

Crossing 241

Chapter 241: Truth!

“Stay calm!” Facing his companions’ inquisition, Lin Zhidong did not become angry, merely asking them levelly to settle down.

“Indeed, we are all from Leiting, all friends. Let’s discuss things civilly. Mu Ying, don’t be impatient, let’s hear Lin Zhidong’s explanation.” A young man seated beside Lin Zhidong advised the livid Mu Ying with soothing tones while throwing a look at Lin Zhidong at the same time, urging him to start explaining things quickly.

“Honestly, if Regiment Commander Qiao were not in Closed Door Meditation, I would have suggested directly to let Regiment Commander Qiao go forth personally to bring those people under control.” Opening his mouth, Lin Zhidong did not explain, instead stating his opinion.

“Why did you have to be so impatient? Couldn’t we do this gradually in a more subtle manner? Do you know that these actions of yours will smear the good name of Leiting?” Mu Ying once more leapt to his feet upon hearing Lin Zhidong’s words, practically spitting in rage as he almost shoved a finger right onto Lin Zhidong’s nose.

Lin Zhidong pushed the other’s finger aside with one hand, turned to look at the others present, and said, “Do you all also think the same way?”

The young man who had initially been playing mediator instantly smiled wryly and said, “Zhidong, your actions over these past few days have really gone a little overboard. Before he went into Closed Door Meditation, the regiment commander had said that any action representing Leiting as a whole needed to be discussed and agreed upon by all of us first before execution. You skipped talking to us, directly going ahead to provoke the other side so openly ...” He cast a glance at the others then added, “We just feel extremely uninformed!”

The corner of Lin Zhidong’s lips carried a hint of a sneer. He looked towards the others — their gazes held unconcealed censure. He sniffed coldly and said, “It’s not that I didn’t want to tell you all, but I was afraid that if I told you all, this secret would get out. At that time, the loss for Leiting would be considerable.”

“You don’t trust us?” Mu Ying leapt up once again ¹.

“Yes, I do not trust you all,” replied Lin Zhidong unreservedly.

“You ...” Lin Zhidong’s words made the faces of everyone there change. They felt that these words were a huge insult directed at them.

Seeing the situation turning sour, the mediating young man quickly said, “Zhidong, how can you say things like that? Being friends for so many years ... don’t you have even this bit of trust in us?”

Hearing this, Lin Zhidong’s expression gentled slightly. “It’s not that I don’t trust you all. I just don’t trust the people by your sides. The more people who know, the easier it would be for this secret to get out.

And this matter concerns whether we, Leiting, will finally be able to conquer and unite the factions in the military academy in the future.”

“What do you mean?” Lin Zhidong’s words caused everyone’s expressions to shift.

“You all must use your spiritual power to make a vow, that the secret ends here with you all, otherwise I will not tell you.” On this matter, Lin Zhidong was surprisingly insistent and forceful. This also made the group exceptionally angry, almost flicking their sleeves to storm away.

The mediating young man once again spoke up to ease the tension, “Zhidong, is this really necessary? Making a vow with spiritual power is no small thing ...”

“The secret I’m about to say has great importance for Leiting. I believe that when the regiment commander finds out, he will also approve of the way I’ve handled things,” answered Lin Zhidong calmly.

Mu Ying was the first to jump out. “If I have to make a vow, then I’ll make a vow! But, Lin Zhidong, if the secret you tell is less than dogshit, I will definitely report this to the regiment commander and get you kicked out of Leiting.”

Lin Zhidong said haughtily, “If you all think this secret is not worth your spiritual power vows, you don’t have to report to the regiment commander. I will ask to leave on my own.”

“Fine, Lin Zhidong, you must follow through with your words!” That said, Mu Ying was the first one to make a spiritual power vow. The others, seeing that Mu Ying had already done so, could only follow suit helplessly.

Seeing that everyone present had made a vow, only then did Lin Zhidong bring out a document from beside him. He then passed it to the mediator youth who was sitting closest to him.

The youth opened it, and his expression changed as he read its contents. He forcefully suppressed the urge to ask questions, merely passing the document to the next in line. A similar expression appeared on the next person’s face as well, and very quickly, the document had been passed through everyone’s hands to finally return to Lin Zhidong. Lin Zhidong threw the document to one side, where an energy converter was already prepared. The converter deconstructed the file, turning it into immaterial energy, and saving it into an energy block.

“Now you’ve all seen it. This is why I did not notify you all, choosing to provoke the other side directly,” said Lin Zhidong coldly.

“How can this be?” Mu Ying’s face was a picture of disbelief. “One or two is still believable, but for an entire ship’s new cadets to be this way — this is too outlandish.”

In the face of Mu Ying’s scepticism, Lin Zhidong’s face darkened. “Do you all not trust my hacking skills?”

One of the group could not help but say awkwardly, “Zhidong, you’re the hacker with the best grades in this school. We all trust in your abilities. It’s just that the contents inside are just too outlandish, so we can’t help but be a little suspicious.”

“Could they have cheated?” Another in the group glanced at Lin Zhidong and then said slowly, “Or perhaps the information Zhidong obtained is false?” At the heart of it, they still did not believe in the appearance of these results.

His companions’ distrust made Lin Zhidong’s expression turn stormy. He held back the rage in his heart as he sneered, “This information, was obtained by me from the academy’s mainframe’s most secure S-tier. If even the S-tier needs to contain such a fake document, I really don’t know where else real documents should be stored. Should they be stored on the Federation’s mainframe’s S-tier instead?”

“As for cheating, do you all really believe in that reason yourselves?” asked Lin Zhidong with a mocking tone, “The ones who test cadets are all hardened veteran soldiers who have been baptised in the flames of fire. Getting them to help you cheat? I don’t know what price one could use to move them. Let me put this another way. Even if they cheated, would they make it so obvious? All the students on the entire ship being so outstanding? Not a single one who failed?”

Lin Zhidong’s words made the others all cool down instantly. Indeed, a fake document would never be placed in the S-tier of the military academy’s mainframe. Since Lin Zhidong had said S-tier, then it definitely could not be wrong. After all, every year, the information Lin Zhidong had mined from the S-tier on the new cadets had always been extremely accurate — it was impossible that he would have obtained false data from a wrong direction this time. Besides, if this was truly a case of cheating, the method was really too idiotic. These abnormal results would certainly attract the attention of the school administration, and prompt inquiries and investigations to prove its validity. No one would dare to be so blatant and daring in doing such an idiotic thing.

“I believe, not much longer after this, the hackers of the other factions should also be getting this data. At that time, there won’t be any hope for us to monopolise this group of people.” Lin Zhidong swept his gaze around their circle before continuing to say, “You all are clear on Regiment Commander Qiao’s standards of recruitment. He only accepts new cadets whose assessment results are pass and above. Especially for those who did well, he would not hesitate to employ measures to obtain them. We cannot allow Regiment Commander Qiao miss out on these excellent talents while he is in Closed Door Meditation.”

Lin Zhidong’s little speech made everyone’s expressions turn grim. They all knew Qiao Ting’s methods — if he knew the assessment results of these new cadets, he would definitely use all sorts of means to pull them into his fold.

“However, since they are so exceptional, they probably won’t be so easy to subdue?” Everyone loved excellent talents, but these people would often be extremely proud and self-assured, unwilling to easily submit to another.

“That’s why I set up this stage. Even if we’re a bit arrogant, we need to let the other side accept our challenge and then follow up with a bet. When they lose, they’ll have to collectively join us, Leiting.” Lin Zhidong had already thought things through.

“What if they are afraid and don’t dare to accept our challenge?” After all, Leiting was the number one faction in the school — these new cadets may find their legs trembling from fear at the mere mention of Leiting’s name.

“That would be even better. We can just push for them to join us if they don’t even dare to fight us. We can then promise to pardon all past transgressions against us. But if they dare to join any other factions, we’ll beat them up every single time we see them. In the mecha world, we will block off all avenues of their growth — if we can’t use them, then we will crush them completely,” said Lin Zhidong with a cold smile. He had already considered both possible reactions from the other side. He would not let them escape his grasp — he would make sure to wrap this up well before the regiment commander emerged from his training.

“If it’s a battle with the new cadets, the school rules only allow physical skills combat. And those students are from Doha, which prioritizes physical skills the most. I fear that we won’t be able to have much of an advantage.”

“No matter how strong they are in combat, they are still just first year cadets, young fledgelings freshly out from the scout academies, while we’re already 4th year or 5th year senior cadets. Mecha combat has not only improved our mecha skills, it has also spurred on the development of our physical skills. Those extra years of combat experience is enough for us to push them around,” said Lin Zhidong with a cold smirk, “Even those among us with the weakest physical skills would have been able to make up for the lack of talent in three years’ time. You think they have a chance?”

“Well that’s true.” The group nodded all around. They may have put their focus on mecha combat for the past few years, but in their spare time they had still gone to the physical skills combat hall to spar with others for the fun of it. They too had sensed the benefits mecha combat had brought to their physical skills — during their spars, they had been able to instantly discover their opponent’s openings. Undoubtedly, their physical skills and vision had improved greatly from when they had first entered the academy.

“Won’t the other factions interfere? If they too know about these people, they will not let us monopolize them.” Someone else brought up another issue.

“Hackers. Our school only has a few names on record, and they all only belong to the top 4 factions. However, I am the first to obtain this information. In order to delay the others, I’ve even added some precautions of my own, so they’ll need to spend some time to crack it. Though I don’t know when they’ll be able to break through, I have been watching their progress. Still, this matter should not be dragged out — if it’s dragged out too long, and the others obtain the real data as well, we may very likely end up with nothing to show for our efforts² ...” explained Lin Zhidong, “So, we need to issue a challenge to the new cadet regiment and settle things. Once we succeed in absorbing them into our fold, even if the other factions discover the truth then, they will not dare to offend us with the regiment commander around.”

“That’s good. Looks like we need to issue our challenge as soon as possible ...” All those seated here finally came to an agreement, and they began discussing when they should issue their letter of challenge to the new cadet regiment.

Chapter 242: Letter of Challenge!

In reality, the new cadet regiment received the letter of challenge even earlier than Ling Lan had predicted. Two days after their discussion ¹, the new cadet regiment's public regiment commander, Wu Jiong, received Leiting's letter of challenge!

On that day, around noon, Qi Long, Wu Jiong, and the others from the Mecha Piloting Class-A had just completed their brutal physical training for the morning. Dragging their tired selves to the large military academy canteen to eat, they had barely sat down and taken a few bites when a raucous commotion broke out by the canteen doors, causing the initially noisy canteen to instantly fall silent.

"Which of you is the regiment commander for the new cadet regiment? Show yourself to accept this letter of challenge!"

The one who spoke was a cadet dressed in a blue military-style uniform. He swept a gaze over the people within the canteen, his haughty expression seeming to view them as trash. Behind him were five or six cadets also dressed in the same uniform. Based on the uniform colour alone, it was clear that they were definitely part of the top 500 brilliant students within the military academy.

The basic colour of the military academy uniforms was green, signifying the average student. Blue represented the top 500 outstanding cadets in the school, based on their cumulative grades from all aspects. Meanwhile, the dux ² of each specialization of each year would be wearing the glorious white uniform exclusive to them. This was a reward for the elite of the elites, as well as a type of respect accorded to them. Take the Thunder King for example. He was the dux of the 4th year mecha piloting specialization, so his uniform was the only white one among those of that year within that specialization.

Initially, there had been a few other people dressed in blue uniforms who had been eating, who had turned with expressions of irritation at being disturbed, but when they saw the badge pinned on the chests of the interrupting group, their expressions shifted, and the rage on their faces faded away. This was because they knew which faction that badge represented — it wasn't something they could afford to go up against ...

Wu Jiong and Qi Long shared a knowing glance. That night, Ling Lan had already assembled them and told Wu Jiong, Li Yingjie, and the other team leaders of her suppositions. Thus, they had constantly been waiting for Leiting's move, and now they had finally come.

"What? Is the new cadet regiment so gutless, not daring to accept our Leiting's letter of challenge?" mocked the youth in the blue uniform. He had already been informed by the upper ranks that he must enrage the leaders of the new cadet regiment, so they would accept the letter of challenge on impulse. Of course, if they refused to accept no matter how he taunted, then he would throw down this ultimatum — the regiment commander of the new cadet regiment would have to go to Leiting's headquarters to apologise personally to the vice regiment commanders, otherwise they would not be spared.

Qi Long threw a glance at Wu Jiong — for this type of antagonistic scenario, his affable face was not at all suitable. In Boss Lan's words, Qi Long had a goofy nice-guy face, much more suited for acting innocent and shifting blame after the new cadet regiment had gone out to bully others.

Wu Jiong understood tacitly what he should do. He used his chopsticks to rap the dishware before him, and then with a harsh throw, his chopsticks smacked loudly onto the metal table, emitting a crisp loud clang. The atmosphere of the initially silent canteen became fraught with tension due to this sharp noise.

With a subtle smirk on his lips, Wu Jiong leaned back in his chair, his arms crossed before him as he said evenly, "I am the regiment commander of the new cadet regiment. Speak if you have something to say, fart if you have to ³!"

Boss Lan had said before — they absolutely could not lose in terms of attitude!

These past few years, although Wu Jiong had always been suppressed by Ling Lan and Qi Long, he had still been an active participant and leader in the grand armed melee back then, as well as in the fight for the spaceship's administrative rights. These victories made him composed and confident, and because he had always been pressed down by others more exceptional than him, he had not become overconfident and arrogant. Right now, even though he was facing the military academy's number one faction Leiting, his heart was as calm as ever, not at all apprehensive.

This attitude of Wu Jiong's was clearly out of Leiting's expectations. Rage emerged on their faces, and the lead youth in particular took one step forward and yelled, "Punk, you watch your mouth!"

