

Wow 1041

Chapter 1041: Complete Victory!

In the stands, many anticipated this duel of "spear and shield" or "fire and wind."

Gu Lan, yet another unfamiliar face on New Bauhinia's roster, had no notable achievements across the Milky Way.

Her Mecha "Swiftwind" appeared uniquely specialized for high-mobility reconnaissance or guerrilla warfare. It was painted in blue-grey with sleek lines, featuring a pair of foldable auxiliary gliding wings at the back, and armed with a weapon that could transform into a rifle or long knife, along with several suspended Spiritual Energy Darts.

"Frenzy Flame" had already issued provocative roars in the corridor, eager to crush his opponent beneath his flames.

At the moment the battle commenced, "Frenzy Flame" indeed wasted no time in launching a furious charge, with engines roaring and ground trembling, like a blazing war chariot charging directly at "Swiftwind"!

Yet, Gu Lan's "Swiftwind" did not choose to withstand the attack head-on or retreat to the maximum distance.

She demonstrated a combat style entirely different from Rose or Catherine—but equally dazzling: a mastery of extreme guerrilla tactics and rhythm.

"Swiftwind's" agility was utilized to its fullest potential.

Rather than moving away from "Frenzy Flame" in a straight line, it performed high-speed, irregular movements at the flanks of the charge path with astonishing flexibility, like a hummingbird fluttering around a giant bear.

Gu Lan utilized the plains' ravines and boulders as temporary cover and pivot points, maintaining a tantalizingly distant and frustratingly elusive distance from "Frenzy Flame"—

Just out of reach of its thermal battle axe and exhaust gauntlets' optimal damage range, yet within the threat radius of its charge.

"Frenzy Flame's" several furious charges and slashes ended up hitting empty air, while "Swiftwind's" nimble traction depleted a significant amount of its energy and stamina.

He attempted to throw Fiery Bombs for area lockdown, but Gu Lan's "Swiftwind" constantly anticipated the impact points, narrowly avoiding the core of the explosions, and even occasionally using the explosion's airflow to accelerate its direction change.

While dodging, "Swiftwind's" attacks never ceased.

The weapon mostly remained in rifle mode, firing not high-energy beams but custom armor-piercing rounds with a subtle Spiritual Energy disturbance.

These bullets had low power but a rapid firing rate, with tricky trajectories specifically targeting the Blast Flame Charger's joint gaps, sensor covers, and booster nozzles.

Though unable to cause decisive damage, the constant harassment and accumulation of minor damages agitated "Frenzy Flame," and its movements began to slightly deform.

What drove "Frenzy Flame" crazy was those elusive Spiritual Energy Darts.

Gu Lan released these darts at the most unexpected moments—such as when "Frenzy Flame's" old force was depleting and new force yet to generate, or at moments slightly constrained by terrain.

The darts didn't fly straight but traced strange arcs, even changing direction after colliding with one another, striking "Frenzy Flame's" visual sensors or booster control nodes from inexplicable angles.

Though most bounced off the thick armor, an occasional hit could always cause "Frenzy Flame's" system to experience brief chaos or warnings, further disrupting its attack rhythm.

This was the style Gu Lan had honed through rigorous practice—

Utilizing all the skills she once learned on the planet, plus top-notch reconnaissance, infiltration, and guerrilla tactics honed in the "Swiftwind" Reconnaissance Corps, seamlessly integrated into Mecha combat.

She didn't pursue one-hit-kill tactics but gradually wore down the opponent's defenses, drained their patience, and magnified their mistakes through extreme mobility, precise harassment, and absolute control over battle rhythm.

"Frenzy Flame" felt as though he was battling an unpredictable wind, possessing brute strength yet having nowhere to unleash it.

His roars, faintly audible through the public channel, became increasingly impatient, and mistakes increased.

Finally, in a moment when the ravine slightly tripped "Frenzy Flame," causing a minor delay in its charge, "Swiftwind" seized the opportunity!

Rather than retreating, it charged ahead even faster than before, its weapon transforming instantly into long-knifed mode, the blade flashing with a Spiritual Energy glow!

"Frenzy Flame," seeing this, wasn't worried but delighted, roaring and swinging its thermal battle axe downwards!

A direct clash? That was exactly what he wanted!

However, Gu Lan's thrust was merely a feint.

As "Swiftwind" approached the battle axe's range in a split second, the auxiliary gliding wings on its back abruptly unfolded, combined with reverse thrust from the leg boosters, causing the body to rise sharply at an almost vertical angle, narrowly dodging the forceful chop!

In the moment "Frenzy Flame" leaned forward due to the missed chop, "Swiftwind," already overhead, reversed its long knife downwards, like a falling meteor. The tip pierced precisely into the Blast Flame Charger's exposed weak spot—the neck and shoulder junction—because of its head-raised axe-swing!

"Whizz—Poof!"

This time, it wasn't mere harassment.

The sharp blade penetrated the armor, deeply reaching the hilt!

Spiritual Energy surged down the blade, instantly disrupting control circuitry and sensor integration systems in the neck.

"Frenzy Flame's" Mecha froze suddenly, dropping the battle axe, staggering forward a few steps, and collapsed to its knees. Sparks and coolant fluid sprayed from the neck area.

"Match is over! Winner: New Bauhinia Republic, Gu Lan!"

It was another seemingly "underdog victory," but actually from start to finish a victory of control.

Gu Lan demonstrated with her spectacular guerrilla tactics and precise lethal strike what it meant to be a "hunter of the wind."

Perhaps she lacked Rose's absolute sharpness at severing joints in one blow or Catherine's steady atmosphere of integrating remote prediction into close combat, but her dazzling mobility, omnipresent harassment, and ability to seize opportunities left opponents helpless.

The Flame Republic's observer looked at the fallen "Frenzy Flame" in the arena with a grim face.

Their prideful direct assault seemed clumsy and inefficient against Gu Lan's agile, wind-like guerrilla tactics.

This Gu Lan, along with her unique combat style, must be studied intensively and special counter-tactics be devised in upcoming team matches!

Four solo matches, four victories, four entirely different yet equally breathtaking combat styles.

Kuang Xin's wild acuteness and tactical wisdom.

Rose's extreme speed and precise strikes.

Catherine's stable predictions and integrated attack-defense.

Gu Lan's nimble guerrilla war and rhythm control.

"What is the origin of this New Bauhinia?!"

"They're not just winning! More importantly, look at who their opponents are!"

"God of a Thousand Machines selection, Shadow Kingdom, Flame Republic... They're all teams of the Seven Sons of the Empire!"

"That draw luck is unparalleled... For some ordinary nations, I'd even mourn them. But who'd have thought the Empire Seven Sons turned out to be the ones taking losses!"

Were it merely crushing some frontier little countries, it wouldn't be as explosive as now.

But look at the opponents of this New Bauhinia team... each possesses notable backgrounds.

Yet all their past glory now served as stepping stones for the New Bauhinia team.

A previously unknown small country in a border Stellar District... rumored to have recently undergone a state collapse and reorganized within a year, now dominating the Mech Pilot tournament gathering the elites from the Galaxy Human Realm, leading the charge.

Such performance, such strength, how could one not be astounded?

...

"I said it was unnecessary to deliberately arrange such a draw, causing damage to the Empire's honor!"

As the Seven Sons of the Empire, such point tournaments previously always advanced to the next round undefeated.

But this time? More because of targeting that damn New Bauhinia?!

"'Shadow Walker,' 'Anvil,' 'Frenzy Flame'... these were elite performers for us in the preliminaries! Now look, they've all become stepping stones for 'New Bauhinia's' fame! Not only failed to obstruct but also dragged down our own point rankings, letting them steal the limelight!"

