

Crossing 441

Chapter 441: Respective Plans!

The curtains were finally lifted on the All-Federation Military Academy Grand Mecha Tournament. First up was the grand opening ceremony at the main stadium at 9 o'clock. This opening ceremony would be broadcast live on the all-federation interplanetary network — both the military and the organisers on planet Qiming took it very seriously.

After waking up early in the morning, Ling Lan washed up and then began circulating her Qi to warm and nurture her body. Over these past two months, the hidden injuries she had received from training with real ace mecha would heal much faster every time she practised her Qi exercises; thus, whenever Ling Lan was awake and had nothing better to do, she would circulate her Qi to take care of her injuries.

However, one month later, Ling Lan discovered the true profundity of the Qi exercises. In the process of healing, her physical constitution was slowly becoming even stronger, though the effects were infinitesimal. If Ling Lan had not noticed how she was gradually receiving lighter injuries from her training with real mecha as time went by, perhaps she would have completely overlooked it, ending up unable to discover this deep secret of the Qi exercises.

This made Ling Lan prize the Qi exercises even more, no longer just practising them only for the sake of treating her injuries. Anytime she was free, she would sit and go through them. Ling Lan's tenacity was rewarded well. Ling Lan felt that the resilience of her body becoming better and better, and so her body's ability to endure the feedback pressure from mecha operation was also becoming stronger and stronger. Naturally, she did not forget to share this discovery with Li Lanfeng; after all, he needed the help of the Qi exercises even more than she did. As long as Li Lanfeng kept up with the exercises, his frail body on the brink of collapse would no longer be a problem he would have to worry about.

After a few circulations, Ling Lan saw that it would soon be the assembly time as notified by the organisers, and so she left her room and slowly began making her way to the assembly point.

The assembly point was at the large square in the middle of the accommodation areas. Ling Lan had only just arrived at the fringes of the square when she could see that there was already a large group of people gathered there. Ling Lan looked around casually and found that almost all the cadets from the various participating military academies were already here. This made it difficult for her to pinpoint where the First Men's Military Academy was gathering for a moment.

However, Ling Lan was not troubled by it for long. Qi Long, who had long arrived at the square, had immediately sensed his boss's position the moment Ling Lan had come within range. He quickly turned his head and raised his right hand to greet his boss, to show that they were over here.

Qi Long's loud greeting naturally startled some of the other military academy cadets around him. However, after a quick glance at Ling Lan, they no longer dared to look at him.

Ling Lan did not hesitate to head over instantly. Many people were already gathered at Qi Long's side — they were all participating students from the First Academy. Ling Lan took a look around and found that not only Qiao Ting's group was here, but even the rest from the other factions, Tianji, Wuji, Dwotong

and so on were all present. Rather, because she had aimed to arrive right on the dot, she ended up being the last one to arrive.

Still, no one would dare to grumble about it. In fact, many of the youths believed that Ling Lan should be the last one to arrive anyway. Qiao Ting's gaze was complicated as he looked at Ling Lan. He sighed mentally — unexpectedly, unconsciously, the regiment commander of Lingtian, Ling Lan, had already gained prominence in the hearts of the students of the First Men's Military Academy. How easily did this become a matter of fact ... he had strived so hard for four years to obtain this, yet the other had done it so easily ... a bitter feeling tinged with resentment towards fate ¹ rose in Qiao Ting's heart — Ling Lan may very well be his rival for life.

As soon as Ling Lan arrived, Wu Jiong who had been coordinating everyone quickly came forward to report to Ling Lan. "Boss Lan, the staff have just notified us that our First Men's Military Academy had been arranged for bus no.397. Now we're just waiting for the other cadets to leave first."

"397?" Ling Lan was taken aback. "So, we'll be the finale?" Don't blame Ling Lan for her surprise — although the First Men's Military Academy was ranked as the number one military academy in the Federation, it had still come in second place for seven consecutive Mecha Grand Tournaments. Ling Lan felt that this kind of results should have made it unlikely for them to be the final ones to take the stage.

"Yes, when I received the notification earlier, I almost did not believe it as well. But then, I thought about it a bit more ..." Wu Jiong glanced towards Qiao Ting not too far away from them, smiled and said, "Maybe it's because of him."

Ling Lan's mind contemplated the idea for a moment and she felt that Wu Jiong's judgment was not wrong. The First Men's Military Academy had been given the special honour of being the finale this time probably because of Qiao Ting — after all, he was known to be the only one after Ling Xiao who had managed to become an ace operator in his fourth year at a military academy. Both the military and the organisers on planet Qiming were pinning high hopes on Qiao Ting; as such, they did not dare to disgrace Qiao Ting in any way at this time.

Qi Long did not care at all about whether they were the finale or not. With a hint of reluctance, he asked Ling Lan in a soft whisper, "Boss, are we really going to let Qiao Ting be the team leader during the opening ceremony?" The team leader would be the one to bear the school flag during the opening ceremony. Every cadet viewed this position as a mark of honour, which was why Qi Long felt rather unwilling to let it go to Qiao Ting. His boss was clearly the true leader — why did Qiao Ting have to be one to enjoy the limelight?

"Isn't that fine? He's a primary force in this Mecha Grand Tournament. It makes complete sense for him to bear the school flag," said Ling Lan nonchalantly. Compared to fame, she would rather have obscurity. Her gender had determined that she would not be able to walk into the public eye.

Qi Long was still rather disgruntled because, in his heart, Boss was the greatest. Although Qiao Ting was an ace operator, his boss was one too! Moreover, his boss was a supreme genius who had managed to advance to ace level in just one year at the military academy — this was not something someone like Qiao Ting could compare with. However, Qi Long also knew that his boss would not change his mind once he had decided on something, and so Qi Long sullenly shut up.

When 9 o'clock came, the square began to bustle. One by one the hover buses arrived at the square, picking up batch after batch of students. Under the arrangements of the staff, everything proceeded in an organised manner and with the passage of time, the number of students in the square gradually dwindled. Around 10 o'clock, it was finally the First Men's Military Academy's turn. They were the only ones left at the square by this time.

Qiao Ting reflexively glanced over at Ling Lan, and when Ling Lan nodded at him, Qiao Ting sucked in a deep breath and shouted, "Let us board!" After saying that, he was the first to step onto the no.397 hover bus.

The First Men's Military Academy lined up according to their faction ranks, boarding the bus in an organised manner. The last group to board the bus was Ling Lan's team. When the final person, Xie Yi, had boarded, the no.397 hover bus left the large square, flying towards the main venue.

At this time, three middle-aged men were standing in a corner of the large square. There were several other people behind them as well, and all of them were watching as the First Men's Military Academy moved. The middle-aged man on the left said to the one in the middle, "Old Zhou, what do you think about the First Men's Military Academy this time round?"

The man in the middle merely huffed coldly without replying. The eyes of the man on the left flickered; displeased with the non-answer, he once again said provocatively, "I heard that your team leader this time suffered a loss at the other's hands, and the one he was disgraced by was just some nameless small fry. It looks like for you all to get first place this time, it'll be a little risky ..."

The other's gleeful tone of schadenfreude successfully provoked the man in the middle. He sneered and mocked back, "Old Wu, I heard that many of the team leaders in the Mecha Grand Tournament this time are ace operators. You all better prepare properly ... don't let your ranking drop from the top four to outside the top ten and disgrace all the men's academies." He turned his head to look at the man on the right who had been quiet all this time and asked, "Right, Old Cao?"

The man on the right had a nice guy face. With a wide smile, he said, "Now that you've mentioned it, Old Zhou, I really feel the pressure." He then looked at the man on the left, sighed and said, "Old Wu, looks like we'll need to keep an eye out for each other and share a helping hand so we don't lose face when the time comes."

Old Cao had barely finished speaking when Old Zhou's face turned black. Meanwhile, on the left side, Old Wu laughed — Old Cao was willing to help him both implicitly and explicitly, so of course he was glad.

The dark-faced Old Zhou smiled coldly. "Old Cao, don't take care of others so much that you suffer instead." His tone carried a vague hint of threat — without the help of his school, did they really think it would be so easy to place well?

In order to contend with the First Men's Military Academy, their three military academies had tacitly cooperated with each other in the final battle royal for the past few tournaments, working together to eliminate the First Men's Military Academy. Things should have been the same this year as well, but unexpectedly, the third place First Co-ed Military Academy and the fourth place Third Men's Military

Academy were actually having second thoughts and had begun ostracizing his military academy now. Could it be that they were dissatisfied because his academy had taken first place for four consecutive tournaments, not giving way to either of the other two?

It turned out that these three men were actually all from the top four schools, the three other military academies besides the First Men's Military Academy. Old Zhou in the middle was from the Second Men's Military Academy which had obtained first place for many consecutive Mecha Grand Tournaments. Old Wu on the left was from the Third Men's Military Academy which had placed fourth last tournament, while Old Cao on the right was from the First Co-ed Military Academy which had placed third last tournament. This time, they had rushed here to the large square together just so they could check out the students who were representing the First Men's Military Academy this year.

Old Cao did not seem to pick up on Old Zhou's threat; still smiling calmly, he said, "How could that happen? No matter how strong the opponent is, we'll still need to work hard and not let others pull one over us."

Old Zhou's complexion improved a little at those words — Old Cao had obviously compromised a little with his reply. Truly, if he did not bare some teeth, they would not behave.

After Old Wu heard these words, he glanced at the agreeable Old Cao and became pensive.

The three men saw that there was nothing left here for them to do, so they bid each other farewell. Then, leading their own assistants, they all went their respective ways.

On the Second Men's Military Academy end, the assistant behind Old Zhou said with a worried expression, "Faculty head, the Third Men's Military Academy and the First Co-ed Military Academy ... what did they mean? Could it be that they don't want to work together anymore?"

Old Zhou smiled coldly and replied, "It's fine. Leave them be for a bit. The competitions at the front depends on themselves. It won't be that easy for them to obtain good results. By the time the marks are tallied up, even if they don't want to work with us, they'll still have to. I don't believe that they would be willing to give up their current positions."

Only then did the assistant breathe a sigh of relief — the faculty head was still more impressive, knowing to leave the line long to nab bigger fish.

Meanwhile, on the First Co-ed Military Academy's end, there was also a conversation going on. However, Old Chao was no longer smiling at this moment, and his assistant was equally indignant. "The Second Men's Military Academy actually dared to do such a thing ... do they really think we will still want to work with them?"

Old Cao sneered and said, "Really thinking that we, the First Co-ed Military Academy, are made from glutinous rice²?! Actually daring to target our female students ... what bastards." The incensed nice guy could not help cursing, "If not for the people from the First Men's Military Academy, our Starship Navigation prodigy would probably have been ruined just like that, and they actually acted like nothing had happened. They're really going too far! This time, even if our results leave us at the bottom, we will pull the Second Men's Military Academy off their pedestal. We will let them know that we, the First Co-ed Military Academy, have our pride and temper!"

Chapter 442: Opening Ceremony!

When Old Cao's assistant heard this, he instantly said happily, "Overseer 1, if that bunch of brats know your intentions, they'll definitely be over the moon. Luo Chao was almost ruined this time, and those stinky brats almost exploded from the anger. They've long been howling that we should show the Second Men's Military Academy what's what."

Old Cao smiled at his words, nodded and said, "That's what our students should be like. If they can't protect their own brothers and sisters, then what use do they have for becoming strong?"

While this side was planning to deceive and trip up the Second Men's Military Academy, on the Third Men's Military Academy's side, Old Wu was asking his assistant, "Ah Qi, tell me, what do you think the First Co-ed Military Academy is planning?"

His assistant Ah Qi replied, "On the surface, they seem like they intend to collaborate with us. Like us, they seem to have some beef with the Second Men's Military Academy. But after Faculty Head Zhou of the Second Men's Military Academy said what he said, Overseer Cao seemed to have retreated."

"Retreated?" Old Wu frowned. "That fellow Cao Yongyu ... although he looks like a really nice guy, very agreeable and open to discussion, we have really never been able to gain any advantage when dealing with him. This kind of person ... would he really just give up because of one statement from Zhou Yuanyi?" He did not believe it.

His assistant Ah Qi also became thoughtful. Then, suddenly thinking of something, he said in a low voice, "Sir, last night, I heard some news from the grapevine. Perhaps it has something to do with this ..."

Old Wu's eyes lit up and he quickly motioned for Ah Qi to elaborate.

"The team leader of the Second Men's Military Academy clashed with the First Men's Military Academy all because of a girl. And that girl is from the First Co-ed Military Academy, a Starship Navigation prodigy whom they are specially cultivating ..."

Old Wu was surprised. He had thought that the Second Men's Military Academy and the First Men's Military Academy had clashed in the marketplace because they just could not see eye to eye. Unexpectedly, there was this extra element to it ... Old Wu suddenly laughed and said, "So that's how it is, so that's how it is. Looks like our chance has come. Watch them closely. Once the results for the earlier competitions are out, we can study the situation better and decide who we should choose as our final partners to work with. It's about time for the perennial fourth place to move up a little." A flash of ambition coursed through Old Wu's eyes.

At this moment, Ling Lan and the rest had already arrived at the main venue, completely oblivious to the dark currents surging behind them. They were nervously lining up to enter the venue — as the last participating group to take the stage, everyone could take pride in this honour they had been given.

Qiao Ting accepted the school flag which had been prepared by the staff members, gripping it firmly. This school flag which represented the military academy he came from ... he had looked at it for five years, and he had never ever felt like it had any particular meaning. But here and now, the school flag

was actually heavy, giving him a sort of invisible pressure. He suddenly felt that the treasured throne of king of just his military academy, which he had desired for so long, was actually such a trivial thing ...

