

## **Wow 891**

### Chapter 891 Costume Change\_2

But the fact that Bai as a deputy can help her break through is indeed an amazing ability.

Faced with the Psychic Energy Canopy, the spy was not confident in achieving the same feat, so anyone able to do so must be more impressive than himself.

Without waiting for Bai E and Catherine's response, this guy started talking to himself, "Buddy, who the heck are you?! So fierce? I haven't seen someone like you before... you're not from this Stellar District, are you?"

As a Star Alliance spy, putting aside strength, his insight was top-notch.

It wasn't like he'd never crossed paths with planetary-level, or even stellar-level strong individuals.

In terms of experience, the spy felt that even Catherine wouldn't have more than himself.

Anyone whom even he hadn't heard of or seen should be from even more fringe Star Districts.

Bai E heard this and nodded obediently, "Mm."

Catherine gave him a side glance, "Stop prying when nothing's happening! Is everything we need ready?"

If the canopy hadn't been broken, then naturally everyone would be finished together, with no need for nonsense.

But if the canopy had been broken, then escaping afterwards was the top priority.

To escape, a disguise and an identity change are basic, but more importantly, navigating the ships to blend into a suitable departing vessel, that is crucial.

Achieving such thoroughness requires the help of those leaders managing the entire Freeport.

So during the earlier ritual, Catherine showed a slight cooperative attitude.

Each side took what they needed.

Catherine needed to blend into the crowd, hide traces, and leave Freeport to return to the Bauhinia.

And Freeport, having been embroiled in this, naturally had to try its best to make up some "benefits" after offending the Peak Alliance.

Such as a "strong background" that might gain acceptance from the common people and reasonable explanations for the various gold sponsors backing them, etc.

This was a pre-planned and agreed action between Catherine and the spy, and when Bai E and Catherine piloted the Mecha into battle, all subsequent preparations were already underway.

"Ready! Of course ready!" The spy patted his chest, "When I handle things, you can rest assured."

The three quickly came to a secret chamber where the spy tossed each of them a large bag of items.

"Inside are your new costumes and identities, and two Myriad Faces Masks, quickly change into them."

"Mm." Catherine simply acknowledged and began changing clothes in front of the two.

Watching Catherine take off her black coat revealing her fitted undergarments and large patches of white skin, the spy mischievously sidled up to Bai E, who was also changing, and said with a lifted chin, "This chick's figure is really something!"

Bai E glanced, "Not bad."

In terms of proportion and delicacy, Yue Ying still takes the lead.

Yet, this alien woman wins with a sort of lofty ambition, and that fierce unyielding sense is her most distinct personal trait.

It's a style others don't have.

"That's considered not bad... buddy, your standards are high."

The spy smacked his lips twice and nosily asked, "What's your name, buddy? I only heard Catherine call you 'Bai', we've been through so much together, I can't not know your name when I brag later, right?"

"Mm..." Bai E glanced at his newly prepared identity, "I'm Lance Li, from Longming Star District's Third Stellar System on the second planet..."

"I'm not asking for your fake name!" The spy was a bit anxious, "Real name! Real name!"

"Oh..." Bai E slightly pursed his lips, "Bai E."

"Bai E?" The spy looked strange, "Who names themselves like that?"

"Is Bai E that strange?"

"Who in their right mind would name their son after something like cement?"

"..." Bai E fell into a brief silence, only now realizing that the "Bai E" the other mentioned was the "refined Bai E" he'd seen before, was that thing similar to cement?

With a slight movement of thought, he followed the other's words and explained, "Maybe they hope I can become a cornerstone of human civilization..."

"Impressive!" The spy gave a thumbs-up, "Great! No need for more words."

After a pause, he curiously asked, "So buddy, where are you planning to go? Want to come with us, or should I arrange another place for you? Don't worry, I've already found out where every ship is headed, no matter where you want to go, I will make sure to arrange everything perfectly for you!"

'Primordial Star, probably unreachable.'

Bai E sighed silently, his face showing an indifferent smile, "I didn't really have a goal, just wandering around. If you don't mind, you can take me along."

It's hard to come by an alien local with some rapport, wouldn't I be remiss not to seize the opportunity to gather more intelligence on alien society?

"Don't mind! Absolutely no problem!" The spy beamed, his curiosity about this mysterious strong figure with an unknown background growing ever stronger.

"But we mind you." Catherine, who had already finished changing, came from another corner of the room.

Having put on a blue skirt uniform, she completely looked like a different person, with soft facial features, pink hair, and even her voice became much sweeter.

The core efficacy, of course, still comes from that so-called Myriad Faces Mask on her face that had already changed form.

Without Freeport's full support, such a strange object would be quite hard to find.

Alien technology, truly impressive.

Bai E once again marveled inwardly.

Meanwhile, Catherine, who had just changed outfits, looked down with disdain at her new attire, the wrapped blue shirt bulging at an astonishing angle, with the short shorts and long boots showing off long legs in a dazzling white.

She gazed up at the spy with contempt, "Is this your twisted taste?"

The spy replied seriously, "Changing attires must be sufficiently subversive to better evade the Peak Alliance's pursuit!"

"That's why we don't intend to take you with us next."

"Why not!?"

"Because... you've been exposed." Catherine's lips curled into a light smile, slightly tilting her head in a sweet yet charming manner, "As bait, would you be so kind as to help us once more?"

"... Ripping the bridge after crossing the river, huh? Fine, fine!" The spy trembled with rage, finally sighing after a while, "But, who told me I like you. You go ahead, once you complete your mission, don't forget our agreement! I will come find you again!"

"Of course." Catherine took Bai E's hand and turned to leave.

"By the way." The spy shouted from behind as if remembering something, "Bai brother, do you still want that little guy of yours?"

"He says he likes the vibe on the Black Pearl, send him to that ship."

The spy instantly showed a knowing smile, "Got it! Arranged!"

...

The two, in new attire, once again blended into the bustling crowd at Freeport.

In the main commercial district of Freeport, just after experiencing a crisis, not many figures were missing.

A place like Freeport wasn't really a safe zone; to some, what just happened was merely entertainment.

What did a tussle between big shots have to do with them, the small ones?

Life goes on with fighting and fussing.

However, as they actually reached the port amidst the crowd, the sea of lining heads waiting to depart seemed slightly suffocating.

Even if the crisis didn't cause panic, the accumulated flights all releasing at once certainly brought pressure from the congestion.

"So many people..."

"Indeed."

The two remained calm, appearing as mere ordinary passengers awaiting departure.

The youthful girl with pink hair snuggled up to the middle-aged stubbled man, her soft pink lips whispering only for the two of them to hear, "Wanna know what the promise between him and me is?"

Bai E whispered back casually, "What is it?"

The young girl adjusted her suitcase, her mouth curved in a mysterious smile, "It's... the treasure I am escorting."

Chapter 892 Shield Field

Catherine began to speak more about the detailed insider information, "The duty of the Star Alliance's secret agents is to gather relevant data on various forces, large and small, across the universe. They ensure that when needed, they hold the first-hand information necessary for mediation..."

The Star Alliance, simply put, is an organization that mediates internal conflicts within humanity.

High-dimensional demons constantly covet everything in the material world. From the perspective of the entire human race, reducing conflicts as much as possible is the only way to mitigate the risk of erosion by these demons to some degree.

