

Crossing 51

Chapter 51: Super Homing Projectiles?

Ling Lan was not oblivious to Little Four's little tantrum, but her attention was entirely absorbed by Little Four's words. Those plasma bolts had been launched in the direction of the two mechas, but the range of plasma cannons were notably short, meaning that it was highly unlikely for those missiles to hit the mechas, unless ...

It wasn't that Ling Lan hadn't considered using the plasma cannons on the hover car, but the information she had obtained from Little Four regarding the plasma cannons had dissuaded her. Plasma cannons had both a distinct advantage and a distinct disadvantage — typically, its disadvantage could be ignored as long as its advantage was utilised to its maximum effect.

Unfortunately, Ling Lan couldn't do that right now. The plasma cannon's advantage was its high attack power, and the likelihood of its projectiles exploding upon impact. This meant that it would cause a certain amount of area-of-effect damage, having a high destructive power against its surroundings. Ling Lan didn't dare to fire the plasma cannons to help Chamberlain Ling Qin kill the assassins because she was afraid that any mistake may end up in tragedy — where she accidentally killed Ling Qin instead of the assassins.

Of course, she had also considered using the cannons to deal with the two mechas in the distance — but the disadvantage of the plasma cannon was its short range. It was likely that the bolts would only fly half the distance before running out of speed and falling to the ground to explode harmlessly.

These two characteristics of the plasma cannons tied Ling Lan's hands. Though of course Ling Lan was already mentally prepared to let Little Four fire the cannons anyway if Chamberlain Ling Qin's life was truly threatened by the assassins.

By now, Ling Lan had gotten a vague sense of what Little Four had been trying to say. She believed that Little Four wouldn't do something pointless — since he had dared to fire the plasma cannons, he must have found a way to overcome its weakness. Perhaps those two minor A.I.s he had mentioned would bring about some effect to solve the problem ... If that was so, then Little Four was truly brilliant. Ling Lan's spirits soared.

Little Four clearly sensed the change in Ling Lan's thoughts, and although he still had his back to Ling Lan, his butt started wriggling around, as if delighted by Ling Lan's newfound cheer.

Ling Lan noticed Little Four's reaction, and knew that she must have guessed correctly. As such, she quickly praised, "Little Four, you're really the best Little Four."

After spending so many years with Little Four, Ling Lan had already become familiar with all his quirks, and knew very well how much he loved praise. With just this simple phrase, she managed to make Little Four so happy that his eyes twinkled, completely forgetting that he had just been angry at Ling Lan.

Little Four pranced back to Ling Lan's side, patting his little chest as he said confidently, "Relax, Boss, leave the two mecha to me. Hehe, there are still two shots in the plasma cannons — let me immediately

install this little A.I. to affect them as well. That way, even if the attack this time is avoided, we can still continue attacking.”

Little Four’s words slightly reassured Ling Lan. As long as they could distract the two mechas, Chamberlain Ling Qin would have even more time to handle those assassins, greatly raising the odds of his safety.

Still, Ling Lan cautioned Little Four not to fire those last two plasma bolts unless absolutely necessary — at times, the threat of an attack was much more valuable than an actual attack.

Ling Lan knew very well that although plasma bolts had a lot of destructive power, that was only against people with basic protective gear. Against those mechas which were composed from super titanium alloys, unless the missiles hit a defensive weak point, such as the mecha’s cockpit (though the plasma bolts would still not be able to breach the cockpit, its attack would shake the surroundings violently, possibly harming the pilot within it), they would be rather ineffective.

On the opponent’s side, as Ling Lan expected, mecha A and mecha B had not given up. They wasted no time in preparing to shoot down that final hover car. To their surprise however, before they could fire their own sniper rifles, the hover car had turned towards them and launched its own plasma cannons in their direction.

Mecha A couldn’t hide the scorn in his voice as he mocked, “Tsk, does he really think he’ll hit us with that?”

Within the Federation, aside from greenhorns, everyone else knew the characteristics of plasma cannons. Firepower was its advantage, while range was its fatal flaw. The only reasons it hadn’t been dismissed completely by the Federation were that its production cost was cheap and that it was still viable in a close-range battle, leading it to remain as one of the staple weapons of the federal military.

That said, plasma cannons were only a real threat to normal soldiers. They were really ineffective against mecha operators like them — even if they were hit, besides the possibility of being pushed around a bit by the shockwave, the missiles would do nothing to them.

Mecha B thought the same as mecha A, dismissive of the harm the plasma bolts could do to them. The bolts might not even hit them to begin with! Impatiently, he said, “Ignore those two junks, just focus on shooting down that hover car. We don’t have much time left.” By his estimations, they only had two minutes left at most — they had no more time to waste.

“Yes!” Mecha A didn’t dare to say anything more, putting all his focus into pulling on his trigger to attack that bothersome hover car.

But he hadn’t managed to shoot that many times when he heard his mecha’s systems issuing a strong warning, “Caution! Caution! Attack detected, we have been targeted! Impact in 9, 8, 7 ...”

On the screen, a lighted dot representing the attack source was closing the distance fast and looked like it was about to hit them very soon.

“F*ck!” Mecha A only had time to curse briefly, before having to move his mecha into evasion manoeuvres. At the same time, mecha B had also started busily dodging.

“Isn’t it just a plasma cannon? What the hell is going on?” As mecha B dodged, the attack source drew closer, and he could clearly see from his screen that the attacks were the two plasma bolts they had dismissed earlier. Of course, one of the bolts was targeting him.

Mecha A completed an almost perfect 90 degree turn, thinking that he would be able to evade the bolt completely by doing so. However, he immediately found that the bolt actually turned with him, causing him to shout out in alarm, “It’s following me! Goddammit, what the hell is this?!”

Did plasma bolts have this tracking ability? And was their range this long? Mecha A felt his world view tilting on its axis — how could such an unbelievable thing happen?

Mecha B naturally noticed this as well. His evasion movements were even more extravagant than mecha A’s, even involving irregular flash evasion (a lower level version of freeform flash evasion). Logically, he should have been able to dodge any number of plasma bolts this way. But now, no matter how he dodged, that one plasma bolt dogged his every move, unlike regular plasma bolts which would have fallen to the ground and exploded by now.

“These are definitely not regular plasma bolts!” The experienced mecha B concluded. “These must be modified homing projectiles — make sure you don’t get hit by them, or else you’ll be dead!”

Mecha B decisively identified the projectiles as homing projectiles that had been modified to look like plasma bolts. Despite appearances, they were sure to be the much more expensive and powerful super homing projectiles which were a nightmare to low level mecha pilots.

Super homing projectiles were a type of artillery which had high destructive power and was equipped with tracking ability. Its power was not something a minor plasma bolt could compare with — if it hit, a normal standardized mecha would most likely be smashed into a pulp, although some higher level mechas might still be able to withstand its attacks.

It had been feared by mecha pilots everywhere ever since it was first created, and was now considered one of the most troublesome artillery by mecha pilots. Another nickname it had was ‘newbie killer’.

This was because the homing projectiles had very formidable tracking — once it locked onto a target, it was useless no matter how the mecha operator tried to outmanoeuvre it. Of course, this was with the exception of high level operators who could pull off highly advanced manoeuvres which utilised the operator’s surroundings, causing the missile to blow up by hitting something else. However, this skill was not something the average mecha operator could handle, and so the homing projectile was considered one of the most hated weaponry among the low level mecha pilots. Many newbies often had their wings clipped because of this projectile, which was how it had gained its nickname.

Thus, when mecha A and mecha B began suspecting that these bolts after them could be homing projectiles, they no longer had any thought to spare for the hover cars. Now, they only had one goal — find a way to dodge these tracking missiles stuck to them.

There was no helping it — if it was before, they wouldn’t have been so concerned. This time, in order to hide their identity, they had been given common standardised mecha to operate, which were incapable of withstanding a hit from a homing projectile.

On Ling Lan's side, she watched in puzzlement as the two mechas jumped around dramatically to avoid the plasma bolts. After all, even if the bolts hit, as long as they didn't hit the cockpit, the effect would be negligible — why were those two mechas so flustered?

Ling Lan had no idea that Little Four's modifications had inadvertently caused the opponent to mistake the bolts for the terrifying homing projectiles, causing them to react accordingly out of caution. It should be said that the heavens were truly watching over Ling Lan, helping her to resolve her greatest threat at this crucial moment.

"Yay!" Watching how his modified plasma bolts were forcing the two mechas to run around in circles, Little Four raised his hand up in a victory pose.

There was a hint of a smile on Ling Lan's lips, and she was no longer as tense as before. She had become much more relaxed since the most pressing problem had been resolved. "Little Four, this time it's all thanks to you." Ling Lan's thanks was heartfelt — if it weren't for Little Four, Chamberlain Ling Qin might have been in real danger. And now, Chamberlain Ling Qin had even more time to make sure he could finish off the final two opponents before him.

"Boss, why are you thanking me? Aren't I your follower? It's a follower's duty to help their boss." Little Four was puzzled. Didn't the novel he read say that it was the unquestionable duty of a follower to back up his boss in all things, no matter if it was to take the fall for a crime or just to help relieve their worries?

Additionally, he found that he loved the intensity of battle. Looking at the bolts he reprogrammed chase the opponent's mechas all over the place, his mood was exceptionally well. Little Four had the vague feeling that he was born to do this — although he hadn't been unhappy helping Ling Lan to earn money in the past few years, the present intensity here truly made his blood boil.

Right then and there, Little Four made a decision. In future, he must look for more opportunities for his boss to encounter battle. Dammit, it was just too exhilarating.

Chapter 52: A Genius among Geniuses!

At this moment, Ling Lan would never have guessed that this fight had captured the interest of Little Four, and under his cajoling persuasion, she would be set upon a path directly opposed to her original plan, moving further away from a stable and peaceful life to a life full of bloody carnage ...

Blissfully unaware of the difficult battles to come in her future, Ling Lan patiently waited for Ling Qin to defeat the final enemy. Ling Lan was very cautious — before she could be sure it was safe, she had kept a tight lid on her presence. Although she had learnt some combat skills and had survived the primordial forest, this was still not enough for her to go up against these experienced killers.

Furthermore, it was possible that far away from here, somewhere out of Little Four's radar, stronger mecha were lying in wait, just waiting for her to reveal herself.

Ling Lan did not believe that she was a victor in life, who could exude dominance with just a shake of her body, and easily cut through all clamouring enemies as if they were experience fodder. She was also not the type of female main character who was loved by everyone around her, who would have flowers

blooming in her presence (it wasn't like she could be a female main character right now anyway), who — when in a difficult situation — would have a prince charming come riding to her rescue ...

Right then, Little Four suddenly exclaimed in shock, causing Ling Lan's heart to jump into her throat again. "What's going on, Little Four?"

Little Four did not answer, but moved the display screen he was looking at in front of her.

On the screen, the two mecha that were busily evading were suddenly surrounded by three different groups of people.

The first group, which was also the most aggressive looking group, had the fewest people. They consisted of only four mecha, but exuded a heavy aura, completely overpowering the other groups in terms of sheer presence.

Their mecha had strange outer appearances, clearly shorter than the other mecha by a head, about 50 to 60 cm, but their torsos and limbs were obviously thicker and bulkier. The joints of the four limbs, in particular, were so thick that they lacked all sense of grace and beauty. But it was precisely this sort of rough and unsophisticated mecha which could strike fear into people's hearts, mounting pressure on their opponents.

These mecha had clearly undergone reinforcement procedures for all their parts. Whether it be in terms of weapon weight load or melee combat, these mecha would perform better than other humanoid standard mecha. At a glance, one could tell they were killing machines, and their body paint emphasised this — they were not painted in Federation white, but rather in a dark understated crimson, which just added to the overall aggression and bloodlust the mecha exuded.

Clearly, these four mecha had rushed over here after a fight, as there were still the signs of battle on their bodies. They were indeed 413's squad. Just as they had been struggling to find Ling Lan, fruitlessly and helplessly, Ling Qin's signal flare had given them direction, and they had finally managed to catch up.

The second group was a troop of six mecha. Their appearance was very similar to Federation regulation mecha, only bearing some slight adjustments. Instead of the uniform bright white, they were a mix of white and blue. Anyone with an understanding of the Federation's mecha would know that these mecha were captain-level mecha, which were one level above the standard mecha. It looked like this troop was from the federal military.

And the final group was a troop of five, common standard mecha, though painted in a dark grey colour denoting that they were private forces. The Federation had an agreement with the elite families, permitting the families to have their own private forces, but their mecha could only be the most basic standard mecha, and the colour of those mecha must be dark grey. The only way to distinguish between the mecha of differing private forces was the logo painted on the chest plate of the mecha.

The logos on the chest plates of this troop of mecha was the Ling family's — a blazing fire phoenix, eye-catching and vibrant. This troop was the Ling family loyalists, the mecha troop responsible for Ling Lan's safety.