“My world should not be limited to a small military academy. It should encompass the entire Federation, no, the whole universe!” A bright flame rose in Qiao Ting’s eyes. He felt as if he was being remade from the inside out, and the bottleneck of his initially frozen and unmoving peak of advanced level Qi-Jin actually began to show signs of loosening ...

Ling Lan sensed the change in Qiao Ting’s condition. She threw a startled glance at the other, thinking that the other was becoming stronger both in terms of force of presence and confidence. She frowned lightly, but the furrow of her brow quickly smoothed out and her eyes soon became tranquil again.

No matter how strong the opponent was, she was not afraid of any challenge!

The pride in Ling Lan’s heart surged and her force of presence began to shake violently. This instantly startled the students who had been caught up in their nervous excitement — the powerful pressure gave them no room to think of anything else. They could only grit their teeth and resist the oppressive pressure with all their might. As they were now putting their full attention on this, their initially stiff movements and restless minds due to their nerves instantly became much more natural and calm.

Qiao Ting sensed the pressure coming from Ling Lan and turned to glance at her. His gaze became even more determined — losing once did not mean losing for a lifetime. He would definitely become stronger than Ling Lan!

The subtle byplay between Qiao Ting’s and Ling Lan’s force of presences was instantly noticed by the spiritually-aberrant Li Lanfeng. He looked at Qiao Ting then looked at Ling Lan, and his gaze turned solemn. Whether it was Qiao Ting, who he viewed as his greatest opponent in this life, or Ling Lan, his most important confidant, they were both constantly improving. In that split second back then, he had felt the two of them becoming even stronger than before.

Sure enough, it was not so easy to alter one’s destiny. He needed to work much harder! Li Lanfeng’s gaze turned cold and he began to silently practise the Qi exercises.

Ever since Ling Lan had told him that as long as he was persistent with his efforts in practising these Qi exercises, his terrible physical constitution would be inherently changed and may even be resolved completely, he had practised the exercises whenever he could. After close to a year of relentless study, he had finally achieved a state where he did not even need to sit down and meditate to circulate his Qi and go through the exercises. Now, he could even practise the Qi exercises while exercising. Although the effects were not as great as when he was meditating, the effects were still noticeable after accumulation over time. Based on his current progress and efficacy, his constitution problem which originally would have required five to six years to resolve may be resolved a year or two faster.

Of course, he had also shared the results of his research with Ling Lan. And as expected, his rabbit was unbelievably aberrant, only taking one month to achieve what he had spent a year to do. At this thought, Li Lanfeng felt both proud and somewhat put out. He was proud of Ling Lan being so outstanding, but put out just thinking of the gap between himself and the other. However, Li Lanfeng’s heart was strong — he was not discouraged by Ling Lan’s aberrant abilities. If he could not compare to the other in terms of talent, then he would use hard work to make up the difference.

Li Lanfeng could never have imagined that Ling Lan had a cheat that allowed her to extend her practice time several times over. As such, whether it was in terms of talent or hard work, Li Lanfeng was doomed to chase after Ling Lan his entire life.

“Boss, retract your force of presence quickly!” Inside Ling Lan’s mindspace, Little Four was panicking. He had not forgotten that Ling Lan’s force of presence was currently extremely unstable — this was also why Qiao Ting had been able to provoke Ling Lan’s force of presence so easily.

Ling Lan, whose force of presence had already reached a critical point, was at risk of losing control at any moment. If his boss’s force of presence was allowed to escalate freely, the possibility of losing control would be infinitely increased — Little Four did not dare to risk it.

Little Four’s words sent a jolt running through Ling Lan’s heart — she too had recalled her problem, so she quickly suppressed her force of presence which was on the verge of rampaging. The team members who had been resisting the pressure with all their might suddenly felt the burden ease, and their bodies became much lighter. They silently breathed a sigh of relief and finally relaxed. Right then, they no longer felt as nervous and tense as they had at the start, becoming much calmer and composed. They glanced at Ling Lan gratefully — they had been able to regain their usual state of mind all thanks to the pressure of Ling Lan’s force of presence. They thought that Ling Lan had been trying to help them.

This was undoubtedly a beautiful misunderstanding. Without her conscious knowledge, Ling Lan had once again made her image become even greater than before.

At this moment, at the rostrum area, Ling Xiao, who was chatting happily with his dear wife Lan Luofeng, suddenly frowned, but his expression was soon relaxed again. Lan Luofeng, who had been peering at the entrance all this time, did not notice Ling Xiao’s shift in expressions. She was extraordinarily excited; tugging on Ling Xiao’s sleeve, she kept asking, “Have they come? Have they come?” Why hadn’t she seen any sign of her baby daughter after so long? Where had the First Men’s Military Academy gone? Why weren’t they here yet?

Ling Xiao quickly reassured her. “Soon, soon. The First Men’s Military Academy is typically saved for the last. Now that the other schools have all come out, it should be their turn soon.”

Although Ling Xiao was all smiles, his smile did not reach his eyes. Just now, he had sensed Ling Lan’s force of presence and, powerful as he was, he had instantly sensed something wrong with it. He was very worried and also somewhat crestfallen at the same time — even when his baby daughter was having problems, she still did not want to seek him, her father, out to help her solve her problems. Undoubtedly, he was too incompetent as a father.

“The last to take the stage is the First Men’s Military Academy. The First Men’s Military Academy is one of the strongest military academies in the Federation, with a long history of cultivating countless talents ...” Following the appearance of another participating school team, the host of the main venue began to announce the name and background of the next school to take the stage, providing a brief introduction as well.

When Lan Luofeng heard that the First Men’s Military Academy was about to appear, she instantly stood up in excitement. Her sudden move greatly surprised the other special guests. Smiling wryly, Ling Xiao quickly stood up as well to applaud the entrance of the participating team from the First Men’s Military

Academy. This move enlightened the surrounding people — General Ling Xiao had graduated from the First Men's Military Academy. No wonder his wife was so worked up ...

Ling Xiao's follow-up action perfectly explained his wife's excitement, and the virtual screens on all four sides of the main venue also began displaying the clapping figures of General Ling Xiao and his wife. This worked up the audience, and they began shouting fervently, submerging the entire venue in a sea of cheers.

In the lead, when Qiao Ting saw Ling Xiao standing on the rostrum, he clenched his hands over the staff of the flag he was holding, holding back the excitement in his heart. Ling Xiao was his idol as well as a target he wanted to surpass. In this tournament, he had to perform well and let General Ling Xiao know that he would be the next Ling Xiao.

When Qi Long and the others who knew the truth saw General Ling Xiao and Lan Luofeng, they peeked at their boss in unplanned unison. Subsequently, they instantly felt a subtle drop in the temperature around their boss.

The student representatives of the First Men's Military Academy saw their senior General Ling Xiao standing and applauding for them and were instantly overwhelmed with emotion. For a moment, the team was at risk of being thrown into disarray — if Ling Lan had not huffed coldly, startling them back to awareness, the boys might have lost control and disgraced themselves despite regaining their calm previously under the pressure of Ling Lan's force of presence.

Ling Lan managed to rein in the situation with some effort, and then she stared speechlessly at the smiling handsome man who was applauding them passionately. This old man of hers ... always unconsciously giving her some trouble.

After that, Ling Lan looked over at the obviously excited Lan Luofeng, and her brain began to ache. Mind you, her mum was the person she most did not know how to handle — if her attitude was just the least bit off in any way, she would instantly be treated to a shower of tears ...

Leaving aside Ling Lan's complicated feelings, after walking once around the stage, they were finally led to the area designated for them by a staff member. Only then did Ling Xiao and Lan Luofeng sit down again. Because of this, the First Men's Military Academy very quickly drew the envious gazes of countless other cadets around them. That was General Ling Xiao, their idol! Why couldn't General Ling Xiao be their senior? In their envy, countless cadets could not help crying internally, unbearably indignant.

Chapter 443: Half Step to God-Realm?

Once the First Men's Military Academy's debut ended, this marked the end of the Mecha Grand Tournament's opening ceremony. Everyone patiently waited for the next event.

At this time, at the centre of the main venue, 100 arenas of equal sizes slowly rose up from the floor. The appearance of these arenas represented the official start of this Mecha Grand Tournament, and the first event to take the stage was the traditional item — physical combat.

“Now, may the participating members of each school advance to the arena number as indicated by the organisers for the scheduled match-ups!” prompted the host.

Seated in his own place, Qi Long suddenly felt his communicator vibrate. He opened it and saw that a message from the organising committee had been delivered. He was actually arranged to be the first to fight at arena 17, and he was also the first one from the First Men’s Military Academy to fight in the physical skills combat to be up.

He quickly informed his boss and then rushed over to arena 17 to prepare for his match.

This time, there were five people from the First Men’s Military Academy who were participating in physical combat. The other four were from Leiting, Tianji, Wuji, and Dwotong respectively.

Wu Jiong watched worriedly as Qi Long went to his arena and asked uneasily, “Qi Long going up ... will it be okay?” The physical skills competition of the Mecha Grand Tournament was a place where all the best and brightest of physical skills prodigies of the Federation were gathered. There was even one military academy specializing in physical skills, whose specific purpose was to cultivate physical skills prodigies. Although Qi Long’s physical skills were very strong, he was still somewhat lacking when compared to these prodigies among prodigies.

At this thought, he could not help but cut a glance at Ling Lan. “Boss Lan, the one best suited for the physical skills competition in our Lingtian is actually you. Why did you choose to send Qi Long instead of going yourself?”

Ling Lan glanced calmly at Wu Jiong and said, “Qi Long’s physical skills just happens to be at a bottleneck. A competition like this will be very beneficial in spurring a breakthrough. Also, don’t you think it would be bullying the others too much if I went up there?”

Even though not many knew about her breakthrough to Domain, even when she had been a half step to Domain, she was already unbeatable to anyone below Domain stage. Fighting against these people at Qi-Jin stage would indeed be rather unsporting. Of course, Ling Lan would not really mind this — the true reason why she was not participating was her problem with her force of presence. She was afraid that in the arena, any slip in her control might end up in disaster. But all of this was not something Ling Lan could tell Wu Jiong and the others. She could only bear it in silence and send Qi Long in her place, feigning some high-mindedness in the process.

Wu Jiong decisively turned his head aside — sob, sob, sob, Boss Lan, you’re really too much! Wasn’t he being just a little selfish, wanting his own academy to obtain a few extra first places? Did he deserve such contempt?

Fine ... here was yet another clueless child who had been deceived by Ling Lan!

Qi Long’s luck was excellent; his opponent could be considered a weaker one. Without expending much effort, Qi Long defeated his opponent and successfully advanced to the next stage. Perhaps because the opponent was too weak, Qi Long did not seem to have had enough fun fighting, so he was clearly rather moody when he returned to the group.

However, Qi Long’s task for the day was done after his match ended. Now he just had to wait for the second day — once all the participants who advanced to the next round were determined, the

mainframe would randomly assign them new opponents. Whether or not Qi Long could progress further would still require some luck. Only if he did not get matched up against those hot favourites to be the winning candidate would he have any chance.

Although the first rounds for the members from Leiting, Tianji, Wuji, and Dwotong had yet to happen, Ling Lan did not plan to continue waiting. If those four participants could not even get past the first round, then they really would not be qualified to be the representatives of the four major factions; as such, Ling Lan was not too worried.

Just like that, Ling Lan led her people from Lingtian as well as the other members who were not interested in watching the rest of the fights to leave the main venue. After that, she turned down Qi Long and her companions' suggestion to go play at the entertainment establishments around the accommodation area, returning alone to her own room.

Ling Lan was so decisive in refusing her companions' invitation because she was 80% sure that her father Ling Xiao would definitely come looking for her right after she left the main venue.

Sure enough, not too long after she returned, Ling Lan heard a knock at her door. As soon as Ling Lan opened the door, she saw the smiling face of her dad who had been leaning comfortably against the door frame, waiting for her to open the door.

Ling Lan could not help but quirk her lips at the sight and say in a slightly mocking tone, "Father, isn't your 23rd Division still not yet established? You actually have the free time to come attend the opening ceremony of the Mecha Grand Tournament?"

Ling Xiao burst out into hearty laughter at her words, reaching out a hand to ruffle Ling Lan's hair. His tone was somewhat resigned as he said, "What, daddy has come all the way here to cheer for you and you're still complaining?"

"But why did you bring mum as well?" When Ling Lan brought up Lan Luofeng, she lost her usual cool; her demeanour carried a trace of helpless irritation. Of course, Ling Lan was still very calm and settled outwardly, but who was Ling Xiao? Just from the minute changes in Ling Lan's tone, he noticed something.

Even as Ling Xiao was surprised by it, he could not help but be jealous. He was surprised that his cold-faced daughter would be as helpless as he was when handling Lan Luofeng. At the same time, he was also jealous of the lofty position Lan Luofeng held in Ling Lan's heart ... the address of 'mum' was enough to prove the deep bond between mother and daughter. Just thinking about how Ling Lan still had yet to call him 'dad', Ling Xiao's heart was instantly bitter and sour. Honestly, all those years ago, he really had not intended to abandon his wife and daughter ... when exactly would Ling Lan forgive him and be able to truly accept him?

Ling Xiao quickly cast aside these depressed feelings, rallying his spirits to answer Ling Lan. "When your first year ended, you only sent a message home saying that you were staying at the academy and would not go home. Your mum missed you a lot. So, knowing that you will be participating in this Mecha Grand Tournament, you think she'd have let this chance go?"

Ling Xiao decisively threw all responsibility over to his wife — he absolutely would not ever admit that he had come because he missed his daughter too much.

Ling Lan thought back to when she had video-called her mum. Recalling her mum's crazed expression back then, Ling Lan was instantly left speechless. Alright, this was all her own fault!