The Star Alliance, in simpler terms, is an organization dedicated to maintaining cosmic peace.

It was initiated by the three heirs of the Galactic Empire, yet it cannot maintain peace among them. Open disputes and covert struggles are countless, with factional pull and suppression frequently seen in local Stellar Districts.

This is precisely why Catherine dislikes dealing with the agents of the Star Alliance.

An organization ostensibly upholding cosmic fairness and peace is, in reality, just another stage for hegemony.

Most secret agents of the Star Alliance naturally harbor their own self-serving motives.

If the details of the treasure she carried were exposed, then Bauhinia's enemies might extend far beyond the nearby Peak Alliance.

After all, this treasure is something that any force across the entire universe would covet!

Of course... There are also a few individuals within the Star Alliance who genuinely strive for the shared destiny of humanity.

After a few meetings and assessments, Catherine's impression of the secret agent Alvin was fairly favorable.

Considering that even if the treasure were to be successfully returned to her homeland, it may still face the covetous eyes of the Peak Alliance, Catherine decided that once Alvin managed to divert the Peak Alliance operatives and they met again, she would disclose the treasure's information to him.

Afterward, she would prepare herself.

If the Peak Alliance were to truly launch an invasion war over this treasure, then the "mediation" from the Star Alliance might just provide Bauhinia with a chance for survival.

Or even if it only buys some time, that would still be a welcome development.

"This treasure... is it really that important?" Bai E asked with some curiosity.

The kind of thing for which every force in the universe would vie?

If it were petroleum or some other resources buried in a planet, Bai E could understand.

But something small enough to be carried by Catherine in a modest-sized suitcase—could it truly be so valuable?

Even though Bai E had never cared much about this treasure from start to finish, Catherine had successfully piqued his curiosity.

Catherine's gaze grew deep, her tone tinged with mystery, "This world has gods. The treasure... is a fragment of a god."

"...God?"

Bai E's expression became complex.

The high-dimensional demons are also sometimes referred to as gods.

From his observations, these beings, whose authority manifests in physical forms, do indeed merit the name "god."

Except, to ordinary humans, these gods are harmful entities, hence why they are more commonly referred to as "demons."

"Of course, not those 'gods' from high-dimensional space," Catherine shook her head. "But rather, the gods of our material universe..."

The world is dual-faced.

High-dimensional space and the material universe are merely two sides of a single mirror.

One side of the mirror operates under its own rules; the other side of the mirror follows its own rules, too.

Under normal circumstances, rules are simply rules.

But when rules transform into authority, and individuals managing this authority gain subjective consciousness and the ability for free action—those individuals become "gods."

If there is any fundamental difference between the gods of the material universe and those of high-dimensional space...

It may lie in the fact that the gods of high-dimensional space remain active along every axis of the river of time, whereas the gods of the material universe have already perished.

No one knows how they fell, nor does anyone know what these "gods" once did to this world.

All that can be said, based on the current exploration of the universe by all civilizations, is that the gods of the material universe have indeed vanished completely.

Only these divine fragments can prove the historical existence of these "gods."

"In fact, this suitcase has been specially crafted." Catherine patted the suitcase beside her.

The large black trunk she carried had been tucked within the suitcase and had not been directly replaced.

The suitcase is designed to shield against the radiating impacts emitted by the divine fragments.

These fragments are dazzlingly radiant—any ordinary human without protective measures who gazes upon them directly would experience the overwhelming "primal knowledge" and have their brain struck to the point of instant death.

Moreover, it is precisely because these fragments belong to the gods of the material universe that they cannot be stored in the spatial inventory of the high-dimensional universe.

Otherwise, if such a small object could be stored away, Catherine wouldn't need to carry this suitcase, and her actions would undoubtedly be much freer—she might even have avoided this kind of danger.

Bai E's gaze instinctively swept over the black suitcase slung across Catherine's body. "So, what exactly is the use of these fragments?"

As something recognized by the entire intelligentsia of cosmic civilization, it couldn't possibly have been mistaken.

While the divine fragments are undoubtedly rare, if they lacked some kind of extraordinary effectiveness, they wouldn't be coveted by every cosmic civilization, would they?

Catherine smiled faintly and straightforwardly explained, "Gods are the embodiment of rules. Divine fragments, naturally, are portions of those rules. Any force that obtains a divine fragment gains knowledge about the fundamental rules of this universe, and in the corresponding domain of those rules, achieves terrifying technological advancements. In fact, the reason why the three heirs of the Galactic Empire have become the central hubs of power within this universe—besides inheriting the foundations of the old Galactic Empire—is because they each possess multiple divine fragments."

Chapter 893 Shield Field\_2

Every fragment of God brings a sudden explosion in a certain field of technology.

So the God fragment discovered by the Bauhinia Republic's exploration team on an unmined planet has become Bauhinia Republic's hope for a resurgence.

But somehow, the news leaked unexpectedly. On the way back, the transport ship was ambushed by the Peak Alliance. Only Catherine escaped in time, smuggling the fragment back alone, leading to the encounter at Freeport.

Through an encounter over the God fragment, after understanding the cause and effect, Bai E had a general understanding of this universe's theme.

'This is indeed a good thing...'

Bai E sighed inwardly, without much greed.

The thing is good, but it was discovered and mined by others.

As the actual ruler of this Stellar District, the Peak Alliance's act of robbery was already disgraceful. If he became like them, what would that make him?

Not to mention, he hadn't even returned to his own power yet, holding onto it would be useless.

"Isn't this a bit too secretive?"

"It's okay." Catherine smiled at the corner of her mouth, "You're not one of those beasts from the Peak Alliance, I trust you. Besides, once we are on this spaceship, we will head straight back to the Bauhinia Republic. By then, all our words and actions will be watched, and it won't be good to talk about these things with you anymore."

From a national standpoint, the fewer people who know about such important secrets, the better.

If the country knew that the suspected Planetary Level powerhouse before them also knew this secret, who knows what trouble might arise.

"It's your turn." Catherine nodded slightly, "Earlier, you mentioned there were things you wanted to inquire about?"

"Hmm..." Bai E was insatiably curious about the new things seen in the universe.

Like the basis of their Psychic Energy Canopy technology.

For instance, their spaceship's technology for travelling through high-dimensional space seemed quite common.

What about bugs? Beastmen? Demons?

How do human civilizations in the universe perceive these disasters?

When facing a previously unknown planetary power, would their attitude be peaceful acceptance or plundering warfare?

The universe, in front of him, was like a layered onion, with one mysterious layer after another waiting for him to unravel.

This female warrior from the Bauhinia Republic trusted him so much, perhaps it would be okay to let her know a bit about himself?

While waiting, the two had already followed the crowd, queuing into the departure port hall of Freeport.

Sitting on the spaceship, amidst a slight vibration, Bai E felt the smooth acceleration of the spaceship gradually leaving the port.

The profound and vast feeling from Spiritual Energy washed over him once more, and under the current circumstance of not possessing much power himself, that sense of insignificance was especially vivid.

Having had one encounter, Bai E couldn't help but feel a little apprehensive about high-dimensional space.

Sitting shoulder to shoulder with Catherine, Bai E looked at the ship's wall beside him, trying to look through the grey iron wall ahead to see the true void space outside, "Have we already entered the high-dimensional space route?"

