

## Crossing 451

### Chapter 451: Brutal and Savage Revenge!

Most people felt that this move of Jiang Shaoyu's was suicidal — using one's weakness to compete against another's strength ... it would be strange not to lose.

However, as soon as Jiang Shaoyu attacked, the situation on the field was unexpected. With a gun in both hands, Jiang Shaoyu was shooting at a rate not much lower than Lin Xiao's, and his marksmanship was very good too. Every beam shot collided with one of Lin Xiao's — an opening began to appear in the encirclement of beams restricting Jiang Shaoyu's movements ...

"Holy sh\*t, Jiang Shaoyu's long-range skills are pretty strong too!" Quite a few people exclaimed when they saw this. Mind you, mecha operators who were proficient at both close-combat and long-range combat would typically choose a balanced mecha to fully apply their all-rounded capabilities. They would not do as Jiang Shaoyu had, abandoning one of their strengths to focus on just one strength.

Jiang Shaoyu's counterattack was effective; he was no longer fully suppressed by Lin Xiao as before. The situation began to look increasingly promising for Jiang Shaoyu, and just when everyone believed that Jiang Shaoyu's chance was coming ...

That chance really came! Perhaps seeing how he was fast losing his absolute advantage, Lin Xiao panicked. He suddenly lost control of his initially very steady and rhythmical shooting. He pulled too fast on the trigger of his beam gun and actually ended up shooting several blanks, and the opening which Jiang Shaoyu was ripping through his encirclement became even larger due to this mistake.

Chance! A cold gleam flashed through Jiang Shaoyu's eyes. His fingers flew, and all the engines on his mecha were instantly revved to their fullest, pushing his speed to the maximum limit. Although this kind of operation would cause wear and tear on the mecha's engines due to being pushed beyond capacity, Jiang Shaoyu could not bother about this anymore at this moment. Opportunity was fleeting — if he did not grab this chance and continued to wait, perhaps he would not get another one. At that time, it would most likely be impossible to turn things around anymore.

The speed of Jiang Shaoyu's mecha broke past the limits of a close-combat mecha, instantly drawing close to Lin Xiao. Meanwhile, Lin Xiao naturally did not wish for his advantage to end here. He too revved all his engines, retreating desperately, but he was still slower than Jiang Shaoyu by a beat — the distance between the two of them was eaten up in an instant.

At this time, Lin Xiao lost the distance he had maintained while suppressing Jiang Shaoyu through long-range attacks. In other words, his initially formidable and threatening long-range attacks were now completely useless. In the blink of an eye, the two combatants had switched over from long-range attack mode to close-combat mode.

"Lin Xiao's in danger now!" Seeing this, everyone felt that things were not looking good for Lin Xiao. Once things shifted to close combat, although a balanced mecha is also strong, it still would not be able to beat a true .

This was a battle between aces — even when one side seemed to have an overwhelming advantage, before the fight truly ended, no one would dare to say that victory was certain. Lin Xiao had had the upper hand all this while, but now he had become the disadvantaged party in the blink of an eye.

At this point, Ling Lan frowned slightly, a trace of contemplation coursing through her eyes ... had Lin Xiao truly made a mistake?

Right then, the two mecha on the field were still engaged in a pursuit, one chasing while the other ran, but now the roles had been reversed. The initial pursuer was now the one being pursued, the initial prey now becoming the hunter.

Lin Xiao did not forget to keep shooting with the guns in his hands as he retreated to prevent Jiang Shaoyu from getting closer and pulling him into a close-range grapple, but Jiang Shaoyu was not someone so easily deterred. His predictive ability was very strong, and the evasion footwork he was employing was also one of the advanced footwork at ace level. Lin Xiao's shooting did not give Jiang Shaoyu much trouble, and the distance between the two of them continued to shrink ...

“What do you think? Senior Zhao?” Ling Lan suddenly turned her head to ask Zhao Jun.

“As soon as the distance is closed and the fight moves into close-range combat, the chances of Lin Xiao losing will become much higher. Now it all depends on whether Lin Xiao can pull away again.” Zhao Jun similarly did not think well of Lin Xiao's chances — challenging a close-combat mecha with close combat was really unlikely to end well unless you were piloting a close-combat mecha yourself.

“Jiang Shaoyu can conceal his abilities. What do you think about Lin Xiao? Can he or can he not do so too?” asked Ling Lan instead, clearly showing that she did not agree with Zhao Jun.

“Conceal? Can or cannot?” Zhao Jun was also a clever person. Enlightened, he said in shock, “Leader, you're saying that Lin Xiao's true strength is not actually long range but close combat?” If things were really as his team leader had judged, then this match would really be too interesting.

Finally, Jiang Shaoyu caught up to Lin Xiao. Jiang Shaoyu saw as the distance between himself and Lin Xiao shrunk, and a savage smile appeared on his face. He swung the mechanical beam gun in his right hand fiercely, intending to slam the other with it hard.

The beam gun whistled through the air — everyone in the audience could hear the sound clearly through the top-notch audio system in the combat stadium. Their hearts were raised up high in suspense — with this amount of power behind it, if struck, even an ace mecha would not be able to fully offset the violent concussive force caused by the impact. The mecha operator inside the cockpit would certainly be injured gravely, incurring terrible internal damage.

Quicker than words could say, just as everyone was worrying for Lin Xiao, a loud ear-shattering ‘bang’ rang out. The two mecha had finally made contact for the first time in the fight.

Those with keen eyes could already tell that Jiang Shaoyu's attack had not worked. At the critical moment, Lin Xiao had used the beam gun in his hands to successfully intercept his opponent's heavy blow.

The two mecha were instantly sent flying backwards away from one another after the violent collision. At the same time, both their mecha each had an item fly off from them. Two loud booms, and those two

items cut a lovely curve through the air before crashing heavily onto the ground, smashing open a shallow pit while sending a large spray of dust and dirt into the air.

Apparently, the beam guns of the combatants had been flung out of their hands due to the collision.

The audience had yet to see what had fallen onto the ground when the two mecha which had been flying backwards once again traded moves in the air. It turned out that as they were flying backwards, they had respectively drawn a cold weapon from their backs and had swung it without any hesitation at the other.

If either side had only been a beat slower, one of them would definitely have been able to hit the other with their cold weapon due to its length and weight. If the opponent was unlucky, he might have been struck at the waist where the cockpit was — then, not only would the opponent have suffered concussive damage, his score would also have been deducted by one-third. A strike to the cockpit was considered a very effective attack, thus garnering the highest point deduction on an opponent.

The two of them moved almost simultaneously, and so the two giant cold weapons clashed violently. The resulting force sent both cold weapons bouncing back and at the same time, their already stabilized mecha were once again sent spinning out of control. Only after shooting back several dozens of metres did the two manage to regain full control of their mecha again.

The two mecha faced each other from a distance of 200 metres. This bit of distance could be covered by the speed of a mecha in an instant, but the two fighters did not move recklessly. That last clash had made both of them keenly aware that the opponent before them was undoubtedly the strongest they had ever encountered thus far. The outcome would be decided in a split second; a reversal could occur at any moment.

The two youths vigilantly held their cold weapons up, keeping their eyes on the other as they waited patiently, each trying to find an opportunity.

The audience which had been completely spellbound by the thrilling fight earlier abruptly came to their senses. They began to exclaim,

“Who’d have guessed that Lin Xiao’s close combat skills are not at all weaker than Jiang Shaoyu’s!”

“Jiang Shaoyu was not the only one hiding his abilities, Lin Xiao was too!”

“Things will be interesting now. Both of them are good at close combat, so even if the fight is now in close-combat mode, the outcome will be hard to predict.”

With the display of just those two moves, those with discerning eyes could already tell that though Lin Xiao’s mecha looked like it was more geared for long-range attack, in reality, his close-combat ability was several degrees better than that of the average close-combat mecha. By this point, everyone understood that both Jiang Shaoyu and Lin Xiao had been concealing part of their abilities.

At this moment, Ling Lan turned to Zhao Jun and said, “Pay more attention to Jiang Shaoyu’s movements. He may be your opponent.”

Zhao Jun was taken aback by her words. He could only see that the two people on the field were evenly matched — it was very hard to predict who would win or lose; both sides still had hopes of winning. It all

depended on who was better at grasping the opportunities they had, and who was more stable and able to keep their weaknesses shielded.

Seeing the doubt and surprise in Zhao Jun's eyes, Ling Lan explained, "Jiang Shaoyu was too impatient when turning the tables around. He did not think through why the consistently calm and collected Lin Xiao would make such a low-level mistake ..."

Only then did Zhao Jun comb through his memories, and indeed, even though Jiang Shaoyu had broken Lin Xiao's suppression, Lin Xiao was still the one with the upper hand. Lin Xiao's personality was cautious to begin with — he definitely would not waver so easily ...

Zhao Jun said in shocked realisation, "Was it all a setup by Lin Xiao?"

"Exactly so. Lin Xiao seems like he wants to use the opponent's most confident point to defeat him ..."  
Ling Lan stroked her jaw. This behaviour was actually very brutal and savage — by unfortunate happenstance, the opponent's confidence may be completely crushed. Unless against an especially hated person or for the sake of revenge, the average person would never resort to such means ...

A flash of insight sparked through Ling Lan's mind. Could this be because of Luo Chao? Although Luo Lang had been the one harassed, anyone who was interested could easily find out the truth of the matter and who Jiang Shaoyu's true target was. Luo Lang had just become a decoy shield due to a misunderstanding.

A subtle smile hung on Ling Lan's lips. She really admired a senior who would openly seek revenge when his junior sister had been wronged, not to mention that the junior sister in question was a close childhood companion she had grown up with. Lin Xiao's current scheme was something Ling Lan was very glad to witness.

Sure enough, the following situation turned out as Ling Lan had expected. Lin Xiao's close-combat abilities were extremely solid, and his mentality was extremely calm and logical. Against Lin Xiao's sure and steady way of fighting, Jiang Shaoyu had no chance at all. In contrast, Jiang Shaoyu became increasingly anxious and impatient. It should be known that although three ace operators had come to participate in this tournament, their proficiencies were not the same. He, Jiang Shaoyu, was operating a close-combat mecha, so his close-combat ability was definitely outstanding and noteworthy, Qiao Ting operated a long-range mecha, so his proficiency was undoubtedly in long range, while Lin Xiao operated a balanced mecha, so he should be about equally good in both. However, this balance also signified mediocrity — Lin Xiao should neither be able to beat him in close combat nor beat Qiao Ting in long-range combat. Originally, although he took this fight against Lin Xiao seriously, he had still believed that it would not be a difficult matter to defeat the other. As soon as he managed to get close, victory would be his.

But reality had now given Jiang Shaoyu a direct slap in the face. In his strongest suit, close combat, his opponent was no weaker than himself — instead, he was the one losing confidence as the fight went on. He could still comprehend why he was weaker than the other in long range, but if he could not beat the other in close combat either, then what face did he have as a close-combat operator?

## **Chapter 452: A Shameless Person?**

Jiang Shaoyu did not want to lose face. He desperately wanted to use his greatest strength to defeat his opponent. Even if he could not do it in one move, he also hoped to strike his opponent so that even as the opponent's points were deducted, he would be able to prove to the audience that he was still stronger in terms of close combat.

Perhaps due to the pressure or perhaps due to Jiang Shaoyu's desperation to obtain results, this mentality made Jiang Shaoyu lose his cool. His movements turned rough and choppy, no longer as fine and rhythmical as before. Anyone with eyes could see that his operation was starting to veer out of control, no longer as perfect as it had been at the start ...

Lin Xiao observed the changes in Jiang Shaoyu and his gaze flickered. He knew that his opportunity would come soon. Lin Xiao did not move immediately — he only had one chance. He needed to act at the moment he had the best shot; otherwise, he would rather wait than be as impulsive as Jiang Shaoyu.

"Hehe, Jiang Shaoyu is probably going to lose now." Zhao Jun could also see the signs now and he could not but break out into a wide grin.

"Hn, from the looks of it now, out of the three ace operators, Jiang Shaoyu is the weakest. That Lin Xiao is very strong and he also knows how to hold back ... he will probably give Qiao Ting a lot of trouble." Ling Lan really quite admired this cadet who had a name which sounded so similar to her dad's — his skills were great both in long range and close range. A balanced mecha was truly most suitable for him.

Moreover, he did not lack cunning either. He had intentionally disguised the outer shell of his mecha to give others the mistaken impression that his strong suit was long-range offense and that his close combat was slightly weaker. This had lured the opponent in to attack his perceived 'weak point' — close combat. Now, this arrangement of his was indeed proving wondrously effective — well, at least, Jiang Shaoyu had tragically fallen for it. Without these elements of disguise, Jiang Shaoyu would certainly have been warier; he was not that easy to fool.

On the field, the two fighters exchanged several more blows in mid-air, their mecha trading positions several times. Following the passing of time, Jiang Shaoyu, unable to find any opportunity to attack, became even more restless and agitated. His brain ran hot, and he actually abandoned defence to attack with full force. Every swing of his mecha's arms with his cold weapon became heavy and powerful, but his speed dropped noticeably. In aiming for a one-hit kill, he caused his mecha to lose its agility. At this moment, Lin Xiao, who had been waiting all this time, knew that his true opportunity had arrived. He finally made his move!

Jiang Shaoyu's ended his latest round of ferocious attacks, and just as he was about to start the next round, Lin Xiao, who had been on full-defence all this while, actually disappeared from sight while Jiang Shaoyu was distracted preparing his attack. Jiang Shaoyu was first startled and paused for a beat, but immediately after, alarms blared loudly in his mind. He silently knew that things were not good — without conscious thought, his fingers flew reflexively over his mecha's controls, instantly bringing his hand speed to its limits. He needed to pilot his mecha away from here, or else he would be in danger.

Jiang Shaoyu's intuition was not wrong, but though he tried his hardest to escape the crisis, Lin Xiao had already waited so long for this opportunity, so how could he let Jiang Shaoyu escape so easily?

"Boom boom boom boom ..."

The engines of Jiang Shaoyu's mecha had just begun to flare, his mecha's body yet to escape from range, when Lin Xiao suddenly descended from above, his attack already a step ahead ...

"Was that space flicker just now?" The spectators cried out in shock. They had seen Lin Xiao's actions clearly — at the moments Jiang Shaoyu's attack had slowed, he had suddenly dashed to the area above Jiang Shaoyu's head. This flicker movement was a technique that only ace operators could perform. It was called 'space flicker', a weaker version of teleportation. As the technical skill required to perform it was very high, many operators who had just advanced to ace level could not learn this technique.

However, these were not the only exclamations. Closely following that, the voices rose once more, "Ah, it's a mecha chain combo!"

In close-range mecha combat, a mecha chain combo was the technique that could best showcase an operator's control skills and explosive power. The more skilful the operator was, the higher the combo chain they could perform — rumour had it that a god-class operator had once managed a combo chain of 128 hits, instantly defeating his opponent who was also a god-class operator.

