

It's Not Easy to Be a Man After Travelling to the Future

Chapter 36: Becoming a Boss

The originally overcast sky cleared up in an instant as Ling Lan saw the surroundings blur around her. Once she could see clearly again, she found that she was now standing on a sandy plot of land while the original racetrack was nowhere in sight.

This sudden change shocked all the children, who could only stand there gaping in surprise.

Where they stood now was no longer the outdoor field they had been seeing; it was actually a 700-800 square-metre enclosed room. There was nothing in the room except a wide expanse of space covered in sand and dirt. Due to the simulation of rain in their test and their running all over the room, the ground was now a disgusting muddy mess.

Meanwhile, the roof above had numerous sprinklers equipped, packed tightly across the ceiling and spread out to every corner — they were most likely the source of 'rain' during the test.

In contrast to the children's shock and surprise, Ling Lan and Han Jijyun merely shared a knowing glance and smiled. The changes to their environment proved that their hypothesis had been correct. They truly had been led unknowingly into a virtual environment training room.

The examiner didn't lead the children back through the door he had come from; instead, he brought them to the door they had entered from at the beginning. Opening it, he signalled for them to leave.

The moment Ling Lan stepped out of the door, she saw that familiar field where the children had sat down at the beginning, where they had first been gathered before being split up into groups.

Ling Lan understood now. She looked back to see the examiner standing on an empty racetrack, nodding at them in farewell. At this moment, his expression was no longer strict and foreboding, but instead contained some trace of humour. Finally, he turned to leave, walking further and further away until he disappeared at the end of the racetrack.

Apparently, the virtual environment mode of these rooms had already been activated while they were outside. When the staff members had brought the different groups of children one by one to the track to prepare for their test, they were actually bringing them into separate rooms.

When the ten children appeared without warning out of the virtual racetrack, the surrounding staff members on the outside couldn't help but reveal shocked expressions. After all, it had only been less than 3 hours since the tests began, which was an hour earlier than the typical end time for this test — could it be that these children had all failed and were prematurely ejected from the testing room?

Just as they were wondering what to do, they noticed the digital number plates by the students' sides. All of them were lit up with the soft green light which indicated the successful completion of the test. The staff members excitedly smiled — didn't this mean that all these kids were amazing talents?

Fine, fine, so even the best Central Scout Academy had an insatiable thirst for promising talent.

The staff members helpfully led them out of the testing site. When Ling Lan walked out of the main gates, the first thing she saw was Ling Qin's anxious face and she immediately felt warmth bloom in her heart.

Yep, being with family was still the best! Only now did Ling Lan feel the aches and pains all over her body — although she had already held back her strength in the previous fight, the excessive exercise had still damaged her muscles, which were now making their protests known.

The parents and guardians of the other children were also there waiting. Seeing their children appear, they all gathered around, asking about the test. The outcome of this test would determine the future of the children as well as influence the future of their respective families.

Learning that they had all passed, the guardians were very happy. Meanwhile, the children themselves had also established a deep bond by going through the test together — they all promised to reunite on the first day of school before reluctantly saying their goodbyes.

Ling Lan said goodbye individually to each of the nine children, her manner polite and reserved, no hint of impropriety in her actions. This greatly pleased Chamberlain Ling Qin who took pride in the fact that his young master was such a gentleman, as expected of Major General Ling Xiao's child.

Feeling that she had done everything as necessary, Ling Lan turned to leave with Ling Qin. But she had only taken two steps when she felt Ling Qin suddenly stiffen beside her before relaxing again. At the same time, there was a violent sound of rushing air behind her — an ambush?!

Ling Lan didn't sense any evil intent, however, so she simply moved one step to the left to evade this fierce tackle.

With a loud “Whump!” her attacker was splayed on the ground, face down in a spread eagle position right before Ling Lan’s feet.

Seeing this very familiar figure, Ling Lan’s eye twitched. She shouted, “Qi Long! What do you think you’re doing?!”

Qi Long was now covered in dirt. He quickly climbed up, face calm as he brushed off the dirt from his clothes before saying, “I have come to say goodbye.”

Hearing this, Ling Lan face-palmed internally. “Just now, didn’t I already say goodbye to you?” Dammit, when did this brat learn how to talk nonsense? Was he just being contrary?

Despite having his lie exposed by Ling Lan, Qi Long wasn’t at all embarrassed. With no trace of shame on his face, he continued, “That was just a group activity. Right now, this is my personal goodbye.”

Qi Long lifted his head to smile winningly at her. “Hehe, Ling Lan, aren’t you touched?”

