

Crossing 71

Chapter 71: Lin Zhong-qing's Objective?

The actions of Ling Lan's four-man group surprised Lin Zhong-qing for a beat, but he was then overcome by a surge of joy. In all honesty, when he had greeted them, his heart was pounding, for he was afraid that Ling Lan and her group would just ignore his existence.

Unexpectedly, Ling Lan and her friends were really headed in his direction — this made him suspect for a moment that he was in a dream.

Lin Zhong-qing's tenacity and perseverance had gained him the favour of the simple-minded organism Qi Long; afraid that his sharp-tongued mate Han Jijyun would say something to hurt Lin Zhong-qing, Qi Long hurriedly called out, "Lin Zhong-qing, why are you looking for us?"

Naturally, Qi Long's good will was felt by the perceptive Lin Zhong-qing. With a grateful glance at Qi Long, he said smiling, "I just wanted to tell Classmate Ling Lan that, I've found him a seat."

Although Lin Zhong-qing had been smiling at them all this while, it was normally just a polite facade; but this time, his smile seemed to be somewhat genuine. For the first time, Ling Lan felt that Lin Zhong-qing actually looked pretty cute when he smiled.

Han Jijyun frowned slightly, and his originally cold expression became even colder. Meanwhile, Luo Lang sniffed, as if displeased at Lin Zhong-qing's unnecessary action. It was true though. A red-coat student would never lack for a seat. If they found a seat they liked (as long as the seat wasn't occupied by another red-coat student), they need only walk up to that person, and without having to say a word, the student dressed in a uniform of any other colour would automatically relinquish their seat.

Of course, Ling Lan's group of four would never do such a tasteless thing. The dining area was very large, so there would always be some seats open — they just needed to spend a little time looking that's all.

Lin Zhong-qing was unconcerned with what Luo Lang and the others thought. Solicitously, he pulled out one of the chairs and said to Ling Lan, "Classmate Ling Lan, please sit here."

Ling Lan looked at his slightly fawning face, and thought back on that slightly sincere smile, and felt her heart soften. So, she did not refuse, sitting on the chair he had pulled out. After all, Lin Zhong-qing was just a six year old child — Ling Lan, who was really a quirky auntie at heart, was truly unable to resist such a little kid.

Seeing Ling Lan take a seat, Qi Long and the others quickly chose a seat before them at random and sat down as well.

Ling Lan's first ever concession to him was obviously a good sign. Suppressing the emotional upheaval within himself, Lin Zhong-qing asked carefully, "What would Classmate Ling Lan and your friends like to eat? Let me bring it over for you all."

'Bring' and not 'buy'! Lin Zhong-qing very clearly articulated to Ling Lan and the others what his bottom line was in terms of service.

Ling Lan cast a searching look at Lin Zhong-qing. This child was just too artful with words and phrasing — he avoided offending them, but also didn't let himself be pushed into a corner. As long as this type of person got a chance, he would certainly become a commendable man.

Ling Lan decided that she would give Lin Zhong-qing that chance. She indicated for Lin Zhong-qing to push his wrist-communicator closer, and then used her own communicator to transfer some credits directly to Lin Zhong-qing. Not much, just 240 credits — the exact amount to pay for six deluxe set meals.

In this era, personal communicators not only could send and receive messages, but were also equipped with the ability to retain personal identification information, bank cards, and other miscellaneous services, truly providing multipurpose convenience.

“Six deluxe set meals, a double portion each for Qi Long and I.” Ling Lan pretended not to see Lin Zhong-qing's stunned gaze, tonelessly listing out what they wanted to eat.

Frankly, Lin Zhong-qing could not be blamed for his reaction. Set meals were typically only chosen by children from the commoner families. Any child from a slightly better family background would basically order separate dishes which had an overall better taste.

Lin Zhong-qing did not know that Qi Long's and the others' credits had long ago been confiscated by Ling Lan on the first day of school. Since then, the communicators of the five of them, including Qi Long (as well as the two girls always hanging out with them), had never contained more than 1000 credits.

Thus, their every meal changed from the luxurious spread of delicacies they began with, to the current simplistic set meals, though these set meals were still of the deluxe variety. Even so, this was undoubtedly many brackets below what they were having before.

Of course, this wasn't a baseless decision by Ling Lan. Through Little Four's research, they found that the food groups within the academy's deluxe set meal could fully provide all the nutrition that the children needed. Even Ling Lan and Qi Long, who had extraordinarily high metabolisms, were able to fuel their bodies sufficiently by eating a double portion of said set meal. Of course, Ling Lan would never tell Qi Long and the others that after she went home, she still had to supplement her diet with a gargantuan supper. It couldn't be helped. Ling Lan was a glutton to begin with, and on top of that, every night she would be tormented ceaselessly by Instructor Number Five, so her energy consumption was rather off the scales.

Lin Zhong-qing very quickly regained his composure, and he felt the stirrings of gratefulness within his heart. Was this Ling Lan and the others' strange way of preserving his dignity? He said nothing, only casting a brief complicated look at Ling Lan before nodding heavily and leaving to help them get their food.

Looking at Lin Zhong-qing's departing back, Han Jijun's frown eased slightly. With a hint of uncertainty, he asked, “Boss Lan, you seem to have some admiration for him?”

Hearing this, Qi Long and Luo Lang turned to look at Ling Lan, and waited for her answer. This would affect how they would treat Lin Zhong-qing — whether he should be considered as a companion or not, the treatment would be completely different.

“Yes, I have some admiration for his tolerance. If we were to switch places, I don’t think I’d be able to bend as far as he has.” Carrying out one’s responsibilities while tolerating shame was not something everyone could do; even Ling Lan, with her two lives of experience, could not say for sure that she’d be able to endure it.

Ling Lan’s words caused Qi Long and the others to descend into a thoughtful silence. Lin Zhong-qing’s humility had made them forget that he was only six years old just like them — what kind of experiences had he lived through to have learned to be so tolerant?

Right at that moment, the sounds of a commotion could be heard coming from not too far away. Ling Lan and the others all turned to look, and saw a significant crowd surrounding a lone figure. Among those in the crowd were students dressed in red, as well as those dressed in uniforms of other colours, while the one being surrounded was definitely wearing bright red clothes.

They seemed to be arguing, which greatly surprised Ling Lan and her group. After all, the hierarchy within the school was clear — unless it was an uncompromisable conflict, the students in school uniforms of any other colour would never challenge a red-coat student. For if they were caught by the school disciplinary committee, it wouldn’t end well for them.

“It’s Lin Zhong-qing,” exclaimed Luo Lang in surprise. From his position, he could just see the profile of the red-coat student being surrounded.

“The ones surrounding him seem to include some of our classmates.” Han Jijyun had also seen some familiar faces in the crowd, and his frown deepened. Although Lin Zhong-qing was ranked lowest within their class, in last place, his popularity within the class was still pretty good. What reason could there be for him to be in a standoff with their classmates?

“It’s Li Yingjie’s group,” said Qi Long with clear dislike. Ever since Qi Long had helped Li Jinghong brush off Li Yingjie, within the class, the two of them were constantly at odds. Every time they met, they couldn’t resist exchanging a few barbed words. If one had to name Qi Long’s most hated person within the academy, Li Yingjie would be it.

Right now, in the first grade Special Class-A, there was the incipient formation of two clear power bases. One of the power groups was Li Yingjie’s — having the prestige of being at the top of the rankings, he naturally drew a portion of the students to his side. Meanwhile, the other power group was Ling Lan’s party. In contrast with Li Yingjie’s abstract rank, the strength displayed by Ling Lan’s one-move defeat of Lin Zhong-qing was much more persuasive. Many students did not really acknowledge the legitimacy of Li Yingjie’s ranking — after all, part of it was just based off interviews, and not truly earned through real battle with other students. This situation was very vexing for Li Yingjie, causing jealousy and hate against Ling Lan to rise within him. He believed that it was Ling Lan who was hindering his steps towards uniting the first grade Special Class-A under his rule.

After some thought, Ling Lan said, “Let’s go find out what’s going on.”

Lin Zhong-qing was currently on an errand for them after all; it was the morally right thing to have a little concern for him.

The four of them walked over to the scene of the commotion and heard the surrounding students in lively whispered discussion. After listening for just a moment, the four of them had gotten a rough idea of the situation.

It turned out that when Lin Zhong-qing was passing by Li Yingjie's group, he had been stopped by one of the lackeys dressed in white. The lackey had ordered Lin Zhong-qing to go see Li Yingjie for a talk. Although Lin Zhong-qing's family background was common, and he was in last place within Special Class-A, he still had the pride of a red-coat student. How dare an insignificant white-coat student order him around with such a tone? He naturally did not respond well, refusing tersely without any concern for politeness.

If that lackey had just stopped there, this matter would have been swept away just like that. Unexpectedly, the lackey had brashly grabbed hold of Lin Zhong-qing. Enraged, Lin Zhong-qing had immediately sent the white-coat lackey flying with one kick.

Lin Zhong-qing's actions were taken as provocation by Li Yingjie's group, who all jumped up in anger and surrounded him, demanding that he apologise. And so this scenario was the result!

Right then, Lin Zhong-qing's expression was extremely dark — if it wasn't for his extraordinary tolerance, he most likely would have already started throwing punches, and this standoff wouldn't have happened.

The appearance of Ling Lan's group of four made Lin Zhong-qing's expression lighten a little, a trace of astonished delight flashing through his eyes.

On the other hand, when Li Yingjie saw Ling Lan and her group, his expression darkened noticeably, looking a little grim, but was mostly disgruntled. It looked like he was unhappy with Ling Lan's group butting in.

Suddenly, Ling Lan's steps paused. With a strange expression, she looked at Lin Zhong-qing, a possibility flashing rapidly through her mind.

Was Lin Zhong-qing's tolerant behaviour these past few days just so he could depend on her to handle Li Yingjie and his group?

When Ling Lan stopped, Qi Long and the other two stopped as well. Although they didn't know why Ling Lan had stopped, it was already a habit for them to follow Ling Lan's movements, so they also stopped without hesitation.

Seeing Ling Lan's group stopping still, Li Yingjie's expression eased a little. He was very pleased at Ling Lan's understanding of the situation. He really didn't want Ling Lan to come interfere in his plans at this moment, and Lin Zhong-qing was his first target.

In contrast, when Lin Zhong-qing saw Ling Lan staying put, his expression changed. He could vaguely sense Ling Lan's intent to just observe from the side-lines, and this troubled him. His initially somewhat calm expression dimmed significantly, and there was actually an almost unnoticeable trace of despair in his eyes.

Ling Lan frowned deeply, troubled and a little puzzled. If Lin Zhong-qing could thicken his skin and suck up to her, then why couldn't he do the same with Li Yingjie? Could he have some other unknown reason for this?

With a shift in thought, Ling Lan decided that she would help out Lin Zhong-qing this one time. After all, doing so was no skin off her nose — she was already on bad terms with Li Yingjie anyway.

Her halted steps resumed once more ... Ling Lan's actions rekindled Lin Zhong-qing's deadened and hopeless eyes, and there was even a hint of gratefulness within his newly brightened gaze.

Chapter 72: A Response Which Exceeds Expectations

Ling Lan moved, and the three followers behind her moved with her. Very quickly, they were all standing before Li Yingjie.

"Lin Zhong-qing, why haven't you bought the set meals?" Ling Lan's tone was brusque.

If he wanted to borrow her strength, then Lin Zhong-qing should understand that this strength was not so easily borrowed. What needed to be paid still needed to be paid — Ling Lan had no intentions of working for free.

Ling Lan's words settled Lin Zhong-qing, and he responded, "Classmate Ling Lan, I'm sorry for making you wait." He swept his gaze towards Li Yingjie's group as if telling Ling Lan that they were the culprits stopping him from buying the food.

Ling Lan obligingly followed Lin Zhong-qing's gaze to cast her attention upon Li Yingjie's group, and with affected surprise, she quirked a brow and said, "Oh? It's Classmate Li! What's up? Do you all have some business with Lin Zhong-qing?"

Ling Lan's surprised look was so obviously faked that Li Yingjie's face immediately flushed with anger. Ling Lan had clearly seen him here from the start but was so blatantly lying. Through gritted teeth, he said, "Oh, so it's Classmate Ling Lan. I do have some business with him." If Ling Lan wanted to pretend, then he would play along and pretend as well — he was sure he could pretend even better than Ling Lan.

Ling Lan nodded, and said almost casually, "Then let's do this on a first come first served basis then. Classmate Li, why don't you wait till Classmate Lin has completed my requests first before coming to look for him again ..." As if suddenly thinking of something, Ling Lan added, "A month later sounds about right."

A little coyly, she continued, "Classmate Lin lost to me, you see, so no matter what, he needs to serve me for a month first. So sorry to let you down."

Ling Lan's words almost caused Li Yingjie to spew blood. This was basically telling him that Lin Zhong-qing was now under Ling Lan's protection.

Li Yingjie could no longer maintain a friendly appearance. With a frigid expression, he said lowly, "Ling Lan, you're really going to oppose me now?"

Ling Lan's expression was innocent as she asked Lin Zhong-qing, "Classmate Lin, do you want to stop carrying out the terms of the bet you lost when you lost the challenge?"

Lin Zhong-qing shook his head firmly. "No."

With a helpless look on her face, Ling Lan shrugged at Li Yingjie. “Classmate Li, it’s not that I want to oppose you, but Classmate Lin isn’t ready to break his promise.” Ling Lan’s expression seemed to imply that Li Yingjie was barking up the wrong tree by being angry at her.