"Where's mum?" Ling Lan saw that there was no one behind Ling Xiao, so she knew that the place for their reunion was definitely not going to be here.

"At the teahouse in the special guests' rest area!" A trace of a smile appeared on Ling Xiao's lips. He was relieved that Ling Lan was able to immediately grasp his true intention in coming here.

"Then, father, please lead the way," said Ling Lan, resigned. Since she could not escape, she might as well go over earlier to avoid her mum exploding from the accumulated resentment. At that time, Ling Lan would only suffer even more.

However, Ling Xiao did not move. He instead continued to lean against the door frame as his smile slowly dimmed. Then, he merely looked calmly at Ling Lan — his piercing gaze made Ling Lan's heart clench and she felt a powerful pressure pressing down on her, once again stirring up her force of presence.

Ling Xiao's force of presence was only flashed for a moment and the pressure vanished after that light touch. Ling Lan breathed a sigh of relief and immediately reined in her wild and unruly force of presence with all her might. The effort of it made countless beads of sweat emerge on Ling Lan's forehead; it was truly exhausting.

Seeing this, Ling Xiao frowned deeply. Ling Lan's condition was worse than he had imagined. He immediately discarded his initial plans and said, "Let's go to the combat room here."

There were many leisure facilities in the accommodation area so that the participating cadets could have a place to relax outside of the competitions. This included a gym for the students to release any pent up frustrations, as well as facilities such as combat rooms.

Ling Lan knew that Ling Xiao had noticed her problem — they were likely heading to a combat room so he could fully explore the issue. Thus, she did not refuse, immediately bringing Ling Xiao to the service counter to request a combat room.

Of course, at the service counter, Ling Lan became unable to sense Ling Xiao for a period of time. It looked like Ling Xiao did not want to be discovered by anyone and had hidden away for the moment. Unfortunately, with Ling Lan's current level of strength, she was actually unable to grasp Ling Xiao's presence when he truly intended to hide. She had even tried asking Little Four to use the surveillance equipment here to search for him, but she was still unable to find any trace of Ling Xiao. This left Ling Lan in awe — a god-class operator truly lived up to its reputation as the ultimate fighting force of the Federation. Even the virtual god Little Four could not grasp Ling Xiao's movements fully.

Ling Lan opened the combat room, and as soon as she entered, Ling Xiao abruptly appeared inside. Almost at the same time, several soft poofs could be heard inside the room. Startled, Ling Lan understood what had happened after a brief pause. Probably, at the moment Ling Xiao had appeared, all the surveillance devices in the room had been instantly destroyed by Ling Xiao's force of presence.

Although this might cause Ling Lan some minor trouble, as she would have to compensate for these broken devices, this little bit of trouble was nothing compared to Ling Xiao being discovered. Ling Lan

immediately shut the doors to the room. From this point on, no one would be able to enter as long as she did not exit the room, and so no one would be able to discover Ling Xiao here.

“Come, Lan-er, let’s spar.” To fully comprehend the extent of Ling Lan’s problem, Ling Xiao would need to have a proper fight with her. As soon as Ling Xiao finished speaking, he did not hesitate to throw a punch at Ling Lan.

Ling Xiao’s speed was too fast — Ling Lan only saw Ling Xiao raise his hand and the next thing she could see was his fist already right before her eyes. There was no longer any possibility of Ling Lan lifting a hand to block, so she could only lean back and raise both her hands at the same time, crossing her arms to withstand this seemingly heavy punch ...

With a ‘bam’, Ling Lan was sent stumbling back several steps from the force of the blow and only then did she manage to catch her footing. Ling Xiao remained motionless, however, retracting his fist in an easy manner just as if he had not been using his full strength in that last punch.

Ling Lan’s eyes narrowed. That attack had shown that her dad’s physical skills level was at Domain, both in terms of strength and speed. Moreover, his Domain was absolutely unlike her own rudimentary Domain that had yet to fully develop but was instead a full-fledged perfect Domain. The distance between their realms left her unable to see the other’s actions clearly; she could only defend passively.

Meanwhile, after retracting his fist, Ling Xiao’s expression was rather bemused. He had sensed a trace of a familiar air in that last attack. He was quite shocked, somewhat disbelieving, but he could not suppress the wild joy surging in his heart. His daughter ... had she truly entered that stage as he thought?

Ling Xiao stared in surprise at his daughter standing not too far away who was currently holding a defensive stance. He smiled slightly and said, “Lan-er, if you have truly reached that level, then display your full ability.”

The corners of Ling Lan’s lips quirked. As expected of her old man — just a little contact with her Qi-Jin and he had already discovered her secret. This also proved that her father had also achieved that level. Ling Lan believed that Ling Xiao’s Domain realm surely exceeded hers by a great margin. Just standing there, he already gave her a sense that she could never win against him, a feeling that she could only look up to him ... Ling Lan could not help but speculate — could her dad have already reached the extreme limits of Domain and had entered that half-god state ... half step to God-Realm?

She thought about the top-secret file on Ling Xiao which Little Four had decrypted — his physical skills level had always been marked with a question mark. The military had previously speculated that Ling Xiao might be at the early stages of Domain, but now it looked like they had still underestimated her father Ling Xiao.

Chapter 444: Ling Lan’s Crisis!

Since Ling Lan now knew her father’s strength, she did not hesitate to unleash her Domain. The attribute of Ling Lan’s Domain was ice — as soon as her Domain was activated, the temperature in the combat room plummeted, and a white layer of frost even appeared to cover the ground.

“The innate talent you awakened is Ice Affinity, so your Domain also inherited this energy potential and manifested with the element of ice?” Ling Xiao silently probed the energy of Ling Lan’s Domain — without a doubt, the ice element inside it was very rich. The more powerful her Domain became, the lower the temperature within her Domain would become. When it dropped to a certain degree, her Domain may even be able to freeze any opponent within it, allowing her to win without having to fight the opponent directly.

Although the ice series was rather cold, it was still a variation of the water series. As a girl, it was undoubtedly extremely appropriate that Ling Lan had awakened a water-type innate talent.

Ling Xiao had just begun to relax when his brow immediately furrowed once more. Following the activation of the Domain, Ling Lan’s force of presence had also begun to spread out from her body. The force of presence compatible with the ice element should be a calm and stable one, but Ling Lan’s force of presence seemed rather berserk, and there was an overbearing dominance behind it. This was completely opposite to the cool calmness of the ice element ...

Ling Xiao finally understood what was wrong with Ling Lan’s force of presence — thrown together with a Domain whose power it was incompatible with, how could the two coexist in one body ...? This discovery made Ling Xiao break out in cold sweat. If they could not solve this problem, Ling Lan would one day be torn apart by these two mutually incompatible forces.

“Domain, activate!” Ling Xiao did not hesitate to activate his own Domain and wrapped Ling Lan within it, including her Domain and her somewhat rioting force of presence. He could not allow Ling Lan’s force of presence to burst out, otherwise they would really have a problem on their hands.

Ling Xiao’s Domain had unfurled without a sound — one could almost overlook its presence. However, the combat room which had become extremely cold due to Ling Lan’s Domain was now slowly seeing an increase in temperature. Soon, the air was enveloped in warmth so comfortable that it gave people the urge to give up on all resistance and made them rather drowsy.

As soon as Ling Xiao activated his Domain, Ling Lan had sensed a warmth coming right at her. Like a spring breeze, it started to weaken her will to fight and she found herself becoming lethargic. Ling Lan knew that something was not right, but her heart just could not summon up the will to resist.

With a soft crack, Ling Lan’s Domain crumbled. This outcome stunned Ling Lan — she had not expected her Domain to be so fragile, only managing to hold out for several seconds under Ling Xiao’s Domain.

This discovery made Ling Lan feel a little discouraged. She lost all thoughts of fighting back and was just about to admit defeat when her suppressed force of presence suddenly erupted. The raging force of presence was unyielding and forceful — under the influence of this force of presence, Ling Lan’s desolate mood was successfully chased away, and she was abruptly jolted to awareness.

She had actually fallen under the influence of Ling Xiao’s Domain unknowingly, losing her usual indomitable spirit and choosing to give up and surrender ... Ling Lan was shocked by Ling Xiao’s Domain — what exactly was the power behind her dad’s Domain? Why was it so strange?

However, Ling Lan did not have time to ponder this question, because she found that a true crisis had appeared!

Strictly speaking, Ling Lan's force of presence was Ling Lan's Dao. Her Dao was the Dominance Dao, so she was destined to be domineering and unyielding. Ling Xiao's Domain had just so happened to possess the ability to dispel one's willpower — this had definitely violated the very roots of Ling Lan's Dominance Dao. It felt that it had been provoked, and so it overpowered the control of its master Ling Lan to begin striking back on its own initiative.

Thus, even though Ling Lan was now sober again, she found that she had lost control over her own force of presence. She could only passively feel as her force of presence erupted uncontrollably, surging forwards madly to meet the pressure exerted by Ling Xiao's Domain.

Meanwhile, on Ling Xiao's end, when he had activated his Domain, Ling Lan's initially still somewhat obscured force of presence was completely revealed, so Ling Xiao could finally experience the source of Ling Lan's force of presence. *'This force of presence is so unyielding and is shot through with toughness and dominance ... strange, how in the world did Lan-er cultivate such a force of presence?'*

A girl's body was inherently weaker physically — even if they became strong, their force of presences would still lean towards being steady and calm. It should be impossible for a girl to develop such an overbearing and aggressive force of presence. Mind you, among all the force of presences possible, a dominant one was the hardest to control — even Ling Xiao himself did not dare to walk this path. Ling Xiao was astonished at Ling Lan's daring, but was also deeply worried. The path of dominance was not easy.

Ling Xiao's thoughts went by in a flash and under the pressure of his Domain, Ling Lan's Domain did not manage to hold out for more than a few seconds before crumbling completely.

Without the resistance of Ling Lan's Domain in the way, Ling Xiao could better feel the violent fluctuations in Ling Lan's force of presence. He immediately sensed something wrong and chose to press down on Ling Lan's extremely unstable and volatile force of presence. He did not want to hurt his daughter, merely hoping that Ling Lan's unstable force of presence would settle down under his pressuring and stop threatening to explode. At the very least, he was hoping that nothing bad would happen before he could think of a way to help his daughter solve this issue once and for all.

Ling Xiao's decision was undoubtedly sound, a product of proper deliberation. However, Ling Xiao had still underestimated Ling Lan's force of presence. Despite the care he took when applying pressure, Ling Lan's force of presence had still sensed the act and had felt offended enough to go on a rampage.

The shift in Ling Lan's force of presence made Ling Xiao's face change drastically. He could feel the rioting of this force — it was rampaging around within his Domain with several times its original strength, causing Ling Xiao's initially rock-solid Domain to begin shaking in an instant.

"Hng!" The outburst of her force of presence made Ling Lan emit a muffled sound of pain, and a trickle of blood instantly flowed out from the corner of her lips. The abrupt growth in the output of her force of presence had also exceeded the capacity Ling Lan's body was able to withstand. She was suffering the reaction force of her force of presence, incurring severe internal damage from it. Besides that, under her clothes, the skin all over Ling Lan's body was beginning to crack. Blood began to ooze from these cracks, and Ling Lan's white uniform was soon stained red.

Seeing Ling Lan's condition getting worse and worse, Ling Xiao was frantic. Right then, he no longer had any of the calm composure General Ling Xiao should have — sweat poured from his forehead like rain, quickly making his hair wet, and then soaking through his collar. If there had been someone else there, they would even see that Ling Xiao's body which was initially as steady as a mountain was currently trembling uncontrollably.

Ling Lan was naturally also very anxious in this kind of situation. She had just begun circulating the power in her body, thinking to use that to suppress her force of presence when her already untamed force of presence pulled an unexpected move in its disobedience. It bucked Ling Lan's consciousness straight into the learning space, making her lose all control over her physical body.

"Boss, what do we do now?" Little Four could clearly see Ling Lan's strange state. When he saw Ling Lan's consciousness appear in the learning space, Little Four knew things had escalated beyond their control. He was so frantic that he was running around in circles — if Ling Lan could not control her body, she would not be able to rein in this berserk and rampaging force of presence. In the end, Ling Lan's body would definitely break down and she would die.

His main body, the learning space, would not lose anything from Ling Lan's death. At most, the explosion of the force of presence would just wipe out all of the learning space's power, so the worst case scenario would be that the learning space would fall into hibernation. As long as he was given time, he would eventually revive and then move on to seek his next host.

However, Little Four did not want that. He was already deeply bonded to Ling Lan. He wanted to become Ling Lan's most beloved follower — he could not accept Ling Lan's disappearance; just the thought of it made Little Four crazy. This was the first time he was feeling this way ... was this fear?

Ling Lan did not respond to Little Four's words. She tried desperately to connect with her body again, to no avail. It was like her physical body on the outside had no connection with her at all — this made Ling Lan both shocked and afraid. As she watched her body deteriorating, she could not help but feel despair rising up within her. Was her second life about to end after only a short 17 years?

"Hmph!" Suddenly, an icy harrumph sounded out by Ling Lan's ear. This cold sound pierced right to Ling Lan's heart, scattering all thoughts of despair. With a jolt, Ling Lan's initially lost and helpless eyes instantly became strong again. Before the final outcome was decided, how could she despair?

Ling Lan could not resist turning back to look at the door the sound had come from, feeling immensely grateful. How could she not know that that cold huff had come from Instructor Number One? Just when she was about to give up out of despair, Instructor Number One had acted to spur her on.

Meanwhile, at this time, in one of the spaces in the learning space, the instructors who were initially scattered in around in different spaces had already gathered together in Instructor Number One's space. All of them were exuding various degrees of worry — Ling Lan was their collective disciple. She was the disciple whom they were the proudest of over all the others they had taught before; thus, they did not wish to see their beloved disciple die as her body broke down ...