“Touched? Not at all. Shocked? Maybe a little,” said Ling Lan drily, face expressionless. Qi Long was the type that would take a mile if you gave an inch — she couldn’t afford to show him any favour whatsoever or else the situation would spiral out of her control.

Qi Long chose to ignore Ling Lan’s jab, instead looking intently at Ling Lan, as if trying to confirm something. His gaze was sharp and penetrating, causing Ling Lan to shift uncomfortably, but before Ling Lan could say anything, Qi Long had said, “Ling Lan, you really are stronger than me. I submit to your strength. From now on, you’re my boss.”

Ling Lan blinked. Boss? What the hell? Had she heard wrongly, or had Qi Long gone mad? Also, did she look like she wanted underlings? Why would Qi Long bring this up?

Furthermore, why didn’t anyone notify her of this? Was this decided privately just like that? Ling Lan’s face was stuck in a deep frown as she thought all this to herself helplessly. Honestly, Ling Lan had never considered becoming a boss — bosses were always at the head of the pack, the primary target, the one who would get shot first. Becoming a boss would go against the resolution she had set from the start — to live a humble, low-profile, and safe life.

The moment Qi Long finished speaking, he waved goodbye and fled, leaving a trail of dust in his wake. Ling Lan never had the chance to say anything. However, for Qi Long, Ling Lan’s opinion was irrelevant. Qi Long was a single-minded creature — as long as he himself had acknowledged it, even if Ling Lan was in denial, he was dead-set on Ling Lan being his boss.

And thus, Ling Lan became Qi Long’s boss.

Ling Lan grimaced as she watched the gradually disappearing figure of Qi Long. She was a little annoyed at herself for being too slow to react. Back then, she should have firmly grabbed hold of Qi Long and communicated with him properly ... of course, this method of communication did not exclude the use of violence to get her point across.

Han Jijyun ambled over with a slight smile on his face, clearly rejoicing in her misery.

Ling Lan complained to him, "Couldn't you have kept a better watch on that bro of yours?"

"Bro?" Han Jijyun was startled by the term, not understanding what Ling Lan meant.

Ling Lan smirked evilly. "Your bromance partner!"

Han Jijyun was clearly taken aback for a moment as he digested this new term. And then, as if coming to a realisation, his jade-white little face turned red. Looks like his skin was still a little too thin to take this sort of joke.

Ling Lan was surprised by Han Jijyun's blush — who knew that the mature-looking Han Jijyun would react in such a childish manner? "Wow, you're embarrassed just like that?"

Oh, Ling Lan, no matter how intelligent Han Jijyun was, he was still just an innocent six years old child — of course his skin couldn't be as thick as yours which had been collected over the course of two lives, a total of 30 odd years.

Out of intense embarrassment, Han Jijyun snapped back, "You're already going to be a boss, can't you be a bit more serious?"

Ling Lan was hit where it hurt. Internally weeping, she looked at the sky. "I heard nothing."

Dear God, she only wanted to live a peaceful life — she didn't have any grand ambitions; she only wanted any children who wanted to rely on her to stay far, far away, and to not disturb her. Amen!

But Han Jijyun's next words caused Ling Lan's fervent hopes to be dashed into pieces. "He's already called you boss, are you planning to reject him? Also, you should also take care of me in the future ... Boss. Ling. Lan."

Hells. Looks like even Han Jijyun was claiming her as his boss.

Chapter 37: The Examiner's Recommendation!
Translator: ryuxenji Editor: H2dH2mr

At this time, Luo Lang stalked over with his head held high with his younger twin sister Luo Chao in tow. He rather looked like a peacock, thought Ling Lan to herself in amusement.

Luo Lang stared at Ling Lan for several seconds, and then said, "Since Qi Long has submitted to you, then I'll also acknowledge your strength ... grudgingly. Please take care of my sister and me from now on."

Huh? What was this? Ling Lan stared back blankly — she didn't really have any connection to Luo Lang, right?

In her mind, Little Four could hold back no longer. Thunderously, he spat, "What else could it be?! He also wants you to be his boss! You- you've wronged me."

Little Four's gaze reflected only sorrow, creeping Ling Lan out. What was up with Little Four? Why did he sound so forlorn saying that she had wronged him?

Ling Lan's mind started racing, thinking about what she could have done to hurt Little Four's delicate soul ... But after much thinking, she still couldn't figure it out and so could only assume that the little rascal's rebellious phase had come.

Little Four was very angry and full of animosity. He hated those shameless people who had come to wrap themselves around Ling Lan's sturdy thighs 1 . He was also mad at Ling Lan's actions — she must have shown off too much to garner so much attention, causing him to have so many competitors to become her number one underling.