This performance by Ling Lan made Li Yingjie even angrier, yet he couldn’t find any way to refute what Ling Lan had said. His face flushed an even deeper red in bottled anger.

Ling Lan was unconcerned with the near-exploding Li Yingjie. Turning her head, she said to Lin Zhong-qing, “Why are you still standing there? We’re almost starving to death.”

“Yes, Classmate Ling Lan, I’ll bring your lunches over immediately.” Ling Lan’s response had already surpassed Lin Zhong-qing’s expectations — he was a little groggy, unsure why the thus far cold and unfriendly Ling Lan would help him this much. Initially, he had only wished for Ling Lan to confirm that he was serving him, just so he had an excuse to refuse Li Yingjie.

Ling Lan was satisfied. She directed a slightly apologetic smile at Li Yingjie, and then led Qi Long and the others away from the area.

This almost dismissive attitude was quickly driving Li Yingjie mad — he wanted to stop Ling Lan and teach him a good lesson, but he just damnably couldn’t find a usable excuse. Right then, he hated the fact that he was within the Central Scout Academy. If this were the outside world, he would definitely use his power and authority to ‘take care’ of this detestable, arrogant bastard before him. (Right now, in his eyes, even Ling Lan’s most normal attitude would be taken as a personal taunt.)

When the boss gets mad, it was naturally up to the followers to help the boss take out his anger. A lackey-boy dressed in a white school uniform leapt out, but knowing that Ling Lan’s group wasn’t something he could handle, he didn’t dare to say anything to them. Instead, he set his sights on the seemingly more bulliable Lin Zhong-qing. “Lin Zhong-qing, don’t you dare leave! If you leave, I’ll make it so your life’s hell!”

Perhaps this punk had gotten used to being an arrogant little sh*t since young, for his first impulse was to threaten. Thing was, his threat made all the watching students burst out into laughter, and of course, this laughter was filled with mockery.

This mocking laughter caused the white-coat lackey’s face to flush and pale erratically. In that moment, he just couldn’t figure out why he was being laughed at.

Actually, he couldn’t be blamed for this. It wasn’t unusual for new students who had just entered the Central Scout Academy to find it difficult to adapt to their new roles within the school. Particularly those second-generation young lords who were used to getting their way from young — it was even easier for them to make a mistake. Only once they had tasted the bitter consequences would they understand that the world within the Central Scout Academy was entirely different from their previous world.

In this world where the strong dominate and everything was based on personal strength, the distinction between the elite and the humble was represented by the colour of their school uniforms. Every six months, the internal academy re-ranking was the chance for the students to find a new foothold in life.

Therefore, how could a white-coat student threaten a red-coat student? The school disciplinary committee would make them understand that the results of violating the colour hierarchy was not something they could bear.

Li Yingjie glared fiercely at that follower who still didn't know that he had violated the school rules. No matter how much Lin Zhong-qing was ignored within Special Class-A, he was still a red-coat student — how could a white-coat student threaten a red-coat student so brazenly? If the academy administration found out, this follower of his would be in a world of trouble.

Lin Zhong-qing turned his head, casting a scornful look at that white-coat student. "I would really like to see, how exactly you would make my life hell." Although he was meek by necessity within Special Class-A, this didn't mean that he would take bullying from the students of the other classes. The red clothes he was wearing represented his status, his dignity.

The white-coat lackey still looked as if he wanted to say something when Li Yingjie said curtly, "He Fei."

Sensing Li Yingjie's rage, the white-coat lackey, otherwise known as He Fei, didn't dare to say anything more.

Li Yingjie looked at Lin Zhong-qing, and asked coldly, "Lin Zhong-qing, you've really decided?" Lin Zhong-qing's family background was common, and his strength wasn't outstanding in Special Class-A, which was why Li Yingjie had initially set Lin Zhong-qing as his first target. He had intended to make Lin Zhong-qing his subordinate, and then slowly tame the other Special Class-A students until he finally managed to achieve full control of Class-A. What a pity this Lin Zhong-qing was such a stubborn fellow — actually ignoring his invitation from the very beginning, until his direct refusal at the end. Not just that, Lin Zhong-qing had aligned himself with the group of people he hated the most.

"Yes, I, Lin Zhong-qing, always mean what I say." Lin Zhong-qing's demeanour was tough and intractable, leaving no retreat for himself. If small obstacles like this could cause him to shrink back, he would never have been able to survive those couple of years in the laboratories. While other children were growing up under the care and affection of their parents, he had already learned how to think for himself, knowing that he would have to depend on himself to obtain the life he wanted.

"Fine, in that case, I won't force the issue." Li Yingjie was straightforward when it came down to it; he truly let go of the idea of recruiting Lin Zhong-qing to his side right then. With a cold expression, he turned to his band of followers and said, "Why are you all still standing? Sit down and eat."

All of his followers were students with uniforms of other colours, so of course they didn't dare to ignore Li Yingjie's orders. They all quickly sat down and began eating.

No longer surrounded, Lin Zhong-qing finally released a sigh. Having Li Yingjie give up on his own was the best outcome for him. Still, he didn't let his guard down yet, afraid that Li Yingjie was only distracting him with empty words, but was actually planning to deal with him privately.

Lin Zhong-qing knew very well that, with his current abilities, he could not stand up to Li Yingjie. The principle of 'survival of the fittest' was protecting him, yet placing him in danger at the same time. The moment Li Yingjie decided to go after him, he would definitely be in trouble. This was the reason why he was willing to stoop so far to insinuate himself into Ling Lan's group's favour.

Indeed, from the very first day of school, Li Yingjie had already set his eye on Lin Zhong-qing. Meanwhile, Lin Zhong-qing had no intention whatsoever of becoming anyone's follower — six years of life within a laboratory had been enough; he wasn't about to so easily let go of the precious freedom he had regained. Yet, he couldn't stand up to Li Yingjie with his own strength. And so he had cracked his head trying to think of a way to help him out of this mess ...

Initially, Lin Zhong-qing had been banking on Qi Long or Luo Lang. Their challenge battles on the first day to get the seats they wanted had shown Lin Zhong-qing just how strong they were. They had respectively managed to defeat the initial rank 5 and rank 8 of the class without much trouble, suggesting that their strength was on par with the top 3 of the original ranking. However, he had then inadvertently heard Qi Long and Luo Lang talking about their absent boss Ling Lan, and changed his mind.

Since that absentee had the ability to be the boss of these two formidable students, Ling Lan's strength must not be any weaker than that of Li Yingjie's. As long as he could borrow some of Ling Lan's power, he should be able to escape the clutches of Li Yingjie. And so, this had led to his challenge towards Ling Lan.

From the very beginning of the challenge, he had already known that he would lose. However, what he wanted wasn't victory, but to lose the challenge so he could obtain the 'punishment' of serving the other for a month. A month's worth of buffer time was sufficient for him to grow and improve so that he could find a better way to handle Li Yingjie.

The result of all this strategizing was worth it! Although Lin Zhong-qing wasn't sure if Li Yingjie had truly let go, he could at least avoid Li Yingjie's outright forceful manoeuvring, having earned some breathing space.

Lin Zhong-qing, who was waiting for the service robot to deliver the set meals, thought about all that had happened thus far. He clenched his fists, eyes shining with a fierce light. As long as he had enough time, he would no longer let anyone be in a position to threaten him again. An intense desire to grow stronger blazed high within Lin Zhong-qing's heart.

Meanwhile, at that moment, Ling Lan, who had been waiting at the dining table for Lin Zhong-qing to bring the set meals over, was talking with Qi Long and the others when, suddenly, her expression tightened minutely, but the change was quickly smoothed away. Her strange expression lasted for only a microsecond, and had not been picked up by Qi Long or any of the others.

"Little Four, enlarge and dissect that expression of Li Yingjie's ..." Ling Lan ordered Little Four within the mindspace.

"Yes, Boss!" Little Four was very excited — finally, it was his chance to shine again! He must live up to the title of number one follower after all.

In the mindspace, the trace of vicious anger in Li Yingjie's eyes was enlarged by Little Four, and then it was studied closely — up, down, left, right, near, far, and from multiple angles. After much comparison and checking, it was confirmed that the target of that gaze was Lin Zhong-qing ...

"Boss, what do we do next?" Little Four seemed ready to stir up some trouble.

Ling Lan rolled her eyes at him. "Do what? Doughnut 1! Just go back and rest." Since Li Yingjie's target was Lin Zhong-qing, then she wasn't going to spend time worrying about it.

Ling Lan was not a saint. Lin Zhong-qing? Helping him once was already her being merciful. Subsequently, whether or not he could tide the waves was all up to himself.

Chapter 73: Ling Lan's Crisis!

Time flew by, and very quickly, five months had passed. The atmosphere within the Central Scout Academy started becoming restless, for the mid-year wide-scale ranking which would decide the fate of the students for the next six months was about to begin. For the sake of doing well in this critical ranking, all the students in the Central Scout Academy were hard at work making their final preparations.

Ling Lan had passed these past few months uneventfully — not standing out, but not being lost in the masses either. However, after Lin Zhong-qing's challenge, Ling Lan hadn't fought with anyone else again. Even during physical combat class, when her classmates would spar with one another to improve, Ling Lan had also refused to fight.

Of course, at the start, in the first month after school began, Ling Lan would still enter the combat hall to hold sparring practices with Qi Long, Luo Lang, and Han Jijyun. But these practices hadn't gone on for long when, in one of the later battles, Ling Lan had lost control and seriously injured Qi Long by accident. After that incident, Ling Lan had adamantly refused to spar ever again, only allowing Qi Long and the other two to spar with one another.

Honestly, it wasn't that Ling Lan didn't want to spar and exchange tips with her friends ... She had her own considerations for this. Because — she had discovered that, when going through the Number Five's most recent so-called 'Ultimate Training Method', a strange fluctuation would appear in her spiritual power after every night of training she endured. As time went by and the nights accumulated, this strange fluctuation just got stronger and stronger. She had been constantly nervous, wondering what this strange phenomenon would bring, but no changes appeared in her daily movements, so she could only set the matter aside temporarily.

But gradually, she realised that whenever she was fighting, especially when she entered attack mode, it was all too easy for her to descend into a bloodthirsty frenzy, and she would be filled with the desire to destroy everything in sight.

In the beginning, she had still been able to contain this desire, so she thought that she was strong enough to overcome these negative emotions caused by the insane training. However, with the passing of time, she found it harder and harder to control the force of these negative emotions. She started having doubts, wondering if something had gone wrong with her spiritual state.

After injuring Qi Long, Ling Lan finally understood. There was indeed something wrong with her — her spiritual power had gotten out of control. Number Five, who was said to have driven countless talents insane, had similarly caused Ling Lan to develop a spiritual issue after tormenting her for a month.

Thus, Ling Lan no longer dared to join in the fights. She was afraid that she would really kill Qi Long and the others next time. If that happened, it would definitely be too late for regrets.

Qi Long and the others knew why Ling Lan refused to fight, so when other students challenged her, Qi Long and Luo Lang had stepped forward. They said that if the students wanted to challenge their boss, they would have to get through them first as they were Ling Lan's followers.

And there were those who really were sceptical whether they would follow through, but when the third-ranked of their class put forth his challenge, Qi Long had immediately stepped in to accept on Ling Lan's behalf.

This time, the challenge was again set as an Open Arena battle, drawing the attention of the students of the Central Scout Academy. School hadn't started for long, but the first grade Special Class-A had already requested for an Open Arena battle twice — this gave the upper grade seniors the uniform impression that this year's new students were certainly a violent lot. Of course, this also increased their anticipation for the upcoming mid-year rankings. Would the rankings of the first grade Special Class-A change drastically? If that really happened, it would likely establish a brand new record within the academy. Mind you, in the past, the rankings of Special Class-A had always been pretty much stable and unchanging.

Qi Long and that third-ranked boy had fought bitterly for an hour, the battle dragging on till the very last moment. In the end, Qi Long's will proved to be stronger, and his stamina was better, and he successfully defeated his opponent.

This result made the initially restless students shut up completely. Think about it. Even the third-ranked had lost; if anyone else wanted to challenge, they had better weigh their own capabilities once more before doing so.

Qi Long's reliable performance helped Ling Lan earn several months of peace, which also gave her time to resolve the troublesome issue of her out of control spiritual state. But as the mid-year wide-scale ranking loomed ever closer, the originally calm Ling Lan began to get agitated, because she had still not been able to find a solution to her problem.

When the mid-year ranking tournament arrived, she would no longer be able to refuse the challenges of her peers, unless she chose to give up on her results and leave the Special Class to become a regular class student.

This was a result that Ling Lan could not accept. After knowing what it meant to be in Special Class-A and having experienced all its myriad benefits, Ling Lan wasn't so stupid as to let it go. That's right, Ling Lan really didn't want to stand out too much, but she also didn't want to become a weakling. She still wanted to be in control of her life, and become a truly free person.

"I must solve this problem," said Ling Lan, clenching her fists tight.

Ling Lan knew very well that if she didn't resolve this issue, she would not be able to fight — the Central Scout Academy would never condone the existence of a homicidal maniac. Her loss of control was already at a rather severe stage. Now, whenever she fought, blood would flow like a river, and corpses would litter the ground. She could still clearly remember how she had failed in the most recent mission given by the learning space.

This time, the mission she had received had been to rescue a hostage. However, she ended up killing everyone in the target area, including the hostage she was supposed to save. Consequently, she experienced the learning space's punishment for the first time.

Ling Lan shuddered violently in recollection — that had certainly not been a great experience. The electricity coursing through her body, lingering, as she hovered on the edge of wanting to die yet being unable to die, wanting to live yet unable to live — that suffering was pretty much on par with Number Five's perverse torments. She definitely never wanted to experience it again.

