

## Crossing 181

### Chapter 181: The Disappearance of Ling Xiao's Legacy!

"Goodbye!" Ling Lan only saw Ling Xiao's lips move, leaving behind this one final word, and then she was chased out by a great force by Ling Xiao once more ...

Ling Lan's mind had yet to settle when Little Four's expression became frantic. "Not good, Dad's legacy space is disappearing!"

Hearing this, Ling Lan was horrified. She tried to enter the legacy space again, but was barred. Even Little Four, this practically omnipotent god of the virtual world, had also been forcefully ejected by this powerful force of the legacy space, unable to find any way to get close ...

At this time, Ling Xiao's voice rang out in Ling Lan's mind, *"Stop, my child. Please forgive this irresponsible father of yours. Please take on my responsibility, take good care of your mother, Lan Luofeng!"*

As this voice faded, Ling Xiao's legacy space also vanished from the virtual world of the scout academy, leaving no trace behind. It was as if Ling Xiao's legacy space had never existed.

"Boss, Dad ... really disappeared ..." Little Four abruptly appeared beside Ling Lan. In virtual space, Little Four could freely control his manifestation. And so, a little boy of about 5 to 6 years old clung to Ling Lan's sleeve, sad tears streaming endlessly from his eyes.

Little Four was so sad because he had not even had the chance to introduce himself to Ling Xiao, or call Ling Xiao 'daddy' to his face ...

Ling Lan suppressed the urge to cry, patting Little Four gently on the head as she tried to comfort him, "Daddy didn't disappear. He will always be in our hearts, isn't that so?"

Ling Lan's words caused Little Four to become thoughtful. He held back his gushing tears, but just when he was about to say something, he noticed a notification from the virtual space. His expression turned grim and he said, "Boss, we need to leave quickly. There are hackers and spectres approaching ..."

Little Four quickly whisked Ling Lan away with him. In several flash steps, they were back in the recovery pod. As they ran, Little Four did not forget to wipe clean all traces of their presence within that virtual space. Little Four believed that, with the work of an intelligence-entity of his level, a normal person would not be able to find anything suspicious. However, Little Four was still very cautious. After sending Ling Lan back, he returned to the scene once again. He had considered it —if anyone found anything by accident, he would utterly destroy the scout academy's virtual world, deleting all data within it. He would not allow any danger to come to his Boss.

Just a few seconds after Little Four had run away with Ling Lan, five people suddenly appeared where they had been standing. Four of them were dressed in uniforms, while the last was wearing a black robe which cloaked his entire body, hiding his appearance. This was the standard outfit for spectres.

One of the men dressed in uniform, obviously somewhat higher in rank, said to the others, "It should be here. Go investigate and see if there are any abnormalities."

Receiving their orders, the other four began to move. Not long after, they reported their findings to the head.

“Colonel, there is no trace of the existence of a legacy space, and there is also no sign of one being moved by human measures ...” said one of the uniformed members obscurely. He knew very well whose legacy space they were looking for. If it were lost, it would be an immeasurable loss for the entire Federation.

“Colonel, I have already successfully noted down all students who were in the area within these three hours. Here is the name list ...” said another uniformed member as he handed a sheet of white paper over to the colonel. On it was a tightly packed list of student names.

The colonel accepted the name list but did not look at it. Instead, he turned to look at the black-robed man on the other side. “Lieutenant Colonel J, did you find anything?”

Lieutenant Colonel J was specially transferred by the military from another special team to assist them. With regards to the other’s details, the colonel did not know much, and even the other’s face was unknown to the colonel. However, the colonel was not annoyed by this. He knew that no one had the right to know the true identity of a spectre other than the spectre’s direct supervisor. These were all necessary measures set in place to protect spectres.

Every country maintained comprehensive monitoring on spectres. In particular, if an enemy nation’s spectre was discovered, all attempts would be made to kill them off. The moment the spectre’s real identity was exposed, as long as there was any chance of killing the other, a nation would choose to make a move even if it had to pay a steep price.

This was because there was no way at present for human society to be separated from the virtual world completely — and spectres were existences equal to death gods in the virtual world. No matter how strong a person was in real life, the moment they entered the virtual world, if they were targeted by a spectre, they pretty much had no chance of escape. It should be said that spectres were a type of balance-disrupting existence to the virtual world. Their death-god-like ability was feared and distrusted by all the people in power, regardless of their nationality ...

Lieutenant Colonel J indicated for the colonel to wait patiently, and then he spread out his spectre ability, beginning to sense the chaotic energy in the surroundings.

Meanwhile, the colonel took the opportunity to scan quickly through the name list in his hands. Seeing no one clearly suspicious on the list, he handed the document over to the uniformed member standing beside him all this while, saying, “Let the monitoring room dig out the information on all the people on this list. Investigate it thoroughly, don’t let anything at all suspicious slip through.”

“Yes, Colonel!” The uniformed member left swiftly after accepting the document.

After sensing for a moment, Lieutenant Colonel J said, “I don’t sense the remnant energy of any other spectre.” A spectre’s energy signature can only be sensed by another spectre. “The disappearance of the legacy space should have nothing to do with spectres.”

Hearing what Lieutenant Colonel J had to say, the colonel let out a breath of relief. If this incident had truly been caused by the infiltration of an enemy nation's spectre, he would probably have been court-martialled and inevitably charged with dereliction of duty.

"However ..." Lieutenant Colonel J's voice carried a slight tone of confusion, "The remnant energy here makes me feel a little uncomfortable."

"Ah?" said the colonel excitedly, "have you sensed something strange?"

Lieutenant Colonel J shook his head and said, "That's not it. Perhaps the self-destruction of the legacy space produced some energy that affects my spectre abilities." He could not explain it. This was just a gut feeling of his, not a sense of danger. That energy he sensed just made him feel extremely uncomfortable, as if somewhat repulsive to his spectre abilities.

The colonel instantly understood what Lieutenant Colonel J was trying to say. A legacy space left by a god-class operator would most certainly carry some of the god-class operator's spiritual energy. These energies were extremely powerful — if spectres could be said to have a counter, these god-class masters would be their only rivals in the virtual world. Their spiritual power was formidable enough that even these death gods could do nothing against them.

After figuring it out, the colonel cast Lieutenant Colonel J's words into the back of his mind. Instead, he began to worry over how he could account for the disappearance of Ling Xiao's legacy space to his superiors. Even though he had escaped the fate of being court-martialled, he still needed to find a reasonable explanation for this freak phenomenon! So, with a woebegone expression, he asked, "Then, Lieutenant Colonel J, can you guess the reason for the legacy space's disappearance?"

Lieutenant Colonel J contemplated the issue in silence for a moment, then said unhurriedly, "Actually, there are many reasons why a legacy space would disappear. One, would be due to outside interference, which would mostly be due to spectre abilities. Another, would be that the legacy of the legacy space has already been passed on. Once an inheritor completely masters everything the legacy space has to offer, to ensure the exclusivity of the inheritor's legacy, the legacy space would choose to self-destruct ..."

The colonel's eyes lighted up. "Are you saying that, it is possible for that legacy space to have been successfully inherited by someone?"

Lieutenant Colonel J nodded lightly. "Yes, that is one of the possibilities. Of course, another possibility is that, the legacy space's creator had set a final deadline. Once that deadline is exceeded, regardless of whether the legacy space was inherited or not, it would still begin its self-destruct sequence."

The colonel had initially been thrilled by hearing of the possibility of the legacy being inherited, but what Lieutenant Colonel J had to say next about a self-destruct deadline caused his face to fall. He truly did not wish for Ling Xiao's legacy space to have disappeared because of the latter reason — this would be such a heavy loss for the Federation.

Right now, he could only hope that it was the second of the three possibilities listed. As long as they could find Ling Xiao's inheritor, then they would be able to obtain all of the secrets to Ling Xiao's ascension to god-class operator status from the inheritor. At that time, even if they could not use those secrets to ascend to god-class, the Federation would probably be able to produce mass numbers of top-

notch mecha operators and dominate the entire human world. The Federation's dream of being at the top of the world would be realised!

Having received an investigative report, the colonel had no mind to continue staying here in this virtual space. He immediately led his team of five away from the scene.

They had not left for long when Little Four's figure appeared where they had been standing. His little face was extremely grim, and he muttered to himself, "Spectres, eh? Rather impressive, as expected ..." That said, he disappeared once more.

Meanwhile, at this time, both in the virtual space and in reality, the news of the disappearance of Ling Xiao's legacy space had already gone viral <sup>1</sup>. Because there had never been confirmed news that Ling Xiao's legacy space had chosen an inheritor, all the students had remained extremely passionate in trying to crack this mysterious legacy space. There was attention on it at all times, so when the legacy space disappeared, the news immediately spread like wildfire among the students. The military, which had wanted to keep the matter under wraps, had been completely caught off-guard.

The only relief was that, aside from some of the upper ranks of the military and the academy's dean, no one else knew who had been the creator of the legacy space.

The military's investigation continued on in secret. The upper ranks of the military were leaning towards the explanation that the legacy had been inherited successfully. Therefore, they ordered strict monitoring and investigation on those people who had engaged with the legacy space over the past month before its disappearance. The moment anything strange was discovered, these students would be apprehended and brought in for covert questioning.

For this purpose, they even transferred in some hypnotists from particular special ops teams to hypnotise the children to try and find out the truth. However, all these seemingly suspicious students turned out not to be Ling Xiao's inheritor. This outcome disappointed them, and also made them anxious — their movements began to intensify, no longer being as covert as before.

## **Chapter 182: I Want to Become Strong!**

These actions drew strong opposition from the purely academic faction within the scout academy. They felt that these measures by the military was obviously making light of the wellbeing of their students. Although the Federation declared that hypnosis was harmless to the human body, and the general public believed that, the experienced teachers in the scout academy knew that hypnosis was actually a form of spiritual attack. It would cause some cracks and holes to appear in the spiritual self of the one being hypnotised. This would affect the children's future development, especially those who wanted to become mecha operators or starship navigators. Spiritual damage was especially taboo for those two career pathways.

From the start, the Central Scout Academy had been the gathering grounds of almost all the top 3 tiers of exceptional children. All of these children were very likely to become excellent soldiers in the future — the loss of any single one of them would be a loss to the Federation. Thus, the pure-academic faction, with Dean Ye Yifan at its head, made the decision to chase out the monitoring military staff currently

within the campus. They needed to protect their students! Moreover, Ling Xiao's legacy space was gone; it was unnecessary for these monitoring staff to remain in the Central Scout Academy.

The upper ranks of the military were naturally unwilling to just give up on Ling Xiao's legacy, but there was a pure-academic faction within the military upper ranks as well which supported the Central Scout Academy's decision. On top of that, the Grand Marshal also seemed to be on the side of the Central Scout Academy, so the military had no choice but to agree to withdraw the monitoring team trying to reclaim Ling Xiao's legacy.

In fact, this intense backlash from the Central Scout Academy was in large part due to the sudden unfounded suspicion towards Ling Lan by one of the senior officers in the monitoring team. The team had then requested the right to interrogate Ling Lan from the academy. This caused Mu Shui-qing, who had been watching over Ling Lan all this time, to become livid, and also spurred the dean of the academy, Ye Yifan, into an explosive rage.

Mind you, for this past month or so, Ling Lan had been calmly lying within a recovery pod, with no way of logging onto the virtual world. Without any shred of evidence whatsoever, the military had actually dared to submit such a preposterous request — this made the instructors of the pure-academic faction of the academy unbelievably mad.

Especially once the academy found out that the fake teachers who tried to assassinate Ling Lan had come about due to the negligence of the monitoring team ... one of their teams had been secretly killed and replaced while returning from the outside and the monitoring team had not noticed the problem, which had allowed the opponents to successfully infiltrate the Central Scout Academy and obtain the chance for an assassination.

Their negligence had already caused their student to receive such severe injuries, and they still wanted to take things one step further to destroy their student's future? Did they really take the Central Scout Academy to be pussycats? Here for them to push around as they liked? Enraged, the Central Scout Academy no longer gave any face to the military. They immediately threw an eviction notice at the monitoring team. This forceful measure let the monitoring team know that the matter was thoroughly out of their control now — although they tried their best to negotiate, it was all useless.

It should be said that the monitoring team had done a very stupid thing. Not only did this suggestion enrage the Central Scout Academy beyond reason, even the pure-academic faction within the upper ranks of the internal military itself was extremely angry. Even the Federation's Grand Marshal expressed extreme displeasure with their actions.

In the end, with no way of salvaging the situation, the monitoring team could only slip away from the Central Scout Academy with their tails between their legs. Meanwhile, Ye Yifan had taken this opportunity to fire almost all of the teachers within the academy who were not focused purely on academics. Only a small portion, with true skills but not much influence, managed to remain at the end of this great spring cleaning ...