Alright, so Little Four was no longer obsessed with the epic 'Three Kingdoms'; he was now addicted to some third-rate novels meant for leisure reading. (The sudden drop in taste was just too jarring.) Consequently, the way he addressed Ling Lan had also changed.

This was how it happened: One day, Little Four was extremely bored, so he decided to surf the net randomly. By chance, he stumbled onto a very obscure website, which was called 'World of Slash'. You even needed a password to log in! This piqued the curiosity of Little Four ... Naturally, passwords and the like were useless against him — he easily bypassed them and toured the site. He discovered countless business opportunities in there. So many people were crying out for slash novels, slash fanworks, slash videos ... and they were willing to pay for them!

Little Four's greatest goal right now was to earn money — how could he let such a golden opportunity slip by? Although he wasn't certain his database had slash fanworks or slash videos, Little Four was confident that his database would at least have some slash novels. Putting aside the other things in his database, the sheer amount of novels he had in there was staggering.

When Little Four searched his database, sure enough, the novels tagged as slash were almost more than he could count. (This was all the fault of Ling Lan's indiscriminate selection of reading material in her past life.) Little Four was ecstatic! He could already envision the Square-Holed Brothers 2 pouring in.

Little Four also found that the more words a novel had, the more money it was worth, so after some picking and choosing, he chose to publish the rather long 'Reincarnation in a Time of Armageddon: the Rise of the Cannon Fodder'. Of course, he was also very curious to see what these slash novels were about, to drive the people here so crazy.

Little Four read as he published and very soon, he found himself transfixed by the deep brotherly bond between the novel's boss and his underling. He then recalled what Ling Lan had said to him, about wanting him to be her younger brother ... Little Four was immediately moved to tears. (Sweat, Little Four was still clueless about what slash truly meant at this point. He had only read up till around chapter 150 where the sexual tones were still very subtle, and so remained as innocent as before.)

However, Little Four's joy didn't last for long before competition appeared, and two at once at that! At this very moment, Little Four could fully understand the depressed mood of Little Ling in the novel — the more competition there was, the greater the pressure ...

Should he treat his boss better in the future so that his number 1 position wouldn't be taken away? Little Four started to think hard about the issue, unaware that his internal core chip was starting to heat up unnaturally once again.

Let's leave aside Little Four wild imaginings and meaningless jealousy, as well as Ling Lan's concerned amusement about it for now. After the examiner for room 072 escorted the children out, he immediately contacted the invigilation room.

In the invigilation room, the superintendent had been watching when the examiner hurt Qi Long by mistake and his brows had locked tight in a frown, and it only got tighter as he saw Ling Lan send the examiner flying. Only when Qi Long stood up at the end, apparently unharmed, did his brows relax.

Seeing the examiner's contact request, he accepted without waiting for the invigilating officer to do so. Not allowing any room for the other to speak, he bellowed, "Number 413, once we're done, report back to the training camp!"

The examiner for room 072 gaped. "Sir! Why are you there ..."

Dammit. Why was his direct superior on the other side of the line? Why was he so unlucky?

With a long face, the examiner asked carefully, "Sir, then when should I come back?"

The superintendent huffed and said coldly, “A month later.”

The superintendent’s reply made the examiner want to curl up and cry. Heavens, a month in the training camp — even if it wouldn’t kill him, he would still shed a layer of skin. He’d never have expected that he would have to go back to that terrifying place again after 5 years, to relive the painful and horrible time when he had been a recruit.

“What? You have something to say about that?” asked the superintendent, tone silky with an undertone of threat.

“No, Sir, not at all! I have nothing to say!” The examiner immediately stood up straight and answered loudly. He knew his superior officer well — if he displayed any hint of hesitation, his punishment would be doubled right away — he had no intention of letting a month’s worth of punishment become two or even three months within the blink of an eye.

“Hn. Good. Was there anything else?” The superintendent was satisfied by the examiner’s attitude, and so prompted him to explain why he had called to begin with.

The examiner collected himself, and stated formally, “I would like to recommend several children for the special classes.”

“Oh?” The superintendent’s lips quirked up in a small smile as he waited for the examiner to elaborate.

“Yes. In my opinion, those children are all very promising ...” said the examiner after some thought, “but I’m especially taken by 0723, 0724, 0725, and 0729.”

“How so?”

“0723 — good foundations, with extraordinary strength for a child. His reflexes are also excellent and better yet, he can think on his feet in battle to the extent that he could be considered a cunning tactician. If we cultivate him intensively, he will definitely become an intelligent strategic-type warrior.” The examiner’s eyes sparkled as he described his observations of Ling Lan, clearly showing how much Ling Lan’s performance had captured his heart.

