

Crossing 171

Chapter 171: I Want to Live!

The opponent's hand unerringly grasped hold of Ling Lan's right hand which was stabbing towards him, a savage smile appearing on his lips.

It's a trap! Ling Lan realised instantly that the other's unstable aura and his frenzied wailing had all been a sham — all for the sake of getting her to attack!

A piercing glint flashed through Ling Lan's eyes. Regardless of whether the other had done this intentionally or not, at this moment, there was no longer any possibility of a sneak attack.

Defenceless, an unexpected spiritual charge could indeed cause a target to lose control of their actions for a brief second, allowing her to carry off a one-hit kill. However, once the opponent had their guard up, then a spiritual charge, which was not very strong, would not be able to cause the opponent to lose control. Consecutive assassinations had thoroughly raised her opponents' guard, which was also why Ling Lan had chosen to use a spiritual blast instead of a spiritual charge when she had killed Xiao Fei.

Thus, for this attack, she had had no choice but to try her luck in a direct confrontation. She only hoped that she could at least deal heavy damage to the opponent, if she could not kill him, before the team leader arrived, so he would be unable to continue fighting.

Although Ling Lan's right hand was in the opponent's grip, she reacted extremely quickly. Her left hand abruptly swept towards the other's neck, and at the tips of her fingers, an extremely small and thin ice needle was revealed. Against an opponent at the same level of Qi-Jin, even an ice needle, which did not look that sturdy, could give the opponent a fatal wound.

His brief but full-on contact with Ling Lan let Xiao Chong know that this seemingly 13 year old youth before him was actually at a similar level of strength as him. He was also a Qi-Jin level combat expert. Thus, Xiao Chong did not dare to take any risks. With a forceful spring of his legs, he dodged that glittering, cold ice needle of the opponent. But in doing so, his right hand had no choice but to let go of Ling Lan.

He thought that the opponent would take the chance to escape — most assassins who were proficient in the various methods of assassination would choose to distance themselves immediately if their attempt failed. Thus, right after he dodged the other's ice needle, he came to an abrupt stop, aiming to stop the other when he tried to escape.

Regaining free use of her right hand, Ling Lan did not run away as he expected; instead, she chose to get even closer, throwing out a fierce elbow in his direction.

Because Xiao Chong had chosen to stop, he had no room at all to dodge again. He had no choice but to cross his arms and forcefully take the opponent's blow.

An audible thud! Both sides had used their full strength — when the two hidden forces collided, loud explosions could be heard. As Xiao Chong had blocked Ling Lan's attack in a hurry, his Qi had not been as substantial as Ling Lan's. Xiao Chong felt his feet become unsteady, and stumbled back three

consecutive steps before the force he had received faded. Even so, he felt a heaviness in his chest as his Qi roiled, and he almost threw up a mouthful of blood.

During the collision, Ling Lan's face drained of its colour. However, she had indisputably won the upper hand in this encounter. So, pressing her advantage, she closed the gap as the other retreated, once again getting up close and personal.

"Godd*mmmit!" Xiao Chong had yet to find his footing when he saw the opponent attacking once more. Swearing loudly, he did not choose to dodge this time, but instead clenched his fists and struck out fiercely at the opponent. He just knew that offense was the best defense — otherwise, he would forever be passively defending against the other's attacks, completely losing the chance to fight back.

Ling Lan saw the opponent's fist coming at her, but did not evade it. Instead, she used her left hand to intercept the opponent's punch, and then, her right fist swung out ...

A flash of joy passed through Xiao Chong's gaze. Similarly, his left hand intercepted Ling Lan's fist, and the two of them were instantly in a deadlock. Undoubtedly, Ling Lan's choice this time was advantageous to Xiao Chong. From his initial passive disadvantaged position, he had now risen to be on equal footing with Ling Lan again.

Right then, Ling Lan's entire body leaned backwards, and a trace of a smirk played on the corners of her lips ...

"Not good!" Warning bells began to ring in Xiao Chong's heart. Without having to think about it, he retreated swiftly, trying to dodge the threat.

But it was already too late — he felt a heavy force striking his abdomen, and then he was sent flying backwards. In mid-air, a mouthful of blood sprayed from his mouth. Ling Lan had used the move she was extremely proficient in by now — Rabbit Sky Leap. Now, her Rabbit Sky Leap no longer had a mere strength increase of 3 times, but 7.

Rabbit Sky Leap was definitely a great skill; its power was formidable and it was extremely subtle. Unfortunately, this skill could not be used consecutively. Because the recoil from executing the Rabbit Sky Leap was too strong, Ling Lan's body could not take the repeated battering of this force. She needed some time to recover before using it again, otherwise it would be too easy for Ling Lan's legs to become permanently damaged.

Even though Xiao Chong had already achieved the late stage of Qi-Jin, bearing the full measure of this powerful kicking force, he was still injured badly.

About to hit the ground, Ling Lan twisted to one side and slapped her right hand against the ground to push herself upright again, once again flying towards Xiao Chong. She swung a long readied fist.

Subtle vibrations could be seen running through Ling Lan's right arm, being transmitted to her fist. This was a combat special skill she had redeemed with honour points from the learning space early on — Wave Stacking Strike!

Wave Stacking Strike stacked the body's hidden force layer by layer onto one's fist. From just 2 layers at the start, Ling Lan could now stack up to 6 layers, which meant that she could attack a target with up to 6 times her normal Qi-Jin.

Ling Lan knew very well that a woman's physical strength was naturally weaker than a man's — to become strong in her own right, besides needing to make sure her combat skills were better than her competitors, she similarly could not lose in terms of strength to those men. In order to make up for this natural deficit, in choosing her techniques, she leant towards those skills which involved power stacking. This was a reason why she had redeemed the Wave Stacking Strike from the learning space.

Xiao Chong saw the opponent's fist hurtling towards him and he grimaced. In the air, he had no way to change directions and dodge, and so could only take the blow. With a shout, he threw out his own fist, prepared to duke it out with Ling Lan.

A loud "Boom!" The two Qi-Jins crashed into one another and the energy swept outwards in a ring. The surrounding trees could not take this powerful force; they all began to lean towards the outside, and a countless number just broke apart under the pressure to fly out.

"Wah!" In mid-air, Xiao Chong once again spewed a lance of blood. He was thrown backwards at a speed greater than before. Only when he slammed violently into a large tree did his body stop moving.

He slowly slid down the tree trunk to kneel on the ground! Meanwhile, the tree he had slammed into had clear cracks spreading out on its bark where he had landed — it was obvious how forcefully he had slammed into it.

In the meeting of the two fists, although Ling Lan had the initiative as well as the support of the Wave Stacking Strike, she still sustained damage. Being thrown backwards, she stumbled two or three steps back and threw up a mouthful of blood. Only then did the roiling of her blood and Qi settle down enough for her to suppress her discomfort.

"Gotta take your life while you're down!" Seeing the opponent already at a critically injured state, only lacking one final blow to end things, Ling Lan showed no mercy. She stepped forwards once more, pouncing like an arrow at the opponent, throwing a palm out at the same time. The moment she finished off the opponent, Ling Lan would once again conceal herself and lay low to wait for her final opponent, the team leader!

Just as Ling Lan stuck out her palm, her heart throbbed abruptly, a never before encountered sense of danger stealing into her mind ... unknowingly, heaven knows when, a thin layer of fog had drifted to her side.

"Not good! He's here!" Alarm bells rang in Ling Lan's mind. Her palm abruptly changed directions to strike at the ground, and using that rebound, she retreated with a backflip. Then, as planned, her legs stomped firmly on the ground, sending her body flying at lightspeed into the distance, instantly disappearing from the area.

Ling Lan who had flown over 100 metres away in an instant suddenly felt her body being struck forcefully. Blood sprayed from her mouth, and her body plummeted uncontrollably to crash heavily into the ground.

At this moment, behind Ling Lan, a plume of thick fog appeared. Then, a figure emerged from within it — it was the missing team leader.

“Who knew that in just 5 minutes, you managed to kill Xiao Lin and Xiao Fei. Even Xiao Chong almost could not escape your lethal grasp,” said the team leader, expression frigid, “You are indeed a dangerous character.”

Ling Lan’s internal Qi-Jin had been scattered by that last strike. Right now, her limbs were lifeless, but she did not want to give up. So, she slowly forced herself to climb off the ground and stand up straight. Using the back of a hand to wipe away the blood stains at the corner of her mouth, she said bitterly, “A Domain fighter!” Although the opponent had just entered the Domain stage, this difference of one stage made Ling Lan unable to bear even one attack from the other. “Your luck is truly great, actually having a breakthrough on site.”

This also explained why the other had taken up to 5 minutes to come. It was likely that the opponent had been in the middle of his breakthrough in this time, and so could not rush over.

“This is still thanks to you, otherwise I would not have been able to find the catalyst to breakthrough,” huffed the team leader. The death of his comrades caused him to be unbearably agonised, leading his already peak Qi-Jin to quake violently, coincidentally causing cracks to appear on the shackled barrier on his development. Initially, he was thinking to finish off the other before finding a place to focus on his breakthrough, but unexpectedly, when he activated his innate talent, he found himself already deep in the process of breakthrough. This made him have no choice but to continue with his breakthrough, which was why he was delayed by 5 minutes, causing him to lose two more comrades. The joy of breaking through could not make up for the pain of losing a comrade — this was why his hate for Ling Lan ran even deeper.

He did not give Ling Lan any chance to continue talking. With a quick flash, he had appeared in front of Ling Lan and was reaching out towards Ling Lan’s neck.

Ling Lan tried to dodge the other’s hand, but found her body pinned in place by an invisible force, sealing away her ability to move. She could only watch helplessly as the opponent easily wrapped his fingers around her neck.

The team leader effortlessly carried Ling Lan by the neck as he headed back to where Xiao Chong was. The opponent’s strength almost suffocated Ling Lan to death. Although she did not know why the opponent did not just kill her directly, the desire to continue living made Ling Lan secretly run through her Qi exercises, hoping to recover her Qi-Jin quicker and win an opportunity to live.

The team leader very quickly arrived back where Xiao Chong lay. He threw Ling Lan to one side and bent over to check on Xiao Chong’s condition. Only then did he let out a breath of relief. Although Xiao Chong’s injuries were severe, he wasn’t dead, and so could be considered lucky. He took out a tube of medicinal agent from the bag at his waist and fed it to Xiao Chong.

Very quickly, Xiao Chong regained consciousness. Seeing his leader, his eyes turned red and he said, “Leader, Xiao Lin and Xiao Fei are dead.” They had been their comrades! On the battlefield, they had not died at the hands of enemy soldiers, but lost their lives here in a common mission to a child ... Xiao Chong found this hard to accept.

With similarly red eyes, the team leader glanced at the bodies of Xiao Lin and Xiao Fei lying not too far away and said quietly, “Xiao Chong, I’m sorry. I still came late in the end.”

Xiao Chong shakily shook his head, "You can't be blamed, Leader, that bastard is just too despicable!" That said, his expression shifted and he asked, panicked, "Where's the bastard?"

The leader threw a glance at the immobile Ling Lan sitting to one side and said coldly, "I caught him. In a bit, we'll use his blood to honour our fallen comrades."

Hearing this, Xiao Chong nodded his head vigorously. He pushed himself to his feet and slowly made his way to stand before Ling Lan. Grabbing her roughly by the throat, he dragged her to the place where Xiao Lin's and Xiao Fei's bodies lay.

Meanwhile, the team leader took the time to bring the body of Xiao Lai over from his place of death, setting him down together with Xiao Lin and Xiao Fei.

"Xiao Lin, Xiao Fei, Xiao Lai, watch carefully, this is the culprit who killed you all. Now, I will send him over to your world ... you all must take proper revenge." As the team leader spoke, silent tears began to fall from his eyes. What he had originally considered a simple and minor mission, had actually ended up with him being separated from his brothers by the boundaries of life and death. In his deep regret, he also hated Ling Lan for his viciousness. He abruptly turned his head and said stonily, "Xiao Chong, kill him!"

"Yes, Leader!" Xiao Chong's visage was gruesome as his fingers on Ling Lan's throat clenched forcefully.

Ling Lan felt as if she could hear the bones of her neck straining under the pressure, about to shatter ... was she really about to die here?

Ling Lan wanted to struggle, she wanted to resist ... but her body was still locked tightly, unable to make any motion to resist. Ling Lan knew that this was probably a manifestation of the opponent's Domain — the opponent was not going to give her any chance to escape.

*D*mmmit! I want to live, I want to live!* Right before Ling Lan descended into unconsciousness, she roared in her heart!

Chapter 172: Domain Stage?

"Die!" Xiao Chong bellowed, his fingers moving to crush the opponent's throat. But suddenly, he felt his fingers go weak, his entire body feeling somewhat numb and cold. He almost lost his grip on the opponent's neck — fortunately, the opponent was already powerless and unable to struggle, otherwise he might very likely have let the opponent escape.

Could it be that his previous internal injury had affected him? Xiao Chong had just begun to puzzle over the issue when all his confusion was driven away by a wrenching pain in his chest.