Of course, this series of events was generally unknown to the scout students. They only knew that some of the teachers they were familiar with were gone, while some new unfamiliar teachers had emerged. However, there would always be new teachers appearing every year anyway, so the students did not find it strange.

Still, the military needed to come to a final verdict for the disappearance of Ling Xiao's legacy space. In the end, the military chose the final possibility as proposed by Lieutenant Colonel J. Ling Xiao must have set a final deadline when he had first created his legacy space. Whether or not his legacy was inherited, when the time came, the space would self-destruct.

This deduction made perfect sense and was accepted by a majority of the upper ranks. Although an extremely small portion of the upper ranks still insisted on believing that someone had obtained Ling Xiao's legacy — they believed they just had not found the inheritor yet. However, when they heard that the Grand Marshal had approved the military's submitted verdict, they knew the tide had passed. They could only regretfully give up on their investigations — no one would dare to question the Grand Marshal's decision. And so, the disappearance of Ling Xiao's legacy space ended without any great trouble, becoming one of the military's unsolved mysteries.

The furore over the disappearance of Ling Xiao's legacy space faded into tranquillity with the passage of time. Meanwhile, after resting for a full month and more, the condition of Ling Lan's body was getting much better. When Lan Luofeng found out that Ling Lan was able to come out from the recovery pod, she decided that it was time to pack up. Three days later, they would return to the Ling family mansion.

In these 3 days, Lan Luofeng was extremely busy. She submitted a request for the academy to process Ling Lan's withdrawal from the school; this was undoubtedly against Federation regulations. However, considering the special circumstances — Ling Lan's body still needed time to recover, and Mu Shui-qing was exerting pressure on Ye Yifan — the academy compromised. Ling Lan would have to return to the school in three years time to take the academy's final exam and apply for further enrolment at a military school or some other specialised academy then. After obtaining this promise from Lan Luofeng, the scout academy agreed to Ling Lan's withdrawal request.

News of the assassination attempt against Ling Lan during the grand armed melee had spread across the whole academy after the grand armed melee. The 7th grade, in particular, found out that Ling Lan had only been attacked by enemy nation assassins after successfully dispatching the top student of the 10th grade. If academy teachers had not arrived at the scene in time, Ling Lan might very well have been killed. This aggravated the entire 7th grade as a whole, because they knew very well that if Ling Lan had not dispatched the top rank of the 10th grade before he had been taken out, the winners of the grand armed melee was likely to have been the 10th grade ...

Considering what might have been, the 7th grade was filled with hatred for those enemy nations of the Federation<sup>1</sup>. Qi Long and the others of Ling Lan's group of friends, were especially livid. They wished they could personally find those killers and tear them into pieces.

Lan Luofeng knew what the truth of the matter was, but also knew that this was politics. For unity, security, and to fan the patriotism of the students, some lies needed to exist, while some truths needed to be buried. Lan Luofeng did not want to be at odds with the country's political machinations — as long as they could give her a satisfactory accounting, she would not concern herself with these trivial things. Thus, she chose to look the other way.

Qi Long and the others were extremely worried about Ling Lan's condition. While Ling Lan was still unconscious, they kept coming to visit him, and so they knew that the damage to Ling Lan's body was severe enough to require a long stay at home. Ling Lan could no longer continue to attend school with

them at the academy. This news saddened them, especially Qi Long. After finding out the news, he ran off on his own to a combat room for a punishing round of training. In the end, it was still Han Jiyun who managed to coax him back out.

Even so, the other members of Ling Lan's team could clearly sense the change in Qi Long. Although he seemed as outgoing and straightforward as ever, it was as if there was a rumbling volcano inside him. Though everything looked normal on the outside, no one could tell when he would explode ...

Han Jiyun was half pleased and half worried at this condition of Qi Long's. He was pleased because Qi Long had become much more proactive over matters involving Boss Lan, displaying much more initiative. But he was also worried because he was afraid Qi Long would be unable to bear the pressure he put on himself, and crumble under it in the end ...

Han Jiyun clenched his fists silently, telling himself that he must work hard. He must not let Qi Long walk down the path of self-destruction. Whenever Qi Long lost his way, he would step up to show him the way ...

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When official news of Ling Lan's withdrawal from school came out, Qi Long's group, including Han Xuya and Luo Chao, as well as the original members of group 072, all came to make their final farewells with Ling Lan.

Filled with reluctance, the group came to stand before Ling Lan. Right then, Ling Lan was seated in a technologically-advanced wheelchair. Seeing the group here to say goodbye to her, Ling Lan's heart was filled with happiness.

However, when Ling Lan saw Qi Long's appearance, her brows twitched into a slight frown. Observant as ever, she had noticed something off about Qi Long.

"Qi Long, come here." Seeing Qi Long's state, Ling Lan was instantly in a bad mood. She coldly ordered Qi Long to come and stand beside her.

Qi Long excitedly walked over to wait for his boss's instructions, but Ling Lan did not say anything. With a flick of her finger, Ling Lan sent an ice bead smacking into Qi Long's forehead, causing Qi Long's head to bend back involuntarily.

Qi Long grimaced at the pain, his right hand flying up to press and rub at his forehead. He shouted, "Boss, why did you hit me?"

Ling Lan's ice bead had left a dark red mark on Qi Long's forehead. It was clear that Ling Lan had not wanted to be soft on Qi Long. "Seeing your current state, I just feel annoyed and really want to hit you."

Confused, Qi Long asked, "Why, Boss? Aren't I doing quite well?"

"Quite well? What's up with your angry-at-the-world attitude?" sniffed Ling Lan. Ling Lan could clearly sense the bottled rage Qi Long had stoppered up inside him.

Qi Long was silent. His hanging arms curled into fists, the veins on the backs of his hands becoming obvious. He did not even seem to notice even when his nails left deep marks on his palms. Should he tell

Boss Lan how much he hated his own helplessness? ... If he had just been a little stronger, Boss Lan would not have had to fight on his own.

Qi Long knew that despite the all-around lock on the communicative functions on their communicators during the grand armed melee, Boss Lan could bypass those restrictions. So, Boss Lan could easily have notified them when he was being attacked. But even when Boss Lan's life had been hanging in the balance, he had still chosen not to contact them, fighting on his own instead. Qi Long knew that this was because Ling Lan did not want to bring them into danger. But from another perspective, this proved that they were just too weak to help Ling Lan ...

"Smack!" A cold staff-shaped weapon rapped the backs of Qi Long's hands, leaving behind a red line. "What are you doing? Self-mutilating? I don't have such a wimpy follower," said Ling Lan coldly, an ice-staff in her hands.

Ling Lan's words caused Qi Long's feelings to become unbalanced, his breathing becoming ragged as his chest rose and fell noticeably. He blurted out, "Boss, I want to become strong!"

Ling Lan's brow quirked. "Why?"

"I don't want to just stand behind you anymore. I don't want to see Boss hurt but be helpless to do anything about it. This feeling sucks ..." Qi Long mumbled lowly. His fists clenched tight once again, and he lifted his head to shout abruptly, "So, I want to become strong enough! I want to be able to fight by your side, Boss, and become your left and right arms, true sworn brothers that can brave life and death together ..."

### **Chapter 183: Latent Problems and a Mission!**

Ling Lan was stunned by these words. She had not expected herself to be the cause of Qi Long's sad state. At this moment, Qi Long had lost his mental balance due to his desperate need to grow stronger. Although being more proactive and more aggressive than before was a good thing, it was not so easy to strengthen one's combat arts just like that. The process needed the accumulation of time. If she did not have the learning space, which multiplied the amount of training time she had by manyfold — just relying on the time she had in real life, it would have been impossible to achieve the peak stage of Qi-Jin ...

It should be said that something had gone wrong with Qi Long's mental state. If this issue was not resolved soon, it would definitely be a great latent danger to Qi Long in future.

After weighing the matter for a moment, Ling Lan said, "Qi Long, I'm very happy you think this way. In future, we may be deployed to a battlefield. At that time, I hope that you will be the one protecting my back!"

Qi Long eyes blazed, his entire being coming to attention. Ling Lan was clearly telling him that he had high hopes for him; this increased his intent to become stronger — he definitely would not let Boss down.

“But, Qi Long, it’s not that easy to become strong. It cannot be rushed. You need the accumulation of time ...” However, Ling Lan’s following words made Qi Long’s heart sink. Was Boss Lan refusing him? Perhaps he wasn’t a genius, and so could not keep up with Boss’ footsteps?

“I hope that you will take things a step at a time and build your foundations well. Then you’ll be able to go higher in the future,” said Ling Lan slowly.

“But that way, the distance between us will just keep getting larger,” said Qi Long agitatedly.

Ling Lan’s brow quirked. “How could it? You will just be getting closer and closer to me.”

“Huh?” Qi Long was struck dumb by Ling Lan’s words. For a moment, he just could not understand what Ling Lan meant.

Ling Lan coolly pointed at her body and said, “What is the condition of my body?”

Qi Long lowered his head and said, downcast, “You need to recuperate for 3 to 4 years!” This was what the Ling family had announced to the public.

“Qi Long, this is the price!” said Ling Lan, self-mockingly, “Although the damage to my body was caused by the assassination attempt by enemies this time, my body is damaged so badly mostly because I had some latent problems remaining from breaking through too quickly before that.”

In her heart, Ling Lan silently confessed her sins to any passing gods. For the sake of her little follower’s future, she could only lie. Honestly, Ling Lan’s words were not entirely a lie — if Ling Lan had not possessed the godlike cheating device, the learning space, even the most talented of prodigies would have had to pay an everlasting pyrrhic price to achieve her current level of strength.

“How can this be?” Ling Lan’s words shocked all of her little companions. They could not believe that their Boss Lan, who seemed so formidable and level-headed, would actually do such a foolish thing.

Ling Lan swept her gaze in a circle over her companions before her and said tonelessly, “Because I did not want to lose to my father ...” Ling Lan lifted her head slightly, as if holding back her emotions. Very quickly, she lowered her head again, and when she faced them once more, she was back to normal. “But my talent is no match for my father’s. No matter how hard I train, I still cannot reach the pace of my father. Slowly, I felt the gap widening so I became impatient. Thus, at a moment not really suitable for breaking through, I still chose to break through.”

Qi Long and a few others knew who Ling Lan’s father was, so they did not reveal any signs of surprise at hearing this. In contrast, the faces of the others who had no idea who Ling Lan’s father was were filled with bewilderment as they stared at Ling Lan. In their eyes, Ling Lan was already so aberrantly prodigious that they could only look up to him ... but now, Ling Lan was saying that he was completely no match for his father ... Then, how aberrant was Ling Lan’s father exactly?!

Ling Lan saw the stupefied expressions of the others, and instantly realised that they probably still did not know that her father was Ling Xiao. It looked like before Qi Long and the others had gotten explicit permission from her, they had not told any of the others about this information. Her heart was instantly filled with gratitude and affection for them. A thought passed through her mind, and she said, “Can’t figure it out? How can there be someone so aberrant?”

Han Xuya, Luo Chao, and the others nodded their heads vigorously at Ling Lan's words. They really could not figure out who could be so aberrant and terrifying to cause the seemingly all-powerful Boss Lan admit defeat.

"My father is Ling Xiao!" The corners of Ling Lan's lips twitched upwards. She could not conceal the pride she felt that her father was just that aberrant.

"Ah!" Han Xuya was the first to scream in shock. A great lover of mecha, she naturally knew what the name Ling Xiao represented.

"God-class operator!" In their astonishment, the others could not help but gulp. In their hearts, Ling Xiao was like a deity — they would never have dared to even think of relating anyone by their side to him.

After a fit of excitement, the companions quickly calmed down. They looked at Ling Lan with gazes of admiration and also sympathy. They admired that Ling Lan's father was the god-class operator Ling Xiao, but also pitied Ling Lan for actually trying to challenge that publicly acknowledged number one prodigy. It would have been more of a shock if he *hadn't* lost badly!

Ling Lan felt somewhat awkward under these stares. In any case, she really had no intention of comparing herself to her father, but this excuse was just more convincing. She coughed and then turned to look at Qi Long, and said, "Qi Long, even though I managed to force a breakthrough successfully, I hurt my foundations. So, I have no choice but to rest for a long period of time after being injured this time. Do you also want to be like me? Lying in a bed for 4 to 5 years, maybe even longer?"

Qi Long shook his head emphatically. He did not want that. He just wanted to be able to stand by Boss's side when he needed him, and not just have to watch helplessly, or even be protected by Boss. Therefore, his desire to become strong would never change. At most, he would be a little more careful, making sure not to rush as much when trying to break through in his physical skills training.

Qi Long's gaze shone with his determination. Ling Lan sighed internally — why was this brat so stubborn? For the first time, Ling Lan had a bit of a headache. It was really so goddamn difficult to be someone else's boss. How could she get rid of Qi Long's tenacious way of thinking?