“0724 — his physical fitness is definitely on a non-human level. He actually managed to break past his body’s limits all on his own ... He is a true prodigy. As long as the Federation provides focused cultivation, he is very likely to be the next IN mecha operator.” By the time the examiner got to the last part of his report on Qi Long, his face was flushed with excitement.

The examiner couldn’t be blamed for losing his composure. Aside from Major General Ling Xiao, no one had managed to rise up to the challenge of becoming an IN mecha

operator during the past 10 years. And now, he could actually see a glimmer of hope in Qi Long — how could he not lose control?

An IN mecha operator, is it? Was 0724 the only potential candidate? The superintendent's gaze was complicated, shaded by his eyelids, hiding away his true thoughts.

"0725 — cool and level-headed, with commendable logic and an analytical mind. He is definitely an excellent staff officer in the making. I recommend that we focus his training in this direction." The Federation not only needed hot-blooded warriors unafraid of death, but also staff officers capable of planning and taking command, who could deploy strategies from thousands of miles away.

"0729 seems weaker than the other three in comparison, however, he has an unyielding spirit ... If we place him together with the other three, this attitude of his could push him to become an excellent soldier, as impressive as the others."

The examiner systematically laid out his thoughts on the four children and then silently waited for his superior officer to make the final decision.

Chapter 38: Who's the Opponent?
Translator: ryuxenji Editor: H2dH2mr

After several long seconds of wait, the superintendent's calm voice was transmitted through the communication device, "Your recommendations have been approved! As for the reward for your recommendations, you'll receive them after you rejoin the troops." With that said, the connection was severed without waiting for the examiner's reply.

Although the examiner had been mercilessly hung up on, he wasn't at all unsatisfied. The tight expression on his face loosened, and the hints of a smile could be seen.

He rubbed off the sweat marks on his forehead and breathed a silent sigh — thankful that he had managed to survive his demonic team leader and, of course, pleased at his own penetrating insight.

He had initially thought that this assignment at the scout academy was just a forced break for soldiers like him, something to spice up their routine while providing them with some extra pocket money ... he hadn't expected that he would be so lucky as to find such promising young talent, earning him additional recommendation rewards which would actually influence his career progression ...

However, he was a little puzzled. Why did even his own demonic team leader get assigned to monitor this test? What the hell was going on here?

The examiner for room 072 was part of the Federation's Special Mecha Forces, a member of the Bladed Special Ops Team, Number 413. This time around, his team had just returned from the battlefield, but before they could settle down and rest they had received military orders to go to the Central Scout Academy to oversee this year's enrolment tests (the final two events).

He still remembered that back then, all the team members had been dumbfounded ... After all, they were all considered bloodthirsty killers on the battlefield — and now, just like that, they were expected to switch from being butchers to being nannies to coddle a bunch of kids?

Of course, as the commander of the Mecha Special Forces, their Demonic Leader — that is, the superintendent (this was just the rank they used in public, the true rank was only known within the military workings) that had been on the other end of his communication device earlier — had protested this assignment, but had been summarily ignored. Resigned, their commander could only send out the Special Ops team to become examiners. Still, he hadn't expected the commander himself to be physically present as well ...

The superintendent, who was also the commander of the Special Forces, shut down his communication device and then said to his subordinate invigilation officer, "Number 137, you'll be responsible for this. Arrange it so that the four of them enter the special classes, and their results must be average there."

Number 137 blinked, confused. "Huh?"

The superintendent swept an icy gaze at him, but though Number 137 did not make any further noise, his face was full of curiosity as if he really wanted to know what was going on.

The superintendent rubbed his forehead wearily — why were all his subordinates such curious people? 413 was one, and 137 was another.

"The tree that grows above the tree-line ... if their results are too good, it'll do more harm than good," explained the superintendent simply. 137 was a hacker — if he didn't give him an acceptable answer, he'd go looking for one himself and may cause all sorts of trouble that way.

137's curiosity was appeased after receiving an answer, so he grinned and said, "Roger that, Sir. Leave everything to me."

Oh, so now he's satisfied he'll call me Sir? The superintendent rolled his eyes and threw a pointed glare at the offbeat 137 before walking away from him to continue supervising his other subordinates as they worked.

Alright, so just within this short period of time when he had stopped to chat with 137, there were already several officers who had begun yawning in the invigilation room, and some had even slumped forwards and fallen asleep ...

