

## Wow 901

### Chapter 901: Reporting\_2

The so-called Peak Alliance opposing them right now would eventually just transform into an ordinary council under Bauhinia's control.

Thinking about this possible future starting from this very moment, Catherine couldn't help but feel slightly annoyed by that guy's constant disappearance.

"We've already sent out notices everywhere. Two and a half days—let's see if that guy can arrive on time. If he can't participate, I'll have no choice but to pick one of the prepared military district mech pilots to fill the vacancy."

Fortunately, the guy didn't let anyone down.

Amid everyone's eager anticipation, near the end of the second day, Bai E suddenly saw a dust-covered petite figure appearing before him.

"So you still know how to show up." Catherine glanced at him, her face full of exasperation.

"Didn't I rush over as soon as I got the news?" A fresh youth's voice came out from under a baseball cap.

The boy lifted his head, revealing a particularly delicate face.

He took off the cap from his head, shook it slightly so his silky bangs fell neatly, then tilted his face upward and flashed a radiant smile. "Got delayed at some pirate's hideout for a few days. Mainly because mech modification materials were hard to track down; otherwise, I would've been here with you guys long ago."

"Arriving is good enough." Catherine seemed rather resigned as she addressed the newcomer.

The boy was younger than her, yet back in the day when they were in the same grade, she hadn't been as strong as he was now.

By the time he reached her age, his achievements might surpass hers.

The only pity was that timing didn't wait for them to be fully prepared.

The once-in-a-decade Star Alliance tournament had already entered the preliminary selection stage for their Stellar District—they couldn't afford to let this boy slowly grow into someone who could hold up half the sky alone.

"Let me introduce him; this is Victor, skilled in close-quarters combat and also an expert at mech modifications." Catherine gestured towards Bai E while turning to Victor and introduced him further: "This is Bai..."

She paused slightly and winked at him, "Very strong."

Victor's eyes lit up instantly, and he stepped forward with enthusiasm, bowing deeply to Bai E, "Master Bai, I'll be counting on your guidance in the future."

"You're too kind."

"Alright." With all personnel accounted for, Catherine clapped her hands and summoned the rest of her team scattered across the starship. "Let's go and check in."

As the team assembled, a few teammates scanned around in surprise and asked Catherine hesitantly, "So... just us?"

"Yes." Catherine took the lead towards the small spacecraft mounted aboard the starship. "Everyone's here; let's head out."

"..." The assembled members took a deep look at the unfamiliar man following behind Catherine, opened their mouths as if to say something, then swallowed their words, biting their lips and silently following along.

When Catherine called up two military district comrades to board the ship as backup plans, many thought they were there to replace Victor—a potential no-show—and this unfamiliar man.

They didn't expect Victor to make it in time, nor did the strangers get substituted.

Unspoken disappointment naturally arose among some, though facing Catherine's authority deterred them from expressing it openly.

As the small spacecraft detached from Bauhinia's starship and connected to the docking port of the host starship amidst tremors, Bai E and the team stepped into a spacious, brightly lit reception hall through the connecting passage.

Taking charge, Catherine submitted the team's registration badge to the reception staff, introducing herself, "We're competitors from the Bauhinia Republic—please proceed with the registration."

Among the reception staff were supervisory personnel dispatched by the Star Alliance, enforcing compliance with Alliance policies in every Stellar District.

"Understood."

The young receptionist, her smile sweet, took the badge and began operating the terminal in front of her.

Just then, a grating, duck-like voice interrupted from behind them, carrying a displeased tone: "You Bauhinia folks are truly arrogant—everyone else managed to arrive early, yet you just had to check in at the last minute. If you really didn't want to come, you didn't have to force yourselves."

Catherine's expression remained stoic, not even bothering to turn around.

But Victor, the smallest and seemingly most innocent-looking member of the group, was the first to lose his patience at such provocation. He spun around, glaring and retorting with fervor, "Feeling itchy, huh? If you're in the mood for a beating, go spar with me right now—last time's thrashing two years ago didn't seem to leave you with any lasting memory!"

"Ha..." The duck-voiced man chuckled mockingly, ready to fire back, when the receptionist abruptly cut him off, her face frosty: "Private disputes among competitors—including verbal and physical altercations—are strictly prohibited during competition. Otherwise, both parties will be stripped of their eligibility! Furthermore... arriving within the deadline falls perfectly within the bounds of normal procedure."

The duck-voiced man glared menacingly at the receptionist, knowing she represented the Star Alliance. After a brief, grudging silence under her cold gaze, he reluctantly turned away, though he left with a spiteful sneer: "You're all dead meat! This tournament will be Bauhinia's swan song!"

"Tch~" Victor scoffed.

His words carried little weight, and no one paid attention.

With the trash-talker gone, the receptionist's cheerful smile returned as she addressed the leading figure of Bauhinia's team: "Respected Captain Catherine, your team registration has been approved. Please proceed to your designated rest area and wait quietly. The tournament procedures will begin on schedule."

"Understood."

Walking down the exclusive hallway leading to the rest area, Catherine kindly explained to Bai E, "The person provoking us just now is a mech pilot from the Golden Eagle Kingdom. A few years back, their country had disputes with ours over the ownership of certain mineral resources. In those battles, Victor directly captured that guy, and they only managed to get him back by paying ransom money. The team from their country isn't particularly strong; they're just staunch lapdogs for the few major nations supporting Peak Alliance, which gives them the nerve to bark face-to-face."

Although Bauhinia faced substantial suppression, its strength within the Stellar District wasn't actually weak.

In fact, Bauhinia had considerable power but refused to act as Peak Alliance's obedient dog, which led to constant pressure and suppression from the alliance representing most of the Stellar District's forces.

"Got it."

The conversation carried them into their Bauhinia-only resting area.

Apart from private spaces for each competitor, their starship also provided a large public area designated for tactical discussions, offering competitors a timely place to strategize and adjust team tactics during the tournament.

...

With Bauhinia's team roster submitted, facial profiles corresponding to each participant quickly surfaced before certain behind-the-scenes operatives.

Catherine, Victor...

Every elite member of Bauhinia's mech battle team who existed in countless surveillance reports was accounted for one by one.

Yet out of the ten submissions, one particular entry was utterly unfamiliar.

"Bai E?"

"Who names someone like that?"

"Could he... be the one who teamed up with Catherine to pierce through the Psychic Energy Canopy?"

Because of Catherine's status as Bauhinia's War Goddess, they had been unable to gather any follow-up information about the mysterious expert who helped her shatter the Canopy.

Now, an unfamiliar face suddenly appeared—it seemed highly likely the anonymous ally had shown up.

"From the hunting squad reports, this mysterious target's strength might actually surpass Catherine's. If it turns out to be him, then Bauhinia's team could have at least one Grade-1 and one Super Grade-1 Legendary Mechanic. When it comes to the team matches, our squad might lack an advantage..."

Chapter 902: First Battle!

"Our opponents total thirty-one. The tournament consists of five rounds, culminating in determining the top three players."

"The number of spots advancing from each Stellar District is currently uncertain. While it's said that the top three all have opportunities, only the first place truly guarantees participation on the stage of the Galactic League."

"The matchups and venues are decided by a random draw. Nobody will know their opponent or the environment of the battle until right before taking the field."

"Primal jungles, snowy mountain peaks, isolated ocean islands, lightning storm zones, electromagnetic anomalous regions... all are possible. Two teams with the same drawn number are opponents, and that number also corresponds to the battlefield environment."

"In this competition, we need to focus on three primary opponents... Thunder Dragon Empire, Blood Cry Empire, and the Thousand Stars Commerce Alliance."

