

Crossing 371

Chapter 371: Ace VS Ace!

“Little Four, pay attention to Qi Long and the others’ location. When they are 3 kilometres from us, let me know.” After coming to a decision, Ling Lan began to arrange things. “Also, listen for my commands after this.”

“Understood, Boss! Emergency activation, right? Little Four will make sure to activate it successfully in the shortest time possible,” Little Four accepted her orders.

Destroying team M and instant activation of mecha — all of this was possible due to Little Four’s optimization of the mecha’s systems. Under emergency activation, the mecha practically booted up in less than a second. If the Federation mecha researchers ever found out about this, they would be absolutely gobsmacked. They had already been researching this issue for several generations, but still they had not found a way to push an ace mecha’s emergency activation period below three seconds ...

The anxious team of Qi Long’s moved quickly. Under the full speed of the mecha, ten kilometres were swiftly covered within three minutes.

“Three unidentified mecha discovered. Two in the air, one on the ground.” Qi Long’s team, which had just entered the three-kilometre boundary, heard the warning from their mecha’s A.I.. Due to the power difference between the mecha, only now did they learn of the enemy mecha’s presence.

“Zoom in!” At first notice, they all chose to first identify whether those mecha were friend or foe. When they zoomed in to see the outer appearance of those three mecha, they all became tense. Sure enough, those mecha were enemies, and the one on the ground was actually an ace mecha. Even the two mecha in the sky were one level above their own mecha, both being special-class mecha.

“Qi Long, what do we do now?” Han Jijyun’s expression turned grim at the sight of those three mecha. He was the first to speak up and prompt Qi Long — at critical moments, Han Jijyun habitually defaulted to letting Qi Long decide.

“I want to continue pushing forwards. Since we already know Boss is ahead, no matter how dangerous it is, I still want to go over there and see what’s going on,” Qi Long said as he looked at those three mecha. Despite knowing that he would most likely meet a bad end if he continued pushing forwards, he could not allow himself to retreat since he knew Boss was there.

“You all can do as you like!” Qi Long had decided to take the risk, but he would not drag his companions together unwillingly. He would let them make their own decisions.

“I will go with you,” said Li Lanfeng without hesitation. He had already vowed that he would never abandon the rabbit ever again — no matter how dangerous it became, even if he had to pay with his life, he would not go back on his promise.

Li Lanfeng’s words had barely faded when all of the others spoke up to say that they would come along as well. They were not timid people — many years of friendship had prepared them to share one fate with their comrades.

However, Li Shiyu, who had been swindled and pressured into joining the clan, remained silent. When everyone turned to look at him, he only replied evenly, "I need to take responsibility for my patient. Wherever Qi Long goes, I go ..."

"Good brother!" Qi Long said gratefully to Li Shiyu. Just as he was about to lead the way forwards, a message suddenly appeared on the team's mecha screens.

"It's Boss!" Qi Long shouted in excitement. The message was sent by Ling Lan via Little Four's abilities. Ling Lan instructed Qi Long and the rest to attack the two special-class mecha in the sky, while she very explicitly labelled the ace mecha as her prey.

"Boss has given us our assignment. We must complete it!" said Qi Long in high spirits with a swing of his fist. Up against two special-class mecha, perhaps they might have a chance.

"Yes!" Ling Lan's appearance instantly gave the clan members great mental support. With different voices but one mind, they replied confidently. Their initial hesitance and uncertainty were swept away, and even as their gazes became steady, a measure of ruthlessness appeared within them. They drew the weapons from their mecha's backs — a beam saber and a beam gun.

Their initially slowed steps sped up once more, and very soon they had emerged in front of those three enemy mecha.

"It's a group of advanced mecha, and academy training mecha at that." After taking a closer look at Qi Long's team's mecha, one of the secondary mecha in the sky could not help but spit.

The ace operator responded calmly. "That's fine. Our mission is to eliminate Qiao Ting, along with all of the cadets here. Since we haven't found Qiao Ting yet, then let's just kill these cadets first. It's all the same."

Students in the military academy who could achieve advanced mecha warrior status must also be extremely talented in terms of mecha piloting. The ace operator knew that if these students were allowed to grow unchecked, as long as they did not die, they would one day become ace operators themselves ... so, the ace operator was very happy to eliminate these cadets who might become their future opponents.

As Qi Long's group of seven was charging straight at him, the ace operator thought they would be attacking him directly. However, around the 1000 metre mark 1, those mecha suddenly revved their thrusters to sweep up from the ground into the air, leaping towards his two wingmen instead ...

Was it because they had discovered he was an ace operator and so did not dare to attack him? Still, even if they decided to change targets, did they think he would just sit still and not follow them to attack? As expected of a group of academy cadets without any battle experience, actually leaving their backs exposed to an enemy ... the ace operator sneered as he unhurriedly removed the high-precision laser sniper rifle from his back. That's right, he was an excellent sniper — he specialised in killing from a distance.

The ace operator quickly raised his sniper rifle to aim at the cockpits of one of the mecha ...

Right then, the A.I. of Lin Zhong-qing's mecha suddenly blared a warning alarm. "Danger! Mecha has been targeted. Please evade immediately ..." If this were any other time, Lin Zhong-qing would definitely

have begun evasion procedures immediately, but recalling that Boss Lan had said to leave the ace operator below to him, Lin Zhong-qing gritted his teeth and ignored the A.I.'s warning. He continued to use his fastest speed to fly in a straight line towards his target.

It wasn't that Lin Zhong-qing did not want to evade, nor did he trust Ling Lan blindly, but the moment he moved to avoid being targeted, Luo Lang, who was before him, would definitely become the enemy's target instead. It had to be said that the sniping trajectory chosen by the ace operator was just too precise — with one attack, he was aiming for two people at one time 2 . Whether to protect himself or to protect a teammate, it was all up to the target. No matter which choice his target made, the ace operator would not miss.

Seeing the cadet show no signs of evasion, the ace operator's eyes held a trace of pity as he said, "You've got guts. Shame ..." Just as he was about to pull his trigger, a long, giant object came hurtling at him from the side, ramming into the sniper rifle in his right hand ...

With a loud bang, the powerful blow jostled the grip of the mecha's right hand, causing the sniper rifle to fall to the ground. The ace operator reacted quickly. With a twist of his body, he instantly moved over 10 metres away from his original spot. At this moment, he was already facing the direction the attack had come from. A military academy trainee ace mecha had appeared where he had been standing, casually catching the giant sword which had yet to fully hit the ground.

"So you are here." The ace operator stared at his opponent and said through the external speakers, "Lieutenant Colonel Tang Yu?"

The ace mecha's question confirmed Ling Lan's suspicion that the enemy had mistaken her for Tang Yu. Ling Lan naturally would not take the effort to correct this misunderstanding — she would be able to gain practical experience and there would be someone else to take the heat for her ... what else could she ask for?

And so, Ling Lan remained silent. Whether or not the opponent was certain in his assumptions, she herself would not expose her identity.

"Who'd have guessed that the elite ace of Huaxia would be stuck here in this small little military academy to be an instructor? You Huaxians really know how to waste talent." Ling Lan's silence did not dampen the interest of the ace operator, who once again spoke up to mock his opponent.

Ling Lan's lips thinned in displeasure. Why did the enemies in this air invasion have so much to say? The first advanced mecha warrior she had encountered had been a chatterbox, and this ace operator now was not much better ... Ling Lan did not want to waste any time, because she knew her team members were engaged in a tough fight right now. She needed to swiftly finish off this ace operator so she could go assist her team members.

With that, Ling Lan accelerated, leaping forwards in an oblique arc. She was before the ace operator in the blink of an eye, and the giant sword in her hands swung in a narrow trajectory, aiming straight for the opponent's waist.

Against another ace operator, she could not use the giant sword the same way she had with the advanced mecha, brainlessly plying brute force. The defence threshold of an ace mecha's outer shell itself, as well as the anti-shock systems inside, would reduce the giant sword's blunt force as much as it

could, so she could not achieve a one-hit kill. Therefore, Ling Lan did not expect to defeat the other in one blow — her aim was to throw the enemy's mecha off-balance so that she would have the opportunity to execute some combo attacks after this.

However, Ling Lan's plans fell through — an ace operator was an ace operator after all. Right at the moment the giant sword was about to hit, the opponent smacked the flat of the blade with his palms. Pushing back from this smack, and engaging his thrusters, the mecha slid back several metres.

Meanwhile, the giant sword was forced to pause for a brief moment due to the force of the smack. Although it continued to swing forwards the very next second, this brief pause was enough for the opponent to find time to evade the strike.

When this attack of Ling Lan's struck air, with a swift shake of the right wrist of her mecha, Ling Lan pulled back the giant sword once more. By this time, the opponent had already drawn a beam saber from his back, which was now emitting powerful waves of energy. Seeing this, Ling Lan decisively hung her giant sword back on her back and switched to a beam saber as well.

The giant steel sword was indeed overbearing and powerful during attacks — it did not fear clashing against other steel weapons or mecha. However, it was useless against these energy-based swords, because the high electrical charge emitted by the energy swords would easily erode the internal structure of the giant steel sword. Once the energy absorption became too much, causing the inside of the sword to overheat, the steel sword would definitely lose its initial hardness and perhaps even be melted down by the energy sword. This was why Ling Lan had switched to a beam saber — she could not bear to see such a powerful cold weapon go to waste like this.

“Bam! Bam! Bam!” Consecutive sounds rang out as the two mecha clashed. The beam sabers met again and again, violently, each collision sending countless electric sparks flying. It looked like the two were fighting evenly, none able to get one up over the other ...

Meanwhile, in the air, the two secondaries of the ace operator had already been separated from each other by Qi Long's team of seven. Qi Long, Luo Lang, and Xie Yi were surrounding one special-class mecha, while Li Lanfeng and the other three were attacking the other mecha.

Chapter 372: Crisis!

Qi Long's team distributed themselves this way because Qi Long, Luo Lang, and Xie Yi already had great rapport in their attacks. Although Li Lanfeng's combat ability seemed better than Xie Yi's, in this kind of fight where teamwork was crucial, he might not work as well as Xie Yi with Qi Long and Luo Lang.

Another point was that although there was only one other mecha remaining for the rest of their team to attack, the combat ability of the other members was considerably lower than Qi Long, Luo Lang, and Xie Yi. Thus, the other group of four needed a powerful lead attacker to fend off the opponent. As a senior cadet with obviously much more mecha piloting experience than the others, Li Lanfeng was undoubtedly the best candidate. In comparison, even though Li Shiyu was also a senior, as he had specialized in military medicine, he only merited a passing grade in terms of mecha piloting. Thus, he was not suited to take up the responsibility of being the lead attacker.

Due to those various reasons, the seven people very naturally split into these two teams. Qi Long's group kept their opponent busy with their teamwork, while Li Lanfeng's group relied primarily on Li Lanfeng to hold off the enemy as the other three members coordinated themselves to attack.

In terms of danger, Li Lanfeng's group was without a doubt in more danger despite having an extra member. Not yet used to working with one another, every time they made a mistake, it was all thanks to Li Lanfeng's desperate efforts that they managed to salvage the situation. As a result, it was not long since the battle started when Li Lanfeng's mecha was scored with two deep gouges from a beam saber ...

As the battle dragged on, due to their great rapport, Qi Long's group of three were acting as one, so their opponent was unable to find any openings anytime soon and could only continue to struggle with the three. However, on Li Lanfeng's side, their opponent had managed to find a weakness in their teamwork.

"Jijyun, dodge quickly!" Suddenly, Lin Zhong-qing's shocked voice rang out in Ling Lan's team's commlink. Qi Long's hands could not help but slow for a brief moment — if Luo Lang and Xie Yi had not moved in time to cover for him, a flaw might have opened up in their teamwork ...

Ling Lan was currently exchanging blows with her opponent; she had just dashed backwards in preparation for her next attack when she heard this horrified shout. She quickly lifted her head to look over and saw Li Lanfeng pilot his mecha to slam Han Jijyun's mecha out of the way in mid-air as he forcibly received the opponent's beam saber attack.

"Zing ..." The beam saber struck the mecha and countless sparks were sent flying. The power behind a special-class operator's beam saber was not something an advanced mecha's beam shield could completely deflect. The beam shield's power suddenly dimmed ... Li Lanfeng was just about to use his own beam saber to parry the other's beam saber away when, taking advantage of Li Lanfeng's attention being turned to his weapon, the enemy lifted his leg and kicked down savagely.

