

Crossing 361

Chapter 361: Kings of Massacre!

Ling Lan's curiosity was piqued because, thus far, she had yet to come across a single person (or group) who had hit upon the same idea as she had but acted before she did. She did not notice any human figures within the storehouse, and neither was there any sign of mecha having been flown out. Thus, Ling Lan concluded that the other party was very likely still inside the secret room.

Ling Lan wondered why the other party had disregarded the advanced mecha all around them, instead choosing to enter that secret space. Was it that the secret space had some secret stashed within it? Could it be that it contained a special-class mecha or something even superior to that?

Even though Ling Lan felt that it was impossible for the military academy to possess combat mecha as terrifying as ace mecha, Ling Lan's curiosity could not be satisfied without taking a peek at what could be inside.

Since she was alone, Ling Lan unsealed all restrictions on her speed. If anyone had been next to her, they would have sensed that Ling Lan's movements were as fast as the wind. There was no way an average person's vision could keep up with her speed; all they might have sensed would have been a shadow flickering before their eyes, but in the next second, she would have disappeared without a trace.

Very soon, Ling Lan arrived at the end of the mecha hold, and the sight that greeted her was that of a broad wall. The average person arriving at this point would conclude that this was the end of the line and turn back. Ling Lan, however, strode forward and put her hands on the wall. Then, she bent her legs into a half-squat and, locking herself firmly into a horse stance while sinking her qi into her core, she forcefully moved both hands towards the right. On the petite forearm that peeked out of her sleeve, there appeared, shockingly, several bulging veins, a testament to the degree of force that Ling Lan was applying.

The 'ga-ga-ga' of gears locking teeth could be heard as the whole expanse of white wall was unbelievably shifted over a metre by Ling Lan through brute force, revealing a tunnel into which Ling Lan immediately darted. With a clap, the white wall returned to its original position, looking once more like the unremarkable, seamless white wall it had appeared to be at the start.

"How dare they break the electric motorization systems inside!" Ling Lan exhaled as she darted into the tunnel. She only had to exert that much force because whoever had entered before her had dared to sabotage the electric motorization systems, probably to avoid detection. This had left Little Four no opportunity to put his skills to use, so relying on Ling Lan's brute force had been the only way to enter. If not for the fact that she had achieved half step to Domain, attempting to displace this entire stone wall weighing over 100,000 catties would have really been a tall order.

However, after entering the tunnel, Ling Lan's progress was exceptionally smooth, as the sabotage of the electric motorization systems had left the few other traps useless. After a minute and a half of quick running, Ling Lan came to the end of the tunnel where she was greeted by the sight of a tall, wide, thick and heavy steel slab of a door. Just as Ling Lan picked up her pace to get to it ...

“Regiment Commander, are we really going to activate these mecha? If we’re discovered by the military academy surveillance team, we’re gonna get severely punished, possibly even expelled from the academy!” A shrill, panicky voice coming from the other side of the door was clearly projected into Ling Lan’s ears.

Owing to the extreme destructive power of mecha, the military academy had always regulated them strictly. Unless a situation called for the need to pilot one, students were normally forbidden from interacting with the mecha freely. Now that the other side obviously intended to seize the opportunity amidst the chaos to take possession of mecha, the timid among them would inevitably be on tenterhooks.

Ling Lan instantly stalled her footsteps upon hearing this, her expression becoming wary. It looked like it was not going to be one person or even a few, as she had imagined, but a whole crowd to match her group in numbers.

“The military academy sounding the emergency alarm signalling an attack with no warning, that’s not normal. To get a handle on the situation, I sent Xiao Yan to steal the ground troops’ intelligence ... you’ve all seen the information, it’s grim out there. It could well be that a huge fight is about to go down. If we can’t pilot the strongest mecha here, what’s likely is that we will become the enemy’s cannon fodder and I absolutely will not stand for it,” said a cold, self-important voice. It was evident from the speaker’s steely tone that they felt extremely pessimistic that the outcome of this battle would favour the ground troops.

“When that happens, let alone the academy surveillance team, not even the military academy is guaranteed to survive,” the frigid voice continued to explain.

The others fell silent at this speech, neither denying nor affirming it. It seemed like the military academy’s strict rules still filled many of them with dread.

Just then, a boorish voice complained, “The regiment commander brought us here because he trusted us, and what he’s saying is the plain truth. Don’t you get it? If things go south, the regiment commander will bear even greater responsibility. If the regiment commander’s not even scared, what are you all afraid of? Anyways, I don’t want to die, nor do I want to become a captive of the enemy. Regiment Commander, I’m right behind you.”

At the end of these words, many of them cheered loudly, quickly raising the morale and quashing the others’ doubts. Ling Lan wondered, was the speaker just a mouthpiece for that regiment commander? Or did they truly put that much faith in their regiment commander?

“Since no one has any further objections, let’s get into the mecha right away. We leave from this launch port in three minutes,” the cold voice ordered without giving the others another chance to voice their opinions.

“Yes, Regiment Commander ...” they responded in chorus, but then one voice abruptly raised a question. “Regiment Commander, aren’t you going to inform Boss Huo and the others to join us?”

This gave Ling Lan a surprise; it seemed that these people were very likely of the Leiting Mecha Clan, which would make their regiment commander none other than the infamous Thunder King.

If it turned out to be that Thunder King ... Ling Lan's gaze cooled slightly. It looked like she would have to be more cautious when she fought Leiting in the future. This Thunder King was an astute judge of circumstances. She had only dared to act because she had confirmation from Little Four. However, the Thunder King could only have acted after the alarm had sounded, boldly ordering his subordinates to steal the ground troops' intelligence, and then using extremely sparse information to determine the possible outcomes and taking the appropriate course of action ... even Ling Lan would hardly dare to be as decisive as the Thunder King without Little Four's help, possibly needing to ponder it a little more first. Ling Lan sensed the difference between herself and the Thunder King in terms of judging circumstances, acknowledging her inexperience.

As expected, one who could dominate the First Men's Military Academy was no fool! Ling Lan's gaze took on a sombre cast. The Thunder King, whom she had not thought much of previously, was now firmly noted by her.

"What we're doing now violates school regulations, so naturally the fewer who know about it the better. We're all people most trusted by Boss ... If anyone else is informed about this, if news of it leaks by accident and the academy surveillance team finds out, they will come and stop us. When that happens, not a single one of us will get mecha." This answer to the earlier question did not come from the cold voice, but the boorish one which had first supported that leader.

The Thunder King did not explain anything, appearing to tacitly agree with what the boorish voice had said ... Ling Lan could not help but furrow her brow briefly, disapproving of the Thunder King's response. Ling Lan believed that if a team was unable to endure through thick and thin together, it would only breed distrust and envy amongst themselves — by then there would be no need for such a team. If it couldn't be helped, one could take the blunt approach, and take those who were deemed unfit to be in the team and expel them ... A leader allowing such distrust and envy to develop within his team, in Ling Lan's eyes, was a failure.

The explanation given by the boorish voice must have been accepted by the rest since no more talk was heard after that. Very soon, Ling Lan heard the sound of several mecha activating. Ling Lan listened closely for a while, then cross-checked Little Four's notes on the mecha and largely concluded that the mecha activated by these people were all special-class mecha.

Special-class mecha, despite being only half a level above advanced mecha in name, were as different as the sky from earth compared to advanced mecha due to this simple half-level. Operators of special-class mecha were already at the level of mecha master, whereas operators of advanced mecha could only be mecha warriors. If they were to enter a squad, an advanced mecha warrior's highest military rank would be senior captain while a special-class mecha master's rank would at least be major.

The knowledge that there were actually special-class mecha behind the metal door made Ling Lan secretly happy. Being able to operate a slightly better mecha would allow her to more fully realize her combat ability, which was undoubtedly the best for her.

Even in her delight, Ling Lan did not forget to count the number of mecha that had been activated, eventually discovering that there were, in fact, no small number of men inside; fifteen by her estimates. Yet Ling Lan could not be certain if the Thunder King was among them. After all, it was rumoured that

the Thunder King was already at ace level ... Ling Lan was unsure if this military academy's storehouse contained the battlefield's Kings of Massacre — ace mecha.

Just then, a mecha that sounded different from the rest was suddenly activated. Hearing that, Ling Lan's expression was initially of surprise, followed quickly by joy, because she could tell that this new mecha activation sound most likely belonged to an ace mecha.

Could it be that, inside this military academy's storehouse, there really were ace mecha, the battlefield's Kings of Massacre? At this thought, Ling Lan's heart surged. Even Ling Lan could not resist the temptation of a chance to operate the battlefield's Kings of Massacre.

Ling Lan's flare of excitement lasted for only a moment. She quickly calmed down and began withdrawing her presence, even activating her innate talent to cause her body to become as cold as ice, practically wiping out her original body heat.

Ling Lan had not forgotten that there were many kinds of automatic scanning features equipped on an ace mecha, one of which was thermal scanning. Once anything was discovered by the mecha, it would proactively warn the operator. This was also one of the reasons why ace mecha could become the kings of the battlefield.

Of course, the various fittings on imperial mecha and god-class mecha were definitely more powerful than those on an ace mecha, but it was precisely because they were too powerful, their destructive power too terrifying — it was said that even one attack by an imperial mecha would be able to turn an area several hundred li in circumference into a wasteland, not to mention the capabilities of god-class mecha which represented the ultimate might of a nation — that unless it was a matter that shook the very foundations of the country, they could only be used as a force for deterrence and would not really be deployed as the main force in a battle ...

All this was because even though humans had built weapons with such terrifying destructive power, they were also frightened of the weapons' might at the same time. In order to restrict other nations from deploying these terrifying weapons, all galactic nations in the human world entered into an agreement that, on the battlefield, it was absolutely forbidden to allow those ultimate weapons above the level of ace mecha to show up ...

This was why ace mecha were known as the Kings of Massacre — they were the most powerful weapons allowed on the battlefield. It could be said that the number of ace operators and the extent of their abilities would determine the final victor or loser in a war.

Chapter 362: Thunder King Qiao Ting!

Ling Lan carefully controlled her body temperature. At this time, she was quite grateful that her innate talent was Ice Affinity, allowing her to make her body temperature match the temperature of the surroundings or even lower. If she had not had this ability, her only option right now would have been to retreat out of the tunnel immediately.

"Eh?" A surprised cry suddenly rang out from behind the metal door. This gave Ling Lan a fright as she thought she had been discovered.

This surprised cry was even louder than the voices of conversation prior to this. Ling Lan knew that the other must have been using the speakers of the mecha so that all the other mecha masters could hear him. This was the reality without the presence of cheat code Little Four — members from different battle clans could not use the clan-specific comms channel to communicate. This proved that these people were not all from the same battle clan.

“Regiment Commander, what’s wrong?” Hearing this startled cry, everyone inside the room reflexively paused, and someone soon spoke up to ask.

“I found that there is quite a crowd now in the advanced mecha section at the front of the storehouse. Quite a few mecha have already been activated,” their regiment commander replied. It looked like after he successfully activated the ace mecha, he had discovered the situation in the mecha storehouse under the sensor prompting of the mecha A.I..

“Actually having the same idea as us? Looks like quite a few people have come to the same conclusion as you, Regiment Commander, not optimistic about the outcome of this battle,” someone suddenly exclaimed.

“The military academy is a lair of crouching tigers and hidden dragons 1 — for someone to think the same as me is not unusual,” responded the regiment commander dispassionately. This injected explanation from the side dampened his curiosity quite a bit. Moreover, those others were only within the mecha storehouse area and had only gotten as far as the advanced mecha section at most. It could be imagined that these people were not very high level in terms of mecha operation. If they were already at the level of special-class operator, they should have managed to make their way to this area.

With this thought, the regiment commander tossed his discovery of these people to the back of his mind. He paused and then asked those present, “Are you all ready? If everything is ready, I’ll activate the launch port tunnel now.”

“Regiment Commander, I’m OK!”

“Regiment Commander, I’m ready.”

“Regiment Commander, everything is good to go.”

Soon, there was a messy chorus of responses. Seeing everyone give the OK, the regiment commander activated the launch port.

Ling Lan sensed that the regiment commander’s attention was no longer on the outside, so she silently asked Little Four whether he could project the situation inside to her. Little Four told her it was no problem — Ling Lan’s current level of spiritual power was enough to support this distance of long-range infiltration. Not long after, a video feed of the situation inside was displayed in Ling Lan’s mind-space.