"Qi Long, you're actually cornering yourself now." Ling Lan suddenly thought of the upcoming mission of the 7th grade, and her eyes lighted up. She felt that she had a way to solve the problem now. Since she could not find a way to suppress Qi Long urgent desire to become strong, then she would give him a safe way to become stronger. "Physical skills are not the only path to becoming stronger."

Qi Long threw a confused glance at Ling Lan, unsure what Ling Lan wanted to say.

"In this world, the strongest people are not physical fighters, but mecha operators," reminded Ling Lan, "Just like my father Ling Xiao, although his physical skills were only at Domain, he still became a god-class operator, the Federation's ultimate weapon. This is an existence that even God-Realm masters cannot compare with.

"And after this, you all will be going to complete the virtual world barrier-crossing mission. This was my original goal. Although I can't go anymore now, that doesn't mean I've given up on this goal. So Qi Long, as the team leader, and as my follower, you need to finish it for me."

Looking at the level of Qi Long's team right now, this mission was totally at an S-level difficulty. Hearing Ling Lan's command, Qi Long's spirits rallied. He pounded his chest and said, "Don't worry, Boss, I will complete this mission."

"This is just the first step. After entering the real virtual world, go and learn how to operate mecha. Three years later, when I return to the academy for the tests, I hope you will all have successfully advanced to intermediate mecha warrior or higher. Especially you, Qi Long, you need to be at advanced mecha warrior level."

"Why?" asked Qi Long, confused.

"Didn't you want to become strong?" said Ling Lan calmly, "An advanced mecha warrior can match up with an early stage Domain master. At that time, you will have the right to stand beside me and fight alongside me."

Qi Long's gaze glimmered. He had finally found a shortcut to becoming stronger. 3 years, and he would have the right to stand by Boss's side. For him, this path was much more secure than physical skills.

Qi Long nodded solemnly and said, "Alright, Boss, I will definitely complete this goal. Three years later, I will definitely become an advanced mecha operator."

"Alright, if you all don't achieve this objective, three years later, just wait for my punishment." Ling Lan's tone was cold and ominous when she said this, causing everyone else besides Qi Long to shiver involuntarily, their expressions paling noticeably.

Mind you, to rise up from newbie trainee to intermediate mecha warrior in three years' time was an absolutely tough challenge. Even if they had not truly experienced what it was like to learn mecha control, they still knew that it required a massive amount of points to upgrade mecha within the virtual world. These points needed to be earned by winning mecha fights. Even more frightening was the fact that, once they lost, an equivalent of the number of points they would have won would be deducted from their accumulated score. This rule had caused many people to become stuck with the label of newbie even after 2 to 3 years, because their total score was still in the negatives.

For them to successfully advance to intermediate mecha warrior in 3 years, they needed to maintain an extremely high win-rate, perhaps even not lose at all ... this was completely impossible!

Face ashen, Han Xuya could not help but open her mouth to plead, "Can the requirements be lowered for us girls?"

Ling Lan swept a glance at the other, "If you think it's impossible, then it's better to just not go and not learn how to operate mecha."

Ling Lan's merciless words caused Han Xuya's face to turn even paler, and she could not help but argue, "I remember that even the most impressive person in the virtual world needed 3 years and 3 months to advance from newbie to intermediate mecha warrior. How can we succeed?"

"That is just on public records. As far as I know, there is one person who only used half a year to become an intermediate mecha warrior from a newbie, in total using just one year to become an advanced mecha warrior," Ling Lan casually described a fact she knew.

“How could that be? Who was he?” Han Xuya’s first reaction was to disbelieve it.

“My father, Ling Xiao!” replied Ling Lan calmly.

“Uncle Ling is a god-class operator, and also the globally recognized number one prodigy. How are we supposed to compare to him?” said Han Xuya feebly. Her cry of ‘Uncle Ling’ made Ling Lan’s face twitch. Mind you, the Ling Xiao in the legacy space had been a stunning pretty boy — completely incompatible with the title of ‘uncle’.

Ling Lan kept her face slack with all her might, and continued to say, “Which is why I asked you all to do it in three years. That’s 3 times more time than what Ling Xiao used to advance. You should know that in the same three years of time, Ling Xiao had already advanced to ace operator status. You all should also know that for a mecha operator to advance to ace operator status is a natural chasm. Many people remain stuck in this chasm for all their lives, unable to break through ... Compared to this, my request is already low enough.”

### **Chapter 184: Divine Command Sect!**

Han Xuya still wanted to say something to that, when Luo Chao beside her frantically used her hand to block Han Xuya’s mouth. Han Xuya was so shocked by this that she did not even struggle, completely forgetting what she wanted to say.

Luo Chao’s action stunned all the other companions — was this still their shy little sister Luo Chao? They reflexively glanced at Ling Lan, sighing in their hearts — Ah, as expected, love can truly make one go wild ...

Seeing everyone looking at her, Luo Chao realised that she had overreacted. Embarrassed, she pulled her hand away and hid behind Luo Lang. In an instant, the bashful little sister Luo Chao had returned.

Ling Lan pretended not to see everyone’s somewhat knowing gazes. Instead, still maintaining an ice-block face, she asked coldly, “How about the rest of you? Do you all think it’s impossible?”

At this moment, the few people who had been through the fires of battle on planet Demonbeast abruptly recalled that, back then, it was the 10 year old Ling Lan who had expertly handled a mecha. Ling Lan had even managed to kill off an X-series ace mecha squad of the Twilight Empire. It was without question that Boss’s mecha control skills were already at a terrifyingly advanced level. If they did not take advantage of these three years to work hard and give chase, the moment Boss’s body recovered, they would most certainly be left even further behind by Boss ...

Qi Long’s initially steady heart became even more determined. Han Jijyun, Luo Lang, and Lin Zhong-qing were also on board. They silently clenched their fists, each setting their own goals within their minds — not to become an intermediate mecha warrior which Ling Lan had asked of them, but to become an advanced mecha warrior like with Qi Long. They too did not want Ling Lan and Qi Long to leave them behind.

Seeing the elder brothers all promise to complete this mission in 3 years with faces filled with determination, Luo Chao gazed at Ling Lan admiringly. *This* was Boss Lan. Only Boss Lan could convince all the elder brothers to promise to accomplish such a nigh impossible mission ...

Without question, in Luo Chao's budding heart, Ling Lan was definitely a perfect boy. Strong, authoritative, charismatic, and reliable. Although Ling Lan could sense the leanings of Luo Chao's young heart, she did not know what to do about it. Thus, she could only pretend not to know anything, and hope that being apart from her for 3 years would be enough to weaken Luo Chao's affections, until the point where they could fade away without a trace.

Just like that, Ling Lan left the Central Scout Academy, seen off by her little companions. She returned to the Ling family mansion, and continued to recuperate for a period of time. During that time, the Central Scout Academy sent over countless medicinal agents, along with some precious cultivation resources. In particular, several tubes of special-grade gene agent would be sent periodically. Combined with the gene agent that Ling Lan received from the inheritance, this allowed Ling Lan's body to recover even faster. Her body had initially been estimated to recover in a year, but after only 8 months it was fully healed with no worry of latent problems.

After Ling Lan's body had fully recovered, Mu Shui-qing asked her to come to the place where he had secluded himself.

The moment Ling Lan arrived, the already waiting Mu Shui-qing asked, "Do you know why I asked you to come here?"

Ling Lan shook her head, but then quickly nodded instead. With a smile, Mu Shui-qing patiently waited for her explanation.

Ling Lan said, "I shook my head because I am not very sure, but then I nodded because I know that you, teacher, will definitely tell me."

"A child with great daring <sup>1</sup>!" Mu Shui-qing could not help but laugh heartily. Ever since Ling Xiao had passed away, this was the first time he was laughing so freely. Both father and son <sup>2</sup> were truly worthy of being nature-defying prodigies capable of upturning the heavens and earth ... they would always take him off guard with pleasant surprises — being able to take them in as his disciples was truly his great luck.

Mu Shui-qing finally restrained his laughter and continued to say, "Indeed. Asking you to come here, I have some things to tell you. I am one of your father's initiate instructors ... Of course, this is just on the surface. In fact, your father is my true disciple." True disciples and initiate disciples were two completely different concepts. For initiate disciples, he only needed to give them some pointers, but for true disciples, they were the inheritors of their sect — it could be said that, at that point, the instructor-student relationship was just like that of a father and son.

Ling Lan thought for a moment, then said, "Then how should I address you? Master's Master?"

Mu Shui-qing did not know whether to laugh or cry. "Just call me 'master'!" Since he would be teaching her hands-on, then Ling Lan would truly be his true disciple. What else should he call him but 'master'? Besides, he really did not care about any seniority issues. In their sect, once you joined, only the relationship within the sect mattered.

Ling Lan rubbed her nose, rather speechless. If she called the other 'master', then wouldn't she be on the same seniority level as her father Ling Xiao? Was she then supposed to call her own father 'senior brother'? Ling Lan was somewhat conflicted.

However, Ling Lan's spirits quickly drooped. Even if she called Mu Shui-qing 'master', she would have no chance to call her father 'Senior Brother Ling Xiao' anyway! In that case ... why should she be conflicted? After thinking things through, Ling Lan did not continue to tie herself into knots. She called out, "Master!"

"Good! Good! Good! This is how my good disciple should be. Efficient in whatever you do, make sure to never be indecisive. On this point, you are better than your father," said Mu Shui-qing happily.

Hearing this, Ling Lan thought back on the feeling Ling Xiao had given her in the legacy space. Her father had seemed pretty decisive and efficient, not at all indecisive like how Mu Shui-qing said he was ... however, Ling Lan quickly cast these thoughts aside, because Mu Shui-qing had begun to speak again.

"Our sect emphasizes the basics. Everything begins from the basics, so now I will be teaching you the foundational physical skills of our sect ..."

"Um ... Master, I already know this," said Ling Lan hurriedly.

Ling Lan's words flabbergasted Mu Shui-qing. "How do you know it?"

Ling Lan smiled wryly and said, "Master, our sect is the Divine Command Sect, right?"

Mu Shui-qing leapt up in shock. "How do you know this?" The Divine Command Sect had always been passed down one-to-one — ever since Ling Xiao died, he was the only one left ... could it be that there were still others of the Divine Command Sect?

An almost imperceptible smile appeared on Ling Lan's lips. "My father told me."

As if realising something, Mu Shui-qing said with an expression of astonishment, "Ling Xiao's legacy space. So you received it."

A trace of mockery appeared on Ling Lan's lips. "It should have been mine from the beginning." Ever since she found out about the inheritance method of the Divine Command Sect, Ling Lan knew very well that Ling Xiao's legacy space had been specially prepared for her.

"Yes, that thing should indeed belong to you ... the military was just a little greedy, that's all," said Mu Shui-qing, sighing. He could understand what the military did, but some things were not able to be obtained just because one wanted them ... the requirements for the Divine Command Sect were too high — the requirements on spiritual power were especially stringent. If Ling Xiao had not accidentally activated his spiritual power and broken past an obstruction through sheer luck, rising up by three whole levels, even he might have had to give up on the Divine Command Sect. On this front, Ling Lan's talent was obviously better than Ling Xiao's, because Ling Lan's spiritual power was innately strong.

"Since you've already received your father's legacy, I won't have to teach you the basics again." Mu Shui-qing was in a great mood. This meant that Ling Lan would finish his studies with him much earlier than he could have imagined. At first, he had been somewhat regretful that he had sought out Ling Lan this late, causing Ling Lan to miss the most opportune timing to learn from the Divine Command Sect. This would make it much harder for Ling Lan to learn and practice the foundational physical skills, perhaps even multiply the time he needed to master them. Unexpectedly, Ling Lan had long received Ling Xiao's legacy, and thus had not missed the best timing at all.

“Yup. In the end, right before father disappeared, he told me to find you to learn the final Divine Command technique,” Ling Lan passed on Ling Xiao’s final message.

After a startled pause, Mu Shui-qing immediately understood what Ling Xiao was aiming for. Ling Xiao had wanted him to know that an inheritor still existed for the Divine Command Sect. He had wanted to deliver Ling Lan to him personally, to try and make up for the pain and regrets he had left his master with when he had departed.

Mu Shui-qing’s eyes turned red and he jerked his head up to look at the sky. His voice was choked with tears as he said, “Ling Xiao, my son, even in death you were worrying about this old man, eh? So you’ve personally sent me hope, giving me motivation to live on ...” How lucky was he to have taken in such a good disciple? It was a shame that he and Ling Xiao’s teacher-disciple relationship had been so brief, lasting only a mere 10 years’ time ...

Mu Shui-qing’s words made Ling Lan realise as well why Ling Xiao had not chosen to pass on the ultimate technique of the Divine Command Sect to her. Since Ling Xiao had already completed his discipleship, he must have already mastered all the techniques in the Divine Command Sect. He had chosen not to pass it on to Ling Lan, because he had wanted her to seek out Mu Shui-qing and tell his master through her that the heir of the Divine Command Sect still lived.

