

Wow 1051

Chapter 1051: Underwater Battle (Part 2)

Gu Lan added, "Moreover, I believe there's another crucial point—if we let the commander join the battle, it sends a clear signal to the outside that we are afraid of underwater combat. The enemy will surely seize on this point and target us relentlessly. There are limits to how many times a person can join a battle, but there are no such limits on maps. I even believe they will arrange our upcoming battles to all take place in similar deep-sea environments!"

"So that's the cruelty of the elimination rounds." At this point, Catherine sighed helplessly.

"This is precisely where the teams from 'Sons of the Empire', with their deep resources, have an advantage. They have sufficient talent reserves and can dispatch specialist teams for different environments without overly relying on a few core members. We... do have a shortcoming in this regard."

Bai E quietly listened to everyone's discussion, his fingers gently tapping the tabletop.

He understood his team members' concerns.

On one hand, this is a single-elimination tournament with no room for error.

On the other hand, his power is a limited resource that must be used judiciously.

Premature exposure or depletion may lead to hidden dangers in more difficult battles ahead.

"Everyone has valid points," Bai E finally spoke, his voice steady. "Indeed, it's not suitable for me to appear directly in this battle."

He looked at everyone: "There are three reasons. First, revealing my adaptability and tactical style in extreme environments too early is detrimental to subsequent matches. Second, I need to conserve my strength and state for potentially stronger opponents later. Third, and most importantly..."

His gaze swept over Kuang Xin, Rose, Catherine, Gu Lan, Zero, Ares, and others.

"I trust you all. Each of you is a companion I've selected, trained, and fought alongside through countless battles to reach today. You possess courage, wisdom, and combat skills that rival anyone's. 'Deep Blue Guardians' are underwater experts, but you are no less."

His words lifted the spirits of everyone.

"Of course... we can't be blindly confident. Underwater combat is a new challenge for us. We need a pilot who is specially adaptable to underwater environments or, at the very least, not averse to it and can learn quickly."

His gaze scanned the faces of everyone, finally falling on... a young mech pilot who had not been part of the core discussion circle but had been quietly standing on the periphery.

This young man had short, deep-blue hair, a calm gaze, and though not particularly burly, exuded a steady and reliable presence.

He was one of the players who came to 'Star City' with the 'Fire Hammer' guild and subsequent support teams, his ID was 'Tideflow'.

"Tideflow," Bai E called out.

The young mech pilot, momentarily taken aback by being named, immediately straightened up: "Sir!"

"I remember your details," Bai E recalled. "You come from a planet with over 90% ocean coverage and were a deep-sea resource exploration squad's escort pilot before joining the 'Fire Hammer' guild. You have extensive field experience in underwater and high-pressure environments and are especially good at using underwater terrain and currents for stealth and surprise attacks. Your mech handling style leans toward agility and precision, correct?"

Tideflow was somewhat surprised that Bai E knew so much about his background and quickly nodded: "Yes, sir. I have accumulated over three thousand standard hours of underwater operations and am familiar with the characteristics and modifications of various underwater mechas."

"Good." Bai E nodded, "In this match, I need you to serve as one of the core assault members. Your task is not to launch a frontal attack but to use your familiarity with underwater conditions to conduct reconnaissance, harassment, and look for opportunities to disrupt the opponent's formation or key equipment. You are our eyes and dagger underwater."

He then turned to the others: "Catherine, you'll be in charge of tactical command for this match. Your calmness and insight are just as important underwater. Zero, although your precision shooting will be affected by the currents, a critical fatal strike is still indispensable. Ares, your strength will be greatly reduced underwater, but you remain valuable as the focal point of attracting fire and making breakthroughs. Rose, Gu Lan, you will be the reserves, making full use of the time for underwater simulation training and ready to deal with unexpected situations anytime."

He lastly looked at Gong Yan and Elorin, who had been relatively silent: "Gong Yan, use the 'Money Eye' network to gather more detailed terrain and hydrological data of 'Silent Sea Trench', even if it's just publicly available exploration data. Scholar Elorin, please continue to focus on competition details, especially the specific criteria for the 'Capture and Control' mode."