"Hmm..." Catherine nodded calmly, feeling a bit excited inside.

This technician Bai was powerful and mysterious.

Possessing abilities stronger than hers, yet seemingly having little understanding of the world.

Such an existence should have already encountered many truths about this world, but his behavior appeared somewhat... ignorant?

The strange mismatch between strength and knowledge had already aroused a bold speculation in her mind.

And now, perhaps was the moment when this speculation might be confirmed.

A person's knowledge comes from many aspects; some basic concepts can reveal more significant issues.

"Isn't there any danger here?" Bai E asked quietly.

"Danger?" Catherine was taken aback, "What danger?"

"The danger of accidents." Bai E turned to Catherine, speaking solemnly, "My spaceship had an accident once."

"An accident?" Catherine frowned, "Was it hijacked by the Black Pirate King?"

A spaceship with a powerhouse like Bai E could only have been hijacked by the Cosmic Pirate King, another Planetary Level powerhouse, what else could it be?

Bai E slowly shook his head, "No, it happened right in this high-dimensional space."

"Accidents in high-dimensional space are very rare; this is the safest place."

Though, theoretically, high-dimensional space is not absolutely safe, in all her adventures, she had never seen a spaceship have an accident directly in high-dimensional space.

The odds of an accident are likely less than one in ten million.

Even if some fatal problem arises in the spaceship's structure, it will explode only after the ship exits high-dimensional space.

Although the high-dimensional space inhabited by high-dimensional demons is not peaceful, in terms of spaceship navigation, it is considered one of the safest places in the universe.

Bai E stared into her eyes and said solemnly, "But we did encounter an accident."

Though she had guessed it earlier, hearing it confirmed made Catherine narrow her eyes slightly, "So your spaceship... did not have a Shield Field?"

Bai E's eyes darkened slightly, "Never heard of it..."

"Daring to charge straight into high-dimensional space without a Shield Field..." Catherine's pupils shrunk slightly, "I bet it wasn't an accident right after entering?"

In their universe, spaceships entering high-dimensional space must be equipped with a "Shield Field Generator" to travel freely, which is a common consensus among everyone.

This consensus comes from the explorations of some daring adventurers.

Any spaceship without a "Shield Field Generator," upon entering high-dimensional space, would immediately suffer from the natural corrosion of that space.

If they notice in time and retreat, usually not much trouble occurs.

But the fact that this technician Bai's knowledge and ability are both evidently not from this Stellar District, and now he talked about his spaceship having encountered an accident in high-dimensional space, his origin is almost evident.

This mysterious powerhouse must have come from a remote, unexplored corner of the universe.

High-dimensional space is not absolutely related to the material world, but they are positively correlated.

Humans will never stop exploring the unknown.

Their current Stellar District might be considered a remote region in the entire human map, but to them, the cosmic space within hundreds of light-years around has been thoroughly explored, never missing any planet capable of hosting a civilization.

The fact that the other party could appear here must mean he carried his spaceship across the endless cosmic space until the ship malfunctioned due to the lack of a Shield Field and he had to eject from high-dimensional space, thereby stranding him here.

The continuous corrosion of human spaceships in high-dimensional space happens incessantly, yet their spaceship managed to navigate far through this space without a Shield Field due to a mighty Spiritual Energy user's will protecting the whole ship.

Realizing this, Catherine's pupils shrank, realizing the other party might be a transcendent leader stronger than herself.

He led his civilization to develop spaceships capable of interstellar travel but didn't develop a Shield Field to protect them during high-dimensional space travel.

This great leader attempted to lead his people into joining the universal family using his abilities alone, but ultimately ended up deserted and stranded in a foreign place.

Chapter 894 New Opportunities

"You said your planet is within the influence range of a black hole?" Catherine's face, disguised as delicate and adorable, was now filled with pure curiosity.

No one would have thought that in such a remote corner of the Galactic Empire, untouched by exploration, there could exist a civilization capable of relying on its own strength to develop and step into the cosmos.

Even less expected was how difficult their journey of exploring the stars had been.

Just as those born into the three Great Empires of the Galactic Empire would never think about the plight of Bauhinia Republic citizens in a civilized society.

Born in the Bauhinia Republic herself, she could hardly imagine in her lifetime how a planet completely lacking an aerospace foundation could take step by step toward exploring the universe.

"Regarding the issue of spaceships encountering different curvature spaces, honestly, I'm not too sure myself." Catherine showed an apologetic expression on her face.

She was a warrior, not a researcher skilled in scientific inquiry.

"If you want to learn about this, I can recommend you to our Academy of Sciences... No, perhaps I'll inquire about it for you—your situation is rather unique. Besides, take this: it's a search tool. You likely have similar devices on your planet, right?"

Bai E took the watch-like gadget and studied it curiously, trying to understand how to use it.

"It's simple to use, but you'll have to wait until you're out of this high-dimensional space. It contains general knowledge and common insights; take time to explore it when you can."

Bai E turned over his hand to grasp the device and said somewhat gratefully, "Thank you."

"Compared to what you've done, this is hardly anything. By the way, I don't know the overall strength of your planet, but if you want to join this interstellar society, I would advise you not to reveal that you come from an undiscovered planet unless you're sure of being able to stand against the most powerful nation or group in a Stellar District. After all, the current Star Alliance Convention only applies to existing member nations."

Just like Bauhinia's long-term oppression, even the Star Alliance Convention couldn't lend a hand—let alone for a newly emerging planet that hadn't joined the alliance.

A cultural planet with a certain level of civilization, used directly as a productive backyard or as a source of recruits—that would be ideal in such a case.

"Only you know your planet's strength; there's no need to share that with me. All in all, for you to be stranded alone here might not be entirely a bad thing. Before better understanding the comprehensive strength of mainstream countries or factions, I suggest exploring via small, individual teams or star-class Ranger squads. If you can integrate into that structure, perhaps forming a roaming merchant group would also be a good route. More specific details will become clearer as you dig into foundational information."

"Alright."

...

In the dark expanse of the void, several gazes from distant locations were fixed on a mechanical spaceship, the kind so inconspicuous that even demons would struggle to detect it, slowly moving forward through the space.

Neither male nor female, an ambiguous voice filled with primordial allure once again transmitted a message perceivable only to beings of the same tier, "That Human Monarch seems dormant."

The waves of Spiritual Energy emanating were vividly clear before their eyes.

Not to mention, the other party was inside their most familiar high-dimensional space. Whether or not he had regained his power could be known with a mere intent of perception.

"Dormancy is best." The benevolent father smiled warmly, "Let him live a peaceful, joyous life, and then fully enter eternal slumber!"

"Hmph! Your schemes towards him are truly tiresome!"

"I advise you not to meddle unnecessarily! Otherwise, turning Four Primordial Sources into Three Primordial Sources might sound just fine." A clown-like voice giggled wickedly, echoing throughout the entire twisted space.

The bold, proud voice stood firm: "If you wish to come, then come—we can settle this! I'd like to see if you've made any progress during these years of recuperation!"

The clown's voice sneered eerily before laughing coldly, "When the Human Monarch finally passes away, do you think we can still maintain this current harmony between us?"

But before that time comes, to ensure the Human Monarch lives an ordinary life and never regains his powers, they had painstakingly created this 'serene cage' for him—it must not be undone!