Wu Jiong threw a cool glance over and said calmly, "What? You have something to say?"

The clear contempt in Wu Jiong's gaze made those people step forward instinctively, faces overcome with rage as they seemed intent on teaching Wu Jiong a lesson.

But before they could get any closer, the new cadets who had originally been seated quietly in the canteen suddenly all stood up in a clatter. They glared angrily at the people from Leiting, as if warning them that if they dared step any closer, then the new cadets could not be blamed for not being courteous anymore.

Seeing 300 over people stand up altogether in one go, the expressions of the five or six people from Leiting paled abruptly. Their steps faltered, and after several changes in complexion, the head youth in blue actually began to laugh, "Haha, that earlier was just a joke! Seeing the new cadet regiment so united, we Leiting feel very heartened by this! You all are worthy to fight against Leiting!"

This person was extremely thick-skinned — even as he flattered the new cadet regiment, he did not forget to elevate his own faction. He smiled gently at Wu Jiong and asked, "This regiment commander, how may I address you?"

Wu Jiong uncrossed his arms to tap his fingers lightly against the surface of the table. He stared at the head youth with a half-smile — this familiar expression made Qi Long and those in his team feel an ache in their teeth. *Please, no matter how much you idolise our boss, you really don't have to learn his mannerisms, right?* They felt cold just looking at him.

Perhaps this expression of Wu Jiong's put a lot of pressure on the head youth, for his smile actually slipped off his face. In the end, he could only stand there awkwardly, unsure how to wrap things up.

As expected, this expression of Boss Lan's could really do a lot of damage ... he would have to use it more in the future; it was enough to subdue some minor characters. Wu Jiong tucked away this

expression, satisfied, and opened his mouth to say, “My surname is Wu. You may call me Regiment Commander Wu!”

“Regiment Commander Wu, impressive as expected. With you to lead them, the new cadet regiment will certainly do well.” The head youth immediately threw up a thumbs up in response, expressing his heartfelt admiration. Since mockery and pressure would not work, he could only try cajoling. As long as the other side accepted their challenge, he would find a way to avenge this humiliation.

No matter how the head tried to hide it, the indignation in his eyes had still been detected by Qi Long and the others. However, since they were already determined to clash with Leiting anyway, they really did not care whether the other was offended or not.

“May Regiment Commander Wu please accept this letter of challenge from Leiting? With such an exceptional opponent as yourselves, we of Leiting are also overjoyed!” Under the glares of over 300 people, the blue-clothed head youth nervously walked over to Wu Jiong, withdrew a rectangular card from his pocket, and handed it over with both hands.

Right then, a hand intercepted to take the card. It was Ye Xu, who was seated beside Wu Jiong. At this moment, he had already stood up, snatching the card over with one hand to then pass it to Wu Jiong.

Only then did Wu Jiong accept the card and open it. Inside, it was written that three days later, the two sides would engage in a physical skills showdown at the combat hall. Both sides would send 5 representatives, with winning 3 out of 5 being the winning condition. On top of that, there would be an additional wager involved, to be disclosed on the day of the showdown, and it cannot be refused⁴.

Sure enough, Leiting’s objective was their new cadet regiment as a whole — Boss Lan’s predictions were not wrong. Seeing this, Wu Jiong knew for certain what was going on. That wager was definitely for the new cadet regiment to join Leiting ...

“Alright, three days later, at the combat hall. Be there or be square!” Wu Jiong snapped the card shut again, and replied with firm conviction. This had already been pre-discussed, so Wu Jiong naturally dared to accept right away.

“Good! Regiment Commander Wu is refreshingly straightforward as expected. Three days later, we’ll await your grand presence at the combat hall!” His mission complete, the head youth of the Leiting group was all smiles.

At this time, from another table, Li Yingjie threw a cold glare their way and said imperiously, “Since you’re done with your bullsh*t, you can scram!”

The people from Leiting had been frozen in place by the sheer force of presence of Wu Jiong and those 300 or so people, and now they were being openly derided by some punk from who knows where. They were abnormally frustrated — they had no way to oppose the new cadet regiment’s Regiment Commander Wu, but teaching this pompous brat should be fine, right? And so, several people began moving towards Li Yingjie with sinister intent.

Li Yingjie flicked his fingers and kicked away the chair behind him, saying with a cold smile, “What? Want to fight?”

With this one sound, a flurry of the screeching noises of chairs being shifted rose throughout the canteen. The 300 or so people who had been standing in place, glaring angrily at them, had actually pushed away their chairs and begun moving closer, several of them already rubbing their palms together in anticipation of a fight.

With that, they could not be unaware that this cocky punk before them was definitely someone from the upper ranks of the new cadet regiment. The blue-clothed head youth could no longer hold back the rage in his heart. He pointed an angry finger at Li Yingjie and said savagely, "Fine! Three days later, just you wait!"

That said, he led his posse to scurry away, sent off by a wave of raucous 'scram!'s from behind, compounding their shame. Ever since joining Leiting, they had always been above others, playing the role of the bullies; but today, they were treated to a taste of being bullied mercilessly by others, and it was almost enough to make them shatter and swallow their teeth ⁵.

Seeing the people from Leiting scurry away, only then did Wu Jiong pass the letter of challenge to Qi Long across from him. Qi Long flipped it open to read, and instantly began to chuckle coldly, "As Boss expected. Leiting has really taken us, the new cadet regiment, for a fish fillet on the chopping block, ready for them to cut as they will."

At this moment, Wu Jiong was already anxiously looking for his chopsticks. Earlier, to create the right atmosphere, he had coolly thrown his chopsticks onto the desk, and now he had no idea where they had flown to ... his poor stomach was so hungry it was about to revolt. If he still did not eat, he would become the first regiment commander to faint from hunger. For the sake of aiding the new cadet regiment's stand, he did not have it easy ...

"I can't take it anymore. Lend me your chopsticks!" Seeing Qi Long's chopsticks set on the table, Wu Jiong could bear it no longer, taking it into his hands to begin eating rapaciously ... Boo hoo hoo, the morning's physical training had already squeezed him dry of his vital energy — if he did not replenish it, he would really starve to death.

"No! Those are mine!" Exasperated, Qi Long threw aside the letter of challenge in his hands, wanting to snatch his chopsticks back, but Wu Jiong was a step quicker. He dashed over to the next dining table, not forgetting to say as he went, "I supported you in acting out this scene. You should repay me somehow — lending me your chopsticks can be considered repayment."

Qi Long directed a rude gesture at Wu Jiong, but did not continue to give chase. Wu Jiong was not wrong; he should have been the one to step up and accept that letter of challenge ... but he was very hungry too! Although he had eaten a bit more than Wu Jiong earlier, his appetite was naturally voracious — how could those few bites earlier be enough to satisfy his stomach which was equally bawling from hunger?

His gaze turned, and he saw Han Jijyun eating seriously beside him, bite by measured bite, slow and methodical, not at all impatient or hurried. It was as if he were not at all hungry, and was only eating to complete the mission of eating ...

"Oh Jijyun, since you aren't that hungry, then first take care of your big bro here!" Qi Long cheerfully snatched away the chopsticks from Han Jijyun's unresisting hand and then began happily eating again.

Han Jijyun stared blankly at his now empty right hand, and then turned to look at the joyfully eating Qi Long. He almost wanted to dump the dishes before his eyes onto Qi Long's head — was there a sworn brother who would do such a thing? Not causing trouble for others, but troubling one of his own instead?

At another table, Lin Zhong-qing saw this scene and let out a soft sigh. He took out a small pouch from his waist, drawing out a few short metal sticks from inside it. Screwing them together, it took but a few moments for him to produce a pair of regular-sized chopsticks, which he then passed silently to Han Jijyun.

Receiving the chopsticks, Han Jijyun tamped down on his anger and resumed eating. In his mind, he decided that he would definitely not help Qi Long next time. No matter how much Boss Lan bullied Qi Long, he would turn his head and pretend he saw nothing ⁶.

The news of the new cadet regiment's haughty acceptance of Leiting's letter of challenge soon spread throughout the entire military academy. Those various large factions which had always been suppressed by Leiting were naturally gleeful at their misfortune — it was unexpected that the forceful Leiting would also have times where they had their faces smacked so hard. However, they did not believe that the new cadet regiment could withstand Leiting's subsequent vengeance. They were all waiting for the new cadet regiment to disperse under the pressure, and were prepared to slip in in the aftermath to take advantage of the panic and chaos to bring those lost new cadets into their own factions.

Just as everyone was waiting to see the downfall of the new cadet regiment, only Li Lanfeng greeted the news with deep contemplation, his expression serious and considering.

Chapter 243: The Distance between the Two?

Li Lanfeng's attitude was only clear to one person by his side, Zhao Jun. Zhao Jun was a little bemused by it, asking, "Why? Do you have some other insight?"

Li Lanfeng lifted his head to glance at Zhao Jun, and said contemplatively, "The new cadet regiment accepted the letter of challenge in such a high-handed fashion ... it's clear to see that they have full confidence in themselves."

Zhao Jun did not think much of it. "The students from the Doha Central Scout Academy have always thought highly of themselves, somewhat blind to reality. Wasn't Zhang Jing-an exactly like this back then? Clashing with the Thunder King right from the start, and now he doesn't even dare to make a peep, tucking his tail between his legs whenever he sees the Thunder King ..."

Zhao Jun rubbed his jaw. "Right now, I really want to see the faces of those new cadets after they've been thoroughly thrashed by Leiting. Their expressions must be very interesting."

Li Lanfeng breathed out slowly and silently, then asked softly, "That aberrant who Zhang Jing-an is still so conscious of after three years — could he only be at the level of someone like Zhang Jing-an?"

At these words, Zhao Jun's expression shifted. He too recalled the secret news he had uncovered from Zhang Jing-an's faction. That aberrant was someone who Zhang Jing-an hated so much his teeth

gnashed, but even so, Zhang Jing-an still had not dared to make a move, forcefully holding back his anger to watch the new cadet regiment establish itself with cold eyes ...

“Who exactly is that aberrant? I heard that the one who presented himself to accept the letter of challenge was a youth called Wu Jiong. He claimed to be Regiment Commander Wu of the new cadet regiment ... could it be him?” Zhao Jun was not very good at analysing data.

“Regiment Commander Wu? Have you ever heard of a true regiment commander being addressed with a surname attached? Only the second or third in command, those vice regiment commanders and such, would have their surnames attached to the title, for convenience of distinction!” said Li Lanfeng calmly.

A cold light flashed through Zhao Jun’s eyes. “In other words, the true regiment commander of the new cadet regiment has not yet shown himself.”

“Showing one’s trump card right from the start, now *that* would be stupid,” replied Li Lanfeng, “So, I have my reservations on the outcome of Leiting’s operation this time.”

Right then, Li Lanfeng’s mind was filled with the information on this batch of new cadets he had gleaned from the S-tier of the military academy mainframe ... those were not a bunch of ordinary new cadets! If the people from Leiting underestimated them, without the Thunder King to hold down the fort, Leiting might really end up capsizing their boat in a ditch.

Of course, it would be his pleasure to see the Thunder King suffer a loss!

At this moment, Ling Lan, who was in the mecha world desperately raising her level, did not know that Leiting’s letter of challenge had already been delivered into Wu Jiong’s hands. However, Ling Lan had already asked the team leaders to inform their respective team members about their upcoming clash with Leiting two days ago.

Telling them served two purposes — one, was to let the regiment members know the decision of the new cadet regiment; two, to distinguish those members within their organisation who would veer with the wind ¹, only thinking to use the new cadet regiment to establish themselves. Ling Lan believed that a faction’s strength laid not in numbers, but in unity — only if they were willing to share their trials and rewards equally would they be able to go far. She felt that the pressure from Leiting this time would be a great opportunity to assess the will and motivation of the members of the new cadet regiment.

As for Ling Lan’s team, Qi Long and the gang would naturally follow their boss loyally. Meanwhile, Wu Jiong was extremely taken in by Ling Lan, for Ling Lan’s many daring decisions had benefitted him greatly. Moreover, ten years of being schoolmates had shown Wu Jiong that Ling Lan was an extremely trustworthy person — he would never abandon any comrades that follow him. Thus, Wu Jiong was willing to fight alongside Ling Lan for a better future. He wasn’t afraid — even if they lost terribly in the end, it would be a waste of their youth if they did not take wild risks!

As for Li Yingjie, even though he had always had a bit of a grudge towards Ling Lan and Qi Long, Ling Lan’s strength truly left Li Yingjie speechless. Additionally, Ling Lan did not do anything to restrain Li Yingjie’s temperament or personality, even outright stating that the arrogant tasks would be his responsibility. This made Li Yingjie feel deep down as if he had finally found someone who understood

him. Under these circumstances, when Ling Lan asked him whether he wanted to leave the regiment, Li Yingjie had instantly refused.

Li Yingjie did not consider anything else. He only thought that since Ling Lan believed in him and trusted him, then he must live up to this trust². Besides, when has the cocky Li Yingjie ever been afraid of someone? The number one faction in the military academy? So what? He, Li Yingjie, would not submit. This was his pride as a member of the first elite family of the Federation.

As for the other students from the Central Scout Academy, Ling Lan's decisions had never disappointed them before, so even though they were somewhat unsure about things this time, they were still determined to push forward or retreat alongside Boss Lan. This was because they knew that if they did not resist, they would still be seen as potential slaves by the other factions. In that case, they might as well fight it out in a gamble — after all, in their eyes, Boss Lan was extremely strong and had never failed their expectations.

