of Li

Lanfeng and Chang Xinyuan's worked wonderfully in tandem with her planned tactic. Ling Lan could not help marvelling at their creativity and innovativeness.

Li Lanfeng's performance had exceeded Ling Lan's expectations, but Qi Long's performance had not disappointed Ling Lan either. Lurking, grasping the timing to attack, and other aspects, Qi Long had done all those things well. The only pity was that his mecha's speed was just too weak. If the speed of Qi Long's mecha could have been increased by just a hair, perhaps she would not even have had to take part in this final fight. Li Lanfeng and Qi Long might have been able to finish off Qiao Ting on their own.

Such a shame ... Ling Lan felt rather regretful. She was not Qiao Ting; she did not really care whether she could be in the limelight. Compared to all this, she was more concerned over her members' performance — if Qi Long and Li Lanfeng had been able to eliminate Qiao Ting on their own, she would have been even happier.

Ling Lan decided that she would definitely increase the speed of Qi Long's mecha and make Qi Long a close combat king with both speed and power.

At this moment, Qi Long, who had already been ejected from the field, suddenly felt a chill run up his spine. He could not help but shiver and immediately circulate his Qi-Jin to chase the chill out even as he muttered in confusion, "That's strange. Where is this cold feeling coming from?"

Qi Long did not know that his boss could not tolerate his tortoise speed and was already planning to "torture" him well ...

Opposite her, Qiao Ting did not know that Ling Lan was feeling regretful over the fact that her leopard and follower had not been able to finish him off themselves. When he heard Ling Lan's disdainful words, he almost exploded in anger. When had he, Thunder King Qiao Ting, ever been looked down upon by a mecha newbie who had just risen to their second year and had yet to even touch real mecha?

"Just those rookie team members of yours ... even though they used this type of despicable self-destruct methods, they won't be able to defeat me. In this military academy, no one can defeat me. No one," declared Qiao Ting vehemently, eyes bloodshot. He, Qiao Ting, was an undefeated king!

"Is that so?" Ling Lan could not help but raise her eyebrows at his words. Looking at Qiao Ting's battered mecha, Ling Lan did not know where the other's confidence was coming from. Even if her mecha was mistaken to be a special-class mecha, comparing her almost undamaged mecha to Qiao Ting's dilapidated mecha, anyone with eyes could see that the odds were on her side.

"Honestly, dying at my members' hands would have been luckier for you." Ling Lan studied Qiao Ting carefully before speaking again. Her voice was as cold as ever, but all the spectators could hear how seriously she meant what she said.

Ling Lan's words caused an uproar among the audience. Even though Ling Lan's chances looked better, Qiao Ting was still the acknowledged number one in the academy after all. As long as he could still operate his mecha, no one could be certain that they would be able to defeat him. Ling Lan's words were obviously rather arrogant and presumptuous, raising the hackles of many in the audience. In particular, the administrators of the academy undoubtedly felt as if Ling Lan's words were smacking them in the face.

“This punk ...” The principal could not help but shake his head. He had originally thought that this child had inherited Ling Xiao’s low profile manner, but now, from the looks of it, Ling Lan was still a little too young and unbridled.

In truth, the principal was blaming Ling Lan unfairly. Ling Lan had really meant no disrespect to Qiao Ting with her words, nor had the words contained any so-called arrogance. The fact was that Ling Lan was merely speaking the truth. If Qiao Ting had died under the consecutive self-destructs of her members, he would still have been able to use the excuse that Lingtian’s tactics had been too despicable. However, if he died at her hands without being able to resist, Qiao Ting would have no excuse, and Ling Lan truly did not want to deal such a heavy blow to the prideful heart of this aberrant talent.

Chapter 423: Not Much After All!

“Shut up.” How could Qiao Ting know the truth of Ling Lan’s words? He was thoroughly enraged by these seemingly disdainful words. Pointing his beam saber angrily at Ling Lan, he laughed wildly and said, “Hahaha ... if you want to kill me, just you all, Lingtian, are not qualified enough.”

“Not qualified enough?” Ling Lan was unconcerned that she was being looked down on, but she would not allow her companions and teammates to be looked down on. She could not help but sneer at Qiao Ting’s words, and she then slowly pulled out a weapon from behind her back. Just like that, a sword-type cold weapon that was even bigger and even heavier than Qi Long’s had been emerged before the crowd.

Ling Lan held the sword with one hand, and with an easy swing, a strong gust of wind was produced out of nowhere. This scene astounded all the spectating cadets and caused Qiao Ting’s gaze to narrow as well, his expression turning even grimmer.

Ling Lan’s expression was nonchalant as she held this giant cold weapon. She said measuredly, “Who exactly is not qualified enough? Let’s battle it out.”

“My pleasure,” responded Qiao Ting coldly, beam saber in hand. For his dreams, for his ambitions, he could not lose here.

After saying that, Qiao Ting faced Ling Lan from a distance. Neither side made a move, merely hovering in the air like two statues.

The spectating students all knew that both combatants were looking for openings in the other’s defence. As soon as one found a chance, a grand fight would begin ...

Five seconds, ten seconds, thirty seconds, one minute, three minutes, five minutes ... time passed bit by bit, and the two still did not make a move. Just as everyone was about to lose their patience, the two combatants finally moved.

Almost at the same time, the two mecha rushed at each other. Perhaps because they had had plenty of time to prepare, their speeds were like light, suddenly crossing paths then suddenly breaking apart again. The spectating students did not even actually see the two of them move. All they saw was a beam of cold light and a beam of white light shining against one another and then disappearing abruptly ... by the time they could see the two mecha clearly again, the two combatants had already crossed each other and swapped positions.

The only change was that they were now back to back instead of facing each other. The two mecha still maintained their attack stances, each holding their respective weapons ...

“Is it a draw?” The spectators could not tell. They all began discussing with the people around them, trying to figure out the result of that last exchange. Unfortunately, the people around them were similarly in the dark. Equally confused, they never managed to find a proper answer.

“Ah, they’re moving!” Someone yelled out, drawing everyone’s attention back to the battlefield.

Ling Lan could be seen slowly sliding the giant sword in her hand back into the sheath slot on her mecha’s back. With an audible ‘click’, the giant sword slid back into place.

Following this sound, Qiao Ting’s mecha which had been suspended in the air, still and silent, suddenly broke apart ... only then did the audience see that Qiao Ting’s mecha had actually been forcibly split in half, and the split even encompassed Qiao Ting’s cockpit.

It turned out that, when the two mecha had attacked as they passed each other, Ling Lan had instantly split apart Qiao Ting’s mecha and its cockpit, defeating Qiao Ting in one blow without giving him any chance to fight back.

“Thunder King Qiao Ting, not much after all!” Ling Lan commented coldly. She turned her head around to watch dispassionately as Qiao Ting’s mecha broke apart to fall to the ground.

This image was etched into everyone’s minds — a black mecha with its back to the crowd, hovering in the air. Its head was turned around slightly, and the faint blue light shining from the mecha’s eyes seemed to look down at everyone, announcing that the new king had arrived.

“Beep!” All the spectating students received this notification alert from the mainframe. It officially declared the end of the match, for Leiting’s headcount of remaining members had changed from 1 to 0.

The entire venue exploded with noise. This reality sent the entire academy into a frenzy — the number one of the military academy, the one and only ace operator Qiao Ting, had really been defeated. And the one who had defeated him was actually a junior cadet who had just entered their second year.

The mainframe quickly announced that the Lingtian Mecha Clan had obtained the victory of this challenge match. When the members of the Lingtian Mecha Clan saw this result, they all leapt up in exhilaration. Some of them were even moved to tears. Before the big fight, none of them had dared to imagine that they would really be able to obtain victory. The only reason they had not chosen to withdraw from the clan was that they did not want to submit to an older faction, just as it had been back during their days at the Central Scout Academy, when they had rather instigate a grand armed melee than submit to the 10th graders.

“Your juniors performed very well ...” In another viewing room, someone said to another, “Unfortunately, they established a new mecha clan. If they had joined the Dwotong faction, the position of number one faction would have been at our fingertips.” These people were part of Zhang Jing-an’s group, part of the number four faction in the military academy, the Dwotong Mecha Clan 1 .

Zhang Jing-an huffed coldly at the other’s words and said, “Stop dreaming. That person, Ling Lan, cannot be taken down by anyone.” In the past, Zhang Jing-an had tried, only to be crushed so badly by the other that he had no face to continue staying at the Doha Central Scout Academy. He had only been able to

slink away to the First Men's Military Academy to lick his wounds. Now, the number one of the military academy, Qiao Ting, had also wanted to bring Ling Lan to heel, and he had likewise been beaten so badly by the other that he had lost all direction ...

"An instant kill! Qiao Ting has disgraced himself big time this time." Recalling the past, Zhang Jing-an indeed felt very humiliated. However, in comparison to the current Qiao Ting, he felt his experience was really nothing after all, and so his mood improved considerably.

"Yes, Qiao Ting can be said to have thoroughly flipped his boat in the gutter this time. He's lost all the honour and prestige he had worked so hard to build up these past four years." The person beside him agreed wholeheartedly. His eyes did not hide any of his own ambition. "Perhaps, this will be our chance ..."

"Don't act rashly. Tianji and Wuji still haven't acted. Our Dwtong should not stick our necks out first," said Zhang Jing-an in warning. He did not want to pit himself against Ling Lan once again; that fellow is really too unfathomable ...

Unfortunately, the other person did not seem to take Zhang Jing-an's words seriously. Seeing this, Zhang Jing-an's mouth twitched, but he held himself back in the end and did not say anything more to dissuade the other.

Zhang Jing-an did not continue to dissuade the other because he was about to apply for enlistment with the army divisions, so he had already officially stepped down as the regiment commander of the Dwtong Mecha Clan. The newly appointed regiment commander was not from the Doha Central Scout Academy, and so he did not know Ling Lan's true capabilities. No matter how formidable he painted Ling Lan to be, the other would not believe him. As such, he might as well let the other experience Ling Lan's fearsomeness for himself — that would be much more persuasive.

Everyone was excited over Lingtian's upset win over Leiting, and they were especially filled with envy-jealousy-hate when it came to Lingtian's regiment commander, Ling Lan ... because Ling Lan was the one who had dislodged the undefeated legend from his high horse, and on top of that, he had accomplished a one-hit kill on Qiao Ting. This was an unrealizable dream for all of the cadets, but Ling Lan had realized it.

"Is Lingtian's regiment commander really very strong?" This was the question in all the cadets' hearts. If he was not strong, then how had he managed to kill the half-crippled Thunder King in one second? Even half-crippled, the Thunder King was still the Thunder King ...

Right then, the VIP viewing room was already completely silent. Lingtian's successful reversal made the expressions of the administrators turn very sour. If they had known this would be the outcome, they would not have requested for the principal to make this an open match. This way, they might still have used their authority to declare this match null and void, but everything was irrefutable now.

After all, Qiao Ting's defeat had been before the eyes of all the cadets; the outcome could no longer be changed. Their initial plans were now completely dashed. Besides that, Qiao Ting, whom they had carefully cultivated over the past four years, had utterly lost his value due to this defeat. What was even more worrying was that this loss had caused Leiting to lose their title as number one faction of the military academy. Three months later, the Federation would be holding the All Federation Military

Academy Grand Mecha Tournament. If they really sent the Lingtian Mecha Clan which had gained the position of number one faction by defeating Leiting here today to represent the academy, would this cause the First Men's Military Academy to become the bottom last school, thus becoming the laughingstock of the entire Federation?

The administrators were distraught at the very thought — they very quickly gathered together once more to begin discussing how they would resolve this issue. In the end, they decided they would let Tianji and Wuji, part of the top three factions, to take turns to challenge the Lingtian Mecha Clan within these three months, and strive to pull the Lingtian Mecha Clan down from that top spot.

