

## Crossing 191

### Chapter 191: The Fearsome Combat Ability of a God-Class Operator!

However, what he discovered next filled 8102 with great pleasant surprise — the mysterious mecha's left arm was currently holding onto a mecha with a broken arm. That mecha was precisely 8217 who had just chopped off part of his arm and had been swallowed by the black hole.

“Look at the left hand of that mecha ... isn't that 8217?” 8102 could not help but ask joyfully. Even though he was sure his eyes were not mistaken, this pleasant surprise made him somewhat doubtful — could the comrade he thought for sure was dead return once more to their side?

8102's question was like a shot of adrenaline to 8207<sup>1</sup>. His spirits rallied and he hurriedly operated his mecha's screen to zoom in on the heart of the black hole and immediately shouted, “It's him! It's him! It's 8217!”

“That mecha ... don't you all think it looks somewhat familiar?” 8102's number one wingman 8112 had also seen the mecha, but his focus was on the other mecha's form.

“It's a mecha from our Federation. I see the golden five-pointed star on his right arm! That's the exclusive symbol of our Federation!” shouted 8122 as well.

Meanwhile, the mecha at the heart of the black hole continued to fight with all its might against the pull of the black hole. After a period of movement, that mysterious mecha finally moved out of the innermost circle of the black hole's centre. There, perhaps due to the weakened suction, the mysterious mecha began to speed up, its appearance becoming increasingly clearer to the crowd.

The body of the mysterious mecha was larger than ace mecha by a ring, and could even be considered a giant mecha. This type of mecha asked a lot from its operator. The mecha's design was rather simple and unsophisticated, and the scars all over its body only added a sense of weariness to it. All of this proved that this mecha had been through great trials and had suffered great hardship.

Still, despite the mysterious mecha's beat-up body, the personal totem at its chest was surprisingly vibrant. A fiery red phoenix being reborn from the blazing flames beneath it, the fire phoenix about to take flight as if drawing from the energy fed to it by the flames ... this totem was extremely familiar to all mecha operators of the Federation at the scene, and this familiarity seemed to come from deep within them ...

“Fire phoenix! That's the fire phoenix rising from the ashes!” Someone yelled out within the public military channel.

“It's Ling Xiao — it's Major General Ling Xiao!” As if being woken from a trance, everyone began to shout and exclaim. The totem of the fire phoenix rising from the ashes — only one person in the Federation had that mark. And that was the god-class operator Major General Ling Xiao! Just like the fire phoenix in his totem, Major General Ling Xiao had risen from the ashes of death to return to the Federation!

“That’s right, it’s Major General Ling Xiao! I’ve seen that mecha in my textbooks before. It’s <Belief> — that is the god-class mecha <Belief>!” There were also some who had recognised that simplistic giant mecha as the legendary god-class mecha <Belief>.

This also explained why this mecha could resist the powerful suction of the black hole at its heart — only a god-class mecha would be capable of such a feat.

On the other side, the Twilight Empire had also identified that giant mecha trying to escape from the heart of the black hole as the god-class machine <Belief> of Ling Xiao who was rumoured to have already been killed by them.

At this sight, within the command ship of the Twilight Empire, Staff Officer Aoki, who had been closely observing the black hole, was stupefied. “How can this be? How can this be? Hasn’t Ling Xiao already been killed by our brave warriors? Why is he still alive, suddenly emerging from inside the black hole?” Aoki could feel his pride crumbling, suddenly being informed that the source of his confidence was all a lie. Right then, he just could not accept it. “No, this definitely cannot be real. I must be seeing an illusion, an illusion!”

“Slap!” Aoki’s face was whipped to the side by a forceful slap. The general standing beside him had thrown a slap at him to wake him up. “So what if he is alive? It’s very easy to let him die!”

The general was a decisive person. He knew that once Ling Xiao returned to the Chinese Federation, the Chinese Federation’s combat power would reach a new unimaginable height. This was something their Twilight Empire could not tolerate.

The general’s eyes turned fierce. He swiftly connected to the military-wide channel and gave his orders. “No matter what the cost, kill god-class operator Ling Xiao!”

Following this order, the mecha operators who were still dubious received an answer — that mysterious mecha coming out from the heart of the black hole was indeed Ling Xiao’s <Belief>.

“Kill Ling Xiao! Kill Ling Xiao! Kill Ling Xiao! Kill Ling Xiao!” The troops of the Twilight Empire had been educated via brainwashing<sup>2</sup>. The killing of god-class operator Ling Xiao was one of the great exploits of their country that had been established 16 years ago — they definitely would not allow this honour to be overturned. All the Twilight Empire mecha operators piloted their mecha to approach the black hole. They raised the beam guns in their hands, shooting fervently towards the heart of the black hole.

“D\*mmmit, they’re trying to kill our Major General Ling Xiao!” The despicable actions<sup>3</sup> of the Twilight Empire infuriated the Federation soldiers who were anxiously waiting for Ling Xiao to escape from danger.

“Protect Major General Ling Xiao!” When Major General Tang Xu saw this, he could not help but bellow into the communications channel.

Ling Xiao was their Federation’s ultimate weapon, one of their guardian deities — they definitely could not let any harm come to him here.

“Protect Major General Ling Xiao!”

“Protect Major General Ling Xiao!”

“Protect Major General Ling Xiao!”

Following roar after angry roar, all the Federation soldiers raised the weapons in their hands and began to intercept the enemy’s attacks. Many of the mecha operators even leapt to the fringes of the black hole, to form a tight mecha defensive wall, using the bodies of their own mecha to bear the brunt of the enemy’s beam fire.

They knew very well that doing so may cost them their lives, but they were unafraid. This was because they were doing this to protect their national military idol, the god-class operator — Major General Ling Xiao <sup>4</sup>.

And so, after every beam attack, there would always be a mecha or two from the Federation mecha defensive wall which exploded as it went beyond its damage threshold. At that time, a new mecha would step up to take its place, once again blocking off the beam fire.

Of course, the Twilight Empire’s mecha operators were not having a good time of it either. The Federation mecha operators fought back just as fiercely, beam fire roaring out from both sides at about the same intensity. This battle had become a standing showdown. The mecha operators were no longer mecha operators — they no longer flew around nimbly, and there were no more complex attack manoeuvres. The two sides just shot at each other mechanically like fixed wooden puppets.

It should be said that this battle was a mecha fight without any strategy. Countless mecha operator lives were lost on both sides, and it was all for the sake of one person — the one currently struggling to get away from the suction of the black hole, Ling Xiao.

The Federation mecha operators did not know how many attacks they blocked off, nor did they know how much time had passed. But finally, they heard a cheer ring out in the general comms channel, “Major General Ling Xiao has successfully escaped the black hole!”

When they heard this news, all the Federation mecha operators swelled with joy and triumph, feeling that it would have been worth it even if they had died.

Subsequently, an extremely gentle voice rang out across the channel, “Many thanks for your protection, brothers.” This voice made everyone unbelievably emotional, also bringing tears to Major General Tang Xu’s eyes. This familiar voice was precisely that of Ling Xiao who had ‘died’ 17 years ago.

Ling Xiao handed over 8217 to a mecha operator of the Federation, then controlled <Belief> to fly upwards to hover above the Federation mecha.

“Activate Divine Punishment system!” said Ling Xiao calmly.

“Command received by <Belief>, Divine Punishment activated!” <Belief> and Ling Xiao’s rapport was already at an extreme — not even a second later, twelve wings suddenly sprouted from <Belief>’s back, and then, the wings began to absorb energy rapidly till a pinnacle of potential.

Next, Ling Xiao controlled <Belief> to aim the twelve wings in twelve directions, pointing at the Twilight mecha horde in the distance.

Ling Xiao decisively pressed his trigger, and twelve powerful beams swept out at the Twilight mecha horde ahead, causing the entire starry sky to become a sheet of light in an instant. The Federation mecha operators found themselves temporarily blinded by the intense light.

When the twelve beams faded away and the crowd's vision was restored, they found to their shock that twelve empty lines had been carved into the Twilight mecha horde. The mecha which had been in those lines previously had all vanished, and even more terrifying was the fact that there was no remaining trace of any of them.

What attack was this? It was way too horrifying! Everyone's gazes were drawn towards Ling Xiao's mecha. Only then did they notice that Ling Xiao's <Belief> had already shifted in appearance. On the mecha's back were twelve wings, so perfect that they enchanted the hearts of all observers, giving others the impression that an angel had descended.

Pure white light was currently accumulating at the tip of each wing, which slowly grew brighter and brighter, almost searing the eyes of anyone who stared at them. Additionally, an immense energy was beginning to emanate from those wing-tips ...

Right then, the twelve wings changed directions simultaneously, still pointed at the Twilight mecha horde, but in twelve new directions this time.

Soon, twelve beams fired out once more, and when the light faded, twelve new vacant rows were left among the enemy horde.

Just two simple beam attacks had obliterated approximately 2000 mecha of the Twilight Empire. Although the majority of these had been intermediate to advanced mecha, there had still been quite a few ace mecha among them. Regardless of mecha type, against this fearsome attack, they were all completely helpless.

"Baka, Ling Xiao must die!" Seeing the horrific results of Ling Xiao's blasts, the general was reinforced in his belief that Ling Xiao could not be allowed to live. Otherwise, it would be a devastating blow to their Twilight Empire. "All starship cannons to aim at Ling Xiao! Fire, fire with all you have! We must kill off Ling Xiao!"

The general knew well that even if all of them died here today, as long as they succeeded in killing off Ling Xiao, everything would be worth it. For the Empire, all sacrifices were worth it.

"Not good, the enemy is planning to go for broke <sup>5</sup>." The enemy starship fleet's strange movements were naturally picked up by the Federation's command centre. They were somewhat flustered — it should be known that the power of a starship's main cannon was extremely horrifying. Even the sturdiest interstellar mothership would not be able to withstand more than 3 to 5 attacks from a starship's main cannons.

## **Chapter 192: The First Marshal!**

"Push forwards! Intercept the starships, do not give them any chance to fire their main cannons!" roared Major General Tang Xu in the comms channel. At this point, they could only fight it out. If things became truly dire, blocking off the cannonfire with one of their starships would also be worth it.

Following this order, all the Federation starships began to move. Unfortunately, the starships were too large and clumsy — it was not that easy to turn their bodies.

This was also why starships, despite having powerful main cannons, could not be the main fighting force in an interstellar battle. In contrast to the agile mecha, the heavy and slow bulky starships were not at all suited for quick battles, completely toyed with by mecha. If not for the fact that starships themselves were bulked up with great defences and the damage of mecha attacks were insignificant against their bulk, incapable of finishing them off, starships may likely have to quit appearing in battle completely.

“Lock onto Ling Xiao, and fire!” The main cannon of the first starship finally had its sights on Ling Xiao, and so the starship’s main cannoner was charged to attack Ling Xiao, who was hovering in place in the air.

A deafening “Boom!” — the main cannon’s fire hit Ling Xiao’s mecha directly. Smoke and fire shot out in all directions, completely engulfing <Belief>.

The starship’s main cannoner leapt up and danced in excitement, hollering, “I’ve hit him! I’ve hit him!” If Ling Xiao were to die at his hands, he would become the hero of the Twilight Empire!

The smoke cleared and the flames vanished! When Ling Xiao’s mecha <Belief> appeared perfectly unharmed before the crowd once more, the dancing cannoner froze, and his excited words became lodged in his throat as if his neck were being strangled. His face was the picture of disbelief. This was because the massive firepower of the main cannon had actually been unable to leave any mark at all on Ling Xiao’s mecha <Belief>.

The Federation soldiers were as equally mystified, unsure how Ling Xiao’s <Belief> had managed to come out of such powerful cannon-fire utterly unscathed. Some sharp-sighted people then noticed the faint sheen of multi-coloured light on <Belief>’s outer shell, and immediately understood. “Divine Shield! It’s the god-class mecha’s exclusive Divine Shield system!”

The reason why god-class mecha could become god-class mecha was that the A.I. of the mecha could support several systems which regular mecha A.I.s could not. One of these was the Divine Shield system — it could convert energy into an almost flawless, practically invincible divine light shield. It could be said that any weapon invented by humankind at the moment was incapable of breaking through Ling Xiao’s defences. Of course, the Divine Shield system was not without weaknesses. It drained too much energy — even a god-class mecha’s supposedly endless power could only sustain the system for a short 3 minutes.

Ling Xiao’s mecha <Belief> withstood the main cannon’s attack this time but did not continue to remain stationary to be a sitting target. The air around the mecha suddenly warped, and in the very next second, it had appeared by the other’s starship.

“The Divine Wind system!” This was yet another of the god-class mecha’s exclusive systems. Once it was activated, the mecha could reach up to 4 times the speed of light, truly achieving instantaneous teleportation.

Right then, Ling Xiao, who had already appeared beside the starship, swiftly removed a giant sword hilt from his back. His mecha gripped the sword hilt tightly in its right hand, and a 100-metre long beam saber abruptly appeared out of nowhere in this starry space.

Ling Xiao gripped this giant saber tightly and then swung it down powerfully in a great arc at the starship ...

A lift of his hand, a swing of his saber — Ling Xiao did not look again at the starship, keeping away his giant beam saber instantly after his attack to hang it once more behind his back.

And then, the air around <Belief> warped again and it reappeared within the enemy mecha horde.

Just at that moment, that starship suddenly split apart. Due to the unexpected explosion, the people inside it were thrown into space, officially becoming space trash and dying instantly.