Rather, it was the decision of the students from the other scout academies of Doha which surprised Ling Lan and the others. They had initially thought that a majority of these people would withdraw from the new cadet regiment, wisely choosing to protect themselves, but surprisingly, most did not want to quit, willing to advance and retreat together with the new cadet regiment. Only an extremely small number chose to quit, not even 30 people in total. Therefore, the total number of people in the new cadet regiment was still endlessly close to 500, not reduced by much. This made many factions which had wanted to see the new cadet regiment fall apart greatly disappointed ... especially Zhang Jing-an, who had wanted to take advantage of the situation to recruit people.

Of course, it had to be said that these students' decision not to withdraw, their willingness to fight with Ling Lan, had a lot to do with one man's efforts. He was the one who had joined Ling Lan's party midway during the spaceship's operation, Third Elder Brother Gao Jinyun.

During this period of time, Gao Jinyun had built up quite a reputation among the students not from the Central Scout Academy. After all, he had been the only team leader who had participated in the plan to conquer the ship who was not from the Central Academy. Under his publicity efforts, Ling Lan's image rose to lofty heights in the new cadets' minds. Even though Leiting was the number one faction in the school, in these new cadets' eyes, that Boss Lan, who was strong enough to 'defeat' the captain, was no weaker than Leiting's regiment commander, the Thunder King. And this was the main reason why they were willing to support Ling Lan in this clash.

Their way of thinking was undeniably extremely naive, exactly like that of a newbie ... but newborn calves are not afraid of tigers³, and sometimes, what looked like a reckless action would turn out to be a momentous turn capable of changing one's fate.

That night, Wu Jiong and the others brought the letter of challenge right away to Ling Lan's villa to pass it to her.

Ling Lan sat on the sofa in the hall and calmly opened the letter. When she saw the contents of the challenge, the corner of her lips quirked up involuntarily. "Sure enough, their challenge is one of physical skills! This is our chance."

Wu Jiong's expression did not ease by much. "They will definitely send the combat experts of the higher grades, perhaps even seniors of the 6th year. They are older than us by five years. Five years' time is enough to pull apart from us by a whole realm." Wu Jiong was currently only at Refinement stage — if the opponent sent only those from Qi-Jin stage, they would lose for certain if they only relied on Qi Long and Ling Lan.

"Not necessarily!" replied Ling Lan decisively.

"How so?" asked Wu Jiong uncomprehendingly.

"Jijyun, can you find the course curriculum for all six years of our mecha piloting specialization?" Ling Lan abruptly turned her head to ask Han Jijyun.

Although Han Jijyun was not sure why Ling Lan would ask about this, he still nodded and began looking up the course info of the military academy on his communicator. In the end, he connected his communicator to the largest virtual projection system of the villa walls, to display the contents of his search.

"Wu Jiong, take a look, what do we have to learn in our six years here?" said Ling Lan, pointing at the info displayed on the screen.

Wu Jiong cast a baffled look at Ling Lan, but still strode forwards without any objections. He scanned the screen quickly and was struck with realisation. "So that's how it is. In our six years, there really aren't many physical skills courses!"

"That's right. In our six years here, the military academy focuses on cultivating our mecha piloting skills, and not our physical combat skills. Thus, the upper years would not have put much attention and effort on physical combat skills, so the gap between us and the seniors should not be as wide as you might imagine ..." Ling Lan stated her thoughts. "This is also why I believe we have a chance. In terms of physical combat, I believe the students of our Central Academy are definitely the best," said Ling Lan with steely conviction.

"Yep, Boss, you're right," Qi Long was the first to respond enthusiastically. Although the others did not say anything, the initial worry and grimness in their eyes had faded, and their gazes began to shine.

Qi Long and the others had regained their confidence so swiftly because Ling Lan's words were not pure consolation, but rooted in truth. Compared to the other scout academies, the Central Scout Academy was undoubtedly one which placed the most emphasis on physical combat skills. It could be said that among the exceptional combat experts within the military academy right now, a large portion were from the Central Scout Academy ... only a handful were from the scout academies from other planets.

Of course, good physical combat skills did not equate to good mecha piloting skills. As mentioned previously, the talent for mecha piloting was different from the talent needed for physical combat, which was why those with good combat talent may not necessarily become excellent mecha operators. This was also why Zhang Jing-an and his group had been finding it harder and harder to thrive within the military academy.

Mind you, from the second year of admission to the academy onwards, after the cadets officially become mecha operators, the competition between students was no longer centred on physical combat, but on mecha operated combat.

“But, even if we survive this time, what if other organisations come after us?” Although Wu Jiong now had confidence, he was still worried about the future of the new cadet regiment. If those other factions came after them one after another, even if they were made of iron, they would eventually be beaten down.

“Don’t worry. After we win this time, the other factions will not come after us,” said Ling Lan evenly.

“Why?” asked Wu Jiong.

“If even the first faction Leiting cannot take us down on physical skills, can they do it?” replied Ling Lan, “I reckon that even if they challenge us again, it will definitely be after we officially become mecha operators. That time will truly be our most difficult time. Not only will we have to fend off Leiting’s revenge, the other factions will also be waiting to strike.”

The Thunder King would not allow the new cadet regiment that had sullied the reputation of Leiting to continue existing. For some reason, Ling Lan actually recalled those words of [No Mecha Unrepaired] — the Thunder King was not someone who could be easily reasoned with ...

Although Ling Lan’s tone was dark and heavy, her face displayed no sign of pressure, calm as ever as she said, “However, at that time, we will no longer be freshmen. Two years’ time is enough for us to gather our strength.”

Only then did Ling Lan look towards Wu Jiong and say, “Of course, this period of time won’t be easy for us. We’ll need to raise our mecha piloting skills as quickly as possible. Otherwise, two years later, lacking strength, we will still become fish meat on a chopping board, free for anyone to slice and dice.”

Chapter 244: My Goal!

Wu Jiong’s expression turned cold and his gaze became solemn. “It looks like we’ll need to work hard! I hope that after two years, our new cadet regiment will be able to become one of the top four factions in the academy. At that time, even if the Thunder King wants to consume us, he will have to stop and think about it.”

“One of?” Ling Lan threw an icy glance over and said with a huff, “You only have that little bit of ambition?”

Wu Jiong was dumbfounded. “Boss Lan ...”

“My goal, is not being one of the factions.” Ling Lan’s words made Wu Jiong somewhat confused, unsure what in the world Ling Lan was trying to say. However, Ling Lan’s following words almost made him fall over in shock. Ling Lan raised a finger to point straight up as he ¹ said coldly, “My goal, is to unite the factions of the military academy. In other words, by the time I leave the military academy, there will only be one faction in the school, and that will be ours!”

Ling Lan's face was cold as ever, his expression extremely serious — it was clear to see that everything he had said was from his true heart. Despite his stature and build not being as imposing as Wu Jiong's, his force of presence was absolute in its domination of the scene, suppressing everyone present. This made Wu Jiong lament once more the distance between him and Ling Lan. Ling Lan could become the boss, not only because he had enough strength and capability, but also because he dared to think the unthinkable.

"Alright, Boss Lan, just based on these words of yours alone, I, Li Yingjie, acknowledge you full-heartedly as my boss!" A voice carried over from the doorway. Wu Jiong did not have to turn his head to know who it was² — Li Yingjie. This stubborn, prickly, and insubordinate fellow had finally admitted his deference towards Ling Lan.

Li Yingjie's admission similarly surprised Ling Lan. With a quirk of her brow, she teased, "I thought that I was already your boss since a long while back."

Li Yingjie choked, the colour of his face fluctuating unpredictably, and he finally deflated and said, "Forget it. Since I've already acknowledged you as Boss, you can just say whatever you want." Li Yingjie could not refuse to submit — he could not beat Ling Lan in a fight, and he did not have as much guts as the other either. And now, he had even lost to Ling Lan in terms of sheer arrogance. What right did he have still to refute Ling Lan's words?

Li Yingjie's defeated manner made Ling Lan feel rather sorry for him. In the end, she still liked the cocky Li Yingjie better, so Ling Lan pointed at the sofa beside her and said, "Sit, Li Yingjie. I do not wish for you to lose your personality. As long as you are capable enough, I don't think there is anything wrong with being arrogant. In future, if there's anything you can't handle, just look for the others, and if they can't handle it either, come find me ..."

Following Ling Lan's words, Li Yingjie's expression lifted up proudly once more, his eyes shining with vibrant light. Behind him, an invisible tail rose higher and higher. Wu Jiong, Qi Long, and the others turned away speechlessly, unable to watch. *Oh, this innocent child ...* Once again being coaxed by Boss Lan onto the path of being a great rogue; he had obviously had the opportunity to change his ways and return to the proper path ...

Ling Lan looked at Li Yingjie's expression and felt rather guilty. Bewitching an innocent babe like this to do bad things — would she be struck down by lightning ...?

Time passed swiftly, and very soon it was time for the wagered fight between Leiting and the new cadet regiment. The exclusive combat hall of the military academy had long been filled with students from the various years. Of course, a large majority of the students were there to see Leiting torment the new cadets. Only very, very few new cadets still carried a tendril of hope that the new cadet regiment which was also made up of freshmen would be able to create a miracle, and do them freshmen proud.

Li Lanfeng and Zhao Jun both arrived a bit late, but they did not have to squeeze and shoulder their way to a good position at the front of the arena stage. As high-ranking members of one of the four top factions in the military academy, one of the VIP boxes in the combat hall was reserved exclusively for them.

They took an elevator up, and then walked to stand before one of the rooms to the side. On the door was a square screen of roughly 30 centimetres. Li Lanfeng raised his right hand and waved it at the screen, and then the room door slid lightly to the left, revealing an entrance of about 2 metres wide. The two of them did not hesitate, entering right away.

The moment they entered, a voice could be heard to say, “Haha, speak of the devil ³ ! Lanfeng, come, let me introduce you to a talented young fellow.”

Li Lanfeng looked in the direction of the voice and saw Han Yu sitting on a sofa waving at him in a rather irreverent manner. Meanwhile, a fresh-faced lanky youth of about 1.8 metres tall was standing tall beside him. He was presumably a new cadet from this year’s batch, and the youth was currently observing him smilingly, a trace of respect in his gaze.

Li Lanfeng’s lips curved up slightly, revealing a slight smile, making his entire being seem endlessly warm. This smile startled the other however, a thread of confusion flashing through his eyes, but the other quickly got a hold of himself to regain his original expression.

The smile on Li Lanfeng’s lips grew deeper. He turned to look at Han Yu, who had been observing his expression intently, and as if not at all aware of Han Yu’s previous impolite attitude, he smiled easily and said, “Han Yu, how nice! Congratulations on gaining yet another great fighter. However, no matter how glad you are, you still need to test him well. Don’t let some pretender slip in and profit from the confusion again.”

Li Lanfeng’s words made Han Yu’s complexion shift slightly. They made him recall when he had happily taken in a bunch of freshmen who had come from his planet a few days ago. Back then, he had brought those new recruits over here to show off to Li Lanfeng because not a single person from Li Lanfeng’s third-rate planet Azure had managed to get into the First Men’s Military Academy this time.

Unexpectedly, those recruits had all been useless fellows — the moment they were pressured by Zhao Jun’s aura, they had all actually cowered with their tails tucked between their legs, not daring to say another word. Those timid and cowardly expressions still made him furious when he recalled them now. The reactions of those people had truly disgraced their planet Wuji.

All this was because Zhao Jun and Li Lanfeng were both from third-rate planets. The two were from different planets though — Zhao Jun was from planet Redrock ⁴ , while Li Lanfeng came from planet Azure. Meanwhile, planet Wuji was a first-rate planet within the Federation, much better in terms of both level, treatment, and resources than the third-rate planets. Therefore, losing face in front of Zhao Jun and Li Lanfeng was extremely infuriating for Han Yu.

Han Yu took a good look at Li Lanfeng, trying to see if the other was intentionally making a crack at him. However, Li Lanfeng’s eyes were unbelievably clear and limpid, and his warm smile and gentle aura had not a single shred of malicious intent in it ... could it be that he was overthinking things?

Han Yu could not see anything strange about Li Lanfeng’s demeanour, so he sniffed coolly and said, “Hmph, would I make the same mistake again?” He pointed at the youth beside him and continued, “Lanfeng, this is my junior, his name is Zhou Ya ⁵ . His specialization is military strategy, and he is the first rank in the military strategy specialization among this year’s freshmen.” When he said this, Han Yu’s expression was proud, not forgetting to glance at Li Lanfeng to gauge his expression to see if there was

any change. Sadly, his efforts were all in vain — Li Lanfeng's expression was no different from usual, as calm as ever.

Han Yu deflated slightly, turning his head to introduce to the youth, "This is the strategist of our Wuji Mecha Clan, Li Lanfeng. In future, you should learn well from big brother Li. Wuji's future will eventually depend on you and your strategies."

"Big Brother Li, hello, please watch out for me in future." Zhou Ya gave Li Lanfeng a military academy cadet bow, his gaze curious as his eyes roved over this gentle-mannered youth before him.

Before Li Lanfeng arrived, Regiment Commander Han Yu had hinted that he hoped Zhou Ya would be able to replace Li Lanfeng and take his position quicker, to become the primary strategist of the Wuji Mecha Clan. Hearing that, he was naturally extremely moved — Regiment Commander Han Yu's words proved the other's trust and acknowledgement of him. Still, he would not become proud and self-conceited because of this and offend Li Lanfeng recklessly.

Frankly, in his conversation with Regiment Commander Han Yu, Zhou Ya had vaguely made out the regiment commander's wariness towards Li Lanfeng. This proved that the other was absolutely not someone to be crossed easily. Otherwise, he would not have been able to retain such a secure hold on the primary strategist position within the mecha clan as someone not from planet Wuji.