Now Ling Lan finally understood. The so-called learning space was not a helpful cheat code (with the exception of Little Four), but was definitely a malicious glitch that existed to torment her.

While Ling Lan was struggling with anxiety and helplessness, in the learning space, the great Number One who Ling Lan had the utmost respect for was ripping apart Instructor Number Five's personal training space with extreme prejudice.

At that moment, Number Five was busily plotting something inside. When he felt the ground shake and the mountains tremble, he looked at the rapidly disintegrating world around him and knew that the situation was not good. But just as he was about to run, a large hand clamped harshly over his neck.

"Number Five, I merely intended for you to train up Ling Lan's ability to withstand pressure and hardship, not destroy her." Number One steadily glared at Number Five, a deep and seemingly unquenchable anger smouldering within his eyes.

He was someone who put his full trust in his brothers and subordinates — since he had decided to entrust Ling Lan to Number Five for training, he wouldn't interfere in the process. Thus, he hadn't been aware of the abnormality which had developed in Ling Lan's spiritual state.

If Number Nine had not been keeping a close watch on Ling Lan and noticed her strange behaviour in time to notify him, he might have only found out the truth after Ling Lan had thoroughly descended into madness.

Facing Number One's wrath, Number Five was still extremely calm. Helplessly, he said, "Number One, I haven't destroyed her. She's just reached the point where she has to choose a Dao 1."

Number One's expression changed. "How did this happen so quickly? My initial estimate was that she would only reach this stage four years later."

Recalling something, Number One's expression turned frigid. With mounting anger, he asked, "Number Five, did you break the agreement you made with me and used your Extreme Hell Training Method?"

Number Five laughed, and his eyes were full of satisfaction. With that, Number One understood everything. Overwhelmed with rage, he no longer held back, instantly slamming Number Five violently into the ground.

With a resounding "BAM", Number Five's training space was once again sent shuddering. Number Five's entire body had been slammed deeply into the ground, and only his face remained exposed aboveground.

This force wasn't easily borne — Number Five's expression was gruesome; the tearing pain didn't allow him to maintain his smile any longer. However, Number Five was unwilling to admit his loss just like that. He forced the corners of his lips to twitch into a smile and said, "Number One, don't blame me. Who asked Ling Lan to be such a great piece of material ... originally, I really hadn't thought of using that method, but every time I set an outrageous mission for her, she still managed to ride it out. You just don't know ... how every time she completed a mission, I would get that much more excited. Even more unexpectedly, in half a month's time, besides the Extreme Hell Method, she had already worn out my bag of tricks. All my insane training torments had been overcome by her."

Number Five's expression turned a little wild. "That resilience ... it's abnormal. I've never encountered anything like it before. And so I became reckless with emotion ..."

"So, you broke the rules and let her into your Extreme Hell Training Method for training. You didn't know that doing so would destroy her," said Number One with profound heartache.

Ling Lan was the first person he had truly wanted to cultivate as an inheritor, but unexpectedly, due to his carelessness, she was on the brink of being destroyed by Number Five. He, who had never regretted anything before, actually felt the stirrings of regret in this moment.

"No, I didn't destroy her, Number One. Did you know, she really passed it — the Extreme Hell Training Method — she's the only one who passed it and kept her mind. She has only become caught up in the confusion of Dao." The more Number Five spoke, the more excited he became, and his face was brimming with the fervour of success.

"Passed? You said Ling Lan passed?" Number One couldn't believe it.

"Yes, she passed. The only regret, is that she actually couldn't find her Dao." Number Five's face was filled with regret. In his visualizations, anyone who managed to pass the Extreme Hell Training Method, as long as they came out with their mind intact, would become a strong fighter possessing Dao. But Ling Lan was an oddball — she passed with a clear mind, but was unable to find the Dao that was right for her, and thus descended into chaotic confusion.

"How did this happen?" Number One was also confused now, since he had faith in Number Five's deductions.

"I suspect that it's because she doesn't have a purpose to become strong." Number Five's expression was a little strange. After spending these past few months with Ling Lan, he had gotten a vague sense of how Ling Lan thought. Ling Lan's thoughts were contradictory — she wanted to become a strong person, yet she didn't want to stand out and be burdened with too much responsibility. Even more emphatically, she didn't want to be weak, unable to control her own destiny.

As a result of these contradictions and doubts, although Ling Lan's spiritual power had already arrived at the doorstep of Dao, its weight was not substantial enough to push open the door to enter a more profound realm. For context, it should be known that once a person grasped the power of Dao, all aspects of their abilities would improve on a vertical axis. In future, regardless of what they wanted to do or learn, their progress would certainly cover a thousand miles in one day 2 — things that would have taken them ten years to learn before, would very likely take them only two to three years to master.

“What Dao do you think she’s most likely to enter?” Number One’s expression was grim as he asked this. Number Five was the most familiar with Ling Lan’s condition — Number One needed to understand more, so he could figure out how to help Ling Lan choose the right Dao.

“Killing Dao! A while back, she failed a hostage rescue mission. The reason being that she killed everyone at the camp site, including the hostage,” said Number Five with a smile. If they left Ling Lan unchecked, then with the passing of time, it was almost a certainty that Ling Lan would enter the Killing Dao.

“Unacceptable. The Killing Dao is too bloody, incompatible with Ling Lan’s personality.” Number One rejected this Dao immediately. Frankly, the Killing Dao was also an extremely good Dao, except that anyone who walked this Dao must be able to become truly cold and emotionless, so it was unsuitable for Ling Lan.

Ling Lan may look cold and aloof on the surface, but inside, she was actually a person who cared deeply. This was why she was willing to pretend to be a boy for Lan Luofeng’s sake, and go through all the accompanying troubles. It was also the reason why when Qi Long and the others had stuck to her and insisted on calling her Boss, she had decided to just give in. It was why even when she knew Lin Zhong-qing was just using her, Ling Lan had still chosen to help him out.

“The Demonic Dao is also a possibility,” choked out Number Five amidst laughter. He actually knew well that Ling Lan was very against the Killing Dao, so it was highly probable that her heart would become troubled and conflicted, resulting in an internal demon. If the internal demon managed to fully develop, Ling Lan would have no other choice than to walk the Demonic Dao in the end.

Number One threw a cold glare at Number Five, causing his exposed head aboveground to break out in a cold sweat. He received Number One’s meaning loud and clear. It was obvious that Number One hated his recklessness, which had resulted in this internal demon forming within Ling Lan, which may force her onto a path that Number One found distasteful.

According to Number One’s original plans, four years later, Ling Lan would very naturally enter the gates of Dao. Then, she would have been able to smoothly transition into the problem-free Sovereign Dao or perhaps the Sage Dao. This was the Dao that Number One had intended for Ling Lan, for it was the broadest and most straightforward of Daos.

Unfortunately, Number Five had interfered. Although he had managed to push Ling Lan to the gateway of Dao within a terrifyingly short time, because Ling Lan’s spirit wasn’t ready yet, she was now plagued with a host of problems.

“Looks like, Ling Lan needs to find her personal reason for becoming strong as soon as possible. But, who can help her?” Number One sighed. He wasn’t good at handling this sort of psychological issues.

“I’ll go.” A clear voice rang out from behind Number One.

Number Nine appeared, her sweet face filled with killing intent, and the gaze she directed at Number Five was almost heavy enough to kill. Number Five raised his head to look up at the sky, pretending that he didn’t see anything. Right now, he simply didn’t dare to annoy Number Nine who was in full protective tiger-mum mode.

Number One’s expression eased and he said, “Alright. Number Nine, I’ll leave Ling Lan to you.”

Number Nine nodded and quickly disappeared.

Only then did Number Five smile bitterly and look back. “Finally, she’s gone. Number One, can you let me out now?”

Number One stared at him coldly, and then stomped firmly right on top of his head, sending him straight into the ground so he was truly buried alive. Then, Number One immediately disappeared from Number Five’s training space.

Not too long after, Number Five miraculously resurfaced from within the earth,. His expression was at ease as he said cheerfully, “So not just Number Nine has developed feelings, even Number One is affected, becoming more and more human. The experiment this time was very successful. Ling Lan truly possesses the ability to influence intelligent bio-entities ... the only thing left, is whether this ability is beneficial or harmful to us intelligent bio-entities?”

“Still, it’s really dangerous for Ling Lan this time ... did I really go overboard? If something really happens to Ling Lan, then wouldn’t I lose a lot of entertainment? There’s no other material with such resilience, capable of withstanding every single one of my newly developed training methods. Hm, yes, looks like I’ll have to think of a way to help her overcome this crisis ...” Number Five was deep in thought — at this moment, he was completely unaware that he, who had never cared for whether a material lived or died, was actually worrying over Ling Lan.

Chapter 74: Little Four’s Suggestion

Ling Lan had just lain down, when she felt her consciousness being forcefully dragged once more into the learning space. However, Ling Lan was now used to this — after all, the instructors in the learning space all just loved to contact her this way.

This time, what she saw first wasn’t the cold face of Number One, nor was it the twisted smile of Number Five — instead, it was the delicate features of Number Nine. Seeing Number Nine’s lovely face, Ling Lan felt as if she was healed instantly.

“Instructor Number Nine!” Overcome with emotion, Ling Lan pounced. She really hadn’t seen Instructor Number Nine in so long. She had really missed her, but it wasn’t up to her whether or not she could see a particular instructor — the learning space was the one who decided.

Hugging Instructor Number Nine tightly, she could feel the generous swell of the other’s bosom under her military uniform. Oh, the envy, jealousy, and hate that stirred within her! Heaven knows if she would be able to have such a voluptuous body like Instructor Number Nine’s when she grew up?

Then, Ling Lan recalled her current identity as a fake man, and was instantly thrust into gloom. She had overheard her mother saying before that, once she hit puberty, she would need to be injected with blockers to prevent her body from secreting too much oestrogen ... In other words, if she could not reclaim her female status, then she would be destined to be just like how she was in her past life — flat as an airport runway 1 .

Number Nine looked at the emotional Ling Lan, and her heart was filled with fluffy feelings. It truly had been a while since she last saw Ling Lan, and she had missed her just as much. However, Number Nine

was still Number Nine in the end. Her emotions were only visible for that short moment before she regained her usual cool and aloof appearance.

She patted Ling Lan's shoulder before letting go, and then asked calmly, "Ling Lan, is something wrong with your spiritual self?"

At this question, Ling Lan bowed her head dejectedly. "Instructor Number Nine, so even you've found out about it."

"Yes. Strange fluctuations appearing in your spiritual self ... as an inhabitant of your mind, of course I can sense it." Number Nine explained why all the instructors knew. Of course, what Number Nine didn't say, was that this was actually only possible if an inhabitant broke the rules, forcefully breaking boundaries to sense the host's condition. For that, Number Nine had had to pay a hefty price.

This was the learning space's restriction upon the inhabitants, as well as protection for the host. If Number Nine wasn't so concerned that Number Five would break Ling Lan, she wouldn't have committed this violation.

Seeing Ling Lan in such low spirits, Number Nine was anxious. Not one to beat around the bush to begin with, she went straight to the point and asked, "Do you know why this situation is happening?"

Ling Lan thought about it for a moment, and then replied uncertainly, "Is it because Instructor Number Five's training has created some negative emotions? Which then influenced my emotional balance?"

"No, that's not it," Number Nine denied firmly.

Seeing Number Nine reject the reason she had thought was behind all this, Ling Lan was even more confused. "If that's not it, then what is it?"

"It's your heart. It's filled with doubt and uncertainty." Number Nine announced the answer directly.

"Huh?" Ling Lan hadn't expected this answer. Could doubt and uncertainty cause her spirit to twist so much that she would lose control? Ling Lan's first instinct was disbelief, that Number Nine was just joking with her.

But seeing Number Nine's steady gaze, Ling Lan could not be sure.

"Ling Lan, although I do not know why your tolerance is so extraordinary, almost aberrant, it is why you were able to withstand all the tests and torments set for you by Number Five. This has made your spiritual power grow very strong, very rapidly, to the point that you've even touched upon the gates of Dao."

"Dao?" Ling Lan was even more bewildered. She was currently in a technologically advanced future world, not an ignorant medieval period when cultivation theory discussions were popular.

"Er ... you don't need to understand this right now. What I want to tell you, is that this abnormality in your spirit is occurring because you do not have a clear purpose in your heart for becoming stronger." Number Nine knew she had slipped up, so she hurriedly tried to gloss over it.

"Purpose?" By this time, Ling Lan's eyes were wide and round, dazed. Number Nine had thoroughly confused her, and her mind was spinning.

“Yes, you’ve accepted all the missions and training we’ve set for you, and endured them despite all the difficulty. Why?”

Ling Lan held her dizzy head in her hands as she desperately searched for an answer to the question.

But Number Nine stopped her. “Don’t be in a rush to answer — go back and think about it carefully. Think about what kind of future is it that you want, and what your reason is for wanting to grow stronger ... Once you’ve figured this out, the spiritual problem bothering you now will go away and you’ll return to normal.”

With that said, Number Nine chased Ling Lan out of her training space.

Just like that, Ling Lan came to the central hall of the learning space. At this time, Little Four was crouched in the centre of the hall, drawing something on the ground with his butt stuck up in the air; completely oblivious to Ling Lan’s arrival.

Ling Lan calmed herself a little, and started to reflect on Instructor Number Nine’s words. Number Nine had undoubtedly given her some good news, which was that the loss of control of her spiritual power she was so worried about was not a huge problem. It could be healed naturally, as long as she could find the answer to dispel the doubt and uncertainty from her heart.

