

Crossing 41

Chapter 41: Wilderness Training?

Ling Lan was a cute drunk — she did not start babbling nonsense, nor did she fly into a drunken rage. She only fell asleep silently, a saliva bubble popping up at the edge of her lips every once in a while.

This adorable sight made Lan Luofeng laugh despite her annoyance. She had just taken her eyes off this child for a moment and she had gone and gotten herself drunk on red wine. Still, this was the only time Ling Lan really looked like a true six year old child, sleeping innocently without a care in the world.

Lan Luofeng knew that these couple of years had actually been really tough on Ling Lan. Every day she had training assignments, and Lan Luofeng had watched with tearful eyes as she trained till she dropped. (In truth, Little Four had notified Ling Lan that time was up so she would get some rest. It wasn't that Ling Lan was slacking off, but her body was really still too weak. Overexerting her body now in training would only cause irreparable harm, harm that even the Qi exercises would not be able to repair.)

Lan Luofeng could not stop her training however, because she knew that this would benefit Ling Lan greatly in the future. The Federation was a world where the fittest survived — an extra measure of strength meant an extra measure of safety. For Ling Lan's future, she had to harden her heart.

Lan Luofeng quickly bundled Ling Lan up and carried her to her room. Ever since Ling Lan could clearly communicate what she wanted, she had demanded a personal room of her own. Lan Luofeng was an overindulgent mother with no bottom-line when it came to her child, so she had caved with minimal fuss and provided a lone room for Ling Lan.

Carefully placing Ling Lan on her bed, Lan Luofeng dropped a light kiss on Ling Lan's adorable round face and then shut the door behind her as she left. What she didn't know was that, though Ling Lan looked as if she was sound asleep, her consciousness had actually been dragged ruthlessly into the mind-space by Instructor Number One.

Ling Lan felt extremely wobbly, finding it rather difficult to stay on her feet, and the things she looked at seemed to waver in her sight.

She felt a little nauseous and so quickly squatted down, gripping her head. Ling Lan just had to squat, lest she fall over the very next second from losing her balance.

"Hmph. How dare you drink." Number One's expression darkened further at the sight, and with a flick of his finger, a basinful of cold water splashed down upon Ling Lan from above. The sudden shock caused Ling Lan to shiver uncontrollably and her muddled senses abruptly came into focus.

"Instructor Number One, you look well!" Ling Lan smiled awkwardly as she lifted her head, her expression pleading for mercy.

"I am very not well." Instructor Number One paid no mind to Ling Lan's pleading, giving her no face as he told her in no uncertain terms that he was angry.

Instructor Number One's words made Ling Lan break out into cold sweat — without even having to ask, she knew that the 'not well' Instructor Number One was talking about had something to do with her. Could it be that she had somehow irritated this fearsome demon instructor without even knowing it?

Looking at Ling Lan's bewildered face, Instructor Number One raged, "In today's fight, what were you doing?! Is that how you were meant to use what Number Nine had taught you?"

Ling Lan was indignant, "I managed to hit the examiner."

"Well you could have hit him directly without having to resort to trickery! If you do this again, don't blame me for punishing you." Instructor Number One firmly believed that honest strength was the true path — any sort of underhanded tricks were all dishonest methods, which should not be relied upon.

Ling Lan paid no mind to the mention of punishment, but asked in surprise, "You mean that, I can actually hit the examiner with my own strength right now?" If that was the case, then why had she felt so overpowered? That the opponent's strength was so much higher than her own? Was it all an illusion?

But then, all three of them had already used up all their strength and skills to fight the examiner for so long ... it was only when they were running out of strength that they had thought up that trick to hit the examiner. Of course, Ling Lan didn't think that using tricks was wrong or unfair — on the battlefield, survival was the only principle.

"That's right. In today's battle, you missed three opportunities." That said, Number One flicked yet another finger and the scene of today's battle appeared before Ling Lan's eyes.

"The first sneak attack was done well at the beginning. You remembered what Number Nine had told you, and kept your killing intent hidden, but when you were just about to succeed, your heart wavered." Number One pointed at the scene, showing how when Ling Lan's punch was just about to hit the examiner, there was a fluctuation in her aura. This little fluctuation had let the examiner sense her attack, which was how he had managed to block her attack in that final second.

"For the second sneak attack, you made the exact same mistake, losing your attention at the critical moment." Number One's voice grew colder and colder, and he looked as if he wished he could drag Ling Lan over to give her a good beating right now. She had obviously learned everything properly — why was she making such stupid mistakes in a real fight? If Ling Lan had only fought as she had trained, the examiner would have been hit by that very first move.

"What angers me the most is that you don't even know how to change your own attack approach. Using the same moves over and over again — after failing in a sneak attack twice, even an idiot would know to watch out for your sneak attacks ... and still you persisted with sneak attacks! Is your head filled with the brain of a pig?" Instructor Number One's rage was incandescent as he observed Ling Lan's third attempt at a sneak attack playing out before them.

"After being discovered, it's alright to just fight directly with the opponent, but what were you thinking using all your might for every single move? What will you use then to defend yourself? Also, don't you know how to mix in some feints among your real moves? Here, when your right elbow was blocked, and you continued to use your left elbow — both the opponent's arms had been used for defense, and because of your friend's attack on his waist, his only usable leg had been neutralised. Why didn't you take the chance to attack his lower body? Didn't you learn the Scorpion Tail Swipe? This was clearly a

great chance for you to score a hit. What disappoints me the most is that you did not notice any of the errors you made during your fight, or even the missed chances — you are literally a combat idiot.”

Many prodigies would often notice their own weaknesses during battle, but unfortunately, Ling Lan did not notice anything at all in her fight up till the very end. Even now, she had still been pleased with herself over her successful trick, which was why Instructor Number One was so angry. “If it wasn’t the fact that the opponent wanted to know how much you all could do, you would have already been killed at this point.” Instructor Number One rolled back the scene to when she had started facing the examiner directly, pointing out how the examiner had stopped many of his moves halfway through so as to avoid injuring Ling Lan.

Under Instructor Number One’s detailed analysis, Ling Lan grew more and more ashamed. She had really thought she had performed pretty well in that battle, but who knew that she had actually done so badly, making mistake after mistake. Her elation at having hit the examiner today disappeared without a trace, leaving behind a cold ball of shame in her gut and her back drenched with sweat.

“Looks like we need to have a round of wilderness training. We’ll see what to do next after you learn how to hunt!” Instructor Number One coolly announced Ling Lan’s fate.

Before Ling Lan could ask any questions or beg for mercy, Instructor Number One had flicked his finger once again. Ling Lan saw the scenery change around her, and then she was standing in a primordial forest with Number One. She could hear the sound of a flowing stream in the distance, as well as the fearsome calls of some unknown wild beasts.

Ling Lan’s little heart felt like it was beating out of her chest. Although she had never spent much time in a forest before, she knew that this type of place was rife with danger — not only were there wild beasts wandering around, nature itself was an intimidating thing, and there were also other unknown terrors lurking within.

Ling Lan’s face fell rapidly, however, she knew that this hunting mission was definitely unavoidable. This year had taught her that once Instructor Number One had made up his mind, nothing was going to change it.

Still, she intended to try and plead with Instructor Number One for just a little more preparation time, so she could go back and ask Little Four for some wilderness survival tips. Unfortunately, Instructor Number One saw through her plans, and without giving her the chance to speak he said, please enjoy yourself, and promptly disappeared in a flash of light from this endlessly verdant world.

Dammit! Number One, you are truly vicious!

Ling Lan savagely directed her middle finger towards the direction where Number One had been standing in a display of futile anger.

Chapter 42: Hunting and Being Hunted!

Dawn. When the first ray of sunlight penetrated the dense foliage of the forest, slowly lending it its warmth, the originally quiescent green world began to wake up once again. Various creatures started crawling out of their nests, beginning a new cycle of their daily routine — hunting and being hunted.

On the ground, an unnamed little creature with wrinkled skin was stealthily making its way over to its destination. It was very small, only roughly the size of two human fists, but it dragged a wide flat tail behind it that was twice the length of its body.

It had no choice but to be careful. In this forest, 80% of the animals could kill it easily — and unfortunately, its meat was tender, so even though it was small and had very little meat, many of the larger creatures still wouldn't mind hunting it as an appetiser.

Its intended destination was an area full of shallow water depressions up ahead. That area was a swampland, very suitable for its survival, because its light weight and body shape allowed it to move freely around the swamp without sinking into it. Aside from those creatures whose natural habitat was the swamp, other creatures could not even enter the area, making it much safer for the creature.

Of course, most importantly, there was food for it here as well, making it well worth its while to come here. It almost started drooling thinking of food — the fish in the shallow depressions here were just too tasty.

It finally made it there, smooth sailing all the way.