"Among them, the Thousand Stars Commerce Alliance warrants particular caution. Of the four Legendary Mechanics qualified to participate in this tournament like myself, two are in their ranks. Thunder Dragon and Blood Cry Empires each harbor one Legendary Mechanic as well. Additionally, many of their other pilots are near Legendary level. It's not impossible for someone to break through in battle or to have ascended to Legendary status in the time unknown to us."

In the preparation room, Catherine shared the information in her hand with every member of the team.

Most of the details were already known to the local members. The thorough explanation was primarily for Bai E. "Of course, all this is surface-level intelligence. Whether they're concealing any trump cards unknown to us is something we currently cannot ascertain yet."

Bauhinia was already heavily suppressed within this Stellar District, and intelligence work was incredibly challenging.

Their own ranks were rife with leaks, while they knew very little about surrounding rival powers.

Fortunately, fate smiled upon Bauhinia Republic. From the uncharted depths of the cosmos, they had acquired an extraordinary leader from a primal civilization to join Bauhinia's team, which granted them a real shot at claiming first place in the competition.

...

Just as a taunting Mech Pilot from the Golden Eagle Kingdom remarked, Bauhinia Republic was the last team to arrive and register.

As time elapsed, when the appointed moment finally arrived, under the live broadcast cameras, the leaders of all participating teams stepped forward to draw their competition numbers.

"Number thirteen."

This was the number Catherine drew.

Five solo matches, one point per match.

One duo match, two points.

One trio match, two points.

One five-person team match, four points.

This was the format of the Star Alliance competition, and the tournament within the Stellar District followed the same system.

Pilots could appear in multiple group matches, and each participant could compete up to two times in a single round. There was only an hour at most for rest between matches.

Participant lists for each sub-match had to be submitted to the official organizers before the matches began and could not be altered.

Thus, no competitor would know their opponent until they were about to take the field.

This system, which left limited room for tactical maneuvering, was designed to test the all-around capabilities of each participating nation's pilots.

Pilots who excelled in specialized combat would only have room to shine during the team matches.

"We still don't know who our opponent will be..." Sitting in a spaceship descending toward the planet, the swaying cabin made Catherine frown in frustration.

Catherine's concern clearly stemmed from something deeper. Sitting next to her, Victor asked curiously, "Sister, did you receive some bad news?"

Catherine shook her head. "I don't know if it counts as bad news... it's just unusual."

During the earlier draw, among those teams she highlighted as needing special attention, aside from the Thousand Stars Commerce Alliance leader, a familiar old rival, the leaders of the other two empires were completely unfamiliar faces instead of the legendary mechanics she remembered.

Ordinarily, a team's leader would be the outright strongest pilot on the team.

Such a change could only mean one of two things.

Either those two legendary pilots were no longer part of their respective empires' teams, or... the new unfamiliar faces were even stronger than the previous legendary mechanics.

Like a new lion king ousting the old one, the new pilots replaced the veteran legends to become the face of their teams.

Either scenario suggested this tournament might not be as straightforward as they had anticipated.

That such a significant shift occurred without Bauhinia catching wind of it highlighted how limited their intelligence network was...

"It's okay. When the time comes, I'll serve as the vanguard. I'll aim to secure the first win for us in every round." Victor puffed out his chest.

Under the current competition system, the first team to reach thirteen points would advance. Securing seven points would be enough to claim victory.

But no single participant could compete more than twice in one round.

To ensure their team's steady progress, Catherine and Bai, as the two ace players, would need to appear in matches with the highest scoring potential.

They would need to win two team matches to secure six points, or a team match plus two solo matches to achieve the same result.

In this scenario, when facing one of the three formidable opponents, someone from Bauhinia's team would need to secure at least one point in the solo matches to ensure the team's qualification for advancement.

Chapter 903: First Battle!\_2

Perhaps the elite mech pilots in the military district are equally skilled, but Victor still chooses to shoulder this responsibility himself.

Catherine's sharp gaze softened as she replied quietly, "Let's hope so..."

...

As the entire drop pod steadied upon landing after a slight tremor, the interior began to stir with mild commotion upon receiving the organizers' audio notification.

The air on this planet was filled with deadly toxic gases harmful to the human body. While most powerful mech pilots had robust physical endurance, no one wanted external factors like this to meddle with their performance at such a crucial competitive moment.

With the help of his teammates, Victor finished donning his bulky protective outerwear, waved goodbye to the others lingering inside the pod with a smile, and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, let me secure our first victory in game one for everyone..."

As Victor stepped out of the pod, an array of Bauhinia mech units, previously submitted, patiently awaited his selection on the airfield.

A kaleidoscope of mechs flaunted exaggerated weapon configurations and flamboyant color schemes.

Each and every mech had been the result of painstaking, round-the-clock fine-tuning and craftsmanship by Bauhinia's countless engineers over countless nights and days.

Through generations of development and innovation, each unit stood out with distinct characteristics and exceptional performance.

The moment Victor stepped out of the pod, the entire match began live broadcasting across the Stellar District.

Those outside the arena could freely select which venue to watch, while inside, participants still had no clue about who constituted their rival teams and where the enemy nation hailed from.

At this moment, numerous citizens within Bauhinia territory, whether at work or lying on their beds at home, solemnly watched the unfolding live-feed with serious expressions.

Since learning of the opponent, many Bauhinia Republic citizens harbored a faint sense of unlucky resentment.

"What rotten luck... Our first opponent is the Thunder Dragon Empire."

"Exactly, why did we have to run into one of the three top-seeded players?"

"Rigged! It has to be rigged! The Peak Alliance, the event organizers, was founded by those three nations. They must have full control over this competition!"

"You're overthinking it! Star Alliance even dispatched people to supervise this. There's no room for underhanded maneuvers. It's just sheer misfortune..."

"Sigh... I genuinely thought our line-up for this season was pretty strong. If it weren't for matching against the three seeds, reaching the top four would've been easy for us."

As a nation perpetually subjected to discrimination and suppression wherever they went, even entering the top four would be an extraordinary achievement.

Should their competitors manage to accomplish this, their citizens might finally find less judgmental glances when stepping outside their homes.

But alas, such hopes appeared on the brink of shattering just as they arose.

After all, this was the Thunder Dragon Empire we were talking about!

"But have a little faith in our competitors... At least this time, none other than our legendary mechanic Catherine herself is leading the team, which might bring us a surprise!"

"Exactly! The Thunder Dragon Empire also has just one legendary mechanic, but so do we. Surely, Catherine isn't going to be intimidated, is she?"

"The match isn't purely about legendary mechanic-level duels though..."

Legendary mechanics relied more on their unique aptitude, whereas those second-tier pilots showcased a country's true foundations.

Being able to consistently train experienced, powerful frontline pilots was an advantage only these major nations possessed.

Bauhinia could not even dream of such strength.

"Oh, enough talk; just watch the match already!"

Inside the drop pod where Bai E and the others were stationed, the perspective was locked onto their own competitor, live-streaming footage of their teammate after entering the fray.

Unlike external spectators who could freely switch views, contestants within the arena were restricted to monitoring their teammate-centered perspectives.

However much insight one could glean about opponents would depend on the tactical decisions of each participant squad.

Hence, some competing nations even assigned analytical substitutes rather than solely combat-oriented professionals as functional additions to their teams.

Watching Victor, dressed in his slightly cumbersome protective wear, approach the line of mechs, some team members appeared visibly excited.

"Wonder what type of mech the little battle maniac will choose..."