He instinctively looked down and was immediately petrified. The first thing he saw was a fair and soft-looking little hand, and in it was a strong-looking heart, still beating ... whose heart was it?

Immediately after, his entire face twisted in shock and fear, because he saw that a bloody hole had appeared on his chest. Right then, fresh blood was gushing out from the hole — not only staining his own clothes, but also painting the plot of land he stood on in red ... Meanwhile, the small figure standing

before him remained spotless. Before any blood could spray onto the other, it would be repelled, as if there was some sphere protecting him.

Xiao Chong's vision once more returned to the heart in that little hand, and his mouth was unbearably dry and bitter. So that vigorous thing was his heart? When had his heart been pulled out from inside his body? And he hadn't felt anything when it happened?

At that moment, another fair and soft-looking little hand touched his wrist and gently pushed his hand away. Only then did Xiao Chong notice that he wasn't gripping onto the other's throat at all. There had been a distance of several millimetres between his fingers and the opponent's throat ... he just had not realised it.

After the little hand pushed away his fingers, it lightly patted his cheek. The initially icy and youthful little face of his opponent actually shifted into a smile. The smile was sweet and lovely, making Xiao Chong feel as if he had seen the sun, blindingly radiant yet so warm that people yearned for it.

"You can die now!" However, what followed the warmth of the sun was only cruel reality.

When this merciless murmur was delivered from behind this beautiful smile, Xiao Chong heard a 'splat', as if something had been crushed. He instinctively looked towards the sound, and then found his entire body gripped by wrenching pain, and his life quickly slipped away.

It turned out that his heart had been crushed by that little hand. He even saw the opponent's fingers pinch and rub it tastelessly for a bit before throwing away the shredded meat with a flick. The opponent's hand then immediately returned to its original pristine condition, not even a speck of blood on it, as if its crushing of the heart had all been in Xiao Chong's mind.

Even scarier was the fact that although the opponent had obviously been committing a horrifying and disgusting thing, the opponent seemed to see it as normal. In his gaze were traces of mockery, taunting, and curiosity — but there was no discomfort or disgust whatsoever, as if the other had long become used to doing such things.

This sort of carefree attitude in playing around with others' lives made Xiao Chong feel as if he had been plunged into icy water, his entire body turning cold ... a demon, he was most definitely a demon!

"Leader ..." Arduously, Xiao Chong turned his head to look towards his team leader standing at the left to the front of him, as if trying to warn his leader that a demon had come.

Domain stage combat experts were extremely sensitive to being watched. The team leader quickly turned his head and saw Xiao Chong's gruesome and tortured expression. His expression shifted and he swiftly retreated, pulling a distance away from Ling Lan and Xiao Chong. It wasn't that he did not want to save Xiao Chong, but Xiao Chong's gaze was clearly telling him to run. This made the team leader have no choice but to be cautious and try to figure out the situation before making a decision.

As he pulled away from the two, he could finally see Xiao Chong's condition. Both of Xiao Chong's eyes had turned greyish white, utterly dead and lifeless — he had used up the last of his life to warn his team leader.

The leader's eyes became awash with red, a dark rage sweeping briefly across his face, "Godd*mn, you actually managed to break the bindings of my Domain?"

To prevent any accidents, he had specially used his Domain ability to fully seal Ling Lan's movements, guaranteeing no chance of failure. Who knew he had still underestimated Ling Lan in the end. The opponent had actually managed to break his binding and even kill off his only remaining team member Xiao Chong right before his eyes. This caused him to be both livid and extremely regretful at the same time — he should have just killed the other immediately when he had first caught him, and not brought him back here.

Still smiling radiantly, Ling Lan prodded Xiao Chong who was in front of her with a finger, and then, with a thud, Xiao Chong's stocky body crashed onto the ground.

Only then did the team leader see the cause of Xiao Chong's death. There was a large hole in his chest, blood still flowing from it, and the team leader could also see the mangled bloody flesh on the ground near it. His entire face twisted up, and he cried out, "You're vicious!"

Hearing this, Ling Lan lightly wagged a finger in front of her and said with a grin, "Tsk, tsk, tsk, you're wrong. This is not being vicious, but creating a masterpiece. Look at his lovely expression ... normally, you won't ever see such a lovely expression." Ling Lan's smile grew wider. "You should thank me, for letting you see such a rare visage."

"Demon!" howled the team leader, "I'll definitely kill you!" Even as the team leader was filled with hate for Ling Lan, he hated himself for not just killing off this evil demon straightaway back then.

"Kill me? Can you kill me?" Ling Lan laughed and shook her head. The opponent's ignorant words were somewhat hilarious from her perspective. Her force of presence abruptly rose significantly, a terrifying and immense wave of pressure descending upon this little forest. The team leader's face fell and he could not help but exclaim, "Domain stage!"

The team leader's words had barely faded when he shook his head emphatically, face filled with disbelief. "This is impossible. He can't have jumped levels to advance into Domain stage. It's not true, this is definitely a lie ..." He tried to convince himself that what he felt from the other's terrifying presence earlier on was just an illusion.

Frankly, the team leader had reason to doubt what he felt. The further one progressed, the more crucial it became to take things a step at a time. In particular, after entering the Refinement stage, every increase in level was built on the accumulation of one's foundations. It was extremely rare for a cross-level advancement to occur, especially for the Qi-Jin stage, where every increase in level needed the accumulation of years of hard work. Take the leader for example, he had been stuck at the optimal peak level of Qi-Jin for a whole 10 years. Although the Domain stage was just a small step away, he had just never found the right catalyst.

If his comrades had not died silently one after another before him, causing his emotions to churn and destabilize his internal energy, which unexpectedly then led to the catalyst of his advancement, he might have lingered on the optimal peak level of Qi-Jin for god knows how many more years ...

His advancement had had a certain element of serendipity to it. Still, it wasn't strange — after all, he had already been at the optimal peak level of Qi-Jin; advancement was the natural and logical next step. However, this was not the case for the opponent. When he had exchanged that one move with the opponent, he had learned that the other had already achieved the peak level of Qi-Jin, but was still two

ranks away from achieving the optimal peak level. These simple two minor ranks were impossible to overcome without 3 to 5 years of effort — how had he jumped straight into Domain stage in one leap?

Besides that, the Domain aura coming from the opponent was clearly thicker and more substantial than his, just as if the opponent had already entered Domain stage for many years. This was not something an expert who had just entered Domain stage should have — this was completely illogical!

“It wasn’t easy to cultivate such a little abnormality, and it was almost ruined at your hands. Just thinking of this, my mood is just terrible. I am not happy at all.” Although Ling Lan was saying that she wasn’t happy, the smile on her face did not dim in the slightest, instead becoming increasingly brighter. But it was precisely this radiant sunny smile which caused chills to run through the team leader’s heart, a never before experienced sense of danger looming in his heart.

“What do you mean?” asked the team leader cautiously. He was naturally very confused right now, somehow just unable to communicate with this seemingly rather insane child before him.

Ling Lan sighed softly, twirling her hair behind her ear gently with a finger, and said with a smile, “Even if I tell you, you won’t understand ... it looks like there isn’t much time left, let’s finish things quickly.” That said, he muttered softly to himself, “This lousy body, actually being unable to sustain my emergence for 3 minutes, how horrible ... Number Nine, put more effort into it in future and train up this little fellow’s body. Make her just a bit stronger.”

Inside the mindspace, expression stony, Number Nine warned, “Stop talking nonsense. Still not finishing off the opponent? Do you really want Ling Lan’s body to break down because of your dithering?”

Number Nine was very unhappy. Number One had clearly asked her to go handle the opponent, but this punk Number Five had rushed ahead and snatched the initiative. If she were not afraid that forcefully taking control away from Number Five would accelerate the collapse of Ling Lan’s body, she would definitely never let him continue to be in control.

Number Nine’s strength was the weakest among the nine instructors. Initially, if she had taken control of Ling Lan’s body, she would be able to last for at least 7 to 8 minutes; but because of Number Five’s insubordination, rushing out on his own, the time limit was shortened to 3 minutes before it would break down. After all, Number Five’s power was just too much for Ling Lan’s current physical body to support.

It should be known that the greater the difference between the strength of the person in control and that of the host’s, the greater the damage to the host. If Number One took control of Ling Lan’s body, it probably would take less than a second for Ling Lan’s body to collapse completely.

“Fine, being able to just come out for a while is already good enough.” Number Five felt that he shouldn’t be too greedy now ... if Ling Lan’s roots were really harmed, he would definitely be pummelled so hard by Big Bro Number One that he would not be able to take care of his daily life ¹, and at worst, his consciousness might just be wiped out completely. A shudder ran through Number Five’s body, some fear swirling in his heart. He had just wanted to come out and see their host’s world, somehow forgetting about his terrifying big bro.

Number Five decided to finish the fight in a few seconds, and then immediately go turn himself in to Big Bro for punishment. So, his fingers flicked lightly, and an invisible force blanketed the area for several li.

The team leader felt as if he had been congealed in a thick liquid — every move he tried to make required the strength of nine bulls and two tigers².

“Activate Domain!” The team leader decisively activated his Domain, dispelling the pressure the opponent was forcing upon his body. Furthermore, his body began to become blurred and unfocused as the surrounding forest began to become thick with fog, and then his entire person disappeared within the fog.

Seeing this, Number Five’s lips curved up into a smile and he said with a chuckle, “This innate talent ... interesting!” That said, he closed his eyes, as if listening intently for something, but also as if unconcerned by what was happening.

Chapter 173: What Kind of Personages?

Suddenly, the thin and wispy fog behind him became substantial, and a sharp blade pierced towards Ling Lan’s back. Number Five seemed oblivious — the blade punching right through to burst out of Ling Lan’s chest, but strangely enough, the wound caused by the blade did not bleed at all. It was just as if the leader had stabbed a fake person.

“Not good!” From the feedback of sensation from his hand, the team leader knew that he had been duped. This figure before him was not a real person — stabbing it did not feel at all like stabbing through blood and flesh, but like stabbing a person made of straw ...

Just when the leader was about to turn into fog once more, he suddenly noticed that countless transparent thin lines had appeared around him, gathering to form a net to wrap around his entire body. His shift into fog was interrupted, and his body was securely bound.

“Ah! Explode!” The team leader was naturally unwilling to just give up and be caught; the Qi-Jin of his body suddenly detonated. Although the transparent thin lines were dense and numerous, they were fortunately not very sturdy. They broke apart one after another under the force of the team leader’s exploding Qi-Jin, and the leader took the chance to struggle out of the web around him. Still, because he had failed in turning into fog, his entire body was now real and tangible.

“What Domain is this?” The team leader’s face changed subtly; he had never before seen such a Domain, which was actually able to set up such an all-encompassing net within this area.

“Oh, this is just a type of Domain modification ...” answered Number Five carelessly. With that reply, his figure instantly turned into a bundle of grass and twigs, breaking apart to drift on the wind. Very quickly, not too far from the leader, the grasses suddenly grew at an insane speed, shooting up and weaving together into one entity, finally changing into the appearance of Ling Lan.

“Plant Replication?” The team leader was startled, and then, as if thinking of something, his expression changed drastically. “Could your spiritual mutation be Plant Manipulation?”

In a forest, encountering a strong fighter with a Plant Manipulation mutation was undoubtedly the scariest thing. This was because the forest would enhance Plant Manipulation — this would be just like entering the opponent’s territory; the opponent’s attack could come from any space or angle.

“Plant Manipulation? What an interesting way of saying things ...” Number Five said with a grin. He did not have the time or mood to explain things to the opponent, and besides, Number Nine was staring intently at him in the mindscape, clearly afraid he would go overboard in playing around. Number Five did not want to offend the other, just so she would not go and complain to Big Bro Number One.

So, he shouted lightly but crisply, “Net, Form!”

The place where the team leader stood was suddenly overgrown by plants, rapidly meshing into a large net, enveloping his entire person within it ...

The team leader naturally did not just stay still and wait to be captured. He tried to turn into fog once again, but just as he activated his Diffusion Domain, his entire body spasmed with pain, and then his entire body was petrified, no longer able to move. Only at this moment did he notice that the large net was not just purely a large net, but also a fearsome weapon made of countless blood-sucking poisonous vines.

The toxins of the poisonous vines caused him to instantly lose his mobility, and its horrific blood-sucking speed made him feel as if the blood in his body was disappearing rapidly. He felt his energy disappearing, and began to feel lightheaded from the loss of blood. Gradually, he felt unbearably cold ... until he finally descended into ice-cold darkness ...

“Retract ...” Number Five sensed that the prey had already lost all signs of life, and so recalled all of the poisonous vines covering the opponent’s body. The vines swiftly sank into the ground, and when the leader’s entire body was revealed, it had already astoundingly become a dry corpse, not a single drop of water left within it.

“Alright, you can scam now,” said Number Nine curtly in the mindscape, clearly in a bad temper.

Number Five just smiled without retorting. In the learning space, Number Five would not argue against the words of only two people ... one of them was Number One — his overwhelming strength gave him no chance to fight back. And while Number Nine’s strength was the weakest, for some unknown reason, Number Five just could not work up the interest to turn against Number Nine, or even think of revenge or anything like that ... Number Five just attributed this phenomena to Number Nine and Number One both being of the cold slackfaced line, and that he just seemed to be helpless against their type.