As long as no thoughtless demon or catastrophic end-world crisis provokes the Human Monarch's true essence, the universe could collectively work toward a harmonious peace, gently letting this Human Monarch transition through his lifetime. Afterward, wouldn't this world be left solely to the wills of the Four Primordial Source Demon Gods?

"Hmph!" A voice imbued with a metallic, bloody taste scoffed disdainfully, saying nothing further.

What exactly was on its mind, none could know.

Though demons are formed inherently by their own rules, they are also bound by the core of their authority.

But at the level of the Four Primordial Source Demon Gods, thoughts and inclinations are entirely unrestrained.

No one knows what private schemes these Demon Gods harbor.

At this moment, several vast gazes quietly watched the ordinary spacecraft drift through the distorted space.

Then, as light shimmered and burst forth, it left the realm—taking with it the traces of the Human Monarch's reincarnation—disappearing beyond a phase gate.

The rules of the material universe are humanity's greatest protection, yet for all who possess Spiritual Energy, they will inevitably be summoned by high-dimensional spaces.

...

Stepping off the spacecraft upon landing, the disguised Catherine visibly let out a sigh of relief, though she did not completely display a relaxed posture.

#### Chapter 895 New Opportunities\_2

She cast a cautious glance around and then grabbed Bai E's hand, heading decisively in one direction.

Walking swiftly like countless others rushing through the port, Catherine explained to Bai E the reasons for her actions and her upcoming plans, "Even back home, it's not truly safe."

The moment they unearthed the God's Fragment, the expedition team immediately reported this vital discovery to the homeland, along with their planned route of action, requesting reinforcements to ensure complete security.

The number of people handling such critical information would undoubtedly be few, primarily high-ranking officials in the Bauhinia Republic. But even so, the expedition team, which should have been unremarkable, faced an immediate ambush from the Peak Alliance.

The expedition fleet itself struggled to communicate in real-time with the outside world; at least, it was impossible to do so without Catherine on the ship noticing.

This meant the fleet's movements being exposed were most likely caused by a leak from a traitor within their homeland.

While it was also possible that the Peak Alliance simply attacked on a whim, such a scenario seemed highly unlikely.

Tasked with a heavy burden, Catherine had to consider the domestic crisis as part of her contingency plans.

For a high-ranking traitor, even Catherine felt it would be nearly impossible to guard against covert interference.

A blade wielded by one of your own cuts deeper... and hits deadlier.

Unless she personally handed the artifact to the National Academy of Sciences under the watchful eyes of witnesses, Catherine wouldn't rest easy.

Having returned to her homeland, Catherine navigated familiar terrain effortlessly.

Determined to avoid exposure, she quickly found a trusted route and embarked on her journey to the Imperial Central Star System capital with Bai E.

Even as the often-bullied Bauhinia Republic, it still formally held the status of a nation governing three planets in name.

One of these was a mining planet, harsh in climate and not particularly rich in resources, yet it remained the lifeblood of Bauhinia.

Another was a colony star, habitable only around its equatorial belt, sparse in population but strategically well-positioned to serve as the "Guardian Star" for the central planet.

Lastly, there was Bauhinia's mother planet—the origin of its republic and home to its national capital.

Bai E and Catherine landed on this so-called "Guardian Star," a gateway to their next destination.

If interstellar ships wished to avoid trouble, they were required to register upon entering portal planets before venturing into the Imperial Central Star System.

Unauthorized intrusions could lead to immediate destruction without justification.

Regardless of whether their previous spacecraft had a direct route to Bauhinia's central capital, to avoid detection, both chose to switch vessels once again.

The journey proved perilous but uneventful.

Though they suspected spies everywhere, their swift reactions and sharp movements allowed them to arrive safely inside Bauhinia's central capital.

Finally home, Catherine let go of the suitcase she had been carrying and stretched her tired, stiff body under the warmth of her mother planet's sun. "We're finally back!"

Pointing toward a cluster of sunlit, gleaming rooftops far ahead, Catherine said in a relieved tone, "That's where our Academy of Sciences is located! Let me take you to my home first so you can settle in, then I'll come back for you after I've delivered the artifact."

"Alright," Bai E replied with a gentle smile.

During the journey, Bai E had used search tools to look up plenty of basic information about alien societies.

What ordinary people took for granted or ignored, Bai E absorbed as the fastest way to understand this unfamiliar world.

He even searched up "Catherine"... unsurprisingly, the woman he had gotten to know was exactly as described online.

...

Catherine's residence was nestled in the bustling city center. As one of Bauhinia's two renowned Legendary Mechanics, her choice of abode was beyond question.

Yet the bold and approachable War God preferred living amongst everyday citizens, her home occupying the penthouse of a commercial-residential building.

Hundreds of square meters of space belonged solely to her.

After settling Bai E comfortably at her place, Catherine immediately left.

The process of transferring the God's Fragment was evidently complex. Bai E, who stayed safely within Catherine's home for three days without stepping outside, finally saw her return, visibly exhausted.

"Was it smooth?" Bai E greeted her immediately with a smile.

"Somewhat unexpected," Catherine replied, furrowing her brows in confusion.

"What was unexpected?" Bai E asked, intrigued.

Catherine's expression wasn't overly serious, indicating the "unexpected" did not pose a major problem.

"Unexpectedly smooth," she said, still visibly puzzled. "After arriving, I reported the entire mission process to the National President. I even spread false information to lure out potential spies or traitors. But strangely... there wasn't a single reaction."

The God's Fragment had been successfully delivered.

The three-day duration had been spent attempting to root out traitors or spies, but clearly, the operation failed.

Either those traitors were deeply hidden, or her judgment was off and there was no traitor among Bauhinia's high-ranking officials.

"Do you think they're reluctant to act?"

"Yes..." Catherine's eyes narrowed. "The interception of the expedition fleet was too sudden, clearly a deliberate, premeditated ambush. I refuse to believe there aren't traitors among the upper echelons, but perhaps they got tipped off and decided to lay low instead."

Knowing traitors lurked within the nation's leadership but being unable to identify them—it was a torment every patriot carried silently.

"Still... the artifact has reached the hands of the Academy," Catherine said with a glimmer of relief.

As long as the artifact was in the Academy's possession, it was all that mattered.

If the Academy could extract enough technological power from the God's Fragment within the next few decades, Bauhinia's national strength could skyrocket in an instant.

By then, an entity like the Peak Alliance that ruled over a remote Stellar District wouldn't amount to much.

The Bauhinia Republic might even qualify to vie for dominance on a cosmic scale!

In times of national strength, even traitors would turn into loyalists.

Feeling a faint sense of hope, Catherine flashed Bai E a warm smile and said, "Speaking of your earlier questions, I've looked into them. For a spaceship to navigate different curvature spaces effectively, dual breakthroughs in materials and biological technology are required. Materials are the foundation, while adaptive self-repair and filling mechanisms are critical. These technologies aren't considered secrets in the cosmic world; most companies capable of building interstellar ships can apply them proficiently. I've bundled the relevant tech and necessary prerequisite advancements for you."

Catherine tossed him a tiny chip, her face glowing with amusement. "As for finding your way 'home'... I did some subtle inquiries, but I don't have a perfect solution for now. Your planet hasn't established 'navigation beacons,' so no interstellar ship's star map contains your location. Without that, it's impossible to reach your planet directly through higher-dimensional space. As for requisitioning a ship for you, my clearance technically allows it, but that would mean your planet's existence wouldn't be secret anymore. The more people know, the messier it gets, and the risks grow significantly. If you insist, I can make arrangements for you, though."