"His personality seems better suited for the assault-type 'Vanguard.'"

"But isn't choosing 'Vanguard' too risky? If he fails to eliminate the opponent during the burst phase, he could easily be played to death afterward."

"I think going for 'All-around' is a more balanced choice. It can stand its ground against any opponent."

With generations advancing the diversification of mech designs across the cosmos, distinct branches emerged, tailored to various scenarios.

For instance, those capable of unleashing extreme speeds in short bursts to close in swiftly and strike explosively — "Vanguard" mechs.

The trade-off for such bursts was a compromise in hull protection levels and limitations on mounted weaponry.

Then there were "All-around" mechs, boasting commendable performance across all metrics.

But being all-around meant mediocre, inferior in speed and burst power to "Vanguard," less capable in long-range support than "Sentinel," and weaker than "Mountain Foothills" in defense and thrust capacity.

Furthermore, Sentinels excelled at firepower but lacked melee capabilities, whereas Mountain Foothills had impressive defensive prowess but suffered severely from poor mobility.

Each type came with its own strengths and shortcomings.

Enhancing one aspect meant compromising another.

Distinct mech types developed unique counter-relations when clashing against one another.

Even within the same type, each nation's models varied greatly in design and specialization.

Until the pilot's individual skill gap widened sufficiently, it was a mech's performance and attributes that ultimately determined the outcome of engagements between two mobile warriors.

Thus, selecting one's initial mech demanded careful consideration.

"Moderation isn't that kid's style. Mechs matching the pilot's character tend to yield better results most of the time."

"Our match terrain is a primitive forest. Under those circumstances, Vanguard units hold a clear advantage. Just Vanguard then."

As they spoke, the team occasionally glanced at Catherine, their otherwise silent leader.

Typically, critical decisions like this would involve input from the leader pre-match.

But for some reason, Catherine had refrained from giving any directives regarding this choice.

She remained focused on the pod's live feed yet shifted her attention lightly to Bai E with a curious query: "Which type do you think he'll pick?"

"All-around, I suppose..."

Though not fully familiar with Bauhinia's mech units yet, Bai E reckoned that kind of balanced design aligned with Victor's eventual decision.

After all... it was also Bai E's personal favorite type.

On primitive planets, mech units didn't come with elaborate distinctions.

"All-around" represented the closest resemblance to the versatility Bai E was accustomed to.

"Seems like you understand this guy better," Catherine mused with a faint smile. "That rascal... He pretends to be wilder than anyone, yet in truth, he holds the strongest sense of responsibility."

As the pioneer competing in the first match, there was little doubt he would opt for the All-around.

Not merely for advantages stemming from mech type countering or relations with opponents, but equally because of one other factor... the environment.

In the face of an entirely unfamiliar alien setting, a pioneer's role transcended securing the opening win; it was about establishing groundwork!

Chapter 904: Vanguard Battle

As expected!

Under everyone's watchful eyes, Victor strode directly toward the Mecha that appeared to have the most balanced design.

After entering the Mecha, Victor saw the map's constraints for the competition and immediately received a notification that he must enter the battle zone within 15 seconds.

During combat, exceeding the battle zone by more than 3 seconds is considered an automatic surrender.

This was a rule everyone knew before the match began.

The towering Mecha emitted a resonating roar, and the primal forest crumbled under the force of advanced technology.

But only just that.

The Mecha strode forward, quickly disappearing into a sea of verdant greenery.

The untouched, wild forest brimmed with untamed growth, and the towering Mecha's passage only caused treetops to sway. In the heavily foliated gaps, one could occasionally glimpse glints of metal.

The moment the Mecha stepped into the forest, the battle had already begun.

Neither combatant knew which country their opponent represented, nor could they predict the opponent's Mecha model.

Countering and being countered, scouting and hiding—these aspects started from the very first moment.

Optical cloaking, radar detection, and countless other techniques emerged one after another.

Only the external audience watching the overview footage could see the red and blue dots representing the two nations' competitors gradually moving toward one another on the map.

In the split-screen views, only shadows of the Mecha could be seen pushing aside the tendrils of the jungle through aerial shots.

The Mecha's body occasionally jerked, as the jungle proved slippery and entangled with dense vines.

Some clearly self-animated plants even tried using their thick strands to strangle any foreign object that dared invade their "territory."

The massive Mecha moved cautiously, mindful not only of attacks from its opponent but also of environmental dangers.

Familiarizing oneself with the surroundings, minimizing environmental hindrance to oneself while maximizing its impact on the opponent—that was the vanguard's greater responsibility.

Victor silently committed every environmental observation to memory; they could become crucial assets for his teammates to achieve victory later.

Bahinia natives were born among thorns, and every citizen fighting for their country was obligated to perform flawlessly without error.

Fortunately, this monotonous probing phase didn't last long. Both sides clearly understood their vanguard roles almost identically. Neither of the "All-around" models had much long-distance advantage, so they gradually pinpointed each other's location during the slow exploration.

Through the dense foliage and shadows, the two Mecha simultaneously locked eyes on each other, and instantly, two perfectly humanoid machines clashed fiercely amid the scattering leaves.

Beneath the endless green canopy, the entire forest experienced its first-ever violent tremor in history.

"Boom!"

"Boom!"

Shells, swords... Cold weapons and hot weapons danced wildly.

Every part of these war machines was capable of unleashing attacks potent enough to annihilate enemies.

However, at the same level of competition, the Spiritual Energy of the pilots significantly enhanced their Mecha's defenses, making it difficult for standard attacks to break through quickly.

Ultimately, whose tactics would prevail depended on who would first reveal a fatal flaw in the heat of battle...

"Swish!"

"Swish!"

Amid the whirlwind of leaves and dirt, swift shadows streaked across the close-up cameras.

The flying gusts caused the footage to violently shake, leaving the audience inside the Drop Pod unable to glean any useful information about the battle's progress.

Fortunately, as the two Mecha engaged in close combat, additional footage appeared for everyone inside the Drop Pod to observe.

In the tangled jungle terrain, the tracking cameras could no longer freely navigate, and the most stable shots consistently came from aerial perspectives.

Yet even these aerial views revealed little information due to the forest canopy's thick shadows.

But for the battle-hardened and seasoned Catherine, just fragmented details were enough for her to determine her opponent's identity—Thunder Dragon Empire.

One of the three major powers that had founded the Peak Alliance, they suppressed Bauhinia Republic the hardest. During their last operation to intercept her return with the Fragment of God, their involvement had undoubtedly been pivotal.

Old rivals meeting again—grievances reignited!

Far quicker than Catherine, Victor instantly recognized his opponent's identity, and his gaze sharpened dramatically.

His already fierce offensive became even more decisive and ruthless, with every move dripping with savage vehemence.

This reckless style caused tension to silently rise in the hearts of all spectators observing the battle; violent tactics often meant the match would quickly reach a conclusion.

Equally focused on this duel, many Thunder Dragon Empire citizens quietly suppressed their concern for their representative while posting comments on social media with smiles.

"These Bauhinia folks are so barbaric—they come out swinging like madmen. Who exactly are they trying to intimidate?"

"If we can endure their initial aggression, we'll easily gain the upper hand, right?"

"Excessive ambition never lasts. Don't these Bauhinia contestants understand this basic principle? How did these crude people even qualify for such a prestigious tournament?"

"Let's not rush to conclusions. After all, they do have two Legendary Mechanics in their formidable nation. Give them a thousand years, and who knows—they might eventually develop to our current level."

"Honestly, their Republic only has that one Legendary Mechanic worth anything. He'd have a better future if he joined our Thunder Dragon Empire sooner rather than later!"