Chapter 1042: Targeted

Four clean and decisive victories, each with a distinct style, struck like loud slaps across the faces of those behind-the-scenes forces who meticulously planned the draw, intending to thwart "New Bauhinia" during the points stage.

Particularly three of these victories directly toppled teams either directly subordinate to or associated with the "Sons of the Empire", leaving some representatives of the "Sons of the Empire" watching from backstage feeling disgraced, even infuriated.

"Absurd! Simply absurd!" In a highly classified strategy analysis room in "Star City", a senior official from the Flame Republic pounded a data-covered table with a clenched fist, face livid, "Who arranged this kind of draw?! Why would our proud Galactic Empire resort to such measures!"

A technical representative from the Forge World Consortium next to him also frowned deeply, speaking in a sullen tone, "The draw procedure itself has no issues; it was done through a random calculation. The problem lies with... we underestimated their strength. We thought using our top-notch elite forces to confront them would be sufficient to test or even suppress them, but we didn't expect..."

"Didn't expect what? Didn't expect these pilots who emerged from who knows where to be so formidable?"

A diplomatic advisor from the Shadow Kingdom, while striving to maintain composure, was equally evident in his displeasure in tone, "Discussion is pointless now. The points race has just begun, and our ace teams and top experts haven't fully exerted their strength. Losing a few points isn't significant. What's truly embarrassing is that our Galactic Empire's teams were consecutively defeated by a previously unknown new team. How will the external world perceive us? Where is our dignity?"

The official from the Flame Republic snorted coldly, "Other few... are probably laughing at us too," he said, "especially those who haven't yet encountered 'New Bauhinia'."

As he had assumed, within other "Sons of the Empire" circles, although they were also wary of the rise of "New Bauhinia", there were some who were enjoying the spectacle, even gloating.

"Those mice from the Shadow Kingdom, always shrouded in mystery, got caught red-handed this time—truly amusing."

"Those brutes from the Flame Republic—what else do they know besides charging? Deservedly outpaced to death."

"Gods of the Many Machines? Their flashy firepower is no match against true skill."

Of course, this attitude stemmed from self-assured strength and pride: "Just because Shadow and Flame can't beat them doesn't mean we from 'Shimmering Star' can't. Their guerrilla tactics and anticipation are nothing compared to absolute strength, just sewer rats!"

"We, the 'Blood Fury Battle Group', are unlike 'Frenzy Flame', who act without brains. Real art of war isn't about petty cleverness."

"Our Ghost Walker's tactics can't be represented by 'Night Owl' alone."

Nevertheless, apart from these bravado stemming from national pride, truly visionary intelligence and analysis personnel had begun delving into the backgrounds of these formidable Mech Pilots from "New Bauhinia" who appeared suddenly.

Soon, some dust-covered or scattered information was unearthed and pieced together from information databases across the cosmos.

"Found it! That female Mech Pilot named 'Rose'! About a standard year ago, she was active around the 'Shattered Star Domain' and the 'Frontier Trade Route', known as a core expert of the well-known charity organization Life Spring, codenamed 'Rose'! She led many high-difficulty rescue missions, renowned for her ferocious close-combat and tough style, and then suddenly disappeared for unknown reasons... didn't expect she joined 'New Bauhinia'!"

"That 'Gu Lan'... even fewer records, but some vague clues point towards the 'Wind Chaser' Reconnaissance Corps and certain border reconnaissance missions, seems adept in environmental adaptation and intelligence gathering, style fits very well."

"And that 'Catherine'... wait, isn't this name the same as the 'Legendary Mechanic' from the 'Bauhinia Republic' who caused quite a stir in the 'Peak Star Zone' a few years back? Is this Bauhinia? And that 'Kuang Xin'... seems there's a bit of a rumor about coming from the Underground Colosseum too?"

"This cannot all be a coincidence! These individuals are likely renowned experts or potential rising stars 'New Bauhinia' spent heavily recruiting from all over the universe! That Bai E might very well be their major patron!"

This conjecture brightened many eyes.

If they're mercenaries or high-salary recruits, there's room for manipulation!

"Poach them! At all costs!" immediately ordered a representative of a certain power, "Find out their backgrounds, preferences, weaknesses. What 'New Bauhinia' can offer, we can offer too, and even more! Honor, status, resources, technology... I refuse to believe they won't be swayed! Especially that Rose and Gu Lan, bring over just one and their team would suffer a heavy blow!"

However, the more level-headed analysts poured cold water: "Afraid it's not so simple. Based on the latest obtained fragmented intelligence on 'New Bauhinia's' reconstruction in the 'Peak Star Zone' and participation in the Star Zone Competition, these individuals... seem to have long-term connections with Bai E, they might even be an 'old team' emerging from some place together. The tacit understanding and trust among them might not be easily shaken by mere benefits. Additionally, remember how they previously handled 'rule traps'. That Bai E is definitely not just a mere patron or warrior; his tactics and the technology backing him are unfathomable."

Chapter 1043: Targeted Maneuvers 2

This remark plunged the room into silence once again.

Indeed, to easily overcome the technical barriers they set up and present a mecha that exceeds standards within a month, such organizational strength and technical foundation surpass the perception of a typical "upstart" or "mercenary group."

"Moreover..." A technical observer from the Foundry World Union, who had been silently listening, slowly spoke, pulling up a freshly received data analysis of the "Dawn's Edge" mecha in combat.

"Everyone, look. These mech pilots' performance is certainly astonishing, but the mecha they are piloting has performance data, energy utilization efficiency, and structural stability that have reached an astounding level. Especially in terms of micro-control under high mobility and high load, and adaptability in special environments, it far exceeds our previous estimations of that 'prototype.' This is a gap that cannot simply be bridged by personal abilities of the pilots. The mecha technology mastered by the New Bauhinia is probably more advanced than we imagined. That Bai E is not only a formidable warrior but may also hold the key to a unique technological source."

This analysis sent a chill through everyone's hearts.

If their strength lies not only in personal martial might but also in core technology capable of affecting future dynamics, then the threat level needs to be raised several tiers.

"Discussing this now is somewhat meaningless." The Priest of the Holy Silver Church Country finally said in a deep voice, a sharp glint in his eyes.

"Their momentum in the point race is soaring, and conventional means are difficult to curb. We can't let them continue gaining ground and ultimately encounter our top teams in the elimination rounds or finals, as the variables would be too great."

His gaze swept over everyone present: "Ladies and gentlemen, it's time to employ some 'unconventional' means. Each of us holds a 'trump card' reserved for this very occasion, those reputed monsters qualified to vie for the title of 'strongest' in this tournament. We can't let that Bai E sit leisurely in the back. We must force him to act during the point race phase, let our 'trump cards' have a go at him! Discover his bottom line, better yet... make him expose all his strength upfront, or even suffer a setback!"

"You mean... deploying our hidden cards in the subsequent matches to proactively challenge the New Bauhinia, specifically pitting them against Bai E?" The consultant from the Golden Federation raised an eyebrow.

"Why not?" The Priest replied coldly, "The tournament rules do not prohibit participants from, after matching, using public channels to issue an 'invitation match' or 'challenge match' request to specific opponents. As long as both sides agree, the Competition Committee usually arranges it, which is also part of the spectacle. As long as we handle it properly, having our people issue the challenge, given the

current aura of the New Bauhinia and Bai E's status as leader, he would find it hard to refuse. Otherwise, it would mean cowardice, critically damaging the morale of their team."

"So, who do we send?" The representative from the Steel Alliance asked, "Those true 'aces' from each of our families, are all proud individuals, they may not be willing to heed such arrangements."

"No need for 'arrangement.'" The Priest's lips curled into a cold smile, "We just need to slightly process the vague assessments we've collected of Bai E's strength and the current momentum of the New Bauhinia, disregarding the 'Sons of the Empire' in public opinion, and reveal this to those most combative and arrogant 'monsters.' I believe, they won't be able to contain themselves."