Number Nine was the first to break under the pressure and speak up. Anxiety writ all over her brow, she asked Instructor Number One, “Big Brother, will Ling Lan be alright?” So consumed with worry, she accidentally reverted to her old way of addressing Instructor Number One.

Number One cast a cold glance at Number Nine. Number Nine’s initially incomparably ice-cold face was already cracking right now. He sighed softly — this younger sister of his was only cold on the surface. In reality, her heart was softer than anyone else’s and when it came to Ling Lan, Number Nine was the most concerned and most sincere among all the instructors.

When Number One, who had originally planned to stay silent, saw Number Nine being like this, he could only speak up to say, “This will depend on how Ling Lan chooses. This is her crisis, but it is also her chance. If she grasps it well, the problem that has been plaguing Ling Lan all this time will be resolved easily¹.”

At this point, Instructor Number One’s gaze turned distant and vacant. It was as if he was looking at the situation outside, but he could also be looking at nothing at all.

“Ling Lan has lost control of her body. No matter what she’s thinking, it won’t help.” Number Five had lost his usual smile at this moment. His eyebrows drew close together, locking a strand of worry between them. “Also, Ling Lan’s force of presence has completely erupted. Even if Ling Lan regains control of her body, she won’t be able to fully suppress it.”

It was nice to say that humans would always beat the odds, but this needed to be established on the premise that the odds were not beyond one’s limitations. Ling Lan’s current situation had long exceeded the bounds of what she could endure. Instructor Number Five had always been an ardent proponent of excavating the limits of the human body, but right now, even he was not optimistic about the situation.

Chapter 445: Ling Lan’s Fulcrum!

Number Five’s words made the hearts of all the other instructors sink. They once again looked towards Instructor Number One, hoping that he could come up with a good way to help resolve Ling Lan’s crisis.

Instructor Number One did not reply. He merely raised his right hand and slashed the air with his index finger. An image instantly appeared before the group — there was nothing in the image but a lone figure. It was Ling Xiao who was currently desperately thinking of a way to help Ling Lan overcome this crisis.

“He is Ling Lan’s fulcrum in this situation!” stated Number One calmly.

Number Two, who had been hiding in Number One’s shadow all this time, suddenly half-emerged from within the shadows. His eyes were glittering and he exclaimed with a hint of urgency, “This person’s spiritual power is very strong!” Only he, who was equally a powerhouse when it came to spiritual power, could truly sense just how powerful the other was. This made Number Two have the itch to compete with the other.

“Not only that, but his strength is also extremely great. At least, he’s stronger than me.” Number Nine had also regained her composure by this time. She too had sensed the immense power concealed within the figure in the image — she lost in comparison.

Instructor Number Five's hunter heart was pleased at this discovery. He could not help licking his lips, saying excitedly, "I really want to try fighting him. It'll definitely be fun." Between the both of them, who was stronger?

At this, Number One turned to look at Number Five and said lightly, "You ... are still no match for him!"

Number One's words made Number Five's expression change, stubbornness and disbelief on his brow.

"His Dao is already mature and is already touching on God's Domain. As long as he is given time, he will be able to enter the world of gods," explained Number One. Only he could clearly sense the other's level; this person hid his capabilities very deeply ... Number One could not help but rejoice for Ling Lan. Ling Lan's problem was already extremely serious — despite already having warned her, Number One knew that there was only a one in a million chance for Ling Lan to resolve this problem on her own.

If there was a master with their own Dao by her side to help her, Ling Lan's chances of overcoming her crisis would be significantly increased. Although all the instructors had their own Dao, they could not materialize in the real world, so they could not be of any help in this regard. Hence, Instructor Number One had had no choice but to hope that Ling Lan could be self-sufficient and find that one in a million chance to resolve her own crisis.

But no, things had changed. A Dao master had really appeared in the real world and was even now helping Ling Lan wholeheartedly. Instructor Number One could finally relax — even if he could materialize outside, it would not be much better than what Ling Xiao was already doing.

Number One's words made Number Five's heart clench as he knew very well what God's Domain meant ... his gaze on Ling Xiao became solemn — he did not expect that he would miss that. This man was very good at hiding things; he only exposed things he wanted to expose ¹.

Meanwhile, the other instructors were all reassured upon hearing that Ling Xiao was so strong. They now pinned their hopes on Ling Xiao, hoping that he would not betray their expectations to help Ling Lan.

On Ling Xiao's end, he had come up with a response plan in the short amount of time he had. In order to avoid any errors, Ling Xiao's brain was running in overdrive, calculating the pros and cons of every possible plan he could think of, as well as considering the potential issues Ling Lan might have in any scenario and the solutions for them.

The matter of utmost urgency was for him to suppress the rampaging force of presence. He could not allow it to continue expanding — once it exceeded the critical point of Ling Lan's ability to withstand it, Ling Xiao knew what the outcome would be. Death by explosion ... How could he let his precious daughter meet that kind of end? He absolutely would not allow it.

Coming to a decision, Ling Xiao did not hesitate any further. The mild and gentle air of his Domain was swept aside, turning into a force with an edge of sharpness. This was Ling Xiao's deeply hidden secret — when he had advanced to Domain, he had activated a dual Domain ...

Ling Lan's overbearing force of presence was once again pressured and pushed back by Ling Xiao's all-encompassing honed power. Still, the force of presence born of the Dominance Dao was after all the most unreasonable and unruly of all force of presences — how could it be willing to lower its head so

easily? Additionally, Ling Xiao was afraid that his sharp aura would harm Ling Lan's roots, so he did not dare to apply his full strength. This also gave Ling Lan's force of presence some breathing room and so, the two sides ended up in a stalemate.

Still, this had managed to temporarily stall the crisis of Ling Lan dying by body-explosion. Her force of presence which had been swelling dangerously all this while had finally been halted in place.

At this moment, a keen light flashed through Ling Xiao's eyes and he barked sharply, "If not now, when?"

Ling Lan's eyes had been closed ever since she had lost control of her force of presence. Ling Xiao had guessed that Ling Lan might have already lost consciousness. He was well aware that it was only by Ling Lan's own personal efforts that this crisis could be resolved; thus, he needed to wake Ling Lan up and make her aware again to work together with him and bring the berserk force of presence under control.

This loud cry was infused with Ling Xiao's massive spiritual power. It instantly broke past the seal of the force of presence to penetrate deeply into Ling Lan's mindscape.

Ling Xiao's spiritual power was undoubtedly formidable — inside the learning space, Ling Lan could clearly hear his cry. With a shift of her mind, she immediately circulated her spiritual power maniacally.

The massive spiritual power involved made Little Four, who had been standing beside Ling Lan, retreat several steps uncontrollably until he was forced into a corner. The sudden outburst of Ling Lan's spiritual power shocked Little Four greatly — he tried his hardest to draw closer to Ling Lan, but was unable to do so no matter what he tried.

Just as Little Four was about to panic, he suddenly jolted and his tense expression eased. He stopped trying to approach Ling Lan, merely standing to one side observing her, ready to act at a moment's notice.

Ling Lan's burst of spiritual power had managed to break past the dominant force of presence's blockade. Her physical body which had originally been completely out of reach was finally responding to her again, albeit weakly. Ling Lan knew the opportunity could not be missed. She shouted, "Little Four, break the seal!"

Little Four seemed to have received some form of instruction before — as soon as Ling Lan spoke, he knew exactly what he should do. He immediately unsealed that excess portion of Ling Lan's spiritual power he had previously sealed away. With the addition of this spiritual power, Ling Lan's spiritual power was doubled, bolstering the spiritual power which had broken through the dominant force of presence's blockade.

Perhaps due to the intense wrangling between Ling Xiao and the force of presence, the unruly dominant force of presence could not spare any effort to deal with Ling Lan. Ling Lan's spiritual power very quickly broke through even more of the blockade, and she could now successfully sense her body.

Ling Lan was ecstatic — she too knew very well that only she could save herself. Only by mastering her body would she be able to overcome this crisis. Thus, she put her heart and soul into infusing her entire body with her spiritual power.

Soon, she could feel the torso of her body, and this was followed by her arms and thighs, sensation slowly spreading outwards until it reached her fingers and toes ... as soon as Ling Lan had fully grasped her body, she could feel a bone-deep pain cascading over her.

“This feeling is so familiar.” Her body felt as if there were countless hands digging into her flesh and tearing her apart, exactly as she had once felt in her previous world. Even though the pain was excruciating, Ling Lan smiled.

The sensation of pain meant that she had truly regained control of her own body.

Unfortunately, her gruesome expression did not become much better due to her smile. Witnessing Ling Lan’s terrible state, Little Four began crying in fear. “*Boo hoo hoo, Boss, are you okay?*”

This familiar scene made Little Four recall Ling Lan’s previous life. He was afraid that Ling Lan would end up as she had in her previous world, her body breaking down completely under the untenable pressure. Now, he did not have the ability to give Ling Lan a second chance at life again — back then, it was a total confluence of luck and circumstances which had allowed that, and now, he had nothing.

Little Four’s terrified look made Ling Lan’s heart ache — she was just about to console him when she ran out of time. Back in full control of her body, her consciousness was pulled back into her body and so she left the learning space.

Standing in place, Ling Lan suddenly spewed a mouthful of blood with a cry and only then did she slowly open her eyes to see Ling Xiao standing before her with a very nervous expression. She blinked.

Ling Lan returned to her physical body with her powerful spiritual power, which her already battered body found very difficult to bear. Her inner organs were injured once again, resulting in that spurt of fresh blood. However, Ling Lan reacted swiftly, instantly sealing away that excess portion of spiritual power again, stopping her body from continuing to receive damage.

The intense pain rendered Ling Lan unable to speak for a moment. In order to reassure her dad, she could only blink her eyes at him.

Seeing this, Ling Xiao knew Ling Lan was back in control of her body, so he shouted, “Compress your force of presence as much as you can, I’ll help.”

At his words, Ling Lan desperately pulled back on her force of presence, attempting to suppress it. However, how could her force of presence give it a rest just like that? It refused Ling Lan’s suppression, instead becoming even wilder and more violent. Just when Ling Lan was feeling helpless against it, a powerful surge of sharp intent smashed into her force of presence, causing the blazing wild force of presence to instantly deflate a little.

Ling Lan had been a physical skills master to begin with, and coupled with her innate talent Profound Insight, she immediately knew that this was the best chance for suppression. She once again mobilized her spiritual power, and borrowing Ling Xiao’s power, she began to compress her force of presence ...

Ling Lan alone, relying solely on her own strength, was not at all up to the task of fighting against her volatile force of presence. But things were different now ... Ling Xiao’s strength was frightening — if he had not been afraid of harming Ling Lan, the domineering force of presence would have long been suppressed by him. Now, as Ling Lan slowly compressed her force of presence, Ling Xiao’s suppression

over the dominant force of presence also grew increasingly stronger. In the end, all of the force of presence was successfully pressed back into Ling Lan's body.

But they had only gotten to the most critical point. The inherent attribute of Ling Lan's body was completely opposite to that of the roused force of presence. This eliminated the possibility of a natural fusion — the only hope for the two to coexist harmoniously was via the application of brute force ...

In contrast to Ling Lan's bewilderment, the worldly Ling Xiao was well aware of this point. He also knew that although this moment was a crisis for Ling Lan, it was also a pivotal turning point for her. As long as she grabbed this chance properly, her problem could be fully resolved.

He was unwilling for this chance to slip by, so he yelled loudly, "Lan-er, use your spiritual power to beat your force of presence into submission!" That large reserve of spiritual power Ling Lan had brought along with her when she returned previously had given Ling Xiao a glimpse of success!

With Ling Xiao's guidance, Ling Lan now knew what she should do. She instantly unleashed her spiritual power — now that she had a purpose, without any hesitation, she directed all of her spiritual power at that unruly and rebellious force of presence within her body that was still trying to wrest free of her control.

"Spiritual charge! Spiritual charge! Spiritual charge! ..."

In order to combat the raging force of presence in her body, Ling Lan used multiple spiritual charges to attack it, trying to subdue it a little.

Sure enough, after all these blows, the volatile force of presence had become much quieter. However, Ling Lan felt even more threatened than before in her heart — it was as if the force of presence was just lying in wait to begin its next onslaught.

Without question, Ling Lan's intuition was very strong. After carrying out multiple spiritual charges, when she could no longer push on due to the great drain on her spiritual power, the force of presence found its chance to counterattack. Taking advantage of this instant, the force of presence surged up violently and began to throw itself around to ravage Ling Lan's body, causing the wounds on her body to split open once more, her blood pouring out like a river.

"Godamm*t!" Ling Lan's terrible condition made Ling Xiao livid. His powerful spiritual power once again enveloped Ling Lan.

"Lan-er, relax your mind!" Ling Xiao's words prompted Ling Lan and she obediently relaxed her spiritual power, and then she could feel a powerful surge of spiritual power merging with hers.

"Spiritual fusion!" Only someone from the Divine Command Sect could do this. Ling Xiao and Ling Lan were all from the Divine Command Sect, so their spiritual power could fuse together.

After Ling Lan received the reinforcement of Ling Xiao's spiritual power, she immediately began counterattacking wildly, pushing her force of presence to one area. As she compressed it more and more, the energy of her force of presence became ever more condensed. In the end, it was actually compressed into countless small balls, distributed in various parts of her body.

Ling Lan knew success was at hand — as long as she put in just a bit more effort, she would be able to completely master this dominant force of presence. Sensing Ling Lan's hopeful feelings, Ling Xiao once again strengthened the pressure of his spiritual power.