Having made the arrangements, Bai E looked at everyone: "In this match, we will fight with Tideflow as the core, along with Catherine, Zero, Ares, and you..."

Bai E pointed to another player mech pilot present, "A total of five of you will be the participants in this battle. Perform your best, with no regrets. As for the outcome... just do your best. When necessary, you will win..."

"Can we win?" Tideflow, being the core, hadn't expected that his first appearance would come with such significant responsibility.

More importantly, did the commander think they would surely win?

...But I don't even have that much confidence in myself.

"It's alright." Bai E smiled, patting his shoulder, "Believe in yourself, our warriors never fear any environment or opponent. Underwater is just another battlefield. Let's go conquer it together!"

...

When the five-member team, piloting the 'Dawn's Edge' mechas equipped with temporary underwater modules, descended into the cold darkness three thousand meters below in the 'Silent Sea Trench', they genuinely felt the oppressive pressure of the environment far beyond imagination.

Inside the 'War God' mecha, Ares was the first to sense something unusual, "The water pressure... the mecha's hull is making noise."

The immense pressure from a depth of three thousand meters caused the 'Dawn's Edge' series, not designed for professional underwater use, to emit faint metallic groans.

Temperature sensors displayed the external water temperature near freezing, requiring additional energy from the mecha's thermostat system to maintain cockpit temperature.

The icy seawater seemed to seep through the armor, sapping the heat and morale of both mech and pilot.

Catherine reminded on the comms channel, "Pay attention to energy allocation, underwater propulsion, and life support systems will increase energy consumption."

"Visibility is poor as well," Zero calmly analyzed, "Optical visibility is limited, sonar interference is severe. I suggest reducing propulsion speed to avoid colliding with reefs."

His 'Silent' mecha was equipped with the most precise sensors but was significantly less effective in this environment.

The searchlights could only illuminate less than fifty meters in the murky water, with the sonar screen filled with complex terrain echoes and chaotic biological signals.

Tideflow, as a professional underwater pilot, supplemented, "The seawater here contains special mineral particles, which will continuously interfere with unshielded electronic equipment. Our communication distance and clarity will be affected."

The team cautiously advanced under Tideflow's guidance.

They quickly discovered that the terrain of 'Silent Sea Trench' was extremely complex—

Steep cliffs, deep trenches, protruding seamounts, and occasionally erupting thermal vents.

The direction of ocean currents was unpredictable, sometimes calm, sometimes suddenly forming strong undercurrents.

"Watch out for the updraft on the left," Tideflow warned timely, "It will push us towards that crystal cluster area."

Catherine observed that maintaining balance in the current required additional thruster energy, "In such an environment, mobility and endurance are severely affected. We need to plan the most energy-efficient route forward."

As the absolute core, Tideflow was mentally tense, "I'll do my best."

Chapter 1052: The Onset

During the advance, the team encountered some deep-sea creatures put in by the Competition Committee as environmental factors—

Glowing schools of fish, crustaceans camouflaged as rocks, and at one point, a giant shadow passed by in the distance.

Based on experience, Bai E judged, "These creatures may be attracted by the energy waves from the mecha, or disturbed by the battle. We need to avoid unnecessary energy release and steer clear of them as much as possible."

"Got it."

Just as the team gradually adapted to the environment and proceeded towards the "Heart of the Deep Sea" beacon point as per the map, an ambush occurred as they passed through a relatively narrow trench passage.

The "Deep Blue Guardian" didn't wait for them at the scheduled "Heart of the Deep Sea" beacon point but ambushed them halfway!

Several high-speed torpedoes shot out unexpectedly from the shadows of the reefs ahead, almost skimming the seabed, and were detected by the sonar warning signal only at point-blank range.

Meanwhile, the originally calm currents suddenly became chaotic, with multiple undercurrents surging from the gaps in the rock walls, trying to disrupt the mecha formation.

"Enemy attack! Scatter!" Catherine's command barely transmitted through the noise-filled communication channel as the battle erupted.