Ling Xiao's killing spree did not end there — like a wolf charging into a flock of sheep, Ling Xiao flew among the enemy mecha horde. At this time, two short swords had appeared in his hands. They were the most basic of mecha equipment, high-frequency blades. Still, just these two most basic of weapons sliced through the opponent's mecha as easily as cutting right through a watermelon. The speed of the Divine Wind system, paired with god-class control and unearthly footwork, caused the mecha to flicker in and out of sight. In the blink of an eye, Ling Xiao had destroyed several tens of mecha, among them quite a significant number of ace mecha.

At this moment, everyone understood why it was said in the human world that god-class operators could dictate the outcome of war — there was just no one who could withstand a god-class operator's attack, nor were there any weapons capable of penetrating the other's defence. Only by relying on forces of nature, such as black holes (this should be eliminated now), or explosions of primordial magnetic energy <sup>1</sup> (this was questionable), or consecutive supernovas (almost impossible to happen), or the butcher's knife of time (pretty much the most helpless waiting game), etcetera etcetera etcetera ...perhaps those might have the possibility of finishing them off <sup>2</sup> .

Seeing this scene, the Twilight Empire general knew that he would certainly be unable to achieve his objective today. Even if they sacrificed every single person on their side, they would still be unable to kill Ling Xiao here. Seeing that the situation was hopeless, he decisively ordered their retreat. He needed to report the news that Ling Xiao still lived post-haste to the Empire's military headquarters.

The Twilight Empire fleet retreated swiftly, very quickly disappearing without a trace. Seeing their opponents scurry off with their tails between their legs back to their own space border, all the Federation warriors cheered! They were cheering for the triumph of this battle, as well as cheering for the return of the god-class operator Ling Xiao.

"Federation 7th Division vice commander, Ling Xiao, requesting provisional docking from an allied starship!" Ling Xiao connected to the general military channel and submitted a docking request.

Tang Xu breathed in deeply, suppressing the elation in his heart as he pressed the button to communicate. "I, Tang Xu, the commander of the First Defence Fleet of the Western Border Guard, permit Major General Ling Xiao to dock on my ship." Following that declaration, the command ship began transmitting a guidance signal.

Ling Xiao operated his mecha to slowly descend onto the starship's navigation frame. Sliding along the frame, he slid swiftly into the interior of the starship.

Ling Xiao's control was extremely precise, accurately stopping right at the stop-line. At this moment, a sweet and gentle voice rang out in the mecha comms channel. "Major General Ling Xiao, hello! I am the JMC guiding your mecha into the hangar this time. Please follow my instructions to carry out the following movements."

"Roger!" Somewhat familiar, the sweet and pretty voice caused Ling Xiao to zone out for a moment before regaining his awareness. That voice had called up his memories of Lan Luofeng — back then at the start, she had been his exclusive JMC. He had not seen her for almost a full 17 years ... he wondered how she was doing now. And there was still their child Ling Lan ... a swell of fear and uncertainty actually rose up in Ling Xiao's heart, his heart beginning to pound. He was homesick, yet he feared the reception he would receive when he returned.

Under the JMC's lead, Ling Xiao piloted his mecha accurately into the frame, and then leaving it to the operation of the starship's systems, his mecha was brought straight into the command ship's mecha hold.

Ling Xiao turned off his mecha and opened the cockpit door. At this time, the entire mecha hold had already become filled with the soldiers of the command ship, both men and women. They all wanted to take the opportunity to catch a glimpse of Major General Ling Xiao in person — he was a heroic figure from legend who had been believed dead for 17 years, after all.

Ling Xiao had long become used to this type of gazes. He had always been an elite among the elites, an aberrant prodigy, idolised by people wherever he went. Although he had been away from the Federation for 17 years, he was not at all unfamiliar with this sort of gawking.

A lift carried Ling Xiao to the ground. His original mecha suit had already become worn and tattered, but even so, it did not detract from his looks. A warm and elegant smile on an unbelievably handsome face — all the female soldiers' were blushing as their hearts throbbed. They wished they could just rush forward and hug him, leaving a beautiful memory for themselves.

But these were all just fantasies; they would never dare to act so impudently. Although Major General Ling Xiao looked exceedingly gentle and mild-mannered, just like a humble gentleman, there was just some mystical force about him that stayed their restlessness, discouraging them from going too far.

"Major General Ling Xiao, welcome back!" Tang Xu had already hurried to the mecha hold by this time. Seeing Ling Xiao land, he rushed forwards and clasped Ling Xiao's hands in his, face filled with elation as he greeted Ling Xiao.

The two men had met a few times 17 years ago and had shared a brief conversation, but following Ling Xiao's unfortunate 'demise', their budding relationship had been ended abruptly. Back then, Tang Xu had deeply lamented the loss of a like-minded brother-in-arms.

"Major General Tang Xu, long time no see!" Before greeting Tang Xu, Ling Xiao had peeked at the other's epaulette<sup>3</sup>, thus finding out the other's current military rank. 17 years were enough for many of his friends to change military ranks. He wondered if the same could be said for his enemies ... a trace of killing intent flashed through Ling Xiao's eyes.

Although Tang Xu really wanted to say something to Ling Xiao, he just could not find any words. He could only shake Ling Xiao's hands solemnly, even though he knew that it was actually more appropriate for them to interact via military salutes.

Ling Xiao swept his gaze around at the surrounding people and smiled wearily, "If possible, please prepare somewhere for me to rest first. I have lived in that damnable black hole for a really long time. I'm physically and mentally worn out."

At the reminder, Tang Xu hurriedly nodded and said, "Done. I'll prepare things immediately!" Ling Xiao's fatigued state proved that his struggle out of the black hole was definitely not as simple and easy as it had seemed to them. He must have paid an extremely steep price in the process.

Just like that, Ling Xiao temporarily settled in with the First Defence Fleet of the Western Border Guard, to rest and recuperate. On the other hand, due to technical issues and a lack of appropriate materials, the mecha <Belief> could not be serviced. It would have to wait till Ling Xiao returned to Doha to receive proper care and maintenance.

Meanwhile, at this very moment, Ling Lan, who had already found out that Qi Long and the other five had all passed and been accepted into the First Men's Military Academy, did not know that a man who would change the future course of her life was on his way home ...

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One week later, the Federation's first marshal secretly arrived at the headquarters of the First Division. A staff officer by his side informed him that the guest was waiting for him in the living room.

The moment the marshal entered the living room, he saw a man sitting primly on the sofa. The man was about 27 to 28 years old, or maybe even around 30, and on his handsome face was an indistinct trace of a smile, naturally drawing the favour of others. However, because he was dressed from head to toe in brand new martial attire, the trim and almost pressed-creaseless general's uniform made him look sharp and dashing. This lessened his original gentle air somewhat, giving him a rare share of stateliness.

"Ling Xiao, you still live! This is wonderful!" said the marshal emotionally the moment he saw the other, his footsteps speeding up subconsciously.

Seeing that the marshal was here, Ling Xiao immediately stood up at attention and gave the other a proper military salute. "Marshal, long time no see!"

### **Chapter 193: Ling Xiao's Request!**

"Yes, it's really been a long time, almost a full 17 years!" said the marshal with a face filled with nostalgia. Ling Xiao had been the abnormally talented prodigy he had singled out by name for cultivation, and had once been his pride and joy. Back when he had heard of his demise, the marshal had been filled with unimaginable grief.

"Ling Xiao, regarding your successful return this time, headquarters has promised to call a press conference to announce your return. Also, congratulations on successfully becoming the 9th General of our Federation. This is the honour and status you should rightfully receive!" said the marshal with mixed



feelings as he patted Ling Xiao on the shoulder. He then moved to sit in an armchair on one side, signalling for Ling Xiao to sit down as well for a talk.

“Many thanks for the appreciation, Marshal!” said Ling Xiao with a soft smile, taking a seat on the sofa beside him. He did not appear to be smug or arrogant from the rise in his status — this formed a strong contrast with his youthful appearance, causing the marshal to nod in approval inside his heart, increasingly pleased by what he saw.

Ling Xiao’s 17 years of trials and suffering were not for nothing; it had caused Ling Xiao’s entire demeanour to become much more steady and reliable. He deserved the esteemed rank of general, worthy of trust.

“As for your assignment ... the 7th Division has, after all, been rebuilt for over 10 years, so every part of the division is already well-developed, making it unsuitable for large-scale adjustment,” said the marshal carefully. He knew well how much the 7th Division meant to Ling Xiao, but times had changed, and now the 7th Division no longer had a place for Ling Xiao.

“How does headquarters want to assign me?” In contrast, Ling Xiao did not seem as concerned as the marshal had feared, merely asking calmly about the intentions of the military headquarters.

“Headquarters is planning to reassign a portion of the troops from each division to build a new 23rd Division. The division will be given drafting priority with the new batch of soldiers this year, while you, Ling Xiao, shall become the sole commander of the 23rd Division. You may freely choose your deputies from any of the other divisions.”

The marshal detailed the plans the military had for him. Since Ling Xiao had become the Federation’s 9th great general, it was of course necessary for him to lead his own army. However, all the current army divisions already had their own commanders and, excepting cases of grave error, armies typically would not casually switch their supreme commanders. In the end, military headquarters decided to just establish a new army division and make Ling Xiao responsible for it. In order to appease Ling Xiao, they even proffered some preferential treatment and special privileges.

“This is fine too!” Ling Xiao found this arrangement satisfactory. Although the 7th Division indeed meant something special to him, its meaning was not on the label of the 7th Division, but rather with his comrades-in-arms within that division.

17 years’ time was long enough for things to change significantly — although the 7th Division still retained its name, those comrades who had fought with him through thick and thin were already gone. Thus, he actually felt it was fine even if he did not go to the 7th Division.

Still, Ling Xiao would not reveal his true thoughts on the matter. Let those folks in headquarters feel as if they had wronged him — this way, he would be able to make some outrageous requests of them.

“Do you still have any other requirements? As long as it is within my means, I will make sure you get it.” Sure enough, as Ling Xiao expected, the marshal was the first to fall for it.

Ling Xiao held a moment of silent contemplation, and then said, “I want to know everything that happened with my wife Lan Luofeng and Ling Lan over these past 17 years. I want to catch up on everything I missed in these last 17 years.”

The marshal cast a searching glance at Ling Xiao and sighed. He then indicated for the secret service officer by his side to hand over a pre-prepared document. The moment he found out that Ling Xiao still lived and was on his way back, he had asked for this document to be prepared. Knowing Ling Xiao, he would definitely ask him for this information.

Putting his hands on the document being handed over by the staff officer, a surge of emotion coursed through Ling Xiao's eyes. He took a moment to settle himself, before reaching out to accept the document fully into his hands.

Ling Xiao eagerly opened the file and began by browsing the bit and pieces of Lan Luofeng's life over these past 17 years. As Lan Luofeng had always stayed at home, there wasn't much in terms of content. Ling Xiao very quickly finished reading this part of the file.

When Ling Xiao moved on to the part of the file with Ling Lan's information, he took in a deep breath before continuing. The first thing that caught his eyes was a student photo of Ling Lan at 13 years old. The red of the scout uniform made Ling Lan look majestic and spirited. His little face was fixed in a stony expression, like a stoic and serious mini-adult. Ling Xiao found this aloof and unapproachable appearance of his unbearably adorable.

So this was his son Ling Lan? He was definitely the combination of his and Lan Luofeng's strengths! Ling Xiao instantly became a *Twenty-four Filial Exemplars* dad <sup>1</sup> ... his child was naturally the best and most exceptional!

In a great mood, he flipped to the next page. The document began to introduce the various things that had happened from Ling Lan's birth onwards. When Ling Xiao read till the part about how the Ling branch family had schemed to usurp Ling Lan's inheritance of his premium military benefits, his gaze turned cold. He had been worried from the start about what troubles these greedy family members could bring to Lan Luofeng and his child ... but he had not expected that their appetites would be so voracious, actually thinking of outright robbing his child of what he had left for him. He must teach them a lesson.

Then, seeing how Lan Luofeng used the combined forces of the military and the government to chase the entire Ling family out of Doha, Ling Xiao could not help but smile. He knew it — Lan Luofeng was not as weak as she appeared to be.

However, his good mood soon evaporated. This was because he saw that Ling Lan had suffered an assassination attempt on the way to his first day of school, and not just that, a betrayer had actually emerged from among Ling Lan's loyalists ... at this point, Ling Xiao almost exploded from rage. He decided that when he got back, he would thoroughly clean up the Ling family loyalists — he definitely would not allow any danger to remain hidden by Ling Lan's side.

But the following information slowly calmed Ling Xiao's rage. He had mixed feelings when he saw that at every ranking tournament, Ling Lan would always surrender on his own at the final moments. His son was clearly capable of dominating all the other students of his grade, but was just unwilling to stand out, finally becoming the grade's uncrowned king. The path his son had chosen to walk was different from his. He had always shown himself to be strong, always in the limelight, while Ling Lan chose instead to hide his talent. His methods of laying low were just a little terrible — anyone who was paying attention could see right through it <sup>2</sup>.

The file documented all of Ling Lan's impressive exploits in the scout academy, and especially at the part where Ling Lan successfully initiated the grand armed melee that had been sealed away for 100 years, Ling Xiao was instantly filled with pride! So this was his son Ling Lan!

Ling Xiao's pride and elation stopped there, however. As he read the next part, his face turned pale.

Who could have expected that enemy spies would infiltrate the academy disguised as teachers to try and assassinate Ling Lan during the grand armed melee? Fortunately, Ling Lan was speculated to have been saved by the God-Realm master Mu Shui-qing. But even so, Ling Lan had already received serious injuries, his body almost being destroyed.

"Dammit!" raged Ling Xiao, his fingers clenching. The paper in his hands was instantly crumbled into powder to drift down from the air.

This outburst allowed Ling Xiao to regain his composure. He looked down regretfully at that destroyed piece of paper — crap, there were still some things he hadn't had time to read yet ...