With a loud "boom", the special-class mecha's right leg struck the chest of Li Lanfeng's mecha with great force, instantly sending Li Lanfeng crashing towards the ground.

Perhaps due to the tremendous force behind the blow, Li Lanfeng temporarily lost the ability to control his mecha. Li Lanfeng's mecha completely lost balance as he plummeted towards the ground. Within the blink of an eye, he had crashed into the ground with a loud boom, sending up a blanket of dirt and dust into the air at the same time ...

Ling Lan's heart clenched at the sight — could the leopard have come to harm?

After that special-class mecha kicked Li Lanfeng to the ground, he did not stop his attack there. He coldly lifted the beam saber in his mecha's left arm and aimed it at the mecha lying on the ground, ready to send the other to hell ...

Realising what was going to happen, Li Shiyu and Lin Zhong-qing pounced frenziedly towards the special-class mecha from both sides. Meanwhile, Han Jijyun, who had been thrown quite a distance away from the push earlier, clenched his teeth and pulled the trigger on his beam gun desperately, trying to use his attacks to hinder the other from attacking.

Seeing how critical the situation was, Ling Lan quickly shifted on the balls of her feet and controlled her mecha to retreat rapidly, preparing herself to rush to Li Lanfeng's aid. But how could her opponent just let Ling Lan do as she wished? Moreover, he had the upper hand right now, so of course he had to stop Ling Lan from heading over to assist. Rather speedily, he flew over and blocked Ling Lan and said in a cold tone, "Don't forget, I am your opponent."

Ling Lan looked at the enemy blocking her way and her expression turned cold. The killing intent in her eyes shone clearly for the first time since the fight began ... no one could see but within her cockpit, Ling Lan's body was now enveloped by a thick miasma of blood-red killing intent. The killing intent spread rapidly and had soon even leaked out to the outside.

The ace operator across from her suddenly felt a chill run through his body. Before he could figure out the reason behind it, Ling Lan's attack was already at his face.

This time, Ling Lan's attack was even fiercer and even more domineering. In the fight before this, Ling Lan had only been using 60 to 70 percent of her power to attack. In other words, she had held back at least 30 percent of her strength as a reserve for defence. But now, in order to finish off the opponent quickly, Ling Lan no longer held anything back and was attacking with her full strength. Either the opponent died or she died — this was a path of no return.

Sensing the clear difference in his opponent, the ace operator's bearing turned grim and serious as well. He did not dare to spare any mind on anything else now, putting his entire focus into countering Ling Lan's attack. Still, a question flashed across his mind — for Tang Yu to be so concerned over that mecha, could it be that the one piloting it was his student Qiao Ting?

At the thought of this possibility, the ace operator was moved. After fending off one of Ling Lan's attacks, riding the momentum, he moved back several steps to pull a distance away from Ling Lan. He then swiftly connected to his team's commlink and said to his two secondaries, "Do your utmost to destroy that mecha on the ground. That is very likely to be Qiao Ting."

There was no rule that the ace level Qiao Ting had to operate an ace mecha ... they might have been limited by this fixed mentality.

At their superior's words, the two secondaries were taken aback, but they trusted their team leader very much. If their team leader believed this was so, then that mecha could truly be Qiao Ting.

Once again evading those annoying advanced mecha, the two special-class mecha raised the beam guns in their hands almost simultaneously to aim at the mecha on the ground and pulled the trigger ... two beams rent the air as they shot downwards, flying right at the mecha lying on the ground.

"Leopard! Dodge quickly!" Ling Lan, who was once again clashing with the ace operator, had still been keeping an eye on Li Lanfeng's situation. When she saw the two beams flying at Li Lanfeng, her eyes were wide in anger and concern as she yelled loudly.

"Pew pew!" The two beams hit the ground, once again sending up countless amounts of dust and dirt. For some time, all the mecha's screens were obscured, preventing them from seeing the situation on the ground clearly. No one could tell whether those two beams had actually struck Li Lanfeng.

The ace operator's heart was filled with joy at the sight. He felt that the other most definitely did not have any chance to avoid the blasts. Besides, he also had faith in the shooting skills of his team members — they definitely would have shot accurately at the other's cockpit. The cockpit was the most defensibly weak area on a mecha 1, and there was just no way a mecha without the protection of a beam shield would have been able to withstand two beam shots.

The ace operator stayed back, waiting for the dust to settle so that he could enjoy the fruits of victory, when he abruptly found that the enemy before him had not become at all flustered by this turn of events. In fact, the other had even become even more focused and centred ...

The opponent had controlled his mecha to retreat swiftly, pulling about 10 metres away from the ace operator. The ace operator thought that the opponent was planning to run over to the advanced mecha's side to attempt a rescue, but just as he was about to charge over to intercept the opponent, he found that the other was merely pausing for a moment before leaping back at him at high speed.

The ace mecha's gaze narrowed. This kind of nearly delay-less operation not only had high requirements in terms of control skills but also placed a great burden on the operator's body. This type of manoeuvre pushed great feedback force on the operator — thus, in order to protect themselves, if the situation was not critical, most people would not resort to this.

Before the ace operator could do anything, he was rendered dumbstruck once more because the other's silhouette had disappeared from his mecha's screens ...

No, it could not be said that he had lost sight of the other — rather, the other had suddenly split into two shadowy figures which were now gliding towards him from both sides. Briefly stunned, the ace operator's expression changed rapidly immediately afterwards. He had realised that what the other was displaying was a top-level technique of ace operators. It was the Shadow Clone technique which even he was not sure he could pull off.

Of these two shadowy figures, one was real while the other was fake. He needed to determine which was which in an instant — if he judged wrongly, he was sure to receive a serious hit.

The ace operator gritted his teeth. He did not choose any one side to attack, instead controlling his mecha to retreat swiftly. He did not like to gamble, especially this sort of gamble which relied solely on luck. Hence, he chose to retreat.

The ace operator thought that as long as he backed off quick and far enough, he would definitely be able to crack the opponent's move. Unexpectedly, after retreating as far as 20 metres, the two shadows were still trailing him without any sign of dissipating — he was still stuck in the same predicament as before.

"This is impossible!" exclaimed the ace operator. No matter how skilled an ace operator was, they would still only be able to maintain a shadow clone for up to 10 metres or so. However, the opponent had managed to double the distance — this made it impossible for the ace operator to keep his composure any longer.

Just then, he heard a great force slam into his mecha's right-hand side. His mecha which had still been moving backwards swiftly was completely thrown off-balance by this sudden impact, causing it to tumble out towards the left side ...

The ace operator knew he had been struck by the enemy. He was silently grateful that he had increased his mecha's beam shield to its maximum defence value right before the attack had hit when he had felt something off about the situation. This meant that even though his mecha had been forced to take a blow from the other's beam saber, the defensive power of his beam shield had been able to completely neutralise the energy attack, ensuring that his mecha remained undamaged. As long as he could stabilise his mecha quickly, he would still be able to regain control of the situation ...

However, before the ace operator could fully appreciate his relief, his mecha's A.I. began to blare a loud warning. "Warning, mecha's right side severely damaged. Right side mobility reduced by 40%. Defence of damaged area reduced by 80% ... Warning, damaged area cannot withstand a second attack!"

"What in the world is going on?" As the mobility of his mecha had been damaged on the right side, the ace operator was unable to take control of his mecha and stabilise himself as easily as he had imagined. Instead, he continued to tilt and fall towards the ground — in the next second, he might just crash.

The ace operator was still an ace operator after all; even in this unexpected situation, he still managed to calmly change his control method. He shifted so that his left arm would hit the ground palm-first, then pushed off it to send his falling mecha springing up into the air once more ...

Chapter 373: Mutual Destruction!

If his opponent had been a mecha operator with normal control skills, or perhaps just an inexperienced ace operator, perhaps the ace operator would have been able to salvage the situation. However, his opponent was neither. Skills? Ling Lan had that in spades. Experience? After many years of torment by the learning space, even the greenest of newbies would have become a veteran mecha operator.

Just as the ace operator bounced his mecha back into the air, his back was struck heavily once again. This time, the blow was even heavier than the one before, instantly knocking his mecha down hard onto the ground, giving him no more chances to get up again.

"Boom!" The large body of the mecha crashed into the ground, sending clouds of dust into the air ... this loud noise drew the attention of the mecha fighting in the sky. Looking down, the two special-class mecha were instantly dumbfounded. They could not help but cry out, "Leader!" and their movements inevitably slowed down.

Leaving aside Li Shiyu, Han Jijyun, and Lin Zhong-qing for the moment, along with the special-class mecha they were fighting, Qi Long, Luo Lang, and Xie Yi with their great rapport saw their opponent's movements slow down and almost simultaneously realised that their chance had come ...

Qi Long was the one who reacted the quickest. Possessing Animal Instinct, this fellow noticed the opponent's opening almost immediately. He was the first to pounce, his beam saber striking out fiercely at the other's slowed beam saber. Due to being distracted, the special-class mecha's beam saber was directly pushed aside by Qi Long's forceful blade. Before the other could regain his bearings, Qi Long's beam saber was already slashing out viciously at the other's wide open chest area ...

"Zing ..." The piercing sound of a beam saber clashing against a mecha's beam shield rang out. Sparks flew where the two met.

That special-class mecha's expression changed the instant he was hit. He was a little panicked, but when he saw his mecha's beam shield holding out in defence, he instantly calmed down. He saw his opponent desperately steadying his beam saber, holding it by force against his beam shield to try and exhaust his mecha's power. He knew this was his chance to counterattack! A ruthless light appeared in his eyes. He controlled his mecha's right hand to swing his beam saber savagely at his opponent ...

There was a "boom" — the beam saber was intercepted before it could hit. Another mecha had charged over as well to use his beam saber to block his own beam saber. Not only that, the other also raised his other hand to aim right at his cockpit ... the beam gun in his opponent's hand which he had thought nothing of previously now loomed large in his vision, a sight to inspire terror.

The muzzle of the gun flashed with a white light, and his mecha was struck heavily. Although a special-class mecha's beam shield was stronger than an advanced mecha's — one beam shot would not do any damage to his mecha — but the opponent obviously would not just shoot once. If he could not find a way to break free from these two enemies, the final outcome would certainly be his beam shield running out of energy resulting in his death.

No one wanted to die, and he was no exception. He knew that only by accelerating to retreat and breaking free of their hold on him now could he have any chance of surviving. Thus, he engaged all his thrusters, pushing his speed to the maximum — he just needed one second to completely escape from their attacks ... right as the mecha's speed indicator showed a shift to overdrive, his mecha hurtled backwards abruptly ... he saw his mecha escaping the other's beam saber — even if the opponents pushed their engines to pursue him, the difference between their mecha levels made it impossible for them to match his speed.

The special-class operator finally let out a sigh of relief. He knew the danger had almost passed. As long as he could avoid this crisis, he would definitely kill these few bastards ... right then, the back of his mecha was suddenly struck by a great force, stopping the mecha retreating in overdrive in its tracks. At this moment, the beam saber he had just pulled away from once again struck his mecha, while the other opponent's beam gun was triggered one more without mercy ...

"Awesome, Xie Yi!" Qi Long could not help but shout. It turned out that Xie Yi had been piloting his mecha to attack from behind when he suddenly saw the opponent retreating in overdrive. He immediately changed his movements to use his side to ram into the opponent, stopping the special-class mecha from retreating any further ...

Trapped in a pincer attack, no matter how much power the special-class mecha's beam shield had, it could not hold up against the frenzied attacks from the beam sabers and beam guns of the group of three. In the end, the mecha's beam shield dimmed and then disappeared completely ...

Qi Long decisively cast aside his own darkened beam saber, his hands swiping down to grip the two high-frequency blades that had sprung out from the sides of his mecha's thighs. Then, he fiercely plunged the two high-frequency blades into the opponent's cockpit ...

No longer defended by a beam shield, even the cockpit of a special-class mecha was unable to prevent a high-frequency blade from stabbing through ...

“Ah ...” screamed the special-class operator. Qi Long’s attack was very accurate, directly piercing through a vital point. The special-class operator knew he was unlikely to escape death. With a savage grin, he ruthlessly pulled up the self-destruct system of his mecha ...

Qi Long’s Animal Instinct was very sensitive. As soon as the opponent pulled up the self-destruct system, he sensed danger and quickly shouted, “Run!”

The three boys scattered in three different directions. They had just flown away when that special-class mecha exploded. The explosion created by the self-destruct sequence of a special-class mecha was unlike that of a normal mecha — although the three boys had instantly dialled their beam shields to their maximum defence value, the shields were still unable to fully neutralize the force of the explosion. The three mecha were instantly thrown off-balance, spinning out of control to crash into the ground below.