At this time, in the shallow water of the numerous depressions, fish the length of fingers were joyfully swimming around, darting from one depression to another. All of the depressions were connected by countless narrow streams of water — although these streams were much too small for bigger fish to get through, they allowed these small fish to swim between the depressions unhindered. In one particular depression, the fish were greedily nibbling on some of the water weeds, oblivious to the fact that their natural enemy had arrived and was getting ready to feast on them to satisfy its hunger.

The wrinkled animal entered the swamp and darted swiftly into one of the depressions. The fish scattered in fright, but swam blindly in their panic, ending up in a dead end ... In the end, their only outcome was to be devoured by the agile wrinkled creature.

After eating up the fishes in this depression, the creature climbed out of it and shook itself, causing the water droplets on its body to go flying, until its skin was once again as dry and pristine as before.

It then rested for a little while. Hunting was not easy — actions that seemed easy actually took up a lot of its body strength. Still, even while it rested, it vigilantly kept a lookout on its surroundings, afraid that a strong enemy would appear to eat it.

Soon after, it had regained its strength, and had begun sneaking over to the next depression ...

However, it did not notice — in the swamp not too far away from it, a pair of gelid eyes had locked themselves on its figure, prepared to ambush it during its next meal.

When it once again leapt into another depression to capture more fish, the owner of the gelid eyes struck. A thick black cable shot out, skirting by the edges of the depression, and the wrinkled animal was gone. The clear sound of flesh hitting water could be heard and then a water snake as thick as a man's arm could be seen sitting in the middle of the depression, its lower half curled up neatly beneath it. From a glance, it looked like it was about three metres long, perhaps more.

In its mouth, the wrinkled creature was struggling with all its might, flapping its wide tail around, but to no avail. It was swallowed by the water snake, bit by bit, until it finally disappeared completely into the snake's gullet.

The water snake raised its head, waiting for its food to travel down its throat into its stomach. And then, right at this moment, a large maw appeared abruptly beside it, sharp teeth glinting menacingly in the sunlight. Before the water snake could react, it had already been bitten, right where it was most vulnerable.

Of course, the water snake was unwilling to just lay back and die — before it died, it used the whole length of its three metre long body to wrap tightly around the opponent, hoping to bring it along with it into death. Unfortunately, the opponent was still clamped onto its vital point, so it could not hold on for long. It soon died, and its coils loosened around its attacker.

And then, a hulking creature climbed out from the depths of the swamp. Its overall appearance looked very much like that of Earth's crocodiles, but compared to a crocodile, its body was even larger, and its four limbs were even thicker.

It was the king of this swamp, and its favourite food was naturally the fastest and stealthiest water snakes. However, water snakes were extremely hard to catch — the moment they saw its shadow, they would flee immediately, slithering swiftly into the swamp water and disappearing completely. Thus, it could only disguise itself and wait patiently — at times up to a whole day and night — to get its prize. Today, it would eat well.

It raised its head and opened its jaws wide, putting this large snake into its mouth, slowly tearing it into pieces as it chewed and swallowed. Halfway through its meal, while half of the snake's body was still dangling outside its mouth, it caught sight of a dark shadow falling rapidly from above it with the corner of its eye.

Dammit, what creature dares to disturb the King of the Swamp at its meal? It did not even consider the possibility of an ambush — it was the undisputed king of the food chain here, no creature would dare think of hunting it ...

Before it could take a closer look, it felt a bone-deep piercing pain starting from its mouth go through its entire body. It let out a furious roar, a sign of its rage and disbelief that a creature would dare to harm it. It wanted to tear that creature apart with its sharp teeth, but found that it could not close its mouth anymore.

No, it wasn't that it couldn't close it — somehow, sometime, a wooden staff had made its way into its mouth. It tried to dislodge the staff, but then found that it couldn't move its body either.

Indeed, it was like it had been pinned to the ground. Aside from flinging its limbs around uselessly, it could not move at all. It had no idea what was going on, and as rage continued to build within it, it tried to roar again, but now found that it couldn't even do that anymore. And then the pain hit, coursing through every part of its body, so intense that it couldn't handle it. What the heck was going on?

"So troublesome." Along with this voice, an extremely fragile looking thing appeared by its head. And then, the creature's final memory was of the strange creature lifting its scrawny foot above its head and stomping down viciously.

Without any change in her expression, Ling Lan pulled her foot out from the skull of this king of the swamp. She had no interest in watching the death struggle of the creature and so had kindly put it out of its misery by stomping through its skull.

Looking at the white brain matter all over her shoes, Ling Lan no longer felt the disgust she had felt at the beginning. The current Ling Lan was enveloped by an aura of honed aggression, just like a king of the jungle; she was no longer the weak and timid person she was before.

Of course, with Ling Lan's current strength, fighting this creature in the swamp head on was not impossible. However, this fellow's skin was as strong as steel and Ling Lan had no weapons which could pierce through it. This skin it had was exactly why it could withstand the water snake's desperate counterattack at the end. Still, all creatures had their weaknesses and this swamp king was no exception.

The insides of the swamp king was very fragile, which was why the swamp king normally would not leave its mouth open. For the only way to attack its insides, was through its mouth. As such, Ling Lan had decided to conceal herself within the swamp and wait till the swamp king started hunting. And when the swamp king had started to eat, she had taken the opportunity to stuff a small tree down its throat, all the way to its tail, sealing its fate with one blow.

Getting to this point was not easy for Ling Lan. Many times, due to problems with emotional control, the swamp king had managed to sense her killing intent and evade her attack, causing her to lose her chance. Thus, Ling Lan had paid the price of death several times over before she finally grasped the ability to hunt flawlessly. The trials and difficulties she went through in the entire process were truly too numerous to be cited.

Chapter 43: The Experience of Death!

Ling Lan had initially thought that she would have to stay in this virtual forest for up to two or three years before she would get used to it and see some results ... but in reality, humans were exceedingly smart and adaptable creatures. Especially for those who were already equipped with offensive and defensive abilities, adapting to this dangerous environment was even easier than expected. Within a month, Ling Lan was now able to move freely through the forest.

Ling Lan had never been a reckless person, so when Instructor Number One had disappeared, she had been very, very cautious with her every step. After all, having never been in the wild before, the forest was an unknown swathe of darkness in her eyes. Furthermore, she strongly believed that this forest was a terrifying place — so her first thought was not about hunting, but rather on how she would be able to survive to see the light of the next day.

Reality proved that she had still been too naïve and had underestimated the dangers of the forest. She had not even made it till the night of the first day before she had been bitten by some unknown venomous insects hidden within the grass. This was her first experience with death — in the net-speak of her previous world, her virgin death.

Frankly, Ling Lan's virgin death was not at all easy. It could even be described as gory, capable of turning the stomach of anyone who saw it — the scene of her death was unbelievably horrific.

For the rest of her life, Ling Lan never wanted to experience that sort of death ever again. The venom of the insects had been potentially vicious, causing immense pain to its victim. This pain was even worse than the pain she had endured through her sickness from her previous life, even more penetrating than the pain she had endured during the medicinal baths of this life — because on top of the pain, was an uncontrollable itch that could not be resisted ... she would never forget it.

For three whole days, Ling Lan had suffered and itched. She had watched as she personally scratched away the bloody flesh from her body bit by bit, and all she had felt then was relief and a perverse sort of pleasure, until her body had been reduced to scraps of skin and flesh hanging on an almost empty skeleton. Only then did she breathe her last breath.

Back then, she had thought that that was the end of it, that she was finally free from the torments of this forest, free to go back to reality. But when she opened her eyes once again, she was back where Instructor Number One had first dumped her, still within the forest. It was then that Ling Lan realised that this virtual world created by the learning space was not as simple as she had assumed — she would not be able to return to reality just by waiting it out.

It was tied up with a mission — so until the mission was completed, she was stuck here, unable to return.

Thus, even though she was still traumatised by her first death experience, for the sake of returning to reality, Ling Lan had no choice but to buck up and force herself to continue exploring the forest so that she could complete her mission. Ling Lan had not forgotten what Instructor Number One had said — his words had clearly indicated that she was to learn how to hunt.

However, when Ling Lan managed to kill one of the forest creatures weaker than her, the learning space did not react at all. This told Ling Lan that she would not be able to accomplish this mission on a technicality — she would most likely have to kill a fierce beast several times stronger than her for it to count.

And so she started challenging this primordial forest. She encountered many dangers along the way — some she managed to escape, while most of the others naturally resulted in her death.

She had been devoured by a swarm of ants, eaten alive until she was nothing but bones. She had been ambushed by an adorable looking animal, small but vicious, ending up as its meal. And she had also died from eating some poisonous fruits by accident, as well as experienced being bitten by some pestilent mosquitoes, dying in the end from the ravages of disease.

However, all these countless deaths were not for nothing — Ling Lan gradually learned how to survive in this primordial forest. She absorbed all the knowledge she gained from her deaths, throwing away the kind and softer emotions that were unnecessary here, only keeping her level-headedness and her ruthlessness. From then on, all the creatures in the forest had only two labels in her eyes — ‘threat’ or ‘food’.