Ling Xiao wanted to comfort his master in this way, but of course, there was also the intent for Ling Lan to take on his responsibilities, just like how he had tasked Ling Lan with the care of Lan Luofeng at the beginning.

Of course, Ling Xiao may also have had the thought of training up Ling Lan’s persistence, asking Ling Lan to seek out the elusive Mu Shui-qing patiently to train up her tolerance. However, he had never expected that Mu Shui-qing was just living within the Ling family mansion. Moreover, not too long ago, due to the assassination attempt on Ling Lan, Mu Shui-qing had been coaxed out of seclusion by Chamberlain Ling Qin’s pleading, and had then stayed by Ling Lan’s side to protect her. Subsequently, when Mu Shui-qing had set eyes on Ling Lan, he had been prepared to teach her already.

It had to be said that Ling Lan’s luck was truly amazing — everything had just fallen into place effortlessly.

A long while after, Mu Shui-qing finally calmed down. He looked at Ling Lan, and the affection in his eyes was apparent. Right now, in his eyes, Ling Lan was not only the only heir of the Divine Command Sect, he was also the hope his good disciple Ling Xiao had given to him. At this moment, no matter how he looked at Ling Lan, his heart was filled with joy and appreciation.

“Since you are already at the final step ... then let me first assess your spiritual power. Let me see if you meet the requirements to learn the final technique.” Although Mu Shui-qing’s heart was filled with fondness for Ling Lan, he was still very strict in the passing on of the final technique. It should be known that the skills and techniques of the Divine Command Sect all depended on the strength level of an individual’s spiritual power. If Ling Lan did not meet the minimum requirements of the Divine Command technique, for Ling Lan’s sake, he would not teach it to him.

“Okay~!” Ling Lan nodded. That said, her spiritual power began to spread out. Very rapidly, it split into countless invisible spiritual threads, each roughly as thick as a finger. These threads flew towards Mu

Shui-qing, but this time, Ling Lan encountered resistance. About a metre away from Mu Shui-qing, she sensed a strong shield made of spiritual power defending Mu Shui-qing on all sides.

### **Chapter 185: Three Years Later ...**

“Spiritual charge!” A strong spiritual charge was sent lashing out at Mu Shui-qing. But when this spiritual charge ran into the other’s spiritual self, it only created some ripples in the other’s spiritual barrier, and then swiftly disappeared.

With this one attack, Ling Lan knew that her master’s spiritual power was definitely thick and substantial — normal attacks would do nothing against it. Sure enough, Mu Shui-qing shook his head and said, “With just this bit of power, it is impossible to learn the Divine Command final technique.”

Ling Lan’s brows furrowed, now knowing that she would not be able to pass the assessment if she did not put her full strength into it. So, she clenched her teeth and decided to use the strongest spiritual attack she had — spiritual blast!

Of course, the strength of one spiritual blast was probably not enough to budge Mu Shui-qing, so Ling Lan immediately brought out the charged four-part blast she could do right now to attack.

To achieve a four-part blast, Ling Lan would divide her spiritual power into four cords and then detonate them separately. The blasts would stack up layer by layer, making the power of the spiritual blast several times stronger. By the time the fourth cord of spiritual power exploded, the force created would be 8 times her initial spiritual blast. It was plain to see that this stacking of the spiritual blasts was copied by Ling Lan from the activation method of One-Inch Punch, and could be considered one of Ling Lan’s self-created spiritual attacks.

Ling Lan carefully condensed her spiritual power into four spiritual cords as thick as her arm. Then, with clear sequencing, she sent them stretching out towards Mu Shui-qing layer by layer. Just as they were about to make contact with Mu Shui-qing’s spiritual shield, Ling Lan shouted four times inside her head, “*Explode! Explode! Explode! Explode!*”

Invisibly, the four cords of spiritual power exploded one by one in the air. In the space where the two stood, violent turbulence appeared in the formless air, layer after layer. When the final spiritual power cord exploded, the layered force of the spiritual blasts crashed like a tidal wave onto Mu Shui-qing.

When Mu Shui-qing’s spiritual shield met this immense spiritual turbulence, a subtle change came over his expression. He clapped his palms together, and with a grunt, the spiritual power shielding his body was reinforced ...

“Boom!” Two waves of spiritual power collided violently in the air. Although Ling Lan could not physically hear the sound of the collision, the feedback force being transmitted by the air clearly showed that the concussive force of this collision was definitely far beyond any of her previous spiritual blasts.

The powerful concussive force was directly reflected onto Ling Lan’s body. The power surge came too quickly and too fiercely — Ling Lan had no way to stabilise herself. Her entire body was sent flying back by the reflected force to crash onto the ground.

Meanwhile, several powerful tremors ran through Mu Shui-qing's body, his complexion paling noticeably, but he quickly recovered.

Still, even though both of them were ultimately fine, Mu Shui-qing's courtyard had been utterly destroyed by the collision of the two spiritual powers. The powerful concussive force had blown everything in the courtyard into dust — even the walls of Mu Shui-qing's home had cracks running through them now, looking as if they would crumble at any moment. It was clear to see how fearsome that turbulence had been.

With a nimble backflip, Ling Lan was back on her feet. It looked like she had not been injured by any of the reflected force, but her complexion was still extremely pale — it seemed that the four-part spiritual blast was quite taxing for her.

“You brat. Actually being so harsh ...” Mu Shui-qing looked at Ling Lan somewhat speechlessly. This brat really had no notion of respecting his master — coming out so strongly with such a powerful spiritual attack right from the start. Also, he had proved himself to be a determined fellow ... it should be known that it was extremely painful to execute a spiritual blast — a regular person would not be able to tolerate the pain.

Ling Lan just stood there, face pale. Right then, spasms of pain had begun to throb at her forehead. The spiritual blasts had drained too much of her spiritual power; she was already at the point of exhaustion. However, she endured the intensifying pain, as well as the nausea rising in her chest, and said, “If I am not harsh with myself, I would have long died at another's hand.”

At these words, Mu Shui-qing felt a pang of bitterness run through his heart. He naturally knew what Ling Lan was referring to. Ling Xiao's achievements had shone too brightly, leading many unscrupulous people to cast their greed upon his legacy and wealth. As Ling Xiao's only legal inheritor, Ling Lan's existence was undoubtedly a thorn in their side <sup>1</sup> that these people would do anything to remove. If Ling Lan was out of the picture, they would be able to blatantly claim the legacy and wealth that Ling Xiao had left behind. In order to achieve this purpose, they had schemed, plotted, and manipulated both on the surface and from the shadows — till now, Ling Lan must have grown up in a storm of blood and violence.

“Sorry, I should have come see you earlier ...” Mu Shui-qing was filled with remorse.

“Master, you being in the Ling family is my protective talisman.” Now Ling Lan finally understood why when the Ling family side branch had plotted to take away her inheritance right, the military had chosen to remain silent and let them do as they would, but had not dared to make their support clear. A large part of it must have been because they feared Mu Shui-qing, who had been stationed within the Ling family. That was why they had not dared to go too far. Also due to Mu Shui-qing's existence, her mother Lan Luofeng had had enough courage to set a trap for the Ling family side branch. And this was also the true reason why the side branch had obediently left Doha after losing that wager ...

It could be said that Mu Shui-qing's decision to seclude himself in the Ling family mansion had protected Lan Luofeng and Ling Lan to a certain extent, causing any others who coveted Ling Xiao's legacy to have no choice but to retreat temporarily.

“Good! With you, Ling Xiao has an heir! Right now you should just train your spiritual power further. Three months later, I will officially teach you the Divine Command final technique.” Mu Shui-qing’s heart was alight with joy. He reached out his hand to pat Ling Lan on the shoulder and conveyed his decision.

“Many thanks, Master!” Ling Lan bowed.

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Three years’ time went by in the flick of a finger ... when spring once again descended as expected on planet Doha one fine spring day, before the sun could fully crawl out from the horizon, when the first rays of dawn had barely stretched out their feelers, at the main entrance of the Central Scout Academy, five red-clad youths were already standing there. They seemed to be waiting for something.

One of the youths, with a strongly-built body, had an anxious expression on his face. Every so often, he would breathe in and breathe out deeply, trying to calm his turbulent emotions.

The guard at the entrance, who normally would not allow any scout students to step out one foot from the gates, was ignoring this group of people. He remained seated at his service station, sipping his cup of tea breezily.

It wasn’t that he did not want to catch them, nor had he been bribed by the party — it was just that he could do nothing against these fellows except watch them. They were all 10th graders from the strongest team in the scout academy, and their team leader was known to be the strongest student in the academy.

Even if the guard had wanted to pull them back inside the gates, he just did not have the capability to do so! The guard smiled wryly as he shook his head and continued to ignore the group.

Although the Central Scout Academy imposed many strict rules upon its students, as long as you were strong enough, those rules would be like a sheet of white paper — free for you to scribble on as you like. This was why the guard had no choice but to leave them be. If he really wanted to make all of them submit, other than mobilising the academy’s mecha squad, there was truly no way of doing so.

Beside the anxious young man, another red-clad youth’s expression was distinctly different. He leaned lazily against the boundary wall, a helpless expression on his face as he said, “Leader, does it have to be this early? Isn’t it just Boss Lan coming back to take his test today?” That said, he yawned widely, as if still half-asleep, some crust still hanging at the corners of his eyes.

Before the anxious youth could answer, a pretty and graceful youth standing beside him, with a frail scholarly air about him, cool and quiet, had reached out a hand to slap the other’s head. He said coldly, “Welcoming Boss back is a huge thing. What are you blathering on about?”

The indolent youth grimaced, rubbing his sore head where he had been slapped. His sleepiness had been chased away, and he said unhappily, “Luo Lang, can you watch your image? Don’t be so rough, okay? Clearly looking so ladylike, yet being so fierce when hitting someone ...”

“What did you say?” Luo Lang blew up. The thing he hated the most was others saying he looked like a girl. Ever since they had entered puberty, compared to his other companions, who had all bulked up and become more rugged, filled with masculinity, his looks had inclined towards willowy grace instead. Other than a slight increase in height, he pretty much looked exactly the same as his twin sister Luo

Chao. It was a running joke among the companions that if Luo Lang cross-dressed and pretended to be Luo Chao, sitting down, no one would be able to tell the difference.

The indolent youth was not afraid of Luo Lang's rage. He suddenly clapped both his hands together in front of him as if in prayer, a trace of bashfulness appearing on his face as he stomped a foot down and whined coyly, "Aiya, my lovely prince Luo Lang, could you please come have tea with me this afternoon?" That said, he batted his lashes with all his might at Luo Lang. He had perfectly re-enacted how Luo Lang had been propositioned these last two years by well-built women, a scene which at one point had been the laugh of their team.

"Xie Yi, you're asking for it!" Luo Lang was really livid now. His pert face was flushed bright red, but this shade of anger just added colour to Luo Lang's cheeks, making him even more alluring. Since young, Luo Lang's temper had not been the best. He had always liked to let his fists do the talking, which was how he had become friends with Qi Long. Right now, hearing Xie Yi tease him, he immediately put up his fists and leapt at Xie Yi, intent on giving him a good beating.

Xie Yi's and Luo Lang's strength were about equivalent; the two of them began to exchange blows right there by the school gates, happily tangled up in one another. The guard sitting at his station found his face twitching uncontrollably as he watched them ... He could only hope that these two fellows would be careful not to destroy school property around the gates as they fought.

"Alright, both of you, stop!" said a cold-faced handsome youth at one side. It was Han Jijyun. He had noticed that their leader Qi Long's mind was not here, so it was pointless to rely on him to stop these two from fighting. Thus, he had no choice but to speak up instead. This was because he could already sense the resentful stare coming from the guard station behind them.

Perhaps the team members respected the authority of their strategist, Han Jijyun, for after hearing him order them to stop, the two fighters drew back their fists and legs. Luo Lang sniffed coldly, then turned his head away from his opponent. On the other hand, Xie Yi scratched his nose idly, and then sticking both hands into his pockets, he ambled leisurely back to his original spot.

Behind Qi Long, emitting his usual gentle air, Lin Zhong-qing said to the returning Xie Yi with a smile, "Xie Yi, coming here earlier is actually not a bad thing. Let us admire the sunrise! I think it's been a while since we've watched the sun rise!" Over the past three years, in order to complete the goal Boss Lan had set for them, they had not dared to play around; all of their time had been spent on learning mecha control. Fortunately, not too long ago, they had all reached their goals, and so could finally relax.

Yes, the five people waiting here at the school gates at the crack of dawn were Qi Long, Han Jijyun, Luo Lang, Lin Zhong-qing, and the youth who had joined them after that grand armed melee three years ago, Xie Yi. Today was the day when all the scout students applied and sat for the enrolment tests of the various military schools and other vocational academies. Consequently, their Boss Lan would be returning to the Central Scout Academy for the first time in three years to participate in the academy's final graduation assessment.