The fire phoenix was one of the spiritual totems of the ancient Chinese people, and the Ling family personally believed that they were the descendants of the god-beast fire phoenix. Hence, they had naturally selected the fire phoenix as their family crest.

When Ling Lan had found out the origin story behind her family crest, she had almost been unable to stop herself from bursting out in laughter. Who'd have guessed that ten thousand years later, in such a technologically advanced era, such unfounded myths and legends would still be around? All she could say was that humanity's love and obsession with the concept of god was just bone-deep.

Of course, it was only called the fire phoenix within the Chinese Federation and its allied countries; in the neutral countries or the enemy nations, it was often referred to as the 'undead bird', and ever since Ling Lan's father Ling Xiao had become a god-class operator, it had degenerated into being called 'that dead bird' — you could just see how deep the enemy's hatred ran.

The three groups saw each other almost simultaneously and raised their respective guards immediately. However, the Ling family troops drew closer to the Federation troops, seemingly intent on allying themselves with them to oppose the other team, the one with the four fearsome looking mecha.

Ling Lan couldn't help but frown, asking Little Four, "Little Four, could you zoom in closer, and hack their communications?"

"Zooming in is fine, but I can't hack their communications. Your current spiritual power cannot support such long-distance hacking." Little Four's words contained a tinge of contempt, and combined with the stink eye Little Four was giving her, there was only one conclusion — she was being looked down upon by Little Four.

Ever since Ling Lan had found out that her body may be ravaged by her spiritual power if it was too much for her body to handle, Ling Lan had been very wary of her spiritual power. She had not forgotten the daily suffering she had gone through in her previous life because of it. That's why, in this life, Ling Lan did not dare to cultivate her spiritual power on her own, fearful that she would overdo it and end up causing irreparable harm to her body.

As such, no matter how much Little Four wheedled, Ling Lan had never used her honour points to redeem anything related to spiritual power training within her mind-space. Still, even so, at six years old, Ling Lan's spiritual power was already at the peak of tier-4 — with just the right push, she would naturally break past the tier-4 barrier to enter tier-5.

Of course, Ling Lan's impressive three tier increase in spiritual power since birth was not really because of her talent in spiritual power, or because it grew too fast — from the beginning, Little Four had sealed up two tiers of Ling Lan's spiritual power. But now, as Ling Lan's physical body slowly developed and grew stronger, Little Four had gradually unravelled the seal around her spiritual power.

The potential problem of her overwhelming spiritual power was so quickly resolved due to Ling Lan's diligence in practising her Qi exercises.

In truth, Ling Lan's spiritual power at birth was actually tier-4. The information Lan Luofeng, Ling Qin, and the military had received was actually fake, a result of manipulation by Little Four.

It was for this reason that, back during Ling Lan's newborn assessment, the assessment device had started screeching in warning. The assessment devices for public use were only able to withstand up to tier-3 spiritual power, military-use assessment devices excluded.

Why did the public-use assessment devices have such a setting? That was because without special care, any child with tier-4 spiritual power would certainly die within the womb, body collapsing under the weight of its spiritual power. It was impossible for a child with tier-4 spiritual power to be born naturally without advanced technological support. Of course, Ling Lan was able to grow well enough in Lan Luofeng's body, primarily due to Little Four's assistance — as mentioned, Little Four had sealed away the excess spiritual power.

However, both success and failure were two sides of the same coin — when Little Four discovered the capabilities of the assessment device to measure spiritual power, he had released all of Ling Lan's spiritual power out of curiosity, wanting to know how high Ling Lan's spiritual power was. Unexpectedly, this almost ended in disaster, almost blowing up the device. If it weren't for Little Four's fast reflexes, quickly resealing Ling Lan's spiritual power back to tier-2, the results would have been catastrophic.

Frankly, Ling Lan's body at birth could bear up to tier-3 spiritual power, though her body would certainly be a little weakened. However, prioritising safety, Little Four had fixed Ling Lan's spiritual power at tier-2.

In any case, Ling Lan had not wasted these past six years. With the passage of time, Ling Lan's spiritual power had grown till the peak of tier-4. It shouldn't be long now before all her efforts culminated and she naturally ascended to a mind-blowing tier-5 at her age.

If the federal military ever found out that a six year old child had managed to achieve tier-5 when most grown men could not, they would certainly be floored. She was certain to be hailed as a genius among geniuses in terms of spiritual power.

Chapter 53: The Ling Family Rescuers!

On the screen, that troop of four crimson mechas had immediately gotten into battle stances, but they did not make the first move. Instead, one of the mechas tried to initiate communications via shouting. Unfortunately, Ling Lan couldn't hear anything from this distance — it made her have the sudden urge to rush into the learning space and redeem some spiritual power cultivation skills so that she could raise her spiritual power enough for Little Four to hack into their communication systems.

Right at that moment, the frozen tableau of the three groups suddenly turned as one to face a particular direction. It turned out that the two mechas which had been evading Little Four's projectiles had inadvertently stumbled into the detection range of the three groups.

The evading mecha B abruptly received an emergency warning from his mecha's systems. "Warning, enemy detected. Warning, enemy detected."

Only then did mecha B notice that several red dots had appeared on his radar, and when he drew closer, fifteen mechas from three different forces were displayed on his screen. By now, their weapons had already been levelled against him, but weren't locked on just yet.

“F*ck this, why are there so many mechas here? Wasn’t it agreed that there would be no one else here?” Mecha B’s entire chest felt cold, and his back was drenched with cold sweat ... could it be that this so-called mission was actually a trap?

Mecha A had also noticed these mechas, and his face paled dramatically. He seemed to have the same suspicions. “Head, let’s just run.”

Mecha B grit his teeth; he glanced at the many mechas before him on his screen, and then glanced at the two homing projectiles close behind them. Relying on his battle experience, he made a snap judgement. “Follow me closely. We’ll just charge through.” In this hopeless situation where they were facing a pincer attack, there was no room for them to retreat — only by charging forward might they have some hope of surviving.

The two mechas did not stop, accelerating instead as they rushed towards those mecha. Of course, as they moved, mecha B did not forget to open general communications to say, “Mecha squad 37 of the Seventh Division in the Third Army, please help us to eliminate the homing projectiles behind us ...”

Mecha B knew that this lie would be easily seen through, but his objective was not really to fool them — he only needed them to hesitate and not open fire, so that he and his partner would have the one minute they needed to escape from their attack radius and leave for safety. If they were a little luckier, they may even be able to borrow the opponents’ strength to get rid of the two projectiles sticking to them like gum.

Sure enough, when the opponent heard the words coming through the general comms channel, one of the squads lowered their particle-beam guns, while another squad lifted their weapons to train them on the air behind him and his partner. Only the four crimson mechas were still wary of them, facing them unwaveringly.

Meanwhile, on Ling Lan’s end, as she couldn’t hack into the groups’ communications, she could only watch in confusion as the two enemy mecha flew like moths to a flame towards the fifteen rescue mechas. She then saw the six mechas representing the military open fire first, however, they didn’t do it to kill those two mechas, but helped them instead to destroy the two homing projectiles tracking them.

Ling Lan’s brow furrowed, and her expression turned grim. Could it be that this assassination attempt on her was sanctioned by the military? Was it because she had proved to be too outstanding by absorbing too much gene stimulating agent, drawing the concern of the higher ranks of the military?

No! Ling Lan immediately threw out that possibility. These past few years, although Ling Lan had been forbidden from going onto the internet due to her being underage, she was still aware of the information available on the net. Little Four had given her a detailed overview of her new world, letting her know that this present world she was in was a militant world. From birth, every person was prepped to become qualified military personnel, and among all the military positions, mecha operators were considered the cream of the crop ...

The requirements to become a basic level operator were still rather common, but the requirements to be an advanced operator were just too demanding. Especially with regards to physical fitness — that requirement could almost be called insane. Thus, the Federation greatly prized all children who had the

possibility to become advanced operators, and all military branches and divisions were responsible to monitor and protect these children. They would never go after her for this reason.

Excluding this possibility, then, as such a young child, who could she have offended? The Ling family members who had been chased out of Doha? They did not have the guts to do this – if investigations found their hand behind this, the military would make sure that the Ling family would be utterly eradicated from within the Federation – the Ling family could not take the risk.

So, excluding herself, and also excluding the family, Ling Lan abruptly thought of the premium military benefits she had inherited. Before he died, her father Ling Xiao had been the youngest Major General in the Federation – could it have something to do with her father?

Ling Lan felt that this was a likely possibility – perhaps when her father had still been serving in the military, he had inadvertently offended some people ...

Only now did Ling Lan notice that she really didn't know much about her father Ling Xiao. She felt a little regretful – all these years, why hadn't she thought of asking Chamberlain Ling Qin and her other guardians about her father?

Of course, Ling Lan knew that her father was the Federation's ... uh, no, the whole universe's coolest, handsomest, most young and impressive, most outstanding, most formidable yet gentle, and flawless gentleman. (All the above was directly quoted from her mum Lan Luofeng, which led Ling Lan to conclude that a woman deeply in love was extremely blind. She would never say that out loud, of course, just letting this opinion stew within her, or else she would certainly be whisked away by her mum for a thorough spanking.)

Pity the present Ling Lan, who only knew her father had been one of the youngest Major General's in the Federation, and that he had died in a chaotic death tunnel during the war with the Ferrand Empire. As for anything else regarding Ling Xiao, she knew nothing ... um, well, that's not quite true – she also had the extremely embarrassing and overblown description her mum Lan Luofeng had insisted on telling her.

Ling Lan decided that when she returned safely this time, she would go find out more about her father and get to the bottom of things. She didn't want to have to be on her guard every day against hidden enemies – she liked having all the information within her hands so that she could chop off any trouble at its root.

Although all these thoughts went swirling through Ling Lan's mind, it was actually a matter of a split second. Meanwhile, when the two enemy mechas had gotten close enough to the fifteen mechas, the four crimson mechas that had been still and silent till now suddenly sprang into action, doing something that stunned all the other operators.

The four mechas had waited till the two enemy mechas were close to them before firmly pulling on their triggers. Countless high-temperature beams shot out from their guns, two mechas in a group, as they fired at the cockpits of the two enemy mechas.

The cockpits could not handle the high temperatures of the particle beams and finally exploded, blowing up the mechas along with them, all of it raining down to the ground in a fall of debris.

At that point, the military squad finally shook themselves out of their shock, and immediately raised their weapons agitatedly, aiming at the four crimson mechas. The situation was tense, and battle looked imminent.

The mecha squad from the Ling family was cunning — knowing that this was not a matter which concerned them, they quietly snuck away as the other two groups faced off against one another. Right now, their top priority was to locate their Young Master Lan; everything else was none of their business.

They soon found the right direction and sped off towards Ling Lan's location. At their current speed, it probably wouldn't even take one minute for them to arrive.

Little Four cast a longing glance at those four extremely powerful crimson mechas, and then looked back at the hover car he was controlling with disdain. He had completely forgotten how excited he was when he had first obtained the hover car, and how grateful he was when he had discovered the plasma cannons it was equipped with ... As expected, comparisons should be avoided — the moment one learns how to differentiate between good and bad in terms of quality, then pickiness and disgust are sure to follow. This was a bad habit that no sentient being could avoid.

Thirty-five seconds later, two particle beams shot out towards Ling Qin at almost the same time, striking the final two opponents he had been struggling with. The two men, which included the team captain, died on the spot.

Ling Qin exhaled deeply, slowly pulling back his attack stance to stand straight once more. With a smile on his face, he looked up at the sky and watched as five mechas appeared before him. The loyalists protecting Ling Lan were finally here; he could finally relax.

As the tension eased from his stance, Ling Qin could feel the aches and pains in his body making themselves known. He knew that this was the result of drawing on his latent reserves, but it was fine — the Ling family had a medicinal bath to repair this sort of damage. As long as he could rest for a couple of days, his body would recover. Of course, for Ling Qin, as long as Ling Lan was safe, even if his body was destroyed in the process, he would regret nothing.

The five mechas slowly descended in front of Ling Qin, until they all landed soundly. Then, three of the mechas continued to maintain a vigilant lookout, while the cockpits of the other two mechas opened up. The operators in those two mechas stood on a halyard and were lowered slowly to the ground. They were both dressed in a blue and white standard mecha operator uniform, with the Ling family fire phoenix logo emblazoned on their chests, flickering in an almost lifelike manner under the sunlight as if it were about to take flight.

The moment they landed, the two men hurried over to Ling Qin's side and removed their helmets. The one in the lead had a remorseful expression on his face as he said, "Elder Qin, sorry, our rescue was late." He was a hulking man, with a strong body and a strong face, with an honest and sincere expression. He was roughly thirty-four to thirty-five years old, and was very mature and reliable.

Ling Qin was very dissatisfied with the slow response time of the Ling family mecha rescue team. In this period of time, if they hadn't been so lucky that the opponent's hover car hadn't fired its cannons ... although it still fired them in the end, the projectiles had seemed uncontrolled, flying wildly in some

random direction, otherwise he would have been dead a thousand times over. And once he died, would Ling Lan – this six year old child – have had time to escape?