But, what were her doubts and uncertainties? Ling Lan was lost once again.

Little Four, having finally completed his masterpiece, stood up, and was prepared to admire it for a good while when, with a subconscious lift of his head, he saw Ling Lan standing right before him.

With a thump, Little Four fell over, and his first reaction was to wonder if his tricks had been noticed by Ling Lan.

This noise startled Ling Lan, who raised her head to see Little Four sitting on the ground with a frightened look on his face. She couldn’t help but frown and ask, “Little Four, what’s going on?”

Little Four hurriedly put on a fawning face and said sweetly, “Boss, why are you here?” With a pull of his right hand, a floor cushion appeared in his hand out of thin air. He carefully set down the cushion by his side and said submissively, “Boss, are you tired? Come sit here.”

At the same time, behind him where Ling Lan couldn’t see, Little Four swiped his left hand and the picture on the ground before him was wiped clean, leaving no trace behind.

Ling Lan’s thoughts hadn’t been on Little Four to begin with, preoccupied with her own internal dilemma. Hearing Little Four’s reply, she didn’t pry any further, but instead sat down with a long face by Little Four’s side, sighing deeply.

Knowing that he hadn’t been found out, Little Four was instantly at ease. It was his duty as Ling Lan’s number one follower to help his boss solve her problems, so seeing Ling Lan so troubled, he quickly opened his mouth to ask, “Boss, why are you sighing? Tell me about it. Maybe Little Four can help.”

“Instructor Number Nine said that my heart has doubts and uncertainties, and that I don’t have a resolute will or purpose for becoming stronger.” Of course, Ling Lan didn’t really expect Little Four to be

able to help her, but it was still nice to share one's troubles, so she spilled her worries to Little Four anyway.

Little Four was very surprised, for he didn't think of that as a great problem at all. "Boss! What's there to worry about? If you don't have a purpose, you just need to find one!"

"Does it work that way?" Ling Lan was nonplussed. Could it be that she was overthinking it?

Chapter 75: The Dream of Having Kids!

"Why wouldn't it? If you don't have a purpose, then let's just build one. Once you have a purpose, Boss, then you won't be doubtful and uncertain anymore." The more Little Four spoke, the smugger he became, and then he abruptly realised that he truly was, as expected, one of the smartest of the intelligent bio-entities.

It made sense! Ling Lan decided to try out Little Four's method, even though Little Four really did seem rather flaky ... Perhaps she would be able to luck out, like a blind cat stumbling over a dead rat, and stumble across the solution.

Ling Lan contemplated for a long while, and then, with a face full of confusion, she asked, "Little Four, what purpose should I build exactly?"

Little Four was speechless. Wasn't this something the Boss should decide for herself? Why was she asking him?

Still, Little Four was undoubtedly a dutiful follower. Without a word of complaint, he immediately browsed through his database, and word after highlighted word started popping out at him. Excitedly, Little Four said, "Boss, let's go dominate the galaxies!"

Ling Lan rolled her eyes dramatically at Little Four. "Do you take me for an idiot?" Anyone who would do something so troublesome — putting in so much mental and physical effort for no praise to boot — must be an idiot.

"Then ... how about becoming a king somewhere?" Little Four lowered his ambition by a large margin.

"Not interested," said Ling Lan huffily. Couldn't Little Four give any more normal suggestions? She was definitely not the type of person who wanted to become a ruler — Ling Lan knew herself well enough to know that.

"Building a harmonious and perfect world?" ... "Becoming a peerless hero?" ...

Ling Lan was peeved. Suggesting all these grand ambitions, Little Four was obviously just mocking her. Dammit, she wasn't a saint!

Under Ling Lan's increasingly displeased gaze, Little Four's voice became softer and softer ... Boo hoo hoo! Boss, these are all search results from the database — even if Ling Lan wasn't happy about it, there was nothing he could do.

Oh? There was one more. Little Four suddenly noticed one unread result. “Right, we could start a harem and sow seeds?” Although he didn’t have a clue as to what ‘start a harem and sow seeds’ meant, this phrase appeared at a rate no less than the previous suggestions.

Hearing this, Ling Lan flew into a rage, immediately hammering a fist onto Little Four’s head. “Idiot, I’m a girl!” Dammit, ‘sowing seeds’ was something men did, alright? Besides, she didn’t have a female-queen mentality. Plus, she had been raised with the concept of ‘one husband one wife’ — as such, this was something that she simply could not accept.

“So a girl can’t sow seeds in a harem?” Little Four pouted, a little unconvinced. He really didn’t understand what this had to do with gender. However, since Boss clearly hated this one, of course it would be discarded without question.

The two of them continued to puzzle over the issue, seated together with their faces resting within the cups of their hands, frowning heavily.

Ten minutes passed ... Half an hour passed ... and finally, an hour passed ... Still unable to think of any good suggestions, Little Four was driven mad. Pulling at his own hair, he screamed, “Aaaah ... I really can’t think of anything! What other great purposes are there?!”

“Great? Why does it have to be great?” Ling Lan seemed to have been triggered by Little Four and found a new avenue of thought. “Perhaps we could start thinking from small wishes ...”

Little Four did not understand. “What do you mean?”

“For example, Little Four, what is the goal you want to fulfil most right now?”

Hearing this, Little Four puffed out his little chest and said, “I want to be Boss’s number one follower.”

Ling Lan’s was speechless. Didn’t he have any slightly more ambitious thoughts? Besides, she had already declared him her number one follower — why was he still so caught up in this issue?

Little Four seemed to have gotten the point though. He looked at Ling Lan with shining eyes and said, “Boss, what do you want to accomplish at the moment?”

“Continue maintaining my position in Special Class-A.” Ling Lan’s response was quick and without hesitation. This was truly what had been bothering her most recently.

“Maintain? Don’t you want to be first?” Little Four was puzzled. With Ling Lan’s strength, getting first place should be a piece of cake.

“No plans for that. Of course, if I get it by accident then that’s fine too. I’m just going to go with the flow.” Ling Lan wasn’t too bothered by this issue.

The moment she finished speaking, Ling Lan jolted. Could it be that the aimlessness and hesitation that Instructor Number Nine had mentioned was precisely this lackadaisical attitude of hers? Because she had always gone with the flow, accepting everything life gave her — be it her grades, her training, or even the training missions in the learning space. Honestly, she had never pursued any of it on her own initiative.

“I’ve figured it out ...” Ling Lan felt enlightened.

“Could it be that I really should go after the first place ranking?” Although Ling Lan felt that she was onto something here, her heart was still a little troubled. Deep inside, she didn’t really want to make waves and push herself into the spotlight — would forcing herself to do something she didn’t want to do really resolve her current plight? Or would she just end up going further down the wrong path?

“If you don’t feel like it then leave it. After all, even if you get first place, there aren’t that many benefits to it. The cost and benefits just don’t match up.” Little Four wasn’t plagued by all those chaotic thoughts running through Ling Lan’s mind; he was only looking for the answer purely from a cost-benefit standpoint. Obtaining first place — there was pretty much no benefit other than an increase in reputation, so Little Four was unconcerned about whether his boss became the first rank.

“Boss, you need to find something more profitable to do.” Out of boredom, Little Four conjured a lollipop in his hand and licked it a couple of times. He believed that anything could be done, just not pointless work.

“More profitable? There really isn’t anything.” Ling Lan, who was all tapped out of desires, really couldn’t think of anything that fit Little Four’s criteria.

Little Four was stumped. He gave a hard lick to his lollipop, and then very seriously said to Ling Lan, “Let’s put it this way. Boss, what kind of life do you want to have in the future?”

“A peaceful, free one. And when I’m bored, I can give birth to a child, raise him, and play with him.” A smile played on Ling Lan’s lips. She really wanted a child of her own. If her two lives were added together, she really wasn’t that young anymore.

When Little Four heard what Ling Lan had to say, his expression turned miserable.

Seeing Little Four’s exaggerated expression, Ling Lan was irked. “What? I can’t have a child?”

“Of course you can,” Little Four hastily reassured her. “But Boss, have you not thought about your situation?”

“Situation? About my identity as a fake man?” Ling Lan was abruptly brought back to reality. With this identity, it was basically fated that she wouldn’t be able to wed someone openly. If she wanted to borrow sperm from some man, she’d even have to do it secretly ...

“I believe the Ling family will arrange for a loyalist to couple with me.” Ling Lan wasn’t worried that she wouldn’t get a man, for Lan Luofeng and Ling Qin would never let the Ling family line die out.

“Won’t work,” objected Little Four, agitated.

“Huh? Why?” Ling Lan didn’t understand.

“Boss, you must know, whether a child is excellent or not is basically all up to the genes of the father 1.” Within this period of time, Little Four had been doing a lot of research on this topic on the virtual network.

“Ah ... so this means that no matter how great my genes are, it’s useless?” Ling Lan was incensed. She would be the one giving birth to the child, but whether or not the child was excellent had nothing to do with her? That was just preposterous!

Regretfully, Little Four said, "Of course if the mother's genetics are better, the child will be even more outstanding, but the main load is still on the father. If the father's genetics are weak, the child's birth stats are almost guaranteed to be weaker."

"In other words, if I want my baby to be more outstanding, I cannot just find some random man." Ling Lan gnashed her teeth. What kind of heredity is this? Why make the father's side so important?

With schadenfreude 2 , Little Four said, "That's right, Boss."

"With my current circumstances, it's impossible to freely date a strong man, get married and have kids." Ling Lan finally understood the meaning behind Little Four's exaggerated expression.

Of course, if Ling Lan didn't care for the stats of the baby, then all this wouldn't be a problem. However, Ling Lan was definitely a responsible mother. If she could let her baby be more outstanding, she would definitely not let her own baby take the lesser option.

"Is there really no way to resolve this?" asked Ling Lan with a frown. She didn't believe that. No matter what, she would have a baby. No matter how difficult the process was, she would still accomplish it — this was all she wanted to do in this life.

"There is. Two ways." Little Four was as reliable as ever, directly coming up with two options for Ling Lan.

"Number one, rob the Federation's sperm bank. I believe there will be lots of strong men's sperm kept there." Little Four's words made Ling Lan's eyes light up, but his next words made Ling Lan's face fall.

"However, you'll need to defeat the ace mecha squad stationed there. Rumour has it that the leader is an imperial operator. As a reminder, an imperial operator is just one level below a god-class operator — for you to successfully steal the sperm from the bank, you'll need to have the capability close to that of a god-class operator, otherwise, you'll be going in alive and coming out dead."

"And the other way?" Ling Lan decisively discarded this option. She only wanted to have a kid, not seek death.

"Find a random strong man you like, push him down, and just have your way with him," said Little Four savagely.

Ling Lan wanted to face-palm. Dammit, these two methods were just not something a normal person could do.

"I recommend you pick the second option. Going up against one strong man will definitely be easier than going up against a team of strong men," suggested Little Four considerately.

Little Four's words didn't make Ling Lan's expression turn any better, because raping a strong man was definitely not an easy thing.

"Of course, you could also try seduction ... if a strong man is willing to take a romp under the sheets with you, Boss, then you wouldn't have to worry anymore." Little Four smiled in satisfaction, thinking that this suggestion of his was just amazing.

“Idiot!” Ling Lan knocked Little Four’s head exasperatedly. Which man would willingly romp under the sheets with another man? Unless he was bent. But if he was bent then she wouldn’t be able to take it, because ultimately, she was still female.

“No? Then Boss, you’ll just have to do it forcefully,” said Little Four regretfully.

“Forcefully, eh? Looks like I’ll have to become even stronger or else I won’t be able to overpower the other.” Ling Lan racked her brains and found that what Little Four said made sense. For the sake of giving birth to an outstanding baby, she just had to break past her limits.

“Yup. Good luck, Boss. You’ll need to work harder from now on, or else you won’t be able to raise an outstanding child.” Little Four gave Ling Lan his encouragement.

Suddenly, Ling Lan found that all her suffering at the learning space’s hands was not meaningless — it would make her stronger, making it easier for her to achieve her goals.

“A child birthed by me, Ling Lan, must be the most excellent one ...” Ling Lan’s eyes no longer held any trace of doubt or uncertainty. No one would be able to stop her from carrying out her resolution to give birth to an exceptional child. “In that case, I must become the strongest so that I will have a greater range of selection ...”

Because of this simple wish, Ling Lan stepped onto the path of the strong, no longer lost.

Chapter 76: The Ranking Tournament Begins

It wasn’t long before the mid-year wide-scale rankings were finally here, and the theoretical exams for various subjects were the first to be held. Ling Lan was very confident regarding these exams. She always had a great memory and now she also had the ultimate cheating machine, Little Four, so it was almost impossible for her not to get full marks.

However, Ling Lan soon found that she had celebrated too soon. Any child who could enter Special Class-A was no simpleton — their IQs were all terrifyingly high, as proven by the publicized scores on the digital bulletin board. Almost all the Class-A students scored full marks, with the exception of a few kids who lost one or two marks out of carelessness.

Alright, so only two students didn’t get full marks, and one of them was Qi Long. Furthermore, he was the one who had the most marks deducted, one mark each for two subjects, tragically putting him in the last place of Special Class-A, which Qi Long felt was a great loss of face.

There was no helping it. His brash and forthright personality made it impossible for him to be as detail-oriented as Han Jijyun and Luo Lang — lacking the patience to check his work, he could only lose marks. Luckily for him, he only made minor errors in two subjects; based on Han Jijyun’s pre-exam prediction, Qi Long would have at least lost marks in three to four subjects.

Meanwhile, the other student had only been deducted one mark. But that one mark was enough to drop him below rank 100, for among the children of the other classes, there were more than a few who scored full marks as well.