"Three hits ... five hits!" By the time Lin Xiao reached five hits, everyone was on their feet in excitement. For the average mecha warrior, a 3-hit chain was already the limit, while a mecha master might be able to do another one or two hits more. Still, five hits was a tipping point — there were very few normal mecha masters who could go beyond five hits. Once someone went over the five-hit mark, that meant that that person's future was limitless.

Under the anticipatory gazes of everyone in the audience, Lin Xiao finally completed the sixth hit in his chain. When the loud 'bang' rang out once more, everyone could not hold back their cheers. Meanwhile, Lin Xiao reached his limit at this time and his combo chain finally ended. After taking Lin Xiao's 6-hit combo, Jiang Shaoyu not only did not manage to escape Lin Xiao's attacks, he was defeated instantly by this combo chain. Six effective attacks instantly reduced Jiang Shaoyu's points to zero — even though Jiang Shaoyu still had the ability to fight, the referee would not give him the chance to do so anymore.

Sure enough, when the referee saw that Jiang Shaoyu's points had been reduced to zero, he decisively raised his red flag and announced the end of the match. On the screens on all four sides of the combat field, Lin Xiao's victory was announced.

With regards to this result, no one had any objections. Although both combatants had been ace operators, Lin Xiao's control skills and mentality had been shown to be better than Jiang Shaoyu's.

After completing his 6-hit combo chain, Lin Xiao sat panting in his cockpit. His initially serious face was now adorned with a wide smile. He wasn't just glad that he had obtained the victory in this match — because victory was already within his expectations — what truly pleased him was that he had actually managed to break through his limits in this fight. For the first time ever, he had managed to up his combo chain to six hits. Undoubtedly, he had once again achieved a breakthrough while putting his all into the fight.

Ling Lan saw the final outcome, and it was as she had expected. She turned to look at Zhao Jun and asked, "Senior Zhao, what do you think of your opponent now?"

Zhao Jun's mouth split into a grin. "Jiang Shaoyu's heart will have an opening remaining. I'll be able to use that in the afternoon."

Ling Lan nodded, but then shook her head. "It's true that there will be an opening, but you are not Lin Xiao, so you won't be able to use it."

"Why?" Zhao Jun frowned, somewhat puzzled.

"Because you are still a special-class operator," answered Ling Lan levelly.

Zhao Jun fell into a thoughtful silence, head bowed. Then, as if figuring something out, he raised his head and asked, "Is this because he has a psychological advantage? So he won't be as caught up in insecurities as he was during his fight with Lin Xiao, making it hard to pick on this weak point of his?"

"Not only does he have a psychological advantage, but he also has the strength to back it up. Even though Jiang Shaoyu will be off his game due to this loss here, it is still very easy for him to defeat you," added Ling Lan.

Ling Lan's words deepened the furrow between Zhao Jun's eyebrows. Well, that was true — although special-class operators and ace operators were both operators, the distance between the two was like heaven and earth; this gap was not so easily bridged.

"Is there no way at all?" mused Zhao Jun regretfully.

"To win will be difficult, but to achieve an internecine outcome is not impossible ..." Ling Lan gave Zhao Jun a great surprise.

As soon as Zhao Jun heard this, he was invigorated. He quickly said, "Leader, tell me quickly ... uh, no, it's Boss, Boss! Tell me quickly!" In order to obtain Ling Lan's battle sutra, Zhao Jun's expression was sycophantic, and he had even shamelessly begun calling Ling Lan 'boss'.

To one side, Li Lanfeng had been listening to their conversation silently, and now he could not help but cover his face in shame, almost hoping he could dig a hole to bury himself in it. *Sob, sob, sob, this shameless Zhao Jun ... I really don't know him ...*

Meanwhile, the other Lingtian members were instantly left dumbstruck in the face of such shameless behaviour from Zhao Jun. Some members who still retained some degree of rationality, like Qi Long, Luo Lang, and Xie Yi, swiftly bounced at least three metres away from Zhao Jun, looking for all the world like he was a stranger to them.

This behaviour of Zhao Jun likewise hit Ling Lan like a lightning bolt. The plan she had thought of had already been by her lips, about to be spoken, but now it slid back down her throat. She decided that she would not say anything for now and let Senior Zhao stew for a while to console her poor frightened little soul.

Zhao Jun was completely oblivious to the disdain and avoidance of his companions in reaction to his behaviour. Yup, well, even if he had sensed some of it, his heart right now was filled with that method Ling Lan had mentioned; he had no mind at all the care about teaching those disrespectful juniors a lesson. He ignored the increasingly cold aura emanating from Ling Lan, happily circling around her and calling her 'Boss, Boss' over and over again. He was completely clueless to the fact that the more ingratiating he was with his behaviour, the more unlikely he was to get what he wanted.

Meanwhile, at this time, in the VIP room of the combat stadium, all of the special guests attending the Grand Mecha Tournament were pretty much watching the fight inside.

Seated beside Ling Xiao was the vice president of the Federation. He looked at the winner's name displayed on the large screen and could not help but laugh and say teasingly, "Oh, Ling Xiao, do you have any thoughts about this person's name?"

Ling Xiao and the vice president held the highest status in the military and the government respectively among all the special guests. Though all the other guests appeared to be watching the match intently or conversing in low voices with the people next to them, in truth, they were constantly observing the actions of the two men. When they heard the vice president's teasing remark, their ears instantly perked up — they wanted to know whether this cadet would be especially valued or disliked by General Ling Xiao due to his similar sounding name. Ling Xiao's attitude would determine how they would treat this cadet in the future.

"He's not bad!" Ling Xiao said with a smile. "The name Ling Xiao really is very popular in the Federation, I see. Vice President, in this regard, you can't match me ..."

Ling Xiao's smug boasting made everyone there smile knowingly. Several high-ranking officers of various army divisions now viewed the outstanding Lin Xiao with greedy eyes, planning to report this person to their commanders immediately after the tournament ended so that the officers sent to assess cadets would work hard to secure Lin Xiao for their respective divisions when they went to the First Co-ed Military Academy.

After Ling Xiao finished speaking, he turned his attention back to the field. Everyone assumed that he was watching the two fighters on the field — only he himself knew that he was looking for his daughter. Unfortunately, there were hundreds of thousands of people in the audience — it really was not that easy to find his daughter in the crowd.

The end of Lin Xiao and Jiang Shaoyu's match signalled the end of the single mecha combat matches in the morning. At 2 o'clock in the afternoon, the rest of the matches would be held to determine the final placings of the four combatants.

The audience in the combat stadium began to exit in an orderly manner. They needed to take the time for lunch before returning to watch the afternoon matches. The afternoon matches were sure to be even more exciting than the morning matches — after all, the coming matches would decide the first and second place, and even the match to determine third and fourth promised to be a view-worthy fight.

Seeing this, Ling Lan stood up. Meanwhile, Zhao Jun still had not been able to receive the answer he wanted from Ling Lan. He saw Ling Lan stand up and quickly hurried to follow suit ... when the other members saw this, they could only smile wryly and stand up as well. Li Lanfeng's feet were a little unsteady — standing on swaying feet, he felt deep regret for the first time for knowing such a shameless person like Zhao Jun.

Ling Lan did not know that when she stood up, Ling Xiao who was still in the VIP room suddenly turned to look in her direction as if guided by some supernatural sense. When he saw that familiar silhouette, the smile playing at the corners of Ling Xiao's lips deepened, and only then did he stand up to say



goodbye to the other special guests. Ling Xiao had honestly sat around here idly for half a day all for the sake of this one glimpse of his daughter.

### **Chapter 453: To Gamble or Not to Gamble?**

Ling Lan led the people of Lingtian out of the combat stadium. They were just passing by the mouth of the passage to the backstage when they heard a round of joyful cheers. Ling Lan turned at the sound and saw a group of cadets standing there. Lin Xiao, who had just won over Jiang Shaoyu, had just walked out of the passage — he should be the reason for these cheers.

Li Lanfeng, who had been watching Ling Lan closely all this while, saw Ling Lan's attention drawn by those cadets, and so spoke up to explain, "These people are the participants from the First Co-ed Military Academy. They should be here to welcome back their team leader Lin Xiao."

Ling Lan nodded lightly in response. She of course knew they were from the First Co-ed Military Academy, because she had seen two familiar figures among the crowd — Luo Chao and Han Xuya. However, the attention of the two girls was on Lin Xiao, so they had not noticed the arrival of Ling Lan's group.

When Lin Xiao came out, he had turned to Luo Chao and Han Xuya and said something. With her skills, Ling Lan could naturally hear everything he said loud and clear. Lin Xiao said that no one would still be able to strut around arrogantly after bullying someone from the First Co-ed Military Academy ... this sentence left the students of the First Co-ed Military Academy beside themselves with excitement, their eyes filled with respect for Lin Xiao. Even the always shy Luo Chao also cast a grateful glance at Lin Xiao.

The corners of Ling Lan's lips quirked upwards and she did not stop, passing by the First Co-ed Military Academy's people just like that. In her mindspace, Ling Lan instructed Little Four to help her send a short message to Luo Chao.

Luo Chao suddenly felt her wrist vibrate, and when she raised her hand to look, she found a message notification waiting for her. She opened the message and her face flushed red, a sweet, shy smile appearing on her lips.

"Little Sister Luo Chao, you have a good senior!" The message only contained this brief sentence, and the sender was Ling Lan.

She had not expected that the always cold and indifferent Boss Lan would actually care about her this much! Luo Chao's heart began to throb, and she could not help but think shyly — was her crush of many years finally being reciprocated?

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In the afternoon, the competition continued. The first to be held was the match to determine the third and fourth place. Zhao Jun and Jiang Shaoyu each piloted their mecha onto the field.

Jiang Shaoyu still had not recovered from his loss in the morning. He was rather unfocused — in his mind, he kept seeing scenes from his fight with Lin Xiao in the morning, all the way up till when he had been KO-ed by Lin Xiao's 6-hit combo chain, and he was immensely frustrated inside. During lunch, his

instructors had already helped him analyse the reasons behind his defeat. He had lost in terms of patience — he had not been calm enough, a little too impatient, and had thus fallen for Lin Xiao's scheme. If he had only been a little calmer, a little more patient ... then perhaps the outcome might have been very different.

Even now, Jiang Shaoyu still could not accept the reality of his loss to Lin Xiao. In his mind, only Qiao Ting from the First Men's Military Academy was a worthy opponent.

The referee's green flag swept down, signalling the official start to the fight.

As the flag fluttered down, Zhao Jun sprang out like a tiger let out of its cage, pouncing at his opponent several hundred metres away. He pushed all the power of his engines into speed, hurtling straight for Jiang Shaoyu in a dark streak of light.

Although there were also different types of special-class mecha, these types were not as extreme in their specializations as ace mecha. Despite having certain strength biases, special-class mecha were overall still quite balanced. Thus, when Zhao Jun pushed his engines to the maximum, his speed was not significantly slower than close-combat ace mecha. In fact, it could even be said that he was faster by a hair.

This move of Zhao Jun's drew shocked gasps from the audience. This was because, for the sake of this speed, Zhao Jun had sacrificed activating even the most essential beam shield protection. This meant that if he was accidentally hit by a stray beam, his defenceless mecha would certainly be immediately KO-ed out of the match. Moreover, his opponent was Jiang Shaoyu — his match in the morning had proven that his long-range attacks were no less impressive than his close combat skills. This action of Zhao Jun's was clearly too reckless ...

Everyone believed that this match would set the record for being the fastest to end — would it be 10 seconds, or 5? If Zhao Jun was unlucky, the match could even end in 3 seconds.

However, everyone soon saw that reality was not turning out as they expected. With this great opportunity right before his eyes, Jiang Shaoyu seemed stupefied. He actually did not manage to lift his gun in time — by the time he raised his gun, Zhao Jun was already less than 50 metres away. With the mecha's speed, this 50 metres would be closed within two steps.

Only at this time did the fearlessly charging forwards Zhao Jun release a sigh of relief. It was as Boss Lan had predicted — Jiang Shaoyu had not taken him seriously because he was underestimating him; this had given Zhao Jun the chance to get close.

Zhao Jun was a close combat specialist as well, though he was no match for Jiang Shaoyu even in close combat. Still, it was much better compared to his long-range attacks — with his lame marksmanship, he would definitely get the crap shot out of him by Jiang Shaoyu.

Jiang Shaoyu was awoken by the blare of alarms from his mecha. One look and cold sweat instantly broke out all over his body. It was lucky he had awoken in time, or else, just half a second later and he might have been subject to a successful blitz attack by Zhao Jun.

Why were these people all so annoying! Jiang Shaoyu's rage burned. He snapped up his beam gun and pulled the trigger on Zhao Jun who was sprinting right at him. Since you want to die, I'll grant you your wish.

With the pull of the trigger, the muzzle of the gun glowed brightly, a sign that a beam was about to be fired. Just then, a long and narrow black sword suddenly sliced down diagonally, stabbing straight into the muzzle of the beam gun.

"Boom!" An explosion rang out, followed by a column of dark black smoke. At this time, the two mecha were already in a standoff. Part of the audience had naturally caught what had happened, but there were some who had been unable to see clearly and were left boggled as to what could have happened. Had Jiang Shaoyu really been hit by Zhao Jun?

Just as everyone was wondering, the two mecha suddenly leapt back from each other. Only when the two mecha were fully displayed before the crowd once more could the audience tell where the explosion had come from.

Jiang Shaoyu's left arm was now a scarred mess. Half of the mecha's palm had been sliced clean off, only leaving a thumb behind. Electrical wires were left exposed to the outside at the broken edge, and some of them were still sparking.

The crowd gasped in shock once more — they had not expected Zhao Jun's reckless charge to work. He had actually managed to ambush Jiang Shaoyu! In that state, Jiang Shaoyu's left hand was pretty much unable to hold anything anymore — in other words, Jiang Shaoyu was now down by one hand, and his combat power would be decreased by three tiers because of it.

Jiang Shaoyu looked at the upper right corner of his screen, at the '100' there representing his points. The number suddenly began to scroll backwards rapidly — Jiang Shaoyu knew that this meant his points were being deducted. When the opponent's sword had jammed the muzzle of the beam gun, the beam energy could not be fired and had actually exploded within the gun. It was a shame for him that the energy block of the beam gun was completely full — the explosion instantly ignited the power left in the energy block. The force of the resulting explosion had been so powerful that it had instantly made waste of his mecha's left palm.

His point tally finally stopped scrolling, and the glaring number '70' sent pricks of pain stabbing into Jiang Shaoyu's eyes. Unexpectedly, his little distraction had actually been taken advantage of so thoroughly by the opponent to launch a successful blitz attack, resulting in such a huge deduction right off the bat, almost one-third of his total points. This made him feel ashamed — he had actually been harmed by a special-class operator. The thread of reason in his mind was fraying — he wanted to kill the other, he must kill the other ... Jiang Shaoyu's eyes began to turn red as a thick killing intent emanated from him.