Ling Xiao could only skip to the final page, only to find that there was nothing more ...

"Marshal, my son Ling Lan was injured severely at 13. What happened after that?" Ling Xiao was anxious to know Ling Lan's current condition, quickly turning to ask the marshal for answers.

Hearing Ling Xiao's question, the marshal knew that Ling Xiao must not have seen the rest of the page he had destroyed. He replied, "Because Ling Lan's wounds were too severe, the specialist doctor prescribed 3 to 4 years of proper rest to heal his body. During this period of time, he cannot take part in any extreme activity, otherwise it would just exacerbate his wounds, very likely leaving some lasting latent trouble in his body."

Saying this, the marshal felt rather awkward. No matter what, as members of the upper rank of the military who were alumni of the scout academy system, they all had some responsibility for the assassination attempt of Ling Lan within the academy. He signalled his secretary to light a cigarette for him, and then continued to say, "Due to this circumstance, Ling Lan made the decision to withdraw from the academy to recuperate at home for 3 years, and only returned to the scout academy in the final year when it was time to apply and register with the various colleges and universities."

"Does that mean his body is fully recovered now?" Ling Xiao's eyes were hopeful.

The marshal drew a mouthful of smoke and puffed it out in a long breath. "No! According to the latest news, Ling Lan's body was injured too severely, 3 years was not enough for him to recover fully. The doctors have diagnosed that he will need at least another year for the possibility of full recovery."

Ling Xiao's entire face turned frigid. His lips were pressed together in a thin line, while his hands were clenched into two tight fists. Due to the extreme force placed on them, the bones of his fingers actually began to emit cracking noises ...

The marshal added, "It was a few days ago when your son Ling Lan applied to the various higher institutions. You should know that the military schools have very strict requirements, especially for the first year when they focus mostly on training up the students' physical bodies. Any student who cannot keep up will be expelled. I don't know which institution Ling Lan will choose in the end, but he probably will not apply for those military schools."

“Can we find out now?” asked Ling Xiao.

The marshal looked at the staff officer, who immediately nodded and said, “Marshal, the information is available for checking now.”

Ling Xiao did not turn to look at the staff officer at all, keeping his gaze squarely on the marshal, awaiting his reply.

“What shall I do with you? Still so tenacious!” Ling Xiao’s clear telegraphing of his intentions of not leaving until he received an answer caused the marshal to shake his head helplessly. He could only send off his secret service officer to look up the final results of Ling Lan’s applications.

Soon, the staff officer returned. His expression was extremely strange as he peeked at Ling Xiao, and he looked as if he were holding back some words which he would have liked to say to Ling Xiao. Still, he remembered his place, and without saying anything, he passed the new folder in his hands to Ling Xiao.

“What, Ling Lan actually applied to the Windchase Mecha Service College on planet Aureolin? What school is this? Why haven’t I heard of it?” Ling Xiao was dumbfounded by the news before his eyes. Even if military schools were out of the picture, there were still plenty of renowned public general universities for Ling Lan to choose from.

“That’s a community college, rank-F,” explained the staff officer in a small voice. Rank-F institutions were at the lowest tier; almost no other institutions could be worse than that. Back when he had first seen this information, the staff officer had been just as shocked, which was why he had taken the extra effort to look up the relevant details and ranking of the Windchase Mecha Service College.

“Ha, Ling Xiao’s son, *my* son, actually falling so far as to enter a rank-F community college ... Marshal, I think you owe me an explanation.” Ling Xiao had been dealt a heavy blow by this news. Losing his previous respectfulness, his tone was curt and demanding. Some people, some things, were his hot buttons, not to be triggered carelessly. Lan Luofeng was one of them previously, and now Ling Lan was one.

The marshal naturally did not take offense at this. In fact, Ling Xiao would only be so direct with him because he truly considered him as an elder who cared for him. He rubbed at his brow in consternation, unsure what he should do.

When he had first seen his staff officer return with that complicated expression on his face, he had known that something was not right. And sure enough, this was the situation.

“Then, you tell me. What do you want?” He indeed owed Ling Xiao a great deal; the marshal could not refuse him.

“I want my son to enter the Federation’s First Men’s Military Academy!” Ling Xiao said with steel-like conviction. In his heart, that was the only place that was worthy of his son.

#### **Chapter 194: Terrible Odds?**

“Impossible!” The marshal rejected the request without even thinking about it.

The First Men's Military Academy was the central focus of the entire Federation. Any student who managed to be accepted into the school was the Federation's cream of the crop, each and every single one of them sufficiently exceptional on their own merits. From the very establishment of the school, in order to preclude any injudicious acceptance of students via backdoor dealings which would ruin the golden reputation of the school, there was supervision from both the military and the government. This completely prevented any possibility of abusing special rights to get into the school via a backdoor. So, even if he wanted to help Ling Xiao, he had no way to handle the government side of things, especially that wily old first premier.

"Marshal!" Ling Xiao's entire expression darkened. He stared intently at the marshal, gaze filled with dissatisfaction. For the sake of his child's future, he would not back off on this.

Seeing this side of Ling Xiao, the marshal was extremely troubled. Though Ling Xiao seemed very agreeable on the surface, he was actually very stubborn in his bones. Especially once he had decided on something, he would not rest until his objective was achieved.

"Godd\*mmmit!" The marshal breathed in an aggressive lungful of smoke, burning his cigarette down to the root. He rubbed out his cigarette butt heavily in the ashtray on the tea table, and with an exasperated expression on his face, he said, "If I could help you, I would definitely do it. But to enter the First Men's Military Academy, it's not just up to me. At the very least, you need to get through the first premier of the State Council."

Having said this, the marshal calmed down a little and continued to advise, "Ling Xiao, even if we allowed it, and your son was accepted, have you ever considered the fact that your son's body will not be able to endure past the first year? If his body was injured irrevocably because of this, won't you regret this?"

"Don't we have you?" Ling Xiao shot this question back at the marshal.

"What do you mean?" The marshal found that he could not keep up with Ling Xiao's train of thought.

"As long as you issue special dispensation, allowing Ling Lan to be exempt from the first year's exams, won't that be fine?" Ling Xiao had already made up his mind; in the first year, Ling Lan would not participate in any training at the school, only continuing to focus on recuperating.

"Ling Xiao, don't you go too far!" The marshal was about to blow up. It wasn't like the Federation's First Men's Military Academy was run by his family ... he couldn't just waltz in and do as he liked!

"I recall that, as long as military headquarters issues a special cultivation plan for a student, they can have full jurisdiction over the student's first year of training." Ling Xiao had already thought of everything. However, this special cultivation plan still required the marshal to sign off on it, which was why he was still here holding up the marshal, trying to obtain his agreement.

"Let military headquarters issue a fake special cultivation plan? No way, this involves too much ..." The marshal wanted to refuse instinctively.

"Didn't you say our 23rd Division was free to choose our mid-level and upper ranking officers as we liked? I can issue this special cultivation plan, with the intent to cultivate Ling Lan as a central pillar of the 23rd Division." For his son's future, Ling Xiao did not mind exploiting his power for personal gain.

“Ling Xiao, giving you command of the 23rd Division is not for you to play dictator!” When the marshal heard Ling Xiao declaring his blatant intention to abuse his power, he was instantly furious. Hells, couldn't he keep himself in check a little in front of him? No matter what, he was still the commander-in-chief in charge of monitoring all the army divisions of the Federation!

“Marshal, setting the relationship between Ling Lan and I aside, just based off Ling Lan's talent and potential alone, if he had not suffered an assassination attempt by an enemy nation three years ago and had remained healthy, would he have been accepted by the First Men's Military Academy this year?” The marshal's fury did not ruffle Ling Xiao; he merely continued to explain his point of view calmly.

The marshal nodded. Ling Lan's talent was no weaker than Ling Xiao's by much — if he had been able to grow up without interruption, even if he did not achieve Ling Xiao's heights, it would pretty much be no problem for him to become an ace operator.

“Then, at that time, when he graduates from the First Men's Military Academy, would he be qualified to be a central force of an army division?” pressed Ling Xiao.

The marshal said huffily, “Any student that comes out from the First Men's Military Academy is fought over by all army divisions for recruitment.” Unsaid was the underlying agreement that if the assassination attempt had not happened, Ling Lan's future would be just as Ling Xiao was describing.

“Therefore, what I am planning to do is not abusing my power for personal gain, but rather, taking responsibility on behalf of the military.” Ling Xiao's eyes were glowing with conviction. “Ling Lan was only injured in an assassination attempt because the enemy managed to infiltrate one of the troops sent by the military into the academy to protect the students. In other words, on this matter, the military should definitely take responsibility.”

Frankly, the marshal also knew very well that the military should indeed take on the full responsibility for Ling Lan's assassination attempt. It was their carelessness and negligence that had allowed the enemy to infiltrate the academy successfully, finally resulting in this regretful mishap.

“We only need to bear the responsibility of shielding him for one year, and we would have salvaged the future of a prodigy. The debt the military owes him, I am only trying to help the military pay it back,” said Ling Xiao righteously, just as if he truly had no personal stake in this at all.

The marshal did not know whether to laugh or cry at Ling Xiao's words — this Ling Xiao was truly unscrupulous in fighting for his objectives. But, he liked it, because this reasoning was sufficiently just and honourable.

“In that case, it is not necessary for you to issue this special cultivation plan. I will make the arrangements.” The marshal did not want Ling Xiao to bear the bad name of abusing his power.

Ling Xiao did not care if he had to bear this so-called bad name or bad reputation, but since the marshal cared, he would not press the issue. Ling Xiao knew very well how to leave a favourable impression on his superiors — a suitable degree of obedience and compliance was absolutely necessary.

That said, the marshal suddenly found that he had been unknowingly led astray from the main problem by Ling Xiao. “Why are we skipping to the end? Ling Xiao, you need to first convince the first premier. As

long as the other agrees, then there won't be any problem on my end. Including everything else after, I can arrange it for you."

"Why is it necessary to convince him?" A smile bloomed on Ling Xiao's lips. Even though it appeared as warm and kind as ever, the marshal could just sense the hidden trace of deviousness behind it.

"I recall that there is this particular rule in the federal military ordinances. To commend the contributions of a soldier to the Federation, when a soldier becomes a general of the Federation, his son shall have the right to a secured place in the First Men's Military Academy. As long as the first marshal approves, he can enter the First Men's Military Academy directly to commence his studies. Since this is something granted by military authority, the government system has no right to object ..."

The Federation was a militaristic nation where military exploits were supreme. No jurisdictional agency nor private individual could prevent a contributor of military exploits from using his special rights.

The marshal's face twitched as he looked at the general's outfit on Ling Xiao's body. He suddenly found himself regretting his actions — why had he moved so fast on Ling Xiao's promotion?

Apparently, the marshal had taken advantage of Ling Xiao's sudden return to life to suggest promoting Ling Xiao to the military rank of general while the other factions were still in disarray. As Ling Xiao's capabilities were unequivocally recognised, and his reputation preceded him, on top of the fact that the factions were utterly confounded by the news of his return, no one had found a reasonable excuse to object at short notice. Moreover, the government also wanted to use Ling Xiao's return to divert public attention, to stabilise the somewhat volatile domestic state of affairs of late, and so had given their energetic support to the suggestion. And so, under these myriad coincidences and circumstances, Ling Xiao's promotion to general did not garner much opposition, passing smoothly.

Afraid that things might change again, the marshal had signed off on the agreement right then and there, and this matter had thus been settled. He just hadn't imagined that his kind intentions would come back to smash him in the foot, leaving him in the awkward position of riding a tiger <sup>1</sup>.

Mind you, this special right had been set aside for the commendation of a general's contributions to the Federation, but practically everyone assumed that it was just an honorary special right. This was because no one would ever use it, as it was almost impossible for someone to become a general before the ages of 60 to 70 years old. By that age, let alone sons, perhaps even their grandchildren would have already wedded wives and sired children. Who then would think to use this special right?

The marshal abruptly found that quite a few military special rights of the Federation at the moment were all just honorary in nature, for there was no one who could actually enjoy those benefits. But now, their existence was obviously there to open backdoors for Ling Xiao ... Ling Xiao's age was just much too young.

"Alright, I've got it," said the marshal, resigned.

Seeing Ling Xiao still standing tall before him, he said exasperatedly, "What else do you want?" If this fellow dared to request anything else, he would definitely throw him out of here.

"The acceptance letter of the First Men's Military Academy!" demanded Ling Xiao.

“Ling Xiao, you really think I’m an omnipotent god? Seek and ye shall find — able to pull an acceptance letter out of thin air? Godd\*mmit, scram! Go home, and wait there patiently!” roared the marshal.

Ling Xiao grinned at these words, and then saluted him respectfully, “Yes, Marshal!” He turned neatly to leave, but when he reached the doorway, he suddenly looked back to say, “Marshal, actually, I was just waiting for this statement of yours!” That said, he laughed loudly as he walked out the door.

“Darn brat!” The marshal couldn’t help but scold even as he smiled. Only Ling Xiao would dare to be so impudent before him, asking for so much. This gave him a sense of kinship with the other. Ever since becoming the Federation’s first marshal, on particular fronts, he had lost many things.

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The moment Ling Xiao walked out the door, a major waiting patiently by the door perked up, his eyes brightening as he rushed over to salute and say, “General!”

“Let’s go!” said Ling Xiao. He then led the way out of the 1st Division’s headquarters to come to the courtyard gates.

A black luxury hover car was gliding towards them to slowly stop at the gates. Its position was very precise; Ling Xiao only needed to walk down 3 steps to get into the car.

The major rushed ahead of him to open the car door.