Through it all, Ling Lan gradually shifted from her initial timid and uncertain self into her current cool and self-composed persona. She could now face any danger without fear, and confidence oozed from her every pore. The entire forest was like her own backyard to her now — she knew all the animals and hazards here as well as the palm of her hand.

This time, she had decided to hunt the swamp king after much thought and consideration. Even though the terrain here was more treacherous than many other areas within the forest, this also meant that the swamp king had a much lower guard than the other kings of the forest. Due to a lack of contest, the swamp king was also comparatively weaker, and although the terrain was to the swamp king's advantage, it wasn't necessarily a disadvantage for Ling Lan either.

And so, Ling Lan had set a trap. Her first few attempts all ended in failure, where she often ended up as the swamp king's excrement, only managing to escape a handful of times. However, every failure added to her experience and Ling Lan slowly but surely started to grasp the swamp king's hunting habits. To give the swamp king a false sense of security, although Ling Lan had been lying in ambush every day, she had not made a move for over a week ...

Ling Lan could still remember Instructor Number One's rebuke, saying that she did not know how to mix feints into her attacks, that continuous sneak attacks were not really sneak attacks anymore. And Ling Lan did not want to make the same mistake twice.

Finally, today, Ling Lan saw a rare opportunity. Perhaps because Ling Lan had not attacked at all this week, the swamp king seemed to think that it had killed off all the stupid animals that dared threaten it. Moreover, it had just managed to capture its favourite snack of juicy, tender water snake, putting it in a great mood, and so it had subconsciously let down its guard ...

Which was when Ling Lan had struck. This time, Ling Lan finally managed to deal a beautiful killing blow, which was also proof that Ling Lan had truly mastered the art of hiding her killing intent, successfully nabbing her prey.

As the swamp king fell dead before her, Ling Lan closed her eyes and reflected on how she had felt back when she had dealt the killing blow. There had been no agitation, no excitement, only cool patience and focus — Ling Lan savoured the difference between her previous attacks and this one, and understood that she had been too hasty before, too concerned with the final outcome to maintain her composure. The moment the still pool of her emotions had rippled, her killing intent had seeped out.

Ling Lan laughed as her hands tightened into fists. Perhaps she could go back now and leave this godforsaken place behind. Although Ling Lan was no longer afraid of the primordial forest, it didn't mean she liked it here. It was too lonely here — there was no one to talk to, no one to spare her any bit of warmth — she was just about to have a breakdown over the imposed solitude. It was just fortunate that she had great mental fortitude, otherwise she'd have already been driven insane by now.

Just then, Ling Lan sensed a change in her surroundings, coming from right behind her. She did not turn around, but her posture shifted minutely so that she would be ready to defend herself and fight back at any moment.

"Not bad at all!" A familiar voice rang out from behind her, and Ling Lan felt rage roil within her even as she felt a profound sense of relief.

Without thinking, she sprung backwards with a dip of her feet, leaning back as she flew through the air, flipped into a somersault, and then facing that man, she resolutely unleashed her leg into a savage kick aimed in his direction ...

Dammit, Number One, you bastard! I'll kick you to death! The long-suffering Ling Lan could no longer keep calm.

Instructor Number One was expressionless as always — seeing Ling Lan's attack, he did not even move his feet, merely holding out two fingers and aiming them at Ling Lan's incoming foot.

"Bam!" The two clashed, producing a rather muffled sound, and Ling Lan felt a huge wave of energy swell from the bottom of her foot. Her entire body was thrown backwards, and that delicate foot that was capable of crushing the swamp king's skull actually felt a little numb, losing all combat ability in a moment.

Ling Lan took control of her body in mid-air with a twist of her waist, allowing her to land on her feet right back where she had started, on top of the dead swamp king's head.

Chapter 44: Resolving a Potential Problem

"Still able to unleash your anger, I see. Looks like you've adapted well." Number One stood in the air before Ling Lan, an almost imperceptible trace of mirth in his eyes as he acknowledged Ling Lan's achievements for the first time.

Ling Lan couldn't help the little surge of happiness she felt at Instructor Number One's words, feeling as if she had been praised by an elder. However, Ling Lan was not so easily placated — her face stony, she asked huffily, "Instructor Number One, weren't you afraid that I would be driven insane by this cruel environment?"

Ling Lan knew very well that if she hadn't been so mentally resilient, this primordial forest was totally capable of driving a regular adult out of his or her mind, much less an apparent six year old child like her. No matter how talented the child was, he or she would not be able to survive for long in this fearsome forest.

Although one could revive countless times in here, the various horrific ways of dying and their realistic rendering upon one's body was more than enough to devastate a child's growing mind, mission notwithstanding.

Ling Lan was very doubtful — was this learning space truly meant to cultivate children, or was it actually meant to destroy a child's future? Thus, she spilled her doubts to Number One.

Number One's expression remained impassive, as he asked in return, "Are you insane?" Implied was the fact that Ling Lan's apparent sanity made her protests moot. If Ling Lan had truly become insane, then she wouldn't have been able to protest anyway ...

Ling Lan stared up at the sky, speechless, weeping internally. Hells, she knew better now. As hosts, they had no true power whatsoever — as they grew up, they were subject to the cruel bullying of the learning space, with no room at all to fight back.

Satisfied with Ling Lan's acquiescence, Number One said, "Since you have completed the mission, the learning space will not skimp on your reward."

That said, Ling Lan immediately heard the notification from the learning space's system. "Hunting mission completed, 50 honour points awarded."

Hells, this learning space was so goddamn stingy!

Ling Lan spat in her heart. This proved that her original hypothesis had not been wrong — honour points were indeed difficult to obtain. This extreme mission which had almost driven her insane was only worth 50 points! She couldn't help but rejoice that she had not carelessly wasted those honour points she had received in the beginning.

After the system had rewarded her, Number One did not say anything, only flicking a finger. The environment around them twisted once again, and the endless greenery, the swamp, and the skeletons all faded away, to be replaced by an empty field.

They had once again returned to the learning space where she had learned physical skills from Instructor Number Nine. Looking at the familiar grounds, Ling Lan was struck by how beautiful this scenery before her was for the first time ... even though there really was nothing in front of her.

"Time is almost up — you should go back. Remember to contain your malevolent aura ..." Without clarifying further, Instructor Number One summarily kicked Ling Lan out of the learning grounds, and in the very next second, Ling Lan had appeared within the great hall of the mind-space.

In a corner, Little Four was seated in a thinking pose. As if sensing something, he lifted his head suddenly, and his eyes filled with joy as he saw Ling Lan. Just as he was about to pounce on her, he suddenly leapt back instead, scurrying to hide behind a large pillar in panic. From there, he peeked out warily, and said, "Boss?"

Little Four's shiftiness irritated Ling Lan. With a flying leap, she had grabbed hold of Little Four's earlobe before he could react.

"Little Four, what are you running away for..." sneered Ling Lan. Although she could do nothing against Instructor Number One, it was a piece of cake for her to handle the rascal Little Four.

"Objection! Objection! You promised me that you would never again use violence on me!" Little Four protested, jumping up and down in rage, and his initial fear fled. Trying to use violence on him — this must be Boss Ling Lan. Just for a moment, he had mistaken Ling Lan for someone else, a malevolent butcher filled with bloodthirst and killing intent ...

With an annoyed huff, Ling Lan released Little Four's ear, asking, "Then why were you acting like you weren't sure who I was? Who else would enter this place?"

Little Four peered intently at Ling Lan, and then said, "Boss, have you not noticed the changes to your body?" As his voice tapered off, a large full-body mirror appeared before them, reflecting both their images faithfully.

Ling Lan lifted her head to look, and immediately understood what Little Four was saying. Now she also understood why Instructor Number One had reminded her to contain her malevolent aura when he left.

The Ling Lan in the mirror was no longer the wide-eyed innocent she had been. Ferocious eyes, killing intent lingering in her gaze, and the faint air of blood-tinged malevolence around her — all indications

that this child was a savage wild beast, fully capable of attacking you the very next second if a chance presented itself.

“How did this happen?” Ling Lan rubbed at her face frantically, trying to soften her expression. If she went out looking like this, she would definitely scare the living hells out of her mother. And even if she did not frighten her mother, terrifying the old staff and guards in the family would not end well either.

Under Little Four’s assistance, Ling Lan finally managed to reign in the malevolent aura around her. With some effort, she squeezed out a smile, and finally rediscovered the harmless Ling Lan of before. Satisfied, only then did she wave goodbye to Little Four and return to the outside world.

Little Four energetically waved goodbye to Ling Lan, sending her off. When Ling Lan’s figure had disappeared completely from his sight, he finally gave up supporting himself and slumped to the ground, wiping away a handful of sweat from his forehead. Even if he was beaten to death, he would never admit to Ling Lan that he had been the one to extend the time period of the illusionary environment to its maximum setting ...