This fight had pretty much exposed the full strength of the Lingtian Mecha Clan. If Qiao Ting had not been overconfident and had sent a few more special-class operators onto the field, the outcome might have been different ... at this thought, the administrators were extremely upset, becoming displeased with Qiao Ting's arrogance and overconfidence.

The only two who were not part of the plotting were Tang Yu and the principal — they were currently deeply stunned. In those final moments of the match, they had discovered a secret. In that final clash between Ling Lan and Qiao Ting, everyone had been fooled by the outer appearance of Ling Lan's mecha. They believed that Qiao Ting had only been killed instantly by Ling Lan's special-class mecha because Qiao Ting's mecha had been too severely damaged.

However, all of this could not deceive the keen eyes of these two people. The two of them shared a glance, a look in their eyes that only the two of them understood. Everything that Ling Lan displayed in that moment where she had killed Qiao Ting proved that the mecha she was operating could not be a special-class mecha. Whether it was in terms of explosive power or in terms of attack force, special-class mecha could never achieve those stats.

Although special-class mecha and ace mecha seemed to just be one level apart, in truth, the difference between all aspects of performance of the two level of mecha was like heaven and earth. Truth be told, even the most beat up ace mecha could not have been destroyed instantly by a special-class mecha. If ace mecha could be so easily defeated and destroyed, it would not have become the king of the battlefield.

To be able to achieve a one-hit kill against an ace mecha, only another ace mecha could do so. As such, without a doubt, Lingtian No.1, that is, the mecha Ling Lan was operating, was definitely no special-class mecha but a true ace mecha.

The principal and Tang Yu had discovered Ling Lan's secret, but they both decided in unplanned unison to keep silent. They were well aware of the parable of how the tallest tree in the forest would be destroyed — in order to protect this aberrant talent, they must bury the truth of the matter deep in their hearts.

"Tang Yu, that kid Ling Lan, I'll leave him to you," said the principal solemnly to Tang Yu. In the military academy, the only one he could trust completely was Tang Yu.

Tang Yu nodded gravely back and said, "Understood, principal. I will protect him well." Advancing to ace operator level in his second year ... Tang Yu knew that as soon as this news got out, it was not impossible

for another enemy nation air invasion to be drawn to the school. The Federation's nemeses would never allow another Ling Xiao to appear in the Federation.

#### **Chapter 424: You Are Destined to Be My Stepping Stone!**

In the Leiting Mecha Clan's headquarters, there were currently quite a few people morosely gathering up their things. They all needed to move out of this place by 2 p.m. this afternoon.

According to the academy's duel regulations, if a lower level mecha clan managed a reversal in a challenge duel, all the benefits the higher level mecha clan enjoyed would be transferred to the winning mecha clan. Therefore, this mecha clan headquarters, the largest in the military academy which represented the number one faction, would no longer belong to the Leiting Mecha Clan but would officially become the headquarters of the Lingtian Mecha Clan.

To that effect, the time given to the Leiting Mecha Clan to pack up and leave was just three days, and today was precisely the third day.

Very soon, the time was close to 2 p.m. Many of the already packed clan members were about to leave when one Leiting member, hefting his things up in his arms, swept a look around this place they had spent so many years in, and a crestfallen expression appeared on his face as he sighed and said, "Who'd have expected that we would one day leave this place in disgrace? I always thought that this would always be the place for us to grow before we graduate from the military academy."

At his words, his companion by his side could not hide his bitter smile as he said, "Yes, our Leiting has always been the strongest mecha clan in the academy all these years, standing proud above the rest ... sadly, we actually lost in a situation where we most could not afford to lose. The decision of the regiment commander this time ..." At this point, he suddenly clammed up, merely shaking his head. In fact, he was extremely dissatisfied with the arrangements of the regiment commander this time. He felt that Regiment Commander Qiao Ting had been too reckless in his overconfidence. If the Leiting Mecha Clan had sent out all of their best elites, how could their Leiting have lost? Then, they would not have had to leave the headquarters so pathetically today.

"The regiment commander was indeed rather rash this time." Another member by their side could not help but comment when he overheard their conversation. If Qiao Ting had not been the one and only ace operator in the academy and thus had great repute within the Leiting Mecha Clan, perhaps his misstep and defeat this time would have been enough for his subordinates to impeach him.

"Shh, don't say anymore. The people from Lingtian are here." Another member leaving together with them saw that there were people entering from the main doors now and quickly spoke up to warn them to mind their words.

His reminder silenced everyone instantly. Everyone's attention turned towards the main doors to focus on the group of youths stepping into the hall right at that moment.

There were about 15 to 16 of them, and most of them had excited smiles on their faces. It was clear to see that these hot-blooded youths were overjoyed and somewhat worked up over springing straight up to become the strongest faction of the academy in one bound. These half-grown youngsters were still

rather immature and unpolished — they had not learned yet how to hide their emotions well. These radiant smiles were frankly rather irritating to the eyes of the Leiting members who had yet to leave the headquarters; animosity quickly brewed within their gazes.

“Hmph, what a bunch of petty victors. Hopefully they won’t be slinking out of here in shame in just a month.” A fiery-tempered Leiting member could not help but sneer at this time.

The military academy had ruled before that every mecha clan would have the right to challenge another mecha clan once per year, and any mecha clan could only be challenged once a month. This year, Leiting had already used up their challenge for this vengeance match, so they had no more chances. However, the members of Leiting believed that the other factions in the academy definitely would not give up this opportunity to become the first faction. A month later, there would inevitably be another mecha clan which would challenge Lingtian — it was just unclear which of the remaining three mecha clans of the top four, Tianji, Wuji, or Dwotong, would be the first to challenge Lingtian.

“Perhaps, they will create the record for shortest tenure as the number one faction in the academy,” said another Leiting member mockingly. His words made many of the other Leiting members’ lips curl up in disdainful smirks. They had already forgotten that the ones who had pulled them off their divine pedestal was precisely this Lingtian Mecha Clan they were so disdainful of.

The youths at the door did not care at all about the hostile stares. Despite their excitement, their gazes filled with the eagerness to explore their new headquarters, they did not continue to move forwards. Instead, they stopped at the door, looking around from time to time, as if waiting for someone.

One of the most eye-catching was an incomparably beautiful teenager. Each move and each smile of that teen were unequivocally breath-taking — even though the Leiting people were filled with animosity towards the Lingtian people, they could not deny that they had indeed been mesmerized by the youth’s beauty. If they had not known that all students accepted by the First Men’s Military Academy had to be male, there would certainly be a significant number of people who would be wondering right now whether the youth was a crossdressing female. Although the chest area was very flat, in this militaristic society right now, it was not uncommon for girls to be less endowed in this respect.

Suddenly, that lovely youth’s subtle smile bloomed into a large smile, a smile so radiant that it dazzled the senses, causing everyone present to instantly lose themselves in it for a moment ...

“Boss!” A warm voice accompanied by a warm smile — many of the Leiting boys dearly wished that this cry was for them.

But very quickly, everyone was dealt a cold awakening. An austere youth stepped through the doors of the number one faction under the respectful gazes of the other Lingtian youths to come into the main hall. As soon as he entered the hall, the ambient temperature in the room instantly plunged to freezing point.

“Boss!” When the Lingtian youths saw this austere youth, they instantly greeted him with respectful expressions.

The cold-faced youth swept an icy gaze over them and then nodded slowly in acknowledgement. This action appeared somewhat perfunctory, but the youths did not seem to feel that way. Rather, their uptight expressions actually relaxed considerably following the youth’s actions.

This was the response they expected from their boss — if the expression or motion had been any different, they might perhaps be terrified, wondering whether they had done something wrong and if their boss was about to deal with them.

Those Leiting members who had initially stared at the Lingtian group with contempt instantly tucked away the sneers on their faces at the entrance of this person. They had not forgotten that it was this person who had unseated their Thunder King from his throne.

That's right, this frigid teenager was our main protagonist Ling Lan. She was here today to accept the handover of the number one faction's headquarters. As soon as the transfer was done, the Lingtian Mecha Clan would officially become the number one faction of the military academy. Of course, to secure this position was not easy — they would have to accept and weather the consecutive challenges of the other factions in the academy in the subsequent few months, but what Ling Lan feared least was challenge.

Three people trailed behind Ling Lan; they were the three other regiment commanders of the Lingtian Mecha Clan, Qi Long, Wu Jiong, and Li Yingjie.

Wu Jiong followed Ling Lan into the hall and took a look around. Not seeing the person he was looking for, he quickly stepped forward to come up to Ling Lan's side and said with a soft chuckle, "Boss Lan, Qiao Ting isn't here yet." Wu Jiong wondered if Qiao Ting was too embarrassed to come earlier.

Ling Lan's lips quirked. "When 2 o'clock comes, he will definitely appear." The academy would not permit its rules to be broken — no matter how much Qiao Ting resisted, he would still come to carry out this responsibility at that final moment.

"When Qiao Ting challenged us, he must never have imagined this moment. He's definitely too embarrassed to come early, hahaha ..." Li Yingjie heard the conversation between Wu Jiong and Ling Lan, and he chimed in with smug laughter.

In contrast to Wu Jiong's and Ling Lan's restrained manner, Li Yingjie's voice was obviously much louder. Those Leiting members who had yet to leave the hall were all enraged by his arrogance — some of them even looked about to charge over to punch him, but they were held back by their companions. All of a sudden, the atmosphere of the entire hall was tense.

Ling Lan and Wu Jiong sweatdropped. This Li Yingjie was an absolute troublemaker — they were here to accept the transfer of the headquarters and not to instigate a fight ...

Trailing behind them lazily, Qi Long sensed the sudden shift in the hall's atmosphere and his spirits rallied instantly. He looked around with lively eyes, his earlier indolence completely swept away. He licked his lips and said excitedly, "Boss, is there going to be a fight?"

Bored as he was, he had not paid any attention to Ling Lan and the others' conversations and so did not really know what was going on. However, his beast-like instinct had alerted him to the potential of a fight.

Wu Jiong could no longer maintain his initially serious expression at Qi Long's words. His facial muscles twitched, and he sent a plaintive gaze at Ling Lan, obviously complaining to Ling Lan for assigning him two such offbeat partners ...

Whether it was with the New Cadet Regiment back then or the Lingtian Mecha Clan now, Ling Lan had always held a laissez-faire attitude as a general. All clan internal affairs were handled by Wu Jiong, Qi Long, and Li Yingjie. Unfortunately, the haughty Li Yingjie would stir up some trouble every so often, and when he could not settle the matter himself, Wu Jiong and Qi Long would be dragged in as well to help him clean up the mess. On the other hand, although Qi Long did not cause as much trouble as Li Yingjie did, he was perpetually at the combat arena. To ask him to handle the affairs of the faction ... fine, to pry him out of the combat arena was even harder than directly asking Boss Lan for help in Wu Jiong's opinion.

Then again, to ask Boss Lan for help ... Wu Jiong felt that he really had no way of withstanding that piercing gaze capable of freezing a person to death. Every time he had no other choice but to seek Boss Lan out to resolve a problem, Wu Jiong felt that his lifespan had been reduced by at least five years. So that he did not die before his time, he decided that it was better for him to just put in the extra effort himself.

Wu Jiong's mournful gaze was resolutely ignored by Ling Lan. She pretended that she did not know anything — she would not step into this stinking puddle of water 1 would not step into this stinking puddle of water 不趟这摊烂水: i.e. not going to involve herself in this mess. .

Right at that moment, the elevator at the end of the hall suddenly dinged. The elevator doors opened, and a handsome youth with chiselled features appeared before the crowd. His initially domineering and confident brow now carried a touch of gloom, his entire being seeming somewhat diminished. He was the present regiment commander of Leiting, Qiao Ting.

When he saw Ling Lan standing by the doors, his gaze flickered and he hesitated for a moment. But he quickly shook it off and strode out of the elevator to come before Ling Lan.