**Chapter 186: Ling Lan Returns!**

Xie Yi could not help but purse his lips at Lin Zhong-qing's words, saying, "I really just can't figure you guys out. Training desperately these past 3 years in mecha control, almost to the extent of forgetting to sleep and eat ... are Boss Ling Lan's instructions really that important?"

By the time Xie Yi had joined the team, Ling Lan had already withdrawn from the academy and left. Therefore, he wasn't very clear about Ling Lan's revered status within the team, and just could not comprehend why the goal Ling Lan had set would cause everyone in the team, including the team leader, to be so driven. The average person would not have been able to endure the sort of training the children had put themselves through which had almost bordered on self-torture. However, Qi Long and the others had persevered — holding on for a whole 3 years. It was as if they would be caught and devoured by a savage beast chasing from behind if they had stopped.

Of course, Xie Yi had suffered greatly these three years as well. His teammates had all been like wound-up springs, training fervently — the amount of training they did was mind-blowing. Despite no one forcing him to train with them, seeing all his teammates training diligently beside him, he could not help but submit to the immense pressure to train too ...

In short, Xie Yi felt like he had been living in hell for these past three years. Along the way, he had sometimes cursed himself back then for being so naive and clueless, being so easily tricked into joining their team ... But Xie Yi did not want to be left behind by his team members, and so he had actually managed to endure it all, obtaining results that he would never have imagined on his own. Moreover, over these three years, Xie Yi had been completely integrated into the team. At this time, even if they tried to kick him away, he himself would cling onto Qi Long's thigh and refuse to go.

Xie Yi's question caused Lin Zhong-qing to begin to reminisce. His smile deepened, and he nodded heavily at Xie Yi and said, "That's right. Although the nominal leader of our team is Qi Long, the true soul of our team is Boss Lan." He then advised Xie Yi, saying, "Xie Yi, remember this. Even though we've all acknowledged you, for as long as Boss Lan does not acknowledge you, you will never be a true member of our team."

Hearing this, Xie Yi's face fell. "So, I still need to gain the approval of Boss Ling Lan?" After three years of working hard beside these companions, Xie Yi had long considered himself as part of the team.

Luo Lang chimed in with a cold sniff, tone proud as he said, "That goes without question. Xie Yi, you should be careful. Don't keep fooling around all the time. Boss Lan isn't as easily taken in as we are." Luo Lang did not forget to step on Xie Yi while he was down <sup>1</sup>.

"Luo Lang, you've known Boss Ling Lan for so long, you must know what Boss Ling Lan likes. Come on, tell me ..." Xie Yi seemed to have forgotten all about his earlier fight with Luo Lang. He began pestering Luo Lang, trying to get some information on Ling Lan so he would be able to play to his favour.

"Boss Lan is very fair and objective, don't think of getting by with tricks ..." Although Luo Lang's words were still curt and cold, his tone had obviously gentled a little.

"No, definitely not. How would I be so shameless? Don't you see how I'm trying now to understand our Boss Ling Lan a little better? Oh Luo Lang, my good brother ... earlier, it's all big brother's fault. Don't be angry, ok? Right now, big brother is in trouble. You need to help big brother a little, right~?" Xie Yi was someone who was 'people-smart' <sup>2</sup> — clearly sensing the easing of Luo Lang's attitude, he immediately

intensified his efforts like a snake slithering up an extended stick<sup>3</sup>. Expression tragic and pitiful, he reasoned and pleaded with Luo Lang. The thickness of his skin made the other three youths look askance at him. They could not help but take a few steps back and pretend not to know this shameless fellow.

“Hmph, so now we’re brothers? What did you say about me earlier?” A triumphant smile appeared on Luo Lang’s lips. His prideful glee made the other three step back a little more. Fine! These two were truly a quirky pair! When their tempers were riled, the two of them fought like cats and dogs — definitely no sign of any brotherly affection whatsoever. But when the two of them got along, their relationship was so harmonious that they could almost share the same pair of pants.

Sure enough, under the bombardment of Xie Yi’s candy-wrapped missiles, Luo Lang caved. He began to tell Xie Yi about what he knew of Ling Lan’s personality and principles. However, his explanations caused the three people beside the pair to lose control of their facial muscles once more ... was the Boss Lan being described by Luo Lang really the boss they knew? Why couldn’t they relate his descriptions to the image they had of Boss in their minds at all?

As the sun slowly rose higher into the sky, and the few waiting youths began to become a little restless, Qi Long suddenly said, “Looks like he’s here ...”

The other youths all looked towards Qi Long, and Han Jiyun said with a raised brow, “Animal Instinct?” Qi Long’s innate talent Animal Instinct was very strong — he would often sense a change in the surrounding environment a step before them.

Qi Long nodded, indicating that Han Jiyun was right. His innate talent Animal Instinct had indeed sensed the vibrations in the air, letting him know that a large convoy was approaching. And today, all of the 10th grade students taking the assessment were already inside the academy. The only one coming here now would be Boss Lan.

10 minutes later, at the horizon, a massive airborne team was slowly approaching them. Right at the front were two miniature mecha. At their chests was the emblem of a fiery red phoenix in flight. As it was a family emblem, there was a black ring outside the flying fire phoenix.

The colour of the ring represented the family’s rank. Families were ranked from top rank, to rank-1, rank-2 ... and so on in sequence until rank-7. In total, there were eight ranks. Gold was the highest rank. Typically, only large and powerful families, which were generally elite families with long-standing legacies, had the right to bear this colour. Within the Federation, there were two top rank families — the Li family and the Ye family.

There were four rank-1 elite families represented by the colour purple. They were the reclusive Northeastern Muqi, the Old Martial Beitang, the Emyreal Zhuge, and the Hundredfold Zhou.

Meanwhile, there were obviously many more rank-2 families, which were represented by the colour bright yellow. Rank-3 elite families used orange, rank-4 red, rank-5 blue, rank-6 green, and rank-7 black. Rank-7 was the most humble of small families, pretty much encompassing all areas of the Federation. Any average family who possessed personal armed bodyguards fell into this category, and the colour they could use was black.

If the Ling family had not split off from the original Ling elite family, they would have borne the red of rank-4 families ... Initially, the Ling family had not modified the totem on their mecha, continuing to use their family totem with its red outer ring. This was because the fire phoenix was red in colour, and along with the flames blazing brightly beneath it, many people would overlook the red of the outer ring, taking it as part of the flames. At a glance, all most people would see was a totem of a fire phoenix being reborn in a wash of flames ...

However, the original totem was retired after Ling Lan returned home to the Ling family mansion at 13 years old. Lan Luofeng, Ling Qin, and the others had felt that it was time to hand over the Ling family to Ling Lan. Once there was an official change in the family head, the totem would be changed to match the status of the family head. Since the Ling family had cut ties with the Ling elite family, then it no longer had the right to use the red of rank-4 families. Furthermore, as family head, Ling Lan did not have any battle exploits nor societal status, and so could only use the lowest ranking black ring.

When Qi Long saw the totem, he exclaimed in excitement, "It really is Boss!"

Closely following behind the two mecha were three black hover cars flying almost abreast of each other, while behind the hover cars were two more miniature mechas tailing closely. This formation was clearly meant to protect the black hover car right in the middle. The gazes of Qi Long and the others all honed in on that hover car. In particular, Qi Long was nervously clenching his fists. His palms felt as if they were a little damp.

The speed of the flying convoy was not very fast, perhaps it could even be considered slow, as if it were waiting for something. The answer was soon revealed as the roar of mecha engines suddenly reverberated throughout the academy. A squadron of mecha flew out swiftly from the within the academy, moving forwards to meet the convoy. If it had just been hover cars, the mecha squad would not have bothered. However, they could not let down their guard with the addition of the four miniature mechas.

Seemingly receiving the mecha squad's permission to enter, under the watchful guard of the mecha squad, the convoy began to accelerate and speed towards the academy gates. Just before they were to arrive, the four miniature mecha suddenly separated to hover in mid-air at four corners, going into a defensive stance. Meanwhile, the hover car in the middle began to descend, slowly gliding down towards the school gates. In the end, it stopped not 10 metres away from the gates.

Qi Long's group of five was just about to approach when a strong sense of danger swept over them. The two miniature mecha closest to them almost simultaneously aimed their beam guns at the group. If they continued to move forward, countless beam shots would rain down on them.

"Ling Yu, they are my friends!" A cool voice rang out from within the hover car. This caused the two miniature mecha to immediately be at ease, pulling back their beam guns.

"It really is Boss!" That familiar voice instantly excited Qi Long and the others. Sure enough, their boss was back!

The doors of the hover car finally swung open, and a youth dressed in a red uniform bent over with his head bowed to get out of the hover car. Black military boots stomped confidently on the ground. The youth stood up straight and lifted his head to look in the direction of Qi Long and company.

Qi Long and the others felt an intense gaze sweep over them — they couldn't help but puff out their chests and suck in their tummies, standing up straight in response.

Then, an extremely subtle smile appeared on the lips of that sculpted cold face. "Companions, I am back!"

"Boss ..." Qi Long and the others pounced at Ling Lan emotionally. Qi Long's speed was the fastest — he was the first one to embrace Ling Lan. His eyes were red, and his voice was choked with tears as he said, "Boss, I've waited for you for so long."

The last three years, he had trained desperately, all in the hopes that one day he would be able to truly stand by Ling Lan's side, so they could become brothers who could watch out for one another and brave life and death together ... and today, he had finally seen this day arrive.

Ling Lan patted Qi Long's back lightly, "Yes, I know. Which is why I've come back."

Qi Long suppressed the upheaval in his heart, reluctantly letting go of Ling Lan. But before he could say anything else, he had been shoved aside by Luo Lang. Luo Lang grabbed Ling Lan and hugged her tight, fiercely snuggling against her, as if seeking comfort. "Boss Lan, I've missed you to death."

This action of Luo Lang's rendered Ling Lan completely speechless. Who the heck was this? When did their team take in a girl? She slowly pushed away the clingy Luo Lang, and after giving him a close look, voice cracking, she said, "Luo Lang? How did you grow up to look like this?"

This punk Luo Lang had actually grown up to be even more feminine than she had — was there still any reason in this world?! This harsh reality deeply wounded Ling Lan's fragile soul. She raged in her heart: *Hells, I am the one who's a girl, alright?!*

## **Chapter 187: My Role?**

Luo Lang's face turned bright red at Ling Lan's shocked question. If it had been anyone else, Luo Lang would definitely have raised his fist and punched them, but Ling Lan was his most respected, most loved, most idolised Boss Lan! And besides, he couldn't win against him anyway ...

Unsure what to do, Luo Lang could only stand there helplessly. His lost demeanour actually added an extra tinge of softness to his appearance, truly prompting pity and affection in others. This caused the wailing in Ling Lan's heart to escalate: Boo hoo hoo ... this brat's existence was absolutely meant to harass her. How was she to live with this cruel reality?!

Ling Lan's question caused Xie Yi, who was standing by the side, to burst out into laughter. Finally finding a scapegoat for his anger and frustration, Luo Lang roared and pounced at Xie Yi, and a grand battle broke out once more.

But this time, no one was willing to bother with either of them; even Han Jijyun, who would usually rein them in, did not have the mind to care about them at the moment.

"Boss Lan, long time no see!" Forcefully holding back his emotions, Han Jijyun peered closely at Ling Lan standing before him. Although he had not lost his composure like the others, the typically stoic expression on his face was gone, replaced by a clear expression of pleasant surprise.

Ling Lan hugged Han Jijyun abruptly, patting his back forcefully as she said, “Jijyun, these past three years, it’s been tough on you.”

Han Jijyun’s strategic planning was definitely instrumental in ensuring that Qi Long’s team remained secure as the strongest team of the academy. It should be known that Wu Jiong’s team and Li Yingjie’s team were both extremely strong teams as well — both those teams must have always been eyeing the throne of Qi Long’s team ravenously all this while.

Truthfully, those two teams were no weaker than Qi Long’s in terms of capability. In fact, it might even be said that they were a hair better, because they were full teams with all 6 members, while Qi Long’s team was lacking Ling Lan and so had always been operating with just 5 people. Inherently lacking, for them to maintain their status as the strongest team, Han Jijyun had played a major role with his careful planning and thoughtful manipulations. Without Han Jijyun, no matter how strong Qi Long became, the team would not have been able to fend off the combined challenge of the other two teams.

The approbation in Ling Lan’s words almost caused Han Jijyun to break out into joyful tears. Ling Lan recognised all his efforts over these past three years! At this moment, he finally understood the meaning behind the phrase ‘a gentleman would die for a patron who recognises his worth’ — having a boss like Ling Lan, was truly his good fortune.

