

Crossing 461

Chapter 461: Ling Lan's Operation Type?

The two fighters on the field were completely oblivious to the situation involving the audience and the referee panel. This impressive bit of operation by Ling Lan had left her opponent, the Tongli mecha operator, scrambling. His first reflex was to chase after his opponent — he could not let his opponent pull away till the optimum distance for long-range attacks.

However, he was already a step late. Even though he tried his hardest to make up for it, he found that no matter how hard he tried, the distance between them just kept growing. The inherent difference between the speeds of their mecha gave him no chance at all ...

The Tongli mecha operator only chased for a few seconds before he realised this. He immediately slowed down and began to think about how he could deal with the opponent's long-range attacks.

In truth, in a mecha competition, the chances would always be equal regardless of whether one excelled in close combat or long-range combat. For a long-range attacker to obtain a safe distance within a match to conduct long-range attacks, they would need to find opportunities to pull away from their opponent and extend the distance between them. On the other hand, if a close-combat mecha operator did not want to passively react to long-range attacks, they would have to try their best to prevent the opponent from pulling away right from the start.

And now, in this current situation, the Tongli mecha operator had lost the first opportunity to do so. He could only hope that the Tongli strategists were correct in their speculations that the opponent's skills were just average — then, he might still be able to salvage the situation and turn things around, otherwise ... the outcome would be unpredictable.

Ling Lan finally pulled away till the optimum distance for long-range shooting. Without any hesitation, she drew a giant gun from her back — it was a long-range long-barrelled beam gun.

Without any special weapons, such as Qiao Ting's ballistic sniper rifle, the standard equipped weapon of long-range mecha would be the long-barrelled beam gun. It was characterized by its long range, but its weakness was that its firepower was a little weak. To break through the beam shield of a mecha at the same level, it would need at least 5 seconds of shooting time ... and this was a difficult thing to achieve. Normally, those who could become special-class mecha operators all had very good operation abilities — they would not so easily let someone else shoot at them for five seconds or more.

However, Ling Lan was not at all concerned about this. If she had wanted to use a long-range gun with greater firepower, she had plenty of ways to obtain one. Her greatest objective in using this gun was to train her long-range skills further. Even if firepower was a problem that would stop her from defeating the opponent quickly, she was not bothered by it.

Ling Lan decisively steadied the long-barrelled beam gun in her mecha's hands and aimed at the opponent who was currently trying to use irregular movements to try and disrupt her shooting.

Judging by the speed of the opponent's mecha, she only had a chance for three shots before the opponent would pass over into close range and the target-locking function of this long-barrelled beam

gun would be rendered useless. At that time, if she still wanted to shoot, she could only rely on pure instinct.

A 'beep' indicated that the long-barrelled gun had locked onto the target successfully. Ling Lan did not hesitate to pull the trigger, and a powerful beam shot out of the muzzle of her gun towards the opponent.

"Fixed-point shooting?" This motion of Ling Lan's made everyone exclaim. Fixed-point shooting was not any advanced shooting technique; it was a basic technique that every mecha operator would know. The more advanced a mecha was, the harder it was to see these kinds of basic techniques being used. The average mecha operator believed that these basic techniques were no longer enough to cope with the more difficult mecha combats.

Just before the beam was about to hit the opponent, as if being refracted, it suddenly grazed by the mecha's side. Anyone could have predicted this outcome — as expected, basic techniques were completely useless in a battle between special-class operators. The audience could not understand why a student participant from the First Men's Military Academy would use such a technique ... could it really be that he had just paid lip service and was here to get a share of the glory? Was the remarkable operation previously just a misperception on their end? Or was it just a flash in the pan?

'This ... it's not just Irregular Dash. Instead, it's more like Irregular Flicker.' Ling Lan was not at all anxious at her missed shot. She calmly analysed the situation and instantly saw that the opponent's footwork was not what it seemed. 'Tsk, well, it can't be considered a true Irregular Flicker either. I can only say that it's something in between the two. This Tongli student is no slouch either, eh? Actually already beginning to learn the advanced footwork that initially only ace operators can learn. Unfortunately, the lock-on function is already useless against this kind of footwork which is bordering on Irregular Flicker.'

"Beep beep beep ..." Sure enough, the lock-on alert of the gun kept ringing to signal that the long-barrelled gun could not lock onto the opponent. It would probably be pointless to shoot again this way.

Ling Lan hesitated for a moment, and the opponent took this chance to once again draw even closer. Ling Lan was rather chagrined by this — she had initially had the opportunity for two more shots, but now, due to her hesitation, she had only one shot left. If she hesitated any further, the chance to take this last shot may be lost as well.

Ling Lan was the type of person to become even more focused and settled the more critical a situation became. Having just one final shot left, she entered into a state with no distractions whatsoever. Fully focused, she stared at the opponent — the target-lock was now useless, so she needed to rely on her own judgment to decide when to shoot ...

Ling Lan began calculating frantically inside — the opponent's speed, possible flight paths, as well as his operation habits ... only by factoring in all of this would she be able to predict the opponent's potential landing point, and that would be the spot she would shoot at.

There!

While Ling Lan was still calculating, she suddenly felt as if she could see a target point. Without conscious thought, she instantly pulled her trigger ...

“Boom!” The beam hit the opponent accurately. The powerful suction force of the beam made it hard for the opponent to move for some time. However, how could a special-class operator be stuck for long by this? At the fourth second, the opponent managed to operate his mecha free of the attack radius of the beam. Although he had broken free of the beam, his initially bright outer shell had already become somewhat dull and dark due to the steep drain on his beam shield’s power to deal with the attack.

“Awesome!” The audience clapped and cheered — how contemptuous they were at the start was precisely how thrilled they were now.

Being able to land a successful hit on an opponent with the basic technique fixed-point shooting ... this completely overturned the people’s general knowledge! Mind you, in all of the previous mecha combat competitions, no one would use fixed-point shooting. Even if someone had used it, no one had succeeded before.

In general, in order to maintain their distance from a close-combat mecha, long-range mecha operators would always utilise the tactic of shooting while moving. And while they were moving around, it was impossible to shoot accurately, so the mecha operators would use ranged attacks to intercept their opponent. Or they might do as Qiao Ting had and use advanced shooting techniques to seal off their opponent’s paths of escape, leaving their opponent with no place to hide. The audience was used to seeing advanced techniques being used this way, so when they suddenly saw a basic technique being effective on the combat field instead, everyone’s interest was raised ...

Ling Lan’s success in using a basic technique to strike the opponent with one shot caused the two imperial operators monitoring the field to nod silently, becoming very interested in Ling Lan. This achievement proved that Ling Lan had already attained a pinnacle in her foundational controls. Oftentimes, only when one arrived at the late stages of ace level did one learn of the importance of the basics. Unfortunately, at that time, it was already futile to consider starting over. Without solid foundations, their futures were limited, and even if they managed to advance to imperial level, they would still be the worst among the imperials.

Ling Xiao felt pride spring up within him at this scene. His daughter truly did not disappoint him. The essence of his legacy had been completely mastered by her — only flawless foundations could support the construction of towers reaching up to the skies ...

This scene also made Lan Luofeng very excited. She did not know anything about foundations or no foundations — no matter what, her precious daughter had managed to hit the opponent. That was the most important thing!

She tugged on Ling Xiao’s hand and asked somewhat incomprehensibly in her excitement, “Lan-Lan has hit the opponent! Why hasn’t the opponent been declared the loser? Why does the fight have to continue?”

“This one shot is not enough to deduct the opponent’s points to zero,” explained Ling Xiao, feeling rather regretful. If the shot had been able to hold the opponent down for just one more second, this match would have been over.

After her hit landed, and once Ling Lan saw the opponent escaping from the attack range of her beam shot, she did not even keep her gun, instantly piloting her mecha to dash backwards.

“Good timing!” One of the imperial operators in the air above who had still been able to maintain his composure could not help but exclaim in surprise when he saw Ling Lan’s move.

“And it’s also seamless control. The shift between the two actions has almost zero excess,” added another imperial operator with an equally amazed tone. This unknown boy below from the First Men’s Military Academy was impeccable both in terms of timing and operation — he was even more precise in his movements than the widely-known Qiao Ting. Right then, the imperial operators were somewhat envious of this mecha operator’s instructor ... that person must be very proud to have such a student.

They did not know that this aberrant Ling Lan was not the product of one person. She was the oddball result of the combination of the rich experience of Ling Xiao’s legacy, the Divine Command techniques from the Divine Command Sect, and the prolonged and extensive training of the learning space.

At this moment, at the rostrum, even the outwardly composed Ling Xiao could not help but cheer loudly in his heart. Ling Lan’s operations were even more refined than they had been a year ago, already showing signs of her own operation style. This style was still in its embryonic stages though, not yet matured. Once it fully matured, perhaps his daughter would truly have the chance to touch upon the realm of imperial level.

Sensing Ling Xiao’s excitement, Lan Luofeng shot a puzzled look at him. In Lan Luofeng’s eyes, Ling Lan’s motions to escape were not as dashing and beautiful as her shot which had hit the opponent. She had no clue that that series of actions was an embodiment of perfection in the eyes of a top-notch mecha master.

The situation on the field also began to worry the Tongli students backstage. They found that the person they had targeted as a soft persimmon was in fact not soft at all and was in fact rather prickly and hard to handle. Right then, they could only hope that their companion on the field would do a little better and chase up to the opponent to drag him into a close-range fight, and thus win the match.

They never imagined that Ling Lan could also be a close-combat expert. He was already so amazing at long range, if he was also amazing at close combat ... even though the opponent was operating a balanced mecha, Tongli vehemently refused to entertain this conjecture in a very ostrich-like manner 3 .

Qiao Ting too witnessed Ling Lan’s series of actions and his expression became shadowed. He found that Ling Lan existed to rain blows on his self-esteem. This long-range basic attack was even more solid than his own ... godd*mn, was this still a close-combat operator?

He could not help but turn his head around to look at Zhao Jun and ask, “Your regiment commander ... is he really operating a close-combat mecha?” They must have been lying to him, right? In truth, Ling Lan was actually a long-range expert?

Zhao Jun stared blankly at the large screen — Boss Lan’s series of long-range operations had also deeply shaken him. When he heard Qiao Ting’s inquiry, he nodded after some hesitation, saying uncertainly, “He should be. I’ve never seen him operate any other mecha other than close-combat mecha before.”

Zhao Jun was rather confused himself. He really did not know anymore what type of operator his Boss Lan was. Could it be that Boss Lan was in fact a comprehensive operator? He had just hidden this fact all this time? Just considering the possibility sent chills running down his back and Zhao Jun shivered. Hells, this was too terrifying! The close combat skills of a balanced operator actually being stronger than them pure close-combat operators ... how were they supposed to continue living?

Chapter 462: Naming —— Ling Lan Shooting Art!

“Hmph, he hid that real deep. He’s probably really an operator of a balanced mecha,” snarked Han Yu, a quick flash of envy passing through his eyes. He was secretly hateful that such excellent long-range control talent did not belong to himself — Han Yu was a long-range mecha operator; he knew in his heart that Ling Lan’s operation was better than his by not just a little bit.

However, right then, Ling Lan, who was rapidly flying backwards, was contemplating another matter. She was wondering what that target point she had seen earlier was all about. Ling Lan was well aware that that target point had not been something she had managed to calculate and deduce on her own. It had appeared out of thin air in her mind, just as if someone had specifically told her about it and was just waiting for her to carry it out.

Could this also be an ability of her innate talent Profound Insight? This was the first thing that came to Ling Lan’s mind, and her intuition would not be wrong.

In truth, Ling Lan was still unclear what the innate talent Profound Insight was truly capable of. In the past, during close combat, Profound Insight was able to penetrate and see the opponent’s fatal weakness at a glance. While watching from the side-lines, it could clearly determine the outcome of a battle, and now, if she was not wrong in her speculations, Profound Insight could accurately predict effective target points for long-range attacks ...

Ling Lan decided to try it once more and see if her speculations were correct. At this time, she was flying at high speed to pull away from the opponent, and then, with a sudden twist, she turned to face her opponent. Her mecha’s engines abruptly shifted from forward thrust to reverse thrust. Although this operation was extremely damaging to the engines, it helped Ling Lan maintain her original speed and flight path, allowing Ling Lan to swiftly enter attack mode.

Right then, Ling Lan had cut loose — in order to prove her speculations as soon as possible, she did not care if she had to pay some price. Facing that Tongli mecha chasing after her, Ling Lan’s gaze once again turned ice-cold. She had entered an extremely cold and focused mode — this was an ability she had obtained after going through countless massacres inside the learning space.

Her mind was cleared of all distractions; the opponent’s mecha was all she could see ... Ling Lan’s finger moved. A string of operations was carried out under her hands, dazzling everyone’s eyes with their speed. At one point, her fingers actually disappeared under the layers of afterimages.

All of the audience could see the right arm of Ling Lan’s mecha hitching up and flicking down, and that low-hanging giant long-barrelled beam gun drew a semi-circle through the air under the mecha’s arm movements. Immediately after, her mecha’s left hand lifted up.

With a 'pop', the giant gun's lower half was hitched up by the mecha's left arm and its muzzle pointed straight at the mecha running towards her.

Will it be a ranged interception? Or perhaps, like Qiao Ting, Ling Lan would display advanced target-locking arts and seal off all of the opponent's possible avenues of escape? When everyone saw this, they began guessing at Ling Lan's next attack. In rapid flight, the gun art that could be displayed were limited to just a few.

Ling Lan aimed at the opponent but did not shoot blindly, nor did she try to calculate or deduce anything. She only concentrated and stared intently at the opponent's mecha, just waiting for that sudden chance to appear.

"Right there!" Several seconds later, as expected, Ling Lan saw an extremely clear shooting trajectory. This was not the result of careful calculation; she had just been able to see it just like that. For no reason whatsoever, and a reason just could not be found, she had simply been able to see it.

Without any hesitation, Ling Lan pulled the trigger. Whether or not this opening was accurate, the facts would have to prove it. This shot was of the utmost importance.

A beam shot out from the muzzle, so dazzling that it seemed almost able to split the air above the combat field into two parts.

Ling Lan constantly adjusted her shooting position and the target point of her beam shot in accordance with the opponent's movement. All this showed that Ling Lan's attack method was still that basic technique — fixed-point shooting.

Everyone was in an uproar. The reason why fixed-point shooting was called fixed-point shooting was that it was used to attack an opponent during situations of absolute stillness, with a fixed and accurate target-lock to ensure a one-hit kill. On the battlefield, it was the best ambush method.

Due to its ambush-like qualities, fixed-point shooting was actually not suitable for a mecha combat match. Ling Lan's previous successful shot with it had already wowed the audience, and now, this current shot had once again shattered the people's understanding of fixed-point shooting. Could it be that fixed-point shooting could also be effective while on the move?

Several experienced mecha operators could not help but shake their heads, thinking that Ling Lan had let the previous success go to her head. Actually audacious enough to try creating a new record and a new form of gun art ... but how could those things be so easy to achieve?

"What a nonsense move¹!" The two imperial operators monitoring from above instantly swore out loud at Ling Lan's unreasonable actions. Ling Lan's previous outstanding performance had earned Ling Lan their admiration, but his deluded efforts to break the mould now by using a completely unsuitable gun art to deal with his opponent made them very angry and disappointed.

Witnessing this, Ling Xiao could not help but clench his fists tightly. He knew his daughter, so he believed that Ling Lan definitely would not do anything crazy for no reason — she must have some degree of certainty for her to have done this. Some hard to conceal pleasant surprise in his eyes, he waited to see the final outcome ...

No one believed that Ling Lan could hit the opponent — that final landing point of the beam she was shooting was obviously wide from the perspective of the onlookers.

“Ah!” At this moment, the audience burst out into exclamations.

The Tongli mecha operator who had obviously been travelling along a safe flight path had suddenly changed the direction of his mecha’s flicker movement and had actually ended up crashing into the range of Ling Lan’s beam. This suicidal action left everyone in the audience gaping in astonishment.

The Tongli mecha operator had just finished his flicker action when he suddenly found that he had charged right into the path of a beam attack. His mecha was instantly consumed by the brilliant beam of light.

“Ah!” The Tongli mecha operator could not help but scream in shock. Being hit under this type of circumstances, caught completely unprepared, anyone would have panicked like him.

“Boom!” The mecha exploded with great force.

Although the Tongli mecha operator had tried his best to change his mecha’s flight path once more to escape the range of the beam attack, unfortunately, when he had jumped into the target zone of the beam attack, his motion was still in progress. To abort the half-complete action, a new command had to be given to first clear the original command. Only after the first command had been erased could the system accept a new motion command. Not just that, when aborting an incomplete action, regardless of how fast an operator’s hand speed was, a special-class mecha would still have some freeze time, and the transition to the new action would also require some buffering time. This series of complicated controls was impossible for a special-class operator to complete in just five seconds. And so, the Tongli special-class operator was doomed to tragedy!

“It hit?”

“It hit!”

The audience members scrubbed at their eyes vigorously, unable to believe what they had just seen. The dissipating smoke and half-destroyed mecha turned their disbelief into acceptance.

With a great furore, everyone took to their feet. Could it be that they would have the honour of bearing witness to the naming of a new mecha technique? They could not help but be excited — mind you, the last time a technique had been named after its creator was over 50 years ago. It had been so long that the people of the Federation had almost forgotten that the Federation still had this naming channel for newly created skills and techniques.