The two of them faced each other. Even though Ling Lan was half a head shorter than Qiao Ting, she did not lose to the other in terms of force of presence. Rather, the sharp chill surrounding Ling Lan was even more evident through the encounter — for a brief moment, the other people there even had the impression that the Thunder King was being suppressed by Ling Lan.

At this sight, Ling Lan's eyes narrowed. Her already cold and expressionless face became even more forbidding. Those who understood Ling Lan well would know that this was an indication that Ling Lan had become even more serious and vigilant.

The two youths did not say anything, merely staring at each other in silence for one to two minutes. The atmosphere in the entire hall was unbelievably heavy — some people with lower tolerance found their bodies beginning to tremble, pressed so far by the two's auras that they were on the verge of breaking down.

Just when everyone thought that the two youths would continue their silent confrontation indefinitely, Qiao Ting spoke up first. "You have come." Perhaps only Qiao Ting knew the full meaning behind these simple three words.

The moment Qiao Ting opened his mouth to speak, the heavy atmosphere was swept away. Those who were on the brink of collapse due to the pressure from the two youths abruptly felt the pressure ease and were revived.

“I have come,” replied Ling Lan, likewise three words in return. Perhaps only Ling Lan herself understood the true meaning behind these three words as well.

Qiao Ting raised his eyebrows slightly at her words and said calmly, “Follow me.” Having said that, he turned to leave, unconcerned whether Ling Lan and the rest could keep up.

Qiao Ting’s attitude made the expressions of the Lingtian members change. Rage rose in many of their eyes, but all of this died away under Ling Lan’s cool gaze. Everyone could read the meaning in Ling Lan’s eyes — she was telling all of them to be quiet and to let her handle this.

After settling her faction members with her gaze, Ling Lan walked after Qiao Ting with steady footsteps.

The two of them entered the elevator and when the elevator doors closed, everyone left behind released a sigh of relief in unplanned unison. Qiao Ting and Ling Lan’s forces of presence were just too powerful — being in the same room with them was really too stressful.

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In the elevator, the two youths continued to be silent. Ling Lan looked at the flashing numbers of the elevator, waiting for the final floor they would reach. Right at this moment, Qiao Ting spoke up unexpectedly, “Next year, I will not lose again.”

Ling Lan glanced over at him in surprise, but before she could say anything, the elevator dinged and they had arrived at their destination floor.

Qiao Ting did not require Ling Lan to respond to his statement; he had only wanted to tell Ling Lan his determination. When the elevator doors opened, Qiao Ting immediately walked out of the elevator.

Seeing this, Ling Lan quirked an eyebrow. She had not expected that Qiao Ting would actually think to fight her again in the academy. Although the military academy was a six-year system, all cadets would typically leave the academy in their final year. They would either enter an army division for practical training, or sign up for an adventuring group to participate in interstellar expeditions to gain practical experience — almost no one would continue to remain at the military academy. These words of Qiao Ting was clearly intended to tell Ling Lan that, next year, he would still be at the military academy to fight her again.

Ling Lan did not understand why Qiao Ting would want to do this. She seemed to remember that Qiao Ting had already caught the Third Marshal’s eye and would be joining the Third Division this year. It went without question that early admittance into an army division would be extremely beneficial; to Qiao Ting’s future development. Now, in order to fight her again, Qiao Ting was actually planning to delay his enlistment ... was this truly necessary?

Ling Lan was rather puzzled, but she did not pause her footsteps. Following closely behind Qiao Ting, they soon arrived at the central control room of the building. Qiao Ting pushed the door open, and Ling Lan saw that there was one other Leiting member still seated in front of a control panel in the central control room.

“Regiment Commander, you’re here.” When that person saw Qiao Ting, he immediately leapt to his feet. Catching sight of Ling Lan standing behind Qiao Ting, his eyes turned dim, and there was even a trace of indignation contained within them.

It looked like the people of Leiting still felt resentful that their headquarters had been taken by Lingtian. They were not convinced of their defeat, believing that their regiment commander had just taken the enemy too lightly. Along with other miscellaneous reasons, Lingtian had just had the luck of the devil that day.

Qiao Ting was well aware of this sentiment in his people. In fact, he too was unconvinced by his loss. However, a defeat was a defeat — Leiting's loss of the title of number one faction had already become fact and was not something they could shy away from. "Prepare transferral procedures."

That person's face stiffened, and with a trace of unwillingness, he once again sat back before the control panel and began the operations to execute the transferral procedures.

Soon, Qiao Ting had wiped all the fingerprints belonging to the current regiment commander of the mecha clan from the headquarters' systems. After Ling Lan's fingerprints were successfully input into the system, the new owner of the headquarters would become the Lingtian Mecha Clan.

Watching as the optical supercomputer declared the completion of the procedure, Qiao Ting zoned out for the first time. He quickly got a hold of himself, however, and turned his head to say to Ling Lan, "Regiment Commander Ling, I hope that you will be able to hold onto this place for this year. Don't make me have to fight an extra challenge." Clearly, Qiao Ting did not think much of the Lingtian Mecha Clan.

Ling Lan snapped her head around, her gaze piercing straight through Qiao Ting as she answered coldly, "Don't worry. Before I graduate, this place will only belong to the Lingtian Mecha Clan. No other mecha clan will be able to touch it." Ling Lan absolutely would not allow anyone to look down on her companions or her faction. Her gaze pressed down on Qiao Ting as she said with full conviction, "I, Ling Lan, will be waiting for your challenge!"

Ling Lan's attitude was clearly telling Qiao Ting that, she, as the winner, was king, while Qiao Ting, as the loser, would be the challenger in a year's time.

Ling Lan's words and her overbearing aura whipped up the hate in Qiao Ting's heart. He clenched his fists tightly, his fingers almost breaking the skin of his palms ...

Ling Lan did not seem to be satisfied, for she continued to bear down on Qiao Ting, saying, "This academy has only one king, and that is I, Ling Lan. Three days ago, you lost to me, and in future, you also will not win. I will use the truth to tell you that you are destined to be my stepping stone."

When the words 'stepping stone' were uttered, Qiao Ting could no longer tolerate the situation. He threw an angry punch at Ling Lan.

With a 'smack', Ling Lan stopped Qiao Ting's fist with an open palm. Two unseen forces collided fiercely, sending the Leiting member seated at the control panel flying outwards to crash into the floor. /  
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That member climbed up with difficulty, a trickle of blood flowing down from the corner of his lips. He stared in horror at the two people still connected by a palm and a fist. His physical skills were already at the peak stage of Refinement, yet he had still been sent flying and had suffered some minor internal

injury just from being in the range of the aftershock of the two hidden forces at play. Just how strong were these two's physical skills?!

Chapter 425: Domain!

"Peak top-level Qi-Jin!" Qiao Ting's eyes glinted with a keen light. A year ago, he had already known about Ling Lan's physical skills stage 1. Back then, he was not confident whether he could beat Ling Lan in physical skills, but now, he had a good fighting chance.

"I've said that you will never ever win!" A smirk appeared on Ling Lan's lips. She had barely finished speaking when she unleashed her full force of presence, and a powerful and chilly pressure instantly blanketed the entire control room. Qiao Ting felt the temperature of the central control room dropping drastically; an inescapable chill invaded his heart, and he felt as if his four limbs were about to be frozen stiff.

It was then that he saw a thin layer of ice actually appear on his fist touching Ling Lan's palm, and the ice was slowly winding its way up his arm ...

Seeing this, Qiao Ting frowned and he did not hesitate to unleash his own force of presence as well, trying to prevent that layer of ice on his fist from spreading any further. However, he soon found that when his force of presence encountered the ice, it seemed to sink like a stone into the ocean, disappearing completely without a trace.

Why wasn't it working? A notion flashed through Qiao Ting's mind. His expression changed drastically and he shouted in disbelief, "Domain? That's impossible!"

Qiao Ting could not be blamed for his disbelief — insight alone was not enough for one to become a Domain master. Even the most prodigious talent would need to accumulate countless years of actual battle experience and endure many trials and tribulations before they might grasp the profound secrets of Domain by sheer serendipity, to finally join the ranks of these top-class experts. In over several hundred thousand years of Huaxian history, there had never been anyone who managed to enter the stage of Domain below the age of thirty. No matter how talented Ling Lan was, how aberrant, without the accumulation of real and substantial experience, he should not have been able to enter that enviable realm at the young age of seventeen. Even Qiao Ting himself who had just entered the peak of Qi-Jin would not dare to claim that he would be able to enter that realm ten years later ...

Qiao Ting did not know then that although Ling Lan appeared to only be 17 years old, due to the learning space, she had already lived through multiple hardships and had been through countless massacres. The experience she had accumulated through all that was definitely no less than several decades of an average person's life.

Seeing the shock on Qiao Ting's face, a trace of pity appeared in Ling Lan's eyes. She said softly, "Anything that is impossible will become possible when I'm involved."

Qiao Ting's eyes narrowed at her words. He understood her meaning — his speculation was actually confirmed to be fact. An unnameable emotion rose in his heart, and Qiao Ting was left dumbstruck for a long while.

But then, Ling Lan's next words jolted him back to awareness. "You should feel blessed, because you are the first person to experience my Domain!"

"Domain, activate!" Ling Lan was doing this on purpose. The activation of one's Domain could be done silently, but Ling Lan was intentionally using a verbal command to deal Qiao Ting another blow. When she had first met Qiao Ting earlier, his reserve and low profile had raised flags in Ling Lan's mind.

Qiao Ting was a prodigy — Ling Lan knew very well that if she did not have the learning space and the careful guidance of the learning space's instructors, without that cheat code, her current abilities would definitely not be at Qiao Ting's level. This kind of peerless prodigy with talent, skill, and diligence had unfortunately become her opponent. And now, he had learned forbearance and knew how to endure for the sake of future vengeance. Ling Lan knew this was not a good thing just thinking about it. If the other was given ample time to grow, when he came after her again in the future, it would be a tragedy waiting to happen.

Ling Lan was well aware that to live on securely, she would need to nip this threat in the bud. Therefore, Ling Lan had turned on the aggression, thinking to completely curb Qiao Ting here. She wanted to make it so that Qiao Ting would be plagued by psychological demons and would no longer have the courage to challenge her again!

Following this cry of Ling Lan's, Qiao Ting felt as if he had been encased in ice. He even had the illusion that his blood had become frozen in his veins!

"No, I cannot be frozen in place. I want to move, I have to move!" Qiao Ting was a prideful person — how could he so easily bow down and submit? He was screaming internally as he forced his arm back strenuously through sheer willpower ...

Looking at the contorted expression of Qiao Ting who still refused to submit despite the toll on his body, a trace of acknowledgement flashed across Ling Lan's eyes. Although Qiao Ting was too forceful and overbearing, he still had the integrity of a Huaxian soldier embedded in his bones ... Ling Lan found this kind of Qiao Ting admirable. Her initial plans of crushing the other changed instantly — she pulled back slightly on the force of her Domain, letting Qiao Ting successfully pull his fist away from her palm.

"Wah ..." Although Ling Lan had eased up on the strength of her Domain, allowing Qiao Ting to pull back his fist, the gap between Domain and Qi-Jin was just too wide. In order to resist the binding power of Ling Lan's Domain, Qiao Ting had still exhausted too much of his own strength, causing himself to take internal damage. He could not stop himself from spewing out a mouthful of blood.

Seeing Qiao Ting slip out of her control with his own strength, Ling Lan quickly retracted her Domain and then stared at the other with cold eyes. Since Ling Lan had decided to show the other some mercy, she did not press any further.

After escaping from the restriction of Ling Lan's Domain, Qiao Ting stumbled back several steps. Perhaps the binding force had disappeared too abruptly — Qiao Ting was not fully prepared; his retreating footsteps appeared rather unsteady. After falling back four to five steps, Qiao Ting found his footing and pressed his right hand lightly to his chest. He tolerated the intense pain shooting through his body, his gaze becoming dull, with even a trace of despair in them ...