Inside the metal doors, it was still an extremely vast mecha storehouse. To both sides of the doors were many neat rows of black mecha. Although there were some minor alterations in particular spots on these mecha, overall, they were largely the same. Each mecha gave off a strong sense of fearsome power.

Ling Lan did a rough count. Each side had about 80 mecha, so there were about 160 mecha total. It could be guaranteed that in the entire academy, there were actually not that many students who had

already achieved special-class operator status. Based on a distribution of one person per mecha, there would at most be 160 people or so. Besides, the military academy would of course prepare a few extra just in case. Otherwise, if someone suddenly advanced to special-class operator status, without a special-class mecha to match, the title of First Men's Military Academy would truly become a joke.

Ling Lan was now well aware that this type of black mecha that differed from the standard Federation mecha was actually the Federation's special-class mecha. At special class, mecha would begin to display signs of personalisation. This was because at this stage, the skills and techniques of operators would shift from the original regulated movements into their own personalised style of operation. However, at this point, their style would not be properly developed yet. As regular advanced mecha could only accept standard commands, they could not satisfy the demands of an operator's personalised operation style. Yet an ace mecha provided too much freedom in its controls that a special-class operator who had just stepped into the world of personalised operation would not be able to handle it well.

Under these circumstances, in order for these exceptional control seedlings to smoothly break through and advance to ace mecha master status, after much dedicated research and design by several generations of mecha engineers, the Federation finally created this sort of special-class mecha to bridge the gap between advanced mecha and ace mecha. Thus, special-class mecha were not completely outside the scope of standardised mecha, but at the same time, they also possessed some individualistic characteristics like ace mecha.

Back during the assassination attempt on Ling Lan when she was six, that team of black mecha which had appeared to help her was in fact a Federation mecha battle clan of special-class operators. However, up till now, Ling Lan still had not been able to find out who it was exactly who had helped her.

Ling Lan saw these tall and mighty mecha, and she understood why this secret storehouse needed to be installed with a launch tunnel of its own. The passage she had entered to get here did not have enough height or room to let these mecha walk out.

Of course, what made Ling Lan drool with want was not these mecha; right across from the metal doors stood a row of just five mecha. Each of these mecha looked different, possessing clearly unique characteristics of its own. One of these mecha had already been activated at present and had been piloted out of its original fixed secured dock.

Ling Lan saw a long-range laser gun, which was about two-thirds the mecha's height, slung across the mecha's back, as well as a standard beam gun equipped on the mecha, and she knew that this mecha was primarily a long-range attack type.

That aside, the launch port the other had mentioned was to the right-hand side of the metal doors. There was a circular tunnel there with enough space inside to accommodate four mecha. Right now, the access door to the tunnel had been opened. A special-class mecha at the forefront walked through it and the access door was quickly shut. When the three warning lights over the door all turned green, a deep, dull sound could be heard ...

"Boom!" Ling Lan felt a strong shockwave rush over her where she stood. Immediately afterwards, the mecha inside the launch port was launched high up into the air by a large force, springing up several dozens of metres in one shot. In the instant it was launched into the air, the mecha's engines began to

roar. Borrowing the force from the launch and the power of its thrusters, the mecha instantly shot out from the launch port tunnel to fly above the military academy ...

It looked like the people of Leitang were already familiar with this type of launch system. They walked into the port one by one to be launched into the skies. The final one to enter the port was the regiment commander controlling the ace mecha. Recalling the rumours she had heard a while back, Ling Lan could already confirm that this regiment commander must be the Thunder King Qiao Ting who had successfully advanced to become an ace operator.

For some reason, after Qiao Ting had entered the tunnel, right when the automatic doors were about to close, the head of his mecha abruptly turned to look in the direction of the metal doors. This unexpected action startled Ling Lan — had the other sensed her?

Very soon, the automatic doors slid shut and she could no longer see the silhouette of the mecha. As expected, a few seconds later, Qiao Ting was launched out of the port like the other special-class operators. Only then did Ling Lan relax.

Still, just to be sure, Ling Lan quietly waited for about a minute before approaching the metal door. Little Four checked and found that the electrical systems of this metal door had not been tampered with. Perhaps after reaching this point, the other party had been afraid that the launch port inside the room would be affected if they destroyed the systems here. Thus, they had chosen to enter normally without applying brute force.

As long as the systems were working normally, Ling Lan could just walk in easy as a breeze with the help of the cheat code Little Four. As she passed by the special-class mecha, she found herself feeling somewhat regretful that none of the New Cadet Regiment members had reached the level of special-class operator. She suddenly thought of that special-class operator friend of the leopard — if he joined her team, then he would have been able to come operate these mecha.

Ling Lan's aim right now was naturally not the special-class mecha; her objective was those few ace mecha. Being able to operate an ace mecha in real life was something Ling Lan had been dreaming of. Back then on planet Demonbeast, the mecha Ling Lan had been operating was actually not an ace mecha but a special-class mecha.

In the military, special-class mecha were lumped together under the term ace mecha, with only the words 'secondary' or 'substitute' added to the title. Those three 'ace' mecha she had finished off then had also only been special-class operators of Twilight. After a period of baptism in war, special-class operators would gradually form and perfect their individual operation style and techniques, which would allow them to officially ascend to ace operator status. This was why they were called 'substitute aces' by the ground forces.

It should be said that Ling Lan was very lucky that she had not truly encountered true ace operators back then. Otherwise, with her barely formed operation style, even if she had only been up against one battle-experienced ace operator, she would have been hard-pressed to win, not to mention that she had been up against three mecha operators back then.

Since Qiao Ting had taken one of the ace mecha, there were only four mecha remaining. Still, Ling Lan was transfixed by them, staring at them with abnormal excitement.

Aside from appearing humanoid like the other mecha, the leftmost mecha had two wings sprouting from its back at a diagonal angle. Based on Ling Lan's knowledge, this should be a transformer-type mecha. In other words, it would become a humanoid mecha at close range, and transform into a flying mecha when attacking at long range. It could be considered one of the more balanced mecha.

This mecha's specialty was speed. None of the other ace mecha here would be able to match it in terms of speed; even its close-range combat manoeuvres would be based on speed. However, what would showcase its speed best was when it transformed into its aviation mode. At that time, putting its entire power into it, at top speed, it would be able to draw away or pull in close in an instant.

This would guarantee that an enemy would be unable to ditch it regardless if they were close-range mecha or long-range mecha. At the same time, this speed was also a means of protection. Whenever its operator found themselves on the losing end, they would be able to pull away swiftly and escape from the opponent's attack range. If a common mecha were to meet this type of mecha in battle, it would be destroyed by it without having any chance to counterattack at all. As for its long-range capabilities, other than that long-range humanoid mecha Qiao Ting had piloted away, only the bestial mecha known as the might have some advantage against it.

The second mecha in the line-up was precisely the mecha that was just mentioned previously. It was the mecha that might overpower the transformer ace mecha by a head in terms of long-range attacks — the bestial ace mecha <King of Ground Combat

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This kind of mecha displayed the characteristics of its bestial form, possessing four thick and strong limbs. The power these limbs could produce were explosively strong — in close-range combat, its power would completely overwhelm humanoid mecha. As for what kind of bestial form it would take, that depended on the operator's preference. This mecha before Ling Lan was in the form of a kingly lion.

The only shortcoming of this bestial mecha was that it could not enter high altitudes or outer space — the thrust force of its engines would only allow it to fight at a maximum altitude of 50 metres. However, by abandoning high-altitude flight, its ground attack capabilities were greatly increased. It had powerful strength at its disposal in close-range combat — a humanoid mecha would have no way of standing up against the impact of its charges. The only thing capable of putting up some resistance were humanoid ace mecha which specialised in close-range combat.

With regards to long-range attack capability, two long-range laser cannons hung on the bestial mecha's back. The range of these long-range laser cannons far exceeded that of ordinary beam guns and long-range laser guns. Thus, when it came to long-range attack distance, before a humanoid mecha could attack it, this mecha would already be able to attack first.

Although this bestial mecha was very formidable in both close-range combat and long-range combat on the ground, hence its name of , there still were not many ace operators who would choose it. This was because, just like its title said, it was only the king of ground combat. Nowadays, a majority of battles were conducted in outer space or high up in the air. On these two fronts, this bestial mecha was significantly limited. The moment it entered those types of battlefields, it was certain to be crushed by humanoid mecha.

The third mecha in the line had been the long-range attack mecha that Qiao Ting had taken. Although its shooting range was less than bestial mecha's, it was greater than other types of ace mecha. Especially in a space battle, no mecha could compete with its long-range attacks, and at the same time, it was also second in terms of speed, only slightly weaker than the transformer mecha — no other mecha could compare. This type of mecha boasted the second-best survival rate (the first being transformer mecha) and it was also the second-best at accomplishing tasks. In terms of overall strength, this mecha ranked first.

The fourth mecha had obviously thicker limbs than other humanoid mecha. There were two swords attached to its back — one was a heat-based weapon, a beam saber with powerful energy, while the other was a cold weapon, a broadsword which could deal the strongest physical damage. Just by looking at it, one could tell that this was a mecha specialising in close-range combat, otherwise it would not have been equipped with two melee weapons.

Let's leave the beam saber aside for the moment and just look at that broadsword. With a blade width of about a metre and a centre thickness of about 50 centimetres, it was clear to see that this was definitely an extremely heavyweight cold weapon, unparalleled in its dominance. One swing of this sword would be able to break the outer shell of a mecha, as long as enough force was put behind it. Because the equipped defence for mecha in general were beam shields, the defence threshold of mecha against firearms was the highest, while their defence threshold against cold weapons was the weakest. This was also why cold weapons had not been eliminated from the arsenal of mecha.

The close-range mecha was the strongest when it came to close-range combat. On the ground, the difference between its strength and bestial mecha was pretty much negligible. It only lacked long-range attack capabilities, but if it managed to get close in the skies or in space, victory was basically determined. Thus, a close-range mecha on the battlefield would oftentimes receive the most battle accolades. However, its survival ratings were also the lowest compared to other ace mecha. Still, as long as its operator lived, this type of mecha was also usually the main mecha type to advance to imperial level. For this reason, the Federation soldiers called it the !

Ling Lan fell deeply in love with this mecha at first sight — her eyes shone with an intense need to possess it. She desperately wanted to board this mecha. This was closely related to how much Ling Lan loved close-range combat; even in mecha, Ling Lan still preferred fighting at close range.

However, Ling Lan suppressed her bucking enthusiasm to look over at the fifth mecha. The fifth mecha was very strange. Mecha usually sported a suspension system on their backs for the purpose of hanging various long-range or close-range weapons. But this mecha did not have that. Its back was directly affixed with a thick and sturdy round metal object, somewhat reminiscent of a turtle's shell. However, this turtle shell had several additional pipes running across it horizontally and vertically, spread out across the shell like green veins. Ling Lan counted closely and found that there were three on each side, six pipes in total, while two more ran across the top, bringing the grand total of pipes to eight.

At first, Ling Lan was rather bewildered, unsure what kind of ace mecha this was. Luckily, Little Four swept in to help once more, instantly searching out a similar mecha type from his databases. Only then did they learn that this type of mecha was called an artillery type mecha. It could be said that this type of mecha was equivalent to a small mobile attack bastion. Its firepower was the most powerful among all the ace mecha. The eight artillery barrels could automatically adjust themselves to lock on to a target

and shoot. Basically, even an ace mecha would find it difficult to fend against the simultaneous fire of its eight barrels. This type of mecha was suitable for large-scale space battles. Each time it attacked, it would be able to annihilate a large batch of enemy mecha, hence it was also known as the .

But it also had a fatal weakness — because of its own burdened weight, its speed was the worst among all the ace mecha, making it very easy for an enemy to draw close. Once it let an enemy get close, especially if it were the which was an ace mecha just like itself that managed the feat, its end would pretty much be decided. Thus, once it moved, it needed another ace mecha or eight special-class mecha to accompany it and protect it. That is, those escort mecha would need to step in at critical moments to intercept other ace mecha from getting close.