Ling Lan released Han Jijyun, and her gaze shifted to look at Lin Zhong-qing. She walked forwards and bumped her shoulder lightly against his. This action, reminiscent of the silent communication between sworn brothers, caused Lin Zhong-qing to be filled with shocked joy. Could this mean that Boss Lan had truly accepted him now, and would begin viewing him as a brother of equal status with Qi Long and the others? He could not help but croak out, “Boss Lan ...”

“Yes!” An extremely small smile appeared on Ling Lan’s lips, but Lin Zhong-qing still noticed it. That smile told Lin Zhong-qing that he was not mistaken.

After interacting with Qi Long, Han Jijyun, and Lin Zhong-qing for a bit, Ling Lan looked over at the other two still embroiled in their fight. Curiously, Ling Lan asked, “That’s Xie Yi?” Ling Lan recalled Qi Long telling her that he was accepting a student called Xie Yi into their team when she had left the academy. And that person was the combat expert hiding within Class-B whom she had inadvertently discovered during the grand armed melee.

Qi Long nodded and said, “Yes. He’s not bad. Willing to train hard with us, just shy of joining us at the advanced mecha warrior level.”

Ling Lan’s gaze glittered. “Looks like you all are getting along well.”

“Yup, this punk’s skin is really thick. He is capable of anything ... even we can’t take it sometimes,” said Lin Zhong-qing, chuckling wryly. He had thought that he was extremely unflappable, that his skin was already thick enough, but compared to Xie Yi, he was really just in the kiddie league — Xie Yi’s behaviour showed him what thick-skinned really was ... his shamelessness knew no bounds.

Lin Zhong-qing’s words received Qi Long’s and Han Jijyun’s agreement. All of them believed that no matter what kind of environment Xie Yi was placed in, he would be able to live on resiliently ...

Hearing Qi Long's and the others' opinions on Xie Yi, Ling Lan glanced contemplatively at Xie Yi. Perhaps he would be able to fill in the gaps of Qi Long's team ... of course, this was with the prerequisite that Xie Yi knew what he was supposed to do.

Ling Lan then asked, "How long are they planning to fight for?"

"Until Luo Lang's tired," said Lin Zhong-qing with a laugh. They all knew that the person who really wanted to fight was Luo Lang; Xie Yi was just going along passively. So, when Luo Lang no longer wanted to fight, the fight would be over.

"Then let's just leave them to it." That said, Ling Lan began walking towards the academy gates. When she had left her home, she had been carefully observing the time. She had no intentions of letting her final assessment be affected by her being late. Even though she was not aiming to enter the top military school, that didn't mean that she did not want to enrol in the other schools.

Seeing Ling Lan make a move, Qi Long, Han Jijun, and Lin Zhong-qing decisively left the two fighting people behind and followed Ling Lan through the academy gates.

Xie Yi, who had been keeping a close eye on Ling Lan's actions, saw that Ling Lan had already entered the gates, and quickly shouted, "Luo Lang, Boss Ling Lan has entered the academy!"

"Ah ..." Engrossed in the fight, Luo Lang had not noticed this at all. He hurriedly stopped fighting, and seeing the backs of Ling Lan and the others entering the school gates, he shouted out, "Boss, wait for me!" He frantically ran after them, leaving his fighting partner Xie Yi behind.

"How heartless!" complained Xie Yi. If he hadn't pitied Luo Lang for his plight earlier, he would not have laughed and given Luo Lang a way out to vent his embarrassment. Of course, there was another reason for his obvious laughter. Back when Ling Lan had first faced the others, those true emotions revealed had made him feel like an outsider, which made him very uncomfortable. Thus, he had taken the chance to tease Luo Lang, egging him into a fight to push aside this feeling.

"So I have to get Boss Ling Lan's acknowledgement? How troublesome ..." Xie Yi frowned, ambling unhurriedly after Luo Lang to enter the school gates.

Still, he did not wish to be excluded by the others anymore! Xie Yi found that he really hated that.

Luo Lang and Xie Yi very quickly caught up to the others. The six of them slowly walked to the nearest hover car stop, and prepared to take a hover car to the assessment centre.

While they were waiting, Xie Yi thought for a moment, then walked over to stand before Ling Lan. He said seriously, "Boss Ling Lan, I'm called Xie Yi. Leader Qi Long and the others said that only if I obtain your acknowledgement will I be a true member of the team ... I hope that Boss can acknowledge me."

Ling Lan glanced at Xie Yi coolly. This glance gave Xie Yi a chill, as if he had been laid bare by it. Initially filled with confidence, he suddenly began to doubt himself ... could he really obtain Ling Lan's acknowledgement?

He didn't know how long he waited — perhaps it was just a second, or perhaps it was 30 to 40 seconds — when Ling Lan finally responded, "Why should I?"

Xie Yi rallied his spirits and replied, "I will not hold the team back."

“There are many who won’t hold the team back. You’re not indispensable,” answered Ling Lan indifferently.

Xie Yi was struck dumb by Ling Lan’s words. Dammit, can’t he tell that he was just being humble?! Was he supposed to be blatantly honest and say that he was the best at fighting, and that his strength was top-shelf material?! Xie Yi’s expression was awkward, but this moment fully displayed the extreme thickness of Xie Yi’s skin. He regained his composure once more and said with a laugh, “Of course, I can also fight very well.”

“To join our team, it’s the most basic thing to be able to fight well.”

Xie Yi choked once more on Ling Lan’s merciless words. True enough, he finally felt the legendary difficulty of Boss Ling Lan — he was truly impervious against flattery and common tricks <sup>1</sup>, utterly unpredictable. That stony expression, that unruffled tone ... Xie Yi really had no clue where he should apply force.

He could only chuckle bitterly and fall silent. This time, it was his loss; he could only retreat for now.

Right then, a hover car arrived. Ling Lan was the first to board, followed closely by Qi Long and Han Jijyun. Meanwhile, Lin Zhong-qing, Luo Lang, and Xie Yi were prepared to take the next hover car.

Han Jijyun had just boarded, the car door still open, when Ling Lan suddenly turned her head to say to Xie Yi, “Xie Yi, what do you think your presence can bring to the team? When you can answer this question, then I will give you a clear answer!”

Ling Lan’s words had barely faded when the car doors closed. Han Jijyun keyed in their destination on the hover car’s A.I., and the hover car sped off into the sky, quickly disappearing into the distance.

Xie Yi was taken aback by Ling Lan’s parting words. He had thought that Ling Lan would not be giving him a response today, so he had already been planning to work on it for the long haul. Unexpectedly, Ling Lan had suddenly thrown him this question. Even as it boggled him, he was a little lost, because he had never thought about what he could bring to the team.

“Xie Yi, what are you blanking out for? Come in quickly!” Luo Lang’s impatient shout came to his ears. Xie Yi blinked and saw that Lin Zhong-qing and Luo Lang were already on a hover car, waiting for him to board. He quickly boarded and closed the car door.

The hover car flew swiftly towards their destination, but Xie Yi’s heart was fully occupied by Ling Lan’s question. *“What do you think your presence can bring to the team?”*

Really, what can I bring to the team? Strength? I cannot match Qi Long, and am even slightly weaker than Luo Lang, only just a little stronger than Lin Zhong-qing and Han Jijyun. But Han Jijyun’s role is that of the team’s tactician, so his combat power has never been the most important thing, while Lin Zhong-qing ...

Xie Yi thought back on the role Lin Zhong-qing played in the team, and found that for every mission, all the information, mission-appropriate equipment, and necessary medicinal agents, had all been prepared perfectly by Lin Zhong-qing ... it looked like Lin Zhong-qing had secured himself the role of being an excellent logistics support for the team.

Only then did Xie Yi realise that everyone in the team had their own designated role. Moving on to the second strongest, the bad-tempered Luo Lang — at the start of every mission, he would fulfil the role of advance guard. He would scout ahead and test the surroundings, reporting the situation back in a timely manner to the team. And whenever he did this, Luo Lang would always complete his duties perfectly.

Meanwhile, the team leader Qi Long had always been in charge of coordinating the team. In contrast, he had always been lounging on the fringes, simply moving wherever the team went. Now, thinking back, he had not known what position he played in the team at all. This was probably the reason why Boss Ling Lan had asked him this question.

That's right, what gave someone the confidence to say that they had the right to become a true member of the team when they themselves had no clue what their own position was in the team? At this thought, cold sweat broke out across Xie Yi's entire body. He had really been such an idiot ...

*"No, I am not an expendable person on the team. I will definitely find a role that belongs only to myself. But ... what is the role that would suit me best?"* Xie Yi felt that his brain was a muddled mess. Groggy and confused, he unknowingly found himself already at the assessment centre.

### **Chapter 188: Applying to a School!**

Watching Xie Yi drift down soullessly from the hover car, the waiting Ling Lan could not help but furrow her brows. Could it be that the little fellow had been struck too deeply by her words and had incurred a spiritual wound?

She looked dubiously at Qi Long, her eyes filled with questions. *D\*mmmit, didn't you all say that this guy was very thick-skinned? Why did he fall into such a sorry state from such a minor setback?*

To Ling Lan's questioning gaze, Qi Long could only shake his head firmly, indicating that he knew nothing.

Of course, after Ling Lan shifted her gaze elsewhere, Qi Long could only murmur in his heart, *'That also depends on who the opponent is. A humanoid weapon like you with such horrific killing power — what does it matter how thick one's skin is? Your power is still unbearable!'*

At this thought, Qi Long couldn't help but glance sympathetically at Xie Yi, donating a handful of compassionate tears for his plight of almost collapsing under a simple jab by Boss Ling Lan ... Thinking back, this was also how I, your big bro, endured till this day!

"Xie Yi, are you really planning to apply for the First Men's Military Academy in this state?" Xie Yi was suddenly jolted out of his thoughts by a familiar cold voice.

Ling Lan was staring at him coldly. The ice in his eyes caused Xie Yi to shiver involuntarily — he could actually feel the same pressure as when he stood before some instructors. It had been a long time since he had felt that sensation.

"If you lose here, then you will really have no right to become a member of our team." Ling Lan's warning made Xie Yi gather his emotions. There was no room for him to consider all these complicated things right now. Only one thought remained in his head — he could not fail here. He must succeed in

enrolling into the First Men's Military Academy, and then prove himself worthy of becoming a true member of the team.

Seeing Xie Yi regain his equilibrium, Ling Lan let out a silent breath of relief. If her previous words had caused Xie Yi to stumble and make a mistake during the assessment, then she would have committed a grave sin.

The few of them arrived at the assessment point specially set aside for the First Men's Military Academy. Almost all of the Central Scout Academy's 10th grade boys eligible for admission was gathered here. Everyone had three application chances, and all of the boys had set their first option as the First Men's Military Academy. This was the dream school of all the boys, so even if they knew the chances were slim, they still used up one of their application chances on this school with no regrets.

Qi Long and the others joined the long line of people waiting. However, the line moved swiftly, and very soon it was their turn. Qi Long and his team lifted their right hands, revealing their communicators, and waved them at the A.I. processing the applications for the First Men's Military Academy. A beep was heard, and then the virtual screen displayed their details, along with the honours and results they had obtained in their 10 years at the scout academy.

After each person concerned verified his details, he would press the 'confirm' button of the A.I., and their information would be delivered instantly to the database of the First Men's Military Academy. After that, all they had to do was wait to receive the confirmation notification on their communicators.

Very quickly, the First Men's Military Academy had responded by sending their application numbers to their communicators. At this point, they then had to wait patiently for the communicator notification for the final testing.

After the 5 members of the team had gone through the entire process, they waited for Ling Lan to do the same. However, Ling Lan did not do anything, merely signalling for Qi Long and the rest of the team to move so they would not obstruct the others behind them from applying.

This unexpected action of Ling Lan's confounded Qi Long. He blurted out right then and there, "Boss, why aren't you applying to the First Men's Military Academy?"

"Let's speak at the side, alright?" Qi Long's outburst had made them the centre of attention; Ling Lan was rather resigned by this.

"Ah ... that's Ling Lan who withdrew from the academy three years ago." Noticing Ling Lan, everyone began to stir in excitement. The grand armed melee that year had been launched by Ling Lan, and due to that decision, many initially unawakened students had obtained the opportunity to awaken ... It could be said that, a large majority of the 7th graders then — that is, the 10th graders now — were extremely grateful towards Ling Lan.

"Our uncrowned king has returned ...!" shouted someone in joy, obviously a loyal supporter of Ling Lan.

"Just now I seem to have heard that Ling Lan is not applying for the First Men's Military Academy? Why is that?" Some people had latched onto Qi Long's question, and began to debate the reason behind it in astonishment.

In their eyes, only those Class-A folks would be able to successfully enrol into the First Men's Military Academy without much trouble. As the king of kings in Class-A, if Ling Lan did not enter the First Men's Military Academy, who should?

"Could it be that Ling Lan's injury from back then still hasn't healed?" asked a random student. The cacophony was cut by an abrupt silence, and then the noise exploded, even more chaotic than before. Could that really be true?!