In the Federation, there were two types of naming with regards to mecha techniques. One was for official skills and techniques developed by the Federation military Mecha Skills Research Department. These techniques would all be given an official name, such as Fixed-point Shooting, N-point Blockade, Chain Combo Art, etcetera etcetera. And the other type was for those techniques which had been created by an individual mecha operator. If these techniques were proven to be fully developed and effective in combat or battle, the skills would be named after their creator. Examples of these include the Thomas Fullspin, Yelu Semi-Flight, Louis Double-Cut, etcetera etcetera ...

And now, Ling Lan had created mobile fixed-point shooting — building a new gun art on top of the original fixed-point shooting. According to Federation law, the name of this technique would carry her name.

Sitting beside Ling Xiao was the attending military representative, the main organizer for this Grand Mecha Tournament. He abruptly stood up and said emotionally to Ling Xiao, “General Ling, a new technique ... a new technique has appeared! I ... I must report this to headquarters!”

Ling Xiao suppressed the exhilaration he was feeling, smiling gently as he nodded and said, “Well, congratulations. You all have a new personal-name technique.” Personal-name techniques were in fact also a means to display the might of a nation — it signified that the Federation was filled with talent. The military would certainly use this opportunity to glorify their nation to the rest of the world.

Even as he felt proud of his daughter, Ling Xiao was silently mourning this new headache. The more famous Ling Lan was, the harder it would be for him to free Ling Lan from her current identity. Ling Xiao smiled wryly — he really wasn’t sure whether his blunder in sending his daughter to study at the First Men’s Military Academy was doing her a service or harming her?

Watching the military representative hurry off excitedly to report to his superiors, Ling Xiao began to fret over how he could protect his daughter. He felt that things were spinning further and further out of his control, yet he was filled with joy and pride inside. He even thought that, if he was given the chance to do it all again, he would still choose to let his daughter study at the First Men’s Military Academy, otherwise his daughter’s exceptional control talent would have been wasted.

This kind of thinking made Ling Xiao feel rather guilty. He carefully peeked at Lan Luofeng, hoping that she had not noticed his little selfish thought.

At this moment, however, Lan Luofeng was completely lost. She had not understood the conversation between Ling Xiao and that military representative. The fact was that she really did not understand much about mecha even though she had married a god-class operator.

“What’s going on? What is personal-name naming?” Lan Luofeng would always ask directly if there was something she did not understand. This was also one of the things Ling Xiao liked about her — she would not pretend to be more knowledgeable than she really was.

“That last attack by Lan-er has created a new shooting technique, which is why this technique will be named after her. It’ll be called — Ling Lan Shooting Art!” Ling Xiao’s gaze shone with pride. This was his daughter! How lucky was he!

“Ah!” Lan Luofeng covered her mouth in her joy and surprise. She stared disbelievingly at Ling Xiao, and when Ling Xiao nodded once more to confirm, Lan Luofeng started shaking Ling Xiao in her excitement. If not out of consideration for the time and place, she would definitely have leapt up to scream and shout.

Ling Xiao smiled as he embraced Lan Luofeng, letting the other calm down in his arms. He looked towards Ling Lan still floating in the air, and the growing smile at the corners of his lips could not be suppressed.

Backstage, Qiao Ting and the rest were gobsmacked. Zhao Jun slapped himself harshly and then asked Qiao Ting non-stop, “Am I dreaming? Am I dreaming? Qiao Ting, that’s a new technique, right? Right? Right? Right?”

Chapter 463: Qiao Ting’s Plans!

Qiao Ting took in a deep breath and looked searchingly at Ling Lan on the field. He then said in a low voice, “You’re not dreaming. That technique ...” It should count as a new technique. Qiao Ting did not voice it. He was afraid that if he did, he would not be able to maintain his nature.

That was personal-name naming! It was something all mecha masters dreamed of obtaining, but how many people would ever truly earn this honour? Throughout human history, techniques that fell under personal-name naming numbered less than sixty, and most of them were from the early days of mecha development ...

Excluding those people, in the past thousand years, only a small number of 12 people have attained this honour successfully ... how lucky was Ling Lan? Having done what countless people could not, even if that technique could not be widely promoted, it was still envy-jealousy-hate inducing for Ling Lan to have an exclusive technique belonging to him! Qiao Ting could not suppress the tendril of bitterness that welled up in his heart. This era should have been his, but Ling Lan’s performance today was enough to put them equal ground. Profoundly, he wondered why fate had chosen to give birth to both of them in the same time frame ¹ .

Meanwhile, on the field, the referee saw the Tongli mecha being destroyed in one shot by Ling Lan and his expression changed greatly. He quickly waved his red flag vigorously, suspending the fight, and then piloted his mecha over quickly to check on the condition of the Tongli mecha.

Stunned, Ling Lan lowered the gun in her hands. If a quick flash of thought had not struck her at that instant when she had taken the shot, making her subconsciously raise her gun’s muzzle by a few inches, she would absolutely have hit the opponent’s cockpit directly. That shooting trajectory she had visualized was not merely an effective path to hit the opponent — it was a fearsome trajectory which would have resulted in a one-hit kill.

Ling Lan was instantly gripped by a pang of belated fear; the sweat on her back felt cold. If she had not had that flash of insight and made some minor adjustments at the instant, perhaps her opponent might be dead right now.

“Profound Insight is one of the top-class innate talents in the Mandora star system. It is the best innate talent for mecha piloting. Cherish it, and use it well.” The words Instructor Number One had said to her that year once again rang out by Ling Lan’s ear.

“Instructor Number One, before this, I have probably disappointed you!” thought Ling Lan with a dry mental chuckle. She had never really paid much attention to this innate talent of hers, thinking that it only provided a little more accuracy to her piloting through its predictive ability. This lackadaisical attitude towards it had made her neglect Profound Insight, thus wasting a lot of time ... still, Ling Lan’s frustration only lasted for an instant. She very quickly rallied herself, thinking, *“Luckily, it’s not too late. I will definitely master all of the abilities of Profound Insight.”*

Just solely excavating that little bit of its abilities had already proven to be so heaven-defying ... Ling Lan had the feeling that perhaps this Profound Insight innate talent was the true cheat she had been given in her transmigration, the true foundation which would allow her to stand at the pinnacle of strength in this world.

When the referee came up to the Tongli mecha, he found that the upper half of the mecha had already been battered by the beam shot, becoming extremely dilapidated, but the cockpit area was perfectly untouched. This meant that the situation was not too terrible; the referee's heart settled. That scene just now had caught everyone off guard — even if someone had had the heart to help and save the Tongli contestant, they would not have made it in time.

The referee instantly made contact with the mecha operator inside the cockpit, and when he heard the other respond back that he only had some minor injuries and that everything else was fine, the referee instantly let out a sigh of relief. Only then did he announce the end of this mecha fight, with the winner being Ling Lan of the First Men's Military Academy. Leaving aside the fact that the Tongli mecha was no longer fit for battle, even if the mecha had been completely undamaged after that last encounter, that shot of Ling Lan's alone was enough to reduce the opponent's points to zero.

After his initial surge of emotion, Ling Xiao calmed down, and confusion settled in. That shot of Ling Lan's ... the execution of it was incongruent with her actual age and experience. Logically, Ling Lan should not have been able to make such an accurate prediction — it should have been impossible for that sure-kill trajectory to be discovered by anyone below imperial level ...

Predictive judgement was a skill which mecha masters had to learn, but the extent to which the ability can stretch completely depends on the mecha master's own strength and experience, and of course a keen intuition was also indispensable. Ling Xiao believed his daughter's intuition was not weak — he had already known this from when he had sparred with her before — but Ling Lan logically should not have been able to achieve such a step at her current level of strength and experience.

How had Ling Lan, his baby daughter, discovered this trajectory? Was it luck? Or had she really seen it? For some unknown reason, Ling Xiao believed deep down that his daughter must surely have seen it. It looked like his daughter still had secrets unknown to him ...

A subtle smile appeared on Ling Xiao's lips — he was not planning to delve any further into the matter. No matter what secrets his daughter was keeping, he did not care, unless his daughter herself was willing to tell him. The parenting bible had clearly stated that one of the taboos was trying to dig into all the secrets of one's child and trying to control them. This would make a child very resentful, angry, and unhappy — the child may even become hateful of the parent, affecting the relationship between father and son (father and daughter).

As a wise and intelligent father, he would never make such a low-level mistake! Ling Xiao thought proudly.

Ling Lan returned victorious and was welcomed back by four gazes filled with envy-jealousy-hate from the other contestants of the First Men's Military Academy. Ling Lan smiled bashfully and alighted using the elevator platform.

Striding up to the four people, Ling Lan looked at Qiao Ting and said calmly, "To complete the mission, it all depends on you now, Senior Qiao."

Qiao Ting stared at her meaningfully and said in a tone steeped in connotation, "I will not lose!" He moved past Ling Lan to the area below his ace mecha and stepped onto the elevator platform before finally walking into his cockpit.

Right then, Qiao Ting already knew that Lin Xiao or Jiang Shaoyu or whomever were all not the people he needed to watch — his greatest rival in this life was this currently still inconspicuous Ling Lan, whose name would spread far and wide later on following the creation of this shooting art. Actually, from the start, from the moment Ling Lan had turned Leiting on its head, they were destined to be lifelong rivals.

As soon as Qiao Ting left, Mu Shaoyu smiled, raised a big thumbs up, and said in a low voice, "Regiment Commander Ling, awesome ²!"

Mu Shaoyu's words made Han Yu beside him harrumph coldly before turning to walk away. Mu Shaoyu could not help but smirk coldly and say, "Don't worry about him. This fellow's pettiness is acting up again." As a long-time rival, Mu Shaoyu knew Han Yu too well — Han Yu had always thought that his mecha control was better than Ling Lan's, but reality had just slapped him in the face. Among the six people who were participating in the group mecha combat event, other than Zhang Jing-an, Han Yu had proven to be weakest of the bunch. He found this hard to swallow right at that moment.

"It's fine. I've only defeated a top 32 opponent. It's nothing worth mentioning," replied Ling Lan nonchalantly. Ever since she had stolen Li Lanfeng and Zhao Jun from Wuji, her relationship with Han Yu could not be described as friendly. If her own regiment members had been stolen away by another regiment commander, Ling Lan believed that she too would not be big-hearted enough to still play nice with the other.

"Not worth mentioning?" Mu Shaoyu gaped. "Regiment Commander Ling, you are the first to have created a mecha technique in over 50 years. I believe that from tomorrow onwards, no no, maybe from now onwards, you will be renowned throughout all of human society."

"Created a technique? Renowned throughout all of human society? What does this have to do with me?" Ling Lan frowned and cast a cold glance at Zhao Jun, asking him what Mu Shaoyu really meant. Was he actually mocking her?

Zhao Jun quickly explained, "As long as a heretofore unseen technique appears, if it was created by an individual, the technique would be named after the individual. Boss Lan, that shot you sent at the opponent as you were flying will be named after you, Boss ..."

In the mindscape, Little Four abruptly clapped a hand to his head. He seemed to have, probably ... forgotten to tell his boss about this.

As Zhao Jun explained, his entire face was filled with envy and respect. These cadets were at most fighting to be the number one within their respective academies. Creating a new technique? That was not something they even dared to think of. In their minds, this was something much too distant from them and so had nothing to do with them. Who could have guessed that his clan leader Ling Lan would actually manage to do this right before their eyes? And so easily too!

“Ah, is that a new technique?” Zhao Jun’s words surprised Ling Lan.

“Isn’t it?” Zhao Jun was dumbfounded. It was obviously a new technique, right? He had not seen wrong, Qiao Ting had not seen wrong, none of the others had seen wrong.

“What do you say?” Ling Lan cast a cold glance at him. This Senior Zhao ... did he not learn his basic controls properly? She had obviously just used the fixed-point shooting technique in basic controls, so what did this have to do with a new technique?

“...” Zhao Jun became rather flustered by Ling Lan’s oppressive gaze. Could it be that he had really made a mistake? He asked carefully, “That ... ah, Boss Lan, may I ask, what technique did you use earlier?” Feeling tentative and unsure, Zhao Jun actually began speaking more formally.

“Fixed-point shooting. You really couldn’t tell?” Ling Lan was even more worried now, which made the chill surrounding her body become even colder. It looked like Senior Zhao Jun’s basic controls were really not solid enough. She needed to think of a way to help him fix that as quickly as possible.

The higher her level, the more Ling Lan understood the deeper meaning behind her dad’s legacy which had emphasized the importance of the basic controls. This was because once one had entered ace level, the basics were the key to advance to the next realm. And yet, after one had entered ace level, one’s personal operation style would gradually begin to form. By the time they reached the late stages of ace realm and wanted to advance to the next realm, the mecha master would find that this problem was an obstacle restricting their advancement. At that time, it would already be too late to turn back and train up their basic controls. Having already formed their own operation style, they would not be able to develop their basic controls any further. Only if their brains were switched so they would forget their own style, then perhaps there would still be a chance to do so.

Ling Lan had already come to a decision in her mind — before Senior Zhao Jun left the academy, she would use basic controls to have a few good spars with him. She had to make sure his foundations became a little more solid.

Zhao Jun could not know that just by asking such a simple question, he had signed himself up for a great amount of torment under Ling Lan’s hands before he would enlist into an army division. He would be tortured so badly that he would almost lose all confidence to even board a mecha to fight ever again ...

Right then, still blissfully ignorant, Zhao Jun once again asked tentatively, “But fixed-point shooting can only be used in a stationary state. Fixed-point shooting while running, is it still fixed-point shooting?”

“Isn’t it essentially still the same? I merely applied it more flexibly,” answered Ling Lan blithely. “It really isn’t a new technique!”

When Instructor Number Three had been teaching her, he had said so very clearly — there was no technique which would never change. Only by incorporating techniques into real battle would techniques become truly useful. She had merely adapted a stationary fixed-point technique for use during motion — there was no difference in the nature of the technique.

If this counted as a new technique, Ling Lan really did not know how many new techniques she had then. Basically, with the guidance and assistance of Instructor Number Three, she was now able to make some changes to every single basic technique.

Sensing that his boss was speaking the truth as Ling Lan was so calm and indifferent towards the whole new technique naming business, Zhao Jun found himself awed and speechless. The great and supreme honour of having a technique named after him was actually unable to move Boss Lan ... he really did not know what else could successfully crack Boss Lan's ice-block face.

In truth, all of the members of the clan secretly wished to see this happen. They were even betting with each other, betting to see who would be the first to see Boss Lan's expression change. Just now, he had really thought he was about to win ... but reality proved that he had still underestimated Boss Lan and had been gleeful for nothing.

On this end, Ling Lan and Zhao Jun were discussing about whether the technique was or was not a new technique, while on the other end, Qiao Ting was already operating his mecha onto the field as prompted by the staff.

Ling Lan and the rest saw this and turned their attention to the combat field. As for whether that move of Ling Lan was considered a new technique, there was actually no need to argue over it — in the end, the final decision would depend on the military. If the military felt that it was, then it was; if they felt it wasn't, then it wasn't.

In reality, among the general public, there were many extremely unique and dangerous mecha techniques spread around in secret. Due to some problems and flaws here and there, or perhaps some doubts with regards to their safety, these mecha techniques had all been unable to receive official military recognition in the end and had been relegated to pseudo-techniques.

Qiao Ting's opponent was the weakest of the Tongli mecha operators — the outcome of this match was already clear even before it started. If not for the fact that giving up without a fight would disgrace their military academy, the Tongli mecha operators might have just chosen to raise their hands up and surrender right at the start.

The match officially began with the downward swing of the referee's green flag. Qiao Ting instantly pulled away from the opponent — his speed was comparable to Ling Lan's, leaving the audience exclaiming in awe. Only some top-class operators noticed that there was still some gap between the reaction speed of the two.

Likewise, Qiao Ting himself noticed it too. After he pulled away, the corners of his lips tilted downwards in disappointment. At the instant when he had moved his fingers to control his mecha, Qiao Ting already knew he had still been a beat slower than Ling Lan. It was not that he did not want to start piloting from the very moment the flag swung down, but his fingers had still slowed a little beyond his control in the instant that he had intended to move. And this brief pause had made him slower than Ling Lan by 0.1 seconds.

With regards to mecha piloting, even the difference of 0.01 seconds was enough to change the tide of a battle. What more this delay of 0.1 seconds? This amount of difference in their reaction times was enough for him to die more than a dozen of times.

At this moment, Qiao Ting deeply admired the strength of Ling Lan's heart — how bold did this person have to be to dare to execute such seamless operation right on the line? Was he not afraid of committing a foul?

Qiao Ting's opponent did not hurry to chase after him when Qiao Ting pulled away. Instead, he stood his ground, calmly waiting for Qiao Ting to pull away till the optimum long-range attack distance for him, looking for all the world like he was resigned to his fate.

No one boo-ed him for his decision, because the audience was well aware that up against an ace operator several times stronger than him, even if he chased after the other with all of his might, he would not be able to close the distance. At most, he would only be able to buy himself some time; the outcome would not change. In that case, he might as well wait calmly and use these brief few seconds to properly think about how he would handle what comes next.

As soon as he achieved the distance he needed for his long-range attack, Qiao Ting drew a long-barrelled gun from his back. This gun was not Qiao Ting's favoured weapon, the ballistic sniper rifle, but the same weapon Ling Lan had used, the standard equipment of long-range mecha: a long-range long-barrelled beam gun.

With a snap, the long-barrelled gun arced through the air to hitch securely on his shoulder, held up by his left hand, sight aimed at the opponent.