However, as the battle progressed, the laughter on many faces started to fade and ultimately disappear.

The relentless assault on the battlefield had already lasted nearly a whole minute.

Force-controlled bursts at full capacity were notoriously short-lived; no one could endure such a high-intensity pace for extended periods.

Mech pilots who managed to maintain full-force combat for thirty seconds often subjected their opponents of similar skill to immense pressure, but this Bauhinia pilot had sustained his burst for over a full minute... His opponent from Thunder Dragon Empire was likely already exhausted.

After the impossible becomes reality, those who assumed they had victory in hand suddenly had cause for concern.

"Will our pilot hold out?"

"How can these barbaric Bauhinia fighters last so long? Are they doping? I recommend pausing the match immediately for a thorough investigation!"

"Agreed! We demand fairness and justice! No nation or competitor should win using dishonorable tactics!"

Chapter 905: first wins!

However, such online protests can never determine the true course of the competition.

The Star Alliance controllers, who hold more authority, would not halt the competition on-site merely because of an extraordinary outburst from an individual contestant.

Even if there are some fouls, inspections must wait until after the battle, and penalties are given based on the severity, with the harshest potentially resulting in a team-wide ban.

Using banned substances is among the most severe violations.

No contestant, unless they are spies from enemy nations, would be foolish enough to use such banned substances in broad daylight.

One minute!

Two minutes!

Two and a half minutes!

The storm-like assault has practically destroyed everything in the surrounding jungle of the competing parties; ordinary flora and fauna could not withstand the violent barrage from advanced mechas.

The mecha opposing Victor endured the pressure firmly, showing no signs of defeat.

Yet, like a lone boat on a raging sea, no one knows how long it can hold out.

Nor does anyone know how much longer the "Bauhinia Berserker", the main attacker, can persist.

It didn't take long, just two or three minutes into combat, for all spectators to come up with a vivid nickname for the participant from Bauhinia.

The battle gradually reached a white-hot phase.

The two titans have nearly exhausted all the thermal weapons on their bodies.

For the mobility of mechas, the amount of ammunition they carry was never much.

In a real battlefield, each mecha might have a chance to replenish ammunition from a central ammo pod, but in these competitions, the limited number of thermal weapons are merely to complement the mecha's primary combat means.

And though the "All-around" is all-encompassing, its core strength, which can always demonstrate combat capability, is forever the alloy battle blade in its hands.

"Clang clang clang clang clang!"

The intense clash of strikes whipped up a storm of shattered leaves, and in the instant when both fields of vision were obscured by debris, the mechas, deliberately orchestrating this scene, launched a final suicidal assault almost simultaneously.

There might be numerous detection modules on the mechas, but when the pilots are tightly wound and engage in peak combat, only the direct visual display is the core information source aiding their decision-making.

The broken blades sliced past each other, then abruptly stabbed toward each other's critical points.

Even though both are "All-around" type mechas, under the different technologies of the two nations, the structural designs of the mechas also differ slightly.

One blade was high, the other low, intersecting with each other.

"Shing!"

The final strikes by both were no impulsive acts.

The repeatedly struck critical points had become exceedingly fragile, and the broken blades simultaneously plunged straight in, penetrating deep into the metallic structure.

The critical hit almost simultaneously severed the operational capabilities of both mechas.

Watching the two mechas on screen nearly frozen in place, all viewers held their breath—

The victory or defeat of the initial fight would undoubtedly have significant implications for the ensuing battles.

If victorious, subsequent participants facing enemies would have boosted confidence.

Not to mention, this first battle between the two sides was so fierce, neither mecha bore any intact section.

In this situation, the outcome of the first battle grew more crucial.

"Can we win?"

"Will it be ruled a draw?"

Many felt their hearts tighten, anxiously awaiting the final verdict.

Time seemed to pause at this moment, only the floating shattered branches and fallen leaves indicated the battle's conclusion remained unresolved.

"Screech~"

With the ear-piercing screech of the mecha's transforming body, the slightly wider mecha released the grip on its battle blade, raising its arm high...

Then its movements halted, emitting no further sound.

Neither did its opponent.

"We won!" Catherine whispered fervently from the Drop Pod at the rear.

At the final moment, our side could move, while the opponent lost any ability to resist, clearly signaling the outcome of this battle.

"We won!"

"Well done, Victor!"

"This kid is truly fierce..."

As the backend computer analyzed the status of both mechas, reports on their battle damage also appeared on the confrontation screen.

The numerous prior damages were merely preludes for both, while the final "fatal blow" came from one's power core and the other's cockpit.

The Thunder Dragon Empire contestant penetrated Victor's cockpit, causing some communication issues between the cockpit and the mecha, and the leak of alien air affected the internal mech pilot due to environmental exposure.

The raised arm was barely the last maneuver his mecha could perform under control.

As for Thunder Dragon Empire's mecha, it was directly pierced through the power system by Victor.

Without the support of the power system, the entire mecha was akin to scrap iron, utterly losing all ability to act.

However... the screen did not directly display the result of the fight.

One second...

Two seconds...

This anomaly undoubtedly raised some doubts in the hearts of everyone in the Drop Pod.

"Why isn't the result showing yet?"

"Isn't it obvious we won?"

"What about the rescue? Victor's cockpit has been severely penetrated, why hasn't the rescue team responded?"

Chapter 906: first wins!\_2

Although most Mech Pilots who can participate in combat possess skills far exceeding ordinary people, with physical qualities beyond comparison, in such an extraterrestrial environment, no one can guarantee whether Victor might be invaded by alien pathogens in the leaked air.

"Playing the negative state," is a tactic favored by members of certain nations.

Even if their side loses, as long as your Mech Pilot ends up with a negative condition, it will be hard for them to perform at their best in the subsequent matches.

After all, the competition schedule is intense, and whether Mech Pilots can sustain their fiery, ever-improving state is the ultimate test for all participants.

Under these rules, where each competitor can participate in at most two matches, any negative condition affecting a strong participant could determine the outcome of an entire match.

Two equally significant concerns weigh heavily on the hearts of every Bauhinia Republic citizen.

In the Competition Committee's backstage area, the entire working group instantly received the appeal submitted by the Thunder Dragon Empire—

The result of this match clearly shows that their Thunder Dragon Empire's Mech Pilot was the true winner.

Their argument is that, in a real battlefield scenario, their Thunder Dragon Empire's Mech Pilot would have been able to wait for rescue safely inside the sealed cockpit.

As for the Bauhinia Republic's Mech Pilot, despite being able to still move his arm in the end, he would have been long dead before the rescue team arrived, given the completely unfamiliar alien environment.

After recovery, their Thunder Dragon Empire's Mech Pilot would still have the opportunity to return to the battlefield, while Bauhinia not only failed to win this single combat encounter but also forfeited the chance to compete further.

A complete and utter defeat.

Or even if Thunder Dragon Empire did not emerge victorious, at the very least, it should have been a draw.

The Bauhinia Republic's Mech Pilot's last-ditch arm-lifting move clearly wasn't enough to entirely disable their Thunder Dragon Empire's Mecha.

Both sides essentially lost their operational capability, so at most, it could only be considered a draw.

By no means could Bauhinia Republic be deemed the victor.

This argument gained considerable support among members of the Competition Committee, resulting in the final outcome of victory or defeat remaining unpublished for so long.

However, the highest adjudicator representing the will of the Star Alliance observed coldly and refrained from speaking... Only after clearly understanding each Competition Committee member's opinion did they cast their decisive vote.

"Winner—Bauhinia Republic."