Li Lanfeng politely returned a bow of his own, and said with a smile, "Zhou Ya, right? Don't be so formal. I'm not specializing in strategy. It's just that Regiment Commander Han Yu was lacking such an important role, so he made do with me filling in. Now you're here, I can take the burden off my shoulders. It's like Regiment Commander Han Yu said, the future of the Wuji Mecha Clan will depend on you all."

Done speaking, Li Lanfeng did not forget to pat Zhou Ya's shoulder in encouragement. Then, seeking out a random sofa, he sat down. True to his words, his expression was clearly much more relaxed, as if he had genuinely spoken from the heart.

This made Han Yu and Wei Ji, both of who had been closely observing Li Lanfeng, to furrow their brows. This was why they had always been wary of Li Lanfeng — Li Lanfeng's expression was always very composed, gentle, and unassuming. It could perhaps even be described as somewhat easygoing and content with one's lot ... but would there really be a cadet, outstanding on all fronts, who had no ambition whatsoever? Both their gazes involuntarily met once more, reading the same suspicion in the other's eyes.

Wei Ji turned his gaze away and suppressed the misgivings in his heart. Standing up, he greeted with a smile, "Zhao Jun, what are you standing at the door for? Still not coming over to sit? I too happen to have a talent from Wuji for you to meet." He pointed at the seat next to his, indicating for Zhao Jun to come over.

Zhao Jun had initially been coldly watching the attacks, both open and covert, being exchanged among the people in the room. Now, seeing Wei Ji calling him, a trace of interest instantly appeared on his austere face. He walked forwards, eyes trained on the youth with a somewhat lazy expression standing by Wei Ji's side, and asked seriously, "A prodigy at mecha piloting?"

Wei Ji choked at those words, and said sulkily, “Zhao Jun, you know that these students have just started working with mecha. No matter how talented, it would be impossible to tell in such a short amount of time!”

Zhao Jun threw a disgruntled glare at Wei Ji. “You know very well that I am only interested in mecha piloting. Why would you mislead me?”

Wei Ji prodded at Zhao Jun helplessly for a moment, finally saying with a bitter chuckle, “Fine, fine, fine, just say it’s my fault. But this Wang Hui is a combat genius from our planet Wuji, already at the optimal peak of Refinement stage, just a half step away from entering Qi-Jin stage.” Wei Ji’s tone was threaded with a faint trace of pride.

Mind you, these past few years, Zhang Jing-an was the only one who had already advanced into the early stage of Qi-Jin before entering the military academy. The others, no matter how strong, had only been at Refinement. Even the number one of the military academy, the Thunder King Qiao Ting, had only been at the peak of Refinement when he had first entered the academy, a level weaker than Wang Hui.

Of course, when the Thunder King had been a freshman, he had already displayed his terrifying talent in mecha piloting, which was how he had begun suppressing Zhang Jing-an ever since the second year. By now, he had completely left Zhang Jing-an several horse heads behind ⁶, shooting straight up to become the number one of the military academy.

Chapter 245: The Dux Li Shiyu!

Without question, the Thunder King was a marvel — and Wei Ji hoped that Wang Hui could reproduce this miraculous achievement of the Thunder King. That way, a few years later, when the Thunder King graduated and left the military academy, it would be the time for their Wuji Mecha Clan to rise to the top.

Learning of Wang Hui’s combat level, Zhao Jun’s eyes flashed brightly. “Not bad, with the addition of these two talents, Wuji’s future is boundless!”

Zhao Jun’s words made Han Yu and Wei Ji laugh, pleased. In contrast to the shrewd and unfathomable Li Lanfeng, Zhao Jun, who only knew to fight, was much simpler — his words would never twist and turn; what was said was what he meant.

Having said that, Zhao Jun clapped Wang Hui on the shoulder approvingly, then walked over to sit down beside Li Lanfeng.

This move of Zhao Jun’s made Han Yu and Wei Ji frown, a trace of frustrated regret in their eyes. Back then, they should not have tried some petty tricks in order to keep Zhao Jun in check through fear, thus enraging him, giving Li Lanfeng the chance to become the mediator between the two sides. From there, Li Lanfeng had gained Zhao Jun’s friendship, resulting in their current close relationship. If Zhou Ya really succeeded in replacing Li Lanfeng, they might still be unable to chase away Li Lanfeng too obviously, to force him to resign from his post within the clan ...

Over these past few years of cooperation, they had come to learn that Zhao Jun was a very loyal and steadfast person, definitely someone who would sacrifice his life for a friend. If Zhao Jun became

discontented with them over Li Lanfeng, he might choose to leave the Wuji Mecha Clan in a fit of rage to follow Li Lanfeng, and that would be a major loss for them.

Zhao Jun was a genius at mecha piloting, strong enough to squeeze into the top three of their year. Excluding Li Lanfeng's strategic planning, Zhao Jun was integral to the Wuji Mecha Clan's secure third-place ranking. If the two of them went off to join another faction because of this, it would very likely affect the position of their Wuji Mecha Clan among the school factions ...

Han Yu's and Wei Ji's eyes met, sharing a glance, conveying their tacit decision to temporarily set their plan aside and continue tolerating Li Lanfeng a while longer. Zhou Ya and Wang Hui still needed some time to grow anyway; their mecha clan indeed still needed Li Lanfeng's strategic mind.

Of course, they decided mentally that they would find a chance to drive a wedge between Li Lanfeng and Zhao Jun in the interim — once the two became at odds, it would be time for them to banish Li Lanfeng.

So decided, the two began conversing enthusiastically with Li Lanfeng and Zhao Jun. Not long after, a dark wall within the box suddenly lit up — it turned out that this was a high-tech screen, and it was currently set up for direct viewing without any segmentations. Of course, it was also possible to choose to dissect the screen into several windows for multiple viewing angles. Right then, on the arena stage dominating the screen, several youths in blue uniforms suddenly appeared. Their expressions were composed and proud; it was the delegation from the Leiting Mecha Clan. With that, the four of them in the box stopped their conversation, turning their eyes to the large screen.

In the dark box, facing the screen, no one saw Li Lanfeng's smile turn mocking from its initial warmth, and his clear gaze became deep and dark. The current Li Lanfeng was no longer at all kind and approachable, instead emitting a cold edge.

The moment the Leiting people got on the stage, they received the passionate cheers of all the students in the audience of the combat hall. The Federation had always championed the rule of survival of the fittest, and this was displayed most vividly within the military academy. The Leiting Mecha Clan was the strongest faction in the military academy, and so obtained the acknowledgement and respect of the majority of the cadets.

At this moment, the other boxes on the second floor were gradually being claimed by their respective owners. Practically all the people in the boxes took the cheers coming from the combat hall below as a matter of fact, absolutely certain that the final victors would be Leiting. Only in one particular corner of one of the boxes was there someone worrying about the fate of the New Cadet Regiment ¹.

"F*ck, the whole hall is cheering for Leiting. No one thinks the New Cadet Regiment will win. Honestly speaking, I don't think the New Cadet Regiment has any hope of winning either. I say, has your younger cousin brother's head been shot at before? Actually daring to accept Leiting's letter of challenge?" In that box, a baby-faced youth in a blue uniform abruptly smacked his hands onto the arms of his sofa, his entire expression a mask of rage at the perceived incompetence.

Standing before the screen, a person in a white uniform was standing tall with his back to the baby-faced youth. He cut a dashing figure, and with a hand on the frame of the screen, he replied without

even turning back, “It’s fine since he has already accepted. At least I’ll be able to see how much this younger cousin brother of mine who has always been aiming for the first inheritance rights has grown.”

“Just for that reason? That’s why you actually emerged from your laboratory to come see this competition that he is destined to lose?” The baby-faced youth’s face was filled with incredulity.

He knew his sworn brother — ever since they had entered the First Men’s Military Academy, and he had chosen to specialize in military medical research, it was like he had been possessed by a demon. Day and night, he was always at the laboratory with his instructors researching the various strange and bizarre diagnostic and treatment questions known to the Federation at present. Perhaps he truly had talent in this respect, for he actually managed to successfully produce several treatment procedures in the course of his research, which after practical real-world testing, were discovered to be extremely effective. As a result of his exceptional performance on these course problems, from the start of the second year, he had successfully become the dux of the military medical research specialization. Since then, the position of dux had seemed reserved for him alone, never to budge.

The baby-faced youth had always believed that if the Thunder King was a peerless prodigy in mecha piloting, then his good friend, Li Shiyu, was certainly a horrifyingly aberrant existence in the medical field. The two dominated over the masses in their respective domains, becoming the indisputable number ones of their fields.

“Lose?” Li Shiyu muttered to himself. At this moment, five more figures appeared on the arena stage, dressed in the average cadet’s green uniform. It was the five representatives of the New Cadet Regiment here to participate in the physical skills combat showdown.

Through the screen, Li Shiyu stared at the cocky punk who was standing with his arms crossed on the stage. His initially handsome face instantly became dark and foreboding, as he bit out word by word, “If that punk loses, I will make him pay the price.” The latent energy spurring gene agent S-modification that he had just developed recently — didn’t it just happen to be lacking some human experimental candidates? Perhaps Li Yingjie would be a suitable experiment subject.

At this moment, Li Yingjie, who had his chin lifted up defiantly, suddenly felt a chill pass through his body. He could not help but shiver, causing Luo Lang beside him to glance at him disapprovingly, “You’re afraid now?”

Li Yingjie glared at Luo Lang, and shot back, “Who’s afraid? There was just a gust of cold wind earlier ...”

Cold wind? Luo Lang looked around at this fully enclosed combat hall with not a single gap for air flow — the temperature forever maintained at 20 degrees by the thermostat. In this place where not a trace of wind could be created ... a cold wind? Who was he trying to fool?

Luo Lang sniffed and rolled his eyes, no longer paying any mind to the cowardly Li Yingjie beside him. He had originally thought that the always cocky Li Yingjie did not know what fear was, but the other was unexpectedly just a tiger in a cave — only cocksure and domineering in its own den.

Luo Lang’s sniff clearly revealed his true opinion, which caused Li Yingjie’s complexion to flush and pale erratically. He wished dearly that he could grab hold of the other’s collar and yell in his face: *What the hell are you sniffing for?! Everything this bro has said is the truth! There really had been a blast of cold wind, or else why would this bro shiver?*

Unfortunately, reality did not permit Li Yingjie to do so. He could only suppress the urge to right this misunderstanding and put aside his shame for now. In his heart, he decided that he must obtain victory in the fighting ring — he would use reality to tell Luo Lang that he, Li Yingjie, had never been afraid of the opponent before.

These things that happened on the stage could not be observed clearly by the spectating students. All they could see was a pretty youth and a prideful youth bending their heads close to exchange a few words, and then move apart again to stand still, patiently waiting for the referee the school administration had assigned to appear.

The military academy permitted wagering on fights, whether official or personal. The only difference was that, official fight wagers would be officiated over by the academy's referee, while personal fight wagers would not involve the academy in any way.

Still, both types of wagering had one restriction — no deaths could be incurred. If an incident of death occurred, the academy would dispatch a team to investigate. And if the offending side was discovered to have killed with intent, the student or organisation which had intentionally caused the death would be mercilessly court-martialled and tried under the full force of the law. The most severe punishment possible naturally being the death penalty.

Thus, even if there was discord or conflict among the cadets which was carried over into their wagers, the wagers would typically not result in any deaths. Of course, cases where the perpetrator intended to die along with their victim were not included in this.

The fight wager between the two factions, Leiting and the New Cadet Regiment, was an official fight wager, which was why a referee from the academy would be present. This official wager was the result of agreement on both sides, because both sides were afraid that the other party would go back on their word.

Mind you, the results of an official fight wager were guaranteed by the academy. The moment the results were out, the wager would have to be fulfilled. Even if one party regretted the wager after the fact and wanted to renege on it, the other party could request for the school administration to step in and forcefully carry out the terms of the wager. Leiting was determined to obtain the New Cadet Regiment. In order to ensure nothing went wrong, they would certainly choose an official fight wager. Meanwhile, the New Cadet Regiment had similar concerns, so, without any objection, the wager this time naturally became an official fight wager.

“Shiyu, look. That youth by your younger cousin brother's side is so pretty, just like a girl. Is he participating as well?” The baby-faced youth seemed exasperated at the sheer incompetence on display, “Heavens, does the New Cadet Regiment not have anyone else? Actually sending out such a delicate youth to fight ... how could they bear to do so²?”

Right then, Li Shiyu too laid eyes on Luo Lang's appearance, and he was instantly stunned. Another face floated into his mind's eye — different, yet equally beautiful — no, that other face was even lovelier than the face of this youth before him, so beautiful that it almost felt as if it should not appear in the human world ...

Li Shiyu's heart abruptly spasmed violently — was this the reason why the heavens was unwilling to give his eldest cousin brother a healthy body? Because he did not belong to this common world to begin with, and needed to be reclaimed?

No, I will not allow it! Even if I have to fight against the heavens, I will keep Brother Mulan here!

Li Shiyu gripped the frame of the screen tightly, his fingers locked around it, savouring the pain travelling up through his fingers. It was as if this was the only way to soothe the wrenching pain in his heart. It was precisely due to this unbearable pain that he had chosen a different path without any regrets. Even if he would lose the inheritance rights to the Li family because of this, he would not regret it.

A crisp "Crack!" rang out — a piece of the screen's frame had actually been shattered by Li Shiyu's iron grip. Baby-face instantly jumped up and rushed over, taking Li Shiyu's hand in his even as he bemoaned, "Heavens, my points ..." Although this box was theirs by right for the year, anything inside that was destroyed would still needed to be paid for.

Chapter 246: What Virtues Or Abilities Have You?