Furiously, he said, “Ling Hua, what really happened? Why didn’t you keep up with us?” The Ling family mecha squad was supposed to trail Ling Lan at all times, not allowing her out of their monitoring range. The Ling family had straightforward demands of the loyalists protecting the master — in cases of danger, they had to be on the scene within 10 seconds, unless it happened in a location where military force was forbidden, such as at the scout academies. But this time, the Ling family mecha squad had been delayed for a whole 5 minutes and more — this was something Ling Qin could not tolerate.

Ling Hua did not argue, only saying with remorse, “Sorry, Elder Qin, it’s our fault.”

Right then, the young man following Ling Hua spoke up, explaining, “Elder Qin, we fell for the opponent’s stratagem to lure us away — by the time we figured it out and rushed back, we had lost track of both you and Young Master Lan.”

“Ling Yu!” raged Ling Hua, as if unwilling to let Ling Yu explain. Perhaps he had decided that a mistake was a mistake, and that there was no excusing it.

Chapter 54: Ling Lan’s Loyalists

When Ling Qin heard what Ling Yu said, his attitude gentled considerably. Shaking his head, he sighed, “Oh you, why didn’t you say anything and just take all the blame on your shoulders? Youngster Hua, don’t push yourself too hard. This time, you all still made it in time, otherwise my old bones would have been ended here today.”

Ling Hua had been raised single-handedly by Ling Qin, which was why Ling Qin was so harsh on him. The deeper the love, the greater the expectation — Ling Qin had very high expectations of Ling Hua, cultivating him as his successor. It was his hope that after he passed away, Ling Hua would be able to take over his position and continue to protect the Ling family, Ling Lan, and her future children.

Still, perhaps Ling Qin had been too harsh on him, causing Ling Hua’s personality to become increasingly reserved, bottling everything up inside his heart. Even when he had been wrongfully accused, he would still keep quiet, silently taking all the blame.

This time, Ling Hua reacted in the same way. Although Ling Yu had explained on his behalf, and Ling Qin did not continue to berate him, Ling Hua still couldn’t get over his own inner guilt, saying, “Sorry, Teacher, I have disappointed you.”

Ling Hua’s fierce eyes were filled with pain and self-remonstration — his carelessness and wrongful judgement this time had almost ended in disaster, causing him to feel extremely ashamed.

Ling Yu felt that he could not let his team captain continue to blame himself; the pressure upon his captain was just too intense. He looked around briefly, and saw no sign of Ling Lan. His expression changed drastically as he asked, “Elder Qin, what’s going on? Where’s Young Master Lan? Why don’t I see Young Master Lan? Did something happen?”

Ling Qin hurried to reassure him, “It’s fine, it’s fine, Young Master Lan is very well. He’s just in hiding!”

He turned his head to look at Ling Hua, chuckling, “Young Master Lan is ... very intelligent, and also very level-headed. I believe that he won’t be any worse than any of the previous Ling family heads — you’ll like him.”

Ling Qin’s tone was full of pride — the rationality and calmness Ling Lan had displayed during moments of crisis was just too remarkable. Even Ling Lan’s father Ling Xiao might not have done any better than Ling Lan at six years old.

Although Ling Qin had jumped out of the car at the same time as Ling Lan, Ling Qin had still spared some attention to keep an eye on Ling Lan’s actions, afraid that Ling Lan would make a mistake under pressure. Unexpectedly, Ling Lan’s conduct had thrilled him immensely — be it choosing a piece of debris to hide behind in mid-air, or even the handling of her landing, everything had been almost perfect. In the end, it was Ling Qin’s hiding spot that had been discovered instead, forcing him to battle just for the hope of survival.

The more Ling Qin thought about it, the happier he became, and the smile on his face deepened accordingly. Perhaps grandparental love was a part of human nature, prompting elders in the family to take solace and fawn easily over their grandchildren and those of the same generation. Ling Qin selectively chose to forget that at six years old, Ling Xiao had already been thrown by his own father into the wilderness for survival training. In terms of resilience and keeping cool under pressure, Ling Xiao was certainly no weaker than the current Ling Lan.

At Ling Qin’s words, Ling Hua’s raised brows revealed his astonishment, but his expression was quickly smoothed back into his usual calm mask as he asked, “Teacher, then where is Young Master Lan now?”

Ling Qin signalled for them to walk with him. The three of them walked past several patches of shrubs and arrived at that wide expanse of flat plain, spreading out before them without a single hiding place in sight.

Looking out at this scene, the mature and reliable Ling Hua did not react in any way, patiently waiting for Chamberlain Ling Qin to explain. However, the young Ling Yu could not hold back his confusion, and asked, “Elder Qin, there’s no place for anyone to hide here. Why did you bring us here? To look at the scenery? What’s so interesting about a plot of yellow soil? It would be better to find Young Master Lan instead, so that we can protect him better.”

Ling Yu’s words implied that Chamberlain Ling Qin shouldn’t fool around with them any longer, that finding Young Master Ling Lan was more important.

Ling Qin glared at Ling Yu irritably, and smacked him on the head, barking, “You rascal, am I that unreliable? Dammit, don’t speak up if you know nothing. Disgraceful! Just keep following me and you’ll see.”

Ling Qin continued to lead the two of them forward, muttering all the way, “Really, you’ve been following after your team captain for around two to three years already, why haven’t you learnt the least bit of composure? Still so impatient ...” Ling Qin was somewhat puzzled — Ling Hua was so steady; after being in constant contact with him for these two to three years, Ling Yu’s character should have settled down somewhat as well. Why was he still so restless? In the future, how would he take over Ling Hua’s position to become the next mecha squad captain?

Ling Yu pulled a long face behind Ling Qin's back, twitching his brows and eyes at his captain as if asking him — had Elder Qin always been so naggy like this?

Ling Hua smiled wryly, communicating with his eyes that Ling Yu should just bear with it — he himself was already used to this.

Ling Qin finally arrived at the piece of debris Ling Lan had used to conceal herself, and he chuckled as he asked the two men beside him, "Do you sense anything?"

Ling Hua looked at that piece of debris before them, and his eyes flashed, thoughtfulness stealing over his face. Meanwhile, Ling Yu's face was full of bewilderment, seemingly completely clueless about what Chamberlain Ling Qin meant. Before him was obviously a flat piece of land — even if there was a small sheet of metal on top of it, it was still just a flat piece of land. There was really no place at all for someone to hide here, right? After all, could anyone be as thin as a piece of paper?

Ling Hua squatted down and touched the sheet of metal. "Young Master Lan should be right below this, right? It is indeed a great hiding place. Young Master Lan is very smart."

At Ling Hua's words, Ling Qin's smile grew even wider, causing his relatively wrinkle-free face to crinkle up into a smile as vibrant as a blooming flower. "That's right, Young Master Lan is just below." Squatting down as well, he knocked gently on the metal sheet, saying, "Young Master Lan, it's safe now, come out quickly."

The metal plate remained motionless, as if no one was below it. But just as Ling Yu started to wonder if Chamberlain Ling Qin was going senile, misremembering the location, the metal plate actually started to move. It twitched and then lifted up slightly, revealing a tiny gap between the plate and the ground.

Although the gap was really really narrow, Ling Yu could still clearly see the difference. He looked on with a face full of astonishment — who'd have guessed that there was really someone hiding below?

When Ling Lan saw that the person standing outside was really Ling Qin, she excitedly threw off the metal plate on top of her, jumped out of the hole, and hugged Ling Qin tight. As she did so, her little body was actually trembling.

Ling Qin sighed, and hugged Ling Lan in return. Although Ling Lan had reacted well under pressure, making all the right decisions, she was still just a child after all. That life and death situation must have really frightened her.

Ling Hua and Ling Yu could now see the ground below the metal sheet, and so finally understood how Ling Lan had managed to hide herself under it. There was a deep man-shaped ditch in the ground, perfectly sized for Ling Lan's body. As such, the sheet would cover it completely when Ling Lan was inside, and still remain parallel to the ground. This would lead outside observers to believe that it was just flat ground, and utterly dismiss the metal sheet.

Ling Hua looked at Ling Lan with a complex gaze. This ditch was most likely forcefully created by Ling Lan at the moment she landed — this meant that their little master was not to be taken lightly, both in terms of strength and situational adaptability. No wonder Chamberlain Ling Qin was so pleased — with Ling Lan in the family, the Ling family would never fall.

Still, due to her young age, she was unable to keep calm to the end yet, and was starting to show signs of aftershock now.

Ling Lan seemed to take comfort in Chamberlain Ling Qin's hug, and when she lifted her head once more, her face had regained its usual calmness, and her eyes no longer held the remnants of fear and shock that they had when he first saw her. Ling Hua nodded to himself. Their Young Master Lan's mental resilience seemed to be exceptional, and she seemed able to adjust her emotions well. As expected of a child who inherited their Master Ling Xiao's excellent genes — several years later, she would certainly be able to become an ace operator, perhaps even a royal operator ...

Ling Hua directed a friendly smile at Ling Lan — he wasn't good with words, and he also had no idea how to interact with a child, but he couldn't go wrong with a smile.

Ling Lan glanced at him curiously, and then tugged lightly on Chamberlain Ling Qin's sleeve, silently asking for Chamberlain Ling Qin to introduce these two men to her.

Ling Qin pointed at Ling Hua and said, "He's called Ling Hua, a Ling family loyalist, captain of the Ling family mecha force, responsible for the master's safety when he is out working. This time, he's in charge of the squad guarding us in secret." And then he pointed at Ling Yu, who had been trying to pose as a big brother figure beside Ling Lan, and said, "This brat is called Ling Yu. He's a member of the force, Young Master Lan can just choose to ignore him." With Ling Yu's erratic behaviour, Ling Qin was afraid that Ling Lan would be infected by it after too much exposure, so it would be better to just separate them from the start.

Ling Lan nodded at Ling Hua, and then asked Chamberlain Ling Qin, "Did something happen to the mecha squad, which is why they didn't manage to keep up with us?"

Ling Yu sputtered in surprise, "Young Master Lan, how did you know we had encountered some trouble?"

Ling Lan rolled her eyes at him, saying in contempt, "Why else would you all arrive so late?"

Ling Hua's gaze brightened unnaturally, but he quickly lowered his lashes, shielding his thoughts.

Ling Yu thought about it and couldn't help but agree — since the Ling family squad had not managed to arrive until this late, it went without saying that they must have been lured away by the enemy or had been caught in a trap. Why was he so stupid? To the extent that he was being looked down upon by a six year old child.

He could only rub at his nose in embarrassment and pretend that he could not feel Ling Lan's contempt as he replied seriously, "When we had just passed by Qiya City earlier and entered this wasteland, the captain was the first to notice a squad of mecha sneakily trailing Young Master Lan. To ensure the safety of Young Master Lan, the captain sent Ling Ze and two other men to draw away those mecha, while the captain and I continued to follow the both of you from far away. But soon enough, we had met up with another group of mecha which already had their weapons set up, who clearly intended to harm Young Master Lan. The captain and I could only open fire and draw way those mecha personally ... and then find a way to slip away."

Reaching this point in his explanation, Ling Yu's expression was dark, "Later, the captain and I managed to regain contact, only to find that we had all been drawn far away from Young Master Lan, completely losing any sign of Young Master Lan. We realised then that we had probably fallen for the enemy's stratagem of Luring the Tiger out of the Mountains. Thinking back on those mecha, they were better than us in terms of both numbers and equipment. It was still possible for the captain to escape, but at my level, I shouldn't have been able to escape, but I managed to ..."

Ling Yu was very depressed. He bowed his head, deeply regretful that he had not noticed all this back then, almost causing trouble to befall the Ling family's only hope. If he had figured out the enemy's intention earlier, even if he had to fight to the death, he would still stick to Young Master Lan. Moreover, he would send out a signal flare so that the other members would be able to rush to the rescue quicker.

Ling Hua was also full of self-recrimination. This cockup was entirely his fault — if he hadn't made the wrong decision, Ling Lan and Ling Qin would never have been pushed into such a dire situation, almost losing their lives in battle.

After Ling Lan had heard what Ling Yu had to say, her little face was grim. "This couldn't be helped. The enemy's plans were detailed and well-connected — even if you all had figured it out from the start and rushed over, it would probably have been useless anyway, and may even have forced the enemy to be even more vicious. Isn't everything just fine now? Everyone survived — that's a good thing, right? As long as we live, there's hope, and we can do what we want to do, no matter whether it's to protect or to seek revenge ..."

Ling Lan sent a warning glance at Ling Yu. "I sure hope no Ling family member is a retard ..." She had noticed Ling Yu's yearning to die in battle, perhaps wanting to redeem himself in this manner out of self-blame. However, this sort of retarded action was something Ling Lan despised — she would not allow her loyalists to become this kind of person.