The four underwater special mechas of the "Deep Blue Guardian" emerged from various hidden positions like true deep-sea predators.

Their attacks were precise and lethal, clearly exploiting their perfect prediction of New Bauhinia team's advance speed and route, along with their absolute familiarity with the underwater terrain.

Even more terrifying, they seemed able to foresee New Bauhinia team's every move, always launching attacks at the most uncomfortable positions, striking swiftly and retreating without engaging.

"Maintain contact, don't get cut off," Catherine's voice echoed in the static-filled communication channel, striving to keep command.

However, underwater, the transmission and execution of orders became extraordinarily slow.

Ares' "War God" mecha, due to its relatively large size, became the focus of concentrated attacks, quickly immobilized by several adhesive underwater mines, and the leg thrusters were damaged.

Zero's "Silence" attempted to assist Ares, making precise shots, but the trajectory of the special armor-piercing rounds was severely disturbed by the water flow.

Most shots missed while revealing its own position, and it was targeted by the opponent from the flank using high-pressure water cannons, damaging the main sensor array.

Another player's "Wind Patrol," utilizing high mobility, tried to harass by circumnavigation, but the opponent also had a high-speed tracking-type mecha assigned to engage him closely, greatly limiting his agility with underwater resistance.

The only one performing as expected was Bai E.

He piloted the newly underwater-adapted "Dawn's Edge · Tidal" type mecha, maneuvering like a cunning fish among the jagged reefs and deep sea canyon.

He narrowly avoided the opponent's ambush several times and even successfully sabotaged a hidden sonar array of the opponent.

But alone, he couldn't turn the entire battle around.

"Deep Blue Guardian" clearly studied New Bauhinia's previous match footage.

They avoided confronting New Bauhinia head-on, continually using the environment for attrition and focusing their attacks on the relatively clumsy Ares and the position-establishing Zero.

By the fifteenth minute of combat, Ares' mecha, having repeatedly endured multiple high-pressure water blades and torpedo attacks, suffered severe damage to the leg thrusters, greatly reducing mobility, and was lured into an area filled with sharp crystal clusters, immobilizing the unit.

Subsequently, Zero's mecha, while trying to assist Ares, was locked on by several intelligent tracking torpedoes from the flank.

Although Zero skillfully evaded most, one torpedo hit the main sensor array on the mecha's back, greatly reducing Zero's vision and target recognition capabilities.

Catherine's mecha also suffered multiple disruptions, leaving its shield energy below thirty percent.

Only Bai E, relying on his underwater familiarity, maintained relatively high mobility and stealth, but he too was struggling just alone.

The opponents clearly noticed this troublesome "fish" and started separating a specially skilled high-speed tracking mecha to encircle and intercept him.

The situation rapidly deteriorated.

New Bauhinia lost its frontal foothold and long-range threat, with limited command and reconnaissance capabilities, while its only guerrilla force was under heavy surveillance.

Meanwhile, near the "Heart of the Deep Sea" beacon point, "Deep Blue Guardian" had already established a preliminary control zone.

The spectators and commentators in the stands, along with online opinion, almost unanimously believed New Bauhinia's defeat was certain.

"Indeed! Without Bai E, New Bauhinia is nothing underwater!"

"Professional is professional, extreme environments cannot be resolved by brute force."

"It looks like the dark horse's journey stops here, making it into the top sixty-four is quite good."

Even some neutral observers shook their heads, thinking that New Bauhinia was overly complacent in its personnel arrangement and underestimated the tactical disruption caused by the environment.

Inside the observation room of the seventh zone of the International Pavilion, the atmosphere dropped to freezing point.

Kuang Xin, Rose, Gu Lan, and others clenched their fists, their faces pale.

Gong Yan bit her lip.

Elorin scholars furrowed their brows, quickly analyzing data, looking for any possible turnaround.

...

Seeing their teammates being trapped one by one, formations cut off, communications intermittent.

"This can't go on!" Bai E felt anxious inside and attempted to suggest to Catherine, "Captain, we must forcefully break out into open areas! We are completely countered by the terrain and the opponents here!"