Hehe! Did they really think this commander of theirs was a lowly superintendent? Actually daring to act so slovenly in front of him ... the commander of the Special Forces smiled sinisterly. He wouldn't allow his soldiers to be so unfocused and to lower their guard so casually, even though there was no real danger in this small Central Scout Academy.

"Attention!" he hollered. The entire invigilation room was immediately thrown into disarray, and the sound of howls and wails could be heard. The Demonic Leader would discipline his soldiers, and he wouldn't show mercy regardless of location.

Meanwhile, on Ling Lan's end, she finally reunited with her mother Lan Luofeng under Chamberlain Ling Qin's lead. Lan Luofeng anxiously asked, "Baby, did it go well?" If she hadn't been worried that Ling Lan's gender would be exposed at school, Lan Luofeng would actually care not one whit how her daughter did in the exams. She had never intended for Ling Lan to be a great soldier to begin with.

Ling Lan smugly replied, "Of course. Who do you think I am?" The self-confidence writ all over her face lay Lan Luofeng's worries to rest, and she too smiled along with Ling Lan.

For the sake of her mother's happiness, Ling Lan was used to acting cute and playing the child. However, her efforts weren't in vain — Lan Luofeng, who had originally been overwhelmed with sadness at her father's passing, had slowly shifted her focus onto Ling Lan and had slowly regained her spirits; hope had rekindled in her eyes as the sadness became muted.

The final results would only be announced half an hour after all the tests ended. Ling Lan didn't know how much longer the other children would take to complete the exam, so waiting here was obviously not a good idea. As such, she suggested to Lan Luofeng that they go home to wait for the results. After all, the final results would be posted on the Central Scout Academy's website, available for public perusal.

Lan Luofeng thought about it and agreed, and so brought Ling Lan home.

As the sky slowly darkened into night, the final student finally completed the exam at the Central Scout Academy. All the invigilators, who were responsible for keying in the marks, entered the scores they had collected into the Central Scout Academy's main

system. The system would then calculate and tally up the marks before arranging them in descending order to produce a name list.

Number 137 was excitedly flexing his fingers at this moment, warming them up for his upcoming performance. Being one of the top 10 hackers in the virtual world, he must definitely accomplish the mission his commander had assigned him flawlessly.

In Ling Lan's home, Lan Luofeng was seated before a large screen, patiently refreshing the Central Scout Academy's website again and again, waiting for the announcement of the final results.

Meanwhile, Ling Lan was lying down on the couch, talking with Little Four in her mind.

"Little Four, can you go online from this position?" Ling Lan asked worriedly. She knew that Little Four could access the internet wirelessly within a certain radius.

Little Four looked like he had everything under control. "No problem, even a little further is fine."

"Little Four, I only want you to enter the Central Scout Academy system to ensure that I can enter the special classes — don't go and do anything else," reminded Ling Lan.

Although Ling Lan was confident, she had still decided to let Little Four keep a lookout for her results, just in case. It wouldn't do for someone else to mess around with the results after all. It had to be said that Ling Lan was very cautious.

137 managed to infiltrate the Central Scout Academy's main system successfully, however, his entry didn't go unnoticed by the watchful Little Four. "Eh? Someone really did show up ... he's gonna die." Little Four was incensed. This sort of action was like waving a red flag at a bull. Remember, he was like a god on the web — who was it that dared to challenge his authority?!

Ling Lan sensed Little Four's anger and hurriedly asked, "What's happening, Little Four?"

Little Four pouted as he huffed, "Someone has infiltrated the system. It looks like he wants to change your scores. Let me get rid of him now ..." Little Four looked like he already had his knife sharpened and ready to slaughter the poor invader.

"Wait, no hurry. Let's see what he wants to do first. Also, can you track his location?" Ling Lan was very calm. Stopping the other prematurely wasn't going to solve the problem and would just alarm the opponent. It would be wiser to just observe for now, and try to figure out the other's background. Ling Lan liked to know all the facts before acting — but if the opponent really seemed to harbour evil intentions, of course she wouldn't choose to be merciful.

Chapter 39: Modifying the Scores
Translator: ryuxenji Editor: H2dH2mr

In the mind-space, Little Four acknowledged Ling Lan's reminder out loud and then became silent and unmoving. Ling Lan knew then that Little Four's consciousness had already gone into the virtual network, leaving behind an empty shell.

10,000 years' worth of technological advancement, as well as the emergence of spiritual power, had greatly changed the methods and approaches of modern-day hackers. Becoming a hacker nowadays was no longer a purely learned skill; it also required some natural hacking talent. This talent referred to human spiritual power and the ability to disguise and hide one's true self.