Ling Lan decisively cast aside the fifth mecha from consideration. Ling Lan was not at all interested in this type of mecha which relied on its configuration and build to win; only those mecha that required control skill would make her feel challenged. Ling Lan decisively returned to stand below the fourth mecha. Leaping upwards, she used both her hands and legs at together to climb swiftly up the mecha and pulled the lever to open the cockpit.

A click rang out as the cockpit was opened, and an opening that would allow easy access to an adult was revealed. Ling Lan bent over to take a quick look inside before jumping in, where she then immediately sat down.

Ling Lan closed the cockpit doors and the lights dimmed. Immediately after that, Ling Lan pressed on the activation button of the mecha. The cockpit lit up once more, and at the same time, in the control seat, a safety belt popped up automatically to bind Ling Lan's body securely. This was to prevent the intense vibrations from piloting the mecha from harming the operator.

"A.I. activated. Checking in progress. Please wait! The estimated time for this check is two minutes. If emergency activation is necessary, please press the emergency activation button." The mecha A.I. followed its procedural settings, voicing out the notifications to alert the operator.

This was the first time Ling Lan was using this mecha, and the situation was not urgent, so she naturally chose regular activation. This time, she was going forth into a treacherous battlefield where the chances of survival were slim, so it was necessary to guarantee as much safety as possible. If she missed out on discovering any hidden problems on the mecha just because she wanted to save these two minutes, it would be too late for Ling Lan to cry later if anything happened.

Ling Lan was a calm and rational person; she naturally would not allow herself to be put into such a dangerous position. She patiently waited for the two-minute activation check to run its course, and only after confirming that everything was normal with the mecha did she begin operating it.

"Little Four, from now on, begin taking over for the A.I.. We must not let the computer retain any battle data of me in the following battle." Mecha possessed auto-saving functions. For one, its recordings were used as proof of an operator's battle merits, and two, it was also useful in helping mecha mechanics adjust and modify mecha based on an operator's habits to make a mecha more in line with the needs of its operator.

Of course, the recording function of the military academy mecha was to facilitate the instructors of the academy in checking the control skills of the cadets. If there were any flaws or weaknesses captured in the video, the instructors would be able to immediately correct the students and fix those issues.

Ling Lan knew very well that when the fighting ended and the military academy's monitoring systems came back online, it would definitely investigate these mecha which had been used in the battle. And these saved recordings of the fight would be the evidence they would pore over. Ling Lan did not wish to expose herself to the administrators of the academy. Even if it was just as Ling Xiao's son, she did not want that to happen.

Just imagine, even someone as powerful as her dad Ling Xiao had been unable to resist the schemes and backstabbing from within the military itself. If the military found out that Ling Xiao's son was also a mecha piloting prodigy like him, Ling Lan did not believe that those people who had set up Ling Xiao would be content to sit back. If by any chance they felt that they could not allow Ling Xiao and his child to continue growing, not only would she be in danger, Ling Xiao's safety may also be put at risk.

Ling Lan naturally knew that Ling Xiao was very strong, but she did not believe that Ling Xiao had enough power to fend against treachery from those who may be friends. This recent period together had let Ling Lan know that Ling Xiao was someone who treasured emotions deeply. Unless he was absolutely certain that the other had truly betrayed him, Ling Xiao would not actively suspect his friends.

This was a strength of Ling Xiao but also a weakness — even as Ling Lan respected Ling Xiao for it, she could not help but worry for him. Thus, till now, she still did not dare to let Ling Xiao know of her true strength and abilities. She was worried that in his joy, Ling Xiao would run and tell his so-called friends about it ...

At the heart of it all, Ling Lan was still concerned about the high-ranking person hidden within the depth of the military who had almost killed Ling Xiao. Being able to arrange all of that so naturally, without flaws, Ling Lan believed that only the few great marshals or the great generals would be able to do so. It may even be the result of several people working together ... so, even if Ling Xiao was extremely trusting of the First Marshal, Ling Lan was actually very suspicious of the other deep inside.

"Got it, Boss!" Little Four responded excitedly when he heard Ling Lan's instructions, as she had always restricted Little Four from interfering with matters of mecha; now, she was finally letting him help. This made Little Four feel that he was truly able to help Boss now ... did this mean that he was well-deserving of his position as number one follower now?

Little Four carried this smug happiness and excitement with him as he took over the administrative rights of the mecha's A.I.. The first step would be to screen the recording function of the mecha.

Little Four understood that his boss did not intend to turn off the recording system completely, otherwise Ling Lan could just have turned off the system herself without needing him to step in. Ling Lan had ordered him to get involved because she wanted to utilise Little Four's ability to create false images, to let the mecha indicate that no one had piloted the mecha. In other words, no one would be able to discover from the recording system that this mecha had ever been used in this battle.

Chapter 364: Prepare to Fight!

Having resolved this concern, Ling Lan decided that she would let loose in this battle. She sent out a mass text to all her team members, telling them that she was going to act alone from this point on. She tasked Qi Long with the responsibility of leading the team members into battle, and specially pointed out to him that if he were to encounter any issues he could not resolve on his own, he could look for Li Lanfeng and Han Jijyun for advice.

The partnership of Qi Long's brawn and Han Jijyun's brain had been intentionally cultivated by Ling Lan. However, when Ling Lan was sending off the text to Qi Long, she suddenly thought of Li Lanfeng. Over this period of interaction, Ling Lan had a good look at Li Lanfeng's abilities, and she found that he had some strengths Han Jijyun did not. If Han Jijyun could be said to be a wise man on the path of righteousness, then Li Lanfeng was the mastermind on the path of grey areas and side channels. Li Lanfeng would often think of some plans that Han Jijyun would never have considered. On the battlefield, there was no doubt that Li Lanfeng was more likely to keep the team alive.

At this thought, Ling Lan had decisively added Li Lanfeng's name to her instructions. Ling Lan believed that with both Li Lanfeng and Han Jijyun helping Qi Long to strategize, there would be no problem at all for the team members to survive this battle.

Li Lanfeng had only needed 2 to 3 minutes time to familiarise himself with the advanced mecha he had chosen. This was because he had already used real mecha before, a year ago. Thus, he was not troubled by the difficulties of adjusting from virtual mecha to real mecha like the other New Cadet Regiment members.

This was likewise for Li Shiyu; the difference between those with experience and those without was clearly evident at this moment. However, because the two of them were there, whenever Qi Long and the others had anything they did not understand, they could quickly receive an answer. This cut short the time they needed to figure things out by trial and error, allowing them to grasp the controls of their mecha faster than other people.

The team members received Ling Lan's message at almost the same time. Seeing that Ling Lan wanted to act alone, though Qi Long and the others had been mentally prepared for this, they still could not help but feel somewhat dejected. After all, with Boss around, they would feel that much more reassured.

Right after that, Qi Long conveyed Ling Lan's decision to Li Lanfeng, telling him that he was to work with Han Jijyun to help him arrange the team's battle strategy. When Li Lanfeng heard this, he was very moved but also felt deeply downhearted.

Ling Lan's decision let Li Lanfeng feel how much Ling Lan trusted him, letting him know that his rabbit sincerely cherished him. But he still felt crestfallen, because when it came time to truly go onto the battlefield, he still was not qualified enough to stand by Ling Lan's side. Obviously, this arrangement of Ling Lan's was in large part due to the fact that they were currently unable to keep up with him.

Perhaps, the rabbit's control technique was already at the level of special-class operator ... Li Lanfeng recalled his good friend Zhao Jun telling him that in a hidden room deep within the storehouse, there was a space dedicated for the storage of special-class mecha. Perhaps the rabbit had gone there. He felt a little regretful — if he had known in advance, he would not have been so stubborn about sticking with his foundational controls, refusing to advance to special-class together with Zhao Jun. If he had given up

on his principles then and advanced to special-class operator, perhaps he would have had the chance to fight by the rabbit's side in the present situation.

Inexplicably, every time Li Lanfeng was by the rabbit's side, he would feel very relaxed. The looming destiny of his that was pressing down and suffocating him felt less heavy in the other's presence. He even got the feeling that changing his fate was not as hopeless as it seemed. Having borne the burden of his fate alone for twenty years, he too had moments when he felt tired, unable to cope and desirous of rest, so he especially treasured and yearned for this feeling.

Li Lanfeng did not want to take even a half step away from the rabbit. He felt that if he let the rabbit leave his life once again, he would really be crushed by this fate of his.

"I must completely master these basic controls as soon as possible ..." Li Lanfeng's low spirits only lasted for a brief instant. He had very quickly remembered that the rabbit was very particular about the basic controls — looking at Qi Long's and the others' controls, it was clear that their foundations were all very solid. If he had chosen to take the shortcut back then, the rabbit definitely would not have reacted favourably. Li Lanfeng secretly tamped down on his insecurities and silently warned himself to never ever cross over into the forbidden territory of the rabbit ... However, in order to make up the gap between himself and the rabbit, Li Lanfeng decided to double the practice load of his already doubled practice load on the basics ...

While Li Lanfeng was tangled up in his own thoughts, the time limit Ling Lan had set for them to adjust to the real mecha crept up upon them. Wu Jiong and Li Yingjie, who had arrived a few minutes later than Qi Long and the others, also seized this last bit of time to activate their selected advanced mecha and tested them out to adjust properly.

Seeing that the time limit had elapsed, Wu Jiong controlled his mecha to make a hand motion at Qi Long's and Li Yingjie's mecha, asking whether they were to go out now.

Qi Long and Li Yingjie both responded with affirmative gestures. Just like that, the three of them led the thirty or so advanced mecha to head out of the mecha storehouse. When the mecha in the intermediate mecha section saw the regiment commanders and team leaders walking out in their advanced mecha, without needing any orders, they fell into line behind their respective team leaders to move forwards in an orderly manner.

Perhaps because 100 or so mecha were walking out of the warehouse at the same time, a minor quake actually ran through the ground as they moved. However, the fighting had not spread to this area yet, so there were no enemies around to notice and discover this batch of mecha walking out from the storehouse.

All the team leaders did not say much, only reminding their team members to choose their pre-set frequencies as their team comms channel to communicate. Before they had come here, they had already discussed what they should do.

Very soon, all of the mecha had arrived at the open grounds outside. Qi Long issued a command, and the various teams dispersed swiftly, each moving in a different direction.

As the only non-ex-Central Scout Academy team there, it was clear to see that Gao Jinyun's team was rather strong since they were able to keep a full team together. However, Gao Jinyun looked over at the

30 or so advanced mecha in the distance and then looked back at the intermediate mecha he was piloting, and he could not help but feel rather disheartened.

Gao Jinyun had been convinced to submit by Ling Lan's unfathomable strength and daring strategy during the operation to take over the ship of the military academy. After entering the academy, he was even more set in his determination to follow Ling Lan and had joined the New Cadet Regiment. Of course, part of the reason he had first joined was out of some minor intention to lean back against a big tree and enjoy its shade 1 . However, following the results of the waged fight with Leiting, Gao Jinyun had thoroughly thrown aside that little bit of selfish motive, deciding to follow Ling Lan with his full heart and soul.

Gao Jinyun was a proud person. Originally from Doha as well, although he had not been able to get into the Central Scout Academy, he had still been one of the strongest in his own scout academy. He thought that even if he could not compare to those few regiment commanders of the New Cadet Regiment, he should at least not be that much weaker than the other team leaders. But today, he was once again dealt a mental blow. Who would have expected those team leaders from the same scout academy as Ling Lan to be so strong? In such a short amount of time, they were now able to operate advanced mecha? (Gao Jinyun did not expect the other side to have broken past the barrier at 13 years old to enter the virtual world and begin learning mecha controls early 2 . This was definitely a beautiful misunderstanding.)

"Sure enough, there will always be a mountain higher 3 . I was still overconfident before." Gao Jinyun chuckled bitterly inside his heart. This experience had smacked him awake, clearing his mind — even though he had been the strongest in his own scout academy previously, here at the First Men's Military Academy which gathered all the best and brightest, he was still greatly lacking ...

However, Gao Jinyun would not just admit defeat like this. He decided that he would work harder to train up his mecha controls and chase up to those team leaders as soon as possible. Losing to Boss Lan, Gao Jinyun was resigned to it. Losing to those other regiment commanders, he could still justify to himself that those were after all the regiment commanders. But losing to those other people who were team leaders like him, Gao Jinyun could not pardon himself. He still remembered the grand ambitions he had back when he had managed to enrol into the First Men's Military Academy — he had been determined to become part of the most outstanding batch of people within the military academy.