Baby-face carefully looked over Li Shiyu's fingers. Discovering no wounds, he instantly released a relieved sigh. If Li Shiyu's hands were at all damaged, he would definitely be dismembered by the senior colonel instructors of the military medical research branch of the medical faculty, and be made into a specimen to be experimented on.

Mind you, Li Shiyu was a gem in the hearts of all the instructors in the military medical research specialization. All the instructors wanted to take in Li Shiyu as their own true disciple. There had even been a large battle fought previously over the matter ... In the end, the head of the military medical research branch Major General Qi had been unable to take it any longer, and had come out to declare Li Shiyu as the shared disciple of all the instructors; only then did the fighting stop. This was also one of the reasons why Li Shiyu was so exceptional in his specialization.

Seeing the worry on his friend's face, Li Shiyu's heart was moved. He took his hand back and said sheepishly, "Yun Xiu, I'm fine!"

"That's good then. What happened earlier that made you so angry?" asked Yun Xiu curiously. What exactly had triggered Li Shiyu?

Li Shiyu looked towards Yun Xiu, and sighed softly, "You still remember the grand armed melee that year? And that I wasn't in the school then?"

Yun Xiu remembered, nodded and said, "Yes, back then I had lamented that it was such a shame you had to miss it! Otherwise you could have already had a chance to cross blows with your younger cousin brother." Then, recalling how Li Shiyu had changed when he had returned, his tone became regretful as he said, "I had originally thought that you would apply for the mecha piloting specialization in the First Men's Military Academy. But unexpectedly, when you came back, you suddenly told me you wanted to become a military doctor! Until now, I still cannot understand it ..."

At this point of his recollection, Yun Xiu's face was filled with confusion. Even now he still wanted to understand why, after just leaving for a brief stint of half a month, Li Shiyu had returned with completely different dreams and goals.

Even more so since Li Shiyu had been given the cold shoulder due to his decision. The second year after he chose to become a military doctor, Li Shiyu gained a newborn younger brother — this move by Li Shiyu's parents was proof that he had been abandoned by them¹. This was because for one to become the family head of the Li family, one had to be the strongest mecha operator within the Li family. Thus, Li Shiyu's decision was a clear declaration that he was voluntarily giving up in the fight to be the first inheritor for the position of family head.

If Li Shiyu truly had no talent in mecha piloting, Yun Xiu would definitely have supported his good friend's decision. But the fact was that Li Shiyu's talent in mecha piloting was very high.

In these four years in the military academy, Li Shiyu had put his full effort into medical research, only using the bare minimum required by the military academy to train in mecha control. But despite that, Li Shiyu still had no difficulty in advancing to the early stages of advanced mecha warrior — it was clear to see how talented Li Shiyu actually was in mecha piloting. Every time this thought crossed his mind, Yun Xiu would lament the waste on behalf of his good friend.

In the face of his good friend's questioning, Li Shiyu only pursed his lips, but did not reply. However, due to his good friend's reminder, the incident that year appeared once more in the forefront of his mind ...

That was when he had just reached the 10th year in the scout academy. He and his parents had been busy preparing for his application to the mecha piloting specialization in the First Men's Military Academy ... but it was at this time when his grandfather, the current family head of the Li family, had suggested that he go visit his eldest cousin brother Li Mulan.

Ever since his eldest cousin brother had gone to planet Azure, he had never once returned to Doha. 10 years' time did not make Li Shiyu forget about his eldest cousin brother. Rather, with the passing of time, after becoming numb to the cold ruthlessness of the Li family members as they fought among themselves for power and authority, the memory of the unique warm aura of his cousin was almost stark in contrast, engraved even more deeply into his heart.

Thus, when his grandfather had suggested he take a vacation to visit his eldest cousin brother on planet Azure, he had gladly agreed. However, he could not have known that this visit would end up changing his entire life ...

Li Shiyu recalled that pale face on that sickbed, those dull-coloured lips, that limp person half laid up on the bed ... Still, that person had smiled so warmly at him — his smile so pure and clean, without any trace of resentment. His eldest cousin brother was not oblivious to the Li family's machinations, but he was still living without a care.

His eldest cousin brother's stamina was already very weak, unable to support speech for too long. Li Shiyu remembered how short the meeting with his cousin had been — only a brief ten or so minutes. During that time, his eldest cousin brother had not said anything about their family, only mentioning some of his own insights, such as how one should observe more, listen more, learn more, and think more — only then would one be able to see things clearer and project their thoughts further. Or, for

example, how one should not blindly judge an incident or a person, for some incidents and people were not as simple as they appeared — how considering things from a few more angles would perhaps yield some new discovery. In the end, he had also said that the hardest things for people were tolerance and acceptance, especially when it came to some friends and relatives. Sometimes, if they made a mistake, one should not be so quick to heap on the blame — instead, give the other a chance to right the wrong. Sometimes, taking a step back may yield even better results ... he had said with a laugh that, Li Yingjie, for example, who seemed so arrogant and bossy, was actually a good person at heart. Treat him with a bit more patience, and one may see more bright gleams of goodness and something different.

Though Li Shiyu had felt that these words were a little strange, as if his eldest cousin brother had been trying to hint at something, he had not thought much of it back then. He had just listened quietly as his cousin spoke, greedily absorbing more of the other's warmth². This was something the Li family in Doha could not provide, so he was hungry for it. Only when he had seen the sweat pouring from his eldest cousin brother's forehead from the strain did he bid farewell and depart very reluctantly.

On the journey home, he settled down and contemplated those words his eldest cousin brother had said, and found something off about them. It was as if his eldest cousin brother had been trying to guide him — back then, he had already been suspicious, wondering why his eldest cousin brother would say all this ...

Only when he returned to Doha and met his grandfather, who then told him personally that in future, his eldest cousin brother's role would be on his shoulders, did he come to a shocked realisation. His grandfather had sent him to visit his eldest cousin brother, not for any so-called kinship bonding, but for the purpose of letting his visit be an announcement to his cousin on the Li family's decision. He was the candidate the Li family had selected to replace his eldest cousin brother as inheritor ...

Li Shiyu was immediately consumed with regret. Due to his ignorance, his idiocy, his dim-wittedness — he had actually hurt his beloved eldest cousin brother by his own hand. He also hated the Li family's heartlessness. His eldest cousin brother's body was already so weak, and they had still given him such a heavy mental blow at this time — they had never intended for his eldest cousin brother to get better, hoping instead that he would just go ahead and die from the shock for their own ease of mind.

Yes, his eldest cousin brother was very intelligent! The moment he had seen him, his cousin had already understood what the Li family had decided. His eldest cousin brother had not reacted with resentment or rage, but had instead done all he could as an elder, giving his younger brother some advice and guidance, entrusting his hopes to him ...

In his heartache, Li Shiyu rejoiced that he had left the Li family early on to enter the scout academy, thus saved from becoming cold-blooded like the rest of the Li family members. He directly refused his grandfather's arrangement, and said that, since the Li family had given up on his eldest cousin brother, then he would be the one to build his eldest cousin brother's future! The Li family people would no longer be allowed to interfere in his eldest cousin brother's life! As for the matter of the Li family inheritor, since Li Yingjie was interested, then they should just let Li Yingjie do it.

Yes, he disdained the position of Li family inheritor — he did not value this cold-blooded Li family.

He had long thought before that when he grew up to become someone strong enough to stand on his own, he would take his eldest cousin brother out of the Li family, the two of them completely cutting ties with this cold-blooded and heartless Li family³.

His grandfather had not been angered by his words. Instead, he asked him with a sneer — what was he basing his words on? If he became the family head, he might perhaps still be able to give Li Mulan a better life, otherwise, everything was just empty talk — he would not be able to give his cousin anything.

Subsequently, his grandfather had listed out the total fees of all the various consultations, medications, and high-grade medicinal agents spent on his eldest cousin brother all this while to Li Shiyu. To maintain Li Mulan's life, it was impossible without several million credits. If Li Mulan had not been a direct descendant of the main branch, so the Li family had borne the costs, he would have long died from illness on planet Azure. The Li family had already done more than enough for Li Mulan. Now, they could not let the average Li Mulan continue to be the first inheritor, making the Li family the laughingstock of the top elite families.

This was the true opinion of a family head. Li Shiyu had been very disappointed — he had thought that his grandfather had truly loved his eldest cousin brother, only sending him to the distant planet Azure to protect him, distancing him from the cruel struggles within the main camp of the Li family. Reality proved that he had been too idealistic. There was no such thing as kinship and blood relation within the Li family; profit was the only thing tying parents and siblings together — there was only calculation, and using one another. Perhaps his grandfather had simply not wanted to keep seeing this disgrace of the Li family, thus sending eldest cousin brother so far away for his own peace of mind.

Li Shiyu was sad and indignant, reflexively wanting to fight back with barbed words. But when the words came to his lips, he recalled those words his eldest cousin brother had said to him back at planet Azure, that he should learn to tolerate ...

Yes, if he became at odds with his grandfather, and let his parents know his true thoughts, it might end up harming his eldest cousin brother.

Li Shiyu knew very well how ruthless his parents could be with their methods. Once they found out that his eldest cousin brother was the reason why he had refused to be the first inheritor, they might very likely employ dirty means to eliminate the problem. This was not something he wished to see; he did not want his eldest cousin brother to be harmed any further due to him. Thus, Li Shiyu was silent. He only said that he would return and think about it.

His grandfather had looked at him contemplatively — that one glance almost making him think he had been seen through — but his grandfather had not said anything on it. He had only informed him that he still had a year's time to consider, but once he began schooling at the military academy, that would be the final deadline. As he left, his grandfather had also reminded him that he could come discuss things over with him whenever he had the time.

The words 'discuss things over' were said with especial emphasis; Li Shiyu understood the hidden meaning behind his grandfather's words. If he agreed to accept the position of first inheritor, his grandfather would be willing to pay some price, such as continuing to pay for Li Mulan's medical expenses for a while longer or something.

Li Shiyu thought for a very long time after returning to the scout academy. He had also considered his grandfather's suggestion — to become the family head, and then hold up the sky for his eldest cousin brother⁴, allowing him to live securely under his wing ...

Yet, Li Shiyu could not fool himself. By the time he truly obtained the rights of family head, it would be thirty to forty years later at least, while his eldest cousin brother's body did not seem like it could hold out for so long. Only by finding the best doctors in the Federation as soon as possible, the best medicine, the best resources, would he have any hope of extending his eldest cousin brother's life.

Li Shiyu did not hope for his eldest cousin brother to die young. Right now, the human lifespan was already infinitely close to 200 years — he wished that his cousin would at least live beyond 150 years ... to achieve this goal, he could only find a way to heal his eldest cousin brother as soon as possible.

At present, what Li Shiyu wanted, he did not have, so it was impossible to rely on any outside power. As for the Li family, his grandfather had already spoken. The Li family had already done their duty by his eldest cousin brother — the age of maturity in the Federation was 20; the Li family would only support him till then. After that, they would no longer continue to pay for those massive medical fees of his eldest cousin brother. According to his grandfather's words, since he would be an adult then, he should be fully responsible for himself.

This meant that there could only be one path before him. Four years later, he needed to possess a large amount of credits, enough to replace the Li family's role in supporting his cousin's exorbitant medical fees. However, at that time, he would still only be a cadet, so he would never be able to afford it. Moreover, the Li family would only give Li family descendants the necessary credits for daily living, not a credit more. Before maturity, even if they earned any credits, those credits would be claimed by the Li family accounts — he would not see a single bit of it.

For those few days, he was plagued with worry, with no mind at all to bother with anything else around him. Even though the 10th grade had been beaten so soundly by the 7th grade that they did not dare to lift their heads, he had not noticed. Every day, he was thinking about his and his eldest cousin brother's future. Just when he was at his wit's end and was preparing himself to lower his head and negotiate with his grandfather, an application brochure from the military academy illuminated a path for him.

The military academy not only had mecha piloting, but countless other specializations as well, and one of them was the military medical research specialization which was held in very high esteem by the military. Meanwhile, military doctors were definitely the best among the Federation doctors. As such, they had the opportunity to work with medicinal agents that had been secretly formulated by the Federation. In particular, there were certain forbidden medicines that only top-level military doctors could access.

Therefore, instead of begging others for medicinal agents and resources, he might as well become a top-level military doctor himself and earn the right to take those medicines and resources. Li Shiyu's gaze had sparkled; he had finally found a path by which he could save his eldest cousin brother.

Li Shiyu did not rush. He immediately went home and had a sincere talk with his grandfather. When he had told the other of his decision, he remembered his grandfather asking him if he would ever regret it.

Li Shiyu remembered that he had smiled as he replied, saying that he did not want to become a puppet controlled by power and profit. He was not heartless enough to abandon his own blood brothers ... and since that was the case, he would follow his heart. He would not regret it.

When he bid farewell to his grandfather, he could vaguely hear his grandfather muttering these words: *Li Mulan, what virtues or abilities have you*

Chapter 247: Wager!

Right at that moment, a human figure slowly walked onto the stage. That person was about 30 years old and was dressed in the alternating blue-white military uniform of the Federation. He had a handsome face and a stately build — by simply standing on the stage, he drew everyone’s eye.

“Ah, the referee is here.” The person’s age and military uniform which differed from the cadets clearly marked him as the referee sent by the academy.

“Heavens, the referee the school sent is actually Colonel Tang Yu ¹ !” When an eagle-eyed student noticed who the referee on the stage was, he could not help but yell out in shock.

“What?! Colonel Tang Yu, that ace instructor who cultivated the Thunder King, the number one in the school?” As the news spread among the students, even those who had not known Colonel Tang Yu before this also began exclaiming in awe.