"Poof, poof, poof, poof ..." Ling Lan heard countless sounds like this ring out all around her body. After that, she felt a lightness spread through her body, suffusing it with energy, and the initially tearing pain also began to ease. She naturally began to circulate her Qi and go through her Qi exercises, beginning the process of treating her ravaged body.

Ling Xiao saw Ling Lan close her eyes once more, and all traces of the initially rampaging force of presence disappeared from Ling Lan's body. Still concerned, Ling Xiao used his spiritual power to check once more, and when he saw that Ling Lan was only fortifying her realm and treating her wounds, he instantly let out a sigh of relief.

Originally, Ling Xiao was planning to wait for Ling Lan to wake up, but it wasn't too long before the communicator on his wrist began to vibrate. Ling Xiao looked down and immediately frowned; he knew he could no longer continue waiting. He knew that if he did not take Lan Luofeng away from that teahouse where they were supposed to meet at soon, someone might become suspicious. His secret guards had sent him news that there were already many people eyeing the teahouse, just waiting for a chance to enter and investigate.

Ling Xiao glanced silently at Ling Lan for a moment, and only after that did he open the doors of the combat room and walk out, closing the doors again behind him. As long as there was someone in the combat room, it would not be able to be opened from the outside. Hence, Ling Xiao was not at all worried for Ling Lan's safety.

Just like this, Ling Xiao disappeared from the accommodation area. Not much later, the very popular figure Ling Xiao led Lan Luofeng away from the teahouse to return to their living quarters ...

Lan Luofeng was extremely angry at Ling Xiao's failure to bring Ling Lan back. She had sat around idly for half a day waiting and in the end, she still had not been able to catch sight of Ling Lan. If she had not been afraid of exposing her daughter, she definitely would have blown her top right then and there ...

After they returned to their residence, Lan Luofeng began interrogating Ling Xiao on the reason why their daughter had not come. Ling Xiao was afraid that Lan Luofeng would worry, so he casually said that he had been testing Ling Lan's strength by sparring with Ling Lan in a combat room. Then, under his pressuring, Ling Lan had accidentally advanced levels. In order not to affect Ling Lan's advancement, he had locked Ling Lan in the combat room, which was why he could not bring Ling Lan to meet her at the teahouse.

When Lan Luofeng heard this, she was instantly enraged. Alright, so the one who had prevented mother and daughter from meeting was this wicked man before her eyes ... also, her child was a lovely daughter and not a tough son. Was great strength so necessary?!

In short, the infuriated Lan Luofeng pounced on Ling Xiao and threw a flurry of wild punches and kicks at him. Ling Xiao was afraid that he would hurt Lan Luofeng by accident, so he did not dare to use his internal energy to defend himself. And so, General Ling Xiao, who had not been injured for a long time, was finally injured.

The next day, when General Ling Xiao was attending an event, the corners of his lips would twitch subtly every time he moved. Under the dashing and majestic general's uniform he was wearing, countless bruises were hidden, too ghastly to look at ...

Chapter 446: Her Little Friends ...

Ling Lan opened her eyes to find the combat room completely dark, and her father Ling Xiao had already long disappeared.

Glancing at the time on her communicator, Ling Lan found that it was already 1 a.m. of the next day. She had not expected to have used almost a full 12 hours immersed in her Qi exercises.

Ling Lan immediately used her spiritual power to examine her body and found that even though she had used a rather long time, the effects were substantial. The countless horrifying wounds previously littering her body were now completely healed. The scabs over some of the wounds were already beginning to peel off — the speed of this recovery was at least 20% better than conventional healing agents.

Joy gripped Ling Lan's heart — this would undoubtedly save her the step of going to Li Shiyu for medical agents. Once she visited Li Shiyu, her whole team would know about her injuries, and Ling Lan did not want to see her team members' worried faces.

Just as she was rejoicing, a bloody and rancid smell invaded Ling Lan's nostrils. She looked down and saw that her white duress uniform had already turned dark crimson-black from all the blood, and the rank smell was wafting off her clothes. Ling Lan's brow wrinkled in revulsion. Not in the mood to continue staying here, she immediately opened the combat room's doors and departed.

At this moment, Ling Lan only wanted to return to her living quarters and take a good shower so she could be clean again.

To avoid others from noticing her strange condition, Ling Lan used her force of presence to envelop the thick scent of blood wafting off her, keeping it from spreading. Then, she swiftly slipped past the guards and staff members on duty, quickly making her way to the accommodation area assigned to the First Men's Military Academy.

Right when she was about to reach her room, however, Ling Lan's footstep faltered. Her gaze flickered and the corners of her lips tilted up. She took a deep breath, pushed down the emotion that had risen up in her, and only then did she walk forwards with steady steps. Turning the corner, she saw a group of people, either sitting, squatting, or standing, gathered at her door. Ling Lan could clearly see the anxiety and worry on all of their faces.

These were her little friends — constantly concerned about her! Ling Lan's heart was filled to the brim with warmth, and her eyes turned red beyond her control. Still, the strong Ling Lan very quickly calmed herself down again, becoming that cool and collected, impenetrable Boss Lan in their eyes once more.

Li Lanfeng and Qi Long turned their heads almost simultaneously. Li Lanfeng, because of his extraordinary spiritual power allowing him to sense a change from a greater distance, and Qi Long, because of his Animal Instinct telling him at soonest notice that something was there.

They turned and saw Ling Lan standing in the distance looking at them and perked up in joy. However, they soon noticed Ling Lan's outfit which was drenched in blood, and their expressions changed drastically. Qi Long was further unable to stop his powerful force of presence from flaring. His heart was unbelievably anguished — who the hell had hurt his boss? He dearly wished he could get his hands on them and tear them apart. The livid Qi Long did not consider this: before an opponent that had managed to harm the formidable Boss Lan, how could he match up?

Qi Long's shift in demeanour alerted the others. They all looked at Qi Long, and when they saw Qi Long staring off somewhere with an anguished expression, they were startled and quickly turned to follow his line of sight. When they then saw Ling Lan standing there in her bloody clothes, all their faces paled.

Before they could cry out, Ling Lan had instantly come up to Qi Long's side. She pressed down on Qi Long's shoulder lightly with her right hand and said softly, "Don't worry, I'm fine."

Ling Lan's calm tone eased the tension in Qi Long's heart, and the oppressive aura around him dissipated.

Li Lanfeng did not believe Ling Lan's words at all — for his white uniform to be so red, how much blood exactly had Ling Lan bled? How could he really be fine? He reached out a hand to grab hold of Ling Lan as she moved to walk past him and said, "This ... what in the world has happened?"

Ling Lan glanced at her hand clasped in Li Lanfeng's, and her heart warmed upon seeing the unconcealed care and concern in his eyes. She squeezed his hand in reassurance and said, "Some minor issue came up as I was going through a breakthrough. It's resolved now."

Everyone gaped at Ling Lan's words, and Qi Long said excitedly, "Boss, you've had another breakthrough?" Qi Long knew that his boss had already successfully advanced to Domain, but he had heard that it was still unstable. Was Boss saying that his Domain was stable now?

Ling Lan knew what Qi Long was asking, and she found that he was right to think what he was when she stopped to think about it, so she nodded at him. This good news was greeted by irrepressible cheers from everyone there. The stronger Ling Lan was, the prouder they were, because Ling Lan was their boss!

The commotion finally drew the attention of a staff on duty outside. He came over and shouted at them, "It's already so late, what are you all making so much noise for?" He saw so many people standing together and was instantly nervous. "What are you all planning to do? Why are you all not resting at this late hour?"

Han Jijyun stepped out from the crowd and replied, "We're only studying tactics. We'll be going back to rest soon."

With that, the staff member relaxed, and then he urged everyone to go back to their own rooms as soon as possible. Ling Lan told the others that they could discuss things further tomorrow via her spiritual power and only then did everyone disperse. Ling Lan had already slipped into her room right before the staff member had approached them.

She had no intention of letting the staff member notice her strange condition. Although she could probably explain it away, it was always better to be cautious and not take unnecessary risks. Ling Lan did not wish for word about this to spread.

The next day, everyone came to Ling Lan's room, and only after hearing an abridged version of events from Ling Lan were they finally fully reassured. After that, they all charged towards the competition hall. Today, the physical skills competition would continue, and some of the other specialization competitions would also be starting, such as the mecha repair and modification competition, the military doctor first-aid competition, and the starship navigation competition ...

Each competition attracted countless spectators. Meanwhile, the Lingtian Battle Clan would be splitting up on this day, because of the fights taking place today; four of the ten people in the battle clan would be competing at the same time.

Besides Qi Long who would be resuming his physical skills competition, Chang Xinyuan would be participating in the repair and modification competition, Li Shiyu would be participating in the military doctor first-aid competition, and Han Jiyun would be participating in the starship navigation competition.

Although the repair and modification competition was called 'repair and modification', the main thing being tested in the competition was still repair and maintenance, rather than modification ability. The competition required contestants to identify the source of a mecha's malfunction as quickly as they could, come up with a repair plan, and then use the shortest amount of time possible to fix the mecha. Of course, on top of the basic repairs, if a contestant could make appropriate modifications to improve the mecha's performance and functionality, their score would be significantly boosted.

There were a total of three people from the First Men's Military Academy participating in this competition. Aside from Chang Xinyuan, one of the other two contestants was a mecha engineer from the Leiting Mecha Clan, while the other was a mecha engineer from Tianji. However, in Ling Lan's opinion, among the three, Chang Xinyuan was the strongest and the most likely to become champion. A mecha engineer who could modify an ace mecha ... Ling Lan just could not imagine Chang Xinyuan losing.

For the military doctor first-aid competition, Li Shiyu was their representative. As military doctors in the First Men's Military Academy could not join any faction, for the past few tournaments, this competition had always been left without a representative from the First Men's Military Academy, considered one of the abandoned events. This time, however, Li Shiyu from Ling Lan's team was mercilessly flung out to represent the school in this event.

When Li Shiyu found out about this, oh how he resented it! Just imagine — he, a dux of the Military Medical Research specialization, actually being relegated to participate in this first-aid competition which involved very little skill ... it was really such a disgrace to him. However, under Ling Lan's high-pressure manoeuvring, Li Shiyu could only bite his little handkerchief with teary eyes and mournfully resign himself to his fate.

Having decided to participate in this competition, Li Shiyu naturally could not let the first place fall to anyone else. If he lost, wouldn't that be an even greater loss of face for him as a dux?

Meanwhile, the starship navigation competition Han Jijyun was participating in was the one with the most uncertain chances of winning. Moreover, their little sister Luo Chao would also be participating in this event under the banner of the First Co-ed Military Academy. In this event, the clever Han Jijyun did not think that he would be able to match Luo Chao. That shy girl who had awakened a navigator's talent could be said to be heaven-blessed with regards to this event.

Of the remaining six people of Ling Lan's battle clan, Ling Lan was planning to go support Qi Long at the combat arena. Li Lanfeng was somewhat reluctant to part from Ling Lan, but he also wanted to go cheer for his brother. He was very conflicted, but in the end, he still decided to go to Li Shiyu's side ... after some thought, Zhao Jun went to Chang Xinyuan's event. A mecha engineer who could modify an ace mecha — no matter what, he needed to score some affinity points with the other.

Meanwhile, Xie Yi, Lin Zhong-qing, and Luo Lang decided to go support Han Jijyun, though of course Luo Lang was more likely to be supporting his sister. As for Xie Yi ... he might be going for Luo Lang's sister's sake, or perhaps for Luo Lang's sake 2 ? Only Lin Zhong-qing was truly there to support Han Jijyun whole-heartedly. He still remembered that Han Jijyun had been a great help in bringing him on board to follow Boss. He was grateful for that, so within the battle clan, he had the best relationship with Han Jijyun.

Chapter 447: Not That Complicated!

The second day of the Grand Mecha Tournament passed without any great fanfare. In the physical skills competition, Qi Long encountered a master in the morning who was from the Third Men's Military Academy. The other's physical skills were at the same realm as his — peak of middle-stage Qi-Jin.

This match was obviously going to be a battle of endurance. However, Ling Lan was not worried — the years of training under her had given Qi Long stamina several times greater than that of the average person's. It could be said that Qi Long was the most unafraid of a battle of endurance.

However, the final outcome was somewhat beyond Ling Lan's expectations. Perhaps due to his boss personally being there to watch him fight, Qi Long seemed like he had been hit up with a shot of adrenaline — his original combat style carried an extra edge of fervency. On the field, Qi Long came out of the gate aggressive, charging at the other with a wild barrage of attacks, taking the opponent by surprise and pushing the other into a passive position.

Qi Long's attacks were too ferocious and unreasonable — as the opponent struggled to handle them, he accidentally exposed an opening. Qi Long's awakened innate talent was one with the strongest instinctual sense, Animal Instinct. He instantly leapt on the opening, immediately KO-ing the opponent and clinching the victory.

This match from start to finish took very little time. This left the audience, who had been expecting a close fight extending several hundred or even several thousand moves before the outcome would be determined, completely blindsided. Even the referee responsible for their arena did not come back to himself in time to announce the outcome after Qi Long successfully KO-ed his opponent. In the end, after running out of patience, Qi Long had to call out to the referee to shake him out of his stupor.

Qi Long successfully moved on to the third round, and the afternoon ushered in a new round of knockout fights. This time, his opponent was a little weaker than him. Nevertheless, Qi Long did not lower his guard just because the opponent was weaker. He rallied his focus and went all out from the very start of the match, not giving his opponent any chance at all. In the end, he defeated his opponent without any surprises and advanced to the fourth round.

Done with his fights for the day, Qi Long walked off the arena stage to see Ling Lan nod at him. He released a great sigh of relief — this meant that his boss was still satisfied with his performance today. He was truly afraid that if Boss was the least bit displeased, he may be dragged off for another round of extreme training ... just thinking about that terrifying whatchamacallit, Qi Long could not help but shudder.