Alright, so Ling Lan’s forced stay in the primordial forest was not really Instructor Number One’s fault, but rather due to Little Four’s meddling. It could only be said that it was just Ling Lan’s misfortune to have such an imbecilic teammate in Little Four — it was pure luck that she hadn’t gone mad.

Back in the real world, due to Ling Lan’s previous diligence, she seemed as weak and fragile as ever, appearing without her newly developed malevolent aura, and so garnered no special attention from the people around her. Still, the very next day, Ling Lan submitted a request for actual combat training to Chamberlain Ling Qin.

Naturally, the excuse she used was the final test at the academy, when she had had to fight the examiner. She claimed that — because she had never encountered actual combat before, she did not perform well in the exam and failed to get a higher score, resulting in her 17th spot ranking when entering the Central Scout Academy.

Ling Lan explained that she could not relax now — perhaps when she entered the academy, actual combat would be one of the specialised courses she would have to take, and she didn’t want to lose face again. Consequently, she wanted to take the initiative before schooling started to train in actual combat.

In truth, this was an arrangement requested by Instructor Number One to solve the potential problem of her malevolent aura.

Malevolent energy should not be contained forcefully over long periods of time — this would harm Ling Lan’s body in the long run, perhaps even affecting her growth. Only when she could control her malevolent aura freely, just like her instructors or other battle-experienced veterans, would the problem be resolved.

Ling Lan’s request moved Ling Qin immensely. What elders loved most was to see their beloved juniors show ambition, aiming for success. Without any hesitation, he summoned the best warriors in the Ling household, and charged them as sparring partners for the young master.

In this manner, Ling Lan began her self-torture program in this one month before school started.

In the morning she fought against the Ling family warriors, while at night she was tormented by Instructor Number Nine. At her current level, Ling Lan still hadn't earned the right to be tormented by Number One ...

With this continuous cycle of combat every day and night, Ling Lan's tightly contained malevolent aura began to seep out slowly, until she managed to reign it in again, little by little, until it finally disappeared without a trace. In the end, only when Ling Lan had the intent to kill, would her malevolent aura reveal itself.

Due to Number One's timely arrangements, Ling Lan safely passed the time when her secret could be discovered. Meanwhile, only two days were left till the start of school.

Chapter 45: Who Wants to Kill Ling Lan?

On the official first day of school, Ling Lan refused Lan Luofeng's attempts to send her to school, only allowing Chamberlain Ling Qin alone to go with her and register.

It couldn't be helped — Ling Lan's eyelid had been twitching ever since she woke up early in the morning, and although she tried to convince herself not to be superstitious ... just in case, for safety reasons, Ling Lan was determined to leave her defenceless mother at home.

Of course, once Ling Lan was seated in the hover car, she began discussing the causes of this physiological response with Little Four, trying to dispel her worry. However, the two of them were like half-empty cans rattling baselessly, neither being able to state anything for certain, and so the discussion could only devolve into confusion.

Looking at the dizzy spirals of confusion that used to be Little Four's eyes, the chagrined Ling Lan decisively ended their fruitless discussion. She summarily concluded that the phenomenon was an unsolvable mystery, which somehow earned her the gullible Little Four's awestruck gaze.

Even as Ling Lan basked in that gaze, she turned away so that Little Four was out of her sight. Hells, it was never her intention to dazzle an underage child with lies.

Just as Ling Lan was trying to dispel the guilt she felt at her deceit, her gaze narrowed and she lifted her head to look out the car window. At the same time, Chamberlain Ling Qin beside her had also sensed the danger, and with a grim expression, he said, "Ling-Zero-Seven, switch into full-body emergency defense mode, and send out a distress signal."

"Yes, orders acknowledged by Ling-Zero-Seven." As the master's designated vehicle, Ling-Zero-Seven was no ordinary hover car.

As Ling-Zero-Seven's voice faded, Ling Lan saw that the transparent areas of the inner car were abruptly covered by another equally transparent defensive layer. Meanwhile, she and Chamberlain Ling Qin had been securely buckled into their seats by safety belts which had sprung out from the seats. Then, Ling-Zero-Seven's speed kicked up a notch and it flew forward rapidly.

Still, despite Ling-Zero-Seven's new accelerated speed, they still did not manage to dodge the opponent's attack.

A cold glint flashed through Ling Lan's eyes and she gripped the handlebar beside her with both hands.

"Crash!" A huge energy wave flipped the hover car and sent it spinning. Ling-Zero-Seven struggled with all its might to regain control of its unstable body.

"Warning, warning! Body integrity at 71.28%, energy consumption at 22% — we can only withstand the same attack two more times!" reported Ling-Zero-Seven as it finally regained control of its body.

"Ling-Zero-Seven, abandon pre-set route. Implement irregular driving; throw them off as much as you can." Ling Qin's eyes shone with ruthlessness — he would never let these people off for daring to try and harm the hope of the Ling family.

"Yes!" Ling-Zero-Seven diverted from its usual movement style — not only did it increase its speed to 2.2 horsepower, it also began moving in random directions every so often, evading the enemies' long distance attacks again and again.

Inside the car, Ling Qin calmly tugged open a buckle in front of his seat and a large box appeared before Ling Lan. In it was a protective vest, as well as an assortment of weapons.

Already educated in this respect, Ling Lan knew that the weapons in the box included a type-II particle-beam submachine gun, a portable cold fusion gun, two flash grenades, two tear gas grenades, a smoke grenade, and of course, two ultra-lithium alloy short swords for melee combat. In the words of her previous world, the two short swords were so sharp that they could slice through iron as if it were soil, and could split a strand of hair if the wind blew it across their edges.

All these weapons were controlled items by the military, forbidden for civilian use. However, where there's a will, there's a way — people would always find a way to get what they want; moreover, the Ling family was established via military means to begin with, and had countless ties with the military. As such, obtaining these weapons was really not that difficult for them.

Ling Lan saw that there was a similar buckle in front of her, so she pulled on it and an identical box appeared before her.

Ling Qin briefly explained to Ling Lan how they were able to access these weapons so easily, "As long as the emergency defense mode has been activated, these weapon boxes will be unlocked. Under normal circumstances, even if you tried to pry the compartments open, you would never be able to get to the weapons."

Ling Qin instructed Ling Lan to follow his lead and put on the protective vest. Who knew how long the hover car could continue to resist and stay afloat — it was necessary to take all possible precautions and defensive measures as early as possible.

Ling Lan nodded her understanding and quickly put on the vest, and then strapped the two short swords securely to the sides of her legs. After some thought, she also picked up the portable cold fusion gun. Although it wasn't as powerful as the type-II particle-beam submachine gun, it was smaller and lighter, which made it much more suitable for a six year old child like her. Lastly, she took out the two flash grenades and tucked them into the side pockets of her protective vest, leaving the other grenades behind.

The usefulness of a weapon was not decided by its firepower, but by its suitability — Ling Lan had learned this principle well from both her Ling family tutors and the learning space. Seeing her choices, Ling Qin nodded approvingly — Ling Lan had selected only those weapons which suited her. Although the other two grenades were very good for harassing the enemy, since they didn't have the proper protective gear, the grenades wouldn't be of much use to them.

Several miles away, 413's squad, which had chosen to guard Ling Lan from a distance to avoid being spotted by them, were shocked and dismayed by the unexpected attack.

"F*ck. Brothers, charge if you don't want to die!" Piloting his own mecha, 413 rushed swiftly towards the scene. Inside the mecha, his entire face was white — if any harm befell Ling Lan, he would certainly be flayed alive by his demon commander.

All this time, 413's squad had been having a pretty easygoing time of it. Ling Lan wasn't an active and rambunctious child who liked to run about — this made their job very easy, only needing to patrol around the perimeters of the Ling household every so often.

The six of them pushed their mechas to the max, the sirens on their mechas wailing as they rushed in Ling Lan's direction. As they got closer and closer to the scene ...

"Watch out! Scatter!" 413, who was in the lead, felt his hairs stand up, and he rolled to one side with a loud bellow.

Six figures scattered apart as a powerful beam of cold light shot through their original path.

"Number 2, unharmed!"

"Number 3 mecha, right foot frozen."

"Number 4, everything's normal."

"Number 5, lost control of left hand."

"Number 6, no damage."

The five members of the squad immediately reported their status to 413. Only Number 3 and Number 5 had received damage in that last attack.

"Number 4, Number 6 — protect Number 3, Number 5. Number 2, with me against the enemy," ordered 413.

"Yes, Sir!"

Just then, a team of mecha troopers flew in from various angles to convene in front of 413. Their neat standardised mecha, equipped to the teeth with weaponry, betrayed the savage nature of the enemy, causing 413's face to become as dark as a thundercloud.

413 turned on his communication button. "What unit are you from? What is your intention?" This type of standardised mecha and its full set of arms were only available within military channels. The military would never allow this sort of weaponry to fall into civilian hands — meaning that, these people had to

have come from the military. And to be able to send out a squad of mecha troopers without alerting anyone, it had to be someone from the upper levels of the military.