"..." Bai E didn't reply, his eyes reflecting deep contemplation.

Noting his hesitation, Catherine grinned and reassured him, "No rush. If you decide, let me know any time. But there's another matter you should care about more right now."

"Hmm?"

"Remember when I mentioned assessing the strength of nations or factions?"

"Yes."

"Well, the opportunity has arrived."

With a sly curve of her lips, Catherine said, "The once-in-a-decade Star Alliance core member rotation is upon us..."

Chapter 896: foreign aid

The number of Stellar Districts across the Milky Way is countless. The core member countries of the Star Alliance are limited to those chosen few, and of course, not every country can claim a spot—it's not even guaranteed that every Stellar District will have representation.

Therefore, to join this core competition, each Stellar District naturally needs to select the representatives from countries that can best embody their internal strength.

The projects for participation are quite straightforward...

In a scenario where large-scale wars are impossible to conduct, the only standards of this competition rely on a comparison of individual capabilities, national technologies, and resource reserves.

Mecha! It is the one solution under these circumstances.

Not to mention, under non-large-scale battle conditions, the mobile units formed by mecha warriors are already symbols of a nation's comprehensive strength. Even in large-scale battles, aside from massive interstellar warships, the performance of mech warriors remains critical.

Mech warriors who pilot mechas are, in fact, the backbone and foundational force of every nation in the universe.

In the real battles occurring on tournament grounds, the damage rate of mechas is exceptionally high. The ability to provide sufficiently reliable advanced mechas or offer prompt and efficient repair logistics is also a reflection of a nation's technological prowess.

Taken together, the prowess mech warriors can display on the battlefield indirectly represents a nation's overall strength.

Even knowing its own limitations, Bauhinia Republic remains highly enthusiastic about such competitions.

Any nation aiming for development in the vast cosmos would not miss this chance to showcase its abilities in front of everyone and interact with other powers.

At the same time, such opportunities are also the perfect chances for Bai E to familiarize himself with the universe's other nations and forces.

If Bauhinia Republic's team could be fortunate enough to break through their Stellar District's competition and win tickets to the Star Alliance selection event, it would grant them the chance to step into the Milky Way's center and witness the array of interstellar civilizations.

By then, Bai E could tag along, making comprehensive preparations for his planet to connect with the galaxy's society.

"This is a good prospect," Bai E's eyes sparkled.

In competitions representing the pinnacle of the universe, participants embodying the leading standard of this cosmos are bound to emerge.

Even if they aren't the few at the very top, they are certainly an elite force in the galaxy.

By observing the standard of these individuals, Bai E could better position himself, as well as others from his primitive planet, in the scope of the universe.

"When do we depart?"

"The Stellar District selection will take place in about half a month. In fact, the news was revealed earlier—but at the time, I was away exploring unfamiliar Star Domains with an expedition fleet. Now that I've returned, I've just learned their intention was for me to lead the team in this competition."

Catherine's eyes shifted fleetingly, as though there were words she hesitated to express.

The expression was far too conspicuous, prompting Bai E to smile and ask outright, "What's wrong? Is there something else you're considering?"

Catherine gently bit her lip, hesitating, "Although I'm one of Bauhinia Republic's rare two Legendary Mechanics, representing a nation in such an event... it almost always boils down to Legendary Mechanics by the end. Unless a country doesn't aim for a good rank, the best choice is to put together a team with the highest possible configuration. My teacher, though also a Legendary Mechanic, is too old and has already surpassed Star Alliance's age cap for participants. If I'm the only Legendary Mechanic leading the team, I'm worried that Bauhinia Republic won't be able to stand out in the Stellar District selection, let alone shine in the Star Alliance tournament."

Between individuals, morals may have a place, but in interstellar politics, interactions between nations are purely dictated by strength.

If you can perform impressively in a tournament, every nation will hold you in high regard.

Only then will Bauhinia Republic receive respectful attention from those nations it hopes to befriend; otherwise, why would other higher-ranked nations show regard for a small country hidden away in some obscure corner?

Dream on!

In such apex-level competitions, relying on just one Legendary Mechanic, Catherine evidently lacked sufficient confidence.

"They've given me full authority over the team selection, so besides myself, I still need to find at least seven other members. If you could help us..." Catherine paused mid-sentence but hurriedly turned her thoughts to highlight the benefits, "After achieving good results, it's entirely possible for them to allocate a long-distance capable spaceship directly under your personal name. Whatever you choose to do with it afterward—no one will question you at all."

To return to his primitive planet, Bai E first needed a reliable interstellar spaceship.

And a spaceship capable of long-distance interstellar travel—purchasing one outright required a sum of money so astronomical, it was beyond what an ordinary person could comprehend in their lifetime.

Bai E had contemplated becoming a bounty hunter to accumulate money through tasks... only to realize that outright stealing might be a faster solution.

As for manufacturing one himself... the technology could be learned, but the multitude of resources required to gather enough components, while easier than buying a ship, still posed financial challenges beyond what most people could imagine.

Summing it all up... stealing seemed preferable.

But if Bai E ruled out the option of simply stealing, Catherine's offer might actually be his fastest route to acquiring his own interstellar spaceship.

At the same time, it was also an opportunity to witness or even personally experience cutting-edge combat power in the universe.

Chapter 897: foreign aid\_2

Even without anything to do with the starship, Bai E still wanted to go and tag along.

As long as Bauhinia Republic's political screening could pass, Bai E had absolutely no objections.

"I'm fine with anything." Bai E replied cheerily, "Actually, even if you didn't bring it up, I wanted to go and experience it with you anyway. Having the chance to personally participate would be even better."

"That's great!" Catherine's face instantly blossomed with a radiant smile.

Bai E's strength was unclear, but it definitely exceeded hers.

Having him there, with two Legendary Mech Pilots in the team, the chances of breaking through the Stellar District were significantly increased.

"With your help, we're guaranteed to make it to the Star Alliance competition."

As for the political screening Bai E was concerned about...

A Legendary Mech Pilot who fell from the sky, and even had the identity of a "steel-hearted guy" who had previously helped transport back the Fragment of God—those officials in Bauhinia Republic would have to be utterly brainless to push him away.

If anyone dared to fail it, Catherine would personally bring a knife to knock on their doors.

"Alright then, it's settled! With your help, handling the rest of the team will be much easier."

"They're not all for show, are they?" Bai E teased.

"Not exactly." Catherine shook her head, "At most, five of them are just fillers."

Bai E cocked an eyebrow curiously at her words, "Do you have some kind of secret weapon?"

"Hmm..." Catherine's gaze grew distant, "It's not exactly a secret weapon, but his talent... it's decent."

Speaking of him, Catherine rubbed her temples tiredly, "Problem is, I have no idea where that guy's run off to now, nor if we'll even be able to find him before the competition is finalized."

...

On a stormy, wave-ridden planet, several pitch-black ships descended slowly onto various platforms.

Within moments, a large group of blindfolded, hands-bound figures were shoved out by burly men with bulging muscles.