"Such as... Astra, the 'Child of Destiny' from 'Shining Star'?"

"Such as... Grom, the 'War Dog' of 'Blood Fury Battle Group'?"

"And... that genuinely 'Faceless' one from 'Ghost Walker'?"

"We might even attempt to contact our 'Executor' from the 'Holy Silver Church Country,' or the 'Steel Soul' from the Steel Alliance..."

Mentioning these names, everyone in the room became solemn and wary.

These individuals are the true elite within the Galactic Empire, cultivated with all strength by their respective forces, prepared to awe the universe as the "ultimate weapons" in this tournament.

Each of them possesses incomprehensible talent, experiences, and strength, regarded as capable of equaling those legendary mech pilots in history, and potentially leading human civilization in the future as "seeds."

Using them to probe, or even target Bai E, is undoubtedly a huge gamble.

Winning would naturally suppress the New Bauhinia's swagger and uncover Bai E's cards.

But if they lose... the blow to the reputation of the "Sons of the Empire" would be devastating.

"The risk is substantial." The consultant from the Golden Federation pondered, "But... there seems to be no better alternative. We can't allow Bai E to keep hiding in the back, watching his men sweep through our teams, and then deliver a fatal blow at a critical moment. At the very least, we must force him to reveal his fangs."

"Agree." The Steel Alliance representative finally nodded, "I will find a way to 'accidentally' leak the information to 'Steel Soul.' He has always had an interest in strong opponents."

"The same goes for us; Grom is probably already impatient to shred the next prey that catches his interest." The Flame Republic representative grinned, though the smile was somewhat sinister.

"Then, it's decided." The Priest of the Holy Silver Church Country concluded, "Secretly guide our families' 'aces' in the upcoming matches to actively 'hunt' Bai E. Who will encounter him will depend on luck. Regardless of how, we must tear through the strongest point of the New Bauhinia during the point race phase! Let the entire universe see who the true master of this stage is!"

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The first day of the point race concluded with New Bauhinia winning all five matches, temporarily ranking first in the group.

In the headquarters of the seventh zone of the International Pavilion, the atmosphere did not become arrogant due to the major victory.

Members of Bai E's team gathered in the tactical discussion room, with the holographic projection replaying key episodes of today's five matches. Each had focused expressions with a trace of relaxation after barely detectable fatigue.

"Well done." Bai E's voice was calm, his gaze sweeping over Kuang Xin, Rose, Catherine, Gu Lan, and all companions involved in logistics and technical support.

"Today's victory demonstrates our preparation and strength, but this is merely the beginning. The point race is still long, and each upcoming battle will be more challenging. Go back, rest well, review today's gains and losses, and continue tomorrow."

No fervent celebration, only pragmatic division of tasks and reminders.

The crowd received the orders and dispersed, each returning to their rooms for personal reflection and rest.

The headquarters quickly regained tranquility, with only necessary sentries and personnel on duty patrolling the perimeter.

However, outside the headquarters, in "Star City" and throughout the network world interested in the Star Alliance Championship, things utterly heated up due to the stunning debut of the New Bauhinia black horse team, with public opinion fermenting overnight, displaying a polarized attitude.

Support and amazement were natural, especially after witnessing the contrasting yet equally splendid combat styles of Kuang Xin, Rose, and others. Many spectators and independent commentators began to cheer for the New Bauhinia.

"Five matches, five wins! The New Bauhinia is too fierce! Five different combat styles, each top-notch!"

"Who previously claimed it was luck? This strength is genuinely earned!"

"The 'Dawn's Edge' mecha looks really cool, and the performance is strong; I wonder if there's a chance for civilian use?"

"Bai E hasn't even made a move! How strong is their leader?"

Yet, simultaneously, a more turbulent and clearly guided wave of negative public opinion began to emerge on major star network platforms, professional analysis forums, and even in some corner reports of mainstream media.

The source is self-evident...

Chapter 1044: Challenge Match

"Barely winning against a few 'Sons of the Empire' second-tier teams, and now they're getting cocky? The real aces haven't made a move yet!"

"These suddenly emerging teams love to pull a 'surprise win', but really it's just a flash in the pan. Once studied thoroughly, they'll show their true colors. It's not like we haven't seen teams like these before, looking fierce at first but ending up in a miserable defeat."

"Their tactics are too simplistic, relying entirely on individual capability. Against truly tactical and skilled teams, they'll be taught a lesson in no time."

"I've heard even the tech audit for their mechs had issues; they might have gotten through by exploiting loopholes. Maybe their combat data is fabricated too?"

"Just waiting for a strong team to come tomorrow and prove them wrong! Their arrogance is irritating!"

Some "professional" analysis posts are constantly surfacing, with titles like "The Hidden Dangers Behind New Bauhinia's Five Consecutive Wins: The Fatal Flaw of Individualism and Team Disconnect", "Deep

Dive: The Limits of 'Dawn's Edge' Mecha and Possible Safety Issues", "On the Traditional Dilemmas of Edge Star Domain Teams in the Galaxy Center Tournament—Case Study on New Bauhinia", and so on.

These posts seem like objective analyses but in fact, they keep emphasizing New Bauhinia's "luck", "immaturity", and "lack of foundation", suggesting their glory is unsustainable.

Some even directly target Bai E, who has yet to compete.

"That captain named Bai E, always hiding in the back letting his teammates fight on the frontline. Is he not confident in his skills?"

"Could it be he knows he's not good enough and is afraid of being embarrassed? After all, with teammates this strong, the pressure on him as captain must be immense."

"I bet he still won't dare to step up tomorrow! It's just a points match, no need to take risks."

"Maybe he's just a figurehead with connections, while the real key players are Catherine or Rose?"

With the help of those with ulterior motives, these comments rapidly spread, forming a prevalent online atmosphere of skepticism towards New Bauhinia, particularly questioning Bai E's personal capabilities.

Many unaware spectators are misled, starting to feel that this team indeed seems a bit "arrogant" and needs to be "put in their place".

Even after "traveling through the universe", Kuang Xin couldn't resist browsing forums. Seeing these chaotic comments, he jumped out of bed in anger, calling his good team buddies to retaliate online.

Gong Yan, in charge of public relations matters, immediately reported the situation to Bai E, although Bai E had anticipated such developments.

"It's fine, it's merely setting the stage for the potential challenges tomorrow."

A new day begins, and the points matches continue.

However, before today's official matches commenced, an announcement issued through the Star Alliance's official tournament channel instantly captured everyone's attention, thrusting New Bauhinia back into the spotlight.

[Special Challenge Announcement]

After deliberation by the tournament committee, the application for a cross-team challenge from the 'Brilliant Star' representative of the Golden Federation, Astra, has been accepted.

Challenge Mode: Single Combat Duel Mode.

Challenge Target: New Bauhinia Republic representative team captain, Bai E.

Challenge Reason: Testing strength, making friends through combat. Having heard of New Bauhinia's captain being extraordinarily skilled, I long to witness his high-level abilities with the sword in hand.

Match Time: To be held during today's third round of points matches, at the number one main arena in 'Honor Combat World'.

This challenge complies with relevant Star Alliance tournament regulations. Upon mutual agreement (the challenged party has a 24-hour consideration period, which the New Bauhinia representative team has already confirmed acceptance), thus announced.

"Destiny's Child" Astra!

This name dropped like a boulder into an already boiling sea of opinions, stirring up monstrous waves!

"Astra! The legendary 'Destiny's Child' of the Golden Federation? He actually initiated a challenge?"

"My god! This is the monster-level player considered a favorite to win the championship this year! It's said his Spiritual Energy has touched the 'Destiny' realm, able to predict and even mildly affect opponents' actions!"