"Whoever perseveres until the end is the victor. This is the simplest judgment of victory and defeat." The highest adjudicator swept an icy gaze over the panel of Competition Committee members, speaking in an indifferent tone as she recognized most were local inhabitants of this Stellar District, "Once you choose to become a judge, you must first forget your origins. Anyone who fails to uphold basic fairness and justice is unfit to preside over any competition."

...

Roughly tens of seconds later, the calm live broadcast finally revealed the final verdict—

"Winning side: Bauhinia Republic. Winning Pilot: Victor. Mecha: All-around Model (Singer)."

"Woohoo!"

A thunderous wave of joy erupted within the hearts of every Bauhinia citizen.

No one had anticipated that, facing the Thunder Dragon Empire—a powerhouse ranked among the top three seed competitors in the Star Zone Competition—their Bauhinia warrior could secure an initial victory in the Vanguard Battle.

This excellent start even led them to believe that defeating a seed competitor, a Stellar District's top-tier nation, was not an impossibility within reach.

Such an exhilarating moment undoubtedly made everyone's hearts race uncontrollably, feeling that the radiant future was nearly beckoning them within arm's reach.

However, for the numerous competitors participating, all Bauhinia participants had no time to bask in the joy of their first victory, as the arrangement for the second individual match promptly followed.

After the result was announced, the Competition Committee's rescue efforts also arrived in a timely manner.

Victor, who was brought back, didn't look particularly lively but managed to maintain full clarity of consciousness at least.

"The air on this planet is alright, not toxic." The young man grinned mischievously and, without wasting more words, started sharing his comprehensive insights and understandings of the competition venue through personal experience...

"Everyone finished listening?" Catherine asked in a flat tone.

An hour of recovery time wasn't generous, especially considering it starts ticking from the moment the previous match concludes.

If Victor's condition had been poor, they might have gained nothing useful from the vanguard's firsthand information on the venue.

Fortunately, the rescue team's actions weren't too slow, and Victor, after being brought back, didn't delay too much time, leaving ten minutes for intra-team discussions after sharing all his exploratory findings.

"From the terrain, launching sudden strikes here won't be easy; the terrain is the greatest obstacle. I think choosing a 'Sentinel' Flyer is a good option."

"If we go with a Flyer, I recommend putting Atos out there; he's the best among us in handling Flyers."

Selecting the most skilled Mech Pilot based on the suitable mecha type is the cornerstone of every tactical discussion.

Reaching this level of competition, most Mech Pilots are relatively "all-around," but even among all-around pilots, there are standout specialties.

"But the opponents might notice this too. If they opt for an aerial combat 'Vanguard,' choosing a Flyer could be problematic for us."

The competition doesn't ban aerial combat, but different terrain maps impose varying flight altitude restrictions.

On their primitive jungle map, the flight altitude limitation is relatively low, leaving flying mechas with virtually no advantage.

Mechas capable of flight inevitably compromise in armor and weaponry, and their ground combat capabilities are absolutely outmatched by ground-based mechas.

When facing most ground-based mechas, aerial combat mechas don't have an edge.

Only when fighting Sentinel Flyers do aerial combat Vanguard mechas hold a decisive advantage.

Once locked onto each other, even if Sentinel Flyers have the advantage of landing the first strike, they can only manage two or three preemptive attacks at best.

After all, the dense jungle terrain not only impacts the ground-based mechas' advancement but also hampers Sentinel Flyers' target acquisition.

By the time the target is detected, both sides are already at a dangerously close distance.

The obstacles impeding ground-based mechas in the jungle pose no problems whatsoever for aerial combat Vanguard.

Once they get into close range, the Sentinel Flyers, entirely lacking close-range combat capabilities, will inevitably become playthings for their rivals.

"But they wouldn't take such a risky move, would they..."

After all, if their side doesn't choose a Sentinel Flyer and the opponent uses an aerial combat Vanguard, it would essentially be giving away a point for free.

The enormous performance gap between the mechas, even if there's some disparity in the skill levels of the pilots, would likely lead to an unavoidable defeat.

"I still think we should go with Flyers... The opponents might not dare to field an aerial combat Vanguard."

"Or let's rethink—how about we choose an aerial combat Vanguard ourselves?"

"This..."

Catherine silently observed her patchwork team of substitutes, watching from the sidelines without interjecting, allowing them to air their opinions freely.

Theoretically, with Victor securing a point, and herself partnering with Bai E likely able to net six points in the two team battles, a win against the Thunder Dragon Empire was highly probable.

But she chose to remain silent.

Though she possessed Bai E as her ace card, Catherine was reluctant to use it purely to "steady morale."

This competition was not just about winning; it was also about honing skills.

Ultimately, external reinforcements would always be external; Bauhinia couldn't always rely on such favorable circumstances.

Only when their own nation's talents had grown strong could Bauhinia achieve true greatness.

From her perspective, Victor was already among the stronger members of her cobbled-together team, but even he only narrowly claimed the first match by catching his opponent off guard with a daring opening.

The overall average strength of the Thunder Dragon Empire remained formidable!

Chapter 907: Game

After thorough discussions within the team, the unanimous decision was to opt for the reliable "All-around Model" Mecha as the choice for the second battle.

Catherine raised no objections to the result.

In fact, regardless of whether they had chosen the airborne "Vanguard" or the flying "Sentinel," she would have remained indifferent.

There is no absolute right or wrong in such strategic selections, much like a game of rock-paper-scissors—attempting to dominate often entails the risk of being countered.

Indeed, when there is a disparity in frontal combat power, taking risks can often yield greater rewards.

The All-around Model mecha is undoubtedly stable and, even when facing "Sentinel" model mechas, can offer some resistance.

However, such a mediocre choice is doomed to never produce a miraculous victory.

Ultimately, it was clear that her teammates held neither high expectations for her nor greater hopes for achieving ultimate victory.

Avoiding radical choices, seeking not achievement but mediocrity, was likely their biggest pursuit at the moment.

Such a hidden mindset might even be something that they themselves failed to realize.

But it didn't matter—she and Bai E would be their backbone.

With one victory after another, perhaps they would eventually shift their mentality naturally.

Until then, it was up to them to adapt and reflect...

As the one-hour preparation time came to an end, an alert sounded in the Drop Pod.

The chosen warrior, bearing the blessings of all teammates, donned the outer protective suit resolutely and stepped out of the Drop Pod, heading toward one of the numerous parked mechas on the adjacent open space—

An identical "All-around Model" mecha as the one used in the previous match, named Singer.

The previous Singer that entered the competition was, of course, still lying in the maintenance hangar, far from being repaired in the brief hour provided.

Yet no participating faction would ever prepare just one mecha per type—a basic test of industrial capabilities required for any competing nation.

If the contestant ended up on the battlefield without a usable mecha... that country's defeat would be entirely predictable.

The mecha returned to the battlefield.

Two mechas, vastly different in size, moved slowly through a towering primeval jungle.

Even though both sides had advanced information on each other's vanguard positions, the fundamentals of concealment and scouting remained a head-to-head contest of skill.

An initial advantage from a single well-placed shot—even just one shot—could prove decisive.

Especially against a "Sentinel" model mecha with long-range sniping capabilities; the closer the encounter, the more significant the advantage gained.

The cautious exploration of teammates in the forest no doubt kept each Bauhinia soldier waiting in the rear on edge.

Based on the vanguard intelligence, this map's terrain inherently favored the "Sentinel" model mecha.

Their team had not chosen the countering aerial "Vanguard" model. If the opponent truly selected the "Sentinel" model, then the seeds of victory or defeat in this stealth phase of the search had already been planted, understandably raising concerns.