The leading thug, grinning broadly, greeted the sinister man with a rat-like demeanor waiting to receive them. He kicked a nearby captive, causing them to stagger, and said, "Another batch of fresh goods—this should last you guys a while, right?"

The sinister man's gaze swept coldly across the hundreds in front of him, his expression dark but with a shallow smile, "How long they last isn't up to us."

How long they'd endure depended entirely on their abilities.

If they were all useless, it wouldn't be surprising if they dropped dead minutes after getting started.

If they were like those few morons captured last time, they might last quite a while.

Undersea mining, after all... as long as the bosses above weren't rushing for shipments, they wouldn't overwork these black-market laborers too much.

The man gestured to his subordinates behind him, signaling them to take the new goods down below.

Immediately, a group of brutish thugs went around removing the black hoods from the captives' heads, dragging their chained hands along as they led them into the facility below.

"Where are we?"

"Nooo! I want to go home!"

"Let me out! Let me out!"

"I have money! I can ransom myself!"

"Let me make a call! Just one call! My brother's a top boss in the underworld—one word from him and everything gets sorted out, man!"

Despite being unmasked and "seeing the light of day" again, the captives only grew more panicked.

They all stared in resistance at the dark, subterranean space they were about to enter.

In the corner of each eye, the endless expanse of blue waves was still faintly visible.

But the lack of familiar landmarks or recognizable architecture anywhere only filled their hearts with greater dread and despair.

"Move!"

"Hurry up!"

"Quit the damn whining!" The thugs lashed random captives with whips.

Each strike inflicted pain that felt less physical and more like a searing electric sting.

A few captives collapsed instantly under the agony of those shocks.

Unmoved, the thugs swung their whips even harder at those who'd fallen.

"Whack!"

"Whack!"

"Don't you dare resist!"

"Don't you dare resist!"

Whip after whip.

Thin clothes tore to shreds at once, exposing torn, bloody flesh beneath.

With each swing, stronger electric shocks surged through their bodies.

Convulsing violently, some captives foamed at the mouth and lost control of their bowels.

In one case, someone even stiffened up entirely, legs jerking a final time—motionless forevermore.

"Dead already?"

"Which idiot told you morons to go that hard? These people are here to work—they're not cattle for you to slaughter!" snarled the rat-faced man, motioning to the body dismissively. "Get rid of it—quickly! Stop ruining the mood around here!"

"Yes, sir!"

The stiff corpse was dragged off by the feet, unceremoniously tossed into the turbulent sea; after a few splashes, it vanished below the surface.

"You lot, carry them!" The thugs pointed at nearby captives, whose compliance this time was instant and unanimous.

Those still capable of walking hoisted unconscious companions onto their backs, trailing behind the thugs leading them step by step into the submerged facility below.

Walking, stopping.

Footsteps faded into utter darkness.

The hum of machinery and grinding of mechanical components reverberated faintly as the captives confirmed among themselves—after the thugs had fully left—that they could safely exchange information.

"Hey, buddy, where're you from?"

"I have no clue. I had just gotten off a tour ship when I blacked out—next thing I know, I'm here."

"No way, you were on a tour too? Me too! Signed up with a group, no idea how I ended up here."

"So I'm the only one who straight-up got snatched, huh? Damn, they hit hard—it stings like hell."

"I boarded a ship voluntarily back at Freeport... dammit! Should've known a ship full of crooks was trouble! Got roped onto a pirate ship!"

As the captives exchanged details, their chatter grew increasingly noisy.

But amid the commotion, one faint yet persistently determined voice stood out, tinged with obsession.

"Brother~"

"Brother~"

"It's me, Lang! Where are you, big bro?"

"Brother~"

"Brother~"

"Quit yelling, damn it!" snapped one annoyed captive at Lang's delirious calls. "What the hell are you hollering for? Who here's your brother?"

"My big brother is MY big brother!"

Another captive who'd accidentally brushed against a whip spoke disdainfully, "We're all stuck here—what use is your brother gonna be? Bound up just like us, pal."

"My big brother... my big brother..." Lang faltered twice, ultimately refusing to boast about his brother's legendary feat of single-handedly breaking Peak Alliance's Psychic Energy Canopy while piloting a mecha.

If his brother had deeper strategies in play, wouldn't flaunting ruin everything?

The Star Alliance operative had told him that his brother was traveling incognito, hidden aboard the same ship as him—which meant he was surely somewhere among these captives now.

"Anyway, my big bro's a beast!" Lang smirked arrogantly, unwilling to argue further with these fools.

Once they saw his brother's true strength, wouldn't these ignorant idiots scramble to cling to his brother's coattails?

Looking down on me now? Soon, I'll be too high for you to reach!

Hah!

And so Lang crouched even lower, attempting to scuttle across the crowd, "Brother~"

"Brother~"

Out of nowhere, a hand grabbed Lang's arm. Before Lang could cry out in joy, a short male voice cut him off with a sharp "Shh."

"Don't talk—we're here."

"Brother!" Lang's face lit up, standing obediently as if he were a wolf cub beside his sibling.

"Whirrr!"

Sure enough, as the space around them decelerated, accompanied by tremors and noise, light crept in as iron gates before them scraped open.

A silhouette backlit by bright light stepped forward, grinning and announcing to all captives loudly, "Welcome, everyone, to your pathway to fortune!"

Chapter 898: peers

Even black miners have money and a future ahead of them.

At least, that's how it appears on the surface.

Without Xu Nuo's promise of a bright future, living or dying would be no different for these people—how else would they obediently stay here doing things no one else could?

Though many know deep down, such promises are nothing more than empty words.

The authenticity of those few cases of escape is highly questionable too.

Yet, this fragile glimmer of hope is the only belief held by all of the black miners captured and brought here.

However, some individuals who clearly see the reality still steadfastly follow orders.

After the batch of players who'd lost hope stirred up trouble and resurrected elsewhere, the painter stuck to his original duties, waiting here for the arrival of "Imperial Forces."

What if he left, and the Imperial Forces arrived but didn't know who made such a huge sacrifice for them? What then?

He couldn't leave!

And so, after another ordinary workday, the painter saw a group of unlucky fresh captives who'd likely be his colleagues for the foreseeable future.

Among these new colleagues, the painter noticed two bizarre individuals whose minds didn't seem quite right.

"I told you I'm not your leader!"

"If you're not my leader, then who is?"

"Whoever your leader is, it can't be me."

"I know! You're hiding your identity."

The small and wiry guy rolled his eyes, his face full of exasperation. "If I were your leader, my identity would've been exposed by now thanks to you..."

"It's fine!" Lang swept his hand across the surroundings. "Everyone here is just unfortunate—everyone's thinking about escaping from those pirates' clutches! If you've got any plans, Boss, just lay them out!"

"Who are you calling 'unfortunate?'" The painter listened from the side, already annoyed, his expression defiant. "I came here on purpose!"

I'm the Vanguard sent by the Imperial Forces to explore the galaxy. You think I can casually share this with you guys?

Lang puffed out his chest with equal pride. "I came here on purpose too!"

You think I can talk about the time my leader and I ruthlessly took down Peak Alliance at Freeport?

Though I don't know why Boss switched identities and boarded this pirate ship, everything Boss says is definitely right!

The small guy pursed his lips in surprise and reluctantly echoed, "Me too..."