A "bang", and a beam shot out from the muzzle. From setting the gun into place and aiming to pulling the trigger, the entire series of actions had been completed in just two seconds. Qiao Ting almost gave his gun no time to lock onto the target ...

This time frame startled cheers out of the audience. Compared to Ling Lan, Qiao Ting's actions had been even more well-practiced and compact, his posture was more elegant and natural, and the time he used was so short that it made the people's eyes bulge.

With a boom, the beam accurately landed where the Tongli mecha had been standing, instantly creating a shallow pit. As with Ling Lan's first shot, the Tongli mecha master accurately dodged this shot.

When Zhao Jun saw this, his expression shifted and he whispered to Ling Lan, "Boss Lan, Qiao Ting seems to be replicating your movements."

Right then, Ling Lan was standing before the large screen and watching the match with her arms folded across her chest. When she heard what Zhao Jun said, she nodded calmly and said, "Hn. The same fixed-point shooting, from taking aim to shooting, this shot of his took at least one second less than mine did. In terms of long-range, he is indeed better than me." Ling Lan was not afraid to face the truth. If her innate talent Profound Insight had not been so nature-defying, she would still be unable to compete against these aberrant prodigies with long-range innate talents at long range.

Zhao Jun chuckled, not at all taking Ling Lan's words seriously. Frankly, Zhao Jun did not think Ling Lan was weaker than Qiao Ting by much. Speed did not mean anything — managing to hit the target was what really mattered.

After evading this first shot, the Tongli mecha operator did not act like his teammate had and try to close the distance between him and the opponent. Instead, he continued to stay in place, cautious, waiting for Qiao Ting's next attack.

He knew very well that even if Qiao Ting's close-combat abilities were very bad, with the distance between their mecha now, he had no chance at all of winning. In that case, he might as well maintain

this distance and carefully deal with the opponent's long-range attacks. Perhaps that way, he might still be able to hold out for some time.

The Tongli mecha master's thoughts were quickly seen through by Qiao Ting. He frowned lightly and shook his gun's muzzle, and then ... "Bang! Bang! Bang!" Three shots rang out.

These three consecutive shots of Qiao Ting's landed in sequence at different positions. The first shot landed where the Tongli mecha operator had been standing at the start, and the subsequent two shots landed where the Tongli mecha operator had moved to after he had dodged that first shot.

The Tongli mecha operator could only keep dodging, dodging, dodging. His figure flashed three times in quick succession, but he was unknowingly moving forwards as he dodged.

Some of the top-class mecha masters could already see the real purpose behind Qiao Ting's three shots at this time. They felt speechlessly amused at Qiao Ting's youthful competitiveness, and some were shaking their heads, thinking silently that he was still too young, not able to keep himself grounded.

On the rostrum, Ling Xiao saw this and quirked an eyebrow. Was this a challenge towards his daughter? He looked at Qiao Ting's mecha with interest and wondered how exactly this youth who was known as the second Ling Xiao would perform.

After the Tongli mecha operator evaded those three shots, before he had a chance to stop to catch his breath, Qiao Ting had followed up with another three shots, forcing the Tongli mecha operator to dodge once again.

These three shots of Qiao Ting still did not manage to hit the opponent, but the Tongli mecha operator was again forced to fly forwards because of the three shots. Unconsciously, he had already moved forwards by 300 metres.

After once again safely dodging the three shots, the Tongli mecha operator had already sensed that these last six shots of Qiao Ting's were different from his first shot.

That first shot had obviously been intended to hit the opponent, and so it was outstanding in terms of both speed and accuracy. However, the subsequent six shots after that were not intended to hit the opponent — they were meant to force the opponent to a specific target point. The Tongli mecha operator was not stupid — how could he miss the meaning of these six shots of Qiao Ting?

A strong sense of humiliation jabbed at his heart. The Tongli mecha operator was infuriated and also extremely aggrieved. The power difference between them left him no choice but to move according to the opponent's plans ...

Fine, since you want to do things this way, then let me see if you, Qiao Ting, can also carry off an attack like the one your teammate had. The Tongli mecha operator no longer wanted to be forced by Qiao Ting. He decided to go for broke and, as Qiao Ting wished, he piloted his mecha to fly forwards at a frenzied pace. Perhaps his fury had reached its limits because, despite operating his mecha in a rage, his mecha's speed did not decrease but seemed instead to be even a level higher than before.

Seeing this, a satisfied smile appeared on Qiao Ting's lips — this was what he wanted.

Yes, Qiao Ting wanted to reproduce the move Ling Lan had used to defeat her opponent. He wanted to tell Ling Lan that, whatever the other could do, he could it too.

Just when the opponent was about to enter close range, at that final shooting point within long range for fixed-point shooting, Qiao Ting finally fired that shot he had long had ready.

With a boom, a bright beam of light leapt at the opponent. The Tongli mecha dodged with all its might, but the beam still managed to hit it ... however, the opponent soon broke free, though the power of his mecha's beam shield had been drained considerably, the shield becoming dull and lightless.

"Sure enough, Qiao Ting is trying to completely reproduce your attack methods. After this, it should be that running fixed-point shooting of yours, Boss Lan. I wonder if he'll succeed." Zhao Jun's expression was rather grim — regardless of whether Qiao Ting's running shot worked or not, his behaviour could be labelled as provocation.

"This shot ... Qiao Ting held back." Ling Lan saw things differently than everyone else. Her eyes were telling her that Qiao Ting had not gone all out. Perhaps Qiao Ting did not want to end the match like this — like Zhao Jun said, Qiao Ting wanted to try that in-motion fixed-point shooting of hers.

When she was done speaking, Ling Lan turned back to look intently at the screen. Zhao Jun did not dare to say anything more, afraid to disturb Ling Lan. Zhao Jun did not know that Ling Lan seemed very focused on the match, but she was actually analysing everything she had just seen in her mind. Were all these information also given to her by her innate talent Profound Insight?

As soon as Qiao Ting's shot ended, as expected, he did exactly as Ling Lan had, turning around to fly swiftly forwards. This obvious movement clued the audience in as to what Qiao Ting was planning to do. In the resulting commotion, they eagerly anticipated the outcome — could this number one of the military academies replicate his teammate's attack?

Was it coming now? When the Tongli mecha operator saw the opponent turning to glide swiftly away, he clenched his teeth and slowed down. Even though he was very angry, he still remembered what his teammate had said after his match. He had said that the reason he had been hit by that shot was that he had been flying too fast. By the time he noticed he had flown into the range of the beam shot, there was already no more time for him to change his motions. If he had been a little slower, perhaps the outcome would have been different.

He would learn from this lesson of his teammate. Since the opponent wanted to try that move, then he might as well slow down his speed. He too wanted to know whether Qiao Ting could still hit him after he slowed down.

Chapter 464: Give Up!

"Could it be that everyone from the First Men's Military Academy knows this move? Or maybe this move was created by Qiao Ting to begin with? And that person just used it first?" In the audience, some people had begun their wild speculations, contemplating this possibility. They felt that their guess was very likely to be true — after all, Qiao Ting was the number one of the military academies, and he was

also the supreme prodigy known as the second Ling Xiao. It was much more convincing for him to be the creator of this new technique rather than that unknown youth earlier.

Of course, they also did not dare to claim their conclusions were true just like that — their speculations had to be established upon the premise of Qiao Ting's success in executing this move.

When the distance between the two combatants was once again stretched far enough for fixed-point shooting, Qiao Ting operated his mecha to turn around swiftly. This series of operations were almost identical to Ling Lan's in the previous match ...

The seamless operations left the audience gasping in awe and also made the top-class mecha masters nod silently in approval.

Even one of the two imperial operators monitoring the match from up above could not help but praise, "This kid's pretty good. Almost copying the previous one's movements exactly without making any mistakes."

"Not bad. The title of second Ling Xiao, he's still worthy of it." The other person seemed to be a little pickier with regards to Qiao Ting; his tone was extremely indifferent.

His companion's words surprised the first imperial operator who had spoken. "Ah, so he's the one!" General Ling Xiao was renowned throughout the entire Federation. Ever since that imperial operator had returned to the Federation and found out that it had such an amazingly talented god-class operator, he had been filled with admiration. "Speaking of General Ling Xiao, I heard that there is no technique he doesn't know. They say he's a complete comprehensive talent."

His companion was stunned by his words. "You ... do you not know that General Ling Xiao's innate talent is Duplication?" In the Federation, this was practically an open secret.

In response, that imperial operator said somewhat embarrassedly, "You've forgotten where I'm from."

His companion was suddenly enlightened, recalling the other's background. He said apologetically, "Sorry, I had forgotten you are from the Lawless Lands."

The Lawless Lands was one of the three ungoverned zones at the fringes of human-populated star systems. It was hundreds of thousands of light-years away from the Federation. The resources there were extremely scarce and the climate was frightful, even worse than that of fourth-rate planets which had been labelled by the Federation as possessing the worst living conditions for human beings. Without a certain level of strength, it was impossible for someone to live there.

The Lawless Lands was a place of sin. Aside from the rare aborigines, all who stayed there were criminals and fugitives from the various nations.

At the Lawless Lands, war and strife reigned all year round — different factions warred with each other, vying for their own territory. There, ace operators were as common as dogs. Anyone who was not an ace just could not survive, and only imperial operators could live like actual people, obtaining a secure place for themselves.

Of course, once someone in the Lawless Lands succeeded in ascending to imperial operator level, they would have the chance to start anew and choose their future path again. They could choose to return to

the world of human order (war criminals and refugees mostly chose this option), and their past crimes would be wiped clean. Of course, they could also choose to continue remaining in the Lawless Lands (the aborigines mostly chose this option) and become a duke in their own right.

That imperial operator was originally a deserter from the Federation. When he had advanced to imperial level, he had chosen to return to the Federation and become a member of the foreign deterrent forces of the military. However, when he had run away to the Lawless Lands back then, Ling Xiao had not been born yet, and there had always been an embargo on news and material goods enforced by the various human nations against the Lawless Lands. Thus, it was impossible to hear news of Ling Xiao there. The imperial operator had only heard bits and pieces of General Ling Xiao's exploits after returning to the Federation, and so he really did not know some of these open secrets.

His companion's apology swept away the imperial operator's awkwardness. He continued to say, "Duplication for an innate talent ... that's insane! So this innate talent can fully duplicate an opponent's techniques after seeing it just once ¹?"

"Yes, you can say that. That's why everyone says that he knows every technique. Even for those he doesn't know, he just needs to see others perform it once and he'll know them," said his companion in an envious tone.

It should be known that the average mecha master needed multiple rounds of tough training to fully comprehend and master an advanced technique and make it their own. In contrast, this innate talent of Ling Xiao was like a cheating device, greatly shortening the time needed to acclimatize. As long as Ling Xiao wanted a skill, just observing it once would do. What's even more frightening was the fact that video recordings of many of the existing present-day mecha techniques could be found in the virtual world. Therefore, as long as Ling Xiao wanted, there really was no technique he could not obtain.

Of course, this did not rule out the fact that some secluded elite families would have their own secret techniques. These definitely could not be found in the virtual world, but they had to be very careful and remember to never display these skills before General Ling Xiao, otherwise these top-secret techniques which symbolised the sect and family clan would become General Ling Xiao's too.

"Perhaps, this is also why General Ling Xiao was able to ascend to god-class," said the imperial operator from the Lawless Lands enviously. At their level, they could already tell what their limits were. They had already exhausted their potential to become imperial operators, and so they were destined to be imperial operators for life now. Not fated to become god-class operators ... it had to be said that this was their regret.

The two of them only chatted casually a bit more before their attention was drawn to Qiao Ting's strange condition.

In mid-flight, Qiao Ting had adjusted his shooting direction several times, and just when everyone thought he was about to shoot, he did not move, holding back. From the time he had turned to fly in the opposite direction till now, three minutes had passed. In contrast, from turning around till shooting, Ling Lan had only used one minute. There was no doubt that the time Qiao Ting was using had already exceeded Ling Lan's by double the amount ...

Qiao Ting's gaze was tightly locked onto the opponent within the sight of his gun; he could almost see the chance to shoot again ... his finger could not help but twitch, but in the end, he still eased the pressure off his finger and endured, once again choosing to give up.

He clearly felt that there was a chance, but he did not have the courage to take the shot because he was not 100% certain, no, he was not even 50% certain he would succeed. Otherwise, with more than half the chances, he would have been willing to take the gamble. Only at this time did he know that he had still underestimated this seemingly simple mobile fixed-point shooting ...

"Should I give up now?" Sweat started to flow down from Qiao Ting's forehead, sliding over the curves of his eyebrows to drip down along the bridge of his nose ... he, who had always been confident, began to doubt himself for the first time. Could he really recreate that move of Ling Lan's? Perhaps he should have used a more stable shooting art to complete this sure-kill.

"No, I cannot give up! Once I give up, that would mean I have admitted defeat to Ling Lan!" Another stubborn voice in Qiao Ting's mind leapt out to stop him.

"If you cannot complete that move, you would still have lost to Ling Lan!" Rationality once again calmly asserted the facts. *"In that case, you might as well do what you should."*

"Should I really just end things like this?" Qiao Ting was very reluctant.

"Even a decade is not too late for a gentleman to take revenge², and besides, your true battle with Ling Lan is a year later. Why are you in such a hurry to suppress the other now? Envy will not let you improve ..." Rationality once again won the upper hand. Qiao Ting's gaze settled and he made his decision.

"The time is fast approaching 4 minutes. Compared to that teammate of his, he has already used almost three minutes more. It looks like that mobile fixed-point shooting has stumped him," the imperial operator from the Lawless Lands could not help but grin and say. Qiao Ting's abnormal state naturally could not fool the eyes of the two imperial operators up above.

"He is still a little too young and wilful, thinking that his control skills cannot be weaker than the other, conceitedly thinking to replicate the other's special technique. Unfortunately ... this special skill is not something one can learn with just one look. Even if he knew all the numerical data and operation methods, to perfectly execute it would still require countless practice runs," his companion sighed and said, shaking his head. Qiao Ting's mecha operation innate talent was indeed very outstanding, but that alone was not enough. The only question now was whether this Qiao Ting would realize this in time — the imperial operator hoped that Qiao Ting would not disgrace the title of 'second Ling Xiao'.

"There is only one General Ling Xiao!" said the Lawless Lands imperial operator. Similarly, he too was not optimistic about Qiao Ting's decision to replicate the move.

Qiao Ting's hesitation was very quickly discovered by the audience members. They all began discussing among themselves — some who had initially thought that the mobile fixed-point shooting was created by Qiao Ting had also decisively discarded this notion at this time. Right then, they were no longer concerned with the final outcome. Instead, what they wanted to know was whether Qiao Ting would take that shot at the end and whether that shot would succeed.

Qiao Ting had been a decisive person from the start — he only hesitated out of self-doubt for an instant. Once his mind was firm once more, he no longer hesitated. He quickly changed his shooting stance. This shift threw the audience into an uproar — they had not expected Qiao Ting to choose to give up after hesitating for up to 4 minutes.

“Good. Daring to ignore any taunting and giving up decisively to choose the most accurate method of attack ... this Qiao Ting’s future is immeasurable.”

Unlike the audience, the eyes of the top-class mecha masters in attendance as well as the representatives from the various army divisions lit up. The current Qiao Ting, compared to before, had grown again in terms of mentality. Moreover, within this extremely short time frame, he had been able to decisively make the most accurate judgment. Even if he was put into a battlefield, he should be able to live a little longer than others.

The Federation truly valued ace operators, but they valued this kind of ace operator who could live longer even more. This was because only ace operators who survived could climb even higher and higher peaks to become the Federation’s ultimate weapon and become a deterrent against other countries.

Without question, this performance of Qiao Ting’s had proven that he was likely to be this type of person. Several army division representatives even decided that they would return to report to their commanders to fight for Qiao Ting to join their divisions.

Qiao Ting very quickly corrected his stance and once again reverted to his most proficient attack method. That feeling of having everything within his control returned, and he quickly took aim at the opponent, locked on instantly, and pulled the trigger.

“Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!” Almost without any pause, four shots were fired simultaneously. In the end, Qiao Ting had still chosen his best advanced shooting art — the N-point Blockade.

The N-point Blockade could fire up to nine bullets simultaneously, sealing off all possible landing points of the opponent at the same time. To begin with, this shooting art combined with the extraordinarily powerful ballistic sniper rifle was a match made in heaven, capable of instantly strangulating the opponent in its web. Now, executed with a long-range long-barrelled beam gun, although its power had been reduced by n-levels, it was still exceedingly easy to land hits on the opponent and deal damage with this technique.

Chapter 465: A Bizarre Line-Up!

The Tongli mecha operator had not expected Qiao Ting to not display mobile fixed-point shooting in the end and choose instead to use his best shooting art, so the Tongli operator’s slow speed made things even easier for the N-point Blockade. The Tongli mecha operator was unable to dodge these four shots — three beam projectiles successfully hit his mecha one after the other, causing his beam shield to once again become dull and dim.

Before the Tongli mecha operator could recover from the shots, Qiao Ting pressed his advantage by suddenly bringing his mecha into a rapid stop in the air with only a slight shake to show for the strain.

Qiao Ting quickly counteracted the issue with his controls. And then, he once again changed his shooting stance, and a powerful beam shot out from the muzzle of his gun, heading right at the opponent.

“Fixed-point shooting!” This stance that Qiao Ting had shifted back into right before shooting was all too familiar to the crowd, causing almost all of the spectators to exclaim in surprise.