Xie Yi took the worst hit. Because he had been immobilizing the opponent, he had had the least time to dodge and run. As such, he had been exposed to more of the blast force than the others, instantly being thrown by the explosion into the forest. Only after crashing into and snapping several large trees did he fall to the ground ...

Even though their method had been mutually damaging, Qi Long, Luo Lang, and Xie Yi had still finished off their opponent in the end. Without Li Lanfeng, the remaining three in the other group — Li Shiyu, Lin Zhong-qing, and Han Jijyun — attacked the other special-class mecha from two sides. Their situation was tough, perhaps even somewhat perilous — if Ling Lan had not managed to strike down the ace operator, causing their opponent to pause in his attack out of shock, they would not have been able to stop to catch their breath.

This fight had shown them that there was still a huge gap between them and an experienced special-class operator. If not for Li Lanfeng’s efforts to protect them from the start, perhaps the three of them would have already had to withdraw from the battle. Even so, their primary attacker Li Lanfeng had still been struck down ...

Li Shiyu looked at the special-class mecha before his eyes and mentally cursed his own helplessness. He could not save his eldest cousin brother, and now he also could not save another Li family member, Li Lanfeng 1 . If only his mecha control skills were stronger, then Li Lanfeng would not have been ... Li Shiyu’s only wish now was that the two beam shots had not struck Li Lanfeng, even though the chances of this wish coming true were miniscule ...

Similarly, Han Jijyun, who was panting heavily in his cockpit, was currently cursing himself during this short period of rest they had gained. At the heart of it, Li Lanfeng had fallen to save him. The one who should have been thrown to the ground was actually him — those last two beam shots should also have been his to bear. However, Li Lanfeng had taken his place to suffer all this. If Han Jijyun could be said to have harboured some doubts still about Li Lanfeng’s motives for joining the New Cadet Regiment, he no longer felt the same way about it now. Which idiot would be so stupid as to manipulate his way into an opponent’s faction and then selflessly sacrifice himself for the sake of his opponent? He had truly misunderstood Li Lanfeng, thought Han Jijyun with regret.

Meanwhile, Lin Zhong-qing kept a watchful eye on the special-class mecha. Even as he was recovering his strength, he asked himself silently: if he was faced with the same situation, would he have been able to make the same choice as Li Lanfeng?

Lin Zhong-qing found that he could not answer yes without hesitation — this made him feel somewhat ashamed. Li Lanfeng had just joined the team, but he was already able to treat the other team members as his own brothers, willing to sacrifice himself to protect them. In comparison, he had followed Boss Lan for so long in this team, but he still could not be sure whether he could do the same ... was this the difference between him and Li Lanfeng? The other was truly a selfless and sincere person, just as sunny and warm as his smile. He was kind and friendly, definitely not at all a person like himself, who had come out from a black-hearted, scheming, dark and sinister laboratory, could hope to compare to ...

How enviable!

Lin Zhong-qing thought with a bitter smile. The feeling Li Lanfeng gave off was completely different from Boss Lan. Without having to say a word, Boss Lan already would have an overbearing aura just sitting in silence. One gaze from Boss Lan was enough to make others cower; his dominance was unparalleled. He gave courage to those who followed him, secure in his strength. His followers would not cower, retreat, or hesitate, and of course, they never felt lost. He was like a steady rock in a roiling sea — by his side, there was nothing to fear and nothing to worry about. As long as they followed him loyally, Boss Lan would lead them to a grand new world. This was the power of a hegemon, causing others to inevitably believe in him, entrust their dreams to him, and follow in his footsteps.

In contrast, at first sight, Li Lanfeng already came off as the older brother living next door. It was impossible to reject his warmth and friendliness — his ever-smiling face made others inevitably think fondly of him. Unconsciously, he would have silently obtained your trust, gaining the status of an important friend or relative in your mind ... like now, even though he had not had much interaction with Li Lanfeng thus far, he had already fully accepted the other as a friend. Of course, the other's actions had indeed left him with no objections.

Some people were heaven-blessed to be liked by others, such as this Li Lanfeng!

These thoughts went by in a flash across Lin Zhong-qing's mind, and the temporary break was quickly over. Just when Qi Long's team of three had begun their fierce attack on their special-class operator opponent, the special-class operator fighting Li Shiyu's team saw that his teammate was in a tight spot and wanted to go and help. However, how could Li Shiyu and the others allow the other to do so? Without even having to think about it, they charged over to block the special-class mecha ...

Li Shiyu and the other two did all they could and finally managed to delay the special-class mecha for about ten seconds. And these ten seconds were enough to pronounce the end of the other special-class mecha.

Chapter 374: He's Still Alive!

Witnessing his teammate die via self-destruction, the remaining special-class mecha finally went berserk. His eyes turned crimson as he stared at the three advanced mecha in front of him who had

prevented him from going to the aid of his friend. The killing intent in his heart rose to an apex — he must definitely kill this rabble and avenge his comrade!

Anger could produce two different effects in humans. One was the loss of rationality due to extreme rage, causing an inability to fully utilise one's true combat power. This type of rage effect was a negative influence and was something mecha operators should strive to avoid. Meanwhile, the other effect was a manifold increase in one's combat power, and this type of effect was called outburst. When a mecha operator achieved special-class operator status, they would definitely go through the cultivation of this type of outburst ...

Thus, this special-class operator's combat power grew exponentially under the force of his rage. This caused the already struggling Li Shiyu, Han Jijyun, and Lin Zhong-qing to be dragged into an even more dangerous situation ...

"Be careful, Li Shiyu ..." Seeing Han Jijyun get thrown aside by the opponent's attack, Li Shiyu was just about to step in when he heard Lin Zhong-qing yell from one side.

Only then did Li Shiyu notice that the special-class mecha had at sometime, somehow, appeared right before his face. Perhaps his attention had been on Han Jijyun, distracting him from noticing the opponent's movements in time. In spite of Lin Zhong-qing's loud warning, he found that he already had no time to evade ...

Li Shiyu gritted his teeth and turned his beam shield's defence to its maximum value, preparing himself to take the opponent's attack by force ...

With a "bang", Li Shiyu felt his mecha being struck by a tremendous force. His entire person was sent flying out to the side — the juddering mecha which had completely lost its balance due to the collision made Li Shiyu's vision black out for a brief moment.

However, Li Shiyu had been secretly injecting himself with modified gene agent these past few years, so though his physical constitution was still incomparable to the odd child Qi Long's, it was still better than average. He recovered after just half a second. Off-balance, Li Shiyu did not panic. He calmly moved his fingers, operating his mecha, attempting to regain control of his mecha as fast as possible.

Li Shiyu knew well that only if he managed to regain control of his mecha would he have any chance of counterattacking. As Li Shiyu calmly focused on his controls, he did not forget to glance every so often at the situation outside of his mecha. He needed to know what was going on — was the enemy planning to follow up with more attacks?

During one glance, his hand abruptly stuttered. His initially calm eyes turned red in an instant, and he actually felt his eyes grow wet. A mecha was fending off the special-class mecha with a beam saber ...

Li Lanfeng! He was still alive! This was great! For the first time, Li Shiyu felt that happiness was such a simple thing!

Right then, on the ground, the ace operator who had received a heavy blow to his back heard his mecha's A.I. emit another loud warning. "Warning! Damage to mecha's main drive systems at 60%. Danger, danger! Please retreat immediately, please retreat immediately!"

When the ace operator heard the A.I.'s warning, he pounded the control panel before him in frustration. Just then, his heart clenched violently as an unprecedented sense of danger settled over him. Cold sweat poured from his forehead instantly. Perhaps due to the pressure of this life-or-death situation, the rate of his fingers dancing over the controls exceeded his initial limits in that instant ...

The ace mecha lying on the ground suddenly rolled away, causing Ling Lan's forceful stab with her giant sword to miss. The giant sword easily pierced up to two metres deep into the ground. And this was still after Ling Lan had pulled back her strength, otherwise the sword might have gone in all the way to the hilt.

Having narrowly escaped, the ace operator looked up at the only special-class mecha remaining in the sky and knew that the other mecha had most likely met an unfortunate end. He smiled wryly and said, "You've long known that those two shots did not hit your student." Otherwise, the opponent could not have been so calm and collected. In contrast, he had relaxed too soon at that moment. This was one of the reasons behind his failure. At the thought, the ace operator's heart was filled with regret — if only he had been able to keep calm and focused back then as well, the outcome might have been very different.

Right up till this point, the ace operator still believed that his opponent was the Federation's elite ace Tang Yu, while the one piloting that advanced mecha which had fallen was Qiao Ting.

Ling Lan did not reply, merely pulling the giant sword out from the ground. As she did this, her icy gaze did not shift at all from the ace mecha lying on the ground. Before utterly destroying the other, Ling Lan would not let down her guard; Ling Lan would not commit such a rookie mistake.

"Your students are really good. Who'd have guessed that the three of them could work so well together that they managed to take down one of my men? That's a special-class operator, you know, a whole level higher than your students ... and I too have lost at your hands. You are truly an elite ace of your Federation. I have lost." The ace operator was not at all bothered by Ling Lan's cold indifference. He continued to blather on, appearing as if he had already given up and was planning to surrender without putting up a fight.

Seeing this, a thought flashed through Ling Lan's mind. She rested the giant sword in her right hand on the ground and put her left hand on the hilt as well, as if using it as a crutch, seemingly announcing that she no longer planned to fight ...

The initially tense atmosphere disappeared all at once due to Ling Lan's actions. Unexpectedly, it was at this moment that the ace mecha suddenly leapt up to lunge fiercely at Ling Lan ... it turned out that everything he had just said and his entire demeanour had all been an act to get Ling Lan to lower her guard. Since they had come to participate in the invasion of planet Newline, they had already been prepared to sacrifice their lives in service of their country. Even if he failed, he would aim for mutual destruction instead of just surrendering meekly.

Faced with the enemy's sudden attack, Ling Lan was not at all flustered or taken by surprise. Her seemingly relaxed actions were actually just to play along with the opponent's act — from the very beginning, she had never intended to let any of these enemies go ... she would never show mercy to anyone who tried to harm her companions.

Already gripping the hilt of her giant sword, her two hands abruptly lifted and the giant sword sprang up to clash violently with the opponent mecha once more. After staying locked together for several seconds, the two fighters sprang apart again ...

No, it should be said that the opponent mecha was flung back by the giant sword. Meanwhile, Ling Lan's mecha backed off rapidly under the force of her thrusters, pulling over 10 metres away from the enemy in an instant ...

"Boom!" A massive blast rang out. The ace mecha Ling Lan had flung away from her exploded, breaking into countless pieces flying through the air.

It turned out that the opponent knew very well that he no longer had any chance of victory. However, he also did not want to simply be killed by the opponent, so he had chosen to self-destruct, intending to take Ling Lan along with him. Fortunately, Ling Lan had sensed the danger right away and even as she flung the opponent away from her, she had engaged her thrusters to send her mecha flying back swiftly, thus evading this crisis.

Still, the concussive force of an ace mecha's self-destruct was incomparable to that of a normal mecha. Despite retreating swiftly to pull a distance away at first notice, escaping the most dangerous blast zone, Ling Lan still had not been able to completely escape the explosion. The blast had still injured Ling Lan. She felt as if her chest had been struck by a heavy boulder, the coppery taste of blood rising up at the back of her throat. Involuntarily, Ling Lan opened her mouth and blood spurted out, staining the bright screen before her red ...

"Boss, are you alright?!" Seeing Ling Lan injured, Little Four cried out in panic.

Ling Lan immediately circulated her qi and ran through the qi exercises, and soon, the heavy feeling in her chest and sense of nausea faded. Her whole body relaxed and she could tell that it had only been a minor internal injury, nothing serious, so she reassured Little Four by saying, "I'm fine. It was just some residual blast force. I actually feel much better after throwing up some blood."

Little Four instantly calmed down after hearing Ling Lan's answer. Having caught her breath, Ling Lan looked up into the sky once more ...

"Are Qi Long and the others alright?" Ling Lan naturally knew that Qi Long's group of three had been sent flying by the blast of the special-class mecha's self-destruct. Although Little Four had already reported back then that Qi Long and the others were fine, Ling Lan was still rather worried. However, back then she had been in the midst of fighting with the ace operator and had not had the time to ask Little Four for details. Now, she finally had the time to spare.