Just as Gao Jinyun was brimming with fighting spirit, a sound startled him out of his thoughts ...

"Third Elder Brother, are we really going to operate mecha into battle?" One of the members of his team asked with a dreamy expression on his face.

"Godd*mmmit, don't use the external speakers, use the team comms." Gao Jinyun could not help but scold when he saw his team member making a mistake. Luckily, this was not yet at the war zone, otherwise this behaviour of his team member would absolutely have been akin to asking for death.

As they still were not a battle clan, they did not have an exclusive private battle clan comms channel protected by a password. Their so-called team comms was just them choosing to communicate on the same radio frequency without any security measures, so it would be very easily cracked by hackers. Still, the situation was urgent, so they could only make do for now.

Amidst the panicked noises of the team member in question, he finally switched his voice output over into the team comms channel. Only then did Gao Jinyun breathe a sigh of relief, but his brow soon scrunched up in worry again.

His team member's immature performance made him concerned. At this moment, he felt a little regretful for not removing one member whose control skills were still not very well developed just so he could keep his team in formation. Mind you, Ling Lan's original requirement was for team members proficient in controlling intermediate mecha and above. Only such members were qualified to follow him onto the battlefield and engage in mecha combat.

"Xiao Jiang, you aren't fully proficient in your control skills yet. Once we start fighting, first protect yourself well. Only attack from long-range when you find appropriate timings." After some thought, Gao Jinyun came up with this arrangement. Since he had already led his member here, he needed to take responsibility for him.

"Okay, Third Elder Brother." Xiao Jiang heard Gao Jinyun's arrangements and his nervousness abated. Honestly speaking, he really wasn't confident at all in piloting a mecha into close-range combat.

Gao Jinyun set up every member's position and then led his members in a sprint towards the battlefield. Knowing his own team was relatively weaker, Gao Jinyun did not bring his team to the dormitory district which was a chaotic mess, swarming with enemies. Instead, he led them in the opposite direction.

It should be said that there was nothing wrong with Gao Jinyun's decision. After all, the more chaotic an area was, the easier it was for accidents to happen. However, he just did not consider that those enemy mecha who appeared to be fighting alone were often those formidable combat experts filled with confidence in their own skills, which was why they dared to go off on their own to begin with ...

"Third Elder Brother, there is an enemy mecha ahead. Our scanner feedback indicates that it's an advanced mecha!" The team member in the lead who was responsible for scouting ahead suddenly warned the team.

Gao Jinyun had only received the news and had yet to make a decision when the enemy mecha noticed them and came charging over ferociously. Gao Jinyun knew that in terms of speed, intermediate mecha were no match for advanced mecha. If they chose to run, they were likely to be taken down one by one by the opponent. As such, they might as well fight with their lives on the line — perhaps by relying on teamwork, they might be able to bring down this enemy mecha.

These thoughts went by in a flash through Gao Jinyun's mind. He firmly declared, "Prepare to fight!"

Chapter 365: The Owner of the Giant Sword!

With tacit understanding and rapport, the team members got into their positions. With Gao Jinyun as point, they formed a diamond array, the beam guns in their right hands raised in unplanned synchronicity. In Mecha World, every time they fought, they had always worked together this way. Habit became nature — in the real world, in this first real battle, all of them chose to fight using this formation they were most familiar with.

"Fire!" shouted Gao Jinyun, taking the lead in pulling the trigger of his beam gun.

Six beams were fired altogether at the enemy mecha — if this were Mecha World, up against the mecha in the game system, at least one or two of their beams would have hit their target. But right now, the opponent they were up against was an advanced mecha warrior with a wealth of battle experience. Facing off against this type of straightforward beam shots, the veteran enemy mecha operator could dodge all six shots easily.

The opponent executed some graceful Z-shaped footwork, evading five of the shots in an instant. The only one he could not dodge was the shot by Gao Jinyun, because Gao Jinyun had fired his shot based on predictive movement trajectory. This was considered one of the more advanced techniques of intermediate mecha operators — he had calculated the reactions the enemy might make and then fired at a position the enemy was likely to move into to evade. Thus, the enemy mecha did not manage to evade Gao Jinyun's shot.

After evading five of the shots, the enemy mecha found that one beam was bloody irritatingly shooting at the position he had evaded into. As dodging required some adjustments, it was impossible to dodge once more, so the enemy mecha instantly activated its beam shield to bear the brunt of Gao Jinyun's beam attack. After that, it leapt aggressively at them, prepared to finish off these small fries at close range.

Seeing their first attack dodged so easily by the enemy, some of the team members could not help but become flustered. Gao Jinyun yelled, "Continue shooting!"

This cry calmed the team members down instantly. They listened to their leader and pressed down forcefully on the firing button in their hands. Beams poured in a torrent from the muzzles of their guns, hurtling towards the enemy mecha ...

This round of frenzied attacks was effective, causing the enemy mecha to become wary and choose to dodge, stopping his frontal attack. He could see that although this group of intermediate mecha's behaviour seemed rather green, their teamwork and rapport were unusually good. This frustrated him, and in the end, he could only choose to dodge.

Gao Jinyun's team witnessed as the enemy mecha took several back leaps while evading, swiftly pulling away from them. In the blink of an eye, the enemy mecha had been swallowed by the night, disappearing without a trace.

Seeing this, Gao Jinyun lowered his beam gun in confusion. Based on the opponent's abilities, no matter how fiercely they attacked, they would have been merely delaying the inevitable. If the opponent had wanted to push forwards anyway, he would have been able to, although that would have damaged the other's mecha somewhat ...

Could it be that the enemy was afraid of his mecha being damaged without there being anywhere to conduct repairs? Thus, worried that this would then affect him in combat later on, he had chosen to retreat? Gao Jinyun felt that this was a likely possibility. After all, this was their home territory.

"Third Elder Brother, I can't believe we actually sent him running. So that's all there is to an advanced mecha ..." commented one of the clueless team members.

"How could that be? If he really wanted to finish us off, he would have been able to achieve it with just some minor price. The opponent decided to avoid the confrontation probably because he did not want

to pay anything ...” rebuked Gao Jinyun. When he mentioned ‘not wanting to pay any price’, a flash of insight passed through his brain and his initial confusion was suddenly given an answer. He shouted anxiously, “Everyone turn on your radar! The enemy could still be here ...”

He had barely finished speaking when Gao Jinyun sensed a strong force rushing at them from his right side. His mecha was blaring an alarm as soon as it picked up the attack — even as Gao Jinyun yelled for his team members to run, he quickly operated his mecha to shove and kick aside two of his team members with a hand and a leg respectively.

A tremendous ‘boom’ rang out and the beam that had appeared so suddenly struck the activated beam shield of Gao Jinyun’s mecha. Gao Jinyun saw his mecha’s energy block exhaust half of its power to resist this attack and found himself both shocked and distressed.

It looked like the power of the advanced mecha’s beam gun was significantly higher than theirs as intermediate mecha. If an intermediate mecha’s beam gun struck another intermediate mecha’s beam shield, it would at most take off 20% power from the energy block of the shielding mecha ... there was no way so much power would be drained by just one shot like this. Gao Jinyun knew that if he was hit once more, his mecha’s power would bottom out. If that happened, he would only be able to helplessly await death.

Gao Jinyun had yet to get over his fright when the enemy attacked once more. However, this time, because the companions by his side had already dodged clear, Gao Jinyun no longer needed to just take the enemy’s attack by force as before to protect them. Although Gao Jinyun was only an intermediate mecha warrior, his control skills were still very solid and the best in his team. He operated his mecha to execute a figure-8 dodge, and the beam shot by just like that ...

However, this was just an attack the opponent was using to fool Gao Jinyun — just as Gao Jinyun evaded the beam, he heard his team members cry out in horror in the team comms, “Leader, watch out!”

Some of the team members with faster reflexes were pulling on the triggers of their beam guns rapidly, shooting desperately at the skies above him, as if attempting to prevent something ...

Gao Jinyun felt a sense of alarm. Right then, he could finally feel the threat coming down on him from above his head. He rapidly turned his mecha’s vision to look up and saw that the enemy who had vanished earlier was now right above his head, swinging a gleaming cold weapon down on him mercilessly.

If he had not moved from his current position, it would not have been impossible to avoid this attack, but his mecha was already in motion from trying to evade that second beam attack. Due to the problem of inertia forcing the completion of the motion, Gao Jinyun was unable to instantly stop his mecha to make an emergency change in direction and execute a new evasion manoeuvre. In other words, the present Gao Jinyun could only helplessly watch his mecha get cut down by the enemy.

Right at this critical moment, Gao Jinyun clenched his teeth and resolutely turned the defensive value of his beam shield up to its maximum. Even though beam shields had terrible defence against cold weapons, at this moment, Gao Jinyun could only gamble on this.

The cold weapon was about to strike Gao Jinyun's mecha when a loud 'clang' rang out. Gao Jinyun reflexively closed his eyes, waiting for the intense pain of severe injury to register with his body, but he soon found that he was feeling nothing at all.

With lightning speed, Gao Jinyun opened his eyes, only to see that the advanced mecha bearing down on him earlier was now already 10 or so metres away from him. Right then, the opponent had his head lifted slightly and was looking up at the air to the right of Gao Jinyun. The cold weapon in his hands that had almost slashed Gao Jinyun had been broken into two pieces. The break in the weapon was flat and even, as if having been sliced clean through by some overpoweringly sharp weapon 1 .

In the next second, Gao Jinyun found the answer. Twenty metres or so on his left side, a giant steel sword about ten metres tall and one metre wide was planted diagonally into the ground. It looked like the opponent's cold weapon had been sliced in half by the flying interception of this big sword. Seeing this, what else was there for Gao Jinyun to learn? He was sure that he had been saved by the owner of the giant steel sword ...

Not too far away from the giant steel sword, Gao Jinyun also saw his three team members reacting just like the enemy mecha, staring dumbly at the sky above him to his right ...

Realisation settled in and Gao Jinyun quickly turned his view to that spot in the air to his right and saw a mecha hovering there. At a glance, Gao Jinyun could recognise that this was definitely a Federation ace mecha. As a mecha operator whose ambition was to become an ace mecha master, Gao Jinyun was naturally familiar with all the various types of ace mecha available within the Federation . And how could he not recognise this he was so obsessed over?

In his joy and surprise, Gao Jinyun could not help but be a little puzzled as well. As part of the ace mecha troops, the strongest force on planet Newline, why weren't they protecting the students at the most critical area at the dormitory district? Why would this ace mecha be here at such a non-central fighting area?

"Ace operator! From the military? No, there is no military marking on your mecha, only the emblem of Huaxia's First Academy. If I'm not mistaken, you should be a cadet ..." That enemy advanced mecha operator suddenly turned on its voice speakers and began speaking to the ace mecha in the air. His Chinese sounded extremely awkward to the ear, his tone strange and stiff — it was clear to see that he was not a Huaxian.

The ace mecha in the air did not say anything to enlighten the enemy mecha; he only stared stonily at the other.

The enemy mecha did not care that the ace operator had not replied. He was only excited at his unexpected great luck in locating the mission target so quickly. If he could eliminate the other, when he returned, he would become a national hero.

Perhaps emboldened by the honour and glory within his grasp, the enemy mecha became very talkative. He continued to say, "As far as we know, in your Huaxia First Men's Military Academy, the only one who has advanced to ace mecha status recently is someone called Qiao Ting, alias Thunder King. He's another aberrant prodigy after Ling Xiao and could be said to hold the hopes of the masses ... this

person should be you!” At this point in his speech, the enemy mecha clicked his tongue regretfully, “Tsk, tsk, tsk, what a shame. There cannot be the emergence of another Ling Xiao in Huaxia.”

Gao Jinyun’s gaze flickered — was the ace operator who saved him truly the Thunder King? If so, he would truly be put in a tough spot. Gao Jinyun knew very well that when he had made the decision to follow Boss Lan, he would eventually go up against the Thunder King one day.

“Are you finished?” The ace mecha in the air finally spoke. His icy voice was so cold that it almost seemed like it could freeze everything in its surroundings.