“Congratulations on entering the top 200 of physical combat!” Ling Lan watched as Qi Long walked over to her side, and although she was rather surprised at his trembling, seeing how energetic he was, Ling Lan decided to ignore it and just congratulate him.

Hearing this, Qi Long rubbed the short hair on his head sheepishly and flashed a silly grin.

Ling Lan said nothing else on this topic, instead bringing up the situation of the other members contesting today. The first one she mentioned was Qi Long’s good bromance partner, Han Jijyun. “Han Jijyun has also passed the preliminaries and has entered the top 50 name list. However, his placing is rather far back, 42 or 43 I think, much worse than how Luo Chao did. Luo Chao’s preliminary results placed her in third, so she’s in the top three ...”

“Wha — Luo Chao’s that strong? Jijyun actually lost to her?” asked Qi Long in shock.

“Don’t look down on Luo Chao. Her innate talent was born to do this. When encountering problems in space, she is able to make the best decision instinctively, while Jijyun needs to rely fully on his brain to analyse and calculate the best option. In terms of speed, he’ll of course be no match for Luo Chao,” explained Ling Lan. “Also, I don’t think girls are inherently any weaker than boys. Sometimes, girls are even stronger!” As Ling Lan said this, she stared pointedly at Qi Long.

This stare made Qi Long’s heart clench in fright. He began to reflect — had he ever said something wrong sometime, somewhere, which had given his boss the mistaken impression that he looked down on girls?

After thinking for a good long time, Qi Long still could not figure out when he had made such a mistake. Just as he was flustered and unsure what to do, a spark of light coursed through his brain ...

Could it be that Boss had become angry because he had made light of little sister Luo Chao earlier? Qi Long felt instantly enlightened. Luo Chao was a childhood friend of theirs, and ever since their time at the scout academy, there was already something brewing between Boss and Luo Chao.

Qi Long believed he had found the answer — he silently reminded himself that he needed to be nicer to Luo Chao from now on, so that when she became their sister-in-law in the future, she would not come after them to settle old accounts. At that time, if she whispered rumours to Boss in bed ¹ and got Boss to personally teach them a lesson, they would definitely meet a tragic end.

Ling Lan did not know that Qi Long was actually building a ship for her and Luo Chao in his head right then, his mind patching ideas together and making such random conclusions that god knows where it was veering off to. She saw Qi Long bowing his head without saying a word and assumed that he was concerned for his sworn brother Han Jiyun, so she did not continue this thread of conversation. Instead, she began speaking of the others. “Just now, Li Lanfeng has just sent news that the competition on Li Shiyu’s side has ended. The first place of the first-aid competition is already officially ours, the First Men’s Military Academy’s.”

At this point, Ling Lan’s lips could not help but quirk up in a small smile. She had had full confidence in Li Shiyu, but she really had not expected that the other would win first place this easily. According to Li Lanfeng, Li Shiyu had ended the competition in just one round. His first-aid plan and the speed with which he executed it had astounded all the referees. “Five different afflictions of different degrees on different patients, and he only used three minutes to finish treating everyone. On top of that, the methods he chose to use were deemed as the most optimal by all the referees.”

“Five people? Three minutes? Holy sh*t, was he injected with stimulants?” Qi Long was flabbergasted. He knew that Li Shiyu’s medical skills were impressive, but he had not expected that they were this impressive. The gold standard of Federation military first aid was one person in five minutes, and Li Shiyu actually managed to treat all five people in less than the time it usually took to treat one.

“It’s because Li Shiyu streamlined the first aid steps to their limits. It was also because of this that the referees decided there was no point in continuing on with the competition.” When Ling Lan thought about how such an amazing person had been hoodwinked by her into her battle clan, she could not help but preen.

Qi Long was also thankful that his battle clan had such an amazing doctor — in future, their lives would undoubtedly be much safer.

Ling Lan then moved on to speak about Chang Xinyuan. “Chang Xinyuan has also advanced to the next round in his event. According to Zhao Jun, Chang Xinyuan may be hiding part of his skills. His score right now is roughly in the middle of the pack.”

“Old Chang, that fellow ... he’s used to being cautious. It’s probably a leftover effect from Qiao Ting’s oppression. He really dislikes being in the limelight; it makes him feel unsafe.” Qi Long and Chang Xinyuan were already on very good terms — because Chang Xinyuan was older than Qi Long by several years, Qi Long was used to calling him ‘Old Chang’.

“Hmm, this is a problem. This is also why I wanted Chang Xinyuan to join this competition. He needs to overcome this issue, or else he won’t be able to become strong.” Ling Lan was well aware of Chang Xinyuan’s problem as well, and she now shared her reasons for making him join the competition with Qi Long.

“He will definitely be able to do it.” Qi Long had faith in Chang Xinyuan.

“Hopefully,” replied Ling Lan. She then lifted her head and looked around. There were still matches ongoing, so she asked, “Qi Long, do you still want to watch any of the fights?” Since Qi Long’s matches were over, Ling Lan was planning to return to the accommodation area. Even though her force of

presence problem had been resolved, she still needed to continue working hard; only by doing so would she be able to freely circulate and use the force of presence she had brought into submission.

“Nah. There are still 200 people to go! Who knows who my opponents will be? I might as well go back to rest and gather my strength to prepare for tomorrow’s fights,” said Qi Long without any fuss. He did not want to waste time here.

“Very well then. Let’s go!” Ling Lan and Qi Long left the combat hall. On the way back, Qi Long finally mustered up the courage to ask something that had been bothering him deep inside for a long time. “Boss, why are you not participating in any solo events at all in this tournament, only joining for the team battle? You should know that, whether it is physical skills or mecha combat, no one can match you, not even Qiao Ting.” Qi Long’s confidence in Ling Lan was a full hundred percent. He did not believe that there was any cadet who could rival his boss.

Ling Lan cast a cold glance at Qi Long, instantly sending the courage Qi Long had just scrounged up packing.

Frankly, Ling Lan’s glance had just been a curious glance with no special meaning. Qi Long was just jumpy because he had been subjected to too much of Ling Lan’s special brand of pressure.

After thinking it over, Ling Lan said, “Physical skills ... with you, it’s enough! For mecha, Qiao Ting will take champion with no problems, and it’s good to let Zhao Jun out to experience the fighting styles of high-level experts ...” In order to maintain her glorious image as boss, she could only continue to feign high-mindedness and pretend her decisions were purely from a selfless standpoint.

“Most importantly, I’m setting my targets on the final battle royal, and when everyone thinks Qiao Ting is the main person to watch out for ...” Here, Ling Lan stopped talking, closing her mouth. But Qi Long could already see the deeper meaning behind Ling Lan’s words. He was instantly thrumming with excitement. So that’s how it was! Boss was hiding behind everyone for the sake of that final grand massacre! As expected of his boss — from the very start, his boss must have already planned things this way.

In the following days, some of the competitions ended, while others started. The widely-anticipated mecha combat event also kicked off on the seventh day of the Grand Mecha Tournament. Like the physical combat competition, each academy had five entry slots. For the First Men’s Military Academy, aside from Qiao Ting, the Lingtian Battle Clan sent out Zhao Jun. This decision did not surprise the other participating students, because on the surface, the strongest in terms of mecha combat in the Lingtian Mecha Clan was Zhao Jun.

Tianji and Wuji each sent out their regiment commanders, and Ling Lan gave the final entry slot to Zhang Jing-an. After all, he was from the Central Scout Academy, and since Zhang Jing-an’s strength was not bad, Ling Lan could openly open this backdoor for him.

Other than the starship navigation competition, Han Jijyun also participated in the tactical planning competition. Besides him, Li Lanfeng had also entered the competition. Both of them were successfully shortlisted into the top 50 name list — Han Jijyun was in the top 10, while Li Lanfeng was somewhere in the 30s, which rather surprised Ling Lan. Li Lanfeng was born to do this — in contrast, Han Jijyun was a

little predisposed to using more forthright plans when strategizing, often overlooking more subtle and sneakier schemes ...

Afterwards, Ling Lan asked Li Lanfeng why the results had turned out as they had, and Li Lanfeng had only smiled without saying anything ... in the end, under the pressure of Ling Lan's penetrating gaze, Li Lanfeng said helplessly, "I'm just following in your footsteps. In the final fight, when all their attention is on Han Jijyun ..."

When she heard this, Ling Lan could only scratch her nose, speechless. Her reasons for not participating in the other competitions were definitely not as complicated as Li Lanfeng made them out to be. It's just her force of presence acting up, alright? She just needed to focus on internal cultivation for a while, okay? Of course, she did not deny she had factored that point into her considerations, but that was something she had only thought of after she knew that she could not afford to participate in any individual events.

Chapter 448: Single Mecha Combat!

As time went by, the results of the various competitions were revealed.

Other than the early procurement of first place in the first aid event, the next competition to end was the starship navigation event Han Jijyun was participating in. Although Han Jijyun's final ranking was only 27th place, it was still a significant improvement from his 43rd placing at the start of the competition.

As one of the only two second-year students participating in the starship navigation competition, Han Jijyun's results were undoubtedly something that one could be proud of and was worthy of praise. However, it just so happened that there was Luo Chao too in the tournament this year. Everyone heaped their praises on this little girl instead because, as a second-year student herself, Luo Chao's performance was breath-taking in the finals. If she had not relaxed in that final critical moment, which had allowed the contestant right behind her to overtake her starship at the last second, perhaps she would have made history as the first second-year to become champion. In the end, she could only regretfully become second place.

However, Luo Chao was not too disappointed. She had come to participate in the tournament primarily because she wanted Boss Lan to see how much she had grown. Of course, she still was not at the peak perfection of her growth yet, but she believed that as long as she continued to work hard, there would be a day when she would become the most excellent ship captain of the Federation. Then, she would be able to navigate a ship for Boss Lan and her big brothers and keep them safe.

The other events also ended one after another. In physical skills combat, Qi Long was stopped at the top 8, but he gained much from his participation. The stubborn bottleneck frustrating him all this while had finally loosened — as long as he went back and put some effort into it, he should be able to break through his current realm and enter the early stages of advanced level Qi-Jin.

Meanwhile, of the other four participants with him, one ended in the top 100, one in the top 50, one in the top 16, and the last one actually ended up in the top 4. Unfortunately, in the finals, he encountered a sixth-year top-class master whose physical skills were already at a very high peak 1 whose physical

skills were already at a very high peak The author does not give the actual stage name here, but based on the great commotion every time Domain is mentioned, I'm guessing that this fellow mentioned here must still be at most in the topmost level of Qi-Jin and not Domain yet, otherwise there would be more commotion from the audience. and could only accept his defeat with regret. That top-class master finally nabbed first place with no trouble at all.

Still, the collective score of the five contestants was considerable. In total, their score placed them in third place among all the military academies for physical skills. As such, Ling Lan was not disappointed by these results.

After several rounds of competition, Chang Xinyuan was slowly breaking free of his mental block — after every round, his ranking would shift a little forwards compared to before. By the time the final round came, he had successfully created an advanced mecha with an elegant outer form based off extremely reasonable design principles. After deliberation, the referee team declared Chang Xinyuan as the champion of the competition, leaving Chang Xinyuan weeping tears of joy.

Close after that was the tactical planning competition. Han Jijyun managed a turnaround, his final results placing him in the top 3 in third place. The first and second place went to the Second Men's Military Academy and the First Co-ed Military Academy respectively. Han Jijyun did not feel at all disgraced in losing to the contestants from these two esteemed academies.

That aside, Li Lanfeng's final ranking was 13th place. This ranking would net his academy a pretty decent amount of points, and would also lead the other academies to underestimate him at the same time. With that, he was extremely satisfied at achieving what he wanted.

During this time, Ling Lan had already secretly met up with Lan Luofeng under Ling Xiao's lead. She had felt Lan Luofeng's almost overflowing maternal love from her endless nagging concern — even as Ling Lan was touched, she surreptitiously sent a pleading look to her dad for help ... Boo hoo hoo, one year away from mum and she had become even naggier than before ...

Finally, Ling Lan could feel the spirit of rebellion rearing up within her. Her rebellious phase had come so late though ... she was almost 40 now if she added up both her lifetimes. At this thought, Ling Lan was truly chagrined — she really did not live up to her mental age.

She knew that Ling Xiao would only leave after the battle royal, so Ling Lan repeatedly reassured Lan Luofeng that she would definitely make time to come see her for the duration of the Grand Mecha Tournament; only then did she manage to convince Lan Luofeng to let go. When Ling Lan left, she spoke to her dad, hinting for him to work harder to get her mum pregnant earlier, so that she could be free ...

Immediately after throwing out these hints, Ling Lan brushed her hands of the matter and ran away without taking any responsibility, leaving behind a gobsmacked Ling Xiao. His cheeks and the tips of his ears quickly flushed red — for the first time, he felt embarrassed in front of his daughter.

Unfortunately ... Ling Xiao sighed deeply, but his expression soon eased out again. He had no more regrets in this life since he had this daughter Ling Lan 2 .

By the seventh day of the grand tournament, the miscellaneous specialization competitions were all consecutively coming to an end. The First Men's Military Academy was pretty much dominating the rankings. After taking everything into account, the First Men's Military Academy's total score put it in

first place for the moment. However, The Second Men's Military Academy, Third Men's Military Academy, and First Co-ed Military Academy were close behind it. The total points of all four academies were extremely close, merely a few points separating them from each other ...

All eyes were on the mecha combat event which was about to officially begin. If any of the other three academies could become the final victor of the mecha combat event, they would be able to break the current status quo and become the front-runner in one fell swoop.