"He's actually challenging Bai E? That captain who hasn't even competed yet?"

"Isn't it obvious? New Bauhinia has become too prominent, and the Golden Federation wants to intervene directly! Using their strongest ace, directly targeting the opposing leader!"

"Bai E is done for... Astra's strength is rumored to be close or even on par with those veteran galactic elites, leading the young generation by a significant margin."

"Why did New Bauhinia accept? Isn't this courting disaster? Could it be that Bai E is really a hidden gem?"

"Hidden gem? Can anyone hide from 'Destiny's Child'? I think they're stuck in a tough spot, forced to accept by public opinion and the opponent's reputation!"

"Place your bets, place your bets! Astra wins, odds are 1.1 to 1, Bai E wins, odds are 9.5 to 1! The gap is huge!"

The online discussions are almost exclusively one-sided.

Although supporters of New Bauhinia defend Bai E, against Astra's skyrocketing reputation and the overwhelming prestige of the Golden Federation, these voices appear weak and powerless.

The vast majority of people believe this is an uneven battle, with New Bauhinia's dark horse journey likely coming to an abrupt end today at the hands of the Golden Federation's 'Destiny's Child'.

Some even maliciously speculate:

"Maybe New Bauhinia internally already knows Bai E is inadequate, but they're forced to push him forward, and now there's no turning back."

"Winning is a major profit, losing is no loss? After all, beating Astra would immortalize him, losing is still just losing to 'Destiny's Child', it's no shame? Clever calculation!"

"Just waiting for the show! Let's see how that captain who's been hiding all along embarrasses himself!"

Chapter 1045: Challenge Match (Part 2)

The atmosphere in the seventh district of the International Pavilion was heavy.

Everyone had seen the announcements and the overwhelming public opinion on the internet.

Gong Yan's face was grim: "It's the retaliation of the 'Sons of the Empire'! They've directly used their strongest trump card against the master! And choosing this moment, when we are at the peak of our momentum, intending to crush us in one fell swoop! The public opinion was also guided by them!"

Kuang Xin exclaimed angrily: "What nonsense 'Child of Destiny', pretending to be mysterious! Master, let me confront him!"

Rose, Catherine, and Gu Lan, though silent, had eyes full of worry and battle readiness.

They believed in Bai E's strength, but Astra's reputation and the significance it carried were incredibly heavy.

Bai E stood by the window of the tactics discussion room, looking at the eternal lights of the "Star City", his expression remaining calm.

He was not surprised by Astra's challenge.

Last night's fermentation of public opinion and this morning's challenge announcement were obviously a series of traps.

Forcing him to participate, and then using the strongest spear to pierce this newly risen star.

The Elorin scholar hurried in, his expression serious: "Lord Bai E, Astra's intelligence...is extremely scarce, but every piece indicates he is remarkably terrifying. His Spiritual Talent 'Destiny Perception' is said to allow him to gain an absolute advantage in battle, even to a certain extent 'lead' the course of the battle in a favorable direction for him. The Golden Federation protects him extremely closely, almost no complete battle footage has been released, all public information is vague and ambiguous, yet all assessments rank him among the top three contenders in this tournament for personal combat strength. This challenge...is extremely dangerous."

Bai E turned around, looking at the core members gathered in the room.

On their faces were anger, worry, and absolute trust in him.

"What is meant to come will always come." Bai E's voice was steady, without a hint of tension. "He wants to fight, then we will fight."

He walked to the tactical table, pulling up the Star Alliance tournament's rules for "Deathmatch Mode", and environment parameters for the main arena number one.

"Deathmatch mode, no time limit, no draw, until one side completely loses fighting capabilities or surrenders. The venue is a standard arena, no complex environmental interference, purely testing the individual ability of the Mech Pilot, mecha performance, and tactical will." Bai E quickly scanned through, "Astra is good at 'Destiny Perception' and prediction...so let him predict well."

"Kuang Xin, Rose, Catherine, Gu Lan, your matches today proceed as usual, without any influence. Gong Yan, continue monitoring public opinion, but no need to respond. As for Astra...don't worry."

Lastly, he looked outside the window, as if able to see the soon-to-be battlefield of the "main arena number one".

"Inform the event committee: challenge accepted. Time, set for today, third round."

"Since they want to see my strength..."

Bai E gently clenched his fist, an invisible yet comforting steady momentum diffused.

"Then let them have a good look."

...

In the next day's points competition, the first to compete was Zero.

This former "Sharpshooter", now also piloting a mass-produced model mecha from the "Dawn's Edge" series, "Falcon".

His opponent hailed from a moderate force known for precision shooting and tactical coordination.

In the standard plain arena, Zero demonstrated the sharpshooter's patience, precision, and ultimate control over battlefield distance to the fullest extent.

He did not seek a one-hit kill, but through precise, continuous point shooting, continually pressured his opponent's movement space, destroyed their mecha's external sensors and secondary weapons, ultimately when the opponent exposed a fatal flaw due to comprehensive vision and firepower restrictions, a long-accumulated special armor-piercing round ended the battle.

Zero used a calm, efficient, and calculated victory, demonstrating to everyone the battle wisdom and skill of those top experts grown from ruthless environments were no less than anyone else's.

Next up was Ares, piloting the "Dawn's Edge" tailored "War God" model that's oriented towards close combat and strong assault.

His opponent was from a team renowned for high firepower coverage.

As the battle started, the opponent tried to pull back and suppress with firepower.

However, Ares showed a rampaging surge ability aligned with his "War God" name.

The "War God" mecha under his control, like a wild beast, charged under the opponent's fire barrage, minimizing evasion actions to reduce hit area, forcefully broke through the firepower net.

The ensuing close-range battle was without suspense, Ares' countless practical experience, broad and open yet precise and deadly melee skills, coupled with the mecha's strong output, in merely thirty seconds completely shattered the opponent's defenses, crushing the armor outside their mecha's core cockpit into dents and deformation, forcing their surrender.

Ares' victory was filled with the beauty of power and relentless momentum, once again showcasing the equally formidable top combat strength within the New Bauhinia team.

Two victories, vastly different in style, yet equally convincing.

New Bauhinia's points continued to steadily rise, firmly holding the top positions in the group.

This also rendered the criticism that "New Bauhinia is only strong because of a few core players" unfounded.

However, everyone's attention had long been completely captivated by the upcoming third match.

After the stunning five consecutive wins over the past two days, paired with doubt and underestimation under guided public opinion yesterday, plus the oppressive challenge from "Child of Destiny" Astra, Bai E, the captain who hadn't yet taken action, his first performance had been given far more significance than an ordinary points match.

It's proof, it's retaliation, and it's the ultimate test of New Bauhinia's dark horse team quality.

The information of both sides of the confrontation had been repeatedly dissected:

Challenger: Golden Federation "Dazzling Stars" team, Astra, mecha: Golden Federation's newest custom model "Judgment of Destiny".

Spiritual Talent involving "Destiny Perception", strength assessment leading singularly over the younger generation, one of the strongest contenders for the individual champion title in this tournament.

Responder: New Bauhinia Republic team, Bai E, mecha: New Bauhinia "Dawn's Edge" prototype "Breaker of Dawn".

Strength unknown, only the brilliant records of his team members serve as side references, along with some vague rumors from the edge Stellar Districts.

The dramatic disparity in strength, sensitive background conflict, and the dramatic "king sniping dark horse" theatrics, made the attention on this showdown unprecedented.

Not only was the spectator seating in "Star City" long packed, but the pre-order numbers for the Star Alliance's live broadcast channel also set a new high since the tournament began.