Of course, Qi Long, who had been deducted two marks, was no longer even within the top two hundred. One could clearly see just how intense the competition was within the academy.

Of course, the current rankings were only temporary — the final rankings were still pending on the combat results, for that was where the real test was. The Central Scout Academy placed the highest priority on combat arts. As long as you defeated everyone, even if your theory grades were average, you would still be the uncontested number one of the Central Scout Academy.

Of course, the theory grades were not unimportant, for the combat exams were held under an elimination system. The children who were eliminated would be given their final rank based on their theory results. Only if two eliminated students happened to have the same theory results, then the two of them would have to go through an additional combat match to determine their final rank.

For example, when the top 8 progressed into the top 4, four students would be eliminated. Based on their theory grades, the one with the highest score would automatically be ranked 5th, and so on and so forth. In the situation where same scores appear, like say the 5th and 6th place had the same theory marks, then the 5th and 6th would have an additional fight to determine the actual 5th and 6th places. If this happened with the 7th and 8th, it would be the same thing, where the 7th and 8th would battle to confirm the 7th and 8th ranks. If the 6th and the 7th had the same theory grades, then the 5th rank and the 8th rank would be confirmed first, and then the 6th and 7th would battle each other to determine the true 6th and 7th ranks ...

Therefore, the theory results were not very important for the winners but were crucial for those who failed. At times, the difference of just one theory mark could spell the difference between heaven and earth.

And so, the much anticipated ranking tournament officially began within the combat hall of the Central Scout Academy.

Because this was the combat ranking battles held every six months, all the arenas in the combat hall were opened. The options for closed battles were removed so all the battles could be displayed openly for public viewing. The students could choose to spectate in person or watch a live broadcast of the all the arena ranking battles from their dorms.

The ranking battles were fought on an elimination system — the ten grades of the scout academy were split across approximately three thousand arenas. On the first day, those participating in the ranking battles were just the regular class students. The winners would then move on to the second day to battle the merit class students. On the third day, the Special Class-B students would officially join in, while Special Class-A would only take part on the fourth day.

These few days, Ling Lan had just stayed put in her own villa. She told the others that she was meditating to centre herself, but in truth, she was actually entering the learning space and making full use of the time she had left to resolve the problem of her loss of spiritual control.

Ever since she had confirmed her desire to have an excellent kid as her purpose for becoming strong, when Ling Lan had once again accepted a bloody mission from the learning space, she actually found that she would no longer lose herself like before when she entered combat mode. She could retain a

little of her awareness now — though this duration was short, it was still undoubtedly a good sign, giving Ling Lan hope that she would be able to regain full control of herself.

Ling Lan was glad that she had the learning space. The ranking battle was almost here so there wasn't much time left in reality, but her time could be considerably extended within the learning space. Without any hesitation, Ling Lan had taken the initiative to ask Instructor Number Five to extend the time within the learning space to the maximum so that she would have sufficient time to resolve her problem.

She knew that this decision would also extend her time of suffering under Instructor Number Five's hands, but in order to accomplish her objectives, Ling Lan no longer feared anything.

Number Five was extremely receptive to Ling Lan's request for further self-torture and had agreed without question. After three years time (time which had been prolonged by the learning space) of bitter suffering, Ling Lan regained her sobriety bit by bit. Finally, she succeeded in mastering her self-control within the time limit. Moreover, due to the additional torments she had endured within this period of time, her heart had become unbelievably strong, and her spiritual power had become extremely solid.

Ling Lan believed that, even if the world were to be destroyed before her eyes now, she would be able to face it with a calm face and a steady heart, as serene as ever.

While she had succeeded in mastering her mind, Ling Lan had also discovered that she now had a new understanding of the combat arts she had previously learned ...

Early on the fourth day, Ling Lan, who had perfectly resolved her control problems, left her residence.

She had just arrived at the hover car stop when she saw Qi Long and the other two boys waiting for her a little further ahead.

When Han Jijyun saw Ling Lang arrive, he used the sensor to call for a hover car to bring the four of them to the colossal combat hall.

Right now, the combat hall was not as crowded as it had been in the last three days. After all, only 200 combatants were left for each grade, so the total of all ten grades only made up 2000 people. Adding on the friends and classmates who were here to spectate, there was still only 5000 to 6000 people. Compared to the first day when there were 70 to 80 thousand people rubbing shoulders, this was nothing.

"Qi Long, here, here!" A strident voice rang out from a corner of the combat hall. Ling Lan looked over and saw that it was the two girls, Han Xuya and Luo Chao, and beside them were some of the other original group 072 members.

Luo Lang was very excited and was the first to rush over while Qi Long, who had been called for directly, naturally went together with Luo Lang. Ling Lan and Han Jijyun shared a smile, and then slowly walked over as well.

The female dormitory where Han Xuya and Luo Chao were staying was on the opposite end of Qi Long and the other three's dorm, so it wasn't very convenient for them to meet up anywhere else but here in the combat hall.

"You all came too." Ling Lan nodded in greeting to the others.

"Yup, we've all been lucky enough to squeeze into the top 200." Li Jinghong was the one who spoke up. As a member of the merit class, he was thrilled to make it into the top 200. It should be known that there were 2000 students in the merit classes. Anyone who could enter the top 200 was undeniably outstanding, for among these top 200, the 50 Special Class-A students were also included.

"Good luck. As long as you win one fight, you might have a chance to enter the special classes," Qi Long cheerfully encouraged Li Jinghong as he patted his shoulders. The top 100 were the special class students, with the only difference being whether one was in Class-A or Class-B.

If Li Jinghong really managed to win his upcoming battle, he would definitely be considered a successful contender and would probably become the centre of attention for a long while.

Li Jinghong was a little embarrassed. "I don't dare to think that far. Everyone here is strong — I can only say that in the earlier fights, I was a bit luckier. The opponents I faced were all not very strong."

Hearing this, He Chaoyang, who was also in the merit classes with Li Jinghong, was a little displeased. "Jinghong, it doesn't matter if we can do it or not, but we shouldn't lose our spirits. Since we've already made it here, we should fight our best."

Li Jinghong was enlightened, and nodded energetically, "Chaoyang, you're right. Since we're already in the top 200, if we don't try our best then it wouldn't be fair to our previous efforts."

"That's how it should be." He Chaoyang smiled. The two of them were the only two of the 072 group to enter the merit classes. Being in the same environment had made them become very close — they'd helped each other, supporting one another as they progressed together.

Seeing this, Luo Shaoyun said worriedly, "Ah, Li Jinghong and He Chaoyang are working so hard ... looks like our positions aren't safe."

Luo Shaoyun's words caused Han Xuya and Luo Chao to become worried in turn.

"You're still alright, but it'll be difficult to say for little Luo Chao and me." Han Xuya sighed heavily. She found that the pressure from entering Special Class-B was much higher than that of entering the merit classes. This time, she had only narrowly made it into the top 200 — if the opponent hadn't fallen over before she had from a lack of stamina, she might already have lost in the battle moving from 400 to 200. Heaven knows if she would be able to continue on this time ... if she couldn't make it into the top 100, she would drop into the merit classes.

Staring at her own fingers, Luo Chao timidly said, "I ... I'm also very worried."

Her expression rendered Luo Lang speechless — unfortunately, he couldn't fight on behalf of his sister, otherwise he would definitely not let Luo Chao be so worried.

"At this stage, it's no longer a matter of just strength, but more of spirit." Seeing the misgivings on the two girls' faces, Ling Lan, who was also a girl at heart, couldn't help but speak up.

“How so?” Apart from Qi Long, Luo Lang, and Han Jijyun, the other children all looked at Ling Lan with expectant faces, hoping that Ling Lan would enlighten them.

“The strength of those who managed to enter the top 200 is actually roughly the same, so it’s possible for either side to win. In the end, victory will depend on whose confidence is stronger, and whose endurance is greater, that’s all.” Ling Lan kept her arms folded behind her back, and secretly crossed her fingers. Her intent was just to encourage them; she wouldn’t take any responsibility for anything beyond that ...

Han Xuya’s gaze brightened. “Just like my previous match! I just have to hold on for a second longer than my opponent, and victory will be mine.”

Ling Lan nodded, indicating that what Han Xuya said was right.

Luo Chao looked at Ling Lan, blushing, and thought to herself: “Ling Lan definitely must not like girls who give up easily. Yes, I must work hard, I must hold on until the end ...”

Ling Lan settled everyone’s nervous jitters with a few words, and their eyes all began to shine with confidence. Han Jijyun stared keenly at Ling Lan. He hadn’t expected Ling Lan to be so astoundingly proficient at handling the hearts of people as well — where the hell did he come from really? An elite family? Some unknown formidable force? Or perhaps ...

Han Jijyun didn’t dare to probe too deeply. He took a deep breath and pushed aside all the stray thoughts in his mind. He warned himself — Ling Lan was just Ling Lan, their Boss Lan. All he needed to do was remember this.

Chapter 77: The Debut of Techniques and Secret Skills!

Frankly, Han Jijyun was overthinking things; clever people were very likely to make this mistake. Ling Lan’s words were all just plain reassurances; there was nothing more to it. As for why they worked so well — all we can say is that Ling Lan was just too highly regarded within group 072, so everyone believed her without question.

Their small group walked to the area set aside for the first-grade ranking battles. Along the way, Qi Long subtly tugged on Ling Lan’s arm and Ling Lan reflexively slowed her steps.

Seeing that the other companions beside them weren’t paying any attention to them, Qi Long whispered quietly, “Boss Lan, has your problem been solved?”

The other companions may not have known about Ling Lan’s problem, but as an unintended victim, Qi Long knew very well that when Ling Lan put his full attention into battle, he had issues with losing control.

Ling Lan’s heart felt warm as she nodded at Qi Long, saying, “Don’t worry, I’m fine now.”

Qi Long smiled in visible relief. “That’s great.” Suddenly, his expression turned serious and he said, “Boss Lan, this time, I will fight with my full strength.” When he said this, Qi Long’s eyes were full of fighting spirit — it was clear that he really wanted to defeat Ling Lan just once.

Ling Lan nodded, accepting the challenge.

Right then, the two of them felt the communicators on their wrists vibrate powerfully. Their eyes lit up — the notification of their battles had arrived.

Sure enough, the communicators displayed their fighting grounds and match order. Qi Long's fight was at arena 33, the third match, while Ling Lan's was at arena 35, the sixth match.

"Boss Lan, this time, my fight will end before yours." Qi Long was very excited. This way, he wouldn't miss out on watching Ling Lan's fight.

Their other companions had also received their respective notifications. Several of them were browsing through their notifications when Han Xuya abruptly yelled, "Ah ah ah, why is my battle the first match?! Ah, I'm not mentally prepared yet!"

Luo Chao hurriedly consoled her, saying, "Mine's not much better, I'm fighting second."

"Me too!"

"Me too!"

Luo Shaoyun and Li Jinghong yelled out at the same time. The three of them anxiously stuck out their arms, lining up their communicators in a row so they could compare their fight arenas. When they found that they weren't assigned to the same arena, the three of them let out a breath of relief. Luo Chao in particular was patting her chest lightly, trying to calm her pounding heart. Everyone's luck was pretty decent; they didn't have to fight amongst themselves from the start.

None of them wished to fight one of their own companions and send the other out.

Both Qi Long and Yuan Youyun were up for the third match, but just like the others for the second match, they were at different arenas. Han Jijyun and He Chaoyang were up for the fourth match, again at different arenas, causing all of them to sigh in relief.

Luo Lang was up for the fifth match, while Ling Lan was up for the sixth. Although they didn't know if there was a seventh match or more after that, this was the best arrangement possible for Ling Lan's group. The knowledge that the strongest Ling Lan was going up last, was an intangible source of inspiration and mental support for them.

The first up was Han Xuya. The first match was at arena 32 and she was up against a chubster from the merit classes.

The fights arranged by the academy were never dictated by luck — the students from the special classes would be fighting against those students from the merit and regular classes who had battled their way up, so if those students wanted to rise up beyond their station, they would have to defeat a special class student fair and square.

The two chubby kids standing together on the arena stage made for a humorous picture. Han Xuya, in particular, had a strange quirk — she liked to chew on jerky during battle, so her chubby cheeks were forever bulging, just like an eating hamster.

Of course, only Ling Lan felt this way. The other companions were all watching arena 32 anxiously, waiting for Han Xuya's battle results. They became superstitious at this time, hoping that Han Xuya could bring back the first win and bring them all luck.

Han Xuya didn't let them down; the chubster across her didn't give Han Xuya too much trouble. Not long after the fight began, Han Xuya caught onto one of the opponent's careless mistakes and threw him to the ground. Before the other could climb back up, Han Xuya barrelled right at him like a mini torpedo.

A heavy "BAM!" of impact made Ling Lan and the others observing gasp in sympathetic fright, teeth aching. Sure enough, the little chubster was utterly stunned by Han Xuya's heavyweight blow, allowing Han Xuya to sit on him without much resistance, wherefore she began pummeling him left and right.

The teacher refereeing the match couldn't help but break out into a cold sweat. He hurriedly called an end to the match and declared Han Xuya the winner. He was afraid that the little chubster would end up dying if he yelled any slower.

Smugly, Han Xuya walked off the stage. Qi Long asked Han Jiyun beside him, "Have you all learned a new move?" Han Xuya's teeth-aching method of barrelling into someone was something she couldn't do before.

Han Jiyun nodded and said, "Yes. For this ranking battle, the elders in the family specially arranged some special training and taught us a few tricks we could use right now."