Zhao Jun had managed to land a hit in one attempt — his heart was inexplicably exhilarated, and his admiration surged so high that he wanted to prostrate himself at Boss Lan's feet. It turned out this entire series of actions had all been directed by Ling Lan. Ling Lan had predicted that the opponent would be unable to focus at the start due to his loss in the morning as well as his natural disdain of Zhao Jun as an opponent. Thus, using the theoretical top speed of a mecha right at the start to draw close to

the opponent for a blitz attack had a good chance of succeeding. Of course, this so-called top speed referred to abandoning everything else on the mecha to funnel its entire available power into speed ...

At first, Zhao Jun was not too sure about following Boss Lan's proposal — he just felt that it was too risky. If there was just the slightest bit of error, he would be KO-ed right out of the match and become the person to be eliminated from a match in the shortest amount of time in tournament history. That would be such a loss of face!

Noticing Zhao Jun's doubts, Ling Lan had merely said lightly, "If you don't take the risk, you will definitely lose. Take the gamble, and there is the possibility of a draw." Yes, at most, Zhao Jun could only push this match to a draw. The difference between their mecha's levels completely threw out any possibility of victory for Zhao Jun. No matter how much he schemed and plotted, it would all be for the sake of just a draw.

Ling Lan's words enlightened Zhao Jun. Yes, if he did not gamble, based on his strength, losing was just a matter of time even if he fought with his life. As such, he might as well take the risk — wasn't a loss the worst thing that could happen<sup>1</sup>?

In reality, Ling Lan had created this plan with an estimated success rate of 70%. In Ling Lan's opinion, as long as the odds were at 50% and above, it would be a gamble worth taking. In order to increase the chances of success, Ling Lan had even lent her newly bought Firmament to Zhao Jun. The typical giant swords used by mecha were all the broadsword type, heavy and solid, thus making them unsuitable for more agile and dexterous attacks. However, Firmament was extremely unique — it was a fine sword and had extremely high resilience, allowing it to do things a typical broadsword could not.

So that Zhao Jun would be able to pinpoint the perfect timing to intercept, after they had eaten their lunch, Zhao Jun had been dragged by Ling Lan over to a mecha combat hall for some urgent training. The main purpose of the session was for Zhao Jun to familiarize himself with Firmament. The way to use Firmament was different from that of other ordinary giant swords — in order to avoid any mistakes, this impromptu training was necessary.

Zhao Jun's efforts had now finally come to fruition, and in the most perfect way. In order to ensure success, Ling Lan and Zhao Jun had analysed all the possible reactions of Jiang Shaoyu in detail, coming up with counterplans for each alternative. Who would have guessed that they would not need to use any single one of those in the end?

Right then, Zhao Jun's heart was running hot — he may be able to make history by proving that there was the possibility of a tie in a battle between an ace and special-class.

However, Zhao Jun did not have the time to really think about all these random things right now. He was staring at Jiang Shaoyu with his full attention, not daring to miss anything. Boss Lan had said that once Jiang Shaoyu was injured, he would definitely go berserk. It could be predicted that the following attack would be an overwhelming one, and Zhao Jun's task was to tide over this round of attacks no matter what. When Jiang Shaoyu found that he was unable to bring Zhao Jun down, his morale would fall, and that moment would be Zhao Jun's chance.

Sure enough, Zhao Jun found himself faced with a barrage of wild attacks. The enraged Jiang Shaoyu's mind was fixated on the thought of killing his opponent. Furthermore, the oppression of the level

difference allowed Jiang Shaoyu to attack without having to worry about so-called skill or technique. He attacked by relying solely on the brute force of his mecha itself, sending punch after heavy punch at his opponent. Zhao Jun desperately protected his most vital spots, slowly being pushed back by Jiang Shaoyu. He looked bitterly at his slowly dwindling points and sweat flowed uncontrollably from his forehead ...

#### **Chapter 454: Punishment and Equal Placement (prelude)!**

Just as Zhao Jun felt that he was unable to hold on any longer, he suddenly felt Jiang Shaoyu's attacks slowing down. Zhao Jun instantly felt the pressure ease, and he managed to catch a break.

He then reacted quickly, knowing that this had to be the chance Boss Lan had mentioned. Without stopping to think about it, he leapt, raising Firmament in his hands to slash forcefully at the opponent.

Jiang Shaoyu saw Zhao Jun charging over without fear of death again and he sniffed coldly. The difference in their levels made it extremely easy for him to handle the attacks of a special-class operator. Seeing Firmament coming at him, he casually operated his mecha to lift his own cold weapon to meet the other's attack.

"Clang!" Jiang Shaoyu's giant sword collided with Firmament, but the results were not as Jiang Shaoyu expected. The swords did not repel each other, but instead became locked tight, unable to part.

At this sight, Jiang Shaoyu stared blankly and then tugged hard to try and bring his sword back. However, he found that when his giant sword returned, that long and narrow sword of the opponent's followed it too. Jiang Shaoyu suddenly sensed danger and without conscious thought, he kicked out a leg at Zhao Jun's mecha that had come even closer following behind Firmament.

"Bang!" "Snap!" Two sounds rang out almost simultaneously.

When Jiang Shaoyu's kick landed on Zhao Jun's mecha, the head of Zhao Jun's mecha suddenly split open to reveal two openings, revealing the two interference missiles contained inside.

Due to the force of this kick, Firmament finally detached from Jiang Shaoyu's giant sword, and Zhao Jun's mecha was sent flying back.

Excitement was writ across Zhao Jun's brow. He stared at the screen — when the value for the best shooting range Boss Lan had told him arrived, he would be ready to press the launch button.

"Pow" — two interference missiles shot out from the head area of the mecha, flying straight for Jiang Shaoyu.

Interference missiles were a type of missile meant to draw away and confuse tracking missiles. They were useful when fighting against starships, but in a battle between mecha, these missiles were almost never used by mecha operators. This was because interference missiles did not have much lethal power. Even if a mecha did not evade them and allowed them to hit it as they liked, the mecha would be left completely unharmed by just relying on the defensive power of its beam shield.

Thus, when Jiang Shaoyu saw that Zhao Jun was actually shooting interference missiles at him from close range, his first thought was: *Is the opponent stupid?* His second thought was: *The opponent really is stupid.* His third thought was: *The opponent is an absolute f\*cking idiot.*

Faced with these two interference missiles, Jiang Shaoyu's expression was disdainful and he made no move to dodge them. He wasn't an idiot himself — why should he be scared by these harmless interference missiles? Instead, he raised the giant sword in his hands and flew forwards, thinking to take advantage of this moment to strike the opponent.

Right when the interference missiles were about to hit Jiang Shaoyu, however, an unprecedented sense of danger welled up in his heart. At this moment, Jiang Shaoyu did not have time to think — he trusted in his intuition. Without any hesitation, he abruptly swung the giant sword in his hands at those two interference missiles he had been ignoring.

If there was danger about, Jiang Shaoyu's intuition believed that it must be coming from these two interference missiles he had been ignoring!

Two loud rumbling explosions rang out.

The giant sword struck one of the interference missiles and the missile exploded upon contact. However, the other missile avoided the sword's interception to fly straight at Jiang Shaoyu's chest.

Under this great looming sense of danger, Jiang Shaoyu's finger speed reached his limits. At the last minute, he managed to tilt his mecha to the side, avoiding a strike to the chest, but the missile still struck his mecha's left shoulder. Right after that, the second interference missile exploded.

The explosive power of the interference missiles was beyond his expectations — Jiang Shaoyu's mecha was instantly sent flying back several hundred metres from the blast. The massive blow caused the blood to roil in his chest, leaving his chest feeling heavy and making him nauseous. If not for the protective mechanisms inside the cockpit, as well as his own tough constitution, the force of this blast would likely have been enough to injure him badly.

However, the mecha Jiang Shaoyu operated was not so lucky. The left arm had been completely blown off by the interference missile — even the defensive power of an ace mecha was unable to withstand against this explosive force.

The horrifying destructive power of the interference missiles which went against all common knowledge caused a rare lull to roll over the audience. It took several seconds for a loud roar to rise up as the venue was filled with the raucous expressions of disbelief. The interference missiles which had been fired from the head of Zhao Jun's mecha had blown apart all everyone's expectations — there were even a few missile experts in the crowd who leapt to their feet in excitement.

With regards to the weapons stored in the head of mecha, these experts naturally wanted to add some power to the missiles there while retaining the interference function the missiles were meant to serve. However, due to the low weight bearing capacity of the head area and the very limited amount of physical space, both the factors of mass and weight had put an end to all possibility of enhancing the offensive power of the missiles. They had not expected a new possibility to rise in this area where they had already given up. This excited them greatly, and they could not wait for the match to just end so

they could grab hold of that special-class operator and properly take apart his mecha to properly see what in the world those interference missiles were.

When Chang Xinyuan heard the spectators around him all discussing what those interference missiles could be, he smiled so smugly that his eyes were slits. He had originally thought that he had created some useless things, but surprisingly, under Boss Lan's arrangement, those trash had actually become treasures, managing to achieve an unexpectedly great lethal effect in mecha combat.

At this thought, Chang Xinyuan felt somewhat regretful. Such an unexpected sneak attack had still been dodged by Jiang Shaoyu. If the opponent had been struck dead-on in the chest, the entire power system of his mecha would have been destroyed, making it a true killing move!

However, Chang Xinyuan's regrets very quickly disappeared. On the field, having lost his left arm, Jiang Shaoyu had insult added to injury — his giant sword suddenly broke with a loud 'snap', right in the middle. The top half of the blade fell heavily to the ground below, sending up a spray of dust.

Jiang Shaoyu's complexion paled greatly at the sight and he stared in shock at the remains of his giant sword in his mecha's right hand, unusually confused. Even now, he still could not understand how the rather harmless interference missiles could suddenly become so powerful. It was beyond his imagination. Two interference missiles — one destroyed his left arm, while the other destroyed his sword ... could it be that the Federation had developed some new range of interference missiles? And the opponent had just been lucky enough to get his hands on some?

Jiang Shaoyu naturally could not obtain an answer, because these interference missiles had been created by Chang Xinyuan of Ling Lan's battle clan. Chang Xinyuan had always considered these missiles his failed products, and so he had never spoken of them to outsiders. If Ling Lan had not seen the value these modified missiles had, they would probably still be buried somewhere in Chang Xinyuan's workshop.

Seeing the outcome, Zhao Jun was also sighing in regret in his heart. Two ultra-NG missiles<sup>1</sup>, and in the end, he had only managed to destroy one of the opponent's arms. By Boss Lan's estimates, the best outcome was destroying half of the opponent's mecha.

Jiang Shaoyu could not comprehend why things had turned out this way, but he was aware enough to know that he had lost face big time now. A grand ace operator actually being pushed to such a sorry state by a special-class operator. Even though he had previously managed to deal considerable damage to the opponent's mecha with his powerful torrent of blows, leaving the opponent's mecha covered in scars, the opponent had still retained the overall integrity of his mecha on the surface. In this aspect, he had lost to the opponent.

The cheers of the crowd were clearly for the opponent, Jiang Shaoyu knew. He felt a strong sense of shame ... with a 'snap', in his brain, a cord called 'rationality' broke. With reddened eyes, Jiang Shaoyu stared at the mecha before his eyes, and his mind had only one thought in it — kill him ... he must kill the opponent! Only then could he wash away his disgrace!

Jiang Shaoyu violently threw aside that broken half sword left in his hands, and then his mecha's right arm reached behind his back to pull out the handle of a beam saber. As soon as he flicked the switch, the beam several metres long instantly extended from the handle. At the same time, his mecha's

engines began to rumble loudly and in the next second, his mecha streaked forwards like a beam of light, barreling straight towards Zhao Jun who was several hundred metres away ...

“So quick!” Everyone exclaimed. This was the true power of an ace. Before this, due to being absent-minded, Jiang Shaoyu had not really displayed the strength an ace operator should have. This was also why Zhao Jun had been able to withstand the opponent’s wild blows earlier.

“If Jiang Shaoyu had used the strength he is now displaying from the start, Zhao Jun would most likely have already lost by now,” said Li Lanfeng with a sigh, seated beside Ling Lan. Though he said this, he was honestly happy for his good friend over his good luck.

Ling Lan nodded in agreement. Frankly, the plan she had designed for Zhao Jun actually had a flaw.

Enraging the opponent could indeed make the opponent lose his cool and cause his strength to decrease, but there were actually two other possible outcomes. One was that despite the anger, the opponent would still be able to control his emotions and retain his original combat power, while the other was the one Ling Lan most did not wish to see. Out of anger, the opponent may instead dig deep and unleash his latent abilities, making his combat power burst past his limits.

Fortunately, Jiang Shaoyu had not turned out to be that type of oddball, allowing Zhao Jun to accomplish his goal despite the most dangerous of margins, claiming one of the opponent’s arms. However, at this moment, Jiang Shaoyu’s strength had been restored to its original standards. Zhao Jun’s luck had come to an end — the match would be over soon. Ling Lan came to a conclusion.

From the audience’s perspective, Jiang Shaoyu’s mecha hurtled like lightning towards Zhao Jun. And from Zhao Jun’s own perspective, he only saw a flash and the opponent was already right before him, the other’s beam saber mercilessly piercing straight for his cockpit ...

This scene made Zhao Jun’s face change drastically. He quickly operated his mecha to turn to one side, and the opponent’s beam saber scraped across his mecha’s outer armour. The power of the beam saber exceeded the maximum tolerance of Zhao Jun’s mecha’s beam shield, hence leaving a noticeable scratch on the mecha’s armour.

Everyone gasped in shock. Seated in the viewing area, Ling Lan’s frigid and stony expression also shifted beyond her control. Her eyes narrowed as rage flashed through them.

“Zhao Jun, it’s time to admit defeat,” muttered Ling Lan silently, rather anxious inside. It could not be avoided — she had an extra burden of worry this time; she did not wish for any of her members to meet with any accidents in this tournament.

Having avoided that killing blow, Zhao Jun heard the feedback given by the mecha’s A.I. and his initially enthusiastic expression froze. A surge of rage spread uncontrollably within him. That last blow was certainly no mistake or a simple slip of the hand — it was intentional; the opponent wanted to kill him ...

Zhao Jun might appear to be a savage brute, the perfect picture of a thug — while he had been with the Wuji Mecha Clan, he had also been mistaken for a simple-minded battle freak — but in reality, he had a set code of conduct. He would repay the tiniest drop of kindness with a fountain, and collect a skull for the grievance of a broken tooth<sup>2</sup>. If Jiang Shaoyu intended to be underhanded, Zhao Jun naturally would not just take this in silence.



Seeing Jiang Shaoyu charging to attack him once more, a cold gleam flashed through Zhao Jun's eyes. His fingers began to dance fervently and his mecha moved. Firmament was gripped firmly in his right hand as his arms spread out slightly, and the tip of the blade dipped down to a 45-degree angle.

Chapter 455: Qiao Ting's Innate Talent!