Online, all kinds of predictions, analyses, even discussions with a gambling nature were overwhelming, although the odds are still overwhelmingly skewed towards Astra, there were those hoping for a miracle, or simply disliking the "Sons of the Empire" hegemony, starting to silently cheer for Bai E and New Bauhinia.

"Glorious Competitive World" main arena number one is a giant venue specifically designed for important matches and showcase games, capable of accommodating tens of thousands of on-site spectators.

Today, it's packed to the brim, the clamor almost lifting the dome.

Countless cameras, sensors, and Spiritual Energy detection devices were aimed at the center stage, a pristine alloy ring.

Without any complex environmental interference, this was the purest stage for power confrontation.

Members of the New Bauhinia team sat in the exclusive player observation area.

Kuang Xin, Rose, Catherine, Gu Lan, Zero, Ares and others had solemn expressions, though they had absolute confidence in Bai E, facing such a notorious and terrifying opponent like Astra, it would be a lie to say they're not anxious.

Gong Yan stared intently at the data board, with the latest public opinion and odds changes rolling.

The Elorin scholar frowned slightly, repeatedly recalling the ambiguous, snippets of information about Astra's capabilities.

"Look! Astra is coming out!" A burst of exclamation erupted from the audience seats.

Chapter 1046: One Sword!

In the passage, a mecha adorned with dark golden and regal purple spiritual energy patterns, with a stately and elegant design resembling a temple warrior, slowly emerged.

With every step the "Tianming Judge" took, it seemed to resonate with a strange rhythm.

A faint golden halo of spiritual energy, like strands of fate, flowed around the mecha, giving an unfathomable impression as if everything was under control.

Just the appearance alone caused an intangible pressure that made many in the audience hold their breath.

Soon after, the "Dawn Bringer" calmly entered the arena from another passage, its blue and white body steady.

In comparison to its opponent's glamorous and mysterious aura, the "Dawn Bringer" appeared sleek, compact, with smooth but powerful lines, without much visible spiritual energy phenomena.

Only the unique metallic sheen on its body quietly flowed under the arena's artificial lighting.

The two mechas stood at opposite sides of the stage, facing each other from afar.

In the cockpit, Bai E slowly opened his eyes, calmly observing the mecha praised as "destined by fate" opposite him.

He could sense an immense yet subtle wave of spiritual energy emanating from the opponent, almost like it could glimpse future fragments, attempting to envelop the whole arena.

Bai E lightly furrowed his brow, looking towards the opponent.

Compared to the core energy of the Bug Race, which was vast, the opponent's spiritual energy was evidently not as profound but was more agile and controllable.

A worthy opponent indeed.

The referee's electronic voice boomed through the feverish stadium like thunder:

"Round Three, Special Challenge Match, Death Match Mode!"

"Facing off: Astra versus Bai E!"

"The match—begins!"

The moment it started, the "Tianming Judge" instantly vanished from its original position.

It wasn't teleportation but an explosive advance!

The dark golden mecha transformed into a blurry stream of light, carrying a strange, fateful humming, crossing half the arena distance in an instant.

A cross longsword, ornate with golden spiritual energy flames, had already appeared before the "Dawn Bringer's" cockpit!

This strike was fast, accurate, fierce, and accompanied by a mysterious, inevitable pressure, as if no matter how Bai E dodged, he would be guided by fate to be struck in a vital spot!

The stands erupted in astonished gasps!

"The child of fate" made a move, and it's thunderous and decisive!

However, just as the sword tip was about to reach the "Dawn Bringer's" armor, the blue and white mecha executed a seemingly minor but exquisitely precise sidestep, narrowly allowing the sword edge to skim past its chest plate, sparking a faint trail of energy.

Bai E's response was simple, efficient, with no superfluous movements, as if he had long anticipated this seemingly unavoidable strike.

Astra's first strike misses, yet its offensive is like mercury pouring out, continuous and unyielding.

The "Tianming Judge's" swordsmanship was ornate and meticulous, each strike carried a strange rhythm, as if weaving an invisible net enveloping the "Dawn Bringer".

What was even more alarming was its ability to preemptively block off the "Dawn Bringer's" seemingly possible evasion routes, as if it could foresee Bai E's next move.

On the scene, the "Tianming Judge" took the initiative, with an offensive like tidal waves.

While the "Dawn Bringer" appeared beleaguered, able only to engage in seemingly panicked blocking and dodging, its occasional counterattack was easily nullified or preemptively evaded by the opponent.

"Indeed! Astra is too strong! Completely dominating!"

"Look! Bai E can only dodge, no chance to fight back!"

"Is this what 'fate perception' feels like? It's as if he knows everything Bai E wants to do!"

"The gap is too wide, not even close in level."

"The New Bauhinia's dark horse myth ends here! Exposed in front of true genius!"

Online, the already lopsided opinion grew even louder, with countless mockery, ridicule, and comments like "I knew it" filling up the comment sections on major streaming platforms.

On the betting platforms, Astra's odds of winning dropped further, while Bai E's odds soared to over 1:15.

In the viewing area for the New Bauhinia participants, the atmosphere was heavy.

Kuang Xin and others clenched their fists, palms sweating.

They could see that Astra's attacks were not flawless, but his "prediction" ability was too much of a bug, making many of Bai E's brilliant counterattacks miss, putting him on the back foot.

Gong Yan looked at the data board filled with one-sided opinions and the constantly changing odds, her face somewhat pale.

The Elorin scholar had a furrowed brow, murmuring to himself, "This level of fate interference... stronger than the rumors. Bai E seems to be adapting..."

On the stage, Bai E in the cockpit remained calm.

He could clearly sense a peculiar spiritual energy field enveloping the stage, continuously trying to "read" his mecha's energy flow, muscle memory reactions, even subtle signs of his intent, and relay them to Astra.

Is this the so-called "fate perception"?

More like an advanced form of "battlefield information reading and probability prediction".

"Interesting." Bai E was not flustered.

This ability is strong, but not invincible.

It relies on capturing and calculating information.

What if...the information itself is "wrong"?

Or, so fast that it can't be calculated in time?

Bai E began consciously adjusting his combat rhythm.

He stopped trying complex tactical deceptions, instead simplifying his movements to the extreme, relying more on the "Dawn Bringer's" superior basic performance and his own well-honed combat instincts to respond.

Chapter 1047: One Sword! (2)

At the same time, he began to make minuscule adjustments to the frequency and pattern of his Spiritual Energy output, making the Mecha's energy fluctuations appear less "predictable".

It was like introducing a significant amount of harmless but difficult-to-process "noise" into the opponent's information flow.

Gradually, Astra's seemingly prophetic suppression showed a tiny bit of sluggishness.

His attacks could no longer perfectly block Bai E's evasions, and occasionally, a sudden burst or change of direction from the "Breaker of Dawn" would require him to spend an extra fraction of a second to readjust.

Although he still held the upper hand on the surface, the feeling of absolute control over everything was quietly loosening.

Likewise, Astra had obviously noticed this too.

His gaze became sharper.

"Indeed, some skill... capable of disrupting my 'Web of Destiny'. But, it ends here."

Astra sneered inwardly; he had originally wanted to play a little longer, to see how many more tricks this much-vaunted opponent had.

But now, it seemed a quick resolution was needed to prevent any unexpected complications.

"Arbiter of Destiny" suddenly retreated to a distance, temporarily halting the storm-like close-range attacks.

The golden spiritual energy patterns on his Mecha suddenly lit up like burning flames, gathering a force far vaster and more profound than before.

He gripped the cross-shaped Longsword with both hands, raising it above his head, its tip pointing towards the sky.

Above the arena, it seemed as though invisible threads of fate were being drawn, with the faint sounds of wind and thunder.

"It's 'Destiny's Verdict'! Astra's ultimate move!" An informed spectator cried out in shock.