Ling Xiao stepped into the car and sat down. Only then did the major close the car door, taking a seat himself in the assistant’s seat <sup>2</sup>.

This hover car was not controlled by an A.I., but by a human driver. A chauffeur was already seated in the driver’s seat. His epaulette showed that he was also a major, clearly marking him as no ordinary chauffeur.

“Return to the temporary military camp!” said the major in the assistant’s seat to the chauffeur.

The chauffeur nodded and began to slowly guide the hover car out. His driving was steady and his speed control was excellent — the passengers could not tell at all that the car was in motion.

Even though the hover car was driven very stably, its speed was not slow. In the blink of an eye, they had already disappeared into the horizon, heading swiftly to their destination.

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Sitting in the hover car, Ling Xiao’s feelings were currently very complicated.

He needed to go home now! He wondered if Luofeng would forgive him. After all, he had left mother and son alone for 17 years!

At this thought, Ling Xiao’s heart cringed. Still, he knew that if he only returned home after the official announcement, Lan Luofeng would most certainly kick him out again.

He must go home as soon as possible! Ling Xiao did not know why, but he just had the feeling that his return this time was marked by terrible odds in his favour ...



## Chapter 195: General Ling!

On this day, as usual, Ling Lan was entering the combat room to carry out her basic training. However, not long after she began, she was interrupted by a grim-faced Ling Qin.

“Grandpa Ling Qin? Is something wrong?” Seeing the other’s solemn expression, Ling Lan halted her movements to ask, as she grabbed a towel to wipe off her sweat.

“Master, we just received an urgent notification that the newly promoted General Ling is on his way to visit you.” Ling Qin’s expression was extremely perplexed.

It should be known that generals were the true military authority below the marshal — there were only nine of them in the entire Federation, inclusive of this newly promoted general. Each and every one of them was a commander-in-chief of one or more army divisions. Just a simple stomp of their feet was able to make the earth quake and the mountains shake within the Federation. This kind of personage whom they had to look up to in the past ... why would someone like that make a personal visit to the Ling family?

If the old family head Ling Xiao had still been alive, he would not have found this so strange. After all, Ling Xiao was one of the mere twelve god-class operators of the Federation — even the marshal did not dare take him lightly. Thus, these generals too would not dare to treat him flippantly, so it was not impossible for them to come pay a visit. But now, the family head of the Ling family was Ling Lan who had barely turned 16. Furthermore, to the outside world, he was a youth who had sustained serious injuries which had limited his growth. A typical person would never pay much attention to the Ling family like this ...

What worried Ling Qin the most was that the other’s surname was Ling. Ling Qin could not help but be suspicious — could this visiting general be part of the old Ling elite family that they had chased out of Doha?

If that was the case, this might very likely be a warning from the other party. It could be that this visit may be to force the Ling family into paying some price! Unavoidably, some apprehension reared up in Ling Qin’s heart.

Hearing this, Ling Lan frowned lightly. She too was a little bothered by this surname Ling. However, she was not thinking as far or as complicated as Ling Qin was. She was only a little bummed because it had taken her so much effort to distance herself from the sights of the upper ranks of the military, but now all that effort may be wiped away by this General Ling’s visit. This was going against her original plans.

Still, Ling Lan knew that since the military had already notified them, they were not in a position to refuse. She could only go with the flow and take things as they came.

“Grandpa Ling Qin, make preparations, and then we’ll play things by ear!” Ling Lan still had a trump card in hand — she was the orphaned child of the god-class operator Ling Xiao. Even if this General Ling had any evil intentions against the Ling family, he would not dare to be too blatant about it.

“Yes, Family Head!” Ling Qin left with his orders.

Only then did Ling Lan return to her bedroom and change into a set of formal attire suitable for meeting guests. Since the other was a general, she could not afford to give offense.

As for Lan Luofeng, neither Ling Qin nor Ling Lan notified her. Ling Qin did not, because Ling Lan was already the family head of the Ling family. All household matters would be carried out according to Ling Lan's will — only if Ling Lan was not present would Ling Qin consider notifying Lan Luofeng. Meanwhile, Ling Lan did not, because she did not want to disturb Lan Luofeng with these matters. Ever since three years ago when Ling Xiao's legacy space had disappeared and his shade's final words were a reminder to take care of Lan Luofeng, Ling Lan had solidified Lan Luofeng as someone she would protect for the rest of her life.

When Ling Lan and company received the news that the general's car was about to arrive, Ling Lan led Ling Qin and Ling Yu to stand at the Ling family mansion gates to wait respectfully. As a common citizen with no battle exploits or ranking to her name, Ling Lan did not yet possess the right to wait indoors to greet the general.

The first thing that came into view were two miniature mecha. Ling Lan could tell from the emblem at their chests that they were part of the mecha escort forces available to those of general rank in the military. Behind them was a convoy consisting of five luxury hover cars, with three miniature mecha on each side, and another two miniature mecha protecting the convoy's flank. The entire procession was flying swiftly towards them.

The general's procession was surprisingly simple, not at all as ostentatious as Ling Lan had expected. Ten miniature mecha and five luxury hover cars, so simple was the convoy which made its way over. This gave Ling Lan a better impression of this General Ling; at the very least, he did not give off an air of oppression.

When the convoy arrived at the Ling family gates, the ten mecha hovered up in the air, beginning to monitor all directions of the convoy. At the same time, from four of the luxury hover cars, ten or so fully-equipped guards disembarked and swiftly formed a large circle around the last remaining hover car in a tight defensive formation.

Subsequently, the car door on the assistant seat's side of that last hover car opened, and a major who was approximately 30 years old stepped out from the car. After taking a careful look around, he then opened the back door of the hover car.

Ling Lan then saw a figure dressed in a general's uniform step out from the hover car, head bowed and waist bent. She did not know if it was just a misperception, but Ling Lan sensed that the other was somewhat nervous in that split second when he had stepped out of the car ... this made Ling Lan rather puzzled.

But this was no time to ponder. Ling Lan quickly suppressed this puzzlement and rallied her spirits, and led Ling Qin and Ling Yu to hurry forwards in welcome.

Right then, that General Ling lifted his head and looked over. When his eyes met Ling Lan's, the both of them felt a jolt in their hearts.

The moment Ling Lan saw that person's face, she almost lost all colour in her face. That face was still clearly etched in her memory — not only because Lan Luofeng constantly rambled at her with Ling

Xiao's picture before her face, but because that face had accompanied her through a large part of her childhood in the legacy space.

Ling Qin's reaction was even worse. Overcome with emotion, he could not stop his body from trembling, his jaw opening wide, trying to call out that name in his memories. But perhaps due to being too emotional, his voice just would not work.

"Uncle Qin, long time no see!" Seeing this, Ling Xiao could not help but greet him with a wry smile. Meeting the person who had taken care of him from young again after 17 years, his feelings were a complicated mess — he almost burst into uncontrollable tears.

"Master ..." Ling Qin finally squeezed out, his tears unlocked in a sudden torrent.

As the current leader of the Ling family mecha squad, Ling Yu's heart was also filled with stunned shock. After all, Ling Xiao was the idol of his youth. However, compared to Ling Qin's emotional state, he was somewhat calmer. This was because he was now the leader of the mecha protection squad of the current family head, Ling Lan. As such, he was only loyal to Ling Lan, so even in his excitement, he reflexively looked towards Ling Lan for instruction.

"Your Excellency General Ling, please forgive the attendants of yours truly for their disrespect! Please come in!" Ling Lan threw a cold glance at Ling Qin, jolting Ling Qin to awareness instantly. He knew that he had forgotten himself, and quickly stepped back to stand behind Ling Lan, no longer daring to even look at Ling Xiao.

Right then, Ling Lan had become extremely calm. The torments she had suffered for 16 years in the learning space showed their extraordinary results now — Ling Lan did not lose her composure just because the other looked like Ling Xiao. Before the other properly expressed his identity, they could not afford to trip over themselves.

Ling Lan's courteous response caused Ling Xiao's steps to slow, and the smile on his face froze for a beat. However, he knew that this was not an appropriate place for discussion, so he braced himself and walked through the gates.

This was clearly his own home, but now it was like he was just here as a visitor! Looking at his son's attitude, he was extremely unwelcome ... there was no hint of pleasant surprise at seeing his father. Instead, his son was carefully on guard against him, just as if he had come to steal something or another — this was really too much! Resentment sprouted in Ling Xiao's heart — he had wanted to hug him close or do something along those lines, but unfortunately, it looked like his son would not give him this chance.

Ling Lan watched Ling Xiao walking ahead of her, and her mind started turning in puzzlement: What was going on? Could it be that this Ling Xiao before her was really Ling Xiao? The Federation used genetical DNA testing to determine a person's real identity though, so this completely precluded the possibility of someone impersonating Ling Xiao through plastic surgery. Still, Ling Lan could not help but be suspicious — because this General Ling had truly appeared at such a coincidental time. Ling Lan still remembered that Ling Xiao's legacy space had disappeared three years ago ...

Of course, perhaps the Ling Xiao before her was really Ling Xiao — but then why did he fake his death for 17 years? And why had he suddenly chosen to resurface again now? Was there some deep mystery

to explain this? He had to go complete some top secret mission? And so had no choice but to fake his death? Or perhaps Ling Xiao had not died on the way to that battlefield, but had been rescued and lost his memory?

At this moment, Ling Lan was filling in the blanks in her mind with her imagination, countless scenarios flashing through her head. In particular, imagining the possibility that Ling Xiao had remarried and birthed more children during his amnesia, only to suddenly regain his memory 17 years later to return home ... a blaze of anger flared in Ling Lan's heart. Whatever the case, it was an injustice to her mother Lan Luofeng. Casting aside one's wife and child for his career, status, and prestige — this man deserves to be killed! Remarrying and starting a new family due to memory loss, it would be fine if he just stayed away and never returned. But coming back to try and enjoy a life with two separate families — he would still deserve to be killed!

Ling Xiao, who was walking ahead, suddenly felt a chill run through his body. Somehow, he kept sensing some unexplainable killing intent around him ... but who here would want to kill him? Ling Xiao shook his head, baffled, and chased away that chill in his heart.

Entering the Ling family mansion, Ling Xiao saw the familiar great hall before his eyes. A photo of him and Lan Luofeng still hung on the wall, but of course there was now a new picture beside it. It was a photo of Ling Lan on the day she turned 16 years old.

This familiar setting caused Ling Xiao's eyes to well up with heat, tears almost falling from his eyes. Fortunately, the trials he had gone through in these past few years had made his heart much stronger than it had been 17 years ago; Ling Xiao managed to control this surge of emotion.

"Uncle Qin, where's Luofeng? Is she doing well?" First off, Ling Xiao wanted to know whether the person that mattered most in his heart was doing well.

Ling Qin was just about to answer when he thought of something. He turned to look at Ling Lan, waiting for her instruction. Although Ling Xiao was Ling Lan's father, Lan Luofeng's husband and their previous family head, the present family head was Ling Lan. He needed to first obtain Ling Lan's approval before responding.

From Ling Lan's behaviour at the gates, Ling Qin perceptively sensed Ling Lan's unhappiness with Ling Xiao. There was even some wariness in her demeanour. This made Ling Qin have no choice but to become cautious as well — as his emotions slowly settled down, Ling Qin too began thinking that the sudden appearance of this General Ling before them was just too coincidental.

After all, Ling Xiao had already been officially dead for 17 years ... if this General Ling was really Ling Xiao, then why had he hidden away for these 17 years? Ling Qin's gut feeling was that there was a deeper story behind all this. Before he could remain level-headed in the face of Ling Xiao's return to life, it would be better for him not to act presumptuously. He might as well leave the current situation in the hands of his current family head, Young Master Lan.

These past 3 years, Ling Lan's performance at home had completely convinced Ling Qin. He believed that Ling Lan was fully capable of handling all this — so he lowered his head and kept silent, taking one step back to make Ling Lan stand out more. With this move, he was showing Ling Xiao that Ling Lan was the current master of the Ling family.

## Chapter 196: An Infuriated Ling Xiao!

Ling Xiao's eyes glimmered. Both Ling Qin's demeanour, as well as the manner of the other young man behind him, proved that the barely 16 years old Ling Lan had truly taken charge of the Ling family. He was truly the family head, not just in name. This pleased and surprised Ling Xiao greatly. Some smugness rose faintly in his heart — as expected of a son of his.

Of course, even as Ling Xiao was heartened by this, he could not help the anxiety in his heart. After all, he still had not received the answer he wanted. Thus, he turned his head to look towards Ling Lan, hope in his eyes, wishing for Ling Lan to give him a satisfactory answer.

However, as if not seeing Ling Xiao's beseeching gaze, Ling Lan merely took one step forwards and waved at the sofa, saying politely, "General Ling, please have a seat."

A tendril of rage rose in Ling Xiao's heart, and his presence flared involuntarily. This brat was really giving him no face! Did he not know how anxious he was to find out about his wife?!

Facing Ling Xiao's pressing presence, Ling Lan continued to maintain her icy expression, unmoved. It should be known that after facing Instructor Number One's tremendous force of presence over a long period of time, Ling Lan had already developed some immunity against this sort of pressure. Of course, this was also due to the fact that Ling Xiao's presence still retained some gentleness, not pressing down much harder than Instructor Number One's.

Seeing the unmoved Ling Lan, Ling Xiao could only sullenly take a seat on the living room sofa. Although he was secretly a little annoyed that Ling Lan did not recognise him, he did not dare to fly off the handle. After all, his 17 years of absence gave him no confidence to yell at Ling Lan that he was his father, so he could only quietly tolerate Ling Lan's cold treatment of him.