Mind you, Colonel Tang Yu was the strongest among the instructors of mecha piloting — it was rumoured that he was already an ace operator. Besides that, in one of the teams he led, which had 6 students in total, the Thunder King was just a half-step away from advancing to ace status, while the other five in the team had all successfully advanced to special-class operator. Undoubtedly, he was the superstar ace instructor of the military academy — rumour had it that after he was done mentoring this batch of students till their 4th year, he would be able to mentor a new batch of 2nd years starting next year.

Perhaps Colonel Tang Yu had willingly taken on the role of referee just so he could take a look at the abilities of this year’s intake? After all, these people could be his students of tomorrow ... of course, it was even more likely that he had already begun taking in students, so perhaps this wagered fight was also an assessment of Colonel Tang Yu’s for the new cadets?

All of the senior students stared enviously at the five freshmen standing on the stage. Even if these students were defeated in this fight, as long as they performed decently and caught Colonel Tang Yu’s eye, their futures would be immeasurable. It had to be said that this year’s freshmen were just too lucky.

The mecha instructors of the military academy did not mentor their personal students up till the 6th year, typically only mentoring them till their 3rd year. As the freshmen were focused on their physical conditioning for the first year, busy building up the proper foundations, the mecha instructors would only take in students beginning from the second year. After mentoring them to the 4th year, their focused mentorship would end. Since the 5th and 6th year students were basically in the process of prepping for graduation, they typically had two options. One, was to go join some adventuring groups

on some intergalactic adventuring mission to increase their own real-world battle experience; the other, was to enter the armed forces directly and begin an internship. Of course, those who chose the second option were all the best the school had to offer, typically already being noticed in their 4th year for their exceptional performance. By their 5th year, the military division which had its eye on them would issue them an internship offer letter and take them away ...

Of course, those 4th year students who performed well this year were pretty much all aiming for the newly established 23rd Division — not because they would have more opportunity to shine in a new division, but because the commander of the 23rd Division was one of the twelve god-class operators of the Federation, General Ling Xiao. He was the idol of all the cadets — the Thunder King was rushing so much to advance to ace operator this year precisely because he wanted General Ling Xiao to know of his existence. With that, he would have a chance to be noticed by the other and obtain that precious internship offer letter.

An internship offer letter did not mean that one would be able to remain at that division at the end of the 2-year internship, but as long as one performed within acceptable standards, one would normally not be dismissed by the division.

At this time, seeing the appearance of Colonel Tang Yu, those within the boxes frowned. Anyone with a brain could tell that the academy's arrangements this time seemed to hint at some deeper intent.

Only Yun Xiu in Li Shiyu's box continued to fret obliviously, "With Colonel Tang Yu as referee, won't he be biased towards Leiting? After all, the Thunder King Qiao Ting is his favoured disciple."

Li Shiyu instantly rolled his eyes at his friend at these words, having no desire at all to even respond.

However, this somewhat moronic question of Yun Xiu's had pulled him out of his memories. Even though his mood remained solemn and heavy, he was no longer caught up in the past. As a result of these few years of research, Li Shiyu was increasingly confident that he would be able to take over his eldest cousin brother's medical expenses before his rite of passage to adulthood.

These past few years, the research studies Li Shiyu had participated in had all yielded tremendous results — besides one forbidden medicine that was restricted for military use, the yields of the other studies could be generalised for public use. As such, to reward him, the academy had given Li Shiyu many awards, which included a large sum of credits.

Back then, Li Shiyu had already told his instructors of his personal situation back home, so these credits were currently stored within the accounts of those instructors.

Of course, the greatest profit was not the school's reward, but the sale of his patent rights. After learning of Li Shiyu's situation, during the forging of the contract with the manufacturer, his instructor had specially requested for the main researcher Li Shiyu to not be directly reimbursed with credits, instead asking for company shares of equivalent value. The interest gained from those shares every year was clearly stipulated to be transferred into Li Shiyu's account once he became an adult. Li Shiyu was overjoyed by this outcome; he was filled with gratitude towards that instructor. This would undoubtedly give him a long-term steady source of income, helping him eliminate future worries.

Seeing Li Shiyu's face recover from its pained expression, Yun Xiu let out an internal sigh of relief. He had not expected that his thoughtless question on why Li Shiyu had changed his mind to study military medicine would cause his good friend so much pain.

His twisted expression had let Yun Xiu know without words that Li Shiyu must have encountered some painful event back then. Yun Xiu could not help but regret his rashness and try to do something to fix things. When he saw Colonel Tang Yu step onto the stage, an idea sparked and he had immediately blurted an extremely stupid question to draw Li Shiyu's attention. Now, it looked like his ploy had been quite effective — Li Shiyu had really returned from his memories, and his expression was now much more natural.

As a cadet, Yun Xiu naturally knew that all the instructors of the military academy were righteous military men. They would never do such an obviously biased thing, and Colonel Tang Yu, who was especially widely lauded for being upstanding, was even more unlikely to do such a thing.

Within the Wuji box ², seeing Colonel Tang Yu step onto the stage, Li Lanfeng and the others also made sounds of shock and surprise. Who would have expected this great god to appear on such a small arena stage ...?

Li Lanfeng's hand which was holding his drink jerked. He could not help but look towards the five representatives of the New Cadet Regiment, a trace of pensiveness in his gaze. Among these people of the New Cadet Regiment, which one was it that had such formidable backing, able to affect the typical style of the military academy? Even the top elite family, the Li family, did not have the capability. Even if the Li family could influence the decision of the president of the Federation, they would not be able to budge the Federation military. And since the military academy was part of the military system, even the president would not be able to order the military academy around ...

A small smile appeared on Li Lanfeng's lips as he thought: *How interesting, looks like this fight of Leiting's won't be as easy as they thought!*

The moment Colonel Tang Yu was on the stage, he coughed loudly, and the initial furore caused by the colonel's appearance instantly died down. Colonel Tang Yu smiled faintly and then said, "Today, I will be the referee for this fight between the New Cadet Regiment and Leiting. I will judge fairly according to the rules. If there is any dissatisfaction with the results, or any complaints on my decisions as referee, you may request an arbitration with the arbitration committee of the academy ..."

That said, Tang Yu glanced at the five representatives of both sides. Seeing the steady expressions on both sides, he nodded slightly, approving at the quality of the representatives chosen.

He continued to say, "This fight is best three of five, to be fought by five representatives from each side. To ensure fairness, the five participating representatives are not announced beforehand. One minute before the fight begins, the leader of each team is to submit the name list ³ of the representatives participating in the fight to me. Remember — once the name list is in my hands, no more changes are allowed, or else the side which makes any changes will be immediately considered to forfeit."

Seeing both sides nod in understanding, Tang Yu continued, "One more thing. There is a wager on this fight as agreed by both sides. Before the fighting begins, the wager needs to be stated clearly. The school rules dictate that the contents of the wager shall not go against anything expressly forbidden by the military academy ..."

At this point of his speech, Tang Yu paused, his cold gaze slashing like a knife across the faction members of both sides seated on the spectating platform, causing those people to feel a shiver in their hearts. Those students who were slightly weaker actually felt cold sweat break out all over their bodies.

"As Leiting is the challenger, please enter your wager into the military academy mainframe." Tang Yu indicated for the Leiting Mecha Clan to submit their wager into the mainframe.

Very quickly, on the large screen behind the arena stage, the contents of the wager was displayed. It was very simple, only one sentence. The contents of the wager read: *If Leiting wins, all members of the New Cadet Regiment shall collectively join Leiting!*

The appearance of this wager made all the spectators break out into a commotion once more. Even the audience within the boxes could no longer keep their composure, overwhelmed with surprise.

"Why this wager? Isn't Leiting very particular about the quality of their members? Why do they want to take the entire group? Could it be that there's some secret about the New Cadet Regiment that we do not know?"

All the leading people of the various factions began to cry out — they could not believe what they were seeing. They had initially believed that Leiting would request for the New Cadet Regiment to disband, and then aim to absorb a portion of the more talented new cadets into Leiting. They would then be able to take advantage of the chaos while the members of the New Cadet Regiment were still filled with anger and hate at Leiting to snatch away a portion of the talented new cadets.

However, this wager of Leiting's threw all their ideal calculations out of the window. Leiting's method of taking the whole pot for themselves without sharing a single errant drop made them extremely dissatisfied.

In the Wuji box, Han Yu and the others were similarly shocked beyond belief. He and Wei Ji shared baffled glances, the confusion evident on their faces.

They reflexively looked towards Li Lanfeng, hoping he would be able to give them an answer. Although they were extremely apprehensive of Li Lanfeng, they still believed fully in Li Lanfeng's analytical abilities. Many times when they were unable to figure things out, Li Lanfeng could strike right at the heart of the matter⁴.

Li Lanfeng met their gazes and opened his mouth to say, "I too do not know why Leiting would do this. But I'm certain that the New Cadet Regiment must have something that Leiting values." Han Yu and Wei Ji nodded; they knew enough to figure this out for themselves.

"In the previous period of time, the major factions were all working on deciphering the data of the entrance evaluations of the new cadets. I wonder if Leiting has obtained that info." Li Lanfeng did not draw things out, plainly stating his thoughts to the two.

It was not that Li Lanfeng did not want to keep things to himself, but he knew that, even if he said nothing, Han Yu and Wei Ji would still have been able to think of this after a few days at the latest. In that case, he might as well be frank, to better give the other two the impression that he really had nothing to hide from the two of them. Moreover, the most important secret was still in his hands. This little bit of trivial news — Li Lanfeng truly did not consider it anything of real worth.

Chapter 248: Luo Lang Fights!

“Could it be that the results of this batch of students are all pretty good? Even if there are some who are a bit weaker, in order not to waste anything, they decided to take in everyone?” mused Han Yu, following the logical flow of Li Lanfeng’s comment.

Wei Ji said in agreement, “This New Cadet Regiment is from Doha, with most of the students from Doha’s Central Scout Academy. Their abilities won’t be too far off the mark. Taking all of them in, Leiting would not lose anything. But I suspect this matter will not be that simple ... could it be some scheme of Leiting’s? His objective may not be the entire New Cadet Regiment, but a particular person within the New Cadet Regiment. However, in consideration that that person may be proud and unruly, he decided he might as well take in the whole lot?” Wei Ji raised another possibility.

“That aberrant Zhang Jing-an mentioned?” exclaimed Han Yu, as if coming to some realisation, his eyes shining.

That aberrant, who Zhang Jing-an was afraid of, would most certainly not be someone easy to bring to heel. Perhaps Leiting was afraid that if they targeted him alone, the aberrant might not have any reservations, thus ending up like that 4th year genius mecha modifier, stubborn to the end, still unwilling to submit even now. Perhaps after that experience, Leiting had chosen to change their methods. By taking in the entire group, that aberrant would have no choice but to consider his companions beside him, and thus lower his head and submit.

“A feint! Certainly a great strategy!” sighed Han Yu, a trace of admiration in his gaze, “Even if Qiao Ting isn’t around, the vice regiment commander Lin Zhidong is not someone to cross.”

A faction could not last for long by relying on one person’s strength alone. Leiting had been able to remain as the top faction in the military academy for so many consecutive years due to the exceptional vice regiment commanders it had, especially the adviser Lin Zhidong. Although this first vice regiment commander was not from the strategy specialization, he was no less capable than those of the specialization.

Li Lanfeng did not refute the two’s suppositions, merely nodding in agreement as he smiled softly. However, the gazes of the four were then drawn once more by the stage, for the representative of the New Cadet Regiment had emerged. It was the public regiment commander Wu Jiong. He had been the one to step up and accept the wager with Leiting, as well as raise their own conditions for the wager. If by any chance the Leiting Mecha Clan lost, then they would have to be responsible for the safety of the New Cadet Regiment for the next two years. This meant that, in those two years’ time, if some other faction challenged the New Cadet Regiment, all the fights would be the Leiting Mecha Clan’s responsibility.

This wager would in fact indirectly make the entire Leiting Mecha Clan into the fighters and protectors of the New Cadet Regiment, but in comparison with Leiting's wager, the New Cadet Regiment's wager was not that unreasonable. Since Leiting wanted to consume the entire New Cadet Regiment, the New Cadet Regiment naturally could also request Leiting to become their helpers. Besides, the New Cadet Regiment did not have ill intentions — they only stated a period of two years, leaving Leiting no way to refuse.

As expected, the vice regiment commanders of Leiting very quickly agreed to the terms after a brief discussion. After all, Leiting too did not want the other factions to covet the promising New Cadet Regiment. If Leiting lost by any chance, this would ensure the cadets would not be taken in by any other faction in the upcoming two years. And two years later, Leiting would have another chance to consume the New Cadet Regiment. Therefore, this wager had no downsides from Leiting's perspective.

When Colonel Tang Yu declared that the wager was established, the upper ranks of all the factions could not help but sigh. With this, even if the New Cadet Regiment won by a fluke, they could do nothing within the next two years. No matter how tempting the regiment was, they could only watch without doing anything, because they still did not have the guts to go up against the Leiting Mecha Clan ...

At this time, they could not help but exclaim in admiration at the strategic thinking of the New Cadet Regiment, coming up with a wager that Leiting could not refuse. Whether they won or lost, the New Cadet Regiment would still obtain the protection of the large tree of Leiting — it was all just a matter of duration.

After the wager was agreed upon, all the representatives of the Leiting Mecha Clan and the New Cadet Regiment walked off the stage, to await the start of the first match. Colonel Tang Yu had already mentioned the rules of the fight. For each match, both sides would have five minutes' time to arrange things. Within those five minutes, each side must decide the candidate for their team. If they did not submit a name within the given time, the referee would give the victory to the opposing side.

Walking off the stage, Ling Lan looked pensively at the people on Leiting's side. Earlier on the stage, she had secretly evaluated those people's skill level, and had a rough idea of their capabilities in her mind. However, other than herself who could beat anyone handily, it would be a little risky for Qi Long and the others ... Ling Lan furrowed her brow slightly, beginning to consider the order they would use for the arena fights.