Chapter 1053: Advent! (2)

In the cockpit, Catherine's voice came through the static-laden communication, still striving to maintain composure: "Xi Liu, attempt to move toward the B7 area; the terrain there is complex, and we might shake off the tracking. Zero, try to repair the sensors, or switch to backup mode. Ares, report damage status, can you break free?"

However, their escape plan had already been anticipated by the more environment-familiar "Deep-Sea Guardians."

At the trench exit in the B7 direction, they had pre-arranged a compound interception net and triggerable thermal spring eruption trap.

When the New Bauhinia team forcibly rushed out, the interception net rose, and the high-temperature chaotic currents instantly disturbed the balance and sensors of all mechas.

"It's a trap!" Zero's warning had just sounded when it was drowned out by the explosive water flow.

The "Deep-Sea Guardians" mechas, like sharks smelling blood, closed in from all sides and launched a full-on attack.

The New Bauhinia team, having lost formation and effective command, was immediately plunged into a desperate situation of each fighting their own battles.

Ares' "War God," while struggling, was caught by the arm with gigantic hydraulic pincers from an opponent's heavy engineering mecha, while another mecha furiously attacked its chest armor with a drill.

Zero's "Silence" sensors were severely damaged, relying only on basic optical vision for blind shooting, was soon approached by an enemy; the high-frequency blade barely deflected a few hits before the opponent's custom armor-piercing harpoon stabbed into its shoulder joint.

The nimble "Whirlwind" was also tightly entangled by the opponent, losing its mobility advantage, and gradually falling into a disadvantage in close combat, with multiple mecha parts damaged.

Catherine's "Snipe Star" tried to provide remote support, but her attacks were also affected by the water flow and the enemy's agile evasion, achieving little effect, and she was constantly hit by stray bullets and torpedoes, with her shield energy in peril.

Xi Liu watched helplessly as his teammates fell into crisis one after another, unable to save them.

He piloted "Tide" left and right, wounding an enemy machine, but was immediately targeted by two others, stuck in a bitter fight.

Self-blame and guilt, like cold seawater, immediately overwhelmed him.

"It's all my fault...if I had scouted more carefully, if I had discovered the trap sooner...if my underwater combat skills were stronger..." Xi Liu clenched his teeth, his eyes burning.

He had disappointed Bai E's trust, failed his teammates' expectations.

Was the New Bauhinia's elimination path about to be ended by his own hands?

Just then, he felt the Spiritual Barrier protecting the mech pilot's consciousness in his mind, lightly touched by a gentle and irresistible force.

A calm and familiar voice directly resonated deep in his consciousness:

"Xi Liu, relax, don't resist."

It was Bai E!

Xi Liu's heart trembled intensely, but almost instinctively, he lowered the protection on the spiritual link.

The next moment, a vast, warm, extremely powerful will, like sunlight breaking through the darkness of the deep sea, instantly crossed the distant space, flooding into his cockpit, creating a profound resonance and connection with his consciousness.

This was not a brute force occupation but a higher level of "synergy" and "guidance."

Xi Liu could still feel the presence of his own body and basic control over his mecha, but his perception, thinking speed, combat intuition, and understanding of the mecha and environment, were instantly elevated to an unimaginable level!

He "saw" clearer water flow trajectories, "heard" the faint hum of enemy mecha energy cores in the distance, "felt" the subtle fluctuations of every energy on the battlefield.

At the same time, countless exquisite underwater combat techniques, energy usage secrets, methods of leveraging the environment, as if instinctively imprinted in his consciousness.

"Now, let's begin."

Bai E's will sounded "in his heart," with an absolute confidence that calmed the soul.

...

From an outsider's perspective, the blue-white "Tide" mecha that had previously shown signs of fatigue and was barely holding up, suddenly underwent a dramatic change in its aura!

Its movements were no longer merely agile and water-savvy, but infused with an indescribable rhythm and foresight, as if merging seamlessly with the deep sea.