"They're fine. They've only been dazed by the blast ..." Little Four had already entered their mecha's systems to examine the condition of Qi Long's group. Xie Yi was in the worst condition, but it was all just external injuries so there was no risk of death. As such, Little Four did not pay any more mind to the three boys. Instead, what Little Four was more interested in now was Li Lanfeng who was currently fighting in the air. "Boss, your leopard seems to have advanced a level."

What is this 'your leopard'? Ling Lan threw a cool glance over at Little Four, warning him to watch his words, but unfortunately Little Four could be rather slow on the uptake sometimes ... he did not notice Ling Lan's cold and cutting gaze at all, still continuing to say with a dumb and innocent expression, "His

control skills are now much more impressive than before. Looks like the life-or-death situation earlier has triggered his latent potential, spurring an advancement. As expected, he is just like you, Boss, a freak. If he weren't family, he wouldn't have entered through the same door 1, eh?" mused Little Four.

Those people who could successfully bring out their latent potential and advance in a life-or-death situation would undoubtedly all become aberrant talents. This kind of advancement was much rarer than normal advancement — the insight Li Lanfeng would gain from this experience would be much greater and much deeper than if he had advanced normally. It could be said that for anyone who advanced from insights gained during a life-or-death situation, advancing to the next level after this was pretty much guaranteed. In other words, as long as he gained enough experience, Li Lanfeng was sure to at least become an ace mecha master in future. Oh, how much envy did this bring to those mecha operators who found themselves stuck all their lives at special-class ...

Originally, when Ling Lan heard that Li Lanfeng had advanced, she was very happy, but that final phrase of Little Four's made her somewhat annoyed. Ling Lan unceremoniously flicked a forceful finger at Little Four's forehead and said scornfully, "Where did you learn such inappropriate words?" Did this little fellow not know that that saying originally referred to husband and wife?

Being flicked out of the blue, Little Four guilelessly rubbed his forehead. He blinked his big eyes mournfully, unsure why his boss was abusing him again now.

This pitiful appearance of Little Four's made Ling Lan rather speechless. Fine, getting angry at this fellow was a waste of energy. He must have just picked up the phrase from some random ancient text and started using it without fully understanding it ...

Ling Lan decided not to argue any further with Little Four. She peered intently at the mecha's screen, which was focused on Li Lanfeng and the special-class mecha's fight. After observing several exchanges between the fighters, she said approvingly, "You're right, Little Four. In that life-or-death situation earlier, he really managed to advance. Perhaps this was why he managed to escape those two shots ... what a shame that he's piloting an advanced mecha. If he were piloting a special-class mecha now, this would not be the current situation." Although Li Lanfeng was keeping up with the special-class mecha's attacks, the gap between the two mecha had still put Li Lanfeng at a disadvantage so he could only defend passively.

Chapter 375: A Physical Constitution Problem?

"Even so, it's not easy for the opponent to kill him. Your leopard can still hold out for quite a while. Moreover, there are no other enemies around. This is a good opportunity to let your leopard fight a bit more. Perhaps this will make it easier for him to find his own control style."

Since there were no other enemies nearby, Little Four also became relaxed. Holding a lollipop he had whisked out from god knows where, he licked it as he gave his opinion. Little Four, who had constantly been exchanging ideas with Instructor Number Three, seemed to have the flair of a mecha instructor about him at the moment. Of course, one would first have to overlook the lollipop in his hand and that stumpy body and immature face.

Ling Lan fully agreed with Little Four's suggestion — this was undoubtedly an opportunity for the leopard to once again raise his abilities. She decided to stand by and watch for the moment, and so instructed Little Four, "Little Four, monitor our surroundings closely. If any enemies approach, notify me immediately." That said, Ling Lan clenched her fist around the giant sword in her hand. If any enemies really approached, she would have to attack to guarantee her companions' safety.

In response, Little Four patted his chest and promised to take care of everything.

Ling Lan thought about how Little Four would make some careless mistakes from time to time, but he had never disappointed her when it came to the big things. So, she relaxed and left him to it. She piloted her mecha to execute a swift flash move, and her mecha disappeared on the spot. In the next second, she had appeared next to Luo Lang, who had been the closest to her previous location.

Although Little Four had repeated once more that Qi Long's team of three was fine, having only been knocked out by the blast, Ling Lan was still concerned and wanted to check on them personally.

Meanwhile, at this moment, the five-mecha fight in the skies had in fact already become a showdown between Li Lanfeng and the special-class mecha. Li Shiyu, Han Jijyun, and Lin Zhong-qing could do nothing to interfere in the fight. They could at most look on from afar and find some opportunities to shoot their beam guns to assist Li Lanfeng.

This development was partly because the opponent's strength had multiplied due to his rage-induced outburst, so the boys could not go up and block as they had before. If they tried to block or intercept the enemy, they would definitely be shaken off by a forceful blade. In terms of power, they were already unable to fight against the special-class mecha now.

Another reason for this development was that the returned Li Lanfeng had similarly gone through a vertical increase in combat power. Even though he was piloting an advanced mecha, he was not losing to the other by much in terms of strength and technique. Many times, when the other boys had accidentally stumbled into danger, it was all thanks to Li Lanfeng that they managed to escape unscathed. These occurrences let them know that they should no longer get involved in this fight.

After fighting with the other for about 2 minutes, Li Lanfeng finally got used to the opponent's attack power and tempo, and the situation began to take a turn for the better for him. This caused the three boys observing from the side-lines to feel some relief — they had been very afraid that Li Lanfeng would end up in a perilous situation at any moment while fighting solo against the special-class operator, so their hearts had been lodged in their throats all this while.

The moment Ling Lan came up to Luo Lang's mecha, she saw that its beam shield had buffered the blast of the special-class mecha's self-destruct, so much so that its glow was almost imperceptible, making the entire mecha look dull. The outer shell of the mecha was covered in countless scars, some shallow some deep. Some of the scars had even gone so deep that she could almost see the intricate gears and circuits peeking out. However, most fortunately, there was no fatal damage around the most defensibly weak cockpit area. Ling Lan's tense emotions eased; she knew Luo Lang was in no big trouble.

Just then, Little Four, who had been monitoring the aerial fight all this while, turned with bright eyes to Ling Lan to report that Luo Lang was stirring within the cockpit.

Ling Lan immediately connected to Luo Lang's commlink and shouted, "Luo Lang, it's me, Ling Lan. Please respond."

"Boss ..." After calling out several times, Luo Lang's feeble voice finally responded from the other end of the line.

"Are you injured? Do you need Li Shiyu to treat you?" asked Ling Lan worriedly.

"It's fine, Boss. Before we left, Senior Shiyu had already given us several emergency healing agents just in case. I've just taken some, and I feel much better now." Luo Lang's voice was much stronger than before, proving that his condition was indeed improving.

Receiving confirmation that Luo Lang was fine, Ling Lan was just about to go check on Qi Long who was about 50 metres away when she saw Qi Long's mecha sit up abruptly.

A frisson of happiness passed through Ling Lan's heart and she was by Qi Long's side in the very next second. "Qi Long, how do you feel?"

Little Four had said Qi Long's injuries were roughly the same as Luo Lang's. Now, from the looks of it, the aberrant physical constitution of Qi Long's was no joke. Luo Lang's injuries had to be treated slowly by the emergency healing agents, while Qi Long's condition was obviously much better even without taking them.

Sure enough, Qi Long's reply proved this point. "I'm fine, Boss. I was just dazed for a bit. My body isn't injured at all." Qi Long's loud and powerful voice proved that he was still hale and hearty ...

"Since you're fine, let's go check on Xie Yi together. I think that Xie Yi is injured pretty badly this time," said Ling Lan to Qi Long. She was much more worried about Xie Yi. The two of them quickly entered the forest and found Xie Yi who had been blasted through several towering trees by the blast.

As it turned out, Ling Lan's prediction was not wrong. Xie Yi was truly the one in the worst condition. Having been the closest to the self-destructing mecha, he had received the most blast force from the explosion. Right after that, his mecha had gone through several consecutive collisions with the trees, causing it to be extremely battered. The entire mecha no longer sported any bit of the glow from its beam shield. The mecha's whole body was a dull sheet of grey.

Besides that, there was no way the mecha itself could have remained intact. Its left arm was completely broken at the shoulder, revealing various broken wires underneath, sparking in the air, while its right leg had been pulverized into dust by the explosion. Meanwhile, the cockpit was already pitted with dents, and there was a deep gouge starting from its edge moving up diagonally ...

Following the path of that frightening gouge on the cockpit, Qi Long's face paled drastically and he immediately controlled his mecha to squat and then swiftly opened his mecha's cockpit door. He could not wait for the landing platform to descend; Qi Long chose to leap down directly from the cockpit.

Landing on the ground, Qi Long rolled with the momentum to release the residual force safely. Then, he sprang up from the ground and using all of his limbs, he climbed up to Xie Yi's cockpit.

The cockpit passcode for all members of a team was the same. The reason for that was precisely just in case this kind of situation occurred where a teammate needed help. Qi Long clamped his fingers down

on an area to the left of the cockpit, and then pulled with force, prying a small metal cover loose to reveal a numerical keypad. He swiftly keyed in a string of numbers and then with a 'click', the internal lock of the cockpit opened. The cockpit hatch automatically sprang open soon after, revealing an opening wide enough for an adult to enter.

Qi Long immediately ducked inside and not long after, he had brought Xie Yi out in his arms. Xie Yi was currently unconscious, traces of blood at the corners of his mouth, a sign that he had thrown up blood from his injuries. It looked like he had sustained some pretty serious internal injuries.

"What's Xie Yi's condition?" asked Ling Lan worriedly at the sight.

"Not too bad. He has just suffered some internal injury. I've already fed him Senior Shiyu's emergency healing agents. He should be fine." Qi Long's complexion had regained some colour. When he had first entered the cockpit and saw Xie Yi pale and barely breathing, he had almost been scared out of his wits. He had truly been afraid that this cheerful punk who had been with them for over three years would leave them just like that.

However, Senior Shiyu's emergency healing agents were really amazing. Only a few seconds after pouring them down Xie Yi's throat, Xie Yi's complexion had improved considerably and his breathing had also stabilised. It looked like they needed to have a good, long talk with Senior Shiyu in the future, thought Qi Long as he glanced at Li Shiyu in the air, who was still trying to find some opportunity to shoot.

Knowing that Xie Yi was fine now, Ling Lan relaxed and gave Qi Long instructions to take care of Xie Yi.

"Got it, Boss," answered Qi Long gravely. He walked back to his own mecha and boarded the elevation platform. He carefully carried Xie Yi into his own mecha and buckled him in securely in the auxiliary seat.

After settling all of this, only then did Qi Long close his cockpit and activate his mecha to rise up into the air again. Qi Long was well aware that from this point onwards, he was not only fighting for himself anymore; he was also fighting to protect Xie Yi. He needed to ensure that his mecha was not taken down because other than himself, Xie Yi was inside his mecha as well.

"Xie Yi, we must survive," said Qi Long under his breath, a savage light in his eyes. Rather than speaking to Xie Yi, he was saying this more for his own benefit.

Focused on his own controls, Qi Long did not notice the unconscious Xie Yi emit an almost inaudible sound of agreement in response — hn!

After Xie Yi was transferred to Qi Long's mecha, Ling Lan felt much more reassured. Having handled the matter of Qi Long's team of three, Ling Lan finally turned her full attention to the still fighting Li Lanfeng.

"Eh? Actually fighting evenly with the other now?" Ling Lan was rather stunned. When she had gone to check on Luo Lang, Li Lanfeng was still at a disadvantage, only able to defend without being able to counterattack.

"Yeah, Boss, your leopard is truly very talented in mecha piloting. He has adapted very quickly to his new abilities after advancing and has forced out the full potential of the advanced mecha," explained Little Four upon seeing his boss's surprise at the scene. He had been keeping an eye on Li Lanfeng's fight all this while.

“Hn, the leopard’s mecha control talent is indeed excellent.” From the start, Ling Lan had already known this. When the two of them had practised their basic controls together, she had obtained so much extra practise time due to the cheating device, the learning space, but in the end, her results had only been that little bit better than the leopard’s. If she had not had the extra buff of this cheat, perhaps she would have already lost to the leopard back then.

Little Four heard Ling Lan echo his words and instantly smiled widely. However, he soon scrunched up his little dumpling face again. Eyebrows knitted in puzzlement, he said, “However, your leopard seems to have some problems with his physical constitution.”