Although Ling Lan's words were a little blunt, Ling Qin was very satisfied. Ling Lan's words had been both gentle yet firm, managing to convey the authority of a master without involving baseless anger, full of understanding and mercy. With this, Ling Hua and Ling Yu should be able to truly recognise Ling Lan as their master.

The Ling family loyalists — although generation after generation were dedicated to the Ling family head at the time, getting them to serve with their lives still required the head to earn their acknowledgement. This was the Ling family's way, a part of their rules and culture — according to the old ancestor's will, if the current head could not get the proud family loyalists to submit, then he should have no business pursuing any grand ambitions. He should just stay at home obediently and focus on siring children, living out his idyllic life.

The Ling family had set the submission of the loyalists as a trial of passage — success meant that the head could go out into the world and pursue his ambitions, while failure meant the head should just give up his dreams and stay home, and protect the already established family assets.

As expected, Ling Yu's face was full of emotion. His eyes were no longer downcast, but were shining brightly on his face. In this moment, he had truly become Ling Lan's loyalist and was no longer just a Ling family loyalist.

Chapter 55: I Suspected It From the Very Beginning!

After regaining his good cheer, Ling Yu noticed Ling Lan staring curiously at the particle-beam handgun at his waist. Showing off, he pulled out the handgun and passed it to Ling Lan, saying, "You like it? This is a particle-beam handgun — although its firepower is no match for submachine guns, it's still more than enough to wipe out anyone not wearing a protective vest."

Ling Lan's eyes sparkled as she accepted the handgun, excitement clear on her face. She lowered her head and began studying the gun, as if curious about how the particle-beam gun was assembled.

A smile played on Ling Hua's lips. In this moment, Ling Lan had reverted to a regular child, full of curiosity towards something she had never seen before.

Only Ling Qin looked strangely at Ling Lan — he knew that Ling Lan had long known about this sort of weapons, why did she want to feign enthusiasm? Still, he said nothing. He believed that Ling Lan must have her reasons for doing so, so he would wait patiently for the answer to be revealed at the end.

Watching as Ling Lan fiddled around clumsily with the handgun, Ling Yu nervously reminded, "Don't flick off that safety. That's the switch — pressing it carelessly will cause problems."

Ling Lan cast a reproachful look at Ling Yu, as if cross that he didn't trust her, but she was soon fully absorbed in playing around with the particle-beam handgun in her hands again. Not long after, after she had played her fill, she seemed to lose interest, and just as she was about to return the gun to Ling Yu, she suddenly saw that the handgun on Ling Hua's waist was different than the one in her hands. With some confusion, she asked Ling Hua, "Why is your particle-beam handgun different from this one?" shaking the gun in her hand.

Smiling widely, Ling Hua answered, "This is because the captain's designated weapons are different from the team members'."

"Oh? So that's why ... can I take a look at your handgun?" Ling Lan's eyes were full of curiosity, as if she really wanted to know what was special about the captain's handgun.

With just a little hesitation, Ling Hua pulled out his particle-beam gun and handed it over to Ling Lan. Of course, he did not forget to caution, "Make sure you don't open the safety catch. This handgun is four to five times stronger than the regular particle-beam handguns, almost on par with submachine guns. Young Master Lan, take care."

Ling Lan nodded obediently; she was not one to reject another's good intentions. Accepting the obviously larger handgun into her hands, she held the two guns up side by side in comparison. They actually didn't look that much different from the outside; only the tail-end, which housed the energy storage unit, and the barrel were noticeably thicker and larger than those on the regular particle-beam handguns.

Ling Lan played around with the two guns in her hands for a bit, but just as Ling Hua and Ling Yu were about to ask for their guns back, Ling Lan's next move immediately caused their eyelids to twitch uncontrollably. They had never thought that their own Young Master Lan could be so shameless — she blatantly put the two handguns directly into her protective vest, and even patted the compartments

they were in with satisfaction after. That smug expression on her face told them loud and clear that the two particle-beam handguns were hers now, confiscated as part of her collection.

Ling Hua laughed helplessly, looking at Ling Qin in hopes that he could say something to convince Young Master Lan to give the guns back. After all, these were their standard weapons, a necessary part of their equipment.

However, just as Ling Qin was planning to do just that, Ling Lan sent a pointed look his way, sharp and determined. His heart thudded in response, and he instantly changed his mind. Instead, he subtly indicated to Ling Hua that they should just let Young Master Lan satisfy her curiosity, and as for their weapons, they would be suitably compensated by Logistics when they got back to the Ling household.

Ling Hua and Ling Yu could only pretend they hadn't seen anything, while Ling Lan smirked like the cat that ate the canary. Their small group quickly left the deserted plains and returned to the place where Ling Hua and Ling Yu's mecha were parked. Ling Lan eyed those two gigantic mecha. Right now, standing proudly on the ground, looking down upon Ling Lan and the others, the mecha loomed large before her, making her feel exceptionally weak and fragile. It would be so easy for these mecha to crush her. The rush of emotion was too great, causing the excitement to blaze from her eyes as if she had just seen her most beloved toy.

In reality, Ling Lan wasn't as crazy about mecha as she made herself look to be, however, the cool mecha that she had only seen in anime and manga in her previous world was now standing right in front of her as something real and tangible ... this made her feel as if she was in a dream, and for a moment, she was unsure whether she was still here or had gone back to her previous world. Thus, Ling Lan could no longer maintain her calm facade.

"So this is our Ling family mecha? It looks so powerful." Ling Lan couldn't help but exclaim.

Ling Hua laughed, thinking back on his first time ever seeing a mecha — his reaction then had been much like Ling Lan's now.

Ling Yu became even more animated, boasting proudly, "Of course! But private mecha can only be this sort of standard mecha. If you enter the military, perhaps you can get even better mecha, and if you can become an ace operator, you can even change the colour of your mecha freely ... I really wish I could paint my mecha in my favourite colour red ..."

"Stop dreaming. We won't even have the chance to upgrade to a captain level mecha." Ling Hua voiced his regrets for the first time. Every mecha operator would like to pilot the best mecha he could handle, and soar freely among the stars, cutting down all enemies before him, being able to dominate through fearlessness and sheer strength.

Unfortunately, mecha were still considered restricted goods in the Federation. Even if some families had the right to own private mecha, all they could get were still the most basic standard mecha within the Federation.

Having his dream shattered by his own captain, Ling Yu could only sigh. Becoming a family loyalist meant that they could no longer pursue a military career.

Ling Lan seemed oblivious to Ling Hua and Ling Yu's actions, walking up to the mecha in a daze. She reached out to touch anywhere she could reach, and her fingertips met a smooth coldness, just as she expected from a metallic outer casing.

She wasn't content to just feel up one, running her hands over the other mecha as well. The slightly sleazy way she did it sent chills running through Ling Hua and Ling Yu as if they themselves were the ones who had been molested. It couldn't be helped — every mecha operator was very protective of his own mecha, loving it just as if it were his own body, which is why the two reacted this way.

At that moment, a loud rumble could be heard coming from above. Ling Lan lifted her head and immediately saw three mecha flying overhead in a radius of roughly 100 metres, each vigilantly watching the direction it was responsible for.

Ling Hua walked up to her and asked, "Young Master Lan, would you like to see how a mecha moves close up?"

Ling Qin frowned slightly. Was it really appropriate to use mecha to entertain a child at this time? Their safety hadn't been guaranteed yet after all.

Seeing this, Ling Hua explained, "The military group came together with us. They are guarding the outer perimeter right now, and we only managed to escape earlier due to their help."

Ling Lan looked up at Ling Qin with a face full of hope, stopping Ling Qin's words of refusal within his throat. Fine, just consider it as a sort of compensation. Ling Lan had almost lost her life this time, it should be fine to spoil her for a bit. So Ling Qin nodded, giving his approval.

At this, Ling Lan saw Ling Hua winking at her conspiratorially, prompting her to giggle. Looks like Ling Hua really wanted to entertain her and had arranged this on purpose.

Immediately, Ling Hua connected the communicator on his wrist. "Ling Ze, fly a bit lower so Young Master Lan can see how cool you all are. Make it a good show!" Ling Hua's words had a double meaning, subtly telling the other members that they shouldn't just do a simple sweep, but should include a few fancier moves — children loved those, after all.

"Roger!" Ling Ze got the point instantly.

The three mecha revved their engines and began flying circles above Ling Lan. And then they began executing various basic flying manoeuvres and combat moves, causing Ling Lan to drink it all in excitedly, clapping and jumping unabashedly.

After a set of extremely fancy movements, the three mecha suddenly dropped rapidly, causing Ling Lan to scream out in shock, before coming to a sudden stop, drawing laughter from Ling Lan once more.

Watching this scene, Ling Qin felt tears gather in his eyes. Ling Lan's usually mature demeanour often made Ling Qin almost forget that Ling Lan was just a six year old child — it was natural for her to be this innocent and carefree. Sadly, due to Master Ling Xiao premature death, she had had no choice but to bear the mountainous burdens of the Ling family, which was why he had no choice but to force Ling Lan to grow up so quickly ...

This was supposed to have been something her father would have shown her, but was now being performed for her by the Ling family loyalists. If only the mecha flying above were Ling Xiao's IN mecha — how wonderful that would be.

The three mecha finally finished their performance and began their descent. To avoid shaking the ground too much, they activated the anti-gravity function of the engine. The mecha gradually descended, and the immense thrust energy coming from the engine caused Ling Lan, who was standing closest to the mecha, to lose her footing. Just as she was about to fall over, however, Ling Hua reacted and grabbed hold of Ling Lan, holding Ling Lan still even as he stabilized her.

On Ling Lan's lowered face, a flash of killing intent came and went. Wasn't Ling Hua holding on just a bit too tightly?

A cold awareness spread through Ling Lan's eyes, and her hands, feet, waist, and torso all shifted slightly in preparation ...

The mecha got closer and closer, and Ling Lan raised her head with difficulty. From Ling Hua's height, he could clearly see the expression on Ling Lan's face, full of excitement and joy, completely clueless about what would happen to her soon.

A trace of regret and hesitation flashed through Ling Hua's eyes ...

Right then, the three mecha which had just landed suddenly raised up their right arms simultaneously, directing their lightspeed guns squarely at Ling Lan. Before anyone could react, Ling Hua, who had been holding Ling Lan, suddenly lifted Ling Lan's entire body up and threw her upwards into the air with all his might ...

Flying above Ling Hua's head, Ling Lan could clearly see Ling Qin rushing over from behind Ling Hua with a face full of fear and panic, while an enraged Ling Yu followed close behind.

Unfortunately, it was too late, as two of the three mecha aiming at Ling Lan abruptly turned to transfer their aim to Ling Qin and Ling Yu ...

Quicker than words could say, a decisive chokehold!

Ling Lan's right arm shot out at an angle which defied human physics, forcibly bending to lock onto Ling Hua's throat, and pivoting on this chokehold, she pulled back her body backwards in mid-air to hide herself behind Ling Hua's back. At the same time, a particle-beam handgun had appeared in Ling Lan's left hand and then it was pressed harshly against Ling Hua's temple.

"Don't move!" Ling Lan yelled out, freezing the three mecha in their tracks. If she had just been a bit slower, they would have pulled their triggers.

Suddenly finding himself in a reversed hostage situation, Ling Hua's face changed. With a chagrined look, he asked, "Where did we mess up, Young Master Lan?"

Ling Lan answered serenely, "From the very beginning."

"Huh?" Ling Hua did not understand.

“From the moment you all were late, I had begun suspecting all of you. And when you all managed to return without any injuries at all, I knew for sure.” Ling Lan had never trusted the Ling family mecha squad from the very beginning.

Chapter 56: Individual Plots

The two sides faced each other in a stalemate. Although the three mecha still had their lightspeed guns trained on Ling Lan’s group of three, because Ling Lan had Ling Hua at her mercy, they didn’t dare to really pull their triggers, afraid that Ling Lan would kill Ling Hua in response.

On the other hand, although Ling Qin and Ling Yu really wanted to get closer to help Ling Lan control Ling Hua, the three mecha clearly knew that letting them gather together would be a bad idea, and had shot a few warning shots at their feet when they tried to move. This was a warning to not move recklessly, otherwise they would willingly choose to let everyone die altogether.

Both sides had their own concerns, so both sides dared not to make the first move ...

“Why?” This stalemate gave Ling Hua the time to voice the questions he held within his heart.

“There is only one possibility why Ling family loyalists would be late to the rescue, and that is fighting to the death after being caught in an ambush — I’m sure you understand.” Ever since Ling Lan had been officially taught how to read, she had blatantly started to go through all the old books and historical records preserved by the Ling family. Therefore, she was well aware of all the information pertaining to the training of the Ling family loyalists — a truly loyal Ling family loyalist would never choose to leave his master’s side on his own.

In a situation like what Ling Hua described, Ling family loyalists would only choose to fight the enemy till the death, and not run away. They would definitely never allow their master to leave their sight unless they all ended up dead.