"It's said that this sword locks onto its target's fate, unavoidable and unstoppable!"

"It's over! Bai E is going to lose!"

The internet was exploding with chatter.

"He's unleashing his ultimate move! Ending the match!"

"I knew it, once Astra got serious, he could finish it in one move!"

"Just end it already, there's no suspense."

The hearts of the New Bauhinia people were in their throats.

Catherine even stood up subconsciously.

Facing this imposing strike, the "Breaker of Dawn", which had been in a "defensive" state, for the first time reacted in a completely different manner.

It didn't attempt to retreat to distance itself, nor did it try to rush up and interrupt the opponent's charge-up. Instead, it slightly lowered its body, assuming an overly simple posture reminiscent of a combat stance.

On the blue-and-white Mecha, the previously restrained spiritual energy fluctuations were for the first time clearly and steadily emitted. They were not violent but carried an indescribable sense of concentration that seemed capable of cutting through all.

"What is he doing? Striking a pose to await death?" This question arose in countless minds.

Just as the momentum of the "Arbiter of Destiny" reached its peak, about to unleash the fate-deciding strike—

Bai E moved.

No, to be precise, it was the core of the "Breaker of Dawn", the energy source Helen called the "Double Helix Steady-State Fusion Core", and Bai E's own Spiritual Energy, that, in a way defying common sense, instantly synchronized, compressed, and then... erupted!

There was no earth-shattering light and shadow, no flashy move name.

Only an almost straight blue-and-white "line" that exceeded the limits of visual capture, extending from the starting point of the "Breaker of Dawn" to right in front of the "Arbiter of Destiny" in an instant!

It wasn't a charge, but more like... a leap through space or a "domain of absolute speed"!

The massive destiny spiritual energy that the "Arbiter of Destiny" was invoking appeared silently as a "rupture" along the path of this "line", like a cloth cut by the sharpest blade!

The energy link and guidance of the fully charged sword were forcibly severed!

And at the end of this "line" was the "Breaker of Dawn's" sword—

Or rather, a simple and straightforward chop, imbued with the purest spiritual energy and physical power Bai E could muster at this moment, and reinforced by the special structure of the "Breaker of Dawn"!

This sword had none of the grandeur or sense of destiny of "Destiny's Verdict", only the purest "speed" and "precision", along with the intent of cutting through all illusions and reaching the truth!

It bypassed all the opponent's predictive defenses, ignoring the yet to fully form power of the destiny verdict.

In Astra's horrified eyes, completely beyond comprehension, it seemed to break through the constraints of time and space, striking the very center of the "Arbiter of Destiny's" breastplate, at the critical node that connected the Mecha's energy core and the Spiritual Power Circuit!

"Boom—!!!"

A dull thud that made hearts stop for a moment replaced the expected roar of the verdict sword.

The magnificent body of the "Arbiter of Destiny" was like an invisible giant hammer hitting it head-on, flung backward violently, with dark golden spiritual energy patterns dimming and scattering chaotically. From the center point of impact, web-like cracks rapidly spread across the chest armor!

It crashed heavily at the edge of the arena, creating a deafening collision, scattering a burst of energy shield's blue fragments.

Meanwhile, the "Breaker of Dawn" had already sheathed its sword, standing there once again in that concise and composed posture, as if the earth-shattering strike a moment ago had never happened.

The entire audience fell dead silent.

The frenetically scrolling online comments froze instantaneously.

Everyone was dumbfounded by this unbelievable scene unfolding in the arena.

The imposing "Arbiter of Destiny", who seemed to control destiny itself, lay on the ground, black smoke trailing from its chest, struggling a few times but unable to get up again.

And Bai E, always seen as at a disadvantage and ridiculed in public opinion, stood calmly in the center of the arena with his "Breaker of Dawn".

The referee seemed to freeze for a few seconds before announcing in a tone of disbelief:

"Mat... Match over! 'Arbiter of Destiny' is out of combat! The victor... the New Bauhinia Republic, Bai E!"

After the deathly silence came a deafening uproar and amazement!

"Wha... What just happened?!"

"What did I see? Astra was taken down with one sword strike?"

"How could that sword be so fast?! I couldn't even see it clearly!"

"Where's the Destiny Verdict? Why wasn't it executed?"

"It was interrupted! The sinister outsider interrupted his ultimate move!"

"My God! One strike! Just one strike!"

Online, the previous mocking and ridicule were instantly washed away with countless "???", "!!!", and gasps, followed by an explosion of exclamations, analyses, and disbelief.

The odds on the betting platforms went into chaos, with countless people who bet on Astra wailing.

In the New Bauhinia spectator area, Kuang Xin jumped up and punched the air: "Damn! The Chief's awesome!"

Rose, Catherine, and others let out a long sigh of relief, with expressions of relief and pride on their faces.

Gong Yan covered her mouth in excitement.

Elorin scholars' eyes flashed with brilliance, muttering: "Instantaneous energy synchronization outburst, surpassing conventional reaction limits with breakthrough speed... and that kind of use of spiritual energy... It's not just the Mecha's performance, but a profound understanding of the essence of power by the Mech Pilot! Lord Bai E..."

In the VIP seats, the "Sons of the Empire" representatives who orchestrated this battle behind the scenes looked grim, one face gloomier than the next.

The Golden Federation's advisor almost crushed his wine glass, the Priest of the Holy Silver Church Country had a dark expression, and the representative of the Steel Alliance fell into deep thought.

Bai E's final sword demonstrated not only combat strength, but an extreme mastery of energy and battle rhythm that they couldn't fully comprehend.

On the stage, the cockpit of the "Arbiter of Destiny" slowly opened, and Astra staggered out.

He looked pale, his eyes filled with shock, confusion, and a hint of lingering fright.

His gaze was pinned on Bai E, who calmly walked out of the cockpit on the opposite side, lips moving but ultimately unable to utter a word.

His proud "Web of Destiny" was fragile as a joke before the opponent's pure and ultimate sword.

Bai E nodded slightly at him, without the arrogance of a victor or intentional pity, as if merely completing an ordinary competition.

But that sword, it was more than enough.

It shattered the "Son of Destiny's" aura of invincibility, as well as the rampant doubts and mockery online.

In the most direct and shocking way, it proclaimed to the entire universe the absolute strength of the New Bauhinia leader.

The debut, was a total domination.

Chapter 1048: Aftermath and the Second Stage

For the high-ranking representatives of the "Sons of the Empire" who were pushing this battle behind the scenes, Bai E's earth-shattering strike was as if it had smashed directly onto their faces.

It left them dizzy, both shocked and angry.

"What level of power is that? Instantaneous energy synchronization and eruption? Surpassing the predictive limits of the 'Web of Fate'?"

The advisor of the Golden Federation roared in a panic at the emergency meeting, his data pad displaying the peak spiritual energy curve and physical kinetic data recorded during the last strike of the "Breaker of Dawn."

The steep climb, almost vertical, completely defied their understanding of mecha output norms.

"It's not just a simple energy eruption." The technical representative of the Steel Alliance looked ashen, replaying the slow-motion footage over and over.

"His spiritual energy and mecha core, even his own will, achieved perfect resonance and synchronization at that moment. Astra's 'Web of Fate' essentially reads the flow of battlefield information for probabilistic predictions, but Bai E... the 'complexity' or 'purity' of the information in his final strike exceeded the processing limits of the predictive model. More crucially, his initiation and attack speed surpassed the update feedback window of the 'web'! This requires an unbelievable level of precise control over one's power, mecha performance, and timing."

The Priest of the Holy Silver Church Country had a gloomy expression, "The key is also at the level of will. That strike contained not just power and speed, but also a... pure intention to sever illusions and face reality. This bears a remarkable similarity to the 'purity' pursued by our Holy Silver path, but its form of expression is so violent and direct. This Bai E is by no means a simple warrior. His 'path' has already begun to take shape."