Ling Lan quirked a brow. “What do you mean?”

“Your leopard’s stamina seems like it’ll be depleted soon ... he can at most fight for another 2 minutes.” Having monitored him all this while, Little Four was very clear about Li Lanfeng’s current condition.

Chapter 376: Don’t Lose to Yourself!

Little Four’s words made Ling Lan frown. Indeed, in the virtual world, when they had been doing the clan-formation mission, she had also noticed this weakness of the leopard’s. The leopard’s physical constitution seemed to be even weaker than the average person’s — what exactly was the reason for this?

It should be known that in the current Federation, even for those with the most average constitution, if they received gene agent of grade C and above, they would be able to fight for at worst half an hour using normal standard mecha in an intense battle. However, from start till now, the leopard had only been fighting for at most 10 minutes or so ...

Furthermore, the leopard was only piloting an advanced mecha at present. The feedback force of standard mecha of advanced level and below (this included advanced mecha) had very little impact on a trained operator’s body. It was not like with a mecha of special-class and above — because of the introduction of an operator’s unique combat style, the feedback force would fluctuate depending on the power of the combat mode ... this was why the higher the level of a mecha operator, the greater the demand upon the operator’s physical constitution.

If they did not resolve this issue, even if the leopard possessed the control prowess of an ace operator, he would still be unable to pilot an ace mecha ... considering this possibility, the furrow in Ling Lan’s brow deepened.

Right then, in his cockpit, Li Lanfeng was already drenched in sweat. His body was soaked as if he had just stepped out of a bath. As the cockpit had the function of automatically regulating the humidity and temperature within the cockpit, even as Li Lanfeng sweated, his sweat was evaporating, causing the entire cockpit to become muggy with steam. He was panting heavily, his mind and spirit beginning to tire. Not just that, even his body was becoming weak and fatigued. The last few minutes of high-intensity operation and combat had drained his stamina rapidly, even exceeding his initial expectations.

“Damm*t!” Li Lanfeng could not help but curse. Having fought till this extent, he really did not want to lose now due to a lack of stamina. He was never more resentful of this broken body of his. If he had the choice, he definitely would not have chosen to be a spectre. He would rather have possessed a healthy

body and become an exceptional mecha operator. That way, he could have become a free warrior, forever standing by the rabbit's side to follow him and protect him ...

"Is this the end?" Li Lanfeng began to feel his hands losing control. There were several moves he tried to execute, but his fingers just would not listen to him any longer and had gone on strike. He reflexively looked towards the bottom of his screen. In a window there, a mecha was silently watching his fight right now.

Li Lanfeng knew that that was the mecha being piloted by the rabbit. The outer appearance of the mecha was so familiar that he could recite all its inner components and equipment and all the applicable accessories for it. This was because that mecha was one of the ace mecha types he desired the most — the ! Who would have expected his rabbit to already be at this level ...

A trace of bitterness coursed through Li Lanfeng's heart. It made sense when he thought about it though. Seven years time ... with the rabbit's unique heaven-given talent in mecha piloting, how could the other just be as he appeared in Mecha World, just a low-level intermediate mecha warrior?

"The rabbit is getting further and further away from me ..." Li Lanfeng was suddenly and fiercely crestfallen. Did he really have the right to stand by the rabbit's side? Perhaps this was all just a fanciful fantasy of his, perhaps he was just indulging in daydreams, when in fact, he was not at all worthy ...

Just as Li Lanfeng was about to despair and give up, the rabbit's cool voice suddenly rang out from his mecha's commlink. "Don't lose to yourself."

Don't lose to yourself ... this phrase reverberated like thunder in Li Lanfeng's ears. He was transported back to when he and the rabbit had first met — back then, they had been training every day in their dry and boring basic control drills, forever running, dodging, flying ... even the most tenacious person would have times when they would falter and become frustrated. Even someone as calm as the rabbit had at times descended into an irritable funk, and at those times, the rabbit would let out a great roar, "Damm*t, don't lose to yourself, you weakling!"

After that, the rabbit would train even harder to carry out those basic drills, and he in turn would be inspired by the rabbit's actions to persevere, continuing to train alongside the rabbit. Perhaps that phrase was what the rabbit used to motivate himself, but Li Lanfeng took those words as a warning from the rabbit for him. Over these past few years, whenever he found himself restless and impatient and about to give up, this phrase would naturally come to the forefront of his mind. This phrase spurred him to continue pushing forwards, causing him to never dare give up no matter how difficult the situation was.

Seven years later, hearing this phrase straight from the rabbit's mouth once again, Li Lanfeng's heart pounded violently. Warmth surged across his body, and he felt the fatigue he had been shoving aside being chased away by this wave of warmth, his entire body filling up with energy ...

"Yes, how can I lose to myself? If I myself admit defeat, what right do I have to speak of changing my destiny to stand proudly by the rabbit's side?" Li Lanfeng spurned his own weakness. His initially dazed eyes instantly became focused once more, and his slowed fingers picked up their pace once again, becoming even faster than before. In the end, they moved so quickly that they could not be seen clearly — only layer after layer of afterimages could be seen, like illusionary flowers slowly blooming.

The two mecha had been fighting on even ground, but from the moment Li Lanfeng considered giving up, Li Lanfeng's mecha had become passive in comparison, no longer putting up a good fight. Instead, he had slowly been pushed to a disadvantage, soon only able to defend on all sides without being able to return any attacks of his own.

Although Li Shiyu, Han Jijyun, and Lin Zhong-qing did not know why Li Lanfeng had flagged all of a sudden, becoming so flustered in battle, they could tell from the situation that Li Lanfeng was probably in trouble. Their hearts sank, and their initially rather ordered shooting also started to become rushed and disorganised.

The special-class mecha fighting against Li Lanfeng was an experienced mecha master. When he saw his opponent suddenly stop attacking, he quickly realised that the other might be running low on stamina. Although this situation was rather abrupt so he was somewhat unprepared, he trusted in his own judgment. He did not lose this chance to intensify his attacks.

Despite going fully on the defensive, after resisting against the special-class operator's frenzied attacks for over ten seconds, Li Lanfeng's mecha finally could not hold out any longer. His entire mecha was shuddering from the opponent's attacks, looking as if it were on the verge of collapsing soon. Li Shiyu and the other two watching from the side-lines were anxious but could not think of any way to help Li Lanfeng in his predicament. They could only shoot desperately in an attempt to pull Li Lanfeng back from the brink of defeat ...

"This ends here!" Under the opponent's frenzied attacks, Li Lanfeng's mecha finally exposed a fatal opening under duress. The special-class operator had been waiting for this moment — seeing the opening, a cruel sneer appeared on his lips. He raised his beam saber mercilessly and slashed down viciously at Li Lanfeng's mecha.

"Watch out!" The other team members could only cry out in warning. Meanwhile, Li Shiyu was so horrified that he could not help but close his eyes. He could not bear to see Li Lanfeng — a teammate, his friend, also a descendant from the same Li family — die here in front of his eyes ...

"Bang!" Two beam sabers collided forcefully, sending countless sparks into the air. The initially flagging advanced mecha had managed to react swiftly in this most critical juncture. His speed had certainly exceeded his previous top speed by at least twofold — it was due to this that Li Lanfeng had managed to block that dangerous blow to save himself.

"That's amazing, Senior Lanfeng!" Qi Long and the others watching the fight instantly cheered in excitement at the sight.

Hearing everyone's cheers, Li Shiyu quickly opened his eyes. Seeing Li Lanfeng unharmed, he instantly let out a sigh of relief. For that split second earlier, Li Shiyu had truly been overcome by despair.

"Even if I run out of stamina and become unable to continue fighting, I must defeat the opponent. I will use facts to tell the rabbit that I, Li Lanfeng, am no weakling." Boundless fighting spirit blazed in Li Lanfeng's eyes — the hesitation and discouraged emotions he felt previously had disappeared. With a loud shout, he pushed his engines to their maximum power and charged right at the opponent with the intent to ram into the other ...

“Goddamm*t,” the opponent could not help but curse, seeing this reckless attack of Li Lanfeng’s. At the same time, he controlled his mecha to dodge — he had no intentions of dying along with the enemy while he still held the upper hand.

If possible, he hoped to swiftly escape after successfully killing the other ... he had not forgotten that there was still an ace mecha watching hungrily below; his team leader had died at the other’s hand. Now, he only hoped that that close combat ace mecha did not have enough power to fly into the sky.

The special-class mecha’s ideas were solid. He planned to evade Li Lanfeng’s reckless charge and then counterattack, but he did not expect that after he chose to evade, all the advantage he held previously was gone in a flash.

Li Lanfeng watched as his opponent dodged and his eyes flashed with a cold glint. He revved his engines and changed directions abruptly, sticking close to the opponent mecha like a shadow — there was no sign of his previous stiff and mindless charge. With that, the special-class operator realised that he had been tricked. The other’s fierce and seemingly mindless attack was just a feint — the other’s true goal was to use it to regain the initiative in this battle.

In this manner, Li Lanfeng successfully stuck close to the special-class mecha and began to rain down blows with his beam saber on his opponent. Perhaps it was because his hand speed had increased via a breakthrough, pushing his mecha’s attack pace much higher than his previous top speed — right then, the special-class mecha was taken off guard, flustered at the sudden change. All the special-class operator could see at that moment were the shadows of beam sabers, and he could only block and defend with all his might.

Although the special-class mecha was in a tough spot right then, he had a wealth of battle experience to fall back on. He knew that he was in great danger at the moment, so even as he dealt with the rain of attacks, he turned the power on his mecha’s beam shield to the maximum setting. That way, even if he missed any of the opponent’s attacks, the heightened defence value of the beam shield would still be able to easily withstand the attack.

With a loud ‘bang’, the special-class operator felt a tremendous force strike his cockpit. The resulting violent vibrations felt like a boulder crushing his chest, and the operator’s vision turned black as a surge of blood rose from the back of his throat ...

With an audible cry, the special-class operator threw up the blood in his mouth forcefully, staining the control panel before him red.

Chapter 377: Ling Lan’s Choice!

But it was precisely because he threw up this mouthful of blood that the special-class operator’s mind began to clear. When he was fully aware again, his first response was to retreat swiftly in an attempt to escape the other’s attack range. Until now, he had not figured out how that attack had come about. This was definitely not something a regular beam saber attack could do.

The special-class operator was truly blind because he was in the thick of it all; in contrast, the members of Ling Lan’s team who were watching from the side-lines could see clearly. While the special-class operator had had his full attention on defending against Li Lanfeng’s beam saber, Li Lanfeng had

surprised the other by executing a knee strike with his mecha. The knee had struck the special-class mecha's cockpit with the powerful force of a mecha behind it.

If not for the gap in the mecha levels, as well as for the special-class mecha's beam shield neutralizing a large part of the force, the special-class operator would not have just ended up throwing up a mouthful of blood. He would probably have been gravely injured already. However, the attack had landed on a vital point of the mecha, with the cockpit directly receiving the brunt of the attack. Even though a special-class mecha's defenses were several times stronger than that of a regular mecha, this great force and the resulting intense vibrations had still inflicted some internal injury on that special-class operator.

The special-class operator desperately wanted to pull away and recover from his current passive situation, but having gained the advantage, how could Li Lanfeng let the other side succeed? With rekindled confidence, Li Lanfeng went all out into the fight. Even if this advanced mecha he was piloting broke down due to overload, he would still make sure that this special-class mecha before him was struck down.

In order to accomplish this objective, when Li Lanfeng saw the opponent retreat quickly, he too pushed all his engines to their maximum capacity to keep up with the opponent. With regards to mecha piloting, this type of behaviour was absolutely forbidden. Pushing the engines to maximum power meant that the mecha was being overburdened. Running on overcapacity, even the most advanced mecha would only be able to sustain itself for a short three to four minutes. Once its limits were exceeded, the mecha would inevitably be damaged. The longer the mecha operated on overload, the greater the extent of the damage, until the point where the mecha might break down completely during combat ...

However, to pilot a mecha till it was overloaded was not such a simple thing. If one's hand speed could not keep up, even if an operator wanted to operate on overcapacity, it would merely be wishful thinking. In the past, Li Lanfeng could barely raise all the power aspects of his mecha to their full 100% value. But this time, due to the life-or-death situation, he had broken through his own limits, which included the limits on his hand speed. Therefore, at this moment, he had truly unleashed 120% of the mecha's capacity, which was theoretically the greatest overload value achievable.