Having already been hit by three shots from the N-point Blockade, the Tongli mecha operator had yet to stabilise his mecha when he was struck by this powerful beam. With a loud boom, his mecha’s beam shield was instantly destroyed by the beam. Without the protection of a beam shield, the mecha suffered an intense explosion and a thick cloud of smoke rose into the skies.

The referee quickly waved the red flag in his hands, suspending the match. In his anxiety, he was also quietly taken aback at how ruthless the students of the First Men’s Military Academy could be, actually blowing up yet another mecha. He could only hope that this time, the Tongli cadet was also safe and unharmed.

After checking on the mecha, the referee sighed in relief. Like his teammate earlier, Qiao Ting’s final attack had only struck the opponent’s head and not the cockpit. After the referee made contact with the contestant inside the mecha, the contestant’s safety was confirmed.

“Who’d have expected that after Qiao Ting had given up on mobile fixed-point shooting, he would still use fixed-point shooting to finish the match? Looks like he’s very persistent ...” Zhao Jun was amused.

Ling Lan also smirked silently at those words. She had not expected Qiao Ting to be so persistent, really. Although his provocative actions were very annoying, Ling Lan did not have any strong negative feelings towards Qiao Ting. Just as with the previously arrogant and haughty Li Yingjie, even though she felt that he was rather troublesome, she still did not hate or dislike him.

The referee very quickly declared Qiao Ting the winner. Overall, the First Men’s Military Academy defeated the Tongli Military Academy with a score of 3-2 and advanced to the next round.

With the end of this round’s matches, the First Men’s Military Academy moved into the top 50. However, the morning’s matches were not done yet. After this, there was still an additional round for the competitors to advance from the top 50 into the top 32. However, not all the military academies would participate in these extra advancement round matches. The military academies in the top 10 of the last tournament would directly advance to the top 32 in this tournament, unless any of them were unexpectedly eliminated during the top 50 advancement round.

Consequently, not long after, the First Men’s Military Academy was once again informed by the organizers that they had successfully advanced to the top 32. This meant that their morning matches were done; now they only had to prepare for the top 32 into 16 round.

Right then, Qiao Ting had already operated his mecha to return backstage. He returned the mecha to its spot and then walked out of the cockpit, stepping onto the elevator platform to slowly descend to the ground. Expression stern, he walked over, and when he passed by Ling Lan, he gave her a deep stare.

Ling Lan thought Qiao Ting had something to say, but surprisingly, Qiao Ting just walked on by with that one look, moving over to a chair in a corner to sit down.

That Tongli mecha operator whose mecha had been destroyed by Qiao Ting had also returned from the field. Of course, he had only returned in person as his mecha had already been broken by Qiao Ting and had been taken directly to the repair shop. When he saw Qiao Ting sitting in the corner, he could not hold back his immense frustration and so he scoffed loudly and said, “Hehe, this match was really too godd*mn irritating! Clearly not one’s style, yet insisting on doing things that way, clowning around in front of a true expert ... this is a self-inflicted loss of face!”

He seemed to be talking about himself, but anyone with a clear mind could tell who he was alluding to. Everyone could not help but turn to look at Qiao Ting in his corner, wanting to see how he would react.

Qiao Ting did not seem to have caught the other’s allusion, still remaining seated, his expression glacial. Compared to these trivial sarcastic remarks, Qiao Ting was more concerned about having been shown up by Ling Lan in long-range combat. This had put him in a very bad mood.

If Ling Lan had shown this strength in close combat, Qiao Ting would not have felt this way, but this had just so happened in long range. Qiao Ting had been very confident that there was no one in the military academies who could rival him in long range. When he found that Ling Lan’s skills in long range were no weaker than his, even good enough to forge a special move when he could not, his initial sense of superiority was blown to pieces and he found that he could no longer maintain his composure.

Han Yu glanced over at Qiao Ting with schadenfreude in his eyes. He was very happy to see Qiao Ting fail to reproduce Ling Lan’s attack method and lose face. In the same year as Qiao Ting, he had been so frustrated from being suppressed by him for five years. Just seeing Qiao Ting suffer and lose face gave him a sense of catharsis.

Meanwhile, Mu Shaoyu looked contemplatively at Qiao Ting and then glanced at Ling Lan — he decided to maintain the high ground and not get involved in this mess.

Zhao Jun was grinning widely. With his tough and built appearance, combined with his smile, he really had the look of a silly giant, looking for all the world like he did not have a single deep thought in his head 1 he did not have a single deep thought in his head 没心没肺: The original phrase here is ‘no heart no lungs’, which can sometimes mean someone doesn’t have any feelings/compassion, but here I took it to mean that Zhao Jun looked like he had no depth, an empty big well-built husk of a body. . This appearance of his made quite a number of people think that he might really not have understood the allusion that had been made.

Only Ling Lan turned a piercing cold gaze over when she heard this!

The Tongli mecha operator had originally wanted to throw another verbal jab at Qiao Ting, but Ling Lan’s sudden and unexpected cold glance made him shudder violently. Ling Lan could already control her force of presence freely, so although she still gave others a very cold impression, she already no longer gave others the same oppressive feeling as before. This was also why she had been overlooked at one point during the tournament.

However, Ling Lan had threaded this stare of hers with her force of presence, stabbing directly at the other’s mind, inflicting terror so the other no longer dared to say anything more.

The other observers were waiting for the Tongli mecha operator to continue mouthing off, but unfortunately, after just that one opening salvo, his expression had changed and he had suddenly fallen silent. The observers felt it was a bit of a shame — they had wanted to see some drama unfold.

With nothing to see, the crowd's attention dispersed. Only then did Zhao Jun's smile retract, and then he asked quietly, "Boss Lan, why did you help?" This was clearly a chance to deal Qiao Ting a blow — why did Boss Lan want to prevent it?

Ling Lan glanced coolly at Zhao Jun and said, "We're representing the First Men's Military Academy!" That said, she turned and walked away.

This statement jolted Zhao Jun's heart. He was abruptly enlightened, and cold sweat broke out all over his body ... his apprehension towards Qiao Ting had made him forget that right now, he and Qiao Ting were not opponents but comrades-in-arms. When a comrade had been insulted by someone else, he had just stood on the side-lines and watched — this had completely tarnished the term 'comrade'. Zhao Jun felt very ashamed.

Standing to one side, Mu Shaoyu had also heard what Ling Lan had said. He too was stunned to awareness, and like Zhao Jun, he was silently ashamed at himself. Watching Ling Lan's upright back, his emotions were complicated. He had not expected that he would lose to a junior three years younger than him in terms of magnanimity 2 magnanimity 心胸气度: Literally 'heart and chest capacity and general air of bearing'. Generally used to refer to one's ability to be a bigger person. I like this definition by the Merriam-Webster dictionary for 'magnanimity' which explains the concept being conveyed here pretty well IMO. "Loftiness of spirit enabling one to bear trouble calmly, to disdain meanness and pettiness, and to display a noble generosity." .

Likewise, Han Yu had also heard Ling Lan's words. His expression changed, and even as he felt frustrated and regretful, he also could not help but begin envying and hating Ling Lan. Who was Ling Lan to say this? They were the seniors, the seniors! Did he think they did not already know this?! Did they need him to teach them this? Unable to face the darkness in his own heart, he could not help but push the blame onto Ling Lan and get angry at her instead.

Qiao Ting had also heard every single word Ling Lan had said. He snapped his head up and looked towards Ling Lan's back, his gaze dark and difficult to fathom. After a good long while, he sighed heavily and said with a wry smile, "Having such a junior is really an unpleasant thing!"

Qiao Ting's dejected mood after coming off the field was completely gone. He stood up and prepared to leave, and as he passed by Zhao Jun and Mu Shaoyu, Mu Shaoyu suddenly called out to him, "Qiao Ting, sorry for earlier."

Qiao Ting glanced at him calmly and asked, "Sorry? What for? We're not gossiping aunties. Why should we quibble with others?" He had not been bothered by the opponent's words to begin with — this type of low-level methods ... he, Qiao Ting, did not think much of it.

Qiao Ting's words made Zhao Jun and Mu Shaoyu laugh, and there was a sense of the tension of unresolved emotions dissipating. At this time, Han Yu also walked over and with a hint of pride on his face, he said, "Qiao Ting, during this time, I am no longer the regiment commander of Wuji!" The

connotation being that he would cooperate in playing the role of being purely a member of the First Men's Military Academy for this duration of time.

Although Han Yu's attitude was not the best, his words truly showed that he was willing to lay aside all grudges for now to work together. This result pleased everyone else there — the rather motley group which struggled to cooperate thus far had finally stepped onto the right track.

Ling Lan did not know that her offhand remark would lead the First Men's Military Academy to be united like never before; she had set down solid foundations for the final battle royal.

Very quickly, the afternoon arrived. Qiao Ting, Ling Lan, and the rest once again came to the combat field to wait for the organizers to announce the name list for the matchups of the top 32. The announcement time was set as 1 p.m. — Ling Lan peered at the time displayed on the large screen and saw that there was still about half an hour before then.

As all the participating students of the top 32 round had come to the backstage to wait, the initially empty and spacious backstage was now rather crowded. In particular, it was packed three layers thick on top of another three layers thick before the large screen.

"Ah ah! We still came too late," said Mu Shaoyu regretfully, looking at that large pile of people before the screen. He really did not have the confidence to squeeze his way through that many hulking stout men.

Nonchalantly, Zhao Jun said, "We'll definitely find out what the results are eventually. We don't have to rush it down to this minute and this second."

Ling Lan had even less interest to go squeeze with the crowd and be squished — she immediately sought out an empty corner and sat down. With Little Four around, even if she did not stand watch in front of the large screen, she would still be able to get the match-up lists at soonest notice.

Seeing Ling Lan find an empty spot and sit down, Qiao Ting also found a spot three seats down from her and sat down. Seeing that both their public leader and secret leader had chosen to sit down and wait, the other three very quickly found seats as well and sat down.

Soon, half an hour had passed. In their drowsiness, they heard someone shout out, "The name list is out!"

In her seat, Ling Lan was resting with her eyes closed, utterly still, just as if she were completely unmoved by this, her expression calm and centred. This patient and unruffled demeanour affected Zhao Jun and the others as well — they saw that the area around the screen was even more crowded now due to that shout, and so they did not stand up either. They decided to wait till the crowd dispersed before going to take a look.

In reality, Ling Lan did not move because she had already received the match-up list. Little Four was as reliable as always, stealing a copy of the name list as soon as it came out.

The First Men's Military Academy's opponent was the military academy from planet Tianyu 3 planet Tianyu 天宇星: Well, if I had to translate it out, this would be 'planet Skyworld', which is ... meh. So, I chose to leave it in pinyin. . The Tianyu Military Academy was ranked number 32 in the entire Federation, thus making it the weakest among all of the military academies, even worse than the Tongli

Military Academy. For them to win three matches against the super strong First Men's Military Academy ... hehe, unless the First Men's Military Academy dropped the ball themselves, it would be completely impossible. It should be said that as soon as the match-up list was out, the First Men's Military Academy already had half a foot into the top 16.

On the other end, when Jiang Shaoyu from the Second Men's Military Academy found out who his academy's opponent was, his brow furrowed lightly. Their opponent was the rank 22 academy whose mecha operators were all pretty strong. He would have to think well on the matches to win three of them.

Jiang Shaoyu had been feeling very stressed in the past few rounds; having been banned for five rounds, he was very afraid that his academy's team would encounter a strong team early on. The First Men's Military Academy had been thoroughly studied by the other schools, but they still managed to enter the top 32 with little trouble due to their formidable strength. In contrast, the Second Men's Military Academy had had to take great pains to change their line-up and come up with versatile arrangements to avoid pitfall after potential pitfall, shakily making their way into the top 32. There had even been a few matches where there was a certain element of luck to their victory, making Jiang Shaoyu's heart rate swing high and low, enduring quite an ordeal. Without him to hold the fort, the strength of the other mecha operators of the Second Men's Military Academy was just too average, not much different than that of the other military academies. This was another reason why the Second Men's Military Academy was finding it difficult to advance.

Jiang Shaoyu then went on to inquire about the opponent of the First Men's Military Academy. When he learned that it was the Tianyu Military Academy, he could not help but envy and hate the First Men's Military Academy for their amazing luck, actually being matched against the weakest academy of the top 32. Barring any accidents, they were almost confirmed to advance into the top 16.

Reality turned out as Jiang Shaoyu had predicted. Against Tianyu, the First Men's Military Academy won a clean set of three straight matches to advance to the top 16. It should be said that this kind of outcome did not surprise the audience. What did surprise the audience was that the First Men's Military Academy's thus far fixed and unchanging battle line-up had changed.

The first to fight had actually been Qiao Ting. When the large screen displayed the pair for the first match, the appearance of Qiao Ting's name had gobsmacked the entire audience. In everyone's impression, Qiao Ting had always been the one to hold the fort and fight last. They had never expected to see the day where he would play the role of vanguard.

As Qiao Ting being the first to take the stage had shocked the audience so much, whoever took the stage after that could no longer shock the audience as much. Even though the second to take the field was Ling Lan, and the third was Zhao Jun, and the two of them were nothing to sneeze at, the audience was still not as stirred up after that.

For this round, the First Men's Military Academy had seemed to be using a regressive line-up, with the strongest coming out first and the weakest coming out last. In the eyes of the audience, this kind of arrangement was an extremely retarded move. If not for the fact that the members of the First Men's Military Academy were overall stronger than the opponents by a head, this kind of retarded arrangement might have caused them to be eliminated right in the top 16 round.

The afternoon matches did not end there — once the top 16 were determined, the round for the top 16 into the top 10 began immediately after. First, the 16 remaining academies were matched up to fight to determine the top 8. From there, the losing 8 academies would again fight against one another until the final 2 spots in the top 10 could be determined.

This time, the First Men's Military Academy's opponent was the Federal Defence Military Academy which was part of the top 10 in the past. Compared to the Tianyu Military Academy, the Federal Defence Military Academy was much stronger. Due to the First Men's Military Academy line-up in their last round, after much consideration, the Federal Defence Military Academy decided to arrange their line-up in the following sequence of strength: 5, 1, 2, 3, 4.

However, the line-up of the First Men's Military Academy had changed again this time. The first to fight was Mu Shaoyu — with his strength at the top-level of special-class operator, he felt no pressure at all against his opponent who was someone who had just advanced to special-class operator level. He managed to gain the upper hand right from the start, and after 30 plus moves, he had completely whittled away all of the opponent's points to clinch the opening victory.

Many of the audience believed that the First Men's Military Academy had regained their reason and would now arrange their line-up in a logical order, but the second person to step out once again upended this view — Qiao Ting had been sent out again!

This unexpected opponent here left the Defence Academy students beating their chests in frustration — their second fighter was the one they had pinned their hopes on to win their first match for them; he was the strongest special-class operator in their military academy. However, even the strongest special-class operator had no chance of winning against the ace operator Qiao Ting.

Here, the Defence Academy cadets were even a little suspicious — while they had been arranging their line-up, had there been a First Men's Military Academy's spy by their sides who had stolen this intel for the opponent? Of course, this was impossible. The Defence Academy cadets were well aware that this was just a spur of the moment insight on the part of their opponents. It could only be said that the First Men's Military Academy was just too lucky (having calculated things so accurately?).

Having lost two matches in a row, the Federal Defence Military Academy had their backs to the wall now. Their only hope was that the third person to fight for the First Men's Military Academy would be their weakest member — this way, they could still win one match with their second strongest operator and save some face. However, reality was cruel. When Zhao Jun stepped up, they knew that their hopes were dashed.

Zhao Jun, who was a special-class operator endlessly close to breaking through to ace level, the third rank of the single mecha combat event ... how could he be someone the second strongest of their military academy could defeat? Sure enough, once the two contestants started fighting, the Federal Defence operator was completely suppressed by Zhao Jun. After struggling to hold out for around 10 moves, he was defeated by three combo hits from Zhao Jun.

Just like this, the First Men's Military Academy won three straight sets, easily entering the top 10. This also pushed the Federal Defence academy who was initially part of the top 10 into the extra round, where they would have to fight with the other 7 military academies who had lost to fight for the final last spots in the top 10.

However, another military academy that was initially considered no weaker than the First Men's Military Academy unexpectedly lost as well, and that was the Second Men's Military Academy. This was the fifth round of Jiang Shaoyu's ban — as long as his academy could weather this round, Jiang Shaoyu would be able to officially take the field for the rest of the tournament.

But the Second Men's Military Academy's luck seemed to end here. Their opponent was the 7th strongest in the last tournament — their individual mecha's strengths might perhaps not be as good as Qiao Ting's or Jiang Shaoyu's or Lin Xiao's, but their overall strength was rather substantial. All six participating members were all at the top tier of special-class.

Although Jiang Shaoyu tried all kinds of methods to hold out for five rounds, his school still lost with a score of 2-3 in this latest round, resulting in the greatest upset this tournament thus far. Fortunately, they still had the opportunity to participate in the additional round to fight for the final two spots in the top 10 along with the other 7 defeated academies. In all this bad news, the Second Men's Military Academy still had the consolation of one piece of good news — Jiang Shaoyu would be able to officially take to the field again in the extra round. This significantly increased the chances of their school advancing into the top 10.

It should be said that Jiang Shaoyu's ban had lifted at a very timely moment. In the extra round, due to the presence of Jiang Shaoyu, after several tough matches, the Second Men's Military Academy obtained one of the final two tickets into the top 10 along with the Federal Defence Military Academy.