Could it be that this world truly had such an aberrant existence? An unmatched prodigy who had reached Domain at 17 years old ... could he really defeat him? Doubt flashed through his heart, but very soon, Qiao Ting had regained his composure. He thought of how this was not the Huaxia of old, when physical skills were dominant — it was now the era of mecha dominance, and he was the only fourth-year cadet to have advanced to ace operator, a feat which was comparable to that of the Huaxian legend Ling Xiao. Even if Ling Lan was abnormally gifted in physical skills, in terms of mecha, he, Qiao Ting, was still the strongest one!

Qiao Ting's heart settled and the light in his eyes was rekindled. Then, he suddenly thought of how Ling Lan was already a special-class operator — it was hard to be sure whether the other would not advance to ace in two years. At this thought, Qiao Ting was even more apprehensive of Ling Lan, and the gaze he directed at the other became dark and inscrutable.

Ling Lan may not have fully comprehended Qiao Ting's entire thought process, but she still had a pretty good guess. It was not to say that Ling Lan was good at reasoning and deduction; rather, Little Four had applied 360-degree monitoring on Qiao Ting, capturing every single change in his expression without errors. Furthermore, Little Four had many expert advisers behind him (Instructor Number Five was the primary force) — very quickly, they had managed to deduce Qiao Ting's true thoughts via analysis, and Little Four had then conveyed these results to his boss. Of course, Little Four very shamelessly took credit for all of the work without revealing that he had other advisers behind him.

Seeing Qiao Ting regain his confidence, Ling Lan sighed mentally, unsure whether to be relieved or concerned. Ling Lan was appreciative of Qiao Ting's resilience. After some thought, she said, "In future, if you're ready, you can come find me at any time."

Although Ling Lan's tone and expression were still endlessly cold, Qiao Ting could still sense that Ling Lan was not being as overbearing as he had been at the start. Qiao Ting's heart was a complex myriad of emotions at this realisation. It was unexpected that there would come a time when he, Qiao Ting, would be oppressed by another ... was this karma for when he had been the oppressor?

Qiao Ting chuckled dryly but quickly rallied himself. He looked at the Leiting member lurking in a corner and said, "Let's go!"

That member hurriedly ran over, his expression one of great relief at being spared. Earlier, when Ling Lan had unfurled her Domain, even though he had not been within the range of the Domain, he had still felt a destructive wave of energy. He had almost thought he would die here ... now, hearing that his regiment commander was going to lead him away, he rushed over quickly, not daring to tarry. That speed was as if there were evil ghouls on his tail — in the blink of an eye, he had run out of the central control room.

Before Qiao Ting left, he glanced one more time at Ling Lan, his gaze extremely complicated ... after cooling down, he realised that Ling Lan had shown mercy just moments back.

Under Qiao Ting's lead, the Leiting members quickly departed from the headquarters. Meanwhile, the already ready Lingtian members surged into the headquarters representing the number one faction as soon as the Leiting people left. And the nameplate hanging high over the door also changed from Leiting to Lingtian at this moment!

“Qiao Ting ...” Li Lanfeng stared at Qiao Ting’s departing figure, his brow furrowed. He had come a little late — he had only arrived in time to see Qiao Ting leading his people away. Apprehensive of Qiao Ting all this while, Li Lanfeng paid a lot of attention to every move of Qiao Ting’s. It could be said that he understood the other very well.

Although he had only caught a glance of the other, the sensitive Li Lanfeng had still sensed the change in the other. How should he put it? The past Qiao Ting was extremely imperious and domineering, prideful and self-centred — his entire being shone so brightly that others did not dare look straight at him. Though this kind of person would draw the adoration of some people who worshipped strength, it would also incur the dislike or even revulsion of some others. Although Qiao Ting had been very strong all this while and had bested everyone by a head, Li Lanfeng had not felt that Qiao Ting was really unassailable. It was not completely impossible if he wanted to oppose the other. However, the Qiao Ting who had just left ... although his force of presence was as strong as ever, it was no longer so keen and sharp that it would irritate others. It seemed as if he had learned how to temper it ...

Carrying some bit of worry, Li Lanfeng arrived at the office resting room of the regiment commander of the mecha clan, only to find Ling Lan standing before a floor-to-ceiling window, looking down at the scenery of the military academy.

“Rabbit, what are you looking at?” When it was just the two of them, Li Lanfeng would intimately call Ling Lan ‘rabbit’. This made him feel closer to Ling Lan. It could not be denied that Li Lanfeng had his own selfish wish. He did not want to just become a normal member of Ling Lan’s battle clan, so he constantly tried to highlight the uniqueness of his existence before Ling Lan.

Ling Lan did not answer, merely staring coldly at the scene below. Li Lanfeng walked over and followed the line of her sight and saw that she was actually looking at Thunder King Qiao Ting. Even though Qiao Ting had led his men away from the headquarters of the number one faction, they were now standing at a hover car stop several hundred metres away and was facing off against another group.

“Those are the vice regiment commanders of the Leiting Mecha Clan,” Li Lanfeng thought that Ling Lan might not know what was going on, so he took the initiative to explain.

In fact, Ling Lan had long known who those people were. From the very moment she set eyes on them, Little Four had already reported the details of these few people.

#### Chapter 426: The Possibility of Collaboration?

Li Lanfeng’s eyesight was very good; he could see how worked up and indignant those people were from here. Li Lanfeng could not help but laugh at their expressions. “It looks like the Thunder King won’t be having an easy time of it for the near future. His subordinates have started to grow some ulterior motives.”

“Hn.” The corners of Ling Lan’s lips quirked. Seeing her opponent in trouble, she was undoubtedly in a good mood, and so deigned to give Li Lanfeng a verbal response.

“This is also a result of him being too overbearing in the past, leaving no room for dissent. So, as soon as he tripped up, the dissatisfaction of all those he had oppressed is breaking out now.” Li Lanfeng was rather gleeful at the other’s misfortune. With a half-smile, he peered at Ling Lan and said, “I had

originally thought it would be a long time before I could see the Thunder King so down on his luck. Who would have guessed that that wish would be realized so soon?”

Hearing Li Lanfeng’s somewhat loaded words, Ling Lan cast an assessing glance at him and said with some realisation, “Leopard, you hate the Thunder King?”

Li Lanfeng’s eyes narrowed and he was silent for several seconds before saying with a soft sigh, “Yes, I hate him. Such a proud elite. Both in terms of talent and physique, he is so outstanding that it’s sickening. No matter how hard I work, I’ll never be able to chase up to him ...” At this point, Li Lanfeng seemed to lose focus a little. All the reasons he had mentioned were all just surface reasons — Li Lanfeng had no idea how to broach the true reason for his hatred, that seemingly absurd reason that even he could hardly believe in ...

Picking up on the displeasure in Li Lanfeng’s tone, Ling Lan thought about how Li Lanfeng had just pushed his body out of the danger zone, and she was instantly filled with understanding. She recalled how she could not help her jealousy in her previous life whenever she saw someone else with a strong and healthy body — back then, she had even cursed the heavens and hated the people around her at times. Why could they possess healthy bodies and spirits while she could only lie there in bed every day, grappling with death?

Perhaps out of sympathy for having shared the same affliction, or perhaps because she could empathize, Ling Lan felt that she could understand Li Lanfeng’s complicated psychological state at this moment. Thus, she patted Li Lanfeng’s shoulder consolingly and said firmly, “I believe that, in a few more years, you will definitely not be weaker than him, and you may even be stronger.”

Ling Lan’s actions and the sincerity and conviction behind her words warmed Li Lanfeng’s heart. This was probably what the books called a bosom friend, right? Someone who would trust him without having a reason to, who would stand unwaveringly by his side no matter what happened ... Li Lanfeng felt heat run through his entire body — at this moment, the usual tendrils of cold air emanating from Ling Lan felt so refreshing to Li Lanfeng.

Ling Lan cast a dubious glance at Li Lanfeng, unsure why the other’s ears had suddenly flushed so red. She started thinking back on what she had said — could it be that he had become so moved and excited by her encouragement?

It looked like the leopard was someone who liked to hear kind words of encouragement. She needed to note this down — it might be a good way to spur the leopard forwards in future. Ling Lan stroked her jaw as she thought about this.

Li Lanfeng was still very good at controlling his emotions; he calmed down again very soon. When he saw Ling Lan staring at the Thunder King and stroking her jaw thoughtfully, an idea sparked in his mind. Thinking of the change he had sensed in the Thunder King, he said with confidence, “Rabbit, are you staring at the Thunder King because you’ve also noticed the change in him?”

Thunder King? Ling Lan was just planning how she could heap some tough training on Li Lanfeng in the upcoming period of time to raise his physical constitution even more as much as possible when she registered what Li Lanfeng asked, and her heart clenched in shock ... cough, cough, always thinking

about how she could torture her friends — it was rather inhumane of her no matter how she looked at it!

Ling Lan was afraid her dark intentions would be discovered by Li Lanfeng, so she quickly gathered up her thoughts. Switching tracks smoothly into Li Lanfeng's topic, she replied, "Hn, compared to three days ago, he is indeed a little different now."

Since the topic of conversation had turned to the Thunder King, Ling Lan began to seriously recall some of the things which had happened during the fight with him. A new idea suddenly appeared in her mind; eyes glittering, Ling Lan asked Li Lanfeng seriously, "Leopard, setting aside your subjective opinions for now, objectively speaking, what is Qiao Ting like?"

Li Lanfeng frowned at her question, not really willing to answer it. However, since his rabbit had asked, no matter how much he disliked to do so, he would answer the question seriously.

"Qiao Ting was extremely forceful and overbearing in the past. Always determined to do things his way, he was rather lacking in leadership ability. The creed he lived by was the survival of the fittest, where strength determines everything, so the strong should rule. Ever since he became the regiment commander of Leiting, Leiting's power structure has basically been distributed according to strength. It should be said that this is another version of fairness and justice ... but an excellent faction should not look at pure strength alone." At this point, Li Lanfeng paused for a moment before continuing, "If we only consider strength, Leiting is the indisputable number one faction in the military academy. However, in terms of clan battles, whether it is the second faction Tianji or the third faction Wuji, who I used to be part of, those other two factions are all a little better than Leiting at clan battles. Unfortunately ..."

"Unfortunately. Tianji and Wuji are both lacking a Thunder King!" Ling Lan finished his sentence.

"Yes, we did not lose to the Leiting Mecha Clan but to Thunder King Qiao Ting," said Li Lanfeng, nodding with a bitter smile. Teamwork was indeed very important for a clan, but before absolute strength, even the strongest clan could only submit. Qiao Ting, who was forever a level higher than the others, was an obstacle which no faction had ever been able to overcome." Thus, he was called Thunder King, and not just because he's from Leiting 1."

"No matter which faction the Thunder King was in, he would have been given the title of a king. If it had not been Thunder King, it would have been Sky King or Earth King." Ling Lan acknowledged Qiao Ting's strength.

"Yes. It is precisely this kind of brilliant prodigy who people look up to. But sadly, he hasn't had very good luck." Li Lanfeng laughed. Looking intently at Ling Lan, he could not hide how proud he felt. "He just had to meet you. He may be a rare talent which only pops up every hundred years or so, but I believe that you must be a peerless aberrant which only emerges every once in ten thousand years."

Perhaps Li Lanfeng's gaze was too passionate, for Ling Lan actually felt a little embarrassed. After all, some of her strength could be said to be a product of cheating, while Qiao Ting was the one who had truly fought for every bit of his achievements. Being worshipped by an oblivious good friend like this ... wasn't this just too brazen and shameless?

In fact, Qi Long and the rest also worshipped Ling Lan immensely, but because they had encountered Ling Lan, who already had a strange auntie mentality at that time, while they were so young, Ling Lan

felt that she was so much older than these little brats. If she could not handle them, then that would be a horrible disgrace. As such, Ling Lan could accept the idolization of Qi Long and the other children with ease. In contrast, Li Lanfeng had joined her later on, and he had always acted extremely mature and reliable, giving Ling Lan the feeling that he was a peer. Therefore, Li Lanfeng's worship made Ling Lan feel rather flustered and uncomfortable.