Ling Lan called the servants to serve up tea. Ling Xiao took a sip of his tea — the familiar taste sent a jolt through Ling Xiao's heart, and he could not help but open his mouth again to say, "Ling Lan, come, let your mother out. There are some things we need to have a good discussion about."

Ling Lan said placidly, "General Ling, my father has been dead for 17 years. As his widow, my mother has always lived a simple and secluded life. It is probably inappropriate for her to meet a strange man. If you have any matters to discuss, you can just tell me. I will pass on a message to my mother."

Ling Lan had already made up her mind. Before she figured out what had happened, she would not let Lan Luofeng out to see Ling Xiao. If she truly found Ling Xiao to be an irresponsible man, or a present-era Chen Shimei <sup>1</sup>, she would definitely chase the other out straightaway to protect her mother. Even if she was no match for Ling Xiao in terms of both power and strength, with Little Four's help, she should still be able to use the influence of the virtual world to bring disgrace and ruin down upon Ling Xiao.

In the mindscape, Little Four was raising his fists high in response to Ling Lan's thoughts, his entire appearance screaming the fact that he would attack and withdraw as his boss commands. But in a place unseen by Ling Lan, he was slumped on the floor, crying, '*Boo hoo hoo, I don't want Dad to be a Chen Shimei ...*'

Ling Lan's extremely cold response made Ling Xiao choke on a breath. He suddenly found that this son of his was so mature and cool-headed that it was somewhat annoying ... shouldn't he be overjoyed by his return and be urging Lan Luofeng to come out so their family could reunite? This kind of courteous speech — he was totally treating him as a stranger! No, a stranger may have received better treatment ... the coldness in that brat's eyes clearly showed that he was seeing him as a boss-level enemy.

Ling Xiao could clearly tell that Ling Lan must have recognised him by now. Back when they first saw each other, he had seen the emotional upheaval in Ling Lan's eyes. However, Ling Lan had swiftly pushed down those emotions, and after regaining his calm he had begun to react defensively every step of the way, showing no sign that he would like to acknowledge Ling Xiao as his father. This knowledge made Ling Xiao so frustrated that he could almost puke blood.

"Ling Lan, I am your father Ling Xiao!" In the end, Ling Xiao could not hold back, revealing his identity in curt, bitten off words. He had only wanted to come home and be reunited with his family — to hug his wife by a warm hearth, to bounce his son on his knee ... was that too much to ask?

At these words, a trace of contempt appeared on Ling Lan's lips. "Oh? Then, 17 years ago, what was that notification we received from the military informing the Ling family about Ling Xiao's demise?"

Ling Xiao kneaded his forehead, smiling bitterly as he said, "Back then, I was blasted by that magnetic energy turbulence in the death tunnel to an unknown location. Honestly, I was lucky. Due to the intense collisions of energy, a black hole was created, allowing me to escape death. However, through the black hole was an unknown world<sup>2</sup>. I couldn't find my bearings anywhere on a Federation star chart. To find my way home, I spent a whole 17 years. Only 10 days ago, when the black hole I had gone through opened again due to the energy turbulence caused by a battle between the Federation and the Twilight Empire, did I manage to find my way back here."

Ling Xiao briefly explained why he had 'died' for 17 years. Back then, everyone had indeed thought that he was dead. Meanwhile, he had been drifting in a foreign land all this time. Back then, he too did not have the confidence that he would live to return to the Federation.

Hearing this, Ling Lan's hanging hands clenched into fists, her heart rate spiking. Did this mean that Ling Xiao had had no intentions of leaving her mum and herself behind from the start?

"Not long after, the military will publicly announce this matter, and you all will know everything. As for my promotion to general, that's because I was already eligible for promotion to Lieutenant General 17 years ago. But at that time, the Federation wanted to push their advantage to eradicate the Twilight Empire, and so intentionally concealed my rank, letting me lead the 7th Division to attack Twilight before the other nations could react ..." Ling Xiao explained the truth of the matter back then, revealing why he had appeared at the frontlines despite being a god-class operator.

"However, at the time, the marshal had suddenly fallen deeply ill, causing the main authority of military headquarters to fall to those below him. Who knows whether it was because of the resulting power struggle, but the plan to attack Twilight was leaked. Or perhaps there were already spies in the highest ranks of the military ... In any case, the Twilight Empire found out that the eradication plan would be carried out by me, and so created a series of plots and schemes targeting me ..."

“Although the marshal took back military control post-haste after he recovered, it was too late. I had already been led skilfully to the spot they had crafted ...” Regret was clear on Ling Xiao’s face. This sequence of unfortunate events had thus caused him to be separated from his wife and son for 17 years.

Ling Qin’s face was filled with true emotion. He looked towards Ling Lan, waiting for her to soften.

“A very interesting story ...” Ling Lan sipped her tea and then continued calmly, “I am very interested in your 17 years of life in that unknown world. What kind of world was it?” Who knew if Ling Xiao hadn’t been able to bear the loneliness and had found some pleasure companion or whatnot to be by his side ... it was better to figure all of this out before deciding whether or not to let her mother Lan Luofeng come out.

At Ling Lan’s words, Ling Xiao paused for a moment, startled at this avenue of questioning. He smiled wryly and said, “That was a primitive world. It did not have the technological advancements of our Federation. You could even say that there were no starships, no aircrafts, and no mecha. When I first landed there, those people thought I was a god ...”

“A god, is it?” Ling Lan abruptly lifted her head up to look straight at Ling Xiao, her gaze cold and piercing. “I would like to ask you — in these 17 years, did you find a new woman there?”

Ling Xiao flew into a rage at these words, barking, “How could that be?! I already have your mother.”

“You’ve said before, back then you too did not know whether you would be able to come back. Did you never consider building a new family there or something?” asked Ling Lan with a quirk of her brow. It was clear to see that Ling Lan did not believe Ling Xiao’s denial.

“Other than your mother, I do not want any other woman.” Ling Xiao abruptly stood up, his gentle air completely gone. In his rage, Ling Xiao could not restrain himself from releasing the dominant air hidden within his bones, “I, Ling Xiao, am definitely not that type of unfaithful, two-timing person.”

Ling Lan’s suspicious questions had undoubtedly caused Ling Xiao to feel deeply affronted. In these past 17 years, there had indeed been women who had flirted and confessed to him, but his heart had always been true to Lan Luofeng and that child in her belly. Thus, he had resolutely turned away all temptation, putting all his mind and effort on getting back. In these 17 years, he had been hard at work in every waking moment, even making many concessions in his quest to return.

Although Ling Xiao was extremely angry, he still remembered that this was the Ling family. He did not unleash all of his force of presence, only focusing it on Ling Lan. He felt that this obnoxious brat really needed a good lesson, actually daring to question his integrity and feelings. It was outrageous!

Ling Lan gave a muffled grunt, the vital energies in her chest roiling, almost forcing out a mouthful of blood. She knew that this was the pressure from Ling Xiao’s focused rage, an outcome she had prompted, but she did not regret it at all. Knowing for sure that Ling Xiao had not betrayed Lan Luofeng, she could then hand over Lan Luofeng to Ling Xiao without worry.

“Ling Xiao, how impressive of you! Bullying us, mother and child, the moment you return?” A crisp voice rang out from above, tone filled with subtle anger. A bolt of joy ran through Ling Xiao’s heart at this familiar voice; his rampaging spiritual pressure was instantly retracted.

“Luofeng!” Ling Xiao walked forwards emotionally, reaching out to try and wrap his arms around Lan Luofeng who was coming down the stairs.

Lan Luofeng fiercely pushed aside Ling Xiao’s arms, completely ignoring him to run to Ling Lan’s side. Face filled with worry and distress, she asked, “Ling Lan, how are you? Are you hurt?”

Ling Lan circulated her Qi through her body once along the pathways of the Qi exercises, and her initially heavy and tight chest felt much better. Ling Xiao had only wanted to give Ling Lan a small lesson and had not been trying to hurt her — Ling Xiao still remembered that Ling Lan’s body was currently injured, so he dared not use too much force.

Seeing Lan Luofeng’s teary and frantic manner, Ling Lan quickly reassured her, saying, “Mummy, I’m fine!”

Seeing that her precious daughter was fine, Lan Luofeng could then turn to addressing the culprit who had almost hurt her daughter. She instantly morphed into a maternal beast protecting her offspring, charging over fiercely to Ling Xiao’s front, and pressed a forceful finger onto Ling Xiao’s chest, scolding, “Ling Xiao, you bastard, you dare to bully my child? Do you really think I, Lan Luofeng, am so easy to bully?” That said, she rolled up her sleeves, and threw her fists at Ling Xiao in rage, as if beating at a drum.

In response, Ling Xiao could only run for his life, dodging as he apologised and pleaded for mercy. Right then, he did not look any bit like the god-class operator and general he was.

Ling Lan’s face twitched uncontrollably. She lifted her head to look up at the great chandelier hanging above them, wondering if she could disappear from here now to show that she really did not know this couple before her ...

Inside Ling Lan’s mindspace, Little Four was gaping in shock and bewilderment. That man fleeing so gracelessly, repeatedly begging for mercy all the way ... was he still that gentle and dashing, unbelievably handsome daddy of his? Also, was that ferocious female warrior chasing and beating him in a frenzy still that so-gentle-she-seemed-to-be-made-of-water mummy of his memory? He felt as if his whole world had been turned upside down.

### **Chapter 197: A Determined Destiny!**

Finally, at a moment when Ling Xiao could guarantee that he would not hurt Lan Luofeng by accident, he pulled her into his embrace, holding her close as he apologised over and over again, “Luofeng, it’s my fault. I shouldn’t have lost my temper ...”

In Ling Xiao’s arms, Lan Luofeng struggled for a bit, but finding that she really could not move, her expression crumbled and she broke out into sobs, “You bastard. You already left for 17 years ... if you don’t come back, that’s that, but why do you bully us, mother and child, right after coming back? Who gave you the right?”

Ling Xiao rushed to apologise again, “I’m sorry! It’s my fault! It’s all my fault!”



“Of course it’s your fault!” As a wife, Lan Luofeng was still somewhat reasonable, but as a mother, bullying her kid was definitely unconscionable.

At this moment, how would Ling Xiao dare to say anything to defend himself? He could only continue to agree, “Yes, yes, yes, it’s definitely my fault!”

Ling Lan finally understood what was meant by ‘even heroes need to back off sometimes’<sup>1</sup>! Against her ferocious mum, her dad could only back off. However, Ling Lan could clearly tell from the light shining from Ling Xiao’s eyes that this was a willing concession on his part. This also proved that all those things Ling Xiao had said in his fury previously were all true.

Seeing this, Ling Lan let out a large sigh of relief inside her heart. Being able to see her parents of this world being lovey-dovey — happiness welled up in her heart.

However, when she saw that the two before her still showed no sign of separating, she couldn’t help but sweatdrop. Hells, they should really mind their shining image, right? There were still outsiders around, you know! So, Ling Lan coughed heavily and reminded them, “Perhaps, we should sit down and discuss things properly?”

Lan Luofeng was jolted to awareness, and she quickly pushed Ling Xiao away with a face filled with embarrassment. She quickly walked over to Ling Lan and holding Ling Lan’s hand, she turned with a proud look to say to Ling Xiao, “Ling Xiao, this is our child, Ling Lan. The best child ever<sup>2</sup>!”

Ling Xiao smiled and nodded, “Yes, I know. Ling Lan, my child, is indeed very good!” Although Ling Lan was sufficiently exceptional, Ling Xiao felt that he should not praise his son too much. He needed to push him down a little, and not pamper him like he would a daughter. Honestly, he had really wished for a daughter who resembles Lan Luofeng ... but it’s alright, they would just have to continue working on it in future.

Lan Luofeng shook Ling Lan’s hand in hers as she smiled blissfully, “Ling Lan, he is your daddy Ling Xiao, isn’t he great?” Her face was filled with anticipation, looking forward to Ling Lan’s acknowledgement of Ling Xiao, and for her to call him ‘daddy’.

Ling Lan nodded and said calmly, “Mm, Mum, your judgment is pretty good.” But she just could not call him ‘daddy’ just yet.

Perhaps Ling Lan had given all her emotions towards Ling Xiao to the spiritual entity within Ling Xiao’s legacy space, so now when she was facing the real Ling Xiao, Ling Lan actually felt somewhat distant from him, making her unable to call him ‘daddy’ right away.

Ling Xiao seemed to understand Ling Lan’s hesitance. He did not push the matter, skipping past it with a smile. Lan Luofeng could only sigh. 17 years of absence made it impossible for Ling Xiao and Ling Lan to abruptly have an affectionate father-child relationship.

Ling Lan saw that Ling Xiao and Lan Luofeng seemed to have much to say to one another; knowing that this was not a good time for them light bulbs<sup>3</sup> to hang around, she indicated for Ling Qin and the others to leave. This included the secret service officer, that major who had entered the Ling family mansion along with Ling Xiao.

Of course, when that major left, his expression was somewhat twisted. It was clear to see that Ling Xiao's current demeanour had completely overturned the valiant and dashing image of General Ling Xiao that all soldiers had in their hearts.

By the time Ling Lan and the others saw Ling Xiao and Lan Luofeng again, it was already the morning of the second day. As for what they had been doing all this time, Lan Luofeng's bashful manner and sultry eyes were pretty glaring clues.

At this moment, Ling Lan was seated at the dining table, playing host to the only guest free to attend breakfast — that secret service officer assigned to Ling Xiao. They were eating a simple breakfast together. Seeing her parents appear in that state, Ling Lan's facial muscles twitched involuntarily. Did these two people not know how to be a little more reserved?

Ling Lan suddenly recalled that her mum was a lustful woman nearing 40 years of age<sup>4</sup>, and could not help but cast a pitying glance at Ling Xiao. She hoped that he had not been squeezed dry by this mother of hers who was, at present, just like a hungry tiger or wolf.