The finalisation of the top 10 also marked the end of the second day of the group mecha combat competition. The night passed in silence, and then it was the third and last day of the group mecha combat competition. On this day, the top 10 military academies would decide the final champions and runner-ups, as well as the rest of the ranking. The top 10 academies were rubbing their metaphorical palms in anticipation, prepared to go all out to bring honour to their school.

In the morning, the top 4 would be decided. The original top 8 would be paired up to compete against one another, with the winners becoming the tentative top 4. At this time, the two academies who had obtained the final two spots in the top 10 would be able to challenge any of the defeated four academies. If they succeeded in their challenge, they would be able to continue on to challenge one of the top 4, and if they succeeded in that challenge as well, they would replace their opponent to become a top 4 candidate.

Likewise, if any of the four defeated academies managed to defend and hold their ground against that first round challenge, they would also earn the right to challenge any of the top 4 academies again. If their challenge succeeded, they too could replace the opponent as one of the top 4. Thus, a first round win here at this stage of the competition did not mean that the winner would be able to laugh till the end.

Very soon, the top 8 into top 4 matches begun. The closer to the end of the competition, the narrower the gap between the strengths of the respective academies became. It was possible for either side to win or lose. The First Men's Military Academy's opponent was the Jingan Military Academy, ranked number 6.

The Jingan Military Academy was very strong, but when they found out that their opponent was the First Men's Military Academy, their expressions became very troubled. No matter when, the First Men's

Military Academy was not an opponent any military academy would like to meet early on in the competition.

It could not be helped. In terms of mecha piloting, the First Men's Military Academy was clearly a head above all of the other military academies. Even though the First Men's Military Academy had always ended up ranking second in the Grand Mecha Tournament overall, they had still never lost the championship position in the mecha combat competition for both single mecha combat and group mecha combat. This also showed that the First Men's Military Academy was holding absolute dominance in the arena of mecha combat.

The Jingan Military Academy did not pull anything strange in their line-up. They arranged their members from the weakest to the strongest in ascending order. The First Men's Military Academy's strange and unfathomable line-ups in the previous two matches had made the Jingan Military Academy give up any thoughts of trying to take advantage of an opportunistic line-up.

Backstage, the five members of the First Men's Military Academy were huddled up together. With a sour expression, Mu Shaoyu asked, "Are we still going to continue using this method to arrange our line-up?"

Zhao Jun grinned and said, "Mu Shaoyu, don't you think this is very interesting?" Zhao Jun was very willing to play along with this; he felt that this way of arranging their line-up was very fun.

Han Yu's expression was filled with displeasure, just eager to get on with things. He tugged harshly on his own sleeves and said impatiently, "Hurry up, hurry up! It's almost time to submit our line-up!"

Qiao Ting frowned at Ling Lan and asked, "Will it be fine?"

Ling Lan quirked a brow and answered calmly, "We just need to win three matches." The implication being that she did not really care.

Qiao Ting glared pointedly at Ling Lan — this idea had been his to begin with, and now he was acting like all this had nothing to do with him ... it was really quite irritating. Qiao Ting turned to look at the other three there and said, "Let's do it!" He definitely would never admit that he too found this way of arranging their line-up rather exciting.

"Ping, Ling, Pang, Lang — Cai 4 Ping, Ling, Pang, Lang — Cai Think of this like the utterance for a kids' game, like 'iniminimainimo' or 'alakazam, walakazoo', etc. It doesn't particularly mean anything.!" Following this cry by Mu Shaoyu, the five of them put out their hands!

"Haha, this time, I'll be the first to fight!" Zhao Jun raised his scissors-hand up high, laughing gleefully. The other four had actually all chosen to throw paper this round, and so he had managed a one-hit kill.

"Tsk, this guy is just too lucky, getting to be among the first three to fight for three times in a row!" Han Yu was unbelievably annoyed. He had already been unable to fight for two rounds already and was about to be bored to death. Tenaciously, Han Yu rolled his sleeves up high, and with the air of a gambler intent on turning things around, he shouted, "Once more!"

Chapter 466: Where Is Your Moral Integrity?

The four of them once again put their hands forwards. Han Yu stared with red eyes at the scissors his hands had formed, so angry that he wished to just chop it off. *Why did you play scissors? Why did you play scissors? Damm*t, couldn't you have stretched out three more fingers?* His entire face a rictus of violent fury, passers-by who inadvertently looked in their direction were instantly sent scurrying back three feet away in fear ...

'My luck is just too horrible!' Han Yu was so frustrated he was gnashing his teeth. The other three had all played rock; he was the only one to play scissors. According to the rules, he was instantly relegated to the final spot, becoming the last person to fight this round. It sounded great, as he would be the finale act, but the problem here was that the four people before him were all like godd*mn bloody wolves and tigers ... would they even give him the chance to come out and fight? Would they? Would they? Would they?! Even thinking with your butt you would know that this was absolutely impossible.

"This round doesn't count!" All worked up, Han Yu demanded this outcome be repealed. Having lost so badly, he had long stopped acting like a gentleman who would never regret a play he had made.

Mu Shaoyu and Qiao Ting, who had been standing beside Han Yu, did not hesitate to grab Han Yu when he displayed such petty behaviour. They summarily tossed him out of their circle — since you have lost, then scam and stay at the side and be quiet. What do you think you're doing blabbering nonsense here?

They were not so stupid as to let a competitor who had already been defeated have a second chance to overturn the results.

Zhao Jun, who already had the right to the opening fight in hand, consoled him with some unholy glee in his tone, "Oh Han Yu, let it go. You'll still have a chance next round!" This sort of insincere consolation was like sprinkling salt on an open wound, instantly enraging the already sullen Han Yu. With a roar, he leapt at Zhao Jun.

The two of them did not use any physical skills, relying solely on the strength of their bodies to grapple with each other. That stance and that momentum ... it was truly the epitome of classical wrestling.

Qiao Ting, Mu Shaoyu, and Ling Lan all wore calm expressions, completely indifferent to the ruckus beside them. The gazes of the three were extraordinarily cold, radiating with powerful fighting spirit. No one was willing to give up on the two slots left among the first three to fight in this round. They all knew that no matter who would be the first three to fight, those three would definitely not show any mercy and give the two members after them the chance to take the field ...

"Ping, Ling, Pang, Lang — Cai!" shouted the three of them in unison, playing their hands at the same time ...

Draw!

Draw!

Draw!

Ten consecutive draws were enough to show how fierce the battle was among the three. None of them were willing to ease up and take a step back.

“Senior Qiao, you are the number one of our military academy. You are most suited to be the last to fight.” After a long fruitless struggle, Ling Lan threw a cold glance over at the stern-faced Qiao Ting beside her and began to prod at him verbally. In order to obtain victory, Ling Lan had made a sneaky move!

“Yeah, Qiao Ting, you’ve already fought for two consecutive rounds already. You can’t keep all the good things for yourself — that’ll incite the wrath of the heavens! It’s time you take a rest. It’s our turn now.” Mu Shaoyu’s eyes lit up at Ling Lan’s words and he immediately jumped on board to put pressure on Qiao Ting.

Qiao Ting’s gaze narrowed at their words, revealing a flash of coldness. He asked in return, “Junior Ling, as a junior, you should know how to respect your elders. How can you fight with your seniors?!”

“Yes, yes, Junior Ling, just cede these two matches to your seniors, okay?” Mu Shaoyu also felt that what Qiao Ting said made sense, so he instantly jumped ship to stand on Qiao Ting’s side, turning against Ling Lan.

Fight, fight! Only this way would he be able to sneak profit amidst danger ¹and obtain a spot among the first three to fight ... Mu Shaoyu’s eyes glittered, glee blooming in his heart ² as he did his best to fan the flames between his other two competitors.

Qiao Ting and Ling Lan had already locked horns — their sharp gazes clashed against the other’s, neither willing to back down.

Just as Mu Shaoyu thought that the two would definitely decide a winner between the two of them, they both suddenly turned to look at him and shouted in unison, “Rock!”

Mu Shaoyu’s reflexes were extremely fast — without conscious thought, his hand had already stretched out to obediently play rock.

Looking down at the paper Qiao Ting and Ling Lan had both played, Mu Shaoyu was livid. He pointed a shaking finger at the two of them, looking to be on the verge of fainting as he said, “You two actually tricked me! That’s too shameful!”

Sob sob sob ... and these two were their public and internal regiment commanders too! Where was their moral integrity? Where, where, where?! Mu Shaoyu was bawling in his heart, silently berating himself for having such quick reflexes, accidentally falling for their trick just like that.

“*Idiot!*” Qiao Ting and Ling Lan glanced coldly at Mu Shaoyu, scorn in their eyes. With that standard of his, actually thinking to fan the flames between them and benefit from their discord ³ ?

Mu Shaoyu was an old rival of Qiao Ting’s, so Qiao Ting was naturally well aware of Mu Shaoyu’s strengths and weaknesses. As for Ling Lan, after this period of observation combined with the data Little Four had gathered, she too had learned of Mu Shaoyu’s characteristics. Qiao Ting and Ling Lan both knew very well that, among the three of them, the easiest person to handle would be Mu Shaoyu. If the two of them really went after each other, it would definitely end with an internecine outcome, which would just ultimately benefit Mu Shaoyu.

The two of them were intelligent people — of course they would not give Mu Shaoyu the chance to profit from their discord. When the two of them had locked gazes, they had already come to a mutual agreement to work together and trick Mu Shaoyu.

Reeling back their disdainful gazes, their eyes met once more as they focused on the final battle between themselves.

Qiao Ting and Ling Lan were completely ignoring him now. Knowing that the outcome had already been set in stone, Mu Shaoyu mournfully squatted in a corner in the backstage area, comforting his poor little wounded soul. He silently bit on his little handkerchief ⁴, poking at the ground grumpily, thinking: *Villains, villains, they're both villains ...*

Ling Lan and Qiao Ting's contest proceeded in a tense silence. Together, they threw out their hands and both of them played rock ...

Ling Lan raised her head and said, "Senior Qiao should play paper!"

Qiao Ting's eyebrows lifted — when did this Junior Ling become so kind, willing to let him win?

And then Ling Lan continued to say, "I'm very interested in scissors!"

D*mn you and your scissors — aren't you just trying to beat me? Qiao Ting replied with a stony expression, "Well, I like to play rock!" Got you! Punk!

Ling Lan raised her head to look calmly at Qiao Ting, her eyes so bright that Qiao Ting's heart was already shouting that things were not good ...

"Senior Qiao is too kind. Actually, I like playing paper!" And with that, Ling Lan did not wait for Qiao Ting to respond, immediately walking over to the staff member to report their line-up for this round.

"This punk!" Qiao Ting's teeth were aching from his frustration. He was so bloody irritating! Actually setting up a verbal trap ... just a moment of inattention and the other had taken advantage of it. Still, he was still part of the first three to fight, so Qiao Ting wasn't all that displeased. He just felt that it was a shame that he had not managed to suppress Ling Lan a little.

Seeing that Ling Lan had gone up to submit their line-up, Han Yu, who was already tired from fighting, finally stopped, and Mu Shaoyu had also recovered from the mental blow he had received to stand up once again. The two of them shared a commiserating look, mourning their misfortune together. They knew very well that they would not have any screen time again this round. The three people before them ... leaving aside Qiao Ting, who needed no mention, even if they did not want to admit it in their hearts, they had no choice but to acknowledge that the other two were indeed stronger than they were by a little. It was a very remote possibility for them to make a mistake and lose ...

Just like that, amidst the sorrows of Han Yu and Mu Shaoyu, the curtains rose on the matches between the First Men's Military Academy and the Jingan Military Academy ...

On the large screen, the names of the first pair to fight appeared. When they saw Zhao Jun's name, the Jingan Military Academy could not help but curse mentally. What in the world was up with the First Men's Military Academy's line-up? Sending their second strongest to fight right off the bat?

In the audience's eyes, Ling Lan, who had been hiding her true strength all this while, ranked third or fourth among the five representatives of the First Men's Military Academy for this group mecha combat event. They believed that she was only a little stronger than Han Yu, at about the same level as Mu Shaoyu but weaker than Zhao Jun by a little. And of course, she could not be compared at all with the ace operator Qiao Ting.

This misperception of the audience was due to Zhao Jun performing so well in the single mecha combat event, forcing a draw with an ace operator at just special-class operator level himself. This result was just too shocking, leading everyone there to believe that Zhao Jun as a special-class operator was an existence who had no rival below ace level. As such, it made complete sense for Zhao Jun to be considered the second strongest in the First Men's Military Academy after Qiao Ting.

Zhao Jun's appearance crushed the hopes of the Jingan contingent for the first match. How could they compete against someone who could force a draw with an ace operator? With this fearful mentality before the fight had even begun, the Jingan mecha operator behaved extremely cautiously from the very beginning of the match. Initially quite strong, he actually only managed to display 70 to 80 percent of his true strength due to this negative mindset.

This caused the difference between Zhao Jun and him to be highlighted even more starkly. Zhao Jun, who had initially intended to have a grand all-out fight, efficiently struck the opponent's cold weapon from his mecha's hands after only 20 moves, easily obtaining the first victory of the round.

Having lost the first match, the Jingan Military Academy could only place their hopes on the second match. For this match, they hoped that Qiao Ting would be the one to appear because they had placed their second weakest member there in hopes of wasting the strength of the strongest mecha operator of the First Men's Military Academy. Then again, they also hoped that the First Men's Military Academy would send out someone of average strength so they could win a match first ...

After a 15-minute recess, the dark large screen finally lit up again to display the following words: "The First Men's VS Jingan — 2nd match: Ling Lan VS Zhu Jing."

"It's Ling Lan! That super newbie who created a new technique!" The appearance of Ling Lan's name caused a commotion among the audience. The response of the audience was even more passionate than when Zhao Jun had taken the field — it looked like the appearance of a new technique had indeed earned Ling Lan some degree of fame within the Federation.

The Jingan Military Academy saw who the First Men's Military Academy had sent and their hearts sank. Compared to Ling Lan, they really wished that it could have been Han Yu or Mu Shaoyu instead, because they were very familiar with those two, having studied their operation style and attack methods very thoroughly, even having conducted targeted training with them in mind. Up against them, Jingan was confident that there was the possibility of victory ...

But this Ling Lan was very mysterious — he had not participated in the single mecha combat event, and in the group mecha combat event, he had only come out to fight two times thus far. These two times had shown Jingan his excellent long-range skills as well as his perfect foundational attacks ... but that was all!

Everyone knew that a special-class operator could not only have mastered some basic attacks; they must have some sure-kill special techniques which were a mark of being a special-class operator ... this was undoubtedly a dangerous thing. If they did not know what special moves the opponent was proficient in, they would not be able to prepare any special defences. Therefore, it would be very easy for the opponent to flip the tables on them at a critical moment. This was another reason why Jingan was so apprehensive of Ling Lan.

“I hope Zhu Jing can perform well and win us this match!” Jingan’s strongest mecha operator, who was also their representative team leader, finally placed their hopes on Zhu Jing. If Zhu Jing could successfully take this match, then they would have hopes of obtaining the final victory.

Chapter 467: The Incident of the Yang Chun Noodles!

Zhu Jing was a long-range attacker. Because he was familiar with all methods of long-range operation, he was even more aware of how impressive Ling Lan was. Although Ling Lan had shown very little in her two matches, Zhu Jing could already tell that Ling Lan was definitely a formidable opponent.

However, despite taking Ling Lan very seriously, Zhu Jing did not think he had no chance of winning. No matter how perfect the other’s basic controls were, that did not mean that they would be able to seriously contend with advanced techniques.

Advanced techniques were developed from basic techniques — birthed from basic techniques, their power was several, perhaps even several multiples of ten, times stronger than that of the basic techniques. This was also why mecha operators would often abandon basic techniques in the later stages to focus on studying advanced techniques to form their sure-kill techniques.

In mecha combat, the ones who most often survived were those who had more advanced techniques under their belt. From this, it could be seen how important advanced techniques were to mecha operators.

Zhu Jing felt that those advanced techniques he knew would be enough for him to contend with his opponent.

Under the guidance of the staff, the two contestants walked out onto the field from two separate passages.

Seeing the two mecha appear on the field, the audience broke out into raucous cheers. After checking to see that both contestants were ready, the referee swung his green flag, signalling the official start of the match.

As soon as the green flag moved, the two mecha zoomed backwards almost simultaneously. Zhu Jing was piloting a long-range mecha, so he naturally wanted to attack from long range. Meanwhile, although Ling Lan was piloting a balanced mecha, she intended to hone her long-range operation, and so ended up sharing a common goal with Zhu Jing to bring the fight into long range. This made the atmosphere less tense than it had been in Zhao Jun’s match.

Right then, the top-class mecha masters watching the fight could not help but frown as they observed Ling Lan’s operation. They found that Ling Lan had not displayed that wonderful on-the-line operation

she had performed yesterday. Even though her speed was still very fast, those with keen eyes could still see the difference.

Ling Xiao had been watching the field all this while with a slight smile, and at this moment, his smile became even more noticeable ...

Last night, after the matches for the day had ended, as soon as the joyful Lan Luofeng had returned to their living quarters, she had stared mournfully at Ling Xiao.

Ling Xiao very resolutely turned to leave. As a general and a god-class operator, how could he lose to his wife's harmless gaze?

"Hubby~!" The undulating tones of this cry made Ling Xiao's body shudder uncontrollably. The gaze on his back was searing, causing cold sweat to break out all over his body, but he was still determined to pretend he had not heard anything.

Knowing Lan Luofeng well, Ling Xiao knew what would be waiting for him if he turned his head. Lan Luofeng would definitely make an extremely difficult request that he just could not refuse ... experience told him that he must muddle through this somehow!