This time, Ling Lan had chosen Qi Long, Wu Jiong, Luo Lang, Li Yingjie, and herself to be the fighting representatives. Originally, she had wanted to see how the opponent would send out their candidates before making her final arrangements. However, Colonel Tang Yu's speech threw her plans out. Concealing the name list before announcing it at the final moment made Ling Lan lose all direction.

"Boss, have you forgotten that you still have me?" Just when Ling Lan was fretting, Little Four began making a ruckus moodily inside the mindspace. Of course he was moody — why did Boss always forget his existence during these critical moments? It should be known that he was the best cheating device!

"Fie fie fie, what was that random thought just now? I, Little Four, am a youth of five virtues¹ — I would never do such a tasteless thing as cheating," said Little Four, happily justifying his own actions and twisting words, *"We are fighting a great battle of information! Taking the initiative by procuring information on the opponent is the bedrock of success — all of this is just the means in service to this*

ultimate end! History shall be written by the victors!" Little Four had recently become addicted to military stories; who knew where he had stolen this particular block of text from ...

Little Four was still throwing words around to extol the virtues of his behaviour, while Ling Lan's eyes had lit up at Little Four's timely interruption. That's right! How had she forgotten that Little Four was a god of the virtual world? If she wanted to know the name list the opponent had set, wasn't it just a simple matter? Her only hope was that the opponent would not choose to key in their selection at the last second. Otherwise, even if Little Four could obtain the information, she still would not have the time to enter her own selection.

Little Four had finally re-established his own self-image, soothing his soul, and he immediately sensed Ling Lan's concerns. In response, he said disdainfully, *"With me, Little Four, around, would you still need to enter it manually? You only need to think of the name in your head, and I, Little Four, will be able to instantaneously send it over ..."* Such a simple matter — why did his boss have to worry so much? Wasn't this just making light of his, Little Four's, abilities? Little Four could not help but pout in silent protest of Ling Lan's lack of faith in him.

Seeing this demeanour of Little Four's, Ling Lan's heart settled. In a great mood, she kneaded Little Four's face inside the mindspace, laughing loudly as she said, *"Good. Little Four, I leave this matter to you."* Only within the mindspace would Ling Lan laugh so unreservedly. The smile behind the laugh made Little Four lose focus ... Boo hoo hoo, why did the charm of Boss's smile seem to have increased limitlessly once more?

Thinking of this, Little Four once again reaffirmed that it was safer for Boss to remain slackfaced. Otherwise, even though he was a god in the virtual world, he would be reduced to a puddle of goo by his Boss's smile ... Little Four abruptly recalled that he seemed to have very low resistance against Daddy Ling Xiao's smile too — could it be that smiles were his fatal weakness?

At this thought, Little Four suddenly felt a sense of danger invade his heart. This was because he remembered that intelligent bio-entities could not be found to have any obvious weaknesses, otherwise they would be recalled for repurposing. Little Four shiftily looked around, and finding no other intelligent bio-entities in the area, only then did he relax. He pounded his chest — luckily he was not in the Mandora star system right now, so no other intelligent bio-entity had observed his abnormality.

Little Four had barely settled from his fright when Ling Lan came up with another question. Even though she may know the skill levels of those people, she had no way to match the person to the name on the opponent's name list.

Little Four became absorbed by Ling Lan's question instantly, forgetting his earlier fright. When he figured out what his boss was worried about this time, he could not help but roll his eyes contemptuously at his boss. D*mmit, and he had thought what kind of difficult problem his boss had now ... it turned out to be such a small matter!

Very swiftly, the named datasheets of the Leiting representatives appeared in Ling Lan's mindspace, along with a 3D rendition of their appearance. Ling Lan quickly matched the people to their names — now, the moment the opponent entered the names, Ling Lan would be able to tell which level their physical skills were at, and make the appropriate counter.

With this, Ling Lan's mind was greatly eased. Ling Lan was prepared once more to mimic Tianji's horse racing — sending out the fighters on her side strategically according to the strength level of the opponent. As long as they won three matches in the end, the New Cadet Regiment would have the right to their own freedom!

“Boss, the opponent's name list is out!” Little Four yelled out in the mindscape, and then the opponent's fighting order and corresponding image were displayed in Ling Lan's mindscape.

*“D*mmmit, actually starting off with the third strongest. Looks like the opponent is also guarding against this strategy of mine, actively working to win this competition.”* Ling Lan could not help but frown as she read over the other's name list; the opponent had indeed dealt a good hand.

Ling Lan turned to look at her companions beside her, and her gaze finally landed on Luo Lang. “Luo Lang, get ready to fight!”

“Yes, Boss!” Luo Lang's pretty face lighted up — he had not expected Boss to send him up for the very first match.

Meanwhile, seeing that Ling Lan had chosen Luo Lang, without waiting for her to give the order, Little Four instantly sent Luo Lang's name to the referee Tang Yu.

Observing Luo Lang's excited expression, Ling Lan had no choice but to be a wet blanket and calm him down a little. With a stern expression, she said, “The opponent is a master at the peak of early stage Qi-Jin, while you have just entered Qi-Jin. The Qi-Jin in your body has not settled yet, and so is unsuitable for a hard confrontation. Draw things out to start, and then figure something out after you've gotten used to the pace.”

Ling Lan had chosen Luo Lang because Luo Lang currently needed a tough fight to help him stabilise his realm of first level early stage Qi-Jin. This was also why Ling Lan had not gone up first to just win the match. Even as she ensured the final victory would be theirs, Ling Lan hoped for her companions to improve through the fights.

Ling Lan knew her arrangement might cause Luo Lang to suffer a tough fight, perhaps even being beaten very badly; however, for the sake of her companions' growth, she needed to harden her heart. Sometimes, losing was not a disgrace, but a type of progress.

“Understood, Boss!” Luo Lang nodded his pretty head seriously, showing that he had heard her advice.

Right at this moment, the five minutes ran out. Colonel Tang Yu shouted from the stage, “Leiting Mecha Clan vs New Cadet Regiment — first round matchup: 5th year Qi Ya against 1st year Luo Lang.”

Chapter 249: Still a Little Ways Off!

Luo Lang took in a deep breath. Although he knew the opponent was stronger than him, Luo Lang did not want to give up just like that — he wanted to help Boss out. Even if he knew it would be very difficult to achieve the outcome he wanted, he still wanted to try.

When Luo Lang walked onto the stage, a commotion broke out among the people watching below. “What’s this? The New Cadet Regiment is actually sending out such a skinny weakling? Could it be the New Cadet Regiment is prepared to throw this match?”

“Look, is that fellow really a guy? He looks even prettier than a girl!” Who knows who yelled this out, causing the crowd’s attention to swiftly turn away from Luo Lang’s thin and slender frame to his lovely face.

“F*ck, it can’t be a girl dressed up as a guy, right?” Some random lecher was in raptures at the sight, beginning to indulge in wild fantasy.

Of course, his fanciful delusions received the contempt of the students beside him — did he really think this was those olden times? Able to impersonate a man just by putting on some guy clothes? Upon entrance to the military academy, the first thing they had to go through was a physical check-up. That had been conducted before everyone else, where they had all been naked ... well, alright, the examining teachers were very reasonable, and would allow you to use your hands to cover your willy.

Of course, these scornful cadets looking disdainfully at that lecher would never ever imagine that there truly was someone who had blatantly enrolled into the First Men’s Military Academy as a girl to study. During that physical check-up, this person had naturally been exempted via special privilege by a particular national idol general who loved his daughter deeply ...

In one of the boxes on the second floor, Luo Lang’s beautiful face and his delicate and seemingly easy to overpower figure made a person’s eyes shine. A covetous smile grew on that person’s lips as he mumbled to himself, “Who could have expected that there would be such a stunner among this year’s freshmen ...” He licked his lips, deciding that he would obtain the other by any means necessary ¹.

Leiting’s candidate, Qi Ya, was a 5th year cadet, currently still at the academy for his last few courses. As his physical skills combat ability was extremely outstanding, in order to ensure victory, Lin Zhidong had personally invited him to represent them. Sending Qi Ya out as vanguard was a calculated move on Lin Zhidong’s part.

Ling Lan was not the only one who had thought of Tianji’s horse racing; Lin Zhidong too had thought of the same principle. He was afraid that the New Cadet Regiment would send out their third strongest to fight against the weakest in his party, catching him off guard and thus causing Leiting to lose the first match. Lin Zhidong knew well that the first match was key — morale would lean towards the side who won. Lin Zhidong did not want to let the New Cadet Regiment obtain that advantage, and so had chosen the third strongest in Leiting’s party, Qi Ya, to fight first, guaranteeing the final outcome.

Lin Zhidong’s thought process was, even if the opponent planned to fight in the order of their strength levels, he would not lose out by sending out the third strongest now. As long as they won this match, he would still have the two strongest at hand — no matter what, victory would be theirs. Although Lin Zhidong was somewhat wary of that mysterious ‘aberrant’, he still had more faith in those two strongest combatants below the Thunder King.

Qi Ya saw how delicate his opponent was, just like a girl, and was instantly filled with displeasure. The gaze he directed at Luo Lang carried a clear trace of contempt. Instead of becoming angered by the

opponent's attitude, Luo Lang was pleased. The more the opponent looked down on him, the better his chances to achieve an upset.

Of course, Luo Lang had not forgotten Ling Lan's earlier instructions. So, the moment he got onto the stage, even though Colonel Tang Yu had not given the signal to start, Luo Lang's entire body was keyed up in readiness. Despite looking no different from his usual standing posture, anyone with a keen eye would be able to tell from his low-hanging arms and slightly bent waist that Luo Lang would be able to unleash his strength in an explosive burst to handle any sudden shifts in the situation.

Colonel Tang Yu was an ace mecha operator, but he was also a combat expert. Otherwise, the academy would not have sent him to be the referee of this fight. Seeing Luo Lang's stance, a gleam of light no one else could see flashed through his eyes. However, when he glanced towards Qi Ya, his brow creased almost imperceptibly ...

Tang Yu raised his right hand expressionlessly, and with a sharp wave, he shouted, "Begin!"

Luo Lang had initially thought to stay on the defensive, drawing out the fight with the other for a bit. Unexpectedly, the opponent did not put up any defence at all. He stood sluggishly, his entire person slouched and seemingly unprepared. Seeing this, a thought sparked through Luo Lang's mind and with a spring off his right foot, his entire body pounced from one side of the stage to the other like a cannonball, striking hard and fast towards the opponent.

Seeing this attack of Luo Lang's, Tang Yu's eyebrows rose slightly, somewhat surprised. He had determined that Luo Lang's original stance had been largely defensive; however, Luo Lang had been able to switch from that stance instantly into offence. Moreover, he had done so without any interruption in his movements, the transition smooth and flawless. It was clear to see that Luo Lang's control over his muscles had reached an extremely high realm.

Even though Luo Lang's body may lean towards the delicate side, not as buff, and with slightly weaker resilience compared to the average boy, this control over his muscles allowed him to compensate for his body's weakness. It could be said that Luo Lang had already developed a combat style appropriate for his body type. This was most definitely a youth who possessed extremely great talent in combat.

Right then, Tang Yu could not help but be pleased by this discovery of talent. This type of ability would undoubtedly be a great help to mecha piloting. As long as Luo Lang's physical condition could pass the 1st year's evaluation, Tang Yu believed he would be unable to refrain from taking in such a talented student.

Luo Lang's attack was undoubtedly sudden. The unprepared Qi Ya took fright, but he was after all a 5th year — in terms of combat, he was very experienced. He would not become flustered like those newbies, choosing to lash out thoughtlessly in his panic. Instead, he retreated calmly and rapidly, trying to put some distance between him and his opponent so he would have enough space to gather his strength and counterattack.

Although Luo Lang was a 1st year military academy cadet, his battle experience was not weak either. Mind you, his companion Qi Long was a battle maniac, dragging his friends off to spar whenever he had the time. Luo Lang was undoubtedly the one who had been dragged off the most² — though Xie Yi had

joined in after that, the frequency still had not dropped by much. The natural result of all this fighting was a wealth of experience.

Luo Lang saw his opponent retreating and instantly knew what the other was plotting. Having the initiative, how could he let go of this advantage? Thus, on the arena stage, two figures could be seen dancing around the stage, one in constant close pursuit of the other. Due to the extremely high speed, the spectating students actually saw the action as a streak of shadow moving across the stage.

Watching this scene, Lin Zhidong could not help but harrumph and say, "I was surprisingly right. The opponent really had been planning to use the principle of Tianji's horse racing ... luckily I had taken measures to counter this, or else the opponent might really have taken the first match." If he had sent out the weakest in his team, whose skills were not much stronger than the other, at that time, it would have been hard to determine for certain which side would win. But now, victory was sure to be theirs ... Although Lin Zhidong's combat ability was not that strong, he firmly believed that with Qi Ya's strength, he would never lose to a 1st year freshman.

On the stage, Qi Ya saw that no matter how hard he tried to retreat, the other was sticking like sticky-candy to him — he could not pull away no matter what. He felt that this performance of his was really too disgraceful, and rage surged in his heart. He began to hate Luo Lang who he had initially looked down upon ... he would definitely teach this detestable fellow before him a brutal lesson.

Even though he was currently at a total disadvantage, with his capabilities, he would still be able to defeat the other.

Having full confidence in himself, Qi Ya did not want to retreat any longer. He abruptly halted his steps, and with a loud bellow, the Qi-Jin in his body gathered rapidly to surge into his right hand, where he then thrust out his right palm in a fierce strike towards Luo Lang.