The previously relaxed mindset of "probing and even suppressing with trump cards" had vanished without a trace.

The strength Bai E displayed had surpassed the category of a "rising star to be wary of," reaching a level that could threaten the position of their true "aces."

What shocked them even more was that Bai E won so effortlessly, as if he hadn't even used his full strength.

This cast unprecedented doubt and hesitation on whether their "aces" could really suppress Bai E in the subsequent matches.

"The plan... needs adjustment." The advisor of the Golden Federation said with difficulty, "We can't let our 'aces' face him so easily anymore. At least not until the draw results of the elimination rounds are out, we can't give him more opportunities to showcase his strength and gather intelligence about us."

"Agreed." The Priest of the Holy Silver Church nodded, "But we can't let him have it too easy either. The point matches are long; find a way within the rules to create other troubles for them, to exhaust their energy and state. Meanwhile, strengthen the research on other members of the 'New Bauhinia.' No matter how strong Bai E is, he is just one person."

This defeat was like a bucket of ice water waking those immersed in the glory of the "Sons of the Empire."

After a brief meeting, the adviser of the Golden Alliance rushed back to his station.

Astra had already returned to the base after the defeat, but it was said he locked himself in a room, refusing anyone to approach.

Everyone had tried to persuade him, but to no avail.

He is a proud person, and he should be proud.

As one of the top talents among the Golden Federation's younger generation, he had never encountered such "humiliation" in his career.

Even the "aces" from other nations among the Seven Sons of the Empire would not have defeated him in such a dominating manner.

But today...

But today!

"Bang bang bang!" The sound of knocking echoed again.

The advisor's voice sounded from outside, "Astra, it's Karry, may I come in?"

Astra remained silent, merely lifting his head from his arm.

Aside from the advisor's voice, he also heard another whisper in his ears—

"Losing to such trash, losing to a stray dog from the fringe, are you willing?"

Are you willing? Are you willing? Are you willing?

Such words echoed repeatedly in his heart, leading to an increasingly agitated heartbeat.

Indeed!

I am the stray of the Empire, the "offspring" of the once great Human Emperor.

As the offspring of the Empire, how can I disgrace the Empire?

If it were a battle among the Seven Sons of the Empire internally, winning or losing would be acceptable.

He's not someone who can't take a loss.

It's just... how can I lose to outsiders?

How can I lose to outsiders?!

"Bang!"

The door suddenly flew open violently with great force, the advisor dodging to the side just barely to avoid the alloy door that was flung away.

Out of the light dust, a figure emerged from the shadows of the door.

"Astra..." The advisor looked at the figure with a startled expression, "You..."

"It's fine." Astra's eyes glowed with a dark purple light, "I'm okay... In the third stage of the competition, I'll meet him again."

The advisor scrutinized him with a slightly skeptical look.

He originally feared that the Federation's genius might never recover, but now it seemed... all was well?

Yet the aura emanating from him now seemed a bit terrifying.

He used to be like the sun, proud and fervent.

Now... why does he seem a little sinister?

Probably in a bad mood after the defeat?

The advisor shook his head, dispelling his doubts.

"That's good; as long as you're okay. Don't worry, we will make them pay!"

"No need for your intervention; I'll take revenge myself!"

...

Apart from the Seven Sons of the Empire as the masterminds behind the scenes, for the vast audience across the universe and more neutral forces, Bai E's victory brought them a range of entirely different feelings.

Chapter 1049: Aftermath and the Second Stage (2)

The audience supporting the dark horse and disapproving of the hegemony of the Seven Sons of the Empire were jubilant, as Bai E and New Bauhinia's reputation reached a new peak in their hearts.

Rumors of the "Eight Sons of the Empire" even began to circulate.

Many small and medium-sized powers also started to reassess the possibility of engaging with New Bauhinia.

A power with such a strong leader and unique technology, even if currently small, has a future full of potential.

Of course, many also believed that Astra might have been careless, or that Bai E just happened to counter his abilities, with real challenges still ahead.

But in any case, Bai E earned respect and fear through his strength, and the name "New Bauhinia" was firmly established among the strong in the Star Alliance Tournament.

With five consecutive wins on the first day and a shocking victory over Astra, New Bauhinia established an excellent point foundation and psychological advantage.

In the following fourteen days of the point-based competition, New Bauhinia's team members continued to compete.

As Bai E expected, each subsequent battle became more difficult.

Opponents had clearly studied recordings of their previous battles and developed more targeted strategies.

Apart from the initial members like Kuang Xin, Rose, Catherine, and Gu Lan, the subsequent team members performed well, but not without losses.

They encountered ruthless blocks from other "Sons of the Empire" teams and lost to some teams with bizarre tactics or genuine strength.

Particularly in team collaboration projects, New Bauhinia exposed weaknesses in relatively short cooperation time and an immature tactical system, losing several matches.

However, thanks to the strong individual abilities of many members, New Bauhinia's score remained stable in the top tier.

Finally, the first stage of the fifteen-day "Qualification Selection" ended.

The New Bauhinia Republic's team ranked seventh in total points, successfully advancing to the top sixty-four and qualifying for the second stage "Glory Elimination."

This achievement was remarkable for a first-time participating team from the Edge Star Domain.

But controversy followed.

Kuang Xin, lying in the base and browsing, alternated between redness and silly grins.

"A newly established small country, competing for the first time in the Star Alliance Final and making it to the top sixty-four, ranking seventh! It's a miracle! Those core mech pilots of theirs, each is top-notch. Their captain Bai E is unfathomable! The future is promising!"

"They just caught others off guard in the initial matches, didn't they also lose several later matches once they were studied? Especially in team competitions, they lost quite embarrassingly. It shows their lack of foundation, relying on a few standout members. In the knockout stage, a single-elimination format, if their weaknesses are caught, they might only last one round. Reaching the top sixty-four was lucky for them, they won't go far beyond that."

Such opposing viewpoints argued ceaselessly online, with some "pure bystanders" who seemed unbiased but stirred up trouble, creating a lively atmosphere.

Undeniably, it was the first time anyone had outshone the established Seven Sons of the Empire in an event of the Star Alliance Tournament's magnitude.

During the short break, many in the base spent their days debating online.

After a brief period of rest and tactical adjustment, the Star Alliance Event Committee officially announced the detailed schedule and rules for the second stage.

Elorin briefed Bai E and others at the tactical meeting:

"The second stage, 'Glory Elimination.' The sixty-four advancing teams will compete through a completely random draw in a single-elimination tournament. This means no room for error, losing one match leads to immediate elimination."

"The competition will be more diverse and brutal. The battlefield will no longer be a standard arena, but will shift to 'Glory Battle World' with extremely complex, harsh, and even dangerous 'special arenas.'" Elorin displayed the relevant information, "Currently announced possible arena types include:"

'Deep Blue Purgatory': An undersea high-pressure environment, testing mecha's sealing, pressure resistance, and underwater mobility. It may involve strong currents, deep-sea beasts, or minefields.

'Heart of Melting Core': Active volcanic areas or around lava lakes, with extreme high temperatures, toxic gases, collapsible ground, and intermittent lava eruptions.

'Void Wasteland': Strong radiation, low gravity or microgravity regions, possibly within abandoned space facilities or asteroid debris fields, demanding high mecha radiation protection, maneuver control, and spatial perception.

'Gravity Maze': A massive space station ruin with fluctuating gravity, testing the pilot's adaptability and mecha posture control.

'Spiritual Storm': A region with extremely chaotic spiritual energy background, filled with illusions or energy turbulence, posing a great challenge to the stability of spiritual ability users, possibly disrupting regular sensors and communication.