Yet, the things people worry about tend to unfold just as feared.

The audience, who could simultaneously see both sides' perspectives, watched as the red and blue markers representing the two mechas on the competition map slowly drew closer, their hearts racing.

It wasn't just the contestants who had vanguard intelligence and tactical analysts; some spectators outside also excelled in theoretical analysis.

The strengths and weaknesses of both sides' mecha selections had long been a hot topic displayed all over the live chat.

And now, it seemed the most concerning mecha choice scenario had indeed come to pass.

On a map most advantageous for long-range "Sentinel" model mechas, the enemy nation selected this model, while their own team seemed oblivious, advancing slowly through the forest as if entirely ignorant.

The enemy's "Sentinel" mecha advanced laterally for some distance before halting. It stood motionless like a spider weaving a web trap, quietly waiting for its prey to willingly step into the snare.

The stark contrast heightened anxiety over their own warrior's situation.

"Don't go—They've already set up a perfect sniping position!"

"What kind of decisions is their tactical analyst making? Isn't this obviously a sniper-favored terrain? Fine, being unfamiliar with the map in Match One was forgivable, but choosing 'All-around' for the second match—are they expecting the opponent to be mindlessly handing out free points?"

"Just stall them, don't go charging forward unnecessarily. On a map like this, 'Sentinel' needs to claim points to win. If they don't control the terrain, it's a loss for them too."

"How do you stall them? Let them calmly set up traps and deploy defensive gun emplacements to push forward?"

"Stop arguing! They're getting closer! Let's see if our player can respond!"

"..."

A frigid bullet emerged abruptly from deep shadows.

It tore through the air, carving a path of destruction, scattering endless fragments of leaves and broken branches.

Before catching sight of the enemy amidst the gloom of the forest, a single explosive armor-piercing round had already drilled fiercely into Singer's right arm.

Shattered steel fragments sprayed in all directions; only now did the mech pilot's expression turn to shock.

'Sniped!'

This was the first thought that surfaced in his mind.

'The damaged area is the left arm—the least critical for combat performance.'

'Judging by the impact force, the enemy is using the Thunder Dragon Empire's standard-issue weapon, Thunderbird. The Thunderbird's primary armament can fire every 2.7 seconds at its fastest. Two consecutive shots are required to penetrate the Class-A armor protecting the chest cavity.'

'Its attack power is not particularly strong, but the Thunderbird's defensive capabilities are above average. Engaging in long-range exchanges with it would put me at a disadvantage! Close combat is now completely off the table.'

Analyzing the incoming trajectory and assessing the impact damage instantly, the mech pilot formulated his next moves based on the available data.

'Boost the engine's power output, but only at decisive moments.'

'Discard all unnecessary weapon loads. Carry just a single alloy combat blade for close quarters—it will suffice!'

In the critical second he finalized his plan, numerous external weapon modules unlocked and were abandoned on the spot.

Many mid-range and short-range heat-based weapons were resolutely discarded as well, leaving only small-scale bombardment missiles capable of inflicting mild disruption at mid-to-long range for deployment at a pivotal moment.

'Charge!'

Through mental control, a volley of decoy flares erupted instantly around him, their dazzling light blinding vision sensors while guiding interference missile radars astray, granting Singer a shroud for its advance.

The one-armed mecha burst forward, emerging from the blinding light in a fearless dash toward its foe.

Then came another shot...

"Boom!"

From the icy void beyond the falling leaves, the barrel's tunnel exuded a chilling menace.

Just as Singer broke from the flares and interference, another shot from the heavy weapon struck. The already-damaged left arm shattered completely on impact...

Chapter 908: Strange Choices

After losing the balance of its left arm, the Mecha's movement speed visibly slowed down.

When faced with an opponent already possessing superior skills, such a weakness was undoubtedly a death sentence for the Mecha.

"Boom!"

"Boom!"

The terrifying weapon, capable of inflicting effective damage even on the defensive armor of large warships used in interstellar warfare, easily pierced through the Mecha's body.

The evasive maneuvers during the sudden directional shifts completely failed to help its pilot dodge any of the incoming blasts.

"Bang!"

The left leg.

"Bang!"

The right leg.

The fragmented Mecha structure, though not entirely severed, was heavily deformed. While still able to move, doing so had become an arduous struggle.

The opponent clearly intended to humiliate.

Even when the Singer Mecha was almost entirely immobilized, they refrained from targeting critical points to deliver a decisive, match-ending blow.

After several sniper shots, the Thunder Dragon Empire's Mecha stood up from its concealed position from afar, looking down loftily at the limping and grotesque Mecha, which was inching closer with its twisted steps.

Its remaining right hand persistently gripped a battle blade that gleamed coldly.

The Vanguard Mecha extended its right hand forward, gave a thumbs-up, then flipped it downward.

The voice of the Mecha's external speaker echoed mockingly over the primeval jungle, "Just because you got lucky once, did you actually think you could beat us?"

The Singer said nothing, only advancing silently.

At this moment, even without further gunfire from the opponent, the jungle itself, brimming with vines and thorns, became the Singer's greatest obstacle.

However, just as it stumbled upon a vine, a spinning battle blade suddenly whizzed through the air with a piercing swoosh, launching toward the Vanguard Mecha during its moment of mockery.

"Shhkk!"

The completely unprepared Vanguard Mecha failed to dodge, taking the full brunt of the blade head-on.

However, the battle blade, even infused with all the power the Singer Mecha had left, couldn't easily penetrate the intact frontal defenses of any Mecha.

The blade merely lodged itself at an angle between the gaps in the Mecha's structure, unable to go any deeper.

An attack that was clearly premeditated could only amount to this level of resistance.

The Vanguard pilot, evidently shaken and feeling disgraced, raised his rifle, aiming it at the Singer Mecha, which was struggling to rise again from the ground.

"Boom!"

"Boom!"

He fired shot after shot, unwilling to stop until the Mecha was completely obliterated.

From within the drop pod, Catherine immediately called for a halt to this senseless, one-sided slaughter.

"We forfeit!"

The team leader outside the arena had the authority to forfeit on behalf of their team members.

After several confirmations, the opposing Vanguard Mecha pilot clearly received warnings from the Competition Committee.

Reluctantly, the raised rifle was lowered. The Mecha's gaze lingered on the Singer Mecha, filled with an undeniable sense of unwillingness.

"Victor—Thunder Dragon Empire."

The soldier inside the cockpit was escorted back by the medical team.

Fortunately, the final few shots, due to the Mecha's fallen position, could not directly strike the cockpit. The cockpit itself remained undamaged, and the pilot inside sustained no serious injuries, apart from some mental strain caused by the high synchronization with the Mecha.

"I'm sorry... I brought shame to our nation." The returning pilot, facing the gaze of his teammates, lowered his head in deep shame.

"You did very well." Catherine gave him a faint smile.

"Yeah... When did you practice that flying blade technique? That throw of yours was really impressive!"

"It's just that our weapon wasn't up to the mark. Next time, we'll have the research department craft you a proper blade. Next time you see that guy again, you'll take his head off in one strike!"

After offering a few words of comfort to their teammate, the team fell into renewed worry over the upcoming matches.

"Now what on earth should we do..."

"I can't believe they had the guts to pick a high-risk fighter like the Vanguard for a one-on-one duel!"

"What's our next step?"

Their voices were filled with uncertainty, and many turned their eyes toward Catherine, who had been quietly sitting in the corner.

As the team leader, her strength and expertise were undoubtedly the most reliable among them.