Without putting up any resistance, Number Five gave control of Ling Lan’s body over to Number Nine. Number Nine did a quick check of Ling Lan’s body, and the expression on her face turned even colder. “Number Five, you’ve godd*mn gone too far with your games.”

Even if Number Nine’s personality was calmer, when she saw the state Ling Lan’s body was in, she could no longer maintain her calm. She could not help but roar like an enraged mother tiger. It turned out that Number Five’s use of his Domain had afflicted Ling Lan’s muscles with varying degrees of injury. By Number Nine’s estimations, Ling Lan definitely would not be able to regain her primordial Qi without a year and a half or so going by. This filled Number Nine’s heart with regret and sympathy, and her rage and disgust at the primary culprit Number Five grew even deeper.

Seeing Number Nine’s enraged demeanour, Number Five gingerly rubbed his nose. Sigh, mother tigers protecting their cubs should never be disturbed ... he had better run away quickly! Number Five very

gutlessly slinked away from the mind-space back to his own area in the learning space, concealing himself.

Seeing Number Five slipping away so irresponsibly, although Number Nine was still infuriated, she knew that she still needed to help Ling Lan clean things up. So, she could only let Number Five off for now. Still, Number Nine was determined that once she returned to the learning space, she would definitely seek out Big Brother Number One and complain, and get him to teach Number Five a good lesson.

Number Nine suppressed the emotional upheaval in her heart, and focused on getting rid of the five bodies and destroying the evidence. Number Nine's innate talent was Cold Flame — she only needed to get a bit of it onto her target's flesh or blood, and the flame would never stop until it had turned the target into ash and dust. It should be said that among the instructors' innate talents, hers was the scariest, but it was unfortunately not suitable for becoming a mecha operator. This was one of her never-ending regrets.

In the Mandora star system, the human body had already evolved till an apex. The humans there were extremely strong — each punch or slap was capable of causing massive damage. Especially after their innate talents awakened, they would only become stronger, absolutely capable of breaking the order of humanity.

However, the Mandora star system was not at all afraid of the fearsome outcome of this human evolution. This was because they possessed mecha which were even more frightening than the strongest human after evolution. As long as a mecha was present, even the strongest human would have no way of resisting.

Let's put it this way. Only one Domain stage expert would appear out of a population of several hundred million, but they would be helpless in front of a Refinement stage special-class mecha operator. The outer shells of mecha were equipped with all sorts of advanced technology, allowing them to be capable of withstanding extreme temperatures, both high and low. They even had various types of energy shields which were capable of resisting all manners of awakened innate talents. A human would just have no way of harming an operator inside a mecha.

Not just that, the weapons and the firepower of the mecha themselves were truly fearsome — all sorts of powerful wide-range attack missiles ... even a Domain stage expert would be helpless against them. Regardless of how strong one's body was, or how fast one's speed was, it would still be no match for a mecha's speed and resilience. There was just no way of competing against the frenzied blasts of these firearms.

This was why no matter how much humans evolved, this was still ultimately a world ruled by mecha. In particular, the emergence of biomecha was just an unexplainable bug for humans.

Number Nine swiftly cleared the scene. She then lifted her head to look out into the distance — several strong presences were approaching, but they were too late. All the evidence here had already been destroyed at her hands.

With a flash, Number Nine disappeared silently from the forest. She had not disappeared for long when several teachers with strong auras appeared in this patch of forest.

It turned out that although the clash between Number Five's and the team leader's Domains had only spanned several brief moments, the fearsome pressure of Domains had still been sensed by other experts of the same stage. The unfamiliar presences stirred their curiosity and confusion, and so they had come to check things out.

Unfortunately, they had still arrived too late. Other than the aftermath of battle and the bits of aura which had yet to fully dissipate, there was nothing to be found.

"Honourable Dean!" A figure appeared on a tree branch; it was the dean of the Central Scout Academy. The teachers present all quickly greeted him.

"Su Qing, sense and see if you can find out what kind of personages we're dealing with?" asked the dean, brows furrowed, to one of the teachers. Su Qing's Domain was Induction — he could determine the characteristics and abilities of a target's Domain from lingering presence signatures, and with that, find out who had been here. Typically, the Federation would have records on the Domains of the various known Domain masters from all countries.

The dean was extremely conscious about the inexplicable appearance of Domain masters here. Mind you, right now was the crucial period when two grades were engaged in a grand armed melee — if any accidents were to happen, it would be a disaster. The Domain masters who appeared here without warning ... were they hostile? If they were hostile, or were perhaps infiltrators from an enemy nation, here to cause trouble ... if massive casualties were incurred among the children at the academy, the dean would have let down the Federation's trust in him, and he would be unable to face the guardians who had entrusted their children to the academy.

Su Qing heard the dean's instruction and quickly responded, "Yes, Dean!" With a quick flip, he landed on the ground, and then activated his Domain ...

Very soon, confusion rose on Su Qing's face. In a flash, he was back at the dean's side, where he then asked softly, "Sir Dean, there are three different types of Domain signatures. There is a majority of a water element type, so one of the Domain masters probably has a water element ability ... but I can't see obvious signs of water in the remains of the battle ... it is possible that the other's ability is some variation of the element of water ..." It had to be said that Su Qing's deductions were extremely accurate — the team leader's Diffusion was, in fact, a variation of a water element ability.

At this point, Su Qing paused, the confusion on her face becoming even clearer. "As for the other two signatures, they're very strange. I can only say I've never sensed this type of strange signature before ... Besides giving me an impression of great strength, I can't figure out anything else. If I had to find a way to describe it, I can only say that one of the signatures gives me a sense of endless emptiness, while the other has an extreme sense of dissonance ..."

The dean was also befuddled by Su Qing's descriptions, but he still managed to glean that Su Qing had been unable to identify the information of the other two Domain masters. So, he asked, "Leave those two aside for now. Can you find a Domain master that somehow fits the first signature?"

Chapter 174: A Fearsome Ability!

“Our own Federation’s Lieutenant General Proteus, the Old Beast of the Northeastern Muqi elite family, King Makino of the Twilight Empire, and General Raye of Dosa. A little further out, those such as Queen Helen of the Aoya Alliance, the Water Sage of the Southstar Galaxy, and the Frost Monarch of the Chaotic Lands all have similar Domain abilities,” Su Qing listed all the renowned masters of the entire human world who fit the conditions.

“Similar? Then that means they are all not the one ...” The dean caught what Su Qing implied.

“Yes, although these masters’ Domain abilities are extremely similar to what I sensed, they are merely similar.” Su Qing knew very well that those masters’ Domain abilities were still distinctly different.

“In other words, this is a Domain master who has yet to be registered ...” The furrow of the dean’s brows grew even deeper. “Su Qing, in your opinion, could this be some Domain masters intentionally hidden away by an enemy nation? A scheme targeting our Federation?”

Su Qing was silent. The dean’s worries were not made in jest — ever since the Twilight Empire set a trap which managed to kill the Federation’s god-class operator Major General Ling Xiao, weakening the Federation’s deterrent power by a whole three levels, anything could be possible.

However, after some thought, Su Qing opened his mouth to say, “It’s also possible it’s just some newly advanced Domain masters. We just haven’t received their information, that’s all.” This would be the optimal outcome, but Su Qing was not optimistic about it. This was because one newly advanced Domain master was still possible, but three mysterious Domain masters appearing without warning at the same time? This was clearly a little too much of a stretch.

The dean also knew this well. After a beat of silence, he continued to ask, “Can you find out the whereabouts of the targets now?” No matter what motives these visitors had, they needed to locate them as soon as possible — it was best to take control of the initiative.

Hearing this, Su Qing laughed dryly and said, “Sir Dean, you’ve forgotten that I’m not good at tracking ...”

The dean rapped himself on the head in frustration and said glumly, “D*mmit, I’ve gotten confused by all these troublesome matters ... Lu Nan, is he here?” asked the dean, looking towards the group of teachers.

“I’m here, Sir Dean!” shouted a teacher not too far away helplessly, raising his hand. When will the honourable dean remember his face? He had been standing right beside him, and he still needed to ask whether he had come ... it was so sad!

Although Lu Nan felt a little hurt, he still immediately locked onto the strongest water element energy at the scene and began to search. But this time, he failed — because the energy could only be found within this area of 100 metres. There was nothing else beyond that range, just as if the Domain master had never even left the area.

Lu Nan was undaunted. Without hesitation, he locked onto that somewhat vacant-feeling energy signature, but no matter how hard he tried to lock on, his ability just could not capture that wispy energy. After trying 5 or 6 times, which all ended in failure, Lu Nan could only choose to give up, and try instead to lock onto that somewhat conflicting and uncomfortable energy signature.

Lu Nan thought that this would likely end in failure as well, but surprisingly, he managed to lock on in an instant. However, before he could commence path tracking, he found that the energy which came into contact with his Domain energy had actually begun to burn without being fanned by the wind, and had begun to devour his energy ...

This bizarre phenomenon caused Lu Nan's expression to change drastically. He resolutely cut off the energy he had used to lock onto that foreign energy signature. His reaction time could be considered godlike in terms of speed, and yet, within these short few seconds, that frightening energy had already consumed one-fifth of his own energy.

The dean noticed the change in Lu Nan's expression, saw him stumble back several steps, looking somewhat haggard and weak, and could not help but ask in surprise, "Lu Nan, are you alright?"

Lu Nan's expression was pained as he said, "I'm sorry, Sir Dean, I am unable to find out where the targets have gone ..."

"What is all this?" The dean's irises contracted, doubt and surprise swirling in his heart.

It should be known that even if Lu Nan's tracking ability was not number one in the Federation, it was still more than enough to qualify in the top 3. As long as he tried to track someone, even a master at the Domain level would find it difficult to escape his search. The dean had thought that this time again Lu Nan was certain to be able to find some clue, but unexpectedly, even he was helpless.

"That water element Domain master Su Qing mentioned had never left this area of about 100 metres, so there's nothing for me to find ... Meanwhile, the other vacant-feeling energy, I cannot lock onto it, and as for the other one ..." Lu Nan's complexion paled, expression revealing traces of lingering fear, "That energy is too terrifying. The moment I locked on and touched it, it began to burn on its own, as if it wanted to devour all my energy. Luckily, I cut off that part of my energy without hesitation, otherwise ..."

If he had hesitated at all due to unwillingness, maybe tried to think of some other way, those few seconds of delay might even have caused his entire being to be burned up by that fearsome energy, leaving no trace ... this was just too frightening! The more Lu Nan thought about it, the more frightened he was. He had never before encountered this kind of strange and terrifying energy ... who could the Domain master who possessed such energy be?

Lu Nan's words were heard loud and clear by everyone present. Their expressions changed, and some of them could not help but take a step back reflexively, as if afraid of being contaminated by this fearsome energy and thus bring disaster upon themselves.

After listening to what Lu Nan had to say, the dean contemplated silently for a few seconds, and then, he said faintly, "You all, do you think that the water element Domain master could have died at the hands of this person?"

The dean's words enlightened everyone there. This would explain why that water element Domain master had not left this area.

"But there isn't a body here ..." remarked one of the teachers, confused. However, he stopped abruptly after only spitting out half his sentence, because he thought of the characteristics of the other's Domain.

Perhaps after being contaminated by this energy, that water element Domain master had been thoroughly consumed?

Everyone there realised the same thing, and could not help but shudder. They looked at those areas with bloodstains, and a chill rose within their bones. They wished they could just leave this place immediately.

The dean was not expecting a response from the other teachers with his comment. He looked towards the direction where the grand armed melee was going on, sighed, and said, "I only hope now that those two mysterious masters are not targeting the students of our academy ..."

The dean's words had barely faded when the pressure of his presence abruptly expanded, and with a grim expression, he ordered, "Su Qing, return to the central control room immediately. Request a class red comprehensive alert from the mainframe. We must ensure that this grand armed melee ends perfectly!"

"The rest of you, freely choose an area to monitor. We need to cover all the areas where the grand armed melee is taking place, and keep a close eye on the progress of the grand armed melee. If you notice anything suspicious, request backup from the academy mecha squad!"

The dean passed down a long string of commands, spurring all the Domain stage instructors into motion. This time, the appearance of a mysterious Domain master within the Central Scout Academy had caused all these Domain masters to emerge from the depths of the academy where they had been hiding. And all of them were now fully focused on monitoring the grand armed melee! Due to their presences, the grand armed melee was fully under their control at all times, so no major injuries or deaths occurred. For the students of both grades involved, this was truly a pleasant surprise.

In a small forested area in the academy, a white-clad, slightly short and petite youth crashed forcefully into a red-clad, tall and thin youth. There was a muffled thud, and then both boys were repelled back from one another to fall heavily to the ground ...

The white-clad youth got up again shakily, roughly swiping away the blood at the corner of his lips. His gaze was as fierce as that of a wolf as he glared at the red-clad youth stumbling to his feet across from him.