Facing the two "Deep-Sea Guardians" mechas coming from both sides, "Tide" no longer dodged but took advantage of a slight ocean current shift, its body weaving a strange arc like a swimming fish, instantly slipping into the blind spot of the two enemy machines' attack.

The high-frequency water flow cutting blade lit up with a soft blue spiritual glow, slicing with lightning speed across the first enemy machine's waist-mounted auxiliary thruster group for balance and steering.

The spiritually enhanced cutting blade easily broke through the specialized alloy armor, damaging its internal structure.

Almost simultaneously, "Tide" turned using the momentum, its left arm's energy shield generator transformed and ejected a short spike blade at an intricate angle into the second enemy mecha's armpit conduit gap exposed due to attacking motion.

Spiritual energy flowed along the spike blade, instantly disrupting its local energy circuit.

The two enemy machines stiffened and lost control almost simultaneously.

"Tide" didn't pause, its body thrusters exploded with power far surpassing previous performance, yet without sparking much water splash.

Like a phantom in the deep sea, it dashed directly toward another enemy mecha attacking Catherine.

The enemy machine clearly didn't expect the flank threat to be eliminated in an instant, hurriedly turned its gun barrel.

But "Tide's" movements were unbelievably fast, it made a slight Z-curve change in direction during high-speed advancement, defying conventional fluid dynamics, perfectly dodging incoming torpedoes and approaching instantly.

The cutting blade, like a scalpel, precisely severed the energy transmission pipe between the opposing weapon base and the main body.

Immediately following, "Tide" charged upward like lightning against the current, directly at the last "Deep-Sea Guardian" that was clearly a command mecha.

The command mecha had already sensed the bizarre reversal of the situation, attempting to retreat and call for support.

But with Bai E's will guiding Xi Liu, his control over the underwater battlefield had reached an unbelievable level.

"Tide" didn't chase directly, but used the periodic spurts from a seafloor thermal spring, predicting the eruption time and water flow direction, and leveraged the exploding ascending thermal currents to gain terrifying instantaneous acceleration.

From an almost impossible side upper angle, it launched an assault on the command mecha's back—

This position was an absolute blind spot for most underwater mecha sensors!

This time, the high-frequency cutting blades on "Tide's" dual arms both lit up, the gathered spiritual light almost turning the surrounding seawater pale blue.

The crossed blades, with a will to cut through everything, struck fiercely at the main interface and spiritual relay connecting the command mecha's back to the seabed beacon!

"Slash—Boom!"

A violent energy leak burst in glare within the deep sea, forcibly severing the command mecha's link with the beacon, causing the entire machine to tremble violently, losing most of its power.

From "Tide's" sudden counterattack to the successive loss of effective combat capability by the four "Deep-Sea Guardian" mechas, the whole process took less than two minutes.

The battlefield instantly quieted down.

Only the subdued rumbling of the seafloor thermal springs remained, along with the hissing sound of energy and gas leaking from damaged mechas.

Xi Liu's four teammates, in their respective mechas, watched this scene in shock.

"What just happened?"

"Is my teammate this fierce?"

"Said earlier they were this fierce, then why need us?"

Only Catherine had her brows slightly furrowed, sensing something wasn't quite right.

... Just now, that miraculous, fluid-like reversal didn't seem like an eruption of Xi Liu's personal abilities.

That absolute control over the battlefield, that delicate to the extreme art that felt like dancing with the deep sea, that vast-as-the-ocean spiritual energy fluctuation...

Only one person could accomplish that.

It's Bai E!

Even without personally stepping into this deep sea, he still used his incredible methods to protect and lead the team, completing this spectacular reversal.

No wonder...no wonder he said they could win.

But such a degree of "miracle," how on earth did he achieve it!

Chapter 1054: The Second Battle: Shadow Kingdom!

In the cockpit of "Tide," the vast will slowly receded like a tide.

Xi Liu regained full control over his body, with an intense feeling of weakness and enormous mental shock hitting him simultaneously.

He gasped for air, with sweat soaking through his combat suit, but his eyes burned with unprecedented excitement, admiration, and enlightenment.