When Gao Jinyun heard this voice, his irises contracted and his face was filled with disbelief ... but soon, his expression turned ecstatic, and his mouth involuntarily split open in a very wide grin. By the time Gao Jinyun managed to rein in his emotions to look up once more at the ace mecha in the sky, his eyes were filled with worship, respect, and admiration, along with joy and happiness that just could not be concealed.

“If I say that I’m finished, what are you going to do?” The enemy mecha’s tone was mocking. An ace operator who had advanced within a military academy, who had never seen real battle nor shed any blood, was, in his eyes, just like a newborn chick, nothing to be afraid of. He believed that, with his decade of battle experience, finishing off such a rookie would be a breeze.

Moreover, while they had been speaking earlier, he had already sent news to his team that the Thunder King Qiao Ting had been sighted here. Thus, his team members should be rushing here soon as well. It turned out that his talkativeness had just been a cover for him to find a chance to send his teammates a message. At the same time, it also worked to buy time so that his teammates could hurry over.

Chapter 366: An Awesome Boss!

“Since you’re finished, then let me send you to the afterlife 1 .” As the ace operator said this in an icy tone, his mecha suddenly moved, his left hand drawing the beam saber from its back as he leapt towards the enemy mecha, blade slashing.

The enemy mecha quickly operated his mecha to take several steps back, dodging the saber. Attacking from a higher vantage point, thus adding the force of gravity to its own strength, the ace mecha’s power right then was not something an ordinary advanced mecha could withstand. Even though the enemy mecha had some contempt for his opponent, he still did not dare to be too careless. An ace mecha was an ace mecha after all — the superiority of its mecha level was still something he needed to take into consideration.

However, the subsequent scene almost caused the enemy mecha to explode from anger. The other had charged down so rapidly from the sky, appearing as if about to attack, but the intended target had not been him at all. Instead, the other had been aiming for that giant steel sword planted in the ground behind him. The ace mecha swooped down fast and low when it was about 3 metres from the ground, and then it was back in the sky in an instant. At this time, that giant sword had been added to the ace mecha’s right hand.

The ace mecha’s right hand gently tilted the giant sword around, checking it, and seeming extremely pleased, he slung the beam saber in his left hand back onto his back and said, “Against you, just this

weapon is enough.” These words almost made the advanced mecha operator blow his top. To rely on this type of strength-based cold weapon as his weapon, it basically meant that, in the other’s eyes, he was not at all worthy of being called an opponent. It was implied that he was just cannon fodder that could be simply kicked around. On the battlefield, strength-based giant weapons were convenient weapons that could help mecha save power and at the same time be used to clear rabble soldiers swiftly and efficiently.

“You — you’re seeking death!” The advanced mecha only had time to say this much before he was interrupted by the other’s high-speed attack.

Perhaps because the ace mecha’s attack speed was too fast, or perhaps the advanced mecha was so angry that his reflexes were slowed — whichever the case, by the time the advanced mecha could react, the ace mecha’s giant sword was already right before his face.

Without any time to evade, he had no choice but to raise both hands and forcibly push them out towards the incoming blade. Following this push, the advanced mecha was sent stumbling a step back ...

“Screech ...” Where the two clashed, dazzling sparks were unleashed, almost blinding the spectating Gao Jinyun and his team. By the time their vision recovered, the two fighters had already swept by each other. The ace mecha was currently gripping the giant sword with both hands in a reverse grip, the tip of its sword seemingly pointed steadily at the advanced mecha’s back.

Meanwhile, the advanced mecha appeared unusually battered — its beam shield which had initially been glowing with a pearly white sheen was now dull and dim. Both the mecha’s arms had been chopped off, revealing stumps at its elbows. The exposed circuitry was still crackling with sparks, proving that this amputation had just occurred.

“How can this ... be possible?!” The advanced mecha warrior forced these words out, tone laced with agony and disbelief. Even for an experienced ace mecha, to finish him off should take up a little more time than this ...

“You talk too much ...” The ace mecha’s tone was as cold and indifferent as ever. With this comment, the ace mecha suddenly pulled back the giant sword whose point had been resting on the advanced mecha’s back.

While the ace mecha had stayed in position, Gao Jinyun and company had not been able to see clearly what was going on. But once the ace mecha pulled back its sword, everyone understood why the advanced mecha had reacted the way he did.

After the giant sword was drawn back, the advanced mecha which had seemed to only have had its arms chopped off suddenly had two strong jets of blood spurt out from both the front and back of its cockpit. Only now could Gao Jinyun and the others clearly see that the giant sword had not just been held at the advanced mecha’s back as they had thought but had already pierced through the advanced mecha warrior’s cockpit. Just looking at the width of that giant sword, they knew that the advanced mecha warrior inside the cockpit must have already been cut into two by the giant sword. There was definitely no chance of survival.

“... Luck is ... too bad ...” The advanced mecha warrior used up the last of his life to squeeze out these final four words.

His luck was indeed too bad, because the one he had bumped into was not that Thunder King Qiao Ting who did not have any true battle experience. Instead, his opponent was Ling Lan, who had been whipped and tormented into shape by the learning space for a whole sixteen years, who had grown up tested by countless experiences of dire life-or-death situations.

Seeing the ace mecha efficiently finish off that advanced mecha, a complicated expression passed over Gao Jinyun's face. However, he was soon overtaken by happiness, but just as he was about to say something, the ace mecha addressed him first.

"Gao Jinyun, your team is not suited for independent action. Quickly bring your team about two kilometres ahead to the right. Coordinates xx, yy 2 . We have other teams there. Go join them and then move together."

At these words, Gao Jinyun's expression turned serious and he replied, "Yes, Regiment Commander!"

"Also, after meeting up with that team there, leave this area quickly, the further the better. Don't come back for any reason." The initially calm tone of the ace mecha suddenly became stern, his tone carrying steel that could not be disobeyed.

Gao Jinyun was taken aback by these words and did not agree immediately. Instead, he asked seriously, "Why, Regiment Commander?"

"The enemy is about to come here soon. That enemy mecha earlier has most likely sent out news to his comrades that the Thunder King Qiao Ting is here." The ace mecha told Gao Jinyun about his speculations.

Gao Jinyun was also an intelligent person. The moment he heard this, he immediately understood what the ace mecha was planning to do. His expression changed drastically and he said, "Regiment Commander, for you to remain here and deal with them alone is much too dangerous!" Fighting here all by himself against so many enemies drawn here by the news was truly too reckless — for the sake of the New Cadet Regiment, he needed to stop the regiment commander.

"This is some rare practical battle experience, how can I miss it? Besides, as long as there are none of our people around, I won't have any worries holding me back. Even if I can't beat the enemy, with this mecha, running away will be an easy matter. You don't have to worry," answered the ace mecha.

Gao Jinyun's bellyful of protests was instantly left stoppered at his throat. He found that the other was speaking the truth — without them holding him back, it would be a piece of cake for his amazing regiment commander to escape from the attacks of a bunch of advanced mecha by relying on this ace mecha. Right then, Gao Jinyun had not considered the possibility that the enemies who would come might be ace mecha instead. If that was the case, even if his regiment commander was controlling an ace mecha, escape would be very difficult.

Gao Jinyun, who did not have much battle experience, did not think of this possibility at all. He felt that what his regiment commander had said made sense, and so agreed and quickly led his team members away from the area, heading swiftly towards the destination his regiment commander had given.

While Gao Jinyun had been speaking with the ace mecha, Gao Jinyun's team members were actually left utterly confused by the conversation. They all thought that the ace mecha was the regiment

commander of the Leiting Mecha Clan, Thunder King Qiao Ting, and so found it rather strange that their team leader was calling the other regiment commander. Still, the Thunder King was the regiment commander of the Leiting Mecha Clan, so it was not actually wrong to address him as such ... they just wondered when their team leader had built such a relationship with the Thunder King, actually getting the Thunder King to step up and save them, who even went so far as asking them to join up and cooperate with a team under him ...

Could it be that their boss had secretly betrayed Boss Lan to follow the Thunder King instead? More than one team member thought of this possibility, and even as they were overwhelmed with shock, they also felt rather indignant. This was because they still admired Boss Lan greatly. That regiment commander of theirs who was so powerful he could defeat a senior cadet from Leiting, the number one physical skills expert in the academy. They believed that as long as Boss Lan was given enough time to grow, he would definitely become the second Thunder King ...

“Third Elder Brother, how did you come to know the Thunder King?” Finally, one of the youngest team members could not hold back any longer, asking the question on all their minds.

Gao Jinyun was stunned. “Thunder King? I’ve heard of him but I don’t know him.”

“Then why are you following his orders to meet up with his people and work together?” That team member felt even more dissatisfied at this response. Was he still planning to deny it even now? Did their Third Elder Brother actually consider them as his brothers or not?!

“Follow his orders?” As Gao Jinyun was still worrying about whether Boss Lan would remain safe in the ensuing battle, he was not fully paying attention, so his responses and reaction to his team members’ questions were obviously a little offbeat and slow. Only when he heard this question did he finally sense something wrong about the scenario — it seemed like his team members had misunderstood.

Concentrating, he immediately understood the root of the misunderstanding. Gao Jinyun instantly smiled wryly and said, “You all think that that ace operator just now was the Thunder King Qiao Ting?”

“Wasn’t it? The only one who has advanced to ace operator in the academy, who else could it be but the Thunder King?” asked another team member, confused.

“Yeah, didn’t that enemy advanced mecha also say that he was the Thunder King?” someone else brought up more evidence.

Gao Jinyun heard what his team members had to say and sighed, saying, “Yes, everyone thinks that in the First Academy, only the Thunder King has advanced to ace. So no one would imagine that some people are born aberrant, as existences that you can never comprehend ... I can only say that we are very lucky to have followed the right boss. The New Cadet Regiment will definitely become one of the strongest factions in the military academy.”

Gao Jinyun’s words caused some of the team members to be completely bewildered, unsure what their team leader was trying to say. Those who were more quick-witted, however, immediately realised the meaning behind Gao Jinyun’s words. One of the ones who had figured things out blurted out in shock, “Third Elder Brother, are you saying that that ace operator ... is our regiment commander Boss Lan?”

This question rendered all the team members speechless. The team which had been moving along quickly yet in an orderly manner suddenly began to display some signs of disarray as some team members forgot about the controls in their hands. Two or three of the mecha bumped into each other, almost causing some of them to fall over.

However, though Gao Jinyun's team only consisted of intermediate mecha, the team members' control skills were still very solid. It did not take the team long to restore order and pick up their speed again as they continued to move closer to the coordinates they had been given.

After marching in silence for ten seconds or so, a team member finally began howling with pride and excitement in the team comms channel. "AAAAAAAHH, our regiment commander is actually an ace operator too! He's only a first year! A first year! Aaaaaaaaahh ...!" The loudness of his voice almost broke the eardrums of the other members, yet no one said anything to rebuke him, because what he was saying was exactly what they wanted to say too!

Hells, their regiment commander was just too awesome! It's just like their team leader had said — they had followed the right boss!

Chapter 367: Making Mischief!

It should be said that Gao Jinyun's team was truly very fortunate. In their critical moment of danger, Ling Lan had arrived in the nick of time.

Speaking of which, how had Ling Lan known to come here? When Ling Lan had completed her preparations in the hidden room, she had entered the launch port tunnel, and then, using the ejection force of the launch port, she had activated her engines to fly out of the storehouse into the air outside.

That moment was also coincidentally when Qi Long and the others of her team were leading the 100 odd mecha operators of the New Cadet Regiment out of the mecha storehouse. Ling Lan looked out at the entire military academy from her bird's eye vantage point and, using Little Four's ability, she opened up multiple channels showing different viewing angles in an attempt to get a comprehensive grasp of the entire battlefield.

Before determining for sure whether the people of the New Cadet Regiment could handle this battlefield, Ling Lan was not going to participate in the fighting directly. Her first responsibility in this battlefield was to ensure the survival of as many members as possible. Ling Lan was well aware that the mortality rate was most often the highest at the start of a battle. Once a fighter had adapted to the battlefield, they would not die so easily.

Ling Lan knew that if she wanted her party members to grow up and increase their strength, they would need to rely on their own strength to fight. Thus, Ling Lan would not act like an old mother hen and watch over her faction members till the end. Once they had safely gotten through this most dangerous period of adjustment, Ling Lan would let go completely and let her faction members fight to secure their own survival.