They were the 7th grade white-clad Xie Yi and the 10th grade red-clad Yuan Chen. Initially, Yuan Chen had thought that it would be a simple matter to handle a white-clad 7th grader, but who could have expected that Xie Yi had such hidden depths — his strength was no lower than his at all. The two of them fought a difficult battle, ending up in a stalemate.

In the beginning, they were still using some techniques, exchanging blows, using a move to counter a move for a rather glorious battle. But later on, after the two of them had used up most of their stamina, they no longer had the mood to keep dragging the fight on. Thus, they began to fight power with power, trying to use blunt force to overpower the other.

Just like this, they clashed violently again and again — if one stopped to count, they had probably clashed up to 20 to 30 times. It should be said that by now, the two of them were already at the end of their ropes. Now all that was left was to see who would fall first, unable to hold on for that final breath.

“D*mmit, a 10th grade red-coat is really hard to handle. I underestimated them ...” Xie Yi thought glumly to himself, spitting out the blood in his mouth.

Xie Yi was someone who liked to play the pig to eat the tiger, and so had hidden away all this time within Class-B. Although Class-A’s Qi Long, Wu Jiong, Li Yingjie and such were extremely popular and well-known within the grade, he was not bothered at all by this. He believed that he would not lose to anyone with his capabilities — the only one he was uncertain about was the uncrowned king of their grade, Ling Lan.

Xie Yi had always been of the opinion that the ‘strong’ of the scout academy wasn’t all that strong. Only at the First Men’s Military Academy where all the best talent gathered — *that* was the gathering grounds of the true aberrant prodigies. Only the cream of the crop of all the planets of the Federation would be accepted there, to become the strongest of the strong.

Thus, ever since he was 6 years old, his goal had been the First Men’s Military Academy. He had lain low till now, just waiting for the day he applied to the First Men’s Military Academy, when he would make his grand debut ¹ !

“Looks like I’ll have to use my ace in the hole, although it’s quite troublesome to use it ...” Xie Yi was not an indecisive person. Sensing that he would not be able to finish off the opponent under current circumstances, he decided to pull out his trump card and go all in.

Xie Yi shifted into an attack stance with a fist facing outwards, just like before, but this time, a sheen of purple light flashed swiftly across his body. With the flickering of this purple light, the muscles of his face twitched noticeably and his expression was one of sufferance, as if tolerating some discomfort.

“Die!” roared Xie Yi, pouncing fiercely. Meanwhile, his opponent, the 10th grade Yuan Chen, had similarly readied himself to attack. Almost simultaneously, the fists of the two boys collided once more.

“Ahhh!” Yuan Chen howled piteously, his entire body spasming violently as if he had been electrocuted.

Xie Yi’s condition was not much better than Yuan Chen’s; his body was also trembling minutely, and the pain on his face was obvious.

A few seconds later, the two of them sprang apart to fall to the ground. At this time, Yuan Chen looked wretched. He was unconscious, and black smoke rose faintly from his slightly agape mouth, his body still twitching every so often.

Chapter 175: Collaboration? No!

Xie Yi was also slumped on the ground. Ignoring the discomfort of his body, he forced himself off the ground. Opening his mouth, a plume of smoke billowed out as he grumbled, “D*mmit, a spiritual mutation ability causing harm to its user? How is that reasonable?!”

Xie Yi was undoubtedly miffed by this ability of his. His spiritual mutation had given him a very powerful ability, Electrify. However, in contrast to others who could control their spiritual mutation abilities perfectly, he had no way to control Electrify. Whenever he used Electrify, he would be harmed in the process as well, though the damage would be half of what his target endures. Still, even at half strength, it was not pleasant. Furthermore, Electrify was not helpful in piloting mecha, perhaps even completely useless — Xie Yi was very disappointed by this, thinking that it was better to have no ability at all over having this crappy one.

On a tree not too far away, two red-clad youths — one sitting, one standing and leaning against the trunk of the tree — were observing Xie Yi's and Yuan Chen's fight.

"The punk Boss told us to watch in his message sure is impressive ..." said the seated youth with a grin. He was very pleased with Xie Yi.

"Was there ever any doubt of Boss Lan's judgment? ... I'm actually more curious about how Boss managed to send us messages ..." said the standing stern-faced youth. This was something he just could not figure out.

Once the grand armed melee started, all the students' communicators had lost their communicative functions. Aside from the notifications automatically given by the mainframe, as well as the surrender and ask for rescue buttons, all other functions were disabled. But all this, to Ling Lan, did not seem to be a problem at all. It was the same back then on planet Demonbeast, and it was the same again here now with the grand armed melee.

"Why think so much ...?" The seated youth cast a moody glance at his companion. His friend just liked to think too much all the time — even simple things became complicated in his mind. "Jijyun, stop wasting your energy thinking about it. If Boss didn't mention it, it just means that this is not something we can do."

He really understood his boss. If it were something they could learn, Boss would not be stingy and keep it to himself. Since Boss said nothing about it, it was probably something they could not do with their abilities. There was no point for them to worry about it.

The standing youth blanked out for a moment at his companion's words, and then, coming to terms with his realisation, he chuckled wryly and said, "Qi Long, you really are the one who understands Boss the best ..." Qi Long's words had parted the fog of confusion in his mind. Thinking back, it was indeed as Qi Long had said — as long as it was something they could use, Ling Lan would never keep it to himself. So, since Ling Lan had not said anything, that meant that this thing was not something they could know or bear ... In contrast to Qi Long's simple thought process, Han Jijyun would still reflect on these things a little deeper.

These two people were none other than Qi Long and Han Jijyun. The two-man team had had a smooth time of it, easily defeating many 10th grade merit class teams and Class-B teams. In fact, they were rather disappointed that they had not encountered any 10th grade Class-A teams.

And then, not too long ago, Qi Long had received a short text from Ling Lan, saying that a very interesting fellow had appeared in this location. Ling Lan had said that the boy was very strong, and had

hidden his talents very deeply. He wanted them to come over and see, and if they were satisfied, they could take him in as the 6th member of their team.

They had stood here and watched for about 5 minutes, getting a general idea of the other's capabilities. Even though the boy was a little weaker than Qi Long, he would probably be a match for Luo Lang.

"Eh? He seems to be using his awakened talent!" Qi Long surprised exclamation startled Han Jijyun from his thoughts. Han Jijyun looked over, and sure enough, that fellow's body showed signs of using his innate talent. Ever since the term 'awakened innate talent' had been brought up by Ling Lan, Qi Long's team had no longer called 'awakened innate talent' as 'spiritual mutation' anymore. This was because they felt that Ling Lan's term for it seemed more appropriate.

Regarding this new term, they were not at all surprised, because all kinds of new terminology had been spouting endlessly from their Boss Lan — they were already used to it.

The two of them watched until the final blow was dealt, also seeing how Xie Yi was tortured half to death by his own innate talent. Qi Long could not help but laugh, "This innate talent is really interesting, actually turning against its own user ... what a quirky talent!"

Watching the scene before them, even the typically serious Han Jijyun could not stop his face from twitching, unable to accept this reality for a moment. He had studied awakened innate talents, a.k.a. spiritual mutation, at depth, so all relevant information was known to him. And yet, he had really never seen mention of such a quirky talent — dealing 1000 damage to the enemy while dealing 800 damage to oneself? This was absolutely an ultimate move meant to drag an opponent down with you at the very end ...

Xie Yi suddenly stopped complaining about his ability, lifting his head to look in the direction of the two boys. "Hey, have you guys seen enough?" he asked coldly. Done with the fight, Xie Yi immediately sensed eyes on him as he calmed down.

"Haha, very cautious, and your senses are also very alert. Really not bad at all!" Hearing this, Qi Long immediately replied with a laugh. The more he looked at this fellow in front of them, the more he liked him. He really wished he could just invite him to join their team immediately.

Frankly, it was very easy to obtain Qi Long's favour. As long as one was strong enough and able to fight with him often, then everything was OK.

Qi Long had barely finished speaking when he had jumped down from the tree, running over to Xie Yi. Seeing this, Han Jijyun could only follow him speechlessly. Qi Long had always been a man of action — Han Jijyun was really helpless to do anything about that.

"Qi Long!" The other being the consistent top rank of their grade, Xie Yi was still very familiar with Qi Long. His gaze then swept to Han Jijyun standing behind Qi Long, and a trace of recognition flashed through his eyes. These two have always been as thick as thieves — for them both to appear before him together was pretty normal ... the only thing was, why would they just happen to stop here and notice his fight? Could it be due to him being a white-coat, while his opponent was a red-coat? Xie Yi was trying to figure out the reason for Qi Long and Han Jijyun's appearance here.

“I don’t know when Boss noticed you, but you’re really very strong. Inviting you to join our team, I approve,” said Qi Long calmly after sizing up Xie Yi from head to toe.

“Join your team?” Xie Yi was bewildered, “Why?” Anyone would be confused and lost if a person suddenly appeared without warning to invite them to join their team.

Qi Long was just about to speak when Han Jijyun suddenly tugged on his sleeve, causing him to instantly close his mouth. Qi Long was a lazy person — since Han Jijyun was signalling that he wanted to speak, then Qi Long would happily back off and wait. He could save his words trying to convince the other.

Han Jijyun stepped forward, and with a serious expression, he asked, “May I know how I should address you?”

“Xie Yi!” Xie Yi was subdued by Han Jijyun’s formal and serious demeanour. This was the kind of person he found most difficult to resist.

“Schoolmate Xie Yi, are you currently in any other team?” If he already had a team, Han Jijyun would just end the conversation here. Although they truly still lacked a teammate, they would not go and steal members of some other team. This was something that was beneath them.

“As a matter of fact, no!” Hiding his true capabilities all this while, he naturally had no interest in joining those weak teams which approached him. Thus, he had been a lone wolf this entire time.

Hearing his reply, Han Jijyun’s stern expression eased a little, however, he continued to explain seriously and earnestly to Xie Yi, “It’s like this. Our team is currently still missing a member, and we’re planning to attempt the barrier-crossing mission in the virtual world soon. Being able to enter the real virtual world one step earlier to experience mecha combat — would you be interested?”

Xie Yi jerked his head up, eyes trained on Han Jijyun’s, trying to determine if he was truly being honest.

With regards to mecha combat, of course he was interested. The reason he had been going solo all this time was partly just waiting for the right bid. He had kept an eye on the 3 major teams in Class-A, seeking an opportunity to cooperate with them. Of course, he had also once considered making his own team to complete the mission on his own, but unfortunately, all the capable students had been whisked away by the 3 major teams. As such, he had had no choice but to temporarily set aside that arrangement.

But now, to his surprise, Ling Lan’s team actually took the initiative to invite him to join. This surprised him greatly, his heart beginning to pound rapidly because of this invitation. No matter how much he had tried to keep a low profile, he was still a 13 year old youth at heart — he still wanted to be the centre of others’ attention. If not for the grand goal he had set since young of making a grand entrance when he applied for the First Men’s Military Academy, he definitely would not have been able to tolerate and hold back for so many years ...

“A collaboration?” asked Xie Yi carefully. He needed to know whether this was a temporary team, or a team meant for lifelong companionship. Depending on the answer, his decision might very well be different as well ...

Han Jijyun instinctively turned to look at Qi Long, and they shared a glance, subtle amusement in their gazes. Han Jijyun then turned back to look at Xie Yi and said, “Collaboration?”

A trace of disappointment flashed through Xie Yi's eyes; as expected, a stranger like him who joined halfway was only suitable for a temporary collaboration.

"No!" Han Jijyun's subsequent words shocked Xie Yi so much that his jaw dropped, his expression filled with disbelief.

"We only take in companions. Collaboration? We have plenty others for that." Wu Jiong and Ye Xu, for example were all candidates for collaboration, but they would never become members of their team. From the very beginning Ling Lan had said that their team would rather go without than settle for someone substandard. Once someone joined them though, then that person would be a long-term companion, a friend they would trust at their back on the battlefield when they battled for their lives.

"If you only want to collaborate with us ... then, sorry, our invitation is void." When Han Jijyun said this, his expression was cold and unyielding, a sharp glint flashing through his eyes.

At this moment, Xie Yi's feelings were extremely conflicted. Agreeing would mean that he would become a member of Ling Lan's team. He would have to sign an agreement stating that he could not drop out of the team of his own accord. Most importantly, if he and his team leader happened to apply to and be accepted by the same military school, the team would be maintained, so he would not be able to join an even stronger team.

Mind you, whether it was Ling Lan or Qi Long as the team leader, Xie Yi believed that both of them were fully capable of successfully enrolling into the First Men's Military Academy. In other words, this current decision of his may very well be a lifelong choice ...

As if sensing Xie Yi's internal struggle, Qi Long and Han Jijyun did not hurry the other. After all, this was indeed a major decision that would affect his future — he could not afford to be careless about it. On their end, they also wished for the other to consider things thoroughly before making his decision. They wanted him to join full-heartedly as a loyal companion who could grow with them, and not join with lingering doubts and uncertainty in his mind, unable to view them as true friends.

Unable to make a decision, Xie Yi thought of Qi Long's exploits as the top rank in the cross-grade challenges, and knew that the other's capabilities were no weaker than his own. He also thought of the mysterious and unpredictable Boss Ling Lan behind Qi Long ...