Qi Long's expression grew grim. Most likely, any student with hereditary family martial arts would have had special training in preparation for the ranking battles. This competition wasn't as simple as he thought it would be.

When Luo Chao went up next, this point was proven. Luo Lang and Luo Chao hadn't wasted any of their prep time either. Luo Chao's physical strength was obviously weaker than Han Xuya's. This time, Luo Chao fought in a very smart manner — she didn't engage the opponent directly like Han Xuya, but danced around the opponent, saving her strength as much as possible as she looked for the opponent's weak points.

Luo Chao's opponent was also a member of the merit classes, who had solid basics — even though his every move and stance was nothing special, they also had no obvious weaknesses.

"Your sister may be in trouble," Qi Long commented worriedly. Although he and Luo Lang didn't really get along, he was still rather protective of the bashful Luo Chao. Seeing the fight entering a stalemate, he couldn't help but say something.

Luo Lang's hands had already clenched into fists by his thighs. He was the one who was the most worried for his sister, but he still remained calm as he said, "Don't rush, just wait a little longer ... as long as she can find a weak point, Luo Chao will definitely be able to defeat the opponent." Luo Lang had seen Luo Chao's hard work all this time; he hoped Luo Chao's efforts wouldn't go to waste here.

This match was the longest of all the first-grade matches — Luo Chao's match was still unfinished by the time Luo Shaoyun and Li Jinghong returned. And at this moment, Qi Long and Yuan Youyun had already received the notification to get ready, for their matches were about to start.

Qi Long and Yuan Youyun hadn't left for long when Luo Chao's movement speed slowed noticeably, and Luo Lang's expression changed dramatically.

At the same time, Luo Chao's opponent was startled for a moment, but then his eyes gleamed with joy. He quickly sped forwards and thrust a fist directly at Luo Chao's chest.

Although Luo Chao had quick reflexes, turning her body to evade, her left shoulder was still hit, and a trace of pain appeared on her young face. However, her left hand didn't slow down at all, grabbing hold of the opponent's right arm which had struck her.

"Not good!" The opponent felt his right arm being grabbed and knew that he was in trouble. As expected, Luo Chao's right fist came right at him but he had no way to dodge. Who'd have expected that such a delicate-looking girl would have the courage to exchange a fist for a fist — this was thoroughly a lose-lose situation where both sides would be injured.

"Oh no! They're both hurt! Is Little Sister Luo Chao alright?" Seeing this scene, the newly returned Luo Shaoyun and Li Jinghong couldn't help but exclaim in shock — they really liked this pretty sister of Luo Lang's.

Luo Lang said nothing in response but looked at the scene with a cold expression. Equally injured? Not necessarily!

Luo Chao's opponent naturally didn't want to just take Luo Chao's punch without resisting — he brought up his left arm in a horizontal block in front of his chest and readied himself to take Luo Chao's attack. In his opinion, girls were naturally weaker so his left arm should be enough to parry the attack and diffuse the power behind it.

However, when Luo Chao's fist met his shoulder, he felt a great surge of energy crashing onto it and then a snapping sound could be heard coming from his left arm. Intense pain radiated from his arm straight to his heart and he couldn't help but scream, "Aaaaaah ..."

Luo Shaoyun gulped. "Luo Lang, is your sister a freakishly strong woman?" This strength appeared to be even stronger than his own. It should be noted that children nowadays had extremely sturdy bodies due to the absorption of gene agents to repair and supplement the body. Although it wasn't at the level of copper skin and iron bones, it was still strong enough that normal levels of strength shouldn't be able to hurt them.

"No, this is one of our family combat techniques — One-Inch Punch 1 !" Luo Lang wasn't secretive about it and he started giving Luo Shaoyun and the others a detailed explanation.

The One-Inch Punch wasn't an advanced technique; many families had similar strike techniques, so Luo Lang wasn't worried about others knowing its name. If the technique wasn't orally taught along with a physical demonstration, observers wouldn't be able to learn its secrets, so there was no need to fear it being stolen by others.

"Little Four, did you save a recording of Luo Chao's attack earlier?" Ling Lan's eyes lit up. This sort of strike technique was pretty good — it would be a good idea to take some time in the future to research it.

"Saved." Little Four's answer was met with Ling Lan's hearty approval. When Ling Lan wasn't paying attention, Little Four smugly made a victory 'V' with one hand. He would never tell Ling Lan that everything that had happened throughout her life, every moment from her birth till now, could be found within his databases. There would never be any storage problems.

Seeing that the child's arm was broken, the teacher in charge of Luo Chao's arena immediately called a stop to the match and declared Luo Chao the winner. Although Luo Chao's opponent was unwilling to surrender, he could do nothing to fight this result and so could only walk off the stage with teary eyes. This time, he had lost due to impatience. He shouldn't have rushed, for his chances of winning had actually been much higher than Luo Chao's.

Luo Chao leapt at her brother excitedly and Luo Lang caught her in a hug. But then, with an unhappy expression, he chided, "Why did you use this method?" Although he was happy that his sister won, he didn't want his sister to win in a way which required her to get injured.

Luo Chao peered up timidly at Luo Lang. "My stamina was running out, and the opponent was still very steady, revealing no weak points. As I said before that my attacking speed is very slow, so, if I didn't use this method, I was afraid I wouldn't be able to hit him."

Luo Chao still wanted to nag, but Han Xuya interrupted a little unhappily, "It's fine as long as she won — did you want to see Luo Chao lose?"

Luo Lang was flabbergasted. "H-how could I?" And with that, he couldn't scold Luo Chao anymore. After all, Luo Chao had won!

Luo Chao sighed internally and sent a grateful look at Han Xuya. She still wasn't good at handling her elder brother's disapproving gaze. Surreptitiously, she glanced at Ling Lan and found Ling Lan looking back at her with a bright smile on his face and approval in his eyes. Her face bloomed red instantly.

He ... is looking at me now! Luo Chao felt as if she was going to faint; her heart was throbbing so violently.

"Eh? Boss, after that little girl looked at you, she looks like she's going to faint. Oh, it must be that you're too fierce and scared her." Little Four recalled the violence he was subjected to when he first met Ling Lan and immediately empathised.

Chapter 78: Advancing in One Move!

Ling Lan glared at Little Four exasperatedly, "*You still have the free time to worry about other people? Have you figured out the secrets of that One-Inch Punch yet?*"

At those words, Little Four puffed out his cheeks. This request of his boss was just too unreasonable — how could the secrets of the One-Inch Punch be so easily deciphered? Such little consideration for her followers, this was obviously child labour abuse!

Hmph, he wanted to lodge a complaint ... er, that is, find a helper!

Little Four's gaze was mournful as he took one last glance at Ling Lan, whose attention had already shifted back to the outside world, and slowly disappeared from the mind-space, going heaven knows where.

Luo Chao's victorious return gave Luo Lang and the others the heart to go check out Luo Shaoyun's and Li Jinghong's battle results. As expected, Luo Shaoyun successfully advanced into the top 100, but Li

Jinghong failed. The students of Special Class-A were not herbivores ¹ — to achieve an upset was really as difficult as mounting the heavens.

When Luo Lang discovered who Li Jinghong's opponent was, he couldn't help but pity him for his bad luck. It turned out that Li Jinghong's opponent was the second-rank, Wu Jiong. Even Luo Lang himself was uncertain if he could beat that fellow for sure — if they fought, the odds would be fifty-fifty, or perhaps Luo Lang's odds of winning might be even lower.

Not long after, Qi Long bounded back happily. His opponent had been someone from the merit classes, and so had not given him much trouble. He had handily defeated the other within ten moves and now returned triumphant.

Meanwhile, Yuan Youyun was still fighting and probably wouldn't be done for a while longer. Soon after, the fourth matches began. Han Jijun and He Chaoyang went up, and they were followed by Luo Lang for the fifth match and Ling Lan for the sixth match. Just like that, they all took their turns on stage, and Ling Lan's group of ten finished their fights for the first half of the day.

Both Li Jinghong and He Chaoyang from the merit classes had ended their run, while the remaining eight had successfully entered the top 100, guaranteeing their places in the special classes. Clearly, the positions of the original special class students were very secure; for any child from the merit classes to overthrow anyone, the journey was still long.

Of the students who advanced to the top 100, Ling Lan was the one who advanced the most easily — defeating the merit class student she was up against with just one move. Of course, this method of winning almost crumbled the other child's confidence. Luckily, the refereeing teacher immediately provided some counselling and spiritual guidance, thus saving the child's future. Because of this, Ling Lan received quite a few displeased glares from that teacher. His gaze was clearly saying that she should have shown some mercy and let her opponent show off some moves at least, why did she have to be so ruthless ...

Against the teacher's pointed gaze, Ling Lan could only rub her nose and quietly slink away. Frankly, she could not be blamed. The moment her opponent had moved, she had clearly seen the other's weak point. This weak point had shone with such a brilliant light that she had thrown a punch before she knew it. By the time she was aware of it, the opponent had already been knocked off the stage, so it was too late even if she wanted to let the other show off a few moves.

Aside from the oddball Ling Lan, the next best results were those who managed to defeat their opponents in ten moves. There were quite a few in that category — the top 5 of Special Class-A all managed it, along with Qi Long and Luo Lang.

Just like that, the battles in the first half of the day were over. Li Jinghong and He Chaoyang collected their emotions and happily joined in the celebrations of their companions who advanced. Together, they came to the school canteen and prepared to indulge in a good feast to reward themselves.

Ling Lan decided to be generous at that moment, agreeing to withdraw 5000 credits so they could order several delicacies and treats they'd been drooling over for a long time in celebration. All of them ate happily. After eating their fill and resting for a bit, they welcomed the second round of the fights for the

day where the top 100 would be narrowed down to the top 50. In other words, it was the final battles to determine the Class-A positions.

Because the number of combatants had been halved, there were only three match slots in the afternoon battle rounds. Ling Lan was no longer the finishing act this time, but was up first instead.

Ling Lan's opponent was a student from Special Class-B. In these top 100 to top 50 advancement rounds, the Special Class-A students would not be placed in a situation where they'd have to face one another. The academy wouldn't be so brain dead as to let the outstanding students face off so early and lose their chance to advance that way. Therefore, if the Class-B students wanted to enter Class-A, they would have to defeat a Class-A student to prove their worth.

The moment Ling Lan stepped on stage, she sensed an extremely blatant warning stare. She looked towards the source of the stare and immediately felt a little guilty, cold sweat beading her forehead. Dammit, why was her luck so terrible?

It turned out that the referee in charge of their arena was, of all people, the same teacher referee from her morning bout. Seeing Ling Lan appear, the narrowed gaze of the teacher was filled with warning, wordlessly telling her that she should tone down a little and not hurry to end things this time. No matter what, she should still leave some room for her peer to keep his confidence.

Ling Lan secretly wiped off the sweat from her forehead, reminding herself that she could not make the same mistake as in the previous round. For this reason, she purposefully put both arms behind her back and gripped each arm with the other tightly, so they would keep each other under control. This way, no matter how strong her reflexes were, she wouldn't be able to move so quickly.

Although Ling Lan was doing all this out of good intentions, in the other's eyes, Ling Lan's action of putting both arms behind her was really just too arrogant and obviously demeaning. He felt as if he had been shamed; his small young face turned bright red in anger.

The moment he heard the referee yell 'start', he pounced. There was no probing involved; he attacked directly with a powerful whirlwind side kick. The force behind the kick could certainly be considered as all the strength his body could muster — it was clear just how angry the opponent was, almost driven to the edge of irrationality, which was why he had charged headlong at Ling Lan to attack without any other considerations.

Regardless of how much Ling Lan had prepared before the fight, it was all, unfortunately, useless. Ling Lan saw the opponent's fierce kick coming at her, and as it got closer and closer, an absolutely fatal opening appeared before her.

Typically, any move, when nearing the end of its force, would have this sort of opening. The only question was, how big the opening was.

Ling Lan's reflexes were definitely top-notch. Seeing this opening, she didn't even have time to think, reflexively counterattacking ...

Wasn't Ling Lan's arms gripping onto each other behind her back? Why could she still counterattack?

Indeed, Ling Lan's arms were gripped tightly with no way of attacking. However, who asked the opponent to attack with his feet? Thus, Ling Lan also reflexively fought back with her feet, instinctively sending a leg kicking out.

When her foot slammed heavily into a human body, she already knew that she had messed up. Unfortunately, by this time, it was too late for her to pull back her strength. The one saving grace was that she had not used the Wave Stacking Art she had learned from the learning space and had even controlled her own physical strength to 50%.

Even so, the opponent was still sent flying off the stage by her kick. This beautifully clean kick drew shocked gasps from all the students in the audience, as well as made the senior students who had inadvertently witnessed the scene sober up. The scene also drew the infuriated gaze of the teacher referee. Dammit, didn't I ask you to take it easy? Why are you doing it again and again and again ...

The teacher's eyes were full of resentment and blame — Ling Lan couldn't take it any longer and shrunk back, jumping off the stage to slip away.

Ling Lan's clean and decisive one-move defeat of her opponent drew the attention of all the first grade students. Remember, Ling Lan's opponent had been a Special Class-B student — although the Class-A students were indeed stronger than the Class-B students by a head, it wasn't at the level where the former would be able to defeat the latter in just one move. Ling Lan's impressive performance caused everyone to start speculating in secret. Ling Lan was most likely the strongest within the first grade — the current best student or first rank was all just in name.