The existence of two Ling Lans, from her life experience of two worlds, had caused Ling Lan's personality to become very complicated and filled with contradictions. She had the gentle compassion and considerate heart of her previous world within her, but she also possessed the cold-blooded

ruthlessness and resolve forced upon her by the learning space of this world ... she could not bear for the innocent companions by her side to be sacrificed pointlessly, but she was also ruthless enough to leave her companions in a desperate situation so they would have an opportunity to break past their limits and find their own path to survival.

At this time, the fighting was already in full swing in the entire campus area on planet Newline. The battlefield which had initially started more than 10 kilometres away from the school had now spread all the way inside the military academy. The flames of war had been kindled at every corner of the military academy, with the dormitory district being the area which saw the most fighting. Almost half of the ground forces were tied up there, with an equally large number of enemy mecha attacking, almost more than half of the total invading mecha force.

Seeing this, Ling Lan's brow furrowed slightly. This situation proved that the objective of these mysterious enemies was indeed like she had deduced — they were aiming for them cadets. The only thing she could not be sure of was whether this sudden and unexpected attack was specifically targeting her team.

A cold gleam appeared in Ling Lan's eyes. If her team had truly been exposed, then she would have no choice but to let her dad step in. The 23rd Division would be the best protective umbrella for her team. Ling Lan believed that Ling Xiao would definitely be able to protect them till they grew up enough. At that time, they would no longer be helpless targets for the enemies to slaughter as they liked. If any enemies wanted to deal with them then, they would have to stop and consider whether they could afford to pay the price.

Ling Lan had just thought of a response plan if things really ended up developing into a worst case scenario when, before she could breathe out, her attention was drawn by one of the panels on her mecha's screen. It was the team led by Gao Jinyun — they were in danger.

As expected, it was not that easy for a team made up of only intermediate mecha to survive the battlefield. If they had had an advanced mecha to lead them, then this kind of situation where they were rendered helpless would never have happened ... Ling Lan decisively pushed all of her thrusters to send her mecha flying like a streak of light towards Gao Jinyun's team.

Although the mecha Ling Lan was currently piloting was not the fastest among all of the ace mecha, its speed was not just one or two times faster than an advanced mecha's but was in fact up to five or six times faster. Of course, Ling Lan could also push the speed to the maximum because her body was currently extremely tough, completely able to withstand the feedback force brought on by the movement of the mecha. If this had been her body from three years ago, things would probably not have been as easy.

And the results were just as we all were witness to — at that most critical moment, Ling Lan managed to rescue Gao Jinyun in the nick of time, and then finished off the enemy advanced mecha in one move.

After sending Gao Jinyun and company off, Ling Lan switched her mecha's battle mode from close-range combat mode to night-cloak assassination mode. This was directly reflected in the mecha's appearance — the energy beam shield of the mecha which had initially been glowing softly instantly turned dark as pitch. The entire mecha no longer emitted any bit of light, merging as one with the darkness of the night

...

The ace mecha which had been hovering in the air all this while vanished just like that. Ling Lan was not at all arrogant. Not knowing what level of enemies would be coming here, she would not stand here blatantly and be a convenient target for the enemies to attack.

A minute later, in the distant night sky, framed by the flames of war, the indistinct silhouettes of five mecha appeared.

“This should be the place. The coordinates M03 gave us is right around here.” The five mecha seemed to be unrelated, but they were in fact communicating with one another in their team commlink.

“Three minutes ago, M03 fell out of contact. I’m afraid something has happened to him. Everyone, be careful.”

“Yes, M01,” responded the other mecha in unison. M01 was likely to be the leader of this team.

Very soon, they discovered mecha M03 on the ground. They immediately flew over and landed. Three of the mecha stood guard as one of the remaining two mecha rushed over to M03’s side and squatted down beside the prostrate mecha to check on its condition. Meanwhile, the last mecha looked as if he were just standing around, at ease with his hands hanging loosely by his sides, not at all on guard, but an experienced mecha operator would be able to tell that the mecha’s current stance was actually the best stance for counterattacking. This was because two extremely short long-range power beam guns were strapped to the outsides of the mecha’s thighs.

Mecha equipped with this kind of weapon suspension system were known as sharpshooters. Just when you believed that the other had no weapons in their hands and let down your guard, the other could give you a fatal shot. Within 0.01 seconds, the other could draw the long-range beam guns from their thighs and strike your mecha’s vital points. This type of mecha had one other name, and that was ambusher!

“M01, M03’s mecha has been pierced through the cockpit by someone with one blow. M03 died instantly from the resulting injury ... based off the extent of damage on the mecha, they might have fought for quite a while before it happened. Otherwise, the arms of M03’s mecha would not have been chopped off. Preliminary speculation is that after M03 had his arms chopped off, he was then stabbed through the cockpit without being able to put up any resistance.” The mecha examining M03’s mecha quickly reported his analysis to M01.

“M05, do you know what weapon the opponent used?” The one operating the sharpshooter was the team’s leader, M01. After listening to M05’s report, he immediately followed up with this question.

“Based on the marks left on the cockpit, it’s an overbearing cold weapon. It gives off a very similar feel to the giant sword of the among the ace mecha.” M05 carefully examined the breaks at the front and back of the cockpit — those huge diamond-shaped holes inevitably brought to mind that giant and domineering weapon.

“Didn’t the intelligence report say that the mecha the Thunder King was proficient at was the long-range < King of Star Space 2 >?” M01 could not help but frown when he heard M05’s report. Although the two were both ace mecha, the control style of these two mecha belonged to completely opposite ends of a spectrum, with there being a great distance between the two mecha’s techniques. Typically, mecha operators who were proficient on one front were very unlikely to be able to operate mecha with a

completely different and opposing style. The long-range and the close-range fell precisely into this scenario of diametrically opposed control styles.

“Could it be that there is another ace mecha operator?” M01’s question caused M05 to jolt, and this question slipped out from his lips.

“We do not know what exactly happened here three minutes ago, so anything is possible,” replied M01 calmly. At the same time, he turned his radar scanner on to its maximum setting. Regardless of whether it was the long-range or the close-range, if they were ambushed by the opponent, things would not go well for their team.

Compared to M03’s arrogance, M01 was obviously much more cool-headed and self-aware. Facing an unseen enemy, he brought all of his focus to the fore, fearing an ambush by the opponent.

Suddenly, his radar picked something up. He instantly drew the two guns by his thighs to shoot frenziedly at a particular corner. Meanwhile, the three mecha standing watch at the edges of the scene reacted swiftly as well. They followed M01’s lead to aim at that spot and began to shoot their beam guns just as wildly.

After a round of attacks, the grass in that area had been completely destroyed by the powerful beam energy to turn into a pile of ashes. Within the ashes, the hilt of a burnt beam saber could be seen. It turned out that the energy reaction on the radar previously had actually been emitted by the beam saber.

“That beam saber is M03’s.” M05’s vision was sharp. Although the beam saber’s hilt had already been struck so much that it had been deformed, its original form almost indiscernible, M05 had still noticed the remains of the owner’s label on it.

“That’s strange. Why would the beam saber suddenly give off an energy reaction? Could it be that someone activated it just now?” asked M01 with a frown. A beam saber needed a person to activate it — it should be said that a beam saber hilt lying on the ground would never give off any energy waves without it being used by someone. But then, if someone had activated it, M01 did not believe that there was anyone fast enough to dodge his sharpshooting and escape his attack range in that brief instant.

M05 also could not figure out this issue that had stumped M01. He could not help but shudder and ask timidly, “Could it be a ghost?”

“How could that be possible?!” barked M01 angrily in return. Several millenniums of scientific research had proven that ghosts were merely figments of the Huaxians’ imagination — they did not exist.

M05 too felt that he was being ridiculous, and so he did not dare to say anything more. Perhaps the beam saber’s switch had been defective and had let some energy leak out.

Right at this time, M01 sensed the radar responding again, highlighting the spot right behind M05. M01 shouted, “M05, move!”

M05’s reaction was swift — he immediately threw himself to one side — and M01 timed things masterfully. M05 had barely moved aside to reveal an opening when the beam gun in M01’s hand let loose a deluge of shots. This time, the three other team members behind M01 did not manage to keep

up. Only after M05 had dodged aside completely did they follow up with their own attacks, shooting at the same area M01 was shooting at.

Very soon, this round of attacks ended. This time, there was a beam gun lying there in the aftermath, a blackened lump already completely deformed from the barrage of attacks. M01's expression shifted at the sight, because he realised that this beam gun was also a weapon of M03's ... could it be that M03 could not rest in peace and so was trying to give them some hint? Or perhaps someone was using M03's things to cause mischief?

"Bastard, don't try to use these kinds of tricks to scare us! Bloody come out and face us if you have any godd*mn balls!" M01 suddenly switched comms channels to connect to his external speakers and shouted.

Chapter 368: Power Gap!

However, all that answered M01 was silence. Although M01 did not believe in ghosts, this situation before him now which could not be explained by logical reasoning and common sense was making him feel rather unsettled and creeped out.

"Ah ..." A horrified cry suddenly rang out in the team's commlink. M01's heart clenched and he whipped his head around. However, all he saw was one of the three guarding members pointing at M05 lying on the ground ... even without seeing the other member's facial expression, M01 could feel the fright and panic of the other.

M01 felt that something was not right, because M05 still had not gotten up from the ground after this much time. This was definitely not normal. He stepped forward and squatted down, flipping M05's mecha around. Only then did he discover that the seemingly perfectly intact mecha had actually had its cockpit pierced by a short and sturdy high-frequency blade right through a vital point on the mecha's front.

Meanwhile, a pool of blood had begun to spread out on the ground the mecha had been lying on. That team member who had screamed must have seen the spreading pool of blood ...

"Bastard, come out!" At this point, what else was there for M01 to figure out? He abruptly stood up and began shouting out at the still silence around them. There was definitely no such thing as ghosts — all of this was just a deliberate ploy of the enemy. Using those things to draw their attention, the enemy had then taken advantage of their distraction to kill the unprepared M05. And all of this had happened right under their noses.

It had to be said that the enemy's ploy was extremely clever. Even now, M01 still could not figure out what method the enemy had used to set it so that the beam saber and beam gun would release some energy response at those specific moments. M01 knew well that it was impossible for someone to activate the power switches at those two locations without being seen, yet at the same time, there was no other setup to show any hidden manipulations. This kind of arrangement that could not be unravelled by common logic had successfully captured their attention, causing them to neglect the unprepared M05. This had given the enemy the opportunity to kill M05 without any sign.

Undoubtedly, their enemy was an experienced assassin. M01 was instantly suspicious, wondering whether this person was not that Thunder King Qiao Ting like M03 had reported. Qiao Ting's talent and potential may be extremely aberrant — otherwise he would not have been able to advance to ace operator — but this kind of rich combat experience was not something a cadet could have.

“We've been duped! Looks like the opponent used the Thunder King as bait to draw us here to kill us one by one,” said M01 through gritted teeth. However, he then instantly backtracked and denied his own words, “No, they do not know our target is the Thunder King Qiao Ting, so they could not have made this sort of arrangement. Unless our plans have been leaked ... also, if this was really a trap, they could not have just arranged for one person to lie here in ambush.”

Although M01 had been thrown off a little by the situation before his eyes, he still managed to retain enough of his composure to think things through. He was able to tell that there should only be one enemy hiding here in ambush, but this enemy was very strong and very dangerous.

“This should be a coincidence ...” Suddenly, M01 thought of Thunder King Qiao Ting's mentor, Tang Yu, that prodigious talent who was known as the ‘Versatile Ace Master’. Could it be him?

At this thought, M01 could not help but shudder. An experienced ace mecha master like Tang Yu was completely incomparable with a newbie like Qiao Ting — for them alone to go up against an experienced ace mecha master like that was an absolutely suicidal endeavour. He knew he could not afford to hesitate any longer. He immediately transmitted the news that Tang Yu could be here to central command, hoping to receive backup as soon as possible.

“Boss, I've obtained their signal source ...” Ling Lan, who had been hiding in the shadows, still and quiet like a ferocious beast on the hunt, preparing to deal death with one blow, stared coldly at the roaring M01 not too far from her. When she registered the excited yells of Little Four in her mindspace, she could not help but clench her fists. She knew that the wait was over — it was now time to kill her prey.