Chapter 176: Ling Xiao's Instructor!

"Although I don't know when Boss noticed you ..." He suddenly recalled what Qi Long had said at the start, as if the one who had first noticed him was Ling Lan and not them ...

Xie Yi's gaze steadied. He looked at Qi Long and asked seriously, "Earlier, you said that the first to notice me was your boss? Did you mean Ling Lan?"

Qi Long nodded and said, "Of course. If Boss hadn't told me you were here, we wouldn't have come here to watch you fight."

Qi Long's words caused Xie Yi to come to an abrupt realisation. He finally knew who had pushed him down from his tree — it must have been Ling Lan!

Xie Yi's expression alternated between red and white as he struggled with the idea. He had thought that even if he was not the champion of the 7th grade, he would still be within the ranks of the strongest few. But now, reality had given him a direct slap in the face. When he had been nudged off the tree by Ling Lan, not only did he not sense the other, he had even thought that he had fallen due to his own mistake ...

It was clear to see that Ling Lan's capabilities were far beyond his; Xie Yi's mouth tasted bitter. "Is Ling Lan really really strong?"

Qi Long threw a puzzled glance at Xie Yi. Ling Lan's strength was unanimously acknowledged by the entire grade — why did Xie Yi look as if he had just found out about this? Still, Qi Long replied properly, "Of course. If Boss fought seriously, I don't know if I can even last for 10 moves ..." As Qi Long said this, he secretly crossed his fingers behind his back, praying to any passing deity to forgive him for his lie.

Qi Long had actually increased the number of moves he could handle in his response. No matter what, he was still the grade's top rank; saving some face was necessary. I mean, it's not like he could be honest and say that he could not even take one move from Boss ... that would be too embarrassing.

Xie Yi had no clue that Qi Long was already buffering his words to save face, adding on a couple extra moves, but still the answer of 10 moves was enough to settle him. He did not think he could beat Qi Long, and so if Qi Long could not last for 10 moves, then he himself would not be able to either.

Even if they enrolled now, Ling Lan's current strength would be no weaker than that of those lauded prodigies of the First Men's Military Academy. With such a powerful team leader, their team would definitely never be mediocre.

Xie Yi's heart was decided instantly. He lifted his head and said, "I will join!"

Qi Long and Han Jijyun exchanged a joyful glance at Xie Yi's clarion response. Although they still did not know Xie Yi very well right now, the other had only made his decision after serious contemplation. As such, the other must have considered things thoroughly, and definitely would not change his mind easily after this. This was precisely the type of team member they needed ...

Of course, to truly become a true companion of theirs, he would still need to go through a series of tests, just like how it was with Lin Zhong-qing at the start ... Xie Yi was just blissfully ignorant of this at present.

Yet, Xie Yi naturally could not join Ling Lan's team right away, because the grand armed melee was still ongoing. All functions of the communicators were still in lock-down mode. Xie Yi could only wait for the grand armed melee to end so that he could receive the invitation from Ling Lan's team ...

Mission accomplished, Qi Long and Han Jijyun departed after asking what Xie Yi was planning to do next. As Xie Yi's stamina was depleted, he needed to find a place to rest and recover, while Qi Long and Han Jijyun needed to continue fighting. In particular, they wanted to seek out the strongest few of the 10th grade Class-A and defeat them all; otherwise, the 7th grade may not be able to win this grand armed melee.

Xie Yi waited for Qi Long and Han Jijyun to leave, and then, smiling sinisterly, he prepared to finish off the still unconscious Yuan Chen. However, before he could act, the teacher monitoring the scene appeared suddenly to whisk the other away, causing Xie Yi to lose his chance.

Still, Xie Yi was not vexed by this. After all, the other had not been a sworn enemy. If not for the fact that the other had tried to kill him first, he too would not think to kill the other. He had only wanted to eliminate all future threat — this was a point which all pig-players¹ had to hold fast to. But since a teacher had shown up, he would not be stubborn about it. Pig-players needed to be clear on the fact that they were just playing as pigs, but were not really pigs²— so, they should not be afraid of any challenges.

That said, Qi Long and the others continued to fight. Because the top team of the 10th grade had pretty much been wiped out single-handedly by Ling Lan —the remaining two members had also been secretly undermined by Ling Lan³ — this greatly alleviated the pressure on the 7th grade Class-A students.

That said, the two members who had been undermined by Ling Lan had encountered a 7th grade Class-B five-man team, and a fight had broken out. Even though the Class-B team was overall weaker than those two members, they worked together well, and hence actually managed to withstand a series of fierce attacks from their opponents. As the fight dragged on, the manipulation Ling Lan had applied began to have an even greater effect. Meanwhile, the team member chased away by Xie Yi had discovered the signals his team members had left behind, and had finally managed to catch up to reunite with them. At this time, having become adjusted to fighting, the reunited 7th grade Class-B team, now with all six members, began to launch their counterattack ...

In addition, due to the pressure exerted upon them by their opponents, two out of the four students who had yet to awaken their innate talents actually awakened them. Although the abilities they awakened were very ordinary, awakening any ability at all meant that in terms of operating mecha, they would go much further than those students who did not awaken ... Of course, the more suited the innate talent awakened was for mecha control, the more of an advantage it was in all aspects of operating mecha.

Against the spirited attack of the 7th grade Class-B team, the two 10th graders were finally overcome. One of them was knocked unconscious right at the scene from a coordinated attack of the Class-B team, while the other, seeing that the situation was not right, instantly turned tail to run ... but was struck down by another 7th grade Class-A team coincidentally passing by.

This kind of battles were occurring at various places around the academy. Those struck down could be 7th graders or 10th graders — only when the grand armed melee ended would the final numbers be known. For now, everyone involved just continued to work hard to remain active in the grand armed melee.

Yet all of this no longer had anything to do with Ling Lan. Controlling Ling Lan's body, Number Nine hurried to the dormitory district under Little Four's guidance.

As long as one pressed the surrender button, they would be able to enter the dormitory safety area. Of course, Little Four could use the mainframe and let Ling Lan enter even without surrendering, but recalling Ling Lan's caution, Little Four knew that he could not do anything that could leave traces to be discovered. If he did this, without a doubt, Boss would be exposed to public scrutiny.

Number Nine decisively pressed the surrender button; Ling Lan's body would not be able to hold out for much longer. If they did not return to an absolutely safe place, she would not be able to be assured of Ling Lan's safety. For both Number Nine and Little Four, in comparison, the outcome of the grand armed melee was just not as important as Ling Lan's life.

Number Nine quickly entered the dormitory area, and with several quick flash steps, she had made her way to Ling Lan's villa where she burst straight into the house. Right then, Ling Lan's body had already begun showing signs of breaking down, her entire body covered in blood. Such a horrific scene caused Lan Luofeng to leap up in shock from the couch where she had been watching the latest updates on the grand armed melee.

"Aunt Nan!" Lan Luofeng caught the falling Ling Lan in her arms as she shouted.

"Young Master Lan! What happened?!" Ling Nanyi appeared in the living room instantly after the shout. From this alone, Number Nine could tell that the other was at the very least a Qi-Jin level master.

"Unidentified enemies pretended to be teachers to assassinate me! Contact Ling Qin to send trained professionals from home for protection ..." After leaving these final words in a hurry, Number Nine regretfully returned to the learning space. It wasn't that she did not want to explain things better, but Ling Lan's body really could not support her manifestation any longer. If she continued to stay, Ling Lan's body would truly be done for.

Lan Luofeng's eyes were wide as she stared at Ling Lan lying unconscious in her arms. A vicious glint flashed through her eyes ... No mother could accept her child being harmed. Even the frailest and gentlest mother would become a savage mother lion in times like this.

"Aunt Nan, let Uncle Qin send people over. Send the strongest people. Not just that. Mobilise all the mecha squads at home for me. I want the academy to give our Ling family an explanation!" Lan Luofeng's face was a sheet of ice. Her initial gentleness was nowhere to be seen, her gaze filled with the intent to kill.

Pleasant surprise flashed through Ling Nanyi's eyes. She nodded emphatically and said, "I understand, Mistress!" This was the presence the mistress of the household should have! She had always been of the mind that Lan Luofeng was just a little too weak.

"Ling Xiao, I definitely won't let anyone harm our baby, no one ..." Lan Luofeng embraced Ling Lan tightly, as if she would be able to protect her child better by doing so.

"Mistress, I've already sent out the notification. One hour later, they will arrive." Ling Nanyi used the special Ling family communication method, contacting Ling Qin speedily.

"Also, I've asked Xiao Ying to activate the recovery pod. It is best for Young Master Lan to go into a recovery pod now ..." From her check of Ling Lan's body, Ling Nanyi found that other than the wide-scale disintegration of the muscles, Ling Lan's internal organs was also displaying varying degrees of damage. However, fortunately, all of these injuries were not fatal with the current technology. As long as there was no problem with the brain, the recovery pod would definitely be able to heal Ling Lan's injuries. It was all just a matter of time.

Lan Luofeng knew that she would not be able to carry the 13 year old Ling Lan all on her own with her level of strength. So, she decisively passed Ling Lan to Ling Nanyi. Since she was unable to help, she should just get out of the way and not make things more difficult. Lan Luofeng knew very well what she should do.

Eyes red, she watched as Ling Lan was placed into the recovery pod. Seeing the recovery pod close, Lan Luofeng finally showed some weakness, her expression showing traces of sorrow and pain.

But once the recovery pod hid Ling Lan from sight completely, Lan Luofeng's expression turned cold and unforgiving. She abruptly turned to Ling Nanyi and said, "Aunt Nan, let us wait for the dean's arrival ..."

"Yes! Mistress!" said Ling Nanyi respectfully.

One hour later, an old man with a head of white hair appeared mysteriously at Ling Lan's villa. Lan Luofeng had met him before — Ling Xiao had brought her to visit him once — he was one of Ling Xiao's initiate instructors⁴, Mu Shui-qing⁵.

"Instructor Mu ..." Seeing the other, Lan Luofeng's eyes turned red, almost breaking out into tears. Ever since Ling Xiao had passed away, Mu Shui-qing had shut himself up in the Ling family mansion. He had not come out for 10 years. This time, due to Ling Lan's near assassination, he had finally been troubled enough to come.

"Where is Ling Lan now?" asked Mu Shui-qing anxiously.

Lan Luofeng hurriedly led Mu Shui-qing to Ling Lan's recovery pod and opened it up. Mu Shui-qing carefully examined Ling Lan's body, and his expression shifted minutely, "There is still a trace of water elemental energy from a Domain master. Looks like the one who tried to kill Kiddy Lan is a Domain master."

Mu Shui-qing's expression eased slightly in consolation, "Although I don't know how he managed to escape from the opponent, surviving an attack from a Domain master is a miracle on its own."

Chapter 177: Old Beast Mu Shui-qing!

That said, Mu Shui-qing thoroughly examined the Qi-Jin in Ling Lan's body. A strange flush appeared on his face, "Good! As expected of Ling Xiao's child. Who'd have thought that you would have achieved the peak of Qi-Jin stage at this age ..." Perhaps Ling Lan had been able to survive this crisis because his opponent Domain master would never have guessed Ling Lan was already at this stage. As such, the opponent might not have used his full strength, giving Ling Lan an opportunity to escape with his¹ life.

Mu Shui-qing's gaze was tender as he watched Ling Lan lying inside the recovery pod. Ling Lan had undoubtedly been very lucky. Just as he was about to close the recovery pod again, he suddenly sensed Ling Lan's initially slowly circulating Qi-Jin speed up, the Qi-Jin accumulating rapidly ... Could it be that Ling Lan was entering the late stage of Qi-Jin peak now? If that was the case, then this would truly exemplify the saying that blessings would come if one could weather a great crisis!

Mu Shui-qing gently closed the recovery pod, then turned to Lan Luofeng and said, "Remember not to open the recovery pod during this period of time. This child is truly blessed with great fortune. In the

midst of this crisis, he actually obtained the catalyst for advancement ... perhaps the recovery time of these serious injuries of his will be greatly shortened due to this advancement.”

Mu Shui-qing’s words caused Lan Luofeng to breathe a sigh of relief. Although Ling Nanyi had reassured her repeatedly that Ling Lan’s injuries looked worse than they were, not actually anything serious, Lan Luofeng had simply been unable to stop worrying. However, Mu Shui-qing was different. He was an instructor who had been greatly respected by Ling Xiao; what he said could not be wrong.

After some thought, Mu Shui-qing added, “After his injuries are healed, let Ling Lan stop his schooling at the academy and return to the mansion. The scout academy has taught all it can; it’s time for him to learn from me now ...”

“Ah ...” Lan Luofeng lifted her head in joy and surprise, “I understand. Thank you, Instructor Mu!”

Lan Luofeng remembered Ling Xiao telling her once that, his ascension to god-class operator was closely related to the things Mu Shui-qing had taught him. However, Ling Xiao had never gone into detail on what it was exactly that Mu Shui-qing had taught. This time, studying with Instructor Mu Shui-qing would undoubtedly be a great help to Ling Lan’s future development.