Hearing this, Ling Hua smiled coldly. “Don’t you know that the Ling family has another family rule? If a new master would like the loyalists to defend him with their lives, he will have to first gain the acknowledgement of the loyalists. You think you’ve done this, Young Master Lan?” His lips curled into a mocking smile. Ling Lan’s baseless accusations and suspicious nature were very likely to alienate others, leading to the eventual downfall of the Ling family. This proved that he hadn’t made the wrong choice — it was just a pity he had failed.

Ling Hua sighed, “Young Master Lan, this time, you were just lucky to stumble onto the truth.” The goddess of luck had stood on Ling Lan’s side today, while he was just unlucky. Still, he wasn’t going to make things easy for Ling Lan. He continued to say, “However, you should really do something about your suspicious and distrustful nature — which family loyalist would be willing to lay down their life for you with that personality? Perhaps he might be the very next person you suspect.”

Ling Hua’s words caused both Ling Qin and Ling Yu’s face to drain of colour. Ling Qin knew that Ling Hua was saying this just to sow the seeds of distrust within the Ling family loyalists, to prevent them from ever fully trusting in Ling Lan, making it so that Ling Lan would never be able to gain the acknowledgement of the Ling family loyalists ... while Ling Yu was worried about whether he was under Ling Lan’s suspicion himself.

Ling Lan had seen the change in both Ling Qin and Ling Yu's expressions — Little Four's full-scope coverage was very efficient. Nothing that happened on the scene would escape his detection, even small actions such as Ling Hua's surreptitious palming of a dagger from within his sleeve.

Ling Lan silently put up her guard, even as her lips curled up in a cool smirk, "Lucky? If your mecha had had any signs of battle on it, perhaps I might have doubted my suspicions ... Unfortunately, you forgot to account for the small details. You should have compared it with Ling Yu's mecha, and added on several scrapes caused by beam shots. Perhaps then your words would have been more believable ... Ah, I'm really such an overly suspicious person."

Slowly but surely, Ling Lan pointed out the mistakes Ling Hua had made in his setup. As Ling Qin heard her speak, his face became more and more wrought with emotion — so his Young Master Lan had already become so capable without his noticing ... Master Ling Xiao truly had a successor now. A frisson of regret ran through Ling Qin's heart — oh, if only Young Master Lan was really a young master!

Ling Yu finally realised that what he had assumed to be the childish whims of Young Master Lan, were actually full of hidden meaning. He looked at the small body clinging to Ling Hua's back, holding Ling Hua hostage, and his eyes glittered with a strange light.

Young Master Lan was so level-headed and intelligent — as befitting her status as master. At only six years old, she was already so amazing, and it was likely that she would only grow up to be even more impressive. Awe and respect surged within Ling Yu — at this very moment, he truly recognised Ling Lan as the master he intended to serve, someone he would be willing to sacrifice his life for.

"So, you were feeling up our mecha to check for the signs of battle." Ling Hua finally understood where he had gone wrong and was filled with regret.

He couldn't believe that he had really been tricked by Ling Lan. He had thought that she was just a child, that no matter how smart she was, she wouldn't be able to see through his plot. Unexpectedly, Ling Lan was so freakishly talented that she had suspected everything from the start. Not only did he not manage to fool the other, but unknowingly, he had been drawn into the other's carefully laid plot.

Frankly, Ling Lan hadn't been sure at first who was the traitor, which was why she had plotted to take away both Ling Hua and Ling Yu's particle-beam handguns so that she could guarantee Ling Qin's and her own safety. And then, she had faked an obsession for mecha so that she could get close enough to inspect the mecha. As she touched the outer shell of the mecha, she took the opportunity to check on the condition of the mecha, which helped her to determine the true culprit.

Ling Hua chuckled bitterly. If only he had taken Ling Lan seriously from the start and treated her as an equal, he would never have let Ling Lan get close to his mecha. Then, she wouldn't have been able to discover his lie, and he wouldn't have ended up losing so terribly.

"Didn't you consider that I could just be that much stronger? The captain must be better than the regular team members after all," asked Ling Hua stubbornly.

Ling Lan was silent for a moment as she considered his point, but then replied regretfully, "Honestly, I would like to think that way as well. I really did not want to see the day the Ling family loyalists would betray the Ling family — betray me ... But, you forgot the most important thing, one of our Ling family's most important house rule."

Ling Lan's voice was soft, but her words crashed into Ling Hua's ears like thunder, "While we still have strength, we are not to abandon our family. Ling Hua, it's true that the Ling family loyalists do not have to put their lives on the line before they have acknowledged the current family head. This is why I do not doubt Ling Yu's loyalty. There are clear signs of beam damage on his mecha, some close to piercing through his cockpit. This meant that he had almost died in his fight, that he had done all that he could ... " Hearing this, Ling Yu's heart warmed, and his eyes became damp instantly.

"But you are different. Your mecha has no signs of damage at all, which meant that the situation was still well within your control. Although I have not gained your acknowledgement, I'm still a member of the Ling family, still a member of your family ... but in that situation, you chose to abandon me. This behaviour ... what does it mean?"

Ling Hua was rendered speechless. So, he had carelessly exposed his true thoughts so easily — he had taken the six year old Ling Lan much too lightly. Deep in his heart, regret swirled. If he had known that Ling Lan was this bright, he would have just carried on honestly with his duty to protect Ling Lan. If he had not fallen for that temptation, and chosen to take this risk, perhaps his children would still be able to receive the best upbringing from the Ling family in remembrance of his hard work ...

"Young Master Lan, I'm sorry. If I had only known you were such a bright child, I would not have accepted another's offer to betray you. Sadly, it's too late. I will not ask for your forgiveness, but only hope that you won't take out your anger on my family and my children — everything is my own fault." Ling Hua exhaled a quiet breath, the regret in his eyes unconcealed as he spoke with an earnest expression.

Emotionlessly, Ling Lan replied, "I never take out my anger on other people."

"Thank you, Young Master Lan!" As Ling Hua's voice rang out, the stalemate broke in a blur of violence. Ling Hua grabbed Ling Lan's hand on his throat with his own left hand, even as he flicked his right hand upwards in a vicious thrust. The dagger in his hand was aiming for Ling Lan right wrist, which was holding the particle-beam handgun to his head. That was the greatest threat to him right now, and he needed to get rid of it while Ling Lan was still unprepared.

But then, he felt a flash of heat course through his head, and all was empty ... he could no longer feel his right hand — had he missed? Why wasn't his left hand holding on to that little hand at his throat?

And then he saw the scenery in his vision change, from the sight of three mecha to a sheet of endless blue ... and that was his final thought.

"Captain!" A terrible wail rose up from among the three mecha.

And then the three mecha pressed down on their triggers resolutely ...

Ling Qin and Ling Yu made a frenzied jump towards Ling Lan, hoping desperately that they would be able to block Ling Lan from the beam attacks.

Only Ling Lan was unmoved, staring steadily at the three mecha without even flinching.

Ling Qin and Ling Yu shoved Ling Lan roughly onto the ground, and then laid their own bodies over hers to cover her from sight completely, almost suffocating Ling Lan in the process.

Impassively, Ling Lan said, “Grandpa Ling Qin, and you too Ling Yu ... you’re flattening me, can you both get off me now?”

Ling Qin barked, “Just stay still and hide yourself! Even if we die, you cannot die. You’re our Ling family’s only hope.”

Ling Yu nodded vigorously in agreement. “I’m Young Master’s loyalist. To die for you is my duty and honour.” That said, he pressed down on Ling Lan’s head once more, as if afraid that Ling Lan would be struck by some stray attack beam. Ling Yu was rather surprised that he could survive for so long under the collective attack of three beam guns, so long that he even had time to respond to Young Master Lan.

Finally, Ling Lan could take it no longer. With a dramatic roll of her eyes, she said, “Don’t you two notice that you aren’t in any pain whatsoever?”

Taken aback, Ling Qin abruptly realised that it was true — why wasn’t there any pain? Could it be that his entire body had been blown to smithereens until his nerves were no longer there to feel pain? Of course, he knew this was impossible, so the only possible explanation was that the opponent had not attacked ...

Ling Yu had also figured it out by this time. They turned back to look and saw the three mecha just standing there, still in their attack stances, unmoving as if they had been frozen in place.

But when they looked at the middle sections of the mecha, they immediately understood — somehow, sometime, the cockpits of the three mecha had disappeared, only leaving behind three large holes.

Not too far away from the mecha, the three cockpits could be seen slowly drifting downwards on parachutes, flashing distress signals all the way. The three cockpits had obviously been set to space rescue mode — as long as no one opened the cockpits up to provide rescue from the outside, the people inside would not be able to open it.

From the looks of it, the three cockpits had been automatically set to rescue mode by the mecha and summarily ejected, causing the pilots to become trapped like fish in a bowl.

Seeing this, Ling Qin and Ling Yu were ecstatic. They quickly clambered off the ground, pulling Ling Lan up with them, and then Ling Yu ran over to check on the three cockpits to make sure the opponents were really trapped within. After all, the pilots still had weapons on them — this was not the time to take any chances.

Meanwhile, Ling Qin had walked over to stand by Ling Hua’s body, sadness written all over his face. Ling Hua was the successor he had raised singlehandedly, outstanding in all respects. Whether in terms of ability or personal charisma, he was heads above all the others. All these years, as Ling Qin gradually released the reins, Ling Hua had taken on a larger role and had gradually gained the trust of the other Ling family loyalists. Slowly but surely, he was being accepted as the next leader of the Ling family loyalists.

In Ling Qin’s original plans, once Ling Hua had acknowledged Ling Lan, he would relinquish his role as the leader of the loyalists and pass it on officially to Ling Hua. He had believed that, as long as Ling Hua took good care of Ling Lan, the glory days of the Ling family would continue. So, even when he died, he would be able to face the previous two family heads proudly in the afterlife.

He would never have guessed in a million years that the successor he had chosen and raised so carefully would betray them, breaking his heart and chilling it in equal measure.

Ling Hua, what in the world could have persuaded you to betray Ling Lan — to betray the Ling family? Could there possibly be someone else like you in the Ling family?

Chapter 57: The Still Unresolved Fear of Heights!

“Little Four, this time is all thanks to you.” With a face full of gratitude, Ling Lan looked at the smugly wriggling Little Four in the learning space. If it hadn’t been for him, no matter how alert she was or how much she tried to prepare, the result would have been the same — the overwhelming strength of a weaponised mecha was not something her strategies could counter, meaning that they actually had no chance of winning.

The reason Ling Lan had blabbered on for so long with Ling Hua, was to buy time for Little Four to infiltrate the mecha’s A.I. and wrest control. Although Little Four was like a god in the virtual world, the natural enemy of all A.I., the A.I. of the mecha was not like the low-level goods installed in the hover cars. For Little Four to gain control, he still needed to expend quite a bit of effort. Of course, after gaining this experience, it wouldn’t take this long to hack into common standard mecha next time, unless the mecha was of a higher level.

Besides that, Ling Lan had also wanted to take the chance to reveal Ling Hua’s true colours to Ling Qin and Ling Yu, as well as lay out the reasons for calling him a traitor. She knew very well that if misunderstandings and grudges were not removed early, after festering to a certain extent, the consequences could be disastrous, and she had no intention of making such a low-level mistake.

After examining the three cockpits, Ling Yu bounded back excitedly, and asked Ling Lan, “Young Master Lan, what should we do next?”

Ling Yu had already acknowledged Ling Lan, fixating on her as his lifelong master, so his first instinct was to look to Ling Lan for instruction.

“Contact home and ask them to send more people over. Bring these people back for interrogation, and find out who exactly is the one who is after me, and after the Ling Clan.” Ling Lan had not forgotten about that locked-down hover car Little Four had parked at the wayside — perhaps the people inside knew something useful.

“Yes, Young Master Lan!” If it wasn’t for the fact that Young Master Lan was not yet sixteen years old, and as such not able to officially accept the position of family head, Ling Yu would have really liked to call her ‘Master’.

That’s right, Ling Yu had already imprinted on Ling Lan for this life — so even if Master Ling Xiao came back to life, his loyalty would not change. Of course, the current Ling Yu did not know that he would really face this extremely difficult dilemma in the future ...

With a heavy heart, Ling Qin walked back to stand by them. Even without looking at his heavy steps, Ling Lan knew that Ling Hua’s death was a great blow to the old chamberlain who had served the Ling family for three generations. After all, within these last six years, Ling Qin had spoken of Ling Hua’s excellence

more than once with unreserved pride. Yet, it was this same person that he had been so proud of that had betrayed the Ling family, betrayed him ... this caused Ling Qin to lose faith his own judgement.

Frankly, Ling Lan's ready suspicion of Ling Hua had a lot to do with Chamberlain Ling Qin's constant mentions of Ling Hua around her. Because, according to Ling Qin, Ling Hua was just too outstanding — so outstanding that it was impossible for him to commit such a low-level mistake and delay rescue. So really, a person should never stand out too much. Doing so would make people remember you, so whenever you decide to drag your feet to cause a bit of mischief, the jarring difference between your performance then and now would easily expose your intentions. If Ling Hua ever found out that this was the reason behind his failure, he would probably deeply regret how brilliantly he had shone before this day.

