

## Crossing 39

### Chapter 39: Modifying the Scores

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 Jijyun'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.