Just as Jiang Shaoyu's beam saber was once again turned towards Zhao Jun's cockpit, his arm abruptly jerked upwards. Inside his cockpit, Zhao Jun roared in anger. Firmament darted out in a dark streak of light, drawing a half-circle in the air, its blade driving up from the base of the opponent's leg towards the opponent's cockpit ...

"Ah ..." Zhao Jun's decision to not avoid the opponent's attack in favour of an internecine outcome made everyone in the audience cry out in shock. Some of the more timid female audience members were even so afraid that they covered their faces with their hands, shielding their eyes in fear of witnessing a tragedy.

When Ling Lan, who had already been extremely worried to begin with, saw this scene play out, her face changed drastically and she rose to her feet. Right then, she was unbelievably shocked and angry. She had always thought that Zhao Jun was a calm and discerning person, and that combined with his four years of mecha combat experience, he would not make any errors in judgment. Unexpectedly, he too had bouts of irrationality, actually disregarding his own life and safety like this ...

Right at that critical moment, a mecha suddenly descended from the skies above. It appeared in an instant above the two mecha, immediately pressing the two mecha which were about to destroy each other onto the ground.

A loud 'boom' rang out, and the entire stadium was shaking uncontrollably due to the force behind it. Dust and dirt spread out everywhere, but because there was a shield separating the combat field from the audience seats, the audience was not affected by the dust and dirt.

Only after the dust had cleared could the crowd see that a dazzling mecha was half-kneeling on the field. That mecha was slightly bent over, both arms stretched down to hold both Jiang Shaoyu's and Zhao Jun's mecha firmly against the ground.

Meanwhile, Jiang Shaoyu and Zhao Jun were like two large tortoises, pathetically pressed flat on the ground. They appeared to still be struggling, trying to climb off the ground, but their opponent's strength was just too much for them. Regardless of how they resisted and pushed back, it was all to no avail. Their struggling merely made them look even more like fat tortoises.

The sudden appearance of the dazzling mecha finally put a stop to this match which might have ended in bloodshed. The audience instantly released a collective sigh of relief. Ling Lan, who had stood up straight in her shock and anger, also calmed down in the face of this scene and sat down again.

However, Ling Lan was still frowning deeply, her anger not at all appeased by Zhao Jun's escape from danger. Her eyes narrowed briefly as rage coursed through them. She decided that a while later, she would find a chance to bring Zhao Jun to a combat hall once and let him have a personal taste of the terrible consequences of being rash and irrational.

At this time, everyone had recognised that the dazzling mecha was one of the five imperial mecha the Federation had previously announced. As such, there was no doubt that the operator of the mecha must be an imperial operator. They were stunned that an imperial operator would appear here, but at the same time, they rejoiced. After all, top-class operators above ace almost never appeared in this kind of large events.

Gradually, the whispered discussion coalesced into a uniform cheer of 'imperial', a testament of the reverence and love the people of this world held for top-class masters, which was arguably greater than that of some entertainment superstars.

By the time the audience's passion calmed, the audience could guess the reason behind this imperial operator's appearance. After all, the Grand Mecha Tournament brought together all the most outstanding cadets of the Federation. In order to ensure their safety, to make sure that no one with ill intentions would harm them, as well as to prevent any tragic accidents from occurring during the tournament, the military had specially sent a few imperial masters to monitor the event. Especially since there were three ace operators participating in the tournament this time, the number of imperial operators sent here had even been increased by a few more.

In fact, the military was also extremely afraid that any carelessness might result in the loss of the talents of the Federation. Mind you, every single prodigy was a treasure to them.

After confirming that the two of them would not continue attacking each other, the imperial mecha released its hold on the two mecha and stood up.

As soon as Jiang Shaoyu and Zhao Jun regained their freedom, they instantly climbed up from the ground, glaring fiercely at each other though the other would not be able to see it. Only then did they stand meekly before the imperial operator, waiting for his verdict.

Ever since they broke the rules of the tournament, they had already been mentally prepared to be disciplined.

"Jiang Shaoyu, Zhao Jun, for violating the associated rules of the tournament, and for the severity of the transgression, after deliberation of the panel, your punishment is as follows. An instant deduction of 100 points in this tournament! When the team battles begin, Jiang Shaoyu is banned for five rounds, Zhao Jun is banned for three." After he received the final verdict of the judging panel, the imperial operator coldly announced the punishment the panel had decided to dole on the two boys.

When Jiang Shaoyu heard the verdict, his complexion paled. He was the absolute main force for his academy in the group mecha combat competition. This five-round ban would be an absolutely subversive blow to his academy. That is to say that, before his team entered the top ten, he would not have any chance to be on the field. To win, it would all depend on his teammates' efforts then. If they lost before that point, this would mean that his journey here in this year's tournament would end, and he could only wait till the battle royal on the final day to be involved again.

Jiang Shaoyu did not want things to be like this — he had led his team here to get the title of champion for both the single mecha combat and group mecha combat events, and not just for a simple excursion. Although becoming the champion of the single mecha combat was now out of reach, he still had not given up on the group champion title.

Under this heavy blow, Jiang Shaoyu's mind finally cleared. Recalling how he had struggled so much against a special-class operator, he was immensely frustrated and upset, hating how badly he had performed in this match. He had lost his usual standards, falling for the opponent's schemes again and again, becoming a laughing stock ...

On this end, Jiang Shaoyu was mired in chagrin, but Zhao Jun on the other side seemed completely unaffected. This was because, in the upcoming group mecha combat event, he was never the primary force to begin with. He was a substitute for that event, the extreme sixth man — whether or not he would even get a chance to take the field was debatable.

In this manner, as the two contestants were both docked 100 points, this meant that Zhao Jun and Jiang Shaoyu were eliminated from the match at the same time. After extended discussion, the judging panel ruled that Jiang Shaoyu and Zhao Jun would both share third place, while the fourth place would be left empty ...

Learning of this outcome, Zhao Jun whistled loudly at the skies with a wide grin. He had originally just planned to leave several scratches on the opponent's mecha armour to vent some of his fighting spirit as well as pay back a little of the grudge on Luo Lang's behalf; now, not only had he destroyed one of the opponent's arms, he had also ruined the other's sword. He had truly overachieved in this task. Most importantly, his ranking was the same as the opponent — the thought of being equal to a special-class operator would definitely disgust the other ... this was stating that he, as an ace, was actually no different from a special-class operator. This was an absolute stinging smack to the face, a handful of salt thrown onto the wound in the opponent's heart.

At this moment, Zhao Jun's admiration for Ling Lan was indescribable. The plan of action Boss Lan had created for him had considered all possible responses of the opponent, not at all weaker than a scheme hatched by Li Lanfeng. Moreover, as an operations expert, Boss Lan's plan was even more suitable for a mecha operator, direct yet amazingly effective. Compared to Li Lanfeng's convoluted plots, Zhao Jun much preferred Boss Lan's plans.

Very quickly, the two of them had gone backstage and disembarked from their mecha to land on the ground. Qiao Ting nodded at Zhao Jun in greeting, expressing his approval. Zhao Jun's performance at fighting Jiang Shaoyu to a draw both surprised and pleased him. After all, the point difference between third and fourth place was still quite significant, and Qiao Ting naturally hoped that their school would rack up more points — this would be very advantageous to their final ranking.

Lin Xiao also walked up to Zhao Jun to offer his congratulations. After all, wresting a draw from an ace operator was an achievement Zhao Jun could be proud of. Jiang Shaoyu saw how Lin Xiao and Qiao Ting were pretty much ignoring him, and the humiliation he felt became even heavier. He huffed coldly and stormed out of the backstage. As for Lin Xiao and Qiao Ting's match after this, he was already in no mood to watch it.

Very soon, the staff informed Lin Xiao and Qiao Ting to get ready; it would soon be their turn to fight. Lin Xiao breezily bid farewell to Zhao Jun and left. Zhao Jun looked at Lin Xiao's back as he left, and then turned to glance at Qiao Ting and said, "Qiao Ting, that fellow is very strong in close combat. If he gets close to you, it'll be very disadvantageous for you. Be careful."

“Yes, I know!” replied Qiao Ting, but when he turned to leave, he said lowly, “Thank you!” After experiencing failure, betrayal, and being ostracized, Qiao Ting had become very humble and low-key. This made Zhao Jun hate him less, and so he was willing to talk a bit more with Qiao Ting and remind him to watch out. If this had been the previous Qiao Ting ... Zhao Jun would not have said anything even if he was going to be beaten to death.

Finally, the two contestants operated their respective mecha onto the stage that was now theirs. Qiao Ting watched Lin Xiao slowly approaching and he also operated his mecha to move forwards. Reflexively, he glanced at the sitting area of the other participants. He knew that Ling Lan would inevitably be there watching this upcoming match ...

Qiao Ting clenched his fists and took in a deep breath, casting aside all the stray thoughts in his mind. Right now, his opponent was Lin Xiao — even though Lin Xiao was very strong, being an all-rounder and so countering him to some extent, Qiao Ting was still unafraid. He would use the victory of this match to tell everyone that he, Qiao Ting, was unafraid of anyone’s challenge when it came to mecha control. He was still the number one of all the military academies!

Qiao Ting knew very well that only Ling Lan was an exception. Ling Lan was a psychological demon in his path to becoming strong — only by defeating the Lingtian Mecha Clan the other led would he be able to set aside his fixation on Ling Lan and focus on becoming stronger. Otherwise, unable to rid himself of distraction, he would not be able to progress far on this road, and that was something that he absolutely would not allow.

The referee checked in with both contestants, and finding them ready, he waved the green flag in his hand.

At the very moment the referee’s flag moved, Qiao Ting’s mecha slid back several hundred metres, pulling away from Lin Xiao. Lin Xiao was indeed strong at both close combat and long-range combat, but in terms of long-range attacks, he was definitely not as good as Qiao Ting who specialized in long-range combat. Qiao Ting’s mentor, the elite ace Tang Yu had said before that Qiao Ting was a natural-born sniper king. His innate talent allowed him to be unlike other long-range mecha operators who needed a certain amount of time to lock onto their targets and make adjustments when shooting; Qiao Ting could almost lock onto a target instantly — one glance was enough for him to lock on and shoot.

In fact, Qiao Ting’s close-combat skills were also good, but ever since he had awakened this instant targeting innate talent, under the guidance of his mentor, he had given up on close combat to focus on long-range combat. Qiao Ting’s decision was undoubtedly correct — his singular focus had allowed him to enter ace level a step ahead of everyone else. Moreover, this focus had also given him a much deeper and more profound understanding of the nature and intricacies of long-range combat. As such, with regards to long-range combat, he had travelled much further and deeper than any of his peers ...

### **Chapter 456: Quandary and Decision!**

Qiao Ting wanted to distance himself and enter long-range combat mode. Lin Xiao, who had done his research on Qiao Ting, did not want to let him do as he wished. As soon as Qiao Ting moved, Lin Xiao

reacted quickly, moving along with him. Of course, Lin Xiao did not retreat but moved forwards instead, and his speed was not much slower than Qiao Ting's.

Lin Xiao's long-range attack was also very strong and so he would be able to hold his own in a long-range showdown. Thus, even if he could not obtain victory at that time, he could at least remain undefeated till the end of the match, and then the final outcome would be determined by the points each contestant still had at that moment. However, Lin Xiao knew that his chances of winning with this option were not high. Showcasing his long-range attack skills in front of an opponent whose long-range skills excelled over his own was foolish — from the perspective of the judges, the decision would be obvious. Without question, the victor would be Qiao Ting.

There was not a single contestant who had fought his way to the finals who did not want to reach the very top. No one would choose an option which they knew for certain would end in a loss for themselves. Likewise, Lin Xiao would not choose that way either. In the afternoon, before the match, he had consulted with his instructors, and they all felt that there was no chance in long-range mode; his only opportunity laid in close combat.

Qiao Ting's specialization in long-range combat was no secret. His close combat skills could be said to be good too, but when compared to a true close combat specialist, his skills were really nothing much. And Lin Xiao's close combat abilities were really pretty close to that of a close combat specialist — if the fight was brought into close range, Lin Xiao believed that Qiao Ting would definitely be no match for him.

The key was whether he could drag the fight into close range, just like how Qiao Ting's victory would depend on whether he could put some distance between them to attack from long range.

Both their objectives were very clear — one wanted a long-range fight, while the other wanted a close-range fight. And so the two of them were in a deadlock, one flying away at top speed, while the other chased him fervently. Originally, Qiao Ting's long-range mecha should have had a certain advantage in terms of speed, but Lin Xiao's mecha just so happened to have been modified to improve its speed; thus, Qiao Ting was unable to wrest free of the other anytime soon. After flying four to five laps around the field, this stalemate remained unbroken ... neither side could do anything to the other.

On their sixth lap, Qiao Ting sighed internally. Truly, this Lin Xiao was not that easy to handle, but he had long made provisions for this type of situation ... in mid-flight, he drew a short compact gun from the fixed slot at the back of his waist and took aim at Lin Xiao who was still flying desperately after him.

It was a beam handgun, a standard weapon for close-combat mecha. Its range was extremely limited, only suitable for close-range shots, barely usable in mid-range, and completely useless at long range. It was a gun so normal that people tended to overlook it, but it now left Lin Xiao in a quandary.

The distance between Qiao Ting and himself was precisely the optimal shooting range for this beam handgun. Although the range of a beam handgun was short, its power was decent. In particular, the beam handguns exclusive to ace mecha had even greater power — if someone was hit continuously for three seconds by the gun, their beam shield would be overwhelmed and their mecha would show signs of damage. Six seconds of consecutive shooting would deal irreparable damage to a mecha.

"Hells, why would a long-range shooter have t his trifle of a handgun <sup>1</sup> for close-combat mecha with him?" Lin Xiao was taken by surprise. He had never imagined that Qiao Ting would have such a weapon

on him, which was why he had dared to chase after him without any worry ... he just could not understand why Qiao Ting would choose to equip this close-combat weapon, a beam handgun which even he did not think much of before this match, as one of his combat weapons.

It should be known that for the mecha combat events, both for single or group, the equipment and weapons on a contestant's mecha were unknown before they went up onto the field. Only in the final 10 minutes before the match would the participants decide on the final selection of weapons they would equip and let the staff members help them organise everything within that time. In other words, this beam handgun of Qiao Ting's had never ever appeared in all of the hypothetical combat scenarios Lin Xiao had simulated.

To advance or to retreat? Lin Xiao gritted his teeth and pushed his engines to the maximum setting. Following this operation, his mecha's speed surged once more, and his mecha leapt at Qiao Ting with an audible swoosh.

Lin Xiao's decision was to advance because he was well aware that if he retreated, he would no longer have any hope of becoming champion. He was unwilling to accept this outcome, so he decided to fight for it.

With the surge in his mecha's speed, Lin Xiao once again shortened the distance between him and Qiao Ting. However, this speed was achieved by running his engines to overcapacity and so would not last for long. He needed to get close enough to Qiao Ting before his engines reached their limits; otherwise, defeat would still be the outcome that awaited him ...