Having said that, there is a need to explain the point distribution of the various events in the Grand Mecha Tournament. First off, on the final day of the tournament, the most important battle royal will account for half of the overall points. In other words, even if a school was at the bottom of the barrel in terms of points before the battle royal, as long as they became the final victor in the battle royal, they would still be able to achieve an upset and win the whole tournament. Similarly, even if a school was at the head of the rankings with their previous score, if they did not do well in the final battle royal, they would also be plummet from the clouds into the mud below.

As for the remaining half of the points, the mecha combat event took up another half of this half. This was also why there was so much attention on the mecha combat tournament. And this huge share of points was again split into two parts — single mecha combat and group mecha combat (five-person teams).

The first to be held was single mecha combat. Both the mecha combat events, single and group, would be using real mecha. This added a very real element of danger, and blood was certain to be shed at every tournament during the mecha combat events and the final battle royal. There had even been one year when the blood had flowed like a river, the wings of many outstanding talents broken right here in the tournament.

Some had suggested for the tournament to use virtual mecha instead, but the military had rejected the proposals in the end. The military felt that if a contestant could not even protect themselves in this type of combat competition intended for training purposes, then they certainly would not be able to survive in a cruel battlefield. As such, those cadets might as well just wash out of the military system. (The Grand Mecha Tournament typically resulted in severe injuries or disabilities — though there had of course been deaths as well, those were much rarer. After all, everyone knew to hold back a little in the tournament. Moreover, the Federation's greatest medical team would be on standby throughout the entire tournament. If any accidents occurred, the team would also be able to mobilise as quickly as possible to rescue the wounded.)

The high-profile ace operator Qiao Ting finally appeared before the public — not only would he be participating in the single mecha combat event, he would also be participating in the group mecha combat event. Generally, the five combatants a military academy would send for the single mecha combat event would often also be the five members participating in the group combat event. After all, these would be the school's strongest five ... but there were also exceptions. For example, this year, when the First Men's Military Academy had submitted their registration form, the reception staff had at first thought that he had misread it.

In the competition this time, Qiao Ting had two main competitors. Namely, Lin Xiao, who was suspected of being an ace operator, from the First Co-ed Military Academy, and Jiang Shaoyu, a confirmed ace operator from the Second Men's Military Academy.

It should be said that the organizers had arranged things very well. The three ace operators would not meet right from the start. The mecha combat competition was split into 4 blocks, and the three ace operators were in three separate blocks. Only when they entered the top 4 would they have any chance of clashing, of course with the premise that they were not unexpectedly eliminated from the competition earlier on.

The single mecha combat event would last for a total of three days. The first two days would be knockout matches among the contestants within the four blocks. The winner of each of the four blocks would then move on to the top 4 and engage in battle on the third day. And after the single mecha combat event ended, the group mecha combat event would begin, and it would likewise go on for three days.

Zhao Jun, who had been pushed by Ling Lan into participating in the single mecha combat event, had luck which was off the charts compared to the other participants from the First Academy. During the draw, he did not pull any of the three blocks hosting one of the three ace operators. Instead, he pulled the only block filled with just special-class mecha, which was the block predicted by all of the audience to be the most competitive area with the most brutal fighting.

And it was indeed so. This block did not have an ace hanging over them, so everyone believed that they had a fighting chance to become the winner. This caused everyone in the block to fight to the end, unwilling to back down. Every mecha seemed almost berserk when they fought, and this block was the one which incurred the highest number of injured operators as well as the worst injuries. The emergency medical team on site was thrown into a chaotic rush to handle all the injuries, running themselves ragged to save these gifted talents.

In this wild massacre, Zhao Jun displayed his prowess, bringing down opponents left and right to finally secure a place for himself in the finals of this block, and then obtain the one and only non-ace position in the top 4 of the event. This result was met with the envy-jealousy-hate of the other three contestants from the First Men's Military Academy — they had just been unlucky, pulling the other three blocks. Without any doubt, when they had encountered the respective ace operators in their blocks, they had lost cleanly.

After the successive battles, Lin Xiao of the First Co-ed Military Academy, who had initially been hiding his true abilities, was proven to have indeed already advanced to ace. He entered the final top 4 without any problems, and Qiao Ting and Jiang Shaoyu soon followed him as well, clinching the top 4 slots of their respective blocks.

On the final day of the single mecha combat event, the top 4 contestants arrived punctually at the mecha combat field. At this point, they still did not know who their opponent of the day would be. The referee on the field first made them each choose a ball from four balls rolling around quickly within a device. The person who got the same number would be their opponent for the first match. The winners of those two first matches would then move on to the final match to determine the first and second place, while the losers would fight to compete for third and fourth place.

The first to step up and choose a ball was Jiang Shaoyu. Qiao Ting heard Zhao Jun take in a deep breath beside him — although their two mecha clans were rivals in the First Academy, they were comrades right now, so Qiao Ting felt that he needed to show some concern. He asked in a low voice, “How are you? Nervous?”

Zhao Jun licked his lips and said with barely repressed excitement, “No, I’m just thinking ... who’ll be my next opponent?”

“Is there someone you want to fight?” Qiao Ting had noticed the deeply hidden excitement in Zhao Jun’s eyes. At that moment, he recalled how Zhao Jun had not shown any fear either when the other had fought him back then, so why would he fear another now? Qiao Ting could not help admiring the other, thinking to himself, ‘This fellow Zhao Jun is really pretty good.’

“Yep, that one on the stage,” said Zhao Jun without any hesitation whatsoever as he pointed at Jiang Shaoyu.

“Why him?” asked Qiao Ting, boggled. Compared to Jiang Shaoyu, Lin Xiao looked easier to handle.

“Because, he attacked Luo Lang before.” Zhao Jun’s reply was simple. His gaze narrowed and a tendril of killing intent seeped out. Since the other dared to lay a hand on his teammate, then even though he knew he was no match for that guy, he still wanted to leave some mark on him ...

Chapter 449: Admitting Defeat!

Qiao Ting could sense the rage in Zhao Jun’s heart, and he knew the reason for it. The incident involving Luo Lang before the start of the tournament ... as long as one had the interest, it was easy to find out about it. What Qiao Ting had not expected was that Zhao Jun would take this slight against a teammate to heart so much after only having joined Lingtian for just a short couple of months. Was this another one of Ling Lan’s unknown abilities?

Qiao Ting glanced at Zhao Jun with a troubled gaze, his emotions a rather complicated mess. He could not tell if he was admiring or jealous of Ling Lan ...

Right then, Jiang Shaoyu had already chosen one of the balls. Holding onto it, he did not look at it any longer than necessary before turning around to walk back to his original position. He had yet to stop walking when the referee had already called up the second person to draw — it was Zhao Jun!

Zhao Jun took a deep breath and stepped forwards. As he brushed by Jiang Shaoyu, he sent a fierce glare at the other. Jiang Shaoyu saw Zhao Jun’s hostile gaze and was instantly aggravated. He had not forgotten that this person had been there at the scene when he was at his most humiliated.

A savage air gripped him by the heart, and Jiang Shaoyu could hardly repress the killing intent that surged up in response ... he clenched his fists so tightly that his fingers almost gouged into the flesh, and the sharp pain helped him to calm down.

By then, Zhao Jun had already turned his gaze away. With a cold huff, he walked past Jiang Shaoyu to come before the choosing station and picked a ball. Jiang Shaoyu slowly turned his head to stare at Zhao Jun’s back as he walked away and his eyes revealed a brief flash of killing intent.

He hoped that the ball Zhao Jun had chosen would have the same number as the ball he had chosen. He would be extremely glad to fight with the other now, not only because Zhao Jun was the weakest and would ensure him a sure pass, but also because he wanted to deal with this detestable person and collect some of the interest on his debt of humiliation.

After Zhao Jun had made his choice, the third to pick was Lin Xiao, and the final person was, as everyone expected, Qiao Ting. After the four youths had made their choices, the referee asked them to press down on the power switch of the small balls at the same time.

As soon as the four boys pressed down, a gash suddenly appeared on the upper part of the ball. A beam of light shot out from each of the balls to form a virtual screen. The four virtual screens were not blank — they each held a number and the audience could see at a glance what the pairings would be for the semi-final matches.

Amidst the cries of surprise coming from all around, Jiang Shaoyu's expression was dark. He threw a sullen glance at Zhao Jun who was standing in a row with him and mused moodily that the other was pretty lucky to have escaped.

Meanwhile, Zhao Jun was also somewhat regretful that his opponent would not be Jiang Shaoyu. He looked at his opponent for this round and sighed mentally. It looked like if he wanted to fight with Jiang Shaoyu, he could only hope that Jiang Shaoyu would lose. This was because his opponent was an old rival that could not be more familiar to him — Qiao Ting! He knew very well that he was definitely no match for Qiao Ting.

That's right. In the semi-finals, the First Men's Military Academy was confronted right off with an internal clash, both surviving candidates forced to fight each other.

In contrast to the audience's surprise and regret over it, the spectating Ling Lan felt that this was an extremely reasonable arrangement. Among the four, Zhao Jun's strength was clearly one level lower. No matter who was matched with him, the opponent would almost be guaranteed a win. And now, by pitting the strongest against the weakest, and leaving the two other combatants with roughly equivalent strength to battle things out, no one could complain that they were unlucky ... everything would be determined by true strength — whoever was stronger would be able to progress further.

As the number above Zhao Jun's and Qiao Ting's balls was the number one, they were of course the first to fight. The four boys went backstage where Qiao Ting and Zhao Jun boarded their mecha before operating their mecha to enter the field.

Qiao Ting's mecha was a long-range attack ace mecha. The Federation public was long accustomed to the various forms of mecha — the moment Qiao Ting's mecha appeared, passionate cheers rang out across the hall. Everyone knew that Qiao Ting of the First Men's Military Academy had managed to advance to ace in his fourth year, becoming the second peerless prodigy to do so after General Ling Xiao, but they did not know which mecha Qiao Ting had chosen to master. And now, the answer was finally revealed before the audience. Although Qiao Ting's choice was different from the balanced mecha General Ling Xiao had chosen, this did not hinder the adoration and anticipation the people held for him.

Meanwhile, on the other end, Zhao Jun had also operated his mecha onto the field. When he saw all the cheers going to Qiao Ting, he could only grin helplessly. However, it was also at this moment when he understood even better why Ling Lan had chosen not to participate in the single mecha combat event. A fourth-year ace was already enough to send these people so wild — if the world knew there was another person who had broken General Ling Xiao's advancement record, achieving the level of ace in his second year, the entire Federation, perhaps even the entire human world, would certainly be shaken to its core ...

At this thought, Zhao Jun could not hold back a shiver, his heart clenching with fear. In order to prevent the Federation from gaining an extra ultimate weapon, the enemy nations would definitely send countless assassins over to target Ling Lan. And in response, to protect Ling Lan, the Federation would likely have to draft him into the army immediately and put him under protection in hiding. At that time, his team leader would have absolutely no freedom to speak of. Only after he had grown up to become the newest ultimate weapon for the country would he be able to regain his freedom. This was still the best case scenario — if the team leader never managed to advance to god-class operator level for his entire life, did that mean that he would be locked up in some base all his life until he died? This was probably not an outcome his team leader wanted.

Zhao Jun was chilled — he had to keep the knowledge that Ling Lan had already successfully become an ace deep at the bottom of his heart and never ever reveal it ...

After receiving confirmation from both combatants that they were ready, the referee responsible for this match raised the green flag in his right hand up high. As soon as he swung the flag down, the fight would officially begin.

Everyone stared at the green flag of the referee, waiting for it to swing down. When it finally did and Qiao Ting was just about to charge over to attack, Zhao Jun on the opposite side did something beyond everyone's expectations. Without hesitation, he lifted both arms of his mecha over his head ...

Seeing what Zhao Jun had done, the referee's green flag had barely swung down when the red flag in his left hand was hastily raised. The referee waved the red flag vigorously — this announced that Zhao Jun's and Qiao Ting's fight needed to be suspended.

It turned out that Zhao Jun's action was the designated motion in mecha combat tournaments which signified surrender. In a competition, if anyone did this action, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the referee would wave a red flag to declare a time-out. Next, an inquiry would be held with the mecha operator who had carried out the action to check if they had truly intended to surrender. If not, the operator who had done the action would have points deducted. This point deduction would be very steep, instantly taking off about one-third of the total marks.

Mecha combat was an event where taking down your opponent was the way to win, but sometimes, due to equivalent levels of strength, the battle might end up in a protracted stalemate. If an outcome had to be decided within a short period of time, there was little choice except to make it a death match and make both combatants put their lives on the line. Although the Grand Mecha Tournament's touted slogan was 'true battle', it was after all just a domestic competition. The Federation's military did not intend for outstanding Federation talent to wither and die here, and so they had set up this point deduction system to determine the final outcome in cases such as the one mentioned previously.

Every mecha would have 100 points at the start of a fight. If the opponent scored an effective hit on you, a corresponding number of points will be deducted from your mecha ... the one whose score drops to zero first would lose. The referee would then end the fight and declare the results of the match.

Thus, as soon as Zhao Jun pulled this pose, although the referee was rather taken aback, he had still reacted swiftly to put up the red flag in his left hand. Seeing the red flag signal from the referee, Qiao Ting immediately stopped all motion to attack and waited for the referee to proceed with the following procedures.

The referee quickly connected to Zhao Jun's commlink, and after receiving confirmation from Zhao Jun that he was indeed admitting defeat, the referee immediately announced the end of the match. Zhao Jun had forfeited, so Qiao Ting would be moving on to the finals without having to fight.

After returning backstage, Qiao Ting grumpily controlled his mecha to the secured seat the JMC pointed out. He locked his mecha safely into the seat, and only then did he walk out of his cockpit and use the landing cable to descend to the ground.