Perhaps Ling Lan's gaze had been too obvious, for Ling Xiao's handsome face actually blushed when he met her eyes. Ling Lan was very surprised by this — who knew her dad who was over 40 would have such thin skin ...?

"What are you looking at?" As she sat down, Lan Luofeng rapped Ling Lan lightly on the head in embarrassment, secretly annoyed at how strange Ling Lan's gaze was.

"Nothing!" said Ling Lan with a straight face. Her cold and stern face looked as unmoved as ever, making Lan Luofeng almost doubt whether she had misjudged Ling Lan's expression due to her own guilty conscience.

Ling Xiao, however, was a god-class operator after all; his senses were extremely perceptive, so Ling Lan's little tricks naturally could not fool him. He coughed awkwardly and then changed the topic to say, "Right, Ling Lan, I forgot to tell you some great news!"

Ling Lan raised a brow, unsure what great news Ling Xiao could be referring to.

"You will be guaranteed admission into the First Men's Military Academy! The school's acceptance letter should be here in a few days." Ling Xiao's following words made Ling Lan spit out the milk in her mouth she had yet to swallow. Meanwhile, Lan Luofeng's chopsticks fell from her hand to drop onto the plates on the table, causing a ringing clatter to echo in the room.

"What did you say?" said Ling Lan in fright as she coughed.

Smiling proudly, Ling Xiao said, "I said, you can go study at the First Men's Military Academy now." His expression that was all but screaming 'quick, thank me!' almost made Ling Lan feel like kicking him in the face.

"Don't you know that my body's injuries still haven't fully recovered? Even if I go, I won't be able to get past the first year of extra tough physical conditioning." Ling Lan's composure had finally cracked; she could not hold back her exasperation as she replied.

Ling Xiao's expression was solemn as he replied, "Of course I know. But, Ling Lan, don't worry, I have arranged everything. For the first year, you will receive special treatment and be exempt from exams. I will make sure to let your body recover fully before letting you go through physical conditioning. I will not let your body retain any latent problems."

Ling Xiao's words were said with steel-like conviction. He had already considered everything that needed to be considered, the only thing that he had not considered was the problematic off-chance that his son was actually a daughter ...

Looking at the self-satisfied Ling Xiao who seemed to have thought of everything, Ling Lan looked speechlessly at Lan Luofeng. Her eyes were questioning: *Mum, did you not tell Dad about my true gender ...?*

Lan Luofeng shot back with her gaze: *Can't you see I just hadn't found the time yet?*

Ling Lan puffed up her cheeks, filled with contempt for her mum. She dare say that the two of them had been too busy canoodling, and so her mum had completely forgotten that there was still this major issue to communicate.

Lan Luofeng glanced at the secret service officer, He Xuyang, who was stealing careful glances at them from one corner of the dining table. Ling Xiao had introduced him previously as the officer who had been assigned to him by headquarters after he became a general. Whether he was loyal to Ling Xiao remained to be seen in the coming days. As such, such a major issue as Ling Lan's gender was not appropriate to be shared with Ling Xiao here.

Yet, this matter was of the utmost urgency and could not be concealed any longer. Mind you, once Ling Lan entered the Men's Academy, she would have to undergo a full body check-up. At that time, Ling Lan's female gender would not be able to remain hidden — this was also the main reason why Lan Luofeng had not wanted Ling Lan to enter a boys' military school.

Frantic, Lan Luofeng abruptly stood up, and pulled Ling Xiao, who had just been about to eat breakfast, up with her as well.

"Ling Xiao, I feel there is something I still need to share with you," said Lan Luofeng.

Ling Xiao's face was filled with bafflement, but he still complied with Lan Luofeng's arrangement. He put down his bowl and chopsticks and left the dining hall with Lan Luofeng, returning to the bedroom where they had spent a sensuous night.

Of course, as they left, Ling Xiao happened to see the astonished expression of the major, who seemed somewhat shocked at his amazing stamina ... this made Ling Xiao's face burn with mortification — Lan Luofeng's words had truly left too much room for interpretation.

The moment Lan Luofeng arrived at the bedroom, she shut the door and pounced forward to cling to Ling Xiao and said, "Ling Xiao, Ling Lan definitely cannot be allowed to go to the First Men's Military Academy."

Ling Xiao was taken aback. "Why?" He had already arranged everything — why was Lan Luofeng and Ling Lan so against this? Ling Lan's expression at the dining table had been too obvious; he naturally picked up on his son's true feelings on the matter.

Through clenched teeth, Lan Luofeng hissed softly, “That’s because Ling Lan is a girl. She’s a daughter, not a son!”

Ling Xiao was instantly stupefied. Face filled with disbelief, he stuttered, “Wh-what d-did you say?”

“I said that our Ling Lan is a daughter not a son,” Lan Luofeng repeated.

“Daughter?!” Before Ling Xiao could yell out in shock, Lan Luofeng had covered his mouth and forced those words back into his throat.

“It’s fine if you know. What are you yelling for?” Lan Luofeng glared at Ling Xiao with censure.

Ling Xiao could not help but rub his forehead, “How did you even think of getting Ling Lan to pretend to be a son?”

Lan Luofeng said angrily, “Isn’t this all because of your sudden death? In order to inherit your premium military benefits, I had no choice. Otherwise who knows if the two of us, mother and child, would have been flayed and eaten alive by those greedy Ling elite family members?”

Ling Xiao was instantly enlightened. Back then, everyone must have been eyeing the right to inherit what he had left behind. Even if Lan Luofeng had been willing to surrender Ling Lan’s inheritance rights, to make sure there were no loose ends, the Ling family clan would definitely have secretly gotten rid of Ling Lan even if they left Lan Luofeng alone. Only if Ling Lan obtained the right to inherit would she also receive care and protection from the military, thus earning the safety and security to continue living. This was one of the reasons why Lan Luofeng had chosen as she had. At the heart of it, it was still his, Ling Xiao’s, fault!

Ling Xiao hugged Lan Luofeng close lovingly, and couldn’t help but sigh in gratitude, “Luofeng, thank you, for protecting our daughter.”

Lan Luofeng pounded Ling Xiao’s chest once in response, and said worriedly, “What do we do now?”

Ling Xiao’s mind whirled. Because the plan to guarantee Ling Lan’s admission into the First Men’s Military Academy had been obtained after so much effort on his part, if he suddenly said that his son wasn’t going anymore, all those involved in arranging this, including the marshal, would definitely become suspicious. This was because he had truly planned everything too perfectly, almost excluding all possible reasons not to go.

If Ling Lan did not go, they might start paying even more attention to her instead ... If Ling Lan had previously shown herself to be a degenerate good-for-nothing, they might still be able to argue that Ling Lan was unwilling to work hard and suffer through training. But unfortunately, Ling Lan had performed exceptionally well at the scout academy, and was a truly buildable prodigy in everyone’s eyes ...

This would just lead everyone to speculate in other directions, perhaps even placing Ling Lan under closer military surveillance — this was definitely nothing good for Ling Lan. On the other hand, entering the First Men’s Military Academy, the main issue would be how to conceal her real gender from others ...

Ling Lan’s stony visage floated to the forefront of Ling Xiao’s mind — there was nothing at all feminine about her. Honestly speaking, if he were to stand side-by-side with Ling Lan, and let others guess who

was the girl between the two of them, the probability of others mistaking him over Ling Lan for a girl would be much higher. It was safe to say that Ling Lan had already achieved a miraculous realm with her impersonation of a man.

At this thought, Ling Xiao couldn't help but admire Lan Luofeng at her success in training their daughter to impersonate a man. No one had discovered the charade these past 16 years, including the marshal and himself — everyone had truly believed that Ling Lan was a boy.

Ling Xiao's brain began to swiftly shift through which events in the military academy would threaten to expose Ling Lan's gender, and then find a method to resolve it. In the end, he found that if he manipulated things well enough, Ling Lan could safely evade all the threats and remain undiscovered. As long as Ling Lan could graduate successfully from the military academy, Ling Xiao believed that with his resourcefulness, he could definitely construct an alternate identity for Ling Lan, allowing Ling Lan to live freely within his 23rd Division with two separate identities ...

Overall, it would be much better than thrusting Ling Lan into the military's sights right this moment! Ling Xiao decided instantly that he would still let Ling Lan study at the First Men's Military Academy.

Although Ling Xiao had decided, at the thought that he would be sending his precious daughter into a den of hungry wolves and tigers<sup>5</sup>, his chest felt tight and he could almost vomit blood.

He could not help but clench his hands into tight fists, and growl mentally: If any presumptuous snott-nosed brat dared to lay a finger on his precious daughter, he would definitely tear the other to pieces, crush his bones, and scatter his ashes!

### **Chapter 198: Cruel Punishment**

Ling Xiao's planning was quite perfect, but it did not receive Lan Luofeng's approval. In fact, when Lan Luofeng heard that Ling Xiao had decided to let Ling Lan study in the First Men's Military Academy anyway, she went berserk.

Lan Luofeng did not want her daughter to continue impersonating a man. Ling Lan was already 16 years old — this was the best time for a young girl to develop, but because she had to impersonate a man, to avoid being discovered, Ling Lan had always been injected with hormone suppressors, restricting the oestrogen levels in her body to prevent the development of her gender. The military had always insisted that hormone suppressors were harmless to the human body, and that once one stopped using them, one's body would quickly recover its equilibrium and return to normal.

Of course, the military had not invented this hormone suppressor for contraceptive purposes, nor was it meant for turning women into men — rather, it was meant to ensure the survival ability of female soldiers on the battlefield.

Mind you, there would always be several days every month when a woman would be inconvenienced and feel uncomfortable, their spiritual energy and physical strength dropping below their usual standards. It was still fine during regular times, but in the event of a battle, these reasons would cause a female soldier's combat capability to drop, risking her life. Thus, any female soldier who was about to

enter a battlefield would be injected with a shot of hormone suppressor beforehand, ensuring that they were not bothered by feminine issues for half a year.

Of course, agents such as this hormone suppressor were categorised as semi-restricted medicinal agents, unavailable to the general populace. However, the Ling family had had two generations within the upper ranks of the military, after all. Even though Ling Xiao had died, the connections he left behind had still been enough to gain these not highly sought agents for the Ling family quite easily.

Ever since Ling Lan turned 10, she had begun injecting herself with these hormone suppressors, and this had continued for 6 years. Lan Luofeng had always been concerned that Ling Lan would suffer some lasting complications due to the long-term use of these hormone suppressors. After all, female soldiers would not be injected with hormone suppressors over a long period of time like Ling Lan — they would only take a shot right before battle during critical periods, and once the battle ended, they would stop using the suppressors immediately.

This time, Ling Xiao's sudden revival had given Lan Luofeng a great joyful surprise while also letting her put down the great rock she had pressing on her heart all this while. Lan Luofeng thought that as long as Ling Xiao was back, Ling Lan's impersonation as a man would naturally be resolved.

This was why when Lan Luofeng had first heard that Ling Xiao had bumblingly sent their daughter into the First Men's Military Academy before knowing the truth, though she had been stunned, she had not been worried or angry. After all, Ling Xiao just hadn't known that Ling Lan was a girl at the time. Therefore, Lan Luofeng had rationally pulled Ling Xiao back to their bedroom to discreetly tell Ling Xiao this secret.

Lan Luofeng had initially hoped that Ling Xiao would then think of a way to refuse Ling Lan's acceptance into the First Men's Military Academy, but unexpectedly, the answer she received in the end was still to let her precious daughter continue living as a man for another 6 years. Not just that, she would have to do so living under the same roof as a group of other men ... this made Lan Luofeng blow her top.

"No way! I will not allow my daughter to enter the all-male First Men's Military Academy. Ling Lan is a girl!" Lan Luofeng was currently extremely thankful that every bedroom in the Ling family mansion had been installed with soundproofing — even if the two of them were screaming at one another, no one outside would be able to hear.

"I know. I promise I will arrange everything properly. No one will discover Ling Lan's true gender." Ling Xiao tried to reassure the hysterical Lan Luofeng, trying to calm her down.

But these words of his just made Lan Luofeng even madder. She pointed an angry finger at Ling Xiao's nose, "Ling Xiao, what is the basis of your promise? 17 years ago, you promised that you would return, but you broke your promise, ending up 'dead' for a whole 17 years, leaving me and Ling Lan to suffer and be bullied, even ending up in this kind of difficult situation. Now, you're talking to me again of promises? Will you only be content after Ling Lan's life and reputation are utterly ruined?"

At this moment, Lan Luofeng was completely unwilling to believe anything Ling Xiao had to say. As a mother, her concerns and fears were much greater than Ling Xiao's — she knew well that if Ling Lan's true gender ever got out while she was in the First Men's Military Academy, Ling Lan's life would truly

be over. No one would be willing to believe in her chastity and innocence, especially since she had been living together with so many men in one place.

Even if Ling Lan did not mind, and Ling Xiao did not mind, as a mother, Lan Luofeng could not accept her own daughter being side-eyed and treated with scorn by others. This would drive her mad!

“I had already had everything planned out, letting Ling Lan distance herself from Doha, distance herself from the sights of the upper ranks of the military so that she could slowly fade out and recover her true gender to live freely ... but all this was ruined by you! Why did you not return earlier or later, choosing precisely this time to come back?”

So speaking, Lan Luofeng’s eyes were glittering with resentment. She hated that Ling Xiao had returned at such a coincidental time, returning at this critical period when Ling Lan was about to decide her future path ... and then presumptuously changing the path they had already arranged, causing Ling Lan to once again fall into such a dangerous plight.