Right at this moment, Qiao Ting finally pulled the trigger and a beam of light shot straight for Lin Xiao. Lin Xiao calmly moved his fingers — with his full concentration put into it, Lin Xiao's hand speed was also pushed to the limit. According to his operation, his mecha began flashing to the left and right without any system to it. This was the Irregular Flicker which only ace operators could learn. However, Lin Xiao had yet to master it — at times, between flickers, some traces of his figure could be still be seen.

The irregular flicker made Qiao Ting unable to grasp Lin Xiao's movements; his beam shots all struck air. Meanwhile, Lin Xiao was once again drawing closer to Qiao Ting. Seeing this, Qiao Ting's brow furrowed. He suddenly changed his shooting style — his hand which had been holding down the trigger began to twitch sporadically.

At this time, the beam he fired was no longer an unceasing stream of light but cluster after cluster of beam bullets. Qiao Ting's hand speed also reached a limit and over the span of several seconds, he had used up all the power inside his beam handgun. But the results were evident — in the air, a massive net of beam projectiles had appeared. Front and back, left and right, from all directions, at almost the same speed, these projectiles were raining down on Lin Xiao ... Qiao Ting did not give Lin Xiao any room to evade. Either Lin Xiao backed off, or he would have to rely on his mecha's beam shield defence to forcibly withstand these attacks.

No, it should be said that Qiao Ting's objective was for Lin Xiao to eat these attacks, because Qiao Ting knew that Lin Xiao would definitely not choose to retreat. And so, Lin Xiao had no other choice.

Sure enough, Lin Xiao instantly activated his beam shield, his mecha charging into the web of beam projectiles. The projectiles struck home with muted thuds, and Lin Xiao's initially radiant beam shield instantly dimmed ...

After its energy had been drained, a beam shield needed one second to replenish its power. This was why Lin Xiao dared to forcefully receive Qiao Ting's attacks. As long as the attacks did not break through the beam shield instantly, no matter how much power was drained from the beam shield, the beam shield would be back to normal in the next second. And in this one second, Qiao Ting would not be able to shoot any more beams at him because the opponent's gun had already been utterly drained of power.

Lin Xiao was well familiar with the characteristics of a beam shield, and so was Qiao Ting. He had so willingly exhausted all the power from his beam handgun to create this beam net, so how could he not have a follow-up move prepared? It should be said that that seemingly pointless beam net had already served its purpose.

When the beam projectiles hit Lin Xiao, Qiao Ting operated his mecha to slam its left hand on an ejection installation on its waist. An energy storage unit sprang out and at the same time, the mecha's right hand deftly swiped at the button at the bottom of the gun, and the drained energy storage unit fell out abruptly ...

The mecha's right hand then dipped with the handgun, accurately catching the new energy storage unit, letting it slot neatly into place within the gun. The mecha's left hand followed immediately, slapping over the rear end of the gun, locking in the energy storage unit with a click.

Quicker than words could say, in less than a second, Qiao Ting was done replacing the handgun's energy block. This series of actions were clean and efficient, each action flowing into the next as smoothly as water ... the audience could not help but cry out in shock and surprise. There was no doubt that this display of Qiao Ting's involved a high level of technical skill. On the battlefield, this technique would allow Qiao Ting to live longer than other people.

After replacing his handgun's energy storage unit, Qiao Ting did not hesitate to pull the trigger of the gun once more, sending another wave of beam projectiles towards Lin Xiao, who still had not fully recovered from the last round of explosions.

"Goddammit! It was a trick!" When the First Co-ed Military Academy students saw this scene, they were instantly pounding their chests in frustration. At this moment, anyone could see the purpose behind Qiao Ting's creation of a beam net despite having to drain his gun's power; he had been trying to force Lin Xiao to back off ...

At this moment, Lin Xiao could also tell that the momentum was gone. Frankly, from the very moment he had not taken the beam handgun into account, he had already been forced into a passive position. He just had not wanted to admit defeat, and thus had walked step by step into Qiao Ting's set-up. He could only choose to retreat now, to free himself from the attack range of the beam projectiles. The beam projectile clusters finally ended up hitting the ground. The 'pow, pow, pow' sounds rang out everywhere, as the strikes sent clouds of dust and dirt into the air. By the time everything settled, the ground was already covered in potholes of various depth.

Meanwhile, Lin Xiao's retreat had allowed Qiao Ting to pull away once more. By the time Lin Xiao dodged the beam clusters and began giving chase once more, Qiao Ting had already achieved the distance he wanted.

With an audible 'clack', Qiao Ting drew a huge, long gun from his mecha's back with his left hand. This was his personal gun — a ballistic sniper rifle. It was his key weapon to win this match. At the same time, his mecha's right hand holstered the beam handgun back in the dock at his waist.

With a great swing of his mecha's left hand, Qiao Ting's gun flew into the air, and his mecha quickly followed it up into the skies as well. With a clap, he caught the rifle in both hands, steadied it on his shoulders, and aimed for Lin Xiao in the distance.

The appearance of this rifle made Lin Xiao's expression change drastically. He had worked so hard to ward off this gun but in the end, the gun had still appeared.

Lin Xiao smiled bitterly inside his heart, but he still operated his mecha to fly forwards rapidly — no matter what, he needed to rush forwards in time. As long as he managed to get within 500 metres of the gun, the ballistic sniper rifle would lose its power. Then, he would still have a chance.

However, how could Qiao Ting let Lin Xiao have his wish when he had already obtained what he wanted? Holding the ballistic sniper rifle steady, he kept his sights on Lin Xiao and calmly pulled the trigger. Without much pause, he sent three consecutive shots at his opponent.

From taking aim to shooting, Qiao Ting's speed was so fast that Lin Xiao was completely flustered and caught off-guard. Although Qiao Ting's data had clearly labelled him as a long-range mecha operator, the deepest secret had still remained unknown to the public. No one knew his innate talent was Instant Lock-on; thus, every person who went up against Qiao Ting would be stunned by his super-fast sniping speed.

Could it be that Qiao Ting had fired these three shots blindly? This was Lin Xiao's first reaction, but he instantly rejected the idea after that. How could Qiao Ting, such an outstanding person who had been able to ascend to ace level in his fourth year, make such a rudimentary mistake?

Lin Xiao did not believe it, nor would the audience believe it. Indeed, their judgment was correct. These three shots of Qiao Ting had truly not been indiscriminate wild shots. As the three shots loomed ever closer to him, Lin Xiao realized this profoundly.

And so, he once again faced another quandary which needed him to make a final decision!

### **Chapter 457: Difficult to Let Go!**

A ballistic sniper rifle was not a beam energy gun; it would not fire beams but solid bullets. However, these bullets were not low-powered gunpowder bullets but extremely horrifying magnetic burst energy bullets. The magnetic energy had been successfully condensed into the bullets, and once a bullet hit its target, due to the high-speed collision, the magnetic burst energy inside would smash through the protective layer of the bullet and cause a violent burst of magnetic energy.



If the power of the explosion exceeded the defensive capabilities of a mecha's beam shield, then tragedy would befall the operator. The magnetic energy was especially powerful against metal — as soon as it came into contact with the outer armour of a mecha, it would ravage the electrical wiring inside it, causing the control systems of the mecha to malfunction and thus leading to the defeat of the mecha operator.

Qiao Ting was clearly well aware of the power of a ballistic rifle — Lin Xiao was likewise well aware, and he naturally would not allow Qiao Ting to hit his mecha if he could avoid it. However, he found that evading was really very difficult because only one of the three shots was targeting him; the other two shots had sealed off his escape paths on the left and right. If he did not dodge, he would be hit, but if he dodged to either side, he would also be hit. The only directions he could choose to escape from were up or down ...

Should he go up or should he go down? Lin Xiao knew that he only had one chance. Qiao Ting's limit was most probably four shots — if he had the ability to fire five shots instantly, he definitely would not have just fired these three shots. If he had shot all five straight away, Lin Xiao would have had no other option but to admit defeat.

Lin Xiao knew that as soon as he chose the wrong direction, he would lose the match. He did not expect that the time to determine the final outcome would come so soon — he had initially thought that, at worst, he would be able to hold out till the time limit for the match almost ran out. This Qiao Ting ... he had still underestimated him.

Since it was a gamble either way, then he would just have to see how lucky he was. Qiao Ting's hands were very steady, so there was no way to tell from them whether Qiao Ting was going to shoot up or down. Moreover, the two of them did not have time to hesitate.

Lin Xiao finally made his choice. Just as his body moved upwards, Qiao Ting also fired his fourth shot.

Right at this moment, alarms rang in Lin Xiao's mind. Without conscious thought, his fingers reached out for the on-off button for his mecha's engines. Perhaps due to the pressure, his fingers actually vanished from sight for a moment as they moved and by the time they reappeared, one of his fingers was already pressing down on the button and the engine instantly shut down.

The initially rising mecha dropped without the support of its engines and immediately after that, the engines rumbled once more. In the process, the engines had been recalibrated to zero level, so Lin Xiao rode the momentum to push the engines to push him down even further. With the addition of the engaged thrust of the engines, Lin Xiao's mecha plummeted even more rapidly.

Turning off the engines had both a good side and a bad side. The good side was that one did not need to shift gears to move in the opposite direction, so not only could one save the time needed to change gears, this also would not cause much damage to the engines. If not absolutely necessary, a mecha operator would never switch so rapidly between opposing thrust forces. The bad side was that once the engines were turned off, the initial high-gear power supplied to the engines would be abruptly cut off and drop to zero instantly. When the engines were activated once more, due process would have to be taken to restore the engines to its initial high-powered state.

But at this time, turning off the engines was really the most suitable choice. Due to gravity, the mecha had already been falling rapidly, so when the engines were activated once more, the speed of Lin Xiao's descent instantly reduced the restoration process of the engine in building up momentum, sending it directly into a high-powered state.

Of course, the main purpose of shutting off the engines was to cut short the time needed to switch directions. In a situation where every second counts, where one's life hung in the balance, being able to shorten the time by even just 0.01 seconds could turn the whole situation around.

"Bong 1 Bong The author actually uses this sound effect with English text in the raws. ! Bong! Bong! Bong!"

Four bullets grazed by Lin Xiao's mecha, hitting the boundary shield and emitting loud explosions.

Everyone could see the four large circles of light that had appeared on the shield in the wake of these explosions. The audience members directly facing these light circles were terribly shocked — their faces were pale as they wiped away the cold sweat on their foreheads, and only at this time did they notice that their legs were also weak from the fright.

When they had seen those four bullets heading straight for them, at that instant, they experienced the terror of impending death. Their hearts had stopped beating for about three seconds ... luckily, the boundary shield had held up, intercepting all the force of the bullets. Thus, their hearts resumed beating again, and they felt as if they had been resurrected.

Frankly, the audience members had just been scaring themselves. Any firearm that could appear on the mecha combat field here would definitely have been subject to six thorough examinations by the organizers before being approved. As such, the audience's safety was assured — the force of any firearm on the field would never be able to overcome the defensive shields in place and harm the audience.

Although Lin Xiao had managed to avoid the crisis of being hit by those bullets, he was still in peril. His mecha was plummeting rapidly — if he could not stop his mecha before it hit the ground, he would have to bear the brunt of the collision. Even with the protection of the cockpit, the resulting intense concussive force would certainly leave him dizzy and disoriented.

If he were not in the middle of a match, this might perhaps not be an issue; but now, there was still an eager Qiao Ting beside him, ready to pounce ... he absolutely could not make any mistakes!

Lin Xiao pulled on his mecha's control stick with all his strength, cutting straight from a rapid descent to the maximum elevation thrust. This type of control method was extremely damaging to a mecha's engines — if unfortunate, the engines might even explode from the strain. However, at this moment, Lin Xiao had no mind to take all this into consideration. With a twisted expression, he yelled, "Get up now!"

To pull a mecha up from a steep descent was one of the most difficult manoeuvres in mecha control. This was also why Lin Xiao had chosen to move up at first — changing directions after elevation was much easier in comparison to going down first. As for descending, due to the effect of gravity, it was difficult to adjust directions quickly. The engines would have to first offset the pull of gravity before they could perform the operator's intended action. The time needed to offset gravity could very well leave him open to another snipe attack from Qiao Ting ...

Sure enough, Qiao Ting's snipe attack came once more, but this time, four bullets came hurtling at him at the same time. It looked like Qiao Ting also knew that this was his best opportunity and so he was giving it his all, no longer holding back.

The audience could also tell that the match had reached its key moment. They kept their eyes glued to the field, waiting for the next scene to develop. Would Lin Xiao be the one to escape successfully in the end, or would Qiao Ting's four shots prove effective?

"Bong! Bong! Bong!" Three shots exploded on the boundary shield as Lin Xiao dodged them.

Close after that, another 'bong!' rang out, but this time, the explosion occurred at the right leg of Lin Xiao's mecha. All of the audience cried out at this development — even as they were glad for Qiao Ting, they also felt sorry for Lin Xiao. This scene caused the expressions of the First Co-ed Military Academy's students to change. They all knew that Lin Xiao was in trouble now. The exact same scene, however, was greeted with cheers by the First Men's Military Academy's students as they jumped around for joy. This successful hit meant that Qiao Ting had gained the upper hand.

Although the team members here representing the First Men's Military Academy came from various mecha clans within the academy which were constantly fighting with each other trying to assert their dominance, right here and now, they were one team. They were all sincerely happy at Qiao Ting's success and shared the pride and glory of the moment.

Qiao Ting's attack did not end there — he did not ease up on his advantage, calmly pulling his trigger once more. Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Four consecutive booms marked four more shots from his ballistic sniper rifle ...

On his end, Lin Xiao was already in a very bad state. Warnings blared in a continuous stream from his mecha's A.I. — that final bullet had struck his mecha's right leg and, in the subsequent explosion, the control systems of his mecha's leg had been immediately destroyed. Although the systems of the others parts had not been affected, his overall balance was thrown off due to the malfunction of the systems of his right leg. To resolve this problem, Lin Xiao needed to instantly recalibrate his balance system ...

However, Qiao Ting did not give him the chance, once again firing four bullets at him. At this point, Lin Xiao knew his defeat was certain. Off-balance and dependant on his engines to merely stay suspended in the air, there was no more time for him to operate his mecha to dodge.

Lin Xiao was a decisive person. Since he knew it was futile to struggle any further, he immediately raised both his hands to signify his surrender. The referee had been closely monitoring the proceedings and so immediately raised his red flag. With that, the imperial operator watching the fight from an extremely high altitude instantly dived down and intercepted the four bullets headed for Lin Xiao with four shots of his own, setting them off before they could reach Lin Xiao ...

Lin Xiao's surrender meant that Qiao Ting was now officially the king of the single mecha combat event for this tournament. When Qiao Ting received the championship trophy signifying this special honour, he suddenly found that he was not as happy as he had expected to be ... as he walked down the podium to meet his team members, he saw Ling Lan's group leaving, and he abruptly understood.