So, who in the upper ranks of the military wanted Ling Lan dead? Could it really be the mole concealed within the military?

Still, just for the sake of one small promising seedling ... was all this firepower really necessary? Were they not afraid of exposing themselves?

At this point, 413 was still unaware that Ling Lan was Ling Xiao's child. If he knew, then perhaps he would understand why someone would put so much effort into killing Ling Lan.

Chapter 46: Scared?

413's questions met only silence, and then a wave of fire and artillery attacks was headed straight for him and his squad.

"Damn! Activate Beam Shield," bellowed 413. The opponent was clearly trying to kill them all to silence them — it looked like there was no more room for diplomacy.

On the other hand, when the enemy squad saw the mecha of their opponents using advanced beam shields, their leader raged, "Why do the rebel troops have this type of weaponry? Looks like the information was correct — someone in the upper ranks of the military has betrayed the Federation. Focus your fire, and break through those shields! Kill them all — the commander has ordered to take no prisoners."

"Yes, Sir!" Following that, an even more ferocious barrage of long-range fire rained down upon 413's squad, rendering them immobile.

"Sir, what should we do?" asked 413's squad members as they fended off the opponent's attacks with their beam shields. Although they were veterans, butchers who had returned from the battlefield, capable of mercilessly slaughtering enemy troops, they were still reluctant to fight troops from their own country.

"Number 3, contact headquarters. Number 5, cover. The rest of you, attack with me!" 413 ordered without hesitation. Pulling out a beam sword from behind him, he charged towards the enemy.

413 knew very well that the opponent might just be a squad of mecha troopers who had been deceived by their superior, completely ignorant that their mission was a mistake. Still, he could not afford to be merciful. He was responsible for the lives of five subordinates and could not allow them to die because of his hesitation. Furthermore, the opponent intended to kill an innocent child — this was something he would not allow ...

Their captain's decisiveness was channelled through to the squad members. The battlefield was no place for hesitation or compassion — only the more ruthless person would survive.

The mecha trooper squad saw four of the opponent mechas rushing towards them with their beam shields up. Their captain harrumphed and said coldly, "Launch the detonation cables."

Following this order, a fiery dragon shot out from each of the six mechas, converging on the four approaching opponents.

Suddenly, there was the crisp sound of several gun shots and the six dragons exploded instantly. A series of explosions followed soon after as the numerous bombs on the detonating cable were set off. There was a tremendous blast, sending tremors through the earth, as well as cloaking the entire scene in smoke.

Apparently, Number 5, who had been charged with providing cover fire, had deftly used the particle-beam gun on his functional right arm to shoot six clean shots, striking those detonation cables and setting them off, protecting 413 and the others in the process.

His view clouded by smoke, the captain of the opponent mecha squad hesitated. Should he continue to overwhelm the enemy with sheer firepower? However, this short pause was enough for the enemy; a blaring warning went through his mecha's systems, "Danger. Enemy lock-on detected. Evade, evade ..."

His first response was to retreat quickly, because he could already see the lead opponent mecha charging out from the smoke, heading fiercely in his direction.

Panicked, he raised the particle-beam gun in his hands, pressing down on the trigger desperately. In this moment, he had completely forgotten how to dodge in his machine, only thinking about how to make the opponent retreat or stop with his attacks.

And then, he saw the opponent suddenly deviate from his straight path, moving instead in a strange radian, skilfully avoiding the dense rain of his particle-beam attacks. His pupils contracting, he shouted in shock, "Freeform evasion! How does he know the most advanced evasion manoeuvre of our military? What the hell is this?" Even as one of the top students at military school, he had yet to learn this skill — why was such a formidable person in the rebel forces?

Heavens, what in the world was happening? It was at this moment that he began to feel that something wasn't right with the situation. But then it was too late.

From his communication systems came the sound of his teammates' terrified screams, but before he could ask them what was happening, his own mecha's display had turned black. No matter how hard he tried to get it to work, pressing the initiate button over and over again, his mecha did not react.

Abruptly he realised, his mecha's movement driver must have been destroyed by the opponent, making him a fish trapped within a jar.

Why did it have to end this way? How could he, an upstanding graduate who excelled in his military studies, lose to these wild mecha operators of the rebel forces? Had the world order been turned upside down? The mecha trooper squad captain slumped in his now useless control seat, face pale with an expression of deep disbelief.

When 413 attacked, he had still shown mercy in the end. He had only destroyed the movement drivers of the mecha, avoiding the pilot carriage and sparing the operator's life. Of course, this was also because the gap in their abilities was distinct, allowing 413 the freedom to choose.

Looking at the six immobile mechas, 413 couldn't help but click his teeth. Hells, thank god these mecha troops were greenhorns who had never seen blood before — otherwise, with their full arsenal against

their own simple collection of particle-beam guns and beam swords, the outcome of the battle would have been hard to determine.

At this moment, Number 3, who had successfully contacted headquarters, reported to 413, "Sir, the commander has said to smuggle these people into the Headquarters of the Bladed Forces, and to destroy their mechas completely. Best to let the opponent think that the pilots died along with the machines."

413 nodded, and passed down the order. "Number 3 and Number 5, stay here and carry out the commander's orders. The others, follow me on rescue detail."

"Yes!"

Just like that, 413's squad split into two groups and the four intact mechas sped towards Ling Lan's last known position.

Together with his three team members, 413 flew for a distance with their eyes peeled, but saw no strange disturbances within their range of sight. They couldn't determine Ling Lan's actual position this way.

Helpless, 413 could only order his troops, "Fan out and search. Notify me ASAP if you notice anything odd."

"Yes!" Acknowledging the order, the three mechas behind 413 chose a direction at random and flew off.

413 controlled his own mecha and continued flying forward. He was undoubtedly anxious — because of the scuffle with the troops, they had been delayed for up to 5 minutes. Within those 5 minutes, anything could have happened. He fervently hoped that Ling Lan and whoever he was with could hold on and wait for their rescue.

They really had to find Ling Lan's whereabouts soon, or else everything would be for naught.

Leaving aside 413's frantic search, on Ling Lan's end, they were going through a high-speed chase and were currently in a precarious situation.

While evading, the hover car had been hit once more by the opponent's long-range missiles and had then given out a warning, telling them that the hover car would disassemble in 56 seconds.

Due to the strain of going over its speed limits, the hover car's defensive abilities were already on the brink of collapse, and adding in the damage it received from the attacks, it could hold on no longer.

"Scared?" asked Ling Qin with a smile as he stroked Ling Lan's head. In his other hand, he was already holding a type II particle-beam submachine gun.

"Nope!" replied Ling Lan coolly, as if she were totally unconcerned whether she lived or died. This surprised Ling Qin yet heartened him at the same time — Ling Lan was truly a chip off the old block. Naturally, he had no clue that Ling Lan's apathy towards death was due to her experiences within the illusory primordial forest within the learning space. There, Ling Lan had already learned that fear and terror would not help save her life — only keeping calm would allow her to capitalise on any chance of survival.

“Protect yourself!” Ling Qin patted Ling Lan several more times on the head before lifting his head to look out the window. In a flash, the muscles of his entire body stretched taut as he prepared to go on the attack. Ling Lan did the same, except her actions were much subtler.

Meanwhile, there was now only less than 10 seconds left on Ling-Zero-Seven’s countdown ...

Chapter 47: The Self-Volunteering Little Four!

Once Ling-Zero-Seven’s countdown hit 1, the still speeding hover car came to an abrupt stop. Ling Lan felt as if she would be flung out of the vehicle, but because her seatbelt was very secure, she stayed anchored in her seat.

Soon, Ling Lan sensed the inertia fading, but unexpectedly, her entire body suddenly felt light and the safety belt unbuckled. It turned out that the hover car was beginning to disassemble, breaking into multiple pieces.

“Run!” barked Ling Qin. He braced himself against the hover car for one last moment before being the first to spring out of the vehicle. Ling Qin had already made up his mind — he would set himself up as bait to draw away the surrounding assassins, giving Ling Lan a chance to escape.

Ling Lan followed him out soon after. Amidst the numerous pieces of wreckage from the hover car, she quickly grabbed hold of one of the larger pieces she had set her eyes on immediately. It wasn’t too large or too small, just right for sheltering her small body, and it was also flying off towards a landing point which suited her.

Like a lizard, Ling Lan clung to the piece of debris, and under the cover of the other debris flying around, she flipped herself nimbly in mid-air to hide behind the debris and reined in her presence. She then let the debris fly as it would until it fell with her positioned below it onto an empty plot of ground with no cover in sight.

At the moment she landed, Ling Lan circulated her Qi throughout her body, filling her limbs and torso with energy as she crashed into the ground. Unknown to outside observers, a large ditch had been carved into the ground under the piece of debris she was holding onto, with Ling Lan fully ensconced within it. Naturally, the piece of debris was flat against the ground above her — no one would suspect a person could be hiding under that debris.