Hearing these speculations, as if thinking of something, Qi Long's face changed.

Seeing the situation slipping out of control, Ling Lan hurriedly signalled for Qi Long and the others to leave the area first. This spot was truly unsuitable for them to talk.

The group quickly left the application point. The assessment time would be sent directly to the applicants' communicators, so it was not necessary to wait at the application point itself. As long as the applicant was not late for the assessment, it was all fine.

The six of them came to a relatively quiet location, and then Ling Lan said, "Actually, choosing not to apply for the First Men's Military Academy is a deeply thought out decision on my part."

"Could it be that your body hasn't healed yet, Boss?" asked Qi Long anxiously. Back then, when the academy doctor had determined that Ling Lan would require 3 to 4 years to fully recover, they had assumed that 3 years would take care of everything for sure. Who knew reality would not turn out this way ...

"Yes, I still need one year's time. And this year just happens to be the most critical one ... If I don't take care, some latent problems will remain in my body, which may even affect my future career as a mecha operator." Ling Lan did not hesitate to exaggerate. Even if she were as fit as an ox right now, she would still spin it so that she was a ravaged wilting white cabbage.

"You all know that the first year of physical training at the First Men's Military Academy is exceedingly harsh — if one doesn't pass, one will be kicked out from the school directly. My family doctor has clearly diagnosed that my body would not be able to withstand that year of training. Since I already know it is impossible, I can only give up on applying."

Ling Lan naturally wasn't afraid of this so-called harsh physical training. The reason why she would not apply for the First Men's Military Academy is that both her mother, Lan Luofeng, and she were not at all confident that she could keep her gender under wraps for all 6 years at the school.

Just the annual physical check-up alone would be an unfordable natural chasm, not to mention the various forms of physical training they would have to go through. Based on what she knew, there were times when they had to fight stripped to the waist — and this was impossible for Ling Lan!

Of course, even without those issues, it still was not suitable for Ling Lan to enter the First Men's Military Academy, this gathering grounds of abnormal prodigies, with her current situation. Mind you, once she managed to enter that school, she would draw the attention of the entire Federation. And this was precisely what Ling Lan did not need. The best thing for her would be to be utterly forgotten, to fade away into obscurity so she could find a chance to regain her female life.

Lan Luofeng did not want her daughter to live forever in the world as a man; she just could not bear it. Thus, after discussion, the final decision was for Ling Lan to apply to the most remote planet in the galaxy, planet Aureolin <sup>1</sup>.

It was an agricultural planet, with beautiful scenery and temperate weather. Moreover, the college there was rather easygoing — one just needed to muck about for a few years there to obtain a degree. Although Ling Lan felt somewhat regretful for the choice, she did not want to let Lan Luofeng worry, and so agreed.

Of course, Ling Lan did not obediently apply to those horticultural colleges as Lan Luofeng wished, choosing instead to apply to the only community college specialising in mecha repairs on the planet. Ling Lan had carefully examined that school, and found that although it was known as a mecha service college, it still had a mecha control course. The course only accepted 50 people, but Ling Lan believed that, based on her status as a Class-A student from the Central Scout Academy, that college would definitely not reject her.

When Qi Long and the other 4 members heard about Ling Lan's situation, their mood instantly dropped.

Han Jijyun could not help but ask, "Then, which military school are you applying to?" The other military schools were perhaps not as strict as the First Men's Military Academy.

"I've prepared to apply to the Windchase Mecha Service College on planet Aureolin." The youths were gobsmacked once more by Ling Lan's reply.

"Servicing mecha? Boss, are you joking?" Qi Long leapt up in shock, his face filled with disbelief.

He had never forgotten Ling Lan's formidable control skills — while in the virtual world, he had piloted a mecha and simulated a fight with the figure of the Twilight mecha that day in his mind, and he had lost spectacularly. This gave Qi Long a clearer idea of Ling Lan's true control ability. For such a prodigious mecha operator to go become a regular skilled technician and service mecha ... he felt that his entire world was being upended.

Ling Lan cut off Qi Long with a cold glare, "The Mecha Service College does not just have mecha servicing courses, it also has a mecha control course."

These words finally let the team members' spirits return to their bodies — Boss wasn't going to go become a mecha repairman! — they felt they had been revived.

"Is the mecha control class of that planet any good?" asked Han Jijyun dubiously.

However, Ling Lan's response to that let them finally understand why their Boss Lan had chosen that school. "It's so-so. But that planet is the most suitable for resting and recuperating. The weather is mild, the scenery beautiful, and the air quality is the most optimum A+ grade. My family doctor has said that my body will be able to relax best there, and will be able to eliminate all latent problems. Plus, the school is very easygoing, working on a credit-based system. For the first year, I plan to rest at home and just work on some theory classes. I will put the actual control classes in the second year ..." said Ling Lan, her expression turning helpless at this point, "Only that school allows me to freely arrange my time, so that place is the most suitable for me ..."

Ling Lan found that she was really good at lying — she herself was almost taken in by her own lies.

Seeing the five still in low spirits before her, Ling Lan added, “Besides, just because I’ve gone there doesn’t mean I won’t ever come back. The First Men’s Military Academy has transfer opportunities every year. Promising students at other schools can still reapply for the First Men’s Military Academy through testing. Once my body recovers, I will be back.”

*First comfort them for now, there will be some excuse to explain things later on ...* Ling Lan decided to take things one step at a time and cross bridges when she came upon them. Right now, she needed to pump Qi Long and the others up for their application test into the First Men’s Military Academy. Mind you, only at the First Men’s Military Academy would they receive the best support for their development. She definitely would not allow their futures to be negatively impacted because of her.

Sure enough, Ling Lan’s words caused Qi Long and the others to rally immediately. It was true when they thought about it! So Boss Lan wouldn’t be applying for the First Men’s Military Academy now, but that doesn’t mean he won’t be able to enrol later on. There would still be chances, and although those chances would be much more difficult than applying now, who was Ling Lan? He was their boss! It would be no problem for him!

It had to be said that Qi Long and the others really had a kind of blind faith in Ling Lan. In their minds, as long as it was something Boss Lan wanted to do, nothing was impossible.

### **Chapter 189: The Flames of War Rise Again!**

Just like that, Qi Long and the others went off in high spirits to take the test for the First Men’s Military Academy. Meanwhile, Ling Lan went to the application point of the school she had chosen. There was no one there; almost none of the Central Scout Academy students would choose to apply to the colleges here.

Here were the most backward vocational colleges and community colleges, and the application for these institutes were all processed by just one A.I.. Frankly, the Central Scout Academy did not want their students to apply to these schools at all — if not for the Federation’s regulations for fairness and equal opportunity, the Central Scout Academy would definitely have driven these schools out of its assessment centre without giving them any chance.

Ling Lan deftly chose the course she wanted to apply for, and very quickly, the Windchase Mecha Service College had approved her application request. Soon after, Ling Lan received the other’s reply on her communicator.

Opening it to read, Ling Lan blinked blankly. Two large words — ‘TEST EXEMPTED’ — came into sight. The other party had actually exempted her from the application tests completely. It was clear to see how shocked and pleased the school was by her application. They were very afraid that this was an impulsive decision on Ling Lan’s part, and so did not want to give Ling Lan any time to reconsider.

It was of course a good thing to be exempted from testing; Ling Lan decisively pressed the confirmation button. With her confirmation, her data file was sent straight to the Windchase Mecha Service College ... That done, Ling Lan immediately rushed back to the application point of the First Men’s Military Academy, to wait for the final assessment results of Qi Long and the others.

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Meanwhile, at this exact moment, at a distant Federation border, on a battlefield between the Twilight Empire and the Federation, another round of conventional warfare officially began.

On the battlefield, the starships of both sides faced off from a distance. Countless intermediate and advanced mecha were being ejected from the starships' ports, almost filling up the entire starry sky. Ten of thousands of mecha engines roared in unison, the sound threatening to rip the starry skies apart.

The mecha of the two nations formed team after team, breaking off to engage their own group of opponents. Ever since technology had advanced enough to make galactic war possible, mecha battles had become the most basic type of combat, sometimes to the point where the final outcome of a war would be determined based on the power of each side's mecha operators. This was also why all nations invested so much in the cultivation of mecha operators — they were the main fighting force, the strongest solo weapons for the purpose of domination and conquest.

Every war was fierce and brutal. Whenever war broke out, great numbers of mecha operators would fall, which was why mecha operators had the highest casualty rate among soldiers. Even so, every soldier of the Federation still wanted to be a mecha operator as their first choice, because only mecha operators could truly control their own lives, as long as they were strong enough.

This was just a conventional battle, but even so, countless mecha operators had already been lost to these starry skies. Those final flares as they fell were like radiant fireworks, lighting up the entire starry skies, leaving behind its owner's final requiem.

On the main command ship in the middle of the Federation fleet, everyone in the command centre was looking at the battlefield before them with serious expressions. They were waiting patiently for the final outcome of the mecha battle — at that time, this clash would be over.

It wasn't that they did not want to arrange any tactics or stratagems to reduce the number of casualties ... it was just that this had become routine. This kind of conventional battle, against a long-standing enemy across many years — they had become familiar with each other's tactics. After all this protracted fighting, what mattered in the end was the overall strength of the two nations, as well as which nation had the stronger mecha.

"There is strange movement on the left side of the opponent's fleet!" Right then, a report rang out in the command centre from a surveillance soldier responsible for monitoring the area.

"Zoom in!" The supreme commander of the Federal Border Protection Fleet, Major General Tang Xu, who had been stationed here for 6 years, gave an immediate command after hearing the report. Tang Xu was 43 years old this year, and was considered one of the few outstanding and authoritative Major Generals in the Federation now. Due to his tenacity, he had ensured the stability of the situation at the Federation's border for several years.

At his command, the large screen in the command centre rapidly zoomed in on the position in question. They then saw black mecha being silently ejected one after another from the opponent starship's launching ports.

The surveillance soldier manipulating the image knew very clearly what was important. He immediately provided a close-up of one of the black mecha, especially focusing in of the arm area and enlarging it. At the sight of the serial number beginning with an 'S', the command centre was instantly in an uproar. There were even several senior officers who couldn't help but burst into foul language.

"Twilight actually sent their special ace mecha squad out!" All the Twilight ace mecha were basically marked with XYZ serial numbers. Z marked the strongest squads of ace mecha, while X marked the weakest. The strength of the ace mecha of the Twilight Empire was equal to that of the Federation's ace mecha. Of course, the Federation's ace mecha squads were also differentiated by their strength. In any case, the S-series special ace mecha squad deployed by the opponent could be considered an extremely powerful veteran mecha team of the Twilight Empire.

Tang Xu knew the situation gave him no time to hesitate. He immediately ordered, "Order the Soaring Dragon ace mecha squad to attack!"

Each fleet would have one ace mecha squad to hold the fort. They were the top fighting power of the Federation — if it were not absolutely necessary, he really did not want to send them out. Just the very idea of losing one of the operators made his heart ache terribly. However, even more, he just could not allow common mecha operators to lose their lives needlessly in engaging the opponent's ace mecha operators. Ace level enemies required aces to match.

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At the right flank of the fleet, an interstellar mothership was hovering, quiet but somewhat forbidding. In its belly, a primed and fully-equipped mecha squad was waiting to be deployed. It was the trump card ace mecha squad of this protection fleet — the Soaring Dragons!

At this moment, they were sitting in their respective mecha with solemn expressions. They were spread out in their respective launch passages, paying close attention to the progress of the battle before them.

Suddenly, the call to combat rang out through the entire mothership. The sharp sound pierced through the initial silence, and all the ace operators instinctively clenched the control sticks in their hands. This sound meant that their turn to battle was about to begin.

They had already been waiting for too long. Every time a battle began, they would always be ready to move out, but in the end, they had never had a chance to see the battlefield. Holding fast to the order from the command centre to wait and be on standby at every battle ... if it were not for the military culture deep within their very marrows, the multiple occurrences of cry wolf<sup>1</sup> would very easily tire them out and cause them to become lax in carrying out their orders.

However, all the ace operators knew well that since they were being deployed now, it meant that the enemy would most certainly be ace operators of the same level. This would be a cruel battle to the death — both sides would use their lives to prove who the true kings were!

"Orders. Ace mecha squad Soaring Dragon to strike. Direction southwest, coordinates 1245, 2340!" Every operator of the Soaring Dragons heard this command from the command centre on their mecha's public channel.

“8001, 8002, 8003, 8004, 8005, all prepped and ready to go. Calling JMC801, requesting deployment!” From each launch port, deployment requests were transmitted from the ace operators to the headset of the JMC responsible for guiding the ace mecha.

“Checking ... All equipment in order, mobility normal. Launch approved. 3, 2, 1 ... launching!” The JMC specially in charge of the ace mecha approved the launch requests after swiftly running through the prerequisite checks.