It was in moments of crisis that she served as the team's guiding anchor.

Yet their anchor showed no interest in concerning herself with such trivialities at the moment.

"This is your test." Catherine shook her head, refusing to offer any insight.

The team's spirits sank involuntarily. Their downcast gazes swept inadvertently toward the silent figure beside Catherine.

One glance, and their dismay deepened.

As if the challenge wasn't tough enough, they still had to carry along this "connected insider" as deadweight.

Exchanging glances, the team's faint sorrow gradually transformed into a burning resolve.

Difficult or not, so what? They entered this competition for their country, prepared to fight with all they had!

Glory?

What does glory even mean?

Only a strong nation can bask in glory.

They were here to fight for their lives!

"I'll take the next match!"

A man with delicate features stood up. "I'm the best at air battles here. If they send their Vanguard, I'll go head-to-head with them. If they send an aerial combat Specialist... it's not like we can't take them on!"

After a brief rest, the third battle unfolded before everyone's eyes.

Yet when the citizens of Bauhinia saw the sleek and birdlike Mecha from the Thunder Dragon Empire on their screens, they collectively broke down.

"What's this nonsense?! They've completely seen through our tactics!"

"The advantage we gained in the first match has been entirely squandered. The Mechas we used in these last two rounds were so weak; the loss wasn't about the pilots at all."

Chapter 909: Strange Choice\_2

"It's not a fault of war! What on earth is their team leader thinking?!"

"Could he be a traitor sent by the enemy?"

"Don't think like that. I still believe in the integrity of our nation's people. Maybe he's just... plain stupid?"

As all the spectators predicted, the Sentinel Model Mecha—which wasn't particularly swift—could only fire twice before the agile Air Combat Vanguard closed in effortlessly with their nimble maneuvers.

Facing the Air Combat Vanguard equipped with two High-Frequency Cutting Daggers, the Sentinel Mecha—lacking any close combat weapon—once again fell into a position where it was utterly toyed with.

"Winner—Thunder Dragon Empire."

Fourth match: Sentinel versus Omnipotent.

"Winner—Thunder Dragon Empire."

Fifth match: Omnipotent versus Omnipotent.

Winner...

Staring at the two mechas on the field, both of which had sustained considerable damage, some members of the Bauhinia Battle Team had a faint glimmer of hope in their eyes.

'Can we win?'

"By the looks of it, unlikely."

"Though both are damaged, it's obvious our pilot is at a greater disadvantage. The situation is firmly in the enemy's hands; it's just a matter of when they choose to strike the decisive blow."

Starting from the second match, Bauhinia's pilots had been subjected to one-sided thrashings in nearly every fight.

Especially in the fourth match, where the Sentinel—despite leveraging the map's tactical advantage—was brutally pierced and killed by the enemy's Omnipotent Mecha.

That round nearly crushed the fighting spirit of every Bauhinia citizen.

Now in the fifth match, with the same mecha types on both sides, the ongoing situation suggested that their odds of victory remained slim.

Watching the Thunder Dragon Empire's mecha slowly raise its right arm, wielding a blade, everyone sensed the final decisive moment drawn close, as if the murderous intent was seeping through the screens.

Could Bauhinia's warrior withstand this ultimate killing blow?

Bauhinia's Omnipotent Mecha, Singer, looked equally battered.

Its left arm and chest plating bore blackened impact marks and warped dents, while its right arm—the one holding its blade—was slightly better off. But the entire system was clearly on the verge of collapse.

Yet, behind the iron shell, those determined eyes remained unwavering.

"Boom!"

The engines roared as the two mechas launched their simultaneous charges.

Stationary defense was never the correct strategy in mecha battles—movement unlocked a mecha's potential advantages.

"Clang clang clang clang clang!"

The clash of blades echoed amidst the fallen giant trees, and a detached metallic arm amidst the endless shredded leaves stood out starkly.

The distinct features of the arm instantly told all spectators whose structure it belonged to.

'Bauhinia's warrior... defeated...'

"Slash!"

With the piercing sound of a blade scraping metal, the battlefield finally fell silent.

"Winner—None."

Draw!

As the strikes ceased, distant cameras edged closer through the gaps of the towering, primal forest.

Amidst the ravaged landscape, the two mechas lay in near-embrace postures, dealing their final blow to each other like desperate swans.

The Bauhinia warrior had practically offered the location of their cockpit to the enemy's blade tip, gaining the opportunity for that one last strike.

The result? Mutual destruction.

But personally, the Bauhinia warrior's cockpit was completely pierced, while the Thunder Dragon Empire's mecha was merely disabled by a hit to its power core.

"Rescue!"

Even those who had long harbored resentment against Bauhinia couldn't help but show traces of admiration in their eyes as they watched the shocking scene.

"What a resilient nation..."

"To achieve their country's rise, their spirit was hardened to such extremes."

"That's precisely why they mustn't be allowed to rise! This is a nation carved out from blood and fire, where the unyielding morale of its citizens continuously inspires every one of them. If given the chance, they might soon become a top-tier power surpassing our alliance of nations."

Every newly joined cosmic treaty nation undergoes a rapid rise stage. When Bauhinia missed their chance back then, they swore they'd never let newcomers surpass them.

"Fortunately, a country's destiny never rests upon ordinary individuals..."

"No matter the outcome of this match, Bauhinia's fate is already sealed."

"Let's enjoy their final struggles... it's not without entertainment value."

Witnessing the elegy of a nation full of vitality yet destined for ruin has undoubtedly become one of the galaxy's rarest forms of top-tier entertainment.

"Let's see how far they can go."

...

"Next round, the two-person team match—I'm in." Upon learning that the fifth-match teammate had been rescued, sustaining only minor repairable injuries, Catherine finally opened her eyes and declared with a deep voice.

The double and triple team matches were worth two points each, but the influence of a Legendary Mechanic was undeniably more pronounced in a two-person match.

As Bauhinia's sole publicly recognized Legendary Mechanic, her participation almost guaranteed victory for the two-person match.

Even if the enemy anticipated her participation and countered her directly, the presence of Bai E in the three-person team match would secure a win regardless of the outcome.

By securing a victory in the single-player rounds, Catherine was nearly certain of an eventual win in the upcoming matches.

The only concern lingering in her mind was concealing Bai E as her trump card for as long as possible.

The later he appeared, the fewer tactical options her rivals would have to counter him.

She wasn't arrogant enough to dream about clinching the Stellar District championship outright.

Bauhinia had been fortunate to recruit one Legendary Mechanic; other nations were undoubtedly capable of striking similar gold with powerful external allies.

The stronger and more enigmatic a trump card, the more pivotal its reveal becomes in the decisive moments.

Fortunately, whether the enemy expected Catherine's move in the two-person match or not, they clearly had no intention of meeting her head-on.

The mysterious Thunder Dragon Empire Legendary Mechanic never showed their hand, allowing Catherine's team in the first two-person match to utterly crush the opponent with an overpowering sweep.

Only during the second triple-team match did the situation briefly hit a stalemate.

Leading Bauhinia's triple-team lineup was Victor with the Omnipotent Mecha, teamed with the Flying General and Mountain Foothills for a well-rounded squad composition. However, the enemy merely swapped the Mountain Foothills with an Omnipotent Mecha, resulting in minimal tactical imbalances.

In such triple-team scenarios, differences in individual pilot skill were less pronounced, forcing both sides to cautiously probe for openings.

Watching this unfold, Catherine's brows furrowed tightly into the shape of a "川."

"Where's their Legendary Mechanic?"