The assessment to categorise spiritual power could only be done after the age of ten, because that was when the spiritual power of a child matured and started to evolve into different types, which would determine the direction of their development and cultivation.

Of course, Ling Lan did not know at this time that spiritual power would evolve that way, nor did she know that the internet hackers these days were so much more dangerous and terrifying than the ones from 10,000 years ago. These days, a battle between hackers could easily result in death or injury, while brain death was a rather common consequence.

In this era, hacker battles were known as death battles without gun-smoke — they were, at times, considered even more dangerous than real battles.

Still, it was fortunate that Ling Lan didn't know, otherwise she would never have let Little Four go into the system. In her heart, Little Four had become her most cherished relative. Even though the risk of her secret being exposed would be much higher if she didn't manage to get into the special classes, the problem wasn't insurmountable. If Little Four disappeared because of the dangers of hacking, however, she would never have been able to accept it.

The moment Little Four's consciousness entered the dummy avatar he had embedded in the Central Scout Academy's systems, 137 jerked to a stop, immediately pausing his actions in modifying the scores.

As expected of a top-tier hacker in the Federation — even though Little Four's entrance had been exceedingly subtle, 137's keen spiritual power had still sensed some disturbance in his surroundings. Cold sweat started dripping from his forehead.

Examiner 413, who was standing guard beside his physical body, stiffened — could it be that 137 was in danger? 137 was only trying to change the scores because of his recommendations — if 137 were to be harmed doing so, he would never forgive himself.

Although the bonuses he would get from these recommendations were considerable, his teammate was much more important.

Number 137 was very careful, surreptitiously sending out mental feelers to investigate. Although he had no idea who his opponent was, he knew that it had to be someone formidable to be able to hide his presence so well.

Little Four observed all this coolly. He wasn't restricted by human limits on the net, whereby each person was only limited to one online avatar. Even hackers were not exempt from these limits — the most a hacker could do was to disguise his identity and obscure his entry point. In contrast, as long as he was online, he could divide himself into multiple avatars with a snap of his fingers, and conceal himself inside the very fabric of the internet itself.

Little Four merely had to trace the spiritual power of his opponent to find his entry point. Although the opponent did use some spiritual power to hide his identity and location, these little tricks were like child's play to Little Four. With no trouble at all, Little Four had managed to lock onto his opponent.

However, when he tapped into a monitoring device at the opponent's location and saw examiner 413, he knew that the matter wasn't the problem he had assumed it would be.

He swiftly relayed this scene to Ling Lan in the mind-space and Ling Lan was stunned at the sight of their examiner Number 413.

"What are they trying to do?" Ling Lan wondered. After all, her current scores had been given by the examiner to begin with. She had already found out her final score a few minutes ago, and although she did not rank first (because her intelligence score was just too horrible), she had easily secured second place, so she was already certain to get into the special classes.

If the examiner did not want her to enter the special classes, he could have just given her a low score directly — there was no reason at all for him to go to so much trouble with a hacker to change her scores now. Could it be that there was some other motive for his actions?

Ling Lan decided to just stay back and observe for now; she could always make a decision after she found out what he was up to.

Of course, Ling Lan could afford to be so daring because she had Little Four's guarantee that, no matter what the other did, he could reverse it with minimal effort.

Meanwhile, Number 137 had spread out his spiritual power to explore the surrounding several times, but still did not manage to catch even a glimpse of the other person in the system. This caused him to be jumpy, and he started to doubt himself — could it be that he was too uptight, causing his senses to be fooled by paranoia?

Time was running out and no matter how hard 137 looked, he could not find the source of the disturbance he had felt. 137 felt helpless as he saw that there wasn't much time left, and recalling that he still hadn't completed the mission his commander had assigned him, he decided that he would just try to modify Ling Lan's score first.

He had already thought it through — the moment he sensed anything off about the situation, he would turn tail and run. 137 wasn't so arrogant as to believe that he would be able to handle a professional whose presence he could not even confirm. Therefore, for safety reasons, running away was the best solution.

His decision made, 137 carefully began to modify Ling Lan's score. Naturally, he dared not touch the scores of the first two tests, which had not been under their jurisdiction. Any changes there would be easily caught. Only the scores for stamina and speed had been controlled by their special ops team, keyed in by 413 and himself, and so could be freely altered. If any problem really occurred, their commander would be there to vouch for them, so he wasn't afraid.

Of course, before this, 413 and he had considered just keying in a lower score. However, they had no idea how the other children from the other groups would do — if the score they entered turned out to be too low, or if something happened so they were unable to change the scores later ... Wouldn't it be such a shame for these children to lose their spot in the special classes? So, with a mind to minimise the risk of that happening, they had decided to key in the original high scores.