"Ling Xiao!" Seeing that being sweet and petulant was not working, Lan Luofeng instantly morphed into an angry lioness and roared angrily. Hells, so brave now, eh? Daring to ignore me?!

Ling Xiao rubbed his forehead helplessly. After a brief hesitation, he finally turned around and asked with a wry smile, "Luofeng, did you want something?"

"I want to see Lan-er!" Hands on her hips, Lan Luofeng put forward her request imperiously like a queen.

As expected! Expression gentle, Ling Xiao coaxed softly, "Okay, okay. Wait till after the battle royal and I'll find a chance for you two to meet."

"I mean that I want to see her right now!" How could Lan Luofeng let Ling Xiao muddle his way through this? Just as Ling Xiao knew her well, she too knew what Ling Xiao was plotting under that gentle smiling face of his.

"Lan-er must be tired after today's fights. Let's not disturb her and let her rest ..." Ling Xiao's face was a picture of concern as he attempted to shake Lan Luofeng's resolve.

"That's why I want to see Lan-er. Every time Lan-er is tired, she will always want to eat the Yang Chun noodles 1 Yang Chun noodles 阳春面: Yang Chun noodles is basically plain noodle soup. It is a basic soy sauce and chicken broth based noodle dish, and was traditionally served without any toppings at all. I make!" Lan Luofeng secretly crossed her fingers in her heart — please forgive her for stealing Auntie Nan's 2 Auntie Nan's This is referring to Ling Nanyi, the chamberlain's wife. credit, but she was the one who had instructed Auntie Nan to cook it anyway, so it was not too much to ask for some of the credit, right?

Cook Yang Chun noodles?? When he heard this, Ling Xiao almost did not manage to keep the smile on his face ... thinking about the n-times Lan Luofeng almost burned the kitchen down ... Ling Xiao thought to himself, *'Wife, could you be any more fake?'*

Knowing that her excuse was untenable, Lan Luofeng decided she might as well go for broke. “In any case, I want to give our daughter a bowl of Yang Chun noodles no matter what! If you can’t get it done, then don’t even think about stepping one foot into the bedroom!”

This move again? Godd*mmmit, this was the move he was afraid of! Resigned and helpless, Ling Xiao could only agree!

Of course, Ling Xiao also believed that, with his skills, smuggling a person over was still doable.

However, in truth, Ling Xiao was not only smuggling a person over, but he was also bringing along a bowl of Yang Chun noodles which Lan Luofeng claimed to have made. As for who was the one who had truly made the bowl of Yang Chun noodles ... erm, the truth of the matter was only known by the Ling Xiao couple themselves 3 the truth of the matter was only known by the Ling Xiao couple themselves T/C: I bet all my spirit stones on Ling Xiao being the one who made it. !

Ling Lan took a soothing shower and loosened her joints, and then she finally laid down on her bed to rest. But only several minutes later, Ling Lan suddenly sprang nimbly off the bed and with a quick dash, she was standing behind the door ...

“It’s me!” Her father Ling Xiao’s voice rang by her ear, and Ling Lan instantly relaxed. She quickly opened the door and after a streak of shadow dashed past her, she immediately shut the door after it.

“This late, father, why are you ... mum!” Ling Lan’s initially calm voice turned into a cry when she saw the woman inside Ling Xiao’s arms. She was startled!

“Hi, Lan-er!” In Ling Xiao’s embrace, Lan Luofeng lazily lifted the bag in her hands, shaking it softly in Ling Lan’s direction. A smug smile hung on her lips as she said happily, “I’ve brought you Yang Chun noodles!”

Yang Chun noodles?? Wasn’t that the noodle dish that her mum just could not learn no matter how hard she tried to teach her which had become a specialty of the housekeeper Ling Nanyi in the end?

“I made it, you know!” Lan Luofeng jumped out of Ling Xiao’s arms and pulled Ling Lan by the hand to sit down on the sofa. She carefully opened the bag to reveal a piping hot bowl of Yang Chun noodles ...

Ling Lan cast a critical eye over the bowl of Yang Chun noodles — it really looked pretty good. However, her mum was a culinary killer — even pigs would turn their snouts up at the things she made ... with a solemn expression, Ling Lan accepted the chopsticks Lan Luofeng passed over, and under Lan Luofeng’s enthusiastic urging, she finally gathered her courage enough to pick up a strand of noodle and then, with the determination of staring death in the face, she took a bite.

Eh? Ling Lan’s eyes lit up and she looked down at the Yang Chun noodles before her with astonishment. It tasted very good! Even better than the noodles housekeeper Ling Nanyi made. There was a unique flavour to it — so warm, like rippling sunlight, making her feel completely relaxed.

“Mummy, you made this?” Ling Lan could not help but be suspicious. When had her mum transformed from a culinary killer to a master chef of an imperial kitchen?

At this time, Lan Luofeng's eyes had narrowed into a single line. When she heard Ling Lan's question, she nodded excitedly once more. "Yes! Isn't it very delicious? I tasted it too and was very surprised. For the first time mak- ... er, making such a delicious taste!"

First time making it? Ling Lan had caught Lan Luofeng's slip. She was sure that this bowl of Yang Chun noodles had not been made by her mum. Even if her mum had been sent back to the forge to be remade, she would not have been able to turn into a culinary master — she just was not born with any talent in cooking. Ling Lan involuntarily turned her gaze to Ling Xiao — perhaps her father could give her some hint.

Ling Xiao shiftily avoided Ling Lan's searching gaze, the fingers of his right hand unconsciously rubbing against each other ...

Ling Lan noticed that the pads of Ling Xiao's shifting fingers were somewhat red, as if they had been scalded ... Ling Lan decisively turned her head to place her attention back on Lan Luofeng. She did not dare to confirm her suspicions. If it ever got out that a god-class operator's precious hands which were used to operate a god-class mecha were scalded while cooking noodle for his wife and child, would she and her mother become the public enemies of the entire Federation?

Contemplating the possibility, Ling Lan shuddered. Once again, she was sure that she really did not know anything at all ... yup, and as for this bowl of Yang Chun noodles before her which was the evidence, she would demolish it with relish.

Ling Lan suddenly lifted the large bowl and the chopsticks in her right hand flew. Within the span of several seconds, the Yang Chun noodles had been completely gobbled down, with not even a single drop of soup remaining. She burped loudly before setting down the large bowl in her hands.

Catching sight of the still smugly smiling Lan Luofeng, Ling Lan was crying in her heart. *Oh mum, this time, your daughter was perceptive and caught this early, completely destroying all the evidence. Next time, you must definitely remember to never let dad cook. That's just asking for some major trouble!!!*

How could Lan Luofeng know about the mental anguish Ling Lan was going through inside? When she saw that her daughter had finished all of the noodles, she threw a smug look at Ling Xiao. Ling Xiao saw it and a fond and deeply affectionate smile spread all the way to his eyes. There was also a trace of satisfaction in his eyes so subtle that it was almost imperceptible.

Since Ling Lan was done eating, Lan Luofeng clasped Ling Lan's hands and began nattering on — of course, everything she said was centred around her care and concern for Ling Lan. She told Ling Lan not to be reckless in the tournament and to be careful and so on. Ling Lan listened to it all patiently, assuring her mum every once in a while that she would do as she said.

Ling Xiao looked at the mother-daughter pair before him and his smile deepened even further. He wished dearly that he could move forwards to envelop these two people he loved most in a hug, to convey his happiness and contentment. Ling Xiao had never ever been disappointed that Ling Lan was not a boy — even if he had no other children in this life, he would never regret it.

In the end, Lan Luofeng was finally satisfied with her nagging. Before saying goodbye, Ling Xiao said seriously to Ling Lan, " In a battle not involving life-or-death, there is no need to push things to the limit. Leave yourself some hidden trumps. That is what a mecha master should do! Today, you shone too

much 4 In a battle not involving life-or-death, there is no need to push things to the limit. Leave yourself some hidden trumps. That is what a mecha master should do! Today, you shone too much T/C: Lessons on being low-key from Daddy Ling. Please note. :3 .”

Ling Xiao’s words made a jolt run through Ling Lan’s heart. She thought about how she had indeed kept nothing back in her efforts to prove the limits of her long-range capabilities. With a serious expression, Ling Lan said, “Father, don’t worry. I will take care!”

When he heard this, Ling Xiao was reassured. He brought Lan Luofeng away again with him from Ling Lan’s accommodations. No one knew that General Ling Xiao had ever visited the accommodation area of the First Men’s Military Academy more than once.

The noise of the audience brought Ling Xiao out from his memories of last night ...

“Lan-er, looks like you’ve already figured things out!”

Ling Xiao looked down with satisfaction at the two mecha dashing in two opposite directions at roughly equal speeds. In this match, Ling Lan had remembered what he said and held back!

Ling Lan’s restraint also gave the audience the mistaken impression that the standards of the two mecha operators on the field were similar. Some of the special-class operators and ace operators were even beginning to suspect that Ling Lan’s brilliant on-the-line operation yesterday was just a lucky fluke. Of course, there were also those with keen perception who would not underestimate Ling Lan just because she had shown some restraint ...

Chapter 468: Miscalculation!

Very soon, the two mecha had pulled the required distance away for long-range combat. The seemingly relaxed atmosphere at the start vanished completely at this moment. Everyone sat up straight in their seats, waiting for the first attack from either one of the combatants!

Zhu Jing abruptly raised the M9 long-range projectile sniper rifle in his hands — this was an extremely special long-range sniper rifle which was capable of instant kills. The weight of the gun was three times heavier than that of the average long-range long-barrelled beam gun. Any long-range mecha operator with a slightly weaker physique would not be able to use this heavy fellow.

The M9 long-range projectile sniper rifle’s bullets were made with concentrated Ng gunpowder ¹, and its firing mode was set to a double-shot setting. As long as the bullets managed to make contact with a mecha, they would explode violently. The shock wave generated by the explosion of just one bullet was enough to destroy the defence of a beam shield. The double-shot setting was just so the mecha master using an M9 long-range projectile sniper rifle could achieve a one-trigger kill.

Of course, at present, the bullets in the M9 long-range projectile sniper rifle had already been substituted with extremely low power hollow bullets which would not cause any dangerous damage. However, as soon as the opponent was successfully hit, the referee would not hesitate to declare an end to the match.

Ever since Zhu Jing had advanced to special-class operator, when he had chosen the long-range weapon he wanted to specialize in, he had chosen this extraordinarily heavy and powerful M9 long-range projectile sniper rifle which also had an extraordinarily powerful recoil as well. He had dared to select this weapon because he was confident that his built physique would be able to fully withstand the M9 sniper rifle's kickback when it was fired.

In reality, Zhu Jing's body was extremely strong and tough. When he had first been assessed, his physical constitution had been graded as an S+, so he was naturally suited to be a close-combat operator. In the end, when it had come time for him to decide his future path, he had chosen long-range mecha. His instructor had been unable to understand until he had chosen the M9 long-range projectile sniper rifle as his specialized long-range weapon. Only then did his mentor discover that Zhu Jing had not wasted his exceptional physical constitution. Instead, with this constitution, he was better able to bring out the potential power of the M9 long-range projectile sniper rifle.

Under the careful guidance of his mentor, Zhu Jing had gained a profound understanding of how to use the M9 long-range projectile sniper rifle. His mentor had once asserted that as long as he continued to work hard, Zhu Jing could certainly become the most outstanding assassin in future!

And right now, this future assassin had finally spread his fangs in an attempt to devour his opponent in his first fight ...

"Boss, this is an M9 long-range projectile sniper rifle!" At this point, Ling Lan's initially silent and seemingly standardized mecha A.I. suddenly spoke with Little Four's voice.

Ling Lan had just lifted her long-range long-barrelled beam gun to take aim — Little Four's sudden interjection caused her actions to slow for a moment, and so her gun did not stop at the most optimum position. Ling Lan quickly rushed to remedy that, even as she asked, "Little Four, why are you here?"

"It's an M9 long-range projectile sniper rifle!" Little Four had no mind to answer Ling Lan's question right now, merely repeating his warning shout at her. Little Four could not be blamed for worrying — that was a horrifying sniper rifle notorious within the Federation for its ability to instantly destroy mecha.

"I know!" replied Ling Lan calmly.

"One shot can kill us!" Little Four was very nervous, afraid that his boss did not know how scary that weapon was. One moment of distraction and it would be 'Game Over'.

"I know!" Ling Lan repeated calmly once again.

Ling Lan's composed behaviour calmed Little Four down. "Boss, you're not nervous?"

"Nervous about what? The Grand Mecha Tournament would never allow an overly powerful weapon to appear on the field. Since this weapon is here, then the bullets inside must have already been adapted ..." explained Ling Lan.

"Oh, that's true!" Little Four was enlightened.

"Besides, even if it's real, so what? You should know that we'll one day go onto a real battlefield. There, there'll be all kinds of things, quite a number of them even more frightening than this weapon. If we're

afraid now, then how can we survive the battlefields then?” asked Ling Lan. “So, we’re fortunate to be able to encounter these kinds of weapons beforehand!”

As Ling Lan spoke, she continued moving her fingers unhurriedly, carrying out a whole series of operations. She adjusted her long-range beam gun to aim straight for the opponent ...

In this match, Ling Lan decided that she would listen to her dad and restrain herself a little. She no longer took the initiative, choosing to defend passively instead even though this mode was unlike her usual personality.

When Little Four heard what Ling Lan said, he instantly fell silent. At this time, the A.I. began reporting the numerical data after Ling Lan had applied her adjustments. The moment Ling Lan heard the mechanical tone of voice, she knew Little Four was not in control of the mecha anymore. Ling Lan did not stop to worry about Little Four sudden appearance and disappearance, and this nonchalance was also what caused her to overlook the changes in Little Four. Little Four was acting less and less like an intelligence entity, and more like a real growing child. He was now showing signs of possessing the seven emotions and six desires, as well as personal thinking and judgment ...

Zhu Jing spent some time calibrating his M9 long-range projectile sniper rifle — this was yet another flaw of this weapon other than its clunky weight. The time needed to calibrate it was longer than that which was required for the average long-range gun. This also proved that the M9 long-range projectile sniper rifle was more suited for covert assassinations and not open upfront battle.

“That Ling Lan of the First Men’s Military Academy is just waiting for the Jingan mecha operator to attack. Isn’t he being too overconfident?” The audience saw that the already prepared Ling Lan was not taking the initiative to shoot, instead choosing to wait patiently for her opponent. This rather contrary behaviour made the audience break out into murmured discussion.

Ling Xiao helplessly put his palm to his forehead, feeling that things were not good. Wasn’t his daughter holding back too much now?

Right at that moment, the situation abruptly changed. Just when everyone believed that Ling Lan would wait for her opponent to start shooting first, Ling Lan, who had been still all this while, suddenly pulled her trigger. A beam of light shot straight at the opponent — it was Ling Lan’s memorable fixed-point shooting.

This attack came on too suddenly — everyone looked towards Zhu Jing, waiting to see what he would do. Would he be hit or would he dodge the attack successfully?

Zhu Jing’s mecha suddenly shifted to one side, instantly drawing out a stack of afterimages!

“Light-and-Shadow Skim!” Those in the audience who knew their mecha techniques could not help but cry out. This was an advanced technique that only advanced mecha warriors could learn. It and Irregular Dash were the two top-tier footwork operators below ace level could learn.

The evolved version of Irregular Dash was the Irregular Flicker that only ace operators could learn, and likewise, the Light-and-Shadow Skim also had its ultimate version — Unshakable Shadow. This version was said to have even higher requirements — one had to at least be at elite ace realm to learn it.

In short, this Light-and-Shadow Skim was an extremely remarkable evasion footwork. Zhu Jing performed it perfectly, allowing him to easily escape Ling Lan's shot.

Zhu Jing did not just end things by defending. When his mecha's figure was finally restored from the countless stacked shadow images, he pulled the trigger on his gun.

"Bang, bang!" Two shots rang out. Due to the M9 projectile sniper rifle's powerful recoil, Zhu Jing's mecha was sent tilting back beyond his control, and the muzzle of his gun was also driven up a little as well.

The entire audience held their breath as they stared at the field, wanting to know the outcome of this shot. Had the shots hit the opponent, or had they been dodged?

Ling Lan calmly observed the opponent's movements, and at the very instant the opponent made his shot, Ling Lan once again entered that mysterious world where she could see the two bullets suddenly slow down, allowing her to clearly see their trajectories ...

"Right there!" Ling Lan saw a way to handle them, a chance to evade. She quickly pulled her trigger!

A "bang" rang out, and Ling Lan returned from the mysterious world back to reality. The bullets regained their regular speed, and at the same time, the beam gun in Ling Lan's hands fired a dazzling beam of light, which met one of the bullets head-on.

Amidst the energy of the beam, the bullet melted swiftly, finally ending up as a drop of liquid metal to dissipate into the air without a trace. Meanwhile, the other bullet brushed past the range of the beam shot to fly straight at the chest area of Ling Lan's mecha.

Ling Lan's eyes were as calm as water. Her fingers danced, becoming countless blooming flowers on her control panel. Under her control, her mecha swiftly dragged out a streak of residual shadow towards the right ...

"Boom!" A loud explosion rang out as Ling Lan successfully evaded that bullet. The bullet had exploded after striking the earth below, sending up a large spray of dust and dirt, blocking the audience's view for a time.

When the dust settled, the audience could see that where Ling Lan had been standing initially, there was now a deep pit. It was obvious how powerful the bullet was still despite having been adapted for the tournament.