On the other side, Zhao Jun was doing the same. Qiao Ting removed his safety helmet and stood frowning as he waited for Zhao Jun to approach him. When Zhao Jun finally came up to his side, Qiao Ting asked with a dark expression, "Why didn't you fight?" Even though he had full confidence in himself, winning without a fight rubbed Qiao Ting the wrong way — he felt patronized.

Zhao Jun heard the muted resentment in Qiao Ting's voice and secretly rolled his eyes. Who would have expected the outwardly dominant and unreasonable Qiao Ting to be so just and forthright internally? Even winning without having to fight made him feel uncomfortable ... Zhao Jun could not help but think of his own team leader and his style of only focusing on the results without caring too much about the process. Yep, his boss would probably go further — following him was truly the right choice.

At this moment, Zhao Jun admired his good friend's eye even more for being so discerning in selecting a team leader. Oblivious to the fact that Li Lanfeng had already known Ling Lan from a long while back, Zhao Jun was once again completely fooled by Li Lanfeng, thinking that the other had asked him to join Lingtian purely for his own benefit ... even though that was certainly the truth, it also could not be denied that Li Lanfeng did have some selfish motives as well in doing so. He wanted to increase the strength of his rabbit's battle clan. It just so happened that his arrangement benefitted both sides

Qiao Ting's aggressive gaze let Zhao Jun know that it was impossible not to answer. Helplessly, he replied, "Since I know I can't beat you, why should I reveal my trump cards for others to see?" Zhao Jun shrugged. He looked towards Jiang Shaoyu and Lin Xiao, who were currently heading into the tunnel leading to the field, and continued, "Thing is, I want to keep a small surprise for one of those two. So I don't want to reveal too much."

"Jiang Shaoyu?" Zhao Jun's explanation dispersed Qiao Ting's dissatisfaction. He recalled what Zhao Jun had said to him previously, and was enlightened.

"Yeah. Now, I really wish the First Co-ed Military Academy's Lin Xiao will work a little harder and defeat Jiang Shaoyu so that I'll have a chance to fight him." Zhao Jun's eyes narrowed into slits. He was filled with fighting spirit to face Jiang Shaoyu. Perhaps he too wanted to tell his teammates that he was already one of them, so he could not bear to see a teammate of his being insulted ...

Just then, the communicator on Zhao Jun's wrist began vibrating violently. He lifted it to see and instantly began chuckling. It was a message from Li Lanfeng.

"Did something come up?" asked Qiao Ting.

"Yes. The regiment commander is looking for me. Qiao Ting, I'll be heading off first." Outside, Zhao Jun had always called Ling Lan 'regiment commander'.

Chapter 450: Lin Xiao vs Jiang Shaoyu

After saying goodbye to Qiao Ting, Zhao Jun hurriedly made his way to the backstage conveyor belt, which would bring him directly to the exit. As soon as Zhao Jun arrived outside, he found Li Lanfeng waiting for him, seemingly completely at ease.

"Lanfeng, why is the team leader looking for me? Why did he ask me to come out from backstage? I was thinking to finish watching Lin Xiao and Jiang Shaoyu's fight." Before Li Lanfeng could speak, Zhao Jun had already blurted all the questions that had been running through his head ever since he had seen the message.

A slight smile appeared on Li Lanfeng's lips and he said, "The team leader wants you to sit beside him to watch the fight together. He might have something to say to you." Regarding why Ling Lan was calling Zhao Jun over, Li Lanfeng had some idea. It would be a good chance for Zhao Jun to improve his strength.

Li Lanfeng was well aware of Ling Lan's control skills — an ace would have much to impart. On top of that, Ling Lan also had an imperial instructor ¹ (Li Lanfeng still did not know Ling Lan's real identity) — Zhao Jun would definitely be able to save himself from many detours if he received some guidance from Ling Lan.

Li Lanfeng's words made Zhao Jun's eyes light up. As familiar with Li Lanfeng as he was, he could glean something from his friend's demeanour — something good would definitely come out from this trip.

Thus, he happily followed Li Lanfeng to the exclusive viewing area of the First Men's Military Academy. When she saw Zhao Jun arrive, Ling Lan motioned for Zhao Jun to come sit beside her.

As soon as Zhao Jun sat down, he saw many team members looking at him in envy. He was completely nonplussed by this, wondering what in the world was going on. Right at this moment, his team leader beside him prompted, "Senior Zhao, please watch the fight closely!"

This cry made Zhao Jun's heart jolt, and he faintly felt cold sweat breaking out on his back. Of course, Zhao Jun was feeling somewhat guilty because he had indeed been distracted and had not seen what was happening on the field. He had not expected that brief loss of attention to have been caught by his keen-eyed team leader.

Zhao Jun quickly turned his eyes back onto the field, showing that he was already fully focused on the mecha fight between Lin Xiao and Jiang Shaoyu now. Only after sensing his team leader's cold gaze turn away from him did he surreptitiously wipe the cold sweat from his forehead, sighing internally. *No wonder Qi Long and the others said that Boss Lan's force of presence was very powerful — one cold stare*

was enough to give them shivers. So it was really true. What's funny was that he had actually not taken it seriously when he had first heard about this. He had thought that Qi Long and the others were exaggerating, but now it looked like they were completely right. Their team leader's force of presence and the blade of his gaze was truly formidable. He reckoned that his team leader must have been showing him some face previously by not presenting his force of presence so aggressively ... at this thought, Zhao Jun was instantly crying inside — was it too late for him to withdraw now?

Ling Lan did not know that her special effort to convert her force of presence into sound to make sure Zhao Jun watched the fight properly would make him come to such a realisation. This was also a result of Ling Lan's increasing comfort with using her force of presence. Compared to how her force of presence had been constantly leaking before, her force of presence now was extremely reserved. But as soon as it was presented, the pressure it exerted would be several times greater than how it was originally. Even Zhao Jun who did not feel that pressured before could now feel the powerful pressure of Ling Lan's force of presence.

The moment he focused, Zhao Jun was pulled fully into Lin Xiao and Jiang Shaoyu's mecha fight.

Lin Xiao's ace mecha was a winged transformer mecha, an improved mecha based off a balanced fixed-type mecha. However, it was not like a fixed-type mecha, which had absolute balance in both long-range and close-range attacks. Instead, it leaned towards long-range attacks, but unlike mecha exclusively specializing in long-range attacks, close combat was not a significant weakness. The close-combat ability of this type of mecha was undoubtedly much stronger than long-range mecha, but it was still weaker than a true balanced mecha.

In contrast, Jiang Shaoyu's mecha surprised everyone. He was operating the mecha with the highest death rate, a close-combat mecha. Although the mecha's long-range abilities were weak, it was the indisputable king of close combat.

Two such distinctly different mecha led to the current deadlock on the field. Lin Xiao was extremely cautious — seeing that the other was piloting a close-combat mecha, he had instantly kept a distance from the start. The hands of his mecha each held a long-range beam gun, and he used a continuous stream of firepower to keep Jiang Shaoyu suppressed below, keeping him from moving forwards and freezing up his opponent's advantage completely.

This situation greatly frustrated the ill-prepared Jiang Shaoyu. Opportunity was fleeting — having already been pushed into a passive situation, it was now very difficult for him to turn things around. If he wanted to obtain victory, he needed to get close to the other; otherwise, under the suppression of his opponent's firepower, he would probably be stuck in this situation till the end of the match. Although he was still dodging beautifully at present so Lin Xiao's beam attacks had not given him any injury whatsoever, the opponent had also completed his ideal setup, perfectly keeping him suppressed within the range of his beam attacks, rendering him effectively immobile.

Following the passage of time, perhaps Jiang Shaoyu had become impatient — a control error caused his mecha's evasion movements to slow for a beat, and a spot on his mecha's thigh was actually hit twice in a row ... if Lin Xiao managed to hit the same spot another two times, that thigh would definitely be blasted off, deducting the opponent's score by a large half and bringing victory within grasping distance.

Seeing this chance as well, the audience instantly perked up, beginning to feel nervous. They looked at Lin Xiao of the First Co-ed Military Academy, silently wondering if he could grasp this opportunity.

Lin Xiao too saw this opportunity — his mind stirred, but he instantly repressed his eager heart, steadily maintaining the frequency of his beam attacks. His shots formed a perfect circle, completely trapping Jiang Shaoyu's mecha but not specifically attacking any part.

Opportunity was fleeting — Jiang Shaoyu's mecha once again regained his evasion momentum, and many in the audience found themselves lamenting the missed opportunity. At this moment, Ling Lan suddenly asked, "Senior Zhao, if you encountered this opportunity, what would you do?"

Those Lingtian members who overheard this question instantly perked up their ears to hear Zhao Jun's answer. While Zhao Jun had still been on the field, they had already heard Boss Lan ask Li Lanfeng to call Zhao Jun over in order to study the methods of the two combatants on the field in this match, in preparation for tomorrow's fight.

They naturally did not want to miss this chance to learn as, after all, this was a fight between two ace operators — if they could hear something from Boss Lan's and Zhao Jun's discussion, they would benefit greatly.

After some serious thought, Zhao Jun replied, "I would do as Lin Xiao did. Choose to give it up!"

At his reply, Ling Lan's lips quirked up slightly. She was very pleased with Zhao Jun's response — just as Leopard had said, Zhao Jun may look like a rough brute, brash, straightforward, and impulsive, but his mind was actually very meticulous and he would not make decisions lightly.

"That weakness appeared too abruptly. Anyone who can keep calm will not fall for it." Ling Lan revealed what she thought. Many who had been fooled by Jiang Shaoyu's ploy only now realised that that opening was actually just a lure.

"But this does not exclude the possibility that it is a ploy within a ploy ..." Zhao Jun did not echo agreement with Ling Lan's judgment, however. The opening was very sudden, true, thus making it very suspicious ... but what if the opponent had truly made a mistake and had simply decided not to hide it out of fear that his opponent might jump on it? He shook his head and added, "It cannot be determined. More observation is necessary."

"Yes, whether it is true or false, to be safe, it is better to be patient. Judging by the situation on the field, the advantage is already on Lin Xiao's side. Giving up on this opportunity will not make Lin Xiao lose his upper hand, so it is right for him to be patient and not charge in blindly. If he falls for a trap, his advantage would be completely lost. Jiang Shaoyu can afford to gamble, but Lin Xiao cannot." Ling Lan did not object to Zhao Jun's judgment; this caused the Lingtian members to feel like they were listening to all this while blinded by fog. Until now, there were still some who just could not figure out whether this opportunity was fake or real.

Qi Long was also watching the fight intently at this time. There was no confusion at all on his face because his Animal Instinct had not given him a strong urge to attack. This meant that that opportunity was not trustworthy.

Li Lanfeng and Han Jijun were calm as well. As strategists, they were originally the suspicious sort. Before they could confirm things 100%, they absolutely would not make any decisions lightly. Like Lin Xiao, they would choose to ignore the opening and maintain the current advantage to wait for a better opportunity.

Luo Lang was the complete opposite of them. His expressions varied greatly — one moment he'd be calm, then he'd be excited, then impatient, then contemplative ... everyone in Ling Lan's battle clan knew that this fellow had most likely activated his innate talent inside, arbitrarily switching between his various personalities to try and come to a cohesive judgment on the situation on the field. As long as this innate talent of Luo Lang's was utilized well, not only would his combat power during battle be explosively increased, during normal times like this, it could also help with battle analysis. Using the different perspectives of the various personalities to dissect a situation would give one a fuller picture with little chance of error.

The others all had their own opinions to varying extents. True battle between aces was not so easy to decipher — anyone who had the chance to view one would certainly gain something from it.

Jiang Shaoyu saw that the weakness he exposed did not work, and he could not help but curse within his cockpit. After a bout of venting, Jiang Shaoyu calmed down. He knew that he had been a little too obvious with that opening — anyone who was cautious would not have acted lightly. And this Lin Xiao just so happened to be a cautious person ...

Jiang Shaoyu's eyes turned in his sockets, and an idea sprouted in his mind. Initially, his right hand had been holding a beam saber, while his left hand held a beam handgun often used by close-combat mecha. The shooting range of a close-combat mecha's beam handgun was no match for the range of a long-range mecha's beam gun. This was the main reason why Jiang Shaoyu had been totally suppressed in terms of range in this battle with Lin Xiao.

Jiang Shaoyu knew he could not continue being passive like this. With a sudden twist of his body, he unleashed a wild flurry of shots from the beam handgun in his left hand. This time, he was no longer aiming for accuracy, chasing speed instead. A continuous stream of beams poured out, and though a portion flew wide, a majority of the shots met the beams coming from Lin Xiao and neutralized them. This gave Jiang Shaoyu a chance to breathe, and then with a great swing, the beam saber in his right hand was sent flying out of his hand.

The beam saber cut through the air, hurtling at Lin Xiao at an incredible speed.

Lin Xiao's mecha was more of a long-range type to begin with, so its speed was among the fastest among ace mecha. He easily avoided the beam saber and the frequency of the attacks coming from both his hands was not interrupted at all.

The beam saber brushed by Lin Xiao's mecha to land heavily on the ground, sending up some dust and dirt. Just as everyone was astounded at this move by Jiang Shaoyu, many of the spectating First Men's Military Academy students sat up straight, eyes shining, Ling Yu and Zhao Jun not excluded. They all knew that Jiang Shaoyu was probably about to launch his counterattack.

Sure enough, Jiang Shaoyu was finally doing something different. This new action caused astonished cries to ring out across the audience seats. It turned out that after discarding his beam saber, Jiang

Shaoyu had drawn a backup beam gun from the secured dock on his back. The counterattack method he had chosen was his weakness — long-range attack!