The subsequent matches seemed to prove the point. The Class-A first-rank Li Yingjie had gone up against a Class-B student and had only managed to defeat the other after 28 moves. This result, in comparison with the results of previous years, was actually quite outstanding. Unfortunately, in comparison with the aberrant Ling Lan, Li Yingjie's performance became extremely average. This caused Li Yingjie to be filled with anger and hatred, and he now had yet another reason to hate Ling Lan: That arrogant fellow had stolen the wind from his sails, he was really too despicable ...

Qi Long's performance was also pretty good — he managed to defeat his opponent at the 30th move — while Luo Lang did a little worse, but also managed to defeat his opponent within 50 moves. These results were already considered above average within Class-A.

Meanwhile, Han Jijyun had got caught up in a drawn-out battle. It couldn't be helped, for Han Jijyun's strength was his exceptional intelligence, while his combat abilities were considerably weaker. In addition, he didn't have any finishing moves and so could only draw out the battle to while away his opponent's stamina. Finally, after almost 300 moves, the clever Han Jijyun managed to find an almost imperceptible opportunity and used it to defeat his opponent, successfully making it into the top 50.

Han Xuya, Luo Chao, Luo Shaoyun, and Yuan Youyun, who had originally been part of Class-B, were all stopped here. They couldn't make it into the top 50 and so would remain in Class-B for the next six months. This proved once again that progressing even just one step further was definitely not that easy.

At the end of this day's battles, the name list of the top 50 was officially released. 49 names stayed the same, remaining as Class-A members, while 1 member was changed. The original 2nd place from the

bottom was defeated by Class-B's 2nd place from the top, who successfully took his place on the new roster. Successfully advancing into the top 50, he became the only child who managed an upset.

This result really made the 1st place of Class-B want to cry. In fact, he was actually stronger than the 2nd place, however, he had lost to the last place of Class-A, Lin Zhong-qing. His luck was really a little terrible; Lin Zhong-qing's strength was actually much stronger than the person ranked before him, leaving no chance for the Class-B first place to win. In the end, he could only watch as his weaker classmate successfully advanced, while he had to wait for yet another six months.

In reality, the classes were basically settled by the end of this day. Over the following few days, the internal class ranking battles would be held and the ranking battles for the top 50, in particular, would be the centre of everyone's attention.

On the fifth day, the internal class ranking battles began. The match-ups were announced on the day itself and, as usual, had been determined by ranks. The 1st-place was matched up against the last place, the 2nd was up against the 49th, and so on and so forth.

Seeing this match-up list, the Class-A 34th place was the first to start wailing. The first person he was up against was the one who had advanced into the top 50 by defeating all of his opponents in one move — Ling Lan. The classmates who were on good terms with him all patted his shoulders in consolation, but they were actually secretly sighing in relief, glad it wasn't them.

Chapter 79: Talent Killer!

Alone in a corner, Lin Zhong-qing stood with his head bowed, carefully reading through the information on his communicator about his fight venue and match order. He heard the voices of the surrounding students consoling the 34th place and surreptitiously lifted his head to look at Ling Lan, who was currently engaged in conversation with Qi Long and the others. His gaze was complicated and hard to decipher.

Of course, Lin Zhong-qing had known that Ling Lan was very strong, otherwise he wouldn't have been able to get Qi Long and Luo Lang, whose strength was on par with the top three of Class-A, to submit to him. Even the abnormally intelligent Han Jijyun had willingly acknowledged him as his boss. (One could tell all this just from their conversations and how they acted.) Still, he hadn't expected Ling Lan to be this strong. Advancing this far with consecutive one move take downs ... it was quite terrifying.

It should be known that this result would be brag worthy at any school. Even the self-titled ultimate genius Li Yingjie was unable to do this. Although Ling Lan seemed very cold and aloof, he was not against helping out if it was something he could do with a lift of his hand, just like when Lin Zhong-qing had needed his help previously ...

Thinking of this, a bitter smile pulled at the corners of Lin Zhong-qing's lips, and regret settled on the surface of his heart.

Sometimes, what's lost is lost. If he hadn't thought to take advantage of Ling Lan back then and had chosen to serve him sincerely instead, perhaps he might have had a chance to obtain Ling Lan's

friendship. Unfortunately, now it was no longer possible. No one would be willing to be friends with someone who had once used them.

Lin Zhong-qing's gaze cleared up instantly, as he ruthlessly strangled the rebellious bit of hope within his heart. The experiences of his youth had made it impossible for him to put down his defences to trust in someone else ... which was why he was destined to be forever alone. Friendship and sentiment and anything else along those lines were all just passing clouds.

Lin Zhong-qing was patiently awaiting the start of the fights, when he found that two people he loathed had appeared beside him. It was Li Yingjie and his lackey, the one who was third-last in Class-A.

Lin Zhong-qing really looked down on him. Although they were insignificant in Class-A, being at the bottom of the heap, that didn't mean that they should throw away their dignity to become someone else's lackey, allowing another to order them around and yell at them, just for certain benefits. Of course, if they were like Qi Long and Luo Lang, who submitted due to the other's personal charisma and strength, and called the other Boss out of their own personal will, he would never view them with contempt, but would instead admire them.

Unfortunately, this punk Li Yingjie, other than being stronger than others, really had no charisma or qualities that would lead others to submit to him. He was just no match for Ling Lan. At this time, Lin Zhong-qing still hadn't noticed that his heart had already acknowledged Ling Lan.

Perhaps sensing Lin Zhong-qing's contempt for him, Li Yingjie's lackey, that third-last in Class-A, actually took the initiative to mock, "Yo, isn't this our dead last Lin Zhong-qing? Who knew you would still be in Class-A, how lucky." Since the second-last had already been thrown out of the class by the Class-B second-place, he could only seek a little sense of superiority from Lin Zhong-qing.

Lin Zhong-qing did not care about the other's taunts. If he didn't even have this bit of tolerance, how could he have survived those six years as a research lab rat? He only glanced impassively at the lackey, before lowering his head to look back at his own communicator. This clearly dismissive behaviour made the other's face flush red immediately.

Lin Zhong-qing's attitude caused the surrounding students to break out into laughter. Lin Zhong-qing was on good terms with most of his classmates, and could be considered a socially intelligent person. However, when it came to Li Yingjie's group, Lin Zhong-qing's attitude was rather unfriendly.

No matter how tolerant a person was, when someone pressed the wrong buttons, they would not be able to just continue tolerating. Lin Zhong-qing, who had already lost six years of his freedom, prized his independence the most. Meanwhile, Li Yingjie had wanted to use forceful measures to get Lin Zhong-qing to become his subordinate, and be at his beck and call. This, had completely stomped all over Lin Zhong-qing's buttons, which was the main reason for Lin Zhong-qing's hostility against Li Yingjie. Unfortunately, till now, Li Yingjie still didn't know where he had gone wrong, and was still trying to use force to get what he wanted, causing Lin Zhong-qing to hate him more and more.

Lin Zhong-qing's attitude enraged Li Yingjie's lackey. He couldn't help but shout, "Don't get too cocky! Later, Boss Li will definitely teach you a lesson!" By the end, his tone held an obvious trace of schadenfreude.

After hearing this, Lin Zhong-qing lifted his head and looked at him strangely. That look was the look one used to look at an idiot. Seeing this, the lackey was about to blow his top, actually raising his hand in preparation to teach Lin Zhong-qing a lesson right then and there.

Lin Zhong-qing waited. If the other initiated an attack, then he would have an excuse to retaliate.

Seeing a private battle about to break out, everyone's gaze was drawn over. Li Yingjie, who was standing by the side, frowned slightly, and yelled out tersely, "Yuan Li, draw back, now!"

Li Yingjie's shout made Yuan Li stop immediately, and he scurried back to Li Yingjie's side with a panicked expression. Ever since agreeing to become Li Yingjie's follower, he had certainly received quite a few benefits — high-grade gene agent, which he had to save up so hard for before, was now given to him, one tube every three months. This was also the real reason why his strength had remained consistent enough so he could keep up with the others, however, at the same time, he also lost a lot to get this, such as his pride ...

Li Yingjie stopped Yuan Li, and only then did he look at Lin Zhong-qing, and say haughtily, "Lin Zhong-qing, stop taunting my subordinate. Purposefully picking a fight ... why don't we make a bet instead?"

Lin Zhong-qing snorted in laughter. Taunt Yuan Li? Was he so free that he had nothing else better to do? Bullsh*t!

Li Yingjie didn't care whether Lin Zhong-qing agreed with him or not. He continued, "Next round, should be the fight between you and me. Why don't we make a bet? If you can hold up against me for 50 moves, then I'll forgive the past, but if I defeat you within 50 moves, then you'll have to acknowledge me as your boss." In the end, Li Yingjie still hadn't given up on bringing Lin Zhong-qing under his control.

When Lin Zhong-qing heard this, he couldn't help but burst out laughing. "Hey, Li Yingjie, is your brain dysfunctional?"

At these words, Li Yingjie's entire face turned dark and cold. From his perspective, he had already given Lin Zhong-qing plenty of face, but unexpectedly, his kind intentions made Lin Zhong-qing become so brazen. Actually daring to be so impudent to his face, he must really want to die. A fierce light flashed through Li Yingjie's eyes. He decided that in the upcoming match, he would utterly destroy Lin Zhong-qing, and chase him out of Special Class-A for good.

However, Lin Zhong-qing's response ripped through Li Yingjie's scheming. "You should probably confirm who your opponent actually is."

Li Yingjie's first reaction was to assume there had been a mistake. He hurriedly searched for the notification on his communicator, and saw that he was up against the 50th place. Wasn't the 50th place Lin Zhong-qing?

He continued to read the rest of the notification, and sure enough, the name listed at the 50th place was not Lin Zhong-qing, but a name he wasn't familiar with, meaning that that person was definitely not someone from Class-A.

With a flash of realisation, Li Yingjie abruptly understood. The Class-B second-place who had defeated their Class-A second-last in the previous round, had been automatically assigned last place in their class by the academy's A.I. because he had just qualified for Class-A. Meanwhile, Lin Zhong-qing had

automatically risen by one rank, becoming the 49th rank. In other words, his next opponent was not Lin Zhong-qing, but the new ex-Class-B student. He had been mistaken.

“What a shame ... I had really wanted to bet with you.” Lin Zhong-qing slowly drew closer to Li Yingjie. Just as he was about to brush by, he suddenly stopped, and threw down this statement. “50 moves? How weak. Ling Lan would have been able to defeat me in 1 move. Compared to him, you are really too weak.”

These words made Li Yingjie’s face burn red in anger. He clenched his fists, forcing himself to stay calm. The academy prohibited students from fighting privately. If any such incidents were discovered by the academy, the students involved were very likely to be downgraded and punished. This was something Li Yingjie could not accept — the moment he dropped down to Class-B, he might even lose the right to contend for the Li family inheritance.

Meanwhile, Ling Lan’s group, who had already noticed the commotion around Lin Zhong-qing, had heard the words Lin Zhong-qing said as he left, and all of them couldn’t help but frown.

“This punk is again adding to your hate value.” These days, Han Jijyun had started habitually using some of Ling Lan’s vocabulary from her previous world when he spoke. He felt that those terms were just too descriptive — such as this ‘hate value’, apt and brilliant.

A fierce expression appeared on Luo Lang’s pretty face. “I’ll go teach him a lesson.”

“Count me in,” said Qi Long hurriedly. He wasn’t in it to teach the other a lesson, but was just looking for a chance to fight.

Ling Lan lifted her hand to grab hold of Luo Lang’s cheek, and pinched and pulled at it harshly for a bit, until Luo Lang was begging for mercy, before letting go. “Don’t be hasty. If we really taught him a lesson, that would just be playing into his hands.”

“Ah ...” Luo Lang was stupefied, a little uncomprehending.

Han Jijyun eyes, however, lit up, thinking of something. Ling Lan shared a smiling glance with him. It was always so easy talking to intelligent people.

Qi Long rubbed his head, but didn’t say anything. He believed that Han Jijyun would explain things for him sooner or later.

Qi Long trust was not misplaced; as expected, Han Jijyun began explaining things to Qi Long and Luo Lang, “Lin Zhong-qing is currently struggling to find an excuse to interact with us. If you go look for him, isn’t that exactly what he wants?”

“But I would be going to teach him a lesson,” said Luo Lang stubbornly.

Han Jijyun smiled wryly as he shook his head. “You won’t be able to handle him. If he thickens his skin and clings to you, you probably won’t be able to deny him. Just think of what happened before ...”

Luo Lang abruptly had nothing more to say. That one month, Ling Lan had always kept cool and ignored Lin Zhong-qing, Han Jijyun had been sly and had not given Lin Zhong-qing much opportunity to get close, while Qi Long had focused on his training, unconcerned about anything else. Only Luo Lang had found

himself subconsciously talking to Lin Zhong-qing, and he had even helped Lin Zhong-qing out of several tricky situations ...

“Alright, I’ll keep away from him.” Luo Lang’s strength was that he would always fix his mistakes if he knew about them, although he might still make the same mistake again later on ...

The morning battles officially began. This time, there were only two match rounds. Han Jijyun was up for the first round, while the remaining three were all up for the second. However, by the time Ling Lan and the other two had returned after their battles, Han Jijyun’s fight was still ongoing — it was clear just how difficult it was for Han Jijyun to fight.

In the end, Han Jijyun’s stamina was better than his opponent’s, so he managed to outlast the other. Even so, Han Jijyun was almost burned out and was immediately sent to a healing pod to recover his energy.

Qi Long and Luo Lang did not have much difficulty. Qi Long had defeated his opponent after exchanging roughly 50 moves to clinch the victory, while Luo Lang did slightly worse, only managing to defeat his opponent after nearly 80 moves to advance. As for Ling Lan ...