"After testing, that explosive power reaches up to 30 TNT. If we're hit by two consecutive bullets, the mecha's beam shield will be on the brink of collapse." Little Four's voice rang out from the A.I. once more.

"Understood!" Ling Lan replied calmly.

"Boss, that explosion has caused your points to be deducted by 20." Little Four immediately alerted Ling Lan after secretly stealing the latest intel on the referee panel's ruling.

Ling Lan was at first taken aback, but she immediately realised the reason for this penalty. The bullets had been adapted to lower their power, so her mecha had not been affected by the explosion at all.

However, in reality, the bullets would generate an explosive force of 60-70 TNT, so her mecha had not dodged far enough to escape the blast radius.

If the explosion was judged according to real-world standards, her mecha would definitely have been damaged severely. Even if the defensive power of her mecha's beam shield was not destroyed, it would still probably be on the verge of collapsing. Thus, the referees all agreed that that bullet of Zhu Jing was considered an effective attack, so it was reasonable for Ling Lan to have points deducted for it. She had forgotten to take that into account.

Ling Lan felt somewhat regretful — she had initially planned to win the match without losing any points at all, but now it looked like there was no hope of that anymore. She once again lifted her beam gun and aimed at Zhu Jing. Although Zhu Jing's gun was n-times more powerful than her own, the time needed for her to calibrate her gun was significantly shorter. This was her advantage.

Ling Lan had taken so long to prep her first shot only because she was trying to show restraint, and at the same time, she had also thought to catch Zhu Jing off guard with an unexpected attack. That was why she had waited so long, only to shoot right before the opponent himself was about to shoot.

However, the outcome was not perfect. The opponent was someone who was well-prepared — even as he had been calibrating his gun, he had been keeping his guard up against her. In that case, Ling Lan might as well dispense with these pointless psychological tactics. She had decided to attack with full force!

Chapter 469: 52 Shots?

It was not difficult to defeat an opponent ... the difficult thing was how one could do so inconspicuously. Her dad's warning had been on point — before she had grown up enough to deal with all schemes and plots, she needed to conceal herself appropriately.

Even though she had already had a turn in the limelight due to the matter with the new technique, the fame gained from having a skill named after her would not harm her much, because that technique of hers had only been a minor adaptation on top of a foundational skill. This was just a manifestation of proficiency through practice — not enough to prove that she was remarkable enough that others needed to be apprehensive of her. Compared to Qiao Ting's advancement to ace level in his fourth year, that was just a minor thing.

Of course, if someone found out that she had advanced to ace level in her second year, the countries that were eyeing the Federation predatorily would most certainly send out countless killers after her to snuff out this future star in the cradle.

Ling Lan was lucky — right now, she could still mingle around freely within her military academy without anyone the wiser. This was completely thanks to Ling Xiao — Ling Xiao had protected her very well so that no one knew she was his child. This proved that Ling Xiao had not suffered for no reason eighteen years ago. While she had been growing up, Ling Xiao had already become strong enough to protect both his wife and daughter.

With such a large and towering tree to shield her from the elements, Ling Lan would be able to live freely and vivaciously. Even if there were some slip-ups every once in a while, Ling Xiao would be there to help her smooth things over. In fact, if Ling Xiao had not intervened, she would have long been exposed before the masses. How could such impactful news as hijacking a military vessel be so easily suppressed? All of this had been settled by Ling Xiao, allowing her to remain concealed among the crowd ...

Although Ling Lan was unclear on the details, unsure what Ling Xiao had done behind the scenes, she could still fully appreciate the love Ling Xiao had towards her and the pains he had taken to keep her safe. And so, she naturally had to listen to Ling Xiao — even as she won, she needed to make it so that others would not be able to distinguish anything from her victory.

Having made her decision, Ling Lan resolutely pulled the trigger of the long-barrelled beam gun in her hands. Beam after beam of light was sent shooting out at very clever timings, forcing Zhu Jing to run about desperately. Although he had trained how to adjust and calibrate his gun while moving, Ling Lan's shots were even quicker, interrupting him every single time.

“Crap!” Zhu Jing once again gave up on fixing the aim of his gun, evading yet another shot by the opponent. He knew that he could not continue on like this — he did not want to be chased all around the field by the opponent until the end of the match. Even if his first shot had been judged effective, he could not be certain that the referee panel would award the victory to him in the end. In order to be certain of victory, he needed to hit the opponent one more time.

” Tess ¹, calculate the opponent's gun's power usage!” After evading the shot, Zhu Jing calmly ordered his mecha's A.I..

“Yes! Captain!” replied the A.I. icily. Very soon, several seconds later, after Zhu Jing had evaded yet another shot, his A.I. reported back. “Till present, the opponent has fired 27 shots. Calculating based on a rate of 8 calories per shot, in theory, the opponent can still fire another 22 to 23 shots ...”

“Theoretically close to 50 shots?” Zhu Jing frowned. He was not pleased with the numbers reported by the A.I.. The opponent had only used about half of his power thus far — he would still have to dodge for a good long while to exhaust the opponent's remaining power reserves. Was there no better way?

After some careful thought, Zhu Jing found that there really was no other way. The opponent's speed was very fast, and his operations were pretty much perfect as well, with almost no flaw to be found. Shot followed shot, connecting almost seamlessly ... right then, Zhu Jing was silently admiring of how the opponent's basic controls were honed to the extreme, endlessly close to perfection. There was practically no hope for him to find an opening there.

In that case, then let him try his best to exhaust the opponent! Zhu Jing was confident that with his control skills, he would be able to exhaust the power of the opponent's gun. At that time, it would be his turn to counterattack.

After shooting four or five consecutive shots, Ling Lan noticed Zhu Jing's strange behaviour. The opponent was no longer trying to adjust his gun, putting his full focus into dodging instead. A spark of insight flashed through Ling Lan's mind, and she instantly knew what Zhu Jing was planning.

A slight smile appeared on Ling Lan's lips — perhaps this would be her chance to defeat the opponent!

“Little Four, how many more shots can the energy storage unit inside the gun support?” Compared to the mecha’s A.I., Ling Lan trusted Little Four’s judgment more.

“Approximately another 25 shots!” Little Four’s spirits rallied when he heard Ling Lan’s question. Ever since Boss had said that she wanted to get used to the mecha A.I.’s of this time period, she normally did not let him take over for the mecha A.I. to work with her. This left Little Four sad and bored — he actually wanted to do something practical to help his boss too!

“How many shots in total?” Ling Lan continued to ask.

Little Four replied gleefully, “After my optimizations, the time needed for the A.I. program for hand-area sensing has reached optimum levels. Each shot would only consume 7.2727272727272727 ...”

“Stop. Just tell me how many shots I can fire altogether.” Ling Lan sweatdropped. She had not asked for such a detailed breakdown, right?

“... you can go up to 55 shots!” Little Four said petulantly to his fingers. He had said so much all because he wanted to show off a little in front of Boss, to let her know that that rubbish mecha A.I. was no match for him, this clever intelligence entity. With such an excellent him, Little Four, around, what use was that rigid program?

Fine, Little Four was actually filled with resentment towards Ling Lan’s decision to use A.I. instead of him — this was obviously depriving him of his joy of living!

“A typical mecha master can only fire 46 shots. These extra 9 shots are enough!” Ling Lan did not know what Little Four was thinking; when she learned that her long-barrelled beam gun could shoot an extra 9 shots compared to others, her mind instantly hatched a plot.

There was no change in the situation on the field — Ling Lan continued to fire shot after shot at the opponent, while Zhu Jing continued to concentrate on dodging ...

“How many shots have been fired?” Quite a few top-class mecha masters had already realised Zhu Jing’s objective. They were keeping count of Ling Lan’s shots, knowing that the moment Ling Lan’s beam gun ran out of power would be the moment Zhu Jing launched his counterattack. Many believed that that would be the critical moment when the outcome of the match would be decided.

“46 now. It looks like the energy block in the gun of this mecha operator from the First Men’s Military Academy is about to run out soon!” The mecha masters all had excellent memories — they very quickly came up with the detailed numbers. Everyone’s spirits rallied and they focused even more intently on the match. This was because the energy block of Ling Lan’s gun might be completely drained right the very next second.

Mind you, the energy storage unit of a standard long-barrelled beam gun equipped on special-class mecha was not constant in the number of bullets it could support. There was a certain degree of variance involved, typically between 46 to 54 shots.

This difference of 8 shots was influenced by many factors, such as the quality of the energy storage unit itself. The better the quality of the energy storage unit, the more likely the energy it stored would reach the upper limits. The basic amount a standard energy storage unit could store was 400 calories, but in

reality, energy storage units could never hit this number. Even the most perfect top-quality energy storage unit could only store between 380-390 calories.

Aside from this, a mecha operator's control standards and the programming of a mecha's A.I. would also affect the energy consumption of an energy storage unit. Imprecise controls would cause each shot to drain even more energy than usual. And then, there were the issues with the A.I.'s system responsiveness to account for. No matter how good your operations were, if your A.I. was unreliable ... that would also result in a certain amount of power drain to the beam gun.

A qualified special-class mecha master could fire 46 beam shots as a basic standard. Beyond that, whether an operator could use the power in an energy storage unit to fire more beam shots would depend on how skilled the operator was, as well as how well-maintained their mecha was.

Of course, the theoretical maximum of 54 shots was almost impossible for anyone to achieve ... perhaps the 12 god-class operators could do it, but they would never lower themselves to operate a special-class mecha.

"Clack!" On the field, Ling Lan's long-barrelled gun suddenly jammed. This sound made everyone sit up straight and exclaim, even as they peered eagerly towards Zhu Jing on the other end of the field. Everyone knew that the opportunity Zhu Jing had been waiting for was here!

This sound also made the expressions of the members of the First Men's Military Academy waiting backstage change. Even though Mu Shaoyu and Han Yu were lined up behind their comrades, waiting for their chance to take the field, they did not really wish for their comrades before them to fail ...

On the rostrum, Ling Xiao's brows raised at the sound. He did not believe that Ling Lan would commit such a low-level mistake and lose track of the power consumption of the gun in her hands. Therefore, the greatest possibility here was that his daughter was plotting something ... Ling Xiao cast a sympathetic glance at Ling Lan's opponent.

Zhu Jing had been waiting for this chance all this while — when he heard this sound, his eyes shone with fervent joy! His fingers danced, and his mecha which had been evading at high speed all this time suddenly jerked to a stop, and his initially low-hanging M9 long-range projectile sniper rifle was raised up once more to aim at Ling Lan.

Meanwhile, at that moment, the arm of Ling Lan's mecha slapped down sharply at its waist and a new energy block sprang out from the secured dock there!

"Emergency Wartime Power Replacement Technique!" Seeing Ling Lan use this move, everyone became worked up. Every second counted now — if Ling Lan could replace her energy storage unit a step ahead of Zhu Jing, then the outcome would still be unpredictable, but if Zhu Jing was a step quicker, then this match would end with Ling Lan's defeat.

The energy storage unit bounced out of the secured dock, and the left hand of Ling Lan's mecha swept downwards to grab it. Right at this moment, perhaps out of nervousness or perhaps just due to a control error, Ling Lan actually missed the grab — the energy storage unit slipped through the gaps between the mecha's left hand to fall towards the ground.

“Ah!” Witnessing this, everyone cried out in shock. Meanwhile, when Zhu Jing saw this, his heart settled — he put his entire focus on adjusting his gun, prepared to give Ling Lan one final attack.

There was a loud “boom”! Zhu Jing, who had just finished calibrating his gun and was about to shoot, had yet to pull the trigger when the screen of his mecha turned black. Immediately after, he felt a tremendous explosion rock the outside of his mecha, and his entire mecha spun out of his control.

His mecha’s A.I. was instantly blaring with loud alarms, prompting him to swiftly eject himself from his cockpit ...

Zhu Jing slammed a hand onto his control panel in anger. Extremely unwillingly, he pressed the button to eject himself from the cockpit. Even now, he still had no idea why his mecha had suddenly exploded. Could it be that his mecha had malfunctioned? He recalled the Zhang Jing-an incident a few days earlier and the little bit of news that had been revealed after that. Everyone was wondering if some problem had been found with this batch of mecha with regards to safety.

Meanwhile, on the field, Ling Lan calmly lowered the long-barrelled gun in her hands. Right as Zhu Jing had been focused on adjusting his aim, she had already been prepared to launch her sure-kill technique — One-Point Sustained Shooting. One-Point Sustained Shooting could barely be considered an advanced technique. It was extremely common, a relatively low-difficulty technique that almost all advanced mecha warriors knew. But at this moment, before the completely unguarded Zhu Jing, it had worked perfectly, instantly destroying Zhu Jing’s mecha.

“His limit was not 46 shots. How many shots were in that final One-Point Sustained Shooting?” Everyone was exclaiming in shock — had there been 5 shots or 6 shots in that string of shots? If there had been 6 shots, then Ling Lan would have made 52 shots in total. Even though it was not the theoretical maximum of 54 shots, this was still not a number the average mecha operator could achieve ...

The two imperial operators monitoring the match from the air hesitated. One of them asked, “There were 6 shots, right? Why do I feel as if something is off ...”

The other imperial operator re-watched Ling Lan’s final attack again and again on his screen and finally confirmed, “There were 6 shots. Maybe there was just a problem with the lighting. That final shot wavered a little, so many people did not manage to catch it.” He had only managed to confirm it after lowering the brightness on his screen.

“Then there’s no mistaking it. 52 shots! This number is truly astounding. It should be almost close to perfect!” exclaimed that first imperial operator in awe.

“Yes, according to the top-secret files of the Federation military, only General Ling Xiao has managed to get so close to the perfect number with 53 shots. There are a few others more who managed 52 shots, but they are all extremely exceptional mecha prodigies!”

“In fact, from the perfect operation of that kid from the First Men’s Military Academy, we should have known that he absolutely would not have only been capable of 46 shots. We were all fooled by him! What a sneaky fellow!” said the other imperial operator gruffly. When Ling Lan had failed to catch hold of the energy storage unit earlier, he had really been shocked. After all, having seen Ling Lan perform so well just yesterday, he did not wish to see him lose.

Chapter 470: Ling Xiao's Pride and Troubles!

The imperial operator's words received his partner's approval. Ling Lan's amazing performance had moved the two initially unperturbed and indifferent imperial operators, making them reconsider taking in students themselves. Yes, maybe next time, when the First Men's Military Academy took in new students, they could go over there to see if there were any good seedlings ...

In the meantime, a heated debate of whether 51 shots or 52 shots had been fired had broken out among the audience. Ling Xiao, who had been quietly seated at the rostrum, showed no change in his expression, but those familiar with him realised that the corner of his lip was slowly but surely tilting upwards, the smile on his lips becoming increasingly tangible. This meant that he was in an extremely good mood ...

Of course Ling Xiao would feel good, because he had seen — and he was the only one who had seen — that there was a trick behind Ling Lan's last shot. Using a special-class mecha, she had successfully gone beyond the boundaries of her level to pull off a skill that could only have been executed by an ace mecha — Synchronous Shooting!

Synchronous Shooting was a skill that allowed an operator to shoot two beam shots at the same time. Besides the muzzle of the gun being lighted up just that little bit more while shooting, the posture and shooting frequency looked exactly as when shooting an ordinary single beam shot. As such, Synchronous Shooting was one of the hardest long-range offensive skills to detect. It was just so stealthy that even the most experienced mecha masters could not confirm for sure whether someone was actually performing Synchronous Shooting or just shooting a single shot. This was also one of the reasons why Synchronous Shooting managed to become an ace level top-class skill. It was just too hard to deal with — truly a technique that just could not be effectively defended against.

Another reason Synchronous Shooting managed to become a top-class ace level skill was that it was very difficult to execute. To successfully use Synchronous Shooting, a mecha master's hand speed needed to be at the peak of ace level. Without that level of hand speed, the mecha master would not be able to perform Synchronous Shooting even if he wanted to. Of course, even with the required hand speed, the skill might still fail. The mecha's A.I. must also be reliable — even a delay of 0.01 second could cause an attempted synchronous shot to end up as two ordinary beam shots.

Ling Lan's success made Ling Xiao feel both proud and a little helpless at the same time. His daughter seemed to have already entered the rebellious phase his parenting book had mentioned.

Ling Xiao had long known that Ling Lan had already advanced into ace level. Still, executing Synchronous Shooting with an ace mecha versus executing it with a special-class mecha were two completely different concepts. With a special-class mecha, the demands on Ling Lan's finger speed was much more stringent, because the A.I. of a special-class mecha was a hair weaker than the A.I. of an ace mecha. Do not underestimate this thin hairs-breadth of difference — it required an operator to pay several magnitudes the cost to execute an ace technique.

Since Ling Lan managed to successfully execute Synchronous Shooting, in the end, her One-Point Sustained Shooting had successfully fired 7 beam shots. In other words, Ling Lan had fired 53 shots in

total and not the 52 or 51 shots as everyone else believed. This number had drawn even with the record set by Ling Xiao in the past. How could Ling Xiao not be proud? This amazing genius mecha operator was none other than his very own daughter! Who said girls could not match up to boys? Ling Xiao believed that his daughter would definitely create a miracle!

However, after the pride he felt subsided, Ling Xiao began to fret. For his daughter's own safety, he had advised her to show a little restraint. On the surface, Ling Lan had indeed seemed to have listened, but in actual fact, this move had displayed her rebellious streak — even if she had to show restraint, she would show it in her own domineering way!

Right then, Ling Xiao's thoughts could not help but stray. Was his daughter trying to prove to him that she was no longer the child that needed him to protect her from the winds and rains? That she had grown up enough to independently face the storms of the outside world?