Following 137's edits, Ling Lan's total score shifted, dropping her rank from the initial 2nd to the 17th place.

After 137 finished his edits to Ling Lan's score, he waited patiently for a long moment. Finding no change in his surroundings, he moved on to modify Qi Long's, Han Jijun's, and Luo Lang's scores as well, causing them to fall from 3rd, 5th, and 6th place, to the 18th, 21st, and 24th place.

137 did not forget what his commander had said: to guarantee the four children's entry into Special Class-A, but to do so in a way that was low-profile so that they did not gain too much attention. Right now, these middle-of-the-pack scores and rankings should resolve all of his commander's worries. After all, the first 50 students would enter Special Class-A, while students ranked 51-100 would go into Special Class-B.

Little Four reported the modified scores and rankings to Ling Lan, and Ling Lan finally realised what the examiner had intended. Looks like he was doing this out of good intentions — these rankings right now were very nice, not too outstanding yet not too shabby.

She had originally been worried whether or not her second place ranking was too eye-catching since Ling Lan did not want to become the centre of attention, which would further increase the risk of her secret being exposed. The only problem was, she had

not dared to change her score herself. After all, there were way too many people who were involved with these scores — any changes would likely be discovered instantly, so Ling Lan did not dare to move hastily. And now, the examiner had solved the problem for her, so she was free to enjoy the results without having to do anything.

Still, Ling Lan was puzzled. “Who is this examiner really?”

The other children may not know, but Ling Lan could tell — the inconceivable taint of blood on the examiner’s aura was something that could only be found on veterans who had fought and struggled through war and cruel battles ... he was completely different from the officers who had been in charge of the intelligence and strength tests.

Ling Lan would never forget the satisfaction shining from the examiner’s eyes as he sent them off. Perhaps the faction within the Federation that he represented had their eye on the four of them and so were willing to go the extra mile to protect them as they grew?

Whatever the case, this was a good thing! Ling Lan quickly put this matter to rest at the back of her mind.

Chapter 40: Downed By a Glass of Wine!
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Although 137 had successfully completed his mission, he still felt restless and unsettled. Something just didn’t feel right. For that reason, after leaving the virtual network, he immediately reported to his commander on the strange disturbance he had sensed in the Central Scout Academy’s system.

After hearing 137’s report, the commander’s expression became stern. Could it really be as the General suspected? Were the culprits behind Major General Ling Xiao’s death on the move again?

He indicated to 137 to leave things as they were, and reminded him about the code of silence before letting him go back and rest. He then turned on his communication device and entered a number he rarely ever contacted.

It wasn’t long before a middle-aged general appeared on the holographic screen, a serious expression on his face.

“Yo, Sir General, long time no see.” At odds with his usual cold persona in front of his troops, the commander was now casually flippant.

“Oh, it’s you, you little brat. Aren’t you back on mandatory leave? Why are you free to contact me?” The familiar voice of the commander caused the general’s face to soften.

“Wasn’t it the military who sent us to the Central Scout Academy to take charge of the tests?” complained the commander casually.

The general’s face stiffened and he said in a rush, “Being with kids is also a way of relaxing.”

The commander laughed. “True!”

And the matter ended there. It had been implicit in the general’s words that their assignment to the school had something to do with him.

“So what do you want, brat?” The general knew that this son of his old friend, who he had watched grow up from a little kid, would not contact him for no reason. Usually, he wouldn’t see hide nor hair of him; the brat would scurry away faster than any mouse.

Reminded of his purpose in calling, the commander’s expression turned grim. He faithfully reported what had happened to Ling Lan, as well as the disturbance 137 had felt on the virtual network. Since their presence at the scout academy had been by the general’s design, then it was very likely related to the matter of Ling Xiao’s son.

“Duly noted,” said the general calmly, “Let someone else handle things after this — don’t get any further involved.”

The commander replied lowly, “Understood,” and then asked, “Will there be any danger to Major General Ling Xiao’s son?” From the general’s words, he could somehow guess what the general was planning.

The general did not answer his question, only saying, “Enjoy your vacation. Don’t worry about anything else.” With those parting words, he ended the call.

The commander stared vacantly at the dark screen, and a shadow passed over his face. The general’s words had indirectly told him the answer. The general himself couldn’t guarantee that there would be no mishaps in his current arrangements.

The commander knew very well that, for the future of the Federation, some sacrifices were necessary. The moles hidden in the higher ranks of the federal military had to be dug out, otherwise another incident like Ling Xiao’s would happen again — and the Federation couldn’t afford to lose any more god-class operators.