Ling Lan chose to hide in this manner because it took advantage of people’s general assumptions and blind spots — in this flat open ground with no place to hide, her hiding place would be easily overlooked, since the natural tendency was to focus on the surrounding shrubs and tufts of wild grass where people were more likely to hide.

Of course, Ling Lan wasn’t hiding here for safety reasons — she intended to counterattack. Once everyone’s attention was further ahead, her position would be right behind the attackers, where she would have a chance to deal a killing blow from their neglected backs.

Ling Lan had no choice but to take this risk. The opponent had chosen their ambush spot too well, where the protection from the cities were the thinnest. From the Ling household to the Central Scout Academy, Ling Lan’s group had always travelled through bustling cities, and it was only during this

particular half-hour stretch that they would pass through uninhabited land. In this stretch, there were only woods or deserted plains, with hardly any people about — the only living creatures being wild beasts and fowl.

By setting up their ambush here, the opponents ensured that by the time the cities on both ends received their distress signal and sent out rescue forces, the earliest possible time for reinforcements to arrive would be 15 minutes. Ling Lan believed that these people were fully capable of killing her multiple times over within these 15 minutes. She also believed that if the opponent couldn't find any trace of her in the surroundings, they would take a scorched-earth approach and do a thorough sweep, perhaps even digging three feet into the ground. When that time came, even if she was hiding in a blind spot, she would still be forced out from her hiding place. She could not take this gamble.

Most importantly, she could not be sure that Chamberlain Ling Qin could hold on for 15 minutes under these circumstances. If she didn't make a move, it was likely that she would see a loved one die for the first time since coming to this future world, which was something she really didn't want to gamble on.

Soon enough, three hover cars flew over. However, the opponent was very cautious, not driving right up to the main site. Instead, they landed about 30 metres away from where Ling Lan was hiding.

Two of the hover cars opened up and eight stout men walked out. The eight of them were fully armoured, with protective helmets on their heads and protective suits on their bodies, and particle-beam submachine guns in their hands. These were all standard equipment, common in both the military and even private personal armouries. Looks like the opponent was cautious in this aspect as well — anything that could reveal their identity had been excluded.

The eight men crept closer, carefully, leaving behind that lone hover car with its doors shut. That car had two plasma cannons raised high above it, covering the men's approach, ready to fire at any sign of resistance.

Obviously, these three hover cars had been privately modified to become combat-suited hover cars, and Ling Lan noticed that there was no Federation-mandated registration number on any of the cars. The opponent was certainly well-prepared.

Ling Lan did not raise her head at all, yet she knew the current situation as well as the back of her hand. Having Little Four meant that she could be aware of what was happening within the radius of a thousand metres even with her eyes closed. In this way, she knew that much farther away from the hover cars here, at a location not visible from this position, there were two humanoid mechas aiming long-range sniper rifles in this direction. The opponent was really determined to kill them.

Calmly, Ling Lan calculated the success rate of several possible attacks within her mind. However, all the scenarios that she had considered in her mind up till now had a success rate of zero. Still, Ling Lan wasn't discouraged — her time in the primordial forest and her survival training there had engraved this lesson into her: be calm even if you were about to die, for a chance would often appear at the most improbable moment.

For just the possibility of survival, she would have to first solve the problem of the predatory hover car. The two plasma cannons were just too great a threat, although the two humanoid mechas in the

distance were also a huge headache ... Ling Lan decided to just focus on the problem right before her for now.

That said, the weapons she had on her now were just not enough for her to get rid of that armoured hover car, not to mention the professional assassins contained within it. With Ling Lan's current small frame, it might still be possible for her to handle one person, but if she had to fight two, then she would pretty much be like a lamb to the slaughter.

What should she do?

"Tch, at this crucial moment, why did you forget me?" In her mind, Little Four, who had been waiting for Ling Lan to call for help all this time, suddenly made his protest heard.

"Huh? How many people can you handle?" Ling Lan was startled and rather confused — she herself could not take on two at one time, what could Little Four do as a mental presence without a body?

"Well, I can't do anything about the humans, but I can handle cars ..." said Little Four resentfully. Why was his boss so stupid? Humans weren't computers which he could hack.

Little Four's words enlightened Ling Lan — she had indeed got caught up in thinking within a box. Modern hover cars were all controlled by artificial intelligences, while Little Four was the natural enemy of anything digital. As long as he was given a chance, Little Four could definitely wrest control of the hover cars, which would prevent the car's weapons from firing ...

"From this distance, can you do it?" Ling Lan couldn't help asking once out of worry.

"Even 10 metres further would be fine ... if your spiritual power were just a bit higher, I'd be able to do it from even further away," replied Little Four with some disdain in his tone, as if looking down on Ling Lan for limiting his range.

Ling Lan bit out in annoyance, "Just do it. If I kick the bucket here, you'll also die ..."

Little Four shuddered — how did he forget that? He did not dare to kid around anymore, immediately borrowing some of Ling Lan's spiritual power to start infiltrating the hover car.

By this time, the eight men had already passed by Ling Lan's hiding place. After all, there was nothing on this plot of land other than several pieces of debris of varying sizes lying flat against the ground, no place at all for someone to hide. Very naturally, they eliminated this area from their consideration, moving steadily towards the surrounding shrubs up ahead. Clearly, that was a much more likely hiding place.

As the men got closer and closer to the shrubs, Ling Lan's heart started thumping anxiously ... because that was exactly where Chamberlain Ling Qin was hiding.

Chapter 48: The Psychotic Grandpa Chamberlain!

A soft "Pop!" was heard and a smoke grenade flew out from among the shrubs. Triggered, the eight men shot wildly at the grenade — their marksmanship was excellent; almost every single shot hit the grenade. However, smoke grenades were unlike other grenades which would explode or become ineffective when struck. It continued to release smoke, and the more it was hit, the faster it released smoke, and soon the entire area surrounding the shrubs was shrouded in a thick cloud of smoke.

Although the protective helmets of the men were able to insulate against the smoke to a certain extent, their vision was still affected.

Still, the eight men were professional killers after all. They did not panic, firing their particle-beam submachine guns instead without hesitation. Countless particle beams shot out, turning the short shrubs into a pile of ash.

Ling Lan was not at all worried however, as she had seen Chamberlain Ling Qin rush into the bushes on his right at the same time he had thrown out the smoke grenade.

But Ling Qin's next actions thoroughly stunned Ling Lan — he untied a thin rope which was coiled around his wrist, and with a quick pinch on one end, the initially solid rope split into countless strands which were as thin as hair.

Holding onto one end, Ling Qin swiftly tied it onto the trigger of the type II particle-beam gun, and then set up the gun within the bushes. Under the sound of gunfire, he snuck away once again to a new hiding place. Ling Lan could clearly see that he still held the almost invisible thin strands of the decomposed rope in his hands.

After a round of fire, the eight men saw that the short shrubs had been reduced to cinders. With a quick exchange of glances and some hand signals, two of the men stepped forward. It looked like they wanted to examine the ashes of the shrubs to see if there was any sign of their target there — of course, any remains would do as well.

The two men crept forward, and used the tip of their particle-beam guns to sift through the ashes. And right then, gunfire rang out from the right and a wave of particle beams cascaded out. The hidden Ling Qin had pulled on the strands within his hands, setting off the type II gun within the bushes.

The type II gun ruthlessly expelled particle beams with an intensity that was way stronger than the opponent's own particle beam guns — as expected of the newest version of the particle-beam submachine gun.

This attack was aimed at the six men providing cover — one of the men could not react in time and was mercilessly shot down. The others, including the two checking the burnt shrubs, were quick to react, directing all their gunfire at the bushes from where the shots originated. They shot unrestrainedly, and one of them finally managed to hit the type II gun lodged within the bushes, detonating it and turning the bushes into a sea of fire.

Seeing this, the seven men stopped their attack, and their tightly strung nerves relaxed. They were certain that since the type II gun had exploded, then the shooter holding it would certainly have been caught in the blast. Besides, with this huge fire, even if the shooter didn't die in the blast, he would still be roasted alive and turned into ash.

But right at this moment, something unexpected occurred. Ling Qin flew towards them from one side as he launched a Ling family signal flare into the sky.

It was alright if he died, but Ling Lan must survive. Ling Qin's purpose in attacking was primarily to draw all their attention, including the attention of the hover car in the background — he hoped Ling Lan would take the chance to escape while they were preoccupied with him. Moreover, he believed that the Ling

family loyalists were already on the way to meet up with them — with the Ling family's strength, handling these killers would be no big deal.

The blazing signal flare hung high in the sky, surprising several groups of people who were frantically searching for Ling Lan. Exhilarated, they turned towards the direction of the flare and started rushing there at full speed.

Ling Qin's attack was too sudden and unexpected. Only the man in the lead had enough time to react, shooting particle beams desperately to try and fend off Ling Qin's attack, while the other six just stood there dumbly.