It turned out that all of this was part of Ling Lan's and Little Four's meticulous plan to obtain the enemy's signal source. Little Four and Ling Lan did not believe the enemy was like them, completely unable to contact the outside world. Sure enough, all of this had pushed M01 in his panic to directly make contact with the enemy's central command on a starship in space, letting Little Four obtain the other side's signal source.

Having obtained the signal source, Little Four was no longer contained on the ground. He had been completely unleashed to become a free-flying king of virtual signals 1 .

After M01 had successfully sent out his message, he had just relaxed a little when he saw a familiar thermal reaction appear once more at one point on his radar. M01's hand paused, a tendril of doubt coursing through his mind — could it be that the enemy was trying to trick him again and assassinate another one of his team members when he turned to deal with the source of the thermal reaction?

Doubt rose in M01's heart, causing his movements to slow, so he did not attack the thermal reaction point as swiftly as he had the previous two times. Right at that moment, from the spot where the heat had been picked up, which was on the left side of the dense forest behind them, a mecha shot out, coming to the area behind M01 in the blink of an eye ... yes, the enemy's target was not M01 but the three members guarding three different directions at his back.

Without M01's guidance, the three members were not at all on guard against that particular spot. When they noticed the mecha leaping at them ferociously, their only response was to pull the triggers of their beam guns desperately, trying to use overwhelming firepower to force the opponent back ...

But, all of this was in vain — the mecha's figure shimmered, and the entire mecha drew a streak of shadow through the air. Their seemingly dense and concentrated firepower merely struck virtual impressions the opponent left behind. Between blinks, that enemy mecha was already before them.

"Bang bang bang!" Three loud collisions caused M01's heart to jerk. This was followed by three terrible screams in M01's team commlink. These three almost simultaneous screams caused M01's gun hand which was aimed at the opponent, about to shoot, to tremble ...

He who had never missed before, perhaps due to this tremble, actually shot wide ... after that mecha achieved his objective with one strike, he suddenly leapt backwards, retreating back into that dense forest, disappearing completely from M01's radar once more ...

M01 looked out at the surroundings before him — there was nothing but the sound of the wind and the distant sounds of cannonfire. There was no other sound in this patch of dense forest ... his entire body felt cold, a chill penetrating deep into his heart. Here at this place, with M03 as the first to go down, four more of his team members were now lying on the ground ... Of the initially rather complete 6-man team, he was now the only one left.

He involuntarily turned his gaze to those three team members of his who had just lost their lives, and his irises contracted. Those three team members had truly died in such a pitiful way. They had had no so-called chance at all of fighting back before they had been crushed alive by the opponent's sheer brute strength. The cockpits of those three mecha were now deeply caved in — M01 did not have to look closer to know that the men inside were now probably ground meat by now. Even if the damage was not to that extent, there was still absolutely no chance of survival.

The way they died proved the enemy had killed them without having to use any advanced combat techniques. By relying only on his mecha's inherent superiority and his horrifying giant sword, he had easily killed those three team members. By this time, M01 had confirmed that that mecha was indeed an ace mecha. Although it was not one with the military's powerful configurations, being merely a trainee mecha of the academy, due to the sheer prowess of its operator, this mecha with its basic configuration had still displayed formidable combat power — the was truly strong and terrifying, striking fear into his heart.

The gap between their strength and that of this ace mecha master was really too wide. A surge of bitterness rose in M01's heart. He knew well that if the enemy wanted to kill him, just another two forceful attacks would be enough to finish him off. The moment the enemy managed to get close, he was sure to have no hope of survival.

M01 stared at the unresponsive radar and a futile hope actually fluttered in his heart. He hoped that the ace operator had already left ... for the first time, this kind of cowardly notion entered his mind on the battlefield. Before this, no matter how perilous the situation, he had never ever feared for his life like this. M01 knew that he had already lost. Facing that ace operator once more, he most probably did not even have the courage to stake his life in battle anymore. Even now, he had the urge to run away — it was only the pride of a warrior which kept him in place to await his final outcome.

“Have you cracked the other’s signal?” Once again concealed, Ling Lan calmly observed her prey who had lost his calm as she questioned Little Four within the mindscape.

“Already cracked!” Little Four raised both his arms to express his excitement. “He actually thought that, Boss, you are the ace mecha instructor Tang Yu ... believing that Qiao Ting is somewhere here as well, he has already requested reinforcements from their central command.”

Hearing the name Tang Yu, an image of the referee instructor who had been vaguely biased towards her side on that arena stage emerged uncalled in Ling Lan’s mind’s eye. He had not favoured the Leiting Mecha Clan just because he was Thunder King Qiao Ting’s instructor. It should be said that the New Cadet Regiment’s triumph in that battle was in large part also due to his consideration for them.

“Does this mean that the other side will also be sending masters here as well?” Ling Lan’s expression turned grim. She naturally wanted to fight against skilled masters, but if a group of masters came, she would not be able to continue with her original plan of waiting here for rabbits to fall into her snare 2 .

“It must be, but I’ve already obtained the signal source of their communications. I’ll keep an eye on them and will definitely figure out how many people the other side has sent here,” responded Little Four confidently. He would not let his boss fall into danger!

“That’s good. Since everything is settled, it’s about time for me to finish off this fellow.” Little Four’s reply caused Ling Lan to relax. Since she had already received the answer she wanted, then there was no longer any need to keep this enemy before her alive ... Ling Lan decisively brought out her giant sword and pointed it straight at the enemy who was still trying to locate her.

M01 stared at his radar with mixed feelings, unsure whether he wanted there to be a response on the radar. Right at this moment, several energy responses appeared on the radar at the same time. These few points were all close to him, and there were even three points that were right by his side. This sudden situation made him raise both his guns in a flailing panic. Aiming for those few spots, he began shooting with both hands, madly sending a flood of beam energy pouring out from the guns in his hands ...

Chapter 369: Team-M’s Annihilation!

The beam shots hit the ground surfaces of those areas which had registered a response on the radar, sending clumps of dirt and clouds of dust into the air. It had to be said that M01’s reaction speed was extremely fast — even though he had lost his calm, his solid foundational skills still let him strike out at those energy response spots in the blink of an eye ...

After one round of attacks, there was still no sign of the ace mecha. Before M01 could let out a sigh of relief, a strong gust of wind came up from behind him. His heart skipped a beat, and before he could operate his mecha to dodge, he felt his back being struck by a heavy force and he could not help but spurt out a mouthful of blood.

M01 clenched his teeth against the pain. He urgently controlled the mecha to roll forwards with the momentum of the blow, and at the same time, he drew out a tube of medicinal agent from a slot inside the cockpit. Flicking the cap of the tube open with his right thumb, he poured the agent down his throat.

Even if he had not seen any sign of the opponent, this tremendous force alone let him know that the one who attacked him was most certainly that unseen ace mecha. As expected, the other was not planning to let him go.

M01 knew that he most likely would not be able to leave planet Newline alive as that last strike had dealt severe damage to his internal organs; unless he immediately escaped from here to find an army doctor, then maybe he would still have some hope of survival. However, M01 knew that the powerful ace mecha would never let him escape. Since death was certain, M01's initial fear was swept away as he prepared himself for one last desperate gamble.

This was why he had used the powerful painkiller formulated by the military. This would guarantee that he would not be paralysed by pain, allowing him to execute the following controls before his life was exhausted. This analgesic agent was a type of medical agent their country had concocted to bring out one's life energy in one final burst. It was meant to let warriors with no chance of survival to go out in a blaze of glory, burning up the last of their life to kill off more enemies ... every warrior who was sent out to battle would have a tube of this agent with them.

"If you want to kill me, you'll need to pay the proper price!" roared M01 in his cockpit. He flipped his mecha around and rose to a half-kneel, then raising both his hands, he aimed for the ace mecha ... eyes red, M01 pulled the triggers of both his laser beam handguns. The speed at which he pulled the triggers was three times faster than usual — it looked like under the lash of both the medical agent and his despair, his latent potential had all been unleashed.

M01 naturally did not dare dream that these attacks would destroy the enemy mecha. An ace mecha was not something their energy weapons could destroy. He only wished to leave some damage on the enemy mecha before he died. That way, it would help the comrades from their reinforcements take down this despicable enemy ... yes, M01 had pinned his hopes on his comrades. Thus, he wanted to help his comrades relieve as much pressure as possible before he died.

But how could things turn out as M01 wished? That ace mecha's response instantly crushed M01's barely regained confidence. That ace mecha did not care at all about M01's resistance — facing the two laser beam guns about to fire, the opponent simply swung the great sword in his hands ...

The giant sword flew out of the other's hands and hurtled through the air. Just as M01 pulled on the triggers, the sword had already arrived before him to slice at his two arms wielding the laser beam handguns ...

There was a loud 'snap' and M01 did not see beams pouring out from the handguns in his mecha's hands as he expected. Instead, he saw two arms suddenly fly into the air — he stared wide-eyed at that pair of arms, which held his two laser beam handguns. They drew a graceful arc through the air before landing heavily onto the ground ...

Before he could shake himself from his confused shock, his mecha's screen was abruptly covered by a dark shadow. His vision in the cockpit was entirely blocked off, and soon after, he sensed a tremendous force slamming into his cockpit once more. This time, he was not as lucky as before to retain his awareness despite his injuries; he was instantly struck unconscious by this force, his entire being plunged into darkness ...

Even if M01 was still alive after this attack, having lost consciousness meant that he would no longer have the chance to wake up ever again.

Watching the final enemy mecha collapsing heavily to the ground, Ling Lan smoothly pulled up the giant sword planted in the ground beside her. Without any hesitation, she instantly stabbed the sword through the other's cockpit ...

The sword slid in, and then Ling Lan could clearly see blood spurt out from the cracks in the cockpit. The glow of the enemy mecha's defensive beam shield gradually disappeared, dimming into darkness, and Ling Lan knew that both the man and machine of this enemy mecha before her eyes was gone.

"Opponent's death verified!" As expected, the A.I. of the ace mecha coldly announced the death of the enemy. Only then did Ling Lan pull out her sword from the cockpit. Reflexively, she lifted her head to look towards the battle-lit night skies. A cold smirk appeared on her lips, and with a flicker, her figure disappeared within the dense forest.

Little Four had just alerted Ling Lan to the approach of three mecha from three kilometres away. The group consisted of one ace mecha and two special-class mecha. This was very likely an ace mecha squadron led by an ace main and two special-class secondaries.

Meanwhile, at this moment, Qiao Ting's group who had moved off ahead of Ling Lan did not linger in the skies above the mecha storehouse to protect their team members as Ling Lan had done. With a clear focus, they moved west, preparing to join the fight in the most battle-intense dormitory district.

Of course, Qiao Ting's group did not choose to enter the frontlines, aiming to land instead at the rear end of the ground forces. This was because they knew that on a merciless battlefield, unidentified mecha would be considered by both sides as part of the enemy forces by default. They were not arrogant enough to believe that they would be able to survive the combined attack of both sides.

Sure enough, Qiao Ting's group had just begun their descent when they received a warning from a mecha column that had temporarily stopped for adjustments. Qiao Ting responded quickly, immediately reporting their status as cadets. As they were indeed piloting trainee mecha of the academy, they were finally allowed to land under the close supervision of the ground mecha team.

Just as Qiao Ting's team was feeling restless and uneasy, Qiao Ting received a video call request. He immediately accepted the call, and a person instantly appeared on his mecha's screen. It was his instructor, Tang Yu.

When Tang Yu saw Qiao Ting, he let out a quiet sigh and said, "Qiao Ting, so it is you. Why have you brought your people here in mecha?"

Qiao Ting primly gave a cadet's salute to Tang Yu and then said respectfully, "Although we're only cadets, we too can fight. So we've come, prepared to raise weapons and protect our academy."

Qiao Ting's reply made Tang Yu's eyes flash with a trace of approval. Able to keep calm in moments of crisis and choosing to go to the mecha storehouse to obtain trainee mecha — this action was undoubtedly correct. Leaving aside whether their combat skills would be at all effective in this cruel battle, their choice at least gave them some means of protecting themselves. Compared to those

students trapped in the dormitory district now, reliant on the forces outside to protect them, Qiao Ting's team was perhaps much more likely to survive this battle.