"We... won." He said in a trembling voice over the communication channel.

"The match is over! Control shifted... New Bauhinia Republic. Winner: New Bauhinia Republic!"

The referee's announcement came through the still somewhat noisy underwater communications.

On the live stands, there was already a huge commotion.

Countless spectators and commentators were dumbfounded, watching the reversal process displayed on the light screen.

Online, it was even more chaotic.

The comment sections and discussion areas of major streaming platforms were instantly flooded with a sea of exclamations, questions, and incredulous remarks.

"My god! How can this be turned around?!"

"What was that maneuver at the end? Did Xi Liu hack it?"

"The movements of that 'Tide' mecha in the last few minutes... It was as if someone else was piloting it!"

"Predicting the hot spring eruption accurately, using ocean currents and terrain for an instant assault, cutting the energy link of the command mecha with one stroke... Is this something a human can do?"

"Isn't 'Deep Blue Guardian' supposed to be an underwater expert? Why does it feel like Xi Liu was playing with them like a fish at the end?"

"How many more monsters does the New Bauhinia have?!"

Various analysis posts, slow-motion replays, and technical breakdown videos emerged like mushrooms after the rain.

Most people focused their attention on Xi Liu, this previously unknown young mech pilot who became famous in one battle.

"Xi Liu has over three thousand standard hours of underwater experience, no wonder he adapted so quickly!"

"But while his performance was good in the mid and early stages, it wasn't enough to crush 'Deep Blue Guardian.' That last outburst... was on a completely different level."

"Could it be some kind of trump card explosive skill? Or is there a special underwater mode in the 'Dawn's Edge' mecha?"

"In any case, another formidable character from New Bauhinia needs special attention!"

...

Meanwhile, in the tactical analysis room of the "Sons of the Empire" and related factions, the atmosphere was much heavier.

The representative of the Steel Alliance looked particularly grim.

"Deep Blue Guardian" belongs to the Deep Space Federation, and as everyone knows, the Deep Space Federation has always been considered their subsidiary.

To overturn in the most favorable environment was akin to being publicly embarrassed in front of the whole universe.

"Immediately retrieve the entire battle data, especially the last three minutes of all operations and energy fluctuation curves of 'Tide'!"

The technical representative of the Steel Alliance ordered sternly, "That Xi Liu... needs to be reassessed! His final outburst, whether in terms of personal ability or mecha performance, far exceeds any of our previous intelligence!"

The priest from the Holy Silver Church Country stared at the replay footage, frowning: "Spiritual energy fluctuations in the final phase showed a distinct abnormal enhancement and became unusually concentrated... this trait seems familiar."

He recalled Bai E's pure strike against Astra.

The advisor from the Golden Federation was more focused on the tactical aspect: "He was clearly holding back. Although he showed good underwater adaptability in the early phase, his combat style was relatively conservative until his teammates were in dire straits before he erupted. Is it some kind of explosive ability that requires a great price? Or... deliberately appearing weak to lure opponents in?"

The representative from the Flame Republic grinned: "Who cares if he was hiding something, as long as it's powerful in the end! This Xi Liu, we'll have to be careful next time we meet him, don't get caught by him."

The observer from the Shadow Kingdom silently noted: "Xi Liu, suspected high-intensity short-term explosive capability, possibly triggered by extreme emotions or special environments. Note that his early 'mediocre' performance might be a disguise."

The technical representative from the World Forging Union was more interested in the "Dawn's Edge" mecha: "To support such intense maneuvers and energy explosions at that kind of depth and pressure, the energy core and structural strength of this mecha... is probably stronger than we estimated."

Almost all analysis conclusions listed "Xi Liu" as a new threat that needs focused research.

A mech pilot who could complete such a reversal in extreme underwater conditions holds immeasurable value.

For his early "holding back," it was commonly characterized as "high cost of outburst, unnecessary to use" or "tactical deception."