In that fight with Lingtian, his ace mecha had become broken and battered from the self-destructs of the Lingtian members before he had clashed with Ling Lan, and thus had been on its last legs. However,

even so, he still could not let go of the fact that he had been finished off by Ling Lan in one move. Only by fighting Ling Lan once more and dealing the other a clean defeat would he be able to return to how he used to be ...

Once again looking down at the trophy in his hands which represented the rank of top person in mecha combat, Qiao Ting then threw it aside carelessly to an admiring team member beside him. With that, he started to walk out of the combat stadium without a backwards glance.

“Boss Qiao, your trophy ...” The team member scrambled to catch the unexpected trophy thrown at him, calling out bemusedly to Qiao Ting who had already moved further front.

Qiao Ting turned his head and said lightly, “If you like it, you can have it.”

“Ah ...” Not only was this team member left gaping in shock, but the other members were gobsmacked as well. This was proof of one’s status as the number one in mecha combat at the military academy level — how could it be given away so flippantly?

Though the typically domineering Qiao Ting did not like explaining himself, he had a soft spot for this group of members who had not abandoned him when he was at his lowest. Sensing his team members’ disbelief, he thus added, “Not being able to become the number one of my own academy, then what use is there in gaining countless number ones outside?”

Qiao Ting’s words reminded his team members of their defeat at the hands of Lingtian. Reflexively, they turned to look at the figures of the Lingtian group disappearing in the distance ... it was as Boss Qiao had said. Without defeating that group, no matter how much glory they earned, they would be unable to cover up the fact that they had lost to someone else. At this thought, their initial joy and exhilaration disappeared. That trophy which they had admired so much earlier had now lost the appeal it had at the beginning.

Just like this, Qiao Ting’s group also left the venue. However, every member now had a clear goal in their hearts. They would defeat the Lingtian Mecha Clan properly once, and then move on to defeating the Lingtian Battle Clan once. And so, the two battle clans embarked onto the path of mutual rivalry ...

## **Chapter 458: Goal!**

The single mecha combat event finally ended with Qiao Ting obtaining first place. This outcome was within most people’s expectations — since Qiao Ting was known to be the second Ling Xiao, then he should of course be an undefeatable presence among his peers like Ling Xiao.

However, the audience’s enthusiasm for more competition was not dampened by much due to the end of this event, because the even more thrilling group mecha combat event would begin the following day.

Compared to the single mecha combat event which represented personal glory, the administrators of all the military academies were much more invested in the group mecha combat event. This was because this competition was the one that truly reflected the strength of a military academy. After every tournament, those academies which ranked higher in the group mecha combat event would be able to receive even more resources from the Federation, as well as gain a higher rate of applications from top-

notch scout academy students. Therefore, the group mecha combat event was one of the most intense events of the entire tournament. Although it could not compare to the chaotic state of the team battle royal, it was not weaker by much ...

The group rounds were run on a best of five system, first to win 3 matches wins. Each academy could send a total of six participants, five regular members and one substitute member. Unlike with the other events, where the substitute member could sub in at any moment, in the group mecha combat event, the substitute member functioned as a true substitute. Only if a regular member was injured severely enough during the fights that he could not continue on would the substitute be able to replace said member and participate in the matches on his behalf; otherwise, the substitute member would not even have the chance to take the field.

Generally, the five regular members participating in the group event would be the same five members who had participated in the solo event. However, this tradition was broken this year. In the name list submitted by the First Men's Military Academy, Zhao Jun, who had obtained third place in the single mecha combat event, should have been a regular member, but he was instead relegated to being the most powerful substitute which had almost no chance of taking the field. Moreover, his slot was replaced by an unfamiliar name —— Ling Lan!

The staff member in charge of registration at first thought that the First Men's Military Academy had made a mistake, and so had specially contacted their chaperoning instructor. When asked, the instructor had smiled wryly and replied that everything listed was as it should be. Even as the staff member was stunned by the answer, he was also curious, wondering what kind of sacred being this Ling Lan was to be able to replace Zhao Jun.

Due to the principle of confidentiality, the staff member did not speak of this issue to anyone else. Thus, the next day, when all of the participants from the various academies took to the field, the audience on the side of the First Men's Military Academy burst into a commotion ...

Han Yu and Mu Shaoyu, who were also regular members for this event, were equally taken by surprise <sup>1</sup>. In particular, Han Yu cast a pitying glance at Zhao Jun standing behind them. In the hands of a clan leader who was so jealous of talent, how could Zhao Jun do well <sup>2</sup>? At this thought, Han Yu's intentions of recruiting Zhao Jun back stirred once more.

Only Zhang Jing-an was unmoved because he knew very well that Ling Lan had always been very aberrant. Back in the scout academy, Ling Lan had already been able to give them seniors a serious beating as a seventh-grader. If Ling Lan had become mediocre after entering the military academy, only then would he have truly been shocked ...

As for Qiao Ting, whether it was Ling Lan or Zhao Jun, they were just his temporary comrades in this event. As long as they did not hold him back, he did not care about the details. Of course, deep down, he trusted Ling Lan even more than he trusted Zhao Jun. Ling Lan's figure as he instant-killed him was deeply etched into Qiao Ting's mind, and it was a scene that he was constantly working on washing away.

Meanwhile, in the VIP area, Lan Luofeng, who had only attended the opening ceremony before hiding away all this while in her accommodations, finally reappeared in public. In high spirits, she was holding

Ling Xiao's arm as she stared at the field, trying to locate her baby daughter among the crowd of 2000 people.

That's right, the only thing that could draw Lan Luofeng out to attend was her dear and adorable daughter Ling Lan. She had long known that Ling Lan would be participating in the group mecha combat event, so she had been waiting for this competition to arrive. Only at this time could she openly watch her daughter and cheer for her.

At this thought, Lan Luofeng could not help but resent Ling Xiao beside her again. If this bastard had not acted so wilfully, how could she have been separated from her daughter? Having to be so sneaky even just to meet up with her ... at this painful thought, Lan Luofeng did not hesitate to reach out her other hand to give her husband's waist a savage 360-degree pinch-twist. That one pinch did not seem to appease her enough; Lan Luofeng gave Ling Xiao several more hard pinches.

Ling Xiao was in the middle of exchanging a few casual words with the other guests beside him. The corners of his eyes twitched, but he managed to endure the pain and maintain the kind smile on his face. Only after he finished his conversation did he turn around like nothing was wrong, gently grab hold of the jade hand still wrestling with the soft flesh at his waist, smile and say, "Luofeng? What's wrong?"

Lan Luofeng glared at him and moved her lips silently. From the shape of her lips, Ling Xiao managed to make out the word 'daughter', and he realised that his wife must have recalled the stupid thing he had done with regards to their daughter again. His smile instantly turned bitter and he scratched his nose helplessly, saying nothing further.

What else could he say? Lan Luofeng wasn't wrong to complain — he was the one who forced his daughter to continue hiding her gender, and though he was not the one who made it impossible for Lan Luofeng to visit her daughter openly ... who asked Ling Lan to be his daughter? He still needed to take the blame for it and, at the root of it all, he was still at fault anyway for placing Ling Lan in the First Men's Military Academy. He really did have to tolerate Lan Luofeng's anger.

On the first day, the morning matches were to determine the top 200. Aside from a few exciting match-ups, most of the competition was nothing really worth watching. The First Men's Military Academy easily advanced to the next round — Han Yu, Zhang Jing-an, and Mu Shaoyu alone were enough to handle their opponents. Even as this disappointed Lan Luofeng, who had been eagerly anticipating her daughter's grand debut, she was also comforted. After all, if her daughter did not have to go out onto the field then she would not be hurt. Compared to seeing her daughter perform well, Lan Luofeng was definitely more invested in making sure her daughter did not get hurt. Thus, Lan Luofeng very quickly adjusted her emotions and continued to watch the afternoon's matches.

The afternoon matches were to determine the top 100 from the top 200. The opponents of the First Men's Military Academy were also not very strong — even though Han Yu had some trouble in the first match, fighting his opponent till the end of the time limit to win by point advantage, the subsequent two matches were clean victories by Zhang Jing-an and Mu Shaoyu. The First Men's Military Academy once again advanced to the next round and yet again, Ling Lan did not have to take to the field.

Still, the First Men's Military Academy successful advancement into the top 100 made Lan Luofeng very happy. Ling Xiao was quick to grab hold of the opportunity to be all lovey-dovey with his wife. Ever since

coming to planet Qiming, it had dredged up all the 'old grievances and new grudges' of Lan Luofeng. And so, Ling Xiao suffered a tragic fate — having to sleep consecutive N-nights on the sofa.

The next day, Lan Luofeng's face was glowing with bliss when she arrived at the combat stadium. With just one glance, Ling Lan could tell that her mum, this not-that-old flower, had been well nurtured by her dad<sup>3</sup> and was now radiating her beauty again ...

The competition today was much busier than it had been yesterday. In the morning, the First Men's Military Academy only had one match, which would let them move from the top 100 to the top 50. This time, their opponent was a military academy from the first-rate planet Tongli<sup>4</sup>. Among all the military academies of the Federation, this academy could rank within the top 30. As such, their team members were not comparable to those from the lower-ranking academies; all five of their representatives were special-class operators.

The match order of the First Men's Military Academy's members had never changed. By the time Han Yu began fighting with the first opponent, everyone knew that things were going to be a bit troublesome this time. The opponent was applying the principle of Tianji's horse-racing — the first fighter from the opponent's team was very strong; Han Yu was actually being suppressed.

Seeing this, Qiao Ting frowned lightly and said to Ling Lan beside him, "Say, do you think this is their strongest candidate? Or is he just the third strongest?"

Qiao Ting had seen how terrifying Ling Lan's abilities were from the two rounds of the competition yesterday — Ling Lan was like an encyclopaedia; no matter how weak and unremarkable the opponent was, he could spout data on them like reading off the back of his hand. This led to Qiao Ting and the others turning to Ling Lan by habit to ask whenever they had any questions about the opponents.

Ling Lan replied calmly, "This person entered the top 50 in the single combat event. There is one other in their team who also entered the top 50, but stopped at the top 32, and the other two are out of the top 100 ..."

Qiao Ting picked up on Ling Lan's tone and knew she had something more to say. The furrow of his brow deepened — if Han Yu lost this match, they might really be in trouble. "The final person ... is he in the top 16?" If that last member was in the top 16, Mu Shaoyu's match would be a little precarious.

"Oh, not to that extent. Their best candidate ranked 19," replied Ling Lan. Mu Shaoyu let out a sigh of relief when he heard this — Mu Shaoyu had ranked 13 in the single mecha combat event, so he was still a steady bracket above the other.

Han Yu's combat style had probably been thoroughly analysed by the opponent — although the two fighters were about equal in strength, caught off-guard, Han Yu finally lost the match. The spectators were flabbergasted at this opening loss on the part of the First Men's Military Academy. In their opinion, the First Men's Military Academy should have been triumphant all the way, fighting their way through their opponents unchallenged into the finals, to finally become champion of the group mecha combat event. That was the way to truly live up to their reputation of the First Men's Military Academy.

Han Yu's defeat made him extremely frustrated. He had made it into the top 32 in the singles event, but had now been defeated by someone who ranked lower than him. He felt greatly humiliated, but Ling

Lan and the others did not go over to console him. Someone who could become the regiment commander of a mecha clan would certainly have the ability to self-regulate his emotions.

Due to Han Yu's loss, Zhang Jing-an was clearly much more cautious in the second match. However, no matter how cautious he was, he could not hide the change in his expression when he discovered who his opponent was. His opponent was not the candidate who was in the top 50, but was instead the one who ranked 19.

"Looks like they've given up on the third match." The unexpected appearance of this person here in the second match caused the people of the First Men's Military Academy to frown. What in the world was the other side aiming for? Even if the opponents won this match, there would be no one else capable of rivalling Mu Shaoyu on their side for the third match.

Standing beside Ling Lan, Zhao Jun seemed to have figured out something. He could not help but chuckle and say, "Boss Lan, they seem to have set their sights on you. That top 32 candidate will probably be arranged to fight in the fourth match."

### **Chapter 459: A Strange Injury!**

Ling Lan fully agreed with Zhao Jun's speculations. She nodded and said, "This battle plan is pretty good. For the next round, we should also make some changes." Tongli's targeted and purposeful line-up reminded Ling Lan that a fixed and unchanging order would make it very easy for others to pick out a flaw. Although they had strength, they would not be able to fend against endless schemes and calculations.

Zhao Jun's words pulled Qiao Ting's attention back, and he turned an odd gaze at the few Tongli cadets who were standing not too far backstage watching the fight closely. He did not know whether to give them props for their bizarre way of thinking or offer them a moment of mournful silence.

Although Qiao Ting did not think that he had truly lost to Ling Lan in that challenge fight, having exchanged one proper blow with Ling Lan, he knew well that Ling Lan's mecha combat arts were extraordinary. Whether in terms of speed, technique, or judgment, Ling Lan had achieved the pinnacle of a special-class operator — and this was why Ling Lan had been able to finish him off in one move.

These were the results of Qiao Ting's repetitive study of the battle recording of their fight. He believed that Ling Lan's control ability was actually even stronger than Zhao Jun who seemed stronger than Ling Lan on the surface. It was also this analysis which made Qiao Ting mentally view Ling Lan as his greatest rival — just think, had he been as strong as the other back when he was in his second year?

Of course, without advancing to ace, no matter how powerful or talented one was, everything would be but a passing cloud. Qiao Ting knew he would continue to keep a close eye on Ling Lan, waiting to see if this aberrant who had already advanced to Domain in physical skills at age 17 would be just as aberrant when it came to mecha piloting.

On this end, while Qiao Ting was thinking that the Tongli people were asking for trouble, on the other end, Han Yu, who did not know Ling Lan's true strength, was becoming anxious. He could not help but begin to resent Ling Lan, silently blaming the other for coveting the honour associated with the group



battles and forcing his way in to make up the numbers, pushing Zhao Jun aside. If not for that, they would never have been put into such a passive state ...

At the thought that they might be ended here in the top 100, becoming one of the most unexpected losers of this competition, Han Yu could not help but think viciously — wait till they got back to the First Men's Military Academy ... let's see how this Ling Lan was going to explain this! At this moment, Han Yu had forgotten that it was because he had lost that first match which he should not have out of carelessness that things had become so passive for them ...

Sensing the discontent in Han Yu's eyes, a trace of a malicious smile appeared on Qiao Ting's lips. He was not so nice that he would help enlighten his old rival — let him stew in his worry for a while.

Ling Lan chose to ignore Han Yu's displeasure and Qiao Ting's indifference; right then, she was reading through a long document in her mindspace. It was the detailed information she had asked Little Four to gather on all the participants of Tongli.

"It should be this person ..." said Ling Lan, pointing at one of the names in the document; she had finally found what she was looking for.