At this thought, Tang Yu looked back at the dormitory district behind him with concern. Although both sides were still stuck in a stalemate at present, their side was already stretched to their limits. Not only had the ground forces been dispatched, even all the instructors of the military academy had stepped up to fight. In other words, they had nothing left in reserve, but they had no idea whether the enemy had any reinforcements left ...

Tang Yu could not help but look up at the endless starry sky above. If the enemy still had any fighting strength left in reserve, the outcome of this battle would undoubtedly be their defeat. Perhaps they instructors would still be able to rely on the superiority of their mecha and temporarily escape with their lives, but the students in the dormitory district behind them would definitely be destined to die ... seeing how the enemy was throwing their full force at the dormitory district, even the stupidest person could tell that the enemy's objective was precisely the students behind them ... would the Federation truly lose several generations worth of capable fighters because of this?

Tang Yu was extremely anxious but he still appeared as calm as usual on the outside. Before things became truly dire, he absolutely would not reveal his anxiety and affect the confidence of these excellent children before him. Thus, he ordered, "Qiao Ting, lead your team members to move alongside us. After this, follow our orders."

Even if they did not manage to protect all the cadets in the end, he still wanted to safeguard these excellent seeds before him now ... Tang Yu vowed in his heart. This was why he had asked Qiao Ting's team to move with them — if things really took a turn for the worse as he imagined, he and the other instructors would do their utmost to protect Qiao Ting and these other excellent talents, giving these excellent seeds a better chance at survival.

"Yes, Sir!" Qiao Ting immediately agreed to Tang Yu's orders. Qiao Ting was well aware that, lacking experience, they were indeed in need of experienced instructors to provide practical guidance. This would make it easier for them to adapt to the cruel realities of battle.

Just like that, Qiao Ting's team followed Tang Yu and the other instructors into battle. The instructors were primarily special-class operators with a small portion being ace operators. Some, like Instructor Tang Yu, were top-class ace operators. On the battlefield, Tang Yu could fight on even ground with two to three regular ace operators — in the past, before the number one ace operator Senior Colonel Qi had advanced to imperial status, he had even been able to handle four to five ace operators simultaneously on his own.

Though they were all ace operators, there was still distinction within the ranks. Of course, this distinction was due to the accumulation of battle experience and had very little relation to control techniques. This was also why ace operators who had gained their advancement inside a military academy like Qiao Ting would be looked down upon by those battle-experienced advanced mecha warriors. Although many of the ace mecha operators who had advanced by this route had very high-level control skills and techniques, due to a lack of true battle experience, there had been numerous cases where battle-experienced advanced mecha warriors had set up traps and successfully turned the tables on these ace operators and killed them.

Thus, levels were actually not that important — the most important thing on the battlefield was whether you could grasp every opportunity available to kill your opponent and survive.

Chapter 370: The Team Members Arrive!

In the meantime, Gao Jinyun had led his team swiftly towards the spot Ling Lan had pointed out to him and met up with another team from the New Cadet Regiment making their final adjustments before battle. The two teams combined, and when the team leader of the other team heard that Ling Lan had instructed them to leave this area quickly, he did not dare to tarry. The two teams swiftly packed up and sprinted off in the opposite direction of where Ling Lan had been.

The two team leaders knew very well that their regiment commander's fight was not something they could get involved with. In order to not create trouble for their regiment commander, it was better for them to stay farther away. Of course, they were also afraid that they might bump into some formidable foe who had gotten slightly lost if they stayed too close to their regiment commander's location. That would be a terrible tragedy.

Just like that, the two teams rushed away, pulling a greater distance away from Ling Lan. Only when they felt a little safer did they slow their steps and prepare to take a breather and gather themselves. Just then, they noticed altogether at the same time that there was an energy reaction marking unidentified mecha on the radar. The two teams immediately shifted into battle mode, prepared to fight tenaciously against this unidentified mecha squad when they found that it was a false alarm.

Apparently, this mecha team that had shown up out of the blue was Qi Long's group. They had just finished fighting with two advanced mecha that had gotten stranded off on their own and were cleaning up when they had abruptly stumbled upon more than ten mecha behind them. They too had received a bit of a fright, thinking that they had been surrounded by the enemy.

When the two sides discovered that it was just others from their own faction, they relaxed. Gao Jinyun saw that Qi Long's team consisted entirely of advanced mecha, and he also saw how they had swiftly and efficiently defeated two enemy advanced mecha. This sparked an idea in his mind. Gao Jinyun thought, though their teams' levels were overall too low to be of any help to Boss Lan, Qi Long's team was a completely different matter. A team of advanced mecha warriors should be able to help Boss Lan out.

Thus, Gao Jinyun quickly relayed Boss Lan's situation to Qi Long's team, pointing out as well that Boss Lan could be in danger and may have been surrounded by the enemy.

This news shocked Qi Long's team and they unanimously decided to rush over to their boss's location. All the members believed that since they were members of Ling Lan's battle clan, of course they had to brave danger and death alongside their clan leader.

Just like that, Qi Long's team hurriedly bid farewell to the two teams there and began rushing towards Ling Lan's location ...

Right at that moment, the ace mecha squad that had charged over after receiving their orders finally arrived at the coordinates team M had reported.

“This should be the spot.” Three mecha came to an abrupt stop in the air above the given coordinates. One of the special-class mecha in the group commented as he scanned the still and silent circular area below.

“It looks like team M has been completely wiped out. We’ve come too late.” The other special-class mecha quickly zoomed in on the empty area below. On his mecha’s screen, the condition of the ground below was now clearly displayed. There were several dull-coloured mecha down on the ground, as well as cockpits spattered with blood, a sign that these mecha had all met a bad end.

The moment their squad had received their orders from central command, they had immediately altered their route to head here instead of towards the dormitory district. It had only taken them a short two minutes or so, but they were still too late.

“Could it be that the enemy has already run away?” The special-class mecha who had first spoken looked at his unresponsive radar and suggested this possibility.

“No, the enemy should still be nearby,” said the thus far silent ace mecha right at the front.

“Sir, how can you tell?” The special-class mecha who was wondering whether the enemy had run away could not help but ask curiously in response to his team leader’s statement.

“Because all the way here, I had opened my mecha’s radar scanner to its maximum range. During this time, there has been no sign of any energy leaving the area. So the only remaining possibility is that the opponent is still here,” the ace operator analysed calmly. “For the enemy to be bold enough to stay back, he must have something up his sleeve. Be on your guard.”

The ace operator’s words caused his two secondaries to become wary, and they quickly replied, “Understood, sir!”

“This present situation confirms that the other is skilled in concealment and assassination. He probably intends to separate us and kill us off one by one ...” the ace operator added after a brief pause. “That being the case, you two remain in the air and maintain full scene comprehensive monitoring. I’ll go down on my own to check things out.”

“Yes, sir!” The two secondary mecha operators knew that they had no place to intervene in a battle between battle-experienced ace operators. Therefore, rather than getting in the way down below, they might as well stay up here to monitor the situation — if anything unexpected happened, they would be able to alert their team leader in time.

After arranging all this, the ace operator piloted his mecha to descend slowly onto the circular open space below. As soon as he landed, the ace operator understood why team M had been completely wiped out in such a short duration of time. This terrain was just too suitable for concealed attacks. The surrounding circle of tall and dense forestry allowed mecha to lurk among the trees easily. As long as the enemy turned off their mecha, another mecha’s radar would not be able to pick up its energy output. On top of that, team M’s combat power was just too weak compared to that of the opponent’s. For an

enemy familiar with this terrain, capitalising on it to conduct ambushes and finish off team M would be way too easy.

At this observation, the ace operator could not help but sigh under his breath. If he had been team M's leader, he would never have landed straightaway. Instead, he would have hovered in the air and destroyed the dense forest in the surroundings first — no matter what, it was necessary to ruin this disadvantageous terrain.

Having looked over the terrain, the ace operator roughly knew how team M had been killed, but he still did not jump to any conclusions, carefully checking the conditions of all the mecha remnants of team M. When he saw that all signs of severe damage were on the mecha cockpits, his heart clenched.

It looked like the enemy was an extremely level-headed person and was ruthless in his attacks — almost every mecha he examined had been killed in one hit. Also, the weapon the enemy used was a giant cold weapon. This type of weapon was extremely overbearing — ace operators generally could not use this type of weapon with ease, but this person obviously could. The other's attacks had been extremely precise, clean and efficient — he was certain to be someone who had mastered this type of weapon ...

The ace operator began to rifle through his mind, searching through all the information he had on the Huaxian ace operators staying on planet Newline. However, he could not find any ace operator that truly fit these conditions ... after turning it over in his mind, only the elite ace Tang Yu known as the 'Versatile Ace Master' could possibly do such a thing. It looked like the intelligence team M had obtained right before they perished had been accurate. Other than Tang Yu, there really was no one else here who could utilise a giant cold weapon with such proficiency.

"Sir, mecha energy detected about 10 kilometres away. Numbers at 1, 2, 3 ... 7. There are 7 mecha in total." Right then, one of the secondary mecha responsible for wide-range scanning reported loudly in the team commlink.

"Enemy mecha? Allied mecha?" In order to prevent an ambush from the lurking enemy mecha here, the ace operator had narrowed his radar's range to its smallest and most accurate range. Hence, he had not noticed this situation which had popped up 10 kilometres away. At his subordinate's words, his brow furrowed. Could it be that central command had sent another squad here to investigate? This displeased him. Did central command think he alone was no match for Tang Yu? As an ace operator, he had his pride. He did not want other people to interfere when he fought with an opponent of equal strength.

"They're enemy mecha coming from within the military academy." At his leader's question, the secondary knew he had not explained clearly enough. They had not received any news that any of their comrades had gone that deep into the enemy territory in that direction, so for so many mecha to appear all at once from that end, it was very unlikely that they were allied mecha.

"Prepare for battle!" Receiving this answer, the ace mecha commanded with a sneer.

With that many mecha coming over, it was almost certain that it would be a team of small fry. They definitely could not be an ace mecha squad, because ace mecha squads were always set with an ace mecha as primary and two special-class mecha as secondaries. Of course, every army had its own trump card — the strongest ace mecha squad would have ace mecha as both its main and secondaries.

Whenever this type of squad was dispatched, it would mean the battle had reached the most critical point, where victory and defeat were about to be determined ...

Moreover, from the intelligence reports he had received, there was no such ace mecha squad on planet Newline, whether it was in the ground forces or within the school's ranks. Therefore, for so many mecha to come at once, it was likely that these were all advanced mecha, or perhaps mostly advanced mecha with a few special-class operators among them. This was the situation at best. With regards to this kind of enemy, no matter how many came, he was not at all concerned. On the battlefield, an ace mecha was definitely a top-level existence which could stand a head above the crowd.

"Boss, Qi Long and the rest of the team are coming." Little Four had also picked up the voices of Qi Long and the other team members. He could not help but holler in excitement in Ling Lan's mindscape, but then, his face fell and his little brow scrunched up in a frown.

These underlings were disobeying orders to come here ... wasn't this just ruining his and the Boss's plans? This was so unreasonable! Little Four puffed up his cheeks in exasperation.

Little Four's alert made Ling Lan rub her forehead in consternation. It went without saying that Qi Long and the team must have met up with Gao Jinyun and found out about her situation here. Although she felt that she would not be able to fight as freely as she would have liked with Qi Long and the others here, it could not be denied that she was actually quite happy deep inside. The actions of her team meant that they really valued her — regardless of the danger, they wanted to fight by her side. Having such loyal and steadfast companions willing to brave thick and thin, life and death, together ... what did she have to complain about?

"Boss, what now? Should I send them a text telling them to turn back?" Little Four was actually very glad that Qi Long and the others were coming, but thinking that this development could spoil his boss's plans, he could not help but feel a little down.

"No need. Let them come. They can help me handle those two troublesome special-class mecha in the air." Ling Lan quickly made her decision.

Perhaps, this was a chance for Qi Long and the others to grow. Mind you, fighting against special-class mecha would not give Ling Lan much experience, but it would be a rare opportunity for Qi Long and the others to gain practical experience. Although it would be a little risky, danger often went hand in hand with opportunity as it was able to force out the latent potential hiding within a person. Besides, Ling Lan was extremely confident that Qi Long and the others would grasp this opportunity well.