Ling Lan didn't know what she could say to console the sad old man before her. She had never been good at consoling others. That was why she had decided to always face her loved ones with a smile in her previous life, just so her parents wouldn't worry. Still, history had proven that this method of hers was useless. Although her parents would keep smiling in front of her, they would always cry later in places where she couldn't see — but her ears were sharp, so she had still heard it all. (Due to her high spiritual power, her five senses were also N-times more sensitive than an average person's.)

Ling Lan believed that for someone to forget their grief, that person should be kept busy. Wasn't it said that time was the best medicine? She was sure she had read it in a book somewhere ... In any case, regardless of whether it works, she would just go ahead and use it for now. She lifted her hands to clasp Ling Qin's hands in hers, and asked, "The hover car is gone. How are we going to get to school?"

Well, alright, so Ling Lan hadn't forgotten the purpose of their trip today. Today was the first day of school for her — Ling Lan didn't want to become that one student who was late on the first day and become the focus of attention that way. Ling Hua's bloody end had driven the lesson home that it wasn't a good thing to stand out and be remembered.

When Ling Qin heard Ling Lan's question, he immediately rallied himself. That's right, now wasn't the time to grieve! He must not allow Ling Lan to be marked down for being late — this black mark would definitely hold Ling Lan back when she applied to the various major military schools in the future. Ling Qin was very ambitious — he was already imagining Ling Lan's entrance into the Federation's strongest number one boys' military school ...

Alright, so Ling Lan's true gender had slipped his mind for the moment — please forgive an old man for his random fit of Alzheimer's!

Without even thinking about it, Ling Qin decided that he would pilot Ling Hua's mecha to send Ling Lan to the Central Scout Academy. As for those traitors and assassins, he would leave them to the reluctant Ling Yu, who really wished he could switch places with Ling Qin.

Looking on as Ling Qin flew away with Ling Lan as a passenger on the mecha, Ling Yu's face was glum as he whined internally. Boo hoo hoo! How I wish I could personally send Young Master Lan to school ...

The mournful Ling Yu could only vent his surging resentment on the few assassins within the hover car. Before they left, Little Four had already unlocked the car door, but for safety reasons, he had destroyed

the A.I. on board to disable its weaponry. As for the old-school particle-beam handguns, they were basically useless against mecha, so the assassins didn't even dare to try and resist, obediently giving themselves up. Even so, they were almost roasted. Ling Yu used the beam gun on his mecha to herd them, and even though the beams had just grazed by their bodies, the intense heat of the shots had still left serious burn damage on them, leaving them one step away from being cooked.

Thus, by the time another batch of Ling family loyalists arrived, the assassins looked at them as if they were their saviours, so moved that they almost wanted to cling to the loyalists' feet and cry.

Dammit, even if they were assassins, and now prisoners, that didn't mean they deserved to be tortured! What happened to human rights?

The moment Ling Lan entered the cockpit, she found out how a mecha carried a passenger. It turned out that behind the control seat of the mecha, between the seat and the wall of the cockpit, there was a small space. It was large enough to hold a grown person of roughly 150 catties 1, but of course it wasn't as comfortable as the pilot control seat, and could perhaps even be considered a little cramped.

Of course, for a child like Ling Lan, this space was still rather large, almost enough for Ling Lan to move around freely inside.

Closing the cockpit door, the lights dimmed, and Ling Qin quickly pressed the A.I. activation button to light up the cockpit once again.

"A.I. activated. Checking in progress. Please wait! To select emergency activation, please press the emergency activation button!" The A.I. reminded as part of its activation procedure.

There were two ways to activate a mecha — one was the regular activation, which was a little slow, requiring about 1 to 3 minutes, while the other was the emergency activation, whose activation time correlated with the level of the A.I.. The higher the level of the A.I., the less time it took to activate. The A.I. of this type of common standard mecha required between 12 to 15 seconds.

Captain level mecha could shorten this time till about 10 to 12 seconds, and moving upwards, each level higher could shorten that time by another 2 to 3 seconds. At the top, the Federation's ultimate weapons, the IN mecha, could truly achieve 0-second activation, which was one of the reasons why they were considered the strongest mecha.

Of course, Ling Qin did not choose the option of emergency activation this time. Although Ling Lan ran the risk of being late, the situation was not so dire that they had to use emergency activation.

Although emergency activation could save time, it had a fatal weakness — it would skip the process of checking the functionality of all its parts and weapons. Mecha, as finely-calibrated combat machines, would accumulate damage to its various parts in every battle. And when a particular part reached its breaking point and stopped functioning as it should, if the pilot decided that day to use emergency activation ... predictably, it would all end in tragedy. The only question being the scale of the tragedy.

Naturally, Ling Qin would not let Ling Lan risk this kind of danger, so he took the regular path of regular activation.

This time, the activation process did not require the full 3 minutes, completing itself in 2 minutes and 10 seconds, logging them onto the main mecha control system.

However, this sort of activation speed drew Little Four's contempt — within the learning space, he was jumping around agitatedly, loudly complaining about how this sort of tortoise-like speed was literally akin to murdering the mecha operator. If it weren't for Ling Lan's quick and vehement objection, Little Four would have already forced his way into the mecha to begin modifying the A.I..

Still, Ling Lan promised Little Four that once she obtained her own mecha, she would definitely let Little Four take charge of the A.I. — it would be up to him completely how he would like to modify it. Only then did Little Four subside reluctantly, agreeing to wait till the day he could show off what he could do.

Swiftly, Ling Qin turned on the mecha's omnidirectional display function, which immediately immersed them in what Ling Lan felt to be like a virtual world. It seemed like she was sitting on a floating seat, looking down at the ground from a height of 5 to 6 metres.

Yep, this feeling isn't half bad! Ling Lan watched with enraptured eyes as Ling Qin piloted the mecha, finding the entire process fascinating. She was a little eager to try it herself, starting to look forward to the day she could pilot her own mecha.

Ling Qin grabbed hold of the control stick, and turned his head briefly to caution, "Young Master Lan, sit tight, I'm about to take off."

Ling Lan nodded and held on tightly to the armrest beside her, indicating that she was ready.

Receiving confirmation from Ling Lan, Ling Qin's hands flew rapidly over the controls — all Ling Lan knew was that within a split second, Ling Qin had gone through approximately 20 different motions.

From the outside, the mecha Ling Qin was controlling was seen to bend its knees, and then it sprang upwards. Simultaneously, the two main engines below the waist section of the mecha rumbled to life, generating an immense propulsion force, sending the mecha flying forwards into the air.

The abrupt movement of the mecha caused Ling Lan's body to be pressed down securely into her seat by the opposing gravity. Fortunately, Ling Lan's physical condition was good enough that it didn't feel particularly uncomfortable.

Although the cockpit had a certain degree of decompression capability, for the sake of better sense control for the pilot, it didn't eliminate this sort of inertia. This was yet another reason why mecha operators needed to have strong physical bodies. Research had proven that, without the existence of pressure, operators were unable to sense the movements of the mecha — they were unable to confirm whether their movements were being projected accurately, and thus couldn't achieve the precision needed to execute the movements they wanted up to proper standards.

Soon, the mecha had entered airspace and had begun flying swiftly towards its destination. Due to the projection of the omnidirectional display, Ling Lan had the false perception that she was sitting on an untethered chair, weaving swiftly through the blue skies and fluffy white clouds ...

All Ling Lan could hear was a persistent buzzing in her ears, and then ... she blacked out.

Before she fainted, she finally remembered — she still hadn't gotten over her fear of heights yet!

Noooooo ~~~ what about my dream of piloting a mecha?!!! Ling Lan was weeping piteously at Little Four within the learning space. In return, Little Four was driven into a frenzy — if Ling Lan did not manage to overcome this problem, how would he ever get the chance to modify a mecha's A.I.?

Chapter 58: A Familiar Totem!

Early that morning, the main entrance of the Central Scout Academy was already bustling with people. Countless hover cars weaved through the air — if the local government hadn't taken the proper precautions by sending out police forces to maintain order, the traffic would most likely have jammed up and several collisions might even have occurred ...

It couldn't be helped, as there were just too many cars. Every year, almost ten thousand students enrolled in this scout academy, and the parents of the students who were only allowed to go home on off days every week were out in full force. They were the main culprit behind the unusual congregation of hover cars in the air today.

After all, only the top hundred kids who qualified for the special classes had the right to be day students 1, and could freely choose the courses they were interested in. The other children had no choice but to accept the school's arrangements to live on campus and were only allowed to go home on off days every week.

However, these children could still change their fate — every year, there were two chances to enter the special classes. To encourage competitive spirit in the children, the Central Scout Academy would rerank the entire school every six months. It didn't matter if you were in the special classes, the merit classes, or the regular classes, no one was exempt, and only those who managed to rank within the top hundred would be taken into the special classes for the next six months.

Of course, for the children from the merit classes and the regular classes to score within the top hundred and enter the special classes ... although it couldn't be said that no one succeeded, the chances of it happening were highly unlikely, rarer than rare 2. From the beginning, the children from the special classes would receive education and resources far beyond the means of the regular classes; half a month's time was more than enough time for the gap between them and the children from the other classes to grow exponentially.

Nevertheless, this was still considered a sort of fairness mechanism — a chance given by the school for those children in the merit and regular classes to break through their limits and reach for the stars 3 — whether the children succeeded in doing so depended solely on them.

On one of the fields of the scout academy, Qi Long, Han Jijun and his cousin Han Xuya, as well as the twin siblings Luo Lang and Luo Chao, were gathered together. They were peering out into the sky with their heads lifted as if searching for something.

They had arrived at the scout academy bright and early that morning. Ever since they had found out that they had qualified for the special classes, they had been filled with anticipation for the first day of school.

That's right, the final results confirmed that all five of them had been grouped into the special classes. Qi Long, Han Jijun, and Luo Chao had all entered Special Class-A, while the two girls had successfully

entered Special Class-B. This result had sent the girls into joyous fits — none of the adults had expected much of them at first, predicting that it was more likely for them to end up in Merit Class-1. So when the results came out, the two girls had been smug about it for weeks.

Besides that, Luo Shaoyun and Yuan Youyun, who had taken the exam with them, had also managed to rank within the top hundred, successfully becoming members of Special Class-B. And while the final two people in their exam group had scored a little weaker, they had still got into Merit Class-1, which was the top class right after the special classes.

Han Xuya and Luo Chao knew in their hearts that these exemplary results were all thanks to Boss Ling Lan. (Since their elder brothers had already recognised him as their boss, of course they'd choose to follow suit.) However, they also knew that it was all up to them from this point onwards — they really did not want to be the first students to drop out from the special classes.

“Qi Long, you still haven't found Boss' hover car?” chubby-girl Han Xuya asked Qi Long rudely.

Han Jijyun marked her tone and frowned. He really disliked the way his cousin sister ordered Qi Long around; she shouldn't lose her manners just because they were familiar. This character of his cousin's made it very easy for her to offend others without even knowing it.

Qi Long did not respond, not because he was angry or anything, but just because he was too lazy to deal with Han Xuya. He just kept his eyes glued to the sky, but sadly, he still saw nothing.

Seeing how Qi Long was ignoring her, Han Xuya was a little ticked off. But just as she was about to say something about it, she saw her elder cousin brother glaring at her, so she could only swallow her words resentfully. What could she do? Her parents had told her to listen to Han Jijyun in all things at school.

Finally, Qi Long could take it no longer. He reeled back his gaze, rubbed his hands over his tired eyes, and said helplessly, “No sight of that hover car Boss was riding before ...”

Luo Lang jeered, “Calling someone 'boss' yet forgetting to get his contact number — tsk, only you.”

It turned out that, in his excitement back then, Qi Long had forgotten the most important thing — to exchange contact information with Ling Lan. As such, now he could do nothing but keep scouring the skies with his eyes for any sign of Ling Lan's hover car among the countless other hover cars in the sky.

Qi Long threw an unimpressed glance at Luo Lang, retorting, “Didn't you forget too?” Who was he to criticize him when they were the same?

“You ...” Qi Long had hit Luo Lang right where it hurt, riling up the boy once again.

Han Jijyun rubbed his forehead in consternation and began to play mediator. “Ok, ok, since we've all acknowledged the same person as our boss, we're all on the same boat now. We should be a bit more united, to avoid giving Boss Lan any trouble.”

Perhaps Han Jijyun's phrasing of 'giving Boss Lan trouble' was effective, for the two troublemakers subsided, although they both still sniffed loudly once before turning away to ignore each other.

Han Jijyun smiled wryly to himself. These two were certainly a handful — looks like their issues could only be resolved once Boss Ling Lan gets here to force them to get along. Alright, so the one who had

always been watching out for Qi Long, Han Jijyun, had also learned how to shift responsibilities, summarily deciding that these two troublemakers were Ling Lan's problem now.