Sure enough, under Li Lanfeng's full-force operation, despite the level gap between the two mecha, Li Lanfeng managed to compensate for it by running his mecha in overcapacity.

And so, two mecha could be seen to fly at extreme speeds in the air, not much distance at all between them. One mecha was desperately backing away, while the other was hot on its tail.

Not only that, even while he pursued the opponent, Li Lanfeng did not forget to swing his beam saber wildly to attack. Li Lanfeng did not know how long this sudden surge of energy would last, but he knew that once it ran out, he would no longer have any more stamina to continue operating the mecha to fight ...

"Your leopard is an absolute maniac." Little Four finally could not help but exclaim. The other was already obviously out of strength, but relying purely on willpower and an unwillingness to lose, he was holding out, and his offensive power seemed even stronger than before.

"Hn, I never expected that he would actually have the same berserk air like Qi Long." Qi Long was a battle maniac — as soon as he entered combat, he was very easily stoked into a manic state of

excitement. Endless energy would surge up from within his body in that mode — even Ling Lan would have to expend a great deal of stamina to defeat Qi Long. She had initially thought that Qi Long was the only oddball in this regard, but now, seeing Li Lanfeng's unstoppable courage in pushing forwards, that dogged desire to finish things, he really seemed to display some signs of Qi Long in his berserk mode ...

Ling Lan could not help but shake her head in silence. What was up with these people she had taken in? The leopard had clearly looked like a gentle and graceful, mild-mannered and cultured person — who would have guessed that he would have a crazed zeal for battle no weaker than Qi Long's? Just imagining the future when she might end up leading a group who would turn into battle-crazed maniacs the moment they began fighting, Ling Lan felt her temples twitch violently ...

Ling Lan very quickly threw this image aside — let her cross that bridge when she came to it. It had to be said that, at times, Ling Lan truly embodied the Ah-Q mentality.

However, Ling Lan soon thought of the leopard's physique which was weaker than the average person's and her joyful spirits sank. If she could not solve this problem, no matter how good the leopard's control skills were, he would still be unable to operate an ace mecha. Ling Lan was well aware that the feedback force an ace mecha plied upon an operator's body was absolutely not something the leopard could withstand in his current state.

Perhaps Little Four had used the term 'your leopard' too many times — under the subtle influence of repetition, Ling Lan had unconsciously begun calling Li Lanfeng her leopard as well, completely forgetting to correct Little Four's wrong phrasing ...

It had to be said that habit was a scary thing. It could make others accept things naturally, without questioning it. By the time one noticed, the habit would have already been ingrained, and there would no longer be any way to resist or discard it ...

While Ling Lan was worrying about Li Lanfeng's physical constitution, in the aerial battlefield, the special-class operator had already pushed his mecha's engines to their maximum value, but he was still unable to get away from the other's pursuit. Moreover, as he was fully focused on trying to get away, in a moment of distraction, the special-class operator was actually struck forcefully several times by Li Lanfeng's wild attacks.

The power of the mecha's beam shield was being drained at a rapid rate as it fought off the opponent's attacks — when it looked like the mecha's remaining power would not be sufficient to maintain the maximum defence value of the beam shield any longer, the special-class operator knew that he had been forced into a corner and had no choice but to fight back soon. Otherwise, he would end up crashing when the opponent's attacks whittled away all of his mecha's power. At that time, his only outcome would be death.

"Argh!" The special-class operator unleashed an angry roar; this dire situation gave him no choice but to fight for his life. He decisively stopped trying to escape — gripping his beam saber tightly with both hands, he aimed accurately for the opponent's incoming beam saber and swung his own blade out to meet it.

The two beam sabers met with a loud bang. Perhaps both parties had used the full force of their mecha behind their blows, for the massive force of the collision caused the two beam sabers to present signs of

distortion in that instant, and energy sparks were sent flying in all directions. In this patch of night sky, those sparks were like radiant fireworks, lighting up the night sky instantly.

Before the flares could dissipate, another loud 'bang' rang out once more. This sound was several times louder and crisper than the sound of the beam sabers clashing previously — the two mecha had slammed into each other at this time.

Even Li Shiyu's group of three who had been chasing after the two fighting mecha could feel the violent shockwaves from the collision of the two mecha. It was clear to see how strong the impact of the collision was.

The two fighting mecha were locked for several seconds and then they leapt back to instantly pull more than 30 metres apart. This was the inevitable outcome of inertia from the collision. The special-class mecha which already had a great deal of its power exhausted by its beam shield had become entirely dull after this collision. However, the condition of Li Lanfeng's mecha was not much better. His beam shield had been amped up to its maximum defence value as well during the collision. And even though the defence value of his beam shield had not been drained before the impact, due to the gap between their mecha levels, this one violent collision had been enough to completely exhaust the power of Li Lanfeng's mecha's beam shield. Li Lanfeng's mecha was similarly dark and dull.

Having been flung back, the special-class operator relied on his solid control skills to stabilise his mecha. When he saw the opponent's mecha also lose the protection of its beam shield, he was ecstatic. He knew that this was his chance! So, he decisively raised the beam saber in his hands and piloted his mecha to charge manically at the off-balance advanced mecha, shouting, "Go to hell!"

Seeing this, Ling Lan's expression shifted. She decisively drew a beam handgun from the back of her waist and aimed right for that special-class mecha leaping at Li Lanfeng.

Although Ling Lan was piloting a close combat ace mecha, this did not mean that her mecha was not equipped with any long-range weapons. That said, the long-range weapons of a close combat mecha were neither those specialised long beam guns nor the even longer range beam sniper rifles long-range attack mecha had; rather, close combat mecha were equipped with beam handguns which had relatively shorter range. Still, a short-range beam handgun was enough to cover the distance between her and that special-class mecha right now.

Although Ling Lan could be said to favour close combat, her long-range shooting skills were equally good. She might not match up to the level of those aberrant marksmanship prodigies who were masters of long-range attacks, but Ling Lan was still a shade better than the average shooter.

However, right when Ling Lan was about to shoot, her gaze flashed and her trigger finger froze. Highly familiar with close combat techniques, she had noticed that Li Lanfeng's seemingly off-balance mecha had actually shifted into a very familiar motion — his mecha's left hand was reaching slightly forward while the entire mecha seemed to be leaning to one side ...

Empty-Handed Weapon Grab 1 ! Of course, the stance Li Lanfeng was using was a modified version, but the discerning eyes of Ling Lan could still see the underlying true form. No matter how much he had changed the stance, its origins were unchanged. It looked like Li Lanfeng was prepared to make his final move.

At this sight, Ling Lan actually had two options. One was to proceed and shoot anyway — a mecha without the protection of a beam shield would require only three consecutive beam shots to eliminate. If those three shots hit, she would certainly be able to penetrate the special-class mecha's cockpit and end this fight instantly. The other option was to trust that the leopard would be able to finish his final attack, though in Ling Lan's opinion, the probability of the leopard succeeding was at most only 60% ...

If this were still the Ling Lan of the previous world, she would definitely have chosen to proceed and shoot. She definitely would not have taken the gamble — her mother hen personality made it a habit for her to gather up the people she treasured under her wings for protection. But in this new life, having gone through the various insane torments and trials of the learning space, Ling Lan had learned to be cold and ruthless, unfeeling and decisive. These two conflicting notions spun through Ling Lan's mind, and then she decisively chose the second option. As long as there was more than half the probability, Ling Lan would dare to take the risk. She believed that if the leopard succeeded, he would once again grow even stronger and get even closer to becoming an ace operator.

Even though Li Lanfeng's life would be threatened, cold rationality told Ling Lan that, for the sake of the other's future, this bit of risk was still worth it ...

Chapter 378: The Attribution of Victory!

Ling Lan's decision was made in a split second, and then the special-class mecha's beam saber was striking out in a savage stab at Li Lanfeng's cockpit. Every mecha operator knew that once an opponent's cockpit was destroyed, it would mean the end of a battle and the clinching of victory.

"Dodge!"

"Watch out!"

"Danger!"

Observing the fight, the other members of Ling Lan's team could only yell helplessly in fright. Qi Long and Luo Lang were not good at long-range attacks, so they could only stare helplessly from the ground below, unable to do anything to help.

As they both favoured close combat, their skills and techniques were largely intended for close combat — they had not paid much attention to long-range attack skills. Right now, they finally regretted their decision. They finally understood why Boss Lan had casually reminded them every so often not to neglect their long-range attack skills even if they wanted to focus on close combat ...

It turned out that when a companion's life was in danger, every extra skill or technique might be the key to turning things around to save that companion ... like now, if only they had some long-range attacks to rely on, they would have long started shooting frenziedly to help Li Lanfeng against the enemy.

Li Shiyu, Han Jijyun, and Lin Zhong-qing too felt their helplessness keenly at this time. If only their mecha control skills were slightly better, they would not have been left so far behind. Furthermore, they also felt that there was something wrong with their teamwork. For example, when they had begun chasing after Li Lanfeng, they had not thought to spread themselves out. Now, all bunched up together, they found that their shooting trajectories were blocked by Li Lanfeng ...

In other words, even though they had the ability to shoot, they still did not dare to shoot now. This was because they just could not guarantee that they would not hit Li Lanfeng, who was closer to them, first before they could even hit the special-class mecha.

Everyone could only stare with wide eyes as the enemy's beam saber pierced towards Li Lanfeng's cockpit ...

"Swoosh!" This was the sound of a beam saber piercing through a mecha. Li Shiyu's group of three following behind Li Lanfeng saw a beam saber suddenly appearing at his back through his body. They all felt despair creep over them — had that mild-mannered, forever smiling nice guy lost his wings here?

Only Ling Lan, who had been observing the fight from the ground below, calmly lowered the raised right hand of her mecha, unhurriedly controlling the mecha to holster her beam handgun back at her waist.

Ling Lan had just finished this motion when the two stationary mecha in the air suddenly moved. Li Lanfeng's mecha abruptly raised a leg and slammed a powerful kick at the special-class mecha sticking closely to him.

The special-class mecha was sent flying backwards by Li Lanfeng's kick, back arching to face the skies, but it still made no motion to resist. Those with sharp eyes could see that a sword hilt-like object was protruding from his cockpit, and at the back of the mecha's waist, an indistinct light was flickering ...

The special-class mecha soaring through the air was not moving; under the influence of planet Newline's gravity, the entire mecha began to plunge towards the ground. Right at that moment, that hilt-like protrusion on his cockpit suddenly dropped off, and the flickering light at the back of his waist was snuffed out at the same time.

Without the hilt-like object in the way, a dark round hole was revealed in the mecha's cockpit, tunnelling right through to the other side ...

A loud 'boom' rang out as the special-class mecha crashed heavily into the ground, sending clouds of dust and dirt into the air. Perhaps because the special-class mecha's construction was extremely solid, it still remained in one piece after the impact.

At this time, the watching crowd finally realised that the winner of this fight was actually their companion Li Lanfeng and not the enemy special-class mecha as they had thought.

Li Shiyu's group of three, which had been hurrying desperately after Li Lanfeng, unwilling to give up hope, were instantly overwhelmed with joy at the outcome. They were just about to fly over to congratulate Li Lanfeng, the clear victor of the battle, when Li Lanfeng, who had been proudly hovering in the air, suddenly lost control of his mecha, which immediately began to plummet.

This unexpected development took the ecstatic team members by surprise. Their expressions changed drastically once more as they leapt forwards in unplanned unison ... the ones in the air hoped to halt the falling mecha, while the ones on the ground hoped to catch the mecha before it could hit the ground ...

Still, it was undeniable that, being so far away, it was almost impossible for them to accomplish their objectives. Even so, they did not give up, still pushing their engines to their limits ...

Mentally prepared, Ling Lan's mecha had flickered right at the moment Li Lanfeng had lost control of his mecha, disappearing from its original position ... the next second, she had appeared right below Li Lanfeng. With a great leap, her mecha flew over 10 metres into the air, just in time to catch Li Lanfeng's mecha by the waist ...

When the other members of Ling Lan's team saw this scene, their hearts relaxed. They had actually forgotten that there was still Boss Lan standing guard below. Everyone slowed their mecha to a stop.

Only Little Four was driven up the wall by the sight. What the hell was this?! A hero rescuing a damsel in distress? A damsel rescuing a hero in distress? Or was it a hero saving another hero in distress? Or should it be a damsel rescuing another damsel ... aaaaaaah, his core chip was quickly being overloaded by this incomputable question!