Li Lanfeng did not sense Ling Lan's shyness — this was all thanks to Ling Lan's perpetual and unchanging ice-block of a face; almost no emotion could be discerned from it. He retracted his heated gaze and continued on to say, "However, though that Thunder King has superior strength, he also has quite a few weaknesses. His aloof personality and insistence to do things his way makes it impossible for him to work with others well. And on top of that, his wilfulness and methods of oppression to get his own way also lost him the support of a considerable number of regular faction members. The previous few years were all smooth sailing, so the problems between him and those below him were not obvious ... but the defeat this time has completely brought out all the hidden conflicts within the clan ..."

At this point, Li Lanfeng's expression turned solemn. "Just now when I saw Qiao Ting, I felt that this defeat may not be a completely bad thing for him. He seems to have learned some tolerance ..."

"You are very perceptive ..." Ling Lan indicated for Li Lanfeng to look out the window. Li Lanfeng saw that although Qiao Ting was being taunted and provoked by his subordinates, he did not get angry. Instead, Qiao Ting listened calmly with a stony expression. If not for the deep furrow of his brow, one could almost assume there was no confrontation between the two sides. It really seemed like Qiao Ting had learned how to be tolerant.

Li Lanfeng's brows knitted together at the sight. "As expected, Qiao Ting has grown even more. Who knows how far he'll go? With such an opponent, it looks like things will be rather troublesome."

Ling Lan's lips quirked up at his words. "Isn't it more interesting this way? Some appropriate pressure can prompt us to improve. Qiao Ting is a good rival." The Thunder King's strength may perhaps spur on the growth of Qi Long and the others, including the leopard before her — Li Lanfeng.

"However, before Qiao Ting becomes a troublesome opponent for us, perhaps there is the possibility of a collaboration." After saying this, Ling Lan stepped away from the window to sit back before her office desk.

Collaboration? Li Lanfeng ran some swift calculations in his head and figured out the deeper meaning behind Ling Lan's words. "You're saying that Qiao Ting might leave Leiting to join Lingtian?"

Li Lanfeng's mood was suddenly horrible, a great sense of danger stabbing him straight in the heart. Could it be that he was going to have yet another rival? Qi Long alone was enough to make him feel suffocated from the pressure, and now Qiao Ting, who was stronger than Qi Long, was going to come? When would he earn the right to stand by his rabbit's side and truly become Ling Lan's right hand who could be trusted and depended on?

Ling Lan cast a cold glance at him, and Li Lanfeng shuddered, crushing his wandering thoughts. "How can that be? I only mentioned the possibility of collaboration. Have you forgotten? Three months later, the All-Federation Military Academy Grand Mecha Tournament will be starting. This year, I do not intend to continue remaining as number two."

The All-Federation Grand Mecha Tournament was held once every three years. As per the First Men's Military Academy regulations and tradition, the battle team representing the school every time were always members from the number one faction of that year. This had also led to a frustrating consequence. Despite having assembled all the most outstanding talents in the entire Federation, the First Men's Military Academy's representative students had only performed on equal ground with the other outstanding students from the other military academies. According to Ling Lan's intel, the First Men's Military Academy had already obtained second place for seven consecutive years in the mecha tournament.

"You're saying that ... you want to break past the current faction boundaries and choose the strongest few students from every specialization in our academy as representatives?" Ling Lan's words made Li Lanfeng's eyes light up. If this move of Ling Lan's succeeded, then it would definitely be a great pioneering achievement for the First Men's Military Academy.

"Yes, since we're representing the academy as a whole, then why should only members from one faction be representatives? This is unfair for those exceptional students belonging to other factions. They have the right to shine as well in the grand mecha tournament."

"The administrators of the academy had originally intended for Qiao Ting to win first place in the mecha tournament. If they know your plans, they will definitely support it fully," said Li Lanfeng with a smile.

"I'm not doing this for them, but because I want everyone in the Federation to know that the strongest military academy is our First Men's Military Academy!" A glint of ambition shone in Ling Lan's eyes. Those rules which she disliked ... she shall destroy them personally!

#### Chapter 427: Caught Out!

After the headquarters of the number one faction was transferred to Lingtian, Ling Lan did not do as everyone thought and remain in headquarters. Instead, she passed on everything regarding Lingtian and the new headquarters to Wu Jiong, and then continued on with her usual simple classroom-dormitory two-venue lifestyle once again.

However, Ling Lan's peaceful life was about to end — the second-years' first mecha practical training lesson was finally here. Ling Lan received the time and venue for their meeting from her communicator, and then led Qi Long, Luo Lang, and Xie Yi over together.

The mentor Qi Long and Luo Lang had chosen was Tang Yu, the same as Ling Lan, while the mentor Xie Yi had chosen was also one of the top instructors in long-range ace mecha. The meeting time and place was exactly the same for all four of them, so they boarded a hover car together to head to their destination.

The location of the practical training was, as everyone had predicted, that large mecha storehouse they had snuck into during the enemy air invasion back then. Today was the first practical training lesson for the mecha piloting department. Along the way, Ling Lan's group met quite a few other students headed the same way.

Once they entered the storehouse, they saw quite a number of students already waiting there. This was the junior mecha area, but Ling Lan and the rest were already advanced mecha warriors, so their classes would not be held here.

Under the envious gazes of the students here, Ling Lan's group of four moved ahead to the advanced mecha area. Once there, they saw Wu Jiong, Li Yingjie, as well as the other team leaders who were already at the level of advanced mecha warrior. Of course, there were also a few unfamiliar faces who were probably promising newcomers from the other factions.

At this moment, the crowd was looking up excitedly at the tall and majestic row of advanced mecha before them. They were rubbing their palms together in eagerness, wishing they could board the mecha immediately and have a good go operating one. Although the members of Lingtian had already ridden mecha before during the enemy air invasion, they had had to be sneaky while doing so after all. Moreover, the situation that night was tense, so their nerves had been tightly strung — and the moment they had left the storehouse, they had been embroiled in bitter battle, constantly afraid that they would die in combat at any careless misstep.

Today was the day they would truly get to enjoy the joy and excitement of piloting mecha; they were that close to pouncing forwards to touch the mecha they favoured.

“Boss!” A familiar voice cried out from behind Ling Lan. Ling Lan turned in surprise. “Lin Zhong-qing, why are you here?” Lin Zhong-qing was in the Logistics specialization — according to Ling Lan's intel, the mecha practical training lessons of the students of that specialization would be delayed till their third year.

Lin Zhong-qing was also very puzzled at this moment. “I'm not sure myself. I just received a notification just now, telling me to come here immediately to report for class.” That said, Lin Zhong-qing stretched out his right wrist to display the notification on his communicator.

Ling Lan glanced at it and saw that it was no different from the notification she had received. A thought struck her and she said, “It's probably a good thing.”

Lin Zhong-qing smiled at her words. “Yep. When I saw you, Boss, I felt that it couldn't be a bad thing.”

Ling Lan was just about to say something when her ears twitched — she peered at the excited crowd and decided to just let it go.

Several seconds later, they heard the ‘clap, clap, clap’ of applause coming from behind them. The group was startled and quickly turned around to look for the source of the sound. There was now a group of instructors standing behind them, and Tang Yu was in the lead, currently clapping his hands together in a slow measured pace. The clapping sounds they had heard had been produced by Tang Yu.

Qi Long could not help but blink blankly at the sight. His Animal Instinct actually had not alerted him to the presence of the instructors — it looked like the instructors' methods were truly special. Wu Jiong frowned as well. The vigilant senses he had trained from young had failed to pick up the instructors' arrival; this frustrated him.

“Ling Lan, Qi Long, Wu Jiong, Li Yingjie, Luo Lang, and also Lin Zhong-qing. All of you follow me!” Tang Yu was the first to speak. He motioned for Ling Lan and the other five to come with him, and when Ling Lan

turned her head to look back, she saw that the other students were also following the other instructors away.

Tang Yu led Ling Lan's group of six to an extremely quiet place and then said, "You six will be learning from me from now on." When he saw Qi Long and the others staring at Lin Zhong-qing with curiosity, he explained, "Lin Zhong-qing is a student I accepted under special circumstances. He will study with you all in future. I hope that you all will learn from one another and improve together."

"Yes, sir!" Qi Long and the rest answered loudly, happy for Lin Zhong-qing.

Even Ling Lan could not stop her lips from quirking up into a slight smile. For Lin Zhong-qing to have caught Tang Yu's eye was undoubtedly his luck; Ling Lan's heart lightened at this turn of events. It should be known that Lin Zhong-qing had sacrificed his passion to choose the Logistics specialization instead for the sake of the battle clan. Ling Lan had always felt rather sorry on behalf of Lin Zhong-qing — Lin Zhong-qing was extremely gifted in mecha piloting, but that talent was wasted in service of the others. Now, having obtained Tang Yu's favour, Lin Zhong-qing's future in mecha piloting was boundless.

After giving this instruction, Tang Yu instantly went into their lesson for the day. He first asked Qi Long, Wu Jiong, Li Yingjie, Luo Lang, and Lin Zhong-qing to choose the advanced mecha they wanted, and then he uploaded a document on mecha controls which matched the mecha type they chose onto their communicators.

After that, he asked them to board their mecha and to work on matching their control panel to the contents of their respective documents. He requested that they swiftly learn the relevant control buttons and control stick of the mecha they had chosen within half an hour.

Seeing the five youths enter their mecha and begin studying and familiarizing themselves with them, Tang Yu then turned to Ling Lan and said, "You, follow me."

Tang Yu led Ling Lan into the deepest area of the storehouse. Ling Lan knew Tang Yu was planning to bring her into that hidden room to choose a special-class mecha to operate.

Sure enough, Tang Yu opened the secret door and walked into that hidden room to arrive at the special-class mecha area. However, Tang Yu did not stop here as Ling Lan had expected. He walked right through the special-class mecha area, going further into the room to stand before those five different types of ace mecha.

Ling Lan followed close behind him, but was silently surprised, unsure why Tang Yu would bring her here. Could it be that the other had noticed her ruse in hiding her true mecha level?

"The mecha you chose in Mecha World all lean towards close combat, but, in the real world, I hope you will choose a little more carefully. Even though close-combat mecha are extraordinarily powerful, reigning in the top ranks of ace mecha in terms of combat power, the risk of danger is correspondingly high. On the battlefield, the mortality rate of close-combat mecha is also the highest."

Tang Yu's warning made Ling Lan raise a brow and she asked in return, "In the Federation army, which type of mecha operator is the majority?"

Ling Lan's question made Tang Yu pause for a beat, a little stunned, but he soon smiled faintly and replied, "It's close-combat mecha operators."

“As you have mentioned, sir, since the mortality rate of close-combat mecha operators is the highest, then why does everyone still choose close-combat mecha?” Ling Lan continued to ask.

Tang Yu said in response, “I think you know what the answer is.”

“Because close-combat mecha are also called guardian mecha. They are the first line of defence protecting one’s teammates. That’s why I want to guard those who have put their faith in me,” Ling Lan said all this lightly, but her tone could not hide the determination in her heart.

For the sake of those childhood friends who had grown up alongside her and believed in her with all their hearts, for the sake of her little companions who did not mind sacrificing their own interests to choose other specializations in order to help her obtain the greatest advantages ... Lin Zhong-qing was one, Han Jiyun was another, and then there were the others, such as Luo Chao and the rest in the federal co-ed military academy, as well as that Li Lanfeng who trusted her and was willing to fight by her side ...

All of this trust weighed heavily on Ling Lan, so she did not dare to relax. In this world where war could break out at any time, she needed to grow strong enough to protect them all.