"Each match's specific venue, environmental parameters, and victory conditions, such as defeating opponents, seizing target points, holding a position for a set time, or collecting special items, will be announced 24 hours before the match begins. This tests the team's rapid response, environmental adaptation, and tactical formulation abilities."

Elorin's tone was serious: "This is no longer merely a stage for comparing mecha performance and individual pilot skills, but a comprehensive test of a team's overall strength, intelligence analysis, logistics support, tactical knowledge, and adaptability. Many teams that performed well in the points race phase may stumble due to unfamiliarity with certain extreme environments or incompetence at specific task modes."

"Additionally," he added, "during the elimination phase, opponent information will become harder to obtain. Everyone will hide their true tactics and trump cards. The random draw also means we could encounter any powerful opponents early on, including ace teams of the 'Sons of the Empire.'"

After hearing this, Bai E's gaze swept across everyone in the meeting room.

Kuang Xin, Rose, Catherine, Gu Lan, Zero, Ares... everyone had a serious look on their faces, but there was more of a burning desire to fight.

Having experienced the trials and victories of the first stage, the team's demeanor had transformed, becoming more composed and confident.

They no longer felt the universe was so vast and distant.

What were once ethereal ideas had become tangible experiences.

These people, stepping out from what they once believed were "native planets," had long since lost their awe of the "universe."

After all, the people in the universe weren't much more formidable than they were, and the so-called "Seven Sons of the Empire"... were nothing special.

"We arrived a month early, acclimated to the 'Star City' environment, and have a preliminary understanding of the 'Glory Battle World.'"

Bai E spoke slowly, "But the second stage is the real battle of life and death. There are no points to squander, no second chances."

"Starting today, adjust our training focus. Dr. Helen needs to expedite the development of the environmental adaptation modules for the 'Dawn's Edge' series. We must conduct specialized simulation training for the possible environments announced. Gong Yan, intelligence collection must continue, with a focus on potential opponents' historical performances in extreme environments and analyses of tactical tendencies. Elorin, please continue to assist us in monitoring tournament details and draw dynamics."

He stood up, staring at the star map on the wall, which marked "Glory Battle World" and those known dangerous zones.

"The results of the first stage only gave us a ticket to the show. The real fight begins now."

"For those who think we 'lack depth' or 'only have a few tricks up our sleeves,' let them see in the second stage..."

"What the resilience of 'New Bauhinia' is, and what our foundation truly is."

Chapter 1050: Battle Underwater

After a brief rest and targeted environmental adaptation training, the draw ceremony for the second phase of the Star Alliance Championship - the "Glorious Elimination Match," took place under the watchful eyes of many.

The entirely random draw added even more uncertainty to this single-elimination tournament.

The opponents for "New Bauhinia" were quickly revealed, and when the holographic screen displayed the results, Gong Yan took a deep breath and her expression became serious.

"The opponent is... 'Deep Blue Guardians,' from the 'Deep Space Federation.'

Gong Yan muttered under her breath, "They are not the Sons of the Empire, nor are they one of the higher-ranked teams from the points stage, but they... are quite unique."

"Unique?" Kuang Xin raised an eyebrow, "In what way?"

Gong Yan pulled up the information: "'Deep Blue Guardians' are not a traditional competition team. They're more like... a professional 'deep-sea operation and rescue' unit, long responsible for the Steel League's special engineering, exploration, and security and rescue tasks in ocean planets, Ice Ocean Worlds, or giant space station water circulation systems. Their mech pilots are more professional underwater engineers and explorers than warriors. Their mechas are almost all special models designed specifically for underwater, high pressure, low temperature, and other extreme underwater environments. In the points stage, their performance wasn't particularly outstanding, but they

maintained an unbeaten record and held a significant advantage in all projects involving underwater or complex fluid environments."

"What about the competition venue?" Bai E asked.

Gong Yan looked at the updated information: "The competition venue is... 'Deep Blue Purgatory' Area 3 - 'Silent Sea Trench.' Competition mode: Occupy and Control. Both sides need to establish a control zone near a Spiritual Beacon Point called the 'Heart of the Deep Sea' at the trench's depths and hold it for enough time, or completely destroy the opponent's resistance capability. The competition will take place at a depth of about 3,000 meters below sea level, where the water pressure is extremely high, the light is dim, the temperature is near freezing, and there are unknown deep-sea creatures and complex underwater currents."

This draw result was both expected and somewhat unexpected.

"The Sons of the Empire's team were likely opponents, and they had anticipated that their opponent might be the Sons of the Empire, but who would have thought they'd encounter such an unusual tough nut—

A foreign team with absolute professional advantages in specific environments.

This undoubtedly cast a shadow over New Bauhinia's debut in the elimination match.

"It seems that our performance in the first stage made some people feel the need to use the environment to limit us," Catherine calmly analyzed, "Or rather, luck is on their side."

"It's okay." Bai E's voice was calm, "The 'Dawn's Edge' series was designed with full environmental adaptability in mind; although underwater modules are not our specialty, Dr. Helen must have made basic preparations. The question now is, who should fight? And how to cope with such a completely unfamiliar combat environment."

Rose frowned slightly: "Underwater, I'll be significantly weakened by water resistance, reducing the stealth and suddenness of close combat raids, and my performance might not be good."

Gu Lan also nodded: "My guerrilla tactics are similarly limited underwater, mobility is greatly reduced, and ocean currents will interfere with the trajectory of my darts."

Kuang Xin was eager to try: "Whether it's in water or fire, let's just do it! I just don't know how much force the mecha will need to punch underwater..."

Catherine, however, was more focused on the tactical level: "The opponents are underwater experts, and they must be familiar with the environment of the 'Silent Sea Trench,' possibly even using the environment itself as a weapon. We not only have to face the enemy but also fight against the natural environment. This is a huge test for our team's cooperation, environmental awareness, and adaptability."

"So..." her gaze turned to Bai E, "sir, if we want to ensure victory, you might have to take the field personally for this battle."

There was no one else on the team who dared to claim they could defeat an opponent with a terrain advantage in such an extreme environment.

Bai E gently shook his head, not intending to take the field in the first match.

"Can't you really go on the field?" Catherine was somewhat anxious, "This is the elimination match... losing one game is the end of it all. We've worked so hard to get to the top 64, if in the first match..."

She didn't finish her sentence, but the meaning was clear.

Facing such a professional underwater opponent, without Bai E, the absolute core, in charge, their confidence was shaky.

After all, in the first stage, Bai E had defeated Astra, the "Child of Destiny," with just one sword stroke, his strength being the team's most solid backing.

Even in the deep-sea environment, where he had never been seen in action, everyone believed he could do his best.

Rose also rarely expressed concern: "There is no room for error in the elimination match. 'Deep Blue Guardians' have an overwhelming advantage underwater. If we can't establish an advantage from the start, or we get dragged into their rhythm, we'll be very passive later."

"The sir might be considering the tournament rules," Gong Yan suddenly spoke up.

"There are limits on the number of appearances each player can make in each stage. If we intend to fight our way into the top eight, we need to play at least three matches: from 64 to 32, from 32 to 16, and from 16 to 8. The sir, being our strongest trump card, if we use him in a match where he is not necessarily needed, what will we do when we encounter stronger opponents later?"

She pulled up some information: "Don't forget, those 'Sons of the Empire' real ace teams, like the 'Brilliant Star' main team of the Golden Federation, the 'Proxies' squad of the Holy Silver Church Country, the 'Blood Fury Battle Group' core team of the Flame Republic, they are all in either the upper half or the other side of the lower half, and we'll eventually run into them. There's also the elusive 'Ghost Walker' main team of the Shadow Kingdom. The sir's opportunities to play must be used wisely."