Only Astra, who had just been defeated by Bai E and had a profound memory of Bai E's spiritual energy traits, upon watching the replay, stared at the final clean, uniquely "rhythmic" cutting action of "Tide," frowning his brow and feeling a strange sense of familiarity and deeper doubt...

In the seventh district of the International Pavilion, the returning five were welcomed like heroes, but the atmosphere was mixed with a subtle undertone.

Kuang Xin patted Xi Liu's shoulder forcefully: "Well done! You've been hiding your talent! Those final moves were fantastic!"

Rose also rarely showed an approving look: "You timed it very well."

Catherine, Zero, Ares, and others looked at Xi Liu, their eyes complex.

They had personally experienced that hopeless predicament and "felt" that last moment of overwhelming, yet unfathomable will covering the battlefield.

They vaguely guessed something, but seeing Bai E didn't say anything, they tacitly refrained from asking further questions.

As for Xi Liu, his heart was surging with both the relief of surviving a disaster and endless awe of Bai E's incredible abilities.

Chapter 1055: Second Battle: Shadow Kingdom! (Part 2)

He knew the victory did not belong to him, at least not entirely.

Bai E greeted them calmly, simply saying, "Good work, well done."

His gaze lingered on Xi Liu for a moment, and he nodded slightly.

Some things need not be spoken out loud.

But in any case, winning is all that matters.

After a brief rest and tactical analysis, the draw results for the second round of the Star Alliance elimination match were announced.

When the results appeared on the screen, even the usually composed Gong Yan gasped.

"The opponent is... 'Ghost Walker,' the main team representing the Shadow Kingdom!"

The atmosphere in the conference room instantly dropped to freezing point.

The Shadow Kingdom, one of the Seven Sons of the Empire, is renowned across the universe for its secretive, treacherous, infiltrative, and lethal combat style.

Their 'Ghost Walker' team is one of the most mysterious and formidable opponents among all participating teams.

During the point match stage, they rarely revealed their full strength, but the few times they acted, they exhibited chilling efficiency and lethality.

"The match venue..." Gong Yan continued reading the information, her voice growing heavier, "'Void Wasteland' Zone Nine - 'Silent Graveyard.'"

She pulled up the relevant data: "It's an abandoned giant space station debris field on the edge of the asteroid belt. The internal structure is as complex as a labyrinth, long in a state of microgravity, riddled with radiation leaks, out-of-control energy conduits, and unexploded defense weapons. More troubling is the presence of a strong psychic interference field, believed to be the remnant of an ancient high-dimensional conflict, producing random illusions, distorting perceptions, and even interfering with the sense of time."

"Match mode..." Gong Yan paused, "'Hunt and Escape.' After the match begins, both parties will be randomly deployed to different areas of the 'Silent Graveyard.' One side is designated as the 'Hunters,' and the other as the 'Escapees.' The 'Hunters' need to find and 'kill' all the 'Escapees' within 120 minutes. The 'Escapees' aim to survive until the time ends, or... counter-kill all the 'Hunters.' Role assignment is decided by a pre-match draw."

He looked at Bai E and the others, his tone solemn: "The 'Ghost Walkers' excel in hunting in complex, dark, and unknown environments. This venue and mode seem specially tailored for them. And we... have been drawn as 'Hunters.'"

This means that the New Bauhinia has to take the initiative, searching for and attacking the elusive Shadow Killers in an extremely unfavorable environment, to which the opponent is most adept.

"Hunting the 'Ghost Walkers'..." Kuang Xin swallowed, "This difficulty..."

Rose's eyes sharpened, "Hunting the hunter in the dark... interesting."

Catherine analyzed swiftly, "Our advantage lies in 'Dawn's Edge's' detection system and psychic adaptability being potentially stronger than they expect. But the disadvantages are larger: an unfamiliar and extreme environment, the opponent are experts, and we're the attackers, constantly needing to seize opportunities."

Bai E listened silently, sweeping his gaze over the structural map of the 'Silent Graveyard,' like the remnants of a giant metal beast, with its complex radiation and psychic interference distribution.

"Hunters" and "Escapees"...

Playing the role of the pursuer in the Shadow Kingdom's most familiar territory.