Ling Lan’s words made Tang Yu’s eyes shine with a brilliant light, a satisfied smile appearing on his lips. He had asked many other students this question before, and every student’s answer had been different. Each of those answers had their own charm and radiance, but Ling Lan’s answer was undoubtedly the one which pleased him the most thus far. Only by having people to safeguard would one be unafraid of sacrifice and choose close-combat mecha which were known as mecha of death.

“Since you understand the meaning behind close-combat mecha, then I’ll hand this life-risking close-combat mecha to you,” said Tang Yu with a smile, pointing at the ace mecha right in the middle.

“That’s an ace mecha.” Instructor Tang Yu’s unexpected arrangement surprised Ling Lan.

“Isn’t your level in Mecha World at ace operator?” Tang Yu peered at Ling Lan with a half-smile.

Ling Lan’s heart dropped — having successfully deceived all the instructors and students in the academy, she had not expected to be caught out by the keen eyes of Instructor Tang Yu.

“Rest assured. This matter is only known to me and the principal. While you still lack the ability to protect yourself, the matter will stop here with me and the principal,” added Tang Yu. He could understand what Ling Lan was thinking. Even though the First Men’s Military Academy was tightly defended, after the enemy air invasion incident, even the principal could not be certain whether the academy would once again see another enemy invasion if the news of Ling Lan becoming an ace operator as a second-year was exposed. The principal could not take the risk, and he did not intend to gamble.

“Thank you, sir.” This decision of Tang Yu’s and the principal’s was undoubtedly meant to protect Ling Lan. Ling Lan could feel their kind intentions and accepted it gladly, and so she earnestly thanked Instructor Tang Yu.

“Once you’ve entered ace level, there’s nothing much for me to teach you. Every ace operator has their own unique control methods, and this depends on your own study. I won’t keep you by talking any further. If you have anything you don’t understand or anything that confuses you, you can come find me

to discuss it. Perhaps my experience can provide you with some tips.” At this point, Tang Yu could not help but smile wryly and grumble, “Who’d have guessed that there would be a student even I, Tang Yu, can’t teach? Taking you in as a student gives me no sense of achievement at all.”

Ling Lan could only listen awkwardly. At this time, she was immensely grateful for her ice-block face for hiding her true thoughts. It was thoroughly unexpected that Instructor Tang Yu, who was so mature and steady in her mind, would also have such a childish side to him; her impression of him was crumbling.

Tang Yu did not know that his image in Ling Lan’s mind was in jeopardy — he asked Ling Lan to board her ace mecha and study on her own. Just like he had said, at ace level, he did not have anything much to teach Ling Lan. And so, he left the hidden room. Compared to Ling Lan, the other five outside was a greater concern for him.

Hence, Ling Lan was left alone to research control methods that would belong to her exclusively. In the meantime, Qi Long and the rest were pushed into gruelling trials and tribulations — every day, they were tortured by Tang Yu till they were half-dead. However, the results were excellent. Not long after, Qi Long’s hand speed gradually increased till it was infinitely close to special-class operator level, and his operation began to show signs of Qi Long’s unique style — Brutal Violence.

428 Dwtong and Tianji!

Translator:ryuxenji | Editor: H2dH2mr The days passed by amidst the hard work everyone invested in their studies, and three months were over. In these three months, it had not all been smooth sailing. The newly established Lingtian Mecha Clan which also managed a reversal to become the number one faction had constantly been the centre of attention for all the cadets. Unsurprisingly, the Lingtian Mecha Clan received two more challenges during this time from other factions in the academy. These challenges were respectively from the number four faction, the Dwtong Mecha Clan, and the number two faction, the Tianji Mecha Clan.

The Dwtong Mecha Clan was the first to step out and challenge Lingtian after Lingtian’s defeat of Leiting. The moment this challenge fight was initiated, there was a great upheaval within Dwtong. It should be known that, in the Dwtong Mecha Clan, there was a portion of members who were students of the Doha Central Scout Academy. Also, the Lingtian Mecha Clan just so happened to be a mecha clan which consisted primarily of students from the Doha Central Scout Academy, while the four main regiment commanders were all from the Central Scout Academy. In contrast with Dwtong which gathered students from all scout academies on planet Doha, the ‘purer’ Lingtian Mecha Clan gave these Central Scout Academy students a greater sense of relatability.

Thus, when Dwtong issued its letter of challenge this time, the seniors in the faction who had graduated from the Doha Central Scout Academy were infuriated. They rose up in indignation and demanded that the regiment commander of Dwtong would take the initiative to give up on this challenge. Unfortunately, the current regiment commander of Dwtong, Gu Jinxing, who had succeeded Zhang Jing-an, was not from the Central Scout Academy. He rejected the demand without any hesitation — this move thoroughly enraged the members who had graduated from the Central Scout Academy, and the conflict among the members began to intensify. Dwtong began to break apart from within.

When the challenge against Lingtian was just about to start, the seniors who had graduated from the Central Scout Academy made a move which flabbergasted all the cadets — they collectively withdrew

from the faction. This move reduced Dwotong's numbers by almost one-fifth, also causing Dwotong to fall to the dusty depths from their position in the top four. Both in terms of numbers and strength, Dwotong was now pretty much equivalent with the other middling factions.

Meanwhile, those Central Scout Academy students who had left Dwotong unsurprisingly all joined the Lingtian Mecha Clan. This boosted the strength of the Lingtian Mecha Clan greatly, and those other factions which had still considered Lingtian's success a consequence of sheer dumb luck at the start now no longer dared to underestimate them.

"Gu Jinxing ... Jinxing, cautious-action, caution in acting<sup>1</sup> — Gu Jinxing really does not live up to his name." Zhang Jing-an, who was currently devoting all his attention into his enlistment applications, broke out into a cold smile when he heard the news from a member of his battle clan. He said, "Ling Lan's group is not so easy to deal with. He is really quite stupid, actually completely oblivious to the other side's tactic."

Zhang Jing-an's words confused his clan member. Seeing this, Zhang Jing-an could not help but shake his head, sigh, and say, "Our Dwotong is lacking a good strategist. It's likely that even Wuji, Tianji, and Leiting have seen and understood what Lingtian was doing. Timely provocation combined with emotional investment, and then by pushing things to a head, under this entire series of calculation, Dwotong can be considered done for. That fellow Ling Lan ... his methods are as vicious as ever. Either he does nothing, or else once he acts, it's like a thunder strike. This kind of person is very scary as an opponent ..."

His team members were rather disgruntled. "Even so, our Dwotong is overall still stronger than Lingtian. Our Dwotong has over two thousand members, while Lingtian won't have even a full thousand even if they add in those members of ours who quit to join them ... our Dwotong still has the better chance of winning in the challenge fight."

Zhang Jing-an chuckled dryly. "How can it be that simple? I can bet with you that the final outcome will be Lingtian's victory." This fellow Ling Lan had never ever lost before ... unless he gave up on purpose.

Just as Zhang Jing-an predicted, the final victor was the Lingtian Mecha Clan. Even though Dwotong's regiment commander Gu Jinxing had learned from Leiting's example and gave up on the elite 12-man team format to choose the 50-man mecha battle, Dwotong's fate was even worse than Leiting's. At least Leiting and Lingtian had fought till both sides had only one man left standing. At the time Dwotong's team was completely eliminated, Lingtian's side still had seven people remaining.

The remaining seven included all the four regiment commanders without exception, and the two senior special-class operators Zhao Jun and Li Lanfeng. No one was overly surprised that these six had remained till the end — after all, the strength of these six had already been acknowledged by the cadets. What truly surprised the audience was the seventh survivor on Lingtian's side. It was not one of the team leaders of the various battle clans in the Lingtian Mecha Clan, nor was it any of the primary fighters in the various battle clans. It was one of the secondary fighters in Ling Lan's battle clan — that enchantingly beautiful, delicate and slender Luo Lang.

But when they thought back on Luo Lang's performance during the fight, everyone could see how reasonable it was for him to have survived. When Luo Lang got into the groove of fighting, he was extremely tenacious and was also willing to be ruthless at the same time, not only towards others but

also towards himself. Many times, when he was forced into a disadvantageous situation, just as everyone believed he was sure to lose, he would fight his way out with frighteningly explosive combat power that verged on the edge of harming himself in the process. That attitude of never giving up gained the admiration of everyone there.

Dwotong's fragmentation before the battle and their defeat in the battle was a wake-up call to all those mecha clans that were thinking of taking advantage of Lingtian. Though there had been an element of luck involved in Lingtian's victory over Leiting, in reality, Lingtian's strength was not as weak as these other factions had believed. Additionally, after taking in one-fifth of Dwotong's men, it could be said that Lingtian was now fully qualified to rank among the rest of the top-line factions.

Under these circumstances, the third place Wuji silently retreated. Han Yu was wary of Lingtian's soaring power, and was also apprehensive over Li Lanfeng's scheming ways. He was certain that Li Lanfeng had a hand in orchestrating Dwotong's tragic outcome.

After much consideration, Han Yu decided to give up on this chance to represent the First Academy in the Grand Mecha Tournament. Of course, the reason Han Yu could give up so easily was that he had long heard that even if their Wuji defeated Lingtian, in order to ensure the best team represents the academy at the Grand Mecha Tournament, the school administrators would still specially arrange a fight between Wuji and Tianji. The final victor of that match would be the faction which would really represent the academy.

The academy administrators definitely wanted to choose the strongest faction in the team to represent the academy. If Leiting had not lost to Lingtian so publicly, thus preventing the administrators from enforcing any hidden manipulations, they would not have had to back down and make do with Tianji. Han Yu was a clever person — he was not willing to benefit Tianji with the fruits of his efforts.

Sure enough, after confirming that Wuji had given up on challenging Lingtian, Tianji issued their challenge. The challenge mode they chose was like Leiting, the 12-man elite team battle. However, unlike Qiao Ting's self-centred and overconfident approach, Tianji chose to send out a whole team of special-class operators as its representative, the strongest 12 Tianji had to offer.

Before the challenge fight, everyone thought that Lingtian's good fortune was about to be ended here — this time, Lingtian would lose for certain. After all, Lingtian only had three special-class operators — Ling Lan, Li Lanfeng, and Zhao Jun — and no matter how strong the others were, they were still only advanced mecha warriors. 3 versus 12 ... no matter how you looked at it, the Lingtian Mecha Clan had no chance of winning. But the results made everyone's eyes fall out of their sockets<sup>2</sup> — the final victor was still Lingtian. Moreover, there were two members who survived the battlefield: Ling Lan and Zhao Jun.

It should be said that this challenge fight was not as one-sided as everyone had assumed. Even though nine of Lingtian's members were advanced mecha warriors, those nine people worked together extremely well. The battle had not started for long before they had managed to group themselves into three team formations. In comparison, the Tianji members reacted much slower — not only did they not get into formation successfully, three of their number had been taken out by Lingtian's formations not too long after the start of the battle. If the regiment commander of Tianji had not picked up on how bad

the situation was and ordered all his members to retreat and regroup, Lingtian might have had even more members survive till the end of the battle.

It was only after Tianji had assembled themselves into formation that Lingtian found themselves caught in a precarious situation. The nine advanced mecha were successfully killed by Tianji, but the members of the Lingtian Mecha Clan were extremely ferocious — even when they died they did not forget to pull their enemies down with them. In the fighting, Tianji also lost two mecha.

However, even as the nine advanced mecha of Lingtian were being besieged and killed, Lingtian's one and only formation made up of special-class mecha similarly revealed its fearsome side, successfully killing off the opponent's mecha formation it encountered.

At this time, Tianji's upper hand was completely gone. 4 against 3 — although Tianji had one extra member, in this situation where both sides were special-class operators, that one additional member was not enough to decide the ultimate victor yet. In the end, the two teams simply ended up pitting blunt force against blunt force — the 7 mecha clashed in a melee battle. In order to protect Ling Lan, after he defeated one mecha, Li Lanfeng used his battered mecha to bring down another mecha in mutual destruction.