“I’m sorry, Luofeng, I was too impatient. When I saw that Ling Lan had missed the opportunity to enter the First Men’s Military Academy due to her injuries, I lost control. I just didn’t want my child to be disappointed — she was so exceptional at the scout academy; she must have wanted to enter the First Men’s Military Academy ... I just assumed.” Ling Xiao hugged Lan Luofeng close as he apologised repeatedly, “What’s done is done. I can only do my best to make up for this mistake. Refusing is not impossible, but the risk Ling Lan will face in doing so will not be any less than if she were to enter the First Men’s Military Academy!”

When Lan Luofeng heard there would be risks involved either way, she calmed down and waited. Ling Xiao immediately took the chance to explain to her the reasoning behind his decision.

Ling Xiao belonged to the marshal’s camp. There were many in the military who did not submit to the marshal — among the nine great generals, four belonged to other factions, while two maintained their neutrality. If these factions had not been at each other’s throats fighting for power constantly, not at all cooperative with one another, the marshal would not have been secure in his First Marshal’s seat for over 10 years.

But even so, at any sign of trouble, the opponent would look for an excuse to attack the marshal, so the marshal could not guarantee that his position would continue to remain secure. Ling Xiao had no choice but consider this as well. It should be known that the marshal had invested a lot in gaining special admission into the First Men’s Military Academy for Ling Lan.

If Ling Lan refused this admission in the end, the opponent factions would certainly not let this opportunity go by. They would set their targets on Ling Lan and monitor her from the shadows to find out the true reason for her refusal ... Even if they found nothing, they were also likely to manufacture something that would cause the marshal, who had approved and fought for her admission, to lose face ...

This would definitely cause the marshal’s camp to descend into a passive and disadvantaged position. As part of the marshal’s camp, Ling Xiao naturally did not want to see this happen, but most importantly, he was afraid that with his lone pair of fists, he would not be able to keep Ling Lan safe from danger.

Even if Lan Luofeng heard nothing else, she got the point that Ling Lan would be in danger if this resulted in long-term surveillance. Lan Luofeng was an intelligent woman — she quickly figured out which option would be more beneficial to Ling Lan. Ling Xiao's decision was not wrong.

Still, although she understood, the rage in her chest was still simmering. It was this Ling Xiao before her with his presumptuousness that had forced her precious daughter to have no choice but to delay regaining her true identity by 6 years ... no matter how she looked at Ling Xiao right now, she just felt irritated!

"Ling Xiao, do you still remember those promises you made when you proposed?" After calming down, Lan Luofeng was rather scary.

Cold sweat welled up on Ling Xiao's forehead, but he did not dare not to answer, "I remember."

"Back then, what was the 4th promise you made to me?" asked Lan Luofeng icily. Right then, she seemed to have the air of a soldier about her.

"After marriage, I will make sure my wife is forever happy and well. I will never make my wife angry. If I break this promise, punishment is up to my wife." Ling Xiao's memory was excellent; he could immediately recite his 4th promise.

"Ling Xiao, right now I am very unhappy, very unwell. I am very, very angry. What do you think I should do?" bit out Lan Luofeng, word by word.

"I know, Luofeng. Tell me then, I will take any punishment." Ling Xiao grimaced. He had no excuse — it was true that he had not upheld the promise he had made back then. Not only did he leave for the battlefield when they had just been newly wed, causing Lan Luofeng much distress, he had even gone missing for 17 years after that, leaving Lan Luofeng to hold up this family all on her own. And now, when he returned, he had immediately created another mess, causing Lan Luofeng to boil over in rage ... he indeed deserved punishment.

"I have decided. Before Ling Lan regains her female identity, I will not allow you to step one foot into my room ..." With that said, Lan Luofeng turned away without a backwards glance at Ling Xiao, opening the bedroom door and walking out.

Ling Xiao was left gaping blankly, before he came to himself and ran after her, shouting, "Luofeng, don't treat me this way, let's discuss things properly ..." He gave chase, pleading with Lan Luofeng to take back those terrible words.

Lan Luofeng's punishment was just too cruel — wasn't this forcing him to become a monk for 6 years? Although he had already abstained and been one for 17 years, at that time he was being a vegetarian without meat in sight <sup>1</sup>, so of course he could bear it. But things were different now. His favourite dish was tempting him every day in front of his eyes, but he was not allowed to eat it? This was definitely a type of flagellation and abuse from the soul ...

Ling Lan saw Lan Luofeng charging back huffily, ignoring Ling Xiao chasing behind her, and just knew that the situation was probably not good.

Meanwhile, the moment Ling Xiao arrived at the dining hall, his initially frantic emotions silently faded away, to be replaced with a calm gentleness. However, Ling Lan could still clearly sense that trace of



awkwardness remaining in his heart ... looks like, against Lan Luofeng in a towering rage, Ling Xiao was equally as helpless.

Lan Luofeng's displeasure was really too obvious. He Xuyang did not dare to linger; he swiftly finished off his breakfast and then found a random excuse to leave the dining hall. Ling Lan's gaze signalled for Ling Qin to follow him and send him off, but it was actually to ensure there was no one else in the surroundings because what's next would be a discussion for their family alone. It was really very important that no one else learned anything of it.

Even though Ling Xiao was calmly eating his breakfast, he was still observing the expressions of everyone in the dining hall. Seeing Ling Lan's caution in handling things, a surge of pride rose in his heart: *Look, this is my daughter!*

Compared to a son, Ling Xiao was even worse at resisting a daughter ...

"Is the decision for me to enter the First Men's Military Academy set in stone?" After receiving Ling Qin's confirmation that the coast was clear, Ling Lan stared at Ling Xiao steadily as she asked.

"Well, no, but the risk of refusing is too great, both for you and for me." Ling Xiao did not prevaricate. He then detailed all the possible consequences of refusing to Ling Lan, and concluded, "The final decision is still up to you. If you really don't want to go, I, Ling Xiao, can still take the fallout. However, the danger to you will be a little greater."

### **Chapter 199: Fellow Disciples?**

At this moment, Lan Luofeng could not hold back from saying, "Ling Lan, don't worry too much. Your father can handle things." Although Lan Luofeng was extremely annoyed with Ling Xiao, her trust in Ling Xiao was still unshaken.

Ling Lan thought for a moment, and then asked, "Can you make sure my gender won't be discovered?" Since Ling Xiao had decided to send her into the military academy, he must have a sure plan.

"Yes, I will arrange everything." Ling Xiao's eyes were filled with confidence; he would never take any chances with his daughter's life.

"Then I'll go," Ling Lan decided. Honestly, the greatest reason why she had not wanted to go study at the military academy was that she feared her true gender being discovered; there were just too many events involving body check-ups over the first year. She had the confidence to hide once or twice, but with such a large number of occasions, she was uncertain she could keep the charade going. Since Ling Xiao could help her eliminate this problem, Ling Lan naturally had nothing else to worry about.

Besides, Ling Lan really wanted to see Qi Long, Han Jijun, Luo Lang, and the others again. When they found out that she would be studying with them at the First Men's Military Academy, their expressions would probably be supremely interesting.

A faint smile bloomed on the corners of Ling Lan's lips. Honestly speaking, she had really been reluctant to part with them. She had spent so many years with the group after all ... the ties and emotions among

them had already burrowed into their respective bones — they were not something she could so easily cut away.

Ling Lan's decision brought a temporary end to the fight between Ling Xiao and Lan Luofeng. The family of three could finally put their attention on their breakfast. However, as the first meal together as a reunited family, the atmosphere was a little strange. It should have been heart-warming, but due to the remnant outrage in Lan Luofeng's heart, along with Ling Lan's subtle discomfort towards Ling Xiao, the overall atmosphere was rather awkward.

Although Ling Xiao tried his best to please Lan Luofeng and Ling Lan, the latter two were in no mood to accommodate him. This caused Ling Xiao to suffer through a rather awkward breakfast, dejection colouring his brow subconsciously.

Seeing this familiar expression, Ling Lan's hand, which was holding her chopsticks, trembled. Right then, Ling Xiao's expression was almost exactly like the expression of the Ling Xiao in the legacy space when she had refused to call him 'daddy'. This made Ling Lan's heart pound, that initial sense of unfamiliarity with this Ling Xiao abruptly melting away. At this moment, she finally felt that the gentle Ling Xiao before her now who loved to smile, was truly the same Ling Xiao that she had willingly called 'daddy' previously ... the current Ling Xiao just did not know this yet.

Ling Lan opened her mouth, but still did not manage to utter 'daddy'. The spiritual entity Ling Xiao was the Ling Xiao of 17 years ago, while the Ling Xiao now was the Ling Xiao of 17 years later <sup>1</sup>. Whether in terms of appearance or physical aura, the two were somewhat different. This brief period of time spent together was not enough for Ling Lan to get over these differences. Besides, Ling Lan had always been a girl who did not open her heart readily to others.

"In that unknown world, were there also many strange and wonderful things?" Even though she wasn't able to call Ling Xiao 'daddy' just yet, Ling Lan still could not bear to see Ling Xiao being so awkward. So, she decided to help him out by initiating a conversation.

Ling Lan's question caused Ling Xiao's eyes to light up. His initially somewhat dejected expression instantly become energetic and lively, and he said excitedly, "Yes! Although the technology there was outdated, they had very rich mineral resources. Many of the materials there are those which the Federation lacks. But, please don't spread this information, I did not tell anyone else about this ..."

Seeing Ling Xiao animatedly telling Ling Lan all about the unknown world he had been at, a smile gradually emerged on Lan Luofeng's face. Ling Xiao and Ling Lan were the two people she loved the most; of course she wanted the two of them to get along. At this moment, Lan Luofeng had completely forgotten to hold onto her grudge against Ling Xiao.

Right then, Ling Lan was actually somewhat regretting her choice of topic. She had not pegged Ling Xiao as a chatterbox, but once he started speaking he could not be stopped ... this made a green vein pop out on her forehead, and she almost flipped the dining table to signal an end to the topic.

Ling Lan did not know that, if it wasn't for her question, Ling Xiao would not have been so excited about the topic and spilled everything about the unknown world in a rush to her. Clearly, Ling Lan's curious tone had thrilled Ling Xiao beyond reason, causing him to lose his composure. He just wanted to make

his daughter happy — any *Twenty-four Filial Exemplars* dad would involuntarily become foolish, long-winded, and unprincipled in front of his daughter.

As if taking pity on Ling Lan's poor ears, the heavens sent someone to rescue her. A cold harrumph rang out in the dining hall, "If you've returned, why have you not scrambled over to see me?"

Ling Xiao was in the middle of his excited narration when he was shocked by this sudden voice. He leapt up quickly and choked out, "Master! Why are you here?"

"Darn brat, can't I be here?" Although Mu Shui-qing was scolding Ling Xiao, his tone was emotional. It was clear to see how much Ling Xiao's return had impacted the old man. If not because he wanted to give Ling Xiao some personal time with his family, Mu Shui-qing would definitely have come seek Ling Xiao out as soon as he heard the news.

Only then did Ling Xiao remember that it was Mu Shui-qing's appearance 3 years ago which had saved Ling Lan's life. His master must have been worried that Ling Lan would suffer another assassination attempt, and so had remained at the Ling family mansion to protect her.

Ling Xiao was instantly overcome with remorse. Because of him, his wandering master had no choice but to stop his travels to stay at the Ling family mansion to protect Ling Lan. In the end, it was still his failing ...

"Ling Lan, bring Ling Xiao over to see me." Mu Shui-qing did not bother himself with Ling Xiao's thoughts. He gave an order directly to Ling Lan, and then went utterly silent.

"Yes, Master!" replied Ling Lan calmly. Her voice was not very loud — you could perhaps even call it very soft — so Ling Xiao, lost in his guilty feelings, did not notice what she said.

Ling Lan's cold face could not help but twitch as she glanced at the pensive Ling Xiao. She had forgotten that she had another identity — as a disciple of Mu Shui-qing as well, Ling Xiao would be her senior brother ...

They were father and daughter, but also fellow disciples of the same sect ... the seniority and relationship hierarchy between them was really such a mess!

Conflicted, Ling Lan put down her bowl and chopsticks. Standing up, she waved goodbye to Lan Luofeng, and then departed swiftly from the dining hall. Alright, right now, she too was utterly confounded by the complicated tangle of her relationship with her father.

Ling Lan's greeting startled Ling Xiao out of his reverie, and without her having to call him, Ling Xiao too said goodbye to Lan Luofeng and followed Ling Lan out of the house to arrive at a back courtyard — the site of Mu Shui-qing's seclusion.

The moment they entered the yard, they saw Mu Shui-qing sitting up straight on a wooden chair in the garden. Ling Xiao saw that Mu Shui-qing's hair was all white now. Though he continued to smile, his eyes abruptly turned red as he cried out softly, "Master!"

Mu Shui-qing peered intently at Ling Xiao, cataloguing the condition of his body, before nodding in satisfaction. "Not bad, no signs of any latent problems." Apparently, Mu Shui-qing's first priority was to scan Ling Xiao's body for any problems. After all, back then, Ling Xiao had been blasted by a tremendous

force to an unknown world — though he managed to survive, he must have received some heavy damage back then.

Mu Shui-qing had been extremely afraid that Ling Xiao had paid the price of depleting his vital energies to earn the chance of survival. But now, from the looks of it, the situation was not as horrible as he had imagined. This reassured him greatly.

“Thank you, Master!” said Ling Xiao gratefully. He naturally knew what Mu Shui-qing had done.

“Other than to check you over properly, there is one more thing I want you to do,” said Mu Shui-qing.

“Please instruct me, Master,” said Ling Xiao respectfully, slightly toning down his smile.