"Alright!" shouted Luo Lang, seeing the other stop running and choosing instead to circulate his Qi to fight him head on. His long ready right fist punched out powerfully at the opponent.

This move of Luo Lang's seemed to go against Ling Lan's instructions at the start, but Luo Lang did not think he was doing anything wrong. He had managed to take the initiative and take control of the flow of the fight from the start due to the opponent's underestimation of him. Plus, the other had attacked from an emergency stop, so the power he could put into his blow would definitely not be as substantial as his own. Thus, Luo Lang felt that even if he met this blow of the opponent's head on, he would not lose, and may even have an overwhelming advantage.

And so, a fist and a palm crashed into each other, sending a muffled whump ringing out across the stage. With Luo Lang and Qi Ya at its centre, a powerful swirl of wind swept out over the surrounding audience.

However, there were Qi-Jin absorbing facilities around the edges of the stage, hence the students sitting below could not feel any of this invisible force. Still, even so, everyone knew that this strike was certainly not as simple or casual as it appeared to be.

The two fighters were frozen in place for several seconds — three perhaps, or maybe just one — and then the two of them were abruptly sent flying back from their stalled state. Luo Lang had been on top to begin with, so when he was sent flying, he immediately flipped into a somersault to dissipate the rest of the force, and then landed soundly on the ground.

Meanwhile, Qi Ya retreated a whole three steps before finding stable footing again, though his face flushed deeply. His complexion quickly returned to normal, but from the perspective of those keen of eye, Qi Ya most likely lost out by a hair in this collision.

The spectating students looked at one another — they had not expected what they believed would be a one-sided fight to be such a close fight instead. It was to the extent that in that last strike, the 1st year Luo Lang had vaguely gained the upper hand, while the 5th year Qi Ya seemed to have lost out in comparison.

Some new cadets became exhilarated watching the proceedings. Even though they had hoped in their hearts that the new cadets would be able to achieve something in the fights, upholding their pride, they knew reality would not be that easy. Furthermore, Luo Lang had seemed unbelievably scrawny, making them lose all hope from the start. Who could have expected that that youth who was as pretty as a picture on the stage could actually fight so well, going at it so fiercely from the beginning, and then even suppressing the opponent in this last encounter ... Could it be that the New Cadet Regiment's arrogance in accepting the wagered fight was not purely out of stubborn pride, but because they truly had the strength to back them up?

Tentative hope rose in these new cadets' hearts. If the New Cadet Regiment really won ... they, as freshmen, would undoubtedly have a better refuge. Compared to those pre-existing factions, the New Cadet Regiment which was made up of freshmen like them was certainly much more acceptable in their minds.

Thus thought the spectating students — and even on Leiting's side, quite a few faces had shifted slightly. After all, Qi Ya was their third strongest fighter; if he lost ... the situation would not look good for Leiting.

Seeing the disquiet of his companions, one of the strongest fighters in Leiting quietly explained some things to the people around him. Consequently, those people relaxed and began to smile in relief.

"Luo Lang, is still a little ways off³," Ling Lan sighed as she shook her head lightly.

Chapter 250: Innate Talent Activated!

Luo Lang may have had the upper hand for the entire fight so far, but the difference in their skill levels made this blow of Luo Lang's utterly ineffective. In contrast, although the opponent may appear to have taken a blow, Luo Lang's stride was broken, causing the two fighters to once again return to the equal ground they were in at the start.

Ling Lan could see that Luo Lang himself, within the fight, had come to understand that his advantage had been lost after that strike, which was why he had not chosen to press his attack. Instead, he cautiously chose to defend, and the two fighters once again faced each other in a standoff.

Standing to one side, Tang Yu saw Luo Lang's actions and nodded silently. This 1st year student did not become reckless and overconfident due to his advantageous position at the start. He could clearly sense the change in the flow of the situation, quickly shifting to defence when he saw his advantage disappear. It was clear to see that he was level-headed and rational — he was definitely a good seedling to be a mecha warrior.

The more Tang Yu observed Luo Lang, the more he liked him. Right now, the only thing holding Luo Lang back from becoming an excellent mecha operator, was his scrawny frame. Tang Yu could not help but wonder whether he should go to his old friend who specialized in medicine, and take several tubes of their newly developed gene agent S-modification ... he had heard that its effects were even better than the special-class gene agents ...

As the referee Tang Yu's thoughts went off on a tangent, Qi Ya, who was across from Luo Lang, had rallied himself mentally to attack despite looking as insouciant as before. If Luo Lang impulsively chose to attack again by force, he might very well get an opportunity to injure him in one blow. Unfortunately, Luo Lang was extremely cautious — he did not act like Qi Ya expected. Qi Ya could not help but curse internally, frustrated at the overly cautious nature of this 1st year cadet.

Luo Lang's manner and actions let Qi Ya know that waiting for Luo Lang to attack first would be fruitless. There were only two paths before Qi Ya — battle Luo Lang in patience, where the one who lost patience first would attack; or Qi Ya himself could launch an attack now.

Of these two paths, Qi Ya almost unhesitatingly chose the second. This was because he did not want to continue dragging things out with Luo Lang, believing that this way of fighting was an insult to his skills. He believed that finishing off the other cleanly with a KO would reflect his true capabilities better, truly highlighting the dominance of Leiting.

Of course, choosing to initiate the attack was also because that previous clash had given him a clear understanding of the true level of Luo Lang's physical skills. In comparison to him, Luo Lang was obviously much weaker — he should have just entered the early stage of Qi-Jin. For Qi Ya, who exceeded his opponent by three minor levels, defeating the other should be a sure thing. Qi-Jin stage was unlike the stages before it, where the difference between every small level was not that significant, so an upset in those stages was indeed possible. However, at Qi-Jin stage, just the difference of one small level would be enough to completely overpower an opponent.

With this understanding as his support, Qi Ya leapt forward fearlessly, coming right up to Luo Lang in the blink of an eye. A powerful right fist flew at Luo Lang.

Luo Lang saw Qi Ya's attack and heard the sound it made as it cut through the air, and knew that he could not take this attack by force. At this moment, his thin and lanky body displayed a completely different combat style from that of someone with a stouter body. Luo Lang deftly shifted a step, lightly twisting his waist to one side, and the opponent's fist sailed by the left side of his body ...

This distance was controlled skilfully, almost calculating the other's attack range with pinpoint precision, resulting in the punch missing him by the barest of distances. Of course, the only thing Luo Lang could not control was that when he had avoided the punch, several strands of hair had not been able to swing away in time, and had actually been sliced off by the power of the wind-force behind the punch. They reluctantly bid farewell to their owner, drifting away wistfully in the air.

A loud 'BOOM' — Qi Ya's punch was heavy, forceful and unstoppable. It crashed into the floor of the stage, emitting a loud sound.

The floor of the stage actually began to crack due to this great force, the cracks spreading out like a web to the outer edges of the stage. Meanwhile, at the point where the fist had landed, a shallow ditch of about 30 centimetres had appeared.

Taking advantage of the lull, before the opponent could make another move, Luo Lang dashed to the other side of the stage with a quick spring of his feet, once again pulling away from Qi Ya. However, his expression was much more solemn than it had been before. Because he had sensed the power of the opponent's fists at close range, he knew even better now that if he were to be hit accidentally, his body would definitely be unable to take it — he would instantly be injured severely and be forced to withdraw. This was the difference between levels in Qi-Jin. Although the levels did not seem to be that far apart, the disparity in vigour and richness of one's Qi-Jin was like heaven and earth.

The damage to the stage made the freshmen spectating below the stage cry out in shock — was the match about to be stopped here? One strike had caused the stage to be damaged to this degree — how many more blows would this stage be able to take?

The older cadets saw the restlessness of the new cadets, and could not help but sweep disdainful glances at them. At that moment, they had forgotten how they had reacted the exact same way to a similar scene back when they themselves were younger.

Not only were the spectating freshmen stunned, even Qi Long and the others were astounded by this development. They had not imagined the arena stage of the combat hall of the military academy to be so fragile, actually unable to withstand one blow from an early stage peak level Qi-Jin. Li Yingjie was still relatively unbothered, but Wu Jiong and Qi Long began musing to themselves, wondering whether they should hold back some of their strength when it was their turn to prevent the entire stage from crumbling ...

Ling Lan saw the stupefied expressions of her companions, and sighed internally. She spoke up to explain, "This is highly advanced simulation technology, able to physically display the strength of a candidate on the stage. Everything will return to normal after 30 seconds."

She had barely finished speaking when the cracks on the stage began to slowly knit back together, becoming whole again in the end. This scene made the new cadets exclaim in wonder once more — who knew the military academy had actually combined simulation technology with the arena stage, allowing a fighter's strength and power to be manifested in this way, providing such visceral stimulus for the spectators.

Seeing this, Qi Long, Wu Jiong, and the others turned their heads to look admiringly at Ling Lan, silently thinking, *'Boss sure enough is Boss. So knowledgeable — nothing can escape his eyes.'*

Ling Lan accepted the idolisation of her companions with a placid face, but internally, she was sweatdropping. Luckily Little Four had given her a heads up in time, otherwise she too would have been one of the clueless horde! Of course, Ling Lan was also grateful for her ice-cube face, unmoving as a rock mountain. It had prevented this fact from being exposed, allowing her to maintain her grand image in her companion's hearts ...

Even as Ling Lan was interacting with her group, the fight on the stage continued. Qi Ya tenaciously launched attack after attack at Luo Lang, but they were all dodged by the other. At this moment, Luo

Lang was steadfastly obeying Boss Ling Lan's instructions — he did not meet the opponent with force, choosing to weave and dodge and drag things out. Just like this, several exchanges went by ... one side erratic like the wind, the other a centred well of power. One light, one heavy, they twisted and turned around the stage, leaving the audience gaping. The one-sided fight they had imagined at the start had never occurred; this fighting style of Luo Lang's would be able to sustain him for very long before he tired.

There began to be some unrest on Leiting's side. Some of the other fighting representatives had expressions of annoyance on their faces, thinking that Qi Ya was performing very shamefully, losing the faces of them seniors.

Qi Ya naturally knew about the commotion below the stage; he was angry and frustrated, but he had no good way of dealing with Luo Lang whose speed was clearly faster than his. The skinny Luo Lang's agility was obviously better than that of the average person. To catch hold of the other, either he had to tire the opponent out, or he had had to make him lose his cool ...

Seeing the easy way the other was breathing, Qi Ya knew Luo Lang's energy level was very sufficient. In fact, Qi Ya suspected that this irritable flea would still be jumping around even after he himself ran out of energy. Moreover, Qi Ya had no intentions of waiting any further — he wanted to defeat the other quickly to defend his honour. In that case, he could only make the other lose his composure ...

An evil grin turned up the corners of Qi Ya's lips. As he brushed by Luo Lang again, he mocked, "You trash who only knows how to dodge, did you use your body to trade for the right to be a candidate for this fight?"

Luo Lang's pretty face flushed red as he dodged once more. He controlled the fires of rage in his heart — he knew the other was only saying this to rile him and make him lose his cool. He must not fall for it ...

Qi Ya advanced once more, his two fists attacking in an endless stream. Luo Lang weaved left and right, narrowly avoiding getting hit several times by the cutting winds of the opponent's punches. Still, even so, several gashes appeared on Luo Lang's uniform, revealing his exquisite ivory skin.

"As expected, you really have excellent attributes. No wonder your regiment commander was beguiled by you, promoting you without concern for anything else." Qi Ya swept a suggestive glance at the revealed skin.

"Shut up!" Luo Lang screamed. He could tolerate an insult to himself, but he would not allow anyone to insult his Boss Lan!

"Shut up? Why should I? If he can do it, then he should not be afraid of others speaking of it!" From Luo Lang's reaction, Qi Ya could tell what Luo Lang's weakness was. He laughed even more wildly as he said, "I want to tell everyone that your regiment commander is gay, that is, a brokeback¹ ..."

Luo Lang's face flushed crimson, his eyes beginning to turn bloodshot in his anger. He continued to dodge, but his body began shaking uncontrollably ...

"Haha, I've hit the nail on the head, right?" Qi Ya added venomously, and then his long-prepared right leg whipped out in a side kick ...

Everyone thought Luo Lang would dodge when, right at that moment, Luo Lang suddenly froze, his head bowed. Just as Qi Ya's savage side kick was about to strike Luo Lang's body, Luo Lang's left hand reached out and actually grabbed hold of Qi Ya's right ankle.

The spectating Qi Long abruptly stood up, his face paling as he said, "Not good!"

This sudden action made Wu Jiong and Li Yingjie look over in bafflement, but the exclamations of the rest of the audience quickly pulled their attention back to the stage. They assumed Qi Long had reacted that way due to his concern for his companion; only Ling Lan knew what that was about. She tugged at Qi Long and warned him quietly, "Keep it down!"

Realising where he was at, Qi Long quickly sat down again, but his complexion remained pale and wan. He leaned towards Ling Lan's ear and said softly, "Boss, Luo Lang activated his innate talent." He had not expected Luo Lang to throw caution to the wind and activate his innate talent on the stage. What in the world had the opponent said to anger him so?

Although Qi Ya had spoken very softly, so the spectators had not been able to make out what was said, from the constant movement of his lips, and Luo Lang's increasingly troubled expression, it was certain that he had said something which had provoked Luo Lang. Otherwise, Luo Lang would not have disobeyed Ling Lan's orders and choose to activate his innate talent.

Ling Lan replied levelly, "I know!"

With that statement, Ling Lan's aura became unbelievably cold and forbidding, with even a trace of killing intent seeping out. Fortunately, this air of Ling Lan's came and went in the blink of an eye, so other than the few people near her, no one else sensed anything. On the stage, Tang Yu cast a dubious glance in her direction, but he quickly turned back in bewilderment to the fight on the arena stage.