This is undoubtedly a massive challenge, even more perilous than the underwater battle.

Yet, this is also a touchstone to truly test the team's caliber.

"Then," Bai E began slowly, his voice calm yet undeniably powerful, "let's see who the real 'Hunters' are in this 'Silent Graveyard.'"

...

When the draw results for the second round of the Star Alliance elimination match between "New Bauhinia" and "Shadow Kingdom: Ghost Walker" were announced, the shock it caused far exceeded the first round.

In the Shadow Kingdom's stronghold in Star City, in a room completely shrouded in shadows and a Silence Force Field, several figures cloaked in black capes, their faces hidden under hoods, gathered around a sleek black alloy round table.

Projected at the center of the table was the just announced draw result.

After a brief silence, a cold, distinctly angry voice emerged like metal scraping, "Who arranged this? This draw result!"

Another voice, slightly hoarse and with a hint of resignation, spoke, "The draw system is completely random. We've checked; there are no signs of human interference."

"Random?" the first voice retorted with sarcasm, "When did 'random' ever pair us against such formidable opponents in the Round of 64? And they're the 'Hunters!' Hunting us in the 'Silent Graveyard?' Is this a draw or a joke?"

If it was truly random, why do the Seven Sons of the Empire always meet in the finals each tournament?

Why do they never encounter each other earlier?

Because there is never absolute 'randomness!'

"The previous 'small actions' consumed too much 'luck,' or perhaps the Star Alliance's supervision during the elimination stage is stricter than anticipated," the hoarse voice analyzed. "After all, we never expected such an opponent to emerge."

A figure that had been silent, with the deepest presence, slowly spoke, the voice like a whisper on a cold night.

"Discussing this now is meaningless. The draw results cannot be changed. The question is... what should we do? The strength of 'New Bauhinia' is evident, and that Bai E is unfathomable. Although he did not act personally in the first round, the explosion shown by a member named 'Xi Liu'... was eerie. In the opponent's specialty 'hunt' mode, if we make even a slight mistake..."

He did not finish, but the meaning was clear.

In the elimination match, losing one match means being ousted.

If the 'Ghost Walkers,' the Shadow Kingdom's main force team, are eliminated in the Round of 64, it would be a severe blow to the Shadow Kingdom's reputation.

Especially since they might not even force Bai E to make a move.

"Afraid?" another voice, slightly sharp, taunted, "When have we 'Ghost Walkers' ever been afraid to act in the dark? 'Silent Graveyard' is our home ground! They're coming to 'hunt' us? Let them see what the real king of darkness is!"

"It's not fear," the deep voice replied coldly, "it's caution. 'New Bauhinia's' performance so far proves they're not easy opponents. The explosion from Xi Liu, Astra's crushing defeat... these all indicate their hidden strength and means exceed expectations. We must prepare for the worst-case scenario."

The hoarse voice deliberated, "Are you suggesting..."

"Deploy the 'Faceless,'" the deep voice declared decisively, "Only he can ensure control over the situation in the 'Silent Graveyard' environment, regardless of the opponent's trump cards, and might even provide the opportunity to hunt them all down."

At the sound of the words 'Faceless,' the air in the room seemed to freeze.

The 'Faceless' is the true trump card of the 'Ghost Walkers,' the most mysterious, powerful assassin king among the young generation of the Shadow Kingdom, and his mere existence is a legend.

Putting him in play so early in the Round of 64 undoubtedly risks exposing a significant card of the Shadow Kingdom prematurely.

"Isn't it... overreacting?" the sharp voice hesitated, "The 'Faceless' only has one chance to appear."

"Precisely because there's only one chance, we cannot afford to lose!" the deep voice intensified, "If we can't even take down 'New Bauhinia,' that would be the biggest joke!"

"But even so, can we actually win? If Bai E also participates..."

"Enough!"

The doubt was sharply reprimanded, "Have you all been intimidated by Bai E?! Just because he defeated Astra doesn't mean he can defeat the 'Faceless!'"

"This battle is decided!"