Still, he felt a little indignant. In service of the Federation, his idol Major General Ling Xiao had already been sacrificed — did his child have to be sacrificed too? He stood for a long moment, staring blindly into the distance, and after much thought, decided that he had to be true to his heart just this once.

He dialled a contact number and was quickly connected. “413, I’m sorry to inform you that your vacation has been cancelled.” After coming to a decision, the initial

melancholy of the commander had been swept away and he was even jovial enough to joke around with 413 now.

413's wails of despair came over from the other end of the communicator, but the commander's heart was like steel and he blithely ignored 413's mournful eyes. He continued to order, "Please accept your new assignment."

Hearing this, number 413 straightened out his long face and stood at attention. "Number 413, reporting for duty!"

"Starting now, for the next month, you and your squad are to protect Ling Lan of the Central Scout Academy in secret." The commander hoped that his arrangements would be able to ensure the safety of Major General Ling Xiao's child, as a personal tribute to his departed idol.

"Ling Lan? Who's that?" asked 413, bewildered. They had just finished their assignment at the Central Scout Academy, but before he could even celebrate their release from babysitting duties, here he was, about to become a full-time nanny. Luckily he wasn't going to suffer through this alone – he had 5 underlings in his squad – which made him feel just a little bit better.

"It's that 0723 you like so much," said the commander.

413's expression grew serious. "Has the enemy nation noticed him? Is he in danger?" 413 knew that there were many foreign spies hiding within the federation. Many promising young talents had barely had the time to sprout before they were cruelly crushed by the enemy nation.

"Perhaps," said the commander, without certainty. After all, it was all just speculation on his part.

"Roger that, Sir. I'll protect him well with my squad. You can count on it," said 413 resolutely. He might have moaned a bit more if it were some other child, but if it was number 0723, he had no objections whatsoever.

Indeed, if Ling Lan didn't veer off from the right path, it was almost 100% certain that he would become an ace operator, perhaps even an imperial operator. Ever since Major General Ling Xiao had passed away, the Federation was stretched thin for skilled operators. Therefore, any young talent who had the potential to become ace operators were very highly valued by the Federation.

"Wait a moment. I will ask 137 to transmit Ling Lan's information into your communicator. Remember, this is a secret assignment. Don't let anyone notice your presence," instructed the commander.

"Yes!"

One day later, the official notification letter from the Central Scout Academy arrived on the Ling family's general notification device, informing them about Ling Lan's acceptance into the academy's special class. The news made the long silent Ling family rejoice.

Looking at the information contained in the letter, Lan Luofeng's mood was exceptionally light. Although she wouldn't have minded if Ling Lan became an idle playboy, all parents took pride in their child's successes and Lan Luofeng was no exception. Of course, most importantly, Ling Lan's enrolment into Special Class-A meant that she didn't have to study on school grounds and could freely choose her own courses, which greatly reduced the risk of her true gender being discovered — this was the greatest source of joy for Lan Luofeng.

In a great mood, Lan Luofeng decided that a grand celebration was in order. She thus instructed Chamberlain Ling Qin to prepare a feast for the entire Ling household to come together and celebrate. This was the first large-scale party held ever since the family head Ling Xiao had died — the lively atmosphere moved Chamberlain Ling Qin almost to tears.

This was also the first time Ling Lan met all the external servants and workers of the Ling household. Of course, some of the guards maintaining the safety of the Ling household perimeters were not in attendance, but the other servants and workers were all there. Seeing all of their excited and hopeful faces, Ling Lan felt pressured for the first time ever. So she wasn't living just for herself ... she was shouldering the hopes and dreams of the entire Ling household.

And this group didn't even include the Ling family loyalists yet — if the Ling family ceased to exist, there would be no reason for the loyalists to exist either.

For the first time, Ling Lan truly understood what her new identity meant, along with the responsibilities she had to carry with it. Although the total age of her two lives was already over 30 years old, making her a mature adult, she was still just used to being an average person, only responsible for her own wellbeing. But now, all of a sudden, she had so many people's hopes and livelihoods resting upon her shoulders ... She panicked.

The typically serene Ling Lan, finally unable to hold on any longer, subconsciously reached out for a glass of red wine and gulped it in down in one shot, and then ... she tragically fell over, dead drunk.

If you must know, in her past life, due to her body's condition, Ling Lan had been prohibited from consuming any drinks and alcoholic beverages that might affect the body. And then, in this life, she had been prevented from imbibing by Lan Luofeng due

to her young age. Therefore, neither her mind nor her small body could withstand the assault of alcohol, causing her to be downed by just one glass of wine.