The moment the fight began, Ling Lan had not dared to open her eyes. She was afraid that she would again see some fatal weakness, and then her body would reflexively attack and steamroll the opponent.

After a night of research, Ling Lan had finally figured out the reason. These uncontrollable reflexive movements were the final remnants of her spiritual loss of control. There wasn’t actually a problem — her body and mind were still in the process of syncing up after she returned to normal, so the issue would resolve itself after another one and a half months. Ling Lan could only blame herself for recovering too late, so there wasn’t enough time for the residual effects to clear out, resulting in her current predicament.

To prevent once again defeating her opponent in one move, Ling Lan decided to close her eyes this time. She thought that, if her eyes were closed so she couldn’t see the opponent’s attack, then it would be impossible for her to attack reflexively anymore, right? Of course, Ling Lan only dared to do so because she had full confidence in her two ears. In the learning space, one of her training sessions under Number Five was in a pitch-black sealed room, where she had to dodge the attacks of hidden weapons without sight. In the beginning, she had died horribly countless times, but eventually, she managed to evade everything to emerge unharmed. This experience had given her a pair of extremely sensitive ears, with the trained ability to discern movement and positions just by listening to the wind.

However, even so, after dodging about 10 moves, Ling Lan could hold back no longer. With just a slip in attention, her eager foot shot out in a kick.

And then, the opponent was cleanly sent tumbling off the stage ...

Ling Lan opened her eyes, and immediately saw the almost apoplectic referee. Her heart dropped — why was it this teacher referee again? As Ling Lan had kept her eyes closed the moment she stepped on stage, she had really not noticed that the one in charge of refereeing her match this time was still the same referee from her previous two matches.

Ling Lan hurriedly put an innocent look on her face, her large bright eyes broadcasting only one thing — she really hadn't done it intentionally. In order to escape responsibility, Ling Lan decided to play up her cuteness just this once.

The referee charged over, the muscles on his face a little twisted, as he said through gnashing teeth, "Couldn't you have pretended to struggle for a few moves with your opponent before defeating him?"

Ling Lan's expression became even more innocent. Didn't she already dodge for about 10 moves?

Seeing that Ling Lan still hadn't figured out her mistake, the teacher couldn't take it anymore, yelling, "You bloody kept your eyes closed, and kept both hands behind your back, and waltzed around cockily daring him to hit you — do you really think we're all blind?"

Clearly, in others' eyes, Ling Lan had still defeated her opponent in one move despite what she did. Moreover, the blow to the other child's confidence this time was even more severe.

In her previous two matches, they could still comfort the children who lost that Ling Lan was just lucky, or that he had just been born with supernatural strength, or perhaps the children themselves had been too careless and had lost to Ling Lan's sneak attack ... these excuses had been enough to salvage the children's confidence. But now, what Ling Lan just did was obviously telling his opponent that he really didn't even consider him a threat. Even if he kept his eyes closed and gave you a 10 move handicap, you would still be unable to hit him, and in the end, he only had to use one move to defeat you. This blow was just too heavy. The teachers were at a loss, unable to find any excuses to use to comfort the losing child this time — tell me, how could they not be frantic?

This was why the teacher could no longer hold his temper. This brat Ling Lan was clearly a talent killer!

Chapter 80: Advancing Into the Top 13!

However, no matter how angry or resentful the teacher was, he could do nothing about Ling Lan. If the children in Class-A were the talent that they treasured and wanted to cultivate, then Ling Lan was most certainly the largest pearl deep within their hearts. The appreciation they had for him was immeasurable. This was why the teacher could only yell somewhat angrily at Ling Lan for a while, reminding him to not be so heavy-handed next time to save them the trouble.

Even if they really, really cherished Ling Lan, they still had to maintain their impartiality on the outside. No matter what was said, the other children were also the future pillars of the Federation — they couldn't just give up on them.

The teacher's demeanour really resembled that of a parent whose child had hit a child from another family. As a parent, he had to scold his own child just to placate the other party; as for whether he was actually gleeful inside ... hehehe, I'm sure you all understand.

Just like that, under the teacher's repetitive nagging, Ling Lan could only nod obediently to show she understood. It couldn't be helped. Ling Lan still had to take the oppression of the academy for another 10 years, so she had no choice but to carry on with her tail between her legs¹. Of course, Ling Lan was personally a child who was so obedient that she couldn't be any more obedient, so obedient that she had never gone through a rebellious phase in her previous life ...

Thinking of this, Ling Lan considered — should she try being rebellious once in this life? But when her mum Lan Luofeng's tear-blurred eyes appeared within Ling Lan's mind, paired with her loving yet melancholic expression, Ling Lan just couldn't muster up the heart to think any more about it. Yup, she definitely couldn't handle the acting of her Oscar-level diva mum. If Ling Lan was a littlefox ² still in training, then her mum was definitely a grand fox demon that had been through a thousand years of cultivation. They were just on completely different levels.

More than once, she had lost to her mum's waterworks. Even if she knew that Lan Luofeng was just faking it, she still fell for it. It was all because she couldn't bear to see others cry. This weakness that she had brought with her from her previous life caused her to be fully trapped within the manipulations of her thousand-year fox demon mother. Just like Monkey-Sun ³ within the Buddha's hand, she would forever be unable to escape from her mother's palm.

At this thought, Ling Lan was shrouded in gloom. She began resenting that dad of hers who had died so early, leaving behind such a troublesome burden for her. If her dad were still alive, this thousand-year fox demon would have been her dad's responsibility.

However, this was all just fanciful thinking by Ling Lan. Lan Luofeng was, in fact, Ling Lan's sweet burden for this life, which she carried with pain, yet also with much joy ...

When the morning's official advancement battles ended, the children who advanced had no more business in the hall and were free to do whatever they wanted. Meanwhile, the students who had been eliminated continued to remain in the combat hall to wait for the system to once again announce the battle pairings for the rankings of the 26th place to the 50th place. Of course, this had nothing to do with Ling Lan's group of four so they went straight to Qi Long's and the other two boys' villa. There, they settled down on the living room sofa, and comfortably watched the fights while having warm drinks.

Among the first grade Special Class-A 26th to 50th ranking battles, the only one whom they were concerned about was Lin Zhong-qing. Who asked Lin Zhong-qing to have impure intentions towards them at the beginning? This caused Ling Lan and the others to involuntarily start paying attention to him.

During the advancement battles from top 50 to top 25, Lin Zhong-qing had been up against the Class-A second-place, Wu Jiong. Lin Zhong-qing had lost as everyone expected; however, unlike what everyone expected, he had not been defeated quickly by Wu Jiong. Instead, he had battled with Wu Jiong for over 100 moves before finally being brought down by Wu Jiong, who had been patiently waiting for an opportunity, when he ran out of stamina.

These results caused an uproar among the Class-A students. However, what the students were stunned by was not Lin Zhong-qing's incredible improvement, but rather, Ling Lan's strength. Because they still remembered how, when school first started, Ling Lan had once beaten Lin Zhong-qing easily with just one punch. Didn't this prove that Ling Lan's strength was already far beyond the top 3 of Class-A?

At that time, the gazes directed Ling Lan's way from the other students had been filled with deep apprehension. The children from Class-A had forgotten that half a year had already gone by since Ling Lan's fight with Lin Zhong-qing — Lin Zhong-qing's current strength could no longer be compared to his

strength back then. If Ling Lan fought with Lin Zhong-qing once more, she might not be able to defeat him in one move anymore ... however, doing so in two moves was still very possible.

However, Lin Zhong-qing's subsequent performance gradually eased their classmates' fears. In the ranking fights to determine his actual ranking, Lin Zhong-qing proved his strength. He consecutively defeated many people, finally settling in the 28th spot.

This result may not seem brilliant, but compared to his rank at the start of the school year, his improvement was undoubtedly astonishing. It should be known that the Class-A rankings were not upset so easily because Class-A was made up of various prodigies from all over, who were all exceptional. To go up in rank among this group of freakish talents ... it was really extremely difficult. This also proved that Lin Zhong-qing's natural talent was prodigious, though of course he also put in more effort than the other students, otherwise he wouldn't have improved this much.

Lin Zhong-qing's performance this time made Ling Lan's group of four start to take him seriously. This little fellow who had a belly full of plots and schemes, though unlikely to be a threat to Ling Lan, could very well become a rival for Qi Long and the others. Han Jijun, especially, felt the pressure most keenly because Lin Zhong-qing's future development was looking to be an intelligence-type soldier just like him.

In the meantime, Ling Lan and the others also watched several matches of the popular upper grade students. As expected, they were all formidable opponents, full of amazing moves. Ling Lan was delighted, making Little Four copy everything down. If they could decipher just one or two of the moves, Ling Lan would already benefit greatly.

The combat arts taught by the learning space was definitely top-notch but was way too lethal. Every move, every stance, was aimed at an opponent's fatal spots, making it rather unsuited for this sort of arena sparring tournaments held by the academy. And while the Ling family had their own combat arts, it had the same problem — the combat arts of the loyalists were naturally geared towards killing an enemy efficiently. Of course, the Ling family did not lack for those so-called 'orthodox' combat arts as well, but with Ling Xiao's death and Lan Luofeng falling out with the entire Ling family, Ling Lan never did have the chance to learn those combat arts.

This was why Ling Lan couldn't drag out the fight for a few moves before defeating her schoolmates. The moment she moved, it was a killing blow — how could the fight be prolonged? Therefore, Ling Lan was extremely interested in these random skills and techniques she saw in the academy though they were looked down upon by the instructors within the learning space.

Ahem, she needed to give face to the academy teachers, didn't she? At the least, she should show that she had already listened to their advice.

When all of the fights ended, Ling Lan's group prepared to eat lunch. However, this time they didn't go eat at the canteen but went online directly to order some takeout, requesting the canteen to send several deluxe set meals straight to the villa.

After they had eaten, Ling Lan and the others rested for a little while and then headed back to the combat hall. Right now, the combat hall was no longer as raucous as it had been at the start; it had already become extremely quiet. Other than the Class-A students of the ten grades, who were waiting

for their match-ups to be announced by the system, almost everyone else had gone back to their dorms to watch the ranking battles of the top 25.

Very quickly, the notifications came. Ling Lan opened it to look and was immediately dumbfounded. It turned out that she had received a bye for this round. It was very likely that the academy was afraid that Ling Lan would commit another one-hit-kill and cause them trouble, so they had arranged for her to just move on for this round.

The moment the news spread, the other children in the top 25 actually cheered in unison — it looked like no one wanted to go up against Ling Lan so early. Although they still needed to fight a proper match, it was still better to have some hope instead of having to face the hopeless situation of going up against Ling Lan.

The match-ups of the fights this time were truly randomised. There was no longer much differentiation in strength among the top 25, so they would be paired up randomly by the system to fight it out. But in this way, tragedy struck. On Ling Lan's side, Han Jijyun and Qi Long were matched as opponents, creating the first occurrence of an internal fight between the members of Ling Lan's group. This made the other students extraordinarily happy — there was no helping it, Ling Lan's group was just too strong, so one less to worry about was a great stroke of luck.

Han Jijyun reacted in a straightforward manner. The moment the fight started, he raised his hand to signal his surrender. He knew he was no match for Qi Long in terms of combat. The two of them often sparred together for practice, so Han Jijyun knew very well what the final result would be. As such, there was no reason to waste his strength.

Luo Lang's opponent was comparably weaker. Still, the students who entered the top 25 all had exceptional strength — against them, Luo Lang did not have an overwhelming advantage; the odds of him winning were 60-40 at most.

Luo Lang, who was only just a little stronger, was very cautious in his fights. He could clearly remember Ling Lan's reminder at the start of the battles. Capsizing a boat in a ditch⁴? He would never allow that sort of thing to happen to him. Still, Boss was really Boss. Why was everything he said so meaningful ... Ahem ahem, yet another unwitting little guy had been won over by the charm of this sort of olden sayings; unknowingly, his admiration towards Ling Lan had risen a little bit more.

Luo Lang fought very carefully and seriously, giving his opponent no chances from start to end. And once his opponent's stamina was about finished, Luo Lang swooped in to grab hold of an unintended small opening exposed by the opponent, knocking the other off the stage, and advanced to the top 13.

The original top 9 ranks of Class-A, as expected, all successfully advanced. However, the 10th rank unexpectedly lost to the student who was originally in 14th place and was knocked out. Including Ling Lan, Qi Long, and Luo Lang, those within the top 13 were officially settled.

After that, the ranking battles to determine the 14th to the 25th place were held. Han Jijyun performed impressively, defeating two people, getting a bye, and then finally going up against the original 10th place to score a win. He ended up in rank 14, which was a significant improvement from his initial rank 21.

However, as his original results had been purposefully suppressed by the hacker of the Bladed Special Ops Team, this was just him returning to his rightful spot now. Of course, if he hadn't had to go up against Qi Long during the advancement rounds into the top 13, he might have perhaps even gone up a few more ranks.

Just like that, the day's ranking battles were over and Ling Lan remained firmly in the category of those who advanced with ease. Qi Long could also be considered as one within that category — after all, he hadn't had to fight at all for his second match since Han Jijyun had just surrendered, letting him advance easily. Luo Lang was the most exhausted one. When they returned to the villa, without saying a word, he immediately shuffled off to lie down in the restoration pod within his room to rest up properly.

There was no time to waste right now; he had to seize every minute and every second he could to recover his energy. Tomorrow morning, there would be two critical matches — from top 13 to top 7, and from top 7 to top 4 — and Luo Lang didn't want to stop there. If possible, he still wanted to participate in the afternoon's semi-finals and finals ... and to realize that wish, he could not afford to be the least bit sloppy.