Meanwhile, Zhao Jun engaged the regiment commander of Tianji in a bitter fight with his strength as the second rank in mecha. Of the three Lingtian special-class operators left, Ling Lan, the weakest one in the audience's eyes, ended up having the easiest time of it. He fought against another special-class operator from Tianji who also was not very strong for up to several hundred rounds.

Finally, half-crippled, Zhao Jun found an opening in the other's defence and defeated his opponent. It could be said that Zhao Jun and the regiment commander of Tianji were about equal in strength — it would not be surprising for either side to win; it all just depended on who was luckier that day. And in this battle, Zhao Jun's luck was indisputably better than that of the Tianji regiment commander as he had managed to catch the other's weakness a step earlier.

At the same time that Zhao Jun defeated the regiment commander of Tianji, Ling Lan also successfully killed her opponent, clinching the final victory for Lingtian. In contrast to Zhao Jun's beaten up mecha, Ling Lan's mecha was almost undamaged, only slightly drained of power.

The spectators were very curious about this because, during the battle, Ling Lan's opponent had previously managed to land a hit on Ling Lan. When struck by mecha of the same level, even the sturdiest mecha armour would also inevitably be scarred. With this question in mind, everyone began rifling for information on Ling Lan's mecha, and only then did they discover that Ling Lan's mecha was a modified mecha.

Of course, all they could find out was the line saying that it had been modified; as for more detailed information, they could not find anything. The mainframe had to protect the privacy of its users.

However, just this point alone was enough to make the cadets think they had found the answer. They believed that Lingtian was just too lucky in having managed to recruit the modification prodigy Chang Xinyuan, thus obtaining such a tough and fearsome modified special-class mecha. As a consequence of this battle, Chang Xinyuan's reputation unexpectedly soared within the military academy ...

This was notably the first time that a mechanic who could modify special-class mecha had appeared in the First Men's Military Academy. As such, Chang Xinyuan shot to fame overnight, becoming the most sought-after person in the area. Many factions all began to inquire about the nature of the contract Chang Xinyuan had signed with the Lingtian Mecha Clan. They were hoping that Chang Xinyuan had only signed a temporary collaboration contract with Lingtian so that they would have a chance to bring this future maestro of mecha modification into their fold ...

Chapter 429: Invitation!

For context, it should be known that an exceptional mecha engineer could add several layers of protection to a mecha operator's mecha. To be blunt, a mecha engineer would give mecha operators better rates of survival — this was why outstanding mecha engineers were enthusiastically sought after by mecha battle clans, making them hot pursuit targets of all battle clans.

However, everyone was destined to be disappointed. Annoyed by all the attention, Chang Xinyuan simply announced that he was already a fixed member of Lingtian. That meant that unless the battle clan he was in was destroyed, it was impossible for Chang Xinyuan to transfer to a new battle clan.

Tianji's defeat rendered the academy administrators completely speechless, and it also made all the other factions which were already wary of Lingtian even more apprehensive. Lingtian's defeat of Dwotong could still be said to be a confluence of luck and circumstances in Lingtian's favour, but their defeat of Tianji was achieved through a straightforward show of strength. The number of mecha experts within Tianji was just slightly less than that in Leiting — even the number three faction, Wuji, had had no choice but to collaborate with Li Lanfeng and Zhao Jun to compete with Tianji; it was clear to see how deep Tianji's power reserves went.

Yet, it was precisely this kind of mecha clan, one that even Wuji found difficult to deal with, which had lost in such a clear-cut manner to Lingtian. This was absolute proof that Lingtian was not a mecha clan which was surviving by luck; Lingtian had truly risen by its own power.

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Planet Southcrest:

In the Strategic Planning Division of the 23rd Division, He Xuyang 1 , who had secured the position of head adviser to General Ling Xiao, unexpectedly received an invitation letter from his subordinates. When he opened and read it, a slight smile appeared on his face. He did not detain the invitation as he would typically, instead sliding it smoothly into the pile of documents to be sent over to General Ling Xiao for perusal.

This move surprised his deputies. It should be known that there were almost over a dozen of these kinds of invitations every month, but General Ling Xiao had long ago instructed that they should refuse all of them. The workload involved in establishing the 23rd Division was massive — General Ling Xiao just did not have the time and leisurely mood to deal with these sorts of boring gatherings or events.

"This ... will it be okay?" When the second adviser Tong Zhiying 2 saw He Xuyang pick up the stack of documents with the invitation within it, ready to go to General Ling Xiao's office, he could not help but ask and give a cautious reminder. Even though General Ling Xiao was always extremely friendly and

affable, Tong Zhiying, as He Xuyang's partner, did not want to see him commit any mistakes that might cause him to be reprimanded by General Ling Xiao.

He Xuyang smiled at Tong Zhiying and explained, "This one is different ..."

Tong Zhiying's heart clenched and he quickly nodded to show he understood. He did not ask any more questions, but turned his gaze back onto the document in his own hands. Those who had managed to climb up so far to get to a position like his were all very cautious and discreet people — they knew not to casually ask about secrets they should not know.

He Xuyang's smile deepened — this was also something he greatly appreciated in Tong Zhiying. In addition, the other was exceptionally skilled. He Xuyang was very happy to be partnered with him. However, regarding matters which concerned Young Master Lan, before General Ling Xiao announced their relationship to the public, He Xuyang decided he had better still keep everything secret.

That's right, this very different invitation had something to do with Young Master Lan. Half a month later, the highly anticipated All-Federation Military Academy Grand Mecha Tournament would begin. On each occasion, the commanders of every army division would receive an invitation card to attend and view the grand tournament. The 23rd Division, as a newly established standing army, had also received an invitation this year.

And the reason He Xuyang treated this invitation so seriously was that he had heard General Ling Xiao inadvertently bring up the topic a few days ago. He had mentioned that Young Master Lan, who was only in his second year, had already created history in the First Men's Military Academy. He had led his clan in a victorious upset over the original number one faction in the academy and had then moved on to successfully defend his faction's new position, thus clinching the representation rights for this Mecha Grand Tournament.

An excellent adviser needed to understand the mind of their leader. He believed that General Ling Xiao would definitely want to observe his son's outstanding performance with his own eyes. General Ling Xiao should be extremely willing to see this invitation letter.

"Ding dong, ding dong, ding dong!" Ling Xiao, who was focusing intently on a document in his hands, heard the alert of the door and softly called out, "Enter!"

The voice-activated door opened automatically following Ling Xiao's call, and He Xuyang strode through it holding a tall stack of documents.

Ling Xiao saw that great stack of documents in He Xuyang's hands and kneaded his forehead in consternation, saying, "Why are there so many documents every day? Are you all slacking off and bringing all sorts of nonsense documents to me as well now?"

He had clearly instructed his men to only bring those extremely critical and vital documents to him for approval — all other documents could just go to his three chiefs of staff to deliberate and decide on.

He Xuyang speechlessly put the stack of documents down on General Ling Xiao's large desk. Recalling the documents piled up as high as a mountain on his own office desk, He Xuyang said sullenly, "General, our Strategic Planning Division is so filled with documents that we hardly have anywhere to stand

anymore. If you still have any complaints at this point, don't blame all of us in the Strategic Planning Division for going on strike!"

He Xuyang's words reminded Ling Xiao of the cluttered and hectic environment of the Strategic Planning Division — everyone there worked as if they were fighting a war. Ling Xiao could not help but shudder just thinking about how dizzying the constantly shifting environment was over there. Fine. He Xuyang's threat had a lot of weight behind it — if the Strategic Planning Division really went on strike, his 23rd Division was sure to be dead in the water 3 .

Thus, Ling Xiao could only point at those documents and ask, "What are these documents?"

"These are the letters of appointment we've drawn up for the latest batch of officers. Please review them. And this is the proposal to set up a Special Forces team ... after collective discussion, the Strategic Planning Division has decided that it is necessary to have one. Also, this one is ..." He Xuyang handed over the documents one by one, explaining their contents as he did so. In the end, he took out an invitation and said, "This is the invitation for a special guest viewing of the Mecha Grand Tournament. They want to know if you will be attending, General."

Ling Xiao's head was already spinning from the great stack of documents earlier. He did not hear what He Xuyang said clearly, only catching the words 'invitation', so he quickly spoke up to refuse, "Like before, refuse them all."

However, He Xuyang did not take back the invitation card as Ling Xiao had expected, instead opening it and placing it right on top of the document Ling Xiao had been looking at. This move stunned Ling Xiao who did not know how He Xuyang could be this daring ...

But Ling Xiao was well aware that He Xuyang would never do such an audacious thing for no reason. Thus, doing so, he had to have his reasons. Consequently, Ling Xiao turned his attention to that invitation:

"Respectfully inviting the commander of the 23rd Division, General Ling Xiao, to attend the 279th Military Academy Mecha Grand Tournament. The time will be ..."

"The Military Academy Mecha Grand Tournament will be starting in just half a month?" said Ling Xiao as he lifted the invitation, his face filled with pleasant surprise.

"That's why I wanted to ask you, sir, if you would be attending," said He Xuyang helplessly. He still remembered how General Ling Xiao had specially disguised himself and went undercover as an assessment officer to sneak into the First Men's Military Academy last year just to see Young Master Lan. Now that there was an officially endorsed chance to see Young Master Lan, he just could not believe that General Ling Xiao would be able to let it go by.

Sure enough, General Ling Xiao replied firmly, "Attend, I must attend! And I'll bring my wife with me."

He just knew that this invitation was special! He Xuyang nodded calmly, replying that he would return a letter of confirmation to the military. Only then did he sedately bid farewell to General Ling Xiao and take his leave.

Hmm, perhaps he should also take a vacation and go with General Ling Xiao to the Mecha Grand Tournament. Speaking of which, he had not seen Young Master Lan for almost half a year ... that icy

youth who had such a distinctly different aura from General Ling Xiao and yet was equally charismatic. The chief of staff He Xuyang thought to himself as he walked out of General Ling Xiao's office.

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At this moment, Ling Lan, who was deeply engrossed in her close-combat ace mecha training, had no idea that her old man had already decided to attend the Mecha Grand Tournament, or that he would bring her mum along as well to meet her. After close to half a month of operating and researching with a real mecha, Ling Lan now finally understood that operating a real ace mecha was not so simple. Real-world operation was still somewhat different from operation in Mecha World — ultra-difficult mecha moves that could be executed smoothly in Mecha World were not so easy to pull off in the real world due to the limitations of her physical body.

Of course, this was not to say that Ling Lan could not do them — however, after she executed those moves, Ling Lan's body would incur varying degrees of internal damage. Ling Lan felt rather helpless on this matter. The difference between the physical constitutions of men and women, which she had never taken to heart initially, had finally reared its ugly head when it came to ace mecha operation. Ling Lan had cultivated a tough constitution almost on par with Qi Long's through the use of countless gene agents and practice of her Qi exercises. And yet, a flaw had still been exposed during ace mecha operation.

"It looks like the physical differences due to gender are not so easily resolved." No wonder there were no female mecha operators who managed to climb to the top in this world — the difference in gender also meant a difference in physical endurance; a female's body was still a little weaker. Ling Lan knew that if she wanted to progress further and advance to imperial level, or even that supreme god-class level, she would need to find a way to break through the limitations of her body. Otherwise, everything would merely be empty talk.

"Maybe, this is what Instructor Number One was talking about, because my body is incompatible with the Dao I've chosen to walk. Perhaps when my body and my Dao become compatible, then the physical issues restricting my progress will no longer exist." Ling Lan had this feeling in her heart. Even though she was rather anxious inside, Ling Lan knew rationally that hurrying was pointless. To solve these issues, she needed a serendipitous chance. Unfortunately, this chance was not so easy to come by.

"Beep, beep, beep!" While deep in thought, Ling Lan suddenly heard her communicator ringing. She opened the device and glanced at it, and found that it was actually Wu Jiong calling her. Surprised, she accepted the call and immediately heard Wu Jiong yelling on the other end, "Boss Lan, are you free?"