Quicker than words could say, Ling Qin's sprinting figure suddenly wavered, and then the leader's particle beams were behind him.

The leader exclaimed in shock, "Irregular flicker!" This was a high level evasive move that was extremely hard to apply well in combat. Typically, anyone who could use this move in combat was certain to be a master fighter.

A cold smile hung on Ling Qin's lips. At this moment, he had already gotten close to the assassin closest to him.

"Quickly fire the plasma cannons!" The team leader's gaze was fierce, holding a vicious determination within it. He shouted loudly through the communicator, retreating swiftly at the same time.

In truth, the men had disembarked mainly as bait to tempt the opponent to attack — the true killing blow was always meant to be the hover car behind them. Of course, for these people who were used to operating from the shadows, sacrificing a few subordinates was perfectly normal, which was why the team leader had given up on his subordinate who was being attacked by Ling Qin without any hesitation whatsoever.

The team leader had already readied himself to dodge, but the hover car behind them did not react as expected and fire its cannons. Instead, it just maintained its original position, along with radio silence.

Before he could turn back to face the front, he heard a pained scream. The subordinate whom he had ruthlessly abandoned had already been pierced through the throat with a dagger by Ling Qin, and had emitted one final chilling cry. The cry seemed to reverberate with rage and despair — after all, he had seen with his own eyes how his team leader had abandoned him right before he died.

Ling Qin's expression was one of aloof disinterest. His face had been spattered with bright crimson drops of blood, and the cloying scent of blood filled the air, thick enough to cause an average person to vomit. However, Ling Qin seemed perfectly at ease, going so far as to even daintily lick at the blood on the corner of his lips — what a psychotic Grandpa Chamberlain! Ling Lan couldn't help but wail in her heart at the sight. What was up with all these people around her ...?!

At the taste of blood, Ling Qin's expression turned obsessed, almost intoxicated — he hadn't experienced this bloody taste in so long!

Two orbs of nameless fire ignited within his eyes. In his youth, he had been the one to crawl through piles of corpses on the battlefield with Ling Xiao's father — this sort of carnage was normal for him then. Sadly, after Ling Xiao had been promoted to god-class, their bloody reign of terror was thoroughly

shoved into the past. It wasn't that Ling Qin wanted to wash his hands of killing, but god-class operators were the symbol of ultimate strength within the Federation, so no one wanted to risk the wrath of a god-class operator.

Ling Qin had thought that the many years of meditation and easy living had caused him to forget his initial savage nature. Unexpectedly, facing battle once again today, his blood still boiled and killing came back to him as easy as breathing. This pleased him greatly, and it felt like the savage beast within him had finally been set free after all this time.

Ling Qin laughed maniacally — looks like killing was still something he revelled in after all.

Observing all this, Ling Lan silently wiped away a handful of cold sweat. Who knew that the strict and serious Grandpa Chamberlain who treated her so kindly was such a vicious character? The way that he killed was almost textbook material, and that chilling smile would make anyone think twice about crossing him.

Ling Lan felt her little heart thunder wildly ... Hells, she must never anger Grandpa Chamberlain in the future! Ling Lan decisively labelled Chamberlain Ling Qin as 'a person not to mess with'.

When Ling Qin launched his attack, he had not considered surviving to begin with. So he didn't stop after killing the first enemy, but instead launched himself at the next person in line.

There was a clear gap between the combat ability of the two sides — despite his age, Ling Qin was strong, and his combat prowess was not much weaker than when he was young. By the time Ling Qin had disposed of his third opponent, the team leader could be heard yelling furiously into his communicator, "You bastard, I told you to shoot! Shoot goddammit ..."

It turned out that the team leader still hadn't given up on the hover car. As Ling Qin prepared to kill yet another two people, the team leader was still desperately trying to contact the hover car to order them to shoot, but obviously, all he received in return was silence, and this silence was pushing him towards the brink of despair.

Finally, he understood that their finishing move — the hover car — must have been taken out somehow and could no longer be relied on. Enraged, he threw away the communicator in his hands and lifted up his weapon, shouting, "Attack!"

Chapter 49: The Threat of Long-Range Attacks

A cold smile graced Ling Qin's lips. If the opponent had attacked him as a group from the start, he might already be a horizontal corpse lying on the ground. But now, besides the one man who had been gunned down by the type II submachine gun, he had successfully ended the lives of three men with his own hands. It was no longer that easy for the remaining four people to hold him back.

In all honesty, Ling Qin was very surprised himself — why was the hover car not reacting? The reason he had attacked so furiously was that he wanted to eliminate as many opponents as possible before he was taken out by the hover car, so that Ling Lan would have a greater chance of escape.

Regardless, Ling Qin was very pleased with the current situation. It was clear that something had gone wrong on his opponents' end, and this was extremely advantageous for him. From the certainty of death to the renewed hope for survival, Ling Qin's attacks only became fiercer and more powerful.

If living was an option, would anyone choose to die? Ling Qin also wanted to live — he wanted to watch Ling Lan grow up, get married, and have kids. He still dreamed of the day he could hold Ling Lan's children in his arms. For this objective, Ling Qin dug out all the inner potential he could from within his body.

Ling Qin weaved left and right, nimbly avoiding all of the opponent's wild shots. He used the irregular flicker to its ultimate effect, leaving Ling Lan astounded as she watched. She decided then that if both Chamberlain Ling Qin and her survived this, then she must get Grandpa Chamberlain to teach her this move — it was just too goddamn beautiful.

Evasion aside, Ling Qin's lethal attacks became even more unpredictable. His dagger flew through the air gracefully like he was dancing, and the mysterious rope being controlled by the fingers of his left hand was even more terrifying.

Every single time the men saw the fingers of his left hand twitch, they couldn't help but back away. The men really couldn't be blamed for being fearful — out of the three men Ling Qin had killed, two had died because of this thin rope. They hadn't been observant enough and had let the rope loop around their necks, and with just a quick twist, their heads had been severed from their necks, blood spewing everywhere. That just went to show how sharp that rope truly was, and combined with how hard it was to see — appearing and disappearing without any warning — how could they not fear it?

Ling Lan watched it with greedy eyes. This was undoubtedly a most subtle killing tool. Who knew that such an unassuming thin rope looped around Ling Qin's wrist would be so terrifying? Ling Lan decided that she must ask about the origins of this rope later, and if possible, she wanted one of her own.

Today's experience taught her that the world she was living in was truly dangerous. She needed to work much harder to improve her own capabilities and diversify the weapons and tools she could use — both were equally important.

Still, although Ling Qin's feat in killing three of the men could partly be attributed to his strange choice of weapon and his own individual strength, a large part was still due to sheer luck. Certainly, the first person he killed was a result of his careful planning, but the following two were just opportunities presented through the opponent's own mistakes.

If the team leader had not moved to abandon his own team member, the other members wouldn't have been so afraid of becoming the next sacrifice, all choosing to withdraw to protect themselves instead of focusing on attacking. In that case, then Ling Qin wouldn't have been able to kill two more men in the chaos, turning the tables around.

All that can be said was that the opponent's team had an idiot in it — and most unfortunately, this idiot was the team leader with the authority to decide whether they lived or died.

Luckily, this idiot was not an idiot to the extreme, deciding to change his orders in time. The remaining four men quickly arranged themselves into the formation of an inverted trapezoid, cooperating with

each other to coordinate their attacks and defense as they faced the aggressive Ling Qin who was rushing towards his fourth intended victim.

The tips of four particle-beam guns lit up, spewing out countless particle beams in Ling Qin's direction, blinding the eyes of all observers, including the two mecha pilots closely watching the proceedings here.

"Head, why don't those idiots fire the cannons?" One of the mecha pilots wondered out loud. He rubbed at his blurry eyes — the display screen on the mecha relayed what was happening live, so his eyes would get tired from staring at it for too long

He really just couldn't understand it — there had clearly been several really great opportunities to launch those cannons, but the men had just let those opportunities slip by, while the hover car just continued to hover there uselessly.

The mecha operator called Head replied, "Who knows? All we need to do is do clean up. Only if those people fail, then it'll be up to us."

"But the opponent has already sent out a signal flare — reinforcements are sure to be on the way. If we don't resolve this matter soon, we may be discovered by the people heading here. Head, didn't you say that the superiors don't want our involvement to be revealed?"

"That's right. If the superiors find out they botched this, we won't have a good time of it either. Oh, what the heck, let's just do it. I'll leave that annoying flea jumping around to you — make sure to get a headshot in one shot." After being reminded of the consequences by his subordinate, the operator called Head abruptly changed his mind and ordered his subordinate to eliminate Ling Qin quickly.

"Got it, Head. Watch me as I take the stage." Finally, it was time for him to show off his skills. The mecha operator who had waited for so long was ecstatic. He controlled his mecha to swing about the huge long-range sniper rifle on its right shoulder, and then the 4-metre high mecha bent into a half kneeling position. Its metal left arm steadied the rifle, which had its sight aimed at the busily evading Ling Qin.