"So you must be my leader!" Having gathered crucial evidence, Lang declared confidently, "Boss, I know it's you. Stop hiding."

"I'm your \*\*\*\*\*!"

The small guy almost jumped up, wishing he could punch Lang in the forehead.

After swearing twice, his whole demeanor radiated an unapproachable vibe. "Anyway, just don't interfere with my actions if you don't want trouble!"

"Boss, do you have plans you can't even share with me?" Lang looked aggrieved, on the verge of tears. "We're supposed to be the best team ever!"

"I've said a million times: I'm not your freaking leader!" The small guy ground his teeth and hesitated for a long moment before grudgingly saying, "Your leader wouldn't be this short, would they?"

"Changing your physical form is just a trivial matter for someone like you, Boss, isn't it?"

"Changing physical form isn't trivial at all, damn it!" The small guy stomped in frustration.

Changing appearances is common enough, but fully altering body shape? That'd require some one-time surgical transformation or something!

"You're seriously not my leader?" Lang stared suspiciously at the small guy, who was a whole head and a half shorter than him, unable to believe it.

"I told you I'm not your leader!"

"Then why are you pretending to be my leader?" Lang flipped his eyes in disdain, his expression unimpressed.

"Pfft!"

"But you clearly said you came here on purpose just now?"

"Of course!" The small guy's eyes turned icy cold as he stared toward the direction of the space pirates, separated by walls of steel and frigid seawater. "Those pirates have harmed so many people over time—they've long deserved their reckoning. I am their reckoning!"

Knowing he couldn't shake off this clueless tagalong by lying, the small guy hissed dangerously, "If you don't want to be stuck here forever, then pretend you know nothing. Once I've killed off all these pirates, you can go free. Got it?"

"What freedom or lack of it?" Lang pouted. "I'm here on a secret mission with my leader."

"Exactly." The painter crossed his arms, proud. "I'm here to guide the Imperial Forces."

"Pirates must die!"

"Pirates must die!"

"But if you're in a hurry, my leader isn't opposed to giving you the chance first."

Lang knows everything. He just can't accept the fact that his leader might've abandoned him.

His quest to find the leader is merely a lie.

Using the excuse of looking for his old leader to recruit a new one is merely his scheme.

After all, without a new leader, he might really be doomed to spend the rest of his life mining in this black pit.

"True... Imperial Forces probably wouldn't bother with such a small place anyhow, so I don't mind letting you have the honor of eliminating them."

The painter knew deep down that if the Imperial Forces hadn't arrived by now, they were either ambushed en route or deviated from the destination entirely...

After such a long delay, they most likely weren't coming.

Lingering here wasn't a solution either. He didn't want to waste his hard-earned strength by committing suicide to respawn elsewhere, especially since he hadn't saved enough money to clone his avatar in the game.

If he didn't find a strong companion to carry him in-game, would he—a dyed-in-the-wool Star Sea vagabond—really have to slowly grind levels in this black mining pit?

The small guy: "..."

He wasn't sure whether any of what they said was true or false, but their intense sense of conviction somehow demanded belief...

"Since our goal is to destroy the pirates, we're allies standing on the same battlefield!" Lang enthusiastically slapped the small guy's shoulder. "Brother, if there's anything we can do to help, just say the word!"

The small guy hesitated, looking conflicted. "Can I really trust you guys?"

"You can always trust Lang!"

"You can always trust the painter!"

"Alright." The small guy reluctantly uttered the word, then resolutely declared, "I need a Mecha!"

"Where's a Mecha in a place like this?" The painter asked blankly.

"There is one!" The small guy nodded decisively. "Their mining machines are essentially deep-sea combat Mechas—they just need a bit of tweaking to restore their fighting capacity. As long as you find me some replacement parts, we'll have the power to resist."

"Oh... But where's the Mech Pilot?"

The small guy immediately puffed up with pride. "I am the Bauhinia Republic's future third Legendary Mechanic!"

"Much respect!"

"That's incredible!"

Chapter 899: teammates

The little guy actually did it...

With a broken, modified mecha, he rose from the water like a Titan Demon, wielding two stirring rods, and completely turned the pirate base on the mining star upside down!

He even commandeered a small spaceship and took all the oppressed black miners from underwater directly through high-dimensional space, landing on a border planet of a nearby nation.

"This guy's got some real skills..."

"Yeah, he's almost on par with my boss."

The Artist and Wild Wolf stood on either side, admiring the little guy's silhouette in sync.

"Your boss is that strong too?"

"Of course!" Wild Wolf puffed up with pride. "My boss is the kind of man who can easily pierce through a Psychic Energy Canopy with his mecha! You know about the Psychic Energy Canopy, right? It's the ultimate war weapon between major nations, but even that couldn't withstand my boss alone!"

"I know, I know!" The Artist, unwilling to expose his lack of cosmic knowledge, nodded enthusiastically, sincere admiration on his face. "Your boss is amazing."

"Naturally!" Wild Wolf straightened his back. "The kind of person worthy of being my boss wouldn't be ordinary! I don't follow just anybody!"

"Fair enough," The Artist agreed wholeheartedly. "But he's still a bit behind our Great General of the Imperial Army. You're aware of the Bug Race's ruling behemoths, aren't you? Any one of them can destroy a city with ease. Our Great General cuts through them one by one, one beast per strike, all the way from the North Pole to the South Pole without blinking an eye!"

What ruling behemoths of the Bug Race?

Never even heard of them.

Still, Wild Wolf nodded eagerly, exchanging exaggerated praise with his newfound companion. "Amazing, amazing! Seems like both my boss and your Great General are incredible."

"Totally, totally!"

Listening to the deliberately exaggerated voices behind him, the little guy at the spaceship window was thoroughly annoyed.

These two—what nonsense were they spouting?

Psychic Energy Canopy? Something humans can pierce through?

And as for the Bug Race's ruling behemoths?

Which backwater corner produced these oddities?

As the sound of footsteps behind him grew closer, the little guy remained focused on the planetary port ahead, his impatience mounting—

'Hurry up, hurry up, hurry up...'

"So, little bro... I noticed you're wandering the cosmos alone—a bit inconvenient, don't you think? Hey, what about letting me handle some chores for you—wait, wait, wait! Don't run! Bro! Dude! Boss!"

As soon as the ship docked, the little guy's figure shot out like lightning. Wild Wolf couldn't catch up. "Big bro! Damn it, big bro, don't run like that!"

"Big bro doesn't want you~" The Artist sighed dramatically from the side.

Wild Wolf stiffly turned his head to look at him. "Brother..."

The Artist quickly waved his hands. "I don't have what it takes to be your big bro..."

"No, I mean... about that Imperial Army you mentioned... any openings?"

His previous boss didn't want him anymore.

The new boss outright rejected him.

But this fellow's Imperial Army sounded at least somewhat promising—why not switch allegiance?

The Artist blinked a few times. "Imperial Army... might have gotten lost."

...

Under Catherine's guidance, Bai E met the team members he would be partnering with for the upcoming Stellar District competition.

Seven people in total—four men and two women—all rumored to be elite soldiers from the Bauhinia Military Department's Mobile Warrior Special Unit.

When they saw Bai E's unfamiliar face, aside from basic curiosity, they felt an overwhelming sense of pride as the military's representatives.