At that moment, a loud siren rang out through the Central Scout Academy!

This siren was to warn everyone present that some weaponised force had entered the outer perimeter of the Central Scout Academy.

Heavens, who would be so daring as to attack Doha's Central Scout Academy? Did they not know that the school had a squad of military mecha in permanent residence?

Before Qi Long, Luo Lang, and the others could react, a dark grey mecha could be seen approaching rapidly from the horizon. Its imposing large body, as well as the two giant beam sabres on its back, sent tremors of fear running down the back of anyone who saw it.

However, the Central Scout Academy also responded quickly — six blue-white mecha had already appeared to fly forward to meet the dark grey mecha.

The only reason they didn't just open fire was that the signal being transmitted by the dark grey mecha registered as friendly, but they still couldn't afford to drop their guard.

Watching this, the children on the ground were slack-jawed and wide-eyed with wonder. Some of them had never seen a federal mecha before — at most, they had seen pictures, or even 3D animations — and while others may have seen the real thing before, they had still never seen a real battle between real airborne mecha.

Regardless, all the children here shared one thing in common. All of their eyes had lighted up at the sight of the mecha, glittering and bright. Unquestionably, they had been utterly captivated by the formidable figures of the mecha.

In contrast, the adults surrounding the children were in no mood to admire the mecha — if that dark grey mecha turned out to be an enemy, they knew that they were in grave danger. The power of mecha was truly horrifying — not only were their equipped weapons fearsome, the mecha itself was fearsome. Their self-destruct sequence before death was not something a normal person could withstand. Even just standing here, they could be drawn into the path of its destruction.

However, the following events helped to settle the fears of everyone there. The six mecha seemed to have reached an agreement with the dark grey mecha, and soon, under the escort of the six mecha, the dark grey mecha had landed at a designated landing spot.

Right then, Qi Long suddenly asked Han Jijyun, "Jyun, the picture on the dark grey mecha's chest — doesn't it look familiar? I feel like I've seen it somewhere before."

Han Jijyun was already on the case. He felt that vague sense of familiarity too, so when he heard Qi Long's question, he nodded and said, "Yes, you're right, it is familiar. I'm sure we've seen it somewhere before ... could it be one of the elite families we know?"

The dark grey colour of the mecha meant that it was a privately-owned mecha, and totems were the favoured symbols by elite families to represent themselves — Han Jijyun's thoughts naturally led in that direction.

Luo Lang, however, was derisive of their actions. In his opinion, it was just an exceptionally ordinary red bird. There were so many elite families within the Federation, large and small, and there were plenty among them who used totems similar to this one. Perhaps they had seen something similar to this before somewhere, hence the sense of familiarity.

Han Jijyun and Qi Long searched their memories but came up with nothing. None of the elite families close to them used anything similar to this totem, so where could they have seen this before?

And then, Luo Chao, who had been standing to one side, spoke up softly, her entire face blushing red, "On Boss Ling Lan's hover car, I think I saw something very similar."

"Ah!" The three boys gaped in surprise; Luo Chao's words were just too unexpected.

Han Jijyun was especially troubled. Could it be that he and Qi Long had also seen it then, but hadn't registered it consciously? Instead, had their subconscious remembered it, resulting in this strange sense of familiarity?

On the other hand, Qi Long had immediately cast away all his doubts after Luo Chao's words. Since he had the answer now, he wasn't going to waste any more effort thinking about it.

Luo Chao was frightened by the response of the three boys, and had immediately scampered like a rabbit to hide behind Han Xuya, and refused to say another word after that.

"Sister, come here, come here. Come tell your elder brother how you know that Boss Lan's hover car has this picture on it?" With a face full of pleasant surprise, Luo Lang hurried to call his sister out for a detailed explanation.

Seeing everyone's attention on her, Luo Chao became even shyer, replying in a low voice, "I wanted to know more about Boss Lan, so I paid special attention to the car that came to pick him up."

And there was the answer. When it came to a boy she liked, a girl would be willing to dig three feet deep just to find out everything she could about the other, and the bashful little Luo Chao was no different than any other girl in this respect.

Luo Lang felt a pang of sourness in his heart. Was the little sister he had grown up with going to be taken away by another just like that? No way. Even though he had submitted to Ling Lan, that didn't mean that he would just give up his little sister on a silver platter ... Luo Lang silently determined that he would think of a way to minimise contact between Boss Lan and his sister. He wouldn't allow his own precious baby sister to be snatched away by someone else — not even Boss Lan.

Han Jijyun did not spare a thought for Luo Lang's internal conflict; he watched the dark grey mecha land safely, then turned on the communicator on his wrist.

"Aiya, so you finally remember me, Master! May I know how I can help you?" An extremely sweet and pretty voice could be heard coming from the device, its tone flirty and playful.

This prompted the Luo twins to turn around with curious looks, because Han Jijyun's communicator was clearly different from theirs, actually containing an intelligent system. Theirs just had boring selection buttons, not personable whatsoever.

On the other hand, Qi Long and Han Xuya were already used to it, and so remained impassive. Han Jijyun had always liked to fiddle with this sort of little curios, and had actually managed to piece together this one functional little gadget over the years.

Chapter 59: Freaktastic Boss!

“Expand search range,” ordered Han Jijyun.

“Ok!” Very quickly, a bird’s-eye view of the Central Scout Academy had appeared on his communicator’s virtual screen, displaying the image of the entire Central Scout Academy within the confines of the screen. Of course, the image was clear enough that they could see the landing spot chosen by the mecha.

Han Jijyun tapped lightly on the landing spot on the virtual screen, and the screen automatically zoomed in as close as it could to the tapped location.

Han Jijyun adjusted the viewing angle slightly, and soon, a dark grey mecha was presented in all its glory before the children. Its entirely metallic outer plating shone with the dark gleam unique to mecha, while on its chest area, a large red bird with outstretched wings on the brink of flight rested, its entire body wreathed in flames, shining with exceptional brightness in the morning sunlight.

Although the mecha had no visible heavy weapons (if it had, it would have been shot down by the Central Scout Academy’s defensive missiles before it could even get near the school), the two giant beam sabers strapped on its back were more than enough on their own to emphasize its might. It should be known that a normal mecha would have just one small beam saber as its standard weapon, but this mecha had two giant beam sabers instead — it was clear to see that the operator of this mecha was an extremely talented close combat mecha specialist.

This clearly customized weapon, so different from the weapons of common standard mecha, made Qi Long and Luo Lang’s eyes burn with want. It couldn’t be helped. Mecha, as high-grade weaponised equipment of the Federation, were banned goods that could not be purchased by the public. The children had almost no chance of seeing the real thing close up — only getting a glimpse through video screens, or even just learning about them through illustrations.

Only if they were direct descendants of some major elite family, or perhaps the offspring of some high-ranking military officer (N-th generation military), then they might have a chance of coming in contact with a mecha.

“Eh? Has the cockpit of the dark grey mecha opened?” Luo Lang’s sharp eyes caught the difference on the virtual screen.

“Looks like it. What a shame the image is still a little small so we can’t see it clearly,” said Qi Long with some regret.

Without saying a word, Han Jijyun threw a scornful glance at the two of them. He didn’t mock them, however, only zooming in once more onto the dark grey mecha, fixing the display on the cockpit.

Sure enough, the dark grey mecha’s cockpit was already open, and they could see a small child climbing out from inside with his head lowered.

“Why does this person look so familiar?” Qi Long was a little slow on the uptake.

This question drew the contempt of both Luo Lang and Han Jijyun — hells, this fool was the first one to rush up to acknowledge him as boss and now he can’t even recognise him?

At the sight of the little figure, Luo Chao, who was standing beside them, had blushed bright red even as her eyes sparkled. It looked as if she had recognised who the person was as well. Meanwhile, Han Xuya was the only person who wasn’t looking at the virtual image, for all her attention was on Qi Long.

Right then, the child in the image finally raised his head.

“Holy sh*t, it’s Boss Lan!” Qi Long finally recognised the person, and couldn’t help but yell out in excitement, “That’s awesome, actually riding a mecha to school! Hail Boss!”

Right now, Qi Long’s respect for Ling Lan was surging endlessly like the waters of a river after rain. Dammit, tell him, who else could be as freaktastic as his boss?

Qi Long wasn’t the only one taken in completely — even Luo Lang had lost the heart to compete with Ling Lan at this point. The distance between the two of them was just too goddamn wide, wasn’t it? Just think, here they were drooling over the mecha on the screen, when Ling Lan had already gotten to use a mecha as mere transportation ... where was the humanity?! Fine, he should just quit comparing himself against a non-human being and save himself some grief.

Luo Lang had been enlightened — he decided he would not waste any time trying to steal Boss Ling Lan’s position; it would be wiser to just faithfully do his duty as a follower. Perhaps then he might even be able to ask Boss Lan to let them touch the mecha ... Thinking of this, Luo Lang’s blood boiled, and his eyes shined with a dazzling light.

Yep, the perks of being his follower may not be half bad.

In contrast, Han Jijyun’s expression was rather troubled. His face was stiff and closed-off, and a question had lodged itself within his mind — who exactly was Ling Lan? Coming here by mecha ... although that was also shocking to Han Jijyun, it wasn’t as impactful as it was for Qi Long and the others. What shocked Han Jijyun more was the response and attitude of the Central Scout Academy.

Qi Long, Luo Lang, and the others may not know what all this meant, but Han Jijyun knew. Piloting a mecha into the heavily guarded Central Scout Academy was a suicidal act. And usually, continuing on after a warning had been given would definitely result in a merciless barrage of fire, until the mecha had been shot down. This scenario, where six mecha were sent out to escort it instead, was something that shouldn’t have happened. Of course, the six mecha were there in part to monitor and dictate the landing of said mecha, but still, no matter what, what happened today was definitely not normal. It looked like Ling Lan’s family background carried some weight.

During their enrolment test, Ling Lan’s exceptional perceptivity, logical reasoning, and combat prowess had gained the sincere admiration of Han Jijyun. Which is why when his good mate Qi Long had chosen to acknowledge Ling Lan as his boss, Han Jijyun had not objected. However, now it seemed like there were some issues surrounding Ling Lan’s identity — he would need some time to think about this, about whether acknowledging Ling Lan as their boss would have any negative repercussions for Qi Long and himself ...

Han Jijyun still remembered what his father, the Head of the Federal Intelligence Agency, had once taught him — be wary of anyone who got close to him, even children, for in their position, it was far too easy to become ensnared in some other's plot, and end up being used as a pawn ...

Descending from the mecha via a halyard, Ling Lan's feet once again met solid ground, and her heart could finally settle.

Still, now wasn't the time to rejoice just yet. She needed to control the muscles of her two legs so they wouldn't tremble — as a member of Special Class-A pinned with high expectations, she couldn't afford to expose her weakness against heights.

Ling Lan took in a deep breath to calm herself before forcing out a stiff smile, and turned to wave goodbye to Chamberlain Ling Qin in the cockpit. Chamberlain Ling Qin could no longer accompany her into the school to handle the registration procedures; the school was not going to allow a mecha which could threaten the safety of the children to remain on school grounds for long.

Aware of the vigilant stares of the six mecha beside him, Ling Qin knew there was no point in delaying. So, he piloted the mecha and left reluctantly under the watchful guard of the six mecha. The reason Ling Qin could leave so simply without protest was that he knew there was nowhere safer than the Central Scout Academy. Their safety measures were even more impressive than that of the Ling family's, so he was completely at ease leaving Ling Lan in their care.

Ling Qin knew that it wasn't wise to linger — if by any chance this issue was manipulated by the Ling family's enemies, the Ling family would be in deep trouble. The current Ling family was no longer the Ling family during the time of Master Ling Xiao — the influence they wielded then and their impenetrable strength had disappeared completely. At the heart of the matter, it was because there was no individual mighty enough support the family. Since Young Master Lan was really just too young, not yet able to withstand the storms of life, they had no choice but to keep a low profile for now and bide their time.

Ling Lan watched as Ling Qin and his escort of six mecha departed, before looking around curiously. The spot she had landed in was a small wooded copse. There was hardly anyone else around, and it was very secluded, but it had plenty of space to support the landing of one mecha. No wonder the six mecha had directed them here to land — it was also a good place if they needed to dispose of any bodies ...

In the midst of her wild thoughts, Ling Lan chose a direction at random and started walking. She was prepared to keep walking until she got out of the woods and found someone to point her towards the registration area for new students.

Since she had confirmed that this location was very secluded, Ling Lan was calm. As long as no one knew she had arrived in a mecha, then there wouldn't be any negative impact on her academic life here. She would still be the totally mediocre genius Ling Lan submerged among the throng of other geniuses.

Seeing Ling Lan on her way out, Han Jijyun shut down his communicator, and turned to tell Qi Long and the others, "Let's go welcome Boss Lan."