Glancing at the time displayed on her mecha's screen, Ling Lan saw that it was already a little after three o'clock. Considering that there wasn't much time before class would end, she said, "What's up?"

Wu Jiong received the implicit permission to go on and said, "If you're free, Boss, I'll call all the team leaders of the battle clans in the regiment, as well as all the outstanding student members of the various major specializations in the regiment to come to headquarters for a meeting ..."

Ling Lan frowned and asked, "A meeting?"

As if picking up on the displeasure in Ling Lan's tone, Wu Jiong hurriedly explained, "Boss, could it be that you've forgotten that, yesterday, the school administrators have already handed over the

representation rights of the Mecha Grand Tournament to our mecha clan? Qi Long, Li Yingjie and I have discussed things at length yesterday and think that it is very hard to determine who should be the representatives, so we want to open a meeting and brainstorm together.”

Chapter 430: Target for Collaboration!

“So it’s about this matter ...” Ling Lan thought of her original decision, and so she said, “That’s fine. Inform the rest. Tonight at six, we’ll have a meeting.” It was about time for them to know what she was thinking.

“Alright, Boss Lan,” replied Wu Jiong happily, pleased at obtaining a concrete time. They only had one week to confirm their name list of a hundred people. Even though that was not a lot, to choose among all the exceptional talents of all the various specializations in the academy who would also be willing to join Lingtian ... Wu Jiong still felt the time was a little tight.

Very soon, night came, and Ling Lan arrived at the headquarters of Lingtian. She had just stepped through the doorway when one of the reception staff in the main hall of headquarters saw their regiment commander arriving. He reacted swiftly, charging over to the elevator as quick as he could and attentively helped Ling Lan press the button to call the elevator.

Ling Lan nodded gently at that member in thanks, and when she saw the doors of the elevator open, she stepped into the elevator and turned around to press the button for the floor she wanted to go to.

The elevator doors had barely closed when Ling Lan, with her exceptional hearing, heard excited voices piping up outside, “Heavens, I’ve finally seen the legendary first regiment commander! Boss Lan is just too cool!” This was obviously a member who had just joined Lingtian; the older members would certainly have seen Ling Lan before.

“Lil’ An, you are just too goddamn fast. Actually getting the chance to interact with the boss close up!” said another member, tone jealous as he looked at the youth still standing by the elevator doors.

“Big Brother Lou, did the regiment commander nod at me just now ...?” That person standing by the elevator did not seem to be able to trust what he had seen; his tone was filled with dreamy wonder.

“Yes! Boss Lan is very cold, you know? And he actually responded to you this time. You’re really such a lucky devil ...” said the one called Big Brother Lou enviously.

“Yeah, yeah, we all saw it! Boss is so cool and so cold ... just a glimpse of him is enough to give me chills. But he actually nodded to you ... you’re so lucky!” All of the members in the hall were filled with envy-jealousy-hate — they could barely restrain themselves from beating up that obviously over-excited fellow. D\*mmit, why had they been just that beat slower than him?

The ruckus in the hall made Ling Lan sweatdrop — she had never expected her simple polite nod to create such a stir among these members. Could it be that she was usually too aloof?

Ling Lan was unaware that, because she had always thrown all the matters of the faction to the other three regiment commanders to handle, she did not appear in front of others very often. The chances were infinitesimal for a regular faction member to see her — this had made her the most mysterious regiment commander in the minds of the faction members. Furthermore, she had led Lingtian to create

one miracle after another which had also made her become the idol of her faction members; thus, the regular faction members could not help but be thrilled to catch sight of her.

As soon as Ling Lan neared the doors of the conference room, she could hear how noisy it was inside. The atmosphere seemed to be very lively. Ling Lan shoved the door open and saw that all of the upper ranks of Lingtian were already here. They were all seated around the conference table, engaged in lively discussion, and some were even bantering playfully with those they were familiar with. Catching movement at the door, the members in the room collectively turned their heads, and when they saw that it was their regiment commander Ling Lan, the room instantly fell silent. Subsequently, they all quickly stood up from their seats, bowed their heads, and shouted, “Boss!”

Ling Lan found herself sweatdropping — even though Qi Long and the others had always called her Boss, they were the little companions who had grown up beside her. They had only started calling her that as a joke, and now they merely continued calling her that because it had become a habit over time which was why she had just let it be. But in the present, these team leaders were all people who had joined their group later on — some of them were even members who had only joined the group after they had entered the military academy. Being called ‘Boss’ by so many people gave Ling Lan the strange impression that she was the head of a heinous and deplorable mafia group!

“Just call me ‘regiment commander’. You don’t have to call me ‘boss’.” Ling Lan decided that she needed to fix the group’s skewed perspective and salvage her glorious regiment commander image. As she said this, she swept a cold gaze tinged with threat around the room in hopes that everyone would not make the same mistake in address again.

Perhaps the threat in Ling Lan’s gaze was too intense — under Ling Lan’s forceful stare, the members once again lowered their heads and replied, “Yes, Boss!”

Ling Lan was speechless — did this really count as agreement?! Why were they still calling her ‘boss’?! Ling Lan looked at the three people who were standing by the door to welcome her. Wu Jiong and Li Yingjie were working partners, so she could not pressure them; thus, she turned a fierce glare on Qi Long, hoping that this fellow would be sharp enough to figure out what she wanted and get everyone to change their form of address and call her ‘regiment commander’ instead. She had established a mecha clan, not a mafia society ...

Qi Long bore the brunt of his boss’s mean glare and asked tentatively, “Boss, can we start the meeting?”

Fine, Qi Long, you’re strong. Actually not folding to my threat ... I’ll deal with you when we return! Ling Lan gnashed her teeth silently, though she only nodded coolly on the outside.

Seeing Ling Lan nod, the group let out silent sighs of relief. It could not be helped. The pressure of Boss Lan’s gaze was just too formidable ... Qi Long was still the man! Everyone secretly cast respectful gazes at Qi Long. Meanwhile, Qi Long surreptitiously wiped the sweat from his forehead. Thinking about it, over this recent period of time, Boss’s force of presence had become even stronger — even he who spent so much time by Boss’s side was feeling the pressure.

Ling Lan walked into the conference room under the accompaniment of the three boys. Qi Long rushed one step ahead to pull out the chair at the head of the conference table and invited Ling Lan to sit. After

Ling Lan took her seat, she swept another cold gaze over the high-ranking members in the room before saying, "Sit!"

"Yes, Boss!" Receiving Ling Lan's order, the group sat. However, the atmosphere at this moment was no longer as raucous as it had been before Ling Lan entered the room. Instead, there was a still silence.

Ling Lan's gaze swept across the room and she found that other than the team leaders of the various battle clans and the four regiment commanders, Li Lanfeng and Han Jijun were also in attendance as the strategists of Lingtian. Li Shiyu, as the dux of the Military Medicine specialization, and Chang Xinyuan, as a prodigious mecha engineer, were also here. Meanwhile, as the primary offensive force of Lingtian on the surface, Zhao Jun had also been specially invited to join the meeting.

Lin Zhong-qing was the note-taker for the meeting, responsible for taking the minutes and keeping track of the agenda; he was sitting slightly behind Ling Lan. As for Luo Lang and Xie Yi, they were pitifully delegated as tea-boys, making sure to keep the cups of the people attending the meeting filled ...

All in all, everyone in her battle clan was here in the conference room, with no exceptions ... Ling Lan cast a pensive look at Wu Jiong.

Seeing Ling Lan's eyes turn to him, Wu Jiong coughed and said, "Since Boss is here, let's officially proceed with the agenda of the meeting. Yesterday, the administrators of the academy have officially announced that the representation rights of the Mecha Grand Tournament this time will be given into the full responsibility of the Lingtian Mecha Clan. All of us know that though the Mecha Grand Tournament is known as the Mecha Grand Tournament, it is actually a competition with multiple events which span almost all of the specializations in the military academies. However, our mecha clan has just been established, and a majority of our members are second-years. Not only are our members spread thin across the various specializations, even if we manage to scrounge up enough talent from all the specializations, those members also would not have four years of learning experience. For them to handle these competitions is likely impossible ..."

Wu Jiong's words made the hearts of all the battle clan leaders sink. Li Yingjie then added to what Wu Jiong had said, "The representatives for the last tournament was the Leiting Mecha Clan. Even a mecha clan with such a long history and substantial reserves had chosen to give up on several of the less popular specializations when they composed their representation name list, because they did not have any members in those specializations within their faction ... that said, because Leiting had an overwhelming advantage in a few of their strong suits, despite giving up on several events, Leiting still managed to obtain second place in the end. If our results are terrible this time, I'm afraid our Lingtian will become the common target of hatred for all the cadets in the academy."

Everyone understood what Li Yingjie was implying. Although the First Men's Military Academy was always rife with internal conflict, all the cadets attached great importance to the reputation of the military academy. If Lingtian suffered a great defeat in the tournament this time, not only would the popularity and prestige Lingtian had earned this past three months through the challenge fights be wiped away, in future, Lingtian would not be able to develop well after as well. Lingtian may even fall apart due to this and become a mecha clan which only lasted for one year in the military academy.

Seated right after Qi Long were the Lingtian strategists Li Lanfeng and Han Jijun. Li Lanfeng saw that everyone was mute, so he concluded the topic by saying, "I have here a listing of all the events in the

mecha tournament. I'll pass it out to everyone and you all can take a look." After saying that, Li Lanfeng passed out the document. He then waited for everyone to at least skim through it once before continuing to say, "Frankly, some of the smaller events are not very important. The really essential event is the last one. This event contributes half of the point value for the tournament. It can be said that, if we manage to win this event, even if we don't obtain first place, second place will be certain."

Li Lanfeng's words drew everyone's attention to the final event. That event was listed as — Integrated Team Battle Royal!

In the Integrated Team Battle Royal, each team would have 120 members participating. The representing teams from all military academies in the Federation would be placed on the same map to fight it out in a time-limited battle royal. The time limit would be set as 3 days, or 72 hours.

Li Lanfeng continued his analysis. "This battle royal does not only challenge a team's combat power. There will be all kinds of sustained damage, double-crossing, schemes and manipulations aplenty. It can be said that the tactics will be endless — the 120 members of each team will not be from just one specialization. The team will be an amalgamation of all the specializations, thus representing the strength of the military academies in its truest sense. It is precisely due to this reason that the First Men's Military Academy has come in second for seven consecutive tournaments. Everyone knows that the specialization distribution of the First Men's Military Academy's representative team is too narrow and focused. Our academy basically only sends mecha operators."

"From the looks of it, to get good results, just relying on us alone is impossible," said one of the team leaders of a battle clan under the Lingtian Mecha Clan.

"Yes. For a 120-man team, it would be best for there to be 5 strategists to coordinate operations." Han Jiyun confirmed what that team leader said and elaborated, "And right now, the only people in Lingtian who can hold the position of strategist are Li Lanfeng and myself. We're lacking three more people. To win the tournament, we must gather a whole set of 5 people."

"Unfortunately, for the role of strategist, as soon as any sign of a person who can take on such a role reveals itself, some mecha clan will whisk them away. To start looking now will probably be very difficult," said Gao Jinyun with a deep frown. "Could it be that we'll have to steal one from the other mecha clans?"

"Even if we want to steal someone, the other mecha clans won't let them go." A team leader by Gao Jinyun's side immediately shot down that idea.

"Not stealing, but collaborating!" said Ling Lan abruptly.

Wu Jiong said dubiously, "Boss Lan, you mean for us to collaborate with the other mecha clans?"

Ling Lan nodded and said, "Yes, send out invitations to all the major mecha clans. We'll draw the talent we need from them and carry out a school-wide collaboration! And our first target will be Thunder King Qiao Ting!"

Everyone in the conference room was stupefied by Ling Lan's words. Collaborate with Thunder King Qiao Ting? Had they misheard?