“Fire!” “Fire!” “Fire!” Consecutive sounds of ejections rang out. From the 5 launch ports on both sides of the mothership, the prepped ace mecha were shot out into the skies.

“8011, 8012, 8013 ... requesting deployment!”

“8021, 8022, 8023 ... requesting deployment!”

Batch after batch of ordered ace mecha were shot into the skies ... at this moment, the exclusive communications channels of each mecha were extremely busy. A mecha battle involving large battalions was not conducted in solo fights; the mecha needed to group together in units to engage the enemy.

“8011 calling 8001. Wingman One requesting to enter formation ...”

“8021 calling 8001. Wingman Two requesting to enter formation ...”

In this manner, every time a formation was fully formed, the mecha would then move swiftly to the coordinates the command centre sends them.

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“Baka, how does the opponent move so fast?” The commander on the Twilight’s mainship, a general with a thin moustache on his upper lip and grey sideburns, saw team after team of silver-white mecha flying from the opponent’s backend, swiftly intercepting their ace mecha which had already gotten into formation, and couldn’t help but swear angrily.

“General, believe that our mecha operators will not lose to those chinks,” said a young staff officer with a slight bow, but his tone was haughty. It should be known that their S-series special ace mecha squads were called the ‘victory mecha which would never fall’<sup>2</sup> — dealing with these small guppies would definitely be no problem.

“Aoki, don’t underestimate them. The Chinese Federation has always been our archenemy. For thousands of years, as long as war breaks out, it has always been the end of their lives or ours. Throughout history, we have suffered defeat many times because we underestimated them, bringing great losses to our empire. We must learn from these lessons.” The general was a cautious person. He was not blindly confident like some people within the country, self-assured in their belief that the Chinese Federation was just a pretty flower vase<sup>3</sup>.

“General, what you say makes sense. But, the Chinese Federation now is no longer the Federation of before. 16 years ago, even their god-class operator Ling Xiao lost his life at our warriors’ hands. Now, they are just in their death struggle. Victory will forever belong to the Great Twilight Empire.” Staff Officer Aoki’s face was filled with pride. The successful assassination of Ling Xiao was the glory of every Twilight soldier.

As soldiers of the new generation of the Twilight Empire, they had grown up under the propaganda of the empire's successful killing of the Chinese Federation's strongest god-class operator Ling Xiao. In their world view, the Chinese Federation was already on the wane, no longer having the strength to resist them. The Great Twilight Empire would definitely obtain the final victory and eventually take over the entire Chinese Federation.

"Is that really so?" The general's expression was grim as he stared at the large screen. He did not believe that the Chinese Federation really had no backup resources. What's more, they still had other god-class operators. Even though those people had remained reclusive all this time, if the Chinese Federation truly was pushed to the brink of no return, these fearsome beings would probably appear one after another. In contrast, their empire only had ninemecha god-kings<sup>4</sup> — they just could not match up in numbers.

"We need to drag them along for another period of time. The oldest god-class operator of the Federation must be nearing 200 years old by now ..." The general calculated in his heart. As long as one or two of the opponent's god-class operators died, then in any top-level contest of strength, their Empire would not be at a disadvantage. At that time, it would truly be the time for their Great Twilight Empire to push their attack.

### **Chapter 190: The Mysterious Mecha in the Black Hole!**

"Aoki, notify the special ace operator squad. Let them use all their might to kill the opponent's ace operators!" The general gave a decisive order. Since a stealth attack was already out of the question, then they might as well eliminate a part of the other's ace operators to weaken the enemy's combat power.

"Hai!" Aoki accepted the general's order with a respectful bow, the pride on his face fading. After that, he turned around and passed on the order to the mecha operators currently facing the opponent's ace operators.

Meanwhile, that batch of deployed Soaring Dragon ace mecha had already begun clashing with the enemy — the curtains were lifted on a scene of brutal fighting.

While the command centres of both sides patiently watched the progress of the ace operator fight, at the heart of the flames of battle, an invisible energy was forming.

On the Federation's command ship, a soldier monitoring the battlefield suddenly cried out in shock.

The other soldiers beside him were startled and quickly asked, "What happened?"

"Look here, what is that?" The soldier zoomed in on the oddity he had seen. Right at the centre point of the fighting, a black dot had appeared unexpectedly.

The soldier was really bothered by the black dot, finding it rather creepy and frightening. He magnified the image of the dot as far as he could, and finally, they could clearly see that, at the centre of the black dot, there seemed to be some energy swirling backwards. Even stranger was the fact that the black dot was expanding at a rapid pace.

“Could this be ... a black hole!” This bone-chilling reverse airflow phenomenon sparked some memory in the soldier’s mind, and he could not help but blurt out his conclusion.

“What happened?” The senior captain in charge of the surveillance room rushed over when he heard the commotion.

“Sir, it’s a black hole! A black hole has appeared at the heart of battle. Order the fighters to retreat quickly!” The soldier’s face was pale with fright. Black holes were the ender of all things ... once swallowed by a black hole, no one could escape from within it. Therefore, the moment the emergence of a black hole was discovered, even if they were in the middle of a battle, both sides would mutually choose to stop fighting and escape together.

By now, the captain could clearly see the black dot the soldier had enlarged on the screen as well. In just this short period of time since the soldier had first discovered it, the dot had expanded from its initial size of a tiny fingertip to a round hole of about 20 to 30 centimetres in diameter. The black hole was spreading at a rapid pace — it was foreseeable that, in short order, it would become a supersized hole capable of swallowing everything. At that time, no one here would be able to escape from its clutches.

The captain knew the situation was dire. He swiftly leapt at his optical supercomputer, and activated the computer’s wartime emergency protocol! Of course, this protocol could not be activated simply. If any abuse of power was discovered, the person in question would definitely be court-martialled.

“Wartime emergency protocol activated successfully. Please choose the required option!” The A.I. inquired coldly.

“Open all military channels. I want to broadcast a wide scale announcement!” Even the short time taken to activate the supercomputer caused the captain’s forehead and bridge of his nose to drip with sweat. A black hole was truly too frightening; he was afraid there would not be enough time.

“Connecting to all military channels, successful!” When the A.I. reported this, the captain immediately pressed the voice button for the broadcast. “Emergency notification for all troops. At the centre of the battle, a black hole is forming! All mecha operators are to retreat immediately, all mecha operators are to retreat immediately!”

“I repeat. Emergency notification for all troops. At the centre of the battle, a black hole is forming! All mecha operators are to retreat immediately, all mecha operators are to retreat immediately!”

This abrupt military-wide broadcast caused an uproar among the Federation fighters. At this time, the command centre had already received the images of the black hole transmitted by the surveillance room. Without even having to think about it, the supreme commander immediately ordered all the starship carriers to send out the retreat signal to the mecha troops they housed.

In the meantime, the black hole at the centre of the fighting had already expanded into a dark chasm of 3 to 4 metres wide. The suction of energy was already extremely obvious now, especially for the ace operators closest to the black hole. They quickly halted their fighting and stared fearfully at the black hole as it grew larger and larger, its suction power becoming stronger and stronger.

Everyone knew what a black hole represented. It was the root of calamity, death, and the destruction of all things.

“It’s a black hole, retreat quickly!” Such an obvious black hole made the Twilight Empire mecha operators retreat swiftly even before their own starships could send out the signal to retreat.

At this time, all the mecha operators of both nations no longer had any desire to continue fighting. All the mecha flew swiftly back to their own starships, afraid that if they were any slower, they would be consumed by the black hole.

But they were still too slow in the end. The black hole, which had already expanded to about 10 metres wide, suddenly burst open! As if being pried open by some force, the black hole abruptly became a gigantic black hole of over 100 metres wide. The innermost layer of mecha were instantly caught in the suction of the black hole.

“Godd\*mmmit, increase horsepower, operate engines at 120%!” The innermost layer of mecha could already feel the growing suction. Some of the operators reacted very quickly, decisively powering their engines to the max to try and escape the suction range. Operating the engines at 120% could not be maintained for long — doing this for too long would leave lasting damage to the main engine. Mecha operators who loved their mecha typically would not bear to do so.

This group of quick-thinking mecha operators were considered lucky. Although they had to pay the cost of breaking their engines, they still managed to at least charge out from the suction range of the black hole, salvaging their lives. In contrast, many more mecha operators lost their chance at survival due to their slow reflexes. They were instantly pulled in by the suction ... by the time they thought to push their engines to the max, it was much too late.

Under this fearsome extra-terrestrial force of nature, even the formidable and dominant ace operators were like infants, unable to resist.

Although most of the ace operators had managed to escape from the suction range of the black hole due to their superior reflexes, because the black hole had appeared right in the middle where the ace operators had been fighting, there were still quite a number of ace operators who had been ruthlessly devoured.

Facing this situation, the operators of both nations could only stare helplessly as those mecha were consumed by the black hole. There were also quite a few mecha who, before they could be fully sucked into the black hole, had directly exploded due to the battering of the chaotic turbulence, turning into countless shards of debris ...

“8217, hold on!” One of the ace mecha formations of the Federation was in a similar crisis. The main mecha 8207 had reacted quickly, almost escaping from the danger zone. As long as his mecha did not break down, escaping with his life was no problem.

However, 10 metres behind him, wingman mecha 8217 was not as lucky as 8207. He was still within range of the powerful suction of the black hole, and most critically, one of his two secondary engines had exploded due to overload. This decreased his speed by a good chunk, and his crisis was precisely due to this significant loss of speed.

The suction of the black hole grabbed hold of him — due to its great power, 8217 actually began sliding backwards. This meant that his mecha’s engines were already running out of power to fight this powerful suction.

As the main mecha of 8217, the leader of the formation, seeing his own wingman 8217 in such grave danger, did not even stop to think about it. He immediately controlled his mecha to grab hold of the other's right arm.

"Leader!" Seeing his leader reach out to help him at this most perilous moment with no concern for his own well-being, 8217's eyes turned red with emotion. He desperately commanded his A.I. to increase the output of his engines, hoping to borrow his leader's extra pulling force to escape death.

They were frozen like this for 30 seconds. When the wingman saw the other secondary engine of his mecha blow up due to overload as well, he knew that it was hopeless.

"Don't give up!" Even though he knew that the chances of the two of them escaping together were miniscule, 8207 still did not let go.

"Leader, let go of me!" 8217 said through gritted teeth. He could not drag his leader with him into death.

"No, 8227 has already been sacrificed. I will not watch as my final brother dies!" 8207 refused firmly.

It was already the end of the line, but 8207 still would not let go — he only kept repeating, don't give up! 8217's tears began to fall, "Leader, let go quickly ... do you really want to die with me?"

"If all my brothers are dead, then what would be the point of living on my own? We've said before that — if we die together on the battlefields someday, we will be brothers again in the next life. Now, 8227 is already gone. With the two of us too, even if we go to the afterlife, all three of us brothers will be able to be together once again," said 8207 with a smile. Being able to die with one's brothers, was also a type of happiness.

"Leader!" Although tears were still falling from 8217's eyes, 8217 smiled as well. "Thank you for taking care of me all these years. Becoming your number one wingman is my greatest fortune." That said, he reached out his left hand to pull out the beam saber on his back, and then, amidst 8207's shocked cries, he resolutely brought the saber down on his own right arm ...

With a "Swoosh!", the mecha's right arm fell. Suddenly losing the weight in his hands, 8207's over-revved engines instantly pulled him out of the range of the black hole's suction.

"8217!" roared 8207 in grief, tears in his fierce eyes. His final brother, using such an intense method to sacrifice himself, saving him ...

There was a deep pain in 8207's chest — mindlessly, he leapt towards the black hole, but was held back by formation leader 8102 who had arrived in the nick of time. "207<sup>1</sup>, calm down!"

"They were my brothers!" 8207 finally burst into tears.

"They were my brothers too!" barked 8102 sharply, "You remember this, your life right now is no longer just your own. It is also 217's."

These words caused 8207 to jerk, his initial struggles dying down instantly.

Right at that moment, 8102's wingman 8122 suddenly cried out, "Leader, look, at the heart of the black hole, something is flying out ..."

8102 looked over quickly. Indeed, at the centre of the black hole, something was slowly moving out against the black hole's suction. Although its speed was exceedingly slow, it was still slowly but surely getting away from the heart of the black hole. "How is this possible?"

Everyone knew that the suction force was definitely the most terrifying at the heart of a black hole — absolutely nothing could stand against it. What in the world was that thing to be able to fight off this type of suction power to slowly escape from within the black hole?

8102 zoomed in on the image of the thing. Sure enough, at the heart of the black hole, a mysterious mecha was making its difficult way forwards, trying to escape the grip of the overwhelming suction of the black hole. The body of that mysterious mecha was marked with clear signs of damage, even looking somewhat dilapidated. Yet, it was precisely this beat-up mysterious mecha that was currently performing a miracle.