"Let me introduce this individual to everyone—this is Bai E, the Bai Mech Pilot; and these are the ace pilots of our military division, specifically handpicked through rigorous selection to form an elite team for this competition."

Catherine intentionally emphasized Bai E in the introduction.

Given Bai E's abilities, she naturally hoped he could guide Bauhinia Republic's mobile warriors during downtime.

As for Bai's own strength, due to the secrecy of his previous operations and the sensitivity of the involved personnel, it wasn't something she could openly discuss.

"In short, for this competition, Bai and I will serve as substitutes for the preliminary stages. Unless it's the final deciding round, we won't intervene. So, I have only one request for you all: win! Keep winning!"

Our goal is the Stellar District championship this time—only by achieving that can we secure a spot in the Star Alliance tournament! Is that clear?"

"Clear!" the team shouted in unison.

As one of Bauhinia's two Legendary Mechanics, Catherine held an unrivaled position of respect and admiration in the hearts of Bauhinia Republic's mobile warriors.

However, after their enthusiastic response, one of the soldiers couldn't help but voice a question. "But I heard the highest team composition for this competition is ten members. Apart from the eight of us..."

The official lineup called for eight primary members and two substitutes, totaling ten participants.

The presence of all eight formal members was a minimum requirement for competing.

If Bai and Catherine were participating as substitutes, that still left one primary spot vacant.

Who would this new teammate be?

No one wanted a deadweight teammate dragging them down in such an important competition for national glory.

Especially with group matches on top of individual rounds.

If team cohesion was lacking, their synergy would inevitably suffer.

Frankly, many already felt it was a bit disrespectful to recruit only seven ace pilots from the military division for such a critical competition.

After all, their unit didn't lack skilled personnel.

Everyone was a comrade-in-arms, and nobody knew each other's capabilities better.

Being chosen for the same team meant their skills were on par, refined through long collaboration, with mutual understanding and trust firmly in place.

Looking across the nation, apart from Catherine, there really wasn't anyone else of suitable age and caliber who could rival them in competence for this tournament.

In their minds, the roster—other than Catherine—should all come from this special unit alone!

Now with Bai as a likely "filler" substitute, if yet another "filler" joined as a formal member, the team's pressure would only mount.

Catherine chuckled softly and shook her head. "That person you should all be familiar with... Victor the Battle Maniac—you've heard of him, right?"

"Him?"

"Him, huh? That explains it."

"But is that guy reliable?"

His style differed entirely from the military's mobile warriors, leaning toward the wild combat school.

While famous domestically, whether he could integrate into their battle rhythm was an open question...

Chapter 900: reporting

"The competition will take place on a desolate planet at the edge of the Stellar District. The planet's rapidly changing environment makes it unsuitable for human habitation. However, its diverse terrain has allowed the Stellar District to develop numerous areas ideal for combat. The location we're heading to now is this very planet. The preparation area is located on a massive starship orbiting the planet, and upon our arrival, we must report to the starship."

Onboard the Bauhinia Republic's fleet of mobile warriors representing the nation, Catherine gave Bai E a general explanation of the event's procedure.

"After reporting in, we'll stay aboard the starship, which is equipped with a complete Spiritual Energy-sealed force field to ensure that contestants cannot communicate with the outside world in any form during the competition. Communication with the outside will only be restored once the entire event process concludes. The entire competition will be broadcast live across the Stellar District to maximize transparency and fairness in the proceedings."

"Are there many mech pilots at your level?" Bai E ignored the specific details of the competition process. After all, it was just piloting a mecha and fighting.

He was only interested in knowing how many opponents like Catherine he would face.

"Of course, not many." Catherine wore a confident smile. "Mech pilots like me and my mentor are rare across the entire Stellar District. At best, there are only four or five opponents of similar caliber to us. And these few individuals are dispersed across three nations as well as that group of interstellar pirates. This competition serves as an opportunity for each country to showcase its national pride to the universe. Even though these nations often act collectively in the Stellar District under the name of the Peak Alliance, when it comes to such events, they would never allow their own legendary mech pilots to become subordinate to another. So, in terms of elite mech pilots per team, we actually have the advantage."

Not to mention, in terms of quality... Catherine could see through the levels of her old rivals, but she couldn't discern the depths of the enigmatic commander beside her.

Conservatively speaking, in a final five-on-five team match, he should have no problem taking on two opponents simultaneously.

Even if he couldn't win outright, at least he could hold them off for a while until she cleared out the weaker opponents. After that, with her assistance, victory would almost certainly be within reach.

To prevent large-scale warfare from spiraling out of control, the Star Alliance's decision to implement such small-scale elite battles to determine status actually presented an opportunity for smaller nations like theirs to rise against the odds.

Of course, if it weren't for their Bauhinia Republic's stroke of luck in stumbling upon an alien-born leader dropping from the heavens, they wouldn't have the confidence they now held.

As Bauhinia's starship traversed space and arrived outside a dazzlingly colorful planet, Catherine gazed through the porthole at the scene beyond with ambitious, burning eyes.

The competition venue had arrived.

"Those vivid colors come from the ceaseless thunderclouds in the planet's atmosphere. The lightning here is immensely powerful—even we wouldn't fare well under a direct strike. However, on a real battlefield, situations change unpredictably. This kind of sporadic bombardment is one of the terrain challenges we'll need to be cautious of during combat."

"Mm." Bai E's gaze swept warily over the visible arcs of lightning dragons streaking across the planet.

This planet's dense metallic particles infused its clouds with vibrant hues, and the thick chains of lightning resembled giant dragons swimming through the heavy, multi-colored clouds.

In such extreme conditions, mere flesh and blood would struggle to survive without a mecha.

If a mecha were to be destroyed, a mech pilot likely wouldn't hold out long enough for rescue by the event organizers.

Although the Star Alliance established this small-scale battle policy to replace war and reduce human casualties, the essence of the struggle remained a bloody contest.

It merely shifted the cost of death from numerous ordinary individuals to the sacrifice of a few elites.

"Aren't we heading over yet?" Seeing the starship slow down and even come to a stop, Bai E looked at the distinctively painted hosting starship in the distance with some anticipation and asked.

He was already eager to witness the presence of more strong contestants from other nations.

Only after pinpointing his exact position within this world could he set the next stage of goals aligned to his current standing.

Hearing this, Catherine's lips curled into a trace of a wry smile as she shook her head helplessly. "Let's wait a bit longer. There are still more than two days until the final check-in time announced by the Competition Committee. We need to wait for that guy who is out training on his own."

That battle-mad individual is a renowned hopeful to become the Bauhinia Republic's third legendary mech pilot.

While participating in this competition serves the purpose of securing qualification for the Universal Apex Tournament, nurturing the country's next generation of core talent is also an essential consideration for Catherine as the team leader.

That individual has been pushing their limits through continuous combat, stimulating potential step by step in various inhuman settings.

If they could encounter higher-level opponents in such a prestigious competition and temper themselves, there's a chance they might break through and ascend to the ranks of legendary mech pilots.

At that point, their mastery of mecha would feel as intuitive and natural as breathing itself. With three legendary mech pilots joining forces, even at the Star Alliance Tournament held at the center of the universe, they could certainly shine brilliantly.

By then, the Bauhinia Republic, even if not representing the Stellar District outright, would stand as the lead figure in the eyes of the entire universe, embodying the District's highest honor and strength.