Seeing the pleased and excited expression on Lan Luofeng’s face, Mu Shui-qing couldn’t help but recall his most outstanding disciple, Ling Xiao, and his expression dimmed. He still remembered, back when he had first met Ling Xiao, he had been overjoyed, believing that the other would be able to inherit his full legacy. With a disciple like that, he had thought that he would have no more regrets in this life.

But who could have expected that the other would die so young, falling from this world before his time. Even as his heart ached, he wondered if the heavens had refused to allow the existence of such a nature-defying prodigy ... his heart was as lifeless as ash, and so he chose to seclude himself in Ling Xiao’s old mansion, shutting himself off from the world.

This time, if not for Ling Qin begging desperately outside his door, pleading for him to intervene and rescue Ling Xiao’s only descendant, he would not have been moved to leave his seclusion. In truth, he had really wanted to take a look at the only child Ling Xiao had left behind ...

Who could have guessed that with just this one look, he was astounded once more — Ling Xiao may have passed away, but his nature-defying aptitude had not been reclaimed by the heavens. Instead, it had been inherited by his child, who was just as prodigious as his father. This discovery jolted Mu Shui-qing’s ash-dead heart to life once again ... the desire to mentor a disciple was rekindled within him.

“Hopefully this child will grow up successfully, and not repeat the tragedy of Ling Xiao ...” He would not be able to bear the tragedy of the accidental death of another beloved disciple. That would be too cruel for him.

At present, sitting within the dean’s office, the dean suddenly received news from the academy mecha squad protecting the campus.

“What?! You say that the Ling family mecha squad is already nearing the campus no-flight boundary?” The dean had already been troubled by the mysterious disappearance of the Domain masters, and now,

hearing this bad news, he was instantly in a towering rage, “What the hell? Is the Ling family trying to mutiny?!”

“Dean, the other party says that their current family head Ling Lan was attacked by mysterious Domain stage teachers inside the academy. Although he escaped with his life, he is currently unconscious with heavy injuries. To ensure their family head’s safety, they need to immediately escort their family head off the premises ...” said the captain of the mecha squad on the other end of the communicator glumly, “From their words, it’s clear that they blame the academy for not doing its duty in protecting its students. They have even demanded for you, the dean, to give their mistress a satisfactory explanation!”

“Domain stage master’s attack?” Coming to a realisation, the dean immediately said, “Who is heading the Ling family mecha squad? Tell him to calm down, don’t be reckless and exacerbate things ...”

The squad captain chuckled dryly and replied, “That won’t be a problem. The lead of the Ling family is Ling Qin! That fellow only moves after careful consideration ...”

When the dean heard that Ling Qin was heading the squad, his brows eased, but then very quickly scrunched up tightly again!

“This fellow ... looks like he’s here to force me to handle this matter personally!” The dean instantly figured out what Ling Qin intended with this show of force. Unfortunately, he had no choice but to comply with the other’s intentions. This was because their academy was indeed in the wrong on this matter — a student had been seriously harmed within their academy grounds. Moreover, the assailant was an unidentified, mysterious Domain master ... no matter what, the academy had to take responsibility!

The dean said helplessly, “Tell Ling Qin that I will visit their mistress immediately. After understanding the situation, I will give them a proper response.”

Very quickly, the captain of the mecha squad returned with Ling Qin’s response. “Dean, Ling Qin has agreed, but is only giving us one hour’s time. If by then they don’t receive a final answer, then even if they all die here in battle, they are determined to try and break through our defences.”

“D*mmmit, this punk is blatantly threatening me. Godd*mmmit!” The dean almost exploded with anger, but he could not fault the other’s response. If he really wanted to give the other a satisfactory explanation, one hour was sufficient for him to find out the truth of the matter. “I understand. Within one hour, I will let their mistress contact them.”

The dean hung up, a dark rage creeping over his heart ... could it be that those mysterious Domain masters were really sent by the enemy to deal with Ling Lan?

“Godd*mn, after doing away with Ling Xiao, now they want to go after Ling Xiao’s child?” Just thinking of this possibility, the dean could no longer keep a lid on his anger, slamming a hand down powerfully on his office desk.

This palm contained both the dean’s rage and internal force, actually destroying the large, thousand-year old red sandalwood desk before him. With a loud rumble, the entire desk collapsed, instantly becoming a pile of debris.

“Sir Dean, where are you going?” In the great hall outside with the mainframe, Su Qing had been monitoring the campus with his full attention when he saw the dean rush out of his office, fuming. He immediately stood up to ask what was wrong.

“Su Qing, those mysterious Domain masters ... their target may very likely be Ling Lan. They want to kill him ...” Facing his trusted senior officer, the dean immediately divulged his suspicions.

Su Qing’s expression paled. Within the academy, other than the dean, he was the only one who knew about Ling Lan’s true identity as Major General Ling Xiao’s only direct descendant.

“Dean, I’ll go with you!” Su Qing could not suppress the rage in his heart, ready to accompany the dean.

“No need. Monitor the grand armed melee closely for me. Do not let the opponent take advantage of the chaos to do anything else.” Although the dean was very worried about Ling Lan, he was still the dean of the Central Scout Academy. He needed to be responsible for all the students — there must not be any more accidents in this grand armed melee.

“Understood, Sir!” Su Qing knew the weight of the matter, and so accepted this command regretfully.

After arranging all this, the dean rushed over to the dormitory district. The safety areas were restricted by the mainframe to keep out those of the two grades who were participating in the grand armed melee — those with status access like the dean could still enter freely. Of course, regular teachers may still find it much more difficult to enter the safety areas during the grand armed melee; the restrictions imposed by the mainframe were still rather numerous.

Arriving at Ling Lan’s villa, the moment he entered the main door, he saw a stony-faced young lady sitting primly on the living room sofa. She was Ling Xiao’s widow, Ling Lan’s mother, Lan Luofeng. Meanwhile, behind her stood the housekeeper of this villa, as registered in the books of the academy, Ling Nanyi.

“15 minutes. Sir Dean, you came pretty quickly,” said Lan Luofeng icily to the dean, closing the pocket watch in her hands. She had already received news from Ling Qin. The Ling family mecha squad were standing by at the edge of the no-flight zone of the academy, awaiting her orders.

Faced with this scene, the dean rubbed his nose, somewhat flustered, uncertain how he should respond. After a brief hesitation, he asked somewhat stiltedly, “Ling Lan ... is alright, right?”

“Thanks to you, he is now lying in a recovery pod, almost dead.” Lan Luofeng’s tone was sharp and cutting, not giving any consideration to the dean.

“As long as he’s fine, as long as he’s fine!” A child being harmed in the academy — their academy was definitely responsible. The dean could only swallow his voice and bear the brunt of Lan Luofeng’s anger.

“The opponent is a water element Domain master, dressed in the clothes of an academy teacher ... Ye Yifan, shouldn’t you give us an explanation?” A wizened voice rang out from above the living room. The dean looked towards the voice, and saw a white-haired, lean old man slowly making his way down the stairs, his steps slow but stable.

The moment he saw the old man, as if shocked, the dean immediately leapt up and said respectfully, “Instructor Mu!”

“Hmph, still remember that I am your instructor? I thought you had forgotten ...” sniffed Mu Shui-qing, discontentedly. Ye Yifan was an excellent student of his in his early years, but later on, they had drifted apart due to ideological differences.

The dean silently wiped away a handful of cold sweat from his forehead. The colour of his face shifted uncertainly, a trace of contemplation briefly coursing through his eyes. Mu Shui-qing had been his initiate instructor when he had been a youth. 50 years ago, Mu Shui-qing had already been a Domain stage master; after so many years, he was probably already at a different stage by now ...

The dean was someone who thought a lot. Seeing Mu Shui-qing appear here, he began to suspect — the other two so-called Domain masters ... could they have been contrived by Mu Shui-qing? Legend has it that God-Realm masters were able to contrive any elemental energy as they wished ...

Frankly, the dean could not be blamed for thinking this way. In his eyes, no matter how strong Ling Lan was, he was still a boy — there was no way he could withstand a Domain master’s attack. Unless Mu Shui-qing had stepped in to help, Ling Lan definitely could not have escaped from a Domain stage master with his life.

For a Domain master to kill a scout student, it was as easy as stepping on an ant. How could Ling Lan have possibly found a chance to escape?

Chapter 178: Ling Lan Wakes Up!

The dean believed that he had obtained the truth. With this, he could explain why that water elemental Domain master had never left the scene — he had probably been killed by Mu Shui-qing right at that spot. And this was also why Mu Shui-qing clearly knew the opponent had been a water elemental Domain master.

Connecting the dots, the dean arrived at an answer. This would also explain why Lu Nan had been unable to lock on to the other two energy signatures. Think about it, how could a Domain stage person use their abilities across stages to track the movements of a God-Realm master? Perhaps at the very moment of locking on, this Old Beast had already noticed the trace, and had then given a slight warning by using mysterious means to destroy part of Lu Nan’s energy.

Sure of his answer, the dean’s initial bewilderment over the mysterious Domain masters was quelled, and his restless heart settled. Anything was the scariest when it was still unknown — once a reasonable explanation was found, then it would no longer be as frightening.

At ease now, the dean’s demeanour became even more respectful. He said to Mu Shui-qing, “Instructor Mu, how could I ever forget you, old man ¹. You will forever be the instructor of the Marshal and I. But, what are you doing here?”

“If I don’t come, should I just watch as Ling Xiao’s child dies here? What the hell is wrong with your safety measures here? Allowing unidentified enemies to infiltrate so easily?” Mu Shui-qing’s expression was one of extreme dissatisfaction, full of anger at the ease with which enemies had entered the scout academy.

Hearing this, the dean complained in his heart: *No matter how tight security is, won't it all be rubbish in your eyes? Won't you still be able to come and go as you please?* Of course, the dean only dared to say this in his mind; facing Mu Shui-qing's merciless scolding, he did not dare to argue at all. He could only nod repeatedly and say, "Yes, yes, yes, we did not do enough. We'll definitely correct this."

"Since you know, aren't you going to go and find out who exactly that water elemental Domain master is for me? Where in the world is he hiding now?" Mu Shui-qing was rather worried. An unknown Domain master hiding undercover by Ling Lan's side ... this was extremely dangerous for Ling Lan. After all, he could not stay beside Ling Lan to watch over him at all times.

"Uh" The dean cast a speechless glance at Mu Shui-qing. The opponent had clearly already died at his hands, why did he still want him to go and investigate?

Recalling that Mu Shui-qing had always been a black-bellied person since the past, the dean could not help but think a little deeper. Could it be that Instructor Mu wanted to take the opportunity to clean up some of the other factions within the academy?

At this notion, a sharp coldness emerged on the dean's face. Indeed, this was a great chance. These past few years, pressure from various parties had given him no choice but to compromise, letting different factions place various people with differing objectives into the academy as instructors. This had caused some unwelcome new developments to appear in the school's culture. It was indeed time to find an opportunity to straighten things up a bit, and restore a clean order to the academy.

Just as the Marshal reminded them, the scout academies were the cradle where their legion of troops was cultivated. They needed all kinds of resources, but should reject all politics.

"Understood, Instructor Mu!" Figuring things out, the dean immediately nodded and agreed, but then continued to say, "However, right now is still the time of the grand armed melee. I can't perform any large-scale cleaning up. I hope to comprehensively reorganise the entire scout academy after the grand armed melee ends, giving peace back to the academy, as well as giving you and Mistress Ling an acceptable accounting then."

"Good! Just do as you say, do not forget your promise." Touched, Mu Shui-qing patted the dean's shoulder. Although this student of his had always been somewhat soft in his character, when necessary, he could still be determined enough. Mu Shui-qing's initial discontentment with Ye Yifan vanished, and he couldn't help but pat his shoulder again in approval.

The two of them were actually talking about two completely different things, and yet their responses matched up flawlessly. They both thought that the other understood what they were saying, and that they too understood what the other wanted to do ...

Seeing that Mu Shui-qing was satisfied, the dean took the opportunity to suggest that Lan Luofeng inform the Ling family mecha squad outside not to trespass without reason and just wait patiently for the grand armed melee to end. Given some time, he would definitely give the Ling family a satisfactory answer.

Obtaining the response she wanted, Lan Luofeng agreed to let the Ling family mecha squad return to the Ling family estate ... Just like that, the major incident that was about to break out among the two parties subsided in this mutual agreement, both sides patiently waiting for the end of the grand armed melee.

Lan Luofeng had agreed to wait so readily in large part because Ling Lan had been the one to initiate this grand armed melee. Thus, she did not want this momentous grand armed melee to be stopped halfway.

24 hours passed by quickly. In the end, at 319 people versus 171 people, and a score of 14922 versus 10776, the 7th graders soundly defeated the 10th graders, becoming the ultimate victors of the grand armed melee.

At the same time, they officially became the strongest grade within the scout academy. All students of the other grades, when faced with a 7th grade student (with a uniform of the same colour), needed to submit and give way. This was an acknowledgement of the strong — because the results fought for by the 7th grade had obtained the recognition of the entire academy. Of course, there were still those who did not want to submit. After a year, they would be free to challenge the 7th grade then and initiate another grand armed melee ... to fight for the title of the strongest grade!