The mecha's movements did not escape Ling Lan's notice. Ever since Chamberlain Ling Qin had begun fighting head on with those men, Ling Lan had been keeping an eye on the two mechas, wary of a sudden attack. Now, seeing one of the mechas getting ready to shoot long-range, she knew they were about to attack Grandpa Chamberlain, but she was not worried.

Within this time, while Chamberlain Ling Qin had been fighting for his life, she had not been idle. After much calculation and strategizing, she had finally found a way to handle the two mechas. It may not be the best plan, but it was good enough to hinder and delay them.

"Little Four, raise a hover car! And then calculate the trajectory of mecha A's attack." Ling Lan had randomly labelled the two mechas as mecha A and mecha B for ease of reference when communicating with Little Four.

Following Ling Lan's order, one of the unmanned hover cars suddenly rose up from the ground, and not even a second later, it was hovering 2 metres above the ground. Meanwhile, in front of Ling Lan, a map of mecha A's attack trajectory had appeared, with coordinates and height clearly labelled on it.

"Move the hover car here," said Ling Lan decisively, pointing at a point nearest to the hover car.

Before her words had faded, the hover car had already shifted into position under Little Four's control.

"F*ck, what the hell? Actually blocking my line of attack." Resentfully, mecha A put down his sniper rifle. The operator was extremely displeased — that had been a prime opportunity to shoot, but it had been ruined by that errant hover car.

That was probably unintentional, it just happened to move there." Mecha B also didn't know what was going on, but he still didn't hesitate to console mecha A, saying, "Don't mind it. Let me try this time."

That said, mecha B started adjusting his own rifle's angle, aiming at Ling Qin who was still deep in battle with the four men. As for whether his shot would hit any of the men on the ground in the process — that was none of his concern.

Chapter 50: Fighting For Time!

"Little Four, mecha B's attack trajectories," requested Ling Lan calmly, "and raise the second hover car." The more dangerous the situation, the more she needed to stay calm — Chamberlain Ling Qin's life depended on her.

Ling Lan was endlessly grateful that she had the help of such a useful companion like Little Four. After Little Four had taken control of the threatening hover car, he had also notified Ling Lan that he had assumed control of the other two hover cars as well. This information was like a ray of light to the perturbed Ling Lan, giving her the precious inklings of an idea which might help Ling Qin and her hold on till backup arrived.

Yet along with her relief, she also felt quite glum. For the first time ever, she truly recognised how weak she was still. Currently, she could only watch as a loved one she cared for fought for his life — if it weren't for Little Four, Grandpa Ling Qin would probably be bleeding all over the scene by now.

As of this moment, Ling Lan did not notice that an intense need to grow stronger had taken seed and sprouted within her heart, and had started to grow secure roots. In the future, when she encountered difficulties and felt tired or lost, it would give her the will to carry on ...

Little Four's actions were impeccable — not only did he manage to calculate and present all of mecha B's attack trajectories, he had also automatically shifted the second hover car to block off those trajectories.

Little Four was a studious child — Ling Lan only had to order him once for him to remember her instructions. Thus, without needing to be told twice, he had already taken the initiative to do what Ling Lan wanted.

"Little Four, well done." Even though she had never raised a child before, Ling Lan still knew that children loved to be praised. So, she was unstinting with her praise, causing Little Four to blush bright red, smiling so much till his eyes were all scrunched up into a line.

When the hover cars once again interfered with the attack trajectories, even a dumber person would have noticed that something wasn't right.

“Not good! Something must have gone wrong.” Mecha B lowered his rifle, expression serious.

“Head, I remember that the people in those hover cars are all out. There’s no one in those cars.” Mecha A had also figured out the truth, remembering that the people who had initially been in those cars were now embroiled in battle with the opponent.

“Not good, we’ve been discovered.” Thinking about how their attacks were being thwarted, mecha B felt cold sweat start pouring out from his pores. His every move was most likely already being monitored by the opponent.

“Ah ... H-Head, what should we do?” Mecha A began panicking. If their identities had truly been exposed, then they would not be allowed to live. Although he didn’t know who their direct superior was, from the little that he had gleaned from Head’s explanations, he knew that it was someone who had the power to move mountains and part oceans. Eliminating them would be like squishing ants to someone like that.

“Shoot down those two hover cars,” bit out mecha B ruthlessly. If they pulled back now, they still wouldn’t be welcomed back; they might as well take a gamble, and perhaps achieve something that might work in their favour.

“Alright, Head.” Mecha A was too afraid not to listen. He once again lifted his sniper rifle to aim at one of the hover cars.

“Little Four, come back quick.” Ling Lan saw the opponent raise his rifle and just knew that they weren’t about to just roll over. She was worried for Little Four’s safety, and so quickly urged him to come back.

Of course, Ling Lan felt a little regretful — she had actually intended to send a warning to the opponent with the hover cars, letting them know that they were being monitored, and hope that they’d choose to retreat out of wariness. Unexpectedly, the plan didn’t work; looks like the opponent was a relentless character, who would fight till the very end.

In that case, come on then! Ling Lan clenched her fists, determination writ all over her face. “Little Four, move the last hover car into a position which can block the attacks of both mechas.”

Before Ling Lan’s words had faded, two loud collisions could be heard:

“Boom!” “Boom!”

The two sounds were almost simultaneous. As expected, the opponent had pressed on their triggers, hitting the two hover cars at the front. However, these hover cars had been modified and were extremely solid — although there was a huge gouge in the car’s body as a result from the rifle shot, where one side had even bent inwards, the internal circuitry was still intact, so the hover car was still able to stay airborne.

“That’s great, these modified cars are really pretty solid.” Ling Lan looked at the hover cars still holding on in the air, protecting Ling Qin, and her heart rejoiced. At first, she had still been worried that the hover cars would not be strong enough, that they would be destroyed in one hit, but now it looked like they would still be able to buy them some time.

Considering the time when Chamberlain Ling Qin had released the signal flare, Ling Lan knew that if they could just hold on for another three to four minutes, assistance might make it here.

Hover cars, you need to stay strong and hold on ... Ling Lan couldn't help but pray.

"F*ck, who made these hover cars to be so solid?" mecha B couldn't resist swearing. He turned his head and continued to order, "Don't slack off, continue to shoot. We must bring down those cars as soon as possible."

"Yes, Head!" replied mecha A as he pressed down on his trigger furiously.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The sniper rifles shot round after round, and on one particular round, a crack finally appeared on one of the hover cars, and continued to spread until the car was a broken mess ...

BOOM! One of the hover cars was hit once more, and this time, it finally gave up the ghost and became a flaming fireball, blazing brightly as it fell to the ground.

In swift succession, the other hover car took another couple of hits and exploded as well, joining its partner in a fiery death on the ground below.

"Hells, why is there another car? When did it move there?" Mecha B finally managed to eliminate the hover cars blocking his line of sight, but just as he was about to relax and start aiming for Ling Qin, he found that he could no longer see Ling Qin once more. And the reason was another hover car that had appeared near Ling Qin.

And unlike the first two which were empty, this car had people in it. The people inside looked at the other two hover cars which had been shot down in flames, and understood what their fate would be as well. In panic, they beat at the doors and windows of the car, but unfortunately, the doors and windows of the hover car had already been sealed up tight by Little Four. There was no way they could get them to open.

Naturally, they had thought about smashing the windows open, but unfortunately the cars had been too thoroughly modified — even the enhanced sniper rifles on the mechas could only destroy the cars after over ten hits, what could they do with only their fists?

Meanwhile, as this was happening, Ling Qin had killed off another two men, leaving only one squad member and the team leader hiding right at the back.

Ling Lan was very nervous. She hoped that this final hover car would be able to withstand the remaining attacks until Chamberlain Ling Qin managed to get rid of the final two men. At that time, even if there was nothing else to block the mechas' trajectory, Ling Qin should be able to utilise the geographical features of the land to find somewhere else to hide, such as another group of shrubs.

Suddenly, the hover car reversed, and its two plasma cannons fired, and the plasma beams rose swiftly through the air.

Ling Lan was greatly startled by this. "Little Four, what's going on?!"

Little Four replied instantly, “Hehe, I didn’t waste any time just now, and finally figured out the artificial intelligence systems of this world. I had not expected you humans to have managed to use this sort of mathematical means to create artificial intelligences which resemble us — of course, this resemblance is minor though, since those A.I.s are still worlds apart from us ...” Little Four was very smug, a proud smirk on his face as he praised his own individuality.

A vein popped out on Ling Lan’s forehead, and she raged, “Get to the point!” Hells, does this brat know what kind of situation they were in? Wasting time blabbering on ...

“I’ve designed two small artificial systems, and have already implanted them onto the navigation system of the plasma cannons.” Little Four pouted, throwing out these words sulkily before turning to face away from Ling Lan. Fine, looks like this rascal child had gotten into another of his moods again.