At her side, Little Four was rather curious. He stretched tall on tiptoe, trying to see who exactly his boss was referring to. Unfortunately, even after 17 years, he was still a little bean sprout — his height was not even at the level of Ling Lan's waist; no matter how high he stood on tiptoe, he was still unable to see.

Looking up to see that sheet of white paper high above his head, Little Four suddenly hated himself. Why did he have to turn the data into paper documents? If he had just displayed it on a virtual screen, wouldn't he be able to see it then? Right then, Little Four was filled with infinite regret, but he also did not dare to make an executive decision to change formats — he was afraid that his boss would once again shut him up in that small black room, oh that small black room.

Ling Lan had long noticed Little Four's behaviour and was snickering in her heart, but she decided not to make things difficult for him. She dipped the paper low, bringing it right before Little Four's eyes, pointed at one of the names and said, "Him."

Little Four reflexively read it out loud, "Du Yuanlang, specialization: Military Strategy. Ranked 7 in this tournament's tactical strategy competition ... this result is not that good, even losing to Han Jijun ..." At this point, Little Four was still befuddled, unsure why his boss had gone to the trouble of searching for this specific person among the list of more than a hundred people.

Little Four's dazed look made Ling Lan smile fondly, and she explained, "This match today, Tongli's lineup was probably by this guy's arrangement. I have to say that this battle plan is very good, almost allowing the other side to achieve an upset ..."

Little Four understood then. Abruptly amused, his eyes crinkled into a straight line as he smiled widely, and somewhat smugly with a touch of schadenfreude, he said, "Sadly, he bet on the wrong person."

Ling Lan did not reply, merely rubbing Little Four's head. She ignored Little Four's resultant protests and instructed, "In short, send a copy each of this person's information to Jijun and Leopard. Tell them to watch out for him. During the team battle royal, this person might bring us some trouble."

After settling all this, Ling Lan turned her attention back to the field. At this moment, Zhang Jing-an's situation was not looking good; he was fighting under the opponent's suppression. This fighter was truly Tongli's ace-in-the-hole — Zhang Jing-an, who was also a special-class operator like him, was still no match for him.

“Senior Zhang is about to lose,” said Ling Lan evenly. She reckoned that there would be just a few more moves before the outcome was decided; based on Zhang Jing-an's condition, he would at most be able to withstand another 10 moves.

Qiao Ting nodded and said, “Yes, it's just uncertain how many more moves he'll be able to take. The opponent is very strong ... his ranking of 19 was probably because he was matched against an ace operator early and was defeated prematurely. His strength is about the same as Zhao Jun's. He could have easily made it into the top 8. Zhang Jing-an's loss is not unfounded.”

Ling Lan was rather taken aback by Qiao Ting's words. She had thought that Qiao Ting, an ace operator like her, would also be able to estimate how many moves were left before the outcome of the match was revealed. Surprisingly, that was not so. Qiao Ting was able to foresee the final outcome, but he could not determine how many moves would be used ...

Just as Ling Lan was puzzling over this conundrum, things abruptly changed on the field after the two mecha had exchanged another 7 blows. Zhang Jing-an, who had only been disadvantaged all this while without showing any signs of being defeated yet, suddenly dodged a little too slow and was struck right in the chest by the opponent's cold weapon. The tremendous force behind the blow sent Zhang Jing-an flying.

Thrown through the air, Zhang Jing-an had yet to stabilize his mecha when the opponent had already pounced after him like a fierce predator. Three consecutive hits instantly sent Zhang Jing-an's mecha crashing into the ground below ...

Ten moves! In the end, the moves needed to determine the outcome was as Ling Lan had predicted — only ten moves! Why could she make such an accurate judgment call when Qiao Ting could not? Ling Lan thought hard on this and was suddenly struck by a fit of inspiration. She had thought of her innate talent *Profound Insight*. Could that be the answer?

Thinking closely about it, that was the only possibility. This made Ling Lan begin to take this innate talent very seriously — she had initially thought that *Profound Insight* was just an ability that allowed her to hone in on an opponent's weakness, but now from the looks of it, she had underestimated this innate talent. *Profound Insight* probably still had some other wonderful uses for her to uncover ... perhaps, she should really put some serious effort to study it now.

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In the learning space, Instructor Number One was seated in quiet meditation on a mountain peak. When he sensed Ling Lan's thoughts, he opened his eyes and a cold gleam flashed through them. Immediately after, he huffed coldly before closing his eyes in meditation once more.

Instructor Number One was actually very displeased that Ling Lan was only just showing interest to understand her innate talent *Profound Insight* now. He had already told Ling Lan much earlier before that the *Profound Insight* innate talent was one of the best of all innate talents, so how could it be

limited to the insignificant ability to identify weaknesses like the lower level innate talents such as Animal Instinct?

However, Instructor Number One was also satisfied that Ling Lan had been able to notice this point so quickly despite her disinterest. Once Ling Lan had fully mastered Profound Insight ... Instructor Number One did not dare to chase this thought any further — she would definitely become an absolutely terrifying existence.

After the three combo hits, Zhang Jing-an's points had already been deducted till zero. The referee immediately raised his red flag to prevent the opponent from moving forwards and attacking again. Ling Lan and the rest waited for Zhang Jing-an to operate his mecha to stand up so that the referee could announce the results.

Several seconds later, Zhang Jing-an still had not moved from where he had crashed onto the ground. Ling Lan's and Qiao Ting's expressions changed.

The referee on the field had also noticed this, and he quickly connected to Zhang Jing-an's commlink and called out to him urgently. Then, he could vaguely hear moaning coming from the other end and immediately knew that the situation was not good. He quickly called for the medical team.

The medical team immediately rushed onto the scene with several high-level hackers in tow. Zhang Jing-an seemed to have already fallen unconscious and was unable to open his own cockpit, so the hackers were needed to crack the code on the cockpit doors to open them before the medical team could hoist Zhang Jing-an to help him.

Seeing this, Ling Lan informed Little Four to lend a hand. After the hackers had begun hacking, Little Four slipped in and broke the code, springing the doors open.

Zhang Jing-an was pulled out — his entire body was limp like a lump of mud. The primary doctor stepped forwards to examine him, and his face changed drastically. He immediately placed Zhang Jing-an into the pre-prepared healing pod and swiftly contacted a transport machine on standby outside the stadium to come and move the healing pod out.

The competition was declared suspended for an indefinite amount of time. This notification let Ling Lan and the others know that something major must have happened. In the live broadcast they were watching backstage, when Zhang Jing-an was rescued out of his mecha, his injuries seemed off, as if several magnitudes more severe than they had imagined.

Worried and suspicious, they watched the video images of the three-hit combo again and again — the opponent's attacks had been very clean, and there was nothing wrong with the area he had attacked either, fully avoiding the cockpit ... then why was Zhang Jing-an so heavily injured? This matter was just too strange; they could not figure it out.

Ling Lan instructed Little Four to secretly sneak into the military comms channels and make sure he found out what this matter was all about.

Everyone was patiently waiting for the results of the examination — when Zhang Jing-an's opponent, that Tongli trump card, returned backstage, he too had a look of bewilderment on his face. He could not understand how Zhang Jing-an had been injured so gravely either. The initially bustling backstage had

now fallen still and silent. Everyone was waiting for news, eager to know what in the world had happened.

“Ah, it’s General Ling Xiao!” In the silent backstage, someone cried out, startling everyone. A commotion broke out as everyone rushed to the big screen to see General Ling Xiao’s glory for themselves. The initially heavy atmosphere was swept away in an instant.

Ling Xiao had not walked down to the combat field alone. The vice president of the Federation was with him, but everyone’s attention was all on Ling Xiao, so the vice president very tragically became part of the background. Expressions grim, they walked up to Zhang Jing-an’s mecha where Ling Xiao then jumped straight into the cockpit with a powerful leap. When he came out from inside, his expression had turned extremely dark ...

He said a few brief words to the vice president and the latter’s expression changed dramatically, a picture of disbelief. Very soon, the two of them re-entered the cockpit together, and when they came out again, the vice president’s countenance was even three degrees darker than Ling Xiao’s.

Soon, all of the academies participating in the group mecha combat event were notified that all of the actual mecha being used in the competition would be inspected by military specialists. Only after they were verified to be safe would the mecha operators be allowed to board them and use them in the competition!

As soon as this notice was released, there was an uproar! Everyone understood now what had befallen Zhang Jing-an!

Chapter 460: Fatherly Love Like a Mountain!

When they received this notification, Qiao Ting’s brows knitted together. After musing over it for a moment, he turned to look at Ling Lan and said, “Regiment Commander Ling, judging from this notification, there must have been some problem with the safety of Zhang Jing-an’s mecha. Could the monitoring system have been compromised? Or is it the control system? Or perhaps ...” Qiao Ting’s expression turned grim and his voice dipped low. “Was there a problem with the mecha itself to begin with?”

By this time, Ling Lan had already obtained the conclusion Ling Xiao and the vice president had come to from her connection with Little Four. Suppressing the rage within her, she replied coldly, “Perhaps. Those are all possible!”

Ling Lan’s words made Qiao Ting turn serious. He was just about to continue discussing the topic with Ling Lan when, right then, the people around the large screen began yelling, “General Ling Xiao, General Ling Xiao is coming ...”

Ling Lan and the others looked over and saw from the video feed that Ling Xiao and the vice president were walking over here shoulder to shoulder. There were also quite a number of officers trailing behind them. Among them, Ling Lan saw a familiar face — it was that secret service secretary He Xuyang, who had now become Ling Xiao’s 23rd Division’s first adviser.

This He Xuyang should have already passed Ling Xiao's tests to become one of his confidants; otherwise, Ling Xiao would not have brought him with him to planet Qiming. Meanwhile, that Adjutant Qiao who Ling Xiao had once brought with him to the First Men's Military Academy was nowhere in sight this trip. It looked like there must have been something wrong with that Adjutant Qiao ... the only question was whether her dad had put him on ice 1 or if he had already utterly dealt with the problem.

By this time, that group had already come to the mouth of a passage. This passageway was very familiar to everyone watching the video feed; it was the passage to the backstage area they were at.

Ling Lan's mind stirred as she began guessing silently as to why her dad would be headed here. Could it be because she was here? Ling Lan felt that this was truly possible.

As soon as Ling Xiao's group entered the backstage, no one there dared to move rashly, afraid to offend General Ling Xiao in any way. Even if they had dared to make any strange moves, the guards who had stepped in ahead of Ling Xiao would definitely have intercepted them. Everyone looked at Ling Xiao with reverent gazes, eyes tracking his every step.

Ling Xiao's destination was very clear. Without any hesitation, he headed straight for the First Men's Military Academy's area. No one was surprised by this move of Ling Xiao's. It was someone from the First Men's Military Academy who had been injured; it made perfect sense for Ling Xiao to go over and provide some reassurance. Moreover, General Ling Xiao was an alumni of the First Men's Military Academy — it was reasonable for him to go over and show some concern for his juniors.

The vice president smiled gently and kept pace with Ling Xiao as they made their way over to the First Men's Military Academy's side. The vice president's destination this time was the First Men's Military Academy anyway — he needed to show some care on behalf of the government.

Watching as Ling Xiao slowly approached, Qiao Ting and the rest were extremely excited. When Ling Xiao was finally before them, the five of them instantly snapped to attention and raised their hands in a sharp salute, shouting in unison, "General, good day!"

Ling Xiao returned a salute with a serious expression. When he put down his right hand, his expression instantly gentled and he said kindly, "That student just now ... though he is injured badly, he will definitely recover with the healing capacity of the Federation. Do not worry."

"Thank you, General!" responded the group in unison, hearts settling at Ling Xiao's words.

Ling Xiao's first remark was to inform them about Zhang Jing-an's condition — Qiao Ting and the rest were silently grateful for General Ling Xiao's compassion. Knowing what they were most worried about, he had instantly provided them with an answer.

General Ling Xiao's gentle gaze swept over the five youths there, pausing for a beat on Ling Lan before swiftly turning to the next youth in line. In the end, Ling Xiao's gaze landed on Qiao Ting and he said, "You. You should be Qiao Ting, right?"

"Yes, General!" Qiao Ting was ecstatic — he had not expected General Ling Xiao to know his name. Suppressing his brimming emotions which were about to overflow, Qiao Ting forced himself to be calm and replied.

"I saw you fight in the singles event. Not bad. Keep up the good work!" praised General Ling Xiao.

Qiao Ting immediately replied, "Yes, General!" He really did not expect General Ling Xiao to not only know his name, but to also go so far as to praise him. Qiao Ting was rather thrown off-balance by this — he desperately restrained himself, barely able to keep his emotions in check.

Ling Xiao's gaze then moved onto the Ling Lan and the others, and he asked with a smile, "Who's up for the next match?"

Mu Shaoyu raised his hand excitedly and shouted, "Reporting to the general! That would be me!"

Ling Xiao looked at Mu Shaoyu and his first adviser He Xuyang instantly shifted closer to whisper in his ear. After He Xuyang had stepped back into place, Ling Xiao glanced at Ling Lan standing beside Mu Shaoyu with a smile in his eyes.

'Truly, a tiger does not father hounds!' thought He Xuyang. He still remembered that Young Master Lan was only just a second-year cadet. For him to be able to participate in the group mecha combat event as a second-year, Young Master Lan's mecha piloting talent must not be weaker than General Ling Xiao's by much.

General Ling Xiao smiled, nodded and said, "Mu Shaoyu, is it? You all have already lost two matches so far. If you lose, the other two after you will not be able to take the field, you know. So that you aren't blamed by them, you need to work hard."

Ling Xiao's slightly teasing words helped to ease Mu Shaoyu's nervousness considerably. He loudly replied, "General, I guarantee that I'll complete this mission!" He turned his head to look at Ling Lan and Qiao Ting, and lifted his chin to say confidently, "I'll definitely let them take the field."

Ling Xiao looked over at Ling Lan, his eyes filled with a kind and loving humour. This look almost made Ling Lan think that Ling Xiao would call her 'my child', but unexpectedly, Ling Xiao merely said, "Fight well!"

Ling Lan was the calmest among the five youths. In response to that, she replied, "Yes, General!"

Her cold face was an emotionless mask — Ling Xiao was rather discouraged by this. How could his daughter be so calm and collected? Although the others were trying their best to compose themselves, it was obvious at a glance how they really felt. Only Ling Lan had not revealed any bit of emotion whatsoever, leaving Ling Xiao floundering as to how she felt. Did his arrival not make his daughter excited at all? Ling Xiao had a bellyful of resentment at the thought.

Seeing that Ling Xiao was done speaking, the vice president followed up with his own words of concern. The First Men's Military Academy group could feel the care from both the military and the government.

At this time, the two specialist mecha safety surveyors that had been transferred here urgently arrived backstage, and they began inspecting the mecha of the two mecha operators about to take the field. Seeing General Ling Xiao and the vice president there, they immediately came over to report. Subsequently, under General Ling Xiao's instruction, they respectively inspected Mu Shaoyu's mecha as well as the mecha of the third participant from the Tongli military academy.