Right now, Han Jijyun's mind was clear. From the start, all the kids in their exam group had not revealed their backgrounds, so they really did not know who Ling Lan's parents were, nor which system he came from. However, Ling Lan also didn't know anything about them either, so they were still on even ground. If he only started worrying about Ling Lan's true identity now, that would be rather narrow-minded of him. So, Han Jijyun wisely decided to let the matter rest.

As for whether Ling Lan was a person worthy of befriending, they had plenty of time to judge that for themselves, so there was no hurry. Han Jijyun decided to take a neutral stance and observe from the sidelines for now.

Qi Long was the first to respond to Han Jijyun's suggestion. "Alright! I'm going to ask Boss Lan later if I can take a ride on that mecha." Qi Long's excitement was palpable when talking about the mecha.

Although Luo Lang didn't say anything to that, the glint of greed in his eyes left no doubt in the others' minds that he was in agreement with Qi Long on this matter.

Han Jijyun opened his mouth, as if wanting to say something in response to Qi Long, but quickly closed it again. A thought flashed through his mind — perhaps he could use Qi Long's questioning to get a better idea of Ling Lan's personality ...

Ling Lan had been walking for roughly half an hour when she suddenly saw the vague outlines of some buildings in the distance. Ling Lan's heart leapt up joyously — she was finally getting out of these woods!

And then, Ling Lan abruptly frowned, and her right hand slipped casually into her pocket, gripping hold of the miniature particle-beam handgun she had taken from her family's hover car previously.

Meanwhile, under her clothes, Ling Lan's nerves and muscles pulled taut — if Ling Lan sensed any danger at all, both the particle-beam gun in her hand and her prepped body would be able to spring to her defence instantly against any ambusher.

"Boss, we've finally found you!" Qi Long's voice boomed out from the edge of the woods.

Ling Lan's face could not help but darken instantly. Sullenly, she thought to herself: Why did she have to meet up with this fellow right when she entered the school? She had never wanted to be a boss or gather any followers — this was obviously contradictory to her personal setting of 'mediocrity'!

Just as Ling Lan was wondering whether she could get away with pretending not to hear him, or perhaps avoid him by turning in a different direction, Qi Long and his group of five were already sprinting towards her.

Well, dodging was out of the question. She sighed, and her right hand slipped out naturally from her pocket. Then, she turned and waved listlessly at Qi Long and the others. At the same time, her tightly coiled body loosened up. Against these companions who took the test with her, she really couldn't keep her guard up.

"Boss, you were just too freaktastic earlier! Actually riding a mecha to school!" The moment Qi Long opened his mouth, Ling Lan's beautiful plans were smashed.

“Who else knows?” Ling Lan glared fiercely at Qi Long, wanting him to explain fully. If it really turned out that everyone had already found out, then she would have to completely reconsider how she would portray herself to the public.

Chapter 60: Group 072 Gathers!

“Only we know,” Han Jijyun was the first to respond.

Ling Lan’s expression eased immediately; things weren’t that bad then. Right now, Ling Lan still hadn’t noticed that she had actually already accepted these few children into her heart, which was why she was unconcerned that they knew about this situation.

Han Jijyun was carefully observing Ling Lan’s expressions. He smiled a subtle smile — Ling Lan’s reaction pleased him because it meant that he had also acknowledged them in return.

Qi Long, Luo Lang, and the others were not as meticulous and contemplative as Han Jijyun. Brimming with excitement, they surrounded Ling Lan and started bombarding her with curious questions about how it felt to ride a mecha.

Facing these questions, Ling Lan was a little embarrassed. She was at a loss on how to answer since she couldn’t very well say she was unconscious for most of the flight.

No way. To protect her glorious image, she definitely could not let this weakness of hers be exposed.

Vaguely, Ling Lan said, “When you all get the chance to ride one yourself, then you’ll understand.”

Hearing this, Qi Long and the others were naturally disappointed, which made Ling Lan feel bad for being so flip towards these children who admired her. So, she added, “There are some things that, if told to you by others, will always belong to them — you must experience these things yourself for them to belong to you.”

These words sounded deep, and as if coming to some realisation, Qi Long and the other children’s eyes lit up. Once again, they were taken in by Ling Lan, who had spouted such profound words with such flair.

Seeing the idolisation on these children’s faces — even the intelligent Han Jijyun’s eyes were shining with pleasant surprise — Ling Lan’s heart wavered as she sweated internally.

She had never intended to deceive children! How was it that she had once again raised the level of idolisation these children had for her?

Finally, Qi Long, Luo Lang, and the others dropped the topic of mecha, and began chatting about what they all did at home after the test. All of them had trained; it looked like Ling Lan had truly inspired them.

When Ling Lan was asked about his activities for the past month, they unexpectedly saw his face turn white, before he said listlessly, “What else could it be like — I was training, just like the rest of you.”

Luo Lang and Han Jijyun could just tell that that training he mentioned was not ordinary, otherwise Ling Lan wouldn’t have such a traumatized look on his face. Only Qi Long remained clueless and continued to pester Ling Lan for details.

Weakly, Ling Lan replied, “I was experiencing death, in various forms ... Would you like to try?”

Ling Lan’s words, said in an eerie dead tone, sent chills running across Qi Long’s body. No matter how brash he was typically, this time he dared not say anything more. Moreover, even Luo Lang and Han Jijyun distanced themselves from Ling Lan, afraid of being dragged in as well. They had no doubt that what Ling Lan said was true ... because they could already feel the malevolent aura seeping from Ling Lan’s body. This wasn’t something that could be achieved through just normal training.

Very quickly, Ling Lan and the others had finished registering and had set their study schedule. As Ling Lan had chosen to be a day student, she had tried her best to squeeze all her classes together. Unfortunately, even so, she only managed to keep Wednesday free, as several of the classes required attendance for consecutive days, making it unavoidable. Next, they went to the logistics department to collect two sets of tailored uniforms each.

As today was just the registration day, the school did not arrange any classes yet, merely allowing the students to wander around campus to familiarize themselves with the surroundings and the facilities. Ling Lan also took the chance to tour Qi Long, Luo Lang, and Han Jijyun’s shared dorm. Although special class students could choose to be day students, almost none of the special class students would choose to do so. As such, this privilege was considered by the students of the Central Scout Academy to be the most pointless and pretentious privilege ever.

The three boys were assigned the same living quarters, a villa just for the three of them. More precisely, all Special Class-A students would be assigned a villa when they chose to board at the school. This was one of the perks of being a member of Special Class-A.

The villa was rather luxurious, and it was free . The kitchen and living room was well-equipped, and aside from the three bedrooms, there was a training room, a gym, and specialised login pods for the children to enter the academy’s virtual reality system.

The Federation was very strict when it came to minors’ access to virtual reality. Any child below the age of sixteen was only allowed restricted login. Meanwhile, young children who hadn’t entered scout academies did not even have the right to enter virtual realities, and could only browse web pages on a screen.

However, once the children entered a scout academy, it meant that they were now allowed to access virtual realities. Of course, this access was limited — they were only allowed to log into the closed virtual reality of the scout academies. There, the only people they could interact with were teachers and other students of the scout academy. They could receive guidance from teachers there, or have a virtual spar with the other scout academy students, but that was it. This was protection provided by the school, to prevent the children from premature contact with the complicated world of adults, which could influence their growth and development.

The conditions of the villa were top-notch. Luxury and comfort, combined with a high level of integrated technology — Ling Lan was overcome with envy, almost wishing that she could board at school after all.

As for the living quarters of the two girls, Ling Lan and the boys did not go over to look. Although the children were still small, they already knew enough to distinguish between the sexes and knew that it wasn't right for boys to simply enter the girls' dorms.

By the time the two girls were done settling in and returned to meet up with them, it was already time for lunch. Qi Long magnanimously declared that he would treat them to lunch for today.

With the commoner mentality of never passing up a free meal, Ling Lan quickly agreed, even though the amount of credits she had personally was staggering. These past few years, Little Four had become a famous online writer — rumour had it that he had N-many crazed fans supporting him — and although Little Four would purchase some gene agent every once in a while, it hardly made a dent in the amount of credits Ling Lan had.

The scout academy's canteen was very large, taking up a full several thousand square metres. Everywhere you turned, there were food options for the children's selection — it was a dazzling smorgasbord of any variety of food you could imagine.

Qi Long, Luo Lang, and Han Jijyun were all descendants of mid- to high- rank military families, certainly not the type to lack for money. Since he had decided to treat, of course he must treat the best available! After asking one of the teachers on duty, Qi Long grandly led the way to a particular corner of the canteen. It was said that the food there was the most delicious and exquisite, naturally with a suitably steep price.

When Ling Lan saw the random dishes of several thousand credits per platter, she felt that she should really rebuild Qi Long's value system. Ling Lan had already found out the value of credits in this world. One credit was roughly equivalent to one Chinese yuan in her previous world, which meant that even the cheapest dishes before her now was easily one thousand yuan each ... they weren't eating food , they were eating money!

Ling Lan was determined. From now on, she would hold onto the money of all these babes — she just couldn't allow them to be so wasteful anymore.

Consequently, all the allowance of the five children were confiscated by Ling Lan, who only gave them 1000 credits each from that. Of course, they could ask for more if they spent it all, but they would need to report what they spent it on, and if any wastefulness was discovered ... The five children had no idea what the consequences would be, since Ling Lan didn't tell them, but the cold smile on Ling Lan's face told them that it would not be good.

Han Jijyun had no objection to all this. Although he didn't know why Ling Lan would care so much about the way they spent money, he believed that Ling Lan had no ill intentions, and may perhaps even have some profound motivation for his actions ... could it be that he wanted them to become more independent? At that thought, Han Jijyun visibly lightened up.

Er ... that was the problem with intelligent children, they would always think too much. Ling Lan really wasn't thinking much about it at all — she just felt that the way they spent was too wasteful. Although Ling Lan was also able to be wasteful now if she wanted to, the commoner mentality embedded in her bones still felt that wastefulness was a sin ...

Because they knew they wouldn't be able to eat this way again from now on, the children dug in with gusto, fully prepared to consume the future's worth of food now. After all, all the credits had already been transferred over to Ling Lan. And so, they ate and drank, and ate and drank, and then they noticed that the other three people from their exam group had also come to the canteen for their meal. Qi Long thought that since his credits would be confiscated from today onwards, he might as well use more now, and so generously invited them to join in as well. Thus, the six-person group expanded into a nine-person group, packed tightly around the round table.

The lively air at their table drew the attention of everyone around. After all, they were all new here — the old students would only be here a week later — so it was rare to see a group as large as Ling Lan's hanging out together, which naturally drew the envy-jealousy-hate of various parties around them.

One such example was this frowning fellow. He was watching them with a face full of displeasure because his should-be underling Li Jinghong had actually decided to leave his side to join them. This displeased him greatly.

"Li Jinghong, why don't you introduce us?" Although he was furious, he could still maintain his calm. Before he found out more about the opponent, he would not be so rash as to start fighting — he kept the Li family teachings close to heart.

"Ling Lan, Qi Long, Luo Lang ... long time no see," greeted Li Jinghong energetically. With that, the companions of exam room 072 were all gathered, and Li Jinghong's arrival was met with a hearty welcome.

Han Jijyun noticed the darkening of the handsome face behind Li Jinghong, and couldn't help but snicker internally. From Li Jinghong's impatient demeanour, as well as the other fellow's arrogant expression, he could just tell that the fellow wasn't all too likeable.

"Ahem." An impatient reminder of his presence.

With an affected expression of realisation, Li Jinghong pointed at the boy behind him with exaggerated motions and said, "This is the third grandson of our Li family head, Li Yingjie."

Li Yingjie stood proudly, waiting for Li Jinghong to continue elaborating, but Li Jinghong wasn't as cooperative as he had assumed, stopping with just that brief introduction. This made Li Yingjie's expression turn even darker, and he looked on the verge of blowing his top.

By now, even Qi Long had figured out Li Jinghong's stance. It was clear that he really did not like this Li Yingjie, but only tolerated him as another member of the same Li family. However, Li Jinghong could not outright offend him, because Li Yingjie was a descendant of the main family after all, while he was just from the branch family. At the end of the day, he was still one of the members being shaded by the large tree of the Li family.

That said, Qi Long and the others did not share Li Jinghong's concerns — since their comrade didn't like that person showing off in front of him, then they should definitely bite the bullet for him and chase the annoying fellow away.

"Li Yingjie was it? Hello! But we're eating right now, so we don't have time to entertain you. Please show yourself off." Qi Long's blunt dismissal caused Li Yingjie's expression to change dramatically. He had

never encountered such treatment before — in the Li family, no one would dare to treat him this way. Mind you, he was a favoured child, for his assessment results at birth had placed him securely before his two elder cousin brothers. Although he was not the first in line to inherit the Li family leadership, he believed that once he grew up, he would definitely be able to usurp his elder cousin's position and obtain the right to inherit.

"You're way too arrogant," bit out Li Yingjie vehemently. If it weren't for the Li family teachings, he would have already charged over to give the other a good pummeling.