“Help your master assess Lan-er<sup>2</sup>,” said Mu Shui-qing, pointing to Ling Lan, who was standing behind Ling Xiao.

“Ah? Master ...” Ling Xiao’s small smile froze. He would never have expected that this was what Mu Shui-qing had wanted him to do. Ling Lan was only 16 years old — could she withstand the force of presence of a god-class operator?

“I forgot to tell you. Three years ago, I’ve already taken on Ling Lan as my true disciple. In fact, she is already your junior sister.” After spending three years together, Mu Shui-qing naturally knew Ling Lan’s true gender by now.

That said, Mu Shui-qing began to laugh heartily. Ling Lan could just feel the trace of mischief running through Mu Shui-qing’s laughter — he really gave off the impression of an old prankster right then.

Hearing this, Ling Xiao’s expression changed drastically. He almost spewed blood, and could no longer hold onto that unchanging smile on his face. Flustered, he said, “Master, Ling Lan is my daughter!” *Couldn’t you have taken on Ling Lan as my disciple on my behalf instead?!*

Mu Shui-qing glared at him. “Before me, the only thing that matters is the relationship within the sect. At other times, it’s up to you what you want to call each other.”

Mu Shui-qing’s determination caused Ling Xiao to rub at his forehead, head aching. At this moment, he no longer had any bit of his usual genial air, his entire aura rather prickly. *Godd\*mmmit, what the hell was this?!* He had not even gained his daughter’s acknowledgement — and now his seniority was undercut by a whole generation, making him his own daughter’s senior brother? No wonder the common folk all called his master an old beast — sure enough, he did not act on logic, but on personal whim.

Ling Xiao began to resent his master’s offbeat manner of doing things.

“Master, father and I do not suit this type of address. Let us just address each other as normal.” Ling Lan was just as conflicted, suddenly finding that calling Ling Xiao ‘senior brother’ was even harder than calling him ‘daddy’ ... Previously, since Ling Xiao was dead, Ling Lan had not thought this would be an issue.

Hearing Ling Lan verbally acknowledge him as her father, Ling Xiao felt a frisson of joy course through his heart. But he was immediately depressed again. This meant that Ling Lan only acknowledged their blood relation; it did not mean that Ling Lan had accepted him emotionally, otherwise Ling Lan would have just

called him 'daddy' rather than 'father'. Ling Xiao was very clear on the difference between the two forms of address.

However, Ling Xiao immediately bucked up again. Since Ling Lan had already acknowledged the truth of their blood relation, he believed that it would not be long before she would be able to accept him wholeheartedly as her dad.

Ling Xiao's heart was filled with motivation — to obtain the acknowledgement of the two most important women in his life, he would definitely work hard. He would use all his love to fill up the gaps left by his absence of 17 years.

Seeing the conflicted and rebellious looks on the faces of his two disciples, Mu Shui-qing could only regretfully set aside his pranking nature. Still, Ling Xiao's reaction had pleased him well — he had finally managed to rip that unchanging smile off of Ling Xiao's face! So it wasn't that Ling Xiao was inherently even-tempered ... it was just that there had been nothing important enough in the past to warrant a change in his expression!

"Oh alright, suit yourselves." Mu Shui-qing finally let Ling Xiao and Ling Lan off the hook. This made both Ling Xiao and Ling Lan sigh internally — if Mu Shui-qing had truly insisted, they could only have obeyed their master's command against their will, and first address each other as fellow disciples. Of course, this would undoubtedly be rubbing salt into the wounds on Ling Xiao's heart. After all, right now, he still had not managed to have Ling Lan willingly acknowledge him as her dad yet.

## **Chapter 200: Ling Xiao vs Ling Lan!**

"However, Ling Xiao, don't hold back. Ling Lan is not as weak as you think she is. She has already obtained your legacy," reminded Mu Shui-qing.

A strange light entered Ling Xiao's eyes. Ever since he had found out that his legacy had suddenly disappeared from the Central Scout Academy, he had already had the premonition that Ling Lan had obtained the legacy. However, so much had happened since he returned that he had not had a chance to ask Ling Lan about it. Now though, Mu Shui-qing's words proved his premonition right. This put him in a very good mood. His legacy had been meant for Ling Lan to begin with — he had only been worried that the military would confiscate it and refuse to hand it over to Ling Lan.

In reality, his worries were not unfounded. The military had indeed refused to hand over the legacy directly to Ling Lan, placing it instead in the virtual world of the Central Scout Academy for all the scout students to attempt when they found they could not crack it. They had still been plotting to keep Ling Xiao's method of ascension within their control.

Although Ling Xiao did not know how Ling Lan had managed to fool those monitoring staff to successfully obtain his legacy from right under the military's nose, this was the situation that Ling Xiao had most wanted to see. He could not help but give his daughter countless thumbs ups inside his heart!

"Alright, Lan-er, just let ... me properly assess how much you've learned?" Ling Xiao swallowed the word 'daddy' he had been about to say, forcibly changing it into 'me'.

Ling Xiao was still very careful — before Ling Lan accepted him, Ling Xiao did not want to put pressure on her and make her unhappy.

Ling Lan did not respond, merely giving a cold martial salute, and getting into a defensive stance as she instantly activated a spiritual shield.

To determine whether one has studied well in the Divine Command Sect, of course one would have to examine one's prowess in spiritual confrontation. The sect's unique combat style was very familiar to Ling Xiao and Ling Lan who were both from the Divine Command Sect.

However, when Ling Xiao activated his spiritual pressure, Ling Lan finally understood what kind of existence a god-class operator was. Ling Xiao's spiritual power was as vast as an ocean, but thick and substantial — just activating it made Ling Lan feel like she was a tiny boat on a raging sea, struggling desperately to stay afloat. If she were at all careless, she would be consumed entirely.

Just this little taste let Ling Lan know that Ling Xiao's spiritual power was more formidable than Mu Shui-qing's, even drawing an unfathomable fear from within her.

Ling Lan's expression turned grim. Of course, on the outside, Ling Lan only seemed to grow even colder — the temperature of the entire space plummeted, bringing a faint chill into the air.

"Your spiritual self mutation is actually along the line of the element of ice!" Ling Xiao sensed the drop in temperature, and his brows furrowed. This type of mutation path was actually not very suitable for piloting mecha. Or more precisely, this spiritual mutation could not add anything to a mecha operator's control skill. That way, it would be very difficult to achieve the merging of human and mecha as one ... For Ling Lan, this meant that she might not be able to touch the gates of becoming an imperial operator in the future. In other words, there was almost no hope for Ling Lan to ascend to become an imperial operator.

Ling Lan knew that the spiritual mutation Ling Xiao was referring to was her awakened innate talent. She replied calmly, "The direction of mutation is not important, and whether or not it is suitable for operating mecha is also not important. Otherwise, there wouldn't be so few imperial operators in the Federation. I believe that ascension to the highest level still depends on serendipity and whether I am putting in enough effort!"

"Lan-er, talent is very important for operating mecha, but the suitability of one's spiritual mutation to mecha is even more important. One cannot lack either one," said Ling Xiao with a sigh. He had seen countless mecha operators who had had the same belief as Ling Lan at the start, thinking that there was hope as long as they worked hard. But in truth, every operator of imperial level and beyond possessed a spiritual mutation which enhanced their mecha operation with its associated abilities. In other words, there had not been a single imperial operator whose spiritual mutation was unsuitable for operating mecha thus far.

"Just because no one has found the way, does not mean that the way does not exist." Ling Lan had full confidence in herself. Instructor Number One had said before that her other awakened innate talent, the top-rated Profound Insight, was the talent best suited for operating mecha. Although she did not know whether her dual awakening would bring some unforeseen challenges to her mecha control, she

believed that as long as she worked hard enough, she would not lose to the various prodigies of this world with their exceptional talents.

Of course, the inherent weakness of her body was also something that would hold Ling Lan back from ascending to a higher level; the physical weakness of women could not be so easily compensated for. However, for 16 years, Ling Lan had been training hard with the full set of foundational physical skills of the learning space, along with the Qi exercises of her past life. This had caused all aspects of her physical capacity to become infinitely close to that of the boys of the same age. As long as she continued her training, this inherent disadvantage would slowly be resolved, and would no longer be a factor holding her back from ascending.

“Good, ambitious!” Ling Lan’s confidence and conviction swept away Ling Xiao’s dejection. He was heartened, and his spirits rallied.

This minor recovery allowed his spiritual power to gather once more. If Ling Lan had not already entered combat mode and kept her guard up impeccably, she might have been overwhelmed by this sudden fluctuation and received damage to her spiritual self.

But even so, Ling Lan still felt a large force slamming into her brain, and was knocked briefly unconscious! This also allowed Ling Lan to experience how her opponents had felt back when she had used her spiritual attacks on them.

“Heptashield!” chanted Ling Lan mentally. Her fingers twitched, and her spiritual power suddenly shifted rapidly — three approximately 1 square unit <sup>1</sup>spiritual shields appeared instantly.

The heptashield, as its name implied, was a top-level Divine Command Sect technique involving the formation of seven shields. It swiftly divided the spiritual power of an operator into seven parts, each part forming a shield in the formation. The defensive ability it created was definitely not limited to the total of the defence values of the seven shields added together — rather, it used the flexible movement of the shields to provide a comprehensive defence with no dead angles. If practised till the end stage, the shield formation could even be used for offence. Of course, Ling Lan currently wasn’t at that level yet — out of the seven shields, she could only control three.

Seeing this, Ling Xiao’s smile deepened. “Not bad. I can’t believe you’ve already learned one top-level technique!” The very first top-level technique Ling Xiao had learned in the past had also been the heptashield. However, back then, he had already been 18 years old, while Ling Lan was currently only 16 right now, so she had learned this technique a whole 2 years earlier. This just proved that, with regards to spiritual power, his daughter’s talent was definitely at the most aberrant level ...

At this time, Ling Xiao did not know that Ling Lan possessed such tremendous spiritual power because this was the accumulation of the spiritual power of both her lives, nothing to do with innate talent. However, all of this was not important, because Ling Lan’s current spiritual power was indeed already much, much more than any of her peers.

“Let me test the defensive ability of your heptashield.” With this warning, Ling Xiao charged forwards with a powerful surge of energy. Ling Lan knew that this was the most basic of spiritual power attacks — as long as one has had any spiritual training, the spiritual charge was an attack they would know!

However, a god-class operator's spiritual charge was unlike a regular person's spiritual charge — although Ling Lan could sense that the opponent was only hurling one cord of spiritual charge at her, she could still sense the great threat posed by the attack coming right at her.

Ling Lan's brows furrowed and the fingers of her right hand flicked lightly. The three shields defending her body immediately shifted into the way of Ling Xiao's attack trajectory. Ling Lan believed in her sense of danger<sup>2</sup> — this should be a hint given to her by Profound Insight. Ling Xiao's attack may seem normal, but there was probably some trick hidden within it.

Ling Xiao's spiritual charge struck the first shield. Without putting up much resistance, the shield shattered. Seeing this, Ling Lan's expression remained unmoved, merely directing the second shield forwards. The second shield was swiftly shattered as well, but it managed to sustain itself for 2 to 3 seconds before shattering, unlike the first which had shattered upon contact.

Without any hesitation, Ling Lan brought her third shield forward to meet Ling Xiao's spiritual charge. But just as the shield was about to encounter the spiritual charge, the spiritual shield suddenly contracted, becoming a small mirror shield the size of one's palm between blinks.

Ling Xiao's spiritual charge crashed soundlessly into that tiny mirror shield of Ling Lan's. If not for the pebbles and twigs and leaves on the ground being thrown in the air to fly away from the point where Ling Lan and Ling Xiao met, no one would know that the two people facing each other were currently locked in a most dangerous spiritual clash.

The observing Mu Shui-qing tilted his head slightly, dodging a random rock that had flown in his direction. The smile on his face was growing increasingly wider, like a wildly blooming garden cosmos<sup>3</sup>, as radiant as it could be.

Mu Shui-qing was naturally very satisfied. His whole life, he had only taken in two disciples. It went without saying that Ling Xiao was his most accomplished disciple, now among the strongest in the Federation — a god-class operator, who were called ultimate weapons in this world. And then there was Ling Lan ... Mu Shui-qing felt that their Divine Command Sect surely existed for the sake of an aberrant prodigy like her. Mu Shui-qing believed that the Divine Command Sect would definitely flourish in her hands.

At this moment, Mu Shui-qing could not help but look at Ling Xiao, thinking: *Ling Xiao, oh Ling Xiao, you should take a look at the heptashield belonging to Ling Lan!*

The moment Ling Xiao's spiritual charge met Ling Lan's small mirror shield, he felt his own spiritual charge being repelled back at him by a massive force!

This spiritual power that had been reflected back at him escaped his control in an instant, actually becoming part of the other's attack force targeting him!

"Heptashield!" Ling Xiao's eyebrows lifted in surprise. His fingers flicked and seven shields appeared around him. With a thought, one of the shields flew forward instantly to block this reflected spiritual power.

"This heptashield is different from mine ..." Who was Ling Xiao? He had noticed that Ling Lan's heptashield was different at a glance — his seven shields could only block, but could not reflect attacks.



“Is it because of the contraction?” Ling Xiao flicked a finger, and one of the shields swiftly shrunk down to become palm-sized as well. However, the shield only became much thicker, without any sign of that mirror surface like Ling Lan’s had. “Looks like this is not the only reason!”

Although Ling Lan had managed to reflect Ling Xiao’s spiritual charge, she did not manage to stand steady. She was forced 5 to 6 steps back before all the force behind Ling Xiao’s spiritual charge dissipated. Still, even so, she felt a nauseous roiling in her chest. Ling Xiao’s power had been too formidable; she had only withstood the hit with great difficulty.