Meanwhile, after being comatose for several days, Ling Lan finally woke up. She found herself inside the learning space, her entire mind somewhat at a loss.

“Boss, you finally woke up!” Little Four, who had been fiddling with his own fingers alone in the learning space, abruptly saw Ling Lan appear before him, and instantly pounced at her emotionally ... his tears gushed out like a waterfall, almost drowning Ling Lan.

“Stop! If you don’t stop now, even if I’m not dead yet I’ll be drowned to death by you ...” Ling Lan poked Little Four’s head weakly, wanting him to keep those worthless tears to himself².

“Boss, I’ve been so worried these past few days, being unable to find you all this time ...” sniffled Little Four.

“Don’t you see I’m fine? I’m still alive. Looks like while I was still unconscious, someone saved me ... Little Four, I want to know who saved me. What happened back then?” Ling Lan asked Little Four, eager to know the truth of the matter.

“At that critical moment, Number Five took over your body, Boss, instantly wiping that horrible fellow out ... originally, Number Nine was the one who was supposed to come out, but Number Five was disobedient and rushed to come out first. It’s because of him that your body, Boss, is in such a terrible condition. Number Nine said that Number Five’s power exceeded Boss’s by too much, and so caused much more damage to Boss’s body. If she had been the one to come out, the situation would have been better,” Little Four prattled on, telling Ling Lan what had happened.

“So the instructors can control my body, this is the first time I’m hearing about it ...” Ling Lan had not expected that the instructors of the learning space could borrow her body to come to her world. This made her wonder — what in the world was the learning space exactly? Was it really just a simple assistive learning device?

The more Ling Lan thought about it, the more mysterious she found this learning device in her head to be. Her heart couldn’t help but beat erratically — who knew if this was ultimately good or bad for her?

“This is nothing. If your technology here hadn’t been so useless, they could have long actualised themselves,” scoffed Little Four. If the technology here were just a bit more advanced, then he would

not have to be so helpless every time Boss encountered danger, only being able to watch without being able to do anything.

“Actualise?” Ling Lan was stunned. She couldn’t help but chase the thought, “Little Four, what is that exactly?”

Little Four felt that he had made a major slip-up, and so began looking around aimlessly, pretending that he could not hear anything. No matter what, he was unwilling to continue discussing this topic.

Seeing Little Four’s actions, Ling Lan realised that this must definitely be something tied to the rules and restrictions of the system. As a support intelligence-entity, the system seemed to impose many restrictions on Little Four. Having figured this out, Ling Lan did not want to put Little Four in a tight spot, and so stopped asking. Ling Lan knew that if this was something he could tell her, Little Four definitely would not hide it from her. Although she was indeed very interested in what ‘actualization’ involved, she did not want Little Four to be punished and harmed by the system’s restrictions. At the heart of it, Little Four was much more important than all of that.

Seeing Boss Ling Lan letting him off with so much understanding, Little Four was instantly greatly moved. Chirp, chirp, chirp³ ... his boss was just the greatest! He must definitely work hard to evolve and become even stronger ... once he became strong enough that the restrictions and bindings become ineffective against him, then he would be able to tell all these secrets to Boss!

At this moment, Little Four’s yearning to become strong became increasingly more intense, and his distaste for the system’s bindings increased correspondingly ... this also spurred him to deviate from the original developmental pathway set for him by the system, to truly become a powerful, independent, emotionally-capable Little Four.

Ling Lan skipped over the topic, turning instead to ask about other things. Thus, she found out that the 7th grade had not disappointed, securing the victory of the grand armed melee, and becoming the final beneficiaries. Moreover, under the academy’s instructors diligent monitoring, along with their speedy rescues, no deaths occurred in this grand armed melee. Of course, the number of wounded was indeed rather staggering — a whole 3000 people had bled and incurred injuries, while 800 of these had serious wounds. It was clear to see how intense and violent the grand armed melee had been.

After being informed, Ling Lan breathed a sigh of relief. She had been the one to initiate the grand armed melee — although she had already been mentally prepared for deaths and injuries in the process, this final outcome was undoubtedly a perfect one ... this made her very happy.

However, what Little Four told her next gave her pause — she never knew that that eminent master living in the Ling family mansion had such a complex background, capable of changing the course of her life with just a simple sentence ... was she really about to leave the scout academy where she had lived for 7 years?

Thinking of the little companions who had grown up alongside her, some reluctance welled up in Ling Lan’s heart. Unknowingly, she had already accepted them into her heart, truly considering them as her own dear younger siblings.

However, the cold rationality Ling Lan cultivated within the learning space very quickly chased away this little bit of reluctance. Ling Lan knew very well that everyone had their own paths to walk — she could

not always shelter them under her wings. Letting them learn how to be independent earlier would be better for their future development.

Besides, there was a secret inside Ling Lan's heart. That was that, she would not choose to enrol in the First Men's Military Academy. Instead, she would enrol in a co-ed military school in a distant galaxy to finish up the remainder of her studies. After that, she would traverse the starry skies, gradually disappearing from the public eye ... to regain her female identity, it was necessary for her to leave the people who were familiar with her. Therefore, instead of making them unbearably sad then, she might as well take the chance to leave now. This way, at that time, she would be able to find a very good excuse to leave this planet.

Chapter 179: Cry 'Daddy'!

Decision made, Ling Lan's thoughts no longer lingered on the scout academy. Her mind turned to that Instructor Mu who had the deepest respect of her mother Lan Luofeng — what sort of personage was he? Based on Little Four's description, he could even berate the dean of the Central Scout Academy without any reservations — his identity was most certainly not simple.

Chattering on and off, Little Four reported everything, and then, suddenly thinking of something, his mood drooped noticeably. With a face full of reluctance, he asked, "Going back just like this, won't it be very difficult to meet up with daddy?"

Outside the academy, when they logged on, they would log onto the real virtual world, not the academy's enclosed virtual world. From there, to seek out the concealed gateway to the Central Scout Academy's network, even if Little Four spread out his resources, would take up considerable time and effort. It was not a simple matter.

That was not to say that Little Four could not break past the barrier-gate, but the virtual world was just too vast — many concealed gateways would be easily overlooked. It was just like that mysterious BL world¹ Little Four had entered previously — if Little Four had not stumbled upon it by accident, he might never have known that a virtual space was hiding at that particular spot ...

That was why Little Four was rather worried — if he could not find that concealed gateway to the Central Scout Academy quickly, then, did that mean that he would not be able to visit daddy within the near future? Mind you, in the recent past, whenever Little Four had time, he would run over to Ling Xiao's legacy space, sometimes even up to 3 or 4 times a day. Although Little Four was very afraid of Ling Xiao's immense spiritual energy and did not dare to interact directly with him, Little Four only needed to see Ling Xiao's warm smile and his mood would become amazingly upbeat ...

Ling Lan was deeply suspicious of this sort of atypical behaviour from Little Four — was her Little Four already at the age where he needed paternal love? This speculation of hers naturally prompted Little Four's empathic denial ... but seeing an extremely noticeable flush appear around the skin surrounding Little Four's ears, Ling Lan instantly realised that Little Four was just too embarrassed to admit the truth.

Little Four's reaction caused Ling Lan to fall into a silent contemplation. Ling Lan's emotions regarding Ling Xiao were extremely complicated. As she was growing up, Ling Xiao had never appeared. Although Lan Luofeng constantly talked about Ling Xiao and his glorious exploits by her ear since she was small,

trying to establish the image of a perfect father in Ling Lan's mind, Ling Lan was after all not a true child. Her mental maturity meant that it was impossible for her to truly accept a man she had never met, a man she only knew by name as her father just because Lan Luofeng kept bringing him up in conversation.

Thus, Ling Xiao had always been the most familiar stranger in Ling Lan's heart! Just like a character on a portrait — beautifully perfect but ethereal and unrealistic.

But then all of this had been broken apart by her accidental venture into Ling Xiao's legacy space. Although the Ling Xiao within the legacy space was just a spiritual entity, it was still a manifestation of Ling Xiao's true character. The words and interactions with the entity inside represented the words that Ling Xiao had imagined he wanted to say even before Ling Lan was born. From those words, Ling Lan had sensed the deep love that Ling Xiao had held for his child ...

Ling Xiao was definitely a caring father. He was willing to trust his child, and when his child needed it, he would provide the warmest and most substantial love and care ... During this period of interaction, Ling Lan could clearly sense this from the spiritual entity, and had been moved by it.

Ling Lan still remembered, back when the two of them had first met in the legacy space, at the end, Ling Xiao had asked Ling Lan whether she could call him 'daddy' ... This request had been ignored by Ling Lan then. Because back then, Ling Lan really had not been able to accept that foreign and young beyond reason man as her father.

However, after spending time with him these past few years, Ling Lan often going into the legacy space to receive instruction from Ling Xiao and spar with him, she had finally got to experience a father's mentorship and expectation for his child. This made Ling Lan unable to continue ignoring Ling Xiao's love and sacrifices ...

Ling Lan muttered to herself, "Yes, I need to find an opportunity to go see him once!" This time, she would call him 'daddy'! He deserved it; the Ling Xiao of 13 years ago had sincerely wanted to be a dutiful father back then.

Ling Lan's words caused Little Four to revive instantly. Deeply moved, he said, "Alright, leave everything to me." Although they were in a recovery pod right now, with seemingly no way to enter the virtual world — who was he? He was the all-powerful virtual god Little Four! As long as there was a path to connect to the virtual world, he would be able to connect ... Oh no, why had he forgotten this earlier? Actually wasting so many days just waiting for Boss to wake up.

Boo hoo hoo, daddy, Little Four has already not seen you for almost 10 days! I really miss you so much! Little Four missed Daddy Ling Xiao's warm presence terribly. That was what a dad felt like.

With Little Four's assistance, Ling Lan was carried by Little Four into the virtual world. As there was no official login device, they were currently online as dark netizens with no identity. Little Four took the initiative to conceal their figures, immediately slipping into Ling Xiao's legacy space.

The two of them walked the familiar path through the Ling family mansion and pushed open the study door. Hearing them come in, Ling Xiao lifted his head, and with a warm smile, he said, "Ling Lan, you've come ..." Just like an extremely patient father who had been waiting unbelievably patiently for his own playful child to return home after playing their fill ...

Ling Lan even had the mistaken feeling that, in these days which she had been absent, had Ling Xiao been sitting alone behind his desk all this time, just waiting for the moment she would open the door and walk in?

Ling Lan felt a pang run through her heart and her lips trembled. Finally, one word escaped her lips, “Daddy!” Although this cry was very soft, in this silent and tranquil study, it was unmistakably clear.

Ling Xiao, who had originally been sitting primly behind his study desk abruptly stood up at hearing Ling Lan’s cry. Because of the rough movement, the study desk actually shuddered, several books piled on it falling noisily to the ground. Right then, Ling Xiao had no mind to bother about all this. Emotionally, he said, “Ling Lan, just now ... what did you call me?”

Ling Lan saw Ling Xiao’s low-hanging right hand curl into a tight fist. His eyes held traces of pleasant surprise, and nervousness, as well as some inconceivable fear. Ling Lan would never have imagined that this strong man before her — who had stood at the pinnacle of humanity, the god-class operator Ling Xiao who was considered an ultimate weapon of the Federation — would actually have times when he was afraid ... What’s more, what he feared was that his child would be unwilling to call him ‘daddy’.

Seeing this side of Ling Xiao, Ling Lan heart was a complicated jumble of feelings. She could not say whether it was joy or sorrow, but her eyelids actually felt a little strained and wet ... Back when Ling Xiao was facing death, had he been just as scared? Afraid that she, who had never had him around to be a father, would not want to acknowledge him as a father?

“Daddy!” The first cry was undoubtedly the hardest. After pushing it out, the following cry seemed much easier. This subsequent cry of Ling Lan’s was much clearer than her first, and it was also much louder.

“Hey!” Ling Xiao responded solemnly. His initially taut facial muscles instantly relaxed, and a large smile bloomed on his face. It was radiant and blinding, actually making it impossible to look at him directly — even Ling Lan, who was used to seeing gorgeous men, found herself dazed and bedazzled in that instant.

By the side, Little Four subconsciously swallowed, and gasped in awe, “I finally know now who Boss resembles ...” He still remembered back when Boss was 6 years old, one smile from her was capable of stealing people’s hearts and souls. Back then, he had puzzled over how Boss had this ability — looks like it had been inherited from her daddy.

Little Four’s words caused Ling Lan to abruptly wake up from her stupor. She could not help but throw a glare at Little Four — what nonsense is this little idiot spewing now? She was Ling Xiao’s child; hasn’t it been said since ancient times that daughters resemble their fathers? Her resembling Ling Xiao was a perfectly normal thing!

Ling Xiao was undoubtedly in a great mood. In the past, he had always waited for Ling Lan to start speaking, but this time, he initiated conversation by asking, “Ling Lan, my child, do you need me to explain anything for you this time?”

Ling Lan shook her head. “Nothing at present. I’ve just come to tell you that we may not be able to come here in the near future for a period of time.”

Hearing this, Ling Xiao was taken aback. “Why?”