Little Four suddenly froze, internal systems hanging, his entire body going slack, gaze blank. However, he reflexively saved a copy of this image, storing it directly in his databank. When his core chip resumed normal functioning later, he would continue processing this question.

"Leopard, how do you feel?" Ling Lan efficiently hugged Li Lanfeng's mecha close as she controlled her mecha into landing softly with almost no tremors at all. Feet securely on the ground, she quickly connected to Li Lanfeng's commlink and asked worriedly.

Even though Ling Lan's tone of voice was as icy as ever, Li Lanfeng could still hear the deep well of concern concealed within it.

Li Lanfeng could not help but smile happily, warmth spreading through his heart. His rabbit truly cared a lot for him, otherwise he would not have rushed so quickly over to save him before he could hit the ground ...

Due to the fierce battle, the metal half-mask concealing Li Lanfeng's upper face all this time had already slipped off. If someone had been able to see the radiant, heartfelt smile on his face right now, and if their resistance was a little low, they would have found their hearts captivated, regardless of whether they were male or female.

"I'm fine!" replied Li Lanfeng, smiling. His eyes felt a little hot, and he raised his hands to wipe away the sweat flowing down into his eyes. Even such a simple movement was very difficult for Li Lanfeng right now — he felt as if his two arms no longer belonged to him.

"Your mecha has no more power to fight." Ling Lan swiftly examined Li Lanfeng's mecha; the grey and dull outer shell of the mecha made her frown. In this kind of dangerous battlefield, it was very dangerous without the protection of a mecha ... Ling Lan instantly made her decision. "Later, come sit inside my mecha."

"Ah, oh, okay!" Ling Lan's words startled Li Lanfeng, but he quickly caught himself and answered ecstatically. Did this prove that his performance this time had gained the rabbit's approval? At this thought, Li Lanfeng's entire being thrummed with excitement. His body, initially so tired that he could not even lift a finger, seemed to be infused with a second wind.

He picked up the metal mask and placed it back on his face. When Ling Lan placed his mecha onto the ground, he opened the hatch of the cockpit and climbed out laboriously. Of course, his movements now

were not as neat as usual, perhaps even appearing rather awkward, because he had half-crawled half-stumbled out of his cockpit.

He then climbed up from the ground and inched step by step to the feet of Ling Lan's mecha. This would have been an extremely simple set of movements under usual circumstances, but now, Li Lanfeng only managed it via a Herculean effort.

Li Lanfeng had just arrived at the feet of Ling Lan's mecha when the boarding platform of the mecha settled onto the ground almost at the same time. Li Lanfeng smiled wryly — it looked like the rabbit was well aware of his current condition, able to estimate his arrival time so precisely. Although Li Lanfeng was somewhat frustrated and embarrassed by this, his joy and gratefulness quickly chased those complicated emotions away ... he took in a deep breath and then stepped firmly onto the platform.

The platform rose slowly, and before it even arrived at the cockpit, Li Lanfeng could already see Ling Lan standing outside the cockpit, stretching a hand out towards him ...

The corners of Li Lanfeng's lips quirked and he placed his hand firmly into Ling Lan's hand. Ling Lan's fingers were rather cold, but his palm was very warm. This warmth made Li Lanfeng's heart thump and settle — so, it felt this safe being held tightly by someone one trusted ...

Just as Li Lanfeng was wrestling with his emotions, a powerful tug came from Ling Lan's hand. The next second, his entire body had been pulled by the other into the cockpit and thrown into the auxiliary seat ...

"Sit tight!" ordered Ling Lan. Her cool gaze swept over Li Lanfeng, as if displeased at Li Lanfeng's dilly-dallying. This gaze made Li Lanfeng shiver, his mind jolting to clarity in an instant. Those pointless musings in his heart were completely swept away. He did not dare to delay any further, hurriedly buckling himself into the auxiliary seat with the seatbelt.

Boo hoo hoo, he really did not want the rabbit to think of him as a burden !!! 1 Somewhat jittery, Li Lanfeng could feel none of his body's pain or discomfort. He was obviously much more agile when buckling himself in. Sure enough, when one's attention was diverted, there would be a painkilling effect.

Seeing Li Lanfeng's quickened motions, Ling Lan closed the cockpit, satisfied, and activated her mecha. She had really been rather annoyed looking at the leopard's slow movements earlier; she truly was an impatient person ... it looked like she really needed to think of a plan to help the leopard solve the problem of his physical constitution completely soon, thought Ling Lan.

As there were no other enemies around, Ling Lan did not ask Little Four to employ emergency activation, choosing to activate the mecha normally. Two minutes later, the mecha's regular activation was completed.

This was already Little Four delaying things as much as he could bear. Otherwise, for the A.I. that had been optimized by Little Four, even regular activation would definitely be completed within one minute. However, this speed would have been much too shocking and suspicious. Even an imperial mecha could not complete regular activation within one minute. Although Ling Lan trusted the leopard, the existence of Little Four was just too bizarre to explain. So, in order to avoid trouble and also to protect Little Four, Ling Lan still chose to cover things up a little.

Chapter 379: The Truth is Revealed!

Having activated her mecha, Ling Lan very quickly contacted the rest of the team and made the subsequent arrangements. Ling Lan felt that continuing to remain here was much too dangerous. After all, two batches of enemies had fallen here — if another batch of enemies came, they definitely would not be just one lone ace mecha squad anymore. It was very likely that two, or even three or more, ace mecha squads would arrive.

Ling Lan had the confidence to go up against one ace operator, but Ling Lan was unsure whether she could take an additional ace. Moreover, she was also not the only one here now — there were still the other members of her team to account for. Ling Lan needed to take responsibility for her team members' safety. After careful consideration, Ling Lan decided to retreat with her team and avoid the keenest edge of danger for the moment!

Meanwhile, at that moment, in the central command centre of the starship fleet in space, two battlefield reports had been delivered to the commander ...

"You're saying that there have been reports from both locations that Qiao Ting has appeared?" The commander looked at the two locations on the map which were over ten kilometres apart and could not help but frown.

"Yes, Commander. On one end is news sent by team-M — preliminary estimation is that the elite ace Tang Yu is bringing Qiao Ting along with him. It's only the two of them, and at present, it has been confirmed that one of the mecha is an ace trainee mecha of the military academy ... meanwhile, the other report came from the dormitory district. Our mecha troops there have discovered a batch of military academy trainee mecha among the ground forces. A majority of those trainee mecha are special-class mecha, with just one of them being an ace mecha ..." The adjutant had pored over the information in detail the moment he had received the reports. Upon the commander's questioning, he quickly spoke up to explain.

"Actually having two ace trainee mecha appear at the same time ... could it be that two ace operators have emerged within the First Men's Military Academy?" The commander-in-chief stared at the two reports, his forehead scrunched up even tighter.

"Unclear. The Huaxians have always been wily. This could just be a smokescreen, a ploy by the instructors, or there really could be two students who have managed to advance and the school had intentionally suppressed this information." The adjutant shared his speculations with the commander.

"It looks like we can't pass on either of these two points. Regardless whether it is true or false, these trainee mecha need to be completely wiped out." A cold glint flashed through the commander's eyes; he had not forgotten the ultimate goal of this operation.

"That location of team-M, since there are two people, send two ace mecha squads over ..." The commander first gave this order.

Thinking of something, the adjutant quickly notified commander, "Sir, before I reported to you, I had already sent an ace mecha team over."

“So what’s the current situation?” asked the commander with a raised brow.

The adjutant’s expression was unsightly. “We still have not received any confirmed updates.”

“How long has it been since the team was deployed?” The commander’s face turned grim.

“It’s already been 10 minutes.” The adjutant too felt that things were not looking good for there to be no news after so long.

“It looks like they’ve probably met a bad end at that spot ...” the commander’s eyes flashed. “It is very likely to be a trap ... but even if it’s a trap, I still want this trap to become a conquest of ours. Send two more ace mecha squads to that location. We must completely eradicate the people lying in ambush there.”

“Yes, Commander!” the adjutant replied immediately.

After issuing this order, the commander walked over to the battle map display, and the adjutant quickly hurried after him.

The commander peered intently at those spots marking the areas where the battle was most intense, and after a thoughtful pause he said, “The dormitory district ... is the area with the greatest resistance. The bulk of our forces as well as the forces of our allies are caught up here ... Adjutant Gare, is the battle still deadlocked?”

“Yes, Commander. The defending troops of planet Newline have already figured out our objective. They have placed all their martial forces at the dormitory district. Our previous few batches of mecha warriors suffered major casualties because the other side was ready for us. We’ve lost many people and are currently disadvantaged in terms of numbers. Although we’ve tried forcing our way through many times, the other side has been able to resist tenaciously.” The adjutant reported the situation at the dormitory district to the commander.

The commander-in-chief once again picked up the reports the staff officer had brought him earlier and his brow scrunched up once more. “The ground artillery is too dense and our landing points are too concentrated ... can’t we disperse our landing points further away?”

The adjutant chuckled wryly and said, “The only safe landing point on planet Newline is this spot at the First Men’s Military Academy. The other undeveloped primal areas are all classified as treacherous terrain. This was specially highlighted during our briefing with the intelligence bureau. Our landing points must not exceed the range of the First Men’s Military Academy at all costs. Otherwise, the lives of our warriors will be in danger ...”

Before the commander could say anything, the adjutant added, “The facts prove that the information given to us by the intelligence bureau is accurate. One of our allied mecha squads made an impromptu alteration to their landing point to avoid the dense cannonfire, going beyond the safe areas we had marked out ... those people are still MIA 1 now. After repeated consideration and deduction, the final conclusion we arrived at is that the entire team was annihilated ...”

The adjutant’s words made the commander’s facial expression change; the adjutant’s expression had twisted as well as he said all this. He paused for a beat and then continued, “Just now, I have carefully studied the briefing file sent by the intelligence bureau again and found that those areas are all

forbidden grounds. They are left there by the Huaxians for operators of ace level and above to attempt a breakthrough.”

The commander-in-chief’s gaze narrowed in interest. “So the Huaxians have found such a great spot! No wonder they would often produce top-class operators after a stretch of time. Moreover, with these forbidden grounds protecting the planet, with only the First Men’s Military Academy situated here, this is a great way of saving labour and resources while providing peace of mind.”

With regards to the Huaxians’ great luck, the commander-in-chief was truly filled with envy-jealousy-hate! After a few seconds of silent contemplation, he finally made a decision. “Adjutant Gare, notify those below. Mobilize the ultimate tool.”

The adjutant raised his head, gaping with disbelief. The ultimate tool was something that was only allowed to be mobilised when the fleet was facing total annihilation. He did not expect the commander-in-chief to violate this principle, actually ordering its mobilization while they were still attacking. If news of this ever leaked to the outside world, the commander-in-chief would definitely receive censure from all sides, and may even be court-martialled.

“Time is of the essence. Do not forget what our primary objective is.” The commander-in-chief was not at all surprised by his adjutant’s reaction. If possible, he too did not want to mobilise this ultimate plan. However, the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry 2 — the sneak attack they had thought foolproof ended up being discovered by the ground forces of the enemy, resulting in mass casualties on their end, pushing the entire battle into a deadlock.

The commander-in-chief knew very well that the longer the battle dragged on, the more disadvantageous it would become for them. At present, their satellite signal jamming technology could only hold out for four hours. As soon as the interference ended, they would be facing enemy reinforcements on all sides ...

In the surrounding star space, the commander-in-chief knew that there were four large Huaxian fleets prowling about. They were only able to cause trouble here for so long because the fleets did not know that planet Newline had been invaded. Once the interference time ended, the ground forces would be able to connect to their satellites again and transmit a distress signal. Those four fleets would definitely rush here at top speed to provide assistance. At that time, they would have to pay a heavy toll to escape, having no choice but to cut a bloody path through the enemies. And this was something the commander did not wish to see.

“Also, I’ve found out that those allied forces outside have already begun to distrust us.” A trace of frustration flashed through the commander-in-chief’s eyes. “In order to salvage the situation and appease them, we need to do something impactful to let them know that everything is still within our control!” Besides, he was not at all planning to return fruitless. He was a staunch champion of the hegemony of the Empire ... even if he would be court-martialled, he still wanted to complete this mission for the empire.

The adjutant became very serious in reaction to the commander-in-chief’s words. He too knew that those words spoken by the allied forces outside were indeed not very pleasing to the ear, some seeming to even suspect that the empire was purposefully using the allied troops as sacrificial pawns. The commander-in-chief had chosen this drastic step in large part to shake off this bad name.