As the backstage began to bustle with activity, the vice president was just about to suggest they leave when Ling Xiao suddenly turned his head and asked the five students of the First Men's Military Academy, "Who will be fighting after Mu Shaoyu?"

Ling Lan could not help but sweatdrop when she heard this. Hells, she did not believe that her dad had not managed to get his hands on their participant name list. However, she knew that this was probably her dad trying to find a way to speak with her, so she raised her hand and said, "Reporting, Sir, that would be me."

Receiving the answer he wanted, Ling Xiao turned to the vice president and said, "Sir Vice President, I really want to take a look at the cockpits of the mecha of the other participants. Why not take this opportunity to look at this student's mecha as well?"

The vice president's face turned stern at his words and he replied, "Suits me."

Even as Ling Xiao's and the vice president's words stunned Ling Lan, she felt a surge of warmth suffuse her heart. Ling Xiao's visit backstage was not only to see her but, more importantly, to inspect her cockpit. Ling Lan knew that Ling Xiao was concerned and ill at ease, unwilling to leave his daughter's safety in the hands of others. He wanted to inspect her mecha personally, and in order to achieve this objective, he had racked his brains, patiently waiting for the most opportune timing.

Ling Lan pressed down the warmth in her heart and led Ling Xiao and the vice president to the mecha she was going to operate later.

For this fight, Ling Lan had not chosen an ace mecha but a special-class mecha which was comprehensively balanced, unlike the typical close-combat mecha she favoured. Ling Lan had her own reasons for choosing this mecha. Over this period of time, she had organized the legacy information she had received from her dad in the virtual space. She found that, on the battlefield, the more cards someone had up their sleeves, the easier it was for them to survive. This prompted her to reflect upon herself, wondering if she was too biased towards close combat and had neglected her long-range skills.

Putting one's full focus on one aspect would indeed allow one to reach a pinnacle much easier; besides that, many people who ambitiously tried to develop both sides often ended up moving towards mediocrity, lost among the masses. In human history, with regards to mecha, of all the people who had managed to ascend to god-class operator status, Ling Xiao was the only one who operated a balanced-type mecha!

Not everyone was Ling Xiao! Ling Lan too had this self-awareness. She would not be so bold as to think she could do as her dad had and become proficient at everything. She was only planning to train up her long-range combat skills a little more so that it could become one of her reliable cards in a crucial moment.

It was precisely this consideration which made Ling Lan choose this balanced mecha. There was no problem in terms of operating it — in the learning space, Instructor Number Three had not simply made her pilot just one series of mecha. She had had training in all the mecha types — it was just that her talent laid in close combat, so her long-range combat paled in comparison. In Ling Lan's battle clan of ten, Ling Lan's long-range abilities could at most rank her at number five ... Li Lanfeng, Han Jijun, and Lin Zhong-qing were all better than her, and even Li Shiyu, who did not focus much on mecha piloting, was better than her by a hair in long-range combat.

Ling Lan's long-range combat skills were only better than Qi Long, Zhao Jun, and Xie Yi, who specialized in close combat, as well as Chang Xinyuan, whose piloting talent was terrible to begin with. As for Luo

Lang, it depended on which personality he had activated at the time — if the personality in control was one suited for long-range combat, then his long-range skills would also be stronger than Ling Lan's. Thus, Ling Lan's talent in long-range combat could only be considered above average, absolutely nowhere close to top-notch.

However, giving up just like that was not like Ling Lan. She decided to spend a little more time training up her long-range combat skills. No matter what, she would make it so that she could squeeze into the top three of her battle clan ...

When Ling Xiao saw this mecha, he looked at Ling Lan contemplatively. Ling Lan noticed the satisfaction and smugness in her dad's eyes, and she instantly realized something and began screaming in her heart. 'Oh Dad, get over yourself! Me choosing a balanced mecha has nothing at all to do with you!'

Did Ling Xiao really have nothing to do with it? In the mindscape, Little Four cheekily morphed into Ling Xiao's image and asked in a stern tone.

Also inside the mindscape, Ling Lan rolled her eyes at this and with a flick of her finger, she made Little Four turn back to his original form. Fine. So there was that little bit of connection. After all, she had inherited Ling Xiao's legacy. Ling Lan admitted this honestly.

The news that Ling Xiao would be personally inspecting Ling Lan's mecha thrilled everyone. They all gathered close — if Ling Xiao's guards had not stopped them, they would most probably have come right up to the bottom of the mecha.

Ling Xiao spent more than 10 minutes inside the cockpit of Ling Lan's mecha. This duration greatly exceeded the time the experts used to inspect mecha. The specialists who were inspecting Mu Shaoyu's mecha were already done with it and had moved on to inspect Qiao Ting's mecha.

When Ling Xiao finally climbed out of the cockpit, his face was somewhat pale. This instantly made the vice president anxious and he asked, "General Ling, is there a problem?" The malfunction of one mecha could be explained as an error, but one more malfunctioning mecha would be a dereliction of duty. That would definitely cause a great upheaval within the entire Federation in both the military and political world.

Ling Xiao shook his head and said, "No big problems, just some minor issues." As soon as Ling Xiao said this, the staff member in charge of this mecha found sweat beading his forehead. However, he did not dare to wipe the sweat away — he quickly rushed over to stand before General Ling Xiao, bowed his head and took the blame. "General, I did not do a good job."

"This doesn't have much to do with you." Ling Xiao's words lifted the staff member's heart from hell up to heaven. He raised his head in pleasant surprise. Ling Xiao did not notice this. He pointed at some parts of the mecha and began describing the problems.

The staff member quickly opened his communicator and began taking notes. The issues Ling Xiao pointed out were largely effects of wear and tear, which would affect the performance of the mecha. Of course, there were also a few very hidden spots which, if not discovered in time, would have caused some insensitivity in the controls of the mecha. However, these had nothing to do with the main focus of the inspection this time as they would not threaten the life of the operator inside the cockpit.



Hearing Ling Xiao's detailed narration on the issues down to the smallest screw, all the people at the side stared with envy-jealousy-hate at the owner of this mecha — Ling Lan, who was currently standing behind Ling Xiao with a composed expression. Everyone was thinking: why couldn't it have been their mecha that was chosen for inspection by the general? Who would have guessed that General Ling Xiao's inspection would be so thorough, not even letting a single minor issue go?

On the surface, Ling Lan was as calm as ever but in truth, when she heard Ling Xiao listing out the issues of her mecha one by one, her heart throbbed once more — was this what was meant by comparing fatherly love to a mountain ?

Ling Lan was well aware that Ling Xiao had not simply conducted a surface inspection, but he had also used his spiritual power to envelop the entire mecha, which was how he had managed to ferret out all these little problems. This method was a huge drain on Ling Xiao's spiritual power — no wonder his face had been that pale when he had exited the mecha cockpit. At the same time, Ling Lan was silently shocked at the frightening realm her father's control over his spiritual power had reached. Even she had not noticed him using his spiritual power.

Ling Xiao's abundant berth of fatherly love made Ling Lan's self-erected barrier abruptly collapse. If they had not been in a public place, Ling Lan believed that she would have easily called out 'daddy' at this moment.

Unfortunately ... Ling Lan's gaze flickered. She finally reined in the shifting warmth in her heart, once again reverting back to the usual cold and seemingly emotionless Ling Lan.

If Ling Xiao had known right then that he had missed the chance to be called 'daddy' by Ling Lan because this was the wrong place and time, he would certainly be pounding his chest in frustration. However, it was also fortunate that he did not know so it did not affect his mood. With a serious demeanour, he instructed the backstage staff to fix each and every one of those problems.

Ling Xiao's serious attitude spurred everyone into nervous action. The problems that originally would have taken one to two hours to fix were completely resolved within half an hour. After Ling Xiao once again entered the cockpit for a reassessment, when he came out, he nodded at the staff to show that everything was fine now.

Having obtained General Ling Xiao's approval, all of the staff members could not help but break out into celebratory applause. This shook Ling Xiao out of work mode and a smile appeared on his lips. Now that the mecha was free of possible issues, Ling Xiao let out a sigh of relief.

However, this joyous atmosphere was soon broken by the news that the specialist inspecting one of the mecha of the Tongli Military Academy had found some problems with it. When Ling Xiao and the vice president heard the news, their expressions changed. Sharing a quick glance, they walked over to that mecha.

After listening to the specialist's report, Ling Xiao boarded the mecha to recheck it, and when he came out, he nodded at the vice president to show that the specialist's inspection results were not wrong. The vice president's countenance darkened instantly. He knew that this was most likely a case of collusion between officials and businessmen, a major incident of corruption, bribery, and dereliction of duty.

“General Ling Xiao ... this matter, can you leave it to us government officials to resolve?” The vice president waited till General Ling Xiao alighted from the mecha before pleading softly.

At this moment, there was no sign of Ling Xiao’s previous warmth and gentle manner. He glanced at the vice president, his gaze so sharp that sweat began to run from the vice president’s forehead. The vice president then heard Ling Xiao reply coldly, “I will need to report this matter to the First Marshal. I beg your pardon, Vice President.” Just thinking about how many of his comrades, who were fighting with their lives on the line on the battlefield, could have lost their lives due to this, Ling Xiao’s rage burned. He would not let this rest.

The vice president knew that his request had been a little too much, so he could only nod bitterly and say, “As you should, as you should. I did not think it through. I beg your forgiveness, General Ling Xiao.”

Only then did Ling Xiao’s tense expression ease and he said sincerely, “Vice President, we can only do things by the book. What happens next is not something we can meddle with.”

The vice president smiled wryly at those words. Compared to Ling Xiao, he was much more worried. If this matter was not handled properly, the government this round may very well have to resign collectively ... he hoped that the skies would not be torn asunder by this 3 !

After settling the concern in his heart, Ling Xiao led his men away from the backstage. Meanwhile, the vice president returned to his accommodations with a mind full of worries. At this time, how could he still have the heart to continue watching the group mecha fights? He needed to convey this news at soonest notice to the president.

As for Ling Xiao, he returned to the rostrum area and nodded lightly to the worried Lan Luofeng. Only then did Lan Luofeng relax — if Ling Xiao said that everything was fine, then everything was sure to be fine. With regards to mecha, Lan Luofeng had the utmost trust in Ling Xiao.

In the meantime, Ling Xiao’s first adviser He Xuyang was already on the road back to their accommodations. He had been sent by Ling Xiao to report what had happened here to the first marshal. As for what would follow, it was just as Ling Xiao had said — those were not things he could control. Of course, if someone was found to have engaged in malpractices for selfish ends, he, Ling Xiao, would not mind intervening — the mecha defence systems which could impact the survivability of a warrior absolutely could not be allowed to be treated lightly by anyone.

Very soon, the group mecha combat event resumed, and Mu Shaoyu operated his mecha onto the field. His opponent from the Tongli Military Academy was significantly weaker than him, so it only took a few moves before the opponent could hardly fight back under Mu Shaoyu’s attacks. After resisting for ten more moves or so, the opponent felt that he could not go on and so immediately found time to make the motion for surrender. The referee immediately waved his red flag and ended the match.

The Tongli team backstage did not show any signs of disappointment at this loss for Tongli. Instead, they seemed even more eager and energetic in their preparations for the fourth match. This also confirmed that the opponents were indeed hedging their victory on the fourth match. They were putting their hopes on defeating Ling Lan who had not participated in the single mecha combat event, but had unexpectedly shown up to participate in the group event.

Zhao Jun was the only one backstage who knew Ling Lan's true strength — his boss was a bona fide ace operator! Even if he was operating a special-class mecha, a special-class operator would still be no match at all for him.

By this time, Ling Lan had already boarded her mecha and was conducting her pre-match checks. She found that after Ling Xiao's repairs and adjustments, her mecha's functions had become one to two points more responsive — it could be said that its responsiveness had doubled, skirting around the edges of the limits of special-class mecha, just a hair's breadth away from an ace mecha. Ling Lan was filled with silent admiration — her dad's mastery over mecha had already reached an amazing pinnacle. Only with that was he able to instantly come up with the best modifications for this mecha on the spot.

Yes, modification. Although Ling Xiao seemed to have only been replacing the worn parts of the mecha without touching on the roots of the mecha itself, it was precisely these unassuming small parts which had brought earth-shaking changes to Ling Lan's mecha. It was not at all overboard to say that this was a modification.

Ling Lan's mind stirred and she immediately asked Little Four to record down the process of Ling Xiao adjusting the mecha as well as all the parts he had highlighted for fixing. She then sent the information to Chang Xinyuan — she believed that this might be a chance for Chang Xinyuan to evolve.

Finally, Ling Lan's match began. Lan Luofeng, who had been awaiting this moment for so long, could not help but grip the sleeves of Ling Xiao's clothes tightly. Her grip was so forceful that Ling Xiao was almost pulled into her arms.

Ling Xiao clasped Lan Luofeng's hand which was holding onto his sleeve and pressed down lightly. Lan Luofeng raised her head, her eyes filled with worry. Her daughter was actually going to operate a mecha to fight with another mecha operator ...

Ling Xiao consoled her in a low voice, "Luofeng, it'll be fine. Believe in her." Under Ling Xiao's comforting words, Lan Luofeng gradually relaxed and looked towards the combat field. One of the mecha operators operating a special-class mecha there was her daughter Ling Lan ... she should probably be the first ever female mecha operator to participate in the mecha combat tournament. Lan Luofeng felt both proud and sorrowful. If at all possible, she did not want to see this scene.

The mecha the Tongli operator was piloting was a close-combat mecha, while Ling Lan was piloting a balanced mecha. The spectators could not help but begin guessing if this would be a mixed battle of long range and close range, or if it would just be a direct all-out close combat match.

In fact, Ling Lan really wanted to push for close combat immediately and KO the opponent cleanly. However, she still pressed down this notion of hers, deciding to first try long-range attacks.

When the referee waved the green flag, before the opponent could react, Ling Lan had already operated her mecha to retreat several hundred metres. This extreme speed made everyone cry out in shock — they all turned to look at the referee's flag, trying to determine if this action of Ling Lan's was a foul.

This was because there had been contestants before who had moved before the referee had waved his green flag and declared the start of the battle. In the end, those contestants had been judged to have

committed a foul and were deducted a whole half of their points. Not only that, the match had been restarted and those contestants were warned that if they made the same foul again, they would be judged to have lost instantly.

The referee panel monitoring the match very quickly gave their verdict — all of the referees on the panel judged that Ling Lan's operation was legal and within the rules. When the referee on the field received the referee panel's conclusion, he immediately waved his green flag around to indicate that everything was fine with the match — Ling Lan's operation had not broken any rules.

The audience applauded enthusiastically at this outcome. With just this move alone, Ling Lan had shown that her control skills were not mediocre. As expected, someone from the First Men's Military Academy could not be much worse than the other representatives from the school even if he had not participated in the solo event. Ling Lan's remarkable operation skill standards immediately dispelled the doubts the people had against her. She was able to participate in the group mecha fights due to her own strength and not because of anything else.