Ling Lan chuckled dryly. “I need to go back to the mansion. There aren’t any login devices tuned to the scout academy’s virtual space there. If I want to come here, it’s a little problematic.”

Ling Xiao’s initial excitement and joy gradually dissipated, and a trace of sadness swept through his gaze. Because it passed by so swiftly, lost in her own thoughts and emotions, Ling Lan did not notice.

After a beat of silence, Ling Xiao opened his mouth to say, “When will you be leaving, approximately?”

Ling Lan silently estimated the time her body needed to recover. “One month later at the soonest.” One month later, even if her internal injuries were still not fully healed, she should be able to come out from the recovery pod.

“Then in this one month, try to take time to come here as much as possible,” said Ling Xiao with a stern expression. Without his smile, he faintly exerted an invisible force of presence, causing Ling Lan to instantly feel pressured.

“Yes, daddy!” replied Ling Lan, standing tall reflexively.

Ling Xiao’s looked long and hard at Ling Lan, as if trying to engrave Ling Lan’s appearance into his heart. Under Ling Xiao’s focused gaze, Ling Lan’s palms were sweating from nervousness. As if sensing Ling Lan’s anxiety and unease, a faint smile appeared on Ling Xiao’s face. This smile made Ling Xiao’s entire force of presence dissipate completely. Ling Lan immediately felt the invisible pressure upon her vanish; her entire person instantly at ease.

“Tell me about your mother. Is she well?” Asking about Lan Luofeng, Ling Xiao’s entire being became extremely gentle, the unconcealed love in his gaze so saturated that one could almost wring water out of it ² .

Seeing this kind of Ling Xiao, an old poem stirred in Ling Lan’s mind — *the strongest score-forged ³ steel, turns to finger-twining silk*. When a man truly loves a woman, no matter how strong he was, he would willingly become finger-twining silk ⁴ ...

The faint melancholy in Ling Lan’s heart rose up once more — if Ling Xiao had not died, he and Lan Luofeng would most certainly have been a heavenly couple. However, the heavens were cruel, unwilling to lay eyes on such a perfect happy ending — it insisted on leaving it unfulfilled, thus engraving it in bone and heart ⁵ .

Ling Lan slowly recounted bits and pieces of Lan Luofeng’s life in these past 13 years. She spoke of her gentleness, her doting love, her petty shameless play-tantrums, her untiring nagging ... as well as her rich descriptions of that perfectly flawless husband in her mind’s eye ...

At this point of her narration, Ling Lan saw a flash of pain pass through Ling Xiao’s eyes, as well as a faint sense of regret, and even a trace of blankness.

The two of them — one seated, one standing — thus conversed half the day away. Only then did Ling Lan realise that there was actually a differentiation between day and night within the legacy space. The visibility inside the study gradually grew dim, as the sun outside the window gradually fell below the western horizon.

Chapter 180: Proud Of You!

Only then did Ling Xiao seem to become aware of the passing of time. He blinked and said, "Oh, it's this late?" He looked at Ling Lan and asked, "Are you leaving now?"

Ling Lan really wanted to say that she had stayed here for too long, that someone outside must already be looking for her. But, for some reason, Ling Lan found that she just could not spit those words out.

Even so, Ling Lan's silence had already told Ling Xiao that she really could stay no longer.

"Don't forget. This one month, find time to come here as much as possible!" Ling Xiao emphasized this point heavily once more, as if worried Ling Lan would forget.

Ling Lan nodded heavily. This was the first time she felt that leaving this place was so difficult, her heart ever so reluctant ...

"Go!" That said, Ling Xiao waved a hand, and Ling Lan felt herself being pushed out by a sweep of energy. By the time she came to her senses, she was already outside the legacy space.

"Boss, let's go!" Ling Lan was not the only one who was reluctant; Little Four was just as reluctant. But they were really just out of time.

The two of them quickly returned to the recovery pod. They had not been back for 3 minutes when the recovery pod was opened to reveal Lan Luofeng's frantic and anxious face.

Ling Lan gave her mother a wide smile, soothing her by saying, "Mummy, I've woken up. I'm fine!" Ling Lan had really wanted to smile brilliantly, but the tears in her eyes began to flow uncontrollably ...

Mummy, did you know that Daddy and I had talked about you all afternoon? Did you know that, when Daddy heard news about you, his face would emit a radiant light? Did you know that, Daddy had to forcefully hold back the grief and regret he felt when he heard those wistful words you said while missing him?

Two people who were so obviously in love ... why did they have to be so cruelly separated by life and death? For the first time, Ling Lan felt pain stab into her heart, on behalf of her parents of this life who loved her so.

"Ling Lan, is it very painful?" Lan Luofeng was frantic over Ling Lan's tears, thinking Ling Lan was in unbearable pain. Ling Lan shook her head and said, "It doesn't hurt. I'm just glad I'm still alive ... Mummy, living is great, isn't it?" If Ling Xiao were still alive, would Lan Luofeng's life be without regrets?

"Yup, it's great as long as you're alive!" Lan Luofeng nodded emphatically, tears flowing down her face as well. As long as Ling Lan lived, even if she had to die immediately in exchange, she would be willing ...

At times, Lan Luofeng would think to herself that, if Ling Xiao were still alive, no one would dare to lay a hand on her Ling Lan. But Ling Xiao had truly passed away so young. Without his protection, those despicable and avaricious people had targeted their child without reservation. From young, Ling Lan had learned on her own that she had to bear everything on her own shoulders ...

Ling Xiao, oh, Ling Xiao, how could you bear to leave us behind? However much I love you, that is how much I hate you! A trace of resentment flashed through Lan Luofeng's teary eyes. For the first time ever, she had a grudge in her heart towards Ling Xiao.

Ever since Ling Lan woke up, her body was slowly recovering within the recovery pod. This news was greeted with great joy by everyone in the Ling family. If the family head holding up a family is out of the picture, the family would very easily collapse on itself.

After finding out that Ling Lan was fine, Ling Qin began a new round of investigative retrenchment within the Ling family mansion. For some of those family loyalists whose loyalty could not be guaranteed, Ling Qin sent them all out of planet Doha to other planets to expand the Ling family businesses. He needed to ensure that before Ling Lan returned to the Ling family mansion, that all the Ling family members remaining on Doha were loyal without question.

Ling Lan's multiple brushes with danger had thoroughly frightened this Ling family chamberlain. He did not want Ling Lan to ever be in such crises again due to some negligence on his part. Ling Qin knew very well that luck would only work once or twice, but never three or four times. He needed to take comprehensive action ahead of time in order to ensure Ling Lan's safety.

At this moment, Ling Lan did not know that because of her, everyone in the Ling family had begun to move, trying to create a safe home for her to recuperate in peace. In this one month, she was busy sneaking into Ling Xiao's legacy space along with Little Four to meet Ling Xiao.

However, in this one month, Ling Xiao was obviously much stricter than before. The moment Ling Lan entered the legacy space, Ling Xiao would throw her into an assessment space to test all the abilities she had learned thus far. Even if she passed the assessment on a particular front, this did not mean that Ling Lan was free — the next time, the assessment would still be there, but its contents would have been raised by a whole difficulty level ...

These kinds of pressure-test assessments allowed Ling Lan to gain a deeper understanding of all the abilities under her belt. Her initially already somewhat loosened and primed Qi-Jin at peak stage, under the continuous pressuring over the course of the month, successfully broke through to officially enter the optimal peak level of Qi-Jin. As long as Ling Lan continued to accumulate the Qi in her body, she felt that she would soon be able to peek into the profound secrets of Domain stage.

Still, Ling Lan had the vague feeling that she already seemed to understand what the profound secrets of Domain stage were — but that feeling was like a flash of lightning, slipping away before it could be caught. But Ling Lan believed that as long as the energy within her body accumulated till a certain level, she would perhaps then be able to know what the profound secrets of Domain stage were.

That great barrier that blocked off 99.999999999% of Houtian Domain masters from ascending to become Xiantian Domain masters¹ — to her, was perhaps not that difficult ...

This feeling was very intriguing; Ling Lan felt as if she were being informed by her own body's instinct. This pleased Ling Lan tremendously. Initially, she had thought that ascending to Domain stage would require luck and serendipity, that she may very well be stuck at this barrier for up to 5 to 10 years —

perhaps even her whole life. But unexpectedly, the heavens favoured her so, actually bestowing such a cheat upon her ...

In her excitement, Ling Lan told her father Ling Xiao what she was feeling. Ling Lan's strange feelings also caused Ling Xiao to be rather stunned. However, Ling Xiao did not believe that these feelings were untraceable, and so carefully asked her for a detailed accounting of everything that had happened in the recent past. When he heard that someone had borrowed her body to unleash Domain energy, Ling Xiao was pretty sure he now understood part of it.

Ling Xiao guessed that, because Ling Lan's body had felt Domain stage energy first-hand, its muscles had generated a type of Domain energy memory. Moreover, this memory would help Ling Lan grasp the profound secrets of Domain, and from there, lead Ling Lan into becoming a true Domain master. Regarding this, Ling Xiao could not help but admit that Ling Lan's luck was truly astounding — actually being able to benefit from misfortune under those kinds of circumstances.

However, Ling Xiao also believed that this muscle memory would fade away with the passage of time. Therefore, for Ling Lan to successfully advance to Domain stage, she would need to do so before this muscle memory disappeared. Otherwise, once enough time passed, the muscle memory would vanish, and this fortuitous catalyst would also be lost. At that time, for Ling Lan to advance to Domain stage, she would then have to do it the hard way like other people. She would have to continue to seek out chance opportunities to obtain the possibility of sudden insight.

Ling Xiao's words gave great joy to Ling Lan even as they burdened her. Indeed, this was her lucky chance — but whether or not she could take good advantage of it still depended on her hard work.

A month passed swiftly. On this day, Ling Lan once again came to Ling Xiao's legacy space. Ling Xiao did not act like before and throw Ling Lan into an assessment space, nor did he give pointers on Ling Lan's combat weaknesses and instruct her through learning exercises. At this moment, he was just sitting behind his study desk, deep in thought.

Seeing Ling Lan arrive, he stood up and slowly walked over to Ling Lan's side, and then hugged her close gently. "Ling Lan, my child, in this one month, you have worked hard. I am very happy seeing your growth."

Ling Lan, in Ling Xiao's embrace, felt her father's warm presence enveloping her. This caused Ling Lan to breathe in silently. This was the first time Ling Xiao was hugging her — it felt so good that she almost lost herself in the sensation.

This kind of warm hug filled with the sense of safety, was an experience so distant within Ling Lan's memory, almost forgotten ... Only when she experienced it again did Ling Lan know that she had always yearned for it inside her heart. She yearned for all of this ... as expected, she was still a girl, somewhat sentimental! This was really not a good thing — her current identity did not permit her to be weak ...

But, just this once, let her let loose and be selfish — let her revert to being a little girl for once, and freely enjoy the warmth and safety of her father's embrace. It was as if the wind and rain would be kept out by this strong and gentle man before her eyes — she could just hide safely within the nest of her father's arms.

“Time really went by so quickly, I don’t feel ready to let go ...” Ling Xiao’s arms suddenly tightened around her, his entire presence shifting from its initial tender warmth into cold grimness. “But, a baby eagle must still leave its nest to fly on its own eventually ...”

Ling Xiao slowly pushed Ling Lan away. “All I should have taught you, I already have. In the end ...” Ling Xiao slowly reached out his right hand, and tapped Ling Lan lightly on the forehead. Ling Lan blinked blankly, then felt a surge of foreign memories rush into her brain, including some of the tasks Ling Xiao needed her to do after this.

Ling Lan stared dubiously at Ling Xiao, unsure why he would use this method to leave his final instructions.

Ling Xiao smiled gently, a finger lightly pressed to his lips, in a shushing motion, indicating for Ling Lan not to say anything. In his eyes, there was a trace of cunning.

“ I believe the military has always been monitoring this area. In truth, I’ve sensed the presence of a foreign spiritual entity, but that spiritual entity does not seem to have any bad intentions, which is why I’ve ignored them. Still, some things, some legacies, should not be known to other people ... it’s fine if you understand, don’t say anything.”

These words by Ling Xiao rang out in Ling Lan’s mind; it was uttered from the spiritual entity Ling Xiao had inserted into her mind just previously.

Ling Lan surreptitiously wiped the cold sweat off her forehead, unsure whether she should tell Ling Xiao of Little Four’s existence. However, Ling Xiao did not give Ling Lan any opportunity to speak. He suddenly lifted his head to look out the study door and said, “Although I really cannot bear to part from you, for your safety, I need to disappear now ...”

Ling Xiao bowed his head, once more looking intently at Ling Lan, his eyes shining with relief and happiness. “Ling Lan, I am very proud I am your father. One day, you will create your own legend. Daddy is proud of you!”

That said, Ling Xiao beamed. The smile on his face this time was more radiant than any before it, dazzling to the eye, but Ling Lan did not get lost in its brilliance this time. Because, an indescribable sadness was rising in her heart at that moment — in Ling Xiao’s smile, Ling Lan could see deeply hidden grief and regret. If it were possible, Ling Lan believed that Ling Xiao would never want to die — he would never choose to disappear from this world.