Thinking of this possibility, Ling Xiao suddenly felt a little crestfallen. The absence of 16 years was not that easy to make up for, especially now when he had come to the realisation that his daughter increasingly did not need him anymore. This fuelled his fury against the people that sabotaged him, for making him miss the most precious childhood period of his daughter.

"It's about time to collect some of the interest on the grudges of that time!" A cold glint shone in Ling Xiao's eyes. There was a brief trace of killing intent, but between blinks of an eye, Ling Xiao had returned to his usual kindly demeanour, still as mellow as jade and as smiley-faced as ever.

Ling Lan saw the opponent eject successfully out of his cockpit and instantly relaxed. That final Synchronous Shot had been unintentional. At that time, while she had been focusing on the operations for One-Point Sustained Shooting, she had actually entered a rare state of harmony between man and nature — this state had reached a peak during her sixth shot, blasting through the bottleneck on her finger speed that had already been stalled for a full half a year to enter a whole new stage.

And it was at precisely that moment when she had naturally performed Synchronous Shooting ... in the end, she had succeeded — that extra beam shot had been like the final straw that had broken the camel's back, causing the opponent's mecha, which should only have been half-destroyed in the attack, to be completely destroyed.

Fortunately, she had been shooting at the upper half of the mecha then, giving the opponent time to eject out of his mecha. It was a truly a great blessing that tragedy had been avoided!

Seeing that the other was alright, Ling Lan calmly instructed Little Four to handle any evidence which could easily expose her secret and her strength. For instance, her long-barrelled beam gun and her energy storage unit had to be destroyed — if it was ever discovered that there was still enough calories inside for two more beam shots, she would definitely be pushed to the forefront of danger. At that time, even her father Ling Xiao would probably be unable to ensure her safety.

Little Four was very efficient, instantly destroying the electrical circuits of the energy storage unit. He also applied a little cover-up to make the energy storage unit look like it had shorted due to having been overdrawn on calories. At the same time, he also modified the saved records on the A.I.. Data on Ling Lan's operations would be saved on the A.I. — this was initially a function meant to help mecha

operators review their own operations to identify their shortcomings and fix them, but it was now a potential source which could expose Ling Lan's true strength. Little Four naturally would not overlook it.

Little Four only needed one or two minutes to deal with all of these things. The reason why he even needed that much time was that it was a little more troublesome to edit the saved records on the A.I. and still keep things reasonable. If he could have just formatted it to wipe everything, he would have been done in just one second. However, if he really did that, it would be too conspicuous and would have certainly aroused suspicion even if there had not been any suspicion to begin with.

Still, a minute or two was not very long — by the time Ling Lan's mecha was descending slowly towards the ground, Little Four had already reported back to Ling Lan that everything was OK.

When Ling Lan alighted from her mecha, Zhao Jun raised two thumbs up high, cheering for her. Fifty-two shots! That was the number which almost every special-class long-range operator aimed for. Unfortunately, this number was not so easily achieved. Those who managed it and survived till now were all imperial operators of the Federation without any exceptions, and some had even achieved god-class status ...

Qiao Ting looked at Ling Lan striding over to them and his fists clenched so tightly that his fingernails were practically digging into his flesh. Despite that, Qiao Ting felt no pain, only a powerful sense of danger creeping over his heart. He even wondered if such an outstanding person would enter ace level earlier than he had ...

Thinking of the possibility, it was like a fire was burning in his chest, leaving him feeling extremely uncomfortable. He took in a deep breath to suppress the agitation within him ... perhaps after he returned from this tournament, he should really contemplate how he could best conserve his power calories while shooting so he could increase his number of shots to the utmost limits!

"I will not lose!" Qiao Ting once again threw down these words like a promise to himself before boarding his mecha and preparing for his match. This left Ling Lan quite speechless. It seemed as if every time she returned victorious, Qiao Ting would come and throw this phrase at her. How proud did this Qiao Ting have to be to be so tenacious in his desire to beat her? Even willing to go to the extent of replicating her attack methods to compete against her? Should they not walk their own paths like the saying 'let the four winds blow as they will, I will remain standing steadfast still'¹?

The Jingan Military Academy had lost the second match as well now, and in such a miserable way to boot. Even though Zhu Jing had not been injured because he had ejected himself in time, after a staff member had examined Zhu Jing's mecha and declared that there was nothing wrong with it, the expressions of the Jingan contingent turned sour. They felt as if they had been given a big hard slap ...

In particular, after seeing how he had been defeated from a replay, Zhu Jing found himself gnashing his teeth in anger towards Ling Lan. He felt that he had lost too pathetically — it had just been an oversight which had led to him falling for the opponent's plot. He had not been on guard, which was why he had been defeated by the opponent's sneak attack.

"Although our defeat is already a foregone conclusion, we cannot let the First Men's Military Academy defeat us in straight matches². No matter what, we need to at least win one match!" encouraged the team leader of the Jingan Military Academy.

Since they had already lost two matches before Qiao Ting had appeared to represent the First Men's Military Academy, this meant that they no longer had any chance of winning the round. This was because they had no one capable of contending with Qiao Ting, so their only wish now was to win a match or two before being defeated to save some face as the 6th rank. Otherwise, if they were defeated in straight matches, then they would be no different from those other military academies who had been defeated by the First Men's Military Academy prior to this. Those schools had just been unlucky enough to meet the First Men's Military Academy a little earlier ...

However, this wish of theirs was instantly crushed when they saw that Qiao Ting was the third contestant. As the third member of Jingan walked onto the field, his complexion was green. If at all possible, he really did not want to take the field just to be tormented by Qiao Ting. The gap between their levels gave him no room to put up a fight ... he could only hope that Qiao Ting's fighting spirit was not too intense so that he would be able to last a little longer and not lose too much face.

Perhaps triggered by Ling Lan's 52 shots (Because no one had even considered the possibility of someone using a special-class mecha to execute the top-class ace level technique Synchronous Shooting, and after factoring in the judgment of the two imperial operators monitoring the match, the referee panel had determined that Ling Lan had fired a total of 52 shots in the end.), Qiao Ting's desire to attack was overwhelming. As soon as the match began, he pulled away at top speed, and when he had gained enough distance, he immediately used two advanced techniques to finish off his opponent.

This match broke the record for the shortest time taken by a long-range operator to end a fight. Long-range operators were unlike close-combat operators who could clash at the first instant to decide the outcome. They needed to first pull a certain distance away before they could carry out their attacks. This also resulted in the time needed for a long-range operator to finish a match being longer than that needed by a close-combat operator. Even such an outstanding long-range ace operator as Qiao Ting who was a head above most others would never be able to compete against the record time of a close-combat operator in defeating an opponent.

However, all of this was not enough to affect Qiao Ting from being the most popular contestant in this tournament. Even though Ling Lan had managed to obtain the excellent results of 52 shots, she was outshined instantly by this new time record of Qiao Ting's.

Ling Lan was extremely pleased by this outcome. She suddenly found that this serious competitiveness of Qiao Ting was actually pretty good for her. At critical moments, he could totally become her shield to deflect attention, allowing her to hide behind him.

"Perhaps, I can try provoking Qiao Ting a bit more? And let him perform a little better?" Ling Lan stroked her jaw as she thought to herself.

The First Men's Military Academy defeated Jingan in three straight matches, letting them move on into the tentative top 4. Meanwhile, at the same time, the three other mecha fights to determine the top 4 were being held at three other mecha combat fields. After Ling Lan and the others had stared for a period of time at the large screen backstage, they received news on it that the First Co-ed Military Academy had also defeated their opponent to become the second to enter the tentative top 4. This was closely followed by the Third Men's Military Academy's advancement. The difference between the two academies' victories was only about 2 to 3 minutes.

The battle for the final slot into the tentative top 4 was rather intense. Since the Second Men's Military Academy had lost prematurely and was not part of the top 8 this year, this had caused the initial solid past rankings of the top 4 to lose one of its corners. This also pitted the original number 5, Qiguang, and number 7, Yaohuang, against each other. Neither side was willing to give up on this chance to progress; the round was fought till the final fifth match. In the end, the 5th-ranking Qiguang won by a slim margin by the referee panel's ruling to advance into the tentative top 4.

After the top 8 military academies had fought, the two resurrected academies, the Second Men's Military Academy and the Federal Defence Military Academy, respectively challenged the initially 9th and 8th rank schools. Having already lost one round previously, the Second Men's Military Academy was no longer as arrogant and conceited as it had been at the start. In order to guarantee their victory, they had cautiously chosen to challenge the weakest academy among their available opponents, the ranked 9th military academy which they had the most confidence to defeat.

It should be said that Jiang Shaoyu's re-entry had caused the Second Men's Military Academy's strength to rise on a vertical axis. Fighting as a resurrected wildcard, they quickly defeated the 9th-ranking military academy in three straight matches to replace the other in the top 8. Meanwhile, the Federal Defence Military Academy clashed with the original 8th-ranking academy, but they were not as lucky — after five tough matches, they had still been defeated in the end.

And so, the defeated Federal Defence Military Academy and the initial 9th-ranking academy that had been defeated by the Second Men's Military Academy would be fighting next for the 9th and 10th position in the rankings of this tournament. If there were no surprises, these two schools which were ranked 9th and 10th in previous tournaments as well would retain their original rankings. This was still an acceptable outcome for both military academies.

Meanwhile, at this time, the Second Men's Military Academy which had been resurrected joined the other 3 schools which had lost to the tentative top 4 academies. Just as with those other academies, they now had a chance to challenge one of the top 4.

The former 8th-ranking school which had been defeated by the First Co-ed Military Academy naturally chose to challenge the 5th-ranking academy. Among the tentative top 4, they were the comparatively weakest one.

However, even though the 5th rank's strength was weaker than that of the First Men's Military Academy, the Third Men's Military Academy, and the First Co-ed Military Academy, the academy was still not weak enough for the 8th-rank to overcome. After fighting 4 matches, the 5th-rank had already managed to win 3 matches, securing their position in the top 4.

Immediately after was the 7th-rank's challenge. Aside from being unable to challenge the opponent which had already defeated them, the 5th-ranking military academy, all the other military academies in the top 4 were viable options. After some consideration, the 7th-rank chose to challenge the Third Men's Military Academy. Of the remaining three academies they could pick, the Third Men's Military Academy was undoubtedly the weakest one — one should always choose the softest bone to chew on.

However, the 7th-rank still lost their challenge. The Third Men's Military Academy may not have an ace operator holding the fort like with the First Men's Military Academy, the Second Men's Military Academy, and the First Co-ed Military Academy, but their five representative mecha operators were all

equally powerful, all of them at the peak of special-class. The 7th-rank still was not strong enough to snatch three matches from these five opponent members.

Next, the 6th-ranking Jingan Military Academy which had been defeated by the First Men's Military Academy chose to challenge the 5th-ranking academy. The two schools were very close in ranking, and their strength levels were extremely similar as well. Perhaps feeling repressed from being bullied by the First Men's Military Academy earlier, the Jingan Military Academy exploded with great ferocity, struggling against the opponent for all five matches to finally wrest victory from the jaws of the opponent. They won their third match by a narrow margin and successfully replaced their opponent in the tentative top 4.

However, their luck ended there. The resurrected Second Men's Military Academy chose to challenge them immediately after. Perhaps Jingan had used up all their strength in the previous challenge round, or perhaps they lost confidence at the thought of facing the Second Men's Military Academy which had the ace operator Jiang Shaoyu leading them — in this match-up, Jingan lost to the Second Men's Military Academy in three straight matches. The Second Men's Military Academy efficiently dispatched the Jingan Military Academy and took their place in the tentative top 4.

With that, all the matches in the morning were done. The official top 4 had been decided. They were still the same few schools who had dominated the past tournaments, unshakeable by thunder or lightning³. They were respectively the First Men's Military Academy, the Second Men's Military Academy, the Third Men's Military Academy, and the First Co-ed Military Academy.

After a short break at noon, the matches resumed in the afternoon. At this time, whether it was the live audience on planet Qiming or the rest of the Federation public who were at home watching the live broadcast, all of their attention was on the combat field. They were all eagerly anticipating the upcoming semi-finals and finals.

The feelings of the four academies waiting backstage for the final match-up list to be revealed were all different. The five members of the First Men's Military Academy were as steady as Mount Tai, extremely at ease. No matter which opponent they drew, they had the confidence to defeat them and advance to the finals.

As for the other three academies, they were all plagued with worry at the moment. Their greatest concern was, of course, meeting the First Men's Military Academy early. Leaving aside the fact that the First Academy had the publicly acknowledged number one of all the military academies, the ace operator Qiao Ting — below him, there was still Zhao Jun, who had managed to force a draw against the ace operator Jiang Shaoyu; Ling Lan, who had perfect basic controls, created a new personal-name technique, and achieved an almost perfect shot-count; Mu Shaoyu, who had already achieved the peak of special class; as well as Han Yu, who was still able to overpower 80% of the special-class operators in this tournament despite being slightly weaker than his teammates. Not a single one of them would be easy to handle.

All three schools knew that if they were to encounter the First Men's Military Academy in the semi-finals, that would certainly spell tragedy for them. And even if they managed to crunch down this hard rock by some lucky fluke and advance to the finals, they would definitely be too exhausted to compete with their opponent in the finals. Some members of these respective academies even began praying

silently that any passing gods or spirits would help them out — please, please, please do not let them meet the First Men's Military Academy in the semi-finals ...

No matter how worried they were, the destined time would come eventually — one academy was destined to become the sacrifice on the First Academy's altar this round ...

When the final match-up listings appeared on the large screen, the Third Men's Military Academy could only bemoan their horrible luck this year. Actually already matched up against the killer First Men's Military Academy in the semi-finals!

Ling Lan and her team continued to use the same method, playing 'rock, paper, scissors' to decide their line-up. This time, Han Yu finally achieved a revolution⁴ and snatched up the right to fight first. Mu Shaoyu also performed well, nabbing the second slot following Han Yu, while Zhao Jun would be fighting third. In the final showdown between Qiao Ting and Ling Lan, Qiao Ting managed to narrowly beat out Ling Lan to obtain the rights to fight fourth. Hence, Ling Lan could only resign herself to being the last to fight, holding the fort for her team.

In reality, Ling Lan and the rest all knew that Han Yu's chances were not good in the first fight. After all, his opponent was also a long-range fighter who was already at the peak of special class, which was a small rank higher than Han Yu's own realm. Unless Han Yu managed a sudden breakthrough during the fight, there was almost no chance of him winning the match.

In spite of this, Qiao Ting, Ling Lan, and the rest of the team still entrusted their hopes to Han Yu, wishing he would perform well in his fight. However, hopes were just hopes in the end — reality was harsh and cruel. Han Yu was suppressed by his opponent from the very start of the match. Both combatants being long-range fighters, Han Yu was so outclassed that he could only exhaust himself running around the field with no way of even fighting back. Still, this was also the match that showed the audience how skilful Han Yu was in evasion manoeuvres. Despite being chased around so badly by the opponent, the opponent only managed to land a handful of effective attacks on him.

One attacking while the other dodged, the two fighters eventually used up all of the time allocated for the match. Unsurprisingly, Han Yu lost due to a lower points total than his opponent at the end. Han Yu knew very well what the outcome would be even before the referee panel made their call — after greeting Ling Lan and the others when he returned, he shuffled off to sit in a corner, staring soullessly into the distance.

Even though Han Yu's personality was a little irritating, Qiao Ting and the others could see that, other than those first few matches where he had performed badly due to looking down on his opponent, he had always tried his best after that whenever it was his turn to fight. This included this last match. Although he had still been defeated in the end, Han Yu had still managed to last till the time limit ran out with a handicap of being one rank weaker than his opponent. It was clear to see how resilient he was and how hard he was trying.

Thus, when Han Yu behaved oddly after returning, Zhao Jun and Mu Shaoyu were rather worried. As Mu Shaoyu had to prepare to fight next, he could only push aside his concern for the moment, boarding his mecha to make some final adjustments.

Zhao Jun hesitated for a moment, but then walked over to Han Yu's side. He wanted to ask him how he was doing. After all, he had worked under Han Yu for four years before this — even though their relationship had been more one of mutually using one another, they had still been working together for a long time. There was some bond there, so he should still check in on the other for a bit.

Zhao Jun had just reached out to shake the other when another hand acted faster than his. Before he could even touch Han Yu, that hand grabbed hold of Zhao Jun's wrist.

Zhao Jun felt his hand go numb, and his hand was rendered immobile. He turned his head in shock, only to see that the one who had stopped him was in fact Boss Lan.

"That fight just now has inspired Regiment Commander Han," said Ling Lan as she released Zhao Jun's hand.

Zhao Jun was astonished. "Boss Lan, are you saying that Han Yu ... has received some insight?" Even though Zhao Jun asked this question, he did not expect to receive an answer. This was because he knew that Ling Lan would never lie. If Boss Lan said Han Yu was processing some insight, then Han Yu was most certainly in the process of enlightenment.

Right then, Zhao Jun could not help but feel envy-jealousy-hate stir in his heart towards Han Yu. How blessed was he to gain this opportunity for insight? Zhao Jun thought of himself and was instantly tearing up inside ... why couldn't he be that lucky? Everyday yearning for an epiphany yet never ever receiving one — that solid barrier blocking him from advancing to ace level all this time ... when would it loosen up?

Knowing now that Han Yu was busy with his insights, Zhao Jun did not try to disturb him anymore. Fifteen minutes later, it was Mu Shaoyu's turn to take the field!