Even though, score-wise, Bauhinia securing this triple-team win wouldn't clinch the final victory.

But still refraining from stepping forward? That seemed unnecessarily reckless.

Considering the potential external allies either side might recruit, could they really be this confident in securing victory against Catherine's led Bauhinia team in the final five-person match?

At a point when their absence might waste the opportunity for anyone to appear in two matches, how could they dismiss the slim possibility of a tied result?

What if this triple-team's outcome indeed became the deciding factor triggering a miracle reversal?

Regardless, the outcome of this heated triple-team no longer held any immediate significance for Catherine.

Securing the next five-person team victory was now the priority.

She turned to Bai E, "Prepare yourself; for the five-person team match, you'll be on."

Bai E chuckled and replied, "Alright."

"But perhaps you'll need to assess the situation before deciding whether to go all-out. You get what I mean? I'll coordinate with you depending on how the battle unfolds."

Concealing strength, huh?

Bai E utterly understood, "No problem."

"By the way, which mecha type will you use?"

"Flying General, I suppose."

Bai E stared at the battle footage on the screen with evident interest.

What could be a better choice for stealthy minimal effort than a long-range shooter?

"You... sure?" Catherine questioned skeptically.

Hiding his abilities wasn't meant to imply actual incompetence.

Using Omnipotent or Vanguard mechas she could accept; but a Sentinel Model Mecha? Not even her skills could unleash a Legendary Mechanic's full potential in a purely defensive unit.

If circumstances truly demanded Bai E to make a decisive comeback, could he achieve it using a Flying General?

Chapter 910: Legendary Mechanics Gather

However, something strange happened.

Despite the Bauhinia Republic's thorough preparations, the Thunder Dragon Empire's five-member team tournament failed to showcase much hidden strength.

Catherine's familiar old rival didn't show up. Without a Legendary Mechanic leading the team, the small group was like slightly resistant rats before Catherine's spearheaded Bauhinia Squad, scattering at the first charge.

A group of slightly stronger frontline mech pilots found it difficult to gain an advantage against a team led by a Legendary Mechanic and composed of second-line mech pilots.

As a result, Bai E practically had no room for action in the entire match, only firing two sloppy stray shots from a distance, as if trying to hit a bird. The team won easily.

Even after victory, Catherine still looked puzzled as she left the field.

The biggest question was...

"Where's Remington?"

As Thunder Dragon Empire's strongest mech pilot, he had always been her greatest adversary when facing the empire.

His age was not an issue like her mentor's, who had long exceeded the maximum competition age. In matters of national importance, if necessary, someone like him would have no excuses not to participate.

So, where did he go?

After that peculiar victory, she felt no joy in her triumph.

All she felt was perplexed by the haze surrounding the situation.

Conversely, the unsuspecting Bauhinia Republic audience was thoroughly elated after witnessing the victory of the first battle.

"We won!"

"We really won!"

"It's just Thunder Dragon Empire! Let's see if they dare to act so arrogant in front of us again!"

Yet, this exhilarating mood didn't last long online. Soon, everyone was dumbfounded by the progression of the upcoming matches.

"The next opponent is... Blood Cry Empire."

The unexpected matchup almost reignited the fervor of Bauhinia's citizens.

"What's going on? Can we even catch a break?"

"First we face Thunder Dragon, now it's Blood Cry. Are we going to fight Thousand Stars Commerce Alliance next?"

"Corruption! There's definitely corruption! This arrangement is completely designed to stop us from advancing!"

"Calm down, everyone! It's just Blood Cry. We've already beaten Thunder Dragon, so what can Blood Cry do?"

"What do you know? Do you think a win against Thunder Dragon can be repeated?"

It was a well-known fact among the informed that both Thunder Dragon and Blood Cry had Legendary Mechanic pilots.

In the recent victory over Thunder Dragon Empire, it was clear their Legendary Mechanic hadn't participated for unknown reasons.

If such luck wouldn't hold for the match against Blood Cry Empire, no one could predict the outcome.

Meanwhile, in a brightly lit conference room, a furious middle-aged man was venting his anger without restraint.

"They said it was for the summit, sending all our pilots to you, and look what happened now. We couldn't even beat that tiny Bauhinia Republic. Look at how our citizens are cursing us now!"

"Even if Remington wasn't sent away, you might not have been Bauhinia's match. Don't forget, they still have a mysterious mech pilot who has yet to make an appearance."

"That guy called Bai E? Who knows if it's even him?"

"Besides, wasn't his name listed in that five-member team match earlier? Yet apart from Catherine's performance, we didn't see anything noteworthy from their squad either."

"None of that matters!" The furious middle-aged man dismisses the sarcastic remarks from the others in the Peak Alliance, demanding a definitive explanation.

"This defeat tarnished our nation's prestige. Someone has to present tangible compensation!"

"Alright, alright." The portly man with a constant smile intervenes, putting an end to the demand for reparations. "This Star Alliance conflict is ultimately for the sake of our entire Stellar District, but as it is being conducted under the name of our Thousand Stars Commerce Alliance, competing on the cosmic stage with those core nations, we understand Thunder Dragon Empire's slight loss of face here. Let's propose this: once we secure the District's championship and qualify as official members of the Universal Tournament, the spoils from annexing Bauhinia Republic will be prioritized for Thunder Dragon Empire's share. Additionally, the Fragment will also be yours for initial development."

Dividing a small nation like Bauhinia was merely a supplement, but the allure of being the first to develop the God fragment was overwhelmingly tantalizing.

Even as allies, each party had their own calculations.

Just like the recent consolidation of Legendary Mechanics—if Thousand Stars Commerce Alliance didn't already possess two Legendary Mechanics, plus managing to recruit another, holding an unequivocal dominant position in the alliance and investing a significant fortune in the plan, no one would have agreed to pooling their resources.

These were Legendary Mechanic pilots painstakingly nurtured with the collective strength of their empires. Just giving them away wasn't something anyone did lightly.

What if Thousand Stars Commerce Alliance didn't return them later? What if their Legendary Mechanics were coaxed into full allegiance under Thousand Stars Commerce Alliance's influence?

The only power that was truly reliable was one under one's own control.

If groundbreaking advancements were achieved while developing the God fragment, they certainly wouldn't share them fully with Thousand Stars Commerce Alliance.

In this universe, trust was nonexistent.

Nearby, another sinister-faced man expressed dissatisfaction upon hearing this. "What's this now? Thunder Dragon lent their pilots, and we didn't? That second battle against Bauhinia Republic was orchestrated by us voluntarily. To expose that mysterious mech pilot, we even dispatched our most promising warrior. If anything goes wrong during the competition, that's the potential future Legendary Mechanic at stake!"

Immediately, someone scoffs, "Oh, so you do understand that's the future, huh? Trying to cash in on future potential now? Isn't that shameless?"

"Go to hell!"

Just as the situation seemed on the verge of chaos, the ever-smiling, portly man diffused the tension promptly. "Come now~ everyone's contribution to the summit is important. We're all equally valued here. Alright, how about this: once Bauhinia is in our hands, their two Legendary Mechanics will be split among you."

"Fine!"

"It's a deal!"

The Universal Tournament was a gamble.

If they could secure enough immediate benefits, there was no desire to face off against those dominant central cosmic powers.

The most important thing in life was self-awareness, and the same applied to nations...

With the backstage interests divided, the behind-the-scenes orchestrators finally settled back into calm observation of the matches unfolding on the field.

As for whether Bauhinia, destined to face off against all powerful nations in the Stellar District, could even reach the Thousand Stars Commerce Alliance's star-filled lineup, they were deeply curious.