Coming to terms with the commander's decision, the adjutant quickly stood to attention and accepted the order. "Yes, Sir! I'll immediately notify those below!"

The commander-in-chief waved a hand, gaze shadowed as he looked down at the verdant planet below. He had already revealed all his cards — he hoped that this time things would turn out to his satisfaction.

Subsequently, order after order was sent out from the command centre. Countless starships once again deployed countless mecha troops — among them was the secret weapon which the commander-in-chief had called the ultimate tool ...

In the command centre of the ground forces, when the commander there received reports of more enemy mecha descending from space, his expression changed drastically, "Issue the command. Hold on no matter what." He tore his army cap from his head in a pique. The back of his crisp-pressed military uniform was already soaked with sweat — it was clear to see that the strategic planning over this period of time had already wrung him out mentally.

"Are we still unable to contact the fleets at the other sectors?" Watching his orders being conveyed one by one down the line by the adjutant staff officer by his side, he could not help but look towards the soldier in charge of communications who had not stopped trying to establish contact with the other fleets.

"We can't send any signals out. We can only passively receive signals from the satellite." The comms soldier was in a similar state as the commander. The anxiety and stress over this period of time had also caused his uniform to be soaked through with sweat.

"It looks like the other is using a signal jammer. The only lucky thing is that they only managed to jam outgoing signals and not shut us down completely." The commander had actually come to this conclusion a long time ago, but he had just been holding on to that last bit of hope, unwilling to resign himself to the situation. At the thought of the opponent's jamming technology being just that bit stronger ... the already sweat-soaked military uniform was saturated even more with a new torrent of sweat from the resulting fear. The commander was well aware that if that had been the case, they would certainly be deader than dead right now, to say nothing of putting up any resistance and counterattacking.

"Commander, the latest news from the frontlines say that this batch of mecha are mostly ace mecha and special-class mecha." Without waiting for the commander to finish being thankful, the news his subordinate brought made the commander's heart sink.

The commander knew very well that they had only been able to hold out for so long because the first few batches of enemy mecha invading from the skies were largely intermediate mecha and advanced mecha, with only the rare few ace mecha scattered among them ...

"It looks like the enemy has pulled out all the stops now." The commander clenched his teeth and ordered, "Let the special-class mecha task force holding the fort — all the mecha of special-class and above — engage the enemy in battle."

He had way too few ace operators on hand ... now, he could only rely on special-class operators to use their lives to fend off the enemy. Hopefully, they would not have to wait till all their forces were wiped

out for the reinforcements to arrive. A glimmer of pain passed through the commander's eyes. In order to protect those students behind them, he had no choice but to make this painful decision.

Chapter 380: Break Apart!

As Tang Yu's group, which had been providing support to the frontlines from the back via long-range attacks all this while, consisted of either ace or special-class mecha, they received news of the new batch of incoming enemy mecha a step earlier than the other regular mecha.

Tang Yu swiftly locked onto an enemy mecha and zoomed in onto its image on his screens. When he saw the familiar outer forms of the mecha, Tang Yu's face paled involuntarily. He then quickly chose another few mecha from the incoming enemy team at random, zooming in on them in succession, and found that a majority of these enemy mecha were ace mecha and special-class mecha, at a ratio of 1 ace to 4 special-class mecha ... their numbers were as high as 500 mecha!

Tang Yu knew that this was likely the enemy's last resort, a signal that the final showdown of this battle was about to begin!

"Instructors of the academy at special-class operator status and above, draw in towards my location immediately ..." As the instructor with the highest military rank, Tang Yu was decisive, instantly connecting to the internal commlink of the military academy instructors to issue this order.

The instructors, who had initially been scattered around the campus, heard Tang Yu's command and quickly stopped shooting, operating their mecha in Tang Yu's direction. In less than a minute, these experienced instructors had all assembled by Tang Yu's side.

Tang Yu shared the news he had received with all the instructors, splitting the instructors into several teams at the same time. He also told them that as soon as these enemy mecha entered the lower air range of planet Newline, they needed to surge forth and meet the enemy.

On the ground, the ones defending the dormitory district were all the armoured ground forces of the Federation. As soon as the flames of battle spread out to scorch the ground, the first ones to suffer would be these warriors. This was why Tang Yu had decided to bring the battlefield into the air. Moreover, the dormitory district was right behind the armoured forces — inside were all those defenceless academy cadets. For the sake of the students' safety, Tang Yu would not allow a mecha fight to break out there.

All the instructors knew that this was an extremely unfavourable battle for them, because the number of ace operators among the ground forces defending planet Newline was just too low. Even if they counted themselves in as well, their numbers were still a tad weaker than that of the invading enemy.

Right at this moment, Qiao Ting, who had also rushed over and was now aware of the situation, asked anxiously, "Instructor Tang Yu, what should we do?"

"Continue to work with the ground forces and provide long-range assistance!" Tang Yu did not dare to let Qiao Ting fight with them — once they went up against the enemy crowd of ace mecha, even he would not be able to guarantee his own safety, much less Qiao Ting's. For the students' safety, he felt that it would be better to keep them behind the lines of the ground forces.

Tang Yu's order was not received well by Qiao Ting. He was an ace operator himself! He should be a bit stronger than the instructors who were still special-class operators, right? If they could fight, then why couldn't he go too? He was about to argue his case when Tang Yu barked, "Qiao Ting, obey my orders!"

Familiar with Tang Yu's character, Qiao Ting knew that Tang Yu had already made up his mind not to let him onto the battlefield. Continuing to plead was pointless, so he gritted his teeth and said sulkily, "Roger that, Instructor Tang Yu!"

The enemy's descent was not fast but it was not slow either — five minutes later, the first of the enemies officially entered the lower airspace of the planet. Seeing this, Tang Yu ordered, "Attack!"

Command issued, Tang Yu was the first to charge into the fray. He revved his main engine and piloted his mecha to soar into the sky. Behind him, the instructors all swooped towards the descending enemies under his lead. Two batches of mecha — one from above, one from below — finally met in the air, 100 metres off the ground, and began their fight ...

"Regiment Commander, what should we do now?" Seeing that Qiao Ting had not followed his instructor's orders to retreat to the backline of the ground forces, still standing rooted in place, a member by his side could not help but ask.

"At this kind of dangerous moment, how can we hide behind our instructors?" said Qiao Ting, pumped up. "I want to fight! I want to protect our academy! Those who want to fight, follow me. Those who want to obey the instructors and stay here can stay. I will not force anyone!"

Qiao Ting's words caused his team members around him to fall silent. At this time, Qiao Ting's most loyal defender stood out once more in support to say, "The regiment commander is right. Now is the most critical moment for our military academy. How can we be cowards and hide behind the instructors? I will go with the regiment commander."

Seeing the other members continue to remain silent, his tone was scornful as he said, "Have you all forgotten the oath you swore before the military flag when you first entered the military academy? Those who don't even have the guts to protect their own academy are not worthy of piloting mecha!"

Many of the members were unable to accept this accusation; provoked, they all spoke up, "I'll go!" "Me too!" "And me!" Eleven members shouted in near unison.

In the end, there were only three left who still remained silent. Qiao Ting asked them coldly, "You all plan to stay behind?"

After another beat of silence, one of the three finally opened his mouth. "Instructor Tang Yu told us to stay here. I think we should listen to the instructor. The first lesson we learned was to obey orders from our superiors and not to act on our own impulses."

Qiao Ting's gaze narrowed at these words, his entire aura turning frigid. The other regiment members sensed something strange in the air; just as one of the other members were about to try and counsel those three, Qiao Ting said, "In that case, you three can stay here." That said, he turned and said to the twelve members who wanted to go with him and said, "The rest of you, follow me!"

As soon as he finished speaking, Qiao Ting was the first to pilot his mecha in a sprint towards the inner regions of the military academy. The twelve members dared not say anything, immediately controlling

their mecha in pursuit. Very soon, Qiao Ting's group of 13 had been swallowed by the night, leaving the range of the dormitory district.

The three people left behind watched as Qiao Ting's figure disappeared. The mecha who had responded to Qiao Ting suddenly slumped as tension bled out of its frame, almost losing his footing. The other two reflexively tugged on his arms to support him, thus preventing the other from falling down.

"Just now, I really thought the regiment commander would fly off the handle," said the unsteady member with a wry smile.

"Me too!" The two mecha supporting him had felt the same.

"I'm worried whether the regiment commander is just biding his time to deal with us later 1?" asked one of the mecha worriedly.

"If we are all still alive then, definitely. The regiment commander will never let us go for defying him. However, if we are lucky enough to survive, I plan to quit Leiting." That member who had spoken up against Qiao Ting said determinedly.

His words shocked the other two mecha beside him. Mind you, once someone quit from Leiting, they would be viewed by the whole Leiting Mecha Clan as deserters. They would definitely find their every step constricted within the military academy.

"The exams that need to be taken have all been taken anyhow. At that time, I'll just request to be sent to some unexplored territory for practical training. By the time I return, it would already be time to enlist ..." That person was not making this decision blindly. He had long prepared for this eventuality; this was also what had given him the courage to defy Qiao Ting's order.

"The regiment commander will go to the Third Division. This is already something that has been finalised. He's entering directly, exempt from being assessed. I heard this was approved personally by the Third Marshal," exclaimed another regiment member enviously. This was definitely a glorious matter. It was said that only General Ling Xiao had ever enjoyed such a distinction back in the past. Back then, it had been the Second Marshal, now the First Marshal, who had taken a shine to General Ling Xiao and personally appointed and approved his enlistment into his own army division without going through the regular assessments.

"You can't enlist with the Third Division anymore. You might not even be able to enlist with any of the divisions on friendly terms with the Third." Even as cadets, they knew that the army divisions had their respective factions. Once Qiao Ting established himself in the Third Division, if they enlisted with any other divisions within the same faction, their lives would not be easy.

"I will enlist with the 23rd Division," declared that person with conviction. "I'm uncertain about the other divisions, but the 23rd Division, General Ling Xiao's division, will definitely have nothing to do with the Third Division. Besides, Boss Huo and his gang are also at the 23rd Division. Perhaps the regiment commander might become the second General Ling Xiao in future, a true elite among elites, but I still think following Boss Huo is a much more reassuring and secure decision."

Regiment Commander Qiao Ting was just too proud — once he had made a decision, he was not able to accept any advice or dissent from others. Even though this could be taken as the confidence a successful

person needed to have, he felt that Qiao Ting was overconfident. This meant nothing good for the future development of the regiment commander, and this was also why he had used Instructor Tang Yu's orders as a legitimate excuse to refuse to follow Qiao Ting.

His words made the other two fall into silent contemplation. A few seconds later, one of them said with a wry smile, "Let me see for a while longer. After all, that's all things that haven't happened yet. Let's just focus on how to survive right now."

His words were extremely reasonable. The three of them no longer had any mood to chat. If they did not manage to survive this battle, all talk of the future was moot. Very soon, they had piloted their mecha back to the rear of the ground forces. They began to carry out their previous duty — shooting their beam guns from far away, helping to keep the enemies attacking the forces at the front at bay.

As they fought, the other member who had not uttered a peep all this while secretly connected to the commlink of the member who had said he wanted to enlist with the 23rd Division and said, "When you apply for enlistment with the 23rd Division, let me know."

Hearing this, the member who had argued back against Qiao Ting smiled. It looked like he was not the only one who saw the problem with Qiao Ting ...

Right then, on Qiao Ting's end, he was swiftly leading his twelve members in a sprint away from the dormitory district. Qiao Ting was confident, but he also knew that they were surrounded by enemy mecha. For them inexperienced cadets to find a lucky break in the chaos was impossible. If they wanted to make any impact with their combat power and have a fighting chance as cadets, they would need to get further away from the main battlefield.

Qiao Ting believed that there were sure to be scattered enemy mecha at the other areas of the military academy. And Qiao Ting's target was precisely these isolated enemy mecha — this was also why he wanted to bring his twelve members away for a change of battlefield.

Unknowingly, the mecha team Qiao Ting was leading and the mecha team Ling Lan was leading in retreat right at that moment were actually travelling on the same route. However, one was moving closer to the dormitory district in order to ensure their safety, while the other had chosen to distance themselves from the dormitory district in order to gain battle merits ...

The battle continued to rage on, and seemed to be intensifying as the fighting progressed. Both the warriors of the Federation and the instructors of the academy were completely embroiled in the whirlwind of battle. Other than fighting, they could only fight and fight and fight some more. As long as they did not die, they continued to fight